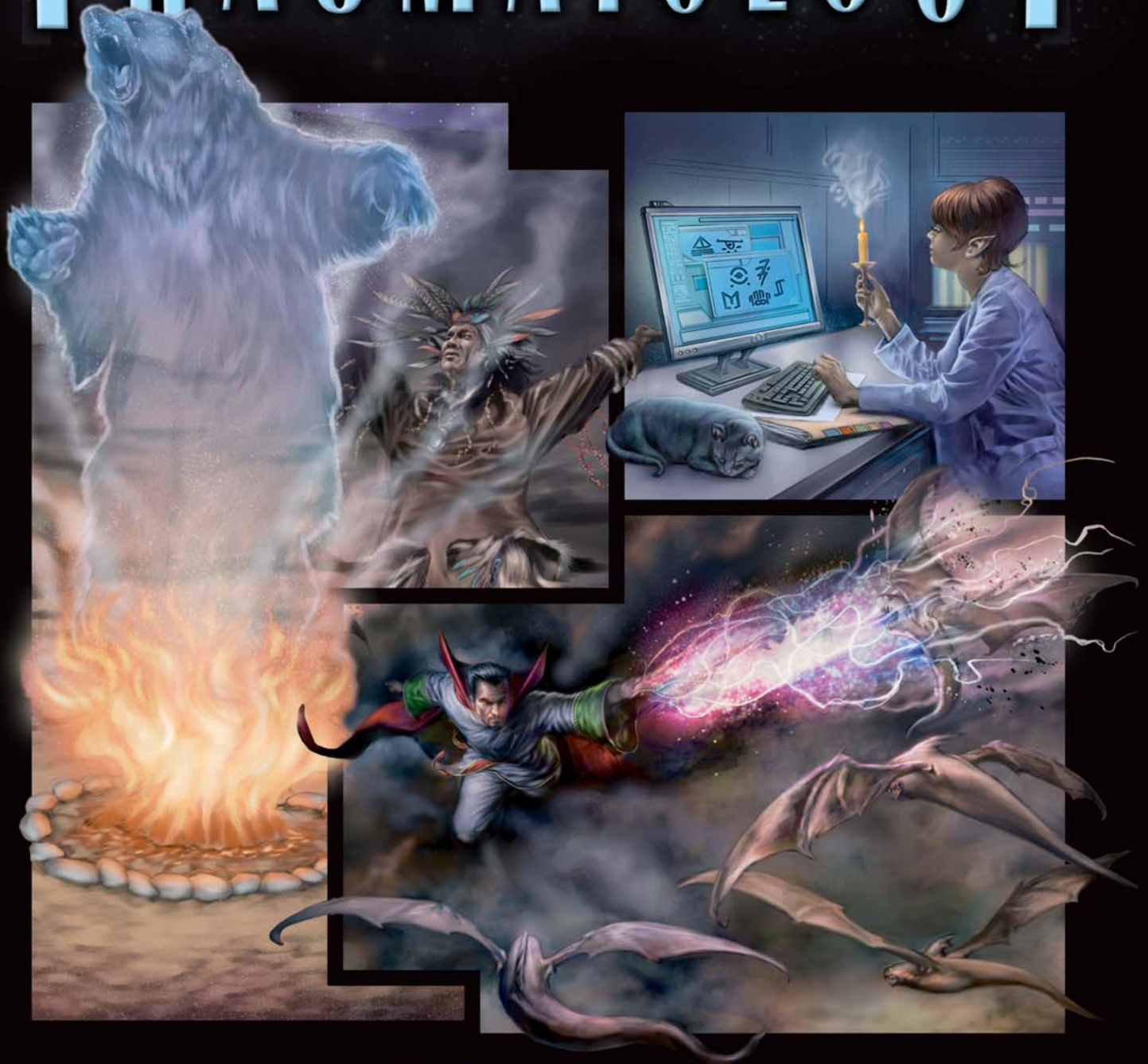


**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

TM

# THAUMATOLOGY



By PHIL MASTERS

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# THAUMATOLOGY™



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# INTRODUCTION

Magic . . . Intuitive art or numerical science? Insanity or perfect control? Quest for divinity or demonic blasphemy? Take your pick. Maybe it's everything at once.

Every myth, fantasy story, and anthropological study has its own ideas on the subject, which makes life complicated for anyone who wants to incorporate evocative ideas about magic into RPGs. The problem is how to handle such visions in game terms – how to make them work as imagined but also in a consistent and playable way. The purpose of *GURPS Thaumatology* is to offer solutions.

Often, RPGs are accused of tying up magic in strict rules, losing its truly fantastical, *magical* essence. *Thaumatology* certainly presents rules – but by offering a wide range of options, it aims to restore a sense of freedom to game magic and to enable the GM to make it an integral part of a setting, not just a handy box of tricks. Still, the specifics are there for those who value them.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

All *GURPS* books are tool kits – you use the parts you like and change or ignore the rest. This is *especially* true of *Thaumatology*. Its many rules and systems are designed to enable the GM to set up games where magic works exactly as envisioned, providing the perfect atmosphere and balance of probabilities. It also includes worked examples and ready-to-use implementations, but even these can be modified.

As with any toolbox, you shouldn't try to use everything simultaneously – and by “you,” we mean whoever is responsible for designing and maintaining the campaign, usually the GM. Pick and choose only what suits your purposes. Not every concept belongs in every game; if you try to use it *all*, you'll probably go crazy and, worse, your campaign will collapse! All of *Thaumatology* is one big suggestion. For example, the point costs for abilities reflect the author's views of effectiveness and balance – but as the GM, you're free to disagree and change the numbers, perhaps to encourage or discourage particular player choices. Just

bear in mind that such tinkering will have consequences in the game.

This doesn't mean that *Thaumatology* is only for GMs. On the contrary, any player whose character uses a magic system or mechanism from this book will need access to it to see how things work and what's possible. But if the GM decides that a section or even a *chapter* doesn't apply, then that's final.

Player or GM, you should consider reading the entire book before making any decisions. A given magic system might draw most heavily on one chapter, but many ideas transfer easily between chapters. You'll also want to compare several possible mechanisms before settling on those that best represent your game's (or character's) version of magic. Finally, the appendices (pp. 242-267) apply to *many* options.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY

*Thaumatology* features something old, something new, and quite a lot borrowed. One of the design goals was to integrate the many magic rules published over the course of two decades of *GURPS* and bring them into line with *GURPS Fourth Edition*, polishing and enhancing them in the process. This means the book owes debts to more people than we can list here – but a few names and titles really must be mentioned.

The spell-based system described in the current *GURPS Basic Set* dates to the earliest days of *GURPS*. It has been adapted for specific purposes many times over the years. Treatments of fictional and mythical sources added and removed spells, reorganized the college structure, and imposed special requirements on spellcasters. For example, Ken and Jo Walton's *GURPS Celtic Myth* added powerful “High Celtic” imagery, while *GURPS Religion*, by Janet Naylor and Caroline Julian, refitted the system for clerics and adopted rules for shamanic spells from Kirk Wilson Tate's *GURPS Ice Age*.



Spell-based magic has also been subject to more radical modifications. In particular, S. John Ross's "Unlimited Mana" rules – first printed in *Pyramid* #9, subsequently reprinted in *GURPS Best of Pyramid Volume 2*, and adapted on pp. 76-82 – showed what could be done with a simple-but-fundamental change to the core system. Later, Ken Hite's *GURPS Cabal* demonstrated what adding modifiers from real-world occultism could achieve.

Some *GURPS* supplements offered completely new models of magic. Notably, C.J. Carella's *GURPS Voodoo* provided a potent, subtle system of ritual magic (called "Path/Book" magic in *Thaumatology*; see pp. 121-165), which Stephen Kenson subsequently revised and expanded in *GURPS Spirits*. Other books developed flexible improvisational systems or rules for powers that, while not explicitly magical, were ideal for representing particular views of magic. Numerous *Pyramid* articles offered further variations and combinations.

All of these ideas were reviewed, updated, and integrated to produce *Thaumatology*. This book simply wouldn't have been possible without those predecessors. It attempts to bring the richness and range of options developed for the first three editions of *GURPS* into *GURPS Fourth Edition*, putting all the material in one place for convenience.

## Current Cross-References

As much as possible, *GURPS* supplements are designed to stand alone. They never need books other than the *Basic Set* to be useful. Because *Thaumatology* is a tool kit, though, it involves more cross-referencing than usual.

Much of *Thaumatology* – notably Chapters 2 and 3 – modifies the standard spell-magic rules. This system is covered in adequate detail on pp. B234-253, but *GURPS Magic* offers a lot of additional material, especially spells! Thus, *Magic* is recommended for anyone planning to use magic, in particular anything based on the spell system, in a *GURPS* campaign.

*Thaumatology* is also designed to complement *GURPS Powers*. Either volume stands perfectly well on its own and can help you set up magic of various kinds for a wide range of campaigns, but the two books work well together. Chapter 7 specifically examines "magic as powers," summarizing the essential rules while offering specific applications, but *Powers* provides many more advantages, enhancements, limitations, and systems.

Finally, *GURPS Fantasy* is likely to be of interest. It provides extensive guidelines for setting up fantasy games, including treatments of magic. Its *Magical Arts* chapter offers many good ideas, some of which *Thaumatology* has borrowed and expanded.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

British games writer and notorious Professor-William-Headley-look-alike Phil Masters tweaked the basic spell system when he wrote *GURPS Arabian Nights* in 1993, and has barely looked back since. His other *GURPS* credits include work on *The Discworld Roleplaying Game*, *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*, *GURPS Atlantis*, *The Hellboy*

## About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: [info@sjgames.com](mailto:info@sjgames.com). Resources include:

*Pyramid* ([www.sjgames.com/pyramid](http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid)). Our online magazine includes new *GURPS* rules and articles. It also covers the *d20* system, *Ars Magica*, *BESM*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and many more top games – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *Illuminati*, *Car Wars*, *Transhuman Space*, and more. *Pyramid* subscribers also get opportunities to playtest new *GURPS* books!

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*Errata*. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see below.

*Internet*. Visit us on the World Wide Web at [www.sjgames.com](http://www.sjgames.com) for errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. To discuss *GURPS* with SJ Games staff and fellow gamers, come to our forums at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com). The *GURPS Thaumatology* web page can be found at [www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/thaumatology](http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/thaumatology).

*Bibliographies*. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to let you buy the books that interest you! Go to the book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

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.

*Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game, GURPS Banestorm, and GURPS Powers*, to name just a few items.

Phil has also worked on lines and products such as *Mage: the Sorcerers' Crusade* for White Wolf, *Ars Magica* for Atlas Games, *Dying Earth Roleplaying* for Pelgrane Press, and *Dreaming Cities* for Guardians of Order, all of which involved thinking about magic systems. That said, he has worked on *Transhuman Space* material for SJ Games and *Champions* for Hero Games, among other things, and had articles in more magazines than he can count. His website is [www.philm.demon.co.uk](http://www.philm.demon.co.uk).

# CHAPTER ONE

# WHAT IS MAGIC?



*"Consider . . . a simple fire spell, perhaps." The centaur snapped his fingers and a flame danced above his hand for a moment. "Magical, is it not? But I see that two occupants of the front row are puzzled, which is good, because it suggests that they not only possess a useful sensitivity but that they are willing to use it. So consider tool use." He extended the same hand and placed a small, glittering object on the lectern in front of him. "This comes, I'm told, from another reality. It produces flame at the touch of a finger, so long as it is kept supplied with a fuel, for which my friends in the alchemists' quarter charge rather a lot. And yet neither the object nor the fuel responds to any tests for enchantment that I or anyone I've met has been able to develop."*

*"So you're wasting our time with mundane toys and trickery!"*

*The challenge came from the back of the room, where a burly, well-dressed lowlander was slouching across two benches. The centaur raised an eyebrow.*

*"I'm talking about important distinctions. But if you think that I'm wasting your time, feel free to leave."*

*The lowlander scowled a moment and then shrugged. He gathered up his slate, rose to his feet, and stalked out of the nearest door. A fraction of a second later, he reentered the room by the door on the opposite side, and then stopped in utter confusion while laughter rippled through the room.*

The basic concept of "magic" is ancient, but there are countless different ideas about what it involves and how it's supposed to work. Consequently, you need to decide what your magic actually is before attempting to represent it with rules.

# THE IDEA OF MAGIC

“Magic” typically refers to a method by which sapient beings can manipulate the supernatural to achieve useful results. This raises the question of what “supernatural” means, however: invisible forces, “spirits,” or something incomprehensible by whatever the world calls “science” or “rationality.” Moreover, not all magic is controlled and not all magical results are useful.

## MAGIC SEEN AS REAL

Magic emerges out of humanity’s oldest legends, and some of the most evocative ideas about it still come from such sources. It represents a way to explain and perhaps control a vast, confusing universe.

### *Magic and Religion*

Magic is both related to and potentially in conflict with religion. Originally, the two might have been one and the same. Humans explained the world in terms of invisible powers, which shamans, wizards, and priests all claimed to understand.

Divisions arise from the question of whether the expert *controls* otherworldly forces or simply speaks to them – interceding, negotiating, and/or worshiping. A priest’s gods are superior beings; trying to tell them what to do is foolish at best. Hence, if wizards (secular magicians) or shamans (spirit-workers) exist, they’re said to deal with lesser beings: *spirits*. This might mean that they’re merely “spiritual technicians,” but there’s often a suspicion that they’re collaborating with demons or other outcast entities, even if they *think* they’re working with non-sentient forces! As a rule, priests form part of the social order, wizards work for themselves, and shamans address individual issues as they arise.

A wizard’s reply to all this might be that priests lack courage or curiosity, and are mere lackeys to their gods, claiming authority over humanity without trying to understand how the universe works. A shaman might say that priests have too simplistic a view; in shamanic myths, the gods are often remote and unapproachable, and life depends on knowing how to work with lower-ranking spirits. Shamans might see secular wizards as prideful and impolite to spirits, while wizards view shamans as being limited to unreliable haggling when formal magic works more reliably.

In a fantasy campaign where more than one type of magic-worker exists, the balance of such disputes is crucial. It’s important to know whether any of the participants are completely right or wrong, or if each has *part* of the truth. If nothing else, such divisions permit some entertaining roleplaying, with priests, wizards, and shamans bickering and verbally sniping at each other (it’s less amusing if the disagreement turns violent, though!).

This three-way division might be too simplistic, however. In “spiritual” or “mystical” ideas, “magic” and “religion” blur together; magic is regarded as a personal, quasi-religious

belief system. It might produce practical results, but these are side effects – the real point is one’s spiritual development. Likewise, many conventional religions include mystical strands whose followers try to gain deeper understanding through meditation and prayer, and mystics are sometimes credited with impressive supernatural powers. To a priest, though, a mystic might seem to be abusing religion for personal advantage, while a secular wizard might see the mystic as importing religious mumbo-jumbo into practical magic.

*Strange: As to how I do magic, there are many, many procedures. As many, I dare say, as for making war.*

– Susanna Clarke, **Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell**

## MAGIC IN FICTION

Folktales and fantasy stories are as likely to refer to ideas about “real” magic as they are to depict it as having more straightforward effects – and these approaches aren’t exclusive. A storybook wizard can hurl lightning bolts or turn into a wolf because that’s simply how his world works. Magic can serve as a symbol, a metaphor, or a power fantasy.

Early fantasy either borrows from myth or – like fairytales – uses magic as a plot device with little regard for consistency, portraying it as something that just *happens*, perhaps impelled by moral or malevolent forces, or by destiny. Its magicians are remote and incomprehensible, living in hidden towers or grottoes and driven by whim. They’re often very powerful, but they aren’t omnipotent. If they enter mundane society to pursue personal goals, a hero may defeat them by shrewdness or a surprise attack (most magic seems to be slower than the sword). Spells often come with “escape clauses,” allowing a lucky or well-informed hero to circumvent even the greatest effects.

### *Imposing Rules*

More modern fantasy – perhaps influenced by science fiction – sometimes tries to depict magic as logical and coherent. Writers may attempt to derive rules and principles from old legends, or define magic as the science of a universe with different natural laws, or simply construct systems that make for good plots or metaphors. Others maintain the traditional focus on *mystery*, however; they might suggest that magic follows consistent rules, but the rules aren’t at all obvious.



Roleplaying games borrow ideas about magic from fiction, and to a lesser extent from myth and history, but must be more specific about how it works. Games have *rules*, and someone playing a wizard needs some idea about what he

can do and what his odds of success are . . . although rules can incorporate elements of uncertainty and give the GM room to fudge.

## Words for Magic

Humanity has used countless words for “magic.” Some started out with clear, specific definitions, but meanings invariably blur over time. In RPGs, such terms are often associated with particular rules and game mechanics that have only a tenuous connection to the words’ origins.

In English, most words ending in “-mancy” originally described methods of divination (for instance, “necromancy” meant “questioning dead spirits”), but the sense has broadened to mean “magic” (so “necromancy” could be any sort of death-related magic). The suffix “-logy” or “-ology” indicates the science or study of something; e.g., “astrology” is the study of the stars, although today it means using the stars for predictive purposes, while “astronomy” is the modern science.

Widespread terms include:

**conjure:** Originally, this meant “to make a pact” – and later, “to call up or invoke.” Spells often invoked magical names, so it could cover all sorts of magic. Today, “conjuring” typically means stage magic.

**enchantment:** Imbuing an object or a person with magic, originally by chanting. This explains why **GURPS** uses the term to refer to the creation of magic items. In other places, though, it’s used to mean magically controlling *people* through their thoughts or emotions (and an *enchantress* is a woman who manipulates others’ minds). The parallel meanings have become quite distinct – take care to differentiate them!

**glamour:** A kind of *enchantment* or *spell*, and hence, metaphorically, dazzling or distracting appearance. As a result, the term has come to refer to a kind of magical illusion – or possibly mind control with an illusory/delusional element. It’s frequently used in relation to the magic worked by fairies, which perhaps consists entirely of powerful illusions.

**goety** or **goetia** (adj. **goetic**): Magic worked by calling up evil spirits or the dead – or originally, the magic of illusions and deception. Contrast with *theurgy*.

**mage** (pl. **magi**): An English variant of *magus*, descending very indirectly from the name of an ancient Persian priestly caste, the members of which were held to be expert astrologers. **GURPS** uses *Magery* to mean personal magical aptitude (required to learn magic in many settings), and refers to anyone who possesses this trait as a *mage*.

**magic:** Another derivative of *magus*. The infamous Aleister Crowley coined a variant spelling, *magick*, to distinguish “the true science of the Magi” from

“counterfeits.” Some people think this offers a useful distinction between stage trickery and the real supernatural deal; others consider it pretentious. A *magician* is anyone who works magic – typically secular rather than priestly, but the distinction tends to blur. In **Thaumatology**, the term often means a practitioner of Path/Book-based magic (see Chapter 5).

**mysticism:** Formerly a mysterious sort of religious activity, not necessarily open to rational comprehension. Still tends to mean something more religious or spiritual than magical, but some mystics are said to possess uncanny powers as a result of their studies.

**necromancy:** Traditionally “divination by communication with the dead.” The meaning has broadened over time to cover any kind of death-related magic – including the creation of undead and dealings with demons (either because demons are powerful in the afterlife or just because both demons and undead are evil). Some people call all magicians “necromancers,” as an insult or an accusation. While necromancy is often classed as evil, in some belief systems the dead may provide willing help if approached correctly, making necromancy lawful or at least neutral (if frightening). Indeed, necromancy was sometimes regarded as the last, best defense against truly evil magic.

**occult:** “Hidden” or “secret.” The word is associated with magic because magic is a secret art. The term *arcane* has a similar history.

**parapsychology:** A modern term for the study of mental phenomena beyond the realm of ordinary psychology (formerly known as “psychical research”). Often relates to psionics, but a parapsychologist might also investigate ghosts, magic, etc.

**shamanism:** Spirit-based religious practice. The shaman generally enters a trance or ecstatic state in which he communes with the supernatural world. Most shamans (the correct plural) also act as healers – perhaps by casting out disease spirits. The word comes from Siberia but is widely applied to similar figures in other cultures.

**sorcery:** Derived from a word relating to fate or luck, this term formerly referred to malicious magic but has mostly lost that connotation. In anthropology, it may imply magic learned through study rather than being inborn. Interestingly, in modern fantasy, it sometimes suggests a less formal, more intuitive sort of magic than “wizardry.”

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## Words for Magic (Continued)

**spell:** Originally a recital or a tale, but nowadays means something magical – perhaps because words have power and can control people! In *GURPS*, it's a magical procedure leading to a standardized result, especially one of the skills learned by wizards in the standard magic system.

**thaumaturgy:** From a Greek word for wonders and miracles, this could mean either “miracle-working” or “magic.” *Thaumatology* was originally the description and discussion of the miraculous, but some modern stories and games (including *GURPS*) use the term for the theoretical study of magic.

**theurgy:** A type of magic worked by summoning good spirits such as angels – often the opposite of *goety*.

**voodoo** (also **voudoun**): Refers to a magical religion evolved from African beliefs among slaves and their descendents in the Americas. Sometimes seen as sinister, but voodoo has a benevolent aspect.

**warlock:** May derive from an Old English word meaning “oath-breaker,” which was subsequently applied to the Devil, then to any demon or monster, and hence to a demon-summoning or shape-changing wizard. Alternatively, it may come from a Norse term meaning “spirit-singer” – a shamanic sort of wizard. Today, it typically means a man who uses the same magic as a female *witch*. Notions such as warlocks having something to do with preventing wars, or being wizards who are immune to metal, are modern confusions.

**witchcraft:** Another old term that came to be associated with secret factions of malicious spellcasters, who were sometimes hunted down by religious witch-hunters. Those who feel that the hunters

persecuted innocent victims – perhaps secret rural pagans – have changed the meaning, and as *witch* may derive from the Old English *Wicca*, the latter term is used for more-or-less-traditional pagan religion. *Witch* often means a *female* magic-worker, but this isn't a firm rule. For historical reasons, witches are often assumed to be rural figures using “primitive” or “intuitive” magic.

**witch-doctor:** A Western term for a magical healer or a benevolent magician – perhaps one who helps against evil witchcraft – in a non-Western, non-literate society. Modern anthropologists regard it as imprecise and impolite.

**wizard:** Once simply meant “wise man” but came to refer to a magic-worker. Sometimes specifically masculine, whence the occasional use of *wizardess* as a feminine equivalent. *Thaumatology* and other *GURPS* books use *wizard* to mean a competent practitioner of magic – usually a secular one (in contrast with shamans, miracle-working priests, etc.) – who needn't possess Magery.

### Academic Terminology

Anthropologists and students of folklore use many of these terms, sometimes with their own specific definitions. “Sorcery” is more likely to retain its old meaning of malevolent magic, and “witchcraft” often means magic seen as evil and persecuted by society. In some cases, the difference is said to be that “sorcerers” deliberately study magic, while “witches” are born with their power. Academics who distinguish between “magic” and “witchcraft” define the former as manipulating external powers, the latter as based on innate abilities.

# CONCEPTIONS OF MAGIC

Fiction often describes magic vaguely. The wizard does *something*, which achieves a result, but how it all works is unclear. Still, there are several common conceptions.

## MAGIC AS A COOKBOOK

Magic might consist of a fixed list of well-defined spells. These may vary within limits – a fireball might do more or less damage for more or less effort, a scrying spell can have variable range – but the system is essentially rigid. This approach is popular in RPGs, as it's simple to implement; the standard *GURPS* system is but one example. It can be a little short on flavor, although that depends on the details of the spells.

It *may* be possible for wizards to invent new spells, but this is a lengthy, expensive, and unreliable process – fine for academics, but not much fun for adventurers. Or maybe

magic is an ancient, largely lost art; more useful spells were once known but have been forgotten, so “research” means archaeological scavenging, and true innovation is beyond anyone living. Or perhaps spells come from the gods, and the human mind can't encompass the complexities of magical creativity – the only hope for novelty is to persuade some deity to grant a new trick.

## Common Standard Magic Items

A variation on this theme makes magic a matter of standardized, often commonplace *items*. Casting spells with your “bare hands” is impossible – or at least seriously limited. Items may be the irreproducible legacy of an ancient Lost Age of Magic, or the product of a straightforward “industrial” system that faces practical constraints in coming up with anything new.

## Magical Invention

If magic is a science or a kind of engineering, or indeed an art, some wizards might seek to *innovate*; e.g., to create new spells. One way to handle this is via *New Inventions* (pp. B473-474).

The “invention skill” required is generally Thaumatology for a new spell or nonreligious ritual, or Alchemy for a new alchemical potion or concoction. The GM may specify other skills: Ritual Magic for rituals, Meditation for chi-focusing techniques, and so on. Innovations involving Herb Lore should be rare, and mostly minor variations on existing themes – the field is built on tradition and old recipes – but they’re possible, especially if new ingredients (e.g., medicinal herbs from a newly discovered land) become available. Likewise, Esoteric Medicine may be used for research in exotic branches of the healing arts.

New procedures and rituals for negotiating with spirits or gods should be tricky. Spirits are traditionally conservative beings, and extremely touchy about being incorrectly approached. Nevertheless, new circumstances – for instance, contact with previously unknown spirits – can justify such work. In that case, the invention skill is either Hidden Lore (Spirit Lore) or an appropriate Theology specialty.

Supernatural or paranormal inventions are rarely of Simple complexity, and are often Complex or Amazing. Generally, Weird Science (p. B228) can’t be used to get a bonus – but in settings where “natural magic” verges on the logical but is always strange, the inventor might find inspiration by looking at the point where magic and science meet. Alternatively, a roll against a more suitable skill might provide a similar bonus; e.g., Mathematics could provide a wild insight for numerological magic, Astrology might reveal how to handle astral influences, and Psychology may suggest how best to convince a spirit.

Facilities costs should usually be as given on p. B474, at least for alchemy or scholastic magic. Other inventions *might* require less cash – especially in low-tech worlds. If so, the GM should substitute more suitable costs: big bundles of herbs for herbal medicine, profuse sacrifices to appease gods, and so on.

The operation skill roll used to test for bugs is the roll required to work the spell or procedure. *Successful* invention gives the inventor a point in the new spell, skill, or technique.

*Production* (p. B474) is rarely relevant. New batches of alchemical potions can be created in the usual way, of course, but production lines aren’t permitted for alchemy or magic unless the setting explicitly allows them. Should an inventor wish to copy manuscripts of spells or prayers, the times and costs should be the same as for any comparable scribal task.

In such a setting, one must acquire the right item for the desired result and “push the right button.” A wizard is a competent tool-user. Wizards needn’t be dullards, though; knowing how to use tools properly can be a skill in itself.

## MAGIC AS ENGINEERING

A slightly more complex approach has magic working like real-world engineering. It *includes* fixed, documented “cookbook” methods – spells are the equivalent of off-the-shelf gadgets and computer programs – but it also permits improvisation. Standardized spells might be more reliable than putting something together from first principles, but more innovative wizards have an edge in complicated situations; in the long run, deeper understanding and research are the paths to power. Some wizards are the equivalent of competent end users, employing a repertoire of standard spells to good effect, while others are like research scientists or design engineers, working to extend knowledge of the rules and creating new solutions and techniques. Innovation in a hurry, maybe even in combat, *might* be possible – but if magic is complex, that could be like trying to design a new gun during a firefight!

This, too, can be compatible with the idea of magic as the legacy of a Lost Age or as tool use. The research wizard may dig through past knowledge but also attempt to grasp general principles, or may seek to create new tools or find new applications for existing devices.

## MAGIC AS ART

Some depictions of magic have it involving too many conditional subtleties for truly standardized spells to work. Wizards have to be quick-witted improvisers with broad knowledge. If each magical working is a unique creation, magic has something of an *art* about it. “Art” might be slightly misleading – not all arts are improvisational, and of course scientists and engineers can improvise, too – but it carries many of the right implications.

This isn’t to say that magic is totally unpredictable, as that would make it useless. Wizards might know, for instance, that certain words or gestures always produce a flame – but how much flame, and for how long, varies from case to case. Codified spells might exist, but these are at most incomplete frameworks, learning aids, or examples of past accomplishments.

This approach works best in games that focus heavily on PC wizards. The constant improvisation takes player time and effort, which tends to draw the spotlight the PCs’ way. Moreover, versatile wizards can be gratifyingly powerful – but if magic is slow or unreliable, they won’t necessarily be *overly* formidable.

## MAGIC AS NEGOTIATION

In some beliefs, magic requires the involvement of supernatural beings, usually intangible spirits. The magician’s role is that of a *negotiator* who not only knows how to make contact but who can persuade, cajole, bribe, or coerce these entities into doing his bidding (or to *stop* what they’re doing). This description suits classic shamanic

*The Drummer: So you've heard me talking about cheat codes. Things that I can say to the computer that alter things in the game environment. Magic words. Magic is the cheat codes for the world. Sending a signal to reality's operating system, see?*

– Warren Ellis, *Planetary*

magic, which likely dates to the Stone Age. It also fits a darker, “diabolic” style, while esoteric concepts of “Christian magic” or Jewish Qabala involve working with angels – although other branches of these religions see this as either disrespectful or plain deluded, running the risk of calling up demons in disguise.

Negotiation-magic is distinct from religion in that the user doesn't necessarily have to be worshipful. Shamans are typically *polite*, and angel-summoners must certainly tread carefully, but the relationship is fairly equal. In some cosmologies, the universe is *filled* with minor spirits, and it's perfectly possible to work with them without worshipping them; modern fantasy writers depict all sorts of elementals and beast-kings who'll make tricky bargains or repay ancient favors. If such a system does overlap with religion, then “magic” is what's done to achieve practical ends, while worship and prayer are directed to higher powers as a matter of respect.

If the beings involved are basically neutral or friendly to humanity, magic is a morally neutral art. If many of them are evil – or just uncaring – magic may be seen as dubious or intrinsically evil. Even a spirit who doesn't *care* about humanity may do huge amounts of damage if summoned into the midst of a community and asked to perform some task by a summoner who doesn't take suitable precautions!

This vision of magic is common in myth and folklore, but rarer in RPGs. It makes work for both the GM (who must create and depict many NPC spirits) and the players (who have to negotiate with them). Still, it can be highly atmospheric. The GM may be able to get away with some simplification by having magicians mostly use standard rituals and contracts, and deal mainly with well-understood spirits.

## MAGIC AS DIVINE FAVOR

If magic does overlap with religion, then it's often called something else, such as “mysticism.” “Real” magic is about *commanding*, whereas a worshipper asks politely. The priest-mystic may propose, but it's the gods who dispose. Descriptions of such magic are hard to distinguish from divine miracles – at least for outside observers.

This kind of magic rarely includes “spells” as such. Outcomes are determined by the deity's whims, capabilities, and judgments – not by rote procedures that lead to predictable results. Still, some divinities seem to limit themselves to a fixed set of effects, or are willing to respond to specific requests. Many religions have been quite pragmatic in their view of worship, seeing it as a contract under which mortals are fully entitled to stop worshipping if the gods don't deliver on their side of the bargain, so this attitude needn't be seen as blasphemous.

This category also encompasses worshipful invocation of beings that might not be labeled “gods” but whose powers are still much greater than human; for example, it covers some concepts of Satanism. For game purposes, though, if a being is worshipped and can respond with power, it's a god. Not all fantasy-game priests use this approach, however; many gods in RPGs simply plant fixed-effect spells in priests' minds, or grant holy folk some other personal ability to use as they see fit.

Magic like this is more common in stories than in games. It makes magic-wielders into rule-bound servants, a role that players often dislike. Miracle-working priests appear in many RPGs nonetheless – albeit usually with fixed, spell-like abilities.

## MAGIC AS REALITY-SHAPING

In a subjective or profoundly flexible cosmos, *reality itself* might be open to change – and “magic” might be the art of reshaping it. This can make for games full of varied-seeming magic, as the techniques required to adjust reality are themselves determined by whatever “natural” laws apply locally, but with an underlying deeper logic and consistency. Magic might consist of knowing the “cheat codes” of reality – perhaps literally, if the universe is really a computer simulation!

Magic in such a setting might well *look like* one or more of the previous categories. However, the rules may sometimes change. Magic-workers with radically different styles might clash on a deep metaphysical level, matching skills or wills to decide who has supreme control.

# SOURCES OF MAGIC

Magic must *come from* something. Talking about this in terms of “energy” can be misleading, however. One might equally ask what *permits* magic.

## THE LAWS OF NATURE

Perhaps magic is essentially a science – a *weird* science, but fundamentally a matter of comprehensible systems derived from fixed natural laws. If so, then it’s susceptible to logical analysis and controlled experimentation. Principles such as sympathy and contagion (see *Laws of Magic*, pp. 14-15) can be stated and documented like gravity or magnetism. This is largely how Hermetic magic was seen in the European Renaissance; that tradition was an ancestor of sorts to modern science, although science has rejected most of its ideas.

Modern gamers tend to be quite happy with such a situation. They may not believe in magic, but they believe in *systems*. The drawback is that they might approach the subject *too* mechanically, treating magic as a set of prepackaged solutions. Anyone who prefers the mysterious, the strange, and the *magical* will find this frustrating. Still, natural laws needn’t be fully understood . . .

## Ambient Energy

This still leaves the question of where magical power comes from. One possibility is that magic accesses an energy field that permeates the universe – essentially, what **GURPS** calls *mana*. (That word originates from the Maori language, where it means a sort of supernatural prestige. Other languages have words for relevant concepts: *numen*, *ka*, *prana*, *ichor*, etc.) Mana might be “richer” or “denser” in some places and times than in others, and its stability and reliability may likewise vary. It might also have different “flavors” or “aspects.” For a little stylish doubletalk, mana can be related to ideas like “cosmic energy” or the outmoded scientific concept of the luminiferous ether.

The idea of ambient magical energy is only really *necessary* if the setting includes something like the modern scientific law of conservation of energy. If magic can create or destroy “energy” as required, it doesn’t require an external source. The standard **GURPS** spell system assumes that wizards tap ambient mana but have to supply a little personal energy to control it, similar to the effort one must exert to control a power tool or a gun.

## Places of Power

Magical potential might not be evenly distributed throughout the universe. Magic may work better in some places than in others – perhaps because more energy is available or reality is more malleable there. The differences might be subtle, or supernatural “wonders” and general strangeness could make “places of power” instantly recognizable.

Places of power will be of great interest to magic-workers – to the point that factions will fight over them. They can be interesting plot devices, but note that campaigns that emphasize this idea may produce static wizards who never leave home if they can help it, because they’re so much stronger and safer there. This could lead to intrigue-heavy campaigns in which the PCs struggle to take sites away from the current occupants while guarding their own. An interesting twist is to have heavy exploitation drain an area of power. If this is temporary, then resident wizards might have to abandon the site or refrain from all magical activity while it recovers, leading to dramatic complications.

Then again, a wizard’s “place of power” might simply be a home base where he knows the metaphysical conditions perfectly, giving him a small edge in spellcasting. Perhaps it’s a place where he has many useful enchantments set up. Or maybe it’s just somewhere secure where he keeps lots of magical paraphernalia!

## Ley Lines (and Similar)

Another view of paranormal geography assumes the existence not of crucial areas or sites, but *lines* of power. One version of this grew from a 20th-century theory that many ancient British sites could be shown to lie on straight lines, extending many miles, which could be traced on maps. The original idea was that these *ley lines* corresponded to Bronze Age roads or tracks, but they were subsequently claimed by occultists, who suggested that they corresponded to flows of mystical energy, that religious or ceremonial sites marked places where the power could be tapped, and that they could be identified by dowsing. Some writers even dropped the idea that ley lines had to be straight.

*Dragon lines* in Asian occultism are a much older idea, forming part of the theory of *feng shui*: the art of determining the most auspicious locations and forms for buildings and activities. Dragon lines are said to correspond to patterns of terrestrial magnetic energy – or perhaps to underground water flows. They’re usually far from straight. Some writers have suggested that ley lines were created by humanity in an attempt to channel and exploit the natural forces represented by dragon lines.

Yet another example is the Australian aboriginal belief in *dreaming trails* or *songlines*: trails used by mythical heroes.

## Personal Force

Alternatively, magic may derive very much from the magician. It might be fuelled by his personal energies or, more significantly, be empowered by his *will*.

It's often important to know whether magic represents *mental* effort (willpower controlling the universe) or *physical* exertion (metabolic energy turned into external effects). "Magic" might for all intents and purposes be what modern parapsychologists call "psionics," a function of the brain . . . or another word for the feats that advanced students of meditation and the martial arts are said to accomplish through what Asian philosophy calls "chi" or "ki." Then again, perhaps these details are irrelevant – some schools of thought don't recognize such distinctions.

If magic uses significant amounts of energy drawn from the caster's person – or if it represents a serious drain on willpower – then the caster's personal physical or mental health sets a hard upper limit on how much he can do. Wizards might also be able to take power from others (as a voluntary loan, or by theft or sacrifice) or generate it via certain acts (e.g., prayer, meditation, sex, purification, or deliberate immorality). This can create a complex economy of magical power.

## GODS AND SPIRITS

In some accounts – notably those drawing on ancient traditions such as shamanism – magic is entirely the art of petitioning or coercing spirits (see *Magic as Negotiation*, pp. 10-11) or even gods (see *Magic as Divine Favor*, p. 11). The key difference is that a god is *worshipped*, and helps as a favor or a reward, while a spirit may *serve* a mortal, whether as a friend, a hireling, or a slave. (Of course, one mortal's "spirit" could be another man's "god"!) These beings in turn produce the desired effects, providing any energy required from their own reserves. They might need their own power sources, but the magic-worker doesn't *have* to understand that part.

## ETHICAL MAGIC

In some metaphysics, ethical categories such as "good" and "evil" are more than adjectives describing how people behave – they're cosmic forces, almost tangible *things*. Magic might have a strong interaction with ethical forces, and even draw power from them. This could be because gods and demons grant their followers power, or because the moral force of virtuous acts and/or the psychic significance of transgression have power in themselves.

If some spells are objectively "good" and others are "evil," then working with such magic marks the user as "aligned" even if he isn't actually a priest. Wizards might have to pursue particular courses of action or lifestyles (represented by a Pact limitation on Magery, among other possibilities). Moreover, being seen to use some magics is liable to earn the caster an extreme Reputation very quickly. Even if most magic is morally neutral, anything but the most lilywhite "holy magic" could trigger reaction penalties if bystanders are unclear on the details.

Individuals who employ evil magic are traditionally depicted as pawns. They may regard themselves as

## Colors of Magic

Traditionally, if some but not all magic was seen as evil, the evil kind was called "black magic." This term is usually taken to imply dealings with demons or undead, not merely the desire to cause harm; after all, good wizards might use magic to harm evil enemies. Inevitably, the opposite – completely virtuous magic – became known as "white magic." Fantasy stories went on to dream up styles or "flavors" of magic associated with many other colors. One common example is "green magic" that works with the power of nature or plant life.

free-thinking individualists, but they often find that they're literally unable to resist control by dark forces – their power is strictly a loan, with a huge price. Even if no demons are involved, "black magic" might draw its power from transgression, and its continued use could require ever-worse acts until the neighbors come calling with torches and pitchforks.

Explicitly good magic may seem like a safer bet, but powers of supernatural goodness are traditionally judgmental and stern. They might not cut the wizard off at the wrong moment, but they'll certainly let him know if he lapses – and unlike demons, most won't tolerate having their gifts used for trivial purposes. If nothing else, people who witness a "good" magician behaving badly are likely to suspect him of lying about the source of his powers.

Magic flowing from such sources may also have other special features. For example, demonic spells might bounce ineffectually off a target with True Faith.

## Other Opinions

"Good vs. evil" isn't the only ethical system that can be tied into magic. Modern fantasy stories and games sometimes hinge on "law vs. chaos." Both a tyrant and a diligent cop can be "lawful" – and both a free-spirited individualist and a psychotic killer can be "chaotic." Magic that disrupts, confuses, or befuddles might be linked to chaos, while that which binds and controls relates to law, but things aren't always so simple. Offensive magic, which causes disruption, might *seem* inherently chaotic but be more neutral, as it can be used to impose law. Similarly, healing that increases the orderliness and structure of a body might *appear* lawful but be the tool of an individualist saint who rejects cosmic laws of entropy.

"Stasis vs. change" represents a similar opposition. More mythically, magic may relate either to the ability to "ride the wheel" of destiny and karma, or to defiance of this principle. Undead (especially free-willed types) and necromantic divination would be "anti-karmic" – souls should move on to new reincarnations after death – while blessings and curses might represent deft adjustments of karma. "Karmic" magic should be subtle and balanced; whether healing represents restoring balance or denies the unfortunate but necessary state of things would depend on the detailed metaphysics. Karmic magic-workers often have Disciplines of Faith, while anti-karmic types tend to Stubbornness.

Lastly, “opposite” principles need not actually be *opposed*. Both stability and change surely have their place in the world, and may be appropriate at different times. Even demons could be servants of the gods, doing dirty but necessary jobs such as punishing the wicked and clearing away “cosmic garbage.” In that case, wizards may work with all sorts of forces without loss of moral status, if they do so respectfully – but those who focus on one side and ignore the other will likely be considered dangerously unbalanced at best.

## SUBJECTIVE REALITY

If reality is essentially *subjective* and shaped by perceptions, then a correctly trained and determined consciousness

might be able to adapt its perceptions and thereby reshape reality. Such magic stems from insight and willpower, and renders questions of energy and power sources largely irrelevant. It can produce, channel, or negate energy in arbitrary amounts – but that energy is really just a surface phenomenon, along with life, matter, and so on. Limited strength of will or imagination might impose constraints that *look* similar to limited energy, however.

This approach has obvious links to *Magic as Reality-Shaping* (p. 11). A sufficiently determined will might well shape truly subjective reality. But reality-shaping magic can exploit whatever rules apply locally, and its users may operate in whatever ways work for them – as engineers, as artists, or even as priests.

# LAWS OF MAGIC

Theories of magic sometimes claim to identify simple underlying principles, while anthropologists and folklorists find consistent patterns in beliefs. Practicing magicians may or may not recognize the various “laws of magic” described by such sources. (In a fantasy world, scholarly mages might employ such terms while “hedge wizards” don’t.) If there *are* magical laws, they might influence actual game rules or merely be a handy source of metaphysical doubletalk.

### The Law of Contagion

“Once whole, always whole,” “once together, always together” . . . two things that have been in close contact are magically connected thereafter, particularly if they were formerly part of the same thing. To harm an enemy, burn a piece of his hair. To gain a maiden’s love, steal her scarf and sleep on it. Such magic uses the Law of Contagion at its most basic. If this law holds true, cautious wizards will take care with their own hair, fingernail clippings, excreta, etc. Blood is often especially important, as it’s intimately associated with “life force.”

### The Law of Sympathy

“Like affects like” – that is, things that look (or act) alike *are* alike, and can affect each other magically. For example, a doll resembling a person can be used to cast spells on him. This principle may be seen at work in “astrological correspondences”; e.g., gold aids solar magic because gold is the color of the sun. (Academic magicians might say that both gold and the sun comprise very similar proportions of the same “decanic energies.”) Sympathy’s most common uses are bluntly practical: the shaman clutches eagle feathers as his spirit flies.

The Law of Sympathy is sometimes known as the Law of Similarity. In fact, similarity and contagion together may be referred to as “sympathy,” and the distinction between the two can be vague. For example, hair clippings from a spell’s target may exploit contagion, sympathy, or both.

### Words and Names

Symbolism is extremely important to magic; symbols are seen as resembling the objects they represent. Words and numbers are crucial symbols, and archaic and ritual languages are often regarded as especially powerful, being mysterious to ordinary folk. *Written* texts, too, have special power, as writing is another intellectual mystery – one that allows the thoughts of the living and the dead to travel the world.

Using someone or something’s *name* may thus invoke the Law of Sympathy, as the name has a close symbolic link to the thing. Some theories say that to reduce anything to syllables and letters is to control it. Christian occultists point out that when God gave Adam dominion over the birds and beasts, He told Adam to *name* them.

### More Magical Laws

The above laws underlie much magical thinking, but others might hold in particular settings. Some examples:

- “As Above, So Below.” A cosmic version of the Law of Sympathy, this statement comes from the “Emerald Table” – a key text of Western occultism. Whatever happens in the universe at large is reflected on a smaller scale, notably in human life, and vice-versa. This is the basic justification for astrology, and one explanation for how a magician can control vast cosmic powers through relatively small actions.

- *The Doctrine of Signatures*. Medieval religious thinking saw the “signature” of God in symbols throughout creation. Following this, the 16th-century physician Paracelsus held that, when God designed the world, He incorporated plants with useful medicinal qualities as a kindness to humanity – and obligingly marked them in ways that are clear to the observant. Specifically, plants that resemble body parts, animals, or objects have uses related to the things resembled; e.g., walnuts, which resemble a head with a brain-like nut inside, are useful for treating head ailments. Other cultures have similar ideas.

In games where such a principle works, a roll against Herb Lore or Pharmacy (Herbal)-2 might identify medical plants and possibly magically useful substances, even if the herbalist is unfamiliar with the specific materials. More generally, the Doctrine might justify using Naturalist and lots of Perception-based rolls as a flexible basis for medicine and magic. The world is full of useful ingredients, clearly labeled for the alert!

• *The Threefold Law.* Modern pagans often say that “whatever you do comes back to you threefold.” In other words, anything that someone does to another person – for good or for ill – will eventually return in some way, three times as intensely. This is actually a statement about how the universe (or the human subconscious) supposedly

works rather than an explicitly magical law, but serves as a warning against malicious magic. *Perhaps* magic that pays back enemies for their misdeeds simply maintains the balance without further problems, but it’s highly unwise to rely on this. Many other views of the supernatural include versions of “karma” or “payback.”

This sort of law can justify building strong “backlash” and “reward” effects into magic rules. If the effect is strong, any significant magic – especially magic that twists luck or fate (such as Bless and Curse spells) – might give the caster an automatic short-term Destiny. Exactly *how* the universe will repay a given good or bad deed should be unpredictable, though!



## MAGIC-WORKERS

To some extent, the nature of magic determines what sorts of people use it, and for what – just as the nature of the individual determines what magic he is able and likely to work. In a few settings, just about anyone can learn magic, although the time and effort required to *master* it might be prohibitive. Typically, though, magic demands something special.

### NATURAL ABILITY

Working magic often requires an innate ability. The standard way to represent this in *GURPS* is with the Magery advantage, which isn’t necessarily available after character creation. In some cases, Magery signifies a sensitivity to magical energies, the idea being that they’re easy enough to manipulate once you know that they’re there, but someone who lacks the gift can no more become a “real” wizard than a blind man can become a painter (although non-mages *may* be able to work some magic by

following fixed rules). In other cases, Magery is a physical ability to shape forces. In a few, it corresponds to importance in the eyes of spirits or gods.

### *Magic and Genetics*

If magical talent is “genetic” – either in strict scientific terms or in the broader sense of being something inborn – then it’s helpful to have some idea of how the pattern of inheritance works. This may be expressed in scientific terms (“Magery is linked to a recessive gene found in 5% of individuals.”), or be vague but sufficient to generate plots and character ideas (“Members of the Trelawney family are often strong in art, especially second sons, although sometimes it skips a generation.”), or be completely *strange* in modern terms (“Anyone born while the sukebind is in bloom, whose mother has never seen a tiger, and whose father has blue eyes, will become an elemental adept.”). *Any* kind of pattern tends to feel both more logical and more magical than complete randomness.

*Knowledge and human power are synonymous, since the ignorance of the cause frustrates the effect.*

– Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*



## Dumb Luck

In some settings, magical power isn't about cultivated talent, dedication, teaching, or divine favor as such – it's about sheer chance. It's something that happens to people out of the blue, perhaps because they're in the right place at the right (or wrong) time. It might even be a curse that attracts more problems than it ever resolves, or that corrupts everyone who receives it.

This approach can make for interesting PCs who acquire magic by chance and must work out what to do with it. It can also produce a range of villains – a consequence of unpleasant, selfish, misguided, or easily manipulated people gaining magical power. Using magic will probably call for at least a modicum of knowledge and judgment, though, and tools are most effective in determined hands, so *effective* wizards will still be good learners with forceful personalities.

## Secret Supernatural Favor

Just to confuse things, something that *looks* like “natural talent” might actually be a gift from gods or spirits! Indeed, many cultures would draw no distinction between these possibilities, holding that all “luck” or “fate” reflects *something's* deliberate actions. The practical difference is that a gift has an *intention*, and might be withdrawn if misused, while a truly random talent comes with no strings attached.

The snag here is that secret favor typically still comes with the requirement to please the higher power, but the recipient doesn't know how to set about this. Logically, gods and spirits can't complain if someone they haven't contacted doesn't follow their wishes. Such entities aren't famous for their logic, however. They often reward a mortal with power because they approve of his fundamental nature – but even living up to one's true nature can be a challenge. In settings where this sort of gift is known to be fairly common, recipients might *assume* that this is the source of their abilities, and try to live accordingly, but they'll have problems.

In game terms, the chosen one might have advantages with the Pact limitation (p. B113), plus a Delusion or a quirk reflecting his incomplete understanding of their source. Really incomprehensible gifts can have the Unreliable limitation (p. B116). Other possibilities include secret disadvantages (p. B120), a Patron with the Secret limitation, and some kind of Destiny.

Conversely, someone may *believe* that an innate ability is a gift with strings attached. A Pact need be no less potent for being enforced by his subconscious! Of course, he might simply be a standard secular wizard with a Delusion.

Of course, “genetics” in a fantasy world needn't work like anything in the real world. For example, they could be strongly Lamarckian; that is, parents' experiences during their lives affect their offspring. A mother or a father with a leg maimed in an accident might produce offspring who are slow on their feet, while a parent who has been subjected to a lot of spells may have children who are highly sensitive (or *resistant*) to magic. Magic *is* often depicted as strongly mutagenic, with animals and people living in magical areas producing wondrous or monstrous progeny.

## Magical Bloodlines

If magic *is* “genetic,” in any sense, then some families will probably be “strong in magic.” This can be important in play. At the most trivial level, wizards might find themselves having to live up to family names, or suffering from negative reputations attached to their ancestry, or working to prove themselves because they have no pedigree. More significantly, the offspring of powerful wizardly clans may be watched – or hunted down by rulers or archmages who want no rivals. Real-world aristocracies almost seem to engage in human breeding programs at times, and if a “Magery gene” exists, such efforts could become earnestly serious. Indeed, the genetics of magic could become thoroughly entangled with questions of aristocracy, especially in countries dominated by magical factions; see *Mages as Rulers* (p. 218).

## Magical Races

Genetic magical talent might produce especially talented subgroups within a species, which may correspond to “races” in the colloquial sense – likely with all the variation, unreliability, and interbreeding that “races” see in real-world humanity. In RPGs, though, the term “race” generally means a distinct *species* of intelligent beings, and some races might be noted for magic. For example, in many games, elves enjoy exceptional magical talent, and half-elves inherit some but not all of that aptitude.

Races might be “magical” in other ways, too. For instance, dwarves are often depicted as expert makers of magic items with no special interest in spellcasting, which could be represented by levels of limited Magery. Other races may have innate Magic Resistance. A few might even possess seemingly mundane abilities with a magical component. For example, a race of winged humans would realistically have trouble flying, but the GM could say that they tap magical forces – meaning that they'd be grounded in areas that lack mana and possibly be brought down by anti-magic.

## Upbringing and Willpower

Magery could instead be the product of environmental influences or upbringing. If such factors are understood – however incompletely – then some individuals will attempt to secure this advantage for their children, while others will seek to suppress it. Such efforts are apt to inflate the cash price of anything relevant to the process and lead to a lot of social regulation.

If being good at magic mostly comes down to trying hard enough, perhaps even shaping reality by sheer determination, then children who show signs of being strong-willed are likely to be encouraged to study the subject. Stories using this idea usually suggest that effective magic requires truly extraordinary dedication and focus, to a degree that resembles a special talent in itself. “Failed wizards” – people who studied magic but couldn’t exert enough will – might be viewed with sympathy or contempt, or may find positions as academics or administrators.

Most stories seem to assume that magic runs off a combination of genetic talent, education, *and* will, however. There’s no point in trying to educate the magic-blind, but learning trumps all but the most extraordinary innate ability – and great archmages combine both with intense focus and determination.

## SUPERNATURAL INSPIRATION

Some or all magic could be a gift from unearthly powers, or the product of special insights into the supernatural realm. It might not be the province of secular scholars, but an outgrowth of prayer or meditation – part and parcel of a life devoted to a higher principle. Practitioners may even avoid the word “magic” as suggestive of worldly vanity, but also deny that they’re working miracles, regarding their abilities as arising naturally from correct behavior. Not every faith necessarily has such magic-workers, even in settings where some do; this is a question of attitude and theology.

If magic comes to those who – by luck, position, minor talent, or timing – happen to please a higher power, then most users may be priests or “holy men.” Other factors could be at work, though, such as family pacts or lucky meetings. If magic comes from deep insight, then it would be associated with intelligence or at least “spiritual wisdom,” or perhaps simply with a fanatical pursuit of holiness. Whatever the case, the gift might be fragile, vanishing if the recipient loses the patrons’ favor or the required tranquility of spirit; see *Power Investiture* (p. B77) and *Pact* (p. B113) for ways to represent this. Then again, a gift from the gods might be *less* vulnerable to random effects or bad luck than magic that’s a purely natural force.

A significant distinction is between power as a gift from *spirits* and from *gods*. In the former case, it tends to be depicted as “coming to” the recipient in a very personal way, the spirits often forming a continuing relationship with the mortal. A wizard with such a spirit-guide must avoid alienating it, as it can be a dangerous adversary; even the most benign examples may nag and pester. Wizards might even *steal* power, tearing it from spirits in contests of will or tricking gullible beings into helping them – an interesting, chancy sort of magic. “Vision quests” can fit well in games; they’re adventures that effectively grant character points in proportion to their difficulty (possibly alongside the occasional new disadvantage). However, this can lead to problems if wizard PCs stop participating in other adventures because of their obsessive questing, or keep dragging their companions off on personal missions.

With truly divine favor, the relationship tends to be much more *hierarchical*. The god who grants the gift may continue to watch over the mortal, but in the role of master or employer rather than guide or teacher. The deal usually requires the chosen one to act as his deity’s agent . . . and he may discover that he shares some of his patron’s enemies. Such an arrangement implies a variety of obvious disadvantages and limitations!

## EDUCATION

If magic needs or benefits from something more than natural talent and intuition, then an education system is likely to emerge. This can range from totally disorganized to highly formal. It might also teach a moral code, in which case self-taught or independent magicians are liable to be seen as loose cannons . . . unless “might makes right” is part of the accepted philosophy. See also *Apprenticeships, Schools, and Colleges* (pp. 220-221).

*To earn the words of power  
he did all the witch asked of  
him and learned of her all she  
taught, though not all of it was  
pleasant to do or know.*

– Ursula Le Guin,  
*A Wizard of Earthsea*

## Oral Traditions and Mentors

In low-tech societies, especially preliterate ones, education is normally very personal, involving a single mentor and a student or two. Even in literate societies, certain “craft secrets” may never be written down – at least, not in full – in order to prevent discovery and misuse by enemies or incompetents, and to preserve the specialists’ privileged standing in the community. And some things can only be taught by supervised personal experience regardless. In a medieval-style society, magical education might take the form of apprenticeship, whether informal (any wizard can teach the occasional pupil in exchange for help around the lab) or overseen by a guild (complete with examinations for would-be journeymen and masters).

Someone educated in such a tradition may have his mentor as a Patron – possibly along with a Sense of Duty to that tutor, or a Code of Honor or an Obsession inculcated by the training. Conversely, a rebel student might have deadly Enemies, notably his angry teacher and/or more conformist peers. Because all of the wizard’s training comes from one source, it may incorporate peculiar flaws such as aspected Magery, Incompetence with certain skills, and Vulnerability to specific types of magic. Lucky students might learn valuable secrets (an Unusual Background) or simply receive superior instruction.

## Education by Spirits

In some traditions, *supernatural* entities may instruct magic-workers. Such beings typically provide a combination of “spiritual initiation” (p. 91) and tutoring in magical skills, infusing the student with power and then telling him how to use it. Even if teachers of magic are mortal, they could be nonhuman or uncanny: “high elves,” “centaur sages,” etc.

The drawback is that superhuman teachers can produce even weirder peculiarities in their students than do human ones. They’re also liable to show up just about anywhere, at almost any time, in pursuit of their nonhuman agendas, and expect their students to drop everything on command. They don’t always understand human needs or society, and may refuse to accept that things have changed in recent centuries.

This sort of education can be difficult to distinguish from brilliant intuition. Someone who “communes with the universe” might be communicating with a cosmic spirit or “merely” using natural insight. It’s hard for outsiders – and perhaps even the individual himself – to tell the difference!

## Book-Learning

Many stories feature texts as repositories of magical knowledge. Individuals might even learn magic entirely from written sources, sans instructor. Fiction often depicts this as risky – books tend to be incomplete and short on warnings of dangers, and can’t tailor their lessons to the student – but sometimes required for *serious* research into obscure lore. Especially talented wizards may even be able to improve their understanding of magic by reading non-magical works such as theological studies, scientific research, and poetry!

In some settings, certain “books of magic” are *intrinsically* magical. Perhaps they’re simply protected by enchantments, or detectable as weakly magical items. Alternatively, magic might be so powerful that merely writing about it *makes* the text enchanted. Such writings could inflict curses or destinies on readers, or subtly influence their minds.

Given the tendency of power to corrupt and the likelihood of strong-willed wizards including forceful personal opinions in their writings, though, *any* magical text is liable to be known for having strange effects on its readers. If magic requires understanding frightening things – such as the power of chaos or the subjective nature of truth – then learning about it might truly damage one’s sanity. And if magic involves subtleties that are difficult to put into words, book-learning may involve lots of experimentation and leaps of logic, with quite a few accidents.

If such works are deliberately made impenetrable, then their notoriety as dangerous or mind-twisting will grow. Magical texts are often written in archaic languages, or include references to nonmagical secrets. Wizards might try to hide secrets from “the unworthy” by writing in code and omitting details that “the worthy” would already know. Modern electronic texts could feature brain-twisting levels of security.

## Magical Schools

If education in magic occurs on a large scale, and if magic can be taught on a one-to-many basis, then a school/college system *might* emerge. This isn’t a sure thing, though. Several factors militate against it – the most obvious being that if magical talent is rare, there might not be enough students! Formal academies are also dangerously easy targets for those who dislike what they teach, from witch-hunters to rival schools.

There’s also the matter of whether formal magical colleges suit the setting. They’re more a feature of modern fantasy than of myth, and universities in the present-day sense are a relatively recent development. Advanced magical education may differ considerably in settings based on earlier cultures. A magical “academy” might be a circle of students clustered around an admired teacher, or an appendage of an institution such as a temple (if the formal religious bodies don’t disapprove of magic) or a court (if a ruler wants to control the supply of wizards).

Finally, there are financial considerations. Independent schools need a way to pay the staff, feed the pupils, and maintain the buildings. Possibilities include sponsorship by the state, a wizards’ guild, or a private benefactor; profitable investments; stiff tuition fees; and turning magic to the task.

## PHYSICAL INITIATION

Magical initiation sometimes has a *physical* component. The would-be wizard not only has to learn but must perform a great task or suffer some trauma. Like other initiations (e.g., entry into adulthood), this could be harsh and painful, even dangerous – a test of courage, endurance, or worthiness. For example, like Odin mastering the runes in Norse myth, the initiate may have to hang from a tree for days. He might emerge physically changed; in game terms, he acquires specific disadvantages.

Scarification and tattoos are common in the real world, but some stories tell of shamans being physically dismembered and reassembled, even losing body parts, during initiation. An anthropologist would ascribe such extreme claims – and the initiate’s ensuing belief that he has special insights into the universe – to hallucinations induced by pain, deprivation, disorientation, and/or consumption of drugs or poisons. In a world with working magic, though, it could all be *true*. Successful candidates might be left with spectacular physical and mental scars. For those who fail, *death* is a possibility – an unpleasant necessity if individuals with magical potential but insufficient willpower are too easily drawn to black magic or possessed by malevolent spirits.

Dangerous tests could also involve limited resources, which might restrict magic to a brave, lucky, or obsessive minority. “Want to be a mage? No problem. Eat the entire heart of a dragon. The bigger the dragon, the mightier your powers will be.”

## CHAPTER TWO

# MINOR SPELL VARIANTS

*The winged cat hurtled screaming toward François. He swung sword and shield up to meet it, hoping that his thrust would penetrate its diabolically tough hide before its claws met his flesh.*

*But the creature never reached him. Ten feet away, its screech stopped abruptly, and it flopped to the ground, its wings fluttering in confusion. François and his first mate, the big, slow Robert de Mallory, reached it at the same moment. François carefully drove his sword into its eye, while Robert's heavy boarding axe sliced into its spine.*

*"My thanks, Father . . ." François began as he turned back toward the man who had commissioned this voyage, but then he stopped, seeing that the little Jesuit was pale and gasping.*

*"Are you unwell, Father?" he asked.*

*"I will be . . . recovered . . . in a moment." The priest smiled feebly. "Magic is as unpredictable as a mad goblin in this*

*place. One moment, I have the power of an archmage. The next, the slightest spell leaves me exhausted."*

*"Rest, then, Father. I doubt that there are any more of these creatures." François wiped the blood from his sword and sheathed it as his crew looked around cautiously. "Even in these islands, a predator needs enough prey to eat."*

*"I hope that you are right, my son." The priest leaned on his staff as the color returned to his cheeks. "But if they were bred by the unlamented heretic wizard, well, who can say?"*

*"You cannot tell us more about him, Father?"*

*"All that I know – all that my Order knows – is that his grasp of magic was as peculiar as these islands themselves. It is said that his perceptions of spell-craft were utterly unorthodox and yet perfectly internally consistent. Who can guess what he accomplished before his death?"*

*If he's dead. Who can tell with wizards? François kept the thought silent – after all, the priest was also a wizard himself, whose spell had quite likely just saved his life.*



New and variant magic systems are fine, but the system described in Chapter 5 of the *GURPS Basic Set* and greatly expanded in *GURPS Magic* is an excellent starting point, thanks to its extensive spell lists and detailed balancing mechanisms. A lot can be done with just those rules and a

little flexibility. What follows are some suggestions for *minor* changes to standard, spell-based magic, many of which can be combined with each other and with more radical ideas from elsewhere in *Thaumatology*.

# LIMITED AND MODIFIED MAGERY

Magery is always useful as a way to augment a wizard's magical abilities. Depending on the local mana level, it might even be *required* to work magic. The basic advantage is perfectly serviceable in this regard, but modifying it a little can add flavor and allow for more distinctive PCs.

It's important to realize that modifications that cause a mage to "lose" his Magery temporarily are a different prospect in normal or lower mana than in high mana. In high mana or above, they're mostly an inconvenience – the wizard can still cast spells, just not as well. In normal mana or below, though, they mean that he periodically stops being a spellcaster! Since limitations are priced generically and don't vary by setting, the players and GM should discuss such modifiers and determine whether they'd be too crippling for PCs before using them.

Finally, note that if a limitation prevents Magery from working some of the time, the Magery only reduces the time needed to learn spells (see *Learning Magic*, p. B235) if it can *conveniently* be kept active throughout the entire study period.

## Maximum Magery

A cap on the number of levels of Magery available is an effective way to keep magic under control. Such a ceiling might be unconditional or apply only at character creation, with players being permitted to save bonus character points so that PC mages can "grow in magic" or perhaps even *train* their ability. This somewhat curbs the general power of wizards by making high skill levels harder to attain (although raising IQ while reducing Per and Will has a similar effect to increasing Magery) and by restricting spells that rely on Magery to set the maximum energy used for casting, notably Missile spells and spells covered by *Magery and Effect* (p. B237). This especially limits "war-mages," since high Magery lets them hurl numerous devastating attacks, provided they have the FP.

A common cap is three levels, which permits wizards to learn nearly any spell while restricting their raw power. A four-level maximum (exactly as for Talents; see p. B89) has similar effects. Setting the ceiling at two levels is slightly more restrictive, locking out potent specialist spells such as Alter Terrain, Great Wish, and Instant Regeneration – although the GM may feel that these are too powerful for starting PCs anyway. A one-level limit is severely restrictive, excluding many spells that even beginners might reasonably possess, such as Lockmaster and Shield. Allowing only Magery 0 precludes access to offensive spells such as Fireball and Lightning, the much-loved Recover Energy, and utilities such as Major Healing and Magelock; starting wizards will be the equivalent of hedge magicians and apprentices.

A compromise is to require mages to buy Unusual Background (Archmage) if they desire extreme levels of

Magery. For example, *GURPS Banestorm* sets the requirement at 10 points of Unusual Background *per level* of Magery beyond 3. This distinguishes high Magery as the mark of the truly extraordinary being. Players of combat mages will probably buy as much Magery as they can afford, but wizards with impressive amounts of Magery will normally find better things to do with their time than get into fights.

*Hellboy: He doesn't utter so much as a squeak, but the air rings like some great frozen bell . . . and I feel for all the world like somebody just swatted me with a submarine.*

*– John Byrne, Hellboy: Seed of Destruction*

## Partially Limited Magery

Another possibility is to apply limitations to some but not all of a wizard's Magery levels. This makes for interestingly complex magic-workers – never entirely useless, but much more powerful in restricted circumstances. When this option is combined with a cap on unlimited Magery, players who want to play the most powerful wizards *must* take personal restrictions.

*Example:* The GM permits PCs to purchase up to Magery 1 without limitations, but requires at least a -30% limitation on any levels beyond that. One wizard buys Magery 1 for 15 points and a further two levels of Magery with the Solitary limitation for another 12 points. He can learn and cast Lightning, Major Healing, and Recover Energy. He can also learn Stone to Flesh and Lockmaster, but to *use* them, he must tell his friends to back away a few yards. His colleague, who buys Magery 0 for 5 points and another level with the One College Only (Fire) limitation for 6 points more, develops a broad repertoire of petty magics but will never get very far with anything but flame effects.

An interesting alternative here is to limit the total number of *points* that anyone can spend on Magery. This permits wizards with limitations to buy more levels than those without. Specialists can thus be more powerful than generalists, *in their limited fields*.

## Limited Magery 0?

The standard rules for Magery (pp. B66-67) imply that one *cannot* apply limitations to Magery 0. This stipulation exists because simply having Magery – however limited – can be useful. Notably, the rules assume that even under conditions that prevent the mage from casting spells (e.g., at night if he has the Day-Aspected limitation), he can detect enchantments and use mage-only magic items. Thus, it follows that limitations might reasonably reduce the point cost of Magery 0 *if* they restrict these abilities as well as spellcasting.

This is certainly true for the One College Only limitation, which limits the mage to sensing only magic items that contain at least one spell of the relevant college – and, by extension, to using mage-only items only if they include such spells. Since this *does* affect the utility of Magery 0, the -40% for One College Only should apply to its cost. Other limitations that extend to the abilities granted by Magery 0 should likewise affect its cost. For example, someone with the Song limitation who can't detect magic items or use mage-only devices unless he's singing ought to pay less for Magery 0.

Even with this rule, fine shadings can get tricky. Mages who have limitations on *all* of their Magery, including Magery 0, cannot cast spells, detect items, or use mage-only items when their limitations apply; they're effectively non-mages some of the time. Those with limitations only on Magery *above* 0 can always cast spells and sense and use items normally, but can only unleash their full power in restricted circumstances. But what about those who can detect and use items but *not* cast spells while their limitations apply? Optionally, the GM may allow such mages to take limitations on Magery 0, but at *half* their usual value.

*Example:* Lysimachus the Dancer buys Magery 0 with the Dance limitation, -40%, for 3 points, plus another two levels of Magery, *also* with that limitation, for 12 points. Total cost is 15 points. Not only must he dance to cast spells, he cannot detect magic items or use some of them without dancing.

Aufidius the Dark-Master buys Magery 0 with the Dark-Aspected limitation at *half* its usual value, or -25%, for 4 points. He buys two more levels of Magery with the full -50% version of that limitation, for 10 points. Total cost is 14 points. Aufidius can sense and use magic items just like an unlimited mage, but he can only cast spells in the dark.

Roxana the Sun-Witch buys Magery 0 with no limitations, for 5 points, plus three more levels with the Day-Aspected limitation, -40%, for 18 points. Total cost is 23 points. She can detect and use magic items, and cast spells that don't have Magery 1+ as a prerequisite, whenever she wants; when the sun is in the sky, though, she casts at +3.

Remember that applying or not applying limitations to Magery 0 will result in at most a difference of 4 points for the buyer, so the GM might not want to worry much about such things. Still, it can be useful to preserve fine distinctions. The GM should monitor PCs with limitations on Magery 0 and make sure that they get *no* use of magic when their limitations apply.



## Mixed Limitations

Some mages might have complex mixtures of limitations on their Magery, with their Magery level varying with *combinations* of circumstances. This can make them more or less powerful in ways that are difficult for others to comprehend. The GM is welcome to permit this if he doesn't mind keeping track of fluctuating abilities – possibly for several PCs.

This *does* raise the question of whether the mage can learn a spell that has a specific Magery level as a prerequisite. In general, he can – *if* he possesses the required level at some time during the year. For example, a wizard who has two levels of Magery beyond Magery 0, one with Night-Aspected and the other with Only Under a Waxing Moon, could learn a spell with Magery 2 as a prerequisite, as there are nights when he could practice casting it. If his limitations were Day-Aspected and Night-Aspected, though, he'd be out of luck, because there would be no time when he has two functioning levels.

The GM is free to make special rulings here, especially if some combinations are possible but rare. Someone with three levels of Magery – one that applies in January, one that works under a new moon, and one that's good within an hour of midnight – could *in theory* have Magery 3 sometimes, but those moments would be so rare that the GM could reasonably question how he could ever master a spell that required it. Strict GMs might rule that different types of limited Magery are functionally distinct, and that two minor qualifications never add up to a major one.

The GM might also wish to put a limit on the total number of levels of Magery of *any* kind, to keep rules lawyers from creating bizarre combinations in an attempt to get cheap power without actually being restricted. A reasonable overall limit is three to five levels. Finally, the GM should simply prohibit abusive mixtures; in particular, nobody can have One-Spell Magery (p. 25) for more than one spell.

## Wizardly Weaknesses

In some stories, even the most powerful adepts have areas of magical weakness. This could be because they dislike or neglect certain fields of study, or because their fundamental abilities have flaws that no amount of training can repair – much as, in the mundane world, a talented scientist and poet might be tone deaf. The One College Only limitation on Magery represents strength in a single branch of magic, but weakness can take many forms.

Flaws sometimes extend to actual *vulnerability*. The adept might become vulnerable to a particular form of magic by attuning himself too closely to its opposite – or to that selfsame magic! For example, a “water wizard” might be not only incapable of casting fire spells but also particularly vulnerable to fire attacks, a necromancer could be so steeped in death that he cannot benefit from the powers of healing, and an expert mind-reader may be wide open to incoming mental assaults thanks to his hypersensitivity.

### College Incompetence

The GM may let wizards take the Incompetence quirk (p. B164) with respect to a whole *college* of spells (but *not* for a single spell – that’s far too narrow to be meaningful). This should be limited to individuals with Magery, and nobody can have Incompetence with more than one college. Moreover, it’s only permitted for a college that the mage would otherwise be reasonably likely to study. A priest-wizard who serves a god of life would probably avoid Necromantic spells anyway, so Incompetence with that college wouldn’t be meaningful. (On the other hand, this *might* be a valid disadvantage if he’s a pragmatic sort; his god might even have afflicted him with it!)

If a spell also falls under another college, then the GM decides whether the wizard can learn it. This depends mostly on the extent to which it fits with the prohibited college’s “style.” Learning a spell should usually be possible if it’s part of *several* other colleges.

Magicians who use *Ritual Magic* (pp. 72-76) can also take college Incompetence. In that case, default use of the college suffers the standard -4 Incompetence penalty.

### Total Spell Incompetence

Certain people might have a glimmer of magical talent but no ability at all to learn or cast spells. One way to represent this is using Magery with the limitation Cannot Learn Spells, -60%. This gives a bigger discount than Untrainable (p. B116), because Magery is usually all *about* spell use. Someone like this gains only the basic ability to sense magic items and changes in local mana level (see *GURPS Magic*), his Magery level as a bonus to his Thaumatology skill, and an aura resembling that of a mage. For an individual who has a *reliable* sensitivity to magic and no special spellcasting ability, however, some version of Detect (p. B48) is often a better choice.

### Weaknesses to Attack

Magic Susceptibility (p. B143) gives a *general* vulnerability. If it applies to just one college, apply a -80% limitation. Reduce the limitation by -5% per additional college, to a maximum of five colleges (-60%). Only colleges that contain at least two spells affected by Magic Susceptibility are valid – and remember that Missile spells and magic weapons *don’t count*. A spell is considered to belong to a given college if it’s listed under that college, even if learned as part of another college!

For physically damaging spells, the alternative is Vulnerability (p. B161). The rarity of magical attacks is setting-dependent, but in general: “all magical attacks” is Very Common, “all magical missile attacks” is Common, a single college that includes more than one damaging spell is Occasional, and a single spell is Rare at best. If magic increases the damage of an otherwise mundane attack (e.g., Icy Weapon cast on an ordinary sword), then the multiplier applies to *all* damage from the enhanced attack – not just the magical bonus.

Someone who takes damage from the presence of normally non-damaging magic has a Weakness (p. B161). For rarity, use the guidelines give above for Vulnerability. Even brief contact with the relevant type of magic (e.g., being the target of an instantaneous spell) is enough to trigger a cycle of damage. Actually *consuming* a magical or alchemical potion is good for at least a cycle of damage with *doubled* effect – perhaps more, at the GM’s option.

Lastly, someone who has Magic Resistance – with or without the Improved enhancement – may take limitations on it to represent specific weaknesses in his defenses. See pp. 62-63.

### “Polarized Magery”

Some colleges or forms of magic have “opposites.” Fire vs. water and earth vs. air are standard, while others are campaign-specific. The GM who wants metaphysical oppositions to feature in his game can encourage players to take Magery (One College Only), balanced by a flaw related to an opposed college. Perhaps those who buy Magery with One College Only (Water) must also take Vulnerability (Fire Spells ×2) with Magery 1, Vulnerability (Fire Spells ×3) with Magery 2, or Vulnerability (Fire Spells ×4) with Magery 3.

Alternatively, such Magery might render mages susceptible to their *own* college. Perhaps Magery with One College Only (Communication and Empathy) always comes with an equal number of levels of Magic Susceptibility limited to that college.

The GM should usually define such polarizations at the start of the campaign. They might be widespread, in which case wizards will probably be aware of their rivals’ flaws! On the other hand, they could be personal peculiarities displayed by only a few mages.

## SPECIAL LIMITATIONS

As explained on p. B67, Magery can take a variety of special limitations, becoming “aspected.” Below are some new possibilities. See *GURPS Fantasy* for more!

Note that if *all* spellcasting in a setting is subject to restrictions equivalent to a given limitation, then that limitation isn’t available. For example, in a game world without Powerstones or anything similar, Can’t Use External Energy simply isn’t valid. On the other hand, particular limitations may be mandatory for *some* mages; e.g., if every wizard taught at a certain academy has song-based casting drilled into him, then all graduates of that school will share a well-known weakness.

### Can’t Maintain Spells

-30%

You can’t maintain spells past their initial duration. You’re fine at casting, but some flaw keeps you from feeding energy into spells that you’ve already cast. You can’t use Maintain Spell (see *GURPS Magic*) or anything similar to get around this.

### Can’t Use External Energy

-15%

You *must* tap your own inner resources to work magic; you can’t use Powerstones, *paut* (p. 52), energy-granting sacrifices (p. 58), or anything similar for additional energy. You can assist in and even lead ceremonial castings, and high skill with spells *does* reduce casting costs for you, but you can’t use energy provided by spells such as Share Energy and Draw Power (see *GURPS Magic*) – although you can cast Share Energy to assist somebody else, and can use Lend Energy, Recover Energy, etc., to recover lost FP *after* casting. Whether personal energy reserves purchased with gadget limitations count as “external” is up to the GM.

This limitation isn’t necessarily a great problem for a beginning wizard, but becomes serious as the mage acquires greater resources and seeks to cast larger spells. If the GM permits characters to buy off limitations with bonus character points, he might rule that it’s impossible to remove *this* one that way. Thus, “free points” early in a wizard’s career will be balanced against a genuine long-term drawback.

If the campaign makes heavy use of external energy sources – for example, if large Powerstones are easily available or wizards frequently cast Draw Power on high-tech electrical supplies – the GM may wish to increase the limitation value. It may be open to abuse if it’s made too large, however.

### Ceremonial Magery

-40%

You *must* cast all spells using *Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238). This is hopelessly restrictive for adventuring battle wizards, but quite appropriate for enchanters who never leave home (at least, not without their personal magical armory!), talented part-timers who use mundane skills when adventuring but cast the odd Knowledge or Healing

spell when time permits, and so on. If all of your Magery has this limitation, you can only sense magic items by performing a minor ceremony, taking at least 10 seconds, before touching them.

In a mostly high mana setting, you’ll be less restricted. You’ll often be able to cast quick spells – just without your Magery bonus. If the world only has a few small high mana locations, “ceremonial-only” mages may regard them as places to have fun and cut loose.

This is often combined with the Solitary Ceremonial enhancement (p. 28), for a net -30%.

### Cyclical Magery

Variable

The Day-Aspected and Night-Aspected limitations can be treated as examples of a broader category of “cyclical” Magery. The limitation should be roughly proportional to the fraction of the time the advantage is unavailable, slightly reduced because the mage can often plan his activities to fit with his powers’ availability. For instance, Day-Aspected and Night-Aspected, each giving 50% availability overall, are worth -40%. If the Magery switches on and off often, then the limitation is more serious – it’s hard to fly long distances if one must land every minute, or to fight magical battles if one’s spells switch off every few seconds!

If a PC’s cyclical Magery has a long cycle time, then the GM or the player will need to keep a calendar or log for the campaign – or perhaps determine the cycle’s state randomly whenever a scenario starts. The GM may prohibit or discourage PCs who are seriously weakened too much of the time, or whose powers are just too variable, if this makes it hard to concoct interesting plots.

Some possible cycles:

*Astrological:* This can be simple (Magery only available for one month of the solar year, when a given constellation is correctly positioned, for -80%) or extremely complex (Magery waxes and wanes as different astrological alignments and configurations form and disperse, in a pattern that appears almost random – and that can even be determined by rolling dice for game purposes – but that a competent astronomer can calculate years in advance).

*Ill-Omened Dates:* The Magery is unavailable on a few specific dates. Friday the 13th (or any 13th day of the month) or the Ides (the 15th of March, May, July, and October, and the 13th of the other months) would be easy options, but there should be others to give the limitation bite. For example, a calendar might be full of holy days that disrupt “ungodly” magic. If some or all mages find their magic failing on their birthday, then they’ll want to keep that date secret! This is worth only -5% or -10%, unless the dates are very frequent and/or the wizard’s *permanent* magic is temporarily suppressed on such days, too. The GM should make sure that this limitation becomes a significant problem – perhaps by having enemies exploit it ruthlessly.

*Lunar Magery:* Magery that ceases to work around the time of the new moon *or* the full moon (say, for three days and nights, or about 10% of the lunar month) has a -5% limitation. If it only works while the moon is waxing or waning (half the time), that’s -40%. Magery that’s only *available* for two or three days per lunar month has -80%.



*Personal:* The GM can let players declare that their mages have completely arbitrary “power cycles” unrelated to anything identifiable in the outside world (“My powers rise and fall every three days, seven hours, and 22 minutes. It’s a family thing.”), linked to pseudoscientific concepts such as biorhythms, or tied to natural processes such as a woman’s menstrual cycle. Be warned that this often means a lot of bookkeeping, which can become a serious nuisance (that last example leading to added complications with events such as pregnancy!). The GM must also watch for “limitations” that don’t actually limit the wizard, and is fully entitled to come up with plots (e.g., sudden enemy attacks, long sea voyages, and pointed requests for help from the king) that are inconvenient – that’s what “limitation” means.

### *Easily Resisted Magery*

-5%/level

You cast spells normally, but they lack “penetrating force.” If your target has Magic Resistance, multiply it by (1 + limitation level) when he resists your spells; if not, he gets a bonus equal to your limitation level to any roll to resist your magic. Any magic items you create have the same problem no matter *who* uses them – this flaw permeates all of your magic. The GM sets the maximum level; four to six levels are recommended.

The GM should restrict this limitation to mages whose magic will face resistance rolls a significant proportion of the time. If a wizard focuses on fireballs and healing, it won’t actually limit him and so shouldn’t be worth anything.

### *Enchantment-Only Magery*

-30%

You may *learn* spells, but you can’t *cast* them in the normal way. You can, however, enchant them into items. This differs from One College Only (Enchantment) in that you can learn spells from any college – even those with Magery prerequisites – if you have enough levels of (limited) Magery. This limitation is more appropriate for static magical craftsmen than for wandering adventurers, but it suits some impressive and significant NPCs very well!

### *External Sources Only*

Variable

This is a whole category of limitations for mages who must draw on *something*, not necessarily “energy,” to work magic. A classic example is the wizard who’s completely ineffective without his staff. Such drawbacks are particularly useful when creating powerful antagonist NPCs; the search for a wizardly villain’s Achilles’ heel can become an adventure in itself. Since heroes can traditionally always draw on their inner resources as a last resort, these limitations aren’t as appropriate for PCs – but they can still make for interesting characters, especially if the heroes have alternative options when their Magery is taken away.

Some examples:

*External Energy Only:* You can never use your personal FP for magic. The energy you use *must* come from external sources: Powerstones, allies and familiars lending you power, etc. This may force you to rely on expensive tools to work significant magics, although you can avoid being totally crippled without equipment by learning spells at a sufficiently high skill level that they cost no energy. The GM sets the limitation value in accordance with the availability and cost of suitable power sources in the campaign, but -60% is usually appropriate. This is mutually exclusive with Can’t Use External Energy (p. 23).

*Item Magery:* A mage who depends on an item of power uses *Gadget Limitations* (pp. B116-117). Having *all* of one’s Magery come from a Breakable, Unique gadget makes for an entertaining one-use villain but is usually a bad idea for a PC, because if the GM exploits the limitation – as is his right – he risks permanently crippling the PC.

### *Extravagant Rituals*

-10%/level

You can cast spells effectively, but you really have to work at it! When using *Magic Rituals* (p. B237), each level of this limitation – to a maximum of three levels – makes the ritual requirement one category worse (that is, more complex). Time and energy cost are unaffected. For example, if your Magery has two levels of Extravagant Rituals and you want to cast a spell you know at skill 16 in an area with normal or better mana, then you must have both hands and both feet free, and speak in a firm voice while casting, although energy cost is still reduced by 1. No matter how skilled you are, you can *never* cast a spell without at least speaking a word and making a small gesture.

This cannot be combined with the Easy Casting enhancement (p. 28).

### *Fading Spell Effects*

-20%

You can work any spell, but none of your magic *lasts*. Injury from damaging spells, and the effects of instantaneous spells that cancel other magic or restore things to their normal, stable state (heal a wounded friend, mend a broken vase, restore a petrified ally, etc.), are unaffected, because there’s no ongoing magic; e.g., a fireball persists for mere moments, leaving behind mundane burns. But spells with nominally permanent or long-term effects end as though reversed or dispelled after 1d hours, regardless of how much energy you spend. For example, created food or drink seems satisfying enough, but while it may keep the recipient going for a while, his hunger or thirst will return in 1d hours, as debilitating as ever. If the GM can’t work out how this reversal would function, you can’t cast the spell!

You *can* enchant items, but these aren’t permanent either – although they last a little better than your other magic. A limited-use creation, such as a magic potion or a scroll that would fade after being read, loses its magic after 2d days. A supposedly permanent item with unlimited uses, such as the typical magic sword, lasts 2d weeks.

See also *Impermanent Magery* and *Faerie Glamour* in *GURPS Fantasy*.

## Injurious Magic

-30% or -50%

This limitation is only available if standard magic uses FP rather than some other energy source. Your magic is painful and debilitating. Some or all of the time when you cast spells, you *must* spend HP instead of FP – exactly as described in *Burning HP* (p. B237).

If the first energy point you spend on a casting, and the first point whenever you maintain a spell, must come from HP – but all further points can come from FP – then the limitation is -30%. If *all* of your magical energy expenditures must take the form of HP, that's -50%. In either case, you may have to injure yourself physically, spilling your own blood; this is a special effect.

To make this limitation more effective, the GM may rule that First Aid and magical healing can't restore HP used to power spells. The injury takes the form of internal bleeding, muscle spasms, etc., that can't simply be bandaged – and life energy spent on magic can't be *replaced* by magic. In that case, you must heal naturally, although you can claim the usual benefits to long-term recovery for being under the care of a skilled physician.

## Limited Colleges

Variable

This works exactly like the One College Only limitation (p. B67), but allows access to more than one college. Two colleges is -30%; three, -20%; and four (the maximum), -10%.

## One-Spell Magery

-80%

Magery that only applies to a single spell has a -80% limitation. Optionally, the GM may allow multi-spell Magery, reducing the limitation by -5% per spell after the first; e.g., four-spell Magery would be -65%. However, nobody can buy One-Spell Magery multiple times for different spells or sets of spells, and the GM should probably only permit One-Spell Magery in conjunction with a limit on the total number of levels of Magery allowed.

## Visible Magical Gifts

Some wizards might be obvious to those with suitably attuned senses – or to everyone. Maybe their eyes glow, their hair swirls around even on calm days, or they shed sparks. Perhaps they radiate an indescribable sensation of *wrongness*. Any such trait could qualify as Unnatural Features (p. B22); it might be the standard mark of magical talent, but it's still distinctive! Alternatively or additionally, apply one of these new forms of Supernatural Features (p. B157):

*Flagrant Aura:* Your magical power is instantly recognizable to individuals who can sense such things. Anyone using the Aura spell will see your aura flare or glow with unusual colors. Those with the ability to discern supernatural beings (e.g., through the Detect advantage) get a Per roll to notice that you're a wizard, although they'll also realize that you're human (assuming you are!). Your aura won't mislead observers about your power level, but it *stands out*. The GM should prohibit this disadvantage in settings where relevant detection abilities are rare or unknown. *-1 point, plus -1 point per +3 to rolls to sense your aura or recognize your magical status, to a maximum of +12 (-5 points total).*

*Unmistakable Power:* You have one or more clearly identifiable magical features that tend to unnerve people. You must take Unnatural Features, which gives +2 per level to all rolls to identify you as a wizard. In addition, you suffer -2 on reaction rolls made by those who notice this effect (except perhaps other wizards or supernatural beings). *-5 points if you can avoid the reaction penalty through subtlety (e.g., by wearing a hooded cloak and not speaking much or casting spells in sight of others), or -10 points if the effect is impossible to conceal when you're in plain sight.*

In all cases, other wizards may be mildly impressed . . . or regard you as sloppy or undisciplined: +1 or -1 to reactions, at the GM's whim.



## Spell Signatures

Magic *use* might produce minor side effects that are unique to each caster; e.g., one wizard generates the sound of phantom laughter, another leaves the scent of flowers, and a third's eyes glow as he casts. A wizard's "signature" may even become a permanent feature of any magic items he creates (GM's option).

This is usually just a colorful but trivial special effect – but if it's inconvenient, it qualifies as a quirk or a variant Trademark (p. B159). In the latter case, the fact that the Trademark is completely involuntary and unpreventable balances the fact that the wizard needn't put any time or effort into leaving it. If the effect makes the caster as easy to trace as a "complex" Trademark but demands less effort than even a "simple" one, split the difference and call it -5 points.

For other side effects, see *Temporary Disadvantage* (p. 27).

## Unusable Prerequisites

Certain combinations of limitations and campaign options can put a wizard in the situation where, to acquire a useful spell, he must learn prerequisites that he can't cast. For instance, one has to know two "Seek" spells in order to learn Seeker – but in a strictly normal or lower mana world, someone who has Magery 1 with One College Only (Knowledge) can't cast those spells, because they're all outside his college.

The standard assumption is that the wizard can *learn* such "useless prerequisites." He studies the underlying magical theory and knows how to go through the motions of casting – and on a good day, might even be able to create ineffective, sputtering, partial effects – but can't actually *cast* those spells. The points they cost do him no direct good. That's just the downside of limited Magery.

This may cause suspension-of-disbelief problems, though. How can a wizard be said to know or understand a spell that he has *never* cast? Hence, the GM may prefer to handle things differently.

One option is to rule that this problem simply locks limited-Magery wizards out of some spells within their college. This can be deeply annoying, and makes the limitation slightly more restrictive . . . but life is harsh.

An alternative is to say that the world includes at least a few tiny areas of higher mana, and that any wizardly mentor or academy of magic worthy of the name has access to them. Students are occasionally taken to these places in order to practice spells in relative ease, which lets limited mages cast spells outside their normal range a few times, to get the feel of them. The GM will have to watch out for PCs seeking access to such "places of power" for other purposes, although that could be an entertaining plot! The existence of the Mana Enhancer advantage in the setting could simplify things – and guarantee any Mana Enhancer a decent job as a teaching assistant, when not being kidnapped by wizards who don't feel like paying him. Having to find and hire such help may make wizard-teachers rather cranky, though. Note also that the Mana Enhancer who lacks the Area Effect enhancement will have to physically *carry* the student.

A radical solution is to adjust the prerequisite/college structure. This makes work for the GM and can have unexpected consequences for the campaign, but is sometimes worthwhile; see *Changing Prerequisites* (pp. 32-33). To keep things balanced, the GM should establish different prerequisites that are at least as stringent as the standard ones; e.g., Seeker might have Magery 2, Detect Magic, IQ 12+, and Per 13+ as an alternative prerequisite set, indicating exceptional magical and general sensitivity rather than specific experience with "find stuff" magic.

## Radically Unstable Magery

Variable

Any spell failure you experience is likely to be a *critical* failure! This limitation comes in three versions:

- You can try to "stabilize" the magic by making an immediate second roll against the spell skill, without range penalties but with all other applicable modifiers. Success turns the result into a normal failure. You don't get a stabilization roll if the spell would have been a critical failure without this limitation, though. -10%.

- You get no stabilization roll. *Every* failure is a critical failure. -30%.

- You get no stabilization roll. Moreover, the GM rolls three times on the critical failure table and chooses the result he considers worst. -50%.

In all cases, you can't *cast* spells (or make stabilization rolls) with an effective skill of better than 15 – although you can *learn* spells at higher levels in order to compensate for penalties. As well, you suffer significant critical failure effects even in low mana areas, where other wizards wouldn't. These may be *slightly* reduced, but not by much, and you always pay the full energy cost.

This limitation cannot be combined with the Stable Casting enhancement (pp. 28-29). The GMs should prohibit it if he feels that frequent critical failure results would damage the campaign.

## OTHER APPROPRIATE LIMITATIONS

Magery can also take several of the general limitations on pp. B110-117.

### Accessibility

see p. B110

Accessibility can represent a broad range of drawbacks, including new varieties of "aspected" Magery. It's also useful for magic that doesn't work in the presence of certain materials (e.g., a specific herb). The GM *might* even permit limitations such as "Only on women" or "Only on machines." If so, these limit any of the mage's spells that would affect someone else, but *not* spells that create a damaging force that goes on to harm the target in an essentially mundane way (like Fireball). The GM should prohibit any such limitation that would impact few or none of the wizard's spells.

Detailed notes on evaluating Accessibility appear on p. 99 of *GURPS Powers*. If a limitation would be *especially* onerous for Magery, the GM may set a higher value. Most of the special limitations on p. B67 are simply forms of Accessibility, and serve as useful pricing guidelines.

### Costs Fatigue

see p. B111

This limitation means the mage can only use magic – at least at full capacity – with some effort. Paying the FP cost

activates his Magery for one minute, after which he can keep it active for *half* as many FP (round up) per minute. Maintaining Magery in this way isn't restful; therefore, Costs Fatigue is incompatible with anything that requires rest, notably the Recover Energy spell.

## Pact

see p. B113

This is a good limitation for the magic-worker who falls somewhere between "secular wizard" and "cleric" (see *Clerical Spell-Magic*, pp. 65-71) – someone whose Magery is a gift from a higher power, meaning it can go away if he fails to show proper reverence, but who otherwise functions like an ordinary mage. It's also useful for defining a mage whose talent is entirely mundane, but who has come to the attention of a greater being who doesn't trust him and who might take his power away if he breaks some rule or code. Finally, it suits those who are subject to taboos because that's just how magic works, or because they have weird subconscious issues.

The key difference between Magery with a Pact and Power Investiture (pp. 66-67) is that the former requires the mage to acquire and learn spells normally, following the rules for prerequisites and so on, while the latter implies that a higher power grants the spells directly, with no prerequisites but a greater need to respect that being's rules. See also *Power Investiture as Modified Magery* (p. 67).

## Preparation Required

see p. B114

Applied to Magery, this yields a wizard who must spend time preparing before each spell but who can then cast it at normal speed – possibly after a delay to do other things. The preparation might involve studying and reviewing the spell; assigning energy of some kind to the appropriate spell or college; or actually performing a complex ritualistic casting, leaving the magic all but cast and in need of a brief "trigger" ritual to release it.

## Takes Recharge

see p. B115

Once Magery with this limitation has "recharged" and become active, it remains functional for one minute. *Maintaining* spells requires still-active Magery, unless the local mana level is high or better; thus, this limitation can be seriously restrictive for some wizards. A spell with duration remaining doesn't vanish just because the caster's Magery went away, though.

## Temporary Disadvantage

see p. B115

Use this for mages whose magic use temporarily afflicts them with some physical or behavioral oddity. Examples include a ringing in the ears that drowns out other sounds (Deafness), a feeling of intoxicating power (Overconfidence), a demonic visage (Horrid Appearance and/or Unnatural Features), and a *dangerous* openness to supernatural forces (Magic Susceptibility).

Temporary Disadvantage is only possible on Magery that can be switched on and off. If the Magery lacks other modifiers that enable this, then it also requires the Switchable enhancement (p. 29). Applying these modifiers to Magery 0 means that the mage is only open to sensing randomly encountered magic items at all times if he's willing to tolerate his "temporary" disadvantage full-time!

## Trigger

see p. B115

This suits mages who have to take a special drug or offer a sacrifice to activate their powers.

## Unreliable

see p. B116

This is good for the classic "promising apprentice, but unstable and unreliable as yet." Roll for activation whenever you try to cast a spell. On a failure, your Magery doesn't work – which often means that the magic doesn't work at all. If you apply Unreliable to Magery 0, then when you see or touch a magic item, the GM will roll secretly to check whether your Magery functions. If it doesn't, he won't even bother rolling to see whether you sense the magic!

# BUYING OFF LIMITATIONS ON MAGERY

Players will no doubt want to use bonus character points or points gained by study to "buy off" limitations on their wizards' Magery. The GM decides how feasible this is. The verdict often depends on whether the limitations represent fundamental flaws in the mage's relationship to magic (something in his *brain*, "the gift the gods gave him," etc.) or merely ignorance, narrow vision, or imperfect training.

If the problem is fundamental, then *any* improvement would be miraculous. Such a change is akin to buying off a physical disadvantage (see p. B292), and often represents a deep shift in character concept. If it's possible at all, it likely implies grandiose magic or even divine intervention.

If the issue is one of understanding, then removing a limitation is closer to a personal conceptual breakthrough, like buying off a mental disadvantage (see p. B291). It *might* be accomplished through study and training, although ingrained bad habits and restricted vision are surprisingly difficult to overcome. A more likely cure is extensive exposure to unfamiliar ideas – perhaps involving some painful experiences.

Limitations won't be uniformly easy to shed. Some might disappear with sufficient study; for instance, One College Only and Extravagant Rituals may require learning the basic principles of other colleges and taking lessons in remedial technique, respectively. Others could be harder to discard; a mage who uses an alchemical drug as a Trigger may need to cast aside a crutch comparable to an Addiction. And many are likely *impossible* to get rid of – how *does* one "internalize" gadget-conferred Magery, or convince higher powers to dispense with a Pact?

## The Unarmored Wizard

A common image in fantasy is the group of metal-armored, sword-wielding warriors accompanied by a wizard who wears a lightweight robe and carries a flimsy dagger. This could merely be a literary convention, partly excused by the suggestion that the wizard has been too busy studying magic to learn to fight. In game terms, spending many points on magical abilities leaves him unable to afford much ST, so he's likely to avoid heavy equipment that would slow him down.

The problem may instead be social. An armor-clad wizard might be seen as admitting that he isn't good enough at magic to defend himself, and be mocked by other wizards.

There might be other justifications, reflected in optional rules:

*Rituals and Encumbrance:* The weight and bulk of equipment may make the physical process of spellcasting more difficult. If so, apply the caster's current encumbrance level (p. B17) as a penalty to spellcasting rolls; e.g., Medium encumbrance gives -2. To make the problem more severe, *double* the penalty (so Medium encumbrance gives -4). Logically, this penalty might only affect wizards who must make significant gestures, applying to those with skill 14 or less and perhaps doubling for anyone with skill 9 or less. But in many stories, even the most powerful wizards avoid armor, suggesting that the penalty should be universal if exists at all.

*Problems With Metal:* It's sometimes suggested that metal, especially iron, somehow disrupts magic, perhaps because of its ability to conduct energy; thus, too much metal (armor, swords, iron chains or manacles . . .) close to a caster's body prevents spellcasting. To simulate this,

estimate the total weight of metal within 6" of the wizard's skin (count a spearhead as 0.5 lb., a polearm blade as 1 lb.), divide by 5, round to the nearest whole number, and apply the result as a penalty to casting rolls. A wizard with pocket change and belt buckles totaling 0.5 lb., a large knife (1 lb.), and a dagger in his boot (0.25 lb.) has no penalty – but replacing that large knife with a 2-lb. shortsword would give him -1, and an 18-lb. breastplate would give him -4 all by itself. (At higher TLs, firearms present similar problems.) Of course, this leaves wizards free to wear heavy leathers and fight with staffs and clubs; raises doubts about how wizards can enchant swords, much less armor; and confronts the GM with the practical problem of keeping track of quantities of metal in, say, building structures.

### Those Without Problems

For a full set of fantasy-game clichés, *some* spellcasters – notably clerics and members of particular races – can wear armor, while secular human wizards of the pointy-hat-and-robe variety must avoid it.

If problems with encumbrance or metal are the rule, then any exceptions the GM allows have an enhancement to Magery or Power Investiture. "Casts Without Encumbrance/Metal Armor Problems" is worth +50%. If the penalty is merely halved, that's +30%. If the standard penalty is *twice* encumbrance, these enhancements are +80% and +50%, respectively.

If such problems are the exception, then they work better as limitations on Magery or Power Investiture: -20% for an encumbrance penalty, or -25% if the encumbrance penalty is doubled, and -20% for a penalty for nearby metal.

## MAGERY WITH ENHANCEMENTS

Magery *doesn't* generally accept enhancements. If a mage desires superior magical effects, he should learn more powerful spells. He *definitely* can't use Reduced Fatigue Cost to lower the energy cost of his spells, or Reduced Time to shorten casting times – for that, he must improve his skill level.

The GM might permit a few exceptions, however. These enhancements concern the nature of the mage's gift – not the behavior of individual spells – and apply to *all* of his Magery, including Magery 0. Because such modifiers can make the mage exceptional and/or bypass the rules' built-in controls on wizardly power, the GM may link access to a substantial Unusual Background.

### Easy Casting

+40%/level

When using *Magic Rituals* (p. B237), each level of this enhancement makes the ritual requirement one category

more favorable (that is, less complex). Time and energy cost are unaffected. For example, if your Magery has two levels of Easy Casting and you want to cast a spell you know at skill 12 in an area with normal or better mana, then you can cast it without any rituals – but it still has its full energy cost and casting time.

This cannot be combined with the Extravagant Rituals limitation (p. 24).

### Solitary Ceremonial

+10%

Ceremonial spellcasting normally requires at least two participants. (Enchanting is an exception.) This enhancement lets you cast spells ceremonially all by yourself.

### Stable Casting

+40%

Whenever you roll a critical failure with a spell, you can try to "stabilize" the magic by making an immediate second roll against the spell skill, without range penalties but with all other applicable modifiers. Success turns the result into

a normal failure. Note that this enhancement may make powerful mages *excessively* flamboyant about their magic. It might also drive down the prices of large Powerstones, which are inflated by the risk of the enchantment process going disastrously wrong.

This cannot be combined with the Radically Unstable Magery limitation (p. 26).

### *Subtle Aura*

+20% or +40%

Your aura doesn't mark you as a mage. If those who can sense auras are at -5 on all rolls to notice traces of magical

ability, the enhancement is +20%. If such detection can *never* discover that you're a mage, it's +40%.

The GM should prohibit Subtle Aura in campaigns where auras reflect fundamental, absolute truths. It can never be combined with the disadvantages discussed under *Visible Magical Gifts* (p. 25).

### *Switchable*

+10%

You can turn your Magery on or off with a Ready maneuver. While it's switched off, you lose *all* of its benefits, but you're also undetectable as a mage and unaffected by any Temporary Disadvantage (p. 27) on your Magery.

## MAGIC BASED ON OTHER ATTRIBUTES

In the standard magic system, spells are IQ-based skills (aided by Magery). This implies that magic is a fundamentally intellectual art, dependent on detailed knowledge and analytical understanding – which agrees with most stories and legends. For an offbeat variation, though, magic can be based on other attributes.

### *DX-Based Magic*

If magic is easy to *understand*, but getting it to work requires precise gestures and perfect timing, then it could reasonably be DX-based. However, this will leave every important adventuring role – warrior, rogue, and spellcaster alike – dependent on the same attribute. A party of high-DX generalists might not be the most interesting group of PCs.

### *HT-Based Magic*

Magic could be a somewhat stressful overflowing of sheer “life energy.” In that case, healthier people who can better withstand the biological strain of spellcasting would make superior wizards. Such magic will likely seem even more primal and less intellectual than the DX-based variant.

### *Per-Based Magic*

Magic might depend on the ability to sense the flow of mana, making spellcasting a delicate act of juggling forces and effects. If so, then it would be logical for perceptive individuals to excel at it. This model retains the link between magic and mental ability (of sorts), but also makes alert animals into potentially formidable spellcasters.

### *Will-Based Magic*

This possibility is consistent with the common definition of magic as the ability to impose one's will on reality. The dependency of Will on IQ means that such magic tends to favor more intelligent creatures – but animals *can* have

high Will, so they aren't automatically excluded. Willpower must be directed by intelligence to look like anything but stubbornness, though, so the GM could plausibly restrict Will-based magic to sapient beings.

If Will is key, then advantages that indicate determination and mental focus – such as Visualization and Single-Minded – might reasonably grant spells the same bonuses they give skills. This makes magical power even cheaper, though, which is already a problem given that Will costs only 5 points/level.

### *10+Magery*

Perhaps *no* standard attribute has any impact on spellcasting. Someone can be more or less smart, deft, alert, or strong-willed, but none of this affects his aptitude with spells. Magical ability is effectively a “fifth attribute” that starts at 10 and increases at the rate of +1 per 10 points, with each additional level being the equivalent of a level of Magery. Wizards must still buy Magery 0 in order to work magic, however.

It isn't *usually* wise to allow “negative Magery” that reduces spellcasting ability, as the players of non-wizards are likely to see this as free points. If resistance rolls against spells are also based on 10+Magery (rather than on Will, HT, etc.), though, then negative Magery might be more balanced – few adventurers will want increased vulnerability to hostile magic! Also, in settings where nearly everyone is expected to learn and regularly use magic, relative ineptitude may be a serious practical drawback.

## PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

These variants aren't without their weaknesses. The most obvious is that using anything but IQ as the basis for spells makes the “scholar wizard” difficult to justify. Such characters will often cost more points – and if they're rare or nonexistent, the campaign won't feel much like traditional fantasy.

## Critical Successes With Spells

A critical success when spellcasting eliminates the energy cost and may provide other benefits (see *Casting Spells*, p. B235). The GM who's stuck for ideas when this happens can roll 1d:

- 1, 2** – The spell can be maintained without energy cost for 3d times its basic duration. For spells without meaningful duration (e.g., Minor Healing and Fireball), see **3, 4**.
- 3, 4** – A *helpful* spell is cast as an Area spell on any of the caster's companions who are within arm's reach. A *baneful* spell is cast as an Area spell on all foes currently engaged with the caster's party who can be caught by a reasonably simple area effect. If the spell is already an Area spell, it gets double radius, provided this doesn't harm the caster's allies. For spells for which area makes no sense, see **5, 6**.
- 5, 6** – The spell works as a better, more difficult, and/or more expensive spell, or adds the benefit of a related spell: Minor Healing functions as Major Healing, Seeker as Seeker and Trace, etc.

## Critical Magical Failures and Luck

The various Luck advantages can normally only affect success, damage, and reaction rolls. They *can't* influence rolls on "effects tables" such as the *Firearm Malfunction Table* (p. B407), the *Gadget Bugs Table* (p. B476), or any critical success or failure table. These rolls represent effects that vary with the situation or that are determined by the GM's whim, rather than being truly random.

All of this extends to magic. A wizard who has Luck of some kind *can* use it to avoid critical failures at spellcasting – but if he does experience a critical failure, he *can't* change the result rolled on the *Critical Spell Failure Table* (p. B236) or on any table in *Thaumatology* that serves a similar purpose. Such a result often represents the universe or the gods punishing the caster for hubris. Mere luck can't deflect that! And since the GM is free to improvise a critical failure result instead of using the result rolled, he could always change back effects altered using these advantages anyway.

*Cosmic Luck:* Optionally, the GM may make an exception for Luck or Super Luck that has a +50% Cosmic enhancement (p. B103). This represents luck that dictates terms to the universe; therefore, it *can* overrule the gods or reality!

Basing spells on something other than IQ also tends to imply that nonsapient beings can not merely use spells, if capable of learning them, but possibly be better at magic than humans, elves, and the like. Most animals would only use magic instinctively (and IQ 0 entities, strictly as their physiological state dictated), but even so, the results could seem odd – especially if they include wizards habitually teaching magic to trained animals! If the GM considers this a problem, he can rule that spells, like technological skills and languages, are among the things that only sapient (IQ 6+) creatures can learn; see p. B15. Thus, a tree could only ever "know" a spell as a racial feature or through divine intervention.

Generally, all spellcasting in a campaign should involve the same attribute or set of attributes. Radically different styles of magic *might* use different scores, but the GM should take care to keep this balanced, lest one style become dominant by virtue of being significantly cheaper to master.

On this last point, the GM needs to be aware that some options are open to *serious* abuse. For example, if magic is Will- or Per-based, then it's cheap to raise the key score – and every spell along with it. The potential for exploitation is even greater with HT, if players are permitted to buy down FP and Basic Speed and take a few levels of Easy to Kill. Strict disadvantage limits will diminish but not remove this problem. Restrictions on adjusting secondary characteristics work well but can seem arbitrary.

Below are a few solutions to these problems.

### Calculated Bases

The GM may want magic to be *partly* tied to intelligence, perceptiveness, willpower, or whatever, but not want everyone who happens to be good in that one area to be great at magic. He might envisage spellcasting as a complex art with several facets. Such goals are easily achieved if the GM doesn't mind complicating matters by basing spells on a value calculated from several scores (plus Magery, of course).

For example, suppose that magic is complex and mentally challenging, and rewards study and intellectual analysis, but that getting spells to *work* requires many complex physical actions and well-timed sequences of gestures. The base "attribute" for spells might then be  $(DX+IQ)/2$ . Intelligence can compensate for clumsiness, or deftness for slow wits, but the greatest adepts are smart *and* dextrous. Or perhaps magical ability is largely unrelated to anything else, but sheer determination helps. A base of  $(Will/2)+5$  would represent this nicely. It would also mean that it costs an equal number of points to improve in spellcasting by raising Will or Magery, with each option offering its own additional benefits.

Weirder combinations are possible! For instance,  $(total\ Striking\ ST+Per)/3$  could represent magic that consists of sensing ambient forces and then *forcing* them to take a desired form through explosive release of muscular energy. It would also make large predators into terrifying spellcasters . . .

### Lower of Two Bases

A useful alternative is to base spells on the *lower* of two attributes, especially if one of them is IQ. If spells are based on the lower of IQ or Per, then good wizards have to be smart – but players who try to buy IQ cheaply by lowering Per will find it self-defeating. If the base is the lower of IQ or DX, then mastering

magic will cost a lot of points. Spells could even be based on the lower of an attribute *without* a Magery bonus or 10+Magery; this, too, would make wizards expensive.

### Varying Bases

Yet another option is to have spells “float” to various attributes – like ordinary skills (see *Using Skills With Other Attributes*, p. B172) – instead of using the same base all the time. For example, casting a spell normally might be a matter of intricate gestures, and hence DX-based, while ceremonial castings are stressful and draining, and thus Will- or HT-based. Alternatively, to keep an intellectual element, the two could be based on  $(IQ+DX)/2$  and  $(IQ+HT)/2$ , respectively. This approach has the benefit of preventing any one attribute or secondary characteristic from becoming the be-all and end-all of magical competence. “Field wizards” and ceremonial specialists would be significantly different sorts of people. When using varying bases, record spells by relative skill level (-1, +2, etc.) rather than with a fixed skill number.

A drawback here is added complexity. In a magic-oriented campaign, everyone might accept that those

playing wizard PCs must track all sorts of calculated numbers. In other games, though, it’s liable to seem needlessly complicated.

### Other Issues

*Attribute Prerequisites:* Some spells have a specific level of IQ as a prerequisite. It’s probably best to leave this as written, even if the base attribute for spells isn’t IQ; such spells tend to require detailed understanding and broad analytical ability to work. The GM is free to change the prerequisite to whatever feels appropriate, of course.

*Changing Attributes:* Shapeshifting, spells, potions, and many other things can alter a wizard’s attributes. If the score that governs spellcasting changes, then effective skill with spells changes by the same amount. This is mostly fair – after all, a standard wizard whose IQ changes already experiences this effect – but physical attributes are typically more alterable than mental ones, raising the possibility of abuse. Should this become a problem, the GM can rule that spell skill *doesn’t* vary with a particular attribute.

## CHANGING THE SPELLS

The GM can adjust the parameters and effects of individual spells – or of *all* spells – to taste. Tweaking one spell may affect others, though, while wide-ranging changes can have major repercussions on game balance. Thus, such adjustments demand a little care.

### BANNING SPELLS

The simplest change that the GM can make is to *ban* individual spells. He may even ban whole *categories* of spells, the most obvious options being specific colleges. For example, the GM might prohibit Enchantment spells, producing a setting where standard magic items don’t exist. Other criteria are possible, though: banning Blocking spells fits a background where magic is too slow and complex to be used for emergency defense; forbidding any spell that creates or summons a free-willed being suggests a robustly materialistic universe with little in the way of spirits or gods; and so on.

Banned spells might “merely” be irretrievably forgotten, or rendered impossible by some shift in the cosmic balance. If Enchantment spells were available *in the past*, then there may be a finite supply of magic items that can never be replaced. Of course, if the GM imposes such a ban, he should be prepared to deal with wizard PCs seeking to resurrect lost lore!

The GM must carefully weigh the full ramifications of any ban, however. A ban could make it impossible to meet the prerequisites of other spells, unless they’re restructured. It might even affect campaign tone. For instance, banning healing spells won’t just lead to a darker game – it will make wise PCs less inclined to risk injury, reducing the amount of actual *adventuring* that occurs. It’s often better to make

spells harder or rarer than to forbid them outright. That way, wizards who *really* want to achieve a particular effect can do so . . . at considerable cost.

### SECRET AND LOST SPELLS

In some settings, certain spells may be “secret” or “lost.” This doesn’t mean “banned” or “impossible.” Knowledge of how to cast those spells might be restricted to a cabal. Or perhaps it’s forgotten but was once understood, and now awaits rediscovery in obscure texts or hidden inscriptions – or even reconstruction from first principles, although nobody has managed the trick yet. Lost magic is a favorite subject of myths, legends, and feverish speculation. Stodgy old wizards may dismiss such talk as fantastical . . . while paranoids accuse such wizards of being part of the conspiracy that’s keeping the secret! This idea especially suits game worlds with a “Golden Age of High Magic” in their past, but a few spells could have been discovered and then lost again in just about *any* background.

The GM may permit PCs to start play knowing *secret* spells. Such wizards will need an Unusual Background – or perhaps a set of advantages, disadvantages, Hidden Lore skills, etc., related to the secret faction that controls the knowledge. If they teach the secrets to outsiders, they can get into trouble. Acquiring such knowledge in play can be a significant task: track down the secret experts, persuade them to let you join (possibly after persuading them not to kill you), and then study magic on their terms. The GM may require PCs who do this to buy any Unusual Background or other requirements with bonus character points, to represent the effort and commitment involved.



The GM might even allow PCs to know *lost* spells, if they take a large Unusual Background – in which case they’ll soon become the subject of much interest from other wizards. On the other hand, such knowledge might be inaccessible without considerable research and effort in play. This could easily become a subplot in the campaign, or even a major theme. Information about a lost spell could have significant cash value, or the spell might be required to defeat a foe or solve some important problem.

As with a ban, remember that if a given spell is unknown, then every spell that has it as an immediate or indirect mandatory prerequisite is *also* effectively secret or lost.

## CHANGING SPECIFIC SPELLS

Any spell or small class of spells can have significant consequences for a game world if it’s widespread and used cleverly. Furthermore, the exact types of magic that are common can have a considerable impact on campaign flavor. Merely prohibiting inconvenient spells can seem clumsy, though, and may have knock-on effects for things such as prerequisites. The GM may therefore wish to *change* individual spells, making them more or less useful, or permitting extra effects with interesting ramifications.

### *Fearsome Magic*

If mastering magic endangers the wizard’s soul or sanity, then learning a new spell (or gaining skill in Thaumatology) may require a Fright Check. This might only arise with certain colleges, such as Necromantic and perhaps Gate. The effects might be worse for advanced spells – perhaps the Fright Check takes a penalty equal to half the spell’s prerequisite count, rounded down. With truly fearsome magic, *casting* the spell may trigger a Fright Check! Such rules will encourage players to create wizards with several levels of Fearlessness, which *does* fit some legendary stereotypes.

An example of a setting that would benefit from this sort of tweaking is the world of the “Arabian Nights” stories. Wizards there are nothing if not *noticeable*, being powerful and flamboyant. However, those showy wizards don’t often hurl fireballs – fiery blasts aren’t unknown, but they seem to require magic items. Magicians are far more likely to change a victim’s shape.

Another category of change that suits some settings is to make healing spells harder, or to give them unpleasant side effects. Quick, reliable magical healing can have huge consequences both for adventurers, who might not take injuries and physical risks very seriously if they have access to a healer, and for the game world, as magic can have medical uses far beyond anything promised by mundane medicine.

*I put a spell on you  
‘Cause you’re mine  
You better stop the things you do  
Lord knows, I ain’t lyin’  
No, no, no, I ain’t lyin’  
– Screamin’ Jay Hawkins,  
“I Put a Spell on You”*

Indeed, given how much healing magic can do, and people’s natural desire to have injuries and diseases cured, wizards may hardly be *permitted* to use magic for much else – or might be paid so much to take safe jobs as healers that the idea of becoming *adventurers* would seem stupid.

### *Changing Prerequisites*

The prerequisite rules give magic a logical structure: a wizard can’t raise a horde of zombies without first learning how to raise just one, toss huge fireballs before learning how to create a small flame, and so on. Prerequisites also provide a balancing mechanism, by ensuring that novice wizards can’t spend a few points to master world-shaking spells instantly – at least not without specializing obsessively and spending a lot of points on lesser spells. No one can hurl even a simple lightning bolt without buying *Magery 1+* and spending six points on other spells, or send rooms full of people to sleep unless they have IQ 13+ and know three other spells.

These objectives aren’t sacred, though. In some fantasies, magic is simply irrational and erratic by nature. The apprentice who digs through a spellbook and finds some huge spell without first trudging through lots of less interesting lessons might fit perfectly well – especially if each spell is a unique “package” of standardized gestures and words rather than part of a complex, integrated field of study.

Also, the game-balance benefit of prerequisites is actually rather limited (a 50-point wizard PC *can* know *Wish* or *Resurrection*, if the player is determined) and generally less important than other mechanisms, such as energy cost. The GM *could* strengthen the balancing effects of prerequisites by ruling that no spell can be known at a higher skill level than its prerequisites, so that specialists in big spells can’t skimp on the supporting smaller stuff. However, it’s equally valid to make some spells much harder to learn, putting them in the province of the expert rather than the dabbler.

In other words, the GM can change the prerequisite structure fairly safely. *Abolishing* prerequisites is probably too extreme. If nothing else, it’s likely to lead to wizard PCs favoring a few handy “adventuring” spells and ignoring all the other interesting and occasionally useful options. It would also make wizards look arbitrarily erratic in their powers. Someone who can hurl fireballs but not light a

campfire without blowing it apart would be ripe for mockery . . . behind his back!

*Simplifying* prerequisites is safer. For instance, the GM might name four or five simple spells required for access to each college, after which the rest of the college is available. Minimum levels of IQ and/or Magery may apply in some cases, though, to emphasize that significant magic requires talent and intelligence.

The GM can always *modify* the prerequisites of individual spells. The most obvious reasons for this are because he has banned a spell in a prerequisite chain and because he wants to let single-college mages master a college without requiring out-of-college prerequisites. Then again, he might simply dislike the standard prerequisites.

Changes could reflect the setting's cosmology or metaphysics. Resurrection might lose Summon Spirit as a prerequisite – either because it's a life-oriented spell, utterly opposed to anything that smacks of necromancy, or because the setting is a materialist universe in which there's no immaterial soul to reunite with the repaired body. In either case, a few Body Control spells might replace Summon Spirit, to reflect mastery of the magic of life forces. Such changes are often systematic, covering *groups* of spells. If Air, Earth, Fire, and Water spells embody the power of the classical elements, then the most powerful spells in those colleges might have prerequisites from the other three colleges, and a master elemental must grasp all four aspects of his art. If it's hard to work with complex machinery unless you know how to put it together and keep it that way, some Technological spells might require Making and Breaking spells.

The GM can also give spells tougher prerequisites to reinforce his views of what those who cast them should be like. If certain spells have prerequisites from multiple colleges, then wizards who want them must become generalists rather than specialists. Mundane skill requirements – e.g., Thaumatology for Enchantment spells, or Lockpicking for Lockmaster – imply that it's impossible to get magic to work right without a solid grounding in the associated mundane theory.

*Examples:* In an Arabian Nights world, the GM could control Fireball by changing its prerequisites to Magery 2 and seven spells from each of the four elemental colleges, limiting it to well-rounded expert elementalists. This would also make any spell with Fireball as a prerequisite harder. Shapeshifting has relatively mild prerequisites, and can't be made much easier. Deleting the Magery requirement would make it an option for dabblers, which is probably too much – but lowering it to Magery 0 might be acceptable. Healing spells could require Magery 3, restricting them to the most powerful wizards, or call for advantages such as Blessed or True Faith, making them essentially divine gifts.

### The Prerequisite Count

Appendix C (pp. 261-267) lists a “prerequisite count” for every standard spell, for use with various optional rules. This measures the shortest chain of prerequisite spells required to learn the spell in question. For instance, if a spell has a count of 5, a wizard must learn five other spells first.

To alter a spell's prerequisites without radically changing its difficulty or frequency of appearance, give it requirements that add up to *roughly* the same prerequisite count. This isn't an exact science! Changing a spell's count from 14 to 5 might cause problems, but reducing it to 12 is unlikely to ruin the campaign. Remember also that any spell that's required as a prerequisite for another, very useful spell will become popular itself; wizard PCs may seek out uses for it.

Many spells have prerequisites other than spells, which prerequisite count doesn't consider. The GM must take care when changing these. In particular, deleting a Magery requirement makes a spell that “should” be limited to casters who are sensitive to magical forces available to dabblers.

### Casting Time and Energy Cost

Adjusting a spell's “operational parameters” can make it significantly easier or harder to use in combat or similar stressful situations. For spells useful in a fight, increasing casting time makes battles chancier and more dependent on direct combat ability.

*Examples:* Multiplying the time to cast Mass Sleep by 10 would prevent wizards from sending whole swathes of enemies to sleep during a fight – although the spell could still be useful in subtler ways, and there are many other spells that can demolish enemy war bands. If adding energy to Missile spells takes twice as long, or even if the caster merely has to spend a second or two on initial casting procedures before he can add energy, such spells would be less effective in combat – but not useless, if the wizard has a screen of guards to protect him while he prepares. Healing spells that take *much* longer would be less useful on adventures but see heavy use “back at base,” and would logically still have a large effect on society, unless they took months or years.

Conversely, reducing casting time makes a spell more tactically useful. *Most* spells that take a while to cast are actually non-combat magics, and their long casting times are largely for appearances; e.g., to prevent magic from making plants grow so fast as to look bizarre. Still, there are important exceptions.

*Examples:* If Shapeshifting is intended to be a favored spell in the campaign, it might be worth reducing the casting time to two seconds or even one second, enabling wizards to use it quickly in response to circumstances – although the standard three-second casting time isn't crippling. A faster Create Door could be used for quick get-aways. A speedier Plant Form Other would be dramatic battle-magic!

Energy cost, too, can be changed. Raising a spell's energy cost may relegate it to the role of an occasional, special trick. Even a small increase can make a spell markedly less appealing, as most wizards have fairly limited FP reserves. An extra energy point or two might not be missed, but larger expenditures take a long time to recover and eventually leave the caster disabled.

*Examples:* Doubling the energy cost of Missile spells would mean that they're still useful in combat, but make it prohibitively tiring to do more than a couple of dice of damage with them. Weapons would look attractive by comparison! Increasing the energy cost more than that would make such spells fairly pointless – *except* for casters with large external energy sources, which is the sort of thing that megalomaniac fantasy wizards love. Multiplying the energy cost of Healing spells by 10 would effectively restrict them to ceremonial use. This would mostly eliminate their usefulness for adventurers without powerful external energy sources, but leave them as a useful option for wizards prepared to stay in secure bases and heal those who come to them.

Lowering energy costs lets wizards use spells more frequently – perhaps even turning non-combat spells into combat options. Take care when significantly reducing very high energy costs, though! Those costs were set that way for a reason, usually to force wizards to work ceremonially.

*Examples:* The GM could certainly reduce the cost of Shapeshifting to make it more viable for routine use – although he should be careful not to make powerful, versatile animal forms too cheap. The ability to set different costs for different forms is a great boon here. Cutting the costs of enchantments could lead to a world cluttered with magic items as adventuring wizards create such things in the field at whim – but this *does* describe some fantasy settings. Dropping the cost of Resurrection to something that an adventurer-wizard could afford in one go is probably ill-advised. It would lead to wizards learning it as a stock emergency measure . . . and to many accidental deaths being reversed.

Casting time and energy cost are interconnected. Generally, a cost much above 5 – certainly, one of 10 or more – will oblige a wizard to cast ceremonially, effectively increasing the casting time considerably. If significant external energy sources are widely available, though, they can remove this problem. Indeed, the wizard who obtains an item that can supply tens of energy points at a time gains the ability to cast all sorts of spells tactically that were previously too slow to consider.

## Changing Effects

Most spells have fairly precise definitions, and changes are unlikely to be required. Specific conceptions of magic sometimes require particular side effects or special effects, however. For instance, summoning spirits might attract hostile attention from those spirits' enemies, magic could be ineffective on holy ground, or spellcasting may draw ambient energy, reducing the local temperature. Furthermore, if the GM regards a spell as disruptive to the campaign's atmosphere, he can add limitations to control it.

*Examples:* The GM could discourage Missile spells by reducing their range or having failed castings inflict backfire damage on the caster. There are *many* simple but effective controls on Healing spells. Such spells might only be able to restore *half* the HP of injury of each wound, as

## Shapeshifters' Choices

In a game featuring the Shapeshifting and Shapeshift Others spells, the GM must decide what animal shapes are available. He may have to create or acquire details for some forms, but many can be based on animals in existing *GURPS* books and a little research. Some suggestions:

*Arabian Nights:* Ape (baboon), ass, cockerel, dog, goat, small bird, small fish, snake (constrictor).

*Aztec:* Dog, eagle, jaguar, owl, snake (constrictor and poisonous are separate spells).

*Celtic:* Boar, deer, salmon, swan, wolf.

*East Asian:* Badger, cat, dog, fish, fox, monkey, raccoon-dog, rooster, small bird.

*Fairytale:* Bear (10 to cast, 3 to maintain), cat, dog, donkey, frog, hawk, pig, rat, wolf.

*Medieval Europe:* Cat, crow, dog, hare, owl, wolf.

*Norse:* Bear (10 to cast, 3 to maintain), hawk, raven, swan, walrus, wolf.

*Tropical Africa:* Crocodile, hyena, jackal, leopard, lion (12 to cast, 4 to maintain), snake (constrictor and poisonous are separate spells).

magic can never perfectly repair damaged flesh; thus, magical healing is useful but serious wounds still require significant natural recuperation. Maybe they can't heal injuries caused by fire or by silver, making those attack forms especially frightening to wizards. Perhaps they only work if the recipient has been exceptionally virtuous or is on a vital mission for his god – mortals must learn that suffering is part of the divine plan!

Likewise, if the GM wants to encourage a specific sort of magic, he might wish to *remove* limitations, increase the numeric values of particular effects, and so on.

*Example:* Shapeshifting will be more popular if the GM eliminates the roll to retain human IQ, or at least makes it less frequent (e.g., daily instead of hourly) and/or easier (e.g., at +3). It will also be more appealing if the forms available include more powerful animals (*weaker* animals, for Shapeshift Other as an offensive spell) – especially if some of these can talk and gesture well enough to cast spells.

## Special Costs

Some spells may require more than time, energy, and a successful skill roll to work. Instead of creating effects out of thin air, magic could transform or expand existing materials. Spells that create permanent changes may require something to provide a continuing power supply. Those that alter their subject's fundamental nature might come with an extraordinary price. Such special costs make excellent limitations.

Possibilities range from the trivial to the extreme. A spell might simply require modest "material components," giving it the cost of a coin or two per casting. More limiting

than this are rare but fairly straightforward requirements, such as valuable items sacrificed to spirits, expensive divining tools for foretelling the future, or the skin of an animal needed when shapechanging. The most extreme possibilities are dangerous, unpleasant, or life-changing, such as sacrifices of sapient beings, body parts of mythic beasts, or perpetual utter devotion to a deity. In some settings, wizards spend much of their time hunting for “congealed magic” that enhances spells and is perhaps required by some; see *The Stuff of Raw Magic* (pp. 227-229).

*Examples:* Another way to discourage Missile spells is to require complex alchemical ingredients that push the cash cost far above that of standard missile weapons. The GM could limit Healing spells similarly, ruling that repairing something as intricate as living flesh requires the expenditure of permanent resources; e.g., \$200 worth of alchemical potions per HP restored, or a unit of “congealed magic” per casting. Healing spells lend themselves well to non-material costs, too. Perhaps they’re *painful* to cast, because the wizard must absorb something of the injury – in which case magical healers will mostly be saintly humanitarians or hard-bitten professionals. This shouldn’t just cause the caster to suffer shock effects (*not* eliminated by High Pain Threshold – he must *fully* share the pain), but force him to make a Will roll to cast the spell and/or a Fright Check afterward. If professional healers voluntarily subject themselves to a wide variety of unpleasant experiences, they’ll probably become a little crazy over time!

## MINOR SYSTEM TWEAKS

One step beyond modifying individual spells is adjusting the spellcasting rules in simple ways that affect how *every* spell works.

### Speed

Ordinary magic takes as little as a second per spell. This supports casting in combat, including the sorts of melees that often occur during adventures. It’s hard to make magic much quicker, but it’s easy to slow it down. A simple way to accomplish this is to make *Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238) the norm. Perhaps the Ceremonial Magery limitation (p. 23) is commonplace – requiring, for instance, a 50-point Unusual Background to avoid. Maybe nothing else is even *possible*!

Ceremonial casting multiplies all casting times by 10, which means that it isn’t fast enough to use in hand-to-hand combat. It isn’t entirely useless in battle, though. It’s roughly as fast as black-powder firearms, and not much slower than crossbow fire. Thus, wizards could be effective in battles that involve full-sized armies and long ranges. They might remain behind shield walls or pikemen, or in fortresses. If spellcasting ability is *really* common, lines of mages might face off like musket troops in Napoleonic warfare, hurling fireballs and lightning bolts. The relatively short effective range of most magic is the only drawback – and even that can be remedied (see below).

For a less-extreme increase, double or triple the standard casting times for spells. For more flexibility, multiply casting time by 2, 3, or 10 *normally*, but let wizards reduce

this to the unmodified casting time by accepting a penalty (perhaps -5).

Long casting times make little difference to the utility of magic *out* of combat, provided that they’re measured in at most minutes rather than in hours or days. A wizard who takes 10 minutes instead of 10 seconds to scry an enemy strongpoint is still valuable, unless his friends are in a *serious* hurry. Thus, increasing casting times is a good way to deter wizards from getting into fights, while keeping them perfectly viable if played with a little subtlety. It makes wizards little use in a combative campaign where every session features multiple melees, but an interesting option for games of intrigue and subtlety. It also stops casters from dominating the battlefield too much if they’re common in the setting.

### Range

Most combat magic is short-ranged compared to missile weapons. Fireball has Max 50, Lightning has Max 100 . . . but even a ST 10 warrior with a regular bow can outrange these spells, while firearms leave them *far* behind. And this assumes that Missile spells are what’s needed; Regular and Area spells lose effectiveness *much* more rapidly with distance. Thus, wizards can look weak on the battlefield. They can do a lot of damage, but they risk being picked off by enemy skirmishers as they close, or charged by enemy cavalry if they’re careless. Missile Shield or Reverse Missiles can help with the former, but that’s extra complication and effort. Wizards also tire quickly – and in most settings, they cost a lot more than a competent infantryman to train.

This fits many traditional images of “war wizards.” They aren’t *supposed* to form up in large blocks on the battlefield, although they’re a terror in a medium-range fight when they have the drop on a foe. What makes them useful is *Information* spells, which only suffer serious range penalties beyond a mile or so, and which can be used out to a good 100 miles by a competent specialist. Thus, “war magic” may mean espionage and logistics rather than killing.

If the GM wants effective “missile magicians,” though, he can always increase the range of Missile spells. Doubling 1/2D and Max puts wizards on a par with light archers and pistol users; multiplying by 10 makes them comparable to modern riflemen. Of course, casters may have difficulty hitting individual targets at those distances. Raising the Acc of Missile spells by a point or two can help.

If the GM wants Regular or Area spells to be useful at great distances, he can reduce their range penalties. A way to do this without making wizards into lethal snipers with every spell is to allow casters who are working ceremonial magic (only) to use the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) or even *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241) for such spells. Wizards can then illuminate areas, read minds, heal friends, or inflict pain on enemies that they can *see* at fair distances, with relatively little trouble – but every casting takes at least 10 seconds, and some will take minutes. Even this can make well-played wizards quite formidable. Opponents should quickly learn to duck, hide, and dodge at the first sign of magic – or even better, to retaliate in kind. Indeed, magical combats may end up resembling chancy, dangerous artillery duels.

## Conditional Negation

In the standard magic system, the simplest way to get rid of many unwanted spells is to use Dispel Magic – or Remove Curse, for especially potent magics. The subject spell can resist the attempt, but multiple castings from a competent wizard will usually succeed in the end. However, this doesn't accord with many stories, in which the way to remove troublesome magic *isn't* to find a more powerful wizard, but to accomplish some heroic quest or to burrow through texts and discover the secret solution.

The GM may rule that any magic with a permanent effect – or perhaps any spell defined as requiring Remove Curse in the standard rules – *must* be given a “negating condition” when cast. This condition should be something that a mortal hero could accomplish or bring about, and knowledge of what it is should be accessible to opponents – although either might require some effort. Alternatively, the condition can be secret, but the universe will set up circumstances that make it *possible*, much like a Destiny being fulfilled.

Such rules are good for a fairytale feel: the way to lift the curse is to find the right princess to kiss the frog. They also suit mythic games with a strong sense of destiny: “Only a hero born beneath the amber star can pass this cursed portal and live.” Indeed, a Destiny advantage may be linked to a great magic with such a condition.

Some degree of control is required, however. Casters shouldn't be able to name totally impossible conditions, or to set whole webs of mystic destiny into motion every time they cast a petty spell. In general, a spell must have no time limit on its effect to have a dispelling condition. Another possibility is to permit wizards to cast restricted-duration spells with simple, easily identified conditions in exchange for a reduction in energy cost (say, 25%). This will encourage wizards to make their magic breakable, and make conflicts with magical foes more interesting.

For a simpler approach to making spell removal tricky, the GM may allow only one Dispel Magic or Remove Curse attempt per caster per subject spell. Alternatively, if the target spell's skill level exceeds that of the removing spell by 5 or more, perhaps the attempt *cannot* succeed. Or maybe a wizard trying to remove a spell has a large penalty unless he first spends hours, days, or weeks researching and analyzing the problem. In all cases, “conditional negation” may also be possible; it might be the only way to deal with spells cast by very powerful wizards.

Bear in mind that the *dramatic* point of range limitations is to allow contests between adventurers and their foes. Striking down an enemy who can't hit back is mere target practice for the attacker and a horror story for the victim. Modern war movies focus on fighter duels or infantry combat, even though artillery and bombs kill the majority of soldiers, to *keep things interesting*. Substantially increased spell range turns wizards into artillery, while forcing spellcasters to focus on nearby opponents maintains excitement by giving the foe a chance to shoot back, mount a hasty charge, or sneak in close. Well-played wizards who sensibly prefer to avoid such things can still be useful in combat by focusing on Knowledge spells and other subtleties for which long-distance modifiers are the norm.

## Duration

Most spells list a specific, restricted duration, even if they don't require a significant continuing energy input to maintain. There are various ways to rationalize this. If magic represents a departure from normal reality, then reality may eventually reassert itself. If magic always uses energy or mana flow from *somewhere*, then at some point, the supply will surely run out.

Duration also represents a crucial game-balance mechanism. If magical effects were longer-lasting, then wizards would be forever casting spells to make themselves, their friends, and their possessions stronger, faster, and better. The mortal world would be saturated with magic. Individuals with more mundane powers would be overwhelmed, while the setting would change in ways that are hard to assess.

Making spell durations shorter, on the other hand, would weaken magic without necessarily crippling it. It would force wizards to make snap decisions, casting spells purely for immediate use – or, conversely, to plan carefully, casting only when and where they really need to. Still, it would have little effect on “instantaneous” spells, including most attacks.

One way to permit indefinite-duration magic without unbalancing matters *too* much is to make it “fragile” and highly likely to be dispelled. Spells such as Dispel Magic might be quick and easy, enjoy long ranges, have broad areas of effect, and/or be resisted at a large penalty, if at all. More radically, contact with something common – such as pure iron or the sound of devout prayers – might cause magic to dissipate. People would be cautious about boarding flying ships if an enemy wizard or priest could bring them down with a few words, and would avoid enchanted armor that crumpled at the touch of an iron mace! Extended spell durations combined with easy dispelling could result in a world where magic is common and sometimes wondrous, but weak and transient . . . just as reduced durations could give magic a reputation as a source of sound and fury, flashes and blasts, but not of reliable protection or detailed information.

Incidentally, many spells with restricted duration just happen to last for roughly the length of a short dramatic scene, or a little longer than most personal combats. This is convenient for practical purposes: players don't have to worry much about spells turning off in the middle of play, but also don't need to track active spells from scene to scene. Thus, changing durations significantly may lead to more bookkeeping.

## Alternate Magic Rituals

When using the standard *Magic Rituals* (p. B237) rules, spellcasting involves words, gestures, and possibly other movements. High skill can reduce these requirements, but they're hard to eliminate altogether. The usual explanation

for rituals is that they're a way for the wizard to focus his mind and will on the task of casting magic. Alternatively, they might be mechanically necessary to manipulate raw magical energies. Whatever they represent, the GM may wish to modify them for flexibility and flavor.

### No Rituals

Rituals don't just make for more dramatic descriptions of events – they represent a game-balance limitation on all but the most powerful wizards. A spellcaster can be disabled by binding and gagging, and gives himself away as being up to something whenever he starts casting. Eliminating this requirement makes low-skill wizards significantly more powerful, and may give magic-heavy games more of an air of intrigue – invisible spells and counter-spells could be flying in any scene where a group of people are seemingly walking around and chatting quietly. This in turn could lead to the heavy use of spells or devices to detect magic use.

### Cultural and Personal Ritual Styles

The GM can vary the descriptions of rituals slightly to fit the campaign. For instance, in a game set in Japan, skill 9 or less might require singing and dancing like a Shinto priest, skill 10-14 could require a few quietly sung words and a couple of dance steps, and skill 15-19 may require *either* a line of a song *or* a dance-like motion.

Rituals can even vary somewhat between individual wizards in the same setting, as long as the general levels of difficulty and inconvenience are the same. This can make it slightly harder to disable a caster, as his opponents might not know *exactly* what he needs to do to work magic. In general, though, binding his hands and feet – and gagging

him, or holding a knife to his throat and threatening him with death if he says anything that sounds at all odd – should be enough, unless he's uncommonly skilled.

### Flexible Rituals

For slightly more complexity, instead of *automatically* reducing the rituals required for spellcasting with higher skill, the GM can apply the following rules. These give all wizards more flexibility in their spellcasting, but deny powerful wizards the ability to forget about rituals entirely.

By default, *all* spells require subtle foot motions (like dance steps), gestures with both hands, and a clearly spoken incantation. However, the caster may choose to omit parts of the ritual by accepting skill penalties:

*Foot Motions:*

No foot motions: -2

*Hand Gestures:*

Gestures with only one hand: -2

No gestures: -4

*Incantation:*

Softly spoken incantation: -2

No incantation: -4

On the other hand, if the wizard makes the effort to be especially precise with his movements, and speaks the incantation loudly and articulately, *doubling* the casting time, he gets +1 to effective skill.

These modifiers don't affect energy cost or casting time *reductions*. For example, if a wizard knows a spell at skill 20, but chooses to cast it with no foot motions (-2), one hand (-2), and no incantation (-4), his effective skill drops to 12, but the energy cost for the casting is still reduced by 2 and the casting time is still halved.

*When he the moon's first mansion thus had found,  
The rest proportionally he could expound;  
And knew the moon's arising-time right well,  
And in what face and term, and all could tell;  
This gave him then the mansion of the moon –  
He worked it out accordingly right soon,  
And did the other necessary rites  
To cause illusions and such evil sights  
As heathen peoples practiced in those days.*

– Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*,  
“The Franklin's Tale”

Applying these rules makes it very hard to deprive wizards of magic entirely. Smart opponents will therefore keep wizard prisoners tightly bound, well-gagged, and blindfolded.

When using these rules, the Easy Casting enhancement (p. 28) functions differently: each level removes -2 from the penalties for less-flamboyant rituals. Likewise, the Extravagant Rituals limitation (p. 24) changes: each level adds -2 to those penalties. These modifiers only apply when the wizard is taking penalties for omitting rituals in the first place, however.

This GM might limit this feature to certain wizards or schools of magic, while others use the standard rules. If so, the benefits and drawbacks roughly balance out. There's no need to treat it as an enhancement or limitation to Magery.

## MINOR SYSTEM ADDITIONS

Finally, the GM can add *new* elements to the way wizards learn and/or cast spells while keeping the standard rules essentially intact.

### Grimoires

In some game worlds, wizards are restricted to the spells they have in spellbooks or *grimoires*. This is particularly likely if the campaign uses *Spell Slots* (p. 56), or if certain spells are secret (see *Secret and Lost Spells*, pp. 31-32) and can only be learned from suitable tomes. Thus, it can be important to know what spells are in wizards' grimoires when the campaign starts.

#### Cost

If magic is rare, and often secret, then *every* spell in a grimoire might count as a perk (p. B100). The GM may wish to be slightly less restrictive and have each point provide half a dozen spells. The simplest approach, though, is to treat the grimoire as equipment bought with cash (or that has a *nominal* cash value, subtracted from the wizard's starting funds). In that case, wizards may still opt to spend points on grimoires, but as Signature Gear (p. B85).

Cash prices for grimoires can vary *enormously* depending on technology, how well-presented the texts must be, the social position of magic, the demand for these and other books, and so on. A suggested rule: each spell costs 2% of the campaign's average starting wealth, and the wizard must have *all* of the prerequisite spells for that spell in the same grimoire. If grimoires don't have to contain full sets of prerequisites, then the price might become 2% of starting wealth plus 1% × the spell's prerequisite count (pp. 261-267).

If the GM wants to make certain spells relatively rare, he can increase their price. He may even require a small Unusual Background for wizards who want such spells in their starting grimoires. For extra complications, some versions might be flawed or unreliable. A Thaumatology roll might identify such problems – although the GM may make the roll in secret, and have *subtle* flaws give a penalty.

#### Weight

The weight of a typical book varies enormously with TL, paper, binding, and so on. Furthermore, each spell could require anything from a half-page of notes to a chapter or more of technical discussion. If this becomes important,

then the GM should estimate weight on the basis of what he thinks fits the campaign. For reference, a paperback novel weighs about 0.25 lb. to 1 lb.; *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, approximately 2.5 lbs.; and a one-volume encyclopedia, around 8 lbs. A substantial medieval-style volume could weigh *substantially* more.

### Gaining New Spells

Wizards will want to add new spells to their collections, and may trade knowledge or even steal books. Certainly, spellbooks make interesting loot! Magical libraries might permit study and even borrowing – and doubtless charge a stiff membership fee. In a party containing several wizard PCs, the players may collaborate to minimize overlap between their grimoires, on the grounds that they can simply copy everything from each other. If the GM wants to avoid this, then he can start the campaign in the middle of dramatic action that leaves no time for immediate cross-copying.

The GM can also introduce rules that make it difficult to copy magical knowledge. Perhaps copying a new spell to one's grimoire requires 1d-2 days, minimum a day, plus a successful Thaumatology roll. To keep magic especially sparse, the GM may increase the time and/or add a cash cost for extra pages and special inks.

If every wizard has his own personal shorthand, and must adapt the basic principles of each spell to his own casting style, then "copying" becomes a *serious* academic project, taking weeks or months. The wizard studying a spell might roll against Thaumatology weekly and record his margin of success, and when the total of these margins equals the spell's prerequisite count, he understands the spell well enough to add it to his grimoire. Such requirements are likely to increase the cost of starting grimoires substantially – they're the product of months or even *years* of intensive and uncertain effort.

Lastly, wizards who use spell slots might not be able to use spells out of each other's books directly. At minimum, they should have to spend 1d hours studying each spell, and then make a successful Thaumatology roll to commit it to memory well enough to count as "knowing" it for the next few weeks.

### Spell Defaults

If the GM wants to give wizards more flexibility than a fixed list of known spells grants, then he may allow spells to default to other spells (see p. B173). Each spell defaults to every other spell in the same college. A spell unknown to the wizard defaults to one that he does know at -4, plus an additional penalty equal to its prerequisite count (pp. 261-267). However, if the known spell is in the prerequisite chain of the unknown one, add a *bonus* equal to the known spell's prerequisite count. A wizard can't cast a spell at default if it requires an advantage (most often a level of Magery) that he lacks. Spells cast at default have *double* their usual energy cost and casting time.

*Example:* Madame Francesca wants to cast Fog to baffle the gendarmes, but the only Water spells she knows are Seek Water-16 and Purify Water-16. Fog defaults to Purify Water at the base penalty of -4, plus an additional -4 for

its prerequisite count. Purify Water is part of the prerequisite chain leading to Fog, though, so Francesca may add its prerequisite count, giving +1. (She could have defaulted to Seek Water, but the bonus would have been smaller.) Her effective skill with Fog is thus 9. Even if she succeeds, creating a mere one-yard-radius fog will take two seconds and 4 FP to cast, and 2 FP per minute to maintain.

Allowing wizards to cast spells at default, while not as cinematic as some options, substantially increases their flexibility. The GM shouldn't allow it if he doesn't want wizards to pull off unexpected effects from time to time.

## Adjustable Spells

The following optional rules are designed to add more flexibility to standard spells – at a cost. They make attack spells *much* more versatile, and can also be applied to other magic. Being almost open-ended, though, they're not for everyone. The GM needs to know the rules in sufficient detail to spot abuses and prohibit applications that produce weird or excessive results. The players require similar knowledge to prevent play from bogging down.

### Trading Energy for Enhancements

The basic principle is that wizards can add enhancements to spell effects – as if to an advantage – by spending additional energy and taking a penalty to effective skill at the time of casting. Each +1 energy and -1 to skill allows +5% worth of enhancements; e.g., by spending +4 FP and taking -4 to his spellcasting roll, a wizard could cast Lightning with the No Signature enhancement (+20%), enabling him to shoot invisible bolts. The extra energy cost counts as part of the spell's cost. The *total* cost is reduced normally by high skill, and can be paid by any energy source permitted in the campaign. The wizard can use options such as *Trading Energy for Speed and Skill* (see boxed text) to improve his skill roll. If the spell is given the Rapid Fire enhancement, the caster must pay the standard casting cost (reduced by skill) for *each* shot, plus the extra cost for the enhancement (once).

The GM decides which enhancements from pp. B102-109, pp. 28-29 and 200, and **GURPS Powers** suit a given spell. Not all of these are valid for all spells. Extended Duration, Reduced Fatigue Cost, and Reduced Time are *completely* prohibited – always use the standard magic rules to adjust duration, energy cost, and casting time. Side Effect and Symptoms are also off-limits; they change a spell's nature too much and are open to serious abuse. Cosmic is permitted to make defensive magic effective against cosmic attacks, but not for other purposes.

### Techniques

The GM may opt to let wizards improve each combination of spell and enhancement as an Average technique. Such techniques have a maximum level equal to the underlying spell skill. Improving a technique doesn't affect energy cost in any way.

*Example:* Fireball with the Guided enhancement (+50%) is a technique that defaults to Fireball at -10. Raising Fireball/Guided to skill-4 would cost 6 points. The maximum level equals Fireball, for 10 points. Regardless of points spent, guided fireballs always require an extra 10 energy.

## Trading Energy for Speed and Skill

One way to introduce more flexibility into standard spellcasting is to allow casters to exchange extra energy for special benefits. Below are two examples; see *Adjustable Spells* (this page) for an additional option. All such rules give magic-workers who have lots of spare energy (high personal FP, piles of Powerstones, etc.) a considerable advantage. The GM should avoid them if he wants wizards to be wrinkled old men who value skill above physical conditioning and magical toys.

*Faster Casting:* Wizards can reduce casting time by one second per 4 extra energy points spent. This option can't reduce casting time below a second, and isn't available for ceremonial magic.

*Increased Effective Skill:* The energy-for-skill tradeoff of *Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238) applies to all castings: +1 to skill for 20% extra energy, +2 for 40%, +3 for 60%, +4 for 100%, and another +1 per additional 100% of the required energy. Such skill increases affect the roll to cast the spell and the Power of enchanted items, but they *don't* reduce casting time, energy cost, or ritual requirements. A further option for Missile spells is to give +1 to the attack roll per extra energy point spent.

Some enhancements come in levels, in which case the wizard may choose how many levels he uses when casting. He can never cast with an effective skill higher than the underlying spell, however.

*Example:* A wizard with 5 points in Fireball/Increased Range could cast a Fireball with 2× range (+10%, -2) or 5× range (+20%, -4) at his full Fireball skill; one with 10× range (+30%, -6) at a net -1; one with 20× range (+40%, -8) at -3; and so on.

In all cases, the technique modifier still applies if other enhancements are added to the spell.

### Requirements

The GM may give all spellcasters free access to these rules, but this *will* make them significantly more powerful for no point cost. A better option is to require wizards to buy perks – either one per spell to which they can apply these rules (“Spell Variation”) or one per enhancement that they can apply to any spell (“Spell Enhancement”), at the GM's option. The latter may be preferable, because it lets the GM explicitly state which enhancements are available. For a more limited version, the GM could require one perk per specific variation applied to a particular spell (e.g., “Enhanced Spell: Armor, Cosmic”). A more generous approach would be to permit *any* variation if the wizard purchases a single Unusual Background (“Trained to Vary Spells”), priced as the GM sees fit. In all cases, there may be additional prerequisites, such as a minimum level of Thaumatology skill.



*Example:* In a campaign that requires one perk per spell, Xavier Smythe-Brown has the perk Spell Variation: Ice Sphere. He finds himself in combat with a gunman at a range of 150 yards, and casts Ice Sphere at -7, spending an extra 7 energy. (Fortunately, he carries a large Powerstone.) This lets him add Accurate +3 (+15%) and Increased Range 5x (+20%) to his spell.

### Implications

The effects of this option essentially overlap with a number of existing spells. For example, Fireball with Explosion

(p. B104) is much the same as Explosive Fireball, while Meta-Spells such as Penetrating Spell and Throw Spell have effects similar to various enhancements. To give wizard PCs distinct personal styles, the GM may let them decide to use a few spells plus Spell Variation *or* a wide range of different spells – their choice. It's equally reasonable to tell players not to bother taking any spell that can be effectively emulated by applying these rules to another spell, to keep things relatively simple.

## CAPPING SPELL SKILL LEVELS

An effective way to put a constraint on magic *and* oblige wizards to display a little more complexity is to have an advantage, skill, or other trait impose an upper limit on spell skill levels. A given spell can't exceed the limit that applies to it, no matter how many points the wizard spends on it. If a single point would normally buy the spell at a higher level, then reduce the spell to the limit.

### SKILL-BASED LIMITS

The simplest option is to rule that *all* of a wizard's spells are limited to his level with a particular skill. This doesn't change things much – the point cost for a useful repertoire of spells will dwarf that of raising one skill – but it helps define the setting: all magic is intimately coupled to competence in something seemingly mundane. Some appropriate possibilities:

*Alchemy:* Magic is built on knowledge of the basic stuff of physical reality. All wizards must spend “lab time.”

*Astronomy:* Spells call down the power of the heavens.

*Dancing or Singing:* Spellcasting must be performed in a precisely correct form.

*Hidden Lore:* Magic-working involves deep secrets. The skill specialty might be in the lore of an ancient cabal of magicians or a society of magical spirits.

*Religious Ritual:* Magic has a “priestly” aspect, drawing on religious procedures.

*Symbol Drawing:* Magic revolves around symbolism.

*Thaumatology:* Magic is highly academic and always involves reference to abstract principles.

*Theology:* The gods govern magic. Spells invoke their names and involve countless small sacrifices.

### Multiple Bases and Other Requirements

A slightly more complex approach is to limit each college with a *different* skill. For instance:

*Earth:* Limited by Geology. “Know the names of the stones before you command them.”

*Healing:* Limited by Physiology. “You can't repair what you don't understand.”

*Meta-Spells:* Limited by Thaumatology. “Such magic requires mastery of underlying principles.”

Alternatively, each magical “school” or “style” might have its own limiting skill, and perhaps other requirements. Such details are highly campaign-specific, but here are a few ideas:

## Skills to Salvage Critical Failures

For a wizard who knows the Physician skill at 15+, critical failures with certain Healing spells usually only count as ordinary failures (p. B248). In some settings, though, Esoteric Medicine is as valid and effective as Physician, and might even be more closely related to magical theory. In that case, it should work as well as or *instead* of Physician for this purpose.

To encourage wizards to generalize and study more than just magic, the GM might extend this principle to other spells, assigning a different “stabilizing skill” to each college, or even to individual spells, as he sees fit. These should usually be Hard or Very Hard,

making them fairly expensive to learn at level 15+. Some possibilities:

*Animal:* Naturalist

*Body Control:* Physiology

*Earth:* Geology

*Plant:* Herb Lore

*Technology:* Engineer (with an appropriate specialty)

*Weather:* Meteorology

The one category of magic that should *never* enjoy a safety net is Information spells for which the GM rolls secretly. Wizards can't stabilize mistakes they don't know they've made!

*Song-Shapers*: Limited by Singing; must have the Song limitation on their Magery.

*Theurgic Wizards*: Limited by Theology; require Disciplines of Faith.

*Will-Workers*: Limited by Mental Strength; need High Pain Threshold.

The possibilities are endless!

## MAGERY-BASED LIMITS

A more radical change is to modify the very nature of Magery: the wizard's Magery level sets an upper limit on spell skill *instead* of giving a bonus to IQ for the purpose of learning spells. The suggested limit is  $10 + \text{Magery}$ ; e.g., someone with Magery 3 can learn spells up to skill 13. This makes powerful wizard characters more expensive. A limit of  $10 + (2 \times \text{Magery})$  allows a bit more flexibility and power.

The *other* roles of Magery are unchanged. Magery continues to add to Sense rolls to recognize magic items, give a bonus to Thaumatology, act as a prerequisite for certain spells, and govern how much energy can be put into spells such as Fireball. Whether it still reduces the time needed to learn new spells is up to the GM.

## Capped Spells and Enchantment

This rule means that generally, only wizards with Magery 5+ will be able to enchant magic items. If the GM wants more widespread item-making, he can remove the cap for enchantment purposes *only*; e.g., someone with Magery 2 could have spells at skill 15+ for use when enchanting, but would perform all other workings at an effective skill of 12. Wizards with high IQ but modest Magery would then do better as enchanters than as "battle-mages."

# CHANGING THE COLLEGES

The standard spell-college structure is quite clear, and should seem fairly plausible to gamers. However, it draws on a mixture of relatively modern concepts (e.g., the division between the animal and plant kingdoms, and the implicit idea that humans are a type of animal) and specifically "classical Western" mysticism (particularly the four elements). By completely rewriting the college structure, the GM can create a setting-specific vision of magic that conveys a *different* worldview.

The nature of the new colleges is up to the GM. They might involve mystical ideas drawn from real-world beliefs or from the setting concept. They can also use

familiar-but-interesting categories, such as the colors of the rainbow or a pantheon of gods. For extra detail, different schools of magic in the background might have their own unique college structures – and perhaps limited spell lists, so that each can accomplish things that the others cannot.

Of course, any change to the college structure involves revising the entire prerequisite system, since many spells require certain numbers of spells from particular colleges. For guidelines, see *Changing Prerequisites* (pp. 32-33). All in all, this can be a lot of work for the GM – but the payoff is a richer setting.



## One-College Magery With Variant Colleges

If the number of colleges increases or decreases substantially due to reorganization, then the GM should adjust the One College Only limitation (p. B67). Appropriate values are -10% if there are two colleges, -20% if three to six, -30% if seven to 14, -40% if 15 to 30, or -60% if more than 30. If the GM allows the Limited Colleges limitation (p. 25), then he should scale it proportionally.

### EXAMPLE: TREE MAGIC

This section demonstrates a *complete* reorganization of the college and prerequisite structures. The colleges are based on the “Ogham” script and symbolism said by some to lie at the heart of ancient Celtic magic. Each Ogham letter is associated with a tree – more precisely, with some kind of plant – and so each college is named for both a plant and a letter. (Different sources give different lists of symbols and plants that don’t always agree with those used here.)

See also *Celtic Tree Talismans* (p. 97), *The Ogham Alphabet* (under *Symbol Magic*, pp. 170-171), and *Ogham Verbs and Nouns* (p. 185).

### The Ogham Alphabet

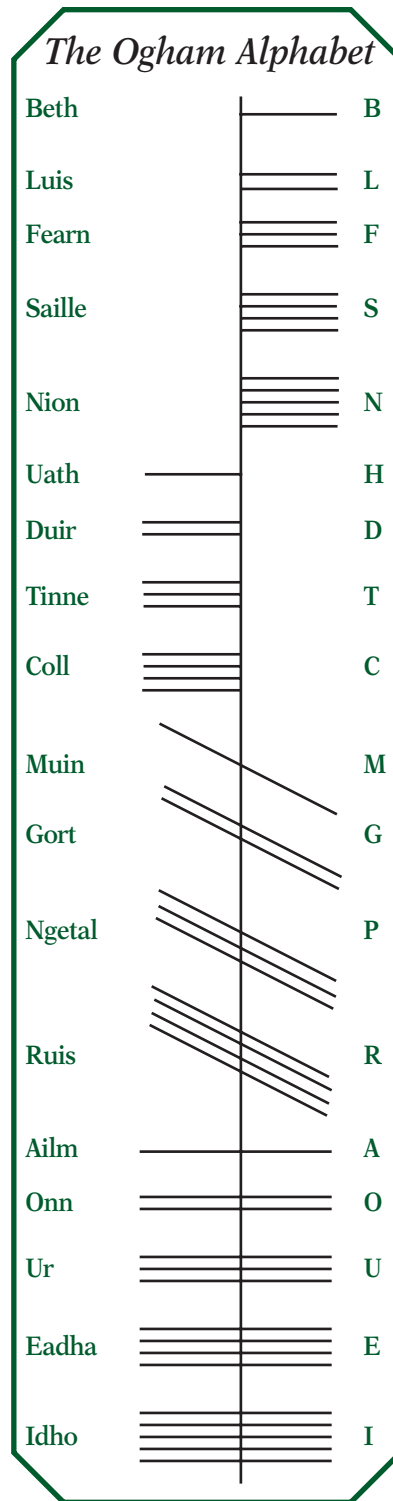
The version of Ogham used here has 18 letters: 13 consonants and five vowels. Most spells are associated with a specific letter, although some “mixed tree spells” are linked to multiple letters. “Vowel spells” are harder and generally more powerful than “consonant spells.”

Mixed tree spells are *especially* complex. To cast them, a wizard must have access to all the colleges involved. Magery with the One College Only limitation can’t help with them. They count as being in *all* of their assigned colleges for purposes of prerequisite requirements.

### Requirements for Knowledge

Tree magic is mainly the preserve of the mystical Druidic Order. The Order has a rigid teaching system and is particular about who it will teach. As a result, while spells in this system have relatively few prerequisites, it’s hard to learn them without satisfying strict requirements.

All members of the Order must be literate in the Celtic tongue, and can learn Thaumatology (called “Tree Lore” in



this setting). The Order has a Rank system (see p. B29), and special rules apply at each level:

*Initiate (Rank 0):* An Initiate can learn consonant spells *if* he has at least one point in Thaumatology. He can’t learn a consonant spell from the Order at a level higher than his Thaumatology skill (see *Skill-Based Limits*, pp. 40-41).

*Bard (Rank 1):* A Bard must have at least one point in Thaumatology (as a theoretical subject, if he doesn’t use spells). He can study Hidden Lore (Vowel Spells): the secrets of higher magic, and how Ogham vowels relate to it. His Hidden Lore skill can’t exceed his Thaumatology skill. If he has at least one point in Hidden Lore, he can study vowel spells. These can’t exceed his Hidden Lore skill.

*Ollave (Rank 2):* An Ollave must have Clerical Investment (p. B43) and at least one point in Hidden Lore (Vowel Spells). He will also have passed many other studies and tests.

*Druid (Rank 3):* Progress to this level demands years of study and secret ordeals. Only *after* achieving this Rank will the Druid learn of the *existence* of another skill: Hidden Lore (Mixed Spells). Studying this lets him learn mixed tree spells – but Hidden Lore (Mixed Spells) can’t exceed his level in Hidden Lore (Vowel Spells), and the mixed tree spells are themselves limited by the new Hidden Lore skill. As Druids are sworn to keep mixed tree spells a secret, they’ll usually be circumspect about casting them.

Members of the Order also master many other skills, including Law, Poetry, and Theology. None of these are absolutely required, but an Ollave or Druid who isn’t an expert on such things will be regarded as eccentric at best.

### Non-Druids

A small number of non-druids know a few spells – usually but not always consonant spells. These are often secrets of a family or a profession, handed down through the generations and taught by rote. A non-druid with a 10-point Unusual Background (“Rote Magical Training”) can know up to four spells, even if illiterate, without needing to know other spells as prerequisites. However, if a spell has Magery as a prerequisite (as all non-consonant spells do), he *does* have to meet this requirement; thus, a non-druid who knows vowel or mixed tree spell also needs Magery to cast them.

## The Consonants

These are the consonant “colleges.” Druidic teachers suggest advancing through the colleges in the standard order of the Ogham alphabet, but this isn’t *required*.

### Birch (Beth)

Beth is the first letter of the Ogham alphabet, and birch is the tree of beginnings, controlling illusions and simple creations. Druids use bundles of birch twigs in ritual cleansings.

Spell	Prerequisites
Clean	Restore
Complex Illusion	Sound, Simple Illusion
Create Food	Create Plant
Create Plant	Three other Birch
Great Voice	Voices, three other Birch
Hideaway	Two other Birch
Illusion Disguise	Simple Illusion
Illusion Shell	–
Knot	Stiffen
Odor	One other Birch
Perfect Illusion	Complex Illusion
Phantom Flame	Simple Illusion
Rejoin	Restore, four other Birch
Repair	Rejoin, six other Birch
Restore	Simple Illusion
Shapeshifting	Any eight other spells
Sharpen	Repair
Silence	Sound
Simple Illusion	–
Sound	–
Stench	Odor
Stiffen	Rejoin
Voices	Sound

### Rowan (Luis)

Rowan (mountain ash) is the tree of magical protection. Its virtues focus on its berries, while its wood is used in some divination-related workings, and to compel ghosts and demons.

Spell	Prerequisites
Banish	Five other Rowan
Conceal Magic	Five other Rowan
Hide Thoughts	–
Magic Resistance	–
Scryguard	–
Scrywall	Scryguard



### Spell

Seek Earth  
Spell Shield  
Summon Shade  
Summon Spirit

### Prerequisites

–  
Magic Resistance, Scryguard  
Summon Spirit  
Two other Rowan

### Alder (Fearn)

Alder, which burns hotter than any other wood, is the tree of fire. It opposes water, controls the wind, and is associated with oracles and resurrection. Because it produces three different dyes, it also governs color magic.

### Spell

Colors  
Continual Light  
Cook  
Distill  
Divination (Pyromancy)  
Dye  
Heat  
Ignite Fire  
Light  
Light Jet  
Melt Ice  
Shape Fire  
Wind  
Windstorm

### Prerequisites

Light  
Light  
Heat  
–  
Ignite Fire, three other Alder  
Light  
Shape Fire  
–  
–  
Continual Light  
Heat  
Ignite Fire  
Ten other Alder  
Six other Alder

### Willow (Saille)

Willow is associated with death, the moon, the feminine aspect, and female spellcasters. It also governs magic that’s *favorable* to water, rather than controlling it.

### Spell

Cold  
Death Vision  
Final Rest  
Freeze  
Purify Water  
Sense Spirit

### Prerequisites

–  
–  
Magery 0 or Spirit Empathy  
Cold  
–  
Death Vision

### Ash (Nion)

Ash controls and dominates water (whereas willow loves it). It’s also the tree from which broomsticks are made, and relates to flight spells.

### Spell

Apportation  
Breathe Water  
Flight  
Levitation  
Lighten Burden  
Manipulate  
Melt Ice  
Poltergeist  
Resist Water  
Shape Water  
Slow Fall  
Swim  
Umbrella  
Undo

### Prerequisites

Flight  
Shape Water  
–  
Apportation  
Apportation  
–  
–  
Apportation  
–  
Three other Ash  
Apportation  
Levitation, Shape Water  
Shape Water  
Manipulate

### Hawthorn (Uath)

Hawthorn is the tree of bad luck and curses (although it’s also said to have associations with cleansing). It’s very bad luck to bring hawthorn blossoms indoors.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Avoid	Hide, Curse, three other Hawthorn
Blur	Darkness
Clumsiness	Spasm
Curse	–
Darkness	Curse, three other Hawthorn
Glue	Curse
Hide	Blur
Itch	–
Nightmare	Ten other Hawthorn
Pain	Spasm
Paralyze Limb	Pain, six other Hawthorn
Sickness	Pain
Spasm	Itch
Strike Blind	Spasm
Strike Deaf	Spasm
Strike Dumb	Spasm
Strike Numb	Pain
Stun	Pain
Total Paralysis	Paralyze Limb
Wither Limb	Magery 1, Paralyze Limb
Wither Plant	Curse

### Oak (Duir)

Oak is widespread in the lands of the druids. Its roots are said to stretch as far below the earth as its branches reach above, so it governs spells of both earth and air. “Duir” also means “door,” and this tree governs spells that grant movement between worlds.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Control Gate	Create Gate
Create Gate*	Magery 1, five other Oak
Divination (Augury)†	IQ 13+, four other Oak
Earth to Air	Shape Air, Shape Earth
Earth to Stone	Shape Earth
Purify Air	–
Shape Air	Purify Air
Shape Earth	–
Stone to Earth	Earth to Stone
Walk Through Earth	Stone to Earth

\* The spell can *only* be used to open gates to planes of existence known to the druids.

† By watching birds in flight.

### Holly (Tinne)

Holly is the tree of good luck and of all blessing spells. It’s also the tree of weather prediction, because examining its berries can reveal a coming hard winter.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Alertness	Any two versions of Keen Sense
Bless	–
Bless Plants	Bless
Bravery	Alertness
Climbing	–
Divination (Augury)*	IQ 13+, three other Holly
Great Haste	Bless, Haste, six other Holly
Haste	–
Keen Sense	Bless
Might	Vigor
Monk’s Banquet	Resist Pain
No-Smell	Bless
Predict Weather	Four other Holly
Purify Food	Bless

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Quick March	Haste, three other Holly
Rear Vision	Alertness
Resist Pain	Four other Holly
Vigor	Bless
Wisdom	Alertness, three other Holly

\* By observing the shape of clouds.

### Hazel (Coll)

Hazel represents wisdom and knowledge, and governs information-seeking spells. It’s sometimes called the most magical of all trees, as it’s found growing in many magical sites and realms.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Alarm	Tell Time
Analyze Magic	Identify Spell
Ancient History	History
Aura	Detect Magic
Beast Seeker	Four other Hazel
Beast Speech	Beast Seeker
Borrow Language	–
Borrow Skill	Five other Hazel
Dark Vision	Infravision <i>or</i> Night Vision
Detect Magic	–
Earth Vision	Five other Hazel
Far-Hearing	Not deaf, Keen Hearing, two other Hazel
Find Direction	–
Find Weakness	Six other Hazel
Glass Wall	Ten other Hazel
Hawk Vision	Keen Vision
History	Trace
Identify Plant	Seek Plant
Identify Spell	Detect Magic
Infravision	Keen Vision
Invisibility	–
Know Illusion	Five other Hazel
Know Location	Five other Hazel
Know True Shape	Magery 0, one Birch spell
Mage Sense	Detect Magic
Mage Sight	Detect Magic
Measurement	–
Night Vision	Keen Vision
Pathfinder	Seeker
Plant Sense	Six other Hazel
Prehistory	Ancient History
Scry Gate	Analyze Magic
See Secrets	Seeker, Aura
Seek Coastline	Seek Water
Seek Food	–
Seek Gate	Pathfinder
Seek Plant	–
Seek Water	–
Seeker	Seek Water, six other Hazel
Sense Danger	Sense Foes
Sense Emotion	–
Sense Foes	Sense Emotion
Sense Life	–
Sound Vision	Keen Hearing
Tell Time	–
Test Food	–
Trace	Seeker
Truthsayer	Sense Emotion
Water Vision	Seek Water

## Vine/Bramble (Muin)

Vine, in the form of grapevine, is associated with intoxication and joy – and also with control and madness. Because grapevines only grow in warmer parts of the druids' territory, bramble takes the same role elsewhere.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Animal Control	Beast-Soother
Beast Link	Beast Summoning
Beast-Soother	–
Beast Summoning	Beast-Soother
Berserker	Drunkenness
Charm	Loyalty
Compel Truth	Forgetfulness
Control Illusion	Five other Vine
Daze	Foolishness
Dispel Illusion	Control Illusion
Drunkenness	–
Emotion Control	Loyalty
Enthrall	Daze, two other Vine
Fascinate	Daze
Fear	Drunkenness
Foolishness	Drunkenness
Forgetfulness	Foolishness, five other Vine
Glib Tongue	Fascinate
Hinder	Tanglefoot
Hybrid Control	Two Animal Control spells
Independence	Control Illusion
Loyalty	Persuasion, 10 other Vine
Madness	Forgetfulness
Mass Daze	Daze, five other Vine
Mass Sleep	Sleep, five other Vine
Master	Beast-Soother
Mental Stun	Daze
Panic	Fear
Persuasion	Compel Truth
Rider	Two Animal Control spells
Rooted Feet	Hinder
Roundabout	Tanglefoot
Sleep	Daze
Tanglefoot	–
Terror	Fear

## Ivy (Gort)

Ivy relates to mental skills, languages, and extracting truths.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Divination (Extispicy)	IQ 12+, Per 12+
Lend Language	–
Lend Skill	–
Memorize	IQ 11+
Recall	Memorize
Remember Path	Memorize

## Reed (Ngetal)

Reed relates to bonds and made things. Its roots knot together as it grows, binding the damp soil. It grows quite profusely, and its stems have various uses.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Conceal	–
Cornucopia	–
Fasten	–
Purify Earth	–
Shatterproof	–
Toughen	Shatterproof

## Elder (Ruis)

Elder governs healing and control over illness. Its flowers and berries are used to make healing draughts.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Awaken	Lend Vitality
Heal Plant	Lend Vitality
Lend Energy	–
Lend Vitality	Lend Energy
Minor Healing	Lend Vitality
Peaceful Sleep	Awaken

## The Vowels

All vowel spells require at least Magery 0, in addition to any listed prerequisites. Each vowel governs one of the great days of the Celtic year. On those days, all spells from the corresponding college are cast at +1 to effective skill.

### Silver Fir (Ailm)

Silver fir is the “birth” tree, governing enchantment and creation. When it occurs as part of a mixed tree spell, a strong creative effect is usually involved. Ailm governs the feast of Imbolc: February 1.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Animate Plant	Enchant, two other Silver Fir
Delay	Enchant, 15 other spells
Enchant	–
Great Hallucination	Magery 2
Great Shapeshift	Enchant, four versions of Shapeshifting
Limit	Enchant
Link	Delay
Name	Enchant
Password	Enchant
Shapeshift Others	Magery 1, Shapeshifting for that form
Staff	Enchant
Water to Wine	Create Water, two other Silver Fir

### Gorse (Onn)

Gorse is regarded as the most powerful tree of magic, especially of protection. In a mixed tree spell, it amplifies the power of the consonant involved. Gorse governs the festival of Beltane: May 1.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Magelock	–
Mystic Mist	Ward, two other Gorse
Reflex	Ward
Remove Enchantment	Ward, one other Gorse
Suspend Enchantment	Ward, one other Gorse
Ward	–

### Heather (Ura)

Heather is another “tree” of blessing and generally favorable effects, and also of personal control. It governs the festival of Lughnasadh: August 1.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Delayed Message	–
Remove Curse	Magery 1, Suspend Curse
Suspend Curse	One spell from each consonant

### Aspen (Eadha)

As the tree from which shields are usually made, aspen governs physical protection. It also governs the festival of Samhain: November 1.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Armor	Shield
Deflect	Shield
Forest Warning	Magery 1
Fortify	Shield
Hide Path	Tangle Growth
Iron Arm	DX 12+, Fortify
Nightingale	–
Shield	–
Tangle Growth	Forest Warning
Watchdog	Nightingale

### Yew (Idho)

Idho is the last letter of the Ogham alphabet, and yew is the tree of death. It governs weapon and death spells, as well as magic concerned with both decay and preservation. Finding a tutor for this college can be difficult, as few druids will teach it to all comers. Idho governs the eve of Samhain – the fearsome night of October 31.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Accuracy	Magery 1
Dancing Weapon	Quick-Draw
Decay	–
Disintegrate	Ruin, Shatter, two other spells from each tree
Loyal Sword	Quick-Draw
Poison Food	Decay
Preserve Food	Decay
Puissance	Accuracy
Quick-Draw	–
Ruin	Weaken
Shatter	Weaken
Weaken	Decay

### Mixed Tree Spells

Like vowel spells, *all* mixed tree spells require at least Magery 0, in addition to their listed prerequisites. If they're learned systematically from the Druidic Order, rather than by rote, each *also* requires at least six spells from the relevant consonants and three from the applicable vowels.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
<b>Alder + Aspen</b>	
Fireproof	Ignite Fire
Resist Cold	Heat
<b>Alder + Aspen + Yew</b>	
Dehydrate	Destroy Water
<b>Alder + Silver Fir</b>	
Create Fire	Enchant
Essential Flame	Create Fire
Flash	Continual Light, Create Fire
<b>Alder + Silver Fir + Oak</b>	
Lightning	Magery 1, Flash, Rain
<b>Alder + Silver Fir + Yew</b>	
Breathe Fire	Flame Jet
Explosive Fireball	Fireball
Fireball	Magery 1, Create Fire
Flame Jet	Fireball
Flaming Missiles	Flaming Weapon
Flaming Weapon	Fireball
<b>Ash + Heather</b>	
Hawk Flight	Magery 1, Levitation

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
<b>Ash + Silver Fir</b>	
Walk on Water	Enchant, Shape Water
<b>Ash + Yew</b>	
Water Jet	Magery 1, Shape Water
<b>Aspen + Elder</b>	
Suspended Animation	Minor Healing, Peaceful Sleep
<b>Aspen + Gorse + Silver Fir</b>	
Utter Dome	Force Dome, Ward
<b>Aspen + Holly</b>	
Weather Dome	Fortify, Predict Weather
<b>Aspen + Ivy + Oak</b>	
Ethereal Body	Body of Air
<b>Aspen + Oak</b>	
Body of Air	Earth to Air, Fortify
Body of Stone	Fortify, Stone to Earth
Entombment	Body of Stone
<b>Aspen + Reed</b>	
Missile Shield	Shield
Reverse Missiles	Missile Shield
<b>Aspen + Silver Fir</b>	
Force Dome	Enchant, Shield
<b>Aspen + Willow</b>	
Body of Water	Fortify, Purify Water
Resist Fire	Fortify, Freeze
<b>Birch + Yew</b>	
Sound Jet	Great Voice
<b>Elder + Heather</b>	
Major Healing	Minor Healing
Regeneration	Major Healing
<b>Elder + Heather + Ivy + Silver Fir</b>	
Resurrection	Instant Regeneration
<b>Elder + Heather + Silver Fir</b>	
Instant Regeneration	Magery 2, Regeneration, four spells from every tree
<b>Elder + Yew</b>	
Cure Disease	Decay, Minor Healing
Neutralize Poison	Poison Food
<b>Gorse + Hazel</b>	
See Invisible	Invisibility
<b>Gorse + Rowan</b>	
Counterspell	Conceal Magic
Dispel Magic*	Counterspell and 10 Rowan
Great Ward	Ward
Reflect	Ward
<b>Gorse + Vine</b>	
Permanent Forgetfulness	IQ 13+, Forgetfulness
<b>Hawthorn + Silver Fir</b>	
Hex	Curse, Enchant
Shape Darkness	Darkness, Enchant
<b>Hawthorn + Yew</b>	
Pestilence	Sickness
Steal Energy	Decay, Pain
Steal Vitality	Steal Energy

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
<b>Hazel + Heather</b>	
Gift of Letters	Gift of Tongues
Gift of Tongues	Borrow Language
<b>Hazel + Silver Fir</b>	
Invisible Wizard Ear	Invisibility, Wizard Ear
Invisible Wizard Eye	Invisibility, Wizard Eye
Wizard Ear	Enchant, eight Hazel
Wizard Eye	Enchant, eight Hazel
<b>Hazel + Silver Fir + Vine</b>	
Mage-Stealth	Hush
<b>Heather + Oak</b>	
Stone to Flesh	Remove Curse, Stone to Earth
Walk on Air	Shape Air
<b>Oak + Silver Fir</b>	
Clouds	Enchant
Create Air	Enchant, Purify Air
Create Earth	Earth to Stone, Enchant
Fog	Clouds
Rain	Clouds
Thunderclap	Clouds
<b>Oak + Silver Fir + Willow</b>	
Frost	Freeze, Rain
Hail	Snow
<b>Oak + Silver Fir + Yew</b>	
Air Jet	Create Air
Earthquake	Create Earth, Disintegrate
Flesh to Stone	Earth to Stone, Enchant
Sand Jet	Stone Missile
Stone Missile	Magery 1, Create Earth
<b>Reed + Yew</b>	
Winged Knife	Dancing Weapon
<b>Silver Fir + Vine</b>	
Hush	Enchant
Plant Growth	Reshape
Reshape	Shape Plant
Shape Plant	Enchant
<b>Silver Fir + Willow</b>	
Create Water	Enchant, Purify Water
Essential Water	Create Water
<b>Silver Fir + Willow + Yew</b>	
Ice Dagger	Ice Sphere
Ice Slick	Enchant, Freeze
Ice Sphere	Magery 1, Enchant, Freeze
Icy Weapon	Enchant, Freeze
<b>Vine + Yew</b>	
Mindlessness	Forgetfulness
Permanent Madness	Madness
<b>Willow + Yew</b>	
Deathtouch	Death Vision, Disintegrate
Extinguish Fire	Decay, Purify Water
Frostbite	Decay, Freeze

\* Considered very dangerous – one never quite knows what it might destroy by accident!

## ALTERNATIVE ELEMENTS

The view that the universe is made up of *four* elements – fire, water, earth, and air – is mostly European, with its roots in ancient Greece. Other traditions have similar ideas but identify different elements. Changing the elemental spell colleges to match is a common variation, and considerably less work than a total rewrite like *Tree Magic* (pp. 42-47).

Chinese philosophy recognizes *five* elements – wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. Indian-derived thinking also has five elements: earth (rigidity and permanence); water (change); fire (transformation); air or wind (mobility and dynamism); and void, also known as space or ether (distance and sound). Japanese mystics use the Chinese list *and* the Indian list, probably acquired via Buddhism. Southern Asian traditions sometimes use the same four elements as Western alchemy.

In the Western view, pairs of elements are opposed: fire vs. water, earth vs. air. This isn't the case in five-element systems, but these often still describe complex relationships between elements. In the Chinese system, wood generates fire and overcomes earth, fire generates earth and overcomes metal, earth generates metal and overcomes water, metal generates water and overcomes wood, and water generates wood and overcomes fire.

The idea of elemental *creatures* is also Western. There's no overwhelming reason why Eastern systems shouldn't feature them, however.

### Metal College

If metal is an element in its own right, then its college might encompass spells from the Earth, Protection and Warning, and Technological colleges in *GURPS Magic*:

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Prerequisites</i>
Bladeturning*	Shield or Turn Blade
Body of Metal	Magery 2, Shape Metal
Conjure Dart†	Shape Metal
Identify Metal	Seek Earth
Iron Arm*	DX 11+, Turn Blade
Magnetic Vision	Magery 1, Identify Metal
Metal Vision	Shape Metal
Repair*	Shape Metal
Seek Earth	–
Shape Metal	Magery 1, Identify Metal
Sharpen*	Repair
Steelwraith	Magery 2, Shape Metal
Turn Blade*	Shape Metal

\* Can only affect *metal* items or weapons when learned as part of this college. This limitation doesn't apply if the caster knows all the prerequisites (and *their* prerequisites, and so on) listed in *Magic*.

† Treat as Ice Dagger – but the missile doesn't melt, it shatters.

### Wood College

Defining a completely new Wood college is unnecessary. Simply use the Plant college and delete any spells that don't fit the setting's metaphysics.



## Elements and Medicine

Elemental theories (see *Alternative Elements*, pp. 47-48) often extend to medicine: the human body is composed of elements, so understanding those elements can help maintain its health. In backgrounds where such thinking is valid, invoking or manipulating suitable elements might provide bonuses to Healing spells – and to spells that directly harm the metabolism or that manipulate mental and emotional states. Conversely, casting such spells in circumstances where the wrong elements predominate may impose penalties.

If elemental *balance* is necessary for magical medicine, then Healing spells might have elemental spells as prerequisites. Certain forms of limited Magery may apply to the Body Control, Healing, and elemental colleges. If there's a skill that covers the underlying theory, then it's likely to limit Healing spells; see *Skill-Based Limits* (pp. 40-41).

### The Humors

The four elements of Western alchemy are related to four *humors* – liquids that are believed to permeate the body. Fire is linked to yellow bile; water, to phlegm; earth, to black bile; and air, to blood. If one humor predominates, it can produce a strong personality type: *choleric*, *phlegmatic*, *melancholic*, or *sanguine*, respectively. Particular diseases are associated with specific elements on the basis of whether they're "cold"

or "hot," "wet" or "dry." Good health, mental and physical, requires balance.

In this picture, a wizard might need to know three spells from each of the four elemental colleges as prerequisites for any Healing spell – and perhaps for Body Control and Mind Control spells, too. The Alchemy skill may limit spell levels.

### Ayurvedic Metaphysics

The Ayurvedic tradition of India, with its five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and void), is linked to a medical theory that recognizes three *doshas*: *vata* (air), *pitta* (fire), and *kapha* (water). *Vata* governs movement, breath, blood flow, and creativity. *Pitta* governs metabolic heat, digestion, and ethical judgment. *Kapha* governs resilience, strength, healing, and several emotions.

To represent the relationship between elements and bodily functions, the GM might add extra prerequisites to certain spells. Cadence, Choke, Clumsiness, Grace, Hold Breath, Reflexes, and similar spells might additionally require "any five Air spells." Spells such as Essential Food, Hunger, Retch, Strengthen Will, and Weaken Will may need "any five Fire spells." Debility, Emotion Control, Frailty, Might, Vigor, etc. – and the entire Healing college – might call for "any five Water spells." The Esoteric Medicine skill could reasonably limit levels with *all* of these spells.

### Void College

If void is an element, then it should have a strange, magical aspect. In Japan, it's associated with heaven, and represents things beyond everyday experience, including pure energy, thought, and spirit. The Indian concept relates to distances and space, and also to sound.

It's simplest to rule that one of the *existing* colleges represents void. Gate is a good choice, as it deals with distances, powerful magics, and spirit summoning. For a less-powerful option with fewer spells that rely on other colleges, consider Movement or Sound. If the GM wants to assemble a college that covers all aspects of this

element, he might draw from Gate, Movement, and Sound – and perhaps also from Communication and Empathy and/or Mind Control.

### New Elemental Spirits

If the GM decides that metal, wood, and/or void are elements, and uses the general system of elemental spirit spells described in *Magic*, then he'll need statistics for new elemental spirits. These quick adaptations should suffice if he doesn't wish to construct entirely new templates:

*Metal Elementals*: Start with the earth elemental template on p. 55 of *Magic*, remove ST+1, and increase DR from 2 to 4.

*Void Elementals*: Start with the air elemental template on p. 28 of *Magic*, lower IQ-2 to IQ-3, remove HP+2, delete the Lighter Than Air limitation on Flight, and eliminate Vulnerability.

*Wood Elementals*: Start with the earth elemental template, remove ST+1, improve DX-2 to DX-1, and delete DR 2.

Alternatively, the GM can create new elementals from scratch. Void elementals might be *extremely* exotic beings that embody pure energy or abstract measurements – perhaps summoned from the heavens or the spaces between worlds!



# ETHICS AND SPELLS

If ethical forces have objective reality (see *Ethical Magic*, pp. 13-14), then there may be spells that detect and manipulate them. Secular wizards *might* wield these spells – treating even morality as just another cosmic force – but such magic is traditionally associated with clerics empowered by higher beings (see *Clerical Spell-Magic*, pp. 65-71). Thus, Power Investiture is a likely prerequisite for ethics-related spells.

If spells like this exist, then the GM must decide what sorts of beings, objects, and places have an “ethical charge.” Gods, demons, angels, etc., almost certainly will, unless the gods turn out to be amoral agents of rules from a higher source! Certain supernatural entities, especially the undead, are prime candidates – and anything that’s repelled by True Faith is probably evil by definition. Holy relics and sacred ground (high sanctity areas; see *Sanctity*, pp. 68-69) are also likely to have some kind of moral status.

Ordinary mortals are trickier. They might *behave* in “good” or “chaotic” ways – but this could be a temporary expression of free will, not a supernatural alignment. On the other hand, there are settings where many people are committed to a particular side in a cosmic confrontation. In a background like this, nearly everyone will have his ethical allegiance (perhaps determined by the temple he frequents) written on his character sheet.

The best approach may be to say that most people are only faintly ethically aligned at best, but that a few remarkable individuals are detectably committed. This can be tied to traits such as Blessed, Power Investiture, True Faith, divinely granted powers with the Pact limitation, and Supernatural Features – and possibly Disciplines of Faith, religious Fanaticism, and sacred Vows. Clerical Investment might link the cleric to his religion’s ethics or be merely a social badge. A dramatic one-off action – such as mass murder, saving the world, or raising the dead – could also set a person’s category, at least temporarily.

In most cases, each ethics-related spell is actually a *set* of spells, equal in number to the applicable ethical categories; thus, there could be Sense Good, Sense Evil, Sense Karmic Defiance, and so on. If the ethical universe isn’t entirely balanced, though, then some spells might not exist for every category. For example, if supernatural good is more powerful than evil, then its priests may have access to Exclude Evil, while Exclude Good is unavailable even to demons.

## SUGGESTED SPELLS

Below are some possible ethics-based spells. Most resemble specialized versions of spells from *GURPS Magic*. Not all need be present in a given setting. The GM should decide what fits and adjust the effects as appropriate. Prerequisites have been left up to the GM as well.

These spells may belong to the Gate, Knowledge, or Meta-Spells colleges, at the GM’s option, depending on whether they primarily interact with extradimensional influences, simple objective facts, or magical phenomena. Alternatively, they could be in their own college – or

perhaps in *several* colleges, with one (often granted to good priests) giving spells to seek out both good and evil, and to ward off evil beings, another (mostly for evil spellcasters) providing only the ability to identify and repel good beings, and so on. The GM is free to treat other spells – notably Aura, Pentagram, Planar Summons for specific “higher” planes, and Seek Gate – as also belonging to these special colleges.

Ethics-based spells can’t *usually* be enchanted into items, but they’re sometimes manifested in rare, very holy relics.

### Sense (Ethical Category)

Information; Area

Functions like Sense Foes (p. B245), but detects an ethical category, not hostile intent toward the caster. Thus, it might work on inanimate objects as well as on thinking beings *if* items can be notably “good,” “chaotic,” or whatever. Critical success provides insight into the *source* of the ethical alignment: divine/demonic contact, possession, inborn nature, free choice, etc. As the basic “ethical spell,” this shouldn’t usually have other spells as prerequisites.

Base Cost: 1 (minimum 2).

### Seek (Ethical Category)

Information

Works like Seek Magic (*Magic*, p. 102), but finds strong manifestations of an ethical category, not magic.

Cost: 6.

Time to Cast: 10 seconds.

### Protection from (Ethical Category)

Regular

This spell acts much like Armor (p. B253) and Magic Resistance (*Magic*, p. 123), but *only* against spells or physical attacks from entities with a specific ethical alignment, or from individuals under their complete mental control. The GM decides whether indirect attacks count as coming from the being that instigated them. Every energy point put into the spell (up to 5) grants +1 DR and +2 Magic Resistance. This spell can only be cast on a willing subject.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 1 to 5 to cast. Half that to maintain.

### Repel (Ethical Category)

Regular

This spell works much like Repel (*Magic*, p. 147), but only against beings of the specified ethical alignment.

Duration: 1 minute.

Cost: 1 per 3 ST worth of “repulsion.”

Time to Cast: 3 seconds.

## Exclude (Ethical Category)

**Special; Resists attempts to cross it**

Works like Pentagram (*Magic*, p. 124), but only bars creatures of the specified ethical category. The caster must trace a simple “circle of protection” using a fingertip, staff, weapon point, etc., but this doesn’t have to be *drawn*, and can’t be physically cut or erased. Excluded entities trying to force their way in use (ST+IQ)/4, not (ST+IQ)/2. The GM may rule that Exclude keeps out normal mortals who have a strong commitment to the ethical alignment – although these might have a better chance to cross its borders.

*Duration:* Permanent unless broken.

*Cost:* 1/2 per square foot protected (minimum 5).

*Time to Cast:* 1/2 second per square foot (round up, minimum 1 second). High skill *can* reduce casting time.

## Loyalty of (Ethical Category)

**Regular; Resisted by Will**

This spell works like Loyalty (*Magic*, p. 136), but only against beings of the specified ethical alignment.

*Duration:* 1 hour.

*Cost:* 2 to cast. 1 to maintain. *Don’t* double cost if the subject doesn’t know the caster, but *quadruple* it if the subject is a foe of the caster.

*Time to Cast:* 2 seconds.

# ENERGY SOURCES

The availability of “energy” is perhaps the most important constraint on spellcasting. In the standard system, a caster pays most of the energy cost for a spell out of his Fatigue Points (FP). This has many inherent drawbacks that will drive high-powered wizards to seek alternatives.

Note that the term “energy” is used here only as a convenience. It doesn’t necessarily refer to “energy” as recognized by modern physics. Many magic rules make more sense if it means something very different!

## EXTRA FATIGUE

If wizards *have* to use their own energy, or need to worry about external sources being lost or stolen (a risk for everything under *Familiars*, below, *Powerstones*, p. 51, and *Alternative Power Stores*, p. 52), then they’ll seek ways to improve their personal reserves. They might simply engage in physical training designed to raise HT and/or FP. More exotic options exist, however, including magical training, personal enchantments, and mystical meditative techniques.

### “Magic Only” Fatigue

The GM may permit wizards to buy extra FP solely to power magic, ignoring any limits placed on normal FP purchases. Such energy points cost the usual 3 character points apiece but are recorded as a separate “Energy Reserve” (ER). They can only be used to power spells (and possibly other explicitly magical powers, at the GM’s option). Spells can *also* draw on standard FP – the wizard chooses whether to use FP or ER when casting, and can mix the two types of energy in a single spell.

Missed sleep and other things that deplete ordinary FP *don’t* touch the energy in the Energy Reserve. If ER points are spent, they recover at the rate of an energy point every 10 minutes, independent of rest. The Recover Energy spell improves this recovery rate as usual. The Lend Energy spell and similar means can also recharge the ER.

These advantages and disadvantages roughly balance out, which is why points in an Energy Reserve cost the same as FP. For general ER rules, see *GURPS Powers*.

## Increased Recovery Rates

Spells such as Recover Energy enable wizards – who sometimes spend a *lot* of FP – to recover FP quickly. If they have arcane ways to regain FP even more effectively, then the GM can allow them to buy Regeneration (p. B80) with either “Fatigue Recovery,” a +100% enhancement that lets them recover FP at the same rate at which they heal HP, or “Fatigue Only,” a -0% limitation that means Regeneration restores FP *instead* of HP, still at the listed rate. These modifiers are only available for Fast or better Regeneration. Additional limitations can reflect special requirements for recharging, such as meditation or orgiastic dancing.

## FAMILIARS

Among other things, magical familiars might be able to supply FP for spells. The simplest approach is for the wizard to buy FP with the “Granted by familiar” limitation; see *Familiars* (p. B38). Another option is for the familiar to cast Lend Energy or Share Energy, or for the wizard to use Steal Energy. Most familiars are relatively small – cats, rats, birds, monkeys, etc. – which can make the idea of tapping them for useful amounts of actual *energy* seem rather implausible. What they supply might actually be “magical potential” or “distilled mana,” however. Familiars could even have substantial Energy Reserves of their own (see “*Magic Only*” Fatigue, above).

## ENERGY OTHER THAN FATIGUE

Magic can use “energy” without it being equivalent to personal FP. For a harsh and limited sort of wizardry, the GM can require that all energy points come from the caster’s *HP*, using the standard rules for burning these instead of FP (see also *Injurious Magic*, p. 25). One or two small castings will be merely painful and stressful . . . but serious magic will quickly leave the wizard staggering or unconscious.

A subtler but equally unforgiving sort of magic would take its energy cost directly out of one of the caster's basic attributes (ST, DX, IQ, or HT), or perhaps Will. This can be a nuisance to administer, since it means recalculating secondary values (damage, Move, skill levels, etc.), but the idea of a wizard growing slower, frailer, or less-assertive with each casting may appeal. A wizard who must spend IQ to power spells will have *severe* problems, as each spell will make the next casting less likely to succeed!

A somewhat less disabling idea that emphasizes the difference between magic and ordinary physical activities is to use a new special-purpose score to power magic. The GM might set this "Base Essence" equal to  $(HT+Will)/2$ , for instance, meaning that both healthy and strong-willed wizards would have their advantages. Alternatively, Essence could simply start at 10. This is essentially "Magic Only" Fatigue (p. 50) given for free – but with the drawback that magic can't use *ordinary* FP. It should cost the same to buy up: 3 character points per Essence point. Logically, Essence might also be bought down, but this represents free points for non-spellcasters, so it should be prohibited unless low Essence has severe side effects (e.g., an increased vulnerability to magic). Essence might also fuel supernatural advantages, exotic skills such as Power Blow, and so on.

Attribute points and Essence spent to power spells are recovered exactly like "Magic Only" Fatigue, at a rate of a point every 10 minutes – or faster, with the Recover Energy spell or modified Regeneration (see *Increased Recovery Rates*, p. 50). Hit Points used for magic must be healed like any other injury, however. Especially harsh GMs can rule that magic can't heal HP spent to power magic – only natural healing, rest, and medical attention work.

## POWERSTONES

Powerstones are described in detail on pp. 69-70 of *GURPS Magic*, and serve as the "default" external energy source in the standard magic system. They're often gemstones, but the GM can let enchanters cast the Powerstone spell *anything*. The criteria selected can make for some interesting campaign-specific details:

- *Cash value*. If Powerstones must be not just gems but *valuable* gems – perhaps with energy capacity dependent on value – then the most academic of wizards has a practical reason to seek out mundane wealth. Anyone looking to make Powerstones will be a good customer for the local jewelers!

- *Natural power*. If ordinary-looking but relatively rare natural materials work best, then wizards or their servants will often be found out in the country, looking at trees or animals with appraising eyes, and may gain a reputation for rusticity.

## Mass Magic

*Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238) enables wizards to draw on multiple supporters for energy. Below are some optional rules that expand on this technique. These methods *might* be widely used – but they could instead be secrets known only to a few specialists, requiring a perk or an Unusual Background. They especially suit megalomaniacal wizards with lots of political power.

### *The Fanatical Spectator*

Enough propaganda (a successful Propaganda roll at -3, using media that can reach at least a city-sized community) or a sufficiently mesmerizing oration (a critical success on Public Speaking, or possibly on Religious Ritual for clerical magic) can increase the amount of energy that spectators can contribute by creating a quasi-religious atmosphere. For each week of propaganda blitzing beforehand, or each point by which the Public Speaking or Religious Ritual roll succeeds, spectators can contribute an additional FP to the ceremonial casting, to a maximum of half their FP.

### *The Stadium Ceremony*

Mass gatherings might serve as sources of extensive ritual power, utilized by adepts on the dais or scattered anonymously through the crowd at key points. The casters must organize or design the assembly in question, inserting their spells, often subtly, into the activities. This may require one or more rolls against Thaumatology (or Theology, for clerical workings). It *might* be possible to hijack a preplanned event for magical ends with successful rolls against Politics, Psychology, Ritual Magic, and/or Artist (Scene Design).

Each wizard involved in the spell – who *must* know it at level 15 or better – can either personally contribute energy to the spell or coordinate up to 10,000 spectators in chanting, marching, or other ritual actions that will generate one energy point per 100 participants, up to 100 points total. Such coordination requires a successful Ritual Magic roll (use Religious Ritual for clerical magic). Failure grants no energy, while critical failure drains 100 points from the total. Fanatical spectators (see above) grant double energy. "Unbelievers" still lower the total, blocking one point per 20 actively hostile onlookers or participants.

- *Personal significance*. If value to the *wizard* is crucial, then casters will carry "juju bags" full of private junk, and wear strange charm bracelets.

- *Cultural significance*. If manmade items with peculiar qualities are required, then wizards might haunt curio shops and the corners of great markets. "Curiosity value" may determine power capacity, thanks to psychic influences; e.g., modern-day wizards might store power in Mickey Mouse watches, Betamax videocassettes, 1960s comic books, and souvenirs from unfashionable holiday resorts.

- *Size*. If sheer mass matters, then wizards may have encumbrance issues. A mage carrying several large lead ingots might be dangerous . . . but he's going to stagger a little.

## ALTERNATIVE POWER STORES

Portable external energy supplies need not be Powerstones. Below are some other possibilities.

### Power Staff

If the “magic staffs” of fantasy tradition are energy stores, then that would explain why old, sedentary wizards seem to hang onto them so hard. One way to represent this is to make a staff the normal subject of the Powerstone spell. Another option is to incorporate a Powerstone into a staff, leading to stylish designs with large gemstones set into twisted wood. Such a stone can energize any spell enchanted into the staff. Letting it empower any spell cast *through* the staff doubles its effective output, which is probably too generous – but some GMs might like this way of boosting wizards’ power.



An alternative is to let wizards buy an Energy Reserve (see “*Magic Only*” *Fatigue*, p. 50) with limitations such as Breakable and Can Be Stolen to represent the staff. Wizards presumably learn how to prepare such a staff during early training. A staff won’t usually be Unique, but replacing it is hard work, and nobody can have more than one functional staff at a time. There may be limits on how much energy such a staff can hold – perhaps equal to the owner’s IQ + Magery. See also *Gadget Limitations* (pp. B116-117).

In all cases, a staff that serves as a power source should generally be a valid subject for the Staff spell (see *Magic Staffs*, p. B240). At the GM’s option, it might even *require* that spell.

### Paut

*Paut*, described in ancient Egyptian texts, is a fluid that functions as a kind of “liquid Manastone.” A wizard can measure out the precise amount of liquid needed, eliminating the need to worry about discrete Powerstones of particular sizes. Drinking paut restores FP depleted for *magical* purposes – spellcasting, magical powers, etc. – at the rate of 1 FP per ounce. It has no effect on FP lost to nonmagical activities. Once the drinker is at full FP, any excess energy remains available, for magical purposes only, for the next 5 minutes. A wizard can drink an ounce of paut per second, and up to 6×ST ounces in any 24-hour period.

Paut can also be used when making alchemical elixirs involving life, growth, or the Astral Realm, at the rate of one ounce per dose; doing so *halves* the production time for such elixirs. As well, paut is sometimes required when making homunculi or other living and pseudo-living creations, and as ink for certain important texts. Particularly strong paut, or paut made from premium ingredients, has a tendency to jiggle and move inside its flask.

Paut is made from silver, pure water, Western emmer, ibis blood, and other, perhaps less-savory ingredients. Treat it as an alchemical elixir (see p. 103, and Chapter 28 of *GURPS Magic*) with a production time of 10 days. The technique defaults to Alchemy-3. Herb Lore *cannot* be used. In some settings, paut-making is a deep secret of certain magical societies, and knowledge of the technique requires high Rank in such a society, a *substantial* Unusual Background, and/or a costly Security Clearance, as appropriate.

Costs of ingredients and of the finished product depend on the nature of the setting. A recommendation is 1/100 of standard starting wealth (p. B27) for ingredients, and 1/30 of starting wealth for usable paut, per one-ounce dose; e.g., \$7.50 and \$25, respectively, in a TL2 campaign. Wherever there are wizards who know of paut, the demand is sure to be steady.

### Raise Cone of Power

#### Regular

This spell is inspired by claims and accounts from modern real-world occultists. It creates an immaterial energy reserve of potentially indefinite size. It’s considered a Meta-Spell.

Raise Cone of Power can only be cast ceremonially (p. B238). The amount of energy generated depends on the local mana level. For every hour of ritual, each participant – regardless of whether he knows the spell – raises 1 point in low mana, 2 points in normal mana, or 4 points in high mana. The initial casting takes one hour and raises an hour’s worth of energy. Maintaining the spell requires uninterrupted ceremonial activity, but continues to increase the energy accumulated every hour. At the GM’s option, energetic dancing (requires a successful Dancing roll; costs FP as for *Hiking*, p. B426) doubles the energy that a participant can produce in an hour – and a critical success might *triple* it!

After the first hour, anyone involved in the casting can drop out of the ceremony (so long as one person who knows the spell remains involved), and take a Concentrate maneuver and make an IQ roll to draw on the Cone to power another spell, which must be cast starting on the next turn. Failure on this spell draws no energy from the Cone; critical failure drains the spell’s full casting cost. The Cone *cannot* be tapped to power itself. This can continue – for any number of spells – until the Cone is exhausted or the ceremony ends.

*Duration:* As long as the ceremony continues.

*Cost:* 6 to cast. 6 to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 1 hour.

*Prerequisites:* Lend Energy and *either* Pentagram or Restore Mana.

## STATIC POWER SUPPLIES

External energy sources don't have to be portable. Some may be fixed in place, making specific locations quite literally "places of power." Such static sources could be marked by miracles and wonders, crackling energies, or a feeling of almost tangible power obvious to everyone . . . or be utterly unremarkable, needing spells and enchantments to unlock them. They might also be a mana level or two higher than their surroundings.

In game terms, a source should be defined by how much energy it supplies (e.g., "10 points available for castings every second"), perhaps with a random element (e.g., "1d+7 points"). Some kind of roll – probably IQ + Magery – may be needed to draw upon the supply, with the option of critical success gaining more (possibly at the risk of "burning out" the source temporarily or permanently) and critical failure making it impossible to tap the site for a while. There could also be an upper limit on how much energy can be used in total per hour, day, month, etc.

If two or more wizards try to access a site simultaneously, then the "flow" *might* be divided equally between them. However, it's more fun to have them engage in a magical struggle for control – perhaps a Contest of Will + Magery, with long-term residents and those who've analyzed the site rolling at a bonus. The winner might gain control for an extended period, or every turn could require its own Quick Contest.

### Ley Spells

A way to make ley lines (p. 12) significant and interesting without necessarily making them crucial is to introduce a few spells that exploit them as a useful but subsidiary feature of magical reality. There could be a spell to locate them, plus spells equivalent to Mind-Sending, Telepathy, Haste, Apportation, etc., that only work for communication or movement along them, but at half the energy cost (or less) of the usual versions. The GM who doesn't want to invent new spells might allow the *standard* versions to enjoy reduced energy cost when cast along leys.

Another option is to give spells increased range when cast along ley lines. Possibilities include dividing effective distance by 2, 10, or more before figuring range penalties; assessing a mere -1 per intervening node; and *ignoring* range penalties. Such effects will turn a ley network into a useful communication and transportation system. Any faction that controls it will wield considerable power. For extra color, attempts to cast magic *across* a ley line could suffer significant penalties.

Finally, ley lines could serve as "power channels" that can be tapped using appropriate spells (or just an IQ + Magery roll) for energy to power other magic. The amount of energy supplied determines how useful a given line is. See *Static Power Supplies* (above) for a related topic.

In some settings, ley lines (p. 12) may serve as the magical equivalent of electrical power lines, channeling energy between high mana sites ("nodes"). By virtue of their own high mana nature, these might delineate the magical geography of the countryside and perhaps mark the borders of areas of differently aspected mana (see *Aspected Mana*, p. 59). See *GURPS Fantasy* for further discussion.

## MEDITATION, HOLINESS, OR STUDY

If magic is an outgrowth of prayer, religious study, or meditation (see *Supernatural Inspiration*, p. 17), then the GM can rule that – for *practical* purposes – these behaviors provide the equivalent of energy. Optional rules for this appear below. To use them, a magic-worker must be Very Blessed (p. B41) and have at least a -10-point version of Disciplines of Faith (p. B132) determined by his chosen faith.

Every eight hours (or "working day") of prayer or sanctified meditation generates the equivalent of an energy point that the practitioner can spend to create supernatural effects or items. This makes *Devotional Enchantment* (below) roughly as efficient a use of time as *Slow and Sure Enchantment* (p. B481). Hours spent in religious study accrue "energy" at half speed. The strict conduct of a virtuous life amasses it at quarter speed. Important meritorious acts (pilgrimages, joining a monastery, etc.) might grant the equivalent of 25 energy points apiece, while lesser acts (such as sacrificing valuable items or memorizing a sacred text) give a smaller amount – all at the GM's option. If evil cults have access to this process, then especially vile acts or bloody sacrifices might be considered "meritorious"; it's the *god's* rules that count. Indeed, vicious deeds that leave the cultist hunted and despised might be worth even more – evil gods appreciate the value of incentives!

The practitioner can hold this "energy" in reserve for as long as he wishes – typically until a specific, usually virtuous use appears for it, at which time he spends it to perform magic. However, what's created and held *isn't* energy as such, although it uses the same units for game convenience. It's a backlog of divine favor, temporary insight, or good standing with higher powers who can be asked for aid. Thus, it *can't* be combined with FP, energy from Powerstones, etc., to cast spells.

The GM may wish to restrict how much "energy" anyone can hold in reserve;  $2 \times (\text{Will} + \text{Power Investiture})$  is a plausible maximum. This isn't required or recommended, though. Divine miracles rarely have size limits!

Learning and casting spells work normally in this system. Usually, the holy man uses *Clerical Spell-Magic* (pp. 65-71), and so possesses Power Investiture rather than Magery, and learns spells from a restricted list. Adherents of abstruse meditational systems, who don't invoke gods, might still use standard Magery-based magic.



## Devotional Enchantment

Optionally, this sort of magic may be restricted to use for enchanting items, which represent the benefits of holiness made manifest. After all, holy scholars are rarely very interested in adventuring, but even they can use special tools! A typical instance of this appears in legends of medieval Jewish rabbis of great holiness and learning who created *golems*: artificial beings empowered by the secret name of God. Devotional enchanters shouldn't have a limit on how much "energy" they can hold in reserve – they'll need plenty.

It's possible to use the standard enchanting system here, but something akin to the enchantment rules for symbol or syntactic magic (see Chapter 6) is more flavorful. The symbols involved should relate to the enchanter's religion. A Norse rune-master would learn Symbol Drawing and the futhark runes (p. 170), carving them onto staves and weapons. A Jewish Qabalist would use a form of syntactic magic with Realms based on the sephiroth (pp. 253-254), although he might still need Symbol Drawing in order to mark his golems correctly with numerologically significant words in the Hebrew alphabet (p. 254).

Enchanting an item this way should be a relatively quick process, usually completed in a day or less. Wizardly enchanters may be astounded by the apparent effortless-ness with which devotional enchanters produce items – not realizing that *decades* of rigorous practice go into the preparation. If the practitioner makes his skill rolls for all of the symbols required, then the "energy" is invested in the item and it's enchanted. Failure means the "energy" isn't spent and the enchanter can't attempt that enchantment again until he has raised all of the skills associated with the failed rolls; his knowledge was inadequate to the task. Critical failure means he may never try that enchantment again; divine displeasure attended the attempt.

### Creating Character Points

This system can be combined with rules that use character points rather than energy to create items (e.g., *Magic Items as Advantages*, pp. 113-115). Every 25 points of "energy" converts to one character point. For instance, 200 hours of prayer or meditation, or one very significant act, would create a character point.

## SACRIFICES

Sacrifices are usually seen as religious in nature, but they're occasionally explained as *magical*. Magical sacrifices might still involve sending something to a spirit or a god – but as a bargain, in return for which the being aids spellcasting. Another possibility is that sacrifices release something that wizards can use directly. Both interpretations support sacrifices providing energy for spells. The *moral* implications depend on the setting!

It's strongly recommended that the GM treat items and beings created using magic as *unsuitable* sacrifices. If he allows them, then they should *never* supply more energy than was used to conjure them. Likewise, repairing or resurrecting the thing sacrificed should either invalidate the effect or be impossible – the sacrifice's "vital nature," soul, etc., is consumed by the magic or sent to the relevant deity.

## The Process

Any sacrifice involves destroying something, and hence takes as long as the process of destruction requires. In some cases, though, the magic-worker may be able to "hold" sacrifice energy until he needs it – or at least for a brief period. In others, he can crush or ignite a prepared sacrifice almost instantly.

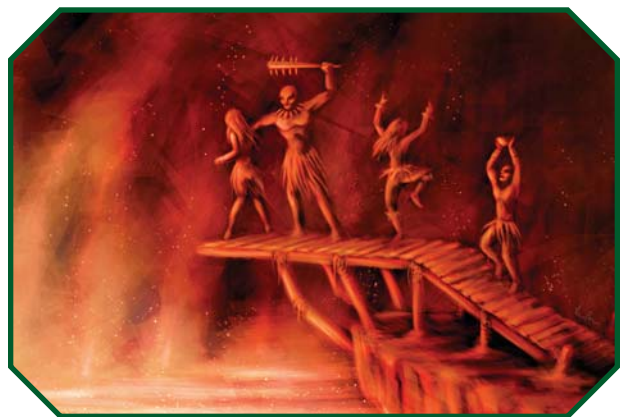
### Simple Sacrifices

The simplest option is to permit anyone (or any *spellcaster*) to perform sacrifices. The procedure either carries no significant risk of failure or is part of the spellcasting process and covered by the spell roll. If the person conducting the sacrifice is distracted or attacked, he might have to make a Will roll to continue, as with regular spellcasting.

### Skill Use

To make things a little harder, performing a sacrifice could demand a skill roll. The skill involved might be Thaumatology if the problem is a technical matter of bringing forces into alignment, Ritual Magic if sacrifices are highly ritualistic but essentially nonreligious (although they may involve dealings with minor spirits), or Religious Ritual if the sacrifice must be formally dedicated to a deity or a powerful spirit. This adds an extra chance for the magic to fail – which can be especially frustrating if the thing sacrificed is destroyed even on a failure. To offset this, the GM might want to give large bonuses for extra time and careful preparation, so that well-planned sacrifices almost always work but hurried emergency procedures are chancy.

*Sacrifice Technique*: A variation is to make magical sacrifice an Average technique that defaults to the relevant skill at perhaps -5. This means that anyone who studies the skill has *some* chance of making useful sacrifices, but only those who focus on the subject will pull them off reliably. If sacrifices are seen as immoral, then only evil individuals will improve the technique – but the temptation will be present for others.



### Sacrifice Spell

If sacrifices require extremely formal procedures to direct and focus the energy, or to contact some supernatural being, then the GM may define a Sacrifice *spell*. This should be part of the Meta-Spells college if sacrifices primarily involve inanimate matter; the Necromantic college if they involve draining life energy from living victims, and

## Sacrifice Values and Character Points

An option for determining the energy value of living sacrifices is to say that it's related to "personal dynamism," "karmic significance," "cosmic standing," etc., as measured by the victim's character point total. One energy point per character point might work. If human sacrifice is permitted, then this could lead to vicious Aztec-style battle scenes in which fighters struggle to *capture* the most-capable enemy warriors (without inflicting permanent injuries on them, which would lower their point value!) and drag them back to the bloody-handed war-wizards. Heroic PCs would have to be wary, but weak and sickly peasants could hope to be left alone.

Energy-for-points might also lead to traditions similar to some found in real history, in which a society appoints a "Year-King" and gives him wealth, respect, and everything else associated with Status . . . except for the freedom to escape his fate as a sacrifice at year's end! If the GM permits such tricks, he should insist that the

Year-King's position and power be *real*. The universe can't be fooled by empty titles and hollow respect.

This idea has problems, though. For one thing, character points aren't a *good* measure of anything except potential usefulness as a PC and effectiveness as an Ally or an Enemy, leading to oddities such as PCs who've purchased Allies being worth more than otherwise-identical NPCs (who don't pay points for Allies), and disadvantages that reflect ritual purity reducing value as much as others that indicate sacrificial unsuitability. Another issue is *negative* point totals – especially for animals with low IQ and limited skills. A further headache is that the GM will need precise point totals for every possible sacrifice, including beasts and minor NPCs. And since it's possible to calculate point values for machines such as computers and cars (which usually have low or zero IQ), the GM must decide whether *these* are valid "living" sacrifices. Thus, the GM should use this rule only if he doesn't mind the consequences or actually wants to explore them.

both if they're versatile. Its spell class would be "Special." It might cost a nominal 1 FP to cast. Reasonable prerequisites would be six other spells from the college(s) to which it's assigned.

### Energy Availability

The wizard should have to use the energy released by a successful sacrifice relatively quickly. The GM can ban the use of time-distorting spells to circumvent this limit, ruling that the magics interfere with each other. If the wizard must start casting his spell within 10 seconds of the sacrifice, and also needs to be the one who performed the sacrifice, then it will be hard to arrange more than a couple of sacrifices to empower a given casting. If casters can "hold" energy for *minutes* or even longer, and if multiple assistants – e.g., every participant in a ceremonial casting – can perform useful sacrifices, then extremely large (and perhaps bloody) workings become possible, and sacrificial magic may be powerful indeed. The GM might prefer to restrict sacrifices to one wizard per spell, unless he *wants* "sacrifice cults" to dominate magic.

Another important issue is whether wizards can divert the energy from sacrifices into Powerstones, Energy Reserves, and similar stores. This might *seem* reasonable, but sacrificial magic becomes much more flexible and effective (and thus tempting) if such stores are widely available. Allowing wizards to "hold" energy for hours or days will have similar effects: wizards are likely to turn themselves into sacrifice-charged batteries at every opportunity – although if sacrificial energy carries a "taint," this may have an effect on their appearance or behavior (see *Flavored Sacrificial Energy*, p. 58). The GM might want to rule that each sacrifice must be linked to a specific casting that follows immediately, as discussed above.

If sacrifice-based wizardry demands preparation, time, and skill, then it will be a cumbersome affair, mostly

conducted ceremonially in secure locations. Adventuring wizards might still manage the occasional improvisation, though, and even carry around a few potential sacrifices in case of emergencies. And if they can improvise with life energy, then battlefields may have their advantages . . .

### Inanimate Sacrifices

The point of a sacrifice might be to release the symbolic value of an *inanimate* object. This offers many interesting possibilities. Simple options include requiring spellcasting to consume "material components," and activating Magery that has the Trigger limitation (p. 27 and p. B115). Such sacrifices might instead provide extra energy for spellcasting, however.

Inanimate sacrifices should generally involve rare and expensive materials. Anything discovered to be magically important will no doubt rapidly rise in price, though, thanks to the laws of supply and demand. With a quasi-religious sacrifice, the usual assumption is that the item's "essence" is sent to a higher power – and most gods and spirits like to receive *rare* or *attractive* things.

A simple rule is for an inanimate sacrifice to give one energy point per (campaign average starting wealth)/250 of worth. Note that this will make wealthy wizards more effective than poor ones! Alternatively, the energy released could be linked to the thing's value to the *caster* – perhaps because the recipient spirits understand intent, or because the power comes from the psychic stress of giving something up. In that case, energy output might be a point per (starting cash for caster's Wealth level)/250 worth of goods. It could instead involve complex subjective judgments and a lot of carefully assessed roleplaying, as sacrificing a souvenir of some great accomplishment, a gift from a loved one, etc., grants bonus energy. See *Inherent Magic* (p. 96-100) for some related ideas.



## Spell Slots

The main game-mechanical purpose of casting costs is to limit the number of spells that wizards can cast in a short time. An alternative way to do this is to assume that casters have a fixed number of “spell slots.” At the start of the day, they “memorize” a collection of spells from their repertoire, which they can then cast as needed. As each spell is cast, it’s “forgotten.” This concept originated in Jack Vance’s *Dying Earth* stories (and is often dubbed “Vancean” magic), and appears in many fantasy RPGs. Below are two ways to adapt it to **GURPS**.

### Modular Abilities

The most straightforward approach uses the Super-Memorization version of the Modular Abilities advantage (p. B71), with the limitations Spells Only, Limited Use, and probably Preparation Required. For the purposes of Preparation Required, all Modular Abilities of the same type can count as a single advantage. This lets wizards have multiple spells “in mind” simultaneously.



Spells Only implies that the wizard can only memorize spells drawn from his personal grimoire – or, for more flexibility, from *any* standard-type grimoire, with the assumption that such books are rare and hence valuable. See *Grimoires* (p. 38). This is typical of Vancean magic. The

GM could require the spellcaster to memorize all of an advanced spell’s prerequisites before he memorizes the spell itself, but that’s rather restrictive. It’s usually enough to require him to meet any non-spell prerequisites (Magery, IQ minima, etc.) and to have the prerequisite spells in his grimoire.

The GM might wish to replace Super-Memorization with Cosmic Power while preserving the Spells Only and Limited Use limitations. This produces a more flexible adept who can whip up any spell that he’s ever transcribed to his grimoire – for a suitably higher point cost.

### Wild Talent

Another option is to use Wild Talent (p. B99), which makes it possible to pull spells and skills out of thin air. The Focused limitation can restrict this to spells. The user rolls against IQ to cast the chosen spell. A mage may add his Magery bonus. If Wild Talent is part of a power (see Chapter 7), add the power’s Talent instead, if this isn’t Magery. This handling best represents a flexible caster who can put together a spell to order, from first principles, but who’s restricted by the nature of magic or by his mental capacities from doing so often.

A wizard who can only use spells that he has studied in the past, in enough detail to transcribe notes and descriptions to his personal grimoire, has a further -40% Accessibility limitation. Studying and transcribing spells should be nontrivial but not *too* hard. This is especially true if Modular Abilities is also available; the two approaches should be roughly comparable in cost-effectiveness.

In some settings, *experiences* can (in a way) be sacrificed: following a restricted lifestyle grants power. Reflect this by applying a Pact limitation to Magery.

### Living Sacrifices: Theory

A darker idea is that a sacrifice steals the life energy of living things. This usually means *animal* life. In most settings, sacrificing plants differs little from sacrificing rocks or metals – although some edible matter may have extra symbolic or cash value.

The amount of energy provided by each type of living sacrifice depends entirely on the setting’s metaphysics, and can have a *significant* influence on campaign style. If such sacrifices can provide no more than 10-20 energy, then they aren’t especially useful – a ceremonial casting with a crowd of helpful onlookers or a few well-trained and willing assistants can achieve as much, with fewer social complications. Only desperate wizards, and those so socially inept that they can’t recruit any helpers, will use sacrifice magic, however cheap or easy it might be. An important exception would arise if it’s possible to store the energy from sacrifices for long periods and then use it when required. In that case, sacrifices would be a way for wizards to “charge up” prior to conflicts.

On the other hand, if sacrifices provide several hundred energy points, then wizards can use them for quick enchantments and other vastly powerful spells that are normally very rare. This makes sacrificial magic *tempting*, no matter how despised or difficult it is. Wizards will look for excuses and “disposable” victims whenever the going gets tough. This can produce epic plots of temptation, and long debates about means and ends . . . but if sacrifices don’t cause obvious corruption, then they might become quite common. If the costs and benefits are more balanced, however, then sacrifices are likely to be the province of ruthless or eccentric specialists – although other wizards might need periodic reminders of *why* they aren’t following this path.

Generally, though, living sacrifices *do* have moral implications – especially if they work better with sapient beings. Any sacrificing-using wizard, even one who limits himself to nonsapient options, will probably be seen as a potential murderer. If sacrifices *require* sapient victims, then this sort of magic (and maybe magic in general) may be illegal. A society might permit it “under license,” especially if it’s a ruthless society that’s prepared to use nonhumans, convicts, prisoners of war, or other “expendables” – but even there, wizards are likely to have an image problem. Being sacrificed might be declared an honor, but that won’t necessarily attract volunteers; self-preservation is a powerful instinct. If magic is associated with a particular religion, then

followers of other faiths may well condemn sacrifices. If magical adepts make superior sacrifices, then wizardly rivalries are liable to turn bloody, and wise magical apprentices will be careful in their choice of teachers!

## Living Sacrifices: Value

Possible ways to determine the payoff from living sacrifices include:

- *Fixed rate.* Each creature provides a flat amount of energy – be it 10 points or 200. This will make ants, mice, and other small animals the standard sacrifices. For a slightly more varied approach, base the value on a multiple of the creature's HT.

- *Size.* Energy is roughly proportional to the creature's size, using a simple conversion based on weight or HP; 2×HP gives a modest amount of energy, while 10×HP gives quite a lot. This will make cows and elephants highly effective sacrifices. Humans might be worth using in emergencies, but aren't much more valuable than sheep or pigs.

- *Intelligence.* Sapient creatures – defined as those with IQ 6+ (see p. B15) – may be *required* for sacrifices, which otherwise use one of the options above. Alternatively, they might simply be much better; perhaps nonsapient sacrifices yield only half the energy. Extending this, the rule might be that stronger minds make better sacrifices; energy = IQ × HP is bad news for intellectuals! A more complex rule would make energy equal to IQ multiplied by the *lower* of HT or HP for creatures of IQ 5 or less, but by the *higher* of the two for IQ 6+ beings; “dumb animals” would only be worth sacrificing if they're large, whereas even a small sapient being would be valuable.

- *Character points.* This complex option is discussed in detail under *Sacrifice Values and Character Points* (p. 55).

- *Other appropriate features.* Virginity, purity, youth, etc., might increase energy by a percentage. Definitions of such things are left to the GM; for instance, “purity” could mean moral behavior, a lack of physical scars, or regular patterns on an animal's hide. People with particular features – from red hair to royal ancestry – may need disguises! To make life interesting for wizards, increase the energy that sacrificing *them* provides, perhaps by 2% per spell known or by 20% × Magery level. Combined with energy based on character points, this could make archmages deeply paranoid! In all cases, “imperfect” sacrifices could be downright useless.

## Living Sacrifices: The Price

Unless the GM wants living sacrifices to become routine in the campaign, they should involve complications. Requiring a skill, technique, or spell is rarely enough on its own; that will merely encourage specially trained wizards. A simple way to keep sacrificial magicians from dominating the setting too easily is to impose a penalty to spells or skills for larger workings – perhaps -1 per full 10 points of sacrificial energy. This tends to rule out the most interesting plot uses of the idea, however. Keeping suitable sacrificial victims rare can help, but it's a tricky balancing act. In any case, the traditional price is more usually moral or spiritual.

This *can* be handled entirely through roleplaying and social effects. Players are likely to accept that killing things for power makes someone fairly evil. Sacrificial magic may be seen as an occasional unpleasant necessity at best and vile demonism at worst, giving anyone accused of it a negative Reputation and eventually a new Enemy (law enforcers). However, wizards might still succumb to temptation out of perceived necessity – or try to keep their use of sacrifice-magic secret. To emphasize the cost, the GM can rule that the universe makes the latter practice difficult.

If sacrifice is a dark supernatural act, then it may mark the perpetrator *supernaturally*. He might soon acquire the traditional necromancer's pallor and eventually start losing Appearance, or emanate an uncanny aura; see *Visible Magical Gifts* (p. 25). He could gain Social Stigma (Excommunicated) – even the supernaturally detectable -10-point version – if the local religion disapproves of necromancy. The social problems could go beyond a negative Reputation to Social Stigma (Monster). Sacrificial practices might even warp a mage's “gift,” imposing limitations on his Magery such as Limited Colleges (permitting Necromantic but not Healing spells; p. 25), Pact (p. 27 and p. B113), or Radically Unstable (p. 24). Finally, the GM may have sacrificial wizards use the *Diabolic/Horrific Table* (p. 258) for critical failures.

## Nonlethal Living Sacrifices

In a few belief systems, a sacrifice can involve a living thing but not *kill* it. For example, ancient Mesoamerican religions sometimes involved sacrifices of blood or pain, which often had to come from high-status individuals, and that were not only voluntary but self-inflicted. If this principle applies to magic, then wizards will tend to be tough, iron-willed individuals who value power over comfort. To make the sacrifice *count*, it will probably have to involve expenditure of HP; see *Energy Other Than Fatigue* (pp. 50-51) and *Injurious Magic* (p. 25). This is essentially just an application of *Burning HP* (p. B237) that makes HP use mandatory and adds some lurid special effects.

Lesser versions of this idea might involve relatively small or easy expenditures; needing a drop of blood drawn from the wizard's finger, or even a cupful that could be taken from a riding horse, would be a moderate limitation – although it would give magic a slightly dark and primal look. Self-sacrifice that requires *pain* would be more serious, especially if High Pain Threshold didn't protect against it (because the pain, by definition, has to *hurt*). Of course, sacrifices of *other* beings that have to be painful would make magic about as blatantly evil as it could get.

Self-sacrifices that inflict permanent injury in return for major gains (such as Odin's giving up an eye for wisdom) can mainly be treated as a justification for wizards having both physical disadvantages and a lot of supernatural abilities at the start of play. If the former explain the latter, then they can't usually be healed by even the most powerful magic – at least, not without giving up the associated benefits. Making such a trade in the course of the campaign will usually be an adventure in itself rather than an exercise in spellcasting.

## Flavored Sacrificial Energy

It's possible that the type of thing sacrificed could "flavor" the ensuing spell effects. This might even be true even for inanimate sacrifices – although one reason to use such things even if living things provide more energy, morality aside, is that magic cast using "death energy" is often tainted and twisted.

This "flavor" or "taint" could be as minor as small sensory clues: a death-powered fireball is dark and smoky, reeking of decay or brimstone; a spell cast by sacrificing rare flowers carries a strong floral aroma; and one energized by a sacrifice of silver jewelry produces a glittering aura and a faint metallic chiming. More seriously, the magic's *effects* might be slightly but distinctly twisted –

created objects distorted toward the shape of the sacrifice, illusions that seem to be smeared with blood, telepathic messages partly drowned out by whispers or moans, and so on. Sacrificial wizards could be prone to temporary disadvantages such as Bloodlust and Berserk as they channel dark energies. Sacrifice-based attribute enhancements or healing may carry distinctly inconvenient side effects – perhaps temporarily imbuing the recipient with something of the personality of a sacrificed animal (the dullness of an ox or the solipsism of a cat) – or simply be painful and disturbing.

"Flavor" could also be reflected in the selection of suitable sacrifices for particular spells. For example, sacrificing a bird might give extra energy to Air spells, while blood sacrifices might benefit Necromantic spells most.

# MANA

*Mana* is another concept designed to help the GM control the availability of magic. It's based on ideas found in mythology and fiction – although in practice, few stories make magic's power and effectiveness *quite* as dependent on geography as it is in a **GURPS** setting with significantly varying mana levels. It's sometimes more useful to declare that the entire game world is at a particular mana level, as this immediately determines much about the game's style.

Note that if mana variations *are* a major feature of the setting, wizards may regard the Sense Mana spell (**GURPS Magic**, p. 101) as absolutely essential.

## MANA LEVELS

The mana levels discussed on p. B235 encompass a range of options, but there are other possibilities.

### Very Low Mana

In *very low* mana areas, only mages can cast spells, all spells function at -10 to skill for all purposes, and any casting attempt costs 1 FP extra before the dice are rolled. This additional cost represents a physical effort, and always comes from the mage's personal FP – never from Powerstones, Energy Reserves, etc. Magic items are affected similarly; they must have a Power of at least 25 to

function, and attempts to activate them cost the user 1 FP on top of any other cost. Supernatural creatures with a Dependency on mana suffer effects as if there's none, but whenever HP loss would occur, they can avoid it with a HT roll, and take only *half* damage if that fails.

If very low mana is the norm in a setting, then magic will probably be regarded as a minor curiosity or even a myth. Wizards – if they exist – will generally have to study one or two carefully selected spells intensively. This could lead to a melancholy "last vestiges of power" campaign, intensive research projects that attempt to exploit magic despite its weakness, and/or wizards laboring night and day to accumulate all the special bonuses they can.

### Continuous Mana

Rather than the standard "fixed quanta" approach, mana levels could vary in smaller increments. Local mana might grant anything from -10 to +10 to spells and the Power of magic items. Below -10 is no mana, while above +10 is probably an uninhabitable magical furnace (or perhaps equates to wild mana, p. 59). Geographical variations may involve smooth "slopes" and "contours," or abrupt changes and a "mosaic" effect.

Other effects related to mana level – harm to mana-dependent creatures, FP recovery rates, critical failure rules, etc. – might cut in at specific thresholds or develop gradually across the range where numeric variation is significant. In general, treat a level of -10 to -8 as very low mana (above), -7 to -3 as low mana, -2 to +2 as normal mana, +3 to +7 as high mana, and +8 or higher as very high mana. An interesting alternative is to let non-mages *attempt* to cast spells anywhere, but at -6 . . . so they're likely to have severe problems unless they can find a site with a large enough mana bonus to compensate.

### Variable Mana

Mana levels in a given location need not be fixed over time, even in the short term. For instance, a site could have low mana by day and high mana by night, or no mana in

### Non-Mages Casting in Lower-Mana Areas

Normally, non-mages – however skilled – simply can't cast spells in an area with normal or lower mana. For a slightly more flexible option, the GM might let non-mages work magic in such areas, but multiply the base energy cost for all spells by 10. "Mundanes" casting spells will soon fall exhausted, but they'll probably be able to manage one small effect if they need it.

winter and normal mana in summer. Fluctuations might be cyclical, variable in other predictable ways, completely random, or something in between – like the weather, chaotic but not totally unpredictable. The mana in some places could even be *linked* to the weather, dropping under clear skies, rising when it rains, but falling again if the temperature goes below freezing. Complex variations might seem incomprehensible but be understood by experts, who can roll against a skill such as Astronomy, Mathematics, or Thaumatology to predict them, given a few minutes (or *weeks*) of observation.

Variable mana sites should be interesting to mages, particularly if they understand them enough to exploit them. While higher levels are generally more useful, variations could make things harder for hostile invading wizards – especially if the defender has analyzed the cycle properly. Often, though, they’ll be a minor nuisance for everyone.

It’s possible to combine this idea with *Continuous Mana* (p. 58). The level could change by +1 or -1 per second, minute, or day – or hurtle up and down much faster!

### Aspected Mana

The ambient mana level in a region need not be the same for every college of magic. Mana that varies by college is said to be “aspected to” the colleges that enjoy *higher* effective mana and “aspected against” those that experience *lower* effective mana. If a spell falls under more than one college, it gets the best bonus that applies to any of them, unless the GM decides that the specific local conditions make this inappropriate.

The reasons for an aspect are sometimes obscure – but often, they’re related to local circumstances or history. An old battlefield might be aspected to Necromantic spells, the immediate vicinity of a volcano could favor Fire magic, and the depths of an old-growth forest might not only be aspected to Plant spells but *against* the Technological college. Manipulating aspects should be extremely difficult, but not necessarily impossible as a long-term project. The battlefield could be exorcised and used as the location of a great peace conference to purge the taint of death, while a dry valley aspected to Fire spells, and against the Water and Plant colleges, could be irrigated by a canal.

It’s fairly straightforward to combine aspects with *Continuous Mana* (p. 58). If the GM is enthusiastic about it, he could even assign locations different bonuses or penalties for each college. That’s probably a little too complex to be fun, however.

### Wild Mana

“Wild” mana is a powerful version of mana with a deadly edge of instability. As in a high mana zone, anyone in a wild mana area can cast any spell he knows – even without Magery – unless he has Magic Resistance. Any success on a spellcasting roll counts as a critical success, and costs 0 FP, while any failure is treated as a critical failure, with the spell’s full normal energy cost.

These conditions make it tempting but dangerous for wizards to attempt large spells that they otherwise lack the FP to cast. If the players abuse this option, then the GM is free to rule that wild mana gives powerful spells *interesting*

side effects. Actual rolled critical successes might cause more-or-less permanent magical wonders: fires that never die, trees that are permanently in bloom on one side but leafless on the other, unearthly singing that can temporarily derange the minds of human listeners, or anything else that the GM likes – although ideally, such effects should suit the spell involved.

Wild mana areas are extremely unlikely to be more than about six yards in diameter, and tend to be very rare even in settings where they appear. Unless the local mana level is generally low, they’ll be regarded as more of a nuisance than a boon. Magic should always feel worryingly unpredictable there, and the local wildlife can be *strange*. Even in the absence of spells, wild mana is often associated with astonishing phenomena: fires may burn in strange colors without consuming fuel, trees might grow up overnight or have bark harder than the strongest axe, and so on. One noteworthy effect is that animals born under the influence of wild mana have a disturbing tendency toward exceptional intelligence and the ability to talk.



#### Variation

Wild mana is typically a category of its own – perhaps a level beyond very high mana – but the GM might opt to combine it with the standard range of mana levels, from low to very high. In a low/wild mana area, only mages can cast spells, and do so at the usual -5 to skill, but all successes are still *critical* successes (with no energy cost) and all failures are still *critical* failures (although they’re *usually* less catastrophic). A normal/wild mana area is similar, but without the -5. High/wild and very high/wild mana zones work as described above.

## Twisted Mana

Some “mana fields” are so weird that they cause magic to behave in an unpredictable, even perverse way. Magic isn’t merely unreliable in such mana . . . it seems to be jinxed, if not downright *malevolent*. Any level of mana can be twisted, but in all cases, spells are cast at -2 in addition to any other penalties; e.g., in low twisted mana, castings are at -7.

All failed casting rolls in twisted mana count as critical failures. The GM is free to improvise the results, which should *hurt*. Killing anyone outright is generally unfair, but wounding and grossly inconveniencing them is fine. The universe should seem to hate the spellcaster!

Even on a success, the spell’s energy cost increases by 1 and its effect are twisted to inconvenience the caster. For instance, a fireball may splash back for a point or two of damage to the wizard and his allies, or explode with such a bright flash that they’re temporarily blinded; created matter of any sort will have a foul smell; and healing spells will inflict severe pain (p. B428) and leave lurid scars. On a critical success, the spell *might* work right – but it should still *seem* to be functioning oddly enough to make the caster worry that it has done something strange. In some cases, he’ll be right.

Twisted mana zones should be fairly small and rare. Distorted plant growths, muffled sounds, and odd light levels might mark them out to perceptive observers. The locals will probably consider such areas cursed. Creatures born or living there are liable to be either sickly and unhappy, or savage and unpredictable.

## MANA-RELATED TRAITS

In some settings, certain individuals can influence mana via supernatural traits. All of the advantages and disadvantages discussed here – particularly Wild Mana Generator (p. 61) and Twisted Mana Generator (pp. 61-62) – are *optional*. The GM is free to forbid them, or to restrict them to highly magical beings (such as the Sidhe of Celtic legend).

### Mana Damper and Mana Enhancer

In campaigns that feature variant mana levels and types, the GM must decide how Mana Damper (p. B67) and Mana Enhancer (p. B68) behave. Some suggestions:

- *Very Low Mana* (p. 58): One level of Mana Damper still lowers low mana to no mana (skip very low mana), and also lowers very low mana to no mana. One level of Mana

## Technology Disrupts Magic?

Some stories treat technology as inherently opposed to magic. The problem with this is defining “technology” in a way that makes sense. It’s based on careful exploitation of natural laws . . . but the processes used by machines – electricity, leverage, chemical reactions, etc. – *also* occur within any earthly living organism! A workable approach is to assume that an increasing human focus on *materialism*, less a cause of technology than a side effect, weakens the psychic underpinnings of mysticism. The more people can do with machines, the less they believe in magic – and magic is sustained by belief.

The GM can use tech level as a yardstick here. At the simplest, an area’s general TL can act as a penalty to all spellcasting rolls made there. What counts as “an area” and “general TL” is up to the GM, but “the standard TL for people born and currently living in this location” is a handy working definition. This can be good for “real world” games in which primitive peoples have access to magic, but where the art has faded almost entirely into myth by the 20th century: the ancient Egyptians (TL1) felt only a small diminution in magic; by the Middle Ages, spells were cast at -3; Edwardian-era groups such as the Golden Dawn were a response to the modifier dropping from a Steam Age -5 to an Electrical Age -6; and most of the West now suffers a -8. But in TL0 areas deep in the jungles of New Guinea, the Congo, or Brazil, magic remains potent.

For a milder effect, the problem might emerge only with the growth of the scientific method and technology that can traverse the world and hurl flaming death at foes. Penalties first appear at TL4, and equal -(TL-3). In this picture, Renaissance Hermeticism becomes an unsuccessful attempt to make previously secret magic fit with the growing proto-scientific worldview.

A further variation suggests that as modern technology becomes increasingly complex, subtle, and frankly incomprehensible to most folk, the general human acceptance of purely materialist explanations of the world actually weakens. People don’t believe in magic as such – but they don’t habitually *disbelieve* in anything that they can’t see, hear, and touch, either, because their lifestyles depend on microchips, radio signals, and advanced materials science. Thus, above a certain threshold, magic might *come back*. For instance, if the threshold is TL7, then every TL above that removes -1 from the spellcasting penalty. At TL9, it’s merely -5, and by TL12, it’s just -2 – and wizards rove the space-ways.

Enhancer still raises no mana to low mana (skip very low mana), but raises very low mana to low mana, too – *not* to normal mana.

- *Continuous Mana* (p. 58): Mana Damper generates a modifier of -5 per level to the effective mana level for anything and anyone it affects. The GM can subdivide it more finely, so that each level costs 2 points and gives -1. Likewise, Mana Enhancer gives +5 per level to the effective mana level, and the GM might allow 10-point increments, each giving +1. If mana is enhanced above +10, the GM may wish to treat this not only as very high mana, but *also* as wild mana! Alternatively, magic of any sort might go completely haywire under whimsical GM control – perhaps in a very dangerous way.

- *Variable Mana* (pp. 58-59): These advantages modify the currently prevailing mana level.

● *Aspected Mana* (p. 59): Apply the effects of these advantages separately to the mana level for each college. The GM might even allow “aspected” Mana Damper and/or Mana Enhancer; represented by giving these traits the Limited Colleges (p. 25) or One College Only (p. B67) limitation. This can produce complicated situations, with three or four different mana levels apparently operating on the same spot.

● *Wild Mana* (p. 59): The GM might treat wild mana as one level above very high and rule that Mana Damper reduces it to a lesser level. Alternatively, he may simply decree that Mana Damper prevents non-mages from casting spells in the wild mana zone while leaving all the other effects unchanged. A Mana Enhancer in a wild mana area becomes a walking miracle, swathed in cold flame or crackling with violet lightning, lighter than air one moment and rooted immovably the next, soundless or with a voice of thunder. He shouldn’t usually suffer immediate, permanent harm – but he’d be well-advised to get out as soon as possible!

● *Twisted Mana* (p. 60): Mana Damper modifies the underlying mana level but doesn’t remove the twist. If this results in no mana, then that’s a temporary mercy. A Mana Enhancer has the opposite effect, and will also attract the place’s dark energies. He may suffer auditory hallucinations, double shock penalties from any wounds he suffers as the twisted energies invade his body, or *gain* an extra level in one or two attributes – along with Berserk and Bloodlust.

### ***New Advantage: Wild Mana Generator***

**100 points**

You generate a permanent wild mana effect (see *Wild Mana*, p. 59). This only affects your magic, plus people or items that you’re carrying. It makes magic easy for you – but also dangerously unpredictable. Modifiers for the ambient mana level still affect your spellcasting normally. To make casting *really* easy and (relatively) reliable for you in a game world with significant areas of low mana, combine this trait with Mana Enhancer (p. B68).

In many settings, Wild Mana Generator is limited to a few extraordinary supernatural beings. It’s usually inherent

in their nature – they *can’t* turn it off. Such entities might be obliged to take one or more levels of Area Effect, too, as their weird power continually floods out into the world. Thus, this advantage *isn’t* normally switchable; it’s always on unless the GM allows the Switchable enhancement.

### **Special Enhancements**

*Area Effect:* The wild mana you generate radiates out from your body, affecting all magic worked in your vicinity. The first level of Area Effect gives you a radius of one yard. Each level after the first doubles this radius as usual; see *Area Effect* (p. B102). This makes life *interesting* for anyone in your immediate vicinity – and you likely leave a trail of minor wonders and strange phenomena everywhere you go. +50%/level.

*Switchable:* You can turn this advantage on or off with a Ready maneuver. +100%.

### ***New Disadvantage/Advantage: Twisted Mana Generator***

**-15 or 15 points**

You generate a permanent twisted mana effect (see *Twisted Mana*, p. 60) that affects magic cast on, by, and possibly near you. This is in addition to the normal effects of the ambient mana level. Your *aura* is twisted, too; those who can see it will probably find it disturbing, and react to you at -3.

If this effect interferes only with *your* spells and with external magic as it affects *you*, then it’s a disadvantage that you can’t switch off (if you could do that, you’d never turn it on!). You probably shouldn’t study magic – although you can, if you like to take risks – and even the most innocent healing spell cast on you gets twisted in ways that are often painful and always inconvenient. Hostile magic causes further ill effects for you without causing problems for the caster. For example, if an enemy wizard reads your mind, then you might suffer a screaming headache, while if someone magically drains your FP, you might suffer pain and a shock penalty equal to the number of FP drained. Other casters *don’t* suffer the -2 penalty when casting on you! -15 points – but 0 points in a campaign where magic is extremely rare.

*Phantom Stranger: Science is a way of talking about the universe in words that bind it to a common reality. Magic is a method of talking to the universe in words that it cannot ignore. The two are rarely compatible.*

– Neil Gaiman, *The Books of Magic*

If the effect radiates out from your body, creating a twisted mana zone around you, then this becomes an *advantage*, as it's good for causing trouble for enemy wizards. It can also disadvantage your friends and yourself – in particular, you still have problems benefiting from magic – and wizards and *their* allies may come to hate you, perhaps even arranging for you to be assassinated (by mundane means, if necessary). You're still ill-advised to study magic, and you suffer the problems described for the disadvantageous form if someone successfully casts magic on you. This may represent a blessing from a god who condemns magic (the problems with having magic cast on you being a punishment for compromising your religious principles) or just a freakish twist in your aura. The base radius of this effect is two yards; the Increased Area enhancement can modify this. *15 points.*

### Special Enhancements

*Increased Area:* Advantageous form only. Each level of this enhancement doubles the radius of the area effect. +50%/level.

*Switchable:* Advantageous form only. You can turn this advantage on or off with a Ready maneuver. +100%.

## ELIMINATING MANA

In games that use the standard spell system – including many of its minor variations – “eliminating mana” simply means fixing the entire setting at a particular mana level,

plus prohibiting any advantage, disadvantage, or spell that modifies or analyzes mana. This is a perfectly good simplifying assumption: the GM doesn't have to worry about assigning each location a mana level, while the players don't have to sweat the effects of mana. The GM can still hint that mana variations are *possible*, or that mana levels differed in the past, to give the background an extra sense of mystery or to explain complexities in the history of magic.

In campaigns that use magic systems that don't involve mana, it's generally possible to *ignore* mana as a concept, with even less fuss (although traits and spells that deal with mana must still be banned). References to mana *do* occasionally appear outside the spell-magic system, though, so the GM may have to prepare or improvise answers to a few questions. In particular, certain magical creatures have a Dependency on mana, meaning that they sicken and die in no mana zones. The GM can simply delete this disadvantage from descriptions and templates – or, to keep something of the same feel, he can identify specific conditions that make an area “magically dead.” For example, if the campaign uses sanctity (pp. 68-69), then areas of zero holiness for gods that empower such creatures, or of high holiness for deities that hate and oppose them, might well be deadly for them. Alternatively, some areas may be cut off from the “ghost realm,” making spirit-related powers hard or impossible to use there, and slowly killing intensely magical creatures that are “part spirit.”

# MAGIC RESISTANCE AND THE MAGE

In some settings, Magic Resistance (p. B67) is the antithesis of Magery. A person must be *open* to magic in order to work spells, and anyone with exceptional resistance to it has no hope of mastering the art. In other worlds, aptitude and resistance are entirely compatible – or even associated, because a magic-wielder is well-placed to fend off supernatural forces (whether consciously or instinctively). In fact, *some* kind of superior defense against magic might be a necessity for wizardly society. If wizards are mutually suspicious, then they'll only be willing to

associate with each other if they don't have to worry too much about sorcerous stabs in the back.

The combination of Magery and Magic Resistance might be a rare natural gift, but it could instead be something that trainee wizards routinely gain as part of their earliest lessons . . . or the mark of the most potent and accomplished archmages. One way to achieve this combination is to take the Improved enhancement on Magic Resistance, which renders it compatible with spellcasting. Alternatively, the GM may permit a new enhancement:



*Switchable:* You can turn your Magic Resistance off or on with a Ready maneuver. You may have Magery, but you can only *benefit* from it, or cast spells, when your Magic Resistance is switched off – which also lets you benefit fully from helpful spells (e.g., magical healing). +100%.

This is more expensive than the Switchable enhancement for Magery (p. 29) because it grants greater benefits. It's comparable to the enhancement used for Mana Damper (p. B67), Wild Mana Generator (p. 61), etc.

Another option is to treat Magic Resistance – at least in some cases – as a charm or a ritual that can be learned, and that grants protection for a finite period or with other restrictions. To represent this, take Improved or Switchable (for non-mages, this is worth +10% and is *incompatible* with Magery), plus a selection of limitations such as Costs Fatigue, Limited Use, Preparation Required, Takes Extra Time, Unreliable, and gadget limitations. Blocking incoming magic might also shield one against the “ordinary magic” and general subtleties of the world, resulting in Temporary Disadvantage limitations that cause Callous, Clueless, Incurious, Killjoy, Low Empathy, Numb, Oblivious, etc.

If the GM doesn't want to deal with combinations of Magery and heavily modified Magic Resistance, he's welcome to rule that mages simply defend themselves using the Magic Resistance spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 123).

### *Flawed Magic Resistance*

For mages and non-mages alike, Magic Resistance might be completely ineffective against some magic, most often defined as one or more colleges. This is a limitation worth -10% for the first college plus -5% per additional college, to a maximum of five colleges in total (-30%). To qualify, a college must include at least two spells that can exploit this weakness. The GM needs to handle this idea carefully. He's free to make a particular limitation smaller if it covers many spells that he considers beneficial – and Magic Resistance that doesn't work against the Healing college must take a Switchable *enhancement*, not a limitation.

A flaw might instead stop Magic Resistance from working against things that aren't defined in terms of colleges: “priestly magic,” magical powers (see Chapter 7), magic delivered by physical contact, etc. The GM should set the modifier value based on how common the affected variety of magic is in his campaign world, and whether it includes many beneficial effects. Magic Resistance that doesn't work against alchemical elixirs should probably take a +50% *enhancement* – the lack of protection against offensive elixirs is a small problem compared to the ability to make free use of the many beneficial types!

## *Resistance vs. Magically Based Damage*

Magic Resistance doesn't protect against damage that comes from a magical source but that takes the form of essentially mundane injury – Missile spells, magic weapons, etc. Beings with defenses that *do* resist such magical harm have Damage Resistance with Limited, Magic, -20% (see *Limited Defenses*, p. B46). If an attack is essentially mundane but has been magical augmented, such DR only stops the magical part; e.g., against a sword that normally does 1d, with an Icy Weapon spell that raises its final damage by +2, this form of DR could eliminate only the 2 points of magical damage, reducing damage to 1d but no further.

## **Magic Addiction**

In some stories, mastery of magic has a drawback: it's *addictive*. This might merely be a metaphor for the corrupting effects of power. Magic grants a lot of abilities, and it can be terribly tempting to exploit them. It has built-in costs, too, and using it at inappropriate moments can lead to all sorts of social difficulties – but some wizards think that they can solve any problem with yet more magic. In games, this is mostly a matter of roleplaying, and of the GM remembering that actions should have consequences. Disadvantages such as Bully, Megalomania, Obsession (“Master all kinds of magic!”), and Overconfidence can reflect the sort of personality prone to overuse magic, and “Likes to solve *every* problem with a spell” is certainly a valid quirk. Of course, some *players* seem to be “addicted” to using magic, irrespective of what the character sheet says.

### *True Addictions*

However, if spellcasting actually causes a physically addictive “rush” – or if *not* casting magic for too long causes emotional or even physical problems – then the addiction might qualify as an Addiction disadvantage. “Using magic,” treated as a drug, is usually cheap and legal, giving it a value of 0 points; it only qualifies as a quirk. It's possible that the addiction demands the use of expensive spell components, though, or the destruction of valuable property using combat spells, increasing the daily expense. Maybe magic is highly or *totally* addictive. Perhaps the use of magic (at least on a “satisfactory” scale) is illegal. And an addiction to something like the intensive use of long-duration scrying magics could be effectively incapacitating.

Addictive magic usually involves psychological dependency, although it might be physiological – especially if it taps fundamental “life energy” and the wizard's body becomes accustomed to a high level of energy throughput. In either case, it's hard for magic to be unavailable to a withdrawing addict, but not impossible; for instance, the wizard could be imprisoned in a no mana area or deprived of required spell components. The mental disadvantages induced by withdrawal from a psychological dependency can be dramatic and dangerous, including very odd Delusions, Megalomania, and ultimately a willingness to use magic to cause all manner of carnage. If the GM wishes, withdrawal could even induce *magical* disadvantages such as Twisted Mana Generator (pp. 61-62)!



# CHAPTER THREE

# MAJOR

# VARIATIONS

*Steel crossbow bolts hissed through the warm evening air. Two slammed into the trunk of the olive tree behind which Ludovine had ducked. A moment later, she risked a quick look around it, throwing knife in hand – but the papal guards, too, were using cover.*

*“Montmorency,” she murmured, “I think that it is time for a spell, if you please.”*

*“I cannot!” Montmorency was huddled behind another tree, nervously twisting the silver amulet which he normally wore under his tunic. “I have done far too much already today . . . the angels permit no more. The blood of Creation curdles around my power!”*

*Ludovine sighed. This was ever the way with Montmorency. One moment he was unleashing hellstorms, the next he was as fretful as an infant. She glanced to where Armand lay groaning quietly while Hector attempted to remove the bolt that was lodged in his shoulder.*

*“I think that you must, my friend,” she said, “in a moment, even these Borgia scum will think to outflank us, and then . . .”*

*Her sentence remained unfinished, as one of the pursuers, doubtless emboldened by the price that Pope Alexander had placed on Ludovine’s head, broke cover and charged. Ludovine’s thrown blade skittered off his armor. He smiled as he raised his sword to strike her down – but then his expression changed. Ludovine pulled her main-gauche out from the weak point under his breastplate as he fell dead at her feet.*

*Now, though, his colleagues were charging in a mass, and she cursed, drawing another blade. But before she could throw, fire blossomed among the attackers. Those worst burned staggered back, screaming in agony and shock. The charge faltered, battle-cries fading. In a moment, those who had not been struck down were fleeing in terror.*

*However, their screams mingled with a howl of agony from behind Ludovine, and her heart was sinking even before she saw Montmorency, or the livid scar that had suddenly appeared across his face.*

The standard magic system can be radically reworked to yield a diversity of flavors and styles of magic without losing sight of familiar rules concepts.



## VARIETIES OF MAGERY

Some variant magic systems involve entirely different versions of Magery. Even the Power Investiture (p. B77) that priestly spellcasters possess can be reclassified as such (see *Power Investiture as Modified Magery*, p. 67). If multiple magic systems coexist in the campaign, then Magery might go from being a single advantage to an entire *category* of advantages. An individual may be able to have several types of Magery and use the magic associated with each.

The GM *might* prefer to have just one variety of Magery even when several different magic systems are available. However, this will make mages *significantly* more powerful unless other controls exist. One possibility is to have different styles taught by mutually antagonistic factions or schools. If the Northern Shamans teach ritual magic while the Southern Philosophers teach spell-based magic, and the Shamans view the Philosophers as atheistic meddlers while the Philosophers regard the Shamans as mad cultists, then learning *both* styles would require great cultural adaptability. Alternatively, it might need incredible mental flexibility – a capacity to bend one’s mind around the hallucinogenic rituals of shamanism while preserving the mathematical rigor that formal spells demand. This could translate into a large Unusual Background, or perhaps high IQ and Will plus several Cultural Familiarities. Double training may also lead to serious disadvantages, as each side suspects the mage of spying for the other, or as his mind cracks under the strain of maintaining two different worldviews.

### *Quirk: Restricted Casting Style*

If more than one style of magic *is* generally available, all the available styles use the same type of Magery, and many mages actually *use* more than one style, then a wizard

### *Clerics and Magery 0*

In addition to providing the ability to cast spells in normal or lower mana, Magery 0 gives several subsidiary benefits: the facility to detect magic items on sight or contact (p. B66), and to sense changes in mana level (*GURPS Magic*, p. 6). Clerics might not really miss all this, as they’re in the business of working divine miracles and don’t have much interest in the concerns of “mere wizardry.” Some deities may confer awareness of “secular” magical forces, however – either as a convenience or because the powers that their faithful wield are closer to wizardry than the clerics themselves would ever admit. Such gods might bestow Magery 0 with limitations such as Cannot Learn Spells (see *Total Spell Incompetence*, p. 22) and Pact. They’re more likely to grant their clerics some variety of Detect (p. B48) with Pact, though, or simply knowledge of spells such as Detect Magic and Sense Mana.

who’s incapable of doing so – who chooses a single style at character creation – may take this inability as a quirk.

### *Multiple Magery 0*

A compromise might be to have each style require its own version of Magery 0 – a different gift or way of perceiving the supernatural – but to let all styles benefit from the same extra levels of Magery (that is, Magery 1+). This produces a clear distinction between mages working in different styles, while not making generalists too expensive.

## CLERICAL SPELL-MAGIC

“Clerical” or “priestly” magic is popular in RPGs, and can be handled in *GURPS* as a variant of the standard spell-based system. The basic idea is that certain individuals who serve their religion in some capacity – known as *clerics* – are favored by their gods with the ability to cast spells, perhaps even having the required knowledge implanted directly in their minds. Clerics therefore have no

need for Magery and can ignore mana levels; the forces with which they work aren’t impartial natural energies, but the power of borrowed divinity. Of course, this may have its own limitations. Moreover, it leaves the cleric dependent on his god for magical effectiveness – although the *devout* cleric has no problem with this.

*Their knowledge of our prayers is due to what we may call an enlinking, a determined relation of things fitted into a system; so, too, the fulfillment of the petitions; in the art of magic all looks to this enlinkment: prayer and its answer, magic and its success, depend upon the sympathy of enchained forces.*

– Plotinus, *The Enneads*

## CLERICAL SPELLS

Clerical spells have no prerequisites. A priest may acquire a new spell simply by praying for it whenever he has points to spend. Teachers and study are thus unnecessary, although the GM might permit a priest to gain a point in a new spell after 200 hours of devout contemplation – or require such meditation before spending an *earned* point.

However, each god's priesthood is restricted to an abbreviated spell list, tied to the god's portfolio; see *Priestly Spell Lists* (pp. 69-70). For instance, fire gods don't usually grant Essential Water. A patron deity may also decide to alter the effects of the magic he grants – or suspend a priest's spellcasting abilities altogether – for *ineffable* reasons.

Thus, the GM must give each deity with empowered clerics enough personality and background that the players of cleric PCs know what to expect in play. He should also create some kind of spell list – although this can be more of a set of guidelines and examples, open to negotiation and improvisation. As well, a god may grant some spells in specific circumstances, or if the cleric can make a logical case for needing them; e.g., a god of death may not generally give out healing spells, but *might* make an exception when his followers are about to go to war on his behalf. Remember, though, that gods don't have the same priorities as humans. Better a few lost worshippers than violation of their fundamental nature!

## REQUIREMENTS

Clerics must possess some kind of qualification for their role. This is usually defined in terms of advantages and/or disadvantages. Clerical Investment (p. B43), likely with Religious Rank (p. B30), is extremely common. In some worlds with highly active gods, almost everyone with those advantages will know a few spells. In other settings, only truly dedicated priests – those with traits like Code of Honor, Fanaticism, and Vows – qualify.

Alternatively, the gods may favor whomever they please, regardless of the formal priestly hierarchy – perhaps to the annoyance of the ordained priests! Those chosen tend to be quite *special*. They often have advantages such as Blessed (p. B40) and True Faith (p. B94).

In many backgrounds, clerical spellcasters *must* have Disciplines of Faith (p. B132), regardless of whether they possess Clerical Investment. Indeed, those disciplines might be what's needed to make contact with the deity and hence to request magical power. Another common requirement is at least one level of Power Investiture (see below), reflecting a minimum of enhanced power that all deities give those to whom they grant spells.

In short, if clerical magic exists, then the GM decides who qualifies to wield it – and almost *anyone* could in theory know clerical spells. This

doesn't make clerical magic a free gimmick for everyone who's vaguely religious, though. On the contrary, it's given out by gods, who are notorious for being whimsical or ineffable, who have agendas of their own, and who can *and will* take the power away if they don't approve of how it's used – and quite possibly follow up with a curse or a thunderbolt for emphasis. The GM should set a specific set of strict conditions for PCs who use clerical spells, and enforce them in the persona of the deity.

## Power Investiture

Power Investiture (p. B77) *replaces* Magery for clerical magic. It improves skill with clerical spells in the same way that Magery aids secular ones. When casting spells that restrict the amount of energy that can be put into the casting each turn (such as Fireball), Power Investiture – not Magery – determines the limit. In this context, it represents the degree to which the cleric can control raw energy, both personal and divine. Magery is *irrelevant* to these functions!

Clerical spells don't generally have prerequisites, but spells that normally require a particular Magery level typically require the same level of Power Investiture when granted by a god. The GM may choose to relax this rule on

## Power Investiture (Shamanic)

Magic-wielders who employ spells to control spirits can be considered a type of priest: they deal with conscious supernatural powers, and their magic is built around that as opposed to following the lines of the standard spell system. This in turn justifies giving them Power Investiture instead of Magery. Figures such as shamans differ from clerics in that their magic is used to *contact* mystical beings rather than being *granted* by such entities, but they fill a “priestly” role in many societies, and using the mechanics of clerical magic to represent their powers is simple and effective.

Whereas most clerics with Power Investiture have to follow some kind of self-imposed mental disadvantage to avoid alienating their deities, shamans who have Power Investiture (Shamanic) must simply avoid annoying the spirits with whom they deal. No single entity can withdraw the Investiture, but gaining a bad name among spirits (who surely communicate with each other!) makes it worse than useless. Summoning and petitioning spirits who dislike or mistrust you is *dangerous* – especially if other spirits take an interest and turn up, too.

The following spells are suggested for individuals with Power Investiture (Shamanic):

Affect Spirits	Command Spirit	Sense Life
Astral Block	Control Elemental	Sense Spirit
Astral Vision	Entrap Spirit	Summon Demon
Banish	Pentagram	Summon Elemental
Beast Summoning	Planar Summons	Summon Spirit
Bind Spirit	Repel Spirits	Turn Spirit

Shamans with restricted fields of operation should use only a subset of this list. Conversely, some might add more Necromantic spells relating to spirits and ghosts, while flamboyant “world-walkers” could have additional Gate spells.

occasion, but deities will usually be very selective about granting substantial powers. An ambitious GM could even give each god's spell list its own alternative prerequisite structure that incorporates levels of Power Investiture (which is associated with a degree of divine favor).

## Power Investiture and Limitations

Power Investiture shouldn't generally have enhancements or limitations. It's a divine gift, and while it comes with conditions attached – something akin to Pact is built into it already – it doesn't tend to have arbitrary flaws. The GM may relax this rule if a player comes up with a good explanation, though. For example, if the deity only grants power when the cleric specifically requests it via a lengthy prayer, then Power Investiture *might* take Preparation Required on the same basis as Magery (see *Other Appropriate Limitations*, pp. 26-27), while a cleric who has to work with fellow worshippers or holy symbols could have some form of External Sources Only (p. 24).

If Power Investiture is classed as a modified form of Magery (see below), however, then it comes with a whole list of built-in enhancements and limitations. With the GM's permission, those playing cleric PCs can vary these. Note that Power Investiture includes a "Limited Spell List" limitation that serves the same purpose as One College Only or Limited Colleges; thus, those limitations are *always* off-limits.

## Power Investiture as Modified Magery

Power Investiture functions a lot like Magery – so much so that gamers who prefer to keep things *elegant* may prefer to treat the former as a modified version of the latter. In that case, apply these modifiers to Magery to get Power Investiture:

*Functions as a Different Talent:* In some campaigns, Magery and Power Investiture may function as Talents of a sort, giving bonuses to things other than spells. If so, then they each aid *different* activities. +0%.

*Inspired Learning:* Power Investiture benefits spells that can be "learned" without the difficulties that secular wizards sometimes suffer. There's no ferreting out obscure texts, hiring teachers, etc. – just a good relationship with the deity, plus prayer, which can be attempted anywhere. Some people *without* Power Investiture may acquire magic on these terms, but Power Investiture makes that magic more potent, so it takes an enhancement. This modifier is generally restricted to clerical spellcasters, but if the setting includes wizards who can somehow learn new spells out of the blue on a regular basis, it applies to their Magery as well. +20%.

*Limited Spell List:* Power Investiture only benefits spells granted by the cleric's deity – and clerical spell lists are invariably less comprehensive than the full set available to secular mages. However, they're generally more well-rounded than the restricted set accessible to mages with One College Only, so this is priced as being as good as access to two colleges. -30%.

*No Magic Item Sensitivity:* Power Investiture doesn't grant or enhance the capacity to recognize magic items on sight or contact, or give the ability to use "mage-only" items. The rules governing holy items – if they exist in the setting – tend to work differently. A secular mage whose magical

sensitivities happen to be slightly flawed could apply this limitation to Magery. -20%.

*No Spell Prerequisites:* The ability to use spells without knowing prerequisite spells is a significant benefit, which Power Investiture compounds. The GM should *definitely* limit this enhancement to clerics, unless he replaces the need for prerequisites with a set of restrictions that's as good for keeping mages under control as prerequisites or divine supervision. Mages who can pull new spells out of the ether in a more restricted way should take Modular Abilities (Cosmic Power) or Wild Talent. +30%.

*No Zero-Level Requirement:* Unlike mages, who must pay 5 points for Magery 0, clerics don't have to buy "Power Investiture 0" before they can start buying higher levels of the advantage. Power Investiture may have *other* effective prerequisites, but they're handled separately. This benefit is usually limited to clerics. +10%.

*Pact:* As noted on p. B77, beings who grant Power Investiture generally require some kind of self-imposed mental disadvantage. This could vary in point value – and the acts required to prove repentance if the pact is broken can be quite diverse (see p. 202 for more on this) – but for simplicity, assume a -10-point disadvantage. See *Pact* (p. 27) for notes on applying this limitation to Magery. -10%.

*Sanctity Replaces Mana:* Standard clerical magic doesn't have to worry about mana levels but *does* depend on sanctity. These concerns are roughly equally restrictive, so this is considered neither an enhancement nor a limitation. If ambient sanctity is very low in general, then this *might* become a limitation, while if clerics can work effectively almost everywhere (except perhaps in shrines to enemy deities, a rare few sites cursed by their god, etc.), then it ought to be an enhancement. In either situation, the GM should set the modifier value and recalculate the cost of Power Investiture. +0%.

The GM can adjust these modifiers without necessarily affecting the price of Power Investiture. For example, a tolerant but not highly interventionist god could grant access to a very short spell list, changing the value of Limited Spell List to -40%, but require only nominal services and respect from his mortal representatives, eliminating Pact. Of course, even such a laid-back deity is likely to attach *some* restrictions to Power Investiture – perhaps only giving it to priests with Clerical Investment.

## CEREMONIAL CASTINGS

Clerics can and often do use *Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238). The rules for assistants contributing energy differ, however:

*Each participant who has any of Blessed, Power Investiture, or True Faith directed toward the deity who has empowered the lead caster – or, at the GM's option, toward an allied deity from the same pantheon – and who knows the spell at 15+ thanks to it being granted "clerically" by such a deity: Any number of FP.*

*Each assistant with one of the above advantages directed toward the deity who gave the spell to the lead caster – or an allied deity – or who knows the spell at 15+ thanks to it being granted by such a deity: Up to 3 FP.*

Each spectator who voluntarily **assists** and is willing to address at least occasional worship to the lead caster's deity: 1 FP, to a maximum of 100 FP from all spectators.\*

Each spectator who **opposes** the casting: -5 FP, to a maximum of -100 FP from all spectators.

\* The GM may rule that to contribute energy, spectators must be more dedicated to the cause than an ordinary wizard's ceremonial assistants. On the other hand, priests can often recruit such supporters from their congregations.

## SANCTITY

In most settings, clerical magic doesn't depend on mana. It channels divine power, not mundane thaumaturgical forces, and works even if there's *no* mana. It can still be dependent on location, however, working well in shrines and temples to the relevant god(s), while being limited in "unholy" places. A truly transcendent deity might be able to extend its power *anywhere* – but even then, merely mortal priests will probably find that an atmosphere of unholy interferes with their spellcasting ability.

The standard way to handle this is to replace mana with a similar mechanism called *sanctity*. This represents a specific deity's level of influence in an area. In a polytheistic game world, it will vary from god to god in the same place. Sanctity levels (see below) range from "no sanctity" to "very high sanctity"; they mirror mana levels, and have comparable effects on clerical spells. Sanctity is more susceptible to human alteration than mana, however; see *Changing Sanctity* (below).

The whole idea of sanctity is optional. The view that mere geography could restrict transcendent gods is questionable. A priest who manages to invade an enemy god's shrine and start laying about him should surely get *extra* support from his god, rather than find his spells failing!

Another alternative is that clerical magic is the same thing as secular spellcasting, granted by the gods as a convenience for their cults' operation. It merely has a different inspiration. In that case, it should share wizardly magic's susceptibility to mana variations.

Finally, if clerical and Path/Book magic (see Chapter 5) coexist, then sanctity might exist but have a complex relationship with "ritual space." See *Ritual Space and Sanctity* (p. 126).

### Sanctity Levels

As a general guideline, most places where a god has any influence at all have *normal* sanctity. Dedicated shrines and temples to a god have *high* sanctity for worshipers of that deity. *Very high* sanctity is limited to the most sacred sites – perhaps where the deity has manifested in person and claimed possession. Many cults may have only one such spot in the whole world, or none at all, and access may be circumscribed with all manner of rules and taboos. Some cults might even keep their very high sanctity locations a deep and deadly secret.

Shrines and temples to rival or enemy gods generally count as *low* sanctity. Those dedicated to gods to which the cleric's patron is neutral or varied in attitude are a matter for GM decision. If the gods are highly territorial and cautious

of each other, then they might lock each other out of their holy sites, metaphysically speaking, rendering them all low sanctity. If the attitude is genuinely neutral, though, then those shrines might rate as normal sanctity . . . although clerics should always be careful about intruding on others' territory. Close allies – such as sibling divinities who share related responsibilities on a friendly basis, or husband-and-wife deities whose relationship is mythically good – *may* even grant each other's clerics high sanctity in their temples.

Zones with *no* sanctity are generally limited to enemy deities' holiest places. There, the cleric's god is totally barred by the full power of the enmity. Other possibilities are blasted wastes that the whole pantheon has cursed with extreme prejudice, and lands dedicated to entire enemy pantheons that can and do guard their borders.

Sanctity conditions analogous to the mana variants under *Mana Levels* (pp. 58-60) might also exist. It's up to the GM to interpret these in theological terms!

Much as mages can detect changes in mana levels (*GURPS Magic*, p. 6), clerics can sense when they cross a boundary between sanctity levels, or when sanctity changes around them for other reasons. This requires a roll against IQ + Power Investiture. Roll at -3 if the cleric wasn't explicitly watching for a change or searching for the boundary.

### Effects of Sanctity

Sanctity level affects clerical spells *exactly* as mana level affects wizardly spells. This has the implication that only clerics with Power Investiture should be able to cast spells in normal or lower sanctity. A snag here is that there's no direct clerical counterpart to Magery 0. The GM is free to define a functional equivalent in his world, however. For example, if any reasonably devout worshiper has a chance of being given clerical spells, then perhaps those with Blessed, Power Investiture, True Faith, or Religious Rank 6+ can cast them without high sanctity; others who receive spells are granted them only for use when defending the faith's holy places or during great formal ceremonies.

### Changing Sanctity

Higher sanctity levels are usually associated with consecrated ground or space. Since consecration is something that mortal priests can perform, mortals can – with effort – modify sanctity. The change may be temporary or permanent, and at minimum requires a ritual. This often involves walking around the perimeter of the location being sanctified.

Note that these rules apply to mortals. The gods themselves can change sanctity with *considerably* less effort. Simply standing somewhere for a moment usually suffices!

### Temporary Consecration

The standard way to sanctify a location is for an invested priest to use the Religious Ritual skill (p. B217). This generally requires Clerical Investment rather than "genuine personal holiness" advantages such as Blessed and True Faith, since the whole point of priestly ordination is that the recipient can perform his religion's rituals. In some faiths, certain rites – including sanctification – also require a minimum level of Religious Rank. Temporarily consecrating a

location, typically a space about the size of a private room (perhaps 20'-30' square) suitable for a small ceremony with a few observers, requires about an hour of prayer and ceremonial purification. The space itself must be marked out or identified in some way – an actual room is best, but marker-poles on open ground may serve – and must not be currently sanctified to another deity or otherwise below normal sanctity for the cleric's god. This gives a zone of high sanctity that lasts for one full day.

If the GM wishes, it *might* be possible for someone who lacks Clerical Investment but who has True Faith or Blessed to temporarily sanctify a similar space. This involves a great deal of prayer; appealing directly to the deity for his blessing. The holy person must pray for 1-3 hours (roll 1d, halve, and round up). Then make a reaction roll for the deity. This roll doesn't take normal reaction modifiers, but add the supplicant's level of Power Investiture, and +2 if he has *both* True Faith and Blessed. The GM may apply a modifier from -4 to +4 if he feels that the reasons for the plea are especially weak or convincing. On a "Good" or better reaction, the area is sanctified as above.

### Permanent Consecration

*Permanent* sanctification requires that the space in question be completely controlled by the faith, and usually demands a special building, stone circle, sacred grove, etc., or at least a fair amount of work and expense to adapt an existing site. Consecration of such a place requires a day or so of rituals performed by someone with Religious Rank 3+ (by a group of respected priests, if the priesthood doesn't use Rank). Afterward, the holy ground will generally need at least one priest to look after it – and preferably a congregation to use it regularly for prayer.

A location can also become permanently consecrated (or *desecrated*; see below) if some great and significant act occurs there. The spot where a saint was martyred might actually become sacred to his god, as may the scene of the god's personal victory over a demon – although his followers should look after the place to make sure. Relics of holy events or very special symbols may also acquire such power, becoming *portable* sources of sanctity that raise the sanctity level by one in their immediate vicinity.

### Effects of Consecrated Ground

The sanctity of consecrated ground affects spellcasting normally. If gods and religion have real power in the world, then sanctified ground might have additional significance; e.g., undead beings may be unable to enter it, or the deity's supernatural servants might occasionally intervene to protect it. See *GURPS Fantasy* for further discussion.

Assume that the sanctity of such areas extends upward to three times the height of the relevant room, markers, or building, or to the maximum height of adjacent buildings, whichever is greater. The shape of a permanently sanctified site will rarely be a simple circle radiating out from an altar – the faith's traditions (and architectural convenience!) tend to dictate the layout of such places – and sanctity may extend to a surrounding open space, such as a churchyard. In *no* case should supernatural beings that are incapable of entering consecrated ground be able to approach closely merely by going over or under, or by exploiting some quirk of engineering.

## Critical Failures on Clerical Magic

The GM *could* treat critical failures with clerical spells as being no different from those with secular magic. The cleric is presumably juggling mindless supernatural energies, just like a wizard, and can suffer unfortunate accidents in much the same way. It's more *interesting* if the results differ, though!

At the very least, the GM should consider using the *Clerical Table* (p. 257) for such "clerical errors." Alternatively, the god might regard a critical failure as an accidental act of minor blasphemy – the use of precisely the *wrong* words – and oblige the priest to perform some kind of atonement before he can cast further clerical magic. Or perhaps the failure involves the cleric suffering a moment of terrible doubt, or experiencing *too* direct a glimpse of the god's power, either of which could justify a Fright Check (p. B360).

Very high sanctity may differ from very high mana in how it influences failures, too. Given that areas of very high sanctity have the god's more-or-less direct attention, it's unlikely that a mere normal spell failure would automatically lead to critical failure effects; continue to treat regular failures as just that. However, if a cleric rolls a genuine critical failure in such a place, he may well accidentally desecrate it: the space's sanctity might drop by one level for the next 2d seconds – or perhaps until priests of the faith can consecrate the area anew and the caster himself makes a small act of atonement. Worse, he might trigger a sort of "divine audit," bringing down judgment on every recent lapse by any cleric in the area. The GM should roleplay the deity passing judgment, perhaps speaking through oracles and Blessed servants. The real drawback to very high sanctity, making it in some ways more risky for clerics than very high mana is for wizards, is that the divinity will enforce all rules and restrictions on clerics *to the letter*, immediately noting and probably punishing minor lapses.

### Deconsecration

High-ranking priests can ritually *deconsecrate* a site – for instance, if the cult wishes to sell off a temple for mundane use. Most other acts that destroy sanctity are considered desecration, an *extreme* blasphemy; details (and punishments) vary considerably between faiths. Unintentional or minor unhallowed acts may temporarily diminish sanctity until a priest cleanses the spot with a ritual.

## PRIESTLY SPELL LISTS

In a game with clerical magic, every *effective* religion or cult needs its own spell list. Some spells are obvious choices, as they permit the caster to perform supernatural acts traditionally associated with the clergy. These include Bless, Dispel Possession, Final Rest, Remove Curse, Turn Zombie, and some kind of Divination.

Others – mostly Knowledge spells or Meta-Spells – are too basic and useful for a deity to disregard. A few examples are Detect Magic, Dispel Magic, and Ward.

Most important are spells that suit the god's responsibilities and outlook. For example, a sea god might grant Breathe Water, Waves, and Whirlpool; a storm god, Lightning and Storm. Spells damaging to the god's sphere of influence would be a matter of style – only a malicious river god would grant Foul Water, but a storm god might consider Destroy Water (“withdrawing my blessing”) entirely appropriate.

A little thought about what does or doesn't fit in this last category can add a great deal to the feel of a setting and the religions found there. For example, a fire god *might* grant his clerics most of the spells in the Fire college, so that they can wander the world hurling fireballs at enemies. If fire is truly *sacred* to the deity, though, then the idea of polluting it with monsters' bodies – or of using it at all casually – may be blasphemy! The only Fire spells on his list might be the likes of Ignite Fire and Warmth, plus Divination (Pyromancy). Clerics who are expected to fight could receive Haste and Flash, along with Neutralize Poison and Cleansing, as speed, brightness, and purification are traditional attributes of flame that priests should emulate.

Likewise, a god of the underworld might grant Summon Spirit, as he of all people can send the spirits of the dead to speak with his priests. Then again, if his function is to keep those souls with him, and to prevent them and the living from disturbing each other, he may regard that spell with total loathing.

Spell lists should also suit the campaign. Players in a straightforward sword-and-sorcery game will *expect* to see fire priests cutting loose with mystic flamethrowers, death priests conjuring undead, etc. The wise GM will avoid getting *too* clever!

## EXAMPLE: THE TEMPLE OF HEPHAESTUS

Hephaestus was the Greek god of blacksmiths. What follows is a fantasy version of his cult for worlds with clerical magic.

### Mythology

Hephaestus is quite important; the son of Zeus and Hera, husband to Aphrodite, and one of the 12 leading gods of Olympus, he also manufactured many of the gods' weapons and furnishings. He sometimes seems to be one of the least among the 12, however – an unattractive figure, with a permanent limp and a perpetually unfaithful wife. But never underestimate the power of divine creativity!

As a blacksmith, Hephaestus needs a forge, complete with a fire. As a god, he uses the greatest fire available: huge volcanoes. Thus, he is in a way a fire god *and* a volcano god. However, this is fire used in a practical, controlled way. The cult of Hephaestus isn't unduly worried about the flame's purity, but they definitely use it to *create*. When they must destroy something, they use excellent material weapons – not spells.

## Cult Organization

The cult of Hephaestus is organized around a large number of modest-sized temples, each run by a staff of one or more full-time priests. The clergy maintain sacred flames, manage sacrifices and other votive offerings, and lead occasional great ceremonies. However, Hephaestus is a craftsman-god who values other craftsmen. Any talented smith or metalworker who isn't an outright blasphemer, and who isn't so stupid as to compare himself to the god, may catch his attention and receive divine favor. In addition, a small number of warriors who *use* weapons well, and who serve the cult directly (usually by defending temples from attack), receive minor boons. Thus, the cult has three types of spellcasters:

*Priests:* Priests have Clerical Investment and Religious Rank. *Acolytes* are Rank 0, and must have a point in Religious Ritual (Greek Religion) and a point in Theology (Greek Religion). *Ordinary Priests* are Rank 1, and must have Religious Ritual (Greek Religion)-13 and a point in Theology (Greek Religion). *High Priests* are Rank 2, and must have Religious Ritual (Greek Religion)-13, Theology (Greek Religion)-14, and a point in each of Administration and Savoir-Faire (High Society). There are no higher Ranks. Any priest *may* have Blessed or Power Investiture; however, for an acolyte to possess either, he must also take Fanaticism (Cult of Hephaestus), and other cultists will probably regard him as a little too enthusiastic.



*Favored Craftsmen:* A craftsman who has attracted Hephaestus' favor must have Blessed, at least one level of Artificer (p. B90), *and* skill 16+ in one of Armoury (any), Engineer (Artillery or Clockwork), Mechanic (Clockwork), or Smith (any). Blessed represents the god's favor; the rest represents the minimum ability needed to gain that favor. Some craftsmen add one or two levels of Power Investiture.

*Temple Guardians:* These are proven warriors with Combat Reflexes, skill 15+ in either Shortsword or Spear, *and* at least a point in Shield. They must also have Fanaticism (Cult of Hephaestus). They occasionally possess Blessed, but never Power Investiture.

No cult member ever has True Faith. Some are very devout, but the specific effects of that advantage simply don't accord with how their beliefs work.

Priests tend to regard the other two “empowered” types with condescension, as favored servants. This is actually largely true with respect to temple guardians, although a junior acolyte talking down to a grizzled warrior will grate on many nerves. Faced with a favored craftsman, many priests talk as though *all* of the craftsman's abilities are gifts from the god – implying that the craftsman should show unconditional gratitude to the cult and its priests. Favored craftsmen, by contrast, tend to be focused on their work,

and view the priests as interchangeable servants and messengers – although they usually contrive to be polite. Temple guardians, being fanatics, treat the other two groups with outward respect most of the time, but quietly pass judgment on their devotion, and may even become openly hostile if it seems too weak.

## Spells

Cult members without Power Investiture can't cast clerical spells in areas of less than high sanctity. Thus, a favored craftsman who lacks Power Investiture but knows spells must either cast them in a Hephaestean temple or shrine, or have a priest temporarily sanctify his workshop. Temple guardians with spells can only *ever* use them in temples or shrines. A few potent spells have a minimum level of Power Investiture as an actual prerequisite.

### Priests

Priests with Blessed or Power Investiture may have clerical spells as follows:

*Acolyte:* Coolness, Divination (Pyromancy), Glitch/TL, Identify Metal, Know Illusion, Lend Energy, Mage Sight.

*Ordinary Priest:* As acolyte, plus Detect Magic, Dispel Creation, Final Rest, Identify Spell, Ignite Fire, Lend Skill, Magelock, Malfunction/TL, Repair, Scryguard, Sharpen.

*High Priest:* Any of the above, plus Analyze Magic, Bless, Earth to Stone, Extinguish Fire, Metal Vision, Oath, Remove Curse (requires Bless), Reshape (requires Shape Earth), Resist Fire, Sense Spirit, Shape Earth, Watchdog. *Power Investiture 1:* Animate Object, Animation, Create Servant, Curse, Shape Metal, Steelwraith. *Power Investiture 2:* Create Warrior, Enchant, Know True Shape. *Power Investiture 3:* Volcano.

### Favored Craftsmen

Favored craftsmen may have: Bright Vision, Coolness, Divination (Pyromancy), Dye, Essential Flame, Essential Fuel/TL, Extinguish Fire, Find Weakness, Fireproof, Identify Metal, Ignite Fire, Inspired Creation, Knot, Lend Skill, Locksmith, Manipulate, Measurement, Mystic Mark, Nightingale, Purify Air, Recover Energy, Reshape, Resist Fire, See Secrets, Seek Fuel/TL, Shape Earth, Shape Metal, Test Load. *Power Investiture 1:* Borrow Skill, Enchant. *Power Investiture 2:* Animation.

### Temple Guardians

Temple guardians may have: Affect Spirits, Coolness, Curse, Deflect Energy, Fasten, Fireproof, Haste, Know Illusion, Magic Resistance, Night Vision, Recover Energy, Resist Fire, Resist Pain, Sense Danger, Sharpen, Vigil, Watchdog.

### Enchantments

A high priest or a favored craftsman who knows Enchant may also receive any other Enchantment spell *except* Ensorcel, Great Wish, Lich, Malefice, Manastone, Scroll, Spell Stone, Talisman, Temporary Enchantment, Wish, or

Wraith. (Hephaestus doesn't do temporary work or necromancy, or cast petty curses, and has some limits to his power.) He may also learn *any* other spell from the god, but *only* in order to incorporate it into a magic item; he can't cast such spells normally. Magic items made by cult members should fit the style and flavor of the campaign and the cult. The GM has the final say as to what spells are available for this purpose.

## Sanctity

Most of the world has normal sanctity for worshippers of Hephaestus. Temples and shrines dedicated to the god have high sanctity. Any blacksmith's forge or metalworker's workshop can be temporarily sanctified in the normal way by an ordinary or high priest (but not by anyone else), as can any small room with stone or brick walls and a fire burning in the center. Open-air spaces *can't* be sanctified, temporarily or permanently.

There are an unusually large number of locations of very high sanctity to Hephaestus. Unfortunately for mortal cultists, these are all active volcanoes that the god used at some point as smithies! Making use of these and living to tell the tale is a heroic accomplishment, although there may be spots near enough to have the sanctity but far enough away for normal humans to survive – and magic can help.

The Greek gods are mostly quite cooperative, so temples to others of the pantheon usually rate as normal sanctity for clerics of Hephaestus. If a Rank 1+ priest of the other deity declares the visitor unwelcome, though, the sanctity falls to low. Occasionally, the sanctity level drops of its own accord for a month or two. Priests who become aware of this ascribe it to the domestic politics of Olympus. Temples to Ares *always* have low sanctity – apparently because Hephaestus once discovered Ares in bed with Aphrodite. The problem *never* occurs in temples to Hestia, which also contain sacred hearths.

## Priest-Wizards

*Clerical Spell-Magic* (pp. 65-71) assumes that clerical magic is similar in form to "wizardly" magic, but different in nature. This doesn't *have* to be the case. In some settings, spellcasting priests may in fact use exactly the same system as wizards.

This doesn't mean that magic, or certain styles of magic, can't still be associated with religion. Many churches and temples have schools attached – if only to train new priests – and these may teach wizardly magic to any novice with the interest and ability to learn, for eminently practical reasons. A missionary who can cast a few spells is much more likely to survive the journey to preach the word – and if he encounters people with little experience of magic, he'll be able to impress them quite a lot, even if he refrains from talking about his spells as "miracles." And nothing creates goodwill quite as effectively as a little healing, magical or otherwise.

Thus, any religion that values and nurtures magical talent can produce a class of "priest-wizards." If it makes a point of teaching them its ethics *especially* carefully, then these casters may well come to display a distinct character of their own. See *GURPS Banestorm* for one use of this idea.



# RITUAL MAGIC

The ritual magic system is described on p. B242 (and also *GURPS Magic*, p. 200). In summary:

- The ritual magician must learn a Very Hard *core skill* – typically Ritual Magic (p. B218) or Thaumatology (p. B225).

- The magician then studies each college as a Very Hard *college skill* or *path*, which has the core skill as a prerequisite, defaults to the core skill at -6, and may never exceed the core skill.

- Each spell is treated as a Hard technique that defaults to the college skill at a penalty equal to the number of prerequisite spells that a wizard would have to know in order to learn it in the standard system. For example, Purify Air (no prerequisites) defaults to Air College skill level, Create Air (prerequisite: Purify Air) defaults to this skill at -1, Shape Air (prerequisite: Create Air) defaults at -2, and so on. Spells can be improved from default as usual for techniques (see p. B230), but cannot exceed the associated path skill.

Ritual magicians *can* cast spells at default. They can try any spell in any college they've studied. In fact, they can attempt any spell at all – although the cumulative penalties from core skill to path to spell can be prohibitive.

Magery adds to core skill (for use in this system, if not for other purposes), path skills, and spells – but only *once*, not three times over for a spell. If ritual and spell-based magic coexist, then Ritual Magery and standard Magery are separate advantages (but see *Varieties of Magery*, p. 65).

Many of the ideas in Chapters 2 and 3 apply as readily to ritual magic as to spell-based magic. For example:

- Ritual Magery might take enhancements and limitations.

- Changing the college structure gives rise to a new set of path skills, and may make some spells easier or harder to cast ritually at default. Distributing the same number of spells across more or fewer colleges makes it harder or easier to master a wide range of magics. Obviously, those playing wizard PCs will prefer fewer, broader colleges!

- Clerics might use ritual magic, combining it with Power Investiture instead of Ritual Magery, and leave spell-based magic to secular wizards. Priests will then seem to have a broader, subtler grasp of supernatural power than formulaic, spellcasting wizards, while wizards will be more powerful with the individual spells on which they choose to focus.

- Conversely, *wizards* may use ritual magic while *clerics* employ spell-based magic. Wizards then become broad-based theoreticians, while clerics rely on standard “package effects” handed down from above.

## “Knowing” Spells to Manipulate Them

Spells that manipulate other spells often require the caster to have some level of knowledge of the magic to be affected. For example, Counterspell works at the lower of the caster's skills with Counterspell or the spell to be

countered, while Ward requires that the caster know the spell to be stopped at 12+. For these purposes, ritual magicians count as “knowing” spells at the level at which they can cast them – at default, if necessary. If they need a point in a spell for some reason, then being able to cast it at skill 10+ is sufficient.

## Strange Paths

For extra weirdness in a world with ritual magic, there may be a few “strange paths”: colleges that are *only* used ritually, with arbitrary mixtures of spells from the standard colleges linked by a seemingly crackpot magical theory, by their presence in an obscure magical tome, or by some mystic or deity's teachings. These will often be secret, or at least obscure. Gaining access to them may require buying a perk or even an Unusual Background for each. For some relevant ideas, see the treatment of Books in Chapter 5.

## THE PREREQUISITE COUNT

A key factor in ritual magic is a spell's *prerequisite count*: the penalty to cast it at default from the path skill. Appendix C (pp. 261-267) provides a table with prerequisite counts for every spell in *GURPS Magic*. The *Spell Table* on pp. 223-237 of *Magic* also gives prerequisite counts, but gamers using the first printing of that book should note that the counts listed there use a variant calculation method (see below).

## Variant Count Calculation

A complication that arises in the ritual magic system is exactly how to handle spells that have non-spell prerequisites. It's easy enough to count prerequisites when only other spells are involved, but some spells list requirements such as minimum IQ scores, Magery, other advantages, and skills. There are a couple of ways to handle this.

The simple answer is to require a ritual caster to possess the non-spell prerequisites for any spell he wishes to attempt (even at default) or improve as a technique, reading “Magery” as “Ritual Magery.” This can prevent many strange results. For example, Scroll normally requires substantial literacy in the language used, and removing this prerequisite means that illiterate ritual mages can suddenly start writing magical scrolls! Furthermore, certain spell definitions makes some such prerequisites hard to eliminate on practical grounds; e.g., Fireball lets the caster put energy equal to his Magery level into the spell each second, so a magician without at least Magery 1 can logically get no use out of it.

However, this means that ritual magicians still have to worry about prerequisites, and may be limited in what they can cast, whereas part of the point of the system is that they can attempt *any* known spell – albeit sometimes with little chance of success. An alternative option is to say that required traits add one to the prerequisite count per 10 *full* character points that they cost. For example, each level of Magery (with a cost of 10 points) adds one to the count, while literacy (free by default – and never more than 3 points for a new language) adds zero. Forbidden traits, such as “not blind,” have no cost for ordinary characters and hence add nothing. Using this approach means recalculating prerequisite counts for many spells; e.g., Lend Energy requires Magery 1 (10 points) or Empathy (15 points), so its prerequisite count rises from 0 to 1, while Simple Illusion requires the caster to be able to see (no cost) and have at least IQ 11 (20 points), so its count becomes 2.

Using the variant method may require some common-sense rulings; e.g., “No totally illiterate wizard can write a scroll, whatever his skills.” The spells themselves might even need minor adjustments. For example, rather than having Magery prerequisites increase the count for spells such as Fireball, the GM could say that the caster must take a penalty to his roll, and can then put energy equal to the size of the penalty into the spell each turn. This would let a caster who took a -3 penalty sink 3 energy points into his spell in one second and then hurl a 3d Fireball.

### ***Double-Counting of Prerequisites***

Another problem with prerequisite counts emerges when the same spell appears in more than one branch of a spell’s prerequisite tree. For example, Create Fire and Shape Fire *both* name Ignite Fire as a prerequisite (optional, in one case), giving each of them a prerequisite count of 1. Flame Jet requires those two spells, and its listed prerequisite count is 3 – because a wizard who knows just three other spells can learn it. Normally, though, a spell that has two prerequisites, each with count 1, would have a count of 4. The system that gives the lower number is probably fairer and more logical, but if the GM wants a faster and more obviously consistent calculation method, he can find prerequisite counts simply by adding up the number of prerequisite spells and all of their prerequisite counts (giving Flame Jet a count of 4).



### ***Changing the Default Modifiers***

If the GM wants to make a specific spell easier or harder to use, then he’s free to change its prerequisite count. He may wish to adjust the spell description and recalculate the count. Alternatively, he might simply change the number by fiat – especially if the campaign doesn’t use standard spell-based magic at all.

For example, Enchant – the most basic spell in the Enchantment college, required by almost anyone who wants to make magic items – requires 10 spells from other colleges, giving it a listed prerequisite count of 10. This makes it nearly impossible to cast at default from the Enchantment College skill without taking that to prodigious levels, and painfully expensive to improve as a technique. If the GM wants ritual magicians to be effective item-makers, then he might simply reduce the count to 5 and adjust the count for other Enchantment spells downward by a similar amount, making ritual enchantment a challenging but not infeasible career. If he still wants to emphasize that an enchanter needs a broad grounding in magic, then he can give the Enchantment College skill a special prerequisite, such as a point in each of 10 other college skills. Likewise, Curse, with its prerequisite count of 20, is almost impossible for ritual magicians unless the GM lowers its count.

In the other direction, Analyze Magic has a prerequisite count of 3. If the GM wants established spells to be difficult for anyone but a few academic specialists to identify, then he could simply increase that to 10.

## **Extending the Rule of 20**

The standard ritual magic rules create a strong incentive for users to improve the core skill to extreme levels. The most powerful ritual magicians might not put *any* points into college skills, instead buying an incredible level in the core skill and then working all kinds of magic at default. This may suit some campaigns – but in others, the GM might regard it as abusive or damaging. One solution is to treat any core skill greater than 20 as 20 for the purpose of default calculation, so that college skills never have a default greater than 14. Once a magician

reaches that level, his best option is to start putting points into college skills.

### ***No Defaults to Core Skill***

Another possibility is to give college skills *no* default to the core skill. The core skill merely defines the maximum level for college skills. While simple, this option makes it impossible to play an interesting fictional archetype: the dabbler in ritual magic who gains a small amount of unreliable spellcasting ability.

## CEREMONIAL CASTINGS

Ritual magicians can use *Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238), much like wizards under the standard system. An assistant counts as a “mage” if he possesses *Ritual Magery* and uses the same specialty of the same core skill as the ceremony’s leader. He “knows the spell at level 15+” if he can cast it at that level using the ritual magic system. He “knows the spell at level 14 or lower” if he can cast it at skill 8-14 using that system.

*Example:* Crassus has Ritual Magery 2 and Ritual Magic (Etruscan)-22. He has Water College-16 by default, which in turn gives him a default Purify Water-15. He, his companions, and a whole cohort of thirsty troops are lost in the Libyan desert – but the pool they’ve just discovered is brackish and undrinkable. Crassus must act as the leader of a ceremony to purify some of the water, despite not having spent any points on that particular college or spell.

His first assistant has Ritual Magery 1, Ritual Magic (Etruscan)-16, Water College-15, and Purify Water-15, and so can contribute as much energy as he can spare. His second has Ritual Magery 2, Ritual Magic (Etruscan)-19, and thus Water College-13 and Purify Water-12 by default; he can contribute 3 points. Unfortunately, Crassus’ friend Laetitia, despite having Ritual Magery 3, bases her magic on the Ritual Magic (Pythagorean) skill, and so counts as a non-mage for the purposes of the casting – just like the totally mundane troops, contributing only 1 energy each. Between them, they should be able to purify enough to survive.

The generous GM might relax the above restrictions somewhat, permitting ritual magicians with slightly different Ritual Magic specialties – and perhaps even standard spell-based wizards who know the right spell – to assist ceremonies effectively.

## KNOWN AND UNKNOWN TECHNIQUES

As written, the ritual magic system gives magicians access to every spell – albeit often at severe penalties. The GM may not want some spells to be available, however. Furthermore, there might be colleges that are imperfectly understood or explored.

The GM could simply delete certain spells, of course. To be fair to the players, he should create the list of unavailable magic at the *start* of the campaign. He’ll become very unpopular if he bans spells mid-game because he suddenly realizes that they’re troublesome! Reviewing the entire spell list before play begins is a big job, but flexible magic systems like this one *always* place extra responsibilities on the GM.

However, it’s more interesting if some spells are *possible* but largely or totally unknown to ritual magicians. They might represent a new field, or merely be so marginal that no one has ever needed them before. Developing such techniques should be a minor but nontrivial research exercise. It ought to be less work than inventing a brand-new spell in a purely spell-based system – because anyone with the

appropriate college skill already knows the underlying principles involved – and the ability to cast at default means that there need not be a character point expenditure . . . but *some* effort should be required. Use *Magical Invention* (p. 10) as a guideline. The invention skill is usually either Thaumatology or the core skill used for ritual magic. Prerequisite count determines invention complexity:

Prerequisite Count	Complexity
0	Simple
1-3	Average
4-10	Complex
11+	Amazing

## ALTERNATIVE CORE SKILLS

In principle, any Very Hard skill could serve as the core skill for ritual magic. Ritual Magic and Thaumatology are the most common choices, and the easiest to explain, but others can be interesting – especially for exotic and limited versions of the system. While IQ-based skills work best, anything is possible given a sufficiently exotic conception of magic:

*Alchemy:* Magic derives from knowledge of arcane aspects of the material world, or revolves around the art of *transmutation*. Casting requires use of appropriate potions and reagents, and actual laboratory work in some cases.

*Biology:* Magic is all about “life energy,” and the manipulation and control of living things. It might be limited to the Animal, Body Control, Communication and Empathy, Food, Healing, and Mind Control colleges.

*Body Control:* The control of self this skill implies can be extended to control of the world and of magical forces. Colleges such as Body Control (of course!) and Healing are especially appropriate.

*Computer Hacking:* In a world controlled and maybe even defined by data networks, the true adept of computers can achieve *anything*. Spellcasting demands access to a terminal (unless one is the transcendent hero of the movie series, which is an Unusual Background).

*Herb Lore:* Magic is an advanced form of traditional witchcraft, functioning much as the Alchemy-based version (above), but with cheaper materials – and maybe a restriction to fairly subtle effects.

*Musical Influence:* Truly Orpheus-grade musicians can not only work on the minds of human listeners, but make stones and trees weep, and influence spirits and even the gods. The musician must play or sing to work magic, of course.

*Physics:* A natural choice in many settings – especially those with a divergent TL (p. B513) that actually means that physical science is pursuing strange and implausible understandings of reality. Frankly, though, with quantum theory and multidimensional interpretations of the universe, Physics/TL8 looks quite bizarre already. Who knows what Physics/TL12 might permit? Spells become procedures involving strange devices and instruments . . .

*Pressure Secrets:* Casting on other beings requires physical contact – or at least hitting them with a ranged weapon. This might grant access to the Animal, Body Control, Making and Breaking, and Mind Control colleges.

*Weird Science:* By definition, this skill concerns itself with things that most scientists would consider insane. This might extend to direct control of paranormal effects. Spells require mad-science gadgets, unless they're actually based on psychical research.

Of course, a Hard skill isn't *much* cheaper than a Very Hard one, and wouldn't be excessively unbalanced in this application. It's easy to imagine Esoteric Medicine, Mathematics (Pure), or Religious Ritual, for example, giving access to the arcane. Alternatively, just about *any* skill could have a Very Hard magical version. Clerics might use "Higher Theology," or the ultimate traders might negotiate with the universe and *always* know the price, thanks to "Advanced Merchant."

## DIVINE RITUAL MAGIC

Combining the ritual magic system with Power Investiture and the concept of divine magic (see *Clerical Spell-Magic*, pp. 65-71) can lead to priests displaying broader, subtler supernatural powers – perhaps in contrast to secular wizards, if the latter use the standard spell-based system. This requires some work from the GM, however.

The core skill for a "ritual cleric" is usually Ritual Magic, with a specialty based on religious rituals. A religious magic-worker who knows this skill can go on to acquire one or more "divine college" skills that default to the core skill at the usual -6. The GM should create these skills in place of priestly spell lists (pp. 69-70). The god may grant them through divine inspiration, or priests may learn them as part of their training. Each such college should in turn encompass a spell list, complete with prerequisite counts – which might be exactly as calculated for secular ritual magic, or tweaked to give each temple or cult a distinctive flavor.

### *Example: Temple of Hephaestus*

If the Temple of Hephaestus (p. 70-71) used this system, it might have the following four divine colleges (prerequisite counts appear in parentheses):

*Powers of the Shrine:* Analyze Magic (3), Animate Object (4), Bless (10), Coolness (2), Create Servant (7), Create Warrior (8), Curse (12), Detect Magic (2), Dispel Creation (6), Divination (Pyromancy) (7), Earth to Stone (1), Extinguish Fire (0), Final Rest (1), Glitch/TL (10), Identify Spell (2), Know Illusion (0), Know True Shape (4), Lend Energy (1), Malfunction/TL (12), Metal Vision (1), Oath (2), Remove Curse (8), Repair (8), Reshape (8), Scryguard (0), Sense Spirit (2), Shape Earth (1), Shape Metal (1), Steelwraith (5), Volcano (9), Watchdog (2).

*Powers of Craftsmanship:* Animation (4), Borrow Skill (4), Bright Vision (0), Dye (4), Enchant (6), Essential Flame (6), Essential Fuel/TL (5), Find Weakness (1), Fireproof (1), Identify Metal (0), Ignite Fire (0), Inspired Creation (0), Knot (10), Lend Skill (4), Locksmith (1), Mage Sight (0), Magelock (1), Manipulate (2), Measurement (0), Mystic Mark (7), Nightingale (3), Purify Air (0), Recover Energy (1), Reshape (7), Resist Fire (0), See Secrets (4), Seek Fuel/TL (0), Test Load (0).

## Wildcard Colleges

Optionally, the GM can simplify the ritual magic system even further. Simply *ignore* the requirement for a core skill. Wizards must purchase magical colleges as wildcard skills (see *Wildcard Skills*, p. B175). Each spell defaults to the appropriate college skill at a penalty equal to 1/3 of its prerequisite count, rounded to the nearest whole number. Magery adds to college skills, and hence to spells – but this must be Magery of the correct *type*, if multiple varieties exist in the campaign.

*Example:* Thaumaticus-Z6G has IQ 15, Wildcard Magery 2, and 12 points in the Air College! skill. He therefore has Air College!-16, and can cast Purify Air at skill 16, Shape Air at 15, and Lightning at 14.

This idea may not be especially balanced, but it is quick and usable, and preserves the distinctions between different wizards. Note that the GM and players must still be familiar with the spell lists – for commonly used colleges, at least – to get full use out of it.

See p. 202 of *GURPS Magic* for an even simpler wildcard system: wizards learn Magic! as a wildcard skill, and may then cast *any* spell at a penalty equal to its full prerequisite count. This has the virtue of extreme simplicity, but may give wizards too much power for too few points. It's likely more balanced in a world with low mana.

*Powers of the Guardians:* Affect Spirits (3), Deflect Energy (1), Fasten (7), Haste (0), Magic Resistance (6), Night Vision (1), Resist Pain (1), Sense Danger (0), Sharpen (3), Vigil (4).

*Powers That Are Imbued:* Any Enchantment spell not covered by one of the other colleges – *except* Ensorcel, Great Wish, Lich, Malefice, Manastone, Scroll, Spell Stone, Talisman, Temporary Enchantment, Wish, or Wraith – with their standard prerequisite counts reduced by 1. This college also includes *any* spell not covered by the other three, with its standard prerequisite count. Such spells can only be used by incorporating them into enchanted items, never cast directly.

Spells described on p. 71 as requiring some level of Power Investiture have the same requirement if cast under this system.

### *Colleges for Pantheons*

Optionally, each god in a polytheistic pantheon might grant *one* divine college. The spells in such colleges would be closely tied to the associated deity's sphere of influence. Ritual spellcasters seeking versatility might have to balance allegiances to a variety of mostly allied but sometimes quarrelsome deities!

## COMBINING RITUAL AND SPELL MAGIC

Games that feature both ritual magic and the standard spell system can work quite well: spell-users have specialist power, while ritualists enjoy flexibility. Rituals probably pull ahead at high point levels and when working with colleges with lots of fairly simple spells, giving users *broad*

capability for low cost. Wizards might learn both approaches, as the “cookbook” and “first principles” sides of their art – especially if the two use the same type of Magery (see *Varieties of Magery*, p. 65). Alternatively, each school or style of magic could focus on just one methodology, leading to academic rivalries with a practical edge. As a further complication, ritual magicians and spell-users may use dissimilar college and prerequisite structures, giving the two sides very different views of some tasks.

# THRESHOLD-LIMITED MAGIC

This variation on standard spell-based magic detaches spellcasting from physical stamina and permits nearly any wizard to crack castles or destroy armies . . . at the risk of personal obliteration or worse! Because it gives wizards the option to cast spells of almost totally unrestricted power – at a vast potential cost – it’s sometimes known as the “unlimited mana” system. While it has its own distinctive flavor, it uses the standard system’s spell lists and additional features almost “as is.”

Divorcing magic from physical vigor lets wizards be, for instance, enfeebled old men and still be formidable tactical magicians. It also means that wizards who’ve overreached themselves will be largely incomprehensible when their mundane allies ask why they can’t cast spells. They aren’t simply *tired* – their problems are more arcane: “To draw too deeply on my Gift can lead to madness and death. Do not demand of me what you do not comprehend.” Thus, threshold-limited magic may be better than the standard system for simulating fantasy fiction.

If threshold-limited and standard magic coexist, then Threshold Magery and standard Magery are separate advantages. See *Varieties of Magery* (p. 65).

## THE POWER TALLY

Spells cast under this system don’t cost FP. Rather, when a wizard *casts* or *maintains* a spell, record the listed cost in a running total – his *power tally*. All the normal rules that modify energy cost (reduction for high skill, etc.) remain in force, modifying the amount added to the tally instead. If

the spell has a variable cost (e.g., an attack spell where the energy invested determines damage), then the caster can vary the amount added to his tally in exactly the same way.

*Example:* Hieron the Magus is trapped in a besieged city. He hasn’t used magic in a while (his tally is 0), and this is an emergency. In his attempt to escape, he casts a huge Mass Sleep spell, with a total cost of 21, on a group of guards. Three are unaffected, and Hieron casts Entombment on one of them, which increases his tally by 10 points, to 31. Two guards remain . . .

### Optional Rule: Auras

A rising tally reflects increasing distortion in the wizard’s metaphysical relationship with the universe, which is visible to anyone able to perceive magical auras (using the Aura spell or other methods). Someone with a high tally – and especially anyone well over his threshold (see below) – may have a “deformed” or “turbulent” aura. This enables wizards and seers to tell when their colleagues have been overdoing their magic.

### Optional Rule: Automatic Maintenance

Threshold-limited castings, being powered completely by ambient energy, may be easier to maintain than standard magic spells. Optionally, a maintainable spell is always maintained *automatically*, increasing the caster’s tally, unless the wizard consciously denies the increase and ends it. If he’s unconscious or asleep at this point, his tally increases one more time, but then the spell ends automatically after *half* the usual maintenance period. A spell that costs 0 to maintain will continue indefinitely without

*Ryan: Isn’t there always some sort of price for magic?*

*Ralph: Think of it like your credit card bill. You just pay it! Easy!*

*Ryan: Hang on a second – hey, your coat is a reversible warlock smock! Nice!*

*Ralph: Ey, not bad is it, lad. Now pipe down. The dark side is like your next door neighbours. Until you get to know em, you don’t trust em! Then you find out they’re mostly okay! Now, cop hold of these black candles, and if you see anything hairy . . . Sorry, forget that.*

*– John Allison, Scary Go Round*

increasing tally, even if the caster is asleep or unconscious, but the caster can end it at any point at the cost of +1 to tally. All continuing spells end automatically the moment the caster dies.

## Tally Recovery

A wizard's tally "heals" over time. The suggested standard *recovery rate* is 8 points per day, with recovery occurring at sunrise. A wizard can improve his recovery rate by taking the Rapid Magical Recovery advantage (p. 79), if the GM permits that. No other traits reduce tally in any way.

## THRESHOLDS AND CALAMITIES

Every wizard has a *threshold* score, defining safe limits on his magic. The suggested standard threshold is 30. If a wizard's tally remains at or below his threshold, then everything's fine. If his tally exceeds his threshold, then bad things can happen. He must make a Calamity Check – a roll on the *Calamity Table* (below) – on any turn that he goes over his threshold for any reason. While he's over his threshold, he must also make a Calamity Check on any turn that he casts a spell (even one with zero cost) or adds to his tally to maintain a spell.

### Optional Rule: Limited Tally Increase

To keep wizardly insanity under *some* control, the GM can set an absolute upper limit on how much any wizard can add to his tally with one spell. Five or 10 times the caster's threshold should suffice.

## Calamity Checks

To make a Calamity Check, roll 3d and add 1 for every *full* 5 points by which tally exceeds threshold after this casting. Calamities take effect immediately, but their nature may not always be apparent to the wizard (see the table for details). Calamities don't normally cause the spell to fail. However, if the Calamity Check total is 29+, then the spell *does* fail unless the caster can make a Will roll at a penalty equal to the bonus to the Calamity Check.

*Example:* Hieron (above) has a threshold of 30. He exceeded this when he cast that Entombment. This requires a Calamity Check. Since he exceeded his threshold by only 1, there's no modifier to the roll. If he decides to entomb the other two guards, each new casting will trigger a fresh calamity, and modifiers will begin to apply.

### Optional Rule: Calamities Reduce Tally

To make wizards a little more powerful and active, reduce their current tally by 1 for every *full* 2 points by which their Calamity Check total exceeds 10. For example, a total of 17 reduces tally by 3, as well as having the effect listed on the table.

## Calamity Table

This table is a *suggestion*. The GM can adjust and expand it to suit campaign flavor and style, perhaps having hubristic magic summon hostile entities, affect the weather in

dramatic ways, and so on; see Appendix B (pp. 256-260) for inspiration. For a dark and dangerous setting, the results might be more severe, and include injury or the acquisition of physical disadvantages. In a comedy game, calamities should be inconvenient and bizarre, but usually temporary. Even within the same game world, the effects may vary by location ("the universe seems less forgiving in the Dark Lands") or by time. And the industrious GM could create a separate table for each race or magical tradition.

Remember to consider calamities' effects on the game world. For example, if a fairly low roll reduces a wizard's Appearance, then there will be a lot of ugly wizards. Wizard-friendly games might include spells that can repair calamity effects – with large tally costs of their own, of course.

As with other magical disaster tables, anyone *trying* to trigger a calamity in the hopes of seeing a specific result should find that this *doesn't work*. Magic can seem willful and perverse – and its disasters, doubly so. Suicide cults attempting to bring down global curses through wild magic will instead find their magical abilities destroyed and their dark gods no longer hearing their prayers. Provoking enemies into overreaching themselves, on the other hand, can be an effective if dangerous trick!

Note that Luck-related advantages *cannot* modify Calamity Checks. See *Critical Magical Failures and Luck* (p. 30).

**3-10** – Nothing happens – this time.

**11, 12** – Wizard suffers from the Nightmares disadvantage (p. B144), with a self-control number of 9, for 4d days.

**13** – Wizard's grasp of his own magic weakens. Reduce his threshold by 2d+5 for the next 1d weeks. The wizard is aware that his threshold has fallen, but not by how much.

**14** – As **13**, but threshold reduction is 4d+10 and the effect lasts 1d *months*. In addition, all of the wizard's spells are at -3 to skill for 2d weeks.

**15** – Wizard's Magery gains the Radically Unstable Magery limitation (p. 26) at the -30% level. If he already has this, then it becomes the -50% version. If he already has *that* – or if he lacks Magery – then any attempt to cast a spell results in an automatic critical failure. In all cases, the problem lasts for 1d+1 weeks.

**16** – Caster gains a -5-point disadvantage of the GM's choice. After 3d days, he has the option of buying it off for 2 bonus character points (it simply fades away). If he lacks the points, or doesn't want to spend them, then the disadvantage becomes permanent. *Any* disadvantage is possible – the wizard can become ugly, marginally insane, etc., at the GM's whim.

**17** – As **16**, but the disadvantage is worth -10 points, and costs 5 points to buy off.

**18** – As **16**, but the disadvantage is worth -15 points, and costs 7 points to buy off.

**19** – Wizard loses the ability to cast a single spell, chosen at random from his spell list, permanently. He still *knows* the spell, and it can still count as a prerequisite, but he can never *cast* it.

**20** – As **16**, but there are multiple disadvantages worth -30 points in total, and costing 15 points to buy off.

- 21** – As **15**, but the problem lasts for 1d+1 *months*. At the end of that period, the wizard must roll against Will + Threshold Magery. Failure means that the condition becomes permanent. In extreme cases, this can cause the permanent loss of useful spellcasting ability.
- 22** – Roll again with the same modifier. The result affects a randomly chosen *companion* of the wizard! If it's one that affects spellcasting and the wizard has no casters among his companions, or if the wizard is operating completely alone, then roll *twice* (with the same modifier) and apply both results to the wizard himself.
- 23** – Wizard permanently loses 1d×5 points of advantages, attributes, and/or secondary characteristics. Determine what's lost randomly.
- 24** – Caster becomes a living “mana-scar”! Within a 3d-mile radius of the wizard, casting and maintenance costs double (in terms of tally additions and, if regular spellcasting is possible in the setting, energy cost), and tally recovery *halts*. This effect lasts for 3d weeks. It also ends in the event of the wizard's death. Enemies or impatient allies may decide on a quick solution . . .
- 25** – Wizard's skill with all spells is reduced by 3d+5. This penalty “heals” at a rate of -1 per day.
- 26** – As **25**, but “healing rate” is only -1 per *week*.
- 27** – Wizard ages 2d+13 years.
- 28** – A plague or a curse (locusts, storms, etc.) descends on the region, lasting for 3d weeks. No one will be able to trace this to the wizard, but he'll be aware that it's his fault. This can drive a benevolent wizard mad as he witnesses the suffering and destruction. Even vicious wizards may be inconvenienced – and worry that they'll somehow be blamed. The GM should be grotesque and *cruel*.
- 29** – Wizard permanently loses the ability to cast spells (but not the knowledge – small comfort). The *generous* GM can treat this as a Divine Curse disadvantage (p. B132); the wizard might have a chance of eliminating the problem, given heroic effort or perhaps impressive and profound thaumatological research. Remember: at this level or higher, the spell may fail.
- 30-39** – As **29**, *plus* something permanent happens to the state of magic in a large region around the place where the casting went wrong. Perhaps all spells are cast at -2 in that kingdom from then on, or a certain class of spells functions erratically. The GM should be creative! If the wizard is found to be the culprit (and every concerned and able group will have a diviner on the job), then he could be a hunted man. Others may assume that killing him will remove the curse; they *might* be right. The wizard cannot get rid of the personal effect (if at all) without removing the problem from the region, and vice-versa.
- 40+** – As **30-39**, but the change is *global*. In addition, the wizard must make a HT-6 roll. Failure means he's consumed in a backlash of magical energy and explodes: he dies automatically (reduced to -10×HP) and the explosion does (Will + Threshold Magery) dice of crushing explosive damage! Success on the HT-6 roll means a less-dramatic backlash: the wizard takes 2d dice of damage and doesn't explode. If this kills him, then the global change may fade over a period of weeks or years – or it may stand as a memorial to his folly.

*Cumulative Effects:* If the wizard rolls a temporary effect from which he's *already* suffering, then both any quantitative penalties suffered *and* the duration of the effect are cumulative. If the wizard rolls an effect (temporary or permanent) that's a version of a problem he already has, then increase the problem's level or intensity; reduce a relevant self-control number by one step, where appropriate; or reroll, if neither is possible.

## ADJUSTING THE NUMBERS

The numbers above should result in an overall wizard power level roughly equivalent to that under the standard rules – but different in style! Wizards can't cast nearly as many smaller spells, but they can sometimes manage large magic; Area spells, in particular, are more of an option in combat, and more-strategic magic becomes possible. Most wizards won't risk a *lot* of big spells, but they can live dangerously in emergencies. Trivial “utility” spells, on the other hand, may seem like too much trouble. Professional wizards-for-hire can't offer as many simple services, but might be more flamboyant. Careful energy-management strategies are no longer an option, likely rendering some Quick and Dirty enchantments less viable and making magic items rarer overall.

The basic numbers are all wide open to adjustment, however. Threshold and recovery rate defaults are a campaign decision for the GM. A threshold of 50 and a daily recovery rate of 1 would allow wizards to cast the occasional *really* powerful spell safely, but cripple them on a day-to-day basis. A threshold and recovery rate of 40 *each* would make for truly formidable wizards, at least on the tactical level, and it might be necessary to charge them a significant Unusual Background cost to keep them balanced with other characters. At the other extreme, a threshold and recovery rate of 5 each would create a distinctly low-magic world, but wizards could still use mighty magics in times of dire need – at huge personal risk.

The assumption that threshold recovery occurs daily, at sunrise, is also entirely variable. Even with a standard daily rate, wizards might have their own “hour of recovery,” chosen at character creation. Alternatively, a campaign might feature recovery – at a proportionately adjusted rate – hourly, weekly, or *monthly*. The latter could lead to odd behavior around “payday,” especially if all wizards share the same recovery day (perhaps when the sun moves into a new astrological house): just before, some wizards will find themselves low on options and others, with lots of margin left, will cut loose with a “use it or lose it” philosophy; just after, they'll *all* have a greater capacity to work magic.

## NEW ADVANTAGES

A few new advantages can help distinguish individual wizards in a campaign that uses threshold-limited magic.

### *Increased Threshold*

**5 points/level**

Each level of this advantage increases your threshold by 20% of the campaign default. For finer distinction, the GM may permit a 4% increase per 1-point level.

## Rapid Magical Recovery

5 points/level

Each level of this advantage increases your tally recovery rate by 25% of the campaign default. For finer distinction, the GM may allow a 5% increase per 1-point level.

## Safer Magical Excess

10 points/level

With one level of this advantage, your Calamity Checks are at +1 per 10 points of excess tally instead of +1 per 5. Each additional level doubles this effect: +1 per 20, +1 per 40, +1 per 80, and so on.

## Thresholds and “Energy Spells”

Certain spells from the Healing college behave differently for wizards who use threshold-limited magic:

- Lend Energy restores the subject’s FP while increasing the caster’s tally. “Threshold wizards” may cast this on *themselves*, restoring their own FP at the expense of their tally.
- There’s *no* threshold-related version of Recover Energy.
- Share Energy lets another wizard add twice the cost of spells that he casts to the tally of the one who cast Share Energy instead of to his own tally, to a maximum of 10 points added (that is, 5 points’ worth of effect) per second.

## Variable Energy Access

50 points

If threshold-based and fatigue-based spellcasting coexist, then the usual assumption is that each casting style has its own spells; see *Threshold-Limited vs. Standard Spells* (p. 81). The GM may wish to allow the possibility of casters who can use either option with the *same* spells – that is, without learning each spell twice. Such wizards *must* take this advantage, as they gain considerable tactical flexibility: when FP run low or tally runs high, they can simply switch styles.

The cost for this advantage is a *suggestion*. The GM can vary it according to the style of the campaign. For a game world full of powerful, versatile wizards, or if mana levels are generally low or worse (making magic hard to use anyway), he can reduce the price to 20 points. If “hybrid” wizards are rare, legendary, and likely to blindsides and confuse opponents, he should raise it to whatever level seems reasonable; in effect, it includes an Unusual Background.

It’s perfectly possible to have this advantage without having any type of Magery. In that case, using one or both casting styles simply requires a local mana level of high or better.

## NEW MAGERY LIMITATIONS

The GM may permit mages to take the following limitations on Threshold Magery.

### Reduced Threshold

-10%/level

Each level of this limitation reduces your threshold by 20% of the campaign default. Five levels (the maximum) make your threshold 0! This is incompatible with Increased Threshold (p. 78).

### Seriously Calamity-Prone

-10%/level

Each level of this limitation, to a maximum of four, subtracts 1 point from the amount of excess tally that gives +1 to your Calamity Checks: one level means +1 per 4 points; two levels, +1 per 3 points; three levels, +1 per 2 points; and four levels, +1 per point of excess tally. This is incompatible with Safer Magical Excess (above).

### Slower Magical Recovery

-10%/level

Each level of this limitation reduces your tally recovery rate by 25% of the campaign default. Four levels (the maximum) means you cannot normally recover at all! This is incompatible with Rapid Magical Recovery (above).

## MAGIC ITEMS

Magic items can exist in settings with threshold-limited magic. If they would cost no FP to use in standard-magic games – “always on,” have the Power enchantment (p. B480), etc. – then there’s no problem. If they *would* cost FP, then there are two options:

- *Items add to user’s tally.* Everyone, wizard or not, has a tally, a threshold, and a recovery rate – although only people who use magic or magic items have to worry about them (still, this may mean extra bookkeeping). This is liable to make all magic items seem a little uncanny and worrying from the normal person’s perspective: use them too much and you don’t get tired – strange things happen to you! Penalties to cast spells also apply to rolls to activate magic items, and calamity effects that remove the ability to cast spells may render non-wizards unable to activate items instead (GM’s decision). Non-spellcasters may have a lower threshold, since magic really isn’t part of their nature.

- *Items have their own tally.* Every item has its own tally (which increases each time it’s used), threshold, and recovery rate. The suggested base threshold for items is 1/3 of the default threshold for human wizards in the campaign; the recommended recovery rate is half the wizardly default. Enchanters may incorporate buffer objects (see below) into magic items, using the rules for “Dedicated” Powerstones (*GURPS Magic*, p. 70), to increase their effective threshold and recovery rate. Calamities suffered by an item might apply to the item *or* the user, as the GM deems appropriate. This can earn some items a reputation as “jinxed” or “cursed,” especially if they have an unusually low threshold.



It's also possible to combine approaches. Perhaps the enchanter decides when making an item whether it has its own tally or "feeds through" to the user. Alternatively, *most* items can add to the user's tally, but those incorporating buffer objects gain their own tally and recovery rate, with base values of 0 before adding the buffer. These options add complexity, but can make items more idiosyncratic and varied.

### Buffer Objects

If the GM decides to permit them, *buffer objects* are the threshold-limited magic counterpart to Powerstones (*Magic*, pp. 69-70). Each can absorb a number of points that would otherwise go to the user's tally, thereby increasing his effective threshold. The Powerstone spell creates buffer items instead (in a game where threshold-limited and standard magic coexist, it becomes *two* spells: one to create Powerstones, one to create "buffer stones"). For each point of energy capacity that the spell would give a stone, it instead confers 2 points of buffer. Buffer stones lose absorbed tally at *half* the rate at which Powerstones recharge energy – that is, 1 point/fortnight in low mana, 1 point/2 days in normal mana, and so on.

## OPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Threshold-based casting raises many special concerns and permits numerous optional rules.

### Varying Capabilities

In some settings, wizards may start with widely varying thresholds and recovery rates, but the *base* values of these two things – before modification by advantages, limitations, or special circumstances – must always give the same product when multiplied together. For example, a wizard could have threshold 30/recovery 8, threshold 20/recovery 12, or threshold 40/recovery 6; all multiply to 240. This can produce wildly different characters. The GM may prohibit extreme cases, such as the threshold 120/recovery 2 wizard who casts the occasional game-wrecking spell and then spends weeks recovering on the sidelines.

### Ceremonial Castings

When casting a spell ceremonially using this system, a caster or an assistant counts as knowing the spell at a given level if he can cast it at that level as *threshold-based magic*. Participants are considered "mages" if they possess Threshold Magery. Assess additions to each participant's tally exactly as you would reckon energy contributed in the standard system. A spectator who opposes the casting reduces the effective total contributed by 5 but *adds* 5 to his personal tally in the process – becoming actively entangled in magic-working, for *or* against the casting, brings a cumulative danger of calamity!

### Emergency Use of Threshold Casting

In some game worlds, wizards might normally use standard fatigue-based magic but be able to draw additional

power "out of the ether" at any time, applying the threshold-based magic rules. The catch is that the campaign threshold is *zero* and cannot be improved! Thus, *every* such "free lunch" casting automatically causes a Calamity Check. Recovery rates should generally be restricted to the low range (1-10 points daily).

It's possible that not all wizards can use this option. If some can't, then those who can must take a 10-point Unusual Background. Either way, this option makes magic slightly more powerful – but not without serious potential drawbacks.

### Other Uses for "Energy"

Threshold-based magic can be combined with the optional rules under *Trading Energy for Speed and Skill* (p. 39) and *Adjustable Spells* (p. 39), allowing wizards to exchange additions to tally for speed, skill, and/or enhancements. This makes casters with high thresholds even more formidable, as they can afford to be extremely flexible when they need to be.

### Trading Fatigue Points for Power

The GM may permit wizards who use threshold-based casting to spend FP to help power their spells – at the cost of 4 FP per point of "spell energy" that doesn't add to tally. Thus, wizards won't bother using FP for most castings, but in an emergency they can exhaust themselves for a few extra energy points that won't increase the risk of a calamity.

### Some Fatigue Cost

With this option, every spell cast successfully – and every critical failure on a casting – costs 1 FP, in addition to increasing tally. This limits the *number* of spells that a wizard can cast in a given scene without limiting his power. It also gives wizards *some* incentive to preserve their physical fitness!

### Variable Threshold

Some regions or entire game worlds might be "variable-threshold zones" where the default threshold changes like the weather, more-or-less predictably, perhaps even on a fixed cycle. Likewise, threshold can vary from place to place, making heavy magic use safer in some lands than in others. Wizards may or may not be aware of the current local level; those with Magery might be able to sense it, while Information spells might exist to analyze it. If it's often unknown and unknowable, wizards are likely to be very cautious.

In all cases, the Increased Threshold advantage and Reduced Threshold limitation modify the current local threshold value, for the individual wizard only.

### Variable Recovery Rate

Instead of tally recovery being a flat rate, the GM can determine it with a die roll. The suggested value is 2d+1, which *averages* to 8 but makes recovery less certain. The Rapid Magical Recovery advantage should then give a flat bonus to the roll: +2 per 5-point level, if using the default value.

## Non-Mages and Lower-Mana Areas

Applying *Non-Mages Casting in Lower-Mana Areas* (p. 58) to threshold-based magic means that “mundanes” casting spells in normal or lower mana may be taking a *large* and unpredictable risk. Instead of merely getting very tired, they’re quite likely to burn out – perhaps literally – after a spell or two. Before then, though, they can at least work some minor magics without physical collapse.

## Recovery Rituals

Daily tally recovery needn’t be automatic. Perhaps wizards must burn incense and meditate – or, in a dark fantasy world, perform animal sacrifices or demonic rituals. Likewise, there might be some rituals that allow *additional* recovery beyond the daily standard, with difficulty and at some kind of cost. Highly prized magical herbs could offer similar benefits.

Individual wizards who want this kind of additional recovery should take the Rapid Magical Recovery advantage with limitations such as Preparation Required and Trigger.

## Familiars as Buffers

Familiars can provide an extra buffer for additions to tally under this system, much as they can supply an external reserve of energy for wizards who cast fatigue-based magic. Adapt the suggestions under *Familiars* (p. 50) as desired. A familiar serving this purpose will have its own tally, threshold, and recovery rate, and will eventually suffer calamities – much like a human wizard.

The familiar *may* draw the consequences of a calamity entirely upon itself, saving the wizard from personal inconvenience. This certainly fits well enough when the problem is, for instance, a threshold reduction. However, the GM can always declare that the close mystical link between wizard and familiar means that some calamity effects pass through the familiar to the wizard. This may be a fixed rule, but the GM might instead decide on a whim (but hopefully without personal malice!) who suffers the problem when a calamity occurs, or even let the *wizard* choose. Outcomes such as loss of spellcasting ability should usually affect the wizard and not the familiar (who might not have such ability to begin with).

## USE WITH STANDARD SPELLCASTING

As with other variant systems, if threshold-limited casting is available alongside the standard system in a campaign, then each of the two will *usually* have its own type of Magery (“Spell Magery” and “Threshold Magery”). However, the GM has the final say. For thoughts on this, see *Varieties of Magery* (p. 65).

## Threshold-Limited vs. Standard Spells

If the two styles *are* fully distinct, then wizards who learn both must declare when learning a spell whether it’s to be cast as “standard” or “threshold-limited.” They may

choose to learn some spells twice, once for each style. The ability to use the same spells with either style is an advantage; see *Variable Energy Access* (p. 79).

It’s up to the GM whether students of magic can use the same magical texts to learn spells in either style, with the logic that the basic principles are common and it’s just a matter of adapting them slightly. If this is true, then individuals who know spells in one style should be able to spend character points to learn them in the other without the need for a teacher or similar external help. Each spell might even *default* to its counterpart in the other style – at, say, -3.

## Mana Levels and Types

The existence of threshold-based magic might reflect the presence of a different *type* of mana, perhaps actually called “unlimited mana.” Whereas standard mana obliges the wizard to draw on his own reserves of energy, this alternate variety feeds energy in but distorts the wizard’s relationship with the universe in the process – until something metaphorically snaps. Unlimited mana should come in all the same levels as standard mana.

If the two styles of spellcasting coexist, then they might both be possible in the same places. The same local mana level may apply to each, or mana levels applying to the two types of casting may vary independently. In the latter case, the Mana Damper and Mana Enhancer advantages (pp. B67-68) *might* come in two forms as well, each affecting one variety of mana – although it’s probably better if such traits affect both sorts of mana equally, making them uniformly annoying or important to *all* wizards.

## CLERICS AND THRESHOLD-BASED MAGIC

Threshold-limited casting is an excellent match for clerical magic (see *Clerical Spell-Magic*, pp. 65-71). After all, the idea that working what amounts to divine miracles should be physically tiring is rather strange – the power comes from the god, not from the miracle-worker! Likewise, it seems entirely plausible that calling for such favors eventually stretches the god’s patience, or pushes the limits of creation, until finally the deity, or reality, *smites* the hubristic mortal.

An obvious option is to give secular wizards standard fatigue-based casting (“calling on their own resources”) and priests the threshold-limited system (“calling on divine power”). In this case, “unlimited mana” is actually sanctity (pp. 68-69), not a special variety of mana. The GM should make the traits described in *New Advantages* (pp. 78-79) available to clerics instead of to wizards, and allow the modifiers under *New Magery Limitations* (p. 79) to apply to Power Investiture. Increased Threshold, Rapid Magical Recovery, and Safer Magical Excess would imply a more tolerant deity or fabric of reality; Variable Energy Access would probably be unavailable (one cannot *usually* consider spells and miracles to be the same thing); and limitations would imply a god who is miserly with his divine aid and doesn’t like being pestered.

## USE WITH RITUAL MAGIC

Combining ritual magic with threshold-based casting is also fine. Indeed, a campaign could involve *four* subtly different types of wizard: fatigue-burning or threshold-limited, spell-based or ritual, in any combination. This might lead to a game with four versions of Magery – although the GM may elect to have just two, either “Ritual Magery” and “Spell Magery,” or “Energy Magery” and “Threshold Magery.”

### Unintended Consequences

Threshold-limited ritual magic is liable to lead to wild wizardly behavior. Ritual magic permits wizards to attempt a huge range of major spells at default in emergencies – but with fatigue-based casting, success merely means that the magician gets tired, and perhaps loses HP. A threshold-based caster who manages to cast a big, powerful spell is likely to generate weird, broad-area side effects while staying on his feet – and may be tempted to try something *huge* that would cripple an FP-burning wizard, because *most* calamities are less-than-lethal.

For example, a ritualist with Weather College-15, faced by a large group of enemies, might attempt a Spark Storm

for the first time in his life. He'd have to roll 8 or less – not great odds, but hardly impossible. If he chose to give the spell maximum damage and a five-yard radius, he'd add 30 to his tally on casting and 15 per minute thereafter, and probably pass his threshold very quickly.

A scarier example would be a magician with Healing College-16 who decides to try to cast Resurrection on a fallen comrade. He'd have to roll 9 or less. If he succeeded, his tally would rise by 300. Even if it was previously zero, and assuming default parameters, he'd have to make a Calamity Check at +54! He would automatically trigger the worst possible result on the table, probably die, and certainly cause a lot of collateral damage – but a romantic or deranged wizard *might* try it. Most FP-burning casters simply couldn't make the attempt without an external energy supply (meaning that few would bother to learn the spell).

Cornered, desperate, or crazy ritual magicians can thus be dangerous for *everyone*, if able to use threshold-limited casting. To avoid excessive wild magic, the GM might put an upper limit on the amount that can be added to tally with a single casting. At the very least, he should require Will rolls, at heavy penalties, even to *try* stunts like those in the examples.

# MANDATORY AND SIGNIFICANT MODIFIERS

One way to make magic more flavorful and colorful is to require castings to be more complicated, with lots of special equipment – or at least, to give significant bonuses for such things. Modifiers for the options discussed here apply to *every* spellcasting roll, usually providing bonuses. See Appendix A (pp. 242-255) for many relevant tables and lists.

## USING THE CONCEPT

This approach may work best in *low* mana settings; faced with a general -5 to spells, mages will be willing to scabble for casting bonuses. It also suits games that use

*Ritual Magic* (pp. 72-76); most powerful spells default from college skills at large penalties, but enough bonuses can compensate for that. In either case, magic will feel like an obscure, subtle, complex art that only functions *well* when the magician has gathered together an assortment of tools and ingredients, and that can be stymied completely by unfavorable circumstances.

The GM can fine-tune the flavor and complexity of magic by adjusting the variety and effectiveness of the available modifiers. The more bonuses there are to be had, the more likely wizards are to be able to cast the spells they need – if they can prepare. If the system is complex and subtle, then

## Ceremonial-Only Casting

To balance magic that enjoys bonuses under *Mandatory and Significant Modifiers* (pp. 82-90) against “conventional” casting, the GM may rule that all modifier-enhanced magic must be cast *ceremonially*. This fits with historical ideas. “Higher magic” of the sort that inspired these rules could rarely be cast on the fly – that was the province of hedge-magic, folk-art, and witchcraft like the Evil Eye.

As a compromise, the GM can rule that magic using materials sufficient to avoid a *penalty* under *Sympathy*

(pp. 243-245) can be cast non-ceremonially, as standard magic, but that such fast castings can claim no special *bonuses* – it takes time to focus mystic energies. Assembling the ingredients for an effective sympathetic casting – bringing astrological calculations, fingernail clippings, etc., into play – should take a good deal of time anyway, of course, but it can't hurt to formalize it. In many ways, this option gives GMs the best of all worlds, balancing massive skill bonuses against meaningful restrictions on tactical usefulness.

the GM can require Thaumatology or Occultism rolls (depending on whether magic is a matter of refined scholarship or shadowy folklore) to identify the best modifiers for a given situation. It might even be *impossible* to cast a spell without appropriate modifying items or situations – although a minimal +0 “placeholder” could be enough. For example, if using *Hermetic Decans* (below), casting a Water spell may involve an amulet scribed with the symbol of Cancer, or a teardrop-shaped aquamarine pendant, or casting on a Friday while wearing blue, or something else associated with Saphathoraél – but casting totally unprepared, without thought, is inconceivable.

### **Knowledge Is Power**

An option to consider when using an extensive set of modifiers is assessing energy cost reductions for high skill (see *Energy Cost*, p. B236) on the basis of *effective* rather than base skill. For example, a wizard who knows a spell at base skill 12, but who can scabble together +3 in bonuses, has effective skill 15 and may reduce the cost for that particular casting by 1 (although he must still both speak and gesture). If he can find +8 in bonuses, he'll have effective skill 20, reducing cost by 2. This makes bonuses doubly valuable!

## **ASTROLOGICAL MODIFIERS**

One system that accords well with more sophisticated sorts of folklore – and that integrates nicely with this approach – uses *astrology*. This implies that the movements of the stars and planets correspond to events on Earth, yielding a rich and complex body of symbolism and relationships. It also suggests that the motion of the heavens reflects and directs vast cosmic forces that can *influence* the world supernaturally, setting up conditions for which spellcasters must allow.

The scheme below is just one way to handle astrological modifiers. There can be others, even within the structure of Western astrology. For example, some astrologers see planetary influences as paramount, and regard decans merely as observational markers.

### **Hermetic Decans**

Most people are aware that Western astrology divides the zodiac into 12 “signs” or “houses.” A more esoteric ancient tradition, adopted by Hermetic theory, further divides these signs into three *decans* apiece, for 36 decans in all. Each decan rules 10 degrees of the zodiac. See *Hermetic Astrology* (pp. 248-253) for a complete list of decans (one version of them – other sources vary in detail), plus associations and symbolism. Assigning each standard magical college to a decan makes it possible to generate astrological modifiers for spellcasting, as follows:

1. Consult *Decanic Correspondences* (p. 248) and find the decan governing the college to which the spell belongs, as well as the zodiacal sign and planet related to that decan. If the spell falls into multiple colleges, then the caster must decide which college he's using at the time of casting.

2. Use *Decanic Natures* (pp. 248-253) to find any bonuses for places or materials associated with the governing

*Rams horns, skulls, baroque metalwork and heavy candles were much in evidence, despite the discovery by younger wizards that the Rite of AshkEnte could perfectly well be performed with three small bits of wood and 4 cc of mouse blood.*

– Terry Pratchett,  
***The Light Fantastic***

decan. The caster must deliberately involve such an association in the casting process (GM's judgment) to claim a bonus.

3. Find the correspondences for the decan's sign in *Zodiacal Correspondences* (p. 247). Every *two* zodiacal correspondences in the spell's area of effect, or that the caster deliberately involves in the casting, add +1 to the caster's effective skill. Each sign also has a sign in opposition. The influences of the opposing sign work against the spell: every *two* zodiacal correspondences that oppose the spell give -1 to effective skill.

4. Look up the correspondences for the decan's planet in *Planetary Correspondences* (p. 247). Add +1 for every *three* planetary correspondences deliberately involved in the casting. Every planet but Mercury has an opposing planet, the influences of which work against the spell: every *three* planetary correspondences in opposition give -1 to effective skill.

Enormous quantities or particularly high qualities of a corresponding (opposing) material might grant a further +1 (-1), at the GM's discretion.

The total bonuses from zodiacal and planetary modifiers – not counting those for day and month, if used (see *Tracking Astrological Time*, p. 85) – can never exceed +3. Any excess effect simply “overflows.”

These energies are *symbolically important* to the universe. This implies that they must be symbolically important in the casting process for it to work, not just vaguely present. The GM should rule that a wizard casting a Missile Shield spell – governed by Roëléd, the decan of Protection and Warning, associated with Leo – derives no special bonus simply because the caster has a heart and there's a bowl of apples in the room. If the caster picks up a yellow apple from the bowl and smashes it into his chest (over the heart) while casting, though, then *that* might be worth a bonus. If he wears a gold-and-carnelian lion amulet over his heart, or burns frankincense and inhales the fumes, then that's yet more symbolic weight for Leo and Roëléd. Wizards often carry several amulets around on their person, and may prefer to cast any important magic in their workshops, where numerous arcane ingredients are close to hand.

## Example: The Cabal

The Cabal (see p. B543 and *GURPS Infinite Worlds*) likes to claim a monopoly on *all* magic, but it has its own distinct style, based on astrological influences. It applies these broadly – Cabalists, or at least Cabalist factions, have access to almost every spell in *GURPS Magic*, and certainly know about every college. The Cabal sometimes incorporates non-astrological methodologies into its theories, but only with caution and difficulty.



Trained Cabalists are supreme experts at exploiting complex modifiers. They can usually find more than enough bonuses to compensate for a -5 penalty, and thus can work very efficiently in low mana, even *benefiting* from the reduced risk of disaster should they make serious mistakes. Thus, Cabalists mostly *prefer* to operate on low mana timelines. They regard worlds with *no* mana as beneath their interest, of course.

Normal and higher mana worlds aren't only uncommon, but actually deprive Cabalists of their biggest single advantage. Worlds like this often have numerous magic-workers. If the Cabal operates in such places at all, they find themselves just one faction among many. Their special knowledge is rarely an *overwhelming* edge, and they're more likely to be detected. While few Cabalists would admit it, they often feel rather uncomfortable in such settings, only going there to acquire resources or conduct "high energy" research.

The Cabal teaches decanic secrets to all members who study spell-based magic. Students are also inculcated with the importance of secrecy, and told bloodcurdling stories about the consequences of betrayal. While the Cabal can tolerate the occasional nonmember with some kind of magical lore, any outsider who seems to have even a partial grasp of these special methods is usually offered a choice between membership and death. Certain Cabalists go straight to the second option. The empty decans (p. 85) are an *interesting* mystery to Cabalists, and

many dream of identifying whole new forms of spellcraft, which would grant both renown (within the Cabal – the only sort that's supposed to count) and power.

The Cabal's grasp of spells certainly includes enchantments. However, with penalties for inappropriate materials *tripled*, problems with using Powerstones to full effect, and the ever-present threat of jealous rivals stealing or breaking their best toys, most Cabalists prefer to rely on personal abilities. On the other hand, they'll go a long way (and commit a lot of crimes) to get hold of ancient items of power.

### *Other Magics and the Cabal*

Cabalists also exploit the laws of magic (see *Magical Laws*, pp. 86-87), materials unrelated to astrological correspondences (see *Materials*, p. 87), and magical languages (p. 87-88). They're aware of other modifier systems, too, but mostly regard them as *inelegant*. The Cabal finds that decanic astrology gives the most reliable results.

The Cabal knows all about *Assisting Spirits* (pp. 90-94). In their experience, though, the only spirits that will aid much are demonic; thus, using this shortcut invariably implies falling to supernatural evil. The Cabal has few rules against *any* magical practice – daring and power are the organization's watchwords – but diabolism is *lazy*, and leads to trouble for everyone. Cabalists call demon-aided magic "casting black," and grow very suspicious of colleagues whose powers seem to develop too quickly.

The Cabal is acquainted with *Words of Power* (pp. 178-179), and a few Cabalists even know a Word or two. This is wild, uncontrolled magic, though, and Cabal doctrine says that the group's purpose is to *control* magic for advantage. Some Cabalists also study alchemy; see *The Cabal and Alchemy* (p. 101).

A small number of Cabalists use other styles, such as mental disciplines that lie closer to psionics. The rules permit this, and researchers work to integrate all magic into Cabalist theory, but these individuals are often seen as freaks or eccentrics, or suspected of allying with forces beyond the Cabal's authority. And some Cabalists are actually supernatural beings – vampires, elves, werewolves, etc. – with innate powers.

### **The Mage's Edge**

In games such as those featuring the Cabal, a wide range of bonuses exist to aid wizards, but the correct *use* of these modifiers is a well-guarded secret of one faction. Initiates might have to purchase advantages such as Illuminated, Rank, Security Clearance, or Unusual Background, or accept a Duty, and will certainly have secrets to defend – but they can cast spells *much* more reliably than anyone else. The PCs can be conspiracy members . . . or desperate rivals seeking to learn the inner secrets of the zodiac, True Names, the arcane calendar, etc.

If contradictions arise – through the ineffable mysteries of the decanic vibrations or the murkiness of occult research – then decanic natures trump zodiacal correspondences, which themselves supersede planetary correspondences. Thus, a yellow gem can be used to concentrate the energies of Akton, decan of decay (corresponding to the Moon), rather than representing the opposing influence of the Sun. To avoid arguments, the GM should consider describing Akton’s gem as “sickly, bilious yellow” and solar-enhancing gems as “rich, vibrant gold.”

## The Empty Decans

Of the 36 decans, 12 have no known college assigned. This can help the GM personalize – and add mystery to – decanic magic.

The GM might decide to create more colleges to accompany those decans, split some existing colleges along decan-related lines, or ditch the standard colleges and build completely new ones for all 36 decans (see *Changing the Colleges*, pp. 41-48). Such decisions could drive an entire campaign. For example, if unworldly researchers synthesize a set of spells for a Void college, tied to Anostêr, then these may become a prize and a target for many powerful factions.

The GM could also reserve empty decans as the source of creepy, ill-defined spells for NPCs, or as the mana source for supernatural beings. Spells such as Lich and Wraith might be secrets associated with Belbel, rather than standard Kurtaël-driven necromancy.

Finally, the GM may allow wizards to invoke *any* decan appropriate to their casting. For example, someone trying to spark a riot with a Mind Control spell (energized by Ruax) might also or alternatively be able to use correspondences with Marderô, which governs rebellion and revolt.

## Tracking Astrological Time

If the GM keeps a campaign calendar, then modifiers for the day and zodiacal month on which a spell is cast become an option. Keep track of game time using an office desk calendar or a pocket diary – or, for a non-contemporary campaign, a perpetual calendar. Occult and New Age publishers produce astrological calendars suitable for those who wish to get even more involved and “realistic.”

If the day matches the planet corresponding to the spell’s decan (see *Planetary Correspondences*, p. 247), then the spell is cast at +1; if the zodiacal month matches the sign corresponding to the spell’s decan (see *Zodiacal Correspondences*, p. 247), then the spell is cast at +2. Conversely, if the day or zodiacal month is in opposition to the correct planet or sign for the spell’s decan, then the modifier is -1 or -2, respectively. Day and month modifiers are cumulative, for this end result:

*Right day, right month:* +3  
*Wrong day, right month:* +2  
*Opposing day, right month:* +1  
*Right day, wrong month:* +1  
*Wrong day, wrong month:* +0  
*Opposing day, wrong month:* -1  
*Right day, opposing month:* -1

*Wrong day, opposing month:* -2  
*Opposing day, opposing month:* -3

In some weird extradimensional realms, time may flow differently from time in the campaign’s normal material plane. If astrological principles hold true, though, then this is a local effect – not the True Time marked off by the cosmic wheeling of the stars and planets. Always use the date on the game’s primary world at the moment of spellcasting when deriving modifiers.

## The Mage’s Star-Sign

When using astrological modifiers, the GM may optionally give mages (only) +1 with magic *corresponding* to the zodiacal month of their birth, but -1 with magic *opposing* their birth-month. Spells that lie in multiple colleges count as coming from whichever is most advantageous, but never get a double bonus. These modifiers only affect rolls to cast spells from the relevant colleges and to sense magic items that contain spells from those colleges.

*Example:* A mage born under Virgo gets +1 on spells drawn from Atrax, Buldumêch, or Ieropaël. He has -1 with Piscean spells – those governed by Akhouiy, Bianakith, or Phthenoth.

Not all birth signs are created equal, though. Taurus, for example, gets +1 to the Gate, Technology, and Weather colleges, while its opposing sign, Scorpio, has *no* associated colleges, meaning there’s no compensatory -1 to any spells. This fits well with traditional astrology, in which specific signs favor particular occupations and skills, but it may lead to a lot of wizard PCs with birthdays close together.

To balance this in terms of character points, treat a mage who has a “good” birthday as having an extra level of aspected Magery. This *does* let him exceed the campaign’s usual upper limit on Magery, if any. Conversely, a birth sign that generates significant problems gives a limitation on one level of Magery – the mage’s “highest” level – and extends no special dispensation to exceed campaign Magery limits. For simplicity, if the benefits and drawbacks cancel out, the mage doesn’t have to take both – just treat this as an interesting special effect.

To determine what’s appropriate, find the mage’s sign and then total *all* bonuses and penalties that it gives to *all* colleges. The result will fall between +3 and -3. Convert this to character features as follows:

Total Modifier	Effect on Magery
+3	+1 level of Magery with -20% limitation*
+2	+1 level of Magery with -30% limitation*
+1	+1 level of Magery with -40% limitation*
0	None
-1	-5% limitation on highest level of Magery
-2	-10% limitation on highest level of Magery
-3	-15% limitation on highest level of Magery

\* Additional Magery represents strictly the bonus the mage gets for his birth sign. It *only* affects spellcasting rolls in the relevant colleges and rolls to sense items that contain enchantments from those colleges. It doesn’t affect Thaumatology, the amount of energy that can be put into Missile spells, rolls to sense items from other colleges, etc.

*Example:* Diane, Edgar, and Flores are powerful mages in a campaign in which PCs can't usually buy more than Magery 3. They were born under Virgo, Aries, and Scorpio, respectively. This gives Diane a total modifier of 0 (+1 each to Earth and Food, -1 each to Body Control and Healing), so she simply has unmodified Magery 3. Edgar has a net +1 (+1 each to Making and Breaking and Mind Control, -1 to Communication and Empathy), so he buys unmodified Magery 3 and then an *extra* level of Magery with a -40% limitation. Flores has a net -3 (-1 each to Gate, Technology, and Weather), and so can buy Magery 3, but the last level must take a -15% limitation.

This entire rule is *optional*. Even if the GM uses it, he may assume that birth sign is only important to *some* mages, and let the players decide for themselves whether their characters are affected. Regardless, the modifiers above never apply to non-mages, even those who can cast spells; such individuals can't cast spells in less than high mana, so it's likely that they simply aren't sufficiently linked into the power of the universe to be influenced by astrological forces.

## CHINESE SYMBOLISM

Chinese tradition offers at least two options for alternative systems of modifiers. First, a large number of concepts are associated with the Chinese elements (see *Alternative Elements*, pp. 47-48): wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. These are mostly useful for creating modifiers for colleges (or individual spells) relating to the elements in question, but see *Elemental Modifiers* (p. 255) for other possibilities.

Second, another symbol system – partly but not completely related to the elements – is based on the “eight trigrams,” or *bagua*, corresponding to eight points of the compass. These, too, have college associations; see *Bagua Modifiers* (p. 255). Those who desire even more cryptic effects should note that the *bagua* relate to the 64 hexagrams of the *I Ching*.

Using the five elements and the *bagua* in combination could lead to contradictions and uncertainties – or interesting synergies.

### Chinese Astrology

Chinese tradition classifies each year as relating to one of the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water) and also to one of 12 animals (rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, serpent, horse, ram, monkey, cock, dog, and boar), giving a 60-year cycle. In addition, each day is divided into 12 two-hour periods, also assigned to these animals. Horoscopes consider both these and other factors; for instance, there are complex interactions between different animals.

Combining this with spell-based magic would produce countless opportunities for dates and times to be declared “auspicious” or

“inauspicious” for particular sorts of magic, especially but not exclusively spells pertaining to the elements. The GM can assign these arbitrarily or randomly – or locate a detailed explanation of the Chinese system and fit it to the campaign calendar. Better and worse times could generate bonuses or penalties to effective skill with a spell.

## MAGICAL LAWS

Principles such as contagion and sympathy (see *Laws of Magic*, pp. 14-15) can generate modifiers, too, if the setting works that way. Wizards who know these laws – which, in game universes where they operate, probably includes individuals with the Thaumatology skill, and possibly those with Occultism or Anthropology – *might* be able to exploit them to gain bonuses to spells. By creating mystical links between widely separated things, these laws can also make it possible to negate mundane problems of remoteness, with effort. While this is a very traditional view of magic, its methods are bluntly unsubtle; it can make wizards extremely powerful if not carefully controlled.

### Casting Interdimensionally

If spellcasting is possible on subjects far away and out of sight, then the laws of magic might also allow casting on targets in other dimensions or “realms” – with difficulty. Casting across planar or dimensional “boundaries” is at -10 *per boundary crossed*, on top of any -5 for being unable to touch or see the subject (p. B239). Where planes actually intersect or intermix, magic interpenetrates more easily. At such places – ley nexuses, Sidhe mounds, etc. – the boundary penalty is only -5. The laws of sympathy, of course, remain active across realms.

This can help explain why gods might take material form and walk the Earth. Except at their temples and sacred groves – which may actually touch their realms – such entities would suffer at least -10 on attempts to cast magic on earthly targets from their home plane. The penalty could be -20 or worse if the universe has intervening “layers”!

Boundary modifiers never apply to Gate spells or summonings, which by definition are *designed* for cross-planar effectiveness.

### Universes Where “Distance” Is Meaningless

In some extradimensional realms, “distance” is essentially meaningless, and magic distinguishes only between “present” and “non-present” subjects:

- A *present* target is one that the caster could currently perceive with vision or a comparable sense, with a minor effort if necessary. Standard rules on range generally apply – the caster imposes dimensionality on the conflict by force of will or subconscious assumptions. The GM establishes the perceived distance at the start of the encounter, and movement occurs more or less normally. If distance is *truly* meaningless and perceived separation can change arbitrarily, then treat all present targets as being one yard distant.

- A *non-present* target is one not within the caster's visual scope. Magic against such subjects in the same plane is cast at -5. This “stacks” with the -5 for being unable to touch or see the subject.

See *Sympathy* (pp. 243-245), *Names* (p. 245), and *Contagion* (pp. 245-246) for rules for generating bonuses for such things. A wizard can claim only the strongest applicable modifier under each law on any given casting; e.g., if he has his subject's blood, then also using hair and nails won't add significant extra juice to the spell under the law of sympathy. Lacking a sympathetic representation rarely gives a significant *penalty*, however – if the caster knows enough about the target to cast a spell on him at all, then that usually counts as a “minimal representation.” Regardless of individual modifiers, the *total* bonus from sympathy, names, and contagion can never exceed +6.

The descriptions of some spells – such as Seeker and Malefice – incorporate ad hoc versions of these laws. For consistency, the GM should apply the rules here *instead* of the ones given for those spells. Conversely, if a spell gives the caster an explicit bonus for being his own subject, then he can't claim further bonuses under these rules – even if he carefully prepares personal materials for the purpose. Otherwise, these bonuses apply *in addition* to existing modifiers.

### Overcoming Distance

At the GM's option, a spellcaster who understands and exploits contagion and sympathy may be able to use a sympathetic connection with his spell's subject to reduce the problems of raw distance considerably, replacing standard spell range penalties with *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241). However, a caster who claims this benefit must also take the -5 for being unable to touch or see his subject (p. B239). This *doesn't* permit a wizard to hurl Missile spells at a foe miles away – such a spell produces a missile in his hand, which he must then throw like a mundane weapon. Most Body Control and Mind Control spells, on the other hand, work fine. The GM is the final arbiter on what can or can't be cast through a sympathetic connection, and is free to veto any application that would, in his view, make sympathetic magic too powerful.

## OTHER POTENTIAL MODIFIERS

Many other modifiers *may* apply. Deciding what does (or doesn't) work determines much about the subtleties of the campaign world's metaphysics.

### Significant Dates

Even outside of astrological theory, dates can have significance. Certain days may serve as “hinges” on a magical calendar; see *Magical Dates* (p. 246) for ideas. Any magic at all might be cast at a bonus (+2 works well) on one of these days. Correctly aspected magic might do even better – perhaps being cast at a whole mana level higher! Key dates may also invoke *historical* associations with symbolic power, giving from +1 to +3, at the GM's option. For examples, see *Historical Dates* (pp. 246-247). In all cases, some spells might take penalties (from -1 to -5 or worse) on especially *inappropriate* dates.

## Materials

In addition to the materials associated with decans or bagua, many more common substances traditionally affect magical actions, positively or negatively; see *Traditional Materials* (p. 244) for examples. By parallel to electrical theory, such things can be divided into “conductors,” which channel and sometimes even enhance magical energies; “insulators,” which keep magic within defined bounds, enabling it to be controlled and used relatively safely; and “resistors,” which disrupt or dampen it. Resistors might be used in a working to provide the same sort of safety factor as insulators, but they're usually too disruptive, and mostly used to create protective barriers. Refined workings can even cause magic to pool in “batteries” or “capacitors.” Some materials can fill more than one of these roles, depending on details and circumstances.

The GM may allow wizards to improvise applications for such materials. Including such effects in a campaign can make magic harder to monopolize, since anyone with a decent Occultism or Thaumatology skill level (12+) might know enough to use them as shields or “lightning rods.”

## Magical Languages

The theory of True Names says that what you call a thing alters your power over it. The notion of magical languages expands this: the closer your incantation is to some primordial or divine tongue, the greater the spell's potential power. At the GM's option, casting a spell in a language you don't speak with Native fluency may require an IQ or Hidden Lore roll first, at -1 for Accented comprehension or -3 for Broken. While you need not appreciate every nuance of the words, you must understand their general sense.

*Giles: I can't perform the incantation to this.*

*Willow: Right, don't you have to speak it in Sumerian or something?*

*Giles: I do speak Sumerian. But it's not that. Only an experienced witch can incant it, and you have to be within striking distance of the subject.*

*Xander: See what you get for taking French instead of Sumerian?*

*– Buffy the Vampire Slayer, “Primeval”*



*Mundane Languages:* Speaking a spell in a common language – such as Chinese, English, Modern Greek, or Spanish on present-day Earth – cheapens and pollutes it. This can give a penalty as severe as -5.

*Sacred Languages:* Languages considered to be more closely attuned to spiritual matters – such as Aramaic, Classical Arabic, Coptic, Gaelic, Hebrew, Latin, Old Norse, Old Slavonic, and Tibetan in the modern world – are the traditional, “default” tongues of magic. They give no modifier.

*Ancient Languages:* Languages spoken closer to Creation would, logically, be nearer to the original, magical language. In a modern-day game, languages such as Akkadian, Ancient Egyptian, Goidelic, Homeric Greek, and Sanskrit might grant +3 to skill. Note, however, that not many people *speaking* these languages on present-day Earth, and it’s often the case that nobody knows enough to articulate them at better than the Accented or even Broken level (although that might be a secret passed down within certain occult groups). Given the large potential bonus, the GM could fairly charge an Unusual Background for knowledge of such a language. Translating a spell from more modern texts back into an ancient tongue in order to cast at a bonus could require days of work, plus Linguistics *and* Thaumatology rolls – even if the target language was actually the original language of the spell!

*Esoteric Languages:* These secret languages come very close to embodying magical truths. Most of them are unthinkable ancient, such as Adamic, the tongue supposedly spoken before the Tower of Babel, and Senzar, the alleged language of Atlantis. Other esoteric languages include those spoken by exalted spiritual beings or tiny magical communities. Learning such languages is usually *extremely* hard for ordinary mortals; the GM may require a large Unusual Background. These tongues would grant at least +5 to skill, but speaking them carelessly might cause supernatural accidents, even when not using them deliberately for spells.

### Cultural Familiarity

When using an exotic language for spellcasting, a wizard should ideally be aware of its nuances. It’s hard to grasp these fully without understanding its origins and context, however. The -3 for lack of Cultural Familiarity (p. B23) might apply to rolls to use a language correctly – or even to the spell itself. Of course, true familiarity with pre-Babel or Atlantean culture is hard to come by . . .

### Poetry

Putting a spell into poetic form may powerfully attune it to the “music of the spheres.” When a wizard attempts this, the GM should roll against his Poetry skill in secret. Success gives a bonus to spell skill equal to the margin of success – or half that, if the GM wants to keep poetic wizards under control. An upper limit on this bonus is recommended; +6 would be more than generous. Failure at best inflicts a penalty and at worst causes the spell to fail outright, limiting this technique to talented (or overconfident!) bard-wizards.

Casting a poetic spell adds at least 2d minutes to casting time, to compose and recite the poem. Since the wizard must meticulously fit the precise form of the resonant

words to the context, a pre-composed poem is generally useless. The generous GM might simply halve the bonus.

The GM may also modify the effectiveness of poetic magic for a caster who has the Public Speaking or Singing skill, Voice advantage, or any other trait that would improve – or, in the case of things like Stuttering, detract from – poetic presentation.

### Sacrifices

Sacrifices might be a source of magical energy, as discussed under *Sacrifices* (pp. 54-58). Alternatively, they could provide modifiers to spell rolls. See *Sacrifice Bonuses* (p. 246) for guidelines.

For a game in which magic always has a blatant, immediate cost, the GM might use a comprehensive system of modifiers but require the sacrifice by destruction of *any* item that gives a bonus. Wizards using astrological correspondences, laws of sympathy, etc., would thus need new materials for each spell. A less extreme version would double the bonus if the item is sacrificed but give the usual bonus otherwise.

Even if the GM doesn’t use these rules for other magic, using them for Bless, Planar Summons, Summon Elemental, Summon Spirit, and similar invocations of spirit entities will add a great deal of flavor to the proceedings.

### Purity

Some traditions suggest that purer materials focus arcane energies better. This can hold for magical components, sacrifices, and even *spellcasters*. To reflect this, for every three days of fasting, exercise, and celibacy – under controlled conditions with few distractions – before spellcasting, a wizard gets +1 to effective skill with any spell, to a maximum of +13. This bonus usually only benefits the first spell cast, but the generous GM might have it last for an hour or even a day if the wizard maintains his self-discipline.

Also, virgins traditionally make superb scryers, being nearly “transparent” to those energies. Optionally, they cast Communication and Empathy spells and Knowledge spells – invoking Naôth and Sphandôr, respectively (see *Decanic Correspondences*, p. 248) – at +5. The GM may wish to treat this as Magery with Limited Colleges (p. 25) at the -30% level and a Pact limitation linked to a Vow.

For any material used in a spell or a ritual, including correspondences, the caster may add an *extra* +1 per +3 in bonuses derived from “virgin” (brand-new, never-used) material. If the caster hand-crafted, or personally grew or raised, the item, then he may add another +1. If the GM wishes to make magic less common and more difficult, then he might instead allow correspondence bonuses *only* for virgin materials.

### Magical Patina

The inverse of this is that objects used repeatedly in spells become progressively better conductors of magical energies – or take on a *taint*. In this case, any item used to focus arcane energies conveys a further +1 to spells relating to a corresponding category of magic, decan, etc., after a year of steady use. Further use grants higher bonuses, as follows:

<i>Time</i>	<i>Bonus</i>
10 years	+2
50 years	+3
100 years	+4
500 years	+5
1,000 years	+6

Add another +1 per additional 500 years of constant use. The GM may similarly increase the Power of enchanted items, further enhancing the value of ancient and storied magical artifacts.

### *Sacred Architecture*

The shape, construction, and decoration of buildings might act to channel or dissipate arcane energies. Perhaps “sick building syndrome” exemplifies this effect in a modern context – but then, so perhaps does Chartres Cathedral. The Western concept of “sacred architecture” builds on Hermetic-Pythagorean mathematical harmonies, while Chinese tradition has the art of *feng shui*. Experts may be able to design buildings that use such principles.

A “sacred architect” must possess both sufficient Architecture skill to create the necessary design *and* at least one spell relating to the college (or “set of forces,” if that can be defined appropriately) he wishes the building to affect. The GM rolls secretly against the planner’s Architecture *and* Thaumatology skills to determine the design’s quality – sacred architects rarely know how well they’ve done until the building is complete. The designer must ensure that the builders follow his plans precisely.

The GM can add complications to taste. Perhaps the design is expensive to build or inconvenient to use, or must be sited oddly. The magical effect might have to be focused on one small chamber in a large building. Engineer (Civil) rolls could be needed to avoid problems with structure or materials. Ignorant occupants may disrupt the delicate flow of forces with ad hoc modifications.

Such buildings give a bonus for casting spells of the appropriate type from within or *into* them. This equals the designer’s margin of success on his Architecture roll or Thaumatology roll, whichever is *lower*. Critical failures can lead to weird and annoying results, at the GM’s option.

Sacred architects may also design buildings that gather looser energies relating to multiple colleges; e.g., every college associated with a particular zodiacal sign in the decanic system. These give a bonus to relevant spells equal to *half* the smallest margin of success (round down). Even broader designs – e.g., corresponding to a planet in the decanic system – give a bonus equal to *1/3* of the smallest margin of success (round down).

It’s also possible to design buildings to *repel* magical energies. Use the rules above, but replace spellcasting bonuses with penalties.

Experts can generally recognize sacred architecture on sight, using any skill that the GM thinks plausible, usually at a bonus. A good roll will also tell what sort of forces it manipulates. The GM may permit sacred architects to check each others’ designs, too. Spotting flaws requires successful Architecture *and* Thaumatology rolls.

Optionally, the GM can replace Thaumatology with Symbol Drawing (Sacred Architecture) throughout these rules.

## MODIFIERS AND MAGIC ITEMS

If the campaign uses any of the above modifiers, then these also apply when creating magic items. Use the modifiers relevant to the spell being enchanted into the item, *not* those associated with Enchant, Scroll, or the like. Inappropriate materials (e.g., Libra-resonant brass in an Aries-governed Mind Control item) give *triple* the usual penalty – their permanent presence severely hampers the transmission of magical energies.

### *Modifiers and Item Power*

Modifiers to the enchanter’s skill *do* affect the magic item’s Power. Since Power reflects previously gathered energies already, modifiers *don’t* affect spells cast using the item.

### **The Voodoo Doll**

Haitian *bokors* actually derived the infamous “Voodoo doll” relatively late, from 19th-century reprints of late-medieval French grimoires. Even today, it’s rarely used in Haiti, being more common in outlying Voudoun communities such as those in New Orleans and New York. French medieval poppet magic, as it perhaps should be properly known, was a refinement of techniques going back to ancient Egyptian papyri that described sorcerers creating wax images of victims to harm them at a distance. Several of the systems in *Thaumatology* can simulate it (for example, *Path/Book-Related Items*, p. 139). Here, it supplies an example of the application of magical laws.

*Example:* Dapper Parisian sorcerer Louis de Grandin wishes to curse the bluff American soldier Jack Cadell, his rival for the fair Mireille. He buys a GI Joe doll (the better to represent contemptible plastic American society) and sneaks a lock of Jack’s hair from the barbershop. He scribbles “Jack Cadell” across the doll’s chest with a marker and gets ready to cast. With a generous +1 for sympathy from the doll (as an appropriate *symbol* of Jack, not as an image) and +2 for contagion from the hair, Louis has a total of +3 to his Pain spell. Because he labeled the doll, he can use it to cast the spell on Jack, but “Jack Cadell” is too unspecific to grant a name bonus.

If Louis takes a snapshot of Jack and pastes it over the doll’s face, then that will raise the sympathy bonus to +2 (the image superseding the symbolism). If he bribes a records clerk to give him Jack’s full name, then that’s another +1. (Sadly for Louis, Jack is a lapsed Catholic, and his baptismal name is his True Name.) If he can somehow get a sample of Jack’s blood, then Louis can write that name in it, increasing the contagion bonus to +3, and cast at the maximum total +6, less modifiers for distance and mana level.

## Resistors and Powerstones

If using *Traditional Materials* (p. 244), the GM may rule that items made from magical “resistors” can’t draw energy from Powerstones.

### EXAMPLE: A MODIFIED CASTING

Cabalist assassin Lisanne Self wishes to cast Permanent Forgetfulness on the Interpol agent hounding her. She begins with a good recording of his voice, saved from an answering machine. She obtained three of his hairs from his comb by breaking into his hotel room (this might have been what tipped him off to her!). Thanks to a bribed contact, she knows that his name is St.-John Scott Palmer; she hopes that’s his True Name as well. These things will let her use the laws of sympathy and, if she creates a strong enough connection, overcome the distance (around 20 miles) between herself and Palmer.

The decan Ruax governs Mind Control spells. Lisanne considers casting from a nearby insane asylum, where Ruax’s energies pool and roil, but rejects that as impractical. Instead, she hangs cerulean blue banners emblazoned with downward-pointing arrows around her ritual space. Inside it, she plugs in a CRT showing a spiral pattern, and sets up an iron brazier to focus the energies of both Aries, from whence Ruax flows, and Mars, which enhances Aries. To further enhance Mars, she wears an iron talisman engraved with its planetary sigils.

In the brazier, Lisanne burns owls’ brains, dragonsblood, Palmer’s brand of cigarettes (Silk Cut), his hair, and poppies grown on the slopes of the Tien Shan Mountains by the

dubious and enigmatic Brothers of Sleep. Inhaling the smoke, she plays the recording of Palmer’s voice backward while writing his name on bamboo splits with the tip of her iron athame. Dropping these into the brazier, she casts her spell.

The modifiers break down as follows:

*Decanic Modifiers:* +4 for the “conventional” components (cerulean blue, arrow insignia, CRT, and spirals) and +2 for the rare and significant poppies. Total: +6.

*Zodiacal and Planetary Modifiers:* The bamboo, dragonsblood, and owls’ brains all draw down Aries’ energies (owls’ brains count as a “double ingredient,” since both owls and brains resonate with Aries). Every two zodiacal correspondences grant +1, so Lisanne gets +2. The athame, tobacco, and amulet make three Mars-resonant components. Every three planetary correspondences give +1, so that’s another +1. The iron brazier counts for both, but isn’t enough to add another point to either – and the maximum bonus here is +3 in any event. Total: +3.

*Other Bonuses:* Palmer’s hairs add +2 for contagion. The recording grants +2 for sympathy (the symbolic action of playing it backward to represent memory loss is neat, but would only grant the same +2 for similarity). Palmer’s legal name (Lisanne’s hope is unfounded) on the bamboo adds another +1. Total: +5.

Lisanne’s total modifier from the ritual is +14. She subtracts -5 for the inability to see her subject, another -5 for distance (within 30 miles), and a final -5 for low mana, for a net -1 to Permanent Forgetfulness. This might not seem like much – but anyone casting such a spell without knowledge of the decans would have been at -10 with only the laws of sympathy, or a staggering -15 without *any* correspondences!

# ASSISTING SPIRITS

Many traditions emphasize that magic is largely or entirely based on negotiations and contracts with spirits. In some worldviews, these beings are usually demons intent on corrupting mortals with power – although careful, virtuous “white magicians” *might* be able to work with angels. In more polytheistic schools of thought, shamans negotiate with nature spirits and elementals.

*Thaumatology* offers several systems for spirit-based magic. The one described below – a generalization of *Demonic Contracts* and *Black Magic* from *GURPS Magic*, p. 156 – provides optional rules for combining a spirit-mediated approach with otherwise-standard spellcasting. The GM can use it as the main casting method in a campaign, or treat it as a risky shortcut for less-talented students. This model grants a *lot* of power cheaply, so it comes with *serious* built-in drawbacks. Mortals here strike deals with much more powerful and often dangerous beings; the power is never truly their own.

This option *cannot* be combined with *Threshold-Limited Magic* (pp. 76-82). Increases to a threshold-limited wizard’s tally don’t represent energy expenditures that he can borrow from a spirit. They represent distortions of the caster’s supernatural *self*.

## THE CONCEPT

In this form of magic, a spirit (or occasionally a group of spirits) casts spells *through* the wizard. The spirit may supply some or all of the magical energy – and often, improved performance. The “caster” provides a conduit and a focus for magic, but pays a spiritual price. Before a wizard can cast a spirit-assisted spell, he must summon and negotiate with an entity that’s willing and able to assist. Once the caster has contracted the spirit, he need not explicitly bring it forth again to cast spells.

The sorts of spirits that are willing and able to assist with spellcasting, and the spells they know and the prices they charge, depend on the campaign. In traditional horror, such beings are inevitably malevolent demons. In a “shamanic” setting, things might be more complex. Of course, it’s always possible that what the typical PC *thinks* is the nature of assisting spirits is only part of the truth – or even a carefully cultivated lie. Hidden Lore skills may help a wizard recognize what he’s dealing with.

## Option: Cheap or Free Spell Knowledge

In its basic form, spirit-assisted magic simply reduces the energy cost for spellcasting. This is advantageous enough – especially if wizards can trade energy for skill and other benefits (see Chapter 2). To make this system truly tempting for greedy and possibly foolish mortals, though, it could *also* grant easier access to the ability to cast spells in the first place.

### Easy Spell Access

The spirit might teach the mortal how to “cast” a spell much more easily, or point him at texts that explain this. Treat Hard spells learned this way as Easy, and Very Hard ones as Average. This is essentially a lie, though! What the spirit actually teaches isn’t how to cast the spell, but *how to ask the spirit to cast the spell*. Using that knowledge invokes the spirit’s power and attention. If the mortal wants to cast that spell “independently,” he must learn it again from scratch, at its normal difficulty level. Spells learned at the lower difficulty can only serve as prerequisites for each other – never for spells learned independently.

Some spirits might *also* teach spells for independent casting, of course, but that’s a completely distinct service. Evil spirits often prefer not to do so, as it gives the mortal power that they don’t control. That is, unless *all* magic is a path to damnation . . .

### Completely Free Spells

Another possibility is to assume that spirits know many spells and can be petitioned to provide a very wide range of effects. All the spirit-assisted spellcaster needs is a basic knowledge of the topic (Occultism at 8+ will do) and a clear idea of the kind of spell he wishes to cast. The GM might require an Occultism roll (possibly at a penalty proportionate to the spell’s prerequisite count) to know that magic can produce a particular effect – although everybody probably knows that it can create fireballs, see long distances, and so on. Reading *descriptions* of spells in old books is often sufficient. Devious spirits may encourage the creation of such tomes, detailing the benefits of magic and the power of the spells in loving detail, but not mentioning the downside. On the other hand, not every spirit knows every spell, and pestering one to cast spells that are beyond it is likely to annoy it.

A mortal with sufficient occult knowledge and the desire to cast a spell that the spirit can provide can simply *do so*, at a skill level equal to his IQ + Magery – or at *half* his Occultism skill, if that’s somehow better. He must cast the spell ceremonially, with a minimum casting time of a minute, but he can do so while working alone. (This only applies to “free” spells supplied by spirits; the wizard still needs assistants for other ceremonial castings.) Furthermore, the caster *must* allow the spirit to pay *as much of the energy cost as possible*.

Spells cast this way tend to require quasi-religious and ritualistic symbols – candles, incense, sigils, etc. A spell found in a text might call for use of that writing’s language, and if the caster’s comprehension of that tongue is less than Native, he suffers a penalty: -1 for Accented, or -3 for Broken (use the *worse* of written or spoken ability). Otherwise, all the normal rules for magic apply.

Thus, this is a complex process with a lot of arbitrary requirements. The GM is free to make it more complicated and unpredictable. It’s essentially asking an NPC for a favor!

Genuine wizards with an array of “independent” spells may also use this rule to cast spells that they don’t know, and are likely to have a better idea of what’s possible with magic. This makes spirit-assisted magic terribly tempting, even for powerful mages – and especially for those impatient for advancement or tired of waiting for mentors to teach them more spells. Suspicious observers may spread rumors of spiritual, and probably demonic, involvement about any adept who seems too proficient with too little study.

## Option: Non-Mage Occultist Casters

In a world with normal or low mana, spirit-assisted magic may serve as a way for those without Magery to cast spells nonetheless. The requirement for Magery in such mana levels is eliminated because the mortal isn’t really the *caster* – he’s just a conduit for the spirit. This combines well with the previous options, letting non-mages cast spells with minimal study, and at terrible risk.

*Example:* Atototl the Bargainer has seen enough of power in her dealings with nobles and priests that she desires it for herself – but the society in which she lives offers few options for an individual from her background. However, she learned to read as part of her trading-caste education. One day, she stumbles across an ancient magical codex in a forgotten storeroom, and succumbs to temptation.

The codex describes the power of the Lord of Vines, a powerful plant-spirit who grants access to the Earth, Plant, Knowledge, and Meta-Spell colleges, and occasionally to minor spells from other colleges such as Water and Weather, if summoned again and specifically petitioned. These spells can be learned at reduced difficulty, or cast ceremonially without actual study. The spirit might also teach spells with normal difficulty for general use – but Atototl isn’t a mage, and her world has normal mana, so she isn’t interested in that.

## THE AGREEMENT

How difficult it is to summon a spirit that’s willing and able to assist with magic is a matter of campaign style. In some settings, it requires high-powered spells such as Planar Summons or Summon Demon, plus detailed knowledge of potent beings with the broad capabilities needed, probably through a Hidden Lore skill. This makes spirit-assisted magic a “power-booster” for advanced wizards.

In other worlds, it’s a matter of finding a simple ritual in a musty tome. This makes magic potentially widespread and easy, so the limiting factor should usually be that the spirits called are *dangerous* and the whole thing is forbidden by someone with clout. Such authorities also traditionally hunt down and destroy the books involved, but there are always more somewhere – possibly because people who pursue this art tend to make lots of notes and are careless with their knowledge. Hidden Lore (Demon Lore or Spirit Lore) might substitute for such texts, which could lead to those skills being *forbidden* as well as hidden! Whatever the case, the summoning may require rare or illegal ingredients.

In yet other backgrounds, the essential *knowledge* might be relatively widespread, and require no spells or special skills. To get *results*, though, the summoner must journey to remote sites of power, negotiate with unpredictable intermediary entities, and otherwise go to great trouble. Advantages such as Medium and Spirit Empathy often help.

If “good” spirits grant magic, then they’ll probably only answer mortals they perceive as serious and dedicated. They might even appear unprompted! They’ll also lay out their terms from the start in most cases. Conditions can involve a lifetime of dedication to the cause, hideous dangers, and an ascetic lifestyle with no free time.

## Contacting the Spirit

Having put together something that *might* bring a spirit, the would-be wizard must make any skill rolls required and hope that he’s got the details right. Appearing without being properly summoned may cost the spirit a lot of effort (perhaps 10 times the normal energy cost of materialization) and anger it. Some spirits can do whatever they like if not contained within correctly designed or enchanted circles, pentagrams, etc. If some sources give useful information on summoning spirits without true spells, then a little research may turn up slightly *better* instructions that include effective binding or protection rituals – although this may require Research, Occultism, or Hidden Lore rolls, and/or knowledge of obscure languages.

Generally, a good reaction – possibly induced by a substantial offer of appropriate payment – is highly desirable. A bad reaction can be disastrous! Unconstrained demons might eat the mortal and return to Hell. Nature-spirits may simply depart, trashing the building and bringing the roof down as a side effect. Angels will probably just look exasperated, but imposing a fair punishment on disrespectful mortals isn’t out of the question.

*Example:* The codex that Atototl found describes how to contact the Lord of Vines. It also warns that the Lord has no love for human civilization, but the section with details is lost, and Atototl ignores those she can read. The Lord doesn’t have any known taste for human flesh or souls, and the codex gives a set of formulaic speeches that will cause him to react at +5. She goes ahead and invokes him. She makes an IQ roll to follow the instructions to the letter. The GM makes a reaction roll that’s good enough for the spirit to stay and talk briefly.

## The Contract

When the spirit appears, the caster may dicker with it. In order to use it for assisted spellcasting later, though, he must sign a contract, swear a solemn and binding oath (by his True Name, in many cultures), or otherwise enter into a serious voluntary agreement. Demons traditionally require signatures in the mortal’s blood! Books of magic sometimes include standard contracts. Sensible mortals will certainly have *something* prepared in advance and double-checked – the sorts of spirits who are delighted to provide draft contracts are precisely the ones who shouldn’t be allowed to do so.

This contract need only establish a service relationship, subject to the limitations below. Any additional benefits – souls, buried treasure, the love of the fair Marguerite, etc. – are between the contracting parties. As long as the mortal doesn’t over-commit himself (e.g., promise his soul to two separate demons), he may sign as many contracts as he can find spirits to invoke. Particularly devious or greedy beings will proffer contracts with “prepaid” levels of Spiritual Distortion (pp. 93-94).

*Example:* Atototl negotiates with the Lord of Vines using her trading skills. The spirit, more used to dealings with unworldly priests and naïve scribes, is rather taken aback by this, and is at heart too contemptuous of humanity to worry about such details – and anyway, he knows that he has all the advantages. They agree to a bargain, sealed by Atototl’s sworn oath on her clan honor – the most binding promise she knows how to make. The spirit will grant Atototl magic, and she’ll protect his beloved jungles.

## THE CASTING

Time to cast a spirit-assisted spell is the *longer* of two full seconds of concentration or the spell’s normal casting time, regardless of skill. This allows a second to invoke the spirit and at least another second to name and direct the spell. Blocking spells are the only exception – although the GM may ban these, or require that the user spend a few seconds calling on the spirit for protection shortly beforehand. Spells cast ceremonially without actual knowledge take at least one minute (see *Completely Free Spells*, p. 91).

*Mandatory and Significant Modifiers* (pp. 82-90) and spirit-assisted magic work well together. *Bonuses* are halved (round down), as the spirit’s influence interferes with and possibly taints the resonances. *Penalties* apply at full effect!

The primary benefit of spiritual aid is that it can reduce the energy cost of the spell by any amount up to *three times* the caster’s Occultism or Thaumatology skill, whichever is higher. Apply this effect before any cost reduction for high skill. The spirit pays for this portion of the spell – which attaches a price.

*Example:* Atototl, pursued by a band of warriors, flees into the forest. They follow. Having learned how to work the Tangle Growth spell with the aid of the Lord of Vines (as an Easy skill), she decides to use that.

There are many pursuers, and she needs plenty of time. She decides to cast the spell over a 20-yard radius, giving it a cost of 40. She has Occultism-12, so she can ask for 36 energy points. She must pay the other 4 herself. Her skill with the spell is 13, and she’s not taking any penalties. She makes the roll, and escapes as the warriors hack through the obstruction.

## The Key Limitation

Spirit-assisted magic, originating from the *spirit* rather than from the mortal “caster,” comes with distinct limitations. These restrictions are defined by the spirit’s personality and motives. Such drives tend to be strong, and not necessarily in the caster’s interests.

If the spirit is any sort of demon or devil, then the magic it provides may not be used to benefit others directly unless, *in the GM's opinion*, doing so would further the unpleasant cause of the fiend providing the power. Such black magic will never heal the wounds of a virtuous man, bring happiness other than grim satisfaction, or provide comfort unless it serves dark purposes that only the GM is presumed to understand. It's for doing Bad Things, preferably to nice people. The caster *can* use demonically assisted magic for practical functions, such as repairing his house and heating rocks for warmth – evil spirits are happy to tempt mortals with promises of personal comfort. Still, demons may lapse into impatience, or taint even the smallest favor, if used for too much trivial work. Powerful ones are notoriously prideful, while their lesser brethren are petty and spiteful.

Magic provided by a genuinely non-demonic being *might* be less downright unpleasant, but the caster certainly cannot use it to benefit anyone the spirit sees as an enemy – or even as significantly annoying. In addition, proud spirits may be unwilling to let themselves be put to trifling tasks; asking an elemental lord for help cleaning your house is begging for trouble. Spirits almost invariably have “realms” or fields of interest that they defend and promote in every way. They aren't usually stupid, but they tend to have *primal* natures. Petitioning them to go against their customary rules for subtle, long-term reasons is unlikely to work.

Any attempt to bypass such restrictions will result in the caster being cut off. Until he appeases the spirit, he won't be able to gain its assistance again. Interpretation of this rule is necessarily subjective. A clever wizard may have contracts with several spirits that impose different rules and restrictions – but sooner or later, some of them will notice that the mortal is breaking their rules or working with their enemies, and react accordingly.

*Example:* The Lord of Vines exists to promote “the wild jungle”: the depths of the natural world, untainted by civilization. He doesn't *hate* humanity, but he'd rather humans remained in small, primitive groups; he regards cities with distaste. And while he has only limited interest in animal life, and doesn't demand any dietary restrictions, he doesn't much like large-scale human hunting either. Atototl can seek political power if she likes, but she'd better not propose great building schemes, start any large fires in the wilderness, or use the Wither Plant spell without an excellent reason.

## Failed Castings

Failures with spirit-assisted magic are tainted with the inhuman power that the caster was attempting to employ, and often have strange results. The GM may require a roll on one of the special critical failure tables in Appendix B (pp. 256-260) even for *normal* failures – and critical failures tend to attract the interest and possibly the wrath of formidable powers. In particular, *any* failure with demonically assisted magic is a “Black Critical,” requiring a roll on the *Diabolic/Horrific Table* (p. 258); any critical failure is treated as an automatic result of 18 on that table.

*Example:* If Atototl fails a spell roll at all, she must roll on the *Spirit-Oriented Magic Table* (p. 260), although the GM may be generous and reroll bad results for minor spells – especially if the spell was meant to serve the interests of the wilderness.

## THE PRICE OF POWER

A spirit-assisted wizard is channeling spiritual energies through his very being. This inevitably *changes* him. He may be corrupted, or become both less and more than human – mostly less.

At the end of any day on which a wizard casts a spirit-assisted spell (one that used spirit-provided energy *or* that he learned at reduced difficulty with a spirit's aid) – and at any other point that the GM considers appropriate – the magic-worker must make a Will + Magery roll. Apply a penalty equal to the total energy borrowed from spirits since the last test of this type. This may make success impossible, but roll anyway, to determine the margin of failure.

Success means that nothing happens. Failure gives the wizard one level of Spiritual Distortion (below) per 10 points or fraction thereof by which he failed.

This is a taint on his soul or a warping of his fundamental being. It doesn't actually reflect his *morality* as such – although observers are entitled to wonder what sort of person gets into this situation.

## Spiritual Distortion

Spiritual Distortion is a skill penalty to any spell cast *without* spiritual assistance. Having committed himself to this form of magic, the wizard increasingly cuts himself off from others. Someone who has contracts with several spirits still has only one Spiritual Distortion total; as he opens himself up increasingly to supernatural influence, *all* of these beings find it progressively easier to mess with his soul. If he got there by calling more on some spirits than on others, then the ones who did the work might be annoyed with the ones who are getting a free ride, but that's not his problem – not until they start squabbling rather than helping him, or attaching special conditions to their aid, anyway.

Spiritual Distortion is visible to anyone who can see auras. As well, individuals with Magery 3+ get a Vision-3 roll, at a bonus equal to Magery, to notice something weird and uncanny – even by the standards of magic – on first encountering the wizard.

*Example:* At the end of the day on which she cast that Tangle Growth spell, Atototl must roll against Will (she has no Magery, remember), at -36. Not surprisingly, she fails. Her margin of failure is 33, which means four levels of Spiritual Distortion. She isn't worried by this (yet) – but a wizard who viewed her aura would see it throbbing with green and brown tints.



## Starting With Spirit-Assisted Magic

Players may want starting PCs who've negotiated bargains with spirits before play begins. If the GM agrees, then treat each contract with a spirit as a perk (p. B100). A wizard who enters play already suffering from Spiritual Distortion has a disadvantage worth -3 points/level.

As long as a wizard possesses any level of Spiritual Distortion, his soul remains a window to the spirit realm. *All* of his magic suffers from the same critical-failure problem as his spirit-assisted magic. Thus, this isn't as limiting for non-mages, since normal magic is unavailable to them in any event. The *next* stage is equally tricky for everyone, however . . .

### Long-Term Consequences

Spiritual Distortion is limited to 10 levels. Once it reaches this point, the wizard is totally imbued with the nature of his patron spirit (or spirits). A demonist is said to have achieved "total darkness." Among other things, this tends to involve substantial changes to the character sheet.

Any disadvantages that contradict the spirit's nature are lost – and possibly replaced with some distorted opposite. Demons hate *virtuous* disadvantages (e.g., Honesty, Sense of Duty to friends, and Vows of chastity); other spirits have their own rules. Advantages that the spirit dislikes or tends to disrupt by its very nature may also disappear.

Furthermore, the mortal gains Addiction (Spiritual Energies). Treat spiritual energies as a cheap, highly addictive drug that causes *physiological* dependency. They might be legal or illegal, making the disadvantage worth -5 or -10 points, respectively. This is primarily a behavioral problem if indulged, with the wizard forever seeking to work minor magics and calling on his patron for trivial reasons. However, withdrawal leads to painful (possibly psychosomatic) effects. See also *Magic Addiction* (p. 63).

Thus, the wizard's point total will probably change. The GM may treat a net gain as a "point debt" (p. B295). A net loss simply lowers his point value!

Essentially, the wizard is now a different person – possibly with a limited future. The GM may even declare that PCs who reach this stage become NPCs, and possibly threats to their old friends. Anyone *this* entangled with specific spiritual powers might be barred from entry to certain temples or dimensions, and is likely to suffer automatically hostile or embarrassingly friendly reactions from some supernatural beings. Demonists who've achieved total darkness are almost certainly damned, and may even be dragged off to Hell at some appropriate moment.

Those who have achieved this state must still make end-of-day Will + Magery rolls, at the usual penalty for energy, when they use spirit-assisted magic – but at +10. Any failure means the wizard's point total drops by (5 × margin of failure) points as he gains random disadvantages and/or loses advantages, attributes, or secondary characteristics; e.g.,

failure by 4 results in 20 points of lost abilities, -20 points of new disadvantages, or some combination of the two. The GM should be weird or cruel. If the magician reaches the stage where no further changes make sense, then he has probably been reduced to a vessel for inhuman energies, and automatically becomes an NPC.

*Example:* After several more close calls, Atototl reaches 10 levels of Spiritual Distortion and becomes a human minion of the Lord of Vines. She previously had Chummy, Code of Honor (Professional), and Selfish (9); the GM replaces these with Loner (6), as the spirit wipes out her feelings for human society and she reacts violently against what she now sees as her old weaknesses. She also loses the Sensitive advantage that previously helped in her merchant dealings, and her level of Gifted Artist; the Lord of Vines isn't interested in human motivations or arts. And she gains that Addiction.

### Soul-Cleansing

Recovery from Spiritual Distortion is painful and difficult. Restoring one's soul requires a period of total abstinence from magical activity. This lasts (20 - Will) days *per level* of Spiritual Distortion to be removed, minimum one day per level.

During this time, the wizard must avoid anything that reminds him of the power and pleasure of magic. This generally includes any sort of sensual pleasures; the use of most sorts of easy magic is a sensual delight, and the reminder is far too strong. Individuals with Gluttony or Lecherousness are in trouble! Others may have to refrain from the exercise of political or social power, specific environments, or anything else that represents temptation. Using magic items that don't require Magery and that aren't fun *might* be safe, but the GM may rule otherwise. The strict GM can restrict the wizard to non-adventuring activities such as silent meditation – or even to painful ones such as self-scourging.

The GM should put merciless pressure on PCs who overuse this option. Fate makes life difficult for those who abuse supernatural power – and some assisting spirits may work behind the scenes to help it along. Any mortal who makes such a contract is by definition rather susceptible to temptation. Even if he locks himself in an unfurnished cell, *something* will crop up that demands a Will or self-control roll to preserve discipline. Major attacks by strong enemies aren't always likely, but they'll happen sooner or later. Powerful individuals who keep dropping out of sight for days at a time will be noted and, at minimum, classed as eccentric.

Someone who has reached 10 levels of Spiritual Distortion must *also* buy off the Addiction and survive the withdrawal if he intends to keep his slate clean. And he's still probably in trouble, especially if he was a demonist – priests (and angels) will suspect that he's still damned. Taking care of *that* is entirely a matter of roleplaying.

*Example:* If Atototl seeks to cleanse herself of the spirit's influence, then she'll have to deal with the Addiction, refrain from magic, and avoid deep forests and wild places. Given that she's now a hunted loner, however, she'll probably just end up as a crazed jungle creature.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# MATERIAL MAGIC



Abebmaat-Ptah of Khem had made his way to the mouth of the harbor-canal of Poseidonis in the hour before dawn, wrapped in a plain dark cloak. He did not think that he had been observed, but it seemed that he had been outmaneuvered. As he approached the bronze colossus that guarded the port, a tall figure emerged from the shadows, a composite bow in hand, and pointed an arrow directly at the Khemite's heart.

"Ictinissia," he snarled, "your treachery is complete!"

The renegade Amazon laughed, although the aim of her bow never wavered. Magic glittered where an amulet rested against her throat. "Fool!" she said, "Twice fool of a Khemite to believe that you could prevail against Atlantis!"

"You no more serve Atlantis than you serve Khem," Abebmaat-Ptah replied. "You have sold your faith to the dark lord of Autochthesa – for a few trinkets."

"Those **trinkets** hid me from your gaze, Khemite. I was two steps behind you all the way from the city. Had I wished you dead, I would not have wasted an arrow. My knife would long since have been in your throat."

"And yet, I still breathe."

"Your life is a fragile thing. My master requires . . . I require one thing. The orichalcum which the Greek rogue stole – where is it concealed?"

"Should I give the blood and bones of the god Geb to those who would use them in dark sorceries?"

"You should give the Atlantean metal to me, if you do not wish to die in this place."

Abebmaat-Ptah paused, seeking words to buy time. If he did die, the secret hiding-place of the orichalcum would be lost, and all hope that it could reach Khem or Athens would fail. And yet, the Amazon's master was ruthless and impatient; he could not delay for long.

"Speak," snarled Ictinissia. But then, another player entered the contest. With a crackle of sorcery and a hiss of polished bronze on bronze, the colossus came to life, raising the spear that it held in its hand and turning to look down upon the two mortals who stood by its right foot. Ictinissia gasped, her bow wavering between Abebmaat-Ptah and the colossus. But Abebmaat-Ptah found little comfort in this salvation. Whoever else was at work here, his chance of surviving the day still seemed all too small.

Magic may take the form, not of spells or rituals, but of *things* and *substances* – of materials and items. This is magic as a matter of creation, or of exploitation of physical resources. While often a secondary element in games, it can make an interesting theme. Indeed, some of the most powerful magic in myth and fiction takes the form of lamps, swords, and rings of power.



# INHERENT MAGIC

At the simplest, some naturally occurring materials may have innate powers that can be released and harnessed by someone who knows the trick: “Prepared correctly, this herb heals all wounds,” “This ore can be used to make magic weapons,” and so on. As common folk magics that provide *modest* benefits, such things can be part of a campaign’s background lore – they’re closer to low-level technology than to magic in effect. If the Sweating Plague is deadly, but reliably cured by an infusion of feverfew leaves, then the friends of an infected PC simply have to scabble in the woods to save him. On the other hand, very rare substances that offer almost anyone *great* magical power can drive whole plots – and unless that power includes invulnerability, it would be wise to keep such discoveries secret, since there are those who would kill to acquire them.

## Releasing Inherent Magic

Unlocking a material’s “virtue” usually requires *some* sort of skill roll. Recognizing the substance may call for a knowledge-oriented skill such as Naturalist, Occultism, or Theology. Occultism or Thaumatology could reveal the steps needed to release the magic – or at least offer a hint. If the necessary methods demand a certain amount of precision, then a roll against Ritual Magic (or perhaps Religious Ritual) might be appropriate, and even Astronomy rolls to assess astrological conditions are a possibility. If laboratory processes are involved, then Alchemy or Herb Lore is more suitable. Releasing the magic inherent in one particular material would be a reasonable technique for such skills (see *Techniques*, p. B229).

## MATERIALS FOR WIZARDS

A material’s power might only be accessible to someone with magical training. This often makes it possible to integrate such substances with a more general magic system.

## Skill Modifiers

Materials might form the basis of a system of skill modifiers to spell-based magic (see *Mandatory and Significant Modifiers*, pp. 82-90) or Path/Book magic (see *Material and Symbolic Components*, pp. 128-129). Bonuses are especially desirable when using rules that make it possible to trade skill for range or other benefits. Particularly potent substances should probably be consumed in the casting – if only to prevent PCs who acquire them from becoming too powerful.

## Raw Energy

Used correctly, some materials might instead supply energy, or reduce a casting’s energy cost (which comes to much the same thing): “Each pound of star-iron gives 20 energy points for use in enchantment,” “Perfected sulfur is worth 5 FP put into a Fire spell,” and so on. One point of materials-based energy is generally only as good as 1 FP.

However, a wizard can use such energy when he has no FP left, and a sufficiently large energy bonus could let a solitary caster work magic that would otherwise require a large ceremonial group.

This overlaps considerably with *Inanimate Sacrifices* (pp. 55-56). What’s suitable for use, and exactly *how* it’s used, are matters of campaign style. Typically, when something is “included” rather than “sacrificed,” a failed casting leaves it intact – although recovery work may be needed (e.g., the sword used in a failed weapon enchantment might have to be reforged) and the strict GM could rule that each failure reduces the material’s energy value by perhaps 10%, through incidental wastage. *Critical* failure is likely to destroy it!

## Prices

Like other prices, those for “magical ingredients” depend on supply and demand. If a material is trivially easy to acquire, then it will be cheap and the magic it empowers will be common. This may have social implications. For example, something that makes the Create Food spell easy to cast will reduce the importance of agriculture, and likely make wilderness exploration and military campaigns easier to organize.

If supply is at all limited and the substance permits broadly useful magic, however, then demand will push the price up. If the stuff also has a secondary use of value, then non-wizardly buyers will compete with wizardly ones, further inflating prices. For instance, rare spices make food taste better and so are likely to be expensive anyway – which is unfortunate for wizards who need large quantities for spells! Goods with known magical qualities may actually acquire prestige value in the *mundane* market.

Materials could become so expensive that wizards rarely use them, perhaps reserving them for urgent applications or special experiments. A good example is large gemstones. These command high prices because they are rare and make beautiful ornaments, giving them “snob value.” If certain magics *also* need them, then such magic will be *expensive*. If word gets around among wealthy prestige-seekers that certain gems are “magical,” then that may send their snob value even higher.

*Oberon: Fetch me this  
herb; and be thou here again  
Ere the leviathan can swim  
a league.*

– William Shakespeare,  
*A Midsummer  
Night’s Dream*

## Celtic Tree Talismans

This is an example of a simple set of “quick-creation” magic items, intended for use alongside *Tree Magic* (pp. 42-47). Each of that system’s “trees” is linked to a body of magical lore. Anyone with Rank 1+ in the Druidic Order, or who has a 10-point Unusual Background (“Talisman Lore Training”) and knows Naturalist at 12+, can cast a specific spell by correctly preparing a piece of the appropriate tree. Vowel tree spells also require Magery.



### Finding the Plant

Roll against Naturalist to locate the correct plant, if necessary. In campaigns set in the British Isles or somewhere similar, most such plants are fairly easy to find:

- *Bramble* never requires a roll, except in the sparsest wasteland.

- In woodland, finding anything but *gorse*, *heather*, or *reed* usually takes just 2d minutes, and the roll is at +2. The GM may make exceptions; e.g., in an old oak forest, the seeker might not have to roll to find oak, but need 1d hours to locate silver fir.

- In cleared scrubland and on hillsides, a roll is always required. It takes 2d minutes to find *gorse*, *heather*, or *rowan*, but 1d hours to find everything else but *reed*.

- *Reed* can only be found near water, usually within 2d minutes.

- *Alder* doesn’t grow anywhere complete dry. *Alder* and *willow* take half as long to find when searching near water.

### Preparation

Roll against Naturalist (again), or Artist (Woodworking) at -4, to cut and prepare the talisman. This takes five minutes.

### Casting

The roll to cast the talisman spell is 12 + Magery, at -1 per full day since the talisman was cut. *Success* “uses up” the talisman; it cannot be reused, although continuing spells last so long as they’re maintained. The following table gives the talisman spell(s) for each tree, with the talisman(s) required:

Tree	Spell	Talisman
Alder	Ignite Fire	Peeled twig
Ash	Flight	Broomstick length
Aspen*	Shield	Hefty branch
Birch	Simple Illusion	Bark
Elder	Lend Vitality	Flowers, berries, or twig
Gorse*	Ward	Twig with flowers (-2 to cast without flowers)
Hawthorn	Curse	Any part
Hazel	Invisibility	15’ pole
	Seek Water	Forked rod
	Truthsayer	Nuts
Heather*	Remove Curse	Flower or straight twig
Holly	Bless	Any part
Ivy	Lend Language	Leaves
Oak	Shape Earth	Acorns or twig
Reed	Fasten	Straight, unbroken reed
Rowan	Magic Resistance	Berries
Silver Fir*	Enchant	Twig with bark intact
Vine	Tanglefoot	4’ length
Willow	Death Vision	Forked twig
Yew*	Decay	Berries or straight rod

\* Vowel tree – requires Magery.

Most talismans weigh between 1/4 lb. and 1 lb., but 15’ poles, broomstick lengths, and hefty branches are a *lot* heavier. A person may carry any number of talismans, but aside from the need for fresh items, these things are vulnerable; individuals who are jostled, attacked, soaked, or otherwise subjected to typical adventuring hazards may lose them, at the GM’s whim.

In general, magic *shouldn't* be able to create magically useful substances – or at least, it ought to consume a far greater value of ingredients than it creates. The GM can justify this with double-talk about conjured materials being “magically denatured” or “latent magics interfering with spell harmonics,” but for plot purposes, the problem is that being able to create spell ingredients invalidates most of the point of the exercise. The GM can relax such restrictions if the required item is commonplace or cheap, or only really serves as a minor point of style. For instance, if a spell calls for a twig that the wizard could cut from the nearest tree in seconds anyway, then being able to create a twig with a small spell simply saves a little inconvenience on rare occasions.

As a broad guideline, raw materials capable of giving one point of energy or +1 to a skill roll will cost about 1/250 of campaign average starting wealth (p. B27). In a typical TL3 game, that comes to \$4 per energy point or +1. This is much cheaper than *paut* (p. 52), because naturally occurring magical materials are far less versatile and don't require preparation by the seller. The cost will be higher for substances that *are* in fact versatile, or rare, but lower for those that are only useful for *very* minor or limited magics, or that call for extensive preparation or processing by the purchaser.

These prices permit wizards with good supplies of materials to cast the occasional, utterly overwhelming spell for a modest cost; e.g., energy sufficient to cast Entombment is just \$40 at TL3, while enough for a Great Healing is \$80. The GM may want to bring this under control without raising the price of small bonuses too high. A way to do this is to rule that wizards can use only *one* external energy source per casting (just as they're limited to one Powerstone), and that this must be a single, unified item that can neither be made up of lesser sources nor subdivided. Then assume that higher concentrations of power are far scarcer, and *double* the substance's cost for each energy point after the first. Thus, at TL3, 2 energy points cost \$8, 3 cost \$16, and so on; 10-point sources, at \$2,048, should only be used for *important* castings; and putative 20-point sources, worth over \$2 million, would be fabulous finds!

### Social Implications of Scarcity

If such materials make the difference between triviality and real power for wizards, and are quite rare, then magic



will suffer from the economics of scarce resources. Magic-workers will have to scabble around looking for the substances needed to cast *really* worthwhile spells – but it's always possible, so they'll try. Of course, there will be severe competition for these substances, becoming ferocious should regular supplies ever dry up. Even the *rumor* of a shortage may trigger wizardly panics and stampedes.

Conversely, the sudden discovery of much larger supplies will cause a “gold rush.” Seekers will cross the world in the hope of wealth. If the new supply then turns out to be substantial and reliable enough, it may even create a social revolution based around common magic.

## NATURAL MEDICINES

Much folkloric “magic” is in reality a matter of deriving drugs and poisons from natural sources – more folk medicine than supernatural power as gamers tend to imagine it. Fundamentally realistic low-tech medicine is the province of the Esoteric Medicine and Pharmacy (Herbal) skills. Even at low medical tech levels, exceptional skill here (say, 18+) can be highly effective, and interpreted as “magical” healing.

In an even modestly fantastical setting, Esoteric Medicine, augmented by the correct selection of natural ingredients, might be able to achieve results on a par with those of Physician/TL7. This will seem miraculous to low-TL observers! When describing Esoteric Medicine in action, the GM should remember that it probably doesn't *look* much like modern scientific medicine, even if it's equally effective – although in context it could be quite “scientific,” giving reproducible results by exploiting natural principles. It may share jargon with magic, alchemy, or mysticism, invoking the elements, chi, or astrological influences, without being detectably magical. However, the GM is free to give the most powerful natural medicines a faint aura that mages can discern, and permit wizards to discover minor useful magical ingredients by investigating herbalists' special knowledge.

The Herb Lore skill moves things into the realm of overt magic – albeit on a homely sort of level. For more on this, see *Herb Lore* (pp. 104-105). It's possible for the same healer to learn all three skills, using Pharmacy (Herbal) to gather a range of useful ingredients and Esoteric Medicine to apply them to routine medical problems, and bringing Herb Lore into play when something more dramatic is needed.

## MAGIC-RICH MINERALS

Many traditions also ascribe power to rocks, gemstones, and metals. Such substances might be naturally powerful or useful in enchantments. They may need to be taken internally, otherwise destroyed, or worn as amulets. It's sometimes necessary to prepare minerals for use, perhaps by inscribing them with words or symbols – but shaping or processing by magically unskilled individuals is liable to destroy their “virtue.”

*Metals* with magical qualities are particularly likely to require special, highly skilled preparation. After all, it takes significant skill to turn ore into something mundanely useful, so magical minerals will surely demand even more

expertise! Smelting a rare and potent metal from ore might require straightforward skill at Metallurgy (perhaps at 15+). The most remarkable materials could have extraordinary requirements, such as magically intense heat (the Essential Flame spell) and a mage to monitor the procedure.

*Locating* such minerals is also often a major task. The GM could reasonably require Prospecting at 15+, plus Magery and/or Knowledge spells to confirm that a find is significant. In many stories, the ore is *only* available in one or two places – although questing miners burrow deep into the world in search of others.

## MANA ORGANS

Animal body parts are another common source of inherent magic. These can be quite mundane, serving as minor ingredients in folk medicine or alchemy, often with obvious symbolism: bull's blood in a strength potion, a lion's tooth for courage, a feather for a flight spell, and so on. Still, such items can be difficult to obtain if the creature isn't native to the region where it's needed. In the modern world, demand for animal parts for use in folk medicine has led to species becoming endangered or extinct – resulting in laws against collecting, selling, or using these things in some places.

For more exotic and dramatic effects, body parts from overtly *supernatural* creatures can have great power. An explanation for this might be that creatures that violate the laws of physics or cast innate spells possess “mana organs” that serve as reservoirs or conduits for magical energy. Any part of an animal (or plant!) could be a mana organ: wings that are too small for realistic flight might work nonetheless, ordinary-looking skin or scales may grant incredible DR, internal organs could confer spellcasting ability, and so on. If this organ can be identified, extracted, and processed correctly, it *might* serve a similar purpose for a wizard, at least temporarily. Alternatively, it may simply act as a one-use energy source – but even that can be valuable, if it offers a *lot* of energy.

Animals can be difficult to find, and some are dangerous. Supernatural creatures are usually both – and also hard to kill. Monster-hunting could be a high-risk, high-profit occupation. The procedure gains an extra level of complication if the beast must be slain without damaging a particular body part. Preserving the organ for later use may require an appropriate skill – e.g., Alchemy, Herb Lore, Naturalist, Survival, or even Cooking – probably at a penalty.

## Gemstones

Some real-world gems and precious stones, and the virtues ascribed to them:

*Agate*: Knowledge of secrets, protection against storms and poison.

*Amethyst*: Clarity of mind, protection against drunkenness.

*Aquamarine*: Water magic, protection for seafarers.

*Cat's Eye*: Protection from enemies and diseases.

*Diamond*: Bodily strength and endurance.

*Emerald*: Healing and fertility, power over serpents.

*Garnet*: Protection against insects, physical and mental strength.

*Onyx*: Powers of darkness and death.

*Opal*: Memory enhancement, mental distraction, travel magic.

*Pearl*: Psychological healing, powers related to the moon, detection of poisons.

*Peridot*: Protection against mental attacks and nightmares.

*Quartz*: Calmness of mind, invisibility.

*Red Coral*: Protection against demons.

*Ruby*: Blood, fire, and war magic.

*Sapphire*: Wealth, protection against magic and spirits, reduction of anger.

*Topaz*: Protection against nightmares, calmness both mental and physical.

*Tourmaline*: Reinforcement of the mind, enhanced use of other magic.

*Turquoise*: Protection from falling and from lightning, necromantic power.

Obviously, protective qualities are among the most common. *Any* expensive gemstone might be useful for making protective amulets.

### Facets

*Faceting* – cutting gemstones to refract and reflect light impressively – is a TL4 development. It may be inappropriate for magic that employs raw minerals or stones carved with inscriptions of power. Alternatively, it might be part of a magical style (slightly anachronistic for TL0-3 fantasy) that uses precisely cut stones to refract and transmit *magic*.

### The Bezoar

A *bezoar* is a lump or a mass found in the intestines of certain animals. The term sometimes refers to an indigestible accretion that builds up in the stomach, usually consisting of hair or vegetable matter. However, in some beasts – mostly wild goats, antelopes, and lamas – it can be a stone-like lump of calcium salts. This was once known as a “bezoar stone.” While not a true stone, neither is coral or pearl!

Legend has it that a bezoar neutralizes any poison on contact, or possibly just changes color, acting as a warning. Some were incorporated into ornate drinking cups for courtiers who feared assassination; others were ground up as antidotes. A bezoar might work this way in a game world. One that neutralized poisons would probably wear out eventually – but even so, a substantial stone from a reliable source could easily cost as much as a fine gem. (Just how much does the buyer value his life and fear poison?) Alternatively, it might be one of the ingredients for an alchemical Universal Antidote, or give a bonus or energy cost reduction to Resist Poison and Neutralize Poison spells.

## Example: Dragon's Blood

Dragon's blood is one of the most magical materials known to legend. It's only likely to be as powerful as described below in settings where dragons are rare and *formidable*, making it difficult to acquire (to put it mildly). If "dream dragons," "petty drakes," minor dragon-spirits, and so on exist, then only a *proper* dragon has blood this potent.

The blood from a slain dragon can't generally be used "raw," although it might be a potent poison in this state (likely losing effectiveness after a few minutes or hours). The GM determines the preparations needed for magical use. The blood may have to be extracted from the heart of a freshly slain monster and then "cooked," or perhaps it must be refined and concentrated, requiring appropriate equipment, an hour or two of work, and a successful

Alchemy-2 roll. A dragon might provide but a single useful one-ounce dose – or 3d doses at most.

Each dose has several *potential* effects, listed below. Details are left to the GM, who may wish to assume that the blood's effects aren't fully understood. It's dangerous and incredibly expensive stuff with which to experiment, and may even vary with vintage and region, like wine. If prepared dragon's blood is available for sale, then a suggested price is \$7,500 an ounce (but up to 200 times that for a guaranteed 987 Geatland). Buyers should take care not to confuse it with *dragons-blood*: the aromatic resin of the palm fruit *Daemonorops*.

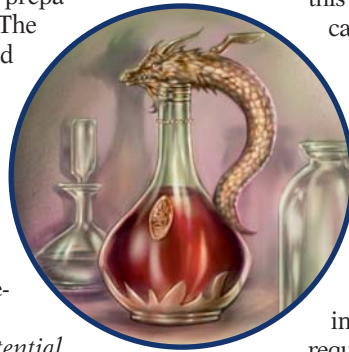
For further ideas, see **GURPS Dragons**.

### Poison

Dragon's blood is a blood agent (p. B437). Sprayed in the air as a fine mist, a dose fills about 2,000 cubic feet, although it settles out after five seconds. It inflicts 3d+2 toxic damage, with a five-second delay and a HT-4 roll to resist.

It's especially deadly if it enters the bloodstream directly as a follow-up poison. It literally sets the victim's blood on fire! Damage is then 4d+4, with a HT-6 roll to resist.

In either case, a successful resistance roll means the victim still takes half damage and is at -2 DX for a week. Failure inflicts the listed damage and leaves the victim at -4 to DX for



a week. Critical failure to resist a spray effect *also* means permanent blindness; for direct contact with more of the blood, it means instant death.

No mundane antidote is ever effective. Magical or alchemical antidotes are likely to provide limited help at best. Would a bezoar (p. 99) neutralize it? Who knows!

### Language Gift

Properly prepared (an Alchemy-3 roll) and consumed, a dose is said to grant the ability to speak all languages, human and inhuman. If dragons are anything but very rare, then this effect should be temporary, unless perhaps the blood came from the heart of one of the greatest dragons.

Represent permanent effects with Modular Abilities (Cosmic Power), with the limitation "Spoken Languages Only" (-50%). The ability to acquire 2 points' worth of languages would cost 10 points and be sufficient to speak – but *not* read – any language at Accented level, or any two languages at Broken level (enabling some cross-translation). The recipient should gain Speak With Animals, too – and also Speak

With Plants, if plants in the campaign have some kind of innate language, and Speak Underwater, if the GM requires this to talk to fish. A PC who acquires these advantages must buy them with bonus character points, going into "point debt" (p. B295) if necessary. Of course, obtaining dragon's blood should be an adventure worth a few points in itself!

*Improperly* prepared, the blood has its poison effect (above) about half an hour after consumption. Note that the GM should make the Alchemy roll in secret, and there's no obvious way to tell by sight if the blood was prepared correctly.

### Fire Magic

Treat dragon's blood as a thick, fluid Manastone that provides 10 energy points per ounce, for Fire magic only. It cannot power "anti-fire" spells such as Cold or Extinguish Fire. Once used, it crumbles to an ashy, oily residue.

### Wild Magic

Atomized and sprayed into the air (as for poison, above), a dose causes any spell or other magic triggered in the affected space to *critically fail*. Non-spell effects don't work, even if they normally require no die roll, and the GM may roll on the *Critical Spell Failure Table* (p. B236). Disrupting any magic causes the blood cloud to "burn away"; it has no further effect.

# ALCHEMY

*Alchemy* is a discipline of magical-mystical procedures concerned with materials, particularly the study and use of mixtures and reactions. A complete system for practical, lab-based alchemy – including an extensive list of elixirs and concoctions – appears in Chapter 28 of **GURPS Magic**. Like spell-based magic, this is amenable to variation and reinterpretation. Most of these optional rules require the Alchemy skill (p. B174).

## CONCEPTS OF ALCHEMY

There are several historical traditions of alchemy. Perhaps the best known of these is that which emerged in medieval Europe and eventually contributed information and techniques to modern chemistry. This was related to the alchemical practices of the medieval Muslim world – and *both* in turn derived from older systems. Meanwhile, China produced its own complex alchemical art.

In many fantasy settings, alchemy is a practical magical science, used to create magic potions and transmute substances. It's generally assumed that since alchemists must work in laboratories with lots of equipment, they're less useful in the field than wizards. On the other hand, because they can follow fixed procedures and use standard tests and equipment, they don't need the special gift or insight (Magery) that defines a mage. But alchemy can still be a source of wonder.

### **Objectives**

Traditional depictions suggest that most alchemists have some great goal in mind, which they may pursue, successfully or not, for their whole career – unless they become sidetracked. In Europe, this objective was usually supposed to be the “philosopher's stone,” originally imagined as a kind of fast catalyst for otherwise lengthy, difficult processes that would transform base metals to gold. Having been described as a “medicine” that improves the state of metals (by making them into the “highest” metal), this came to be seen as a cure for human ills – and perhaps even as the secret of immortality. Chinese alchemists likewise sought immortality, and some theorized that they might achieve this by creating a drinkable solution of gold. The rare, valuable, corrosion-resistant metal always had a lot of symbolic value!

Alchemists could often be persuaded to pursue lesser (and perhaps more feasible) objectives – if only to raise funds for their greater work. For example, they developed many useful dyes and pigments. Alchemy's ultimate goal could

*Know, therefore, that it is  
arcana alone which are strength  
and virtues. They are, moreover,  
volatile substances, without bod-  
ies; they are a chaos, clear, pellu-  
cid, and in the power of a star.*

– Paracelsus, *Alchemy,  
The Third Column of Medicine*

have practical *social* applications: the idea of making gold appealed to hard-headed politicians, while Chinese rulers were often interested in immortality. Indeed, historical “alchemists” frequently seem to have been either con artists or victims of the same. Even in a world with magic, the pursuit of expensive, uncertain long-term goals may lead genuine alchemists to cut corners and make overly optimistic claims to potential sponsors.

Alchemists with disadvantages such as Obsession (Find the philosopher's stone) and Delusion (“I am close to some great secret!”) would fit the historical image very well – and could be dragged into adventures by the need for funds. *Successful* alchemists might be able to make at least some gold, and hence have high Wealth. Con men usually have Greed. Almost any alchemist could justify a wealthy Patron.

## **Alchemy and Special Modifiers**

Appendix A (pp. 242-255) offers many special modifiers for magical activities. The GM may wish to apply these to alchemy. One option here is to assume that materials associated with particular effects or types of magic – perhaps though astrological or elemental “resonances” – are *required* components for elixirs that produce similar effects. This is a simple way to add style and flavor to alchemical activities. After all, the expensive ingredients that alchemists need have to consist of *something*.

It can be more interesting to have special ingredients provide real benefits, though. An especially appropriate, rare, *optional* material might give a bonus to Alchemy skill if it's available in quantity when making associated elixirs. Another possibility is that such a substance can reduce expenses by substituting for something off-the-shelf but costly.

*Example:* In a setting that uses *Hermetic Astrology* (pp. 248-253), Jealousy and Music elixirs resonate with the decans Akton and Agchoniôn, respectively. When producing a Jealousy elixir, the alchemist must mix dried and powdered maggots and wormwood. Adding cocaine, other bitter and unpleasant ingredients, and powdered cactus and topaz (for their connections through Scorpio) might merit +1 to Alchemy. Setting up the lab in an old slave market could also help. The standard recipe for a Music elixir

uses ear of bat and ground-up seashells. Including dolphin blood and powdered amethyst, and making the elixir in a lab built in a narrow canyon, might earn +1.

For extra fun, in a campaign where astrological effects influence magic, the alchemist might have to begin and end elixir creation at precisely the right instant. Before he starts cooking, he must make an Astronomy roll to determine the exact stellar influences. Failure gives him his margin of failure as a penalty to his Alchemy roll. Success means no penalty but also no special bonus; the “astrological check” simply works to prevent mistakes. When using *Tracking Astrological Time* (p. 85), apply day and month modifiers for the elixir's completion date – not for its beginning date or the date when it's consumed – and *triple* any penalties. Elixirs are sensitive, and the tiniest unfavorable shifts in governing stars can spoil the whole batch.

### **The Cabal and Alchemy**

The Cabal (p. 84) uses alchemy, applying decanic and other modifiers to its processes. However, Cabalistic alchemy is so closely tied to astrology that elixirs can *only* be prepared at specific times, which can be very inconvenient. Most Cabalists prefer the direct effectiveness of spells, seeing alchemy as at most a secondary tool.

## SCHOOLS OF ALCHEMY

In both fiction and reality, the term “alchemy” is used for several different practices that, while they may owe something to each other, have distinct methodologies and goals. This suggests that the Alchemy skill might require specialization. Cross-defaults depend on the degree of communication and shared assumptions between groups of alchemists.

In a game based on real-world history, Alchemy (European) and Alchemy (Islamic) might default to each other at -2; they share ideas and texts, but come from notably different cultures. Both derive from Alchemy (Ancient Hellenic), which mystics would say has its share of lost secrets, so both default to and from that specialty at -2. *Tech-Level Modifiers* (p. B168) may also apply; European and Islamic alchemists generally operated at TL3-4, while the Hellenic world was TL2. If Alchemy is primarily a mystical process rather than a science, though, then it might not be a technological skill. Historically, the tools and techniques *did* evolve – but perhaps not as radically as some technologies.

Alchemy (Chinese) and the above specialties differ so much that there may be *no* default between them. If a default exists, then it’s likely to be at -6 or worse. Alchemists from these cultures *might* be able to learn something from each other, but they’d have to break down huge barriers of language, imagery, and assumptions.

There’s some evidence of an Indian version of alchemy. Certainly, ancient India had useful practical chemistry. Alchemy (Indian) might default to and from Alchemy (Hellenic) at -6 and Alchemy (Chinese) at -4.

### *Alchemy as a Spiritual Discipline*

Some modern writers claim that alchemy – in its most sophisticated form, anyway – was *really* a spiritual discipline. They theorize that the creation of gold from base metals and the attainment of immortality were metaphors for the quest for spiritual perfection. Certainly, some quite early alchemists claimed that the mental disciplines involved were more important than the practical chemistry, and Western alchemy came to include a fair amount of Christian symbolism, while the Chinese version had longstanding links to Taoism. Alchemical processes were often described in obscure terms (to protect the craft’s secrets from “unworthy” readers), and incorporated many rituals (ensuring repeatability and controlling timing). Still, most alchemists seem to have had distinctly material goals.

An alchemist who *is* pursuing spiritual goals should study the Meditation skill (p. B207). If spiritual perfection is necessary, then he must enter a meditative trance before attempting any major alchemical process. He may also need a degree of “spiritual improvement” to achieve high levels of Alchemy skill. For instance, Alchemy at 14+ might require Will 10+, no worse than -15 points in “bad” mental disadvantages (as defined by the GM, or simply *anything* not tied to spiritual purity), and no disadvantage self-control number below 12; Alchemy at 18+ could call for Will 14+, no unsuitable disadvantages at all, and no self-control number below 15 in any event. The philosopher’s stone might only be found by an alchemist who’s a model of self-control,

balance, and virtue – and may cure mental problems as well as creating gold or granting immortality.

### *Alchemy as an Aspect of Other Subjects*

If magic is a complex academic discipline, of which alchemy is one branch, then the Alchemy skill may be part of any competent wizard’s repertoire. It might even be a prerequisite for other magical activities, and the wizard who doesn’t understand the basic interaction of magical forces with matter – alchemy – doesn’t have a hope of getting a spell to work. This could be a general restriction, or apply only to elemental colleges, spells requiring contact with the spirit realm, etc.

Alchemy could also be a vital part of wizards’ academic training, providing a symbol system or basic theory. The Alchemy skill may be a prerequisite for Thaumatology or Ritual Magic. In some settings, those skills might be unable to exceed Alchemy by more than a couple of levels – the more advanced the grand theory, the more underlying knowledge is required. Conversely, if alchemical ideas arise naturally out of abstract magical studies, then Alchemy might default to Thaumatology at -4 or so.

## LABORATORY PROCEDURES

Historically, alchemy involved lengthy, repeated processes: heating, sublimation, distillation, etc. Alchemists invented much of the standard equipment known to modern chemists, and used it heavily. Fantasy alchemy may be less tedious, but Alchemy is *definitely* a laboratory-based skill, and the effective alchemist will need a well-stocked lab. Setup costs and other statistics are as follows:

*Home Lab:* No skill modifier. Fills a sturdy table. \$1,000.

*Professional-Grade Lab:* +1 to skill. Fills 100 square feet. \$5,000.

*Excellent Lab:* +TL/2 to skill (round down). Fills 200 square feet. \$20,000.

### *Analysis by Taste and Scent*

Real-world alchemists assessed substances, not only by chemical tests and by sight, but by smell and sometimes even by *taste*. The risks involved – given all the natural poisons, heavy metals, mercury fumes, etc. – should be obvious. Competent alchemists doubtless knew that some materials were too dangerous for this, but their view of procedural safety would rarely pass in a modern laboratory.

The logical consequences here only have a place in the most grittily realistic of games – especially if anyone wants to play an alchemist. A sickly, hallucinating, short-lived, brain-damaged PC isn’t much fun. Emphasizing that alchemy involves a certain amount of eccentric risk-taking might be amusing, though, and could justify an assortment of disadvantages. Alchemists could also benefit from *advantages* acquired through careful training and gradually acquired resistance, including Acute Taste and Smell, Discriminatory Taste (for individuals who’ve achieved cinematic degrees of refinement), High Manual Dexterity, and Resistant to Poison – and maybe Combat Reflexes and Danger Sense for those whose laboratories explode especially often.

## ALCHEMICAL INVENTIONS

Historical alchemists often claimed to be working toward recreating ancient wisdom and perfecting standard procedures, but their art did involve *some* innovation. Alchemists played as low-tech mad scientists could emphasize this, pursuing outright novelty and clever solutions to problems. Alchemy can use *New Inventions* (pp. B473-474), subject to a few special rules modified and expanded from those in *GURPS Magic*.

### Required Skills

Alchemy, of course!

### Complexity

The GM sets this, as usual. As a guideline, he can base complexity on the default penalty to *manufacture* the elixir:

Default Penalty	Complexity
0	Simple
-1 or -2	Average
-3 to -5	Complex
-6 or worse	Amazing

Rather than use standard complexity modifiers for invention rolls, the GM may prefer to apply a base -6 plus *twice* the default penalty for the elixir being invented; e.g., an alchemist trying to develop an Invulnerability elixir (-4) would suffer a penalty of  $-6 + (2 \times -4) = -14$ .

### Tech Level

Elixirs don't have TL ratings. Other alchemical inventions might, at the GM's option.

### Concept

If a dose of an existing elixir is available, then it counts as a "working model." The alchemist must analyze it in detail with an Alchemy roll, which uses it up. Success gives him the usual +5 on any number of attempts at the Concept roll.

### Prototype

Equipment modifiers for this stage depend on the available laboratory facilities (see *Laboratory Procedures*, p. 102).

*Modifiers:* -10 for *no* proper facilities (or the GM can simply rule that the attempt is impossible), -5 or worse for an improvised or minimal lab, 0 for a home lab, +1 for a professional-grade lab, or +TL/2 for an excellent lab. -5 if the lab is in low mana.

This gives a *much* lower facilities cost than is normal for inventions. The GM can raise the prices for labs to match those on p. B474, on the basis that *original* research in alchemy is an expensive business, or simply say that magical chemistry is cheaper than technological engineering. Alternatively, an alchemist with the Gadgeteer advantage might use the lower values, while everyone else must pay the much higher costs.

A successful Prototype roll produces a sheaf of notes that serves as a formulary, plus one dose of the new invention. Elixirs and similar may now be manufactured, studied, and so on, as usual. If the alchemist loses his notes before mastering an elixir, however, he must repeat the research, albeit at +2 to all skill rolls. (*Exception:* Eidetic Memory lets him recreate his lost notes with an IQ+2 roll; Photographic Memory allows him to do so automatically.) Critical failure on a Prototype roll has the same effects as any other critical failure with Alchemy.

### Testing and Bugs

New elixirs don't usually have noticeable bugs. The whimsical GM can add the occasional strange feature to such inventions if he wishes, however.

### Gadgeteers

The GM may let alchemists who have the Gadgeteer advantage use *Gadgeteering* (pp. B475-477) when inventing. In that case, apply the default penalty to manufacture the elixir (e.g., -4 for an Invulnerability elixir) to Concept and Prototype rolls *instead* of the complexity modifier.

## ALCHEMICAL GADGETEERING

If the GM wants alchemists to be able to make themselves *spectacularly* useful, then he might not only let them invent new potions, but also allow them to capitalize on the Gadgeteer advantage (p. B56) – and possibly Gizmos (p. B57).

### Gadgeteering

Either version of the Gadgeteer advantage enables an alchemist to invent more effectively. See *Alchemical Inventions* (above).

### Quick Gadgeteering

The Quick Gadgeteer advantage lets the alchemist in a hurry hastily produce any preparation that he knows how to make. This takes *minutes* equal to half the number of days it would normally require (round up). He must roll against Alchemy at the elixir's full default penalty, *plus* any penalty for an unmastered elixir (-6 for an alchemist lacking both formulary and supervision; see *GURPS Magic*), *plus* an extra -1 for improvised equipment. The alchemist can improve his ability with "quick techniques" in the usual way; however, such techniques differ from conventional ones, and he must learn them separately. He can never buy off the improvised-equipment penalty (except in exceptional circumstances, with GM permission) – even in the best lab, anyone working this fast is by definition improvising!

Ingredients cost doesn't change – and contrary to p. B476, the Scrounging skill can't reduce it. Assume that whatever the alchemist has on hand or can find with a quick search will serve, however. Alchemist-gadgeteers doubtless walk around with pouches full of peculiar ingredients, which the GM can occasionally exploit for minor plot purposes, good or bad.



## Alchemical Gizmos

The GM may let alchemists buy Gizmos – perhaps with an Accessibility limitation: Alchemical elixirs only, -20% – and apply them to alchemical preparations. He might even let alchemist-gadgeteers exceed the normal limit of three Gizmos, or at least go to four if they take the Accessibility limitation. An alchemist can use a Gizmo to pull out *one* dose of any standard elixir that he could previously have made or acquired. With enough Gizmos and a good array of potions, he can function as a formidable combat wizard.

Elixirs *aren't* considered minor, ignorable, or inexpensive, so an alchemist must usually own one before he can reveal it as a Gizmo. He need not state in advance that he's carrying it, however. For more flexibility, the GM might let him pay for any needed elixir – at market price, out of his spare cash (assuming that he has enough) – *without* previously noting that it was part of his stock. Obviously, it's cheaper for the alchemist to build up a specified reserve of elixirs that he's made himself, if he can spare the time!

The GM *might* even permit gadgeteer-alchemists to whip up “improvised” elixirs in a single turn, at no cash cost, using *Gadgeteers and Gizmos* (p. B58). This requires a skill roll, at the usual -6 for no formula, -1 for improvised equipment, and -2 for hasty work, *plus* the elixir's default penalty (from -1 for Healing, through -6 for Resurrection, to -9 for Youth) – that is, Alchemy at -10 to -18. Such elixirs are thrown-together and highly unstable; they must be used *immediately*, much like Missile spells (apply the rules for those if the alchemist walks around with a prepared elixir in hand). Hence, they can't be sold unless the alchemist has a buyer who needs an effect *right now* and has the cash.

An improvised elixir's nominal value can't exceed \$500 *adjusted for the alchemist's Wealth*: \$1,000 if Comfortable, \$2,500 if Wealthy, \$10,000 if Very Wealthy, and so on. Thus, Resurrection – \$25,000 even in a common-magic campaign – calls for a Filthy Rich alchemist (who perhaps got rich selling resurrections). This reflects the cash value of ingredients that the alchemist is carrying around, paid for by his cost of living.

Cinematic gadgeteer-alchemists should also consider other skills. Fast-Draw (Elixir) brings a vial or pastille into play instantly, while Throwing makes it an effective ranged weapon. Devious individuals will want Holdout and Sleight of Hand. Those who are also wizards should consider Ignite Fire to light pastilles quickly – and Apportation to place them exactly where needed.

## HERB LORE

Herb Lore (p. B199) is defined as an alternative approach to something like alchemy, with fewer applications but cheaper, more-accessible ingredients. This is a valid model, but the GM may wish to keep the two schools of magical potion-making distinct, and to emphasize differences in style. Alchemists and herbalists *might* be able to

exchange ideas and understand the common features of their professions – or they might regard each other with total incomprehension, seeing the universe in utterly different ways.

## Capabilities

Herb Lore generally represents a “folk” approach to concocting magical preparations, corresponding to countless tales about talented rural healers and natural ingredients that produce wonderful results. An herbalist doesn't usually pursue some grand mystical or scientific goal. He can't tell you *why* grinding blue mallow with kingsfoil makes a good healing elixir – but he knows that it *does*. Thus, while Herb Lore allows herbalists to compound elixirs, it *doesn't* let them duplicate any other feats of Alchemy, such as analyzing elixirs or magic items.

Furthermore, herbalists can't use alchemical formularies. The suggested rule for most settings is that books of herbs and their uses – called *herbals* – exist, but lack the depth and detail of formularies. A good herbal might help when studying the skill, and may even give a bonus to Naturalist or Herb Lore, but it isn't rigorous enough to offset the penalty for working without a formula. Herbalists therefore mostly learn new elixirs by instruction, not through study.

Herbalists *can* use *Alchemical Inventions* (p. 103), replacing Alchemy with Herb Lore – somebody has to come up with new herbal concoctions – but can't analyze an existing sample to act as a “working model.” As well, Gadgeteer grants them no special benefits when inventing. The GM may limit herbal inventions to rare experts with Herb Lore at 18+, and even these sages may need access to completely new herbs in order to create novel effects.

## Costs

Herb Lore's major advantage is that herbalists work with . . . well, herbs. Alchemy uses exotic, rare, and *expensive* ingredients – like lion's blood and fossilized beetles from Far Cathay – while herbalists can work with the gleanings of a day in the woods and a few Naturalist rolls. The GM should therefore make the materials cost for herbal preparations at least 50% less than that for alchemical elixirs, with a maximum discount of \$100. This ought to reduce the market price that herbalists charge by at least the same dollar amount – and probably by more, since their skill is traditionally more common, and the financial and personal risks involved are lower.

The cost of equipping a home lab is just \$500. Better labs cost the same as alchemy labs (see *Laboratory Procedures*, p. 102), as they involve alchemist-style equipment. Few Herb Lore specialists will have such things if they're just rustic healers, though.

## Limitations

Herbalists' lower costs mean that they're likely to dominate the elixir market, forcing alchemists to focus elsewhere. To keep alchemists in the potions business, the GM may rule that certain elixirs are simply impossible for herbalists, or are so difficult that few bother trying – they



really do *need* those exotic ingredients. For instance, the GM might prohibit herbalists from manufacturing elixirs of Dragonslaying, Regeneration, and Resurrection, most or all that grant magical abilities, and Alchemical Antidotes – or perhaps just anything with a materials cost of \$300 or more. However, they *should* be able to brew elixirs of Awakening, Fertility, Healing, Health, Sleep, and Love, and most hostile elixirs; these are the clichés of rustic herb-wisdom.

Other restrictions are possible. Herbalists may not be able to make pastilles. Perhaps they can't apply the Gadgeteer advantage to their art, relying on rote where gadgeteers use generalized theories and inspiration. This lets the GM portray them as rustics, useful enough in their place but lacking alchemists' versatility (and impressive jargon).

### *Herb Lore Critical Failures*

Generally, herbs aren't as volatile as alchemical reagents. A critical failure on Herb Lore may cause problems, but nothing as dramatic as an alchemical disaster.

Instead of using the critical failure table for Alchemy (*GURPS Magic*, p. 210), the GM may opt to roll 3d on this table:

- 3-5** – Elixir is overheated or spilled, releasing steam, volatile oils, pollen, etc. Everyone within 20 yards suffers its effect or the reverse; 50% chance of either.
- 6-8** – Herbalist suffers elixir's effect or the reverse, as above.
- 9-12** – Elixir turns foul and taints much of the equipment used; replacing it costs 30% of the lab's price.
- 13-15** – Herbalist laid up sick for a week; if he tries to move around, he must roll HT-2 every minute or suffer retching (p. B429).
- 16-17** – Elixir *looks* fine, but functions as a randomly chosen hostile elixir when used.
- 18** – Elixir *looks* fine, but functions as a Death elixir when used.

The GM should make as many of the relevant rolls as possible in secret, leaving the player uncertain whether the elixir-production attempt worked or produced something dangerous.

## Herb Uses and Rarities

Listed below are some real-world herbs and temperate-zone plants, with likely rarities and traditionally associated effects. They might be taken as medicine, displayed as charms, or even used as symbols. As a guideline, in a rural area, Very Common herbs can be found in 1d minutes with a Naturalist+3 roll; Common ones, in 3d+2 minutes with unmodified Naturalist; and Uncommon ones, in 2d×10 minutes with Naturalist-2.

*Angelica* (Common): Protection against witchcraft and plague.

*Apple* (Common): Purity, knowledge.

*Basil* (Common): Creates scorpions (and medical uses including *treatment* of scorpion stings); aphrodisiac.

*Bay* (Common): Communication, promotion of poetry.

*Caraway* (Common): Protection against the evil eye, mischievous spirits, and thieves; used in love potions.

*Chicory* (Common): Grants charisma.

*Clover* (Common; four-leaf plants are Uncommon): Luck.

*Coriander* (Common): Improves memory; controls the libido.

*Cowbane* (Uncommon): A dangerous poison, nonetheless used in many medical treatments and often in witchcraft.

*Dandelion* (Very Common): Promotes urination.

*Deadly Nightshade* (Uncommon): A poison and a hallucinogen, used in witchcraft.

*Fennel* (Common): Dreams; divination; protection against evil magic and witchcraft.

*Foxglove* (Common): Heart medicine (potentially poisonous).

*Garlic* (Common): General healing and magical protection; aphrodisiac; grants courage.

*Ginger* (Common): Prevents aging; used in love potions.

*Hemlock* (Uncommon): Another poison used in witchcraft.

*Henbane* (Uncommon): A painkiller and a poison with hallucinogenic properties; possibly used in flying spells.

*Horseradish* (Common): Brings prosperity.

*Laurel* (Common): Denotes honor; associated with light and darkness; protects against lightning, plague, hallucinations, and demons.

*Lily* (Common): Associated with beauty.

*Mandrake Root* (Uncommon): Magical power; influence over enchanted humans.

*Parsley* (Common): Purification of the breath; associated with the Devil.

*Poppy* (Common): Sleep, powers of the mind.

*Rue* (Common): Repels venomous creatures; protection against evil spirits and plague.

*Saffron* (Uncommon; requires careful extraction from a cultivated flower): Physical strength; aphrodisiac.

*Thyme* (Common): Protects against witches and poison bites; increases courage; grants the ability to see faeries.

*Walnut* (Common): Secrecy, security.

*Wormwood* (Uncommon): Associated with decay and bitterness; prevents fatigue; protects against worms, snakes, and sea monsters.

*Yarrow* (Common): Flight, divination.

This is just a tiny sampling! *Most* herbs and many plants were held to have medical applications. Quite a few were believed to be aphrodisiacs, or to have magical properties – including protection against the plague, witchcraft or evil spirits, and maybe scorpion stings. For other plants with magical associations, see *Tree Magic* (pp. 42-47) and Appendix A (pp. 242-255).

## CONSUMING MULTIPLE ELIXIRS

Alchemical elixirs work by performing arcane transformations on the user. This raises the possibility that consuming two or more elixirs at the same time might lead to weird synergies – and even that an expert could use multiple substances to produce a specific result when they react within the body. Alchemists might manufacture “binary” drugs and poisons, seemingly harmless substances that combine to dramatic effect, offering a way around the problem of food tasters and other tests for poison.

### *Binary Elixirs*

A variant elixir that works when mixed within the body represents a new invention. Use *Alchemical Inventions* (p. 103), treating the task as equal in difficulty to inventing the simple “one-part” elixir from scratch, with the added requirement that the inventor must make a successful roll against Physician or an appropriate Esoteric Medicine specialty (as suits the alchemist and the setting). Binary elixirs can involve any of the usual forms, but each combination – an elixir that works when mixed as smoke from two pastilles, one that’s consumed as two potions, one that’s partly inhaled and partly imbibed, etc. – is a *different* invention.

After successfully inventing a binary elixir, manufacturing it is a new technique. It’s equivalent to producing the standard version, but has an additional -2 to skill and takes 25% longer to make (round up).

### *Ad Hoc Mixing*

Normally, consuming multiple elixirs in succession is quite safe. If the GM wants to restrict alchemy or play up its (dark) comic potential, though, then he can rule that this is *dangerous*. He should make an exception for Alchemical Antidote, of course.

Those using elixirs might have to leave a period of time – 5-10 seconds, a minute, an hour, or a full day – between doses, or they may simply have to avoid taking one while another is still affecting them. Otherwise, each elixir pollutes the other, negating either or both. More dramatically, the two could synergize bizarrely, with horrific, comic, or merely inconvenient results, depending on campaign style. Possibilities include one or both not working, reduced or increased duration, changed (but still magical) effects, intoxication, nausea, and/or injury. The GM can decide by whim or randomly. A Body Control skill roll at -3 or so might moderate the worst consequences.

Such outcomes shouldn’t be easily repeatable. Alchemy is traditionally either an art, or a science so precise that tiny variations lead to vastly different results. Alchemists who want to recreate a particular mixing result should probably have to roll against Alchemy or Esoteric Medicine at -4 or worse, but *might* claim a +1 bonus on rolls to invent new elixirs that recreate the effect.

## ALCHEMY AND MEDICINE

Traditionally, alchemy was associated with medicine. *GURPS Magic* does indeed offer handy healing potions – and Esoteric Medicine, Pharmacy, and Physician skills learned at TL0-4 no doubt include alchemical terminology – but applying alchemy or herbalism for *specific* medical purposes can make things more complex. Alchemist-physicians might mostly use Healing, Health, and Universal Antidote elixirs, of course, but if those formulas are unknown or take too long to prepare, or if suitable ingredients aren’t available, then a simpler, “targeted” alchemical treatment may be in order.

### *Esoteric Medicine*

If alchemy can serve medical purposes, then there may be a body of “arcane” medical theories that represent a specialty of Esoteric Medicine, doubtless including lots of alchemical jargon. In settings where alchemy sees wide use for preparing medicines, this may be the standard therapeutic skill, and can work just as well as Physician at the local TL. Where Esoteric Medicine replaces Physician in this way, any skill that defaults to Physician – notably Diagnosis – can default to Esoteric Medicine instead.

### *Alchemical Cures*

Preparing an alchemical treatment for a specific, known condition (usually previously identified with Diagnosis) first demands an analysis of the problem in alchemical terms. This takes 3d minutes and requires a successful roll against the appropriate Esoteric Medicine specialty – although Physician might serve if the GM feels that the setting’s “conventional medicine” can be related to alchemy.

After that, composing and preparing a suitable treatment requires 1d+1 hours, a lab, basic alchemical or herbal supplies, and a roll against Alchemy or Herb Lore. This skill roll takes the same penalty that a mundane physician would have to treat the condition. If the expert’s Healing, Health, or Universal Antidote elixir technique would be higher, and seems appropriate, then use that instead.

*Modifiers:* Modifiers for lab quality; see *Laboratory Procedures* (p. 102). Alchemists (*not* herbalists) with Gadgeteer get +2, and may halve the time required; alchemists with Quick Gadgeteer get +3, and may divide the necessary time by four. If simultaneously treating multiple patients with the same disease or condition, then apply -1 to skill, and add 10% to time needed, per patient after the first.

Apply the margin of success on this roll as a bonus to any HT or Body Control roll that the patient makes to resist or recover from the problem; the minimum bonus is +2. Critical success means that recovery is automatic (assume the best result possible on all HT rolls) – and if the patient lost any HP or attribute levels, he recovers 1d of each immediately on application of the treatment. Critical failure indicates that the alchemist dosed the patient with something inappropriate, giving him -2 on his next two HT or Body Control rolls.

The GM is welcome to apply modifiers and special conditions at whim – alchemical medicine should feel like an *art*. In particular, special ingredients may well be needed, sending the alchemist or his assistants off on frantic searches. The GM might permit a patient who has the Body Control skill and can communicate with the alchemist to make a skill roll to get an *extra* +2 to all HT-based rolls.

#### “Kill or Cure”

Alchemists are used to trying things out to see what works, and are notoriously prone to accidents. This can lead to problems with doctoring. To emphasize this, the GM might rule that even with *successful* alchemical treatment, a patient who fails his HT roll suffers 1d-3 points of injury (minimum 1) as the power of the alchemical infusion overstresses his body; that *any* failure on the Alchemy skill roll gives the patient -1 on his next HT-based roll due to unwise initial treatments; and that critical failure further inflicts 1d-1 points of injury (minimum 1).

For a really worrying approach, assume that *any* alchemical treatment causes 1d-2 points of injury (minimum 0) unless the recipient makes a HT roll, and always leaves the patient nauseated for 3d minutes.

Herb Lore, being more subtle, may not suffer from such problems. The generous GM could let alchemists (but *not* herbalists) *opt* to accept such “kill or cure” rules in order to reduce the time taken to prepare the treatment by 50%.

## Elixir Delivery Methods

**GURPS Magic** discusses elixirs in the form of potions, powders, pastilles, and ointments – all of which take effect rather quickly. For a more realistic-seeming game, the GM can increase onset times. Potions might take 1d×5 minutes; powders, 1d×5 minutes when eaten but just 2d seconds if snorted like snuff; pastilles, anything from 2d seconds to 1d minutes, at the GM’s whim; ointments, between 1d minutes and an hour, depending on the nature of the effect.

Higher tech levels might bring new delivery methods. Smoking an elixir in the form of a cigar or a cigarette (TL4) may work much like a pastille – but only on one person, and *without* the time and cost increase. Pills (TL4) are just a simple variant of powders. Injection (TL5) could give onsets within 1d seconds. Aerosols (TL5 for simple atomizers, TL6 for pressurized cans) could function like pastilles, or be a way to apply refined ointments; double the usual production cost. The GM decides what elixirs can be made in which of these forms.

# ENCHANTING ITEMS

Myth, fiction, and game rules offer many ways for objects to gain magical powers – although these sometimes involve chance, unpredictable coincidences, or the action of powerful gods or unreliable spirits.

## THE STANDARD SYSTEM

In the standard magic system, wizards create magic items using spells from the Enchantment college alongside applications of other spells that generate the specific effects desired. Chapters 2 and 8 of **GURPS Magic** cover this process in great detail, and include an analysis of the economics of enchanting. In addition, most spells in **Magic** have an “Item” description, while those that don’t normally be enchanted into items.

It’s worth noting that the GM *doesn’t* have to use the exact item forms suggested in **Magic**. Spells described as being enchanted into wands or staves might instead be placed on gauntlets, fly swatters, blunted daggers, rattles, etc. Magical jewelry may become magic belts of rare leather – or fine silk headbands bearing intricate hieroglyphs. The Scroll spell can use just about *any* written medium, especially if paper, papyrus, and vellum are unknown in the culture; for example, in a Sumerian-style setting, wizards could work spells into writing on small clay tablets. A postmodern mage might “write” a spell as a file stored on a PDA (PCs who try to copy these digital “scrolls” will find that this *just doesn’t work*, that the original has a

magical charge while any copies are useless gibberish, or that copies are as good as the original but that triggering any one of them uses up the magic and deactivates or wipes every copy, everywhere – GM’s decision).

Ruling that specific spells *can’t* be enchanted into items – whatever **Magic** says – can help preserve trained wizards’ monopolies. Allowing enchantment with spells that have no “Item” description is trickier, as they’re often set up that way for practical or game-balance reasons. Still, there’s no obvious reason why, for instance, Colors, Rejoin, or Increase Burden shouldn’t be worked into wands or rings. Of course, the GM would have to set energy costs for these enchantments, based on other spells of similar power and complexity.

### Quick and Dirty vs. Slow and Sure

The **Basic Set** (pp. B481-482) and **GURPS Magic** (pp. 17-18) describe two standard enchantment methods. *Quick and Dirty* enchantment involves high energy requirements, usually met with the aid of multiple assistants. *Slow and Sure* work feeds in energy over time, allowing wizards to achieve almost any enchantment using a minimum of external energy sources – eventually – while suffering fewer skill penalties. These two techniques offer options for both emergency enchantments and cottage industry work, and should logically lead to a fair variety of magic items in a campaign. The GM can adjust the parameters of either or both to create specific game styles.

*As for the planisphere, its possessor hath only to turn its face toward any country, east or west, with whose sight he hath a mind to solace himself, and therein he will see that country and its people, as they were between his hands and he sitting in his place; and if he be wroth with a city and have a mind to burn it, he hath but to face the planisphere towards the sun's disc, saying, "Let such a city be burnt," and that city will be consumed with fire.*

– *The Arabian Nights*, "Judar and his Brethren"

For example, to preserve magic items as the rare handiwork of dignified stay-at-home wizards, while permitting emergency castings by highly skilled or desperate individuals, Quick and Dirty enchantment might take a blanket penalty of -4. It could further suffer conditional penalties; e.g., the -1 for other people within 10 yards could become -2 *per person* within 25 yards, forcing enchanters to find plenty of space. Conversely, given that the proximity penalty would be a problem for any enchanter working in a garret or an apartment block, the GM could reduce the critical distance.

To make magic items cheaper and more common, reduce the time requirements of either or both methods, and recalculate cash costs accordingly. To slow down enchantments, in a world where wizards don't trust each other much, say that mages can never collaborate on such castings; each must be a solo project. To speed them up within a system of collegiate collaboration, permit less-skilled and unskilled spectators to contribute limited quantities of energy as explained in *Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238) – either for all enchantments or only for Slow and Sure work.

The GM can even make just *one* of the two standard approaches available. If only Slow and Sure enchantment is possible, then adventuring wizards who lose magical equipment must wait until they return to civilization to replace it. Minor items will often be too expensive to be interesting – a situation akin to that in many high-fantasy tales and legends.

If Quick and Dirty is the only way, then the creation of high-powered items will be *extremely* difficult, requiring large-scale collaborations, high skill levels, and lots of organization. Tinkering with the setting's assumptions about energy supplies (see *Energy Sources*, pp. 50-58) can make the process more interesting and atmospheric; e.g., if Powerstones are unavailable but sacrifices provide plentiful energy, then enchantment might be a bloody business. Combining Quick and Dirty enchantment – with its high energy costs – with *Threshold-Limited Magic* (pp. 76-82) or *Assisting Spirits* (pp. 90-94) could produce strange and twisted enchanters.

Lastly, the GM might restrict Quick and Dirty enchantment to the (NPC) gods. He could even limit it to one or two gods of craftsmanship – and *perhaps* their superhuman servants. This would lead to a situation such as is seen in Homer's *Iliad*, in which a deity who wants a gift for a warrior goes to the blacksmith-god, who, asked politely, produces some superior armor in short order.

## Facilities

Enchanters are assumed to need properly equipped laboratories or workshops. The GM may use the rules for alchemy labs (see *Laboratory Procedures*, p. 102), applying the bonuses for better facilities to enchantment skills. Whether an alchemy lab *also* counts as an enchantment workshop of the same quality is up to the GM. The two could probably share the same space, unless perhaps the workshop is used for enchanting items such as swords or armor – a blacksmith's shop doesn't much resemble a chemistry lab! Then again, weapon *enchantment* might be closer to alchemical refinement than to metalworking.

## Time and Reliability

The standard enchantment rules make the creation of truly significant items – those that require enough energy that only the Slow and Sure option remains viable – a lengthy process, often taking months or *years*. They also make the whole business terrifyingly unreliable: at the end of all that time, even a highly skilled enchanter can destroy his work by rolling a single failure. This serves to limit magic-item manufacture, leaving it mostly in the hands of professional NPCs, and deterring wizards from ever trying really *interesting* projects. If the GM wants to encourage adventurers to make the occasional item for themselves without them having to work in large teams, then he might wish to relax things a little.

To begin with, the GM could simply eliminate the requirement for a skill roll at the climax of the process. Effective skill still matters – it determines the item's Power – but enchantment is assumed to be a methodical, many-stage task, with the occasional glitch compensated for and corrected. The GM should probably limit this change to Slow and Sure enchantment – Quick and Dirty work is *supposed* to be chancy! Of course, this approach also removes the possibility of getting an extra effect on a roll of 3; methodical, many-stage work doesn't produce any great surprises.

For a more complex approach, use *Long Tasks* (p. B346). Those rules introduce the possibility of speeding up the process by working longer hours – or by rolling many critical successes. They also require a *lot* of rolls for any project that takes weeks or months. To simplify matters, roll for each worker once per week, per 10 days, or per month instead of every day. To keep things interesting, failures might waste 1d × \$50 in special materials, as well as time.

In *any* version that requires success rolls, a failure (or at least a critical failure) might give the item a “quirk” or other odd feature, rather than result in outright disaster. An item could produce strange lighting effects or noises, not function in specific (usually rare) conditions or against certain targets, require special techniques to activate, only work some of the time or a limited number of times per day, have extra weight, make *loud* noises, or be unpleasantly hot or cold to the touch; use the *Random Side Effects Table* (p. B479) or make something up. Enough critical failures could yield an item flawed enough to qualify as one of the “cursed” artifacts found in some fantasy games – although it should usually still be of *some* use for its intended purpose. To balance this, critical successes might add minor-but-useful embellishments, probably related to the enchanter’s personality or his goals for the item.

The GM can reduce the time taken for enchantment – usually meaning the Slow and Sure method – in various ways. A flat reduction will make items cheaper and more common, but for decreases up to about 50%, the effects will be essentially marginal – more magic items will exist, but they won’t be trivial or cheap. Reducing average times to 1/4 of the standard or less will lead to a campaign far more dominated by magic-item manufacture; PC wizards might even solve problems by taking time out to work appropriate enchantments. This in turn is liable to make them more inclined to stay home, and could produce a setting in which many people own a magic item or two, regarding them as valued tools but not as wonders.

Applying *Time Spent* (p. B346) gives enchanters the option of varying the time they take in useful ways. Another possibility is simply to reduce Slow and Sure production times by 10% per level by which the maker’s relevant abilities (normally the lower of Enchant or the specific spell) exceed the Power of the item being made, to a minimum of 10%. The item’s Power should still have to be at least 15 – or 20, if it’s to be used in low mana. Such approaches will give most enchanters only marginal benefits, but real arch-mages, with spells at skill 20+, can become famously prolific. In all cases, if the GM requires a skill roll to complete the task, then the enchanter rolls against *modified* skill. Assistants can’t reduce their skill to hasten the process, and must still have level 15 in the appropriate spells.

To make Slow and Sure enchantment *much* faster, change the rule so that the energy any participant can contribute daily equals his Magery level (minimum 1 energy/day). This would, for example, let a Magery 3 enchanter with a Magery 2 assistant produce a 100-energy item in just 20 days. The GM should note that if Magery 2+ is anything but rare, this will make enchanted items substantially more common, and many powerful mages will enter the enchanting business. Combining this option with a ban on Quick and Dirty enchantment will keep items fairly rare and preserve the image of enchanting as “long-term work.”

If the GM wishes to make item manufacture especially common, at the cost of there being a lot of low-quality items, then he can relax the required minimum Power of 15. Less-powerful items might only work in high mana, though – and pieces of junk with Power 10 or less might require *very*

*high* mana! This of course negates the usual rule requiring a minimum spell skill of 15 for ceremonial magic. Such a change might make only a small difference in itself – most competent PC-grade wizards tend to know spells at 13 or 14, at least – but combine it with the option to trade skill for time, as above, and someone with Enchant and Fireball at 16 has the option to turn out a fireball wand with Power 11 in little more than a year, even without assistance. Assistants working on such projects must know Enchant and any other spells involved at the item’s intended Power level or higher.

## Spending of Yourself

In some settings, enchanters can or *must* “put something of themselves” into their works. This might be a way to speed up enchantment – or even the *only* way to create magic items. The price is loss of a crucial personal ability for an extended period, and possibly permanently.

In game terms, the enchanter converts the point value of a specific advantage – or possibly an attribute or a skill, or even a *disadvantage* voluntarily assumed – into energy points applicable to the enchantment. The GM determines what traits the wizard can “burn” for this purpose. These should always be related to the enchantment work in some way.

The enchanter might eventually be able to “re-buy” sacrificed abilities, and buy off any added disadvantages, with bonus character points and/or points gained from study (GM’s option). In other backgrounds, restoration is *impossible*. The wizard puts himself into the work permanently – and it likely remains forever linked to him in some magical sense, allowing those who possess it to use location spells or other sympathetic magic to find him, perhaps even giving a bonus for the purpose.

## Lend Skill in Items

Lend Skill (*GURPS Magic*, p. 47) and similar spells don’t have standard associated magic items. This is because such items have the potential to disturb game balance. In particular, they can enable wealthy PCs to dominate in every situation by trading cash for competence. Still, some campaigns do fine despite including “skill items” (e.g., “skill chips” in cyberpunk games), and such artifacts *do* sometimes appear in fiction or myth. They aren’t necessarily an overwhelming problem.

A game might, at minimum, feature a few hard-to-reproduce items that grant a single skill apiece – perhaps to enable the PCs to accomplish some essential heroic task for which they’re otherwise unqualified. If the GM is concerned about balance and explanations, these can have built-in limitations on how well or how often they work. They might even be products of divine craftsmanship, remnants of a Lost Age of High Magic, etc.

Every character point expended in this way grants the equivalent of 25 energy points. If wizards can use this option with Slow and Sure enchantment, then every five character points (or fraction thereof) used this way requires one day's work. This is *instead* of the usual day per energy point.

### *Resonant Designs and Materials*

Traditionally, many magic items *look* the part, with shapes and embellishments that match their abilities. This makes sense in light of the Law of Sympathy (p. 14). It also provides an excuse to reduce energy costs for some enchantments.

Optionally, the GM can reduce enchantment costs by 2% per stylistic feature that makes the item blatantly *appropriate* for its enchantment, so that anyone who looks at it and knows that it's magical can guess some of what it does. The viewer should at most require Cultural Familiarity with the maker's culture, and perhaps have to make an IQ+4 roll. If the symbolism and clues require close inspection, or a roll against a skill such as Occultism or Thaumatology, then the reduction is only 1%. Such details also tend to be stylish, flashy, or rich – thieves should certainly be strongly tempted on sight!

The maximum energy reduction should be about 10-15%, or perhaps twice that if the detail work is *very* expensive, inconvenient, and attractive to thieves – although fitting that much symbolism onto an item ought to take some ingenuity! That said, permitting even larger energy discounts would offer a way to make enchantment significantly faster, if enchanters are sufficiently clever and willing to produce some bizarre items.

*Example:* An enchanter is making an Illusion Disguise item. A mask is an obvious symbol here (-2%). Spells of illusion are “lunar magic” in his world – and everybody knows that silver, moonstones, and seed pearls correspond to the moon – so he has the mask cast in silver (-2%), decorated with those gems (-2%), and shaped like the well-known lunar moth (-2%). It's also engraved around the edge with subtle occult moon symbols (-1%). That's -9% to energy cost. Given the expense of this thing, its slightly cumbersome form, and the temptation it represents to thieves, the GM would have permitted twice that, had the player thought of further appropriate details.

Conversely, if symbolism works, then incorrect symbols should be disruptive. In that case, deliberately obscuring an item's function with inappropriate form or symbols raises energy costs. Each misleading detail *adds* 5% to the energy requirements – and the strict GM can also apply a cumulative -1 per such feature to the enchanter's skill rolls. Some misleading symbolism might simply be impossible; e.g., “No demonic item will work if marked with symbols of divine benevolence.”

*Mandatory and Significant Modifiers* (pp. 82-90) produces comparable effects, but those rules modify skill instead of energy cost. It's up to the GM to decide whether this is a good mix or a bad one. If an enchanter can find *lots* of appropriate materials and symbols, then he might be able to use some to gain skill bonuses and others to reduce energy costs.

## ENCHANTMENT THROUGH AGE

In legends and traditional fantasy tales, the best magic items are often *old*. This might be because they were created by truly great artificers or wizards whose names are likely lost to time and whose skills are certainly forgotten or inimitable. This approach works well in settings that feature a past age of gods and heroes – especially if magic is secret lore. There, the greatest artifacts tend to emerge from storied hoards and ancient ruins.

However, the “lost arts” theme doesn't fare as well in settings where thaumatology is a science and modern researchers build on their predecessors' work, taking care to preserve all of their knowledge. In such worlds, a modern item is usually preferable, just as a 21st-century firearm is generally better than an 18th-century one. Even so, the idea of mighty ancient artifacts could be compatible with that of progressive magical science, if *the passage of time itself* induces or increases magical power in items.

Enchantment through age is certainly found in backgrounds of *both* types. Whether magical knowledge is fading or advancing, older items are often the best.

### *Mechanisms*

Enchantment through age supports several possible explanations, each with its own requirements. Wizards might be fully aware of these phenomena (GM's decision), but exploiting them is another matter – except perhaps for immortal gods, patient and long-lived elves, and the occasional time traveler. Even these individuals can have problems. Finding a secure hiding place for a detectably magical item should be *difficult*.

#### **Amplification**

The structure of forces bound into a magic item may attract similar energies from the ambient mana, reinforcing and enhancing the initial enchantments. This suggests that magic doesn't obey thermodynamic principles – but that's hardly news! For example, a flaming sword might once have been a minor, primitive item, but after sitting in the man-god's tomb for 500 years, absorbing “unused mana,” it projects the heat of a furnace.

The only requirement is that the item starts out enchanted – although it need not be powerful. Then it merely has to survive in a location where mana is available. Resting in a quiet tomb, for instance, is fine.

#### **Significance**

Items might gain power from their symbolic value and the psychic import of events in which they're involved. For instance, the sword carried by every ruler of the country for 20 generations – and wielded in a dozen famous wars – can't help but become magical.

The key requirement here is *significance*. The sword or crown of a king, or the ornate gates of a great city, will benefit much more than some lost and forgotten tomb ornament. Such items need not be enchanted to start with. They also don't have to see *heavy* use – although it helps to have the occasional legend wrapped around them.

## Use

Objects may soak up available life energy or emotional power. This could in turn lead to magical forces congregating around them as they're used, amplifying their usefulness. Mundane items employed in wizardly activities might even absorb some of the ambient *magical* energy in such a way that they can eventually reinforce or facilitate similar magical workings.

*Use* is the main requirement for this kind of enchantment, which favors items that see practical employment. For example, a sword that's neither famous nor used by anyone special could become magical after serving in war after war, absorbing power from all the deaths, berserker rages, terrified last stands, and acts of raw courage that it witnesses. Thus, a sword hung on the lord's wall as a memento and an ornament will gain little, while one passed down in a family of obscure-but-capable mercenaries who live by fighting will have plenty of opportunities to gain power (which doesn't mean that such things will be common – pragmatic mercenaries generally trade their weapons in for something newer from time to time).

*Emotion* can also lend psychic energy to the process. The weapons of a berserker or a great hero will usually gain more than the arms of a regular soldier who's mostly focused on survival and the next meal, just as the pen of a romantic poet or the crown of a high-minded ruler (or a crazed tyrant) will gain more than the possessions of a casual hack or a dutiful, dull monarch. The emotions involved often “flavor” the power gained, helping determine *what* enchantments time creates (see *Suitable Enchantments*, below). The GM decides what circumstances induce which enchantments.

## Rate of Enchantment

In all cases, an item that qualifies for this process gains power in proportion to the time spent in appropriate circumstances. The suggested rate is an energy point per year. This assumes normal mana; halve the rate in low mana,

double it in high mana, and *triple* it in very high mana. Anything below low mana grants no significant energy. In variable mana (pp. 58-59), take an average. Aspected mana (p. 59) “flavors” the enchantment as the GM sees fit; the same goes for wild mana (p. 59) or twisted mana (p. 60), only worse.

The GM can increase this rate if he wants lots of “ancient” items of power in play but hasn't given the setting a long history – or if he expects too many artifacts to rust, rot, or be destroyed. A rate of 10 points/year will produce items that develop significantly in the course of a human lifespan. The GM can also *reduce* the rate – e.g., to a point every five or 10 years – to limit the number of powerful enchantments in a world with millennia of magical history.

These rules can be combined with *Magic Items as Advantages* (pp. 113-115). Character points generated by age can be spent on appropriate advantages with gadget limitations. The standard rate is a point per 25 years in normal mana, modified as above.

## Suitable Enchantments

The GM decides what enchantments an item gains and when they develop, bearing in mind that these rules represent the work of weird and significance-driven magical forces. The uses to which the item was put, and the peculiarities of the local mana and mundane environment, can have large and sometimes perverse effects. A sword that spends 750 years in a glacier may gain the ability to freeze victims . . . or to protect its bearer from cold. A ring that spends a century in a phoenix's nest may grant protection from flames, the power of flight, or guaranteed regular fertility.

Remember that nobody actually has to cast any new enchantments. Indeed, residents of the game world are unlikely to realize that the item is gaining power with time. Since no specific enchantment is involved, the results of this process can vary radically from any spells known in the setting. They might even use entirely different rules of magic!

## Activating Items

Most standard magic items have operational requirements similar to those of spells. In particular, they take time to activate and require FP. This is simple and balanced, but not especially close to such artifacts' behavior in many stories. If the GM is prepared to improvise, then he can replace this approach with a more varied and arbitrary system of activation methods.

Any item might consume some kind of fuel, or call for special circumstances or skills to work. This can range from something cheap and simple to replace a cost of 1-3 FP (e.g., a jug that turns a pint of water into a salve that provides a Resist Fire effect if used immediately; a Geology+1 skill roll to operate a Seek Earth amulet), through moderately difficult or costly measures in place of 5-15 FP (e.g., a Thaumatology roll at -8 to work an Analyze Magic device; a coffin that casts Zombie on any corpse within it, but only

if buried in a black wasteland bog), to vastly expensive or unique requirements for mighty magics (e.g., a staff that must be dipped in a roc's heart-blood to cast Resurrection). Other items may carry dangerous special costs (e.g., boots that grant Great Haste while aging the wearer by a month per minute used), or just have highly specific purposes and only work “for the cause.” Spending FP is one possible trigger among many, but not the only option.

This sort of thing requires GM judgment – not only when the item is created, but also in play. If the GM uses special activating conditions to make items too hard to use, then players will dismiss them as worthless. If activation is too easy, however, then items may take over the campaign, overshadowing PC abilities. Done right, treating every artifact as a one-off device with its own eccentricities is very much in keeping with many styles of fantasy.



The GM should be cautious about letting Powerstones or other power sources benefit from these rules – they could easily gain *considerable* power over the centuries. It's easy to justify a veto, though: because a Powerstone soaks up energy from its surroundings by recharging, there's none left to enhance it. If such things *do* improve over time, then they should probably gain major quirks, too; "Will only recharge on the spot where it spent 200 years" would be fine.

## ENCHANTMENT THROUGH DEEDS

Noteworthy deeds may enhance already-enchanted items and/or grant magical power to mundane objects through a process similar to but faster than *Enchantment Through Age* (pp. 110-112). In particular, enchantment through deeds shares the property of allowing artifacts to gain power by being used in great events, perhaps because of their symbolic significance or because of the associated emotional energies (especially when death and destruction are involved) – most fabled magic items *are* said to have been present at historic incidents. While there are no simple rules to cover this effect, the following examples provide rough guidelines:

- Killing someone with a weapon – enchanted or not – can grant power, provided that the killing was a goal in itself. For instance, assassinating a ruler would count, but not merely eliminating another guard (although slaying 100 guards might be noteworthy enough to confer some dark power). This may grant from 20% to 100% of the victim's character-point value as energy points; 100% is the recommended default. Defeating monsters, spirits, etc., also qualifies, *if* they're famous or important, and not just another minor incident in an adventuring career.

- Stealing the crown jewels using a cloak of magical stealth or a lockpick inherited from a master thief could be worth dozens of energy points – or *hundreds*, if the general public learns some of the details. Stealing a flagon of wine from a shop would be worth nothing, *unless* the act became a key part of the legend of a great romantic rogue.

- Negotiating peace between two kingdoms is potentially a legendary deed, although one that tends to be overlooked in stories. Doing so with the aid of a mind-control device cheapens the accomplishment, however, and so would only be worth a few points. The circlet worn by one of the kings involved, mentioned in ballads and depicted in a famous painting of the event, could gain some points toward a charisma-enhancing enchantment, or one that helps in assessing or calming others' emotions.

- The act of creating an item can *itself* be a significant or famous deed. The smith who forges a very fine blade for the founder of the empire, or the jeweler who carves a huge gem into an uncannily lifelike shape, may find that he has imbued his work with magic. Optionally, any time a craftsman rolls a critical success for an important act of creation, roll again. A second critical success gives the item a noteworthy enchantment of the GM's choice, as well as ensuring that it's of the best possible quality. (If subsequent rolls are required, and any are critical failures, then the enchantment can gain a significant quirk.) Ordinary success on the second roll may give the object a minor enchantment, at the GM's option.

In all cases, divide energy by 25 if you need character points for the enchantment.

This approach is easy to combine with enchantment through age: an item can have a long history of dedicated use that includes some special incidents, and together these grant it substantial power. It's also possible to use this system in concert with *Magic Items as Advantages* (pp. 113-115); simply take the character-point value of the deed or incident for this purpose.

### *Naming Objects*

It may help enchantment through deeds if the item involved has a *name*. Unlike other aspects of the effect, this can be consciously controlled – although famous objects may also pick up informal nicknames. To be magically effective, a *deliberately* given name has to be decided while the artifact is being made. During the crafting process, the maker must inscribe the name on his work; this requires a Symbol Drawing roll, by either the craftsman or somebody who can instruct him. Alternatively, if the GM uses *Talents as Magic* (pp. 198-199), he might allow craft skills aided by magical Talents to produce named items. In all cases, the creator must be literate in order to mark the name correctly.

If the GM decides that the name is appropriate, the object looks the part and works very well (which usually requires it to be of at least fine quality), *and* the owner makes an effort to make the item famous (bribing bards to mention it in tales, brandishing it and saying its name in public whilst making a Public Speaking roll, etc.), then the item might receive 3d energy points immediately. The process then continues as above, under GM control. The item should have a good chance of eventually developing *some* kind of powers, however.

Generous GMs may even make this a primary method for enchanting items. In that case, a PC who uses famous, named items on an adventure gets bonus character points equal to what he earned for himself to divide equally among those items; multiply by 25 to get equivalent energy points. Less-generous GMs can give items only 1/2 or 1/3 as many points. The GM still controls what enchantments develop, but the wielder may be able to influence this by how he uses the item, using Divination spells or astrology to determine the influences at work on it, or carefully casting temporary spells through it.

### *Traumatic Enchantment*

A variant of enchantment through deeds is enchantment through an emotionally or psychically *significant* incident – which may be more failure or disaster than "deed." This often involves a death, with the individual's life force being converted into magical energy; for example, a hero cut down while attempting a task that he had sworn on his life to accomplish may imbue his weapon with the power of his determination. Death isn't absolutely required, though; for instance, a betrayed lover might leave rage and spite imprinted on the necklace that he bought as a love-gift before he learned of the infidelity. And death might not be enough if it's ordinary – even a soldier dying in battle doesn't necessarily release appropriate psychic energies.

The amount of energy involved is up to the GM, but it should be proportionate to the life and death energies or the emotions attached to the event. As with a weapon used in some significant killing, the death of an item's owner may grant from 20% to 100% of his point total in the form of energy points. Alternatively, the GM could use 10% of the wielder's point total multiplied by the absolute value of any mental disadvantages that his death somehow leaves "open" or "unfulfilled." If the individual in question doesn't die but is involved in an extraordinary event that brings his determination into focus, then simply use the absolute value of any relevant disadvantages – and possibly that of advantages that imply supernatural determination, such as Blessed and Higher Purpose. The GM *might* permit a PC involved in a traumatic event to make a Will roll at -5 to trigger this process semi-deliberately, if the scene is roleplayed well.

*Example:* Brother Hans has a Sense of Duty to his faith (-10 points). This has caused him to dedicate his life to restoring its greatest temple, which was burned down years ago – an Obsession (-10 points). He also has a Higher Purpose (5 points).

One day, Hans annoys a local herbalist, who slips some special mushrooms into his food. Hans nearly dies, hallucinates for days, and awakes with instructions from spirit-messengers sent by his god. This experience was traumatic, so Hans makes a Will-5 roll. He succeeds and acquires 25 energy points (10+10+5) to turn his holy symbol, which he clutched throughout his illness, into an enchanted item. The

GM decides to turn those 25 energy points into a character point, and incorporates the Autotrance perk into the item.

Later, Hans is martyred by unbelievers. He makes another Will-5 roll in the process, and his holy symbol becomes a significant relic. Hans was a 175-point character at his death; 10% of that, multiplied by 20 (10+10), gives 350 energy points. The GM assigns 200 of those points to imbuing the symbol with the Sense Spirit spell, enabling it to indicate when spirits are within a two-yard radius of the bearer, and keeps the other 150 in reserve. The relic will accumulate more energy through age and deeds; its bearers will be noted for their ability to sense and talk with invisible entities.

## DEVOTIONAL ENCHANTMENT

It may be possible for priests and mystics to create miraculous artifacts by praying or meditating, focusing their souls on higher powers or requesting divine aid or guidance, and then imbuing items with the power this concentrates. For example, by praying over a weapon to be wielded by a champion of the faith, a devout priest might in effect enchant it. Rules for this appear in *Meditation, Holiness, or Study* (pp. 53-54), and are most flavorful when combined with *Symbol Magic* (pp. 168-179). Devotional enchantment also works well alongside *Magic Items as Advantages* (below): simply find the character-point value of the time spent (see *Creating Character Points*, p. 54) and use those points to buy advantages that the deity involved would, in the GM's opinion, be willing to grant.

# MAGIC ITEMS AS ADVANTAGES

Some or all magic items might be advantages with gadget limitations, bought using character points – an approach that integrates well with *Enchantment Through Age* (pp. 110-112) and *Enchantment Through Deeds* (pp. 112-113). If the GM allows PCs to create such "advantage items" in play, then this should be a lengthy and creative process, possibly with a high materials cost. Just coming up with a method for making a particular item may call for *Magical Invention* (p. 10).

The manufacturing process itself could follow the guidelines for learning (p. B292), with every 200 hours of effort corresponding to a character point. Alternatively, it might go faster but require some kind of skill roll at the end. Failure wastes the effort. Success means the item is functional but won't actually work until the first owner "attunes" to it by paying character points equal to the modified advantage cost. Subsequent users might also have to attune, or – if the item is designed to work for anybody – the initial owner's efforts may have brought the magic permanently to life.

## ADVANTAGES

An item could confer almost any advantage. Good luck charms might give Extra Life, Hard to Kill, Luck, Serendipity, or Super Luck. Magical weapons, armor, or jewelry may grant Innate Attack, Damage Resistance, or

Enhanced Defenses – and improved defenses from items *do* add to those bought as innate advantages, perhaps enabling PCs to exceed normal maxima. A powerful holy relic could even bestow True Faith. Social advantages are also possibilities, and likely to be the result of subtle world-twisting; e.g., a blessing might guarantee that the recipient can always find somewhere to stay in strange towns (Claim to Hospitality), while a magical crown could ensure that its wearer is always treated with respect (Social Regard). Allies and Patrons are suitable, too, if given the Summonable or Highly Accessible enhancement, respectively, to transform them from social to mental advantages.

*Destiny* is an interesting case: the bearer of an item may be supernaturally *guided* by it. If he fulfills this Destiny, then he may trade the artifact's point value for a positive Reputation, Status, etc. Of course, this benefit will be less than one attained by someone who achieves a similar "innate" Destiny, but that's a problem with relying on magic. The object itself may lose its enchantment at this point, or it may gain the ability to confer a similar or brand-new Destiny on somebody else – probably an NPC, perhaps another PC. Of course, if it always confers the Destiny of becoming King of the Land, and the land can only have one king at a time, then the old bearer will doubtless treat it as a threat to be locked away!

*Goodgulf hastily withdrew a tinder box from his robes, and frantically striking sparks off the walls and floor, he managed to light the end of his wand, producing a flickering glow about half as bright as a dead firefly.*

*“Such magic,” said Bromosel.*

*– The Harvard Lampoon,  
Bored of the Rings*

## ENHANCEMENTS

The GM decides what enhancements suit advantages bought as magic items. He may *require* Switchable (p. 200) if the item is easily donned and slipped off (e.g., an invisibility ring). One new enhancement is often appropriate for magic weapons.

### *Melee Attack (ST-Based)*

+100%

Only for crushing, cutting, or impaling Innate Attacks. You can add your dice of thrust or swing damage to your Innate Attack's damage. Take the Melee Attack limitation (p. B112) as usual, and then add a +100% enhancement. All of Melee Attack's normal restrictions apply.

Generally, cutting and crushing attacks add swing damage while impaling attacks add thrust damage. If an impaling attack adds swing damage, then the GM should apply the rules for picks (p. B405).

Permitted for general use, this enhancement provides a cheaper alternative to Striking ST, with much the same effects. Thus, except possibly in cinematic campaigns, the GM should probably reserve it for appropriate special cases such as melee weapon gadgets.

## LIMITATIONS

Magic tends to have odd limitations; magic items, even more so. They are, of course, a kind of gadget, and subject to *Gadget Limitations* (pp. B116-117). Many are Breakable – but great magics sometimes produce effectively invulnerable items, disposing of which may call for a dangerous, trilogy-generating quest. Artifacts subject to such complex destruction methods don't qualify for Breakable; their destructibility is more plot feature than genuine problem. Some items lose their powers entirely when damaged, while others can be repaired – although they tend to require a bit more skill and effort than mundane gear. Most are Unique, unless supplied by a powerful friend who can make more . . . or unless they have the ability to twist fate to ensure that they *always* return to their rightful owner when lost.

Mana Sensitive (p. B34) is often standard for magic items. Holy or “spirit-powered” items, and the products of exotic supernatural power, might be exceptions. Of course, such artifacts tend to have their own peculiar limitations.

Temporary Disadvantage (p. B115) can reflect a curse or a “gesa” that influences the item's bearer, or a personality somehow imprinted on the artifact that can impose itself on the user. Any such disadvantage is only active when the item is actually *used*. For one that applies when the object is merely *carried*, see *Disadvantages* (below).

Uncontrollable (p. B116) can make an item more trouble than it's worth. The usual implication is that it incorporates a spirit with a mind of its own. Note that what the *item* regards as a stressful situation isn't always the same as what its *wielder* finds stressful!

## DISADVANTAGES

A magic item may also include *disadvantages*, which should take the same gadget limitations as any advantages it confers. These disadvantages affect the bearer whenever he *carries* the item, regardless of whether he actually *uses* it. For a disadvantage that only applies when an advantage is active, use the Temporary Disadvantage limitation.

*Example:* A magic pendant blessed by the Goddess of Love herself might give its wearer Charisma 3 at the price of inducing Lecherousness. If the problem cuts in only when the wearer deliberately activates the Charisma, then that's Temporary Disadvantage. If it persists as long as the pendant is anywhere on the owner's person, then that's a full-scale disadvantage.

The GM should make it hard for PCs to put such items aside, or at least give them lots of trouble about recovering the things when they're needed in a hurry. He's free to treat an object in a backpack, a satchel, or even the trunk of a car as “carried” for this purpose. And some artifacts *object* to being put aside.

Alternatively, the disadvantage may actually apply directly to the item, whether or not it's being carried. For example, it might have an Enemy who wants to destroy it, but who doesn't care much either way about the people who use it. Or it might have a Destiny to be involved in some disaster. If the owner carries it, he'll be drawn towards that event, while if he leaves it at home, he'll have free will – but the *item* still has the Destiny . . .

Artifacts may also carry a Divine Curse, especially if they've been involved in events that annoyed some deity. The curse might even persist in the item's absence, if the god chooses to curse “anyone who ever uses this thing”! It's probably unfair for the GM to inflict a major disadvantage on a PC merely because he picked up an interesting-looking piece of loot, but if the atonement condition is relatively easy, then this can set up an interesting short-term plot.

### *Disadvantages Already Possessed*

If an item imposes a disadvantage that the user already possesses, then the two effects may be cumulative. For example, an artifact's bad Reputation and its bearer's may sum, making the poor sap *really* despised. If this doesn't work out, however – e.g., if the item inflicts a mental

disadvantage that its owner already has – then simply recalculate the item’s cost *for that person*. This might involve finding the difference between a lesser, innate level of a disadvantage and a greater, item-granted one. The same principle holds if an item-bestowed advantage has a Temporary Disadvantage limitation that overlaps with the wielder’s own personality.

In short, a magic item’s point value *isn’t* absolute – it’s simply the cost for a given individual to have that device on his character sheet. A consequence of this is that an evil person might have to pay more points than a less-corrupt individual does for an artifact with built-in evil disadvantages – but if the nicer person takes and uses the item, he may be corrupted. Acquiring objects of power from the bodies of slain dark lords is a notoriously bad idea!

## INTERACTIONS

If objects of this kind use the same basic magical power as spells or rituals, then they will show up to magic-detecting spells and advantages, stop working in no mana, and so on. For more on this, see Chapters 7 and 8.

Remove Enchantment and Suspend Enchantment spells *might* be able to remove or suppress such an item’s magic, although the GM should be careful about using these countermeasures too freely – especially if they’re permanent and if players have spent character points for magical equipment. Still, part of the point of gadget limitations is to make advantages vulnerable to removal. If necessary, treat each advantage as a separate “spell” (unless two or more advantages are *very* closely linked, in which case they may count as one – GM’s option). For this purpose, the effective energy cost to place the advantage/enchantment equals 25x its character-point value. The caster will have to make a close, lengthy study of the artifact beforehand to count as knowing exactly what “spell” is involved, and will almost always rate as not knowing how to cast it himself.

Spells such as Dispel Magic and Suspend Magic can’t permanently stop items from working but *might* be able to suppress or prevent their effects. For example, the wearer of a crown that grants magical Mind Control can have his victims freed. In that example, the bearer resists the spell with his IQ plus any Talent; see Chapter 8 for other cases.

### *Power Talents and Gadget Items*

Advantages that are grouped into powers often have associated Talents that give a bonus to relevant attribute and skill rolls; see *Power Talents* (p. 203). The GM may treat advantages built into a magical gadget as being likewise grouped, and let the item’s owner buy a Talent with it. This typically costs 5 points/level, unless the item is extraordinarily versatile. It represents training or experience at using the device, and an understanding of its function. If the item is lost, then the Talent becomes valueless – but that’s a problem with relying on equipment.

## EXAMPLES

The GM need not permit the following artifacts in *his* campaign, but they illustrate how to build magic items as advantages.

### *Magic Sword*

This enchanted blade can do significant damage even in the hands of a weak user, cut through armor, and injure intangible foes. Capable of stabbing *and* chopping, it’s bought as two Innate Attacks that will use *Alternative Attacks* (p. B61): Impaling Attack 1d, for a base 8 points, and Cutting Attack 1d, for a base 7 points. Both have these modifiers:

- Affects Insubstantial, +20%
- Armor Divisor (2), +50%
- Breakable, DR 12, SM -3, -25% (DR is better than for an ordinary sword, thanks to its enchantment)
- Can Be Stolen, -20% (requires stealth or trickery; disarming in combat also works, but that’s trickier than a Quick Contest of DX)
- Mana Sensitive, -10%
- Melee Attack, Reach 1, ST-Based, +75% (adds thrust damage to the Impaling Attack, swing damage to the Cutting Attack)
- Unique, -25%

This adds up to +65%. The Impaling Attack ends up costing 14 points. The Cutting Attack comes to 12 points; thus, as an alternative attack, it adds 3 points to total cost. Final item cost is 17 points.

The GM rules that the sword uses the Broadsword skill. Even in the hands of a fairly unremarkable ST 12 warrior, it does 2d-1 impaling or 2d+2 cutting against half DR!

### *Djinn Lamp*

When rubbed, this lamp summons a djinni that must grant the user’s wishes to the best of its ability. The djinni is an “ultra-powerful individual” relative to any ordinary human, and so worth a base 20 points as a Patron. It appears on 15 or less (the magic is occasionally subject to arcane restrictions), tripling cost to 60 points. These modifiers apply:

- Breakable, DR 6, Cannot Be Repaired, SM -6, -35%
- Can Be Stolen, -40% (requires an unopposed DX roll)
- Equipment, +100% (the djinni supplies *valuable* equipment)
- Highly Accessible, +50%
- Special Abilities, +100% (for extraordinary reach in space and time)
- Unique, -25%
- Unwilling, -50% (the djinni serves because it’s magically bound)

This comes to +100%, making final cost 120 points. The *lamp* isn’t Mana Sensitive – it’s a manifestation of deep, ancient power – but mana may limit the *djinni’s* abilities.

# ITEM DRAWBACKS AND PERSONALITIES

Magic items in myth and fiction are frequently special and complicated. They aren't just hard to operate – they sometimes have *personalities*. This doesn't necessarily mean that they're sentient or even sapient. Some certainly are, but others have “personalities” more in the sense that a car with mechanical quirks does, or influence the *user's* attitude.

## RESTRICTED ITEMS

The simplest examples are items with magical restrictions built in, often because the maker wanted to limit how they could be used, or because it made the creation process cheaper or easier. A wizard can accomplish this via limiting enchantments (see *GURPS Magic*, pp. 68-69), especially Attune, Bane, Limit, and Link. An enchanter can also influence the ways in which wielders will use a device by enchanting it with “always on” versions of Mind Control spells such as Emotion Control, Lesser Geas, Suggestion, and Great Geas. Many of these spells affect a “wearer,” and for this purpose, anyone holding the object firmly may qualify – particularly if its enchantments include Hex! Any of the spells mentioned above might emerge in an artifact enchanted through time or deeds, if its history suggests that such results would be appropriate.

For a different kind of restriction, see *Activating Items* (p. 111).

## Cursed Items

A special category of restriction is the supernatural curse. An enchanter could include this in an item deliberately, as a trap or a protection against misuse. Alternatively, it may result from a twisted form of enchantment through time or deeds; e.g., an item used by a long series of unlucky, misanthropic owners might acquire a hatred of humanity.

The enchantment version of Curse is one obvious and temporary possibility . . . but a magic sword enchanted with Emotion Control to induce jealousy or anger, or a Lesser Geas that compels the wielder to attack his enemies as soon as possible, can *really* mess up someone's life! An angry, twisted wizard – or perhaps enchantment through deeds – might give a weapon a Geas directed against “orcs,” “Southlanders,” etc., as a tool of continuing revenge. All the people who get killed carrying it are just collateral damage.

Cursed items often include a Hex to make them impossible to put down. However, clever enchanters can give them enough obvious benefits, and make their drawbacks sufficiently subtle, that users will keep on wielding them even after their nature has become clear. Mind Control enchantments to impair the bearer's judgment are helpful but not essential.

## WILLFUL AND SAPIENT ITEMS

In some stories, magic items go beyond mere quirki-ness. They may or may not have *minds*, but they definitely display a degree of *willpower*. They might be strongly directed toward some goal or ideal, and can usually influence events and often their users. While advanced enchantments can cover much of this, certain items are complex and intelligent enough to be treated as *characters*.

## Item IQ

Items with IQ 1-5 are classed as *willful*. Willful artifacts are on a par with animals, although their mental processes are very different. They can form and convey emotions and basic concepts, but not use language. In general:

- IQ 1** – Item has minimal awareness. It can pursue simple objectives and deal with very simple categories.
- IQ 2** – Item has the ability to make basic decisions, recognize fairly subtle distinctions, and learn that some things are good or bad for it. Its personality is still minimal.
- IQ 3** – Item can form a basic relationship with its user, and display a certain amount of initiative and even ingenuity, but is still very goal-oriented.
- IQ 4** – Item is the equal of a dog or a cat, with a very distinctive personality – possibly including tastes and preferences, although it may be dominated by “instincts.”
- IQ 5** – Item verges on sapience. It may even be able to understand the essence of spoken communication, and to plan ahead for more than a few minutes.

Artifacts with IQ 6+ are *sapient*. They're fully conscious and self-aware, with true personalities. They could even be PCs in a sufficiently offbeat game! While a willful item is primarily a tool and a problem, a sapient one can be completely independent.

## Enchantment Spells

The obvious way to give an item a nonzero IQ is via the Weapon Spirit enchantment (*GURPS Magic*, p. 64). There's no reason to limit this spell to weapons. For example, a wizard's robe might be enchanted to watch the wearer's back, a king's scepter could be given the personality of his father's trusted advisor, or a child's toy may be turned into a teacher. Of course, “mentor items” run the risk of growing out-of-date and inflexible as the world changes around them – and who'll dare contradict a venerated relic?

Weapon Spirit can produce a sapient item, but the enchanter may set its IQ lower if he prefers that his creation not think too much. As written, the spell *doesn't*

permit the object's personality to control any other magic that's present on the item – a somewhat arbitrary shortcoming. If the GM wants this to be possible but not automatic, then he can let the artifact's creator modify its other enchantments with a Link enchantment: "Only works with the approval of the inhabiting spirit."

In some settings, Weapon Spirit may be seen as fearful necromancy. An equally valid interpretation is that the deceased acts purely as a "template" for the item's personality, and that his soul isn't trapped or kept from going on to the afterlife. Still, the spell might be illegal. If the GM wants willful or sapient creations to be possible without any hint of death magic, then he can create Weapon Spirit variants that acquire the requisite mental template from somewhere else; for example, they might be cast immediately after Create Elemental, Awaken Craft Spirit, Planar Summons, or Summon Demon, and lock the beings brought by those spells into the object. There should probably be a different version of Weapon Spirit for each preceding spell, with the summoning spell replacing Summon Spirit as a prerequisite. The GM determines the personalities of the spirits used – including their skills, mental advantages and disadvantages, and quirks. Elementals would mostly be direct and straightforward, craft spirits might be obsessed with the use and function of the artifacts they embody, and demons should be violent and destructive, if capable of subtlety and misdirection.

Optionally, the GM might allow willful and sapient items created with Weapon Spirit to have higher Will than IQ, up to the template spirit's original Will. This benefits some skills, and can make it harder for an item's user to browbeat it into forgetting its purpose. Each point of Will in excess of IQ adds 50 points to the spell's energy cost.

### *Enchantment Through Time or Deeds*

Traditionally, willful artifacts often get that way through the long-term effects of existence in a magical world and the psychic intensity of great events; in other words, via enchantment by time or deeds. While the GM could treat such an outcome as equivalent to a casting of Weapon Spirit – especially if the acquired personality is based on that of a previous (deceased) user – this tends to be



extremely expensive in energy points. The GM is free to bend the rules and declare that anything that gains major enchantments through time or deeds can also develop a will, when this would be interesting. An item involved in grand deeds performed in wild mana (p. 59) should have a good chance of becoming willful, too. And if a wizard casts Awaken Craft Spirit on an object with this much magic soaked in, then something of the spirit might linger permanently, at the GM's whim.

Weapons *forged* in areas of wild mana may also tend to turn out willful. This could happen to any weapon or only to enchanted weapons (GM's decision). It *might* also be accomplished deliberately, without spells – although the maker may have to possess Magery and make a permanent sacrifice, perhaps a point of HT, to invest the item with some of his own life force.

Items treated as characters may also have been empowered through time or deeds. If the GM wants to track the details, then he should use the character-point equivalents of the time or events involved, as described for the relevant enchantment method.

### *Common Item Abilities*

Even minor willful items should be *unique*, with peculiarities and purposes. Several features are quite common, though – verging on universal. These may be incorporated through enchantments or bought as advantages with character points from time, deeds, etc. Some advantages require an IQ roll to use, which severely limits low-IQ items. To improve effectiveness, either give such artifacts a power Talent (p. 203) with all of their magical abilities or use the Reliable enhancement from **GURPS Powers**.

#### **Communication**

Weapon Spirit grants an item a limited ability to communicate with its user. Adding further enchantments can improve this. Use the enchantment cost for incorporating the spell into a staff or a wand. If a communication spell costs energy to use, then the artifact will also need a built-in Powerstone or a Power enchantment.

Items treated as characters may have Telecommunication – usually Telesend with the Touch-Based limitation and perhaps the Universal enhancement, although other types of communication are possible, especially for high-tech devices. At IQ 5 or less, only simple images or feelings can be sent. Mind Probe and Mind Reading, with Touch-Based, suit intrusive items. Some artifacts establish a Mindlink or a Special Rapport with their users.

In all cases, if an item's IQ is 5 or less, then it *cannot* know any language (see *Sapience and Language*, p. B23).

#### **Control**

Many willful items can control their users, or at least influence them. This can wreck or shorten a wielder's life, as the item obeys some wild motivation. In some cases, an item can only control someone touching or using it; in others, it can extend its influence over a distance, perhaps to acquire a new owner if its current one isn't doing what it wants. Some artifacts regularly get their possessors killed as they seek out more useful or easily manipulated bearers.

For items enchanted with spells, Mind Control enchantments are an obvious choice; see *Restricted Items* (p. 116). An item with a conscious Weapon Spirit may be enchanted like a staff or a wand used to cast such spells, but giving the *spirit* the ability to cast the spell on its *holder*. It will need a built-in Powerstone or a Power enchantment to cover the energy cost.

For items treated as characters, use the Mind Control advantage, possibly with Touch-Based or other limitations. Powerful artifacts may have the Conditioning enhancement; weaker but insidious ones can have the Conditioning Only limitation. Some might be able to dominate bearers so completely that they gain Puppet.

### Movement

Willful items can't *usually* move around unaided, but it's not unknown. Some can at least come to their users over short distances, or fight for brief periods. A few can travel to their owners when lost.

The Loyal Sword and Dancing Weapon enchantments cover much of this. The GM may also allow these spells on small non-weapon artifacts. Combining Dancing Weapon with Weapon Spirit (and possibly Link) gives a self-motivated, mobile item. To bestow even greater mobility, the GM can develop variant enchantments based on Movement spells.

Items treated as characters might combine the No Legs (Portable) disadvantage (p. 119) with Warp, or No Legs (Aerial) with Flight. Mobility advantages may take limitations such as Emergencies Only and Limited Use.

### Items as Characters

An item with a bundle of enchantments is still defined as an *object* in game terms. To be played as a *character*, it will need a character sheet. (Converting enchanted items into character format is an interesting exercise for gamers who enjoy rules tinkering!) The GM can then handle it as an NPC Ally, Patron, or Dependent – or even allow it as a PC.

When designing or playing such characters, remember that items often have great goals and desires to accompany their strong and assertive personalities. This can be something as simple as a magic sword that wants to kill, as odd as a spirit-controlled mannequin searching for true love, or as grandiose as a demonic weapon seeking to provoke Armageddon. Artifacts may also be loyal to their makers or intended users; even if they function for other people, they might seek to twist events so that they eventually return to their rightful owners. If nothing else, they're liable to become impetuous at crucial moments, or grow petulant if their wielder is distracted by "lesser" concerns such as friendship.

The GM should be aware that some players may regard sapient items bought as Allies as merely a cheap way to acquire "gadget" advantages. He should *only* treat a magic item as an NPC if he's willing to have it function as one, complete with a personality and the ability to pursue its own agenda. An artifact that can neither communicate nor influence its owner's behavior, and that has no abilities that aren't under its user's direct control, *isn't* an NPC – it's an object, to be treated as such.

### Attributes and Secondary Characteristics

These are *general* guidelines. Some items are interesting exceptions!

- *ST* may well be 0, but a "dancing weapon" might have Striking *ST*, a vehicle could have Lifting *ST*, etc.

- *DX* is mostly a matter of style. Weapons tend to be a little defter than the average human – perhaps *DX* 11-13. Most other items can probably be left at *DX* 10.

- *IQ* rarely exceeds 10-11. An intellectual item may seem rather strange, although an intelligent spirit bound into artifact form can be interesting. Note that anything with *IQ* 6+ has a voice unless given the Cannot Speak disadvantage.

- *HT* is of limited use, but most items are fairly resistant to shocks and weakening effects, so *HT* 11-13 seems about right.

- *HP* should be adjusted to weight-appropriate levels, even if *ST* is 0.

- *Will* may significantly outstrip *IQ* for items. Most are focused on their purpose and hard to dominate.

- *Per* might also be quite high, especially for items that exist to gather information or guard against danger.

- *FP* can be used to power abilities. Increase *FP* for an item that carries a large charge of energy; reduce *FP* for one with limited reserves. Complex mechanical devices with the Machine meta-trait don't have an *FP* score; see *Machines and Fatigue* (p. B16).

- *Basic Speed* is useful for items that will use their abilities in combat.

- *Basic Move* may be rendered irrelevant by physical disadvantages.

- *Size Modifier* is often different from zero – and usually negative – for items.

### Advantages

Magic items can have a wide range of advantages; see *Magic Items as Advantages* (pp. 113-115) and Chapter 7. Everything under *Common Item Abilities* (pp. 117-118) still applies, but items-as-characters have more options, possibly including social features. Some specific concerns:

- Damage Resistance should suit the object's material form, and usually has the Can't Wear Armor limitation. An item with parts made of substantially different materials may have the Partial limitation.

- Digital Mind is appropriate for magically awakened computers and the like.

- Doesn't Breathe and Doesn't Sleep are the norm. Doesn't Eat or Drink is extremely common, but certain items need fuel.

- Immunity to Metabolic Hazards (or lesser versions of Resistant), Pressure Support, Radiation Tolerance (if radiation is a concern in the campaign), Temperature Tolerance, Unaging, and Vacuum Support are all logical requirements for nonliving items.

- Injury Tolerance is usual for items. Most are Homogenous or Unliving, and have No Blood, Eyes, Head, Neck, and/or Vitals, as appropriate. Unkillable 1 may suit robust items.

- Reawakened could be appropriate if the item was created with a Weapon Spirit spell and has begun to recall something about its spirit's previous life.

Items may also have perks. Accessory in particular suits those with built-in secondary functions.

### Disadvantages

Disadvantage totals for items often go far beyond the normal limit for living PCs. Items may also have quirks – especially colorful *mental* quirks! A few other notes:

- Mental disadvantages are common; e.g., Bloodlust and Callous are traditional with magic weapons, Slave Mentality suits items that exist only to serve, and completely non-socialized entities may have Clueless, Low Empathy, or No Sense of Humor.

- Physical disadvantages should be related to physical form; e.g., Fragile, No Fine Manipulators, and No Legs.

- Social disadvantages such as Dead Broke and Social Stigma (Valuable Property) are likely. Few items can avoid being used, which can rate as a Duty.

### Meta-Traits

Certain meta-traits are highly appropriate for items, and often incorporate advantages and disadvantages discussed above. Body of Metal suits magic weapons, Machine fits enchanted mechanisms, and AI is likely for magically awakened computers. Mentally limited artifacts might have Automaton or even Domestic Animal. A magical vehicle could have Ground Vehicle.

### Skills

Many possibilities exist! Some items advise their owners in battle (Soldier, Tactics, or Strategy), in polite society (Savoir-Faire), or in the wilderness (Survival). Others are repositories of knowledge (Area Knowledge, Expert Skills, History, Theology, etc.). Those that can move and fight on their own need combat skills.

## NEW DISADVANTAGES FOR ITEMS

Two new disadvantages are useful when building magic items as characters.

### *No Legs (Portable)*

-30 points

You are incapable of moving under your *own* power, but compact enough to be carried around. You have Basic Move 0 in all environments and get no extra points for this; furthermore, you can't have traits that imply movement-related body parts such as legs, wheels, tracks, fins, wings, or jets. You aren't anchored in place, though – your shape and size let you be carried (like a weapon or a gadget), worn (like clothes), attached to a vehicle, or perhaps even *implanted* inside another character. You might even be able to pilot a vehicle or command a living host to move, although you'll count as encumbrance unless you're carried in Payload. If you have manipulators, you have no penalty on fine work but get -6 DX on tasks that require the stability that legs provide, unless you're anchored to a person or a vehicle with at least 10 times your mass. This includes combat, with the sole exception of firing vehicle-mounted weapons.

See also *No Legs* (p. B145).

### *Weapon-Form Modifiers*

A character with the physical form of a weapon (e.g., a magic sword imbued with a personality) may add one of the following modifiers to Affliction, Claws, Innate Attack, or Striker. Such an entity might be able to move and attack under its own power, but is usually wielded as a weapon by somebody else.

*Must Be Wielded:* Your attack originates from your form but *you* can't use it; somebody else must wield you as a weapon, applying whatever skill fits your shape and function (GM's decision). You might, for example, be an enchanted crossbow, in which case your user must load you, aim you, and pull your trigger. You *must* take the advantage Compartmentalized Mind (Dedicated Controls) (p. B43); you may also have other abilities to aid your operator. -20% if you can prevent your wielder from using your attack advantage, or at least restrict him to the abilities of a totally mundane weapon with your shape; -30% if anyone can wield you at full power – even someone you dislike, against people you like.

*Can Be Wielded:* This works exactly like *Must Be Wielded* – including the need for Compartmentalized Mind (Dedicated Controls) – but also lets you use the attack yourself, under your own power. For example, if you're a magical “dancing sword” with Flight, then a warrior can wield you but you can also fly around attacking people. +20%.

Melee weapons should *also* take Melee Attack (ST-Based) (p. 114) on Innate Attack. That enhancement normally lets the buyer apply *his* ST to an attack, but with the above modifiers, substitute the *wielder's* ST for this purpose.

A magical attack that requires mana to work should add the Mana Sensitive limitation (p. B34), too.

### *No-Mana Shutdown*

-20 points

Enchanted items normally function as totally mundane objects in areas without mana, but spring back to life the moment they return to mana. Such a complete shutdown in no mana would render an item treated as a character “comatose.” This is a disadvantage analogous to Nocturnal (p. B146). It has the same point value – despite areas with no mana generally being less common than sunlight – because daytime is predictable and almost always ends within hours, while an artifact with this disadvantage could end up trapped in a no mana zone indefinitely, possibly through hostile action. Obviously, the GM shouldn't permit No-Mana Shutdown in a game world that lacks areas without mana!

For items that actually begin to fall apart in no mana, use Dependency (Mana). For those that merely lose their special abilities – and for advantages that would normally be available to a wielder whether or not the item was “conscious” (see *Weapon-Form Modifiers* boxed text, above) – add Mana Sensitive (p. B34).



## EXAMPLE: THE SILVER HARP

225 points

This small harp, of the type often carried by wandering bards, is haunted by the spirit of a faerie queen who swore to gain the love of its first owner without use of magic, and who pined to death when she failed because he had given his love to another. The faerie stole some of the man's very spirit when her love turned to hate, which explains how the harp can possess the sort of creative abilities that usually elude the faerie folk. This gives the harp a dual personality: sometimes, it has a faerie's whimsical flightiness, colored by a hatred of attractive mortal women; at other times, it falls into the morbid depression of a lover taken from his life and love, with an aversion to lies and deceit and a tendency to misfortune. However, its voice is always that of a faerie woman, and its hatred of the being who divided its human spirit appears as self-hatred. It can "speak" (sing) with a wonderful voice; it can also send thoughts directly into the mind of anyone who touches it, and even look into that mind. Its faerie personality is fully capable of embarrassing mortals by casually giving away their secret thoughts in song.

The harp's body is fine wood, beautifully embellished and protected by thin but remarkably tough silvery metal. It's uncannily resistant to corrosion or decay. Breaking the strings will stop it playing until they're replaced, but do it no actual injury – harp strings break all the time, after all.

The Silver Harp illustrates how *Enchantment Through Deeds* (pp. 112-113) and *Traumatic Enchantment* (pp. 112-113) might apply to an item created as a character. Its involvement in a legendary romantic story and the death of a faerie queen was enough to provide 225 character points. Point total permitting, it could make an *interesting* PC – or an Ally or a Patron for a musician PC. It might instead appear in an NPC's hands, making trouble for attractive female PCs, or providing unique insights into the musical arts or faerie folk. Its character sheet assumes a TL3 setting – specifically, a fantasy-flavored medieval Europe – but the GM can adjust its social background to suit other campaigns (e.g., discovered in some ruin or dusty attic and reawakened, it would have a few levels of Low TL).

**ST** 0 [-100]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 12 [20].  
Damage 0d/0d; BL 0 lbs.; HP 5 [10]; Will 12 [-5]; Per 13 [0];  
FP 12 [0].  
Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 0 [0]; Dodge N/A.  
18" tall and wide; 5 lbs. (SM -4).

### Social Background

TL: 3 [0].

CF: Christendom [1]; Faerie [0].

Languages: Languedoc (Accented/Broken) [3]; Latin (Broken/Broken) [2]; Norman French (Native/Accented) [-1].

### Advantages

360° Vision [25]; Damage Resistance 5 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [15]; Detect (Faerie Beings) [10]; Discriminatory Hearing [15]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Handsome (Impressive) [12]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Eyes, Head, Neck, or Vitals; Unliving) [47]; Mind Reading (Touch-Based, -20%; Universal, +50%) [39]; Musical Ability 4 [20]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Protected Hearing [5]; Protected Vision [5]; Reputation +1 (As subject of a romantic tale; Everyone; 10 or less) [2]; Reputation +3 (As wondrous instrument; Professional musicians; All the time) [7]; Telesend (Touch-Based, -20%; Universal, +50%) [39]; Temperature Tolerance 10 (0° to 175°) [10]; Unaging [15]; Vacuum Support [5]; Voice [10].

Perks: Accessory (Built-in high-quality harp). [1]

### Disadvantages

Dead Broke [-25]; No Legs (Portable) [-30]; No-Mana Shutdown [-20]; No Manipulators [-50]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Split Personality (12) [-15]; Unhealing (Total) [-30].

First ("Faerie") Personality (-30 points):  
Absent-Mindedness [-15]; Callous [-5]; Impulsiveness (15) [-5]; Intolerance (Attractive Women) [-5].

Second ("Mortal") Personality (-30 points): Versatile [5]. Chronic Depression (15) [-7]; Guilt Complex [-5]; Truthfulness (6) [-10]; Unluckiness [-10]. Quirks: Always tells couples in love to act on their feelings immediately; Broad-Minded; Hates its other personality. [-3]

Quirks: Can only "speak" by singing (-1 reaction when this gets on people's nerves). [-1]

### Skills

Area Knowledge (Faerie) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Area Knowledge (Western Europe) (E) IQ [1]-13; Carousing (E) HT [1]-12; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-12; Hidden Lore (Faerie Lore) (A) IQ+2 [8]-15; History (European Music) (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Hypnotism (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Musical Composition (H) IQ+2\* [1]-15; Musical Influence (VH) IQ+1\* [1]-14; Musical Instrument (Harp) (H) IQ+2\* [1]-15; Naturalist (Earth) (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Poetry (A) IQ [2]-13; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-13; Singing (E) HT+6\*† [1]-18.

\* Includes +4 for Musical Ability.

† Includes +2 for Voice.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# PATHS AND BOOKS

*I walked straight from the hilltop circle to the chief's tent. It was a bitter winter night, and I was naked to the waist and barefoot, but I'd worked up some rituals to shield me against cold. They didn't do quite enough – I'd suffer no actual harm, but I **felt** things – but I carefully showed no discomfort. The tribe had to fear me.*

*I drew my knife, cut through the thongs that held the tent's entrance closed, and cast the knife aside. I'd have preferred to have it to hand, but the look of confidence was more important.*

*The chief woke as I walked in amidst a flurry of snow. I'll allow that he was fast to realize how things stood; he came to his feet while bawling at the men who'd made to follow me in to stay out, saying that he could handle me without any help. As the tent-flap fell closed, I met his glare with one of my own.*

*"I know," I said.*

*"Know what?" he asked. I really thought for a moment that he'd try to bluff.*

*"I've walked in your dreams," I said as he bent to gather up his fur tunic, "I've seen what you dream about. I know the bargain . . ." And then he straightened up with the knife he'd left among his clothes, and threw it at me, underhand but hard and fast.*

*It stopped a hand's-width from my chest and fell to the floor, and the amulet attached to my belt shattered. Before he could act again, now that I was defenseless against such mundane attacks, I stepped forward and threw the dust I held in my right hand directly at his face.*

*He gave an inhuman howl, staggered back, and collapsed. Black fumes burst from his mouth and nose, and gathered above him. I found myself studied by glowing yellow eyes as the tent filled with the reek of decay, and I knew that the demon was contemplating me as its next vessel.*

*But then the spirit I'd summoned came howling down from the hill, no longer constrained by the ancient prohibition that stops it harming mortals – and the real battle began.*

*Traditional magic little resembles "adventuring magic" that rains down destruction at the snap of a finger. Most of it involves lengthy rituals and ceremonies – often effective over considerable distances – that give subtle results. Such magic is highly atmospheric, good for a less-flashy game . . . and still extremely powerful, when worked intelligently.*



## Path/Book Ritual Terminology

**adept:** Anyone with the Path/Book Adept advantage (pp. 123-124).

**Book:** A collection of rituals linked conceptually or by tradition and presented in a single source – often (but not always) an actual, physical book.

**caster:** Person performing a ritual.

**charm:** Item empowered through a ritual. Protective charms are often called *amulets*, while charms that draw things to the wearer are called *talismans*.

**client:** Person on whose behalf a magician performs a ritual. In many cases, the client and the magician are the same person.

**fetish:** Item containing the essence or power of a spirit.

**focus:** Item that aids in the performance of ritual magic.

**magician:** Anyone with the Ritual Magic skill (p. B218).

**Path:** Branch of ritual magic focused on a particular type of effect, encompassing a collection of closely related rituals.

**ritual:** Ceremony intended to have a magical effect – or more broadly, any use of the Ritual Magic skill or a skill based on it.

**subject or target:** Person, place, or thing a ritual is being cast upon or against.

**tradition:** Set of beliefs and practices for learning and using Path/Book ritual magic.

# ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES

This system is a broad variant of *Ritual Magic* (pp. 72-76). Its basis is the Ritual Magic skill (p. B218), which defines the principles behind all the operations. Multiple Ritual Magic specialties might exist – reflecting different approaches to the art – or all magic may be essentially the same. The skill's description notwithstanding, it doesn't necessarily involve working with spirits; this and other details depend on the setting's metaphysics.

A magician using these rules works *rituals* rather than spells. Many rituals appear under *Paths* (pp. 140-162) and *Example Books* (pp. 163-165). The GM can develop others to suit his campaign, using these examples as guidelines. A few rituals somewhat resemble standard spells, but they're different in fundamental assumptions – they tend to be more flexible, subtler, and less direct. Gamers who desire fireballs in tactical combat will find that standard spell-based magic better suits their needs.

For game purposes, there are two ways to explain how this type of magic works, each with its own rules. "Effect Shaping" magic is the default approach described below. The "Energy Accumulating" version is explained on pp. 134-137.

## EFFECT SHAPING THEORY

In Effect Shaping magic, magical ceremonies work because they *shape* the desired result, either by manipulating reality directly or by invoking and binding or persuading spirits to perform the task. A ceremony is more-or-less fixed in length and format. If the procedure is performed correctly, and the magician overcomes any resistance, then it works; if it isn't, and he doesn't, then it fails. Any energy required is gathered and manipulated as part of the procedure, and usually comes from the ambient environment or is provided by conjured spirits – although small quantities may be drawn from the magician.

## PATHS VS. BOOKS

This type of magic can also use two alternative systems of organization. A version built around *Paths* assumes that magic has a coherent, hierarchical structure. Each Path focuses on a different aspect of magic or reality. The wizard who masters it can produce a set of related effects.

A version that uses *Books* is more arbitrary and eccentric, being based on a set of grimoires or similar references that exist as physical objects in the game world. Each Book may have some kind of theme or internal logic, but this is often obscure to all but advanced students – the organization of magic is much more a matter of *style*, or of the interests and peculiarities of various authors. Books do have a certain underlying coherence, however; anyone who studies a Book will gain some idea of how to work any of the magic it describes.

The difference between the two approaches is largely one of flavor. Paths offer neatly organized categories of magical effects; e.g., a magician might master all sorts of "weather-control magic" or "mental effects" by studying appropriate Paths. Books tend to be more diverse and

### *Books, Hidden in Plain Sight*

In a few settings, magical Books are actually well-known "mundane" texts, such as a religion's holy writings, a set of game rules, or an epic poem. Most people see only the surface meaning, but experts can crack a subtle code or apply deep mystical understanding to extract magical knowledge from the same works. In this case, the standard rules for Books apply but magicians will need special training – Cryptography, Hidden Lore, Theology, literacy in obscure languages, etc. – to reflect their extraordinary understanding.

arbitrary; e.g., a Book might include methods for causing thunderstorms and creating mental illusions, but nothing about fog or telepathy. Most campaigns – and magical traditions – will use only one model or the other. Each Path or Book available to a magician represents a skill.

Note that the terms “Book” and “Path” are used mostly for convenience. In settings with Path-based magic, Paths might be documented in what are – physically speaking – books. Conversely, not every Book is necessarily a written work with pages, binding, and a cover (or even a scroll, or a CD-ROM); the work may describe a body of lore represented by carvings on a staff, or numerological secrets encoded in a painting. Some things can fall into either category; e.g., the collected writings of a famous sage, or the

magic that a specific spirit enables, might have a Path’s logical cohesion *or* a Book’s arbitrary convenience.

A setting can even feature both Paths *and* Books. In that case, Paths are probably standard, fairly well-known forms of magic, while Books represent strange secrets and arcane mysteries. The GM might want to treat such Books much like Hidden Lore skills (p. B199) for many purposes – although they’ll differ in skill difficulty.

Where a magician *does* learn this sort of magic from some kind of text, he must be able to both speak and read the language in which it’s written at the Accented level or better. The GM may optionally apply small penalties to spirit-related rituals that deal with touchy or prejudiced spirits if the ritualist speaks the relevant language with an accent.

## PATH/BOOK ADVANTAGES

The mechanics of Path/Book magic involve a few new or variant advantages. These are somewhat optional, and the GM can adjust them to fit game-world assumptions. In particular, he may wish to add prerequisites – in some settings, certain benefits are only accessible to magicians who’ve worked up to them.

### Magery (Path/Book)

see p. B66

Magery might be important to Path/Book magic. In a setting that features multiple types of magic that benefit from different kinds of Magery (see *Varieties of Magery*, p. 65), Path/Book magic uses Magery (Path/Book). The GM decides which of the following *optional* rules apply.

#### Mandatory Magery

Only individuals with at least Magery 0 can perform Path/Book magic. No one else can influence magical forces enough even to try.

#### Limited Non-Mage Ceremonies

Non-mages can work Path/Book magic – but not well! They’re at -5 on all ritual rolls.

In highly detailed games, “fractional” Magery 0 that partly eliminates this penalty may exist. This costs 1 point per -1 removed. A magician receives *none* of the other benefits of Magery 0 until he has eliminated the full -5.

If some PCs have useful access to a single Path or Book – or even to a lone ritual – then the GM might let them to purchase Magery 0 with a limitation. “One Path/Book Only” is -60%; “One Ritual Only” is -80%. Such limited Magery grants no other Magery 0 benefits.

#### Magery Adds to Rituals

The magician’s Magery level serves as a bonus to skill rolls for rituals, much as it benefits spells in the standard system. However, it *doesn’t* add directly to the Ritual Magic skill or to Path or Book skills – it strictly modifies *effective* skill for specific workings. This is only recommended for settings that use Effect Shaping magic.

#### Magery Caps Skills

The magician’s Magery level sets an upper limit on his Ritual Magic skill and on all Path or Book skills. This usually equals 10 + (2 × Magery), although 10 + Magery is a severely restrictive alternative. If a single point would normally buy such a skill at a higher level, then reduce the skill to the cap. This best suits settings that use the Energy Accumulating model – or games with Effect Shaping magic where the GM wants to limit the power of magic. When using this rule, it’s strongly recommended that the GM let PCs raise Magery after character creation, either through study or with bonus character points.

#### Path/Book Adept

10 points/level

You can ignore, or at least reduce, the need for some of the elements of Path/Book magic; see *Elements* (pp. 127-129). Each level of this advantage (maximum three levels) lets you omit one of the three elements. You must choose *which* element(s) when you buy the trait.

Path/Book Adept can enable a magician to dispense completely with ritual space or material/symbolic elements, with no skill penalty. It can diminish the time component to 1d seconds of concentration – just long enough to visualize the effect. Adepts using Effect Shaping magic can reduce time further by accepting a penalty (see *Time*, pp. 127-128). If the Energy Accumulating model applies, then time reduction is only possible for the first attempt to acquire energy; each subsequent energy-gathering attempt takes the full time, usually five minutes (see *Ritual Stages*, p. 135).

In many settings, this advantage has *substantial* prerequisites: exceptional Will, high levels of Ritual Magic and/or multiple Path skills, several levels of Magery, significant Religious Rank, powerful supernatural Patrons, Illuminated, a *large* Unusual Background, or anything else the GM likes. Prerequisites for the second or third level can be even stricter than those for the first. Path/Book rituals are *supposed* to require lots of time and special conditions and equipment. Magicians who can surpass these requirements tend to be terrifyingly powerful, experienced, and well-connected.

## Special Enhancement

*Choice of Element:* You're able to decide which elements you can ignore or reduce when you start each ritual. If you have a choice of two elements, defined when you buy the advantage, then this is worth +20%. If you can choose any one of the three, then it's +40%.

Note that if you buy Path/Book Adept 2, there's no point in taking more than the +20% version, as you can define this so that you can always choose which two of the three elements to ignore. If you have Path/Book Adept 3, then don't bother with this enhancement at all! If you purchase extra levels of this advantage in play, then you're free to rearrange or reduce the choice of enhancements to avoid wasted points; e.g., you could spend 10 character points to go from one level with the +40% enhancement to two levels with the +20% version.

## Special Limitations

*One Path/Book Only:* You can only function without an element when working a single category of Path/Book magic. -40%.

*One Ritual Only:* You can only omit an element when working a specific ritual. -80%.

## Talents

see *Power Talents*, p. 203

Mundane Talents (p. B89) *never* apply to Path/Book magic; they don't add to Ritual Magic skill, or to Paths, Books, or rituals. Magery (Path/Book) (p. 123) often serves this purpose – but if it doesn't, then a 10- or 15-point Talent that enhances a suitable magical power (see Chapter 7 and

*GURPS Powers*) *might* apply. For example, if Path/Book magic invokes spirits, then the relevant Talent would be that for Spirit or Shamanism powers; if it manipulates elemental energies, then the Talent for an Elemental Command power would be appropriate. The GM is free to ignore this option if he feels that it makes such Talents too broadly powerful.

Remember that skills (such as Paths) that benefit from a default to another skill that's assisted by a Talent cannot *also* be raised by that same Talent. That is, they can't claim a double benefit.

## OTHER APPROPRIATE TRAITS

Several other advantages may be appropriate or even required for a Path/Book ritual magician, depending on the campaign. In some settings, this is a religious activity, and Clerical Investment (or Blessed) could be mandatory. In others, it involves considerable dealings with spirits, which can be reflected with a wide range of advantages, including Channeling, Medium, and Spirit Empathy; a spirit as an Ally or a Patron; and even versions of Insubstantiality or Jumper defined as the ability to become or project a spirit, or to enter the spirit realm. In yet other backgrounds, Paths or Books are studied in a highly structured environment, and most magicians have Allies, Patrons, and/or Rank in a mystical organization. In *all* cases, the magician might also have a Duty or a Sense of Duty to his faith, the spirit world, or his fellow magicians.

## “Mystic Symbol” Advantages

In some settings, ritual magicians carry special symbols or tools that act to focus ritual activities and help resist magical attacks. Such a *focus* might be anything, but tends to be an item used in magical or religious ceremonies.



To represent this in game terms, buy levels of Magery (or a suitable power Talent), Will (with the Accessibility limitation “Only for magical purposes,” -40%), or Magic Resistance (with Improved, +150%), and apply gadget limitations; see pp. B116-117. Whatever kind of bonus the focus grants, it typically falls between +1 and +5. Foci that grant larger bonuses should be extremely rare – and sought after by every magician who knows of them!

Foci *might* work for anyone, but by and large, only magicians can employ them. The GM may permit ritualists to buy foci with points from “study” (actually time spent carefully preparing a personal symbol) or with bonus character points. The GM might even allow a magician to use a borrowed focus, or one captured in play. Generally, the new user must still pay points for this, which represents the effort of attuning to it – although capturing a powerful focus is often an exploit worth significant bonus points. The GM is free to permit use without attunement on a one-time basis, treating the focus as both a bonus for having good ritual elements and a sympathetic link to the original owner, if applicable; see *Material and Symbolic Components* (pp. 128-129). In all cases, no one may benefit from more than one focus at a time.

# PATH/BOOK MAGIC IN OPERATION

Rituals are invariably complex and tricky things. Working them effectively requires a long process of study and training. They're no less intricate for the advanced adept who can work them without visible effort – he has simply internalized the complexity. Each ritual should feel like a significant event in play!

In game terms, a ritual consists of an extended series of Concentrate maneuvers. If the magician is attacked or injured during this time, then he must make a Will-3 roll to continue. Someone who interferes sufficiently with the magician's equipment or the ritual space can disrupt *any* casting.

## Extended Rule of 20 – Again

The rules for Path/Book ritual magic – like those for spell-based ritual magic – may reward magicians who buy an extremely high Ritual Magic skill and run everything off defaults. This may please some GMs but annoy others. A possible solution is that described under *Extending the Rule of 20* (p. 73): treat any Ritual Magic skill greater than 20 as 20 for the purpose of default calculation, so that Paths never have a default greater than 14.

## LEARNING PATH/BOOK MAGIC

Students must normally learn the Ritual Magic skill from a teacher. Depending on the nature of the campaign world, would-be magicians may be apprenticed or accepted as members of a magical order, and then taught Ritual Magic. However, self-teaching (p. B293) is a possibility – albeit at half speed, as usual – if sufficient information is available. The GM might even allow individuals with Magery to develop a certain *instinctive* level of skill (which should never exceed IQ), with no points in specific rituals.

### *The Paths or Books*

The prerequisite for *all* Path or Book skills is the Ritual Magic skill. Furthermore, no Path or Book skill can exceed the practitioner's Ritual Magic skill – to advance, he must first improve his core knowledge. Ritual Magic provides a basic understanding of how magic works and the cosmology of a magical tradition. It may in fact give the student the potential to conduct rituals without further training, although it's usually best to study some specific details.

## Magical Steps

Magical rituals – especially in spirit-oriented magic – are often described as having five “steps.” Some traditions change the elements or the order, but the underlying pattern is usually consistent. Gamers defining magical traditions can consider what form each step takes, for flavor:

1. *Preparation:* The magician readies himself, the ritual's subject, and the location where the ritual will take place. This includes things like drawing or painting mystical symbols on the walls and floor (using Symbol Drawing); ritually cleansing the area with a broom, water, or incense; anointing participants with special oils; ritual baths; and meditation or prayer. Shamans often use dancing, chanting, and drumming to raise their energy. Magicians may also prepare the working area with rituals intended to protect participants from harmful forces.

2. *Invocation:* The magician calls on any necessary powers or spirits. This process often begins during the preparation but continues beyond it – the chanting or ritual activity is repeated throughout the ceremony. During the invocation, the names of any and all powers involved will be spoken, and symbolic representations may be displayed.

3. *Intent:* The magician expresses what he wants the ritual to accomplish. This can be a simple, direct petition (“destroy this enemy”), or something more complicated, such as linking a symbol of an effect with the ritual's subject; e.g., during a harmful ritual, the magician may destroy or damage a representation of the victim, while some exorcisms use a ritual bath, symbolizing the cleansing process. The invocation generally continues while such symbolism is being enacted.

4. *Offering:* Spirit-oriented or religious rituals frequently add an offering to satisfy the spirits or appease the deities. This can be a sacrifice, a gift of food or drink (which may be consumed by the participants or left out for the spirits), or something less tangible, like a pledge of servitude or a prayer of thanks.

5. *Dismissal/Dissipation:* The ritual concludes with the dismissal or dissipation of the invoked powers. Spirits may be sent away; excess accumulated energy or mystical power may be safely “grounded.” This is usually straightforward – but some magicians deal with hostile spirits that may resist and turn dangerous, or juggle vast, unstable forces. This is a crucial component of *harmful* rituals, because the magician must take steps to shield himself and his client from the effects of the magic.

# RITUAL SPACE

## Ritual Space and Sanctity

Ritual space (p. 128) doesn't necessarily have any connection to the sanctity levels used for clerical magic (see *Sanctity*, p. 68-69), but the two *might* be related. If ritual magic calls on powers that are essentially part of the divine hierarchy, then ritual space and sanctity can be linked as follows:

*No Sanctity:* These areas are useless as ritual space, giving at least -5 to ritual workings even *after* attempts at consecration. The GM may declare such places "spiritually dead," making Path/Book rituals totally ineffective there.

*Low Sanctity:* These areas permit makeshift consecration for single rituals (-1 to skill) – but such preparation is *always* required, and nothing better is possible. Even adepts who can normally function without ritual space may be at -3.

*Normal Sanctity:* The standard rules for ritual space apply. Such areas may be consecrated as usual.

*High Sanctity:* These areas are powerful mystical centers, granting a bonus of +1 to +3 to Path/Book ritual workings *if* the powers involved are friendly to each other.

*Very High Sanctity:* As for high sanctity, but the bonus is +4 or +5.

If clerical and ritual magic conflict for some reason – perhaps because the worship of gods is radically opposed to a shamanic religion that empowers rituals – then the relationship might be *reversed*. Areas of no or low sanctity are then best-suited to ritual magic, while places of high and very high sanctity impose penalties . . . and vice versa for clerical magic. This can certainly hold true for areas sanctified to individual deities who are inimical to the spirits of Path/Book magic.

For even more interesting complications, clerical and ritual magic may be opposed most of the time, but areas of no sanctity might still be useless for rituals, as neither gods nor spirits can function there.

Remember, though, that Path/Book rituals don't *have* to involve spirit invocation – whether they do or not depends on the campaign.

## Ritual Space and Mana

If Path/Book and spell-based magic are closely related, then the local *mana* level can determine modifiers for rituals, probably replacing the requirement for ritual space:

*No Mana:* Rituals produce no results.

*Low Mana:* Rituals work at -5, and only for magicians with suitable Magery.

*Normal Mana:* Rituals function normally, but still only for mages. Optionally, non-mages can work rituals at -5; see *Limited Non-Mage Ceremonies* (p. 123).

*High or Very High Mana:* Rituals work for everyone.

If the GM wants the added complication, he can make "ritual mana" distinct from the spell-related kind.

## Aspected Space

Path/Book ritual magic normally assumes that ritual space is the same thing for all magical operations. However, many theories of magic would consider this plain *wrong*.

### Religious Alignment

If rituals call on spirits or gods who have their own enmities and rivalries, then the GM who wants additional detail can rule that ritual space is *tradition-specific*:

*Space belongs to the magician's tradition, or is associated with beings of the exact kind that empower the ritual.* Use the normal modifiers under *Ritual Space* (p. 128).

*Space consecrated by a similar tradition.* Count the space as one level less suitable; e.g., a hasty consecration counts as having no prepared space (-5), while a properly consecrated American Indian medicine lodge might count as makeshift (-1) for an Inuit wise-man. Longstanding sacred sites lose at least +1 of their bonus and could even impose *penalties* – a god or a spirit might tolerate invocations of his allies and friends in his lesser shrines, but be highly possessive of his great temples and ancient places of power.

*Space consecrated by a completely unrelated but not actively opposed tradition.* Such a space counts as having no prepared space. This would be the case for an African witch-doctor working in a shaman's medicine lodge, or a Roman priest invoking the *lares* and *penates* in an Egyptian Greek temple to Ra. Moreover, it's impossible to consecrate space already permanently dedicated by an unrelated tradition without first deconsecrating it – which can be a lengthy, tricky process, even if the original owners aren't able to object. Such details are a matter for GM judgment and a lot of roleplaying.

*Space consecrated by an opposed tradition.* Such a sacred space not only counts as having no ritual space, but the opposing tradition treats any bonuses as penalties. For instance, a demon-worshipping priest trying to perform a ritual at a centuries-old Christian religious site has -5 for having no ritual space *and* -4 for the site's power, for a total of -9!

The GM is the final judge of what places are considered sacred to which traditions.

### Secular Forces

Even in a nonreligious context, ritual space may be "aspected" to forces or principles that disrupt or damp each other. For example, if magic is based around the four elements, then a place that gives a bonus to earth rituals might be no help for fire or water rituals, and could actively penalize air magic. See also *Decanic Modifiers and Rituals* (p. 129).

The GM and the setting determine the Paths or Books known to a given magical tradition. Each Path or Book is an IQ/Very Hard skill. Paths default at -6 to specialties of Ritual Magic corresponding to traditions in which they're known, and can of course be improved from default (see p. B173). Books have *no* default – the magician must study them specifically.

*Example:* Dark Cloud, a shaman, has IQ 13 and Ritual Magic (Southern Bloodlore)-17. His tradition encompasses the Path of Cunning, and he has spent 18 points to raise its level from his default of 11 to 16. He could raise it once more, to 17, but he can't raise any Path above 17 until he improves his Ritual Magic skill.

Each Path or Book has a number of rituals, each of which produces a specific effect. In an Effect Shaping system, these are Hard techniques (see p. B230) that default to the appropriate Path or Book at a penalty between 0 and -8, as specified in the ritual's description. These techniques cannot be raised above Path or Book skill.

*Example:* Dark Cloud wishes to master the Hallucination ritual. His default for this is 10 (Path of Cunning-6). He can raise it to a maximum of 16, for 7 points. After that, he can't improve Hallucination until his level in the Path of Cunning rises.

## ELEMENTS

Rituals have three basic elements: *time* to conduct the ceremony, *ritual space* attuned to the spirits or forces involved, and *material and symbolic components*. Magic-working is an involved process, and these things act as a focus for the magician's intent, making it easier to achieve results. In the right quality or quantity, suitable ritual elements might even grant bonuses to ritual skills, but these measures are subject to the law of diminishing returns: the total of all such bonuses (disregarding penalties) cannot exceed +15. The GM may vary this limit to make bonus-chasing more or less useful.

It's possible, in an emergency, to dispense with ritual elements. In theory, none of them are *required*. Adepts (individuals with the Path/Book Adept advantage, pp. 123-124) can eliminate features from a ritual and still be effective, but most magicians who take such shortcuts risk failure or backfire. Omitting an element usually imposes a penalty to ritual rolls. The cumulative penalty for missing elements has *no* limit.

### Time

Rituals are meant to be conducted over a long period. Even after a ritual ends, its effects might not take place immediately – blessings and curses can take *days* to manifest. Conditions placed on a ritual may also introduce a delay; see *Conditional Rituals* (p. 138).

How long a ritual takes to work depends on the magic involved. In the Effect Shaping system, each ritual has a standard, listed time (treat this as a rough estimate; rituals aren't entirely predictable). This is typically between 10 minutes and an hour, with the ritual either succeeding or failing at the end of that time.

### Haste

Most of the time spent on a ritual goes into repetitive activities – chanting, dancing, etc. Dropping these makes the ritual more difficult:

- Reducing time to 1/10 the listed amount plus 1d minutes gives -2 to all skill rolls.



- Reducing time to a mere 1d seconds, with a minimum of a second per 10 minutes usually taken – just enough to visualize and concentrate on the intended result – puts an ordinary magician at -5 on all rolls (or worse, at the GM's option).

- A magician with the Path/Book Adept advantage may use it to eliminate the time element. He can reduce time to a simple 1d seconds at *no* penalty. He can cut it even further by accepting a skill penalty of -1 per -1 seconds; e.g., 1d-3 seconds gives -3 to skill. Minimum time is always a second.

Haste *isn't* always possible. The GM is free to rule that a given ritual requires an irreducible minimum time.

### Extra Time

*Extended Rituals:* Taking three times the basic time or more adds +1 to all skill rolls.

*Multi-Day Castings:* Putting *lots* of extra time and care into a ritual further improves its chances. The magician must perform preparatory rituals in the chosen location – using all the materials, assistants, etc., involved in the magic – every day in a period leading up to the casting, with a missed day meaning that all the preceding days are wasted. No skill roll is required, but the preparations take at least half an hour of uninterrupted work per day, and the location must be protected from desecration or vandalism until the final working is complete. A magician can only have one ritual in extended preparation at a time (although he can work shorter rituals in the same period), and a given location can only be used for one such procedure at a time. The target of a hostile ritual may be able to sense that magical forces are being arrayed against him before any actual harm occurs (see *Sensing Ritual Attacks*, p. 138); thus, attempting a multi-day casting against a large group of people has the problem that some of them are likely to be magically sensitive enough to notice the attack before it's triggered! One day of preparation plus one for the casting gives +1 to the ritual. Each doubling of this two-day period confers another +1: four days for preparation and casting grant +2, eight give +3, and so on.



*Example:* Miles, a Voodoo houngan, is sending a Doom against a corrupt cop who's extorting protection money from the neighborhood. Doom normally takes an hour. If Miles were in a hurry, he might conduct the ritual in as little as six seconds, but his effective skill would then fall from 16 to 11, making it likely that the victim would resist or, worse, that Miles wouldn't be able to protect himself against backlash effects. Miles therefore errs on the side of caution. He conducts a preparatory ritual daily for a week, and on the eighth day, he takes three full hours to work the Doom with effective skill 20.

If the cop had been magically sensitive, he might have realized that he was coming under attack during the preceding week – but he wasn't, and the ritual works perfectly. Over the next fortnight, he's suspended on suspicion of corruption, his wife kicks him out, and he finally falls down a fire escape and breaks his neck.

## Ritual Space

*Ritual space* is an area that's favored by the spirits, symbolically *right*, or magically resonant, such as a temple, hidden grove, medicine lodge, or magic circle. It's specially dedicated or attuned for ritual use, receiving spirits or energies comfortably and smoothly. This requirement isn't generally hard to fulfill. Modifiers are as follows:

- Conducting a ritual with *no* prepared space gives -5 to skill.
- Hastily preparing a well-defined area up to about the size of an ordinary room in a private house requires a ceremony lasting 1d minutes (which cannot be reduced) and a roll against Ritual Magic – or possibly Thaumatology or Religious Ritual. This includes placing candles, mystic symbols, etc., in the area. Success makes the skill penalty just -1 for the next ritual only.
- Properly readying an area requires at least a one-hour ceremony performed daily for a week, to cleanse it of negative influences. This eliminates the penalty indefinitely.
- A place used constantly for rituals often acquires a mystical “charge” that aids any ritual conducted within its boundaries. This gives a bonus to all ritual rolls, as indicated on the table below. Adepts capable of ignoring the requirement for ritual space *can* still claim this bonus.

Time	Bonus
Used for 20 years or more	+1
Used for 50 years or more	+2
Used for 100 years or more	+3
Used for 500 years or more	+4
Used for 1,000 years or more	+5

Truly powerful mystical centers are likely to be claimed by magical traditions or factions, who may or may not allow others to use them. If a space is left unused and untended, then the GM decides how quickly its bonus decays.

## Choosing the Moment

When a magician conducts his ritual may also be important. Some traditions speak of auspicious and inauspicious times for magic-working, mentioning sunrise, sunset, lunar cycles, or holy days; see *Significant Dates* (pp. 246-248) for

inspiration. If astrological factors have a bearing (see *Hermetic Astrology*, pp. 248-253), then certain times are likely to be distinctly better or worse for particular rituals.

If the GM chooses to use such factors, then he should apply from -3 to +3 to ritual rolls, depending on the occasion. More extreme modifiers are possible if time is utterly crucial. Some occasions affect rituals in different ways; e.g., the waning moon may aid banishing and cursing while hindering blessing and summoning. A successful roll against a skill such as Astronomy, Occultism, or Theology ought to be able to determine auspicious or inauspicious times, estimating the relevant bonus or penalty.

## Material and Symbolic Components

*Material components* include representations of the target and any spirits involved in the ritual, sacrificial offerings to those spirits, and occult symbols of power. They can be as simple as a photograph, necklace, candy bar, or ring . . . or as complex and bulky as a life-sized mannequin, a fully stocked temple with statues and paintings, a small herd of animals, or a set of robes and wands. Simple, minimal components allow the magician to conduct the ritual at no penalty, while elaborate preparations may provide bonuses.

Precisely what *sorts* of components are needed depends on the setting's style and assumptions. In some cases, all magic – or perhaps all rituals in a particular Path – may demand the same wand and a little incense. In others, each ritual might require special efforts to work out an appropriate array of materials and symbols, followed by a scavenger hunt. The GM sets this depending on how difficult, colorful, and expensive he wants magic to be; e.g., real-world Voudoun has a fairly standard set of requirements, adjusted according to the *loa* being invoked, while a system based on astrological resonances and decans could become very complex (see *Hermetic Astrology*, pp. 248-253).

For some other possibilities, with skill modifiers for especially appropriate or inappropriate applications, see *Traditional Materials* (p. 244).

## Symbolic Representations

Objects that represent the subject use the rules under *Sympathy* (pp. 243-245). These are often *required* when a ritual's living subject is an unwilling target. Willing recipients rarely require special symbols.

## Names

Names tend to be *very* important. Attempting a ritual without at least some sort of name, title, or nickname for the subject usually gives at least -5, and may simply be impossible (GM's option). Better names use the bonuses under *Names* (p. 245).

If the ritual's target is a group of people (see *Multiple Targets*, p. 130), then a group name or a simple-but-precise description (“The Diogenes Club,” “All American men,” “Everyone holding a copy of this book,” etc.) is good for casting at -2. If the group can't be so easily defined, then that becomes -5 (as above) unless the caster has a personal name for *everyone* in the group. Some kind of clear, positive definition is required – a magician can't usually target “everyone mentioned in this book” unless he has somehow

## Decanic Modifiers and Rituals

The GM can apply decanic modifiers (see *Hermetic Astrology*, pp. 248-253) to Path/Book ritual magic, but this requires a certain amount of improvisation. He must associate each ritual with one or more decans. *Decanic Correspondences* (p. 248) assigns each Path in this chapter to a decan, which provides a quick way of finding such relationships – if magic is Path-based. If it's Book-based, then the GM should match Books with decans as seems fitting; e.g., *Gentle Arts of the Floating World* (pp. 163-164) might be connected with Nefthada. The GM who desires additional detail can specify the decans invoked by individual *rituals* or even by particular uses of rituals.

The decans governing a ritual determine a set of appropriate materials and locations. In addition, each

decan has an associated planet (see *Planetary Correspondences*, p. 247) and zodiacal sign (see *Zodiacal Correspondences*, p. 247), which can be used to determine further correspondences. However, the decan's correspondences always outrank those of its sign and planet. One good item associated with the decan itself usually satisfies the need for a symbolic representation well enough to let the magician work the ritual without penalty. This would require at least two ingredients connected merely with the decan's sign, or three related to its planet. Likewise, components associated with signs or planets must be high-quality, rare, or plentiful to give any sort of bonus.

Rules for *Aspected Space* (p. 126) may also apply. Locations and spaces can be associated with or consecrated to a decan, resulting in modifiers to rituals.

memorized it. "Everyone in this specific telephone directory" *might* give just enough precision for a casting at -5, as the directory defines a category of sorts; the directory itself may also give a bonus as a symbolic representation. If the caster *can* name each individual, then use the modifier for whichever group member provides the *worst* result.

Rituals targeted at simple areas or volumes (e.g., "A 10-yard diameter centered on that sundial") don't need a name, and take no modifier for that. With the GM's permission, it may be possible to target identifiable houses, towns, countries, etc., and have the effect stop neatly at the walls or legal borders. Generally, a house address or a place name is enough to remove all *penalties* – but it doesn't provide any *bonuses*, unless it has some kind of deep, mystical significance.

### Spiritual/Magical Symbols

Occult symbols are important in traditional magic. If magic invokes spirits, then even a simple drawing, amulet, or talisman depicting the spirits may allow the magician to conduct a ritual without penalty. If magic is tied to decanic powers, then the magician should identify the appropriate decan for any ritual or desired effect, and find materials or objects associated with it. Having no such symbols – or only inappropriate symbolism – gives -3. Intricately detailed or substantial symbols, such as sculptures and paintings, or large quantities of rare (or decanically appropriate) ingredients, grant from +1 to +3. Symbolic images might require use of the Symbol Drawing skill (p. B224), and in some settings, the GM may give the standard bonus for success on that roll.

### Contagion

*Contagion* (pp. 245-246) isn't always applicable to this type of magic, but the GM may opt to allow those modifiers.

### Sacrifices

While sacrifices are rarely *necessary* in most traditions (that is, there's no penalty for their absence), they can make spirits more inclined to assist, or release usable energies. Where this works, use *Sacrifice Bonuses* (p. 246). Skill

bonuses from sacrifices, especially self-sacrifice, *might* not count against the +15 maximum – traditionally, they're a fast and dangerous route to power.

### Acolytes

Groups of *magicians* collaborating on a ritual are covered by *Combined Efforts* (pp. 132-133). However, some traditions – especially those that regard ritual magic as religious in nature – assert that unskilled assistants can also provide some aid, by holding symbols and adding their voices, wills, and belief. (Others claim that such people just get in the way!) In effect, these acolytes act as living material components. If this works, and the magic is nonreligious, then such helpers can be hirelings. Religious rituals usually require sincere believers.

Some religious procedures may *require* a congregation, but if it's strictly optional, then the suggested rule is to give +1 for having at least three unskilled assistants who support the ceremony of their own free will, +2 for six, or +3 for 12. The GM can modify these numbers to fit specific beliefs or numerological systems. Larger groups are unlikely to be any more help; they can't be coordinated or participate directly in most rituals, and probably *will* get in the way. If the GM wants to encourage massive rituals, though, then he can give +1 for each further doubling of numbers. If any "helpers" are actually unwilling or opposed to the ritual, then their negative desires or subtle errors drag the others down: subtract *twice* their number from the number of willing supporters.

## RITUAL PARAMETERS

A ritual may need fine-tuning for a particular task. Precisely what this entails depends on the magic involved. The parameters of the resulting effect will determine modifiers to the skill roll – for instance, a longer-lasting effect over a larger area is harder to cast. For most purposes, consult *Magical Scope Parameters* (pp. 242-243). Treat the modifiers given there as skill penalties; e.g., a Mist ritual cast over a 90-yard diameter is at -10, and if it lasts an hour, that's another -2.

These modifiers are *suggestions* – the GM is welcome to adjust them to make rituals more or less effective and durable. In particular, he may wish to change area, duration, and multiple target modifiers to increase or decrease the feasibility of working rituals against whole towns or countries, or over extended periods. Varying them too far is liable to produce peculiar results, however. The GM can also impose any hard limits he likes; e.g., “No magic may last longer than a year and a day.”

The GM is free to declare that certain effects are simply beyond some casters, too. A suggestion: if the total of all penalties for the desired outcome (disregarding bonuses) exceeds the magician’s skill with the ritual, then he simply *can’t* cast it, no matter how many bonuses or ways to eliminate penalties he can assemble.

## Multiple Targets

Rituals designed to target individuals can be expanded to affect whole *groups*. The caster defines the targets – e.g., “everyone in the city,” “all redheads in the city,” or “all redheads named Diana in the city” – and then the GM determines the modifier using the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243). The penalties for huge groups tend to be prohibitive for lone magicians (but see *Combined Efforts*, pp. 132-133).

The caster will usually need symbolic representations of the entire group, too – and it’s often hard to acquire good symbols for large groups. A sketch map or a drawing of a town, plus its name, allows casting at -2. Chips of stone taken from its walls and those of its town hall, or a copy of a club’s constitution, might enable a ritual working against citizens or club members at *no* penalty or bonus. And an up-to-date, intact telephone directory or club membership list *might* be worth +1 or +2 as a symbolic representation of the group, although it doesn’t give a bonus for names unless the magician has actually *memorized* the entire contents (see *Material and Symbolic Components*, pp. 128-129).

The GM should determine secretly how many people meet the criteria, and determine the modifier accordingly. Usually, the caster can only guess at this number. If he believes that his ritual is more specific than it actually is, then he may suffer an embarrassing or dangerous failure!

## Group Defenses and Resistance

Treat a ritual that targets a group as if it were cast on the *most difficult* member of the assemblage for the purpose of determining penalties. In addition, if different members of the group give penalties for different reasons, apply the *most severe* penalty of each type. The GM may give a large or diverse group an extra point or two of protection to reflect the difficulty of affecting significantly dissimilar targets simultaneously. See also *Type of Target and Magic Resistance* (p. 131).

*Example:* A magician curses a group of people. One has Magic Resistance 2 and one has Magic Resistance 4. One is carrying a folk-charm that provides +1 protection against curses *and* has cast a minor ritual of his own for another +1 protection. The total penalty is -6: -4 for the *highest* Magic Resistance, -1 due to the charm, and -1 from the defensive ritual.

Against a resistible ritual, the target group makes a single resistance roll. If every group member has an identical attribute for this purpose, then use that. If individual members are detailed as characters, then use the best score in the group, *plus* the best available bonus from any individual’s Magic Resistance, *plus* the effects of any defensive rituals, powers, etc., protecting the group or the area. Otherwise, estimate the best likely defenses in the group. As a guideline, groups of humans or near-humans resist with a roll of 12 if there are no or few magically competent or significant individuals among them, at 14 if at least 10% of them are magically capable or likely to be carrying some kind of protection, and at 16 if at least 20% of them are magically potent or defended.

## Number Affected

Even if the ritual succeeds, it might not affect the entire group. Groups of 10 or fewer people are always affected. Otherwise, determine the magician’s margin of success. For an Effect Shaping casting, this is his margin of success on the ritual skill roll.

For groups between 11 and 100, the total number of people affected is equal to 10 or half the total (75% on a critical success), whichever is *greater*, plus the caster’s margin of success.

For groups larger than 100, 20% are affected (40% on a critical success), with a minimum of 50, plus another 2% × margin of success.

*Example:* Claudius the Dark Adept curses a village that dared offend him, using Malaise. He likes this ritual; his base skill is 23. He takes his time and uses a number of ritual aids, special magical tools, and animal sacrifices (mutilating local cattle) for a total bonus of +12, raising effective skill to 35. He casts the curse on all males aged 20-40 in the village. There are 89 such, so the penalty is -20, which reduces effective skill to 15.

The villagers, being ordinary folk with no Magic Resistance or special protections, resist with a roll of 12. Claudius rolls a 9, so his margin of success is 6; the GM, on behalf of the villagers, rolls a 10. Claudius thus wins the Quick Contest. Half of the 89, plus 6 – or a total of 50 people – fall prey to a disease that strikes them within the week. The mystery plague devastates the village economy; only a handful of victims die, but the moral and financial damage is severe.

## Area

A ritual can be cast over a given area instead of on a group. In that case, it’s subject to *Area Effect Modifiers* (p. 242). To affect a very large area, several magicians may have to collaborate (see *Combined Efforts*, pp. 132-133). The caster must define the area’s boundaries somehow, using drawings, mystical cornerstones, etc.

Such a ritual may affect anybody within the area, all those who enter it while its effects endure (see *Duration*, p. 131), or anyone who performs specified activities there. Physical effects such as fogs or storms often blanket whole areas, wards set up barriers around their borders, and showers of magically created missiles can strike at every individual within a space. The GM may rule that massively

damaging effects (e.g., magical firestorms) take *double* the usual modifier, if he wants to make them rare but not impossible.

The GM might wish to prohibit magicians from casting “personal” effects such as curses, blessings, and magical diseases to affect everyone within an area; a caster who wants all of a town’s citizens to sicken or prosper must treat them as *people*, using *Multiple Targets* (p. 130). Effects can always be cast to affect anyone crossing an area’s borders or meeting a similar, moderately exclusive condition, however – that’s a little more personal and requires less raw power. During the ceremony, the magician may specify any activities which, performed in the area, trigger the ritual’s effect. For example, a sacred site could be protected by a curse that affects anybody who disturbs it, a spring may grant a healing effect to anyone who drinks from it, or a doorway might be enchanted so that crossing it summons a specific, hostile spirit. See *Conditional Rituals* (p. 138).

### *Type of Target and Magic Resistance*

The target’s nature sometimes affects the ritual’s difficulty. In particular, the target’s Magic Resistance (MR), if any, acts as a penalty to skill rolls. This can even complicate rituals worked on areas rather than people, if the resistant individual is in the area and the magic would affect him in any way. For example, Conjure Flame cast on a house is likely to burn the inhabitants, so their MR would oppose the ritual. Magic Resistance *also* gives the target a bonus to resistance rolls.

Other types of targets may also prove tricky. For example, certain races might be difficult to affect with this sort of magic. This should usually be reflected by giving them MR in their racial template. However, a caster who’s unfamiliar with the species may suffer a penalty between -1 and -5 due to the difficulty of making correct symbolic connections or attuning to an alien mind.

Note that a Path/Book ritual that sends a physical attack (lightning bolt, magically conjured missile, etc.) at a living target *does* suffer a penalty for the subject’s MR. This kind of magic is inherently indirect, and must always form a magical connection with its victim. Thus, it’s quite different from spell-based magic!

Objects or materials may also have intrinsic resistance, depending on the campaign metaphysics. For example, if pure iron is hard to enchant, then it might have MR 2 for this purpose – or MR 10, or simply make some rituals *impossible*. People may surround themselves with materials that protect against specific rituals or types of magic. Those who wish to do so must usually make an Occultism roll, acquire suitable materials, and otherwise go to some trouble . . . but if the GM wants commonplace folklore to stymie some magic, then that can be a part of the campaign background.

Mana level could also play a role. Low mana areas in worlds where mana is generally higher might be treated as giving MR 5 against any ritual cast on the area – and perhaps on anyone in it. Areas with *no* mana may simply be completely dead for all magic, even if cast from areas of higher mana.

Finally, there are rituals that act specifically to oppose other rituals.

Of course, the caster may not know how much MR or other protection his target has. This means that a magician’s *player* often won’t know exactly what his effective skill might be. He’ll just have to roll the dice and learn from the GM whether he succeeded or failed!

Individuals who don’t wish to resist can sometimes permit the caster to ignore things that make them harder to affect. For example, someone who’s aware that he’s the subject of a healing ritual can set aside his protective amulets. However, unmodified MR always applies, willing or not, and the same goes for anything else that isn’t under the subject’s conscious control.

### *Duration*

The magician must specify the duration of any continuing ritual effects such as visual images, magical fires, and changed weather. A conditional ritual (p. 138) also requires the caster to state duration; it remains “set,” able to be triggered, throughout that period. The *consequences* of magic – wounds caused or healed, buildings constructed, etc. – last indefinitely. See the *Duration Effect Modifiers Table* (p. 243) for modifiers.

### *Triggering an Effect*

If a magician creates an effect with an extended duration and a trigger that activates it only when some event occurs or a condition is met, then he must roll at the time of casting – after all penalties have been set – to determine whether the ritual works. When the trigger condition arises, he rolls again (against the same value) to determine whether the effect functions correctly *at that moment*. The victim’s resistance roll, if applicable, contests the latter roll. Critical failure on a trigger roll means that the ritual effect stops working for 1d weeks – or altogether, if its duration ends during that time.

### *Range*

Path/Book ritual magic often disregards range. The “sympathetic links” provided by symbols, materials, etc., connect the ritual directly to the target, ignoring the space in between. If the GM wants to prevent magicians from cursing victims from the other side of the planet, however, then he can use *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241). These modifiers might affect all magic, apply strictly to physical or physically damaging effects (nightmares can go anywhere, but a lightning bolt must cross intervening space), or only penalize casters who lack proper sympathetic connections to their targets (see *Material and Symbolic Components*, pp. 128-129). Measure range to the nearest edge for an area, to the nearest individual for a group.

### *Cross-Dimensional Casting*

The GM may let rituals affect targets in other dimensions – with difficulty. A casting across planar or dimensional boundaries incurs -10 *per boundary crossed*. At sites where planes intersect or intermix, this drops to -5. These penalties don’t apply to rituals that open portals to other realms, contact the dream world, summon extradimensional beings, etc.; such magic is by definition *designed* for cross-planar effectiveness. For other notes, see *Casting Interdimensionally* (p. 86).

## Multiple Simultaneous Effects

In general, the effects of Path/Book ritual magic don't require "maintenance." A successful ritual calls and binds a spirit, or sets a destiny in motion, or feeds any necessary magical energy into the effect. The magic then works itself out with no further attention. Indeed, the caster must make a conscious effort to stop it early!

However, if the GM decides that a particular effect *does* require some kind of continued attention, albeit short of actual Concentrate maneuvers, then this may represent a distraction when performing other rituals. Each such effect still on and demanding "maintenance" gives a cumulative -1 to any other ritual skill roll. This penalty also applies to rolls to cast standard spells, if the magician can use both types of magic – and likewise, rituals are at -1 per spell currently running. If the caster actually has to *concentrate* on an effect, or on anything else (such as maintaining spell-based magic), then he can't work new Path/Book rituals at all.

### Damage

If a ritual physically damages its target, then the margin of success on the skill roll usually determines the amount of damage. See the ritual's description for details.

### Complexity of Effect

Some ritual effects are broadly defined or extremely flexible, and can be set to simple or complex purposes. A telekinetic effect might move a rock from one place to another . . . or manipulate a dozen components to build a machine. A general-purpose mind-control ritual might convey a single instruction ("Kill the duke!") . . . or a complex set of commands ("Go to the third door on the left, knock three times, and say that you're looking for the purple rose."). Using rituals to complex ends is harder than using them simply. To determine how much harder, decide how many *constituents* the desired result includes; a "constituent" could be a single object to be moved, a one-phrase command, a being to be summoned, etc. Then consult the *Multiple Constituent Modifiers Table* (p. 243).

Note that really complex tasks may also require skill rolls. For example, assembling a clock from its component parts not only involves multiple constituents, but calls for one or more Mechanic skill rolls.

## COMBINED EFFORTS

Two or more magicians may be able to collaborate on a single ritual, increasing its effectiveness – although frequently at increased risk. This differs from using unskilled supporters; for that, see *Acolytes* (p. 129). To combine efforts, all the magicians involved must know (and *use*) the same Ritual

Magic specialty *and* have at least one point in a Path or Book skill that encompasses the ritual to be performed. Suitably skilled people are rare in most settings, making it difficult to recruit such aid – especially for dangerous or controversial purposes.

One of the magicians, usually whoever has the highest effective skill with the ritual, is designated the "leader." The others are "assistants." All must conduct the ritual at the exact same time. They need not be in the same place, but they must have some way to coordinate: line of sight, magical communication, radio, etc. If the participants aren't all in sight of each other, then all ritual rolls are at -1 unless they have some kind of *close* mental communication, such as contact through the dream world.

The benefits depend on how powerful the GM wants "group magic" to be.

### Simple Collaboration Options

For a simple rule that makes collaborative castings moderately powerful, the GM can have each doubling of the number of magicians involved give +1 to rolls the leader makes to work the ritual: +1 for two collaborators, +2 for four, +3 for eight, and so on. Normally, only the leader needs to roll against ritual skill – but for a more restrictive version, the GM may require each participant to make a successful roll against unmodified ritual skill, or perhaps Will, before the leader can claim the bonus. The GM might wish to consider this a ritual element bonus, subject to any limits on such things (see *Elements*, pp. 127-129). Any critical failure results affect the entire group.

Alternatively, *each* participant might eliminate -1 in penalties for ritual parameters (multiple targets, area, duration, etc.) instead. This makes groups little use for petty effects, but allows large, cooperative magical societies – if they exist – to work mighty magics. However, if the GM rules that an effect is entirely beyond the leader's abilities without this aid, then no amount of assistance can compensate.

### High-Powered Collaboration

To make collaborative castings potentially very formidable – although not for simpler magics – divide the ritual parameter penalties evenly among the participating magicians, rounding against them. Apply default penalties and penalties for not using proper ritual elements to each caster individually, however – and do the same for bonuses granted by ritual elements, especially appropriate materials, etc. Finally, assess everyone a further penalty of -1 per magician involved after the first.

At the end of the ritual, everyone rolls against modified skill. If *any* of the casters fail, then the whole ritual fails. Any critical failures, backlashes, etc., affect the entire group. Otherwise, the magicians add together their margins of success to determine the ritual's total effect, if necessary. Resistible effects use the average of the final, modified skill levels involved (round *down*), at +1 per magician after the first, in the Contest against the victim's resistance.

*Example:* Four magicians – all of whom use Ritual Magic (Crowleyan) and have at least a point in the Path of Luck – wish to cast a ritual so that anybody entering their sanctuary who isn't a member of their group will be struck by a Doom.

Their skill levels in Doom are 17, 16, 15, and 15. Careful use of ritual elements gives each of them +4. The area to be protected has a five-yard diameter (-2) and the effect will last a year (-9), giving a -11 that's divided evenly among the four: -3 each. Finally, there's -3 for three extra magicians. The net modifier is thus -2. All of the rolls succeed, so a Doom with an effective skill of 16 (their average modified skill of 13, +3 for three extra casters) strikes any outsider who enters the place.

Note that this rule makes it possible to reduce overwhelming penalties to relatively manageable ones; e.g., five magicians could treat -50 as only -14, which they could then balance with ritual elements, extra time, etc. The casters have to agree that the effort is worthwhile, of course, and must make their skill rolls – but still, moderate-sized groups might well be capable of world-changing magic. If the GM wants this to be possible but *hard*, then he can require extra IQ or Will rolls to maintain coordination, especially over long castings. Alternatively, he can simply rule that total penalties beyond a certain size make the working impossible, even if shared by a group.

### Treachery

In addition to any dangers posed by the magic itself, magicians collaborating on a ritual are vulnerable to *treachery*. The mystical link they establish can be used as a conduit for attack. If one of the parties involved casts a harmful ritual at another participant – or attacks with a spell, psychic power, etc., that the GM considers magical – then the original ritual ends and fails immediately, and the target gets *no* resistance roll!

## EFFECT SHAPING IN OPERATION

To perform an Effect Shaping ritual, prepare the space, gather the ingredients, take the time required . . . and then make the modified skill roll. In some cases, the ritual's target is allowed a roll to resist its effect, and the procedure

becomes a Quick Contest. If the caster succeeds on the skill roll *and* wins any Quick Contest, then the ritual takes effect.

### Resisting Rituals

A ritual's target can usually resist – with Will, unless the ritual's description indicates otherwise. Magic Resistance adds to resistance rolls. When the caster rolls for the ritual to take effect, this becomes a Quick Contest between his final, modified ritual skill and his target's resistance. Many protective rituals resist attacks with their own modified skill levels, potentially giving a second resistance roll that's compared to the *same* roll made for the hostile ritual.

The subject can always choose *not* to resist with Will (or IQ, where applicable), if he knows about the ritual and trusts the magician. If the effect is resisted by HT, though, then he gets no choice – it's his body opposing the magic, not his mind. If he isn't aware that he's the target of a ritual, then he's normally assumed to sense the supernatural intrusion subconsciously and oppose it instinctively, whether or not it's actually hostile.

### Critical Success and Failure

Critical successes and failures mostly have the effects described for the specific ritual. Optionally, where no such results are noted, the GM may rule that a critical success gives the best possible result for the ritual, while a critical failure triggers a roll on one of the tables in Appendix B (pp. 256-260). Interpret the latter freely – those tables were designed with spell-based magic in mind.

### Example: An Effect Shaping Ritual

Thau-Ka-Mur is a student of decanic ritual magic – specifically, of the Bronze Tablets of Nommo, which describe how to work the Summon ritual (p. 162). He has Magery 0, Ritual Magic (Astromancy)-15, and Book (Tablets of Nommo)-14. Summon defaults from that Book at -2, and he hasn't spent any extra points on it. He wants to summon a scorpion-man, one of the guardian spirits who serve the gods.

## Path/Book Ritual Magic as Religious Ritual

Ritual magic is often intimately related to religion. Some faiths take a very *practical* view of such things, and see nothing strange in the idea that what happens in a temple or a church is functional magic. Others normally avoid any associations with magic, but the ritual magic rules still fit the practical effects of particular ceremonies; e.g., a funeral ceremony may guide the deceased safely to the next world.

In such cases, assume that the religious ceremony in question counts as an Effect Shaping ritual – usually something from the Path of Spirit, such as Lay to Rest or Banish. Exorcise is also suitable, although the Exorcism skill (p. B193) might serve that general purpose. The GM determines what rituals are available to priests, which should be a restricted list; this is a side benefit of

religious office, not serious magical training. Clerical Investment – or possibly some less-formal sign of divine favor, such as Blessed – eliminates any penalties that would normally apply for the lack of Magery. Priests have no need for the Ritual Magic skill; Religious Ritual (p. B217) serves instead.

If *all* priests of the faith can produce such effects (which usually means that the list of available rituals is extremely limited), then Religious Ritual stands in for the Path or Book skill, and the rituals default directly from that. If clerics require specialized training to accomplish these results, then Religious Ritual replaces Ritual Magic in the standard rules, Paths default from that at -6, and priests can study these and then the relevant rituals.

The GM – who likes to allow lots of scope for modifiers – decides that this invokes Iudal, as it opens a portal, and to a lesser extent Anatreth (the spirit will travel to the summoner), Bianakith (the spirit takes a part-human form), Charchnoumis (it's also partly animal), and Roêléd (it's a guardian). The connection to Iudal means that Taurus and Mercury are worth evoking, too. The signs and planets for the other decans aren't worth considering. Taurus is opposed by Scorpio, ironically, so scorpion symbols are actually *inappropriate*, and Thau-Ka-Mur should avoid anything associated with the decans Akton, Nefthada, or Tepsisem.

Thau-Ka-Mur starts by choosing his location. Bridges or crossroads would be fine if they weren't so public, and no eclipses are predicted; in the end, he opts for a doorway in his home, cleaning the place up and clearing away his collection of ancient artifacts to avoid associations with Akton or Tepsisem. This is good enough to avoid a penalty, but no more. He takes a week to sanctify the space, eliminating negative influences.

As he's summoning any scorpion-man he can get, he only needs a generic symbol. The best he can manage is a small, crude statue of one carved out of amber (associated with Iudal), for +1. He doesn't know the name of any scorpion-men, but in the circumstances, using the species name – checked in various sacred texts – lets him get away

with only a -1 penalty. Sadly, those writings don't suggest any appropriate sacrifices.

He looks for more magical symbols. A great iron key and a large bronze mirror are obviously improvised, but they do both evoke Iudal, so the GM gives him +2. He can't find any really effective links to Taurus. He thinks of making a pentacle on the floor out of sandalwood staves, but remembers in time that sandalwood invokes Tepsisem, so he traces it in orange dye instead, and borrows a pair of harmless snakes from a friendly priestess, holding one in each hand as he chants. This is just enough to connect him to Mercury, for +1. A mass of river-clay smeared over himself, and a doll carved of ivory, invoke Bianakith, for another +1. All the objects go in the center of the pentacle.

Thau-Ka-Mur can thus work his ritual with a net +4 for materials. His effective skill becomes 16. He isn't an adept, so he takes the standard amount of time (1d×10 minutes; the roll gives 30 minutes). His player rolls a 10. The GM rolls against the scorpion-man's Will of 14, at -3 against this ritual. The GM's roll of 13 means that Thau-Ka-Mur easily succeeds!

The magician is glad to see this, given how much the amber, dye, and ivory cost. Readers will notice that he hasn't done anything to protect himself against an irate super-human being, but he thinks he has a way to persuade it to cooperate . . .

## ENERGY ACCUMULATING MAGIC

In settings where Path/Book magic uses the Energy Accumulating model instead of Effect Shaping, the actual "shaping" of a ritual may be relatively easy, taking only moments and a word or a thought. The problem is that effective magic requires considerable *energy* – far more than any caster can supply personally. A variant idea is that this "energy" actually represents large numbers of minor spirits, which the magician must summon and bind until he has enough of them. This works much the same way, although it's often more colorful and potentially dangerous. Alternatively, each ritual could involve a series of negotiations with a number of spirits in a complex hierarchy,

working up to one who can offer the help required; in that case, the accumulated "energy" in fact rates the caster's negotiating position. Whatever the energy points used here stand for, they *don't* correspond to FP (although both are abstractions, not "energy" in the sense used by physicists).

Each ritual lists a base cost, which takes modifiers to determine how much energy is needed to produce a specific effect. Most castings will raise the cost significantly above the base! Ceremonies are required to acquire the necessary energy from external sources, or to negotiate sufficient "credit." Once the magician has accumulated enough, he directs it, and the effect follows.

*Grimnir looked on with much bad grace as Shape-shifter moved through the ritual of preparation. He did not like witch-magic: It relied too much on clumsy nature spirits and the slow brewing of hate. He preferred the lightning stroke of fear and the dark powers of the mind.*

*But certainly this crude magic had weight. It piled force on force, like a mounting wave, and overwhelmed its prey with the slow violence of an avalanche. If only it were a quick magic!*

– Alan Garner, *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen*

These ceremonies vary in length, depending on how long it takes the magician to acquire what's necessary. The problem is the difficulty of working with supernatural power: it's hard to control. The longer the process takes, the greater the chance of error – and a bad slip may send the energy gathered so far, or the attention of powerful spirits, *anywhere*.

## Ritual Parameters and Energy Required

The parameters for a ritual's effect are determined much as described under *Ritual Parameters* (pp. 129-132), but modify the base energy cost instead of skill. Use *Magical Scope Parameters* (pp. 242-243), treating the resulting modifiers as *additions*. For example, a Mist ritual cast over a 90-yard diameter needs +10 energy – and if the fog is to last for an hour, then that's another +2. A target's Magic Resistance, if any, adds to the energy requirement and *also* gives a bonus to resistance rolls.

Casters often have to estimate how much energy they'll need – and if they guess too low, then their rituals fail. Many magicians add a point or two to the totals they assign to their castings, as a safety margin, in case the task has hidden complications that make the requirement greater than estimated. They must decide such things at the *start* of the ritual, declaring exactly how much energy they intend to accumulate, and cannot change the parameters or the safety margin if they later find that they can acquire energy more or less freely than expected.

The GM may rule that any ritual requiring total energy, say, more than five points greater than the caster's relevant Path/Book skill is simply too difficult. Even if the magician can accumulate enough energy safely, he doesn't have the skill to shape it correctly, or he'll burn himself out trying.

### Multiple Targets

If a ritual succeeds against a group of 11 or more, then make an Effectiveness Roll (see *Effectiveness*, p. 137), and use its margin of success (minimum 0) with *Number Affected* (p. 130) to determine the proportion of the group affected.

### Range

Convert penalties from *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241) and *Cross-Dimensional Casting* (p. 131) into additional energy requirements by changing the sign; e.g., a ritual worked against a target up to a mile away needs +2 energy.

### Damage

The damage inflicted by a ritual that causes direct harm is often determined by how much energy the caster supplies. If the requirement isn't otherwise defined, then find it using the *Damage Modifiers Tables* (p. 243).

## Ritual Stages

Energy Accumulating rituals are performed as a series of repetitive stages, each of which has a chance to accumulate some energy and build it into the effect's "structure." The suggested time for each stage is five minutes, although the GM can lengthen or shorten this to make magic slower or faster. It *might* even vary with some kind of mana level – or sanctity level, if energy represents divine favor – making it

perhaps 20 minutes in low mana, 10 minutes in normal mana, 5 minutes in high mana, and 2 minutes in very high mana. Most magicians cannot shorten this period at all. An adept who eliminates the time element can reduce the first stage *only* to 1d seconds, but no shorter. Taking longer grants no bonuses; magicians who lengthen their rituals are simply performing more energy-gathering stages.

At the end of each stage, the magician rolls against the appropriate Path/Book skill; there are no separate techniques for different rituals in this system. However, the roll can receive modifiers. In particular, ritual elements work much as they do for Effect Shaping magic; see *Elements* (pp. 127-129). As always, there will usually be an upper limit on the size of the bonus from well-chosen elements – and since Energy Accumulating magic tends to be a little less concerned with symbolism and sympathetic connections, fewer bonuses may be available and the cap may be lower. Ritual parameters, on the other hand, never modify the roll; their effect is entirely on energy required. The result of this roll determines how much energy is acquired (see *The Casting*, p. 136). The ritual continues until the magician accumulates enough energy, gives up, or suffers a catastrophe.

### Varying Modifiers

Skill modifiers are usually established before the first stage, and apply throughout the ritual. Sometimes, though, the situation changes, or the magician realizes that things are going badly and that he needs to improvise – often meaning that he sacrifices something close to hand for a bonus! Thus, a caster's effective skill *can* change from stage to stage.

*Example:* Hoodoo Pete is on a ship that's being driven towards a rocky coast by a gale. Pete knows a Weatherworking ritual (pp. 156-157), and tries to divert the winds. The GM says that he has about 20 minutes. Unfortunately, his first attempts fail to accumulate anything like enough energy. In desperation, Pete grabs the captain's parrot and sacrifices it to The Big Gull, a being with command over the air. The Big Gull notices and approves, giving Pete a bonus on his next ritual roll – which gets him just enough energy, just in time. Now he simply has to convince the captain that the beheaded parrot was a necessary price to pay to save the ship, and worry about other spirits that don't much like that blasted Gull.

## "Aspected" Energy

Optionally, energy (or minor spirits) gathered in this way might have an "aspect," and only *some* of it may ideally suit a given ritual. Using the wrong "flavor" of energy for the task at hand can lead to peculiar consequences! The aspect required generally depends on the ritual, but may sometimes be a function of the use to which it's put; e.g., if energy can be aspected to fire, water, earth, or air, and the ritual is a general-purpose "Control Element," then all four types of energy may be appropriate in different circumstances.

A setting that uses this rule should probably feature three to six aspects. These can be linked to a system of elements (see *Alternative Elements*, pp. 47-48); to matter, energy, mind, and spirit; or to whatever else fits the setting's metaphysics.



## Learning Outside Your Tradition

A magician is generally limited to the Paths or Books known to his magical tradition. Other Paths or Books may exist, however, and some sorcerers might put considerable effort into seeking out such knowledge and integrating it with their own techniques. The GM decides how difficult this is, but it should never be easy! Even with a friendly teacher and/or a textbook with lots of lucid theoretical explanations, a magician might need months or *years* to incorporate concepts from one form of ritual into another – *if* such adaptation is even possible. It will certainly require multiple skill rolls, with critical failure on any of them indicating that the task is beyond the researcher.

Even if all goes well, the new Path could be a bad fit for the magician's ritual style, with an unfavorable default to his Ritual Magic skill. It might be easier to learn an entirely new Ritual Magic specialty – if a teacher is available. Ritual Magic specialties do sometimes default to each other, but note that this *doesn't* automatically grant access to Paths or Books associated with the other specialties. A magician must be *trained* in a form of Path/Book magic to use its rituals.

Optionally, the GM can permit magicians to start play with access to Paths or Books from outside their traditions. This should involve an Unusual Background worth 10 points or more *per Path or Book*. It's also likely to draw the attention of curious or jealous rivals!

## ENERGY ACCUMULATING IN OPERATION

When attempting an Energy Accumulating ritual, the magician must first determine the energy required. If he doesn't *need* to accumulate energy – perhaps because he can draw on a power item (see *Power Items*, p. 139) – then he can produce the desired result with a minimal ritual that requires just 1d+1 seconds and a single roll against modified skill at +4. Otherwise, he begins performing the first stage.

*Example:* Madame Jasmine, pursued by a warlord's minions as she returns to her hidden valley, decides to block the pass behind her using Rockfall (p. 144). She has Ritual Magic (Invocationist)-14 and Path of the Elements-13 – and also Magery 3, which adds to effective skill with rituals in this setting. The date isn't especially auspicious or inauspicious, and gives no skill modifier. Working in a hurry, Madame Jasmine can't prepare the location, so she's at -5. Her target is a mass of rock, and simply grabbing a pebble of the same type of stone from the ground lets her claim +2 for a symbolic representation. Rocks don't have names, so there's no bonus or penalty there; likewise, Madame Jasmine carries the few symbols that her style of magic needs, but can't get bonuses for them. Her effective skill is  $(13 + 3 - 5 + 2) = 13$ .

The ritual has a base cost of 8 points. Madame Jasmine perceives that she has but to get one large rock moving and an avalanche will sweep down, so there's no modifier for multiple targets or constituents. The GM rules that she needs to affect a three-yard-diameter area (+1 energy), but that a momentary effect (+0 energy) will start things moving. The GM decrees that range is a factor with this working, so since the rock in question is over 200 yards away, but less than half a mile, that's +1 energy. The ritual doesn't inflict damage directly, so there are no damage modifiers. The overall energy requirement is thus  $(8 + 1 + 0 + 1) = 10$  points.

Madame Jasmine's school of magic recognizes five aspects of magical energy: fire, wood, earth, metal, and water. Not surprisingly, Rockfall requires earth energies.

### The Casting

At the end of each ritual stage, roll against effective skill. At every third stage, apply a cumulative -1 to skill – the longer you've been working, the harder it is to find more energy. Interpret the results as follows:

**Critical Failure** – Roll on a critical failure table; see *Critical Failures* (p. 137).

**Normal Failure** – You gather a single energy point, which is randomly aspected if using "*Aspected*" Energy (p. 135).

**Normal Success** – You collect energy equal to your margin of success (minimum 1 point). If using the rules for aspected energy, then this energy is randomly aspected – but you may opt to acquire only *half* as much (round *up*) with the aspect of your choice. You're free to discard incorrectly aspected energy at this point, if you don't want to keep it.

**Critical Success** – As normal success, but if using the rules for aspected energy, you gather energy equal to your full margin of success, with the correct aspect.

The GM can adjust this system; e.g., he might declare that a roll missed by 5 or more triggers a critical failure, or increase or reduce the energy acquired to reflect magic's potency and stability in the setting.

Once the magician believes that he has accumulated enough energy, he can invoke the ritual effect with just one second of concentration. If he gathered sufficient energy, then the effect takes place; any excess energy dissipates safely. Otherwise, the ritual fails, with a few flashes and sparks, or a momentary sense of mystical chaos, as the energy floods back into the universe. The caster *can* "hold energy ready" if he wishes to delay for some reason, but he must continue to concentrate – and if he's attacked or injured while doing so, and fails a Will-3 roll, he loses the energy (possibly causing a catastrophe, if the GM wishes).

### Use of Incorrectly Aspected Energy

When a magician uses wrongly aspected energy in a ritual, it "flavors" the effect, as determined by the GM. Such consequences shouldn't stop the magic from working, but might well be disturbing, disruptive, or *weird*. They *definitely* ought to prevent the magic from being subtle! For example, psychic energies might produce mood swings or mild hallucinations in everyone nearby; spiritual energies could

produce ghostly voices, chill winds, or a sense of haunting; fire energies may add sparks and flashes; and stone energies are liable to render magical effects not only solid, but heavy and immobile.

## Critical Failures

Critical failure effects with Energy Accumulating magic can be much like those for other magic; roll on the *Critical Spell Failure Table* (p. B236) or one of the alternative tables in Appendix B (pp. 256-260). If the magician has accumulated a large proportion of the energy required, then it may feed into the ensuing catastrophe, making it even more dramatic, as the GM sees fit; e.g., a lightning bolt slams down repeatedly over an area, a mind-control attempt induces strange impulses in everyone present, a divination stuns the caster's mind with countless irrelevancies, or a ward forms a rigid barrier that stops everything and anything vaguely related to what was intended. This is sometimes known as the magic "running wild." A caster who was *attempting* a broad, chaotic, destructive effect will probably find that the critical failure result focuses entirely on him, however! Wild magic is perverse.

*Example:* Madame Jasmine (above), knowing that she's a quarter of an hour ahead of her pursuers, sets to work. After five minutes of chanting and dancing, she can start gathering energy. She rolls against her effective skill of 13, but gets a 15. The GM determines randomly that the single energy point she acquires is water-aspected. Given the urgency of the situation, she keeps it – a muddy landslide will do the job, after all.

After another five minutes, she rolls again – a 6! She could claim 4 points of earth-aspected energy, but she opts for the full 7 points. She gets lucky: the GM determines randomly that it's earth-aspected anyway. She still hasn't quite met her needs, but she has Overconfidence, so she keeps going.

This time, her confidence seems justified; the warlord's men only come into view as another five minutes end. She rolls one last time, at -1 because this is her third energy-gathering stage. Unfortunately, she gets a 17 – a critical failure! Normally this would mean a roll on the "Oriental" Table (p. 259), but the GM decides, with all that energy already acquired, to impose a simple wild effect. The mountainside explodes, actually sweeping away the leading troops – but now a mudslide is bearing down on Madame Jasmine . . .

## Effectiveness

Energy Accumulating rituals are resisted slightly less often than Effect Shaping ones, since sufficient energy can often overcome difficulties in affecting the target. However, some *can* be resisted, which demands a die roll. Assessing results such as the proportion of a group affected (see *Number Affected*, p. 130) also calls for a roll.

For these purposes, make an *Effectiveness Roll* if the ritual succeeds. This is a roll against the relevant Path or Book skill, with bonuses for Magery (if applicable) but with *none* of the other modifiers that apply to energy-gathering rolls. Failure doesn't prevent the ritual from working, but it makes the effects easy to resist and means that multiple-target

rituals affect only the minimum number. The GM can also use this roll to determine whether a ritual being used for a complex task is precise enough; e.g., sending a magical wave to capsize a boat without harming two adjacent vessels might require success by 3 on the Effectiveness Roll.

## Trading Energy for Effectiveness

Optionally, the GM might allow magicians to improve their Effectiveness Roll by gathering and using extra energy during the ritual. Each +1 to the roll costs +1 energy. The caster has to declare the bonus he intends to claim when he defines the ritual effect, and he *must* gather the extra energy for the ritual to work.

## Combined Efforts with Energy Accumulating

Magicians can collaborate on Energy Accumulating rituals. They're subject to much the same restrictions noted for Effect Shaping (see *Combined Efforts*, pp. 132-133): all must use the same Ritual Magic specialty, all must be in communication, etc. As usual for Energy Accumulating, ritual parameters modify energy requirements, not skill. Other penalties apply normally and affect all participants equally – *don't* divide these between them. Each caster also has -1 to skill per participant after the first, due to the problems caused by everyone attempting to get hold of much the same thing in the same place.

After each stage in the ritual, *each* magician makes a skill roll, and gathers energy as the roll dictates and/or discards unwanted energy. Critical failure results affect everyone equally! If other skill or attribute values are needed when determining the ritual's results, use the average for all the participants, rounded down – and where raw power matters more than finesse, add +1 per magician after the first.

If magical energy is very much a finite resource, then wizards engaged in group castings may suffer the cumulative -1 to skill at every *second* stage – or even at every stage after the first – rather than at every third stage.



# OPTIONS AND VARIATIONS

Path/Book magic is inherently flexible. The GM may add or vary details to suit his campaign's atmosphere or the style of a particular magical tradition.

## CONDITIONAL RITUALS

A ritual's effects normally happen as soon as the ceremony is completed, or after a short delay, and last for the duration that the magician specified when he set the ritual parameters. However, casters can alter this if they wish by including *conditions*. There are two types of conditions: those stipulating when the effects *start* and those affecting when they *end*.

If a magician specifies a starting condition, then the ritual's effects will begin to apply if and when that condition is met during the duration defined for the effect. A continuing effect then lasts until that duration ends. For example, a magician might cast a Doom ritual over his sanctum, set to affect any intruder who enters, or cast a combined Slumber and Dream Shackles ritual over some apples, set to affect whoever takes a bite from one. A common use of conditional curses is in magical oath-taking, where a curse strikes the subject if he breaks the terms of an oath. Many charms (p. 139) are effectively conditional rituals; e.g., Chaperone (p. 152) creates a protective charm that takes effect when it encounters a danger to the subject.

A magician can also set a condition that, if met, causes a ritual's effects to end before its duration expires. This is commonly used in conjunction with curses. For instance, if a village witch curses a cruel lord "until he reforms his ways," and the lord *does* reform (in the GM's judgment), then the curse is lifted.

Conditions only result in additional modifiers to ritual skill rolls or energy costs when they necessitate changes to ritual elements or parameters. For example, a symbolic representation of the target isn't usually available for a conditional ritual where the target is unknown. If an effect is cast with an Energy Accumulating ritual, then it's up to the magician to give it enough energy to affect any likely target – and if, for instance, the eventual victim has more Magic Resistance than the ritual allowed for, the effects won't work.

## COMBINED CEREMONIES

The rituals described on pp. 140-162 are individual effects, but a caster may be able to combine them into a longer ceremony that's intended to have more than one effect. For example, a magician might conduct a ceremony to call a spirit (Summon) *and* control it (Bind). To be combined, all of the rituals must have the same intended target and use the same kind of aspected energy (if applicable). For Effect Shaping rituals, add together the time to perform the rituals, and make a separate ritual roll for each effect in the composite ritual at the end of the total time. For Energy Accumulating rituals, make rolls at the usual intervals and use all the energy gathered to pay the total cost for the combined rituals. If the rituals are resisted, then the target resists each effect separately.

## SENSING RITUAL ATTACKS

Most people don't know when a hostile ritual is being used against them from out of sight – at least, not until they suffer harm – unless they have some sort of prepared defense, such as a Chaperone (p. 152). However, certain folk *can* sense this . . .

When someone with Magery is cursed, he may feel the initial assault as "nameless dread," pain, or nausea – or directly *perceive* the incoming forces. Precognition of any kind certainly tends to give some kind of warning. Even simple Danger Sense might alert the target, if the GM decides that this advantage is paranormal or that the attack involves a preliminary physical element. The Vision of Luck ritual and analogous spells are very effective tests for curses, and an individual with the ability to see auras may perceive incursions or "stains" with a Per roll at -4.

If ritual magic employs spirits, then individuals who can sense such things (with the Medium advantage, for instance) – particularly if they're ritual magicians – can almost always perceive the entities that implement curses. When the ritual is being worked with an extended preparation period (see *Extra Time*, p. 127-128), the forces or spirits involved start to gather, and thus are detectable, from the very beginning. If the ritual targets a group or an area, then every potential victim has a chance to sense the attack – and *someone* is bound to do so, if enough people stand to be affected.

Such knowledge can save lives – or fill a victim's final days with anguish. If the sufferer lacks the ability to remove a curse, then its mere presence may oppress him. A cursed "sensitive" might even suffer nightmares or depression; depicting this would be good roleplaying. A Fright Check might also be appropriate. All this is a small price to pay, though, if the victim recognizes the need to assemble countermeasures.

See also *Magic of Mass Destruction* (p. 218).

## CANCELING AND DISPELLING EFFECTS

Ritual effects rarely continue forever. In general, a caster can freely cancel one of his *own* workings before it has run its course. This takes 1d-2 seconds of concentration (minimum 1) and requires no roll – although the GM may request an unmodified Ritual Magic roll if he deems it appropriate. However, a magician can't cancel a ritual that has run wild (see *Critical Failures*, p. 137), that involves confusing aspected energy effects, or that's otherwise out of his control.

Magically dismantling out-of-control effects, or other casters' rituals, is trickier. This usually requires Dispel Ritual (pp. 157-158) or some variant thereof. However, *destroying* an effect by physical means can sometimes be easy! When the effect is tied to a charm, malefice, or similar item (see *Path/Book-Related Items*, p. 139), simply breaking that object is often enough. And in many traditions, killing a sorcerer is thought to end all of his continuing magic. Whether or not this is true, the danger for suspected magicians is obvious.

## Path/Book-Related Items

Path/Book magic produces and involves several types of magic items that differ from those created by Enchantment spells.

### Charms

Most magical items produced by Path/Book rituals are *charms*: objects empowered to grant their holder a benefit. A person can only carry or use one charm created by a particular ritual at any given time. Charms usually work exclusively for the individual for whom they were made.

Protective charms are often called *amulets*, while charms that draw things to the wearer are termed *talismans*. Many amulets break when their effects have lapsed or when they've failed, in order to alert their wearer. Some rituals require charms (see description). For others, charms are optional, and usually a means of preparing the ritual in advance and setting conditions for its activation, such as someone picking up, donning, or using the charm (see *Conditional Rituals*, p. 138).



A charm's exact form varies with magical tradition. Common examples include jewelry (particularly necklaces and rings), small bags or pouches filled with herbs and other ingredients, stones or crystals, vials of liquid (oils, potions, etc.), ointments, incense (burned to activate the charm), feathers or other animal parts, woven cords, and pieces of paper with magical writing.

### Fetishes

A *fetish* is an object containing a spirit's essence. See *Fetishes* (p. 161).

### Foci

A *focus* is an item that aids in the performance of ritual magic. See "*Mystic Symbol*" *Advantages* (p. 124).

### Malefices, Dolls, Etc.

*Malefice* is a general term for a symbolic or sympathetic representation used to cast hostile magic at a distance, such as the "Voodoo doll." The concept is commonplace in ritual magic, as an aspect of casting rather than a spell in itself. The items under *Material and Symbolic Components* (pp. 128-129) often take the form of dolls or small statues, or are shaped into such when being prepared. In some traditions, this is almost mandatory.

Hostile rituals from the Path of Health often involve malefices. If the magic takes effect over an extended period, then the doll must usually be kept intact throughout that time. This can be dangerous for the caster – in some settings, the discovery of such an item is taken as evidence of serious magical crime. Destroying the malefice (non-ritually!) typically negates the magic.

### Power Items

Magicians working Energy Accumulating rituals may benefit from items that provide a certain amount of "free" energy (aspected, if using that rule). In some cases, these are fetishes. For instance, a fetish with a dryad bound to it might provide wood-aspected energy.

In other cases, ritual items – notably foci – acquire this quality through long use. Use *Enchantment Through Age* (pp. 110-112) and possibly *Enchantment Through Deeds* (pp. 112-113); every 100 energy points (4 character points) imbued in this way gives the artifact the ability to provide *one* energy point for ritual purposes, once per ritual casting. The GM determines the object's aspect (if any) as he feels is appropriate, based on how it was used.

It should generally be difficult or impossible to create power items except through binding spirits or centuries of use. If the GM doesn't mind Energy Accumulating rituals being quick and easy, though, then he can use some of the other enchantment rules in Chapter 4, treating the artifact as a variant Powerstone. Every 5 energy points the "Powerstone" would provide converts to 1 point of the type used by rituals

## BACKLASH: INSTANT KARMA

Optionally – especially in settings where ritual magic involves spirits, and magic is subject to the Threefold Law (see *More Magical Laws*, p. 15) – *hostile* rituals might be subject to a special rule. On successful completion, such rituals work as described but also require an *additional* ritual skill roll to protect the magician or his client from the dangers they raised. For Effect Shaping magic, roll against modified ritual skill. For Energy Accumulating ceremonies, roll against Ritual Magic, with a bonus for Magery and a penalty equal to the target's Magic Resistance (or similar defenses, at the GM's option), as applicable, but no other modifiers.

Failure means the *client* also suffers the ritual's effects – and if the magician is the client, then *he* is affected! Critical failure means the client suffers the effect of a critical success on the ritual. In either case, a ritual that normally does damage based on the margin of success causes damage based on

the margin of *failure*. No resistance roll is allowed against this backlash – it represents a sort of “instant karma.” In settings where it's a risk, ethical magicians are exceedingly careful with hostile magic.

## ALTERNATIVES TO RITUAL MAGIC SKILL

The ideas discussed under *Alternative Core Skills* (pp. 74-75) for spell-based ritual magic are equally valid for the Path/Book version. The GM would have to decide which Paths default to a particular nonstandard core skill; e.g., the Path of Gadgets might default to Computer Hacking, or the Path of Health to Pressure Secrets. Alternatively, a Book may be accessible through such a skill, representing the highly esoteric “inner secrets” of some exotic field of study.

# PATHS

The following Paths and rituals cover the more common magical effects in stories and legends. This list is by no means exhaustive! The GM is invited to expand it, using these examples as guidelines. Conversely, the GM is free to forbid Paths and rituals that don't suit his campaign; e.g., the Path of Health is unlikely if magic is “dubious” or downright diabolical, the Path of Gadgets is largely inappropriate for low-tech games, and the Path of the Elements doesn't fit settings where magic is supposed to be subtle and indirect.

The names of rituals and Paths frequently differ from tradition to tradition. The GM and players are encouraged to make up evocative names for in-game use.

### Statistics

Each ritual includes two lines of statistics:

*Effect Shaping:* Path defaults and casting time as an Effect Shaping ritual.

*Energy Accumulating:* Base energy cost as an Energy Accumulating ritual.

Either may also include notes on effects, where these depend on margin of success or energy used.

## THE PATH OF CUNNING

The rituals of this Path focus on trickery, deception, and subterfuge.

### Cloud Memory

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-7; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 12 points.

This ritual lets the caster alter or erase one of the subject's memories. The target may attempt to resist normally. If the caster wins, then he can erase a selected memory (leaving the victim with a period of “missing time”) or replace it with a fabrication. The erased or altered memory may be recovered using hypnosis, the Read Memories ritual, the Mind Probe

advantage, etc., at a penalty equal to the magician's margin of victory. Otherwise, the effect is permanent.

### Guise

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-1; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 4 points.

The subject looks and sounds like someone else for the duration of the ritual effect. The effects include clothing, so Guise can, for example, clean and dress a scullery maid like a princess without otherwise changing her appearance. This transformation shows up perfectly clearly in photographs and videos. The GM can require an Artist (Illusion) skill roll to match exact details or create an aesthetically pleasing effect. Guise doesn't change the recipient's *abilities* in any way.

Guise *isn't* resisted by observers. It generates a visual illusion that everyone will see – although they may question it, if it's wildly implausible.

### Hallucination

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-6; 1d×10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 10 points.

If the target fails to resist, then the caster can affect his perceptions, convincing him of the complete presence or absence of one (and *only* one) “thing”; e.g., a person, a torch-wielding mob, a building, or a flock of birds. Anything that can be described as a single entity should pass muster, but the GM's judgment is final. The resulting hallucination appears completely real to the subject – he can see it, hear it, feel it, etc. – but exists entirely in his mind.

A hallucination can't directly cause physical injuries or shock penalties. Particularly creepy or scary visions – biting into a hamburger only to find it full of maggots, waking up in a bed full of snakes, etc. – may merit a Fright Check at a penalty equal to half the caster's margin of victory (round down). This illusion *can* be more frightening than the real thing. The magic can dig right into the victim's mind!

## Hand of Glory

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-7; 1d×5 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 11 points.

This ritual creates a charm that aids greatly in the performance of burglaries. The charm must take the form of a candle or candles. If the candle is made from the hand of a hanged thief, then all ritual skill rolls *and* Effectiveness Rolls are at +5. The effect is always used to affect a single building, so it *must* be defined to cover a building-sized area.

Once the Hand is created and enchanted, the client takes it to an entrance to the target building and lights it. At that moment, everyone in the building – including guard dogs and the like – must try to resist the ritual, using Will-2. Failure means they're rendered paralyzed but conscious and aware for the effect's duration. Furthermore, every physical lock in the building is opened or disabled. This *will* (for example) raise bars, move bolts, and disable electronic locks, but won't open a door that has been nailed shut or blocked by rubble. The client must immediately carry the candle into the building. All the ritual's effects last until the candle leaves the building, burns out, or is extinguished, or until the end of the duration specified in the ritual.

## Liar's Charm

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning; 20 minutes; grants -1 to opponents' rolls, plus a further -1 per *full* 3 points in margin of success.

*Energy Accumulating:* 3 points per -1 to opponents' rolls.

This ritual turns a small, innocuous object (e.g., a coin) into a charm that makes the subject a more convincing liar for the effect's duration, provided that he carries it on his person. It gives a penalty to any roll to use the Detect Lies skill, the Empathy advantage, magic, etc., to discern that the carrier is lying. Victims don't get a resistance roll against the ritual, but do receive any normal rolls to spot lies – just at the ritual's penalty. The charm *doesn't* protect against direct mind reading; someone who can perceive the user's thoughts will realize that he's lying.

## Lust

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-4 or Path of Health-5; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points.

The Lust ritual inspires sexual desire in the subject. The magician creates a charm and gives it to the client. When the client next comes into contact with the ritual's target, that person can attempt to resist the ritual. Someone with Lecherousness must first make his self-control roll or resist at -8. Failure to resist means the victim is consumed with desire for the client and reacts accordingly.

This ritual inspires desire – *not* love. The subject will react in accordance with his personality traits, including mental disadvantages. This may mean that he makes another Will roll, with success indicating that he runs away and seeks forgiveness for impure thoughts instead of lustfully pursuing the client!

## Mist

See p. 144.

## Obscurity

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-5; 10 minutes; gives points of skill modifier equal to margin of success (minimum 1).

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points, +1 per point of skill modifier.

Casting Obscurity on a person, place, or object renders it less likely to be noticed or found. This isn't invisibility! The subject remains visible – it's just that people tend to overlook it.

The effect generates a skill modifier. *Living subjects* treat this as a bonus to Stealth and similar skills. *Objects* affected by the ritual grant those who try to conceal them a bonus to Holdout, Smuggling, etc. *Locations* shielded by Obscurity give a penalty to Area Knowledge and related skills, and to Sense rolls required to find or enter the place (e.g., people walk past the odd house on the corner without even noticing it's there, and tend to forget it even when it's pointed out to them). Victims don't get a roll to resist the ritual, but do have a chance to see or remember the subject – just at this penalty.

## Slumber

See p. 143.

## Suggestion

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-6; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

The magician can use this ritual to plant a *single* command in the target's mind, similar to a posthypnotic suggestion. The subject resists normally. If the caster wins, then he implants the suggestion. When it activates, the victim must make a Will roll at a penalty equal to the caster's margin of victory. Success lets him ignore the command. Otherwise, he carries it out to the best of his ability. Dangerous, bizarre, or wildly out-of-character actions may give a bonus to the Will roll.

## Veil

See p. 152.

# THE PATH OF DREAMS

This Path gives magicians access to the “dream world” – the abstract realm where people's minds go when they sleep – and enables them to affect others' dreams. The descriptions that follow assume that the dream world has a degree of objective reality as a “spirit realm,” but that doesn't *have* to be the case; the rituals might instead work by interacting with mundane dreams via magical telepathy. In either case, the subject may opt to use his Dreaming skill (p. B188) in place of Will to resist or oppose these effects.

While in the dream world, the caster can conduct other rituals. These affect “dream selves,” *not* the physical bodies of normal people. For instance, a Path of Health ritual could heal or harm the target’s dream persona, but not his body in the waking world.

## Dream Sanctum

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Dreams-3 or Path of Protection-6; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points.

The caster creates a magical barrier around an object or an area in the material world that resists intrusions from the dream world. For a Path of Dreams ritual to affect anyone inside, it must first *win* a Quick Contest against Dream Sanctum. If the attacking ritual loses but has a duration of an hour or more, then it can try again once per hour until it succeeds or its duration expires. If the subject leaves the protected space using a Path of Dreams ritual, then his dream self becomes vulnerable to ritual attack.

*And I can't sleep,  
'Cause you got strange powers,  
You're in my dreams,  
Strange powers.*

– *Stephin Merritt,  
“Strange Powers”*

## Dream Shackles

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Dreams-8; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 13 points.

This ritual imprisons the subject in the dream world. Failure to resist means that he’s unable to wake; he wanders in dreams while his body remains in a deep sleep. The ritual takes effect the next time he falls asleep, or *immediately* if conducted while he’s asleep. If the imprisonment lasts until the victim has had one full night’s sleep, then the ritual needs no duration modifier – but if the caster accepts the penalty for a longer duration, then the ritual effectively puts the target in a prolonged state of unconsciousness.

While Dream Shackles lasts, other Path of Dreams rituals can affect the subject, and he won’t be able to wake up. As well, his body is helpless against physical attacks; e.g., if his room is set on fire, he’ll burn or suffocate. A victim shackled for long enough will die of dehydration and starvation unless he receives medical attention.

## Dream Visitor

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Dreams-2; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 4 points.

The subject must be asleep while this ritual is cast. He may resist using Will. If the caster wins, then the sleeper immediately begins to dream. The caster then falls into a

trance and, after a brief sojourn in the dream world, enters the target’s dreams.

The magician can try to reshape features of the target’s dreams by imposing his will on the environment. Treat this as a Quick Contest, with both caster and subject using the higher of Will or the Dreaming skill, but the victim rolling at -3. The visitor can send messages, deliver warnings, create pleasant images, inflict effects equivalent to ordinary failure on the self-control roll for Nightmares (p. B144), or, if he’s there all night, *suppress* that disadvantage. A badly failed dream-control attempt – especially if trying to inflict or suppress Nightmares – may mean a Fright Check for the intruder, at the GM’s option. The dreamer always remembers the content of these dreams.

## Dreamwalk

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Dreams; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points.

After conducting this ritual, the magician enters a trance. He experiences a brief period of disorientation (1d minutes), and then begins to dream. His sojourn to the dream world lasts as long as he wills. Unless an outside force attempts to detain him (see *Dream Shackles*, above), all that’s necessary to leave is a second of concentration and an unmodified Path of Dreams roll.

The magician generally determines his surroundings, but encounters with other dream travelers may change the scene. Even so, Dreamwalk gives him far more precise control than the Dreaming skill does, and can achieve anything that Dreaming can accomplish. Experts in the Path of Dreams use Dreamwalk as a tool to explore their own minds, to investigate peculiarities in the dream world, and to set up situations in which to receive guests who are using the Dream Visitor ritual (above).

## Night Terrors

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Dreams-5; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 10 points.

This ritual inflicts terrifying nightmares on the subject when he next sleeps. He resists normally. If multiple Night Terrors are cast on him during a single day, then he still only suffers *one* attack when he goes to sleep – albeit with the effects of the most successful ritual. He must spend a day awake and be targeted anew by Night Terrors before he can suffer another attack.

While casting, the magician defines the basic features of the nightmare, which lasts 1d minutes (no duration modifier required). During that time, the subject’s body becomes rigid. Even if the dreamer realizes that he’s suffering a nightmare, he must make a Will roll at -6 to awaken before the dream is over. At the end of the dream, the victim must make a Fright Check with a penalty equal to *twice* the caster’s margin of victory.

The Fright Check becomes more severe if this ritual is worked successfully against the same victim on several consecutive days. Apply an additional -1 per day. Magicians *can* drive people insane this way, or even kill them.

## Slumber

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-3, Path of Dreams-2, or Path of Health-2; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 4 points.

Slumber causes the target to fall into a deep, *natural* sleep; beings that don't sleep are immune. The subject resists with Will, at a penalty equal to *twice* any FP he's missing due to lost sleep or Nightmares. Failure means that he falls asleep immediately. Even if he resists, he must make another Will roll every two hours subsequently, with the same penalties for missed sleep, until he falls asleep (at the GM's option, sleep suppressants such as caffeine might give a small Will bonus here). He automatically dozes off if he settles down willingly. This ritual requires no duration modifiers – it's a one-off effect that makes the subject inclined to sleep.

The target's slumber is normal in every way, and untroubled unless some other force intervenes. If left undisturbed, he sleeps for his normal sleep period, with a minimum of 1d hours, before waking. He can be awakened normally at any time.

Magicians often cast Slumber as a prelude to other Path of Dreams rituals. It's also used to provide rest and comfort. Of course, cast on someone who's driving alone on the highway late at night, it can be deadly . . .

## THE PATH OF THE ELEMENTS

The Path of the Elements suits campaigns where magicians use Path-based magic for direct, *dramatic* effects. It might not be worthwhile in settings where spell-based magic also exists – combat spells are generally quicker and easier than Path/Book rituals for this sort of purpose. On the other hand, ritual effects can be made broader and longer-lasting than most spells.

### *Calm the Winds*

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements; 10 minutes; reduces wind force by levels equal to margin of success (minimum 1).

*Energy Accumulating:* 2 points, +1 per level of reduction of wind strength.

This ritual must be cast over an area. It reduces wind speed and strength throughout the affected region, perhaps even creating a "bubble" of calm within a hurricane. Each level of effect lowers wind speeds by one step on the Beaufort scale (for details, see p. 194 of *GURPS Magic*). Five levels will reduce a moderate gale to a light breeze; eight will turn a full-power storm into a gentle breeze; and 12 will diminish some hurricanes to dead calm. When cast over the sea, this tends to decrease wave heights and strengths in the area (if they're caused by wind), but only within limits – a few yards of calm air *won't* stop a ship-killing wave whipped up by a typhoon!

### *Command the Waves*

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-4; 10 minutes; gives levels of effectiveness equal to margin of success (minimum 1).

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points, +1 per level of effectiveness.

Raises, suppresses, or diverts waves in water across its area of effect. Each level of effectiveness can raise or lower wave heights by 1'. Five levels can move floating objects within the area at 1 yard/second in any direction.

## Conjure Flame

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-4; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points.

This ritual creates fire(s) over its area of effect. Adjust skill or energy according to the *Damage Modifiers Tables* (pp. 242-243); damage *type* must of course be burning. This modifier determines the damage inflicted per second on things that spend a full turn in the flames. Someone running through the fire may suffer less harm, at the GM's option; see *Flame* (p. B433) for guidelines. If there's little or no useful fuel in the affected area, then *triple* all duration modifiers. On the other hand, if flammable materials are present, then even a momentary-duration, minimum-damage casting can ignite blazes that will last until they burn out or are quenched – although these will only burn with their natural heat and strength.

## Endure Elements

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements, Path of Nature, or Path of Protection; 10 minutes; grants levels of Temperature Tolerance equal to 10 × margin of success (minimum 10 levels).

*Energy Accumulating:* 2 points, +1 per 10 levels of Temperature Tolerance.

Temporarily grants the subject the Temperature Tolerance advantage (p. B93). Magicians use this to do things like walk through blizzards or stand amidst raging fires.

## Firecalm

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-1; 10 minutes; gives levels of effectiveness equal to margin of success (minimum 1).

*Energy Accumulating:* 3 points, +1 per level of effectiveness.

Firecalm reduces the intensity of fires, as well as that of dangerously hot phenomena such as molten lava. Each level of effectiveness lowers the damage inflicted by heat or fire by 1 point across the area of effect. If this eliminates a point more damage than the fire's maximum, then it extinguishes the blaze; e.g., 13 levels would quench flame that causes 2d damage (maximum 12 points).

## Inexorable Breeze

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-1; 10 minutes; gives levels of effectiveness equal to margin of success (minimum 1).

*Energy Accumulating:* 11 points, +1 per level of effectiveness.



This ritual creates a breeze that moves around as the caster wishes within its area of effect. The effects are similar to those of the Shape Air spell (p. B243), including the potential to cause knockback. Treat the breeze as an attack that inflicts 1d per two full levels of effectiveness, but *only* for knockback purposes – it does no actual damage.

## Mist

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-4, Path of the Elements-2, or Path of Nature-3; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points.

This ritual creates a thick fog that fills the affected area. The mist functions exactly like that conjured by the Fog spell (p. B253) for the effect's duration.

## Rockfall

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-6; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

Rockfall triggers avalanches and landslides. All unworked stone in its area of effect gains the *potential* to split along multiple fracture lines. If fracturing in this way would allow it to fall, then that's exactly what will happen, while rocks that are *already* loose will start to roll. Note that gravity, not magic, shifts the rocks. A ritual worked on more-or-less flat ground will accomplish nothing – the stone will remain intact and undamaged – but a magician who notices a slope with many precariously balanced boulders can start things moving with a well-aimed minor ritual. A major avalanche from a previously intact rock face inevitably requires a large area of effect, however.

## Shake the Earth

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-7; 20 minutes; success by 0-4 gives level 0, success by 5-9 gives level 1, success by 10+ gives level 2.

*Energy Accumulating:* 10 points for level 0, 15 for level 1, 20 for level 2.

This ritual shakes the ground over the affected area. The caster probably won't want to be in the vicinity – and range modifiers *do* apply! The quake always lasts for only a few seconds, so there are no duration modifiers. It must affect a fairly large area to be useful; shaking one corner of a building will upset the occupants, but won't cause it to collapse unless it was already seriously weakened. Interpret levels of effectiveness as follows:

*Level 0:* Minimal effects – a slight swaying.

*Level 1:* Damages buildings, but doesn't bring them down. People in the area must make a DX roll to remain standing.

*Level 2:* Cracks stone walls; may collapse towers. People in the area must make a DX-3 roll to remain standing, repeated 1d times until they fall, hit the ground voluntarily, or find some solid support.

Higher levels aren't possible, but multiple quakes can weaken and then bring down a building. Structures designed to be earthquake-proof may resist more effectively (GM's option).

## Thunderbolt

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-6 or Path of Nature-7; 1 hour + 10 minutes (see below); gives dice of burning damage equal to margin of success (minimum 1d).

*Energy Accumulating:* 12 points; use *Damage Modifiers Tables* (pp. 242-243) to determine damage, which *must* be burning.

Thunderbolt is one of the most physically spectacular rituals. It calls down a bolt of lightning from the sky to strike a target designated by the magician. The ritual has two parts.

First, the caster must prepare a small charm that serves to “draw” down the lightning. When using Effect Shaping, this takes an hour and requires one roll, at +2 to modified skill. When using Energy Accumulating, this calls for 1/3 of the ritual's total energy requirement. The resulting charm must then be placed on or near the target of the strike. This may be (and usually is!) done without his knowledge or permission.

The magician must perform the second part of the ritual within 12 hours of the first, unless he accepts modifiers for extended duration. When using Effect Shaping, this takes 10 minutes and requires another roll (at no additional bonus or penalty), and the target may resist with Will at -2. When using Energy Accumulating, this requires the remaining 2/3 of the ritual's total energy requirement and *can't* be resisted – although the GM may require an Effectiveness Roll if the target is moving fast or otherwise difficult to hit. If the ritual works, then a lightning bolt strikes the target. The victim can't dodge this if the charm is on his person, as the object draws the bolt to him! The lightning destroys the charm if the ritual succeeds.

Lightning does burning damage. It can have odd effects on electrical equipment and around conductors. See the Lightning spell (p. B244) for guidelines.

## Weatherworking

See pp. 156-157.

# THE PATH OF FORM

The Path of Form deals with shapeshifting into animal guise, and grants some affinity with beasts. While its rituals aren't exactly subtle, the more spectacular effects it grants can often take place out of sight of spectators. Thus, this Path *might* suit “subtle magic” games – particularly those based on real-world beliefs, which frequently associate shape-changing with shamans and similar figures.

## Gentle Beast

See p. 156.

## Reversion of Form

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Form-5; 30 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points.

Reversion of Form forces a shape-changed being back to his true (typically human) form. If a ritual or a spell caused the transformation, then it resists this ritual; if the change

involved an innate ability, then the subject may resist with the *better* of HT or Will, plus any applicable Talent. Worked with a “momentary” duration, this ritual simply changes the subject back as a one-off event. Given a longer duration, it forces him to *stay* in his native form for that long. The GM may rule that it can only be cast in the shapeshifter’s presence.

### See the True Face

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Form-1 or Path of Knowledge-6; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 3 points.

The ritual’s subject *must* be in sight, and may resist with Will at -5. If the caster wins, then he discovers whether the target is shape-changed. Successfully cast on someone who’s using an innate shapeshifting ability, this ritual *also* reveals the shifter’s native form and gives the magician a momentary vision of his true face. If the subject is under a magical illusion or similar effect, though, the caster detects the presence of such a thing but nothing more. In all cases, critical success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll provides some details about what caused the transformation.

### Skinchange

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Form-6\*; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points\*.

\* Adjusted for form; see below.

Skinchange isn’t a single ritual but a *category* of rituals that grant the magician the ability to assume the shapes of animals. Each species calls for its own ritual. In most traditions, the list of available options is fairly short; see *Shapeshifters’ Choices* (p. 34). In some, the caster must have the specially prepared skin of an animal to adopt its form, even if he’s an adept who normally doesn’t require material elements. Magicians in most settings can’t cast Skinchange on others. If they can, then that’s probably a *much* harder ritual – especially if the caster, not the subject, controls the transformation.

A successfully cast ritual temporarily grants the caster the Alternate Form advantage (p. B83). He transforms immediately rather than having to concentrate for 10 seconds, and retains the advantage for the effect’s duration or until forced back into native form. The condition that will cause him to revert is anything that negates the ritual effect. The GM should define the template for the animal form, with input from the player if he chooses to allow one that isn’t a standard type for the setting. If the template doesn’t include an IQ reduction, then it may contain the Stress Atavism disadvantage (p. B156). The caster can’t voluntarily return to his normal form while suffering this disadvantage’s effects, or while his IQ is reduced to 5 or below for any reason.

For every 10 character points (or fraction thereof) by which the cost of the Alternate Form’s template exceeds that of the caster’s racial template, the Effect Shaping version of this ritual takes an additional -1 to skill, while the Energy Accumulating version adds +1 to base cost. For example, a human with Path of Form-18 whose tradition

permits shifting into a wolf form with a 42-point template gets Skinchange (Wolf) at 7 by default if using Effect Shaping, or with a base energy cost of 14 if using Energy Accumulating.

### Speak With Beasts

See p. 156.

## THE PATH OF GADGETS

This Path assumes that magic is able to make technology work a little better or worse, and can invoke the *idea* of machines. It may involve manipulating probability or entropy, or spirits that choose to associate themselves with machinery.

When working on large machines, use *Area Effect Modifiers* (p. 242) to find a penalty for an area large enough to contain the entire machine – or all the machines together, if casting on multiple targets. This isn’t necessary when dealing with a small, *identified* component. Using Fix Glitch to unblock a small fuel pipe on a gigantic motor wouldn’t take an area penalty, provided that the caster knew exactly where the blocked pipe was situated.

### Fix Glitch

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-2; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 4 points.

This ritual fixes any problem or set of minor problems with a single machine, provided that the necessary repairs could normally be made using a standard tool kit of the machine’s TL, with no replacement parts (even if such are available), in 30 minutes or less without penalties for haste. The repair process begins *after* the ritual is completed, and takes half the time that a typical mechanic would need; no duration modifiers are required. The magic can tighten or loosen nuts and bolts, adjust timing, remove small blockages . . . anything to get the machine working again. It can even re-inflate tires, if they’re flat enough to cause problems, but it can’t replace wheels (that involves spare parts) or top up fuel.

The machine doesn’t have to be opened up for this ritual to work. It *does* have to be accessible to standard tools, though. If the casing were padlocked to prevent tinkering, then the caster would need the key.

### Fuel

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-4; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points.

A successful use of Fuel restores enough fuel, charge, or reaction mass for a single non-magically powered, mundane machine to continue running at full power for one hour at normal efficiency. This can be gas in a tank, coal in a tender, electrical charge in a rechargeable battery, or even fissionables in an atomic pile (in which case the amount of fuel involved is doubtless microscopic, given that it will only last an hour!). The fuel can’t be extracted for use elsewhere – if anyone tries, it simply doesn’t work.

## Ghost Sword

See pp. 161-162.

## Great Gas Mileage

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets; 10 minutes; reduces fuel consumption by margin of success  $\times$  5% (minimum -5%).

*Energy Accumulating:* 2 points, +1 per 5% reduction in fuel consumption.

Great Gas Mileage reduces the fuel or reaction mass demands of a nonmagical, self-powered machine. Minimum consumption is 10% of normal. Consult the *Duration Effect Modifiers Table* (p. 243) for duration and double the resulting modifier. This magic can affect multiple machines; see the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243). Machines still need fuel to operate while subject to this effect – they merely enjoy supernatural efficiency.

This *cannot* be combined with the Fuel ritual. The fuel supplied by that is always consumed at the standard rate.

## Gremlins

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-3 or Path of Luck-4; 30 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points.

Complex machinery is inherently highly vulnerable to tiny adjustments in probability and luck. Gremlins causes a single machine to break down and become inoperative – a car might develop engine trouble, a computer may suffer a fatal hard-disk error, and so forth. The machine resists with its effective HT at -3. For vehicles, HT is a standard statistic; for other mechanisms, the GM should assign a value, from 5-6 for delicate jury-rigs, through 10-11 for ordinary, well-used machines, to 12+ for robust constructions in good repair. Ultra-advanced self-repairing systems sometimes have even higher HT!



If the ritual succeeds, then the machine breaks down within 1d hours; no duration modifier is required. It can be fixed normally. However, a critical success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll means that it's damaged beyond repair – at best, a lengthy and expensive rebuild in a fully equipped workshop *might* get it back in action.

If sentient machines exist in a setting, then the GM must decide whether they can resist ritual magic. If they can, then Gremlins doesn't affect them – use Doom (p. 152-153) instead. Fully sapient machines can *certainly* resist magic and thus ignore Gremlins.

## Journeyman's Blessing

See p. 153.

## Journeyman's Curse

See p. 153.

## Know Fault

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-1 or Path of Knowledge-4; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points.

The magician can determine what's wrong with a nonmagical machine or device that isn't working properly. If he lacks the technological skills to understand this, then he'll get an outline of the problem in layman's terms that will make sense if relayed to an expert. The precision and certainty of this knowledge gives the caster +2 on skill rolls to repair or otherwise address the trouble. Critical success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll means that he can also determine the quickest *or* cheapest way to fix it. Cast on a machine with *multiple* faults, this ritual provides details on the 1d most serious issues.

## Locate Spares

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-4 or Path of Knowledge-7; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points.

This ritual enables the caster to find spare parts for a nonmagical machine or device. The magician decides which parts he's looking for, describing them in a sentence at most; e.g., an auto mechanic might seek "a spare wheel," "new oil filters," or "a whole new engine." He can also specify whether he wants new hardware or merely a functional replacement. Then he works the ritual. The only symbolic connection he requires is the machine in need of spares. Area-effect modifiers *don't* apply.

Success lets the caster know the location of the nearest spare parts that he can acquire *without* criminal activity or serious physical risk (although the ritual might direct him to a shop charging stiff prices, or a junk heap that must be shifted out of the way), and use without major adaptation (but the parts may be slightly nonstandard, or need cleaning). The GM determines *how* the ritual conveys this information. For instance, the magician might swing a pendulum or other symbolic tool over a map, or open a trade directory at random and stick a pin in the page.

*Sing, clear-voiced Muses, of Hephaestus famed for inventions. With bright-eyed Athene he taught men glorious gifts throughout the world – men who before used to dwell in caves in the mountains like wild beasts.*

– Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns*

## **Machines Hate You**

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-5; 30 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points.

The caster must direct this curse at a living subject, who may resist with Will. Rituals such as Chaperone, Cleansing, Curse Mirror, and Curse Sanctum also oppose it. If the magician wins, then he turns any number of nonsapient machines against the victim for the effect's duration.

Machines will suffer minor, transient failures or behave in slightly odd ways around the subject; e.g., his car will take multiple attempts to start, almost every traffic light will turn red for him, domestic appliances in his home will blow fuses (meaning, at minimum, a lot of spoiled food), and showers will run too hot or too cold. This curse is *particularly* bad in highly computerized societies: the victim will temporarily disappear from some databases and become confused with the worst sort of people (wanted felons, suspected terrorists, etc.) in others. Technicians will have no trouble fixing any problems that they actually witness, but they'll be unable to find the underlying cause. And frequently, *no* glitches will manifest while they're watching, but as soon as they're gone . . .

Appropriate operation skills can *sometimes* overcome these problems (GM's option), but this should require multiple rolls, often at penalties. As a general rule, any such roll that's required anyway is at -2, and if the victim's work involves machinery, his next job roll is at up to -4. This curse isn't usually lethal unless the sufferer takes deadly risks (driving in a high-speed race, attempting aerobatics, etc.) – and even then, especially if other lives are at stake, the GM may make the results terrifying rather than automatically fatal. Still, the subject should be *strongly* discouraged from pushing his luck. The general consequences for someone who doesn't actually risk death are a matter for roleplaying and GM judgment, but frustration and depression tend to take their toll over time, leading to small penalties to skill rolls – and to reaction rolls from people who come to associate the victim with trouble.

At the GM's option, long-duration versions of this curse may be broken and negated if the victim accomplishes some great feat of technological skill despite it, or suffers a genuinely life-threatening accident because of it.

## **Perfect Control**

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-2; 20 minutes; grants +1 to operator's effective skill per *full* 2 points in margin of success (minimum +1 to skill).

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points, +2 per +1 to operator skill rolls.

Perfect Control makes nonmagical machines – including animal-powered vehicles, but *excluding* weapons – easier to operate by increasing the effective skill of the person in charge (pilot, driver, master, etc.). It *doesn't* benefit crew or assistants, help with ancillary equipment (e.g., a vehicle's radar or radios, although it could be cast separately on such systems), make the machine less prone to damage or failure if taken beyond its limits (except insofar as higher operator skill helps), or affect maintenance or repairs. If the machine incorporates a sapient computer and can operate itself, though, then this ritual *can* make the task easier for the built-in software!

Note that Perfect Control affects the machine, not its user; its bonus aids any operator who takes over the equipment while the effect lasts. Find duration on the *Duration Effect Modifiers Table* (p. 243) and *double* the associated modifier. A single working can benefit multiple machines; the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) applies normally.

## **Read the Manual**

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-2 or Path of Knowledge-7; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points.

Read the Manual provides the caster with a reasonably detailed understanding of the *routine* operation and maintenance of a given machine, which must be available to see and touch. The information obtained is equivalent to that which could be found in a good user manual, but less than the sort of thing that a specialist workshop might have on hand. It eliminates any unfamiliarity penalties for that model of machine, and alerts the magician to its peculiarities or special problems. This knowledge remains in the caster's mind for the effect's duration, after which it fades – although the magician might get enough practice during this time to eliminate unfamiliarity penalties permanently. Cast on a machine that needs a multi-person crew or staff, this ritual only provides the details needed by one specified individual: master, chief engineer, helmsman, etc.

The ritual *doesn't* imbue the caster with new skills, but it lets an ordinary person perform routine tasks without problems. Cast on a car, it would enable the magician to top up the radiator or change a tire as fast as anyone who knows the model – and with an appropriate Mechanic skill, he could also change the brake fluid or adjust the engine timing with ease. The GM may permit the caster to buy or improve related skills with earned character points, and justify this as knowledge retained from the ritual effect.

## Repair

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-5; 30 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

Repair fixes any one problem or set of *minor* problems with a machine, provided that the necessary repairs could be made using an ordinary workshop of the machine's TL – plus only those replacement parts and special tools that are currently to hand – in three hours or less without penalties for haste. The repair process begins *after* the ritual ends, and requires 1/4 the time that a typical workshop would take; duration modifiers don't apply. The magic does whatever is needed to get the machine working at normal efficiency. It can effectively apply as much strength as an average man assisted by standard tools, but nothing superhuman. It can't top up fuel levels, but it can supply a *little* lubricant or coolant, since such things are common workshop supplies.

The machine doesn't have to be opened up for Repair to work. It *does* have to be accessible to standard tools, though. If the casing were padlocked to prevent tinkering, then the caster would need the key.

## Smooth Ride

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-2; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 4 points.

Cast on a nonmagical vehicle – whether powered by an engine, animals, the wind, or something else – this ritual causes it to ride extremely smoothly for the effect's duration. A land vehicle feels as if it's driving along a smooth road; a boat, as if it's on a calm sea; an aircraft, as if there's no turbulence. This doesn't make the vehicle any more comfortable than it would be in those circumstances – if it's *always* prone to bumping and jolting, then the passengers will still suffer that.

Penalties to vehicle control rolls and to attack rolls with vehicular weapons still apply. Likewise, the ritual doesn't mitigate any dangers; e.g., an aircraft flying through severe turbulence remains at risk, even if the passengers don't notice until it turns over or the wings come off. Optionally, the GM may give a *small* bonus to control or attack rolls to offset the penalties for dreadful conditions, simply because the operator is more comfortable than he would otherwise be – although he's also not getting as much tactile feedback.

A smooth ride is more than a frivolous luxury, though. Passengers suffer no penalties for rough conditions on skills they're using *within* the vehicle (e.g., Surgery). This ritual can be a life-saver if cast on an ambulance carrying a badly injured patient!

## Supercharge

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-3; 20 minutes; increases Top Speed and Acceleration by margin of success  $\times$  5% (minimum +5%).

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points, +1 per 5% increase in Top Speed and Acceleration.

Supercharge increases the speed of a mechanically propelled, nonmagical vehicle for its duration. It boosts Acceleration and Top Speed (see *Vehicle Statistics*, pp. B462-463) *without* improving Handling or Stability Rating, which

can be dangerous. Some vehicles face other hazards when operating far above their normal speeds. For example, while the exact consequences of a subsonic aircraft hitting the sound barrier are up to the GM, they won't be healthy!

## Unlimited Ammo

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-4; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points.

Cast on a firearm designed to be carried by a single living user *and* that holds more than two shots in an internal magazine, cylinder, etc. (external belts, open hoppers, and the like *don't* count), this ritual magically reloads it to full, ensuring that it won't run out of ammunition for the effect's duration. This ammo can only be removed by shooting it; the rounds seem to be firmly welded in place until discharged, after which the spent cartridges will come free. Both projectiles and casings remain in existence once fired. They appear to be entirely mundane, but lack serial numbers and other unique identifiers.

If the weapon can fire several types of ammunition, then Unlimited Ammo loads it with the most basic variety. This means standard ball rounds for a handgun (*never* armor-piercing, hollow-point, etc.), buckshot for a shotgun, baton rounds for a riot-control weapon, etc. Grenade launchers get the cheapest type of explosive grenade available.

In all cases, consult the *Duration Effect Modifiers Table* (p. 243) for duration and *double* the resulting modifier. This magic can affect multiple weapons, but modifiers from the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) are doubled, too. Regardless of duration, dismantling the weapon ends the ritual effect immediately.

## THE PATH OF HEALTH

These rituals affect a living target's physical body. This might be for good or for ill. The principles are the same – skill at healing also means skill at harming.

### Dose

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health\*; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points\*.

\* Usually subject to modifiers; see below.

Dose cures diseases and long-term ailments, from arthritis to heart conditions. The problem's severity and the patient's vigor determine the ritual's difficulty – a cancer-ravaged body is much harder to help than that of an 18-year-old athlete. The ritual must be conducted in the subject's presence. Success eradicates the symptoms and eventually the illness over a period of 3d days.

*Modifiers:* A penalty equal to (patient's HT - 12) for Effect Shaping, or extra energy equal to (12 - HT) for Energy Accumulating; HT 12+ gives no modifier. Simple ailments (e.g., common cold, mild allergies, and minor infections) give +1 to skill/-1 to energy; moderate ones (e.g., bronchitis, moderate infections, fevers, and smallpox), no modifier; tougher ailments (e.g., malaria, tuberculosis, and severe infections), -4/+4; a congenital heart condition, -7/+7; and diseases such as cancer and AIDS, -15/+15.

Critical failure with an Effect Shaping casting doesn't usually kill the patient, but does indicate that the problem is incurable for *this* caster. With Energy Accumulating magic, use of incorrectly aspected energy and wild effects have strange and unpleasant consequences. If the GM doesn't want powerful healers to be able to cure everything, he can rule that *any* failure means that the magician can never heal this problem for this subject. In addition, some problems might be immune to magic, or involve "mystical imbalances" that must be resolved before Dose can do any good.

## Evil Eye

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-7; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 12 points.

This is one of the most powerful Path of Health rituals, but it's risky. The magician performs the ritual on *himself*. Then, at any time during the effect's duration – which cannot exceed a day – he can try to kill one person with a glance.

The caster activates this attack by making eye contact with his mark, most often by subterfuge. This usually requires getting within 10 yards of the victim, if not closer, and won't work through telescopes, cameras, etc. A touch and a long stare *might* suffice to affect someone who is blind or has his eyes shut – the GM decides what fits the setting's style. The magician and his target then roll a Quick Contest of Wills. If the caster *wins*, then his victim must make a HT roll, with a penalty equal to the margin of success on the original ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll.

If the victim *succeeds*, then he's wracked with nausea and a general feeling of illness. He loses 2d each of ST and DX, regaining 1 point of each per minute thereafter. He falls unconscious if either score drops to 0 or below, awakening when both recover to 1+.

If he *fails*, then a severe effect strikes his body. The actual symptoms may be those of stroke, kidney failure, or any other sudden ailment. For game purposes, though, always treat this as a heart attack (see *Mortal Conditions*, p. B429). However, a successful Dose ritual (above), use of the Healing advantage (requires an IQ roll), or possibly an Esoteric Medicine roll (especially if the tradition involved recognizes the power of the Evil Eye) can substitute for standard resuscitation.

The drawback is that if the attacker *loses* the Quick Contest, he's affected exactly as if he had been the target. The forces invoked aren't particular! A tie normally "uses up" the ritual ineffectually – but if the GM wants to emphasize the darkness of this magic, then a tie can affect *both* individuals. Otherwise, Evil Eye affects only one person; it's for assassination, not mass murder.

In most traditions, if the magician doesn't use this curse within its duration, he must dissipate the malevolent spirits or forces. The GM may require a ritual skill roll at +3 for this. Failure means the caster suffers the ritual's effects.

## Fertility

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-2 or Path of Nature-3; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points.

This ritual helps ensure growth and reproduction, for crops or for animals (including people). For crops, the magician performs a straightforward ritual for a specific area. Success means that plants in the area grow quickly and well, untroubled by pests and disease. Increase overall yield by 5% multiplied by the margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll, to a maximum of +100% (a true bumper crop).

For animals, the ritual prepares a charm that's placed on or near a female subject. The next time it's possible for her to conceive (within the effect's duration), she does. This magic *doesn't* circumvent contraception or medical conditions that prevent conception – but if they fail somehow, then conception will occur.

## Hasten Mount

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-5 or Path of Nature-5; 10 minutes; gives +1 Move per *full* 3 points in margin of success (minimum +1 Move).

*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points, +3 per +1 Move granted.

By performing this ritual, the magician lends a single riding animal unusual fleetness. The creature must have IQ no higher than 5, and has to be both capable of carrying an average member of the caster's species on its back *and* trained or otherwise willing to do so. The mount gets extra Move in its preferred medium (air, ground, or water – wherever it's normally fastest), with a minimum +1 Move.

## Lust

See p. 141.

## Malaise

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-5; 1 hour; gives the subject -1 to HT rolls against the disease inflicted per 2 *full* points in margin of success.

*Energy Accumulating:* 10 points, +2 per -1 to HT rolls against the disease inflicted.

Malaise inflicts a disease on the subject. The ritual *isn't* resisted normally. Instead, as with a mundane illness, the victim gets an unopposed HT roll to fight off the infection, with standard bonuses for Resistant (p. B80).

The disease is described using *Defining a Disease* (pp. B442-443). The vector is the spell, the resistance roll is as defined above, and the delay is normally 24 hours, but can be reduced; every halving of the delay gives -3 to skill/+3 to energy (e.g., a delay of just three hours gives -9/+9). Use the *Damage Modifiers Tables* (p. 243) to find the modifier for the damage the infection causes (usually toxic, but can be fatigue instead), and then multiply this by the number of cycles; if the disease does only 1 point of damage (or 1d-3, if the caster wants more randomness), then treat every four cycles as 1d damage. The standard interval is 24 hours, which the magician can shorten by accepting a *second* modifier, calculated as for delay. For seriously inconvenient or debilitating symptoms, work out the damage modifier as if damage were 1d higher. Diseases induced by Malaise are non-contagious.

*Example:* Mad Old Aggie casts Malaise on a cop who keeps trying to find out what happens to her neighbors' pets. She defines it as taking effect in 12 hours (-3 to skill/+3 to energy), having an interval of six hours (-6/+6), and inflicting 1d-3 toxic damage for eight cycles (equivalent to 2d) while causing inconvenient symptoms (equivalent to 1d), giving a total "effective damage" of 3d (-8/+8). Total modifier is -17/+17.

The caster can't specify the ailment's exact nature. That's up to the magical forces (which may take the form of "disease spirits"), in the persona of the GM, who can leave it as a "generic disease," pick something plausible for the setting and the effects chosen, or just decide on something interesting. It shouldn't be anything to which the victim has a specific immunity, but it may be something against which he has lesser defenses. If in doubt, roll dice to determine how effective the curse really is.

*Example:* The GM rolls 2d, with high being good for Aggie. He gets a 3. He decides that she has given the cop a virulent sort of flu – and that the cop is the type to keep his flu shots current, which is good for +3 to effective HT, if only for symbolic reasons.

## Slumber

See p. 143.

## Soothe

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 3 points.

This simple ritual relieves pain and eases the symptoms of illness or injury. Success eliminates any penalties that the subject is suffering due to fatigue, coughing, sneezing, nausea, pain, or retching (see pp. B428-429) caused by disease or wounds, provided these developed or had started to develop before the ritual took effect. This benefit lasts only for the effect's duration and *isn't* a cure – it merely treats the symptoms. The magic can't eliminate severe afflictions such as paralysis, or alleviate problems caused by lost body parts; it simply suppresses pain and feelings of sickness. It *can* ease childbirth, and this is a common application of Soothe.

## Sterility

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-1; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points.

The opposite of Fertility (p. 149), Sterility *prevents* conception and renders plants and female animals (including humans) barren throughout its duration. Plants growing in an affected area of earth won't produce seeds, fruit, or anything else of value as food; even their leaves will be shriveled and sour. Any seeds planted there will fail to germinate. Animals targeted by Sterility are completely unable to conceive – and unlike Fertility, no charm is involved.

Fertility or Cleansing (p. 157) can immediately undo Sterility's effects. To do so, the curative ritual must *win* a Quick Contest against Sterility. Mundane medical science can neither explain nor correct the problem, however.

## Succor

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-4; 30 minutes; effects last for days equal to margin of success (minimum 1 day).

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points, +1 per day for which the effects continue.

Succor involves dressing injuries to stop bleeding and promote healing. At the ritual's end, the subject's wounds are considered bandaged. If the caster knows the First Aid or Physician skill, then he may roll against it for the usual benefits; see *First Aid* (p. B424). In addition, if the ritual works, the patient gets *six* rolls per day to recover lost HP while its effects last, and these are at HT+1. He also recovers from lasting crippling injuries (p. B422) as if they were temporary, although there's no effect on *permanent* crippling. This ritual doesn't require a duration modifier; instead, its effects last as noted above.

## Tirelessness

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-5; 30 minutes; gives +1 to endurance rolls per *full* 2 points in margin of success (minimum +2).

*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points, +2 per +1 granted to endurance rolls.

Tirelessness grants enhanced stamina for the purpose of long-distance travel. The subject must be a *living* being. The ritual gives him a bonus to any roll he makes to avoid fatigue or injury when traveling long distances under his own power, be that against HT or a skill such as Flight, Hiking, or Swimming.

## Vitality

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-3 or Path of Protection-4; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

Vitality creates an amulet that protects its bearer from any contagion or infection. Mundane disease (see *Illness*, pp. B442-444) can only infect the subject if he rolls a critical failure on a required HT roll. Hostile Path of Health rituals must *win* a Quick Contest against Vitality before attempting to affect the wearer – but in that case, the charm ceases to function immediately afterward regardless of which ritual prevails. The amulet may break, change color, etc., in different ways to indicate whether it worked or failed.

## Warrior's Blessing

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Health-6; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 11 points.

Warrior's Blessing increases the subject's physical prowess. It produces a charm for the client, which only he can use. At any point thereafter, within the effect's duration, he can use this to invoke one of two benefits. Either costs him 1 FP per turn, and he can't use both simultaneously:

- *Speed:* He gains Combat Reflexes and +1 to Basic Speed. If he already has Combat Reflexes, then he gets an *additional* +1 to all active defenses and Fast-Draw skills.

● *Strength*: His ST increases by 50%. This improves damage and Basic Lift, but *not* HP.

When the subject stops paying FP, the effect ends and the charm loses its power.

## THE PATH OF KNOWLEDGE

This Path provides knowledge and insight. The GM should roll for these rituals in secret, since the magician doesn't necessarily know if the information they supply is accurate.

### *Aura Reading*

*Effect Shaping*: Path of Knowledge; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating*: 2 points.

The caster can see the subject's aura simply by looking at him. This effect is identical to that of the *Aura* spell (p. B249). If using *Energy Accumulating*, make an *Effectiveness Roll* to determine whether the magician can perceive "secret" traits.

### *History*

*Effect Shaping*: Path of Knowledge-4; 10 minutes for a general overview, 1 hour for a detailed history.

*Energy Accumulating*: 6 points for a general overview, 9 points for a detailed history.

This ritual lets the caster know the history of an inanimate object, which *must* be present for the casting. The magic reveals the past of the item, the personality of its user, events of significance to it, etc., but only through information available from the *object's* point of view. The history can be detailed or general, at the caster's discretion.

### *Know Fault*

See p. 146.

### *Locate*

*Effect Shaping*: Path of Knowledge-5; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating*: 7 points.

*Locate* finds a person or an object. The caster rolls at -2 *at best* if he lacks a symbolic representation of the subject, even if he's an adept who can normally disregard material elements. He's at -1 to -5 if the target is well-hidden – and if it's screened by *Obscurity* (p. 141) or *Ward* (pp. 158-159), then he must subtract the protective ritual's level of effect from skill (*Effect Shaping*) or add it to energy cost (*Energy Accumulating*).

If *Locate* seeks someone with the ability to perceive magical forces (via *Magery*, the *Detect* advantage, etc.), and he doesn't consent, then he can resist with *Will*. Otherwise, the subject cannot resist.

Success reveals the subject's location to the caster. In some traditions, *Locate* guides the magician to the target using a symbolic tool – pendulum (swings faster the closer it gets), magnetic compass (points in the right direction), dowsing rod, etc. In long-range rituals, this device is



often used over a map or other symbolic representation of the area.

### *Locate Spares*

See p. 146.

### *Read Memories*

*Effect Shaping*: Path of Knowledge-7; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating*: 12 points.

*Read Memories* lets the caster reach into the subject's mind and retrieve a particular piece of information. This can be either a quick (one-paragraph) summary of everything the target knows or believes about one person, place, or thing relevant to a particular issue, or the answer to a specific question (provided that the individual knows, or *thinks* he knows, the answer).

*Two* ritual rolls or *Effectiveness Rolls* are required: a *Quick Contest* against *Will* to enter the target's mind, and an *unresisted roll* to remain undetected. Success on the first roll grants the caster the desired information in the form of a vision or a flash of insight, failure turns up nothing, and critical failure gives *misleading* information. Failure on the second roll means the subject becomes aware of the intrusion.

### *Read the Manual*

See p. 147.



## Read Thoughts

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Knowledge-7; 10 minutes.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points.

This ritual is resisted by Will. If the magician *wins*, then he may read the subject's mind for minutes equal to his margin of victory; no duration modifiers apply. The caster can "hear" the target's surface thoughts as they cross his mind. Language isn't a barrier, but very alien minds may give -2 to skill (Effect Shaping) or +2 to energy cost (Energy Accumulating) – or worse, at the GM's option. The subject isn't aware of the intrusion, except on a critical failure.

## Scry

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Knowledge-6; 10 minutes.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

At the end of this ritual, the caster slips into a trance. Success gives him a brief vision of the target, as if he were physically present, floating above the scene; this often enables him to gather information about the subject's current activities and whereabouts. Failure means no effect. Critical failure brings a *false* vision, created by the GM.

Visions last for minutes equal to margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll, with 0 meaning a momentary glimpse; no duration modifiers apply. Use margin of *failure* for false visions. Depending on his tradition, the magician may see images in a dream, in a mirror or a crystal ball, on the surface of water, etc.

## See the True Face

See p. 145.

## Veil

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Cunning-4, Path of Knowledge-3, or Path of Protection-4; 20 minutes.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points.

Veil resists all Path of Knowledge rituals cast on the subject or on anything in the affected area. The intruding ritual must *win* a Quick Contest against Veil to affect its intended target.

## Vision of Luck

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Knowledge-3 or Path of Luck-5; 10 minutes.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points.

This ritual shows whether good or bad luck awaits the client in the future. Results are usually vague, and generally describe what *might* happen if the subject picks a course of action. In most traditions, the caster uses divination aids – tarot cards, rune stones, conch shells, animal entrails, etc.

Success gives the caster an answer to a question pertaining to the consequences of the proposed action. This tends to be simple, usually limited to one or two words – although greater degrees of success might yield slightly more elaboration. For example, responses to "Should I return home?" could reasonably include "No," "It's dangerous," and "Yes, but great danger awaits."

The GM decides what answer is reasonable. When in doubt, he may opt to use some actual "divination" method, even one as simple as opening a book at random and reading a sentence, as a guideline. Having given an answer, the GM can make minor adjustments to the plot and setting to ensure that it's accurate. Players who dislike this approach are free to have their PCs avoid this ritual!

## THE PATH OF LUCK

The ceremonies within this Path directly affect or assess probability in many forms. This includes both good luck (blessings) and bad (curses). The greater the odds (for or against), the more difficult things are to influence.

## Chaperone

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck-3 or Path of Protection-5; 1 hour.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

Chaperone is a conditional ritual (p. 138) that creates an amulet that safeguards the wearer against *one* peril or curse. The bearer is automatically protected against the *next* significant danger that occurs – anything that, in the GM's opinion, could easily lead to death or disabling injury. For instance, he might be the sole survivor of a shipwreck, or remain untouched by a drive-by shooting that slaughters other bystanders. The magician can specify a particular threat or type of threat (e.g., "accidents" or "violence") when casting the ritual, if desired.

This protection extends to magic. A *minor* curse – Journeyman's Curse (p. 153) or any other ritual that doesn't directly threaten the victim's life or soul – automatically fails against the protected party. Against a major curse such as Doom (below), the charm merely delays the attack for 1d days. During that period, the wearer is plagued by visions or nightmares indicating that the amulet is barely keeping hostile forces at bay. He may seek help in time, *if* he understands the imagery's meaning!

Once the amulet has acted, it breaks and become useless. Chaperones cannot be saved or hoarded. Only one charm can protect a particular person at a time. Attempts to create others will simply fail until the current one is used up.

## Doom

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck-8; 1 hour.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 13 points.

Doom is a powerful curse that brings great harm to the sufferer, leading to his ruin, injury, and probable death. It also involves enormous risk for the caster and the client. Rolls to avoid backlash (see *Backlash: Instant Karma*, p. 140) are at -2, and the GM is encouraged to require such rolls for Doom even if they *aren't* otherwise standard. Any critical failure or wild effect should likewise lead to vicious problems. Doom doesn't take duration modifiers; it's a one-off direction of concentrated misfortune at the subject, who may resist with Will.

Starting the night after the ritual is completed, nightmares plague the victim for several days. These borrow features from the ritual, and may include clues to the identity

of the people wishing him harm. The GM can roleplay this, or give the victim one IQ roll per night to guess part of the truth – but at -2 due to the disturbing nature of the whole experience.

Within a week, material effects begin to appear. Misfortune hounds the victim. The first consequence is the equivalent of a critical failure on his next job roll (p. B516). After 1d days, he'll offend or otherwise drive away most relatives and friends. Make a reaction roll for every person or group the subject associates with, at a penalty equal to *double* the margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll; on a Bad reaction or worse, friends and loved ones turn their backs on him. The sufferer could cause this with an inadvertent offense or unlucky "accidents": his wife discovers that he had an affair years ago and leaves him, he runs over his best friend's dog, etc.

Finally, 1d days after that, the victim suffers a horrible accident or act of random violence – car accident, fall down a skyscraper elevator shaft, blow from a falling safe, run-in with a marauding band of fanatics, etc. As a result, he takes dice of damage equal to *triple* the ritual's margin of success (minimum 3d), or equivalent. Whether or not this kills him, the curse then ends.

At any point during the effect, the subject may realize that he's the victim of a curse. If he seeks a magician's aid (rituals from the Path of Protection are a good bet), then that *might* save him before the worst effects occur. Doom is very strong, though – protective ceremonies or other magical workings are at -4 to skill against it! If the victim finds the caster and somehow persuades him to lift the curse, then the effects stop automatically and the Doom affects the client instead. Since the caster and the client are sometimes the same person, the caster may be *very* reluctant to do this. The most drastic solution is to kill the magician before the Doom runs its course; this also lifts it. Some cultures regard killing someone suspected of casting Doom on you as self-defense.

## Gambler's Token

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 3 points.

This ritual turns a small, innocuous object (often a coin) into a charm that gives the client *one* moment of good luck when using the Gambling skill in a game that depends on pure chance, or where luck is otherwise relevant in some way (e.g., in the fall of the cards). It won't help with the Games skill, which is generally more about skill than luck, nor will it help when betting on races or sporting events. The contest must be one that's resolved within seconds of any bets being placed; the magic can't predict or influence the future further ahead than that.

The client must hold the charm in his hand at a crucial moment. He can then take the best (for him) of three rolls for a use of the Gambling skill – his own or someone else's – or for randomly determining something like the spin of a roulette wheel. This is a *small* burst of luck; if the subject chooses to take a one-in-a-thousand bet, then his chances improve slightly . . . but they're still poor. Likewise, Gambler's Token does nothing to help with completely rigged games. The charm simply loses its power if not used

within the effect's duration. No one can have more than one Gambler's Token available to him at a time.

## Gremlins

See p. 146.

## Hunter's Blessing

See p. 156.



## Journeyman's Blessing

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-5 or Path of Luck-3; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

This blessing helps the subject perform a mundane job successfully, making things go his way, drawing attention to his good points, helping him avoid accidents, and so forth. The ritual produces a charm that the client must carry at all times while on the job for the next month. If he does, then on his *next* job roll (p. B516), any ordinary success becomes a critical success, a normal failure is considered a success with a margin of 1, and a critical failure is treated as mere failure by 1. The charm lasts for *one* job roll; no duration modifiers are required or permitted.

If the caster bases this ritual on the Path of Gadgets, then it may only work for clients who have to use a fair amount of machinery competently in the course of their work. The GM decides whether a given job qualifies.

If the subject is *looking* for a job (see *Finding a Job*, p. B518), then his next die roll to find one gets a bonus equal to the margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll.

## Journeyman's Curse

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-5 or Path of Luck-3; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

This curse harms the sufferer in the performance of his job. If it's successful, then the victim suffers a mishap at work within the next 3d days; no duration modifier is required or permitted. Specifics are up to the GM – perhaps the boss walks in while he naps on the job, his computer loses a week's work, or the dog eats his performance report – but the result is equal to at least a failure on the month's job roll. For positions with a fixed salary, the subject usually loses 1d×5% of his monthly pay (due to docked wages, having to cover costs personally, etc.); at the GM's option, he might instead have to work 3d hours of unpaid overtime in one week to fix problems, suffer a minor injury (at a physically hazardous occupation), or something similar. Critical success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll means that the target *critically* fails his next job roll.

As with Journeyman's Blessing (above), castings based on the Path of Gadgets may only affect subjects who depend on machinery for their work to go smoothly. It's up to the GM which jobs qualify. This and Journeyman's Blessing can cancel each other out. Treat this as a Quick Contest, with the winning ritual negating its rival and taking effect. A tie cancels *both* rituals.

## Love Charm

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck-3; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

This ritual creates a charm that will attract a suitable romantic partner to the subject, if possible (it's of no value on a desert island!). The client must carry the talisman, which only works for him. If the ritual succeeds, then he'll meet someone appropriate within 3d days, and they'll get to talking for long enough for both of them to notice there's a spark.

Critical success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll indicates that the potential partner is absolutely ideal, and lets the magician offer a hint as to how his client will know that person; e.g., "She'll be wearing green," or "He'll give you a rose." Failure means that nothing happens. Critical failure attracts somebody who *seems* right but is ultimately very wrong – a stalker, someone who's already married, etc.

This ritual doesn't guarantee love or romance – it provides an opportunity. Because it attracts a good match, though, it *does* improve the odds: that person's initial

reaction roll toward the client has a bonus equal to the caster's margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll. Moreover, the individual met through this charm will be a suitable *long-term* romantic partner, not an exciting fling or a business contact. The GM decides what the magic considers "suitable." In difficult cases, the client might have to adapt to make the relationship work.

## Loyal Item

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck-4; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points.

Loyal Item enchants a single item to always return to its owner. This object must be physically present and in its owner's possession when the ritual is performed. Thereafter, if it's lost, then the forces of chance will conspire to return it. A passerby might pick it up without really noticing, take it in the owner's direction, and then lose it or put it down when he turns from that route. Then somebody else might carry it, or it might float down a river, be found by a bird or a squirrel, fall into the back of a truck, and so forth. Note that the effect *doesn't* improve the owner's chances of finding his property – it merely ensures that his property will eventually find *him*.

The GM decides how long it takes a given item to find its way home. As a guideline, small, portable things come back faster than large, unwieldy ones (which must wait for rather ideal circumstances) – and *anything* returns faster in a densely populated area than in a sparsely populated one, as there are more possible ways for the item to make its way back. A small object might cross a city in an hour or two, while a large one or something lost in an isolated place could take days, weeks, or even months. Valuable or appealing articles often have difficulty getting away from holders: the finder resists the ritual with Will, and can hold onto his find if he wins – but reroll once per week for the effect's duration. The effect ends immediately if the owner willingly *gives* the item to someone else, however.

An object can return any number of times during the effect's duration. If the duration expires while the item is still en route, then its current holder can do what he likes with it. If the article is brought into a warded area, then the ritual must *win* a Quick Contest against the ward to leave or be stuck there.

## Stroke of Luck

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck-1; 10 minutes; grants one "benefit" per *full* 2 points in margin of success (minimum 1).

*Energy Accumulating:* 3 points, + 2 per extra "benefit" granted.

This simple ritual grants the recipient a *modest* measure of good fortune. If it works, then the subject enjoys one or more "benefits" – small successes or lucky breaks – over the next week or two. Alternatively, one significant problem in his personal or professional life is solved in that time. Some examples: a coworker who was previously uncooperative has a change of heart, apologizes, and acts friendlier; the subject finds a \$20 bill on the street; the client decides not

## "Routine Magic" Paths

In some settings, almost everyone in a society knows a few simple magics. Specialist wizards have to study much more, but *anyone* can try these lesser techniques, probably having learned the required procedures at their mother's knee, or perhaps as part of an initiation into adulthood.

To represent this, the GM may define "The Path of the People": a single Path that *doesn't* have the Ritual Magic skill as a prerequisite and that encompasses every common minor ritual known to the society. Possible rituals include Calm the Winds (defaults to Path of the People at -3), Love Charm (defaults at -3), Journeyman's Curse (defaults at -4), Soothe (defaults at -4), and even Doom (defaults at -10). If significant curses are available, then people may become immensely suspicious over *any* run of bad luck – after all, any of their less-friendly neighbors could have become bitter enough to risk a curse. An entire culture can acquire a reputation for cleverness, strangeness, or dangerous sorcery, thanks to the rituals included in its Path of the People.

Most ordinary folk will have a point or two in this Path, and will occasionally try a small working when necessary. Some keen amateurs will know it a little better. Minor "wise folk" might know it *very* well while not being especially capable with other Paths. If necessary, many or all members of the society may have Magery 0 (Path of the People Only, -60%) [2], perhaps granted by adulthood ceremonies or initiations.

A related possibility is that certain "mundane" skills actually have a subtle magical element, and so a few minor rituals default to them. Weapon Blessing and Gentle Beast might default to Smith; Weatherworking, to Shiphandling; and so on. Experts can then improve these rituals from default.

to order the three-alarm chili at the new Tex-Mex restaurant and avoids a violent bout of stomach trouble.

This blessing's effects *aren't* spectacular or life-changing. They don't protect against life-or-death situations, either – although the magic might tilt the balance in the subject's favor, at the GM's option. For instance, an assassin's bullet might miss his heart, leaving him seriously wounded but still alive. Any such major intervention “uses up” the ritual's effects, no matter how many benefits remain.

## Vision of Luck

See p. 152.

## Weapon Blessing

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck-6\*; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 11 points\*.

\* Modified for weapon weight; see below.

Weapon Blessing makes a weapon more efficient in combat. Determine duration normally. Weapon weight adds a further modifier of -1 to skill/+1 to energy per pound. The magician can cast the ritual over multiple weapons; the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) applies normally, while the weight modifier is that for the weapons' total weight.

Success allows the weapon's user to ignore -1 in skill penalties per two *full* points in the caster's margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll. This doesn't increase the wielder's skill, but it *does* let him overcome penalties for hit location, shock, visibility, and almost anything else. Thus, those who wield blessed weapons can make more difficult attacks, and may achieve “impossible” feats on occasion. Furthermore, the magic changes any critical failure rolled with the weapon to a normal failure, although this immediately ends the ritual's effect.

## Windfall

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck-2; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points.

Windfall typically involves associating symbols of prosperity with the subject. No duration modifiers apply; the effect is a one-off benefit, with a delay of 2d days as things fall into place. After that time, the client receives money equal to 5% of campaign average starting wealth, multiplied by the caster's margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll. If the ritual roll is made exactly or the Effectiveness Roll fails, then the subject gets a *small* amount of cash, perhaps a day's average income for him. Critical success brings the equivalent of two months' average income or the sum that the usual calculation would give, whichever is greater. In all cases, the client benefits from a stroke of luck (lottery winnings, inheritance, forgotten debt repaid, etc.) – this ritual doesn't materialize money out of thin air!

Failure on the ritual means no money is forthcoming. A critical failure or wild effect reverses the magic: either the subject *loses* 1d×5% of campaign average starting wealth or, if the GM is feeling sadistic, receives some cash through a stroke of *bad* luck (e.g., a loved one dies and the insurance pays off).

Succeed or fail, Windfall can't affect the same subject again for another 1d+2 months. Furthermore, it won't work at all for anyone within the same community (tribe, town, neighborhood, etc.) more than once a month or so – luck in a local economy can only be stretched so far. Finally, it doesn't work in non-money-using societies.

The GM is welcome to put other limitations on Windfall if it's being abused. It's supposed to be an *occasional* source of emergency funds – not a reliable font of vast wealth. For example, Luck advantages probably can't be used to maximize the margin of success; the ritual is *already* granting good luck! Failures are a good opportunity for the GM to remind PCs (and players) forcibly that fortune can only be manipulated so far.

## THE PATH OF NATURE

The Path of Nature produces some fairly dramatic effects, potentially putting it in competition with spell-based magic – although it's somewhat more subtle than the Path of the Elements (pp. 143-144). As well, this Path concerns itself with *many* aspects of the natural world, and may be too broad for some campaigns.

### Defining “Animals”

Several rituals within this Path specifically affect “animals,” which usually means nonsapient species; that is, creatures with a *racial average* IQ of 5 or less. This agrees with the definition used for spells of the Animal College (see *GURPS Magic*). However, it excludes certain IQ 6 species – such as apes – that the GM may be inclined to classify as “animals,” while it potentially includes exotic or supernatural beings that the GM might wish to treat as immune to animal-influencing magic. Thus, the GM may prefer to define “animal” as any species that has the Domestic Animal or Wild Animal meta-trait (see p. B263). To restrict this Path's effects to *natural* animals, he can further exclude any entity that possesses supernatural traits (see pp. B33, B120), including abilities with supernatural power modifiers. Many other definitions are possible, as suits the individual campaign. Alternatively, IQ 6 creatures may be susceptible to animal-influencing magic, but get +5 to resistance rolls.

If creatures such as apes *are* immune or highly resistant to this Path, then logically, they should be susceptible to rituals that influence sapient beings and generally treated as “people” for magical purposes.

### Command Beast

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Nature-4; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points.

Command Beast lets the caster control the actions of an animal, which resists with Will. The magic empowers a charm – typically a collar or a leg band – and permits the magician to fasten it on the creature. The beast obeys the caster's verbal commands for the duration of the ritual, provided that it wears this item. This ritual can affect multiple animals; the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) applies normally.

## Endure Elements

See p. 143.

## Fertility

See p. 149.

## Gentle Beast

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Form-6 or Path of Nature-1; 10 minutes; gives a reaction bonus equal to margin of success (minimum +1).

*Energy Accumulating:* 3 points, +1 per point of reaction bonus.

This ritual improves the reactions of an animal toward the caster. The magician can affect multiple beasts; the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) applies normally.

## Hasten Mount

See p. 149.

## Hunter's Blessing

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Luck-4 or Path of Nature-3; 1d×10 minutes; grants a base +2 to hunting skills, and another +1 per 2 full points in margin of success.

*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points for a base +2 to skill, +2 per additional +1 to skill.

Hunter's Blessing assists a group of people in hunting one *species* of animal, selected at the time of casting. The magician can't specify an individual creature – the hunters must take their opportunities as they appear. The eventual prey is still considered the ritual's "target," however; e.g., if the hunters plan on bringing down several kills, then the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) applies. This effect isn't resisted.

The caster must perform this ritual with the hunting party present. If it works, then for the blessing's duration, they gain a bonus on all skill rolls *directly* related to the pursuit of the named species. This usually benefits Tracking and weapon skills, frequently aids Stealth and Camouflage when the hunters are setting up an ambush, and quite often adds to Survival or Traps. It's up to the GM what other skills are relevant to a given hunt.

## Mist

See p. 144.

## Predict Weather

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Nature; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 2 points.

Predict Weather forecasts the weather accurately – but in broad, nonscientific terms – for the next 1d days. No duration modifiers are required or permitted. This ritual *doesn't* anticipate the impact of supernatural effects – such as Weatherworking (below) – on the weather.

## Seek Beast

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Nature; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 2 points.

This ritual gives the caster a vision of the nearest animal or group of animals of a specified species, and indicates direction and distance.

## Speak With Beasts

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Form-4 or Path of Nature-3; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points.

The magician can communicate with the subject animal (see *Defining "Animals,"* p. 155) as though he had the Speak With Animals advantage (p. B87). As a guideline, each minute of duration permits one useful question and answer.

## Summon Beast

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Nature-3; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points.

Summon Beast calls one animal of a named type. Range modifiers don't apply. If the ritual works, then the caster knows the location of the closest beast of the specified sort, and how long it will take for the creature to come to him. The animal moves toward the caster as fast as it can, until either the effect's duration ends or beast and caster can see each other clearly.

After it arrives, the summoned beast stays nearby, without attacking, while the ritual effect endures. It reacts at +1 to the magician (only). If the caster or someone near him attacks it, then the effect ends immediately and the animal may fight back or flee, depending on its nature and a new reaction result.

This ritual can also call *many* animals. The *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) applies normally.

## Thunderbolt

See p. 144.

## Weatherworking

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-6 or Path of Nature-5; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 10 points.

This ritual changes the weather. While it affects an area, it doesn't use standard area modifiers. Instead, a successful ritual affects a one-mile diameter. Every -1 to skill/+1 to energy cost increases the diameter by another mile. Success means the magician *might* get the weather he desires.

If the ritual works, then the GM should determine the chance on 3d that the desired weather would occur naturally. Some guidelines:

*Likely weather for season and region* (e.g., rain on the coast in the spring): 10 or less.

*Rarer weather* (e.g., drizzle in the desert): 5 or less.

*Extraordinary weather* (e.g., an inland hurricane, snow on the equator): 3 or less.

Add the caster's margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll to this chance. For example, success by 3 would conjure "likely" weather on 13 or less. Then roll the dice.

Success on *this* roll means the effects occur within 12 hours. The caster can reduce the onset time, but he must specify this during the casting. The ritual is at -1 to skill/+1 to energy per hour subtracted. After reducing the time to one hour, each minute shaved off is another -1/+1. Having the weather change one minute after the ritual is complete gives -70/+70!

The changed weather remains for the effect's duration. It then dissipates – or not – depending on what's likely in the region. Rain on the coast in autumn could linger for hours without any magical encouragement; rain in the middle of the desert will vanish in seconds.

The GM may allow this ritual to increase the odds of other environmental phenomena – earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, etc. Most such events are *very* unlikely. Depending on local conditions, the GM should require a minimum margin of success – at least 5 to 20 points, perhaps more – before there's *any* chance of the desired event happening. Further points of success then increase the chance normally.

## THE PATH OF PROTECTION

Protection ceremonies keep supernatural or physical threats away from the subject.

### Chaperone

See p. 152.

### Charm Against Dark Beasts

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Protection-6; 1 hour.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 11 points.

This ritual empowers a charm that helps the client deal with *animalistic* supernatural beings. The GM decides what qualifies – but as a rule, this magic should affect anything that detects as magical or otherwise supernatural *and* that can't speak and/or has IQ 5 or less. Creatures that explicitly and willingly serve the powers of light or good might be immune (GM's option).

To work, the charm must be in contact with the client's skin. While it's active, any "dark beast" that comes in sight of its bearer is compelled to flee unless the entity can *win* a Quick Contest of Will-5 against the amulet's effective ritual skill or Effectiveness Roll. If the creature wins and decides to fight, then the charm's wearer gets a bonus to damage rolls equal to *half* the ritual's margin of success (rounded down, minimum +1).

### Cleansing

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Protection-4; 20 minutes.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points.

This ritual attempts to dispel any ongoing curse (such as Doom or Malaise) currently affecting the target person or area. Roll a Quick Contest between Cleansing and each hostile ritual. Cleansing must *win* to remove the malign magic. This works best if the opposing effect hasn't progressed very far: Cleansing gets +3 in the Contest if conducted when the

first symptoms appear, but -3 if the curse is already close to a climactic ending.

Even if Cleansing fails, the caster may learn a *little* about the curse's source. At the GM's option, this might require a successful Occultism, Thaumatology, or Theology roll.

### Curse Mirror

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Protection-3; 20 minutes on an individual, 1 hour to create a charm.

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points on an individual, 8 points to create a charm.

Curse Mirror can reflect a hostile ritual back on its caster. The magician casts it using the normal rules. The first time someone tries to curse the subject, however, roll a Quick Contest: a *new* ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll for Curse Mirror against the attacking ritual. If Curse Mirror *wins*, then the curse affects its caster as if he were the subject.

Magicians sometimes cast Curse Mirror on a charm, which *anyone* can carry, instead of on an individual. The ritual works as above, but when triggered – successfully or not – the amulet breaks and its bearer knows automatically whether his defenses have been penetrated.

### Curse Sanctum

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Protection; 1 hour.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points.

Curse Sanctum is a simple ritual of protection against curses. Many magicians cast it on themselves routinely, as a first line of defense against magical attack. It doesn't protect at all against *physical* effects conjured by magic (bolts of lightning, blasts of flame, etc.).

Successfully cast, Curse Sanctum opposes the first curse that tries to affect the subject. The attacking ritual must *win* a Regular Contest with Curse Sanctum to get through; roll every hour until one ritual succeeds and the other fails. Even if Curse Sanctum loses, it delays the hostile ritual for 1d-1 days, buying time to implement stronger measures.

### Dispel Ritual

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Protection-6; 1 hour.  
*Energy Accumulating:* 11 points.

Dispel Ritual counters other rituals' effects. The magician *must* have a reasonable idea of what he's trying to dispel. Being able to name the target ritual and its Path or Book is usually more than enough. In less-certain cases, the GM decides. Attempting to eliminate an effect that isn't present does nothing.

Roll a Quick Contest between Dispel Ritual and the target ritual's effective skill. If the magician who cast that ritual is somehow "linked" to the effect or aware of the dispel attempt, then he may opt to resist using his Will, if that's higher. He can also choose *not* to oppose the effort.

If Dispel Ritual wins (succeeds, if unopposed), then it dispels the target ritual. A tie or loss (or failure, if untested) has no effect. Critical failure automatically alerts the subject of the opposing ritual *and* its caster, if he's on the same world.

## Special Options

● If the dispeller's margin of victory (margin of success, if unopposed) is only 0-1, then the GM may rule that the target effect continues at reduced power. *Halve* its diameter, damage done, etc. Subsequent attempts to resist or dispel it are at +3.

● In a contested attempt, if one magician suffers a critical failure, or rolls an ordinary failure while his rival gets a critical success, then the loser may suffer mental or even physical harm from "magical feedback." Possibilities include mental stun (p. B420), a Fright Check (p. B360), or taking half of any damage that the target ritual inflicts when it works.

● Ritual magic with bizarre side effects, such as those from aspected energy, may be harder to dispel. For example, the caster might have to make a Will roll to work through strange mental influences. The ongoing consequences of critical failures and rituals run wild should be *especially* difficult – they're out-of-control by definition! These resist Dispel Ritual with the *higher* of skill 18 or the effective skill used to create them. They call for three successful Dispel Ritual attempts, with each reducing the effect's power (diameter, damage done, etc.) by a third. Any failure may carry the danger of mental or physical harm, as above. However, the magician who originally cast the troublesome magic has a slightly better feel for the problem, and gets +2 on attempts to dispel it.

● As defined, this ritual is difficult and lengthy. In some settings, the GM may ban it as simply impossible. In others, it might be *easier*; the GM is invited to adjust it to taste, down to a straight Path of Protection roll and 10 minutes (Effect Shaping), or 10 energy points (Energy Accumulating). Additionally or alternatively, each Path or Book might include a limited version of Dispel Ritual that can only dispel its own rituals.

## Dream Sanctum

See p. 142.

## Endure Elements

See p. 143.

## Exorcise

See p. 161.

## Ghost Shirt

*Effect Shaping*: Path of Protection-7; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating*: 12 points.

This blessing protects against bullets, arrows, and other ranged attacks. It doesn't *deflect* such attacks – it reduces the chance that they'll hit the subject by misfortune. Since most battlefield injuries result from essentially random bad luck (suppression fire, shrapnel, stray bullets, etc.), this ritual is very effective at keeping the client from being hurt in battle, but provides little protection against attacks deliberately aimed at him.

The ritual empowers a charm that the subject must wear next to his skin. This amulet works only for the



person for whom it was made; nobody else can benefit from it. While the client wears it, he enjoys complete protection from random ranged attacks – nothing that wasn't specifically directed at *him* will ever hit him (he'll never be an "innocent bystander," or hit by "friendly fire"). Even deliberate ranged attacks from 10 yards away or further are at -3 to hit the subject unless the attacker takes at least one Aim maneuver, as there's an element of blind chance involved. Melee attacks, which require deliberate, focused intent from the aggressor, are usually unaffected – but random blows by blinded opponents, friendly attacks that go astray in close combat, and similar misfortunes will always miss.

## Veil

See p. 152.

## Vitality

See p. 150.

## Ward

*Effect Shaping*: Path of Protection-4\*; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating*: 9 points\*.

\* Modified for Power level; see below.

Ward prevents hostile rituals and supernatural beings from entering a protected area. Like Curse Sanctum (p. 157), many magicians use Ward as a matter of course, casting it before performing other rituals (to exclude any forces that might seek to interfere) or putting it on their working and living areas.

At the time of casting, the magician must specify the *Power* of his Ward. Every two Power levels give -1 to skill/+1 to energy. The Ward can be as powerful as the caster is capable of making it. Power is frequently *extremely* high around areas important to large groups of magicians!

All hostile rituals directed across the Ward's boundaries take a skill penalty equal to its Power (this may also affect other magical attacks; see *Interactions Between Magic Systems*, pp. 222-226). Intangible supernatural beings attempting to enter or leave the warded area must make a Will roll to penetrate the Ward, at a penalty equal to its Power. Likewise, corporeal supernatural or magically summoned creatures seeking to cross the Ward must roll against the *higher* of ST or Will, also with a penalty equal to Power. The GM decides what entities qualify as "supernatural." A being stopped by a Ward can try again after 1d seconds. The magician can specify that certain rituals or beings are permitted through the Ward; e.g., he might make the Ward effective against hostile rituals and spirits, but not corporeal beings.

Wards aren't impregnable, though. Hostile spirits can wear them down and eventually break through. By spending FP equal to the Ward's *initial* Power, a spirit can reduce Power by 1, for itself only. If a number of spirits equal to the initial Power level all erode Power by 1 in this way, then Power drops by 1 against *everything*. If enough spirits attack a barrier, it will collapse in short order!



*Example:* Against a Ward with Power 20, a spirit must spend 20 FP to reduce Power to 19 for itself. If 20 spirits *each* spend 20 FP, then they can permanently reduce Power to 19 against everything. If they did this once a day, then the Ward would collapse in under three weeks, and drop to an ineffective Power level even sooner.

Corporeal supernatural beings are potentially even worse. Such a creature can inflict thrust damage on the Ward once per second, degrading Power by 1 per *full* multiple of initial Power that it inflicts in accumulated damage. This reduction benefits that entity only, however – not rituals or other beings.

Finally, hostile magicians can weaken a Ward using Dispel Ritual (pp. 157-158), although this can be slow. Treat each casting as a Quick Contest with Ward. If Dispel Ritual wins, then subtract its margin of victory from the Ward's Power.

Once a Ward is established, a new one cannot replace it until the first is eliminated or removed by its caster. Thus, a group of magicians besieged by hostile spirits *cannot* keep recasting Ward to keep them out. The Ward's casters can check its state at any time by making an unmodified Path of Protection roll; they perceive the Ward as a translucent energy sphere, and can sense any weakening in it.

## THE PATH OF SPIRIT

This Path encompasses rituals relating to whatever sorts of spirits exist in the setting – possibly including the souls of mortals. Some campaigns may feature a separate Path for each spirit world and/or category of spirits. If so, then these *might* default to each other at -4 or so.

### Astral Projection

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit-5; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

For the duration of this ritual's effect, the subject's spirit wanders the "spirit realm" in intangible form. He effectively gains the Astral Entity meta-trait (p. B263). Depending on the campaign's specific metaphysics, he might also acquire the ability to travel to other dimensions, or to interact with ghosts or higher powers. However, he leaves his physical body behind in a comatose state while doing so, and it gets *no* resistance roll against possession attempts by spirits, so it's advisable to prepare some wards beforehand.

While projecting, the traveler always knows the direction and distance to his body. He cannot be summoned or controlled like an actual spirit, but he may be trapped by various rituals or spells, attacked or detained by other intangible beings, or otherwise prevented from returning. If he stays away beyond the effect's duration, then he and his body both lose 1d-3 HP immediately, and then 1 HP every 12 hours until one or both die. There's *no* way to heal this damage until spirit and body are reunited.

## Path/Book Ritual Magic and Spirits

Ritual magic is traditionally associated with metaphysical systems in which spirits and similar entities are important. Some versions even assume that *all* rituals – and perhaps all magical operations – work by invoking and commanding spirits. This is particularly the case with Effect Shaping magic, where the basic idea is that spirits can provide any energy the task requires, but the magician must perform the ritual correctly to get them to do his bidding. The spirits then warp probability, repair machines, or whatever. Games that use Effect Shaping need not adopt this model – but it *does* explain a lot about how and why ritual magic works. In a campaign where this interpretation *is* accurate, the GM should give some thought to what spirits exist, how they regard being summoned, what they can accomplish, etc.

If ritual magic and spirits *are* linked this way, then certain advantages acquire a special significance. Channeling or Medium might let one detect and possibly speak with spirits working on behalf of a ritual magician; such beings probably won't talk freely about their tasks, but they might at least admit to their own nature (GM's option). Some varieties of Detect may permit the user simply to observe such entities. Spirit Empathy could enable someone to guess a spirit's nature and intentions, and in some settings allow an attempt to negate or deflect a curse by appealing to the spirit's personality, perhaps even at a bonus (say, +1 to +5). The combination of Medium *and* Spirit Empathy could conceivably let the possessor resist a ritual using Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, etc., instead of Will, by perceiving and talking to the spirits involved!

If spirit-based ritual magic coexists with other types of wizardry, then spells or effects from those magic systems that specifically relate to spirits (e.g., parts of the Necromantic college) may interact with ritual effects. For instance, Control Elemental spells might be able to divert effects from the Path of the Elements, and the Turn Spirit spell might deflect *any* ritual effect. Also, Talents governing spirit-related powers such as Shamanism (pp. 207-208) may give bonuses to ritual magic; if so, then they should cost *at least* 10 points/level.

The magician usually works this ritual on himself. Sending another person's spirit to the astral plane *might* be possible, likely with a significant skill penalty or added energy cost, or the GM may prohibit it, except perhaps for group effects that include the caster. Certainly, the subject must be within touch range throughout the entire casting, and not physically resisting. Someone who's tricked into cooperation, who has second thoughts, etc., can still choose to resist – using the *higher* of HT or Will – at the moment the ritual is complete, when he gets some idea of what's being done to him.

Other details can vary with the setting. For example, the traveler may snap back to his body immediately when the effect ends, the subject might be susceptible to the full range of spirit-controlling magic, or the rate of HP loss for an abandoned body could be higher. There may even be a variant ritual within the Path of Gadgets that grants psychic access to the Internet instead of the astral plane!



## Banish

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit-4\*; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points\*.

\* Modified for target's HT; see below.

Despite its name, Banish injures and destroy immaterial spirits (but not the resident souls of material living creatures). It has an additional skill penalty or energy cost equal to the target spirit's HT. The spirit must be *present* for Banish to work; thus, unless the ritual is quick, the spirit must somehow be restrained. If the spirit has possessed someone and won't leave, then this traditionally involves restraining the possession victim. The spirit resists with Will. If the magician wins, then he inflicts dice of damage equal to his margin of victory (minimum 1d) on the spirit, disregarding its DR and other protections.

What happens to spirits who "die" through HP loss is a matter of setting metaphysics, possibly reflected on their character sheets (especially if spirits are viable PCs!). In some cases, they're blasted to nothingness. In others, they may truly be banished – perhaps sent to a distant spirit realm and massively weakened so that they cannot escape for centuries. Banish is supposed to get rid of spirits effectively permanently, though.

## Bind

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit-3; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 5 points.

Bind is normally combined with a summoning ritual to make sure that the spirit being brought into the magician's presence follows his orders. The spirit resists with Will. If the caster wins, then he can command the spirit to perform a number of tasks equal to his margin of victory. A "task" is any short action in a combat situation, one long action otherwise. The caster must specify any spirit powers that he wants the entity to use to accomplish the task. If the spirit is unable to comply (e.g., it lacks sufficient FP to do what's asked), then it simply disregards the instruction.

Fast uses allow a magician to direct spirits for spell-like effects; e.g., commanding a spirit to throw objects at a target, or having several spirits lift him so that he can "fly." The limits depend entirely on the spirits available for binding in the setting. Bind *cannot* be used to control the spirits that implement the effects of other rituals, such as Evil Eye. Special-purpose rituals are specifically optimized to control those spirits, which are too powerful, subtle, or focused on specific functions to be managed with general-purpose magic like Bind.

## Embody

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit-5; 2 hours.

*Energy Accumulating:* 12 points.

Embody creates a physical body for a spirit, which *must* be present (and may, in some settings, be a human soul). The GM is free to rule that only certain types of spirits can benefit from it. He could even require a completely different ritual for each kind of body and/or spirit.

The body is constructed from whatever special materials the GM feels fit the tradition and setting; the bodies of

animals or humans (living or dead), clockwork, marble statues, or weird combinations of these and other options. Certain ingredients may be expensive, dangerous, or illegal. Crafting them into a body might demand one or more skill rolls, possibly at penalties. The body's abilities depend on what it's made from and the degree of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll. After the effect's duration ends, the body falls apart – often messily – or reverts to its original nature.

While controlling the body, the spirit effectively loses the Insubstantiality and Invisibility advantages (usually gained as part of the Spirit or Astral Entity meta-trait, p. B263). Its immaterial form "rides around" inside the body, and may be injured by attacks that affect immaterial beings, or possibly exorcised (GM's option). If it's driven out, or if the body crosses a barrier that stops immaterial spirits, then the body falls lifeless.

The body may temporarily grant any advantages, disadvantages, or attribute modifiers that the GM agrees fit with the materials used and general concept. It may also negate traits that the spirit possesses – *especially* anything specifically related to its immaterial nature. The net character point value of all gains and losses, apart from Insubstantiality and Invisibility, cannot exceed 10 × the ritual's margin of success.

*Example:* Redeye Gareth stitches together a body for a friendly spirit from assorted animal corpses. He makes his ritual roll by 3, so the body can grant up to +30 points net.

The GM rules that this pseudo-living body reduces the spirit's Attractive appearance to Monstrous, and adds Semi-Upright, giving Gareth's player another 29 points to play with, for a total of 59 points. The player persuades the GM to let the thing have +2 ST [20], +5 HP [10], +1 Basic Move [5], DR 2 [10], Fur [1], Sharp Claws [5], Sharp Teeth [1], and Temperature Tolerance 7 [7], using up all 59 points.

The spirit *isn't* obliged to enter the body. If more than one spirit is present and wishes to occupy the body when the ritual is completed – and the GM decides that it's suitable for any of them – then the one that wins a Quick Contest of Wills gets it. The GM may give the intended spirit +1 to +3, since the ritual is specifically shaped to aid it.

Everything about Embody is fairly open-ended. The GM should only permit it to PCs if he's prepared to improvise and negotiate when they use it. Note also that this ritual is liable to make spirits with friendly magicians quite powerful.

## Empower

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit-4; 10 minutes; transfers FP up to margin of success × 5 (minimum 5 FP).

*Energy Accumulating:* 6 points, +1 per 5 FP transferred.

Empower transfers FP from the magician or another source to a spirit. It *can* aid a spirit imprisoned by Ward (pp. 158-159) or Spirit Trap (p. 162), but it's resisted by any such confining rituals between the caster and the subject. A single working can transfer FP from the magician; from other beings who are present and either willing, magically controlled, or totally helpless; and from magic items that the GM feels provide the appropriate type of energy

## Fetishes

A *fetish* is an object, created using the Fetish ritual (below), that contains a spirit's essence and gives its wielder access to the spirit's capabilities. Normally, fetishes hold servitor or mindless spirits. While a free-willed spirit *might* agree to be embodied in a fetish as part of some bargain, most such entities are bound against their will and resent it.

A fetish enables the holder to employ the spirit's powers as if *he* were the spirit. The fetish provides none of the abilities of Elemental or Spirit meta-traits (pp. B262-263), nor advantages that affect only the spirit (Damage Resistance, Regeneration, etc.). For example, a fire elemental fetish might let its wielder use the elemental's "flaming blast" Innate Attack, but not its Body of Fire meta-trait. The *spirit's* FP power the fetish's abilities, where necessary; when the spirit reaches 0 FP, the fetish stops working until the spirit recovers at least 1 FP.

The holder of a fetish can also draw on the spirit's FP, using them to power his own supernatural abilities – spells, powers, etc. The GM may wish to allow the spirit's FP to act as an energy source in Energy

Accumulating rituals, too. In that case, every 5 FP the spirit provides convert to 1 energy point.

Any critical failure rolled at any time when using either of the above functions gives the spirit in the fetish a chance to escape if it wants. Roll a Quick Contest of Wills between the spirit and the fetish's wielder. If the spirit *wins*, then it's free; it may flee or attack, depending on its disposition and a reaction roll. Otherwise, the spirit remains trapped. This is in addition to the critical failure's *other* consequences!

Finally, a fetish can serve as a permanent charm (see *Charms*, p. 139). The spirit's power maintains the ritual cast on the fetish indefinitely, allowing the caster to *ignore* duration modifiers. This precludes the fetish from providing other abilities; its holder cannot use the spirit's powers or FP. If the charm requires a roll to activate or use in some way, then a critical failure offers the spirit a chance to escape, as above.

Destroying a fetish frees the occupying spirit, which can then do as it wishes. However, it must make a HT roll. Failure means it's stunned and takes 1d damage – or 4d damage on a critical failure.

(Powerstones *might* qualify). If this raises the recipient's FP total above its normal level, then the excess remains available for 1d seconds and then dissipates.

It might seem unusual for magicians to want to give spirits energy, but a spirit may have exhausting powers (such as healing) that are desperately needed, or the magician might worship a spirit as a god, or the energy could be the price of a service.

### Exorcise

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Protection-5 or Path of Spirit-2; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

This ritual makes it painful and difficult for spirits to approach the protected area or person. Cast on a living subject, it also protects an area around him with a radius in yards equal to his Will/3 (round down); this requires no additional modifier. In all cases, the spirit resists with Will-5, with success meaning that it merely has -1 to DX and IQ while it remains in the area or possessing the subject.

If the spirit fails to resist, though, then it's repelled. A spirit that isn't yet in the target area or subject finds entering that locale or facing that person too painful to undertake. This effect becomes permanent if – in addition to overcoming the spirit's resistance – the magician rolls a critical success or the spirit rolls a critical failure. A spirit that's already in the subject or target area must immediately depart, leaving behind any living thing or physical body that it's possessing.

This ritual is similar but not identical to the Exorcism skill (p. B193), using magical instead of religious power. A

setting may feature either or both. The two can be equally effective at driving off spirits.

### Fetish

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit-8\*; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 13 points\*.

\* Modified for target's ST or HT; see below.

This ritual traps or embodies a spirit in an object, creating a *fetish* (see *Fetishes*, above). The spirit must be present for the ritual and obedient to the caster, either willingly or via coercion (as with Bind, p. 160); hence, it doesn't resist. Fetish has an additional skill penalty or energy cost equal to the spirit's ST or HT, whichever is *higher*. Success binds the spirit and empowers the fetish. Failure frees the spirit of any compulsion to obey the magician, who suffers a cumulative -1 to skill/+1 to energy on further castings of Fetish on that spirit. Critical failure means the caster *can't* cast Fetish on that spirit again.

### Ghost Sword

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Gadgets-5\* or Path of Spirit-3\*; 30 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points\*.

\* Modified for weapon weight; see below.

Ghost Sword empowers a weapon to injure and kill incorporeal spirits. Determine duration normally. Add a further modifier of -1 to skill/+1 to energy per *full* 2 lbs. of weapon weight. The magician can prepare multiple weapons; the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) applies normally, while the weight modifier is that for the weapons' *total* weight.

Success lets the weapon inflict its normal damage on incorporeal targets. Despite the ritual's name, it can affect ranged weapons – but it must be cast on the *ammunition*, not on the weapon itself. Thus, it can enchant a bullet or an arrow, but not a gun or a bow. Note that Ghost Sword doesn't increase the wielder's ability to see or detect spirits!

If ritual magic is linked to spirits (see *Path/Book Ritual Magic and Spirits*, p. 159), then a weapon empowered by Ghost Sword can ignore the effects of protective rituals such as Ghost Shirt by winning a Quick Contest against them.

## Lay to Rest

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 3 points.

Lay to Rest guides the spirit of a newly deceased person to the afterlife (whatever that may mean for that individual). The magician casts it on the subject's remains; he's at -1 to skill/+1 to energy cost per full week since the target's death. No other time or duration modifiers apply, but the effects are permanent. A successful ritual resists any attempt to summon the spirit of the deceased (via rituals, spells, etc.), *including* efforts to resurrect him. The would-be summoner must *win* a Quick Contest with Lay to Rest in order to contact the spirit at all.

## Spirit Slave

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit-6; 1d×10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 10 points.

This malevolent ritual captures part of a living target's *soul*, making him vulnerable to the caster's influence. The subject may resist with Will. Magicians often wear down their prey using other, fear-inducing rituals and/or mundane tricks before casting Spirit Slave. For example, Voodoo practitioners use a special poison that induces a deathlike trance, and the victim is buried alive. Such preparations give -1 to -5 to resistance rolls.

A victim who fails to resist gains High Pain Threshold (p. B59) and Hidebound (p. B138), and has -10 to Will for the purpose of resisting *other* rituals worked by the same caster. The magician imprisons the soul-fragment in a bottle, gemstone, or similar vessel. Rituals and spells intended to affect the subject's soul or spirit automatically fail unless the caster holds this "soul jar" – in which case the victim is at the same -10 to resist. Breaking this container lets the fragment return to its rightful place, canceling the ritual effect.

At the GM's option, if the victim is killed, then his ghost may remain in the physical world, under the caster's control, until the magician releases it or an appropriate ritual or spell overcomes the Spirit Slave effect.

## Spirit Trap

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit-4\*; 1d×10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points\*.

\* The GM may modify this for different types of spirits.

This ritual traps a spirit inside a container chosen by the magician. Bottles, enclosed pots, etc., are typical. The



vessel should have a stopper or a lid, which is usually closed and sealed as the ritual takes effect. A combined ceremony (p. 138) involving Spirit Trap and a summoning ritual is a common and useful option.

The spirit resists with the *higher* of Will or ST. If the magician wins, then the spirit is imprisoned for the ritual's duration. Breaking the container frees the spirit – who might well seek vengeance on its jailer! A failed ritual also means the spirit is likely to attack (or flee, if the magician is especially powerful).

## Summon

*Effect Shaping:* Path of Spirit\*; 1d×10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 4 points.\*

\* The GM may modify this for different types of spirits.

This is the basic spirit-summoning ritual. The caster *must* know the name of the spirit (for a unique entity) or type of spirit (for a "generic" one) that he's calling upon. Willing spirits appear on a successful roll. Reluctant ones – and most are – resist with Will-3.

The spirit appears in the general area, in sight of the magician, and may or may not be communicative or helpful. *Powerful* spirits take a dim view of being summoned against their will. The GM may apply a reaction penalty from -1 to as much as -5, depending on the entity and the conditions. A magician *can* summon a spirit into an area protected by a Ward (p. 158-159) – a common precaution – provided that he's one of the Ward's creators.

# EXAMPLE BOOKS

Book contents are arbitrary, which means that it's up to the GM to define the Books available in his campaign. The most important consideration is the intended *atmosphere*. The GM is, as always, free to invent new rituals – and some Books describe very strange magic!

## THE BOOK OF THE NAMES OF THE DEAD

*Suggested Setting:* Modern-day or historical horror/dark fantasy.

This tome seems to be relatively modern, but is traditionally said to be a revised translation of an ancient text. Some claim that it's actually *nonhuman* in origin. It deals entirely with the sort of necromancy that ends up banned by any lawmakers who learn of it – but it includes enough protections and countermeasures that benevolent scholars sometimes force themselves to read it.

The Book describes two unique rituals (see below), plus several rituals found in various Paths, with the following defaults to Book skill:

Ritual	Default	Page
Banish	-4	p. 160
Bind	-3	p. 160
Evil Eye	-6	p. 149
Exorcise	-4	p. 161
Hand of Glory	-8	p. 141
Night Terrors	-4	p. 142

## Command the Bodies of the Dead

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-7\*; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 12 points\*.

\* Modified for body's SM.

This works exactly like the Zombie spell (p. B252). If the target corpse is larger than human-sized, then subtract a skill penalty or add an energy cost equal to 4× the body's SM. This

ritual can be cast on multiple cadavers, but with *double* the modifier from the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243).

## Summon the Unspeakable

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-4; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 9 points.

This ritual works much like Summon (p. 162), but it can only bring forth twisted, terrifying entities from beyond the realms of sanity. These beings rarely attempt to resist . . . but anyone who sees them manifest – including the magician – must make a Fright Check! Their motives are bizarre and inhuman; roll a reaction at -2, and don't bother trying to explain the results.

## GENTLE ARTS OF THE FLOATING WORLD

*Suggested Setting:* Historical secret magic.

This Book traditionally takes the form of a box full of bamboo scrolls, and experts who can read Japanese much prefer to study it in that, its original language. It's said to have been created by a medieval Japanese secret society that operated in the half-hidden world of magicians, geisha, and ninja. While the rituals it contains may seem limited in their usefulness, they can be powerful if used cleverly – and somehow, the Book is always in demand.

This Book describes four unique rituals (see below), plus several rituals found in various Paths, with the following defaults to Book skill:

Ritual	Default	Page
Dream Sanctum	-6	p. 142
Love Charm	-3	p. 154
Lust	-4	p. 141
Slumber	-3	p. 143
Soothe	-3	p. 150
Vitality	-6	p. 150

## Book Titles

Given that Books of ritual magic tend to loom large in a campaign, titles can be as significant as content. It's important to get the flavor right, after all!

Book titles should mostly be verbose and mannered – magic is a grandiose subject, and its scholars want to be taken seriously. In some cases, the title may describe the contents, if in a roundabout way; “Powers of the Ever-Mobile Azure Element” sounds much more interesting than “Water Magic.” In others, it might say more about the context in which the Book was written, or the attitudes of the person who titled it; “Accounts of the Ever-Wondrous Works of Our Forebears” could refer to almost anything, but it probably describes either potent magic for some golden age of the art, or trivial magic that the author

*thought* was impressive. The occasional succinct title can provide welcome contrast, though, suggesting either a businesslike, pragmatic writer, or a Book so significant that it doesn't *need* an extravagant cover.

An author may try to attach his *own* name to a title. This is only likely to last if he gains a considerable independent reputation, however. Writers of Books often acquire obscure nicknames or codenames after their death, and these end up attached to their works.

Finally, titles may be translations that contain all sorts of peculiar terms that made much more sense in the original tongue. These might well be gibberish to anyone who doesn't know the context. Authors' names can also be translated – often becoming unrecognizable in the process.

## Impotence

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-3; 30 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points.

Impotence renders the subject – who *must* be a male of some species (not necessarily human) – incapable of sexual intercourse for its duration. This may seem a petty curse, but the subtle effects on the victim's morale can be significant.

## Perfect Appearance

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-4; 40 minutes; improves Appearance by one level per 5 *full* points in margin of success (minimum one level).

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points, +5 per level of Appearance improvement.

This ritual *subtly* adjusts the subject's looks. He remains completely recognizable, but somehow, his Appearance improves for the effect's duration, to a maximum of Very Handsome/Beautiful. The magic can do nothing for looks worse than Ugly, however!

Perfect Appearance only affects humanoid beings. The magician determines whether the improvement is in the eyes of the *subject's* species or the *caster's*, if their standards differ. As well, the magician can qualify Appearance with Androgynous or Impressive if he desires, with no additional difficulty.

See *Physical Appearance* (p. B21) for Appearance levels and options.

## Unbearable Pleasure

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-5; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

The magician enchants the subject with the ability to induce intense pleasure by skin contact. The client can use this effect once, at any time before the duration expires. This requires only a touch and a simple thought.



The person subjected to this pleasure can resist the ritual with Will if he wishes, but at -5. If he succeeds, then he must still make a HT roll or be physically stunned. If doesn't (or doesn't choose to) resist, then he experiences ecstasy (see *Incapacitating Conditions*, p. B428). He can try to recover once every 30 seconds, rolling at Will-4 on the first attempt, Will-3 on the second, Will-2 on the third, and so on. These rolls are uncontested.

At the GM's option, this effect can function much like a drug, giving the magician considerable power over those who develop an Addiction.

## Virility

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-3; 30 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points.

Virility renders the subject – who *must* be a male of some species (not necessarily human) – fully capable of sexual intercourse for its duration, any medical conditions notwithstanding. The magic does nothing about his *other* health problems (such as a weak heart . . .). If both Virility and Impotence (above) are cast on the same person, roll a Quick Contest between the rituals; the winning ritual takes effect, while a tie cancels both.

# THE DEEPER PRINCIPIA, ANNOTATED

*Suggested Setting:* A "magical clockpunk" alternate world or secret history.

This Book is in fact Sir Isaac Newton's three-volume *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, widely known as a primary source for modern physics. Mathematicians wonder why Newton used such archaic geometrical methods in this groundbreaking work. Some magicians know that it's because this scholar of alchemy and arcane theology actually embedded mystical secrets in the text, and have developed techniques for teasing out powerful rituals. Their copies invariably consist of facsimiles of the original, full of ragged bookmarks and marginal annotations.

Understanding the *Principia* well enough to use its magic requires close study, which demands Accented-level knowledge of Latin (written and spoken), plus Chemistry/TL3-12, Mathematics/TL3 (Applied)-14, Occultism-11, Physics/TL4-14, and Theology (Neo-Arian)-13. Many magicians think that there are more secrets to be found, and obsessively study any annotations or commentaries they can find. In settings where this lore is secret, most librarians who have responsibility for early copies of the book are aware that there are some very strange people who want to study it. Hence, many such copies on display are actually facsimiles; the real volumes are locked away in secret vaults.

This Book describes Scry (p. 152), which defaults to Book skill-7, and four unique rituals.

## Measurement

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-2; 10 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 4 points.

Measurement determines the exact dimensions, weight, or temperature (as applicable) of an area, object, or creature; the physical force being applied at a point; or, if cast with a duration on something in motion, the target's average velocity in that period. It offers the same precision as the best instruments available to the general public in the setting. However, it can measure things that ordinary instruments cannot, such as the internal temperature of a sealed object. It cannot be cast on multiple targets. Area effect modifiers (p. 242) for an area large enough to hold the subject *always* apply.

### Perfection of the Soul

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-5; 20 minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

This ritual gives the subject a calm, balanced mind and spirit. He gains +3 to Will, +1 to Per, and the Indomitable and Unfazeable advantages, and can completely disregard all mental disadvantages and quirks except Code of Honor, Disciplines of Faith, and Vow. He can even override *those* for a sufficiently pressing reason, suffering no mental strain or sense of guilt while the effect continues.

Perfection of the Soul doesn't take duration modifiers. Instead, the effect lasts for 10 minutes times the margin of success on the ritual roll or Effectiveness Roll. It ends immediately if the subject falls asleep or is rendered unconscious, however. Someone who acts wildly out of character under the ritual's influence may suffer mental stress or severe guilt once the duration expires; e.g., if he ignored a Phobia, then he'll probably have to make a Fright Check.

### Thicken the Walls of the World

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-3; 1 hour.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points.

This ritual reinforces the nature of reality across its area of effect. It resists any attempt to summon extradimensional entities, open portals to other realms, or channel divine or diabolical power in that locale for the effect's duration. The GM is the final arbiter of what's affected.

### Transmutation of Metals

*Effect Shaping:* Book skill-4; 30 minutes; improves metal quality by one level per 5 *full* points in margin of success, or reduces it by a level for every 3 *full* points in margin of success.

*Energy Accumulating:* 8 points, +5 per level to improve metal quality or +3 per level to reduce it.

This ritual requires a certain amount of alchemical apparatus as its material/symbolic component, although it *isn't* a chemical treatment, and can work at long ranges without physical contact. Success either "improves" or "reduces" (caster's option) the quality of all metal of one specific type – iron, steel, aluminum, bronze, or whatever – in the area of effect. This change lasts for 3d minutes; no duration modifiers are permitted.

Each level of improvement or reduction adjusts the DR of anything made of the metal upward or downward, respectively, by 20% (round to the nearest whole number; halves round up). This includes personal and vehicular armor: Every *two* levels of improvement increase a metal weapon's quality by a level, from cheap, to good, to fine (the best this magic can manage), while every level of reduction worsens metal weapon quality by a level, from very fine, to fine, to good, to cheap. Lowering the quality of metal parts that play a *significant* role in a vehicle's structure gives -1 per level to vehicle HT; roll against the diminished HT immediately, with failure indicating that the vehicle breaks down. Other machines may experience similar effects (GM's option). The point is that metals become harder or softer, with whatever consequences the GM feels that implies.

## Writing New Books

Suitably skilled magician PCs might be tempted to immortalize their names by writing new Books. This isn't just a matter of writing down a bunch of techniques and getting them printed or copied, however. While Books may *look* like bundles of arbitrary facts and techniques, each one actually has an underlying logic – a sort of personality. A would-be author must not only pull together a collection of magical effects and describe them with all the excruciating detail and cryptic subtlety associated with magic, but also find some way to *relate* everything so that someone who reads the Book correctly gains useful insight into the nature of the magic. Many Books also represent genuinely valuable (if rambling) textbooks on various academic skills, which should suggest the level of expertise required.

If a PC is determined to try to write a Book, then the GM can handle it using *New Inventions* (pp. B473-474). New Books might contain only rituals that the author knows from other sources, subject to GM agreement that

they fit the common theme. Alternatively, rituals, too, can be invented from scratch; see *Magical Invention* (p. 10).

No Book can be an invention of less than Average complexity; one containing new rituals is at least Complex, and some such projects are Amazing. The author will need to know every ritual he wishes to include in the book at an appropriate level for the invention skill, at least one other skill (Occultism, Thaumatology, Theology, Hidden Lore . . .) at the same level, and Writing at 13+. Production facilities should be relatively cheap – but *other* parts of the process can get as strange as the GM wants. If the magician succeeds in the invention process, then he acquires a point in the new Book skill. He'll need to train that up to the invention skill level before he starts trying to teach his theories; otherwise, he'll appear vague and uncertain, triggering automatic bad reactions from other magicians.

Creating a Book might be the subject of a whole *campaign*, with countless arbitrary complications.

## CHAPTER SIX

# FLEXIBLE MAGIC



*Scribing the names of Iudal and Anatreth in glowing symbols in the air, Rogero opened a gate and plunged into the void between the worlds. The gate slammed shut behind him, sealing itself against any power less than an archangel – and a moment later, even as he began to build up the speed that he would need on this journey, Rogero sensed that he was pursued.*

*With a thought, he rotated his astral body. A sword of flame appeared in his right hand, but when he saw what followed him, he dismissed the blade. Two dull gray torpedoes plowed through the void on his trail, the energies of spite and treason that empowered them discernible even at this distance, mindless malice in their glowing red eyes. Their warheads would be laden with distilled annihilation; if he shattered them with forces of his own, he would vanish forever in the ensuing chaos. If he was fortunate, he would die.*

*He cast about for some way to escape these weapons, his will preserving his velocity all the while. But the torpedoes were slowly gaining upon him, and he guessed that their sender had bound them to his image with a glyph of relentlessness. He spat a doubled-treason charm at them, hoping to turn them against each other, but it slid harmlessly off their casings.*

*Then, with no action on his part, they **did** both turn aside. Frowning, Rogero watched them, and was startled to see them pause obediently before a new figure, as if suddenly transformed into pets. Their original sender might have chosen to destroy or disable them, but this was surely a denial of the things' carefully sculpted natures.*

*Working a charm of vision, Rogero saw the newcomer standing on a summit of perfect stone that jutted into the void from some sub-world that he could not perceive. She held a length of cord in her hands, and as he watched, she tied it into a loop. Then, with another quick motion, she created a cat's cradle of threads between her hands. A puff of breath, a simple gesture, and the cords became a skeletal golden chariot in which she stood. A further cord, produced with the gesture of a stage conjuror feigning nonchalance, became a silver astral binding around the quiescent torpedoes . . .*

*No, not binding them – forming reins.*

*Rogero gasped despite himself. All this violation of the Precepts of the Art was performed utterly casually.*

*For the first time, the woman looked at Rogero. Then, the torpedoes started into motion once again, drawing the chariot across the void. Rogero drew four symbol-stones from his pocket, conjuring a set of robes as he stood forth to meet his rescuer. He had suspicions about his situation, but he was too much of a wizard to show fear.*

Magic in the game need not be limited to restricted lists of spells, rituals, potions, and so on. Suitable rules can make it as flexible and as versatile as anything in fiction, with wizards assembling a huge range of effects from first principles. Managing the ensuing campaign and anticipating all the possibilities can be challenging for the GM, however – especially since open-ended systems are *inevitably* somewhat susceptible to abuse. Thus, the GM who allows such magic must be confident of his conception of what magic can and cannot do, while players who are prone to confrontations with the GM should probably avoid this kind of magic. Given a little confidence and judgment, though, the results of flexible magic can more than justify the effort.

## EFFECT CLASS

It's often useful to assign flexible magic effects a *class*, as is done for spells (see *Spell Classes*, pp. B239-242). Some special considerations:

*Regular:* Regular effects generally disregard mundane physical barriers, but magical wards are another matter. Some imbue the caster or another subject with a temporary offensive ability that he must then wield, such as an intangible sword of force or a freezing stare. The wielder normally uses the Innate Attack skill (p. B201) for ranged effects, but other options are possible – Force Sword (p. B208) is definitely appropriate for intangible mystic melee weapons.

*Area:* Standard Area effects extend four yards up from a surface, but the GM may prefer to assume that certain effects radiate *spherically* from a center. They may also be cast on noncircular, even irregular areas; use the modifiers for the smallest circular or spherical space into which the target area could fit.

*Missile:* These effects are usually harmful, although it's perfectly conceivable that a magician might hurl bolts of beneficial energies. Remember that Missile effects don't take range modifiers of any kind when cast – it's the *attack* roll that suffers range penalties. The caster uses an appropriate specialty of the Innate Attack skill (p. B201) to attack. The GM can assign statistics based on a similar spell effect or mundane missile weapon; when in doubt, assume 1/2D 25, Max 50, Acc 1, RoF 1, and Rcl 1.

*Blocking:* If the style of magic makes it impossible to produce results in a very short time, then the GM may ban Blocking effects *unless* they can be generated beforehand and held in reserve until needed.

*Information:* The GM should impose whatever limits he deems appropriate on these effects. They may take modifiers for complex or exclusive questions, such as "Where's the nearest ammunition that *isn't* in that enemy fortress?" Attempts to acquire information about something that isn't in plain view are often limited to once per day per caster or collaborative group.

*Enchantment:* Effects intended to imbue objects or beings with magical power are special cases, in a class of their own. Details vary by setting, but this kind of magic tends to be slow and require a lot of effort. The item being enchanted almost always has to be physically present.

## Simple Flexible Magic

The flexible magic rules are intended for campaigns in which such magic will play a *significant* role. They assume that flexible magic will be available to PCs, and see heavy use. In some games, though, "flexible mages" will be rare – perhaps appearing solely as the occasional impressively cinematic NPC, who pulls magic out of his pointy hat between issuing gnomish pronouncements and generally being weird and slightly annoying.

If magical flexibility is intended to be rare and mostly kept to the background, then defining a complete, detailed system for it is overkill. In such games, the best approach may simply be to give the relevant NPCs high levels of Modular Abilities (p. B71), most likely Cosmic Power, with the Spells Only limitation – or perhaps Wild Talent (p. B99) with the Focused, Magical limitation. When the GM needs such an NPC to produce an effect, he just locates an appropriate spell in *GURPS Magic*, allocates points or marks off the usage, and rolls the dice.

Nothing prevents the GM from extending this option to PCs, but there *are* drawbacks. For one thing, the point cost to acquire this sort of flexible magic as anything more than an occasional emergency option is high. For another, unless the players are familiar with the entire spell list, they're liable to slow down the game by regularly taking time out to review their options.

*Special:* It's perfectly possible for an effect not to fit in any standard category, just as a spell can be classed as "Special."

## Resisting Effects

Like a spell, a flexible magical effect is *resisted* if the subject has a chance to reduce or eliminate it by personal resilience or fortitude. In general, if the effect resembles a Resisted spell, then the subject can resist it using the rules under *Resisted Spells* (pp. B241-242). Melee and Missile effects don't usually permit resistance, especially if they do ordinary HP damage; instead, the target gets an active defense roll (Dodge, Block, or Parry), while armor or other DR can stop damage.

The subject generally uses Will to resist effects that assail his mind, and HT to resist those that attack his metabolism, immune system, etc. However, these aren't the only possibilities; for example, illusory magic might be resisted by Per (to recognize its nature) or IQ (to figure out inconsistencies). The GM decides what's appropriate. The subject's Magic Resistance, if any, *always* adds to his resistance. A spell or other magical effect resists using the caster's effective skill when he cast it.



# SYMBOL MAGIC

Many legends and stories describe magic that's based on sets of signs that represent mystically potent words, sounds, or concepts. The idea probably dates to the days when writing was a new invention – one that undoubtedly seemed like a miraculous secret to preliterate peoples. The Vikings had futhark runes, Celtic druids had Ogham, and the Qabala places great importance on the Hebrew alphabet. Chinese, Sanskrit, hieroglyphics . . . all have been used as magical symbol-languages.

A symbol-magic system lets those with proper training use such a character set to work magic. The process typically involves scrolls or items enchanted with powerful glyphs, but wizards can also use the power of symbols to create magical effects directly. Symbol-casters are usually free to learn other forms of magic (but see *Interactions Between Magic Systems*, pp. 222-226). Use of symbols grants flexibility, while fixed spells or rituals trade that for raw power – and magic-workers often want both. Indeed, a “spell” may be conceived as a preset configuration of symbols that accomplishes a standard result.

The key to symbol magic is the Symbol Drawing skill (p. B224), which requires specialization by magical tradition. More precisely, it requires specialization by *symbolic lexicon*: the set of magical symbols (such as “futhark” or “Ogham”) associated with a tradition. Symbol magic *cannot* mix symbols from multiple lexicons, and someone who has studied one lexicon won't have the faintest idea what symbols from another will achieve. Many lexicons also serve as alphabets, and literacy in an associated language might therefore be a prerequisite for Symbol Drawing – but it's possible for a lexicon's magical function to be completely divorced from its use in mundane writing, if any.

## SELECTING A SYMBOLIC LEXICON

A symbol-magic system requires a lexicon to describe or define anything that the magic can do. The first thing the GM must decide is which lexicon to use.

### Size

Lexicons vary in size. A smaller symbol set either excludes some magical effects (making symbol magic relatively limited) or has symbols that represent broader aspects of reality (making a wizard who masters a few symbols more powerful). It can also make some effects hard to define, and certain combinations of symbols difficult to interpret or unusually versatile. Conversely, a larger lexicon offers greater subtlety and precision when defining effects – but since each symbol corresponds to a skill, a well-rounded symbol-user will have to spend more points.

Most interesting lexicons have around 15-30 symbols. If nothing else, it's hard for players to keep track of much larger sets and to remember what they need for any given purpose. A small set – perhaps a dozen or so – suggests that

each symbol is a powerful “keystone of reality.” Fewer than that is generally *too* few.

Lexicons are usually divided into “nouns” (e.g., “humanity” or “water”) that describe what the magical effect is operating on, and “verbs” (e.g., “create” or “analyze”) that express the sort of operation being performed. This division needn't be absolute, though. A verb symbol can stand for the consequences of performing an action, or a noun for a task associated with a thing – and symbols may have *multiple* meanings, some noun-like and some verb-like. In general, between a third and a quarter of the lexicon should be verbs, with a minimum of about four or five (e.g., “perceive,” “create,” “destroy,” and “control”), that being the smallest set capable of describing a satisfactory variety of effects, and a maximum of around 10-12 (e.g., “locate,” “analyze,” “control,” “ward,” “move,” “diminish,” “empower,” “create,” “destroy,” and “transform”), since more than that makes matters too complicated.

There are no “adjectives” or “adverbs” in this system. Modifications to magical effects are handled via modifiers to the casting process – not through extra words. If the GM *wants* magic to be more complex, however, then he's welcome to add such things!

### Comprehensiveness

Less-extensive lexicons tend to leave gaps – effects that they just can't accomplish – but even the largest symbol set can have omissions. For example, many religions say that worldly magic can have no power over God or His personal emissaries, so a lexicon may have no symbol for the deity. Similarly, it's possible that magic can't truly create (that being limited to God, or prevented by a magical equivalent of conservation of energy), in which case the set of verbs

## Symbol Magery

The standard symbol-magic system doesn't require Magery and gives no benefits for that advantage. This is easy to change, however.

One possibility is that a symbol-wizard requires at least Magery 0 to *draw* or *activate* effective symbols in areas with normal or lower mana. In addition, his Magery level adds to the skill he uses for either task at any time. Magery *doesn't* benefit Symbol Drawing or specific symbol skills for *all* purposes – it helps only when actually using those skills to perform magic. For example, Magery wouldn't help when determining the purpose of a symbolic inscription created by someone else, or when familiarizing yourself with the function of an inscribed parchment.

Alternatively, Magery can give a bonus to *activate* symbols, but not to inscribe them. In that case, anyone with the right knowledge can prepare an inscription of power – but often, only a mage can get it to work.

*I have often admired the mysticall way of Pythagoras, and the secret Magicke of numbers.*

– Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici*

will exclude “create” – and workings that *appear* to produce something out of nothing actually use “locate” plus “control” or “move” to bring the thing, or “transform” to convert an existing item. In a particular setting’s metaphysics, anything that’s totally immune to magic (the sea, iron, rowan wood, or whatever) might have no corresponding symbol, or the symbol for some ancient race or power may have been lost.

### Secret, Forbidden, and Lost Symbols

In most settings, the basic meanings of symbols are common knowledge – or at most call for an Occultism or Thaumatology roll to deduce – and anyone can study them freely, although it’s best to find a teacher. The GM may decide to make certain symbols secret or forbidden, however, and require quests or extensive research to uncover them. It *might* be possible for PCs with suitable Unusual Backgrounds to enter play knowing these symbols, or the GM may prefer to keep such mysteries hidden.

Generally, anybody who knows Symbol Drawing gets a skill roll to recognize an unfamiliar symbol from within his tradition, even if he has never seen it before. Success gives him no special skill with the symbol, but allows him to improve the symbol skill with character points in the normal way. However, truly *strange* symbols may be obscure and complex enough that the student must see them in use several times before he can even begin to grasp what they can do.

“Incomplete” symbol sets are an interesting way to put limits on magic, ensuring that non-wizards have something to do and setting up countless practical challenges. Students of magic may also find them an interesting puzzle. It’s possible that a “missing” symbol is in fact lost or undiscovered; finding and mastering it could then be a great, campaign-long project. Alternatively, its absence might reflect an unbreakable law of reality – which probably won’t prevent misguided researchers from wasting their lives *trying* to find it.

Certain symbols may be secrets of particular groups, giving them a crucial advantage in conflicts. If symbols must be inscribed for use, though, then it’s difficult to keep other symbol-uses from seeing them! Thus, this edge can only be used carefully and rarely.

Finally, some symbols might be banned or feared. If “destruction” and “demon” raise dark forces, then anyone inscribing them in the course of a magical working is marking himself as a target for lawful folk. Conversely, an evil overlord – or complex theological rules on the side of good – may prohibit the symbol for a *benevolent* power.

### Symbol Skills: Difficulty and Base Energy Cost

Each symbol has a corresponding skill. This has *no* default and has Symbol Drawing as a prerequisite; mastering it represents mastering that aspect of magic. A given skill’s difficulty reflects how hard it is to control that sort of power. Each skill also has a *base energy cost*, used when determining the total energy cost for an effect. The table below offers some loose guidelines.

The GM is welcome to adjust difficulties and costs. This can have interesting effects on the subtlety and balance of the system and the setting. For example, if the symbol for “magic” itself has a Very Hard skill, then fundamental forces are tricky to master, while if the symbol for “weaken” has an Average skill with base energy cost 0, then magic evidently has a disruptive, entropic quality.

### Other Attribute Bases and Caps

Symbol skills are normally IQ-based, but the GM may find it interesting to link them to other attributes. The most likely candidates are Per (implying that the wizard must carefully study the subtleties of each symbol) and Will (suggesting that activating magical symbols requires sheer mental effort). At 5 points/level, though, these scores are cheap to improve; using them as the basis of magic could lead to distorted character designs. Basing symbol skills on DX might be reasonable if the caster must trace each symbol with precision – although this may produce curiously nonintellectual symbol-wizards! See *Magic Based on Other Attributes* (pp. 29-31) for further thoughts.

Alternatively, the GM may simply apply *Using Skills With Other Attributes* (p. B172). For instance, he might base *drawing* on DX or Per, but *activation* on IQ or Will. This would be reasonably balanced, and emphasize the difference between the two steps.

Symbol's Nature	Examples	Skill Difficulty	Base Energy Cost
<b>Nouns</b>			
Restricted in scope	Food, Sound	IQ/Easy	1
Broad in scope	Air, Image, Plant	IQ/Average	2 or 3
Very important or flexible	Magic	IQ/Hard	3 or 4
<b>Verbs</b>			
Typical	Communicate, Weaken	IQ/Average or IQ/Hard	1
Very potent	Control, Create, Transform	IQ/Hard	2 or 3

## The Futhark Runes

Note that the rune used here for Magic (Futhark 25, called “Unknowable,” or “Destiny,”) is always represented as an empty

space! However, tracing or carving it takes as long as for any other Hard rune.

 Communication/Separation	 Healing/Fertility	 Transform/Gateway	 Earth	 Sound/Signals	 Necromancy/Soul
 Knowledge/Naming	 Break/Weaken/Harm	 Air	 Fire	 Plant	 Illusion/Mystery
 Strengthen/Repair	 Move/Travel	 Water	 Animal/Property	 Magic/Destiny	
 Protect/Guard	 Warn	 Body/Man/Human	 Food/Offering		
 Create	 Control/Bind	 Light (& Darkness)	 Mind		

Source: *The Book of Runes*, by Ralph Blum.

Finally, symbol skills might be unable to exceed certain other skills or attributes. See *Capping Spell Skill Levels* (pp. 40-41) for options.

## EXAMPLE LEXICONS

The GM can use almost *any* symbol set as a lexicon. However, some sets work better than others, and all require decisions about what the symbols represent, skill difficulties, and base energy costs. The following examples illustrate these considerations.

### The Futhark Runes

The *futhark* runes were used in northern Europe during the Dark Ages and early medieval times. They represent a mundane alphabet as well as a magical tool – one can write ordinary language in the runic script (indeed, the name “futhark” is spelled by the first six letters). The runes were said to have been discovered by the god Odin when he

sacrificed himself to himself, hanging from the branches of Yggdrasill, the World-Tree, and were much used in magic and divination. A number of related alphabets exist, with the one presented here being loosely based on the “Elder Futhark” system employed by modern would-be magicians.

There are 25 futhark runes, most with several symbolic or magical meanings – including about 10 that can serve as verbs. Thus, these runes are an ideal symbol-magic lexicon. The table below associates each rune with a letter (or letters) from the Latin alphabet, a standard meaning, variant meanings (useful in more subtle games), and a suggested skill difficulty and base energy cost.

### The Ogham Alphabet

The Celtic Ogham alphabet, described and depicted under *Tree Magic* (pp. 42-47), is another suitable choice. For symbol-magic purposes, the consonants serve as nouns and the vowels, as verbs. The table on p. 171 gives Latin letters for each, and suggests standard and alternative meanings, skill difficulties, and base energy costs.

### The Futhark Runes

Name	Letter	Associated Word	Other Meanings	Skill Difficulty	Base Energy Cost
Fehu	F	Animal	Property	Average	2
Uruz	U	Strengthen	Repair, Make	Hard	1
Thurisaz	TH	Transform	Gateway, Tension	Hard	3
Ansuz	A	Communicate	Insight	Hard	1
Raidho	R	Sense	Knowledge, Name	Hard	2
Kenaz	K	Fire	–	Average	4
Gebo	G	Food	Offering, Gift	Easy	1
Wunjo	W	Air	–	Average	3
Hagalaz	H	Weaken	Break, Harm, End	Hard	1
Nauthiz	N	Control	Bind	Hard	2
Isa	I	Image	Deceit	Average	2
Jera	J	Plant	–	Average	1
Eihwaz	EI	Earth	–	Average	2
Perthro	P	Magic	Mystery, Secrets	Hard	2
Algiz	Z	Protect	Guard	Hard	1
Sowilo	S	Spirit	–	Average	2
Tiwaz	T	Mind	Rulership	Average	3
Berkano	B	Create	Growth	Hard	2
Ehwaz	E	Move	Travel, Progress	Hard	0
Mannaz	M	Body	Human, Self	Average	3
Laguz	L	Water	–	Average	2
Ingwaz	NG	Heal	Fertility	Hard	1
Dagaz	D	Light	–	Average	2
Othala	O	Sound	Story	Easy	2
–	–	Destiny	Magic, Unknowable	Very Hard	4





## The Ogham Alphabet

Name Letter Associated Word Other Meanings Skill Difficulty Base Energy Cost

### Consonants/Nouns

Beth	B	Image	Love, Fundamental Forms	Average	2
Luis	L	Air	Light, Ghosts	Average	3
Fearn	F/V	Fire	Oracles, Colors	Average	4
Saille	S	Water	Death, Cold	Average	3
Nion	N	Flight	Water in Motion	Average	2
Uath	H	Body	Bad Luck, Cleanliness	Average	3
Duir	D	Earth	Plants, Clouds, Portals	Average	3
Tinne	T	Protection	Good Luck	Average	2
Coll	C	Sense	Wisdom, Knowledge	Average	2
Muin	M	Dominance	Madness, Joy, Food	Average	2
Gort	G	Strength	Skills, Languages	Average	3
Ngetal	NG	Bonds/Linkages	Movement	Average	2
Ruis	R	Living Things	Healing	Average	4

### Vowels/Verbs

Ailm	A	Create	Enchant, Sound	Hard	2
Onn	O	Amplify, Empower	Magic, Animal	Hard	2
Ura	U, W	Control, Refine	Earth	Hard	2
Eadha	E	Shield, Protect	Mind	Hard	1
Idho	I	Destroy	Spirit	Hard	1

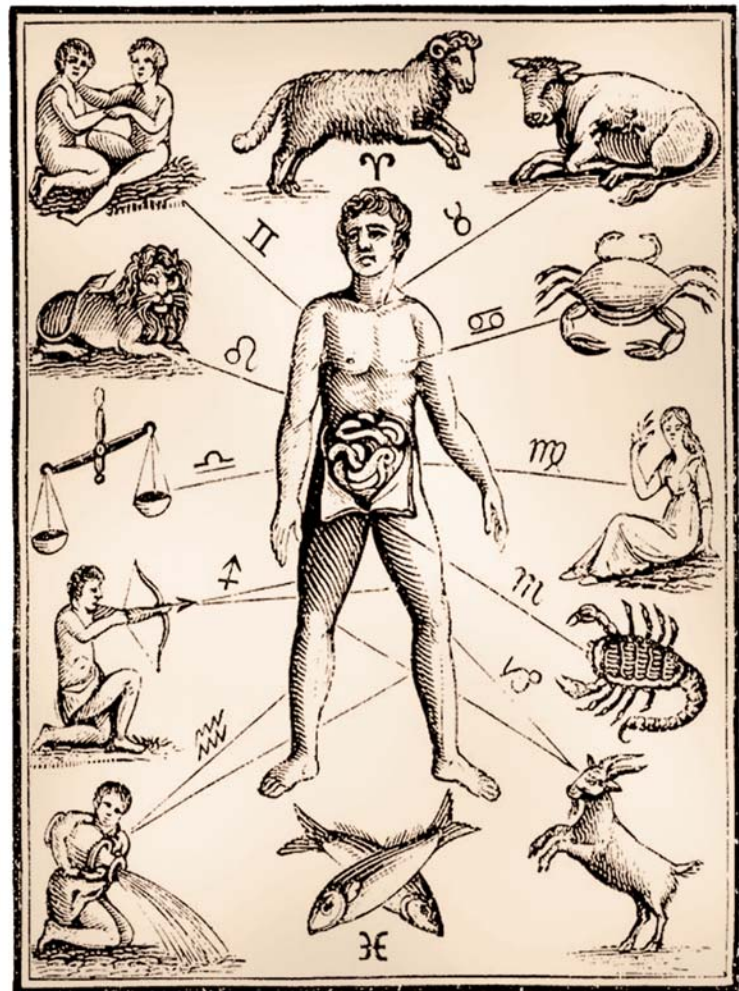
Note: *GURPS Magic* presents an alternative system based on a slightly different, 20-character variation of the Ogham alphabet. The GM is welcome to use whichever version he prefers – perhaps even treating the two extra symbols in *Magic* as lost or secret.

## Astrological Symbols

Western astrology provides yet another useful set of symbols (which it shares with astronomy): 12 relating to the signs of the zodiac, one each for the first-quarter moon and last-quarter moon, and one for each of the nine planets, giving 24 in all.

The recommended approach is to use the symbols for the zodiac, the sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, and *one* moon symbol, for 19 in all. The zodiacal signs have IQ/Average skills and base energy cost 2, while the heavenly bodies have IQ/Hard skills and base energy cost 1. When working magic, match the desired effect to a decan using *Decanic Natures* (pp. 248-253). Invoking that decan requires the symbols for its sign and planet, as listed under *Decanic Correspondences* (p. 248).

Examples: A fireball, governed by Eneuth, requires the symbols for Sagittarius and Mars; a luck charm, invoking Akhouiy, needs those of Pisces and Jupiter; a working to cause pain, involving Belbel, demands those of Gemini and Venus; and creating water, which needs the power of Saphathoraél, calls for those of Cancer and Venus.



## The Hebrew Alphabet

The alphabet traditionally used for the Hebrew language – and hence employed by Jewish Qabalists in word-based mysticism – has 22 letters, all consonants. Vowels are indicated by additional markings, but can be omitted. See *The Hebrew Alphabet* (p. 254) for the symbols and their associations. Qabalists consider words to be extremely significant, and previous **GURPS** books have suggested using this alphabet for symbol magic.

This doesn't work terribly well, however. The lack of vowels is one problem. More seriously, Qabalists don't regard individual letters as having fixed meanings. Rather, they perform complex numerological analysis of texts. Each letter has a numeric value, but it's the *combination* of letters that's significant. Thus, it may be more appropriate to handle Qabala according to *Ideogram Symbols* (p. 177), with each *word* representing an ideogram.

Alternatively, the GM could treat Qabala as a form of Path/Book ritual magic (see Chapter 5). The core skill would be Ritual Magic (Qabalistic), and Symbol Drawing (Hebrew Alphabet) would provide the bonuses recommended on p. B224. The Paths available should be suitably abstruse, and not involve dealings with dark forces; Health, Knowledge, and Protection would be reasonable, with Spirit added strictly to exorcise demons and negotiate with angels.

To make Qabala highly versatile, the GM could consider it a form of Realm-based *syntactic* magic (pp. 179-184 and 188-192), with writing and numerology acting as a required "practice" for each working. A good basis for the Realms would be the sephiroth (pp. 253-254). Each letter *does* correspond to a "path" linking two sephiroth, and might have to be used in texts invoking those two.

Of course, the GM is free to ignore the Qabalistic approach to language and use the (questionable) idea that the Hebrew letters may have evolved from pictograms in an ancient script. In that case, wizards could employ them in symbol magic – although some letters will have limited usefulness, and there's a shortage of verb-like meanings. Each symbol should have an IQ/Average skill and base energy cost 2.

## WORKING THE MAGIC

Before attempting a symbol-magic working, the wizard's player must describe what he wants it to *do*. If the GM feels that the intended effect is achievable, then he decides what symbols it requires. He also determines what class fits it best and whether it's resistible (see *Effect Class*, p. 167).

Most symbol-workings require two symbols – usually a verb and a noun, but possibly a zodiacal sign and a planet, a vowel and a consonant, etc. Complex or powerful effects may involve *many* symbols; e.g., changing a man into a bird could involve "transform," "human," and "bird," while causing a small volcanic eruption in a previously stable area might need "command," "empower," "earth," and "fire." A working *can* use a symbol multiple times; e.g., transforming a sparrow into an eagle might invoke "bird" twice. If a wizard wants a very potent effect, then the GM may require him to repeat the symbols at least once for emphasis. Thus, great complexity and power take longer and are harder to achieve, if only because the caster must roll against more skills.

### Drawing the Symbols

The wizard then prepares the magic by writing the symbols (see *Parchment Symbol Casting*, pp. 173-174), arranging symbol tokens (see *Symbol Tokens*, p. 174), tracing the symbols in the air (see *Finger-Tracing*, p. 174), or inscribing the symbols on an object (see *One-Off Enchantments*, p. 175). The time required depends on the method. If someone attacks the caster or otherwise tries to disrupt the magic during this time, then apply *Distraction and Injury* (p. B236).

For *each* use of *each* symbol, the caster rolls against the *lower* of Symbol Drawing and his skill with that symbol to see if he draws or places it successfully. Doubling the time required gives +1, while halving it gives -2; alternatively, the GM can use *Time Spent* (p. B346). Using materials that aren't traditional for the symbol set may give -1 or worse. Having other effects or spells in operation at the same time (if they don't require actual concentration) *doesn't* give a penalty; drawing a symbol isn't a magical action in itself.



## Activating the Symbols

After successfully creating or placing the symbols, the caster must activate them with another roll against the *lowest* of Symbol Drawing and his skill with any of the symbols involved. He cannot activate the inscription if it includes any symbols he doesn't know. Activation takes a second per symbol involved (and can be interrupted). At the GM's option, this roll takes range modifiers as for a similar spell. Information effects normally use *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241); offensive workings are often better treated as Missile effects. If the wizard has other effects or spells active that require any kind of input or attention, then apply the penalties under *Casting Spells While Maintaining Other Spells* (p. B238).

Success activates the symbols – and note that if these were flawed due to failures during the creation process, they may still be activated, flaws and all! Use this roll in the Quick Contest for a resisted working; see *Resisting Effects* (p. 167). In all cases, critical failure means what it does for a spell: a roll on the *Critical Spell Failure Table* (p. B236) or an alternative table from Appendix B (pp. 256-260).

The working also has an energy cost. Normally, the caster pays this out of his FP on activation. See *Energy Cost* (p. 175).

## Mana Levels

The local mana level mainly affects activation. *Drawing* works the same everywhere except in areas with *no* mana. There, it's impossible to draw symbols effectively due to the lack of latent magical forces to work into the process.

*Activating* symbols requires mana, however. The rules are the same as for spells; see *Mana* (p. B235). Activation is impossible in no mana. It's at -5 in low mana, and may require *Magery*; see *Symbol Magery* (p. 168). It takes no penalty in normal mana (where it might still require *Magery*) or high mana. In very high mana, activation costs less energy overall, but all failures are considered critical failures.

### Optional Rule: Symbols and Wild Mana

In wild mana (p. 59), even *drawing* symbols is risky! Critical failure means the symbol explodes or otherwise misbehaves dramatically. Even perfectly drawn symbols shed excess magic in a worrying fashion – glowing fiercely, emitting sparks, etc.

## Parchment Symbol Casting

A symbol-wizard can write symbols on parchment or paper to create a temporary magic item. This concept is easy to adapt to a particular setting's writing technologies: symbols might be impressed on clay tablets that are then carefully baked; painted on silk scrolls, leather, etc.; carefully carved into thin bark; subtly encoded as images stored on digital memory chips; and so on. The GM may even let casters mark symbols on their *bodies*, although he'll probably want to limit this to magics that affect the body itself (e.g., ST enhancements worked through symbols on the limbs) or that originate from the body in some way (e.g., flaming breath conjured using markings around the mouth). Thus, while these rules use the term

## How Symbol Drawing Works

As explained under *Symbol Drawing* (p. B224), the Symbol Drawing skill can work in two ways. Either the symbols act as a focus for magical activities that take their power from elsewhere (the caster, spirits, gods, etc.), or they're innately supernatural, like words or gestures in other types of magic, and have power *in themselves*. Symbol magic assumes the latter. The rolls to *draw* the symbols determine how well the magic is performed, while the roll to activate them is essentially a matter of "flipping a switch" correctly – although it's sometimes used to determine whether the effect can overcome resistance, is accurately targeted, etc.

The other view of Symbol Drawing can also work, however. In that case, well-drawn symbols give a bonus to the next act of magic worked over or through them, equal to half caster's margin of success on his Symbol Drawing roll (round down). This fits best with Path/Book ritual magic (see Chapter 5), but suits some views of spell-based magic as well. When using Symbol Drawing this way, each ritual or spell probably corresponds to a specific combination of symbols, and an expert can determine what's being cast by looking at these.

"parchment" for convenience, this can refer to any substitute that the GM allows – with suitable changes to the Artist specialty involved, as necessary. In all cases, these things are faster to make than scrolls in the standard spell-based system, but harder to use.

Drawing the symbols correctly is *crucial* here. The roll for each symbol is against the *lowest* of the creator's Artist (Calligraphy) skill, his skill with the desired symbol, and his Symbol Drawing skill. The time required per symbol depends on the difficulty of the associated symbol skill: one hour if Easy, three hours if Average, six hours if Hard, or 12 hours if Very Hard. The person who draws the parchment defines the magic's effect.

The parchment can be carried indefinitely, by anyone, until needed. However, *any* damage to the symbols – or to *any* part of the parchment – will render it useless. The eventual user must have a good idea of how the parchment works and what it does. If he created it, then this is automatic. Anyone else must study it first, taking 10 minutes per symbol and making a Symbol Drawing roll at -1 per symbol after the first (e.g., -2 for a three-symbol parchment).

A person can only have *one* parchment ready for use at any given time, plus one more per two skill levels by which his Symbol Drawing skill exceeds IQ: one at skill levels up to IQ+1, two at IQ+2 or IQ+3, three at IQ+4 or IQ+5, and so on. A new creation or study displaces the oldest – and when he uses one, he must create or study a new parchment if he wishes to replace it. Even if it's one that *he* made previously, he must study it anew.

*Example:* Corbin the Inscraper has IQ 12 and Symbol Drawing-14. His skill level is IQ+2, so he makes up two parchments to carry around. He then discovers an interesting four-symbol parchment made by somebody else. He spends 40 minutes studying it for use, and makes a successful roll against effective skill 11. This means he's no longer able to activate the older of his own parchments.

Later that day, Corbin uses one parchment. He can now restudy the one that he lost track of how to use, regaining the ability to activate it.

To trigger a parchment's encoded magic, the user contemplates it and makes the usual activation roll. He rolls at -4 if trying to activate a parchment created by someone else. If he succeeds, he pays the energy cost. Succeed or fail, the parchment becomes useless at this point. It crumbles, or the symbols simply fade. In a cinematic game, it may burst into flame!

### Symbols and Dust

The GM may permit symbol-wizards to trace symbols in earth or sand much as if on a parchment, but at -2 to the skill used to draw them. Times are as for a parchment. These symbols can be activated *repeatedly* while they last (GM's decision, but the lesser of 3d hours or 2d uses is reasonable, and such symbols are certain to become blurred, scuffed, and useless within a week). Such inscriptions *aren't* portable – disturbing the material, even to move it very gently, disrupts the subtle web of magical forces. Symbols in earth or sand are extremely easy to damage, by accident or by hostile action; furthermore, any critical failure rolled while drawing or activating them destroys them immediately.

### Symbol Tokens

A symbol-wizard may carry a collection of tokens (typically made of wood, shell, bone, or stone), each inscribed with a single symbol from a lexicon he has studied. This needn't be a complete set – but obviously, that's more versatile. The wizard must carry his tokens *together* in a case or a bag. To work magic with them, he lays out or holds up the required combination of symbols and then makes the usual activation roll, which is subject to penalties (see below).

Define the desired effect and determine its energy cost in the usual way. If the wizard must ready the tokens quickly, then the time required depends on the method he uses to find them – but each symbol always takes *at least* a second to prepare, even if the set is first neatly spread out on a flat surface in a standard order. Extracting a particular symbol from a bag or a case usually takes longer. The GM can and should impose reality checks on this! Thus, the drawback of having more symbols is that it often takes longer to find the ones you need.

Wizards in a hurry may grab *randomly* and use whatever they get. Many accept that this is inevitable, and develop the art of improvising with whichever symbols come to hand; some claim that fate will give them whatever is most mystically appropriate, and even that an element of randomness is *required*, as this magic draws on the power of chance. In such cases, the GM chooses the symbols in any manner desired – usually by rolling dice. The wizard generally can't produce an effect until he has extracted both a verb and a noun; he can continue drawing until he gets both, or return the set to the

bag and start again at any time. If he keeps drawing, then the eventual working must use *all* the symbols he has in hand at that time (the GM decides if a proposed effect does this). Casters may try many unusual – and humorous – effects in extreme situations!

Unfortunately, flexibility comes at a price. Activating an effect produced with tokens takes *three times* as long as usual, which normally means three seconds per symbol. As well, the relevant skill is at -2 *per token used*.

Each wizard must handcraft his *own* set of tokens. Others cannot use these. If he loses a token, then replacing it calls for appropriate materials *and* considerable effort. The time required depends on the difficulty of the symbol skill: two hours if Easy, six hours if Average, 12 hours if Hard, or 24 hours if Very Hard.

In some traditions, symbol tokens are also used for divination. They might serve as the required materials for a Divination (Symbol-Casting) spell, as the focus for divination effects of other sorts, or as props for a specialty of the Fortune-Telling skill (p. B196).

### Finger-Tracing

In an emergency, a symbol-caster can use a finger to trace the symbols he needs in the air. In a "low fantasy" campaign, the GM may wish to prohibit finger-tracing, or at least require wizards to draw the symbols using a glowing pointer (e.g., a white-hot metal tip). Whatever the details, this method doesn't create a temporary magic item – it simply casts the desired effect.

To draw the symbols, the wizard must make a successful roll against his skill with *each* symbol involved, at -3. If mana level affects symbol magic, then in low mana, this penalty becomes -8 *and* each symbol costs the caster 1 FP. The time required per symbol depends on the symbol skill's difficulty: two seconds if Easy, six seconds if Average, 12 seconds if Hard, or 30 seconds if Very Hard.

When the wizard finishes tracing, he must *immediately* attempt his usual activation roll for the symbols.

## Recognizing Intent and Capability

Deducing exactly what effect a symbolic inscription will produce requires 10 seconds and a Symbol Drawing roll (using the correct specialty!) for *each* symbol involved. Roll at -3 per symbol: -6 for two, -9 for three, and so on. Any failure means the inscription's full purpose remains hidden – although correctly interpreting *some* of the symbols may offer hints. This quick look doesn't give enough understanding of the working to control it, merely a basic comprehension of its nature. For a longer, more detailed analysis, use the rules under *Parchment Symbol Casting* (pp. 173-174).

Successful Occultism or Thaumatology rolls *may* let someone identify symbols from familiar traditions – and even allow him to recall the sorts of effects they're associated with – but he'll still have to guess what this *particular* use is intended to achieve.

## One-Off Enchantments

A symbol-caster can mark or carve symbols onto an item (door, book, etc.) to create a one-off instantaneous effect that will occur when something triggers it. Possible trigger conditions include someone touching the object, viewing the symbols from no more than a yard away, or performing some other easily defined action involving close proximity. Details are up to the wizard, but the GM is the final judge of what's reasonable.

Drawing works much as it does for a parchment; see *Parchment Symbol Casting* (pp. 173-174). The roll to mark or carve each symbol is against the *lowest* of the wizard's skill with that symbol, Symbol Drawing, and an appropriate artistic skill – Artist (Calligraphy), Artist (Woodworking), etc. This process normally takes as long as creating a parchment. The wizard may reduce the time to *minutes* equal to the usual number of hours by taking -2 to all skill rolls (including activation) and doubling energy cost – or to that number of *seconds* by accepting -4 to all rolls and tripling energy cost.

The wizard must make his activation roll, with any penalties for haste, the moment he finishes drawing. Success means the magic remains active, waiting to be triggered, for a period set by the caster. Treat this as a maintained effect with a base duration of a day and half energy cost to maintain per additional day; see *Energy Cost* (below). The wizard pays the full energy cost for this period – possibly multiplied for rushing – upon making the activation roll.

## ENERGY COST

The GM can base the energy cost of a symbol-working on that of the closest spell in the standard spell-based magic system; e.g., a magical fireball might cost 1 FP per die of damage. He's free to add a point or two to balance symbol magic's greater flexibility. Alternatively, *especially* if no similar spell exists, use these guidelines:

- The standard cost normally equals the base energy cost of the verb plus that of the noun. For workings that can control things in a relatively complex way (usually with a symbol such as “control”), *double* the cost of the symbol governing the thing being controlled. For multi-symbol castings, use the sum of the base energy costs for *all* the symbols, doubling the costs of all nouns that are subject to control effects. For effects that transform the subject radically (through symbols such as “transform”), cost will thus be the cost of the verb plus the costs of the nouns governing the state of the thing before and after – and if the same symbol applies to both forms, and has been inscribed twice, then count it twice. For example, a futhark casting that turns a dog into a flower would use the total costs of the runes Thurisaz, Fehu, and Jera, while one that changes a dog into a cat would use the cost of Thurisaz and *twice* that of Fehu.

- The resulting cost is appropriate for a Regular effect cast on a subject with SM 0, or as the base cost of an Area effect. For larger targets or areas, increase cost as for spell-based magic (p. B239).

- This cost is suitable for magic that inflicts 1d of crushing or burning damage, gives 1d of healing, or raises an attribute or a secondary characteristic by the equivalent of 10 character points. For larger effects, multiply

cost in proportion. For other damage types, multiply by the appropriate factor from the *Damage Type Table* (p. 243). Another useful guideline is that “leveled” attack effects have a multiplier equal to 1/5 the level cost of the closest attack advantage. Healing certain injuries (e.g., wounds caused by magical attacks that harm the spirit as well as the body) may also cost more, at the GM's option.

- Magical effects are typically instantaneous. For an effect analogous to a spell with a continuing effect that must be maintained, base duration is usually a minute, but may be longer (10 minutes, an hour, or even a day) if similar spells have such extended durations *and* the GM considers this justified. Protective combat magic rarely needs to last longer than a minute, while a working that lets you go without sleep is useless if it won't even get you through the night! The GM may increase energy cost or assess skill penalties for magic with an unusually long duration. Temporary effects can normally be maintained at half the cost to cast – but if the effect is linked to symbols that are written *on* the subject, then the GM can rule that it lasts without maintenance until the symbols are erased.

Whatever method is used, there's no cost reduction for high skill. As with a failed spell, failed activation costs 1 FP if success would have had any cost, *unless* it's a critical failure or involves an Information effect, in which case it has full cost.

## Variations

This system attaches a fairly modest energy cost to minor effects – albeit one that's often higher than that of the most basic magic in the spell-based system. However, cost can rise markedly if the caster attempts anything more powerful. To moderate this, the GM may opt to reduce energy cost by 1 FP per *full* 2 points in the wizard's margin of success on the activation roll. Applying penalties for range, Magic Resistance, etc., to this roll will thus tend to increase energy cost.

In high-magic settings, the GM may rule that symbol magic has no energy cost – or perhaps a token 1 FP per activation attempt. Instead of requiring extra energy, high-powered workings should then take penalties for area, duration, and multiple targets, as well as for range. Use *Magical Scope Parameters* (pp. 242-243), treating the modifiers as penalties. This may seem generous, but symbol magic tends to take significantly longer than spellcasting, and these penalties should suffice to keep power levels under control.

For many other options, see *Energy Sources* (pp. 50-58).

## SYMBOL-BASED ENCHANTMENT

A symbol-wizard can also use his magic for enchantment, creating a magic item by inscribing two or more symbols on an object in a *permanent* fashion. This method is good for enchanting swords, staffs, doors, and anything else that can carry a clear set of symbols. The symbols may or may not require *activation* with the Symbol Drawing skill when the item is used – a decision that the enchanter must make before he begins, as it affects many things.



Using a “symbol item” usually costs energy if this is normal for the symbol-working or spell that the enchantment resembles. Self-powered items are possible, but require the addition of a symbol with a meaning such as “magic” or “power.” Once activated, self-powered items with non-instantaneous effects work until the user stops holding, wearing, or occupying them, after which they must be reactivated.

The creation process uses the standard enchanting rules (see *Magic Items*, pp. B480-483), but in place of the spell to be used and the Enchant spell, the enchanter and any assistants must know the skills for all the symbols involved, and the Symbol Drawing skill, at appropriate levels. If the item *doesn't* require activation, then the lowest of these skills determines its Power, so this skill must be at least 15 – or 20 if the item is to work in low mana. As an optional rule, one advantage of symbol-based enchantment might be that less-skilled wizards *can* attempt it, because items that *do* require activation take their effective Power from the skill used for that.

The enchanter must make *two* rolls for *each* symbol involved. One is against the *lower* of his Symbol Drawing skill or his skill with that symbol. The other is against his skill in working the material – usually a suitable specialty of Armoury, Artist, Jeweler, or Smith. At the GM's option, these rolls might be made at points during the enchantment process, thereby enabling the wizard to discover failures and give up before he commits too much time.

Both Quick and Dirty and Slow and Sure enchantment are possible. Symbol-wizards often lack access to large external energy sources, though, so the former method tends to be limited to minor enchantments. The GM can determine the energy required for the enchantment in either of two ways:

1. If the enchantment is the same as or very similar to one that standard spell-based enchantment can produce, then simply use the energy requirement (and any other special rules) given for the relevant spell.

2. If there's no similar spell-based enchantment (or if the GM prefers a completely independent rule), then calculate the energy cost for the symbol effect – as per *Energy Cost* (p. 175) – and then multiply this by 250. Restrictions can modify this in similar ways to spell-based enchantments limited by spells such as Bane. For example, for a sword enchanted so that its magic only works against giants, divide energy cost by 3 and then increase it by 100.

In either case, if the item requires activation to use, then *halve* the time required by the enchantment process – be that Quick and Dirty or Slow and Sure.

## Activating the Item

If the item *does* require a Symbol Drawing skill roll to activate, then this works much as for other symbol-castings, taking a second per symbol (although the generous GM can reduce this to a flat one second, to make symbol items more useful in combat). The user *doesn't* have to have skill with all of the symbols involved, however, and gets no benefit even if he does; Symbol Drawing (for the correct lexicon) is all that's needed. If the item works, then the effect is that chosen by the enchanter – the holder cannot alter it. Thus, someone who doesn't know exactly what an artifact does is taking a risk by activating it!

At the GM's option, critical failure on the activation roll for a permanently inscribed item may inflict *up to* 5d damage on the object, as uncontrolled energies surge through the markings. This is in addition to the usual critical failure results. While this is one way to keep symbol-enchanted items under control, it's rather harsh given the time needed to produce such things.

Items that *anyone* can use are generally governed by the rules for spell-enchanted items useable by non-mages.

## Options

Most of the variant enchantment rules in Chapter 4 are compatible with symbol-item creation. If using the guidelines under *Time and Reliability* (p. 108-109) for reducing time by lowering effective skill, then symbol-wizards can't reduce skill below 15 – or 20, for items intended to work in low mana. The GM might allow lower skill for items that will only work in *high* mana. If the GM opts to divide inscribing into stages, with skill rolls at the end of each stage, then the enchanter can lower his skills for a given stage in order to reduce the time taken by that stage alone.

## User-Determined Effects

If the GM wants to develop this system into something varied and subtle, then he can permit items inscribed with multiple symbols that users who know Symbol Drawing can activate in various combinations to produce different results. For example, a staff enchanted with symbols for the verbs “create” and “protect,” and the nouns “fire,” “cold,” and “storm,” might let the wielder activate “create” and “fire” to cast effects analogous to Create Fire and Fireball; “protect” and “fire” for Fireproof; “protect” and “storm” for Resist Lightning; “create,” “cold,” and “storm” for Hail and Rain of Ice Daggers; and so on. Such items can include several copies of a symbol to enable a single casting to use it more than once. The suggested energy cost for this option is the total base energy cost of all the symbols involved, multiplied by anything from 300 (if the item permits just two or three very similar effects) to 1,000 (if it permits a wide range of improvised castings). *Halve* all enchantment times, since these items always require activation with Symbol Drawing.

## Symbol Tattoos

Another possibility is to enchant *living things* by marking them permanently with symbols, using the Artist (Body Art) skill. While the GM who permits this could treat it like any other enchantment, it might instead be a way to acquire magical advantages or spells in a setting where these aren't otherwise available. The GM can require recipients to pay for such benefits out of starting or earned character points, grant them a character point per 200 hours spent acquiring and attuning to the tattoos, or even let tattoos count as Unnatural Features that give back a point or two to help cover the abilities' cost.

## Enchanted Symbol Tokens

The tokens used with the *Symbol Tokens* (p. 174) casting method can be permanently enchanted for greater effectiveness. Stones or gems are the usual choice. However, the GM may allow small wands, wooden plaques, polished bones, shells, or anything else that fits the setting and the tradition.

Each token is created as a magic item with an enchantment cost that depends on the difficulty of the associated skill: 100 if Easy, 300 if Average, 600 if Hard, or 1,500 if Very Hard. It's advantageous to make such symbol tokens from gemstones or other rare, valuable materials; a token with an intrinsic value of \$1,000 gives +1 to effective skill while enchanting, while one with an intrinsic value of \$5,000 gives +2. If the GM wishes to emphasize magic's chancy nature, then he can rule that the token shatters on a critical failure – or perhaps even *any* failure – on any of the enchantment rolls.

The main advantages of permanently enchanted tokens are that the time to activate them *isn't* tripled – use the normal one second per symbol – and that there's *no* penalty to the activation roll. Moreover, such tokens work for *anyone* who knows the Symbol Drawing skill for the lexicon and who has skill in the specific symbols. Lastly, using enchanted tokens in divinations might give +1 or +2 to the skill involved (GM's option).

A wizard *can* mix enchanted and mundane tokens in a set, but then all workings count as being performed with only ordinary tokens, taking longer to activate and suffering the skill penalty.

## EXAMPLE: IMPROVISATIONAL SYMBOL-CASTINGS

Fiona the Astromancer has Symbol Drawing (Astrological)-16 and knows the skill for every symbol in the corresponding lexicon at 16, too. She also possesses eight enchanted symbol tokens – gems inscribed with the symbols for Mars, Jupiter, Mercury, Venus, Aries, Cancer, Gemini, and Sagittarius. While exploring a shadowland, her party is attacked by imps. As the hired guards hold

them off, she dips into her pouch to find a response. The GM has marked eight scraps of paper with the eight signs, and draws these from a cup to see what Fiona gets.

Unfortunately, decanic symbol magic calls for *one* planet and *one* star-sign to create an effect, so when Fiona's first attempt draws Aries and Gemini, she must try again, having wasted two seconds. Her next draw produces Venus and Sagittarius, but that's no better – there's no corresponding decan. A third try gets Mercury and Gemini, enabling her to invoke Sphandôr, the decan of divination.

Fiona, aware that imps are hierarchical creatures, decides to use this to identify the attackers' leader. She spends two seconds activating the two symbols, and rolls against base skill 16, with -2 because the GM decides that the imps' Magic Resistance applies, but no other modifiers. This working resembles an Information spell, subject to *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241), but the imps are within 200 yards (no penalty). She succeeds, and pays the base energy cost for this combination: 3 FP. The magic tells her which imp leads the pack, and she informs her personal bodyguard, who is a crack shot. One crossbow bolt later, the imps withdraw to squabble over who gets to be their new leader.

Fiona's friend Argentis was injured, however, so Fiona decides to attempt a healing; 2d should be enough. Phthenoth is the appropriate decan, and Fiona doesn't have Pisces or the moon among her tokens, so she resorts to finger-tracing. Pisces is an Average-difficulty sign, taking six seconds to draw, while the moon is Hard, requiring 12. The roll to draw each is 13 (16, -3 for finger-tracing); Fiona makes both rolls successfully. She then has to roll to activate the effect, taking two seconds for two symbols. Lastly, she rolls 2d for the injury healed. The energy cost of this 20-second working is 6 FP (base 3, doubled for a 2d effect). Fiona orders the guards to secure the position while she recovers from exhaustion.

# SYMBOL MAGIC: VARIATIONS

There are as many views of symbol magic as there are lexicons. The following ideas might modify elements of the standard rules in some campaigns, exist alongside them in others.

## IDEOGRAM SYMBOLS

Symbol systems need not be small and uncomplicated. There could be a large set of symbol-magic spells – possibly every spell in *GURPS Magic* – each with its own symbol. This would be essentially equivalent to using ordinary spell-based magic, but with the particular constraints of symbol-magic castings.

## WHOLE-LANGUAGE SYMBOL MAGIC

The standard rules require symbol-wizards to know Symbol Drawing to represent their general familiarity with a

symbolic tradition, and then to learn each symbol separately to represent deeper study of individual mysteries. Optionally, the GM may treat each symbol as a Hard *technique* that defaults to Symbol Drawing, at -4 for Easy symbols, -6 for Average ones, -8 for Hard ones, or -10 for Very Hard ones. This makes symbol-casters more flexible; to compensate, the GM should consider being conservative with the effects possible.

## KNOT-SYMBOL MAGIC

Knots appear occasionally in magical folklore, where their reputation is mixed: witches tie up storms and winds in knots, but wives knit good luck into sweaters for their fishermen husbands. The knotted cord symbolizes control and restraint, is associated with craftsmanship and seafaring, and can take many forms depending on the application. Most knots serve either as "containers" for magical effects or as channels that divert baleful energy (malign magic must run the entire length of the knotted string, growing steadily

weaker as it goes, before reaching its intended victim). A common theme is that the magician ties a knot or a set of knots according to the effect required, and then blows on it, giving the magic the “breath of life.”

Knots might simply serve as required or optional materials, granting bonuses to spells or rituals (see *Mandatory and Significant Modifiers*, pp. 82-90), but another approach is to treat “knot magic” as a symbol-magic variant. Most of the usual rules apply, but with the Ritual Magic (Knot-Tying) skill replacing Symbol Drawing. The lexicon consists of a reasonable selection of “verbs” and “nouns,” each corresponding to a different knot. A scouting handbook or sailors’ manual with a list of knot names and functions can help the GM add stylish detail! Each knot corresponds to an IQ/Average or IQ/Hard “symbol” skill.

To work a knot-magic effect, the caster needs one or more cords, and must roll against Knot-Tying (p. B203) for each knot before attempting a roll against the magical skill associated with that particular knot. Critical success lets him tie the knot in 1d seconds and grants +2 on the corresponding magical skill roll. Any normal success means he ties the knot in 3d seconds, and gives no modifier. On a normal failure, he wastes 3d seconds, but may try again after that. Critical failure hopelessly tangles the cord, which the wizard must either discard or fully untie (which takes 1d minutes) before starting over.

Anyone can carry a successfully knotted cord until needed. A given individual can have one knotted cord prepared, plus one more per two *full* skill levels by which his Ritual Magic (Knot-Tying) skill level exceeds IQ. However, magical knots inevitably loosen or slacken over time, becoming ineffective. Each cord lasts 1d×10 minutes (1d hours if *all* the Knot-Tying rolls to create it were critical successes); thus, knot magic is usually worked up on the spot.

Activation works almost exactly as for a symbol-casting, taking a second per knot. The roll is against Ritual Magic (Knot-Tying), however, and is *HT*-based, not *IQ*-based (see *Using Skills With Other Attributes*, p. B172), as the wizard must blow energy into the knots. Succeed or fail, an activation attempt causes the cord either to come untied or to tighten into an unusable mass that will take many minutes to loosen.

The GM may let wizards use knot magic to work one-off enchantments, much as for symbol magic. To accomplish this, the caster must tie a cord around or through the target object; e.g., around a door handle, set to place a curse on the next person to pass through the door. Use the time requirements under *One-Off Enchantments* (p. 175), *not* those above.

## Defensive Knots

In settings where knots have power, *anyone* may be able to tie a “defensive knot” to tangle or divert hostile magic. If this is possible, then someone who knows or suspects that he’s the target of a specific spell or curse can roll against Occultism at +3 to recall or devise a defensive knot. Default use *is* allowed.

To tie the knot in a cord, he must roll against Knot-Tying at -3. This takes a base 20 seconds, but extra time confers the bonuses under *Time Spent* (p. B346). Success gives him

a level of Magic Resistance per *full* 3 points in his margin of success (minimum one level). This is only effective against *one* use of the effect specified, from any source, but lasts for 1d days. A person can have only one defensive knot active against a particular effect at any given time, but can carry multiple knots defending against different effects.

## WORDS OF POWER

In some settings, the most fundamental of magics are “Words of Power.” These are the ultimate symbols of which all others are shadows, and hence closely tied to symbol magic. There should be a finite, well-defined list of Words, which ought to be associated with the basic structure of magic – spell colleges, decans, Paths, symbols, etc. Some of these Words might be unknown to any living wizard; in fact, except perhaps in a mythic campaign, none of them should be *widely* known.

Someone who merely *hears* a Word of Power being spoken cannot repeat it; it carries vast mystical overtones and subtleties. Rather, “knowing” a Word, and thus being able to truly speak it, is a matter of deep mystical understanding – in game terms, an advantage (see below). It *might* also be possible to *read* a Word aloud from a magical text.

Speaking a Word of Power requires at least three seconds of concentration followed by an unmodified IQ roll. Success means the Word is spoken, but only *critical* success lets the speaker control the effects. On a failure, the Word comes out as gibberish – and a critical failure does 1d crushing damage directly to the speaker’s larynx (the neck hit location). To voluntarily stop speaking a Word midway through requires a Will roll at -2, with success injuring the speaker as for a critical failure. Should anything (blow, wound, supernatural attack, etc.) interrupt the speaker’s concentration, he must make a Will roll to finish speaking it or suffer the same injury.

Successfully speaking a Word of Power costs 36 energy points. The speaker may pay this out of his FP or HP, but *not* from Powerstones or other external sources. By default, the Word will drain all of the speaker’s FP, and then his HP. If he dies without supplying enough energy, then the Word tapers off in a whisper. If he merely loses consciousness, then he finishes speaking the Word first – or perhaps the Word is speaking *itself* by that point.

A successfully spoken Word of Power causes a magical effect somewhere – often *everywhere* – within earshot. Treat this as up to 360 energy points’ worth of spells, rituals, etc., performed with skill 36 by an entity with Magery 10. The effect’s nature will depend on the specific Word. Unless the speaker rolled a critical success, all details are entirely up to the GM.

Words of Power are impressive, powerful, and unpredictable. For example, speaking the Word of Fire in a room might launch a 10d Fireball, create fire across the room’s walls, puddle many weapons to slag, cook off all ammunition in the area, and inspire love poetry in all witnesses. A Word is a magical explosive, and the best a speaker can hope for is a shaped charge.

At the GM’s option, some effects may manifest even after an interrupted or willingly aborted speaking, although their practical value should be minimal. An incomplete Word of

Fire *might* make people in the room feel uncomfortably warm, start a few loose papers smoldering, and scorch the wallpaper – or it might do something else entirely. The GM should be creative and sadistic toward PCs who try to get “free” effects by stopping a Word midway through.

The GM may opt to prohibit the use of Luck and similar advantages – and *Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347) – when speaking Words of Power. Words are the raw stuff of Creation, deeper than mere personal good fortune. On the other hand, players who think that they can use this sort of

thing safely usually manage to get themselves into deep trouble soon enough anyway.

## Word of Power

10 points/Word

You’ve somehow learned a Word of Power. Such knowledge can, if not carefully managed, lead to all manner of problems!

# SYNTACTIC MAGIC: OVERVIEW

“Syntactic” magic is perhaps the most versatile and potentially the most *powerful* type of all . . . which means that its game mechanics require the greatest care. The syntactic magician decides on the fly what effects he requires – and if he has enough skill and power, he can make them come to pass. Such magicians tend to see magic as a creative art, with no two workings ever quite the same (although they might have a few “rote” tricks to simplify common tasks). They deal in fundamental principles.

Two forms of syntactic magic are discussed here. The “verb and noun” type (see *Syntactic Magic: Verbs and Nouns*, pp. 184-187) defines an effect by what is done (the verb) and what it is done to (the noun). The “Realm-based” version (see *Syntactic Magic: Realms and Power*, pp. 188-192) defines the effect entirely by what “Realm” encompasses the subject of the working; the magician’s degree of raw power over that Realm determines what and how much he can do.

## DIVIDING UP THE UNIVERSE

A major part of the process of setting up a syntactic magic system is deciding how to categorize everything. Such systems work in terms of “Words” or “Realms,” similar to the symbols of symbol magic, but generally assumed to be even more fundamental to reality. Symbols describe; Words or Realms *define*. Thus, there will usually be only *one* system of Words or Realms in a given campaign. It’s possible to have more than one, reflecting hugely different

views of the universe, but this can make handling interactions between magicians considerably harder. Players *don’t* get to invent their own Words or Realms, or to decide how many levels Realms are divided into!

In general, nouns or Realms relate to the building blocks of the universe, while verbs describe what can be done with them – although a Realm might encompass a category of actions rather than of things. Possible nouns or Realms include Life, Humanity, Evil, Luck, Distance, Forces, Angels, various elements (see *Alternative Elements*, pp. 47-48), and the domains of gods in a pantheon.

## Categories

The exact divisions chosen reflect the setting’s metaphysics. For example, humans (or “human-like beings,” including elves, dwarves, cat-people, etc.) might occupy their own category, Humanity, if magic distinguishes sapient, living entities from other creatures. Then again, they could belong to the same category as other animals, and be affected by the same magic as horses, dogs, and mice. Or *everything* alive, including plants, may be part of an even broader Realm: Life. Whether any of these Realms cover thinking and emotion, or whether there’s a separate category of Mind, is another question – and even if Mind exists, it’s possible that the magic of physical bodies still controls “base passions” such as lust and anger. Alternatively, a metaphysical system based on a materialistic worldview might not treat life of *any* sort as a distinct category, regarding it instead as a complex form of Matter, animated by manifestations of Energy.

*Prospero: . . . to the dread rattling thunder  
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove’s stout oak  
With his own bolt; the strong-bas’d promontory  
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck’d up  
The pine and cedar; graves at my command  
Have wak’d their sleepers, op’d, and let ‘em forth,  
By my so potent art.*

– William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

Likewise, many settings will have a Realm or noun of Energy that covers fire and lightning, perhaps winds and other forms of motion, and also nuclear energy, radiation, etc., if they appear. Other backgrounds might divide this up more. Systems that use the classical Western elements – Fire, Water, Earth, and Air – often place lightning within Air. A worldview could treat Cold as a type of energy in itself, categorize it under Water (as the opposite of Fire), or – in line with modern science – see it as the *absence* or negation of heat and hence of Fire.

Another common category is Spirit, which may or may not be subdivided, depending on whether it's appropriate for the same sort of magic to affect angels, demons, ghosts, and faeries. Control of elemental spirits sometimes involves Realms related to their respective elements instead. There *might* even be a Magic category, enabling experts to detect all sorts of workings in action, and perhaps to suppress them by attacking their fundamental nature, or make them permanent by reinforcing it. In some worldviews, workings using this category also affect spirits that are somehow made up of pure magical force.

However the system works, it's *usually* best to make all categories roughly equally broad, so that two magicians who've achieved similar levels of ability in two different categories will be equally impressive and equally useful in play. This isn't a hard-and-fast rule, though – reality may have some peculiar quirks. If the categories Elements and Mind cover a huge range of useful effects, while the category Faeries is as hard to learn despite the fact that faeries are rare and weak, then players will favor elementalists or mind-workers as PCs – but Faerie experts can make for some interesting, unworldly academic NPCs. And when some faerie lord of unprecedented power starts making trouble, and the PCs find their magic ineffective against him, they may have to call on such NPCs for aid, or broaden their education in a hurry!

### Scope and Limitations

In most cases, the categories used in syntactic magic encompass the entirety of reality between them, without significant overlaps. A magician who possesses sufficient power and skill with all of them can potentially do *anything*.

However, some systems have *gaps* – things that syntactic magic just can't do. For example, secular magic may be prohibited from intruding on the domain of the gods, meaning that there's no way to influence deities or their servants, or to enter their planes of existence; nouns or Realms such as Heaven and Angels simply don't exist. Syntactic magic might even concern itself entirely with the physical elements, leaving mind control, prophecy, mastery of immaterial spirits, and so on to other specialists.

Overlaps are possible, but best avoided – if only for aesthetic reasons. If the structure of syntactic magic defines the universe, then having both Liquids magic and Destruction magic work on acids in exactly the same way just looks untidy (although Liquids might move them around while Destruction influences their effects on other matter). Different magics can *often* achieve the same result via unrelated routes, however. For example, a magician who wants to extinguish a fire could use "Weaken Energy" to suppress it or "Transform Matter" to make its fuel nonflammable.

Likewise, if a friend is performing a task, then it might be equally helpful to invoke Mind to boost his intelligence and to draw on Fortune to help him make the right decisions by dumb luck.

## SYNTACTIC WORKINGS

Before attempting a syntactic working, the magician's player describes what he wants it to do and selects the Words or Realm that he plans to use. The *possible* effects – given a particular degree of control of nouns, verbs, or Realms – are ultimately limited only by the player's imagination, although every caster has practical limits. The GM then decides whether the intended results are *achievable* considering those limits and *appropriate* in light of the proposed approach, and assigns the effect a class (see *Effect Class*, p. 167), a set of parameters (below), and a resistance roll, if necessary (see *Resisting Effects*, p. 167). These things in turn determine features such as skill modifiers and energy cost.

At this point, the standard spell-based system can be used as a convenient reference. Look for a spell that produces a similar effect, and identify its class, energy cost, and prerequisite count (the latter serving as a measure of difficulty). In many cases, the GM can assume that the syntactic working has parameters identical to those of the spell. However, extensive guidelines appear below for situations where no such spell exists. Some gamers may find it more satisfying and consistent to use these at all times – and more convenient not to have to consult multiple books in play.

## PARAMETERS

Every syntactic working has a set of *parameters*: numerical values and modifiers that define how it takes effect. The exact form these take can vary from setting to setting; the GM customizes them to set the flavor of the game. Either the caster decides beforehand exactly what he wants the working to do, and this determines modifiers to the skill roll and/or energy cost, or he makes a skill roll with no modifiers for this parameter, and the margin of success determines the working's power. The former approach makes magic more reliable and predictable; the latter may grant more raw power, but with the problem that the precise effectiveness of any casting is unpredictable.

However, some options – those that *must* be determined before attempting the effect – always produce skill modifiers. For example, if magic normally takes several seconds to work and involves speaking in a loud voice, then casting in a hurry and only speaking in a whisper will inevitably penalize the attempt. Of course, penalties will reduce margin of success on a successful working.

### Determining Base Energy Cost

An effect's base energy cost is usually defined as the energy needed to affect a single target of SM 0 or less – or the base area, for an Area effect – instantaneously or for one standard duration interval. The GM can take this from a standard spell with a similar effect, or derive it as follows. Under *no* circumstances does a syntactic working get an energy cost reduction for high skill!

## Verb-Noun Workings

Each Word has an associated energy cost; see *Suggested Verbs and Nouns* (p. 185) for examples. A working's cost is normally the sum of the costs of *all* the Words involved. For workings that can control things in a relatively complex way – typically with a verb such as Control – *double* the cost of any nouns subject to such effects (the verb's cost is unaffected). For effects that change their subject radically via verbs such as Transform, the cost is simply that of the verb plus the costs of both nouns (or twice the noun's cost, if the same noun applies to both forms).



## Realm-Based Workings

The base cost usually equals *twice* the level of the highest-level Realm involved, *plus* the level of any other Realms used. For example, a delayed-action explosion created using Fire/3 and Time/1 would have a base cost of  $(2 \times 3) + 1 = 7$ . If the Realms have few levels that are relatively broad in scope, then the GM may opt to increase this cost.

## Parameter Effects

Any parameter can generate a skill penalty or an increase in the magic's energy cost, or require a particular margin of success on the casting roll. Applying both penalties *and* energy costs makes useful magic very difficult. The GM should normally opt for one *or* the other – or use margin of success instead of either.

If margin of success *does* determine certain parameters, then apply the entire margin separately to each such parameter; don't divide it up among them. For example, if the caster's effective skill is 15, and he rolls a 9, then the effect can have 6 points' worth of range, *and* 6 points' worth of area, *and* 6 points' worth of duration, and so on. The magician never has to use his full margin – if he wants a 10-yard-diameter effect, then he doesn't have to let his magic spread over 100 yards just because he rolled well! For resistible effects, the GM may opt to subtract the margin of success on the target's resistance roll from the caster's margin, in effect meaning that such castings use margin of *victory*.

Effects determined by margin tend to be somewhat more powerful, but they're less predictable, and a working's

power might be *greatly* reduced if the subject's resistance diminishes effective margin. In general, the caster must define the desired result in fairly specific terms. If he doesn't get a large enough margin, then the casting simply fizzles out – although the GM may permit magicians to leave some parameters open, to be determined by the margin rolled.

## Range and Familiarity

Regular or Area syntactic workings typically take a skill modifier of -1 per yard of distance to the target or to the nearest edge of the area of effect. If the GM prefers to increase energy cost, then such effects cost +1 energy per *two full yards* of range; e.g., +3 to cost for a casting at seven yards. If margin of success determines range, then use the following table:

Margin of Success	Range
0	Touch Only
1	2 yards
2	5 yards
3	10 yards
4	20 yards
5	50 yards
6	100 yards

Greater margins follow the same “2-5-10” progression.

Melee, Missile, and Blocking effects have *no* range parameter; the effect is generated in the caster's hand or immediate vicinity. Enchantment effects, too, generally involve direct contact with the subject – but where the GM deems it appropriate for these to work at a distance, they take modifiers as for a Regular effect.

Information effects – and magic incorporating nouns or Realms such as Distance or Space – can often transcend distance. In such cases, apply *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241) to skill, or change the sign of those penalties to get *increases* in energy cost (e.g., casting from three miles away costs +3 energy). More powerful uses of such magic, including most applications with results determined by margin of success, ignore range penalties entirely but require some degree of familiarity or contact. To determine the appropriate skill penalty, energy cost, or margin of success, use these guidelines:

*Currently close enough to touch, or in line of sight (if there's **any** doubt, make a Vision+4 roll), or mystical True Name known:* 0.

*Close family member, lover, favorite possession, or something with which the caster has carefully set up a strong mystical link:* 1.

*Friend, well-established possession, some mystical connection established:* 2-3.

*Place or person the caster can identify by a unique “common name,” a thing he has handled and studied at length, or something he can view simultaneously over a television link or by scrying magic:* 4-5.

*Casual acquaintance, something handled for a few minutes in the last week, something with a good photograph available:* 6-8.

*Anything clearly identifiable in the same world:* 9+.

For something merely vaguely “known of,” the GM can require a modifier/margin of 10+ or even 20+.

## Extradimensional Range

Sending magical effects into other dimensions usually calls for the incorporation of Words or Realms such as Spirit or Gate. Creating a gate or a portal to another dimension normally takes no range modifier and requires no margin in itself – although it may need an area and a duration to be useful – but it might be harder if the otherworld in question is especially hard to reach (GM’s option). However, sending a ranged effect into another plane of existence, other than through an existing portal, gives -10 to skill or +10 to energy cost, or requires a margin of success of 5, *per dimensional boundary crossed*. Halve these values where planes intersect or intermix (see *Casting Interdimensionally*, p. 86). If the target isn’t at a point corresponding to the caster’s position in the dimension he presently occupies, then penalties for the ordinary physical distance covered in the other plane also apply.

## Range in Time

“Range in time” is a required parameter for magic involving perception (or possibly *travel*) through time, whether in the form of prophecy or precognition, retrocognition, or “time-slipping.” Such workings must usually incorporate a suitable noun or Realm; e.g., Time. For skill penalties, use *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241), substituting “days” for “miles.” For energy costs, do the same thing but convert the negative values into positive extra energy costs. If margin of success applies, use the following table:

Margin of Success	Range in Time
0	Moments Only
1	Up to 10 minutes
2	Up to 1 hour
3	Up to 1 day
4	Up to 1 week
5	Up to 1 month
6	Up to 1 year
7	Up to 10 years
8	Up to 20 years
9	Up to 100 years
10	Up to 1,000 years

For larger margins, each +1 multiplies maximum range in time by a factor of 10.

## Duration

Extended-duration effects normally have an increased energy cost rather than a skill penalty; they function like a standard spell with a maintenance cost. Having set up such an effect, the caster can keep it going for as long as he can spare the energy. Temporary but non-instantaneous effects usually have a base duration of a minute, but the GM may increase this (to 10 minutes, an hour, or even a day) – especially if similar spells have greater durations. Optionally, if temporary effects *do* require continuing energy input to maintain, the GM may permit magicians to increase the base duration by a factor of 10 by taking -5 to skill. Whatever the duration, the caster can typically maintain a temporary effect by paying *half* the casting cost per additional time increment.

If the GM prefers to use skill modifiers, then the suggested penalty is -2 per duration interval after the first. Not having to pay ongoing energy costs to maintain the effect can be convenient for the caster, but it also means that the magic *will* end at the set time. The only way to keep it going for longer is to recast it.

Some effects are instantaneous, but it may be possible to convert these into ongoing, temporary effects (e.g., to turn a flaming blast into a continuously burning flame). Whether using energy costs *or* skill modifiers, this gives -2 to skill. Base duration then becomes 10 seconds.

Other effects are intrinsically “lasting” – they don’t require maintenance, but continue until some condition is met (the Bless spell is such an effect). They may still have a time limit, after which they simply fade. The caster can give more-temporary effects a similar quality by adding a noun or a Realm such as Time or Conditionality. For these, see the *Duration Effect Modifiers Table* (p. 243) and *Variant Durations: Conditional Termination* (p. 242). This sort of thing should be tricky, possibly having both an energy cost *and* a skill penalty. Genuinely permanent effects are effectively enchantments; rules for this appear where applicable.

If the GM would rather use margin of success to determine duration, then he should once again consult the *Duration Effect Modifiers Table* and *Variant Durations: Conditional Termination* rules. Find the modifier there equal to the margin, and read off the corresponding duration; e.g., success by 4 gives a *maximum* duration of a day. If the desired effect wasn’t defined as something that could plausibly endure for this long, then the GM should reduce the actual duration. Lasting effects may require “fuel” or special conditions, diminish over time, or fail when supernatural conditions shift.

## Area of Effect

Extending an area of effect generally calls for extra energy rather than a skill penalty. If the effect covers a circular area, then treat it like an Area spell, multiplying the base cost by radius in yards. The GM can increase this for especially powerful or damaging effects, and reduce it *significantly* for subtle effects involving large-area phenomena such as weather or long-term plant growth. For example, a working that merely creates light rain might have a cost multiplier equal to the radius affected divided by 20 or even 50; thus, producing rain over a 100-yard radius might cost only 5× or just 2× base cost. However, the GM may *also* choose to impose skill penalties for huge areas, as even if the energy is available, it could be hard to channel and stabilize.

If using skill modifiers for all area effects, then the suggested penalty is -1 per two yards of radius. This, too, can be increased for especially powerful or damaging effects, and reduced for subtle effects and large-area phenomena such as weather. *Area Effect Modifiers* (p. 242) might apply in some cases.

When using margin of success, determine the area affected by treating the margin as a Size Modifier on the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) and then reading off the corresponding *diameter*. For example, success by 6 gives a maximum diameter of 20 yards.

In *all* cases, for noncircular areas, use the modifier or margin for the smallest circle inside which the desired region could fit completely. Effects designed to conform to strange or complex shapes may suffer an extra skill penalty (usually -1 to -3) due to the fine control required.

## Damage

For damaging effects, base energy cost with no skill modifier yields 1d of burning crushing, piercing, or toxic damage. As with duration and area, the standard way to increase

this parameter is to pay extra energy – not to accept skill penalties. Simply multiply the base cost by the number of dice. If the GM prefers to focus on skill modifiers, then he can give the effect a base -3 to skill per die of damage after the first. When using margin of success, damage becomes 1d per 2 points or fraction thereof in the margin; a margin of 0 gives only 1d-2.

For different damage types, multiply the added cost or the penalty by the values on the *Damage Type Table* (p. 243), or *divide* damage calculated from margin of success by the same factor. For example, a 3d cutting attack would cost 4.5× base value, or take -9 to skill, or drop to 2d if using margin of success; a 4d small piercing explosive attack would cost 3× base, or give -7 to skill, or increase to 5d+1 if using margin of success. If the effect delivers multiple shots, then simply divide damage by RoF; e.g., a 4d attack could become a 1d attack with RoF 4.

### Healing

In the case of healing effects, base energy cost with no skill modifier restores 1d HP. Either multiply energy cost by the number of dice or take -3 to skill per die after the first. If using margin of success, then healings repair 1d HP per 3 points or fraction thereof in the margin, with a minimum of 1d.

At the GM's option, certain categories of severe injury (such as burns) or "magic-defying" wounds (those caused by silver weapons qualify in some settings) may further increase the penalties or required margins. These workings might even require access to different Words or higher levels in a Realm. If the GM wants to keep healing hard, then he can reduce all such effects – perhaps halving the number of dice.

### Personal Abilities

A successful casting at base energy cost with no skill modifier can add or remove attributes, secondary characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages worth a total of 10 character points (positive or negative). If using skill penalties, apply -1 per *additional* 5 points of modifications. For example, lowering or raising the subject's Basic Speed by 2 would give -6, while granting him Unkillable 1 would be -8.

If using energy costs, simply multiply cost proportionally. Thus, adjusting the target's Per by 3 would cost 1.5× the base, while afflicting him with Bad Temper (6) would cost 2× the base.

When using margin of success, each point of success adds or removes traits worth 10 character points, with a minimum effect of 10 points. Hence, a strengthening effect that succeeds by 2 can raise the subject's ST (and thus HP) by 2, while a curse of stupidity that succeeds by 7 can lower his IQ (and with it, Per and Will) by 3.

### Weight Affected

Where the target's *weight* is directly related to the magic's effectiveness (as is usually the case for telekinetic effects, teleportation, transmutation of matter, etc.) and the magic must be cast on the *entire* target, the basic, unmodified version should affect up to about 10 lbs. of matter. Working with smaller quantities gives no benefit. For greater weights, find the relevant modifier on the *Weight Affected Modifiers Table* (p. 243) and treat it as a skill penalty, energy cost increase, or required margin of success; e.g., 5 tons would

give -6 to skill, cost +6 energy, or require a margin of 6. Radical transmutations and bizarre effects may have steeper requirements, perhaps doubling or tripling the value from the table (GM's option).

### Multiple Targets

When an effect can be aimed at many distinct targets, find the number of targets on the *Multiple Target Modifiers Table* (p. 243) and treat the associated modifier as a skill penalty, energy cost increase, or required margin of success.

### Multiple Elements

For an especially complex or subtle effect, the GM should decide how many distinct tasks, commands, or objects it involves, look up this number on the *Multiple Constituent Modifiers Table* (p. 243), and interpret the corresponding modifier as a skill penalty, extra energy cost, or required margin of success. For example, assembling a structure from 20 discrete components, or instilling a mental suggestion that can influence 20 different actions, would give -6 to skill, cost +6 energy, or require a margin of 6.

## CASTING TIME

The base casting time for syntactic magic is largely a matter of campaign style. Each working may involve an intricate ritual . . . or a momentary effort of will. Furthermore, a required practice (see *Practices*, pp. 192-193) might take longer than the actual casting. Below are some general guidelines.

### Verb-Noun Casting Times

Each Word has an associated time to cast (see *Suggested Verbs and Nouns*, p. 185). The working's base time requirement is the sum of the casting times for the constituent Words. Thus, complex workings involving several Words (e.g., transformations) can take substantially longer than simple "one verb, one noun" effects. If the same noun applies to the subject before and after a transformation, then count it twice. Magic that manipulates the target in detail, through verbs such as Control, is trickier; *double* the time for the affected noun.

### Realm-Based Casting Times

The suggestion here is seconds equal to (highest-level Realm employed + 2). For example, a Birds/3, Mind/2 casting would take five seconds.

### Modifying Casting Time

It may be possible to adjust casting time through skill modifiers:

*Reduced Casting Time:* In many settings, syntactic castings *cannot* be rushed. If haste *is* possible, then the suggested penalty is -3 per halving of casting time (round time up). The GM may forbid reductions below one second, or he might permit this occasionally; e.g., for emergency Blocking effects. Where such "instant" casting is possible, calculate the penalty to reduce casting time to one second, and then apply another -2.



### *Capping Syntactic Magic*

Syntactic magic is potentially *very* powerful, given good skill or Realm levels. The GM may therefore wish to “cap” such levels. The suggested rule for this is a variation of *Magery-Based Limits* (p. 41). As there, Magery doesn’t add to IQ for the purpose of learning magic. Instead, it sets an upper limit – typically 10 + Magery – on syntactic magic skills. In a Realm-based syntactic magic system, the recommendation is to limit a magician’s level in any Realm to his Magery level.

As when applying such rules to spells, if enchantments call for minimum Word skills of 15+, then the GM who wants item-making to be a plausible option for many mages might relax the limit for this purpose only. For example, a magician with Magery 2 can have Word skills at 15+ for use when enchanting, but must perform all other workings with an effective skill of 12.

To further control syntactic mages, the GM may rule that Magery related to this magic must be bought with the Cosmic enhancement at the +50% level. Syntactic magic transcends the limitations of mere spells, after all!

*Extra Casting Time:* Magicians *might* be able to work better by taking longer (GM’s option). The recommended limit is +1 to skill, requiring at least double casting time.

It usually isn’t possible to change casting time by varying energy expenditure, but the GM might permit casters to halve time by adding 50% to energy cost. Conversely, taking extra time may reduce energy requirements, with each doubling of time giving -1 to cost, to a minimum of half the working’s original cost.

### *Extended Workings*

An “extended” working is one involving several skill rolls over a longer-than-usual period, producing a cumulative effect. This isn’t possible in every setting. If the GM chooses to allow it, then he should combine it with effects based on margin of success.

In an extended working, the caster can make repeated rolls – in effect performing a lengthy, repetitive ritual – until he accumulates enough effectiveness to do what he wants. Simply add together the margin of success on each roll,

counting a margin of 0 as 1. If the effect is resistible, then the subject gets a *single* roll that’s compared to the total of all the margins. Thus, extended workings can be difficult to resist, although good resistance rolls may at least reduce the magic’s overall effectiveness.

To prevent extended workings from being an easy path to world-shattering effects, each roll after the first can cost an extra 1 FP – or even the working’s full energy cost, for a severely limited version. This caster may have to pay this added cost out of his FP rather than from external sources; hammering away at the same problem repeatedly is *tiring*. In some settings, castings grow harder with time, too, suffering a *cumulative* -1 or -2 to skill per roll. Combined with the possibility of side effects (see below), this can make extended workings very chancy!

Another obvious drawback is that, if magic requires expendable resources, then each roll uses these up. Multiple rolls also offer extra possibilities for disaster. Any critical failure spoils the whole attempt (and has its usual consequences). If using *Errors and Side Effects: Reality Bites Back* (pp. 193-194), then each roll faces those risks. The GM who *still* feels that this rule makes wizards too powerful should note that enemies or meddlers can interrupt at any time, probably scrambling the working – and anyone able to detect magical forces may be able to identify lengthy extended rituals from vast distances.

## **DISTRACTION**

Syntactic magic is as likely as any other kind – perhaps *more* likely – to put demands on the magician’s attention.

### *Interruptions*

If someone attacks the caster or otherwise tries to disrupt the magic while it’s being cast, then *Distraction and Injury* (p. B236) applies.

### *Casting While*

### *Maintaining Other Effects*

The GM may apply the penalties from *Casting Spells While Maintaining Other Spells* (p. B238) if the magician has any other effects, spells, etc., currently active and requiring any kind of input or attention. He can also rule that some procedures require the caster’s full attention and either can’t be cast at all in these circumstances, or take larger penalties – or that certain effects are self-sustaining, and cause no actual distraction.

# **SYNTACTIC MAGIC: VERBS AND NOUNS**

In a verb-noun system, effects are defined by two or more *Words*: verbs that specify what’s being done, and nouns that match whatever it’s being done to. Each Word

has its own separate IQ/Very Hard skill. Magery might add to IQ when learning Word skills – but it may instead cap these skills (see *Capping Syntactic Magic*, p. 184).

## SUGGESTED VERBS AND NOUNS

The “standard” verb-noun syntactic magic system uses the following set of 24 Words – 10 verbs and 14 nouns. The GM is welcome to modify this to better suit his campaign. Completely different systems are certainly possible!

### Verbs

Word	Energy Cost	Time to Cast
Communicate	1	0
Control	2	1
Create	2	2
Heal	1	2
Move	0	0
Protect	1	1
Sense	2	0
Strengthen	1	1
Transform	3	2
Weaken*	1	1

\* Weaken encompasses “Destroy,” and the GM might prefer to use the latter term.

### Nouns

Word	Energy Cost	Time to Cast
Air	3	1
Animal	2	3
Body*	3	2
Earth	2	3
Fire	4	1
Food	1	3
Image	2	2
Light	2	1
Magic	2	4
Mind*	3	2
Plant	1	5
Sound	2	2
Spirit	2	4
Water	2	3

\* As a rule, any attack that *directly* assaults the target uses Body; e.g., magic to break bones would require Weaken Body, although a spell triggering a lethal avalanche could be simply Move Earth. Workings that affect the caster directly use either Body or Mind.

## DEFINING CASTINGS

Once the casting’s description and parameters are set, the player selects the verb and noun that he wants to use, and the GM decides whether they’re appropriate. In situations where the GM feels they *aren’t* suitable, he may let the wizard go through the motions and then simply say that the casting fails – or even that it produces an unexpected result. However, it’s generally fairer to tell the player that his ideas don’t match the game-world metaphysics, and perhaps offer alternatives; the strict GM can require a skill roll, probably against Thaumatology, to assess the suitability of a Word choice. In any

event, the Words used determine a base energy cost, from which the final, modified cost can be derived.

### Appropriate Words

For some effects, the most suitable Words will be obvious; e.g., in a game that uses the standard Words, a flight spell is Move Body. For others effects, several different combinations might be able to achieve the same results; e.g., fireproofing a wooden cart could be Weaken Fire *or* Protect Plant. The GM should be flexible, permitting players to capitalize on their wizards’ strengths while avoiding needless, lengthy arguments about the optimum configuration of Words. If a magician just doesn’t know the right Words for the task, then the GM should firmly say so rather than let the player try to haggle.

### Multiple Words

Some workings will require more than one verb or one noun. For example, deflecting all weapons aimed at the caster, whether of wood or of metal, might need Move plus both Earth *and* Plant. Alternatively, it could use Protect Body – but if the wizard wants to protect his clothing and gear as well as himself, then he might have to add Animal, Earth, and Plant!

## Ogham Verbs and Nouns

The Ogham alphabet – discussed at length under *Tree Magic* (pp. 42-47) – can form the basis of a syntactic system. Use the consonants as nouns and the vowels as verbs, as for symbol magic. See *The Ogham Alphabet* (p. 171) for a table with suggested meanings.

Using the Ogham alphabet as Words sometimes requires a little imaginative thinking – if only because of the varied secondary meanings of each symbol. For example, healing somebody would generally require an Onn-Ruis working, amplifying the body’s natural vigor; but somebody who was dying *might* be kept alive by an Idho-Saille working, temporarily eliminating his ability to *die* while the caster maintains the magic. In the latter case, the subject would still be hurt, and remain incapacitated, until actual healing was available.

Turning a living thing into something else is always a complex working, Ura-Beth-Ruis, as this manipulates the fundamental form. Discovering the truth about something in plain sight is Ailm-Coll, but discovering something that can only be known through an oracle adds Fearn. Fireballs are Ailm-Fearn, powerful lightning bolts called from the clouds might be Ailm-Duir (weaker bolts from thin air could be Ailm-Luis), and earthquakes require major Ura-Duir workings. Once cast, effects can be extended or amplified with a combination of Onn and the relevant noun. Quick curses are Ailm-Uath (which might be negated by Idho-Uath, Ailm-Tinne, or Onn-Tinne), but really wrecking somebody’s life also calls for Idho-Tinne (which can be opposed by Ailm-Tinne or Onn-Tinne) – and protection in advance against such assaults comes from Eadha-Tinne.

Critical failures with a working might trigger disastrously *wrong* meanings for the symbols used. For example, an Ailm-Ngetal working designed to bind a foe might give him extra movement powers. Idho-Uath, intended to remove a friend’s bad luck, might destroy his body instead!

## WORKING THE EFFECT

To work a verb-noun effect, the caster makes *two* rolls: one against verb skill and one against noun skill. Penalties for parameters, reducing casting time, distraction, etc., apply to *both* rolls. The GM can assign further modifiers – most often penalties – for especially strange or complicated castings. The process should also use *Alternate Magic Rituals* (pp. 36-38) and possibly other modifiers, such as some of those under *Traditional Materials* (p. 244).

### Multiple Words

When using more than two Words, the caster must roll against the *lowest* verb and noun skills used, at -1 per Word after the first two. However, he gets to *choose* which verb and which noun will determine energy cost and time to cast. Players may try to introduce unnecessary Words into workings in order to benefit from their favorable costs or casting times. This is less of a problem than it seems – it tends to lead to casting at lower skill levels – but even so, if PC wizards attempt too many bizarre effects to exploit this rule, then the GM is free to assign special penalties or introduce appropriate side effects. For example, weaving Water into a casting for such purposes is liable to make things wet, while including Fire means the magic is likely to burn things – and the GM, *not* the magician, decides what gets soaked or torched!

Alternatively, the GM can simply use the *greatest* energy cost and casting time from among the nouns and verbs used. This keeps things simple, but discourages interestingly complex workings.



## Results

If both skill rolls (verb and noun) are successful, then the working takes effect. The caster must immediately pay the energy cost as calculated. A critical success on either roll halves this cost. Critical success on *both* rolls means there's no cost.

If one Word is successful but the other isn't, then there may be *some* kind of magical result . . . but not the one the caster had in mind. The GM shouldn't be malicious here; the consequences should be trivial, or at most inconvenient, but never devastating; e.g., failed magic to make someone sneeze might flare his nostrils, but probably won't make him expel concussion blasts from his sinuses. In this case, the caster only has to pay the energy cost for the working if, in the GM's opinion, the effect produced was substantial and perhaps marginally useful.

If both rolls are ordinary failures, then nothing happens, and the caster must spend one energy point. A critical failure on either roll has disastrous effects; roll on a suitable table (see Appendix B). Critical failure on *both* rolls should be spectacular – one option is to roll twice on the table and combine the results.

The caster always knows whether his working succeeded or failed. If it failed, then exactly what (if anything) *did* happen won't always be obvious to him. He'll be aware that it wasn't the result he intended, however.

### Margins and Resistance

When basing effect on margin of success, and for *any* resisted casting, use the roll with the *lowest* margin to determine effect or resistance.

## Transformations

Effects that change the target into something else, using verbs such as Transform, are a special case. Unlike every other syntactic working, transformations require *three* rolls: one for the verb, one for the noun governing the initial form, and one for the noun governing the final form. If the same Word governs both forms, then roll against it two separate times, once per form. Thus, shapeshifting from human to animal would be "Transform Body to Animal," and call for rolls against Transform, Body, and Animal, while tuning a fig into a thistle would be "Transform Plant to Plant," and require one roll against Transform and two against Plant. Such workings *don't* suffer -1 to skill for using a third Word – but if the caster somehow weaves in additional Words, then he's at -1 per Word after the first three.

## EXAMPLE: VERB-NOUN WORKING

Professor Emily Elspeth, Mistress of Arcane Science, encounters a pack of jackals while exploring a pre-dynastic Egyptian tomb, and decides that a simple attack should deter them.

Arcane Science is verb-noun syntactic magic that uses the standard Words on p. 185. It prescribes skill modifiers for ordinary range and familiarity, multiple targets, and casting time. It requires extra energy costs for range in time

and across dimensions, duration, area, and damage. Margin of success determines weight affected. Extended workings are permitted. Magery caps skills rather than adding to them, so Professor Elspeth's Magery (Verb-Noun) 4 limits her to skill 14 with any Word. In fact, her relevant skills are Control-14, Create-13, and Air-14.

Her player asks if Control and Air would enable her to create a wind attack. The GM reminds her that he has already said that this is a calm day, so she's going to have to use Create and Air. However, it's established in this campaign that air magic can strike very hard – wind blasts might do reduced damage (albeit perhaps with increased knock-back) in some games, but Professor Elspeth can inflict crushing damage.

Create Air has a base energy cost of  $2 + 3 = 5$  points, and a base casting time of  $2 + 1 = 3$  seconds. Because it's going to be a Missile effect, this working doesn't take range modifiers, and modifiers for multiple targets won't apply either (the penalties for trying to hit more than one jackal will come with the attack rolls). The jackals are still fairly distant, so Professor Elspeth takes double casting time (6 seconds), for +1 to her skills. She isn't attempting cross-dimensional, extended-duration, or area-effect magic, but she decides to produce a 1d crushing attack with RoF 5 – effectively a 5d attack. Multiplying the base cost by 5 means that the working will require 25 energy points; fortunately, Professor Elspeth carries a plundered Mayan staff loaded with 40 energy points. She doesn't have to worry about weight affected, and Missile effects can't be resisted, so margin of success won't be an issue.

After 6 seconds – as the jackals, hunger overcoming caution, begin moving in – Professor Elspeth rolls against both her skills at +1 (an effective 14 and 15). She makes both rolls, and furious energies roil around the tip of her staff. The GM rules that this attack has statistics similar to the Fireball spell (1/2D 25, Max 50, Acc 1) and, being weightless magic, Rcl 1. The jackals have drawn close – 5 yards away – so Professor Elspeth forgoes aiming and uses *Spraying Fire* (p. B409).

She decides to direct two blasts at each of the two leading beasts, and one at a third; obligingly, these three are approaching shoulder-to-shoulder, so she won't waste shots tracking between them. Her Innate Attack (Beam) skill is 17, and all three attacks are at -2 for range and -1 for the jackals' SM, giving effective skill 14. The first attack has the standard Rcl 1; on an attack roll of 10, both blasts hit. The second has effective Rcl 2; with a roll of 13, only one blast hits, but the GM rules that the one that misses will at the very least worry another jackal that was coming in just behind the leader. The third is a single shot, so its effective Rcl 3 is irrelevant; on an 8, it hits. At 1d per shot, this is unlikely to kill any of the jackals, but it should be enough to make the pack back off.

## VERB-NOUN ENCHANTMENT

There are a couple of ways to incorporate item enchantment into verb-noun syntactic magic. One option is to use *Symbol-Based Enchantment* (pp. 175-177), replacing symbol skills with Word skills. Each Word then has an associated symbol, used only when enchanting, and Symbol Drawing becomes the skill of enchanters. The energy costs for Words

replace those for symbols in any calculations required. Most items made this way should be defined as working for everybody, unless Symbol Drawing is fairly widespread – or unless the enchanter *wants* his creation to be useless for most people.

Alternatively, the right combination of words might allow enchantment to work much as it does for standard spell-based magic. For example, when using *Suggested Verbs and Nouns* (p. 185), an effect equivalent to the Enchant spell would call for Transform, one or more Words appropriate to the thing being enchanted (Plant for a wooden staff, Plant and Metal for a steel-tipped wooden spear, etc.), and Magic. This combination prepares the item to be imbued with other effects, which must use appropriate Words of their own; e.g., Strengthen and Earth for magically robust steel armor, Protect and Body for a shield that helps protect a living bearer, or Control and Animal for an amulet that can control animals. If the artifact can generate "active" magical effects, then these require energy equal to that required for a temporary verb-noun working with the same results, and either the user must supply this or the item needs an additional enchantment – likely involving Create or Strengthen, plus Magic. Multiply the energy cost, skill penalty, or required margin of success for enchantment workings that provide energy by the number of energy points they supply per use.

In all cases, the enchanter's effective Word skill levels cannot be below 15 for an item that will work in normal or better mana. This minimum rises to 20 if the artifact is to function in low mana. The *lowest* skill rolled against defines the item's Power (see p. B481).

Enchantments call for permanent or indefinite durations. Assume that the enchanter *must* pay energy costs for this. For each part of the enchantment, calculate the base cost for the Words used. Then, for the initial working that prepares the item for enchantment – and for any working that limits or controls how it functions – multiply base cost by 10. For other effects incorporated into the item, multiply by 30 if only mages will be able to use the artifact, or by 50 if it will work for anyone. Once the total cost is known, use either *Quick and Dirty Enchantment* (p. B481) or *Slow and Sure Enchantment* (pp. B481-482). See also *Enchanting Items* (pp. 107-113).

*Example:* Horatio Ling, Archmage, is enchanting a wooden rod with the ability to shatter stone at no energy cost to the user. It will work for anyone. He uses verb-noun syntactic magic and the standard Words.

The initial working – to prepare the rod for other enchantments – uses Transform, Plant, and Magic. This has a base energy cost of  $3 + 1 + 2 = 6$ . Multiplied by 10 for permanence, it requires 60 energy points.

Next, Horatio enchants the rod with the ability to provide up to 6 energy points per use. This is a Create Magic effect, with a base cost of  $2 + 2 = 4$ . Multiplying by 6 for the amount of energy and by 50 for permanence gives an energy cost of 1,200 points.

Finally, the rod's actual effect uses Weaken and Earth. This has a base cost of  $1 + 2 = 3$ . Multiplying by 50 for permanence makes the cost 150.

With a total requirement of 1,410 energy points, Horatio is going to have to use Slow and Sure enchantment!

# SYNTACTIC MAGIC: REALMS AND POWER

The second type of syntactic magic divides the magical universe into *Realms*, and focuses on the degree of power the magician possesses over each Realm. To compare this approach to the verb-noun model: Realms are quite similar to nouns (although some define *methods* and *effects* as much as they define *things*), while the magician's level of power in a Realm identifies the verbs available to him. However, Realm-using casters don't have to worry about the exact magical description of their intended effect – only whether they have the power to accomplish it. For an example of a Realm-based magic system, see *Oceanic Magic* (pp. 232-233).

## Realm Levels

Magicians buy their power over a Realm as levels of an advantage; see *Level Costs* (pp. 189-190) for pricing. Low levels indicate the ability to sense things in that category – and maybe to nudge them a little. High levels permit more dramatic effects.

## Realm Skills

Each Realm *also* has an associated IQ/Very Hard skill that determines the magician's fine control, as well as how much raw power he can exercise without problems. Hence, capable magicians must be skilled in addition to having high levels in their preferred Realms. For example, creating flame might require only middling levels in the Realm of Fire, but setting fire to a whole building with one action, especially without also being caught in the blast oneself, is likely to require skill. Combining high Realm skills with low Realm levels makes for a subtle style of magic, but *not* a useless one; the magician may be able to perform precise analyses, divert damage by a crucial hair's breadth, or manipulate small, fragile objects without damaging them.

## DEFINING THE REALMS

Realms are the setting's most fundamental magical categories; see *Dividing Up the Universe* (pp. 179-180) for guidance. Ideally, each Realm should have an evocative name. This isn't merely aesthetic, remember – a magician with a high level in the Realm of Wood, for instance, will have considerable power over *anything* to do with wood.

Determining how many levels of mastery exist for each Realm is another key world-defining decision. The greater the number of levels, the more the players will get the sense that magic is a tall ladder that their characters must ascend at length and with effort. However, large numbers of levels can make true power seem frustratingly distant, and render the distinctions between levels overly fine and hard to assess in play. For a game where the PCs can start close in power to the real movers and shakers, and with fairly straightforward magic rules, divide the Realms into fewer levels.

## One to Three Levels: Basic Structures

Each Realm *could* have a single "level," meaning that somebody who studied it would be able to do just about anything with it. This might work if the number of Realms is huge, but it's generally too simplistic. Two levels are a little better – perhaps the first represents simple sensitivity and control, while the second offers creative power – but three is probably the best working minimum. A three-level model might look like this:

*Level 1: Detection and Measurement.* The magician can determine the presence or absence of anything the Realm encompasses, with considerable precision, and can analyze it. For example, level 1 ability with the Realm of Stone – usually recorded as "Stone/1" – would let the magician detect gold, and identify types of gemstones or rocks. Many Realms can effectively be manipulated, a little, by anyone who's sensitive to them. For instance, Luck/1 might enable the magician to tell what actions would be lucky or unlucky – and by choosing the former and avoiding the latter, he'll usually enjoy good luck. In fact, the magician can probably "nudge" the Realm in various ways.

*Level 2: Control and Suppression.* The magician can manipulate anything that falls within the Realm – and manipulation includes suppression or diversion. However, he can't create it from nothing, or make it vanish completely. For example, Thought/2 might grant the ability to instill the target with interest in a topic, or to inspire him to avoid it, and may suppress thought enough to leave the victim dazed or asleep – but it couldn't render him entirely comatose. Level 2 power over inanimate objects grants some capacity to reshape them, and *might* even let the magician make them move around – although that could require some kind of power source, at least if they're to move fast or fly through the air, depending on how the GM defines the Realms.

*Level 3: Creation and Destruction.* The magician has complete – but finite – power over the Realm, and can create and destroy anything that it includes (although perhaps not permanently). Birds/3 probably allows him to slay any bird, and to conjure birds from thin air; Storms/3 lets him call up or calm any storm. *Permanent* or "high-powered" creations may require access to a second Realm, or to an external source of "raw magic."

## More Levels: Lower and Higher Mysteries

Having more levels per Realm allows finer subdivisions and greater subtlety – although too much subtlety may lead to confusion and arguments about exactly what each level can accomplish. The question of exactly how many levels are "enough" is left to the GM's judgment, but anything beyond six is probably too complex. One possible structure:

*Level 1: Detection and Measurement.* This is much the same as level 1 in the three-level system discussed above, but strictly limited to passive sensing.

*Level 2: Control and Diversion.* The magician has limited control over anything that falls within the Realm. This includes the ability to encourage its natural growth and to calm it, but not to create it or suppress it much below its natural level. Weather/2 might allow a ship's wizard to save the vessel from being blown onto rocks by turning the winds around a few points, and maybe stopping them from growing much worse, but the ship would still have to run before the wind until it blows itself out. Objects can only be reshaped within their natural limits, although perhaps a little faster than usual; wood warps naturally, so Plants/2 could make a door twist loose from its frame in a few minutes. Likewise, ghosts are always bound by rules and restrictions, so it's not hard for a wizard with Necromancy/2 to create a barrier that prevents them from entering a room. If a force or a power permeates the entire universe, then level 2 in the associated Realm permits its exploitation in straightforward ways. The magician's person and identity may be easier to manipulate than something external; Health/2 might, with GM permission, let the user heal his own minor wounds, but not regenerate lost limbs or help others.

*Level 3: Command and Simple Creation.* With substantial control over the Realm on a local level, the magician can call up things that might exist, make them go away, repair them, or change their appearance or capabilities. This also permits the creation of *simple* manifestations of the Realm. The GM decides what's "simple," but while a lightning bolt or a rock should qualify, and a tree or an insect *might*, a living person certainly won't. Humanity/3 might, however, grant the ability to heal (or inflict) wounds, influence someone else's emotions and thoughts, and cause the nearest human beings to approach. Likewise, Motion/3 could grant the power of flight, or Magic/3 could enable the user to dispel most other magics by suppressing their magical nature.

*Level 4: Authority.* Anything that lies within the Realm is open to command, and the magician can create all but the most complex manifestations of this aspect of reality. He can also negate use of lesser levels of the same Realm by commanding that working's subject not to be affected. Decay/4 might let him not only cause the destruction of anything that's subject to decline (living or not), but also make something that has already decayed work "as new" by suppressing all consequences of the decay. Biology/4 might enable him to change the sex of living things, make them physically older or younger, or grant them special abilities borrowed from other, similar species.

*Level 5: Complete Power.* At this level, the magician's control of the Realm appears more-or-less complete. He can turn it off or on, perform the most radical transformations (although he may need access to another Realm for this; e.g., turning a tree into a horse might require not only Plant/5 but also Animal/4), or create the most complex forms from nothing (albeit still subject to any fundamental rules of magic concerning permanent creations). He can also remove or change individual features of the target, often in complex ways. For example, Image/5 might permit him to make someone appear to be a man

to one observer, a horse to another, and invisible to a third – simultaneously.

*Level 6: Transcend Limitations.* This is a legendary level of power over the Realm, achieved by few mortals. It could be nothing more than a wild rumor, or achieving it may be the lifetime ambition of every wizard. The GM is free to require *large* Unusual Backgrounds for PCs who wish to attain it. Essentially, an expert can adjust the nature of the Realm itself, at least locally. Energy/6 might permit a magician to turn electricity into a purple liquid, while Love/6 might make indifference into the highest expression of love. Primarily, though, level 6 in a Realm is the point at which *anything* is possible – temporarily, and if the GM approves. The potential dangers of such power are as great as the benefits.

*His whole being, body and soul, is so delicately attuned to the harmony of the world that a touch of his hand or a turn of his head may send a thrill vibrating through the universal framework of things . . .*

– James Frazer,  
*The Golden Bough*

## Level Costs

Power over each Realm is a separate advantage, bought in levels. The cost per level depends on the breadth of the Realms, and on how much control each level adds. Some suggested guidelines for determining this cost:

1. Basic cost per level, in a system that grants *complete* control over the Realm at the highest level, is 60 points divided by the total number of levels per Realm. If magicians enjoy only *partial* control over each Realm at the highest level, then calculate cost as if there were further levels with similar gradations of power, up to whatever hypothetical level would grant total control.

2. Decide how many Realms the campaign features. Include Realms that aren't widely known to magicians.

3. Assess how much of the universe Realm-based magic can control – aside from any transcendent or omnipotent gods – and count how many distinct and substantial aspects of reality it *can't* influence. This judgment is necessarily subjective, but the GM should have a fair idea how many problems these weaknesses will cause. Minor flaws and glitches in the laws of magic don't count here, but can justify small cost reductions, or at least rounding down.

## Realms as Powers

A radically different approach to Realm-based magic is to define mastery over each Realm in terms of advantages – or bundles of advantages – from the *Basic Set* and *GURPS Powers*. This brings such magic very close to the general system for powers described in Chapter 7 and *Powers*; each Realm becomes a power, complete with a Talent. A capable Realm-wizard would thus have *several* powers, all sharing the same *source* but each with a different *focus*. For this to work, the GM must be flexible in his treatment of the abilities involved.

The first thing that someone with such a power acquires – equivalent to level 1 in a Realm – is the Detect advantage, attuned to the Realm's subject, usually with the Precise enhancement. Sensitivity to Realm-related phenomena can also justify sensory advantages – Empathy, Mind Reading, etc. – often with the Preparation Required limitation (representing the need to “work magic”). Being able to sense, and so prepare for, incoming attacks may explain some limited defenses as low-level abilities, too.

The next ability acquired is generally the Control advantage (*Powers*, pp. 90-92), with any modifiers needed to fit the Realm concept; the Natural Phenomena enhancement is common, while Collective may be associated with advanced

comprehension of the Realm. In some cases, however, other advantages are more appropriate. Possibilities include Affliction and Healing (for Realms that govern living bodies), Mind Control (possibly with a limitation restricting it to one species), Mind Probe, Obscure, Permeation, Precognition, Telekinesis, and Temperature Control.

Greater control over the Realm – with the ability to create and destroy – may call for a wide range of advantages. Create (*Powers*, pp. 92-94) is extremely common. Other options include Illusion (*Powers*, pp. 94-95), Innate Attack, Insubstantiality, Invisibility, Jumper, Luck (with Active), Neutralize (*Powers*, pp. 97-98), Telecommunication, Tunneling, and Warp. Alternatively, simply invest heavily in Modular Abilities, probably with the Physical enhancement.

Realm powers usually require a power modifier; see *Calculating the Power Modifier* (p. 202). What's appropriate depends on the exact nature of Realm-based magic in the setting. Channeled energy is fairly common, along with special countermeasures if rival wizards can dispel Realm effects. If Realm-based magic represents deep control over reality, then it might have the +50% version of Cosmic; only other Realm-controllers can oppose such workings.

4. Add the number of Realms from step 2 to the number of inaccessible aspects of reality from step 3, and modify the cost per level from step 1 as follows:

<i>Realms + Weaknesses</i>	<i>Modifier</i>
1-2	×5
3-4	×3
5-6	×2
7-9	×1
10-12	×2/3
13+	×1/2

*Example:* A setting has four Realms: Matter, Light, Spirit, and Distance. Living things are regarded as Matter infused with Spirit, so anything affecting them must use those two Realms in combination, while Light encompasses fire, lightning, and other intangible forces, so weather magic involves Matter and Light. Each of these Realms has three levels. Magicians aren't quite capable of complete control over any Realm – that would require a hypothetical “fourth level,” which seems to be the preserve of the gods. Thus, the basic cost per level is calculated as for a four-level system:  $60/4 = 15$  points/level.

This magic has three fundamental weaknesses. First, it can't control a class of beings known as the Discarded Ones, who predate the current order of creation. Second, it can't acquire any information never known or perceived by a living thing or a spirit – which also means that it can't foretell the future, although looking into the past is often possible by using Distance and Spirit in combination to pluck the knowledge from some unknown being's mind. Finally, it doesn't work against or through pure silver or gold, which manifest divinity in material form.

The last weakness is a minor problem, not worth treating as an aspect of reality in itself. However, the Discarded Ones,

while extremely rare from most mortals' point of view, are a persistent threat to wizards, and being unable to foretell the future or learn certain secrets is also a nuisance; thus, there are two inaccessible aspects to reality. This means Realms + weaknesses =  $4 + 2 = 6$ . Consulting the table, this multiplies the cost of power over each Realm by 2. Final cost is 30 points/level.

## DEFINING EFFECTS

Having decided what he wants to achieve through a Realm-based working, the wizard must determine whether he can accomplish it.

### *Appropriate and Multiple Realms*

The main question is which Realm or Realms apply. In general, this ought to be fairly clear. A Realm-using wizard should have a good enough idea about his abilities that the player can simply ask whether something is possible at a given level. Still, the occasional working will require negotiation and discussion between player and GM.

Many workings involve more than one Realm. This might increase range or effective duration, or permit transformations from one Realm to another (see below). It may also make the magic harder to counter (see *Countermagic*, p. 194), in that an opponent must have power over every Realm used. However, multiple-Realm workings are inevitably somewhat harder.

### *Transformations*

Effects that transform one thing into another are tricky – especially if they change the target into something from a

different Realm, which calls for a significant level of power over *both* Realms. In general, the caster requires whatever level permits transformations in the Realm corresponding to the subject's current state (this level is campaign-specific, but invariably high), plus a sufficiently high level in the other Realm to perform at least minor creations (a suggested minimum: one level less than the first Realm level, or level 2, whichever is higher). The GM can assign significant skill penalties or energy costs for especially radical transformations, even *within* a Realm.

### Realms and Damage

In general, a caster needs *at least* level 2 in a Realm to use it to inflict damage, and even level 2 workings (assuming that higher levels are available) tend to be limited to small, localized harmful effects: electrical sparks, flammable materials catching light, nauseating rather than lethal toxicity, and so on. The GM may rule that such damage is rolled at -1 to -3 *per die*, allows the target an attribute roll to avoid it, etc. Level 3+ in Realms such as Energy and Cold can permit more effective attacks.

Damaging things that fall within the Realm directly – rather than using the Realm's power to generate a minor ad hoc weapon – requires a moderate to high level in the Realm, or a combined working that includes another; destructive Realm such as Decay or Death. For example, in a system with four or five levels per Realm, Plant/3 might serve to shatter a wooden door; Plant/2 combined with Decay/3 might rot it, so that it crumbles after a few seconds; and Decay/4 could conjure pure entropic destruction from nowhere, destroying the door with a touch.

### Enhanced Damage at High Levels

Given high levels of control over a Realm, the caster can do things that fall within it more serious damage, by disrupting their fundamental nature. A simple general rule: for every level by which the magician's power in the Realm exceeds that required to damage the target, give his attacks +1 damage per die. Alternatively, the GM may define these attacks as having an armor divisor of (2), or decree that the injury they inflict heals more slowly or even not at all unless treated with equally powerful healing magics.

## PERFORMING THE WORKING

A Realm-based working always requires a single skill roll, with the modifiers noted under *Parameter Effects* (pp. 181-183), plus those for modified casting time, distraction, etc. When more than one Realm is involved, use the caster's *lowest* skill in any of them, at -1 per Realm after the first. For example, a wizard with the skills Thoughts Realm-15 and Distance Realm-13, trying to communicate telepathically with someone on another continent by combining the two Realms, would have an effective skill of 12 before other modifiers. Use this roll to find any margin of success needed to determine effects or resistance.

### Energy Cost for Realm-Based Magic

Base energy cost for Realm-based magic usually equals *twice* the level of the highest-level Realm involved, *plus* the

level of any other Realms used. See also *Determining Base Energy Cost* (pp. 180-181).

## EXAMPLE: REALM-BASED WORKING

Yova-Tu-Te-Wir, Master of the Waves, is stranded on a deserted island and needs to create a boat. Unfortunately, even with magical aid, it will take him many days of travel across difficult seas to reach the nearest inhabited land. He decides to *transform* his tame gull, Thar-Hiu, into the craft he needs, so that it will have a mind of its own, allowing it to look after itself while he rests. (His magic is incapable of *creating* a mind, or even controlling one directly – that's reserved for the Volcano Gods.)

The GM rules that this working, involving vastly increased mass and abilities, is tantamount to an act of creation as well as transformation. The relevant Realms are Nature/4, to perform a radical transformation on a living thing, and Craft/3, to create something like a boat on an existing, common pattern. Yova-Tu-Te-Wir has both, and the skills Nature Realm-13 and Craft Realm-14. He'll be rolling against the lower of those, at -1 for including a second Realm. Base energy cost is  $(2 \times 4) + 3 = 11$  points. It's time to determine the parameters.

First, there are those that generate skill modifiers in this setting. Yova-Tu-Te-Wir will perform the magic at touch range. There's no time-spanning or cross-dimensional factor, and the working doesn't have a damaging or healing effect, or multiple targets. Yova-Tu-Te-Wir is happy to take plenty of extra time, for +1.

Next come energy costs. The craft that Yova-Tu-Te-Wir is creating will weigh about 600 lbs. (anything less would be unsafe), adding +4 to cost. This isn't area-effect magic, doesn't modify personal abilities, and again doesn't have multiple targets; while these can affect energy costs, they won't do so here. Total cost is 15 FP. Fortunately, Yova-Tu-Te-Wir is quite healthy, with 13 FP, but this is going to be hard work; the casting will also cost him 2 HP. It will be a temporary working; in this setting, margin of success determines an effect's duration, but a wizard can then keep his magic active by spending extra energy. Maintaining the effect will require half the casting cost (8 points) per time increment.

Yova-Tu-Te-Wir makes his first attempt, rolling against effective skill 13. He succeeds, but only by 2. The duration of the change is just one hour – maintaining it would be impractical. Yova-Tu-Te-Wir slumps to the ground and spends two and a half hours recovering (during which time the boat turns back into a confused Thar-Hiu), then casts healing magic on himself, rests to recover the energy *that* cost, and tries again.

Unfortunately, his second attempt is a critical failure. Not only does he use up all his FP (and 2 HP) again, but a roll on the "*Reality-Warping*" Table (p. 259) leaves the island covered in weird light effects for some minutes. Yova-Tu-Te-Wir gives up for the day.

The next morning, rested and refreshed, he tries again – and rolls a 7, succeeding by 6! The transformation will last for two weeks; if he doesn't reach another island in that time, then he'll have to maintain it. Yova-Tu-Te-Wir rests and heals himself yet again, drags the new boat down to the sea, and sets off.



## REALM-BASED ENCHANTMENT

A magician who wishes to create a permanent magic item using Realm-based magic must imbue it with the Realm's nature and power. The resulting artifact has one or more specific functions that a wizard employing the Realm could perform or enable. This kind of enchantment requires command of the Realm itself, and may *also* require power over one or more additional Realms, such as Magic (to bind supernatural forces into a new shape) or Matter (to adjust the object's structure to hold its new power). The GM can impose whatever supplementary requirements he sees fit, as a general rule or in specific cases – including knowledge of other skills (whether those related to magical operations or mundane craft skills to shape the item) and use of special materials.

The enchantment process can use the standard rules for spell-based magic (see *Magic Items*, pp. B480-483, and *Enchanting Items*, pp. 107-113); either Quick and Dirty or Slow and Sure enchantment is possible. The enchanter rolls against the *lowest* relevant Realm skill, which also defines the artifact's Power. His skill with every Realm

involved must therefore be at 15+ if the item is to work in normal or better mana – or at 20+, if it's to function in low mana. The energy cost for this purpose is equal to the sum of the levels of the Realms involved in the process, multiplied by 150 if only a mage can use the item, or by 250 if anyone can use it. If a Realm plays multiple roles in the enchantment, then count it once per application.

*Example:* Carbuncle the Barely Sane manufactures an Amulet of Commanding Giant Ants. The GM rules that preparing the amulet uses Matter/2 (to transform it to carry this puissant effect) and Magic/2 (to make it *magical*); the actual function requires Insects/3 (to control the ants) and Magic/3 (to make the amulet self-powered). The total of all these levels is 10; therefore, the energy cost is 2,500.

### Draining Enchantment

In some settings, Realm-wizards can *permanently* transfer a portion of their magical power to an item, making enchantment faster – or perhaps achieving results that aren't possible by any other means. Use the rules given in *Spending of Yourself* (pp. 109-110). The points required usually come from a relevant Realm advantage.

# SYNTACTIC MAGIC: SPECIAL CASES AND OPTIONS

Syntactic magic systems are intended to be *flexible* above all – which means that the GM should be prepared to apply any number of campaign-specific rules and options.

## PRACTICES

The default assumption is that wizards work syntactic magic exactly as they would standard spells: with a certain amount of waving of hands and spoken invocation, but no further requirements. The GM can, if he wishes, determine how much activity a given working requires by looking up the caster's modified skill with the effect on the list under *Magic Rituals* (p. B237) – perhaps borrowing some ideas from *Alternate Magic Rituals* (pp. 36-38). However, it's also possible that some or all such castings require other actions, special tools, or materials. These elements are collectively known as *practices*.

The practice needed for a particular effect depends on the setting and its metaphysics. Item requirements are among the simplest examples. For instance, each wizard might have to wield a carved wooden staff; casting without one's staff might be impossible, or just give -4 to skill and double energy costs. Prophetic magic could demand examination of the stars, the flight of birds, the entrails of a sacrificial animal, etc., as with different versions of the Divination spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 108).

Practices can be more complex and defining, however. For example, a style of verb-noun magic might involve improvisational alchemy, in which a caster carefully

combines reagents relating to each Word in an appropriate vessel. In another variant, verbs might be musical keys and nouns, songs. To summon a ghost, the wizard would sing the song of Spirit in the key of Summoning – and just as a skilled musician can play one key while singing another, he could even attempt to *play* the song of Spirit in the key of Command while *singing* it in the key of Summoning, in order to summon and bind the ghost.

Yet other practices involve nonmagical skills. Commanding a set of Realms might demand intense mental concentration, and consequently a roll against the Meditation skill during each casting – or call for the ability to improvise a subtle chanted invocation, and thus need both Poetry and Singing rolls. Other workings may represent ordinary human abilities raised to a supernatural

*Rhialto the Marvellous: I have evolved a new technique which easily befuddles the monitors. I need only a pair of quampics and a red-eyed bifaulgulate sandestin.*

– Jack Vance, “Fader’s Waft”

pitch, and so require successful rolls against relevant mundane skills: Body Language or Interrogation for mind reading, Physician for healing, Public Speaking for mind control, and so on. In such cases, the GM decides on the time required for each attempt to use the skill. Improvising a song could take a few seconds; meditating properly, a minute or so; creating armor or weapons, hours or days. Working in haste or taking extra time modifies effective skill; see *Time Spent* (p. B346).

Different schools of magic that use the same *rules* for parameters, effects, etc., may still employ distinctive *practices*, reflecting the many routes by which diverse magicians reach the same goal: while a mystic martial artist meditates to make his skin rock-hard, an alchemist uses an ointment, a saintly priest prays for protection, and a scholar-wizard inscribes warding symbols in the air with his wand. Practices can be as simple or as complex as the GM wishes. Normally, they're part of a campaign's special effects, with no direct effect on magicians' point costs.

### *Practice Problems and Costs*

The GM should try to ensure that each set of practices is about as complicated, costly, and inconvenient as the next. However, a practice that's *exceptionally* onerous and inaccessible next to others, or that *substantially* reduces magic's utility, probably merits a point-cost savings. Conversely, a school that's notably more convenient than most ought to cost more points to learn. Handle this by applying limitations (e.g., Preparation Required) or enhancements (e.g., Cosmic) to Magery, Realm levels, and other magical advantages. Another possibility is that the skills for Realms with slower, less-accessible practices might be easier – Hard or even Average instead of Very Hard – because they break down complex thaumatological procedures into a series of simple tasks.

However, even styles with the *same* point cost can be faster or slower – or simpler or harder to use – for different purposes. Alchemists might be able to transmute inanimate matter in seconds with the right chemicals, but only call down lightning bolts from the clouds after spending hours preparing highly complex “resonant talismans,” whereas shamans can petition the lightning-spirits in a moment, but only change materials through lengthy and intricate negotiations with the spirits of matter. The GM has to balance these factors when designing the setting, and should make sure that every school of magic has *something* to make it worth studying for *somebody* (although “somebody” may be an eccentric NPC) – if only a lot of coolness!

## TECHNIQUES

While syntactic magic is versatile and improvisational, it's entirely plausible that at least some wizards would have a few favorite or standardized tricks and applications – and that, through deliberate practice or repeated use, these individuals might become especially adept with such effects. Thus, the GM may opt to treat a roll required to work a standard trick as a technique (see *Techniques*, pp. B229-230). Highly specific “effect techniques” – with every parameter and option absolutely fixed – can have Average difficulty, but most ought to be Hard. Each should

be about as flexible as a spell from the standard magic system. For example, an attack technique might do variable amounts of damage, but making it explosive calls for a new technique. Likewise, a technique to create food might bring forth a range of similar foodstuffs, in varying quantities, but probably couldn't conjure pure water.

## ERRORS AND SIDE EFFECTS: REALITY BITES BACK

One way to keep this rather powerful sort of magic under control is to assume that it's prone to especially troublesome side effects and unintended consequences. After all, it tends to involve tinkering with the very structure of reality, or calling upon potent spirits. Such things may *object* dramatically if mishandled!

### *Critical Failures*

At minimum, truly messing up a syntactic working – as opposed to merely failing – should lead to *trouble*. Reality can “snap back” violently! Whenever a wizard critically fails at such a casting, he must roll on the critical failure table chosen by the GM for syntactic magic. See Appendix B, especially the “*Reality-Warping*” Table (p. 259) and *Spirit-Oriented Magic Table* (p. 260).

### *Reactive Reality*

For more extreme effects, every working – possibly even if successful – can strain reality or the gods' tolerance, leading to problems that build up and attach themselves to the caster. This can explain why high-powered wizards are often strange and unnerving people – sometimes with unusual features that range from small, hidden “witchmarks,” through uncanny staring eyes and wild hair, to downright demonic malformations. Magicians are epicenters of twisted fate, marked by spirits or mutated by contact with magical energies. *Dedicated* ones regard such consequences as a price worth paying, even a badge of honor.

To reflect this, the GM may rule that every syntactic working carries a potential cost in *Distortion Points* (DP) gained by the caster:

- *Simple working that fits well with divine or natural laws*: 0 DP on anything but a critical failure; 1d-1 (minimum 0) DP on a critical failure.
- *Standard magical working*: 0 DP on a critical success; 1d-3 (minimum 0) DP on an ordinary success; 1 DP on an ordinary failure; 1d+1 DP on a critical failure.
- *Significantly “unnatural” or “hubristic” working*: 1d-2 (minimum 0) DP on a critical success; 1d-1 (minimum 1) DP on an ordinary success or failure; 3d DP plus an automatic Distortion Crisis (see below) on a critical failure.
- *Spectacularly “unnatural,” radical working that threatens the structure of reality or insults the most tolerant gods*: 1d DP on a critical success; 3d DP on an ordinary success; 2d DP on an ordinary failure; 4d DP plus an automatic Distortion Crisis on a critical failure.

All Distortion Point gains from critical rolls are in addition to any other effects. The GM can change these guidelines to reflect the relationship between hubris, magic, and reality in his campaign.

Whenever a wizard gains Distortion Points that bring his new total to 3 or higher, there's a danger that he'll suffer a *Distortion Crisis*. Roll 3d. If the result is less than or equal to his total, then a Crisis threatens. The magician may be able to suppress this by rolling against an appropriate skill – for example, Ritual Magic, plus Magery, minus *half* his current total – but he still has the DP if he succeeds. If he fails to suppress the Crisis, or chooses not to, then the Crisis normally resets his DP total to zero in addition to its other effects. Thus, sensible wizards usually take their punishment as soon as possible.

The form a Crisis takes depends on the setting metaphysics and how many Distortion Points are involved. Outcomes may be linked to the type of magic the wizard has been using, his behavior, or arbitrary divine laws. Some suggestions:

- FP loss equal to the DP total.
- HP loss equal to the DP total divided by 5, in the form of injuries that magic can't heal.
- Immediate Fright Check at a penalty equal to the DP total.
- Temporary physical deformity, personality change, or “uncanny air” that causes a reaction penalty equal to *half* the DP total (round up). This penalty fades at a rate of -1 per day until it reaches zero.



- All magic the wizard works triggers a roll on the “Reality-Warping” Table (p. 259), regardless of whether it succeeds. The result combines with that of a successful working as the GM sees fit. This lasts a day per DP.

- Wizard gains what seems to be a new advantage, but it's too much of a good thing, or it transfers bad luck to his associates; e.g., members of the opposite sex won't leave him alone, he gets +5 to defense rolls but attacks that this defeats automatically hit his allies, or birds suddenly appear when he's near. This lasts *two* days per DP.

- Wizard suffers one of the above effects at half strength (halve duration, penalties, etc.), but only loses 1d DP, not *all* of them.

At the GM's option, wizards who accumulate 14+ Distortion Points may be at risk of *permanent* effects such as Unnatural Features. They may also find that a certain number of DP become permanent, and won't dissipate after a Crisis.

Getting rid of Distortion Points without a Crisis might well be impossible. At best, it should involve a great deal of

effort – say, a week to shed 1d-1 DP. During this time, the wizard must normally refrain from *any* magical activity, and may also have to engage in intensive meditation, devout prayer, or similar disciplines; take a course of alchemical medicine; or anything else the GM thinks is appropriate.

## Working With or Against Reality

Another implication of using something as fundamental as syntactic magic is that workings that are at least broadly compatible with the laws of reality may be markedly easier than those that blatantly fly in the face of nature and involve bigger, more basic changes. If this is a factor for syntactic wizards, then “unnatural” workings might suffer a skill penalty, in addition to risking extra Distortion Points when using *Reactive Reality* (pp. 193-194). Conversely, highly “appropriate” workings could receive a skill bonus, as well as garnering fewer DP.

## COUNTERMAGIC

Syntactic magic involves the manipulation of some aspect of reality. In most versions, it can also usefully oppose or counteract other *magic*.

At the simplest, syntactic wizards may enjoy superior resistance rolls against effects incorporating Words or Realms that they know how to use. They must have skill or levels in *every* Word or Realm involved in the incoming magic; thus, complex workings that draw on multiple elements have an advantage against wizardly targets. If the defender's *lowest* relevant skill is better than the value he'd normally use to resist, then he can resist with that skill. A Realm-using wizard receives his highest relevant Realm level as a bonus to the normal resistance roll instead.

Alternatively – and more powerfully – the wizard may get an *additional* defense roll to reduce or negate the power of incoming magic, even if it wouldn't normally permit a resistance roll (e.g., a Missile effect). The defender must be conscious. In some settings, he also has to be aware of the magic's nature (through detection abilities, etc.); in others, this is a reflexive response to something that he instinctively recognizes. Roll against the magician's *highest* skill with a Word or a Realm involved in the magic, and subtract his margin of success from his attacker's margin. This can cause the magic to fail entirely, or it may simply reduce the potency of magic that depends on margin of success to determine some or all of its effectiveness.

These rules make it significantly harder for wizards to affect each other than it is for them to affect “mundanes.” This may be dramatically desirable – it fits with many stories! However, it's *also* liable to make wizards arrogant and prone to attacking each other through unfortunate friends and allies.

## DISREGARDING ENERGY COSTS

Syntactic magic might not have *any* energy costs, especially if it's about manipulating reality at a fundamental

level – why should such a power require anything as gross as energy? It might even *create* any energy it needs for itself! This may sound unbalancing, but it needn't be. The GM can handle all the parameters that a working requires through skill modifiers or margin of success – and possibly bring in *The Stuff of Raw Magic* (pp. 227-229) if he wishes to incorporate something analogous to energy but “more fundamental.”

Another interesting possibility is to borrow the rules for *Threshold-Limited Magic* (pp. 76-82). Rather than “burning energy,” this sort of syntactic magic distorts the user's relationship with reality. This also fits well with *Working With or Against Reality* (p. 194). When combining these ideas, *halve* additions to the wizard's tally for subtle workings or those that fit with “natural law,” but multiply them by 1.5 or 2 for magics that offend the universe or the gods (the factor can vary to match the offense). Combining threshold-limited magic with *Reactive Reality* (pp. 193-194) isn't recommended; the two systems overlap too much.

### *Enchantment Without Energy*

Even if magic has no actual energy cost, enchantments can still be defined using the *rules* for energy requirements, and then performed using the Slow and Sure method. This makes all enchantment times rather lengthy. However, there may be ways to speed up the process, such as very rare ingredients or Raw Magic; see Chapter 4 for more ideas.

## LINKED WORKINGS

Wizards may “link” syntactic workings to triggers; that is, set them to remain inactive until a condition is met, or to function like a Blocking spell at some point in the future. The effects resemble those of linking spells (see *GURPS Magic*, pp. 130-132). Links may require Words or Realms such as Magic, or that are related to the triggering event (GM's option). The more Words or Realms involved in the link, the more precisely defined it becomes – and the harder the magic is to cast. If the link works but the syntactic magic it activates partially fails, then something strange may happen when the triggering event occurs.

## COLLABORATION

For syntactic wizards to work together on a casting, they must generally be using an identical syntactic system – or at least something *very* similar. Two people manipulating reality in different ways are asking for trouble. At best, they'll simply fail to comprehend each other.

Such collaborations can use *Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238) in order to combine energy from multiple casters; when determining who can contribute what, simply use applicable skill(s) with the Words or Realms involved rather than spell skill level. Alternatively, if margin of success is relevant to the working, then *every* participant who could perform the working on his own can roll and add his margin of

## GMing Syntactic Magic

Syntactic magic can be hard to GM. Its open-ended nature enables wizards to wreak havoc on the most careful campaign planning, because it's difficult to anticipate what the players might do when they have an infinite range of effects at their disposal. Thus, it's *crucial* to set limits. Just because a player can imagine it doesn't mean that his character should be able to do it. On the other hand, it's no fun to play a wizard if your workings never work – or worse, if they never work *right*.

Striking an appropriate balance usually means accepting the *principle* of what a player wants to do, while setting reasonable limits – which really must be determined by the setting's metaphysics. If fireballs are part of the way that magic generally works, then the GM should be prepared for PCs tossing fireballs (and explosive fireballs, delayed-action fireballs, homing fireballs . . .). Conversely, if the GM has made clear from the outset that magic never seems to produce a working fireball, then the players should understand that fireballs aren't an option – unless they can come to understand that laws of nature that prevent them, and work around the problem. And if the PCs aren't the first great wizards and don't have access to unprecedented wisdom, then the GM can fairly remind them that a lot of other smart magicians have probably tried before them – and failed.

There shouldn't be too many arbitrary, absolute limitations, though. It's almost always more satisfying for a player to be told “Yes, but . . .” than “No.” Rather than flatly refusing a proposed effect, try something like, “Sure, you can do that. Let's see, about 15 minutes to cast and 200 energy should be about right. Now if you'd settle for less than totally destroying the castle . . .” It may take a while for the players and GM to come to a mutual understanding of what's appropriate – patience is needed all around.

What's vital is that the GM doesn't become too attached to anything – any plot point or NPC – that the players might conceivably find a way to circumvent. This is true in *all* games, but syntactic magic makes the range of options wide indeed. The payoff takes the form of a greater chance for player creativity. Try to encourage that, without ruining the game. And remember to enjoy it when the players come up with a particularly clever idea!

success to the total. In this case, the GM may opt not to multiply casting time by 10 as usual for ceremonial magic. The drawback is that if any collaborator rolls a critical failure, the working fails and everyone must roll on the relevant critical failure table. Also, if using *Reactive Reality* (pp. 193-194), add any Distortion Points earned by anyone involved in the working to the total of *everyone* involved.

Normally, wizards collaborating on workings must be in the same area, or at least in unobstructed line of sight of each other and able to communicate directly and unambiguously. However, if magic can create clear, reliable, two-way communication of some kind, then magicians may use this to facilitate collaborations when physically separated. Such a working might have to incorporate a Word or Realm such as Magic to facilitate the flow of energies between participants, though.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# MAGIC IS POWER



One of the interesting things about my job is that you never quite know who's going to be coming in on any day. This morning, the first face I saw was one of our best agents.

"Good morning, Jimmy," I said.

"Good morning, Felicity," Jimmy answered, and the amulet I wear above my left elbow turned ice cold on my skin. I ignored it; I don't need that to tell me when someone is directing superhuman sexual magnetism in my direction.

"Who is it today?" I asked. "No, don't tell me – let me guess. Surely not Oggun . . . No, I bet it's that synthetic pop-culture idolon you love so much."

"And what makes you think he's important to me?" Jimmy smiled beautifully, but the smile didn't touch his baby-blue eyes.

I sighed. "Why else did you change your name?"

Instead of answering, Jimmy spun on his heel. A Walther pistol somehow appeared in his hand, and his opening shot

dropped the first of the black-masked men who chose that moment to burst through the supposedly unbreakable window.

I slipped to the floor as Jimmy continued shooting, and called security – specifically, the elemental that's bound to my desk. It snatched bullets out of the air inches from my computer, but did nothing to protect the potted plant that I kept on top of the filing cabinet. I sighed again; we'd only just finished cleaning up after the last time.

Much "magic" from myth and fiction can be represented, very simply, by advantages. This includes innate "knacks" and "wild talents," the powers of magical beings such as vampires and werewolves, and normally mundane abilities that happen to originate from supernatural sources: Combat Reflexes granted by a war god to his followers, Longevity conferred by a potion, and so on.

*Mr. Wicker: He controls vegetation. He can travel anywhere, instantly. Outside Chicago recently, he apparently caused an earthquake. Plus, he's totally invulnerable.*

– Alan Moore, *Swamp Thing* #53

## MAGICAL ADVANTAGES

Many of the advantages in the *Basic Set* are, or might be, magical; e.g., Precognition can represent “second sight.” Most also support other explanations, however. They're only *magic* if that fits the character's backstory.

Magical attacks customarily range from insidious curses (Affliction) to flaming blasts or bolts of raw thaumaturgical force (Innate Attack). As for defenses, while high-fantasy wizards might conjure glittering shields of force, traditional measures tend to be subtler. One of magic's more dramatic manifestations in folklore is in fact enhanced *movement* – perhaps because travel was so often difficult and slow in pre-modern societies. Modern fantasy writers may be less interested in this, preferring to send their characters on epic quests the hard way, but the power of flight remains one of the fundamental images of high magic, and some legendary wizards could give whole armies the ability to move rapidly around the countryside.

Magic is also often credited with the power to expose secrets and facts hidden from mundane search. Indeed, many of the advantages that cover this sort of thing are more-or-less supernatural by default: Channeling and Medium are innate abilities to contact the spirit world; Clairvoyance could be psychic or magical, and the same

goes for many varieties of Detect; Illuminated is inherently uncanny in some way; and Oracle, Precognition, Psychometry, and Spirit Empathy may be inborn or god-given, but certainly imply paranormal sensitivity. In addition, Contacts can be defined as spirits or similar beings that provide useful information that few mortals could acquire.

### *Shapeshifting*

The ability to transform into an animal (or a monster) has been ascribed to shamans and sorcerers since the earliest times. Dramatic and impressive, it distinguishes the true wizard (or the terribly cursed lycanthrope) from the mere dabbler. The key advantage here is of course Shapeshifting; Alternate Form suits lycanthropes, selkies, and so on, while Morph is more appropriate for powerful magicians, demons, djinn, etc. A few were-beasts and similar creatures have *multiple* Alternate Forms, most often transitional shapes with mixed human and animal features. Some stories feature humanoid races – typically sinister infiltrators – who can assume many different humanoid forms; this usually requires Morph with the Retains Shape limitation, although Elastic Skin might suffice.

### Unusual Background (Supernatural Ancestry)

In settings where people with gods or other supernatural beings in their family tree sometimes inherit fantastic abilities, the GM may require PCs to buy such ancestry as an Unusual Background, *if* the relevant advantages are rare enough to provide a distinct edge. Generally, the point costs of superhuman gifts are enough to reflect their benefits; an Unusual Background is only appropriate for genuinely exceptional traits. Even then, it might be superfluous – or free to the PCs as a “campaign advantage” – in games where all PCs are *expected* to be part-demon, with spectacular individual powers.

The cost of this Unusual Background necessarily varies with the campaign assumptions. If it merely supports one or two minor advantages, then 5-10 points is fair. If it explains playing an invulnerable magus in a game built around mortal human warrior PCs, then the GM might charge 50-100 points – or simply forbid the character concept.

An interesting option is an Unusual Background that comes in grades, with costs and benefits proportionate to the number of supernatural beings in the PC's ancestry. For example, each nonhuman great-grandparent might cost 10 points and grant the ability to buy *one* exotic or supernatural advantage that isn't available to ordinary folk. A seemingly mortal hero with just a trace of divine blood could have a 10-point Unusual Background that justifies buying Clinging or Mimicry (“It's a family blessing – one of my ancestors married a tree spirit.”), while a full-blooded minor god, Sidhe, or whatever would pay 80 points for the right to purchase a battery of eight special advantages. Some major or exotic traits (e.g., Flight or Invisibility) might require *several* levels of such an Unusual Background; being able to walk up walls or see in pitch darkness is a neat trick, but flying is venturing into the realms of the gods, who restrict such things to themselves and their own children.



Curiously, *partial* shapeshifting – the ability to grow claws, wings, etc., as needed – features less prominently in myth. Still, it fits some conceptions of magic, and especially suits spirits who aren't bound by any one form. Represent this with physical advantages such as Claws, Damage Resistance, Doesn't Breathe (Gills), Flexibility, Flight, and Striker, with modifiers that allow the user to hide the advantage and/or that render it unavailable at times; Preparation Required and Switchable (p. 200) are often appropriate. Monstrous transformations may call for a Temporary Disadvantage limitation that reduces Appearance or adds Unnatural Features.

### Conjuring Assistance

With the simple addition of the Summonable enhancement, the Allies advantage can represent such classic magical powers as calling upon spirits, demons, or angels; creating zombies from dead bodies, or elementals from inert matter; and summoning helpful wild animals. Some varieties of Summonable bring a *different* being (albeit with essentially the same characteristics) with each use; if one such entity is killed, then the summoner can conjure a replacement, although he must wait a full day before attempting to do so. In that case, the GM makes a reaction roll whenever new Allies appear, to determine their willingness to obey orders. The drawbacks of conjuring creatures with no memory of or devotion to the summoner offset the benefits of being able to replace slain Allies automatically; Summonable costs +100% either way.

Summonable often calls for the Minion enhancement as well. If it brings new Allies every time, then the GM should probably *require* this – the summoner won't know the beings well enough to have any special obligation to them, although he may need to treat them fairly well to ensure helpfulness. Many magic-workers who possess this version of the ability also learn how to magically control the sort of entities that they can summon, thereby solving the problem of a bad reaction.

Generally, it's better to treat conjured beings that only give advice or information as Contacts, and very *powerful* entities as Patrons with the Highly Accessible and Special Abilities enhancements.

## GURPS Powers Advantages

**GURPS Powers** introduces six new or substantially expanded advantages, all of which have their uses in magical games. Control, Create, and Illusion fit the sort of high-fantasy archmages who turn aside raging fires with a word, materialize iron walls with a gesture, and command illusory armies to distract their foes. Leech is useful for insidious supernatural beings and sinister wizards who can steal an opponent's life. Neutralize suits the purposes of magicians who prefer to deal with rivals by simply shutting down their powers, or priests who petition their gods to deal with other categories of problem. Static appears occasionally in the person of a saint or a super-skeptic whose mere presence prevents magic from working.

## TALENTS AS MAGIC

In settings with subtle magic, someone who's *really* good at certain mundane skills may in fact be expressing a supernatural "gift of the gods" or "harmony with the Tao." One way to represent this is using a Talent (p. B89) with attached limitations. Some possibilities:

- *Mana Sensitive* (p. B34): This implies that the Talent depends on *magical* energies. If it actually draws on *divine* power, then the GM may permit an analogous limitation related to Sanctity.

- *Pact* (p. B113): "These great skills are a divine gift; to keep them, you must serve the gods correctly" – or perhaps the Pact actually involves the rules of some arcane craft guild.

- *Preparation Required* (p. B114): Before applying his Talent, the user must perform some ritual, or invoke the blessings of a higher power. For lengthy tasks, he has to repeat this preparation at the start of each day's work. To represent the gift of someone who can execute *any* task better if he plans and prepares carefully, use Visualization (p. B96).

A Talent *can't* be one of the abilities of a power (see *Powers*, pp. 202-208).

### Enchantment Through Talent

Supernatural Talent might even let the user enchant objects. This is best limited to individuals with two or more levels of a suitable Talent, which can serve instead of Magery as a prerequisite for Enchantment spells *only*, or similarly enhance other systems of item enchantment. The GM decides which spells are available, and should generally restrict enchantments to those that enhance the artifact's nonmagical functions; e.g., a sword could become sharper, but couldn't gain the ability to shoot lightning. Accuracy and Puisseance would suit a weaponsmith; Fortify, Deflect, and Lighten, an armor-maker; and so on.

Such work normally uses Slow and Sure enchantment (but see below). Assistants may help with the enchantment, reducing the time taken, if they know the appropriate craft skills to work on the item at 15+ *and* take part in any rituals needed to trigger the Talent. They don't require any special Talent of their own, however. The craftsman may employ one assistant per level of Talent he possesses.

A craftsman with the Quick Gadgeteer advantage (p. B57) can attempt Quick and Dirty enchantment. In that case, any assistants function as usual for *Ceremonial Magic* (p. B238) and *Quick and Dirty Enchantment* (p. B481). Artificers working this way cannot employ Powerstones.

In some settings, master craftsmen may or must put something of themselves into their finest works. Use the rules under *Spending of Yourself* (pp. 109-110). The points required might have to come from the Talent itself!

## MAGIC AND MODIFIERS

Magical advantages *might* be straightforward and unmodified, but they often take enhancements or limitations (pp. B101-117).

### Accessibility

see p. B110

Some supernatural abilities require ritual or worship by others to work. To evaluate “Only with assistants,” halve the basic point value that Maintenance (p. B143) gives for that number of people and write it as a percentage; e.g., 11-20 people is -25%.

### Affects Insubstantial

see p. B102

Magics designed to deal with spirits often have this enhancement. Advantages modified with it affect those using Clairsentience, Jumper, or Warp with the Projection modifier (*GURPS Powers*, p. 44), as well as targets using true Insubstantiality. The GM may permit a variant:

*Affects Insubstantial (Selective)*: You can choose to affect just insubstantial targets, just substantial targets, or all targets. (If you can *only* affect insubstantial targets, take the Insubstantial Only limitation; see p. 201.) +30%.

### Affects Substantial

see p. B102

Those who possess Clairsentience, Jumper, or Warp with the Projection modifier (*GURPS Powers*, p. 44), Shadow Form, or any similar ability that renders them *effectively* insubstantial can use this modifier to let advantages that wouldn't normally affect the physical world do so. As with Affects Insubstantial, a variant exists in some settings:

*Affects Substantial (Selective)*: You can choose to affect just substantial targets, just insubstantial targets, or all targets. +50%.

### Based on (Different Attribute)

see p. B102

Some entities (e.g., demons) can “aim” Afflictions, Mind Control, etc., at their victims' weaknesses. If the GM permits, an attack can have several instances of this enhancement, letting the user choose how his attack is resisted.

Each attribute – *including* the one that normally resists the attack – costs +20%. For instance, to target IQ, HT, or Will costs +60%. The attacker must choose the target attribute before he attacks.

The GM may permit this modifier on advantages that require the user to roll against his *own* DX, IQ, HT, Will, or Per, shifting the roll to another of these scores. This still costs +20%. He can take this enhancement twice to change his roll *and* his target's roll, where logical.

### Delay

see p. B105

Supernatural attacks often use a variant of Triggered Delay that goes off if the victim performs some forbidden act: attacks someone, speaks, etc. This is worth the usual +50% if the triggering condition is fixed, +100% if the attacker can specify the details when he attacks. The traditional way to neutralize such attacks is with an exorcism, Remove Curse spell, or similar measure.

### Malediction

see p. B106

Unless the GM rules otherwise, a Malediction can affect substantial and insubstantial targets equally, whether the user is substantial or insubstantial; see *Insubstantial Beings Affecting the Material World* (p. 228).

### Pact

see p. B113

Pact is common for advantages that are gifts from gods or major spirits.

### Preparation Required

see p. B114

This is often appropriate for advantages that require extended preparatory meditation, prayer, rituals, incantations, etc.

### Resistible

see p. B115

At the GM's option, a supernatural disease or magical poison might allow a Will-based resistance roll. Represent such things by adding Resistible and specifying an attribute besides HT; e.g., “Resistible, Will-3, -15%.” *Don't* use Based on (Different Attribute).

### Side Effect

see p. B109

An Innate Attack with Side Effect can have Based on (Different Attribute) to shift the resistance roll from HT to another attribute. Use this score instead of HT in the duration formulas, too. This is especially suitable for a supernatural attack that produces a curse-like effect that's tied to wound severity but more logically resisted by Will than by HT.



## Temporary Disadvantage

see p. B115

Those who wield evil or mind-warping powers often suffer major mental lapses the instant they activate their gifts. To simulate this, select a mental disadvantage that requires a self-control roll (e.g., Berserk or Pyromania), specify a self-control number of “N/A,” and price Temporary Disadvantage as if the disadvantage were worth 2.5 times its listed cost (drop fractions). Using the ability *always* causes the effects specified for a failed self-control roll.

*Example:* Yathrik Demon-Binder can summon a fire demon to “possess” his body in order to use its powers. However, the demon exists purely to make things *burn*. While Yathrik mostly remains in charge, he can’t suppress its nature. Pyromania is a -5-point disadvantage, so it’s worth -12 points if irresistible. Yathrik has a -12% limitation on his fire powers – he can’t activate them without immediately setting out to torch everything in sight!

## Uncontrollable

see p. B116

When using Uncontrollable to represent an ability that originates from a familiar or an allied spirit, the GM determines this being’s attribute scores and agenda, much as for an Enemy. It acts purposefully and perhaps subtly; it may even leave the user “in control” but pervert his intent; e.g., by sending *extra* commands when using Mind Control.

## Untrainable

see p. B116

In addition to suffering the limitation’s other effects, abilities with Untrainable gain *no* benefit from a power’s Talent (see *Power Talents*, p. 203).

## NEW ENHANCEMENTS

**GURPS Powers** introduces many new enhancements, several of which are highly appropriate for magical abilities; see that book for more information. The following enhancements are especially relevant here.

### Switchable

+10%

This is only available for physiological features, defenses, and other traits that are normally “always on.” It lets you switch your advantage off and on with a Ready maneuver. Specify whether it switches on or off – or remains in its current state, whatever that is – when you’re knocked out.

You can’t add Switchable to an advantage that lists special modifiers that enable you to turn it off and on, regardless of whether *your* ability has those modifiers. If an advantage notes Switchable as a special enhancement with a different value, use that value instead. Switchable isn’t permitted on meta-traits, either. To get a switchable meta-trait, buy an Alternate Form.

## World-Spanning

+50% or +100%

Your ability can reach parallel worlds. Find the distance in *space* as if you and your subject were on the same world. The GM may also permit a Plane-Spanning variant for abilities that work across dimensions other than parallel worlds. Either is worth +50% if you can *only* contact other worlds or planes, or +100% if your ability also works in your current realm.

The GM decides which advantages can use this enhancement. It’s meant for sensory and communications abilities (e.g., Clairsentience and Telesend), but might suit other mental abilities – like Possession – if the user also has an ability that lets him sense his target across the dimensions. If the GM allows this on an *attack*, Cosmic (+50%) is a prerequisite.

## NEW LIMITATIONS

**GURPS Powers** also includes several new limitations. The most useful of these are repeated below.

### Aspected

-20%

Your ability works only when pursuing a specific class of *related* tasks or activities (e.g., athletics, combat, investigation, or social interaction), or in a specific area of daily life (e.g., job, personal health, or romance). The GM has the final say, and can make the categories as broad or as narrow as he wishes.

Aspected is meant primarily for Intuition, Serendipity, and advantages that directly alter your odds of success at tasks (Luck, Super Luck, Visualization, etc.). The GM may allow it on other traits. Certain “aspects” aren’t *useful* even on normally permitted abilities, though; for instance, Visualization is slow enough that Aspected, Combat would make it largely worthless.

### Fickle

-20%

Your ability is or seems sentient, and sometimes reacts poorly. Make an *unmodified* reaction roll whenever you wish to use it. For an attack, make this roll before each use. For other abilities, the advantage works until you need to make a success roll for it . . . then make a reaction roll. For instance, Flight requires a reaction roll when you try a DX roll to “push the envelope,” or an Aerobatics or Flight skill roll, while Dark Vision calls for a reaction roll anytime you attempt a Vision roll in the dark.

On a reaction of Neutral or better (10+), the ability works as expected and you can attempt your attack roll, DX roll, Sense roll, etc., as applicable. A Very Good reaction (16-18) gives +1 to the ensuing roll; an Excellent reaction (19+) gives +2.

On a reaction of Poor or worse (9 or less), the ability fails. If it wasn’t already active, it refuses to activate. If it *was* active, it shuts down. This doesn’t normally endanger you directly; for instance, Flight sets you down gently and

## Affliction: The Evil Eye

According to some folklore, certain people have the ability to bring misfortune and even death upon others just by *looking* at them – perhaps without knowing it! A reputation for the “evil eye” can be *extremely* dangerous; a person suspected of possessing this power is liable to be blamed for anything bad that happens to someone in the community, especially if he quarreled with the “victim” at some point. The ensuing hostility can easily end in a lynching, as a punishment and in the hope of ending any continuing misfortune.

Ways to represent the evil eye in the game include spells such as Curse and Pestilence (at skill levels high enough that casting involves a glance and minimal effort), or rituals such as – unsurprisingly – Evil Eye (p. 149). Another option is the Affliction advantage, typically enhanced with Attribute Penalty, Disadvantage (often causing Chronic Depression, Cursed, Epilepsy, Klutz, Nightmares, Terminally Ill, Unhealing, or Unluckiness), or Heart Attack, although other effects are possible. It takes the Malediction enhancement, and possibly limitations such as Vision-Based or Onset. If it’s sometimes or always an unconscious effect, then add Uncontrollable and possibly Unconscious Only, or maybe Unreliable.

Given the reactions it can trigger, someone even *suspected* of having the evil eye may have a serious negative Reputation. It also makes a dangerous Secret.

### Countermeasures

The evil eye may sometimes be warded off by countermeasures that anyone can use. If such things are available, then this can justify a special Accessibility limitation, “Weaker against protected target.” Each +2 to the victim’s resistance roll gives a -5% limitation, or -10% if the protection is *extremely* easy to acquire and widespread in the culture. The GM may opt to treat measures that give +10 or more to resist as providing *totally* reliable protection.

Such defenses are highly culture-specific. Examples include ritual cross-dressing at vulnerable or dangerous times, or blackening the face (both aimed at disguising personal identity and thus confusing evil spirits); not eating or drinking in public (because the soul is more vulnerable when the mouth is open); wearing sacred texts, amulets, or charms (commonly hung on animals, too, since they’re also vulnerable to the evil eye); and ritualistic behaviors or gestures.

Insubstantiality leaves you in open space. Of course, the sudden loss of DR in battle or Dark Vision in an unlit room full of traps can endanger you *indirectly*.

On a reaction of Very Bad or worse (3 or less), the ability *does* endanger you, or turns on you *unpleasantly*. Flight drops you like a stone, Insubstantiality leaves you stranded inside a wall, your attack blasts you . . . The GM should be creative!

You can try to invoke a failed ability every second if you wish, but the reaction roll is at a cumulative -1 per repeated attempt as your ability (or the force behind it) becomes increasingly annoyed by your requests. To eliminate this penalty, you must go for a full hour without using your ability. When using Fickle as part of a power modifier, the outcome of the reaction roll and the hour needed to lift penalties for repeated attempts apply to the entire *power*.

The GM may permit a weaker limitation:

*Requires Reaction Roll:* Your ability works as described above, but normal reaction modifiers *do* apply to the reaction roll, and you can substitute an Influence roll. -5%.

## Glamour

### Variable

Glamour is only available for Chameleon, Elastic Skin, Invisibility, Shapeshifting (with the Cosmetic limitation), Silence, and similar traits that alter how others perceive you. Your ability controls others’ perceptions through a persistent hypnotic suggestion, mental illusion, or psychic compulsion. It doesn’t affect machines. Living victims get a Will roll to resist your influence and sense you normally –

and individuals with Mind Shield may add their level to this roll. A resistance roll against Will-5 is worth -5%. Each +1 to the roll is a worth another -5% (e.g., Will+4 is -50%).

## Insubstantial Only

-30%

Your ability *only* affects intangible targets: beings with the Spirit meta-trait, individuals using Insubstantiality, and those using Clairsentience, Jumper, or Warp with the Projection modifier (*GURPS Powers*, p. 44). This modifier is especially useful for attacks intended to exorcise spirits.

## Terminal Condition

Variable

This limitation is only allowed on abilities that affect others for at least a minute. Your enemies can end your ability’s ongoing effects with a simple act: kissing the subject, speaking three words, etc. If this condition isn’t met, the effects have their usual duration.

This is worth -5% if the condition is arcane enough to require research; -10% if a skill roll (against Religious Ritual, Ritual Magic, Thaumatology, etc.) can discover it; or -20% if common knowledge. These values become -0% (a special effect), -5%, and -10% if the condition is difficult to arrange even if known, like a kiss *from a princess* or words *spoken by a high elf*.

Abilities that *can’t* end until a certain condition is met just have Extended Duration, Permanent (+150%). This enhancement already requires such a condition – you can’t take Terminal Condition separately.

# POWERS

A “power” is a group of advantages with a common foundation and nature. The psionic powers on pp. B254-257 are good examples, but *many* other possibilities exist – including magical and supernatural powers of all kinds. Each power requires a pair of fundamental properties to describe it:

- *Source*: The origin of the energy that the power’s wielder manipulates to produce its effects. Some typical sources appear under *Advantage Origins* (p. B33) – e.g., Telepathy is “psionic” – but the GM can invent others.

- *Focus*: The thing the power manipulates or the concept it revolves around. This can be broad, but should be well-defined. It might be a form of matter or energy (e.g., air, cold, or electricity), some natural or supernatural phenomenon (e.g., death, second sight, or weather), an abstract principle (e.g., good or evil), or many other things.

Each power also has three game-mechanical components:

1. A set of advantages, the power’s *abilities*. Attributes and secondary characteristics aren’t normally allowed. Neither are advantages that grant bonuses directly to attribute or skill rolls, such as Acute Senses, Magery, Power Investiture, or Talent. Advantages that represent physiology, surgical modifications, etc., are also off-limits, unless they’re Switchable (p. 200). Lastly, a power can’t include skills or social traits (but note that the Summonable enhancement turns Allies into a supernatural ability).

2. A special modifier – usually a limitation – called a *power modifier*, applied to all of the power’s abilities.

3. A *Talent* that makes the power easier to use.

For book-length detail on these concepts, see **GURPS Powers**.

## Calculating the Power Modifier

A power modifier is simply the sum of one or more component modifiers – usually limitations. Common elements include:

- *Mundane Countermeasures*: If fairly obvious, easily accessible, *nonmagical* tricks or substances can negate the power, then add -10%. For example, water, sand, etc., would logically douse fire powers, while iron traditionally averts faerie powers.

- *Special Countermeasures*: If opponents with special or magical capabilities – such as wizards who can cast Dispel Magic – can negate the power, then add -5%. If available technology (e.g., anti-psionic gadgets and drugs) can baffle the power, then this is worth -5%, too.

- *Required Disadvantages*: If the power is conditional on behavior enforced through a disadvantage – obeying a Code of Honor or a Vow, leaving a Trademark, etc. – then add -1% to the modifier per point the disadvantage is worth; e.g., a power that requires a -10-point Vow has a -10% limitation. The power-wielder *also* gets the usual points for the disadvantage. Add +5% if the power vanishes gradually, with plenty of warning, if the user ignores the requirement – but

add -5% if it not only changes rapidly, but *turns against* the user. The difficulty of restoring the power after an indiscretion also affects the modifier: +5% for a day or so of prayer or meditation, or sacrifices worth a day’s income; +0% for a week out of adventuring, sacrifices worth a week’s income, a minor quest, or minor harm (1d injury or an irritating affliction); or -5% for a month out of adventuring, sacrifices worth a month’s income, a major quest, or serious harm (4d injury, crippling, or an incapacitating affliction). If the total from all this is positive, then reduce it to 0%; an advantage that’s conditional on minor behavioral rules and easy to restore if these are broken isn’t seriously limited, but it shouldn’t cost *more* than its basic form!

*Evil: I feel the power of evil coursing through my veins, filling every corner of my being with the desire to do wrong! I feel so bad, Benson!*

– **Time Bandits**

- *Channeled Energy*: A power may use some external energy source or condition. If this is generally available (e.g., mana, in most settings), then add -5%. If it’s relatively easy to cut off (e.g., sunlight), then that becomes -10%. Varying levels of the channeled energy often cause interesting problems. For instance, a power that channels mana won’t work at all if there’s no mana, has -5 to relevant die rolls in low mana, and may behave oddly in very high or wild mana.

- *Fickle Forces*: These include spirits and gods who may or may not help; the power-wielder must ask to invoke the power. Such powers incorporate the Fickle limitation (pp. 200-201), worth -20%. Fickle is intended chiefly for spirit powers, and best suits powers that command *capricious* spirits: demons, faerie, loas, etc. Powers granted by angels, genii, or totems tend to have required disadvantages instead. Of course, a spirit power could have *both*!

- *Other Factors*: Accessibility, Costs Fatigue, and Nuisance Effect are all common. Enhancements are rare but not unknown; e.g., Cosmic is appropriate for truly impressive powers.

*Example*: Mana Sensitive (p. B34) combines -5% for special countermeasures (Dispel Magic, etc.) with -5% for channeled energy (mana), for a net -10%.

## Power Talents

A power's Talent represents natural or learned aptitude with the power. It resembles a mundane Talent (p. B89), but instead of aiding skills, it gives a bonus to success rolls made to activate or use any of the power's abilities. This includes DX rolls to maneuver with movement abilities; Innate Attack skill rolls to hit; and IQ, Will, and Perception rolls to use mental abilities. For example, Telepathy Talent 3 gives +3 to IQ, Will, and Perception rolls for telepathic abilities.

Talent *doesn't* modify rolls for the *effects* of abilities, such as damage rolls, targets' resistance rolls, or rolls on the *Fright Check Table* (p. B360). It doesn't normally affect reaction rolls either, but the GM might make exceptions for entities directly conjured by the power (e.g., Allies with the Summonable enhancement) and beings associated with the power's source (e.g., angels that serve the god behind a divine power). Talent also doesn't aid rolls to work around limitations on abilities; for instance, it doesn't benefit the activation roll called for by the Unreliable limitation. In particular, Talent never adds to the reaction roll required by Fickle (pp. 200-201) – even if the GM rules that it influences *other* reaction rolls.

Talent only aids the abilities of the associated power. Since individuals with multiple powers must assign each of their abilities to a specific power, no roll ever gets a bonus from two or more Talents. However, an advantage that involves multiple success rolls gets the benefit of Talent on each roll; e.g., when Oracle is part of a power, Talent adds to both Sense rolls to detect omens and IQ rolls to interpret them.

Most power Talents cost 5 points/level. Very broad ones cost 10 points/level. One that affects nearly everything the character does costs 15 points/level. No one may buy more than four levels of a given Talent without the GM's permission. Power-wielders are never obliged to buy *any* Talent.

## SUPERNATURAL POWERS IN PLAY

When powers are just one aspect of the supernatural – alongside gods, spells, etc. – it becomes crucial to know how everything interacts. The GM may find the following rules and guidelines helpful.

### Power Talents and Magic

Talents associated with supernatural powers represent competence at manipulating supernatural energies. Logically, they might also help with other sorts of magic, and the GM may wish to let players apply Talent bonuses to the success rolls for such things. This requires great care, however.

The main concern is *balance*. For example, Magery gives +1 per level to spells and costs 10 points/level, so if some power Talent costs only 5 points/level and also adds to spells, then players who buy Magery will justifiably complain. Letting a Talent aid one or two noncombat skills, or the occasional attribute roll, is fine – it makes the power more interesting. More than that, though, and the GM should raise the Talent's cost to 10 or 15 points/level.

## Supernatural Creature Abilities

Many supernatural creatures have abilities that are, essentially, magic. Others are psionic, manipulate chi, or wield divine or natural power. True gods mostly have “cosmic” powers. These capabilities don't *require* limitations to reflect their source; they can be so fundamental to the being's nature that they work reliably almost everywhere. However, the GM may choose to treat them much like things discussed in this chapter – complete with limitations.

Racial templates for supernatural creatures don't usually incorporate full-scale *powers*, although that's not impossible. “My species' abilities” *isn't* usually a valid focus; while vampires might be able to transform into bats or mist, cling to walls, and hypnotize victims, those capabilities shouldn't be lumped together in a “Vampire power” (but a “Shapeshifting power” would certainly be valid). Likewise, dragons can't justify their flight, scaly hide, and flaming breath as abilities within a power, but they can use their wings for several effects (flight, gusts of wind, etc.), so a “Mighty Wings power” might just be okay.

*Spirits* certainly can have powers that reflect their specific nature, though. For example, air elementals may direct winds to batter opponents, move things, and fly, while a guardian spirit might possess an array of mental effects – illusions, terror, etc. – to enable it to drive away intruders. Major demons and the servants of powerful gods often have *very* formidable but focused abilities. **GURPS Powers** discusses powers related to elemental forces, natural phenomena (such as plant life), and abstract principles (e.g., good and evil), any of which could be appropriate to spirits.

### Gods and Arch-Devils

A cosmos' movers and shakers might well have abilities greater than most GMs feel inclined to detail in game-mechanical terms. However, cosmic laws may compel such beings to adopt limited forms when in the mortal world – and certain divinities may limit themselves, for their own ineffable reasons. Perhaps mortal flesh can experience greater pleasures than divine forms, or perhaps a deity likes to test mortals in combat and feels obliged to make the contest relatively fair. And of course mortals sometimes call lesser (but still impressive) beings “gods.”

Still, gods generally manifest *large* powers. It's simplest to give them a lot of Cosmic Power (see *Modular Abilities*, p. B71), but a deity responsible for one aspect of reality might have a themed power. In some cases, the power's nature will be rather obvious (as with gods of fire, storms, love, etc.); in others, it may need a little thought. For example, a god of scribes might have transformational abilities, because when he writes a new name for something, he also changes its nature. Legends suggest that most gods can fly or teleport vast distances, read minds, and change shape at will, but such things are less likely to belong to a power than to be part of a standard divine meta-trait.

## Dispelling Magical Advantages

If a magical ability is bought with limitations that make it vulnerable to suppression or negation by spells such as Dispel Magic, then the user will sometimes have to make a roll to oppose such spells – usually in a Quick Contest. Roll against HT + Talent for a physical ability, Will + Talent for a mental one.

Some spells, notably Counterspell, only work if the caster knows the specific spell being countered. To make them work against a magical ability, the user must possess that ability himself – although he may have it at a different level. At the GM's option, it may suffice to have an ability, or to know a spell, with a very *similar* effect.

*Example:* Fe Lung knows Counterspell and wishes to use it to prevent his antagonist, Ha Lung, from disturbing his tranquility by flying around. Ha is using the Flight

advantage limited with special countermeasures – it employs magical forces – but without any other modifiers. Fe would be fine if he had the exact same advantage. Unfortunately, he purchased his own Flight with other modifiers, including the Gliding limitation, which in the GM's opinion makes it too different. Ha mocks Fe, and flies on.

A month later, Ha returns. Since their last meeting, Fe has learned the Flight and Hawk Flight *spells*, which the GM rules come close enough. Fe shuts down Ha's Flight, and explains Ha's mistake while generously bandaging his injuries.

If a continuous magical ability (e.g., Regeneration) is shut down by an instantaneous spell, then to get it working again, the user must take a Ready maneuver *and* make a successful roll against HT + Talent for a physical ability, Will + Talent for a mental one.

# SAMPLE POWERS

Below are some sample supernatural powers. These are merely *examples*. It's entirely possible for other powers to share these names but be constructed differently.

## BARDIC ARTS

In some fantasy settings, “bards” are highly adept musicians whose skills cross the line into magic. It's perfectly possible to create an impressive and more-or-less magical *skill*-based bard using Enthralment (p. B191) and Musical Influence (p. B210) – this power is for even more cinematic figures. Bardic Arts mostly takes the form of subtle mind control, and possibly some reinforcement of the bard's *own* mind.

Many bards are trained to memorize huge quantities of historical information and lengthy epics, and would have Eidetic Memory. As artistic entertainers, they often have advantages such as Charisma and Empathy, too. None of these things are abilities within their power, however.

### Bardic Arts Modifier

-20%

This is simply an Accessibility limitation: Bardic Arts abilities only work while the bard is singing or playing his instrument of choice, and only affect people who can hear the music properly. The bard can always hear *himself* unless local noise levels are truly monstrous, so abilities that affect just him usually work. In all cases, the performance must be at least as loud as normal speech; thus, it's hard to use this power while being stealthy.

The bard can use any number of different instruments, but must have skill 14+ in each – or in Singing, if he uses that. He can talk while playing an instrument, but the music has to be louder, and he must make a Musical Instrument skill roll to keep the tune going correctly while he speaks. He can't converse while *singing*, however. Bards with exotic advantages such as Compartmentalized Mind

and Extra Mouth might be able to work around these problems (GM's option).

In some settings, bards are agents of a religion, and the GM may add a required disadvantages element to the modifier to reflect the rules of the faith.

### Bardic Talent

5 points/level

The cost rises to 10 points/level if this Talent also adds to mundane musical skills – although it's probably simpler just to purchase Musical Ability separately. The GM may permit the 10-point version to benefit the Enthralment and Musical Influence skills, too.

### Bardic Abilities

Affliction, with subtle effects, mostly imposing minor *mental* advantages or disadvantages; Fearlessness; Indomitable; Mind Control; Mind Shield; and Rapier Wit.

## ELEMENTAL COMMAND

This is magic for flamboyant high-fantasy and four-color superhero campaigns. It may also represent the sort of power that subtler wizards *dream* of acquiring! It involves direct control of the four elements of classical Western philosophy, but is easily adapted to fit other cosmologies (see *Alternative Elements*, pp. 47-48).

### Elemental Command Modifier

-5%

Elemental magic implies the use of channeled energy – some kind of “raw elemental power.”

*Options:* Elementarists who access mana rather than a distinct elemental power would have Mana Sensitive (-10%) instead.

## High Craft Powers

Mundane Talents may be supernatural in origin (see *Talents as Magic*, pp. 198-199), but can't be abilities within powers. Other advantages that assist specific types of craftsmanship *can*, however, which raises the possibility of "High Craft" powers. If the GM allows these, then anyone who wishes to take one must buy a relevant mundane craft skill at 15+.

*Power Modifier:* No specific elements are universally appropriate. The power modifier might well be +0%. On the other hand, a power that's a gift from a god of craftsmen may have required disadvantages (e.g., Disciplines of Faith).

*Talent:* High Craft Talent costs 5 points/level. It doesn't benefit normal craft skills – although many High Crafters *also* have a mundane craftsmanship Talent, and adding High Craft Talent to Visualization rolls can help a lot. If the GM opts to have a single Talent govern both regular and supernatural craftwork, then it should cost as much as the power Talent and the mundane Talent added together.

*Abilities:* These might include mental advantages focused on the topic, such as Gadgeteer, Intuition (Aspected, Craft-related tasks, -20%), and Visualization. Wild Talent (Focused, Craft, -20%) would grant "jack of all trades" versatility. Superhuman sensory abilities are also likely: Detect (for something related to the craft's materials or processes), Microscopic Vision, Penetrating Vision (perhaps limited to the interior structures of appropriate materials), Sensitive Touch, or even limited Psychometry. More "mythic" High Crafters could have Resistant (to common hazards of the craft) or Control (for their materials). Control cannot usually take the Ranged enhancement, and often has the special effect of needing to be worked through tools; the drawback of requiring tools and the benefit of being able to work indirectly through those tools (e.g., a blacksmith can use Control on red-hot iron without having to touch it directly) are assumed to balance out.

### Elemental Command Talent

10 points/level

This Talent costs more than most because the power is extremely broad, and will see frequent use in combat and many other situations where skill and accuracy count for a lot.

### Elemental Command Abilities

Affliction (dazzling fire-bursts, irritating sandstorms, etc.); Allies (elemental creatures), with Summonable; Binding; Control (an element, usually Common); Create (forms of an element, typically a Medium or Small category); Detect, for elemental phenomena; Doesn't Breathe; Enhanced Move; Filter Lungs; Flight; Infravision; Innate Attack (elemental blasts); Neutralize (Elemental Powers); Obscure; Permeation; Pressure Support; Speak Underwater; Telekinesis (elemental forces); Temperature Tolerance; Terrain Adaptation; Tunneling; Walk on Air; and Walk on Liquid.

## PERSONAL HOLINESS

Several advantages explicitly represent benefits suitable for individuals with great personal religious faith. The GM may wish to group these and other gifts into a power. In some settings, they represent subtle interventions by a god; in others, faith itself takes an almost tangible form. Atheists may explain such powers as unconscious use of natural psionic or magical ability, channeled into a form that the wielder believes *should* work – but even if this is true, the advantages still function the same way, because the wielder believes completely that they must.

Clerical Investment *might* be a prerequisite for this power, but not everyone who's truly devout belongs to the priesthood – despite what the priests themselves are likely

to claim. Someone who *is* this holy may well be drawn to a life of formal service, but even then, he might not necessarily have a position that grants the social and administrative powers of a full priest. Individuals widely *known* to be favored by a god often enjoy Social Regard, however.

### Personal Holiness Modifier

-15%

This degree of holiness demands that you lead an extraordinarily virtuous life. The required moral code is a -15-point disadvantage (-15%), typically Disciplines of Faith (Asceticism), Honesty (9), Sense of Duty (Entire Race), or a great Vow. Should you transgress, your god will suspend your power – but since he's benevolent, he won't cut you off if this would endanger you (+5%), save for the most egregious sins. To make amends, you must offer *significant* penance: up to a month of fasting, questing, or the equivalent (-5%).

*Options:* Dedication to less-benevolent deities might still constitute "holiness," and permit a wider range of required disadvantages. However, if you lapse, such a deity is likely to revoke your power *instantly*, causing it to turn on you in horrible ways until you make amends (-5%). A single unpleasant act will probably get you back in favor – and since you've already committed yourself to darkness, you should find this easy (+5%).

### Holiness

5 points/level

This is the power Talent for Personal Holiness. While "training holiness" may seem downright disrespectful, and several appropriate abilities don't require rolls to activate or use in any case, it isn't unimaginable that a holy man might learn to focus his will to use divine gifts to best effect – or just receive very good guidance from above.

## Clerical Spells and Power Investiture

*Clerical Spell-Magic* (pp. 65-71) offers an alternative treatment of supernatural power derived from faith and divine favor. It may be possible for a holy person to acquire both advantages and spells from the same source (although it's hard to imagine two *different* gods working through the same mortal in two different ways!). The spells correspond to specific divine gifts, while the power represents sheer strength of faith. Someone who has both may, at the GM's option, treat his Power Investiture as Holiness when using Personal Holiness abilities.

## Personal Holiness Abilities

Allies (angelic guardians), with Summonable; Blessed; Danger Sense; Healing, with Faith Healing; Illuminated; Intuition, with Preparation Required (guidance through prayer); Luck, with Active (minor divine aid); Magic Resistance; Mana Damper, with Switchable; Mind Shield; Neutralize (Magic, or other "ungodly" abilities); Reduced Consumption; Spirit Empathy; Static (Magic, or other "ungodly" abilities); Temperature Tolerance; True Faith; and Unfazeable.

Several of these advantages already incorporate restrictions on the user's behavior. When taken as part of this power, the restrictions that the power modifier imposes are *noticeably* more severe than those built into the advantage. A god may grant a single gift in return for obedience to a simple set of rules, but a full-scale power demands *more* worthiness!

## PLANE-WALKING

This is the ability to move (and perhaps reach) between dimensions, usually acquired via intensive study and meditation, but sometimes "genetically" from divine forebears, or even as a benefit of extreme holiness – the true saint being permitted to visit Heaven in the flesh. The gifted plane-walker might conceivably be able to step outside of



reality and then return instantly some distance away, or enter a spirit realm that overlaps with the material world, remaining visible in the latter as a phantom. Plane-walkers also tend to be good at dealing with the denizens of spirit dimensions, if only thanks to experience.

## Plane-Walking Modifier

-5%

This power can be disabled in places where access to the relevant planes is restricted by exceptional sanctity or unholy, by gods withdrawing a mortal's special privileges, or by the use of exotic magics or weird technology to "thicken the veil." Such things are considered special countermeasures. Otherwise, because Plane-Walking can come from such a wide range of sources, its modifier has few universal elements. The GM is free to add more in specific cases.

## Plane-Walking Talent

5 points/level

## Plane-Walking Abilities

Allies (extra-planar creatures), with Summonable; Detect, for extradimensional entities, dimensional portals, Warp or similar abilities in use, etc.; Enhanced Dodge; Insubstantiality; Jumper (World); See Invisible (Spirits); Snatcher; Spirit Empathy; and Warp.

## REINCARNATION

In settings where souls are reincarnated from lifetime to lifetime, some people may gain advantages from memories of past lives. Such recollections could be unlocked by special training, random chance, or a traumatic experience such as a near-repeat of a previous death experience or the ever-popular blow to the head.

While the Reawakened advantage (p. B80) is obviously associated with this kind of thing, it *isn't* part of this power. It is an Unusual Background that can justify access to skills and learnable advantages – not an "ability" in itself. It might be a *prerequisite* for the Reincarnation power, though.

Reincarnated individuals sometimes suffer from Split Personality. Continually calling up past thought-patterns can lead to some of them taking over!

## Reincarnate Modifier

-10%

This is an Accessibility limitation: the benefits this power grants are limited to things that could be recalled from *past* lives. For example, Modular Abilities and Wild Talent conferred by this power can't access skills from above the setting's current TL (unless the game world has a past age of lost high technology, which could justify letting the reincarnated character buy up his personal TL), and skills relating to specific modern equipment may suffer familiarity penalties.

The benefits the power-wielder can call up are generally limited to things he could plausibly *remember*. Recollections of past lives may include recall of training in

psionic powers, but psi power itself probably requires specific physical structures in the brain, so the new body can't do anything useful with the memories – although the Reawakened advantage could justify someone buying high levels of Talent with a *separate* psionic or magical power, without training or experience. Reincarnated people can be amazingly good guessers, though; centuries of experience in how the world works help a lot.

It might be tempting to require PCs with Reincarnation to have a list of past lives, and to restrict benefits from the power to things that could reasonably match experiences on that list. It's usually easier not to get that detailed, though – someone could have *dozens* of past lives – but to permit players to improvise new bits of backstory as appropriate, subject to GM approval. Simply keep a list of past lives mentioned so far, and avoid any that clash in historical dates – no remembering fighting against Napoleon in Russia in 1812 if you've already established that you were a 25-year-old sailor on HMS Beagle in 1832! If you take Racial Memory as one of your abilities, then it implies that you come from a species, family, or other group whose members have a peculiar tendency to reincarnate among their descendants; bear this in mind when determining past lives.

### Chi Control Powers

The Chinese term *chi* – *ki*, in Japanese or Korean – refers to a type of energy that flows through the human body and perhaps the entire universe. Experts can use meditative techniques to control chi, thereby empowering superhuman feats of strength, healing, etc. Such capabilities are typical of the heroes of legends and more far-fetched martial-arts movies. Chi powers are too large and varied a subject to describe properly here, but are covered in detail in **GURPS Martial Arts** and **GURPS Powers**.

Some sources describe chi control as being completely distinct from magic, but the two may interact. Conceivably, *all* magic could involve chi manipulation, with wizards using ambient chi – possibly equivalent to mana – to produce flashy effects, while meditative martial artists use more internal control for subtler but no less useful purposes.

### Reincarnate Talent

5 points/level

This Talent *doesn't* add to skills temporarily acquired through Modular Abilities or Wild Talent.

### Reincarnation Abilities

Common Sense; Cultural Adaptability; Intuition; Language Talent; Modular Abilities (Cosmic Power), optionally with Skills Only (-10%); Racial Memory; Social Chameleon; Special Rapport (karmic link); and Wild Talent.

The GM may wish to include Serendipity as well, since reincarnated individuals find or remember useful things amazingly often.

## SHAMANISM

A shaman is an expert at treating with spirits, doing so on a more equal basis than a priest deals with gods. The simplest way to accomplish this is with the Religious Ritual skill, to which some spirits respond favorably. However, shamans sometimes have more direct methods, and derive useful personal benefits from the interaction; e.g., they might borrow the senses of animal spirits, or be blessed with good luck. Because spirits govern and permeate the natural world, shamans may also be able to converse with supposedly nonsapient beings, or read omens in their surroundings. Extremely gifted individuals can even project their consciousness through the spirit world.

In some cultures, shamans have Clerical Investment. In others, their social position is less formal. They might have Social Regard – but Feared is often as fitting as Respected or Venerated!

### Shamanic Modifier

-5%

To sustain his powers, a shaman must follow an elaborate system of rituals, or form a relationship with a patron spirit. Hence, the power modifier includes a -5-point required disadvantage (-5%) – typically Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism) or Sense of Duty (Ally Spirits), or occasionally a Trademark. If the spirits are offended, they may turn against the shaman at the worst possible moment (-5%), but he can *usually* mollify them with a modest sacrifice or a day or so of prayer (+5%).

*Options:* Less reliable shamanic powers based entirely around the invocation of whimsical spirits may also incorporate Fickle (pp. 200-201). This could imply that merely *speaking* to spirits requires the use of other, unreliable spirits as intermediaries.

### Shamanic Talent

5 points/level

This Talent encompasses practice at defending yourself against spiritual possession (a common danger of shamanic work), and hence adds to Will rolls to resist such things, including when using Channeling.

*Option:* If Magery variants such as those used in Path/Book magic (Chapter 5) relate to influence over spirits, then the GM might allow shamans to use such Magery in place of Shamanic Talent.

### Shamanic Abilities

Absolute Direction; Allies (spirits or spirit-animals), with Summonable; Animal Empathy; Channeling; Clairsentience, with Projection (**GURPS Powers**, p. 44); Common Sense; Detect, for spirits, supernatural beings, or supernatural beings *and* phenomena; Discriminatory Smell; Jumper (Spirit), with Projection (**Powers**, pp. 57-58); Luck; Medium; Mind Probe, with Spirits Only (-25%); Mindlink (only with spirits); Oracle; Plant Empathy; See Invisible (Spirits); Speak With Animals; Speak With Plants; Spirit Empathy; and Ultrahearing.



More dramatic concepts of shamanism add the capacity to assume the shapes of totem animals via Alternate Form. Others let the shaman enter the spirit realm *physically*, using Insubstantiality with Projection (**Powers**, p. 56) – typically combined with Invisibility with Substantial Only, Switchable, and Accessibility, Only in spirit form (-10%). Some shamans also have Blessed, but this isn't considered part of the power, as it already incorporates restrictions analogous to the power modifier, and as special aptitude at dealing with minor spirits (Shamanic Talent) doesn't help in dealings with higher powers.

## SOOTHSAYING

Soothsaying is the power to foretell the future and discern hidden truths. While most soothsayers are limited to a single method, they can often acquire more than one sort of useful information this way – and some have a broader sensitivity to signs and portents. Soothsayers often know what to do so instinctively that they appear uncannily lucky, and well-controlled soothsaying can aid skill performance by anticipating problems.

### Soothsaying Modifier

#### Variable

A soothsayer typically has to focus on his power to the exclusion of a normal life, implying Disciplines of Faith as a required disadvantage: Ritualism (-5%), if he merely needs to follow various procedures scrupulously; Mysticism (-10%), if he must spend much of his time contemplating omens; or Asceticism (-15%), if he has to detach himself almost entirely from the here-and-now. Alternatively, if the power is god-given, then he may have to follow a code represented by a different self-imposed mental disadvantage,

such as Honesty or Code of Honor. Typically, loss of the power comes quickly but not in a dangerous way (+0%), and restoration requires only a minor quest or moderate sacrifices (+0%).

In some cases, the power “descends on” the soothsayer *despite* his wishes and efforts. This may imply completely different limitations. Uncontrollable is likely, perhaps with Unconscious Only, and very possibly also Nuisance Effect or Temporary Disadvantage (Odious Personal Habits, Noisy, etc).

### Soothsaying Talent

5 points/level

If the soothsayer receives his guidance from a god, uses clerical spells from the same source, and has Power Investiture, then the GM may let him treat his Power Investiture as Soothsaying Talent when using Soothsaying abilities.

### Soothsaying Abilities

Absolute Direction; Blessed, but *not* Heroic Feats; Clairsentience, but *not* with Reduced Time; Danger Sense; Detect, for supernatural beings and/or phenomena; Empathy; Intuition; Luck, with Active (a quick look at the immediate future); Oracle; Precognition; Psychometry; Serendipity; Spirit Empathy; Super Luck; and Visualization.

If the soothsayer acquires the Blessed advantage through his power and has a power modifier that requires him to follow his god's rules or commandments, then the restrictions that the modifier imposes must be noticeably more severe than those already built into Blessed. Mortals entrusted with knowledge of the future and hidden truths are held to *very* high standards by higher powers!

## Freeform Folkloric Magic

Any game system that offers rules for magic inevitably has to *restrict* it, limiting it to what the rules permit. That doesn't necessarily “feel” the same as magic as it appears in myths and stories, however. There, it's often depicted as an unrestricted but unreliable, whimsical force, beyond the comprehension of the story's point-of-view protagonists.

Thus, in “folkloric” or “fairytale” games, the GM may prefer to rule that magic is essentially the preserve of NPCs, who can just *do things* as the tale demands, without worrying about game mechanics – and without making excuses when the story requires them to remain inactive. This doesn't necessarily mean that magic is entirely inaccessible to PCs, though; one of the *things* that magical NPCs sometimes *do* is grant magical gifts to heroes, either as payment for services rendered or out of enigmatic benevolence. Some of these boons may take the form of advantages with modifiers suitable for magic; see *Magical Advantages* (pp. 197-201). Others will be one-off rituals, intended to accomplish a single effect that meets a

specific need; e.g., so long as the PC follows some specific instructions correctly, he can travel to another dimension, or walk unharmed through molten lava. These rituals are generally highly specific, and probably won't work outside of a particular time and place, so there's no need to charge points for them.

That said, while the powers of magical NPCs are mostly enigmatic, *some* of their abilities may be predictable and consistent; e.g., all wizards can fly, or change shape, or travel to the Nine Hells. Likewise, such figures might be powerless in a church, or vulnerable to silver weapons regardless of any precautions. This gives them a degree of controllability in plot terms, and offers the PCs clues as to how to deal with them if they turn hostile.

In general, this approach works best in a “narrative-heavy” campaign where an interesting plot counts for more than PC dominance, and where the players trust the GM to play broadly fair and spin a good tale, without too many ego issues.

# MORTALS WITH SUPERNATURAL SERVANTS

One conception of the mortal magician is that most or all of the effects that he seems to work directly – on other people or on the physical world – are *actually* produced by intangible and/or invisible spirits that are at his beck and call. His only true, personal power is the ability to communicate with and control these beings.

The snag with this approach is that to handle any sort of magician in play, the GM will need details – ideally a full character sheet, plus notes on behavior – for countless non-human beings. Even if such entities come in standardized forms, this can add greatly to the GM's workload – especially if he keeps hold of the spirits' character sheets so that the players can never be entirely sure what they can do. The GM might let players define their own servitor spirits, but then he'll sometimes have to veto ideas that don't fit the setting. Thus, this model is probably best saved for campaigns where it will be a major theme, worth the extra effort and debate.

## SUMMONING AND BINDING

Most magicians of this type have the ability to summon spirits. This usually isn't that rare in settings with lots of spirits – and wizards need to be able to find servants *somehow*. It might be as simple as speaking the spirit's name. More involved options include spells from *GURPS Magic* – see *Power Investiture (Shamanic)* (p. 66) for suggestions – and the rituals under *The Path of Spirit* (pp. 159-162).

Summoning ability isn't completely mandatory, though. If spirits appear reasonably often in the game world, then would-be wizards can locate them by paying attention to rumors and tracking them down. Skills such as Hidden Lore, Occultism, and Theology might suffice. Advantages such as Detect (Spirits), Medium, and See Invisible (Spirits) – all invaluable to any spirit-worker – can inform the seeker that he has succeeded, or that spirits happen to be nearby. Once a magician gets one or two spirits working for him, he may

send them to find and recruit more. Some wizards receive their first spirit-servant from another as part of their training or initiation, and work up from there.

The ability to *control* spirits tends to be more important. Again, this usually involves spells or rituals, but there may be alternatives. Spirits are often immensely rule-bound; have disadvantages such as Dread, Revulsion, and Weakness; are absolutely required to keep their word; or are simply highly controllable by anyone who uses the right “key,” reflected by Reprogrammable. Some may give, and keep, their word in exchange for fair payment; thus, for wizards with the Spirit Empathy advantage, simple use of Influence skills could suffice (see p. B359). In some settings, there might even be an appropriate specialty of the Law skill! Hence, it's conceivable for a knowledgeable expert with the right equipment and a lot of time and nerve to recruit spirit servants despite having few supernatural gifts.

## SUPERNATURAL ALLIES AND PATRONS

One restriction that PCs with spirit Allies face is that the maximum point total for an Ally is 150% of their own (see *Ally's Power*, p. B37). Since it's hard to define a being that has the 261-point Spirit meta-trait (p. B263) *and* any sort of useful abilities with less than about 300 points, such PCs will probably need to start at 200+ points. Not all spirits (in the broadest sense of the term) require the Spirit meta-trait, though. Some minor types may be locked in physical form. Most such spirits are in the shape of animals, although they're typically more intelligent than mundane creatures, with supernatural powers and perhaps above-average physical abilities. This can permit somewhat less expensive Allies – but any *significant* set of spirit-servants is still going to cost a lot of points.

*Faustus: Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,  
Resolve me of all ambiguities,  
Perform what desperate enterprise I will?  
I'll have them fly to India for gold,  
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,  
And search all corners of the new-found world  
For pleasant fruits, and princely delicates.  
I'll have them read me strange philosophy,  
And tell the secrets of all foreign Kings.*

– Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragedie of Doctor Faustus*

## “The Lord Gave, and the Lord Hath Taken Away”

This chapter offers several models for magic granted by supernatural beings. An important check on such abilities is that what was given can be *taken back*. The GM should be aware that enforcing this can get tricky.

One approach is *Mortals With Supernatural Servants* (pp. 209-210). The wizard invokes Allies (usually with Summonable and Special Abilities) or a Patron (often with Highly Accessible and Special Abilities), and asks those NPCs to use their own capabilities. This *seems* simple. However, it creates work for the GM, who must roleplay the supernatural NPCs. Moreover, the GM's first-person judgments can cause tensions with the players.

An alternative is *Powers* (pp. 202-208). The magician wields a power, and the power modifier has a required disadvantages element, adjusted to reflect how quick the empowering entity is to judge and to withdraw the privileges, and how easy it is for errant users to make amends; see *Calculating the Power Modifier* (p. 202). The GM must still roleplay, though! The granting NPC should veto uses of

the power that are inconsistent with the code of conduct he demands of his servant. If the power simply *works*, regardless of the NPC's agenda, then there's little justification for the reduced point cost.

In these and other cases, the GM must strive for balance, roleplaying a strong personality without making it *too* prone to lecturing mortals on correct behavior; enforcing arbitrary rules, and pursuing its own agenda. For instance, if the PC overstretches the supernatural NPC's patience just as in-game events come to a climax, then both PC misbehavior *and* the rules would – strictly speaking – justify the GM deciding that the being withdraws its aid, crippling the PC at a crucial moment. However, that almost certainly isn't worth the inevitable distraction from the plot and likely hard feelings on the player's part.

Thus, the GM should probably limit such magic to players and groups who don't mind roleplaying their PCs as servants of higher authorities, and who can accept that their coolness will be at the mercy of judgmental NPCs.

Of course, PCs *can* have relationships with far more powerful spirits – these just have to be Patrons or Contacts rather than Allies. In the world of spirit-magic as in mundane affairs, it can be tricky (although not impossible) to have *several* Patrons; a Patron can be jealous, and will often demand a Duty . . . and multiple Duties can easily clash. However, a magician *can* have a pantheon or “family” of spirits as a single, collective Patron, and call on different members of the group for diverse types of aid. Assume that such a Patron group is in broad agreement about what it expects of its followers.

These advantages frequently have modifiers. For Allies, Summonable is almost universal, Special Abilities is common, and Minion suits spirits that have been very effectively bound – although this last situation might also result in the Unwilling limitation. Likewise, Patrons often have Highly Accessible or Special Abilities, but also Minimal Intervention or Unwilling.

### *Example: A Shaman and His Spirits*

Crag Goggle-Eyes – a 250-point starting PC – is a powerful shaman whose magic comes from the spirits. His player, consulting with the GM, designs him as follows.

First, he needs some basic abilities to explain how he achieved his position. He has the advantages Medium [10], Power Investiture 2 (Shamanic) [20] (p. 66), and Spirit Empathy [10]. He also has 1 point each in the spells Affect Spirits, Bind Spirit (Animal Embodiments), Bind Spirit (Spirits of Place), Command Spirit (Animal Embodiments), Command Spirit (Family Totems), Command Spirit (Spirits of Place), Control Air Elemental, Control Water Elemental, Repel Spirits, Summon Spirit, and Turn Spirit. This comes to 51 points.

Crag's most important spirit association is with Father Turtle, a water-and-nature spirit who inhabits a lake near his tribe's hunting grounds. Some people would say that Turtle

was Crag's totem; Crag met him by chance years ago, and has built a good relationship. Turtle is Crag's Patron. He's an extremely powerful individual who appears on 12 or less, costing 30 points. He *isn't* Highly Accessible, being mystically bound to his lake; to contact him from elsewhere, Crag must send a spirit messenger. Of course, Turtle's aid doesn't come free; Crag owes him a Duty (9 or less).

Turtle has commanded one of his own servants to work for Crag as a “familiar.” This being takes the form of a large goose – not the most imposing of animal Allies, but he does have some supernatural powers of his own. He's a 125-point character (50% of Crag's total). As an Ally appearing on 15 or less, he costs 6 points.

Crag also has four spirits serving him. They're 300- to 375-point characters, making them base 10-point Allies. The first is an ancient tribal guardian that comes from wherever it may be when the tribe's shaman speaks its name; it's Summonable, and available on 12 or less. The second serves freely, in exchange for small favors and minor sacrifices, but is often elsewhere; it appears on 9 or less. The third is similar, but lacks independent will and so serves without question when it's around – a Minion that shows up on 9 or less. The last is a petty demon that Crag caught harassing his tribe and threatened with revelation of its secret name (provided by Turtle in payment for a large favor); it's Unwilling, but available on 15 or less, since Crag has it terrified. They cost 40, 10, 15, and 15 points, respectively.

Lastly, Crag can ask numerous local spirits for information about events in the spirit-world. They constitute a Contact Group that provides Area Knowledge, Hidden Lore, Naturalist, Occultism, Pharmacy (Herbal), Weather Sense, etc., with effective skill 15 and the ability to obtain information magically. They're available on 15 or less, and somewhat reliable. This costs 45 points.

All this costs Crag 212 points, less -5 for his Duty. That leaves his player with 43 points, plus any points from further disadvantages, to round out the character.

# SPIRIT VESSELS

Another class of magic defined using advantages involves a mortal who's temporarily infused with a spirit or god's power, borrowing some of its abilities. Although the subject usually retains control of his actions, the experience often involves partial possession; in addition to having to follow his supernatural visitor's code of conduct, the host undergoes temporary personality shifts. These rules refer to people empowered in this way as "spirit vessels." More colorful terms found in specific settings include "spirit warriors," "temporary avatars," "horses," and "god-masks."

In many traditions, no one can *ever* have more than one spirit-vessel guise. The vessel owes absolute allegiance to a specific supernatural power, who won't accept divided loyalties – even if they involve other beings to which it's friendly. Regular possession by multiple superhuman entities may also be stressful on one's sanity! In other beliefs, it's possible to have a whole array of cooperative spirit aides. Regardless of such considerations, powerful spirits and gods are almost universally capable of dividing *their* attention, and thus can have and empower several vessels simultaneously.

## Prerequisite Advantages and Disadvantages

People might become spirit vessels because they're sensitive to the spirit world, or they could develop sensitivity through their experiences. Thus, advantages such as Blessed, Channeling, and Medium are common. Some traditions may actually *require* one or more of these.

From the spirit or god's viewpoint, possessing a vessel might be a means to practical ends, or something more. Often, it's a way to experience the pleasures of mortal life. In that case, the devotee may be *required* to open himself for possession regularly, perhaps at religious ceremonies – an aspect of a mandatory Disciplines of Faith disadvantage.

## Game Mechanics

The spirit vessel's ability is represented by the Alternate Form advantage (pp. B83-84). For each being that empowers vessels, the GM must create a "racial" template, and vessels have to base their Alternate Forms on these standard templates. Players may make suggestions regarding a template's makeup – but ultimately, the empowering spirit's nature, as defined by the GM, determines the vessel's abilities. The GM should be cautious of players who suggest vessel concepts with no strong unifying theme or personality; this capability represents being the favored servant of a supernatural being, not merely an easy way to justify a bundle of paranormal advantages. Personal variants aren't permitted, either; mortals can't pick and choose among gifts from higher powers!

However, spirit vessels *may* use a partial version of a template if they already possess a trait found on the full template; see *Templates and Personal Abilities* (pp. 212-213). This isn't a general option for Alternate Forms; vessels are

receiving a set of abilities, not transforming into a standard shape. Since spirits are traditionally *more* likely to aid mortals who have something in common with them already, the GM shouldn't discourage this.

Also unusually for Alternate Form, the change *doesn't* normally physically transform the spirit vessel. The benefits (he can pass as his normal self, where that's useful) and drawbacks (no free disguise effect) generally balance out. The vessel may carry himself differently while possessed, however – and there *are* exceptions where a transformation occurs.

## Lesser Alternatives

Very minor instances of spiritual possession, with only small benefits, *don't* require Alternate Forms, templates, etc. The GM may allow advantages, and possibly attribute increases, with limitations such as Pact (representing the fact that they're gifts from spirits, who can withdraw them if the user misbehaves) or Temporary Disadvantage (if they come with troublesome side effects). Channeling is appropriate for someone who simply acts as a mouthpiece for spirits. The GM can treat other lesser possession effects as Split Personality. Indeed, whether someone shares his body with a spirit or is merely crazy might not be obvious to ordinary observers – he could be suffering from a Delusion or Phantom Voices!

## TEMPLATE FEATURES

Spirit vessels can have a wide range of abilities. The following are merely suggestions.

## Attributes and Secondary Characteristics

Attribute and secondary characteristic modifiers are very common. A spirit vessel often becomes more capable in many ways, gaining extra ST, DX, IQ, or Basic Speed. The infusion of supernatural energy may also grant HT or FP, and many spirits are noted for their iron Will or superhuman Perception.

## Advantages

Spirit vessels usually gain multiple advantages. Some of these are quite mundane; e.g., a fragment of the spirit's commanding personality (Charisma) or creativity (Versatile). Others are overtly supernatural; for instance, a lightning spirit may grant an Innate Attack, a bird-totem might give Flight, or a deity could bestow the ability to throw potent curses or blessings in the form of Afflictions. Most will be mental or supernatural, or physical advantages that don't require visible bodily changes (such as Ambidexterity, or a few levels of Acute Senses), but some spirits might induce gross transformations. Many vessels gain a few points of Damage Resistance with the Tough Skin limitation (sheer supernatural resilience).

## Disadvantages

Most spirit-vessel templates include at least one or two mental disadvantages; spirits' personalities tend to be intense and idiosyncratic. Such traits often have poor self-control numbers – spirits rarely see much reason to exercise restraint, and their nature is likely to overwhelm a mortal's personality completely. In some cases, the spirit may even impose physical, supernatural, or exotic disadvantages; possession might change the mortal's form, or the spirit may act in some way out of *habit*. For instance, a maimed god might make his vessels effectively Lame, while a demon could cause possessed worshippers to display a Revulsion to holy symbols.

Social disadvantages are less common, but a spirit vessel might start worrying about the spirit's Dependents, or be attacked by its Enemies. However, disadvantages like this often apply even when the mortal isn't possessed, and hence belong on his standard list, not on the template. The GM can *require* vessels to take such disadvantages separately.

### Exhausting Transformations

Some vessels find it tiring to remain in empowered form for long. To represent this, add Dependency on resuming natural form – a Very Common “item” – to the template, with the limitation Fatigue Only (-50%) from Weakness (p. B161). Two examples:

- Dependency (Assuming my natural form; Constantly; Fatigue Only, -50%) [-12]. *Notes:* The character pays 1 FP/minute after a minute in vessel form, and stops losing FP after a minute in his natural form.
- Dependency (Assuming my natural form; Hourly; Fatigue Only, -50%) [-10]. *Notes:* The character pays 1 FP/10 minutes after an hour in vessel form, and stops losing FP after 10 minutes in natural form.

Optionally, the GM may prohibit versions of Dependency that cost FP less frequently; they're unlikely to represent much of a disadvantage.

### Skills

Gods and spirits often grant their vessels a fragment of the special skills for which they're noted; e.g., somebody possessed by a blacksmith-god might display impressive metalworking abilities. Thus, it's fitting for templates to include skills. Alternatively, the entity could grant *potential* rather than specific abilities, making a “racial” skill bonus (p. B452) or a Talent more appropriate; e.g., the package for that blacksmith-god might include +3 with the Smith (Iron) skill, or a couple of levels of Artificer.

## TEMPLATES AND PERSONAL ABILITIES

Occasionally, traits on the spirit-vessel template may duplicate or otherwise interact with the mortal's normal personal traits.

Where interactions involve a *clash*, disadvantages generally override advantages; for instance, a mortal with Blindness can't use Telescopic Vision that comes as a

standard part of his spirit-vessel template, while someone with Acute Hearing loses its benefit while acting as a vessel with a template that includes Deafness. When two disadvantages (or advantages!) conflict, template traits *usually* supersede personal ones; e.g., someone who's normally Chummy loses that disadvantage if he takes on a template that includes Loner. However, the GM may rule that a major personal disadvantage suppresses a minor template disadvantage – even one that's part of the spirit vessel's nature – and delete the latter from the template, increasing the Alternate Form's cost. The GM should penalize players who try to use templates to get around their characters' disadvantages, though; for example, anyone who switches back and forth between Chummy and Loner is likely to get into a lot of suddenly stressful situations. A spirit might even be unwilling to take on a vessel with a radically opposed personality, and the GM is free to ban such character designs outright.



Where the individual and the template *share* advantages or disadvantages that come in levels or otherwise combine or “stack” meaningfully, simply add them, disregarding normal level limits; e.g., someone with Charisma 2 who takes on a template that includes Charisma 4 exhibits effective Charisma 6. If “rounding” is necessary, this always works against the mortal; for instance, if somebody who's Handsome [12] adds a template with Unattractive [-4], he ends up with a net 8 points in Appearance, which “rounds down” to Attractive [4], while a person with 8 points in the Poetry skill who gets another 2 points from a template has 10 points in Poetry, which isn't enough to grant an improvement. For disadvantages with self-control numbers, use the sum of the point values to find an appropriate, worse level; for example, if a man with Bully (15) [-5] acquires a template with Bully (12) [-10], then he displays Bully (9) [-15]. The GM might wish to encourage duplication like this – spirits and gods *like* having followers who emulate them, and will probably be more inclined to lend power to such people!

In some cases, the mortal will have an advantage or a disadvantage that renders part of his spirit-vessel template irrelevant. When this occurs, simply delete or modify the trait on the template, and adjust point values accordingly. *This is an exception to the general rule that standard templates can't be modified.* Contrary to the guidelines given earlier, the generous GM may also opt to remove template

advantages that the mortal's disadvantages render useless, such as Telescopic Vision for someone with Blindness. In that case, if the disadvantage is somehow cured, then the player must not only find the points to eliminate his PC's disadvantage – he must also increase his Alternate Form cost and pay for *that*.

*Example:* Jacinth the Liar grants spirit vessels Elastic Skin [20], Empathy [15], Voice [10], and Compulsive Lying (6) [-30]. There are no limitations on the Alternate Form, so it normally costs a human  $15 + (0.9 \times 15) = 29$  points.

Adam Jones becomes a vessel of Jacinth. However, he already has Voice and suffers from Compulsive Lying (15) [-7] – he's a natural devotee! Voice can't be taken more than once, and Compulsive Lying can't have a self-control number worse than 6, so *his* template contains only Elastic Skin [20], Empathy [15], and Worsen Compulsive Lying to (6) [-23]. Becoming a spirit vessel costs *him*  $15 + (0.9 \times 12) = 26$  points.

## Nonhuman Spirit Vessels

Normally, the cost of Alternate Form is based on the *difference* in cost between the target form's template and any racial template the buyer already possesses. Activating Alternate Form causes the new template to *replace* the user's native one. As written, these rules could lead to the oddities such as an elf paying less to be a spirit vessel, but losing his elven racial abilities when he assumes his spirit guise . . . which doesn't really fit the spirit-vessel concept.

Fortunately, there's a simple solution: everyone, regardless of race, pays the same cost to be a vessel for a given spirit. Nonhumans effectively buy a variant spirit-vessel template that includes all of the traits on their racial template, which therefore remain when they transform. The costs then balance correctly.

## LIMITING THE ADVANTAGE

Alternate Form can take limitations and a few enhancements – several of which are appropriate for some spirit vessels. Modifiers apply to the basic 15-point cost per form, but *not* to the form-specific cost (90% of the difference in template costs). For the purpose of modifiers, transformation in either direction counts as a one-off “use” of the advantage, but merely remaining in the transformed state – for however long – *doesn't*. Of course, advantages on the template can have their own modifiers, which *will* change template cost and apply whenever those advantages are used.

- *Transformation Time:* Alternate Form normally takes 10 seconds of concentration to change, which is reasonable for a certain amount of prayer or meditation. However, some transformations may be quicker or slower; to reflect this, add Reduced Time (p. B108) or Preparation Required (p. B114), respectively. Preparation Required is more appropriate than Takes Extra Time (p. B115), although *one* level of the latter might be acceptable.

- *Energy Cost:* Acting as a conduit for superhuman energies may strain a mortal body. Reflect this with Costs Fatigue (p. B111). This means that the user pays FP at the

time of transformation, not to *remain* transformed (but see *Exhausting Transformations*, p. 212).

- *Conditional Favor:* This advantage often depends on obeying rules imposed by the spirit, and hence can easily qualify for a Pact (p. B113). The spirit vessel must live up to such requirements at *all* times. When transformed into vessel form, he should find it almost *impossible* to behave inappropriately – the spirit has significant influence over his actions, and disadvantages on the template are likely to reinforce its code of conduct. In some cases, though, spirits or gods aren't bound by the commandments that they expect mortals to obey, and may break them when “riding” a mortal's body. For example, if eating a particular foodstuff is a privilege reserved for the gods, then a faithful worshipper couldn't do so most of the time – but he *could* when acting as a vessel for the deity, who might well take the opportunity to enjoy this pleasure of the flesh. Higher powers who limit their aid to specific spheres of activity might even inflict Aspected (p. 200).

- *Unreliable Spirits:* Some beings don't always *want* to help. Represent this using Fickle (pp. 200-201) – or possibly the lesser Requires Reaction Roll version, for an entity that's open to negotiation. A spirit may see empowering vessels as a very personal matter; the GM is free to apply bonuses or penalties to the reaction roll if the spirit regards the task at hand as especially important, inappropriate, or trivial. Asking for aid fighting an ancient cult enemy might be worth +2 or more, while using spirit-vessel abilities to avoid minor inconveniences might give -4. Lengthy summoning rituals, sacrifices that the spirit appreciates, etc., could also merit a bonus, especially in the case of Requires Reaction Roll. The GM shouldn't encourage *too* much bonus hunting by those with the full-fledged Fickle limitation, though; at -20%, it's a problem that should bite, and fairly often. If the spirit simply wants the mortal to obey some commandments, but provides reliable aid on that condition, then use Pact instead; if it will only help when the vessel faces real danger, but is dependable in those circumstances, then use Emergencies Only (p. B112).

- *Downright Dangerous Spirits:* A spirit might even take direct control of a vessel in unexpected or stressful situations, and pursue its own interests rather than those of the mortal. Represent this using Uncontrollable (p. B116). Since such spirits tend to have several substantial mental disadvantages on their vessel templates, and most are capable of doing a significant amount of damage while in charge, the “harmful ability” version of Uncontrollable (-30%) is often justifiable.

- *Other Limitations:* Further elements depend on the spirit's nature and attitudes. Plausible options include Limited Use (p. B112) if the spirit will only come a few times in any day, and Trigger (p. B115) if the “possession ritual” requires sacrifices or a drug. If spirits must tap ambient mana or similar – or perhaps even a mundane power source, such as sunlight – to transform their vessels, then apply the channeled energy limitations from *Calculating the Power Modifier* (p. 202).

See *GURPS Fantasy* and *GURPS Powers* for additional modifiers and options for Alternate Form.

## Becoming the God

Spirit-vessel abilities are highly variable, being intimately tied to the granting entity's personality and capabilities. In many beliefs, the spirit vessel *becomes* his god, in a limited but real sense; while his gift can be used for mundane ends, it has a devotional aspect. Spirit vessels aren't always priests of their religion – clerics may even be *required* to operate in a more formal way, leaving spirit vessels to act as freelance agents of the faith – but they're definitely a part of it.

Spirit vessels don't always serve "gods" as such, however; in some traditions, spirits who are much less than divine empower mortals. Nor are all vessels good; indeed, they might channel demons or *evil* gods. If such malevolent beings exist and work through mortals, then the psycho killer or master criminal who says "My god told me to do it!" may be *telling the truth* – and can be terrifyingly powerful.

## SAMPLE SPIRIT VESSEL PACKAGES

The GM need not permit these spirit-vessel forms in *his* campaign, but they illustrate the basic concepts involved.

### The Mask of Coyote

Coyote is a trickster god in some Native American mythologies. Deceitful, ungrateful, and often obsessed with food or sex, he's also a law-giver, imposing order on the world through magic and divine pronouncements. In some tales, he dies – but he always comes back. This package assumes that a shaman or a magician can assume the guise of Coyote by donning a special mask and performing a ritual dance. The spirit vessel gains some of Coyote's trickiness and a little of his immortality, along with a few of his appetites and faults . . . *if* Coyote chooses.

#### Template

138 points

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST+2 [20]; DX+2 [40]; IQ+3 [60]; HT+2 [20].

**Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:** Will-5 [-25].

**Advantages:** Elastic Skin (Glamour, Will-2, -20%) [16]; Hard to Kill 2 [4]; Speak With Animals [25].

**Disadvantages:** Gluttony (12) [-5]; Lecherousness (12) [-15]; Trickster (9) [-22].

**Skills:** Fast-Talk (A) IQ+3 [12]; Traps/TL0 (A) IQ+2 [8].

#### Spirit-Vessel Advantage

131 points

The base 15-point cost of Alternate Form has these limitations:

- Accessibility, Must wear a special carved mask and dance to trigger possession (but don't have to keep them around afterward), -10%
- Fickle, -20%
- Preparation Required, 10 minutes, -30%

These total -60%. The cost to be a spirit vessel of Coyote is thus  $(15 \times 0.4) + (138 \times 0.9) = 6 + 125 = 131$  points.

Make the first daily self-control roll for Trickster the moment the vessel transforms. If he resists the impulse and subsequently changes back to normal, his current cumulative penalty to the roll carries over to the *next* time he dons the Mask!

### Chango

The Voodoo loa of lightning, volcanoes, and fire, Chango represents uncontrolled energy. He's by no means evil, but he *is* a fiery warrior who acts with little regard for consequences. Syncretistic cults identify him with Saint Barbara, the Christian patroness of gunpowder. His spirit vessels tend to wild behavior, plunging their hands into boiling water, eating lit cigars, and playing with fire – all without harming themselves – and speak in deep, thunderous voices. This treatment assumes that he'll generally aid his vessels, especially if they make a plausible plea, and that possession is quick to invoke but slightly tiring.

#### Template

204 points

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST+6 [60]; DX+3 [60]; HT+2 [20].

**Advantages:** Burning Attack 2d ("Fire-Starting"; Area Effect, 4 yards, +100%; Selectivity, +10%) [21]; Burning Attack 3d ("Lightning Strike"; Accurate +2, +10%; Affects Insubstantial, +20%; Overhead, +30%; Surge, +20%) [27]; Damage Resistance 10 (Limited, Fire and Electricity, -30%) [35]; Damage Resistance 4 (Tough Skin, -40%) [12].

**Disadvantages:** Bad Temper (9) [-15]; Lecherousness (12) [-15].

**Quirks:** Wild and dramatic behavior (-1 or -2 on reactions from people who don't expect or understand it, and sometimes draws unwanted attention) [-1].

#### Spirit-Vessel Advantage

201 points

The base 15-point cost of Alternate Form has these modifiers:

- Costs Fatigue 1, -5%
- Reduced Time 1, +20%
- Requires Reaction Roll, -5%

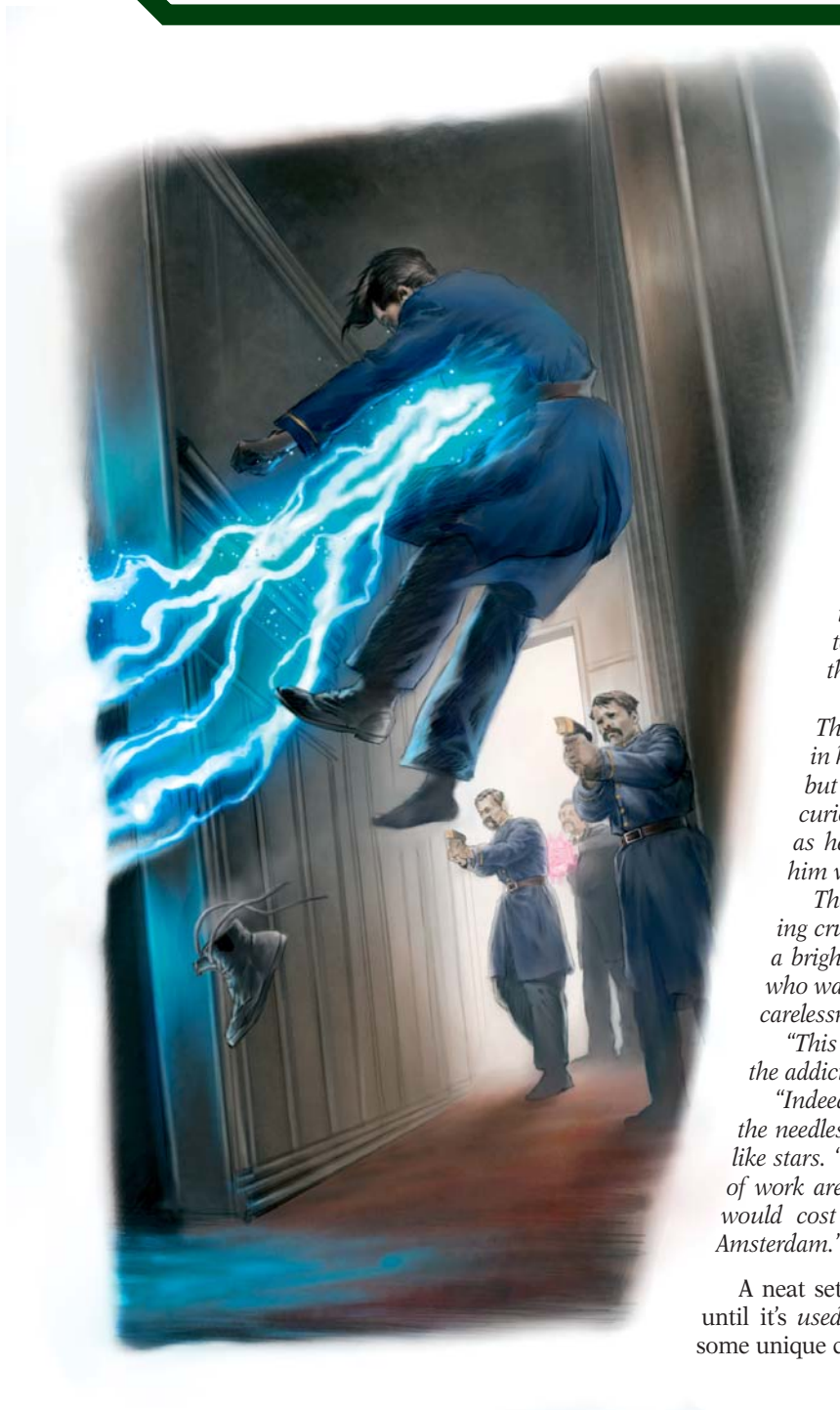
That's +10%. The cost to be a spirit vessel of Chango is thus  $(15 \times 1.1) + (204 \times 0.9) = 17 + 184 = 201$  points.

**Variants:** When the vessel is a woman or a child, speaking in the voice of Chango adds Disturbing Voice [-10] to the template, reducing advantage cost to 192 points.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

# GAMES OF HIGH ENCHANTMENT



In a shabby lodging in Victorian London, the addict lay disarrayed and motionless on his unmade bed. His eyes were closed, but he was not unconscious; indeed, his senses were attuned beyond the merely human. Thus it was that he noted new arrivals downstairs; and yet, they had not entered through door or window.

This, the addict found curious, in a trivial, momentary way. He flailed a little, locating another hypodermic syringe.

Moments later, the first I-Cop entered the room cautiously, gun in hand – but when he saw the addict, with needles discarded on the bedside table, he relaxed. **Typical junkie**, he thought, and stepped forward. Then the addict's eyes snapped open and focused, and the addict spoke a tongue-twisting word. Lightning arced across the room and took the I-Cop in the chest, throwing him back out the door.

There was a gabble of voices, and then a pause. Then, another I-Cop appeared in the doorway, weapon in hand. The addict murmured another strange word – but now, nothing happened. The addict found this, too, curious, but then the I-Cop shot him with a taser, and as he convulsed, a third member of the team injected him with a tranquilizer.

The team's ally-of-convenience entered the room, wiping crushed lavender and mandrake from his hands with a bright blue handkerchief. He glanced at the first I-Cop, who was receiving first aid, and muttered something about carelessness. The team medic scowled back.

"This is him, then," the I-Cop sergeant asked, indicating the addict.

"Indeed." The Cabalist picked up a glass phial from beside the needles. Even in the dim lamplight, the contents glittered like stars. "And here's his drug. You know, people in your line of work are forever talking about street values, but this stuff would cost a fortune at a jeweler's in Hatton Garden or Amsterdam." He smiled. "Irony everywhere one looks."

A neat set of magic rules is all very well, but it's pointless until it's used. Putting together a magic-using campaign has some unique challenges and considerations.



# MAGICAL CAMPAIGNS

While magic in “traditional” fantasy games isn’t exactly *mundane*, it’s often a means rather than an end, and variant magic systems are merely different tools. If you’re going to the trouble of defining unique magic systems, however, then magic may well be the campaign’s central theme – and perhaps its entire *point*. The PCs could all be wizards, or their assistants, patrons, or employees. Plots might revolve around research, mastering new techniques, building a cooperative community of adepts, or using one sort of magic against another. Subplots might be little more than incidental distractions.

The divisions between these categories aren’t firm, though. Magical researchers intent on burying themselves in their books can get dragged into a *lot* of subplots – whether they like it or not. “Unworldly” academics may evolve into consummate politicians, so involved in acquiring resources and security that they forget the study that’s supposed to be the point of the exercise. Conversely, academic concerns could motivate the most pragmatic-seeming adventuring mage or court wizard. While other adventurers plunder ancient tombs for gold and gems, their mage companion might be sifting through fragile scrolls and worn inscriptions. The courtier may have a secret agenda involving the protection of his old college – or even the creation of a magical government.

## Research Games

Research may seem dull as the basis for a plot, but much depends on the *type* of research. The most dramatic option is “paranormal archaeology”: digging lost secrets and puissant items out of ancient ruins while fending off rivals, guardians, and monsters. But research can be exciting without being cinematic; it might involve long journeys to talk to reclusive archmages, visits to strange lands to locate dusty libraries, negotiations with proud and touchy spirits, or voyages of exploration, mapping the world’s magical geography and discovering new beings and secrets. The transportation for such missions could be magical in itself – perhaps flying ships might carry the PCs into the crystal spheres of the heavens!

Even quiet lab-and-library work can be interesting, especially if the GM has worked out a reasonably complex metaphysical system and the players are interested in its implications. The PCs can spend their time probing the limits of knowledge, exchanging ideas, and occasionally emerging to track down an experimental ingredient, take tea with a wise old mentor, or argue theory with some fool of a rival. Experimental magic isn’t without risks, and ancient texts might be dangerously flawed – or even deliberately booby-trapped by malicious predecessors or demons seeking souls to corrupt.

If magic derives directly from gods or spirits, then things become even more blurred. Holy magic is primarily about making the world fit the divine pattern better, while spirit magic only works if the spirits are kept happy. Those who use either always have *some* nonmagical concerns.

## MAGICAL ADVENTURES

Campaigns that revolve around magic – especially those that focus on wizard PCs – can use all the usual RPG plots, but certain kinds of adventures are *especially* suitable.

### Quests

A classic magic-focused plot is about getting *more* – more magic, more energy, more occult secrets, etc. Because magical lore is often obscure, the standard plot structure here is a *quest*. This fits well with the common assumption that wizards are curious academics who might not be interested in power as such, but who are insatiably hungry for *knowledge*, which comes to much the same thing in the world of magic. The mere hint of a lost text or a unique item can send them across continents or dimensions.

Of course, quests for power can be high-minded, if the power will be used for good. Conversely, the most amiable of scholars can have rivalries, or personal theories that he *desperately* wants to prove. And questing adventurers may occasionally seek out sources of power or knowledge in order to *destroy* them, either because they’re too dangerous or because they contradict some pet theory. It’s perfectly possible for magic-users to go on quests for money or other simple rewards, too – even wizards have to eat. Finally, a time-honored plot has a master wizard sending a junior colleague on a quest that interests only the senior partner, in exchange for teaching or assistance in wizardly politics.

### Saving the World (or Destroying It)

When a threat is big or weird enough, magic may be the only thing that can deal with it. Thus, mages could be called upon for help – even if they’d rather stay in the library. If the heroes have enough warning of some great menace, they might actually have time to study strange arts from scratch. And some wizards are just naturally venturesome, and hence likely to encounter threats while pursuing their interests in deeper mysteries.

One plot of this kind is the search for “plot tokens”: magical items arbitrarily defined as being the *only* thing that can save the world, stop the evil god, etc., and that the heroes must collect from all the places to which they’ve been scattered. The arch-villain almost inevitably knows about this quest – or at least is aware that it’s a possibility – and sends agents to stop it and maybe grab the power first. A classic variation makes some plot token a necessity for the villain’s schemes, and destroying it especially hard; the quest then is to find a method of destruction that works.

Alternatively, the plot may task the PCs with *destroying* the world, and send them looking for the necessary

knowledge, power, or plot tokens. This doesn't mean that they have to be nihilistic villains. They could be a counter-strike team invading a world of unremitting evil that's attacking their own. Or perhaps the world's destruction is inevitable, but if it's accomplished in the right way, then it will be possible to recreate it afterward in an improved form. Or maybe the wizards know that the world is a *prison*, and that destroying it will free all the souls trapped within.

### **“Because It’s Cool”**

Assuming that there must be some great justification for a power-quest may be over-intellectualizing, of course. Chasing mystical secrets and legendary spells “just because” might seem immature, but why should mages be paragons of maturity? Being the coolest kid on the block always appeals, and if getting there involves a few risks – to the wizard or to reality – well, nothing good was ever easy. Wizards with such motivations often see adventuring as a high-risk, high-return option: learning by doing and digging out hidden secrets is faster, and more entertaining, than hanging around the lab or library.

This sort of adventuring may seem tricky for the GM – how do you keep the PCs (and the players) interested, if they're only in it for kicks? Dangling a steady supply of new tricks and ancient secrets in front of them works surprisingly well, though, and the threat of a rival getting ahead should guarantee dynamic responses. Moreover, even the most egocentric wizard can stumble into other sorts of plots and find reasons to help out – and if it's a matter of saving the world, well, that's the world where *he* lives! Adventurers like this need not be entirely bad or selfish people. *Evil* wizards certainly want all the power for themselves, but thrill-seekers mainly seek admirers to appreciate their superiority, competitors to outclass, and people to talk to.

## **MAGIC IN SOCIETY**

In a magic-centered campaign, the social role of magic and magic-wielders will affect how adventures play out – and inspire *new* plots. These guidelines look at wizards' place in mundane society. For thoughts on wizardly culture, see *Magical Society* (pp. 220-222).

### **Persecuted Mages**

Magic, while useful, may also be a source of trouble. The idea of magical power as a cause for persecution has a historical basis – “witches” and “sorcerers” were frequently hunted. However, it's important to note that this was generally because people either believed that magicians were using magic to commit crimes (indeed, “good” magic was sometimes an acceptable way to track down the malefactors) or saw magic as a form of religion that opposed the dominant faith. Non-harmful, non-heretical magic was *usually* safe, except in extreme cases of social breakdown. For example, some medieval thinkers held that use of “natural symbols” (herbs, gems, animals, etc.) was morally neutral, and saw only the use of “artificial” symbols, such as runes or pictures, as evil.

*Professor Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel.*

*– J.K. Rowling,  
Harry Potter and the  
Sorcerer's Stone*

Thus, if magicians are persecuted, there should be a *reason* for it. Magic might have been abused in the past, giving it a bad name; the ruling class may see it as a handy scapegoat for other problems; or perhaps society has broken down catastrophically, leading *lots* of people to seek scapegoats. Some magic systems occasionally generate large catastrophes as side effects, maybe harming thousands of people. Intensive magical study might induce enough arrogance or eccentricity to annoy the neighbors. It's even possible that magic *does* have a heretical element; for example, if astromancers perform calculations based on the knowledge that the Earth goes around the sun, when religious doctrine says that it's the center of the universe, then there's bound to be trouble.

So why would wizards bother with magic, if it brings them so much trouble? Surely they could pick another career?

There are several possible answers. The practice of magic might be fundamentally *involuntary*; someone born with “The Gift” may find himself healing or casting the evil eye by accident, and training mostly serves to provide much-needed control. Magical aptitude could come with mystical insights that make those who have it psychologically *odd*. Alternatively, magicians may think that they have a reasonable hope of completely turning the tables on their persecutors; thus, developing their gift seems an acceptable gamble, as the long-term benefits should outweigh the short-term risks. The chief persecutors might even be truly nasty people who *need* to be opposed! Then again, magic may simply be an occupation for rebels and nihilists who don't care about risk.

Campaigns with such premises will tend to be either “rebels vs. oppressors” epics of desperate struggle, guerilla warfare, and revolutionary strategy, or low-key tales of adventurers with a secret edge. There may be wizards on *both* sides of any dispute. For instance, if some magic uses the laws of nature while other styles call on strange supernatural powers, then the legal status of the two types will probably differ.

## Mages as Rulers

On the other hand, magical power may make its wielders the rulers of the world, or parts of it. Magic could be so powerful that wizards have little difficulty taking charge, or it might give clever wizardly factions just enough of an edge to try. Indeed, taking over the world – or at least founding a wizard-ruled nation – could be a campaign in itself.

Of course, even the most powerful wizards don't *have* to become rulers; they may well prefer quiet lives of study, or less-quiet swashbuckling adventure. Still, they might have their reasons. Some could be power-crazed, or desire glory or lots of resources for their own purposes. Others may find mundane laws and political systems inconvenient, and want to change them – or have enough supernatural wisdom or divine guidance to see (or at least, to *believe*) that the existing rulers are doing a poor job. Perhaps the gods *give* magical power to rulers, because they need it most. Maybe wizards are the people best placed to run things after some global disaster. And once wizards have taken control of the land, wizard rule might simply become the accepted norm.

### Aristocracy vs. Meritocracy

An important question is whether magical ability is inherited. If it *is*, then wizards will tend to form an aristocracy. They'll probably have an ideology that says that being "blessed" with magical ability shows fitness to rule, because it marks the possessor as a superior being or indicates divine favor. However, there are interesting plot possibilities involving the illegitimate offspring of wizards, family "black sheep," and perhaps the occasional unexpected new talent from among the commoners. If mages from lower-class backgrounds do exist, then the rulers might see them as dangerous figures, to be destroyed or co-opted. Conversely, aristocratic offspring without magical talent will be embarrassments, perhaps even calling the morality of their mothers into question – although if they're numerous enough, the system may have a place for them.

If magic isn't reliably hereditary, then the system will be a meritocracy of sorts, with the ruling hierarchy locating new members through searches and tests. Most parents would probably watch their children hopefully for signs of talent, but some might dread losing their offspring to a ruling class that tells its members to forget old ties. Among ruling-class parents, the human impulse to help one's offspring will often cause problems; unless wizards are carefully controlled, perhaps even prohibited from becoming parents, they'll look for any way to ensure that their children also have power – including rigging the tests. If magical genetics are patchy, and the society's basic ideals are democratic, then people are likely to see wizards as claiming unwarranted superiority.

The question of whether magic is associated with intelligence is crucial. If it is, then there's some sense to making wizards into rulers, as they'll at least have the potential to be *smart* rulers. If it isn't, then wizard-government may be inefficient, even disastrous. Like aristocrats throughout history, though, wizard-lords might at least be trained as rulers from childhood, if they're identified early enough. They could also employ good non-wizardly advisors. The traditional link between intensive study and magical power implies problems, especially if government rank is linked to

*proven* power; the highest offices will go to people who *haven't* paid enough attention to the art of rulership, while rulers who spend time on politics will be vulnerable to challengers who aren't as good at the job. It would certainly take a towering genius to be both a great mage and a great king; shrewd wizard-lords will seek a balance.

A pure "mageocracy" would probably be hard to sustain, as the link between magical talent and administrative competence is likely to be weak. A compromised or modified version could last a while, however – historically, *mundane* monarchy and aristocracy survived well enough. If it turns into a tyranny, though, it will probably get quite brutal. If magic comes from the gods, then the political system will be more of a theocracy, and potentially *very* stable; it's hard to bring down a government that has both magical firepower and Heaven's backing. Of course, if the theocrats *lose* that backing, they'll be in serious trouble!

## Magic of Mass Destruction

Several of the magic systems in *Thaumatology* are open-ended, giving wizards who are prepared to spend enough time, effort, and/or resources a chance to create continental- or global-scale destruction. In campaigns that include insane death cults or embittered nihilists, someone may try this, sooner or later. Assuming the GM considers this a bad thing, though, it isn't hard to find reasons why it never quite happens. Divinations and omens of many kinds might predict long-term, broad-area attacks – possibly at bonuses proportionate to the size of the working. Mad magicians who try to destroy whole cities, countries, or worlds tend to attract attention in many ways, well before they can succeed, and even archenemies are likely to pause for a truce long enough to eliminate such lunatics. Doing something about wizards powerful enough to try such things may be an adventure in itself, of course.

### The PCs' Place

If the PCs are wizards, and part of the ruling class, then they'll need lots of Wealth and Status. They might be entangled in power politics, or trying to reform or improve the system. Alternatively, they could be up-and-coming outsiders who have to prove their worth, in which case they're likely to be sent on dangerous missions, and possibly even attacked directly by jealous rulers. Or perhaps they're rebels, in which case they might approve of wizard rule in principle, but see the current system as corrupt.

The PCs could instead be rebellious non-wizards, or experts in a different *sort* of magic. That's likely to be a difficult fight, but maybe an honorable cause. Or they might be nonmagical advisors and guards, manipulating the people who *think* they're in charge, or trying to accomplish reform without provoking confrontation.

Wizard and non-wizard PCs alike could be agents of a benevolent mage-government. And of course the PCs could

simply adventure for wealth and glory in a world where the king happens to wear a pointy hat.

## Politics

If magical adepts are rulers, or form colleges or guilds to promote and regulate their profession, then they'll inevitably become involved in *politics*. This could be genteel and peaceful – or brutal, even murderous. Wizards might be dissuaded from simply hurling fireballs at each other, but they have many options for subtle assassination. However, magic also provides plenty of possibilities for detective work, especially if it leaves detectable “traces”; a stable magical-political society will tend to develop rules against violence, and enforce them. Arrogant wizards may only bother making rules regarding assaults on *themselves*, leaving their servants as legitimate targets – but if they can't guarantee their employees at least a modicum of safety, they'll probably have difficulty keeping staff (except for those who run fanatical cults, which has its own complications).

Espionage, sabotage, violence, and murder don't describe the most interesting sort of politics, though: getting things done through talking and social manipulation. Intelligent wizards have great potential here. Traditionally, however, they tend to be highly focused and poorly socialized – even geeky. Thus, wizardly politics may not be all *that* subtle.

## MAGICAL IMAGERY

Magic should ideally be dramatic, weird, unpredictable, fascinating . . . *magical*. Even the most utilitarian RPG magic offers players the power-fantasy of hurling fireballs and lightning, healing injuries with a touch, or sending rooms full of monsters to sleep. If the GM goes to the

trouble of defining a new magic system, then it should be *interesting*.

This need not be the same as “complicated” – although such magic should usually give at least the *impression* of depth and complexity. Rather, the point is that magic traditionally involves resonant imagery, dealings with nonhuman beings, and strange forces and phenomena. Even if its users see it as a science, producing repeatable results by performing standardized actions, the relationship between cause and effect shouldn't always be obvious.

## Keeping It Unreal

Portraying magic in this way to gamers – who need rules and have a highly pragmatic interest in what their characters can *do* – is tricky. The systems in *Thaumatology* allow a fair amount of GM judgment and offer many optional modifiers, but even the most artistic GM can only go so far before his players complain that magic is too arbitrary and dependent on GM whim. Even if magic is *supposed* to be arbitrary and dependent on the whim of higher powers, stating as much is rarely a satisfying answer.

One approach is to work a large number of arbitrary but *standardized* factors into the system. Rules such as *Mandatory and Significant Modifiers* (pp. 82-90) and *Announcing Curses* (p. 226) go a long way toward giving magic a sense of strangeness. If the PCs get into the habit of loading up with cinnamon, blue silk, bronze coins, etc., then things are becoming colorful! Another option is to involve spirits and ultraterrestrial entities in the game; players *expect* these to be bizarre, and the fact that they're conscious beings with their own motives justifies extra complexities. Lastly, the GM can encourage or require players to give magic-wielding PCs disadvantages such as Obsession, Stubbornness, and Compulsive Vowing, with low self-control numbers; magic that's primarily the concern of the marginally sane should have a certain air of weirdness.

# “SUBTLE, AND QUICK TO ANGER”

Magic-wielders are among the strangest of folk, traditionally requiring intelligence, focus, special talent, or an utterly bizarre obsession – and possibly all four. Magic grants great power, but that isn't always the *point*.

The magic rules used for a setting determine whether just about *anyone* can become a wizard, given enough smarts and determination, or whether “The Art” requires special talent, divine favor, or personal peculiarities. Wizards are fairly rare in most settings – which, given magic's usefulness, implies that magical power is difficult to acquire. At minimum, it may need enough intelligence that only brilliant students are worth teaching (or are safe to teach!), while training could require many years of individual instruction.

If special talent is required and somehow linked to innate intelligence, then this would explain why wizards

are commonly assumed to be smart. If there's *no* link between talent and intelligence, then either the setting ought to feature some less-smart wizards, or wizardly education should be good at training the mind. While the relative extent to which intelligence is inborn versus the result of upbringing or teaching is controversial, it's fair to assume that training in magic will focus on the use of memory, logic, or judgment, and thus will help even dull students make the best of what they've got. In any case, wizardly “intelligence” is often depicted as unworldly and academic; wizards might merely be well-educated, and not as clever as they think. The IQ attribute specifically includes an element of education, so giving wizards good scores would still be justified – but they could reduce Per and/or Will to reflect the fact that their minds aren't terribly powerful in the broader sense.

In a dark setting, wizards might fear what happens when magic falls into the hands of those who lack the intelligence to use it carefully. After all, even minor spells can cause lots of trouble! Magicians might have methods for removing magical ability from the unworthy, or they may simply kill them. Even if such a system is excused as a painful necessity, powerful wizards could corrupt it into a method for eliminating independent-minded potential rivals or upstarts.

## IDENTIFICATION AND RECRUITMENT

Any training system must start by finding students. In settings where magical ability is mostly genetic, this means watching the offspring of talented parents – although there may be a problem with unexpected “outsiders” going unnoticed. Where raw intelligence is the top factor, a system of competitive examinations is likely, or master wizards may simply choose apprentices whom they like and who show suitable cleverness. If magic is explicitly a gift from gods or spirits, then hopefully these entities will reveal the chosen. This could take the form of visions or blatant omens, or it might be more ambiguous; priests and shamans may have to look out for youngsters who show signs of supernatural influence, and then distinguish that from mere insanity (assuming the two aren’t linked).

If magical ability is more random and less ostentatious, then tracking it down may involve more methodical, magical methods. In some settings, potential mages are marked out as uncanny and unnatural, and recruitment is a matter of following rumors about unearthly children or adolescents suspected of casting the evil eye. Where magic is primarily spirit-based, the trick is usually to ask the correct questions of the right spirits. Spells such as *Aura* and *Divination* can help with the search, in traditions where they exist. Given that *Magery* enables its possessor to sense magic items, recruiters may wander the country with a bag full of junk and one minor enchanted item, and run further tests on those who can spot the magic item. And in worlds where the first sign of potential is a driving need to find *something*, wizards may find potential apprentices tracking *them* down.

Once a suitable candidate has been identified, he must be recruited. If magic is a respected, well-paid profession, then this shouldn’t be difficult. A few especially humble or devout people may quibble, the occasional child might be unwilling to leave beloved families or aged parents in need of help, and it’s possible that aristocrats could consider any “trade” – even wizardry – beneath them, but those are relatively minor problems. If magic is less respectable, then recruitment will be harder; in some societies, wizards may even have a reputation as child-stealers. In all cases, see *Apprenticeships, Schools, and Colleges* (below) for what follows.



## STUDY VS. FIELD EXPERIENCE

Most depictions of magic assume that it’s a scholarly pursuit, which suggests that it’s best mastered by spending a lot of time in the library or laboratory. Nevertheless, wizards often go off on adventures. Magic-using PCs even seem to grow exceptionally powerful as a result of this. There are also many potent NPC wizards – especially arch-villains and patrons – whose magical power remains impressive despite their frequent involvement in mundane events.

One explanation might be that the most powerful wizards are the ones to whom magical power comes easily and naturally, giving them more free time than the full-time scholars. Another possibility is that such power attracts attention from supernatural beings or the forces of destiny, which leads to adventures, like it or not. If magic can be enhanced by direct knowledge of the workings of the universe or the sort of ancient lore that’s mostly found in moldering tombs and lost temples, then seeking those out could be a quick-but-risky path to greatness. Finally, if magic is highly personal and flexible, then books may be not be as useful as exercising one’s power under stress and observing other experts’ personal techniques – at least for certain types of knowledge.

Still, the GM may wish to encourage magic-using PCs to spend at least some of their time studying. One option is to rule that a wizard can only acquire spells, Paths, Realms, etc., that are completely new to him with points from study (pp. B292-294), and that earning these points requires a teacher or a good written source – whereas *improving* such things can (and perhaps must) use points from on-the-job learning or adventuring, including bonus character points. If the GM wants to emphasize magic’s scholastic nature even more strongly, then he can simply rule that *all* growth in magical abilities demands study . . . and then throw problems at PC wizards that force them into the field or the dungeon.

## MAGICAL SOCIETY

Where multiple magic-wielders have dealings with each other, a *society* must come into being. Societies need rules and traditions. Large, introspective groups can develop their own specialty of the *Savoir-Faire* skill, while secretive ones might be the subject of a *Hidden Lore* skill.

### *Apprenticeships, Schools, and Colleges*

To start with, there will probably be traditions regarding training; see *Education* (pp. 17-18). These could resemble mundane educational systems, although they’ll doubtless include a few peculiarities. If wizards have a formal organization, then this group is likely to impose rules against teachers abusing pupils, driving down prices for training, not teaching safety techniques, or whatever else the majority considers important; it might even run the schools directly.

*Piffany: Oh it's awful here! They gave me a classroom full of the most evil children to be instructed in the ways of goodness and virtue, but they just can't be reformed! They bite, they scratch, they make vile incantations, they summon beasts from the darkest planes and they're so icky-bad nasty that I just wanna scream not-nice words and stuff!! What's worse, if they don't improve soon, I'll probably wash out of my clerical order!*

– Aaron Williams, *Nodwick* #10

There may be formal academies, which fiction often depicts as important to magical society, as they ensure that magic will be around in the future, that many magicians of the same generation know each other, and that traditions survive. This in turn implies examinations, which can mark out the “high achiever” wizards and even form the basis of a system of social class. Such an arrangement could easily be corrupted to favor the privileged, and could certainly end up rewarding a particular philosophy of magic. If it only allows those with high marks to pursue further study or read “dangerous” books, then it will effectively limit talented, unorthodox wizards.

Educators could be competent, versatile wizards with some social ability, or hard-up, semi-competent, or eccentric individuals with personal agendas and bizarre pet theories. Wealthy or promising students may have first pick of instructors, leaving others to acquire patchy skills and recognizable habits from strange teachers. (“A green flame and enough sulfur to choke an ox? You must have learned from Mad Eloise.”) There's *also* a fictional tradition of impoverished students finding unpromising tutors who turn out to know important things that the posh, fashionable figures do not.

### *Hierarchies of Magic*

Societies tend to have hierarchies. Wizards *might* base theirs on raw power, but they may prefer something more complex, given that it's *displays* of power that establish the pecking order in systems based on force, and these often lead to bloodshed – or at least humiliation – and thus instability. Furthermore, the most powerful wizards may be reclusive scholars or saintly mystics with little interest in mundane responsibilities.

Thus, a magical society might be run by middling-power wizards who've chosen to pursue politics rather than polishing up their spells. How such people keep powerful-but-apolitical wizards under control is an interesting question, but a combination of numbers, organization, and control of material resources could accomplish plenty. The leadership may also ally with nonmagical authorities.

### *Rivalries and Enmities*

Other possible divisions in magical society include geography (e.g., with French wizards, German wizards, Italian

wizards, etc.) and styles of magic (e.g., the hierarchies of thaumaturges, witches, and diviners are mutually distinct). Factions may cooperate and even share an overall top-level leadership, mostly ignore each other, or be in outright conflict. When there's *open* conflict, the rest of the world will doubtless try to put an end to it, punishing magical murder in the streets and keeping the wizards in line. Secret wars may persist for generations, however, with truces, betrayals, and realignments.

Even without hidden wars, wizards are likely to have their share of private conflicts. Strong personalities invariably lead to the occasional argument. Part of the point of most social systems is to restrain such feuds, but a magical society may institute dueling codes as well as peaceful arbitration methods.

Of course, two senior wizards might have a personal rivalry that never quite tips over into personal violence. Whether their pupils and followers can avoid getting caught up in the enmity – and perhaps having it turn violent for *them* – is another matter. There may be rival wizardly “houses” (colleges, families, economic factions, etc.) given to *Romeo and Juliet*-style brawls.

Magic with a religious element adds yet another twist. Cults and temples that desire respectability will try to keep followers in line. If the gods have a tendency to personal intervention, though, then they might use their worshippers as pawns in *their* feuds!

### *Views of Mundanes*

If magic is powerful and not everyone can perform it, then it may be hard for wizards to refrain from treating non-wizards as inferiors. This might lead to the situations noted in *Mages as Rulers* (pp. 218-219), a society of secretive wizards who avoid “tiresome” contact with mundanes, or just lots of wizards with a reputation for obnoxious snobbery.

On the other hand, if magic provides only limited power, some non-wizards can do interesting things that most wizards can't, and/or wizards usually have mundane friends, families, and allies, then *sensible* magic-workers will mostly be reasonable people. If magic grants telepathic abilities, then its users might even be notably empathetic – after all, they *know* that others have feelings. Still, it's unlikely that magic will produce fewer snobs than any other profession.

## The Lab-Rat Problem

Even if a campaign is supposed to involve a lot of travel, some PC wizards may decide that their best option is to stay in the lab. This might be due to some feature of the magic system, or a character (or a player!) who's either overly interested in research or just too good at it.

The GM could simply to invite the player to retire that PC and create a more adventure-prone one; however, players generally create characters they *want* to play, and resent losing them. Another possibility is to engineer circumstances within the game that *force* the PC into action: enemies burning down his home, dead ends in his research, appeals from Dependents, government orders, etc. This can work, but players usually dislike feeling as though their characters are mere pawns – especially if they didn't get points for it.

What's sometimes better is to quietly restructure the campaign's aims and plotlines. Give the PC his lab time – but also persuade him to emerge periodically to show off his growing powers. Space out events to let him work, while giving other PCs “background stuff” to do in the same period. If necessary, allow each player a second PC, so that while one is distracted by lengthy research, another is having adventures. Carefully build up things that matter to the PC *outside* the laboratory, such as long-term political plots or personal rivalries that he can pursue in his spare time.

Ultimately, the solution demands not only GM judgment, but consideration for the other players. The lab rat shouldn't be allowed to hog the spotlight with what others consider a boring play style. Still, a little thought and subtlety can entangle *any* PC in interesting plots.

If wizards are persecuted, or have been in the past, and non-wizards can threaten them by dint of numbers or technology, then *fear* might tint their view of mundanes – and fear all too easily leads to hatred. Whatever their negative feelings, though, few wizards are likely to be able to get by without any servants, assistants, or suppliers, so some contact is probably inevitable. Relationships could be cautious, touchy, abrasive, or complex. Shrewder wizards may regard their paranoid or arrogant colleagues as stupid or dangerous; mundanes are *useful*, so alienating them is a waste.

### Views of Religion

The power of religion could enable mundanes to meet wizards on more equal terms. This might take the literal form of god-granted supernatural power – but *social* power can achieve a lot. Religion is likely to offer the organization and educated leadership required to oppose wizard rule. In extreme cases, it might even motivate the faithful to attack “evil, godless” wizards!

The most likely scenario is that wizards will just be a *little* less respectful of the gods than most people; after all,

sermons about supernatural power are less likely to impress someone with power of his own. On the other hand, if certain religious figures – high priests, saints, or actual gods walking the earth – can completely overwhelm wizardly magic or perform feats beyond any spell, then wizards may feel their own sort of respect. Wizards might also have a need for religious comfort, regarding their magic as a “gift from above,” like any other talent, and conceivably developing eccentric or heretical theological ideas entangled with magical theory.

If magic is *directly* related to religion, then things will be different. “Wizards” may *be* priests, or both magical and priestly functions could be in the hands of “shamans” or “witch-doctors.” Magic that comes from divine or spiritual powers might form part of religious practice, although its wielders would be unlikely to use it casually – that would be disrespectful – and may spend a lot of time worrying about the origin and nature of any given instance of magic, in case it emanates from the *wrong* source. Religion itself would also change in character; if everyone has seen blatant displays of divine power, then they'll probably regard the gods as a concrete fact of life, but not so much as a mystery or a wonder.

# INTERACTIONS BETWEEN MAGIC SYSTEMS

When a campaign features multiple magic systems, important questions arise: How do they interact? Do any of them have critical advantages? Can a determined scholar master more than one?

The answers depend largely on the setting's metaphysics. The GM doesn't have to invent a complete imaginary science, but he should have *some* idea what lies behind magic. The complexities resulting from magical interactions can make for interesting games; however, they *are* complexities.

### Aspects of the Same Reality

At the simplest, all magic has something in common; it all accesses the same energies or symbolic structures, and each form has a comprehensible relationship to the others. This permits lots of direct interaction between different magical activities. A “dispel” from one magic-wielder always has a chance against a working from another, and any wizard can try to detect the magic of any other. Some magic systems

may be better for some tasks, but logically, one with *no* advantages over any other shouldn't be popular – unless the better options are new introductions or well-kept secrets.

### *Limited Interactions*

Alternatively, the various magic systems in a setting might be roughly equal in power and significance, but not interact much except on a gross physical level. They manipulate completely different energies. Calling them all “magic” is a semantic convenience rather than a meaningful definition.

For instance, any wizard might be able to erect a wall of stone that will stop a flaming blast hurled by another – but only because *any* stone wall would do so. The same might go for mental barriers; “walls of will” around the mind may be much like walls of matter around the body. Augmented attributes typically work this way, too, since they mostly affect the physical world directly; e.g., two arm-wrestlers could pit one kind of magically boosted ST against another. In subtler matters, though, there's little interaction. Detect and dispel effects do nothing across systems, and magical defenses can't prevent scrying or divination from a different source. The relationship is similar to common treatments of psionics or advanced technology in games that feature magic.

In such a situation, different systems are intrinsically about equal in power – although some might offer more or better options – so there should be few issues with character point costs. Thaumalogists may seek “unified field theories” to encompass all magic, and any rumor that a researcher from one background has mastered some of the forces involved in another will likely cause nervous excitement, as it suggests the possibility of one set of magic-wielders being able to dominate the others. If each system has clear and distinct strengths and weaknesses, though, then they'll generally function in parallel – although not without a little casual rivalry or snobbery!

A variant possibility is fundamentally *hostile* interactions. Perhaps one magic system drains the localized mystic energies that another needs, or creates “interference” that scrambles others' spells. Maybe different kinds of wizards invoke mutually hostile gods or spirits, who get into devastating fights if they meet. Such situations are likely to lead to a lot of conflict. Some wizards might simply avoid those whose powers differ from their own, while others actively seek to achieve dominance and outlaw their rivals.

### *Total Mutual Incompatibility*

Different magic systems could be *completely* distinct, to the point that even workings that should logically produce straightforward physical interactions simply don't. For instance, a psychic's lightning blast might slide right through an elementalists' ice shield. This likely implies some strange metaphysics. Perhaps *everything* – or at least, every magical effect – is essentially illusory, and illusions of dissimilar types have *no* reality to each other, however tangible their consequences.

This, too, tends to make every magic system roughly equal in potential. However, it should all seem rather strange to the players. The GM needs to be ready to

adjudicate in complicated cases; e.g., can two fighters with different forms of magically enhanced DX somehow ignore each others' superior reflexes and accuracy in combat?

### *Hierarchies of Power*

It's also possible for one magic system to be clearly *better* than another – most often because it accesses “higher” or “deeper” forces. Maybe divine power, working through priests, trumps mere mortal magic . . . or perhaps syntactic casters, having access to the cheat codes of reality, can shut down anything else. “Greater” magic can sense, analyze, manipulate, and stymie “lesser” workings, while inferior varieties can *at best* sense the obvious effects of superior ones and defend against them with crude physical barriers.

Most players will want their PCs to use the top-level system, which should have a higher point cost to reflect its greater power. One way to address this is with an Unusual Background – especially if access to such magic actually requires a remarkable personal history. There may still be good reasons for PCs to learn lesser magic, however. For instance, it might give useful results with casual study (a few points), whereas higher magic is almost useless without intensive training and aptitude (*dozens* of points), or it may offer specific effects that nothing else can accomplish.

A setting can have as many levels of magical effectiveness as the GM likes. There may be *several* tiers; e.g., from petty “hedge-witchery,” through potent-but-constrained “thaumaturgy,” to great divine miracles. For a *really* complex structure, each system could dominate another while being dominated by a third, their relationships forming a circle instead of a hierarchy.

### *Incompatible Choices*

An important question is whether a wizard can learn two or more different magical systems. The simplest assumption is that he *can* – but since each art takes time and effort to master, dividing his efforts means that he'll end up mediocre in everything. In game terms, this is a natural outcome of spreading finite points across several forms of magic.

## **Transformations**

Magical transformations frequently require GM judgment calls. In general, a transformed object or being behaves in all ways like a natural one. However, transformation cannot significantly increase intelligence or knowledge (although *additional* effects might accomplish this) – a servant made from a dog will be faithful, but not very smart! As long as a transformed object remains undamaged, it can be restored to its original form – unharmed – with a new appropriate effect, a spell such as Remove Curse, etc.; see *Contests* (p. 226) if this attempt opposes the original magic. Even if it *is* damaged, restoration is often possible, although the object's original form will be suffering from a proportional degree of injury.



Many settings assume some kind of fundamental incompatibility, though – that using one kind of magic locks an individual out of others. If magic originates from conscious external sources – that is, it's all clerical or shamanic – then the entities behind it might have rules that *forbid* approaching other beings for power. They could be jealous and mutually antagonistic; their gifts may have a price in the form of devout service, making it infeasible to serve several spiritual masters; or they might benefit from mortal alliances because they draw power from worship, and any division reduces their essential supplies. It's also possible that magic-working needs deep faith to sustain or empower it, and that revering multiple higher powers fractures that faith. Magic-granting gods might prohibit *secular* magic, too – whether out of jealousy, because it leads mortals into hubris, or because it involves a style of thought that simply doesn't work when applied to divine miracles or spiritual invocations.

Purely secular systems can also have incompatibilities. Magic might use the caster's body or soul as a "conductor" or a "channel," and each form of power may taint or twist this path in such a way that it can't handle the others. The magical arts could demand mental discipline, verging on obsession, such that attempts to master more than one end in psychosis. Or magic might involve imposing a new set of rules on local reality – rules determined by the worker's beliefs, so that attempting to use multiple sorts involves trying to accept several incompatible fundamental philosophies at once. While humans are actually remarkably good at that, *wizards* probably can't afford the degree of self-delusion required . . . although *really* enlightened or truly insane ones *may* be able to switch between conflicting outlooks at whim, find deeper similarities, etc.

## GAME MECHANICS

When different magic systems interact, the GM will need rules to handle things. This is *especially* true when two workings directly oppose one another. Common sense and a little improvisation will usually suffice, but the following guidelines may help.

In general, one effect is "offensive" and one is "defensive." The problem is that the definition of what a given defense protects against is often rather narrow. For example, the Mind Shield advantage works against advantages with the Telepathic limitation, and also affects Communication and Empathy spells and Mind Control spells, while Magic Resistance explicitly opposes spells and alchemical elixirs. However, both should also defend against certain rituals, powers, etc.

When integrating multiple systems, the basic approach is to restate the offensive and defensive effects in terms of *what* they attack or protect, and *how*. A telepathic Mind Shield protects the mind. The Strike Blind spell affects the body. Therefore, a Strike Blind spell isn't opposed by a Mind Shield – but Cloud Memory, a ritual defined as influencing the mind, should be.

That leaves the question of *how* a given defensive effect works against a particular offensive one. To handle this, the GM must place the defense in one of the following categories.

## Guards

A *guard* provides a new or enhanced resistance roll against a resistible effect. It may even allow a resistance roll against something that *isn't* normally resisted. Some guards, such as the Pentagram spell, stop certain things completely, without a roll – but there's generally *something* that can overwhelm or batter down this kind of defense, the usual mechanism for that being a Quick Contest.

Most offensive abilities have a skill roll attached, such as a wizard's roll against his modified skill with a spell or a ritual. For those that don't, the GM must determine what kind of roll the attacker needs to make. For Energy Accumulating magic (see Chapter 5), this is typically an Effectiveness Roll. In other cases, it may be a roll against an attribute or a characteristic: most often Will, since getting magic to work despite resistance tends to be a matter of determination; sometimes HT, for physical effects; occasionally DX, if magical energy is easy to muster but has to be directed with precision; possibly IQ, for magic that requires careful mental work above all; and so on. The GM is free to specify a skill roll instead, such as a Religious Ritual or Ritual Magic roll for effects invoked by a ceremony, or a Psychology roll for cunning mental manipulations. At the GM's option, Magery, Power Investiture, or a relevant Talent might give the attacker a bonus on *any* of these rolls.

If the attack normally doesn't require a roll, because it's somehow defined as being ultra-reliable – e.g., it has the "No die roll required" version of the Cosmic enhancement from **GURPS Powers** – then the GM must still assign one. However, he should set this at 20 or whatever attribute or skill (modified for advantages) he considers appropriate, whichever is *higher*. If the attack doesn't usually permit a resistance roll but a guard forces one anyway, then *The Rule of 16* (p. B349) *doesn't* apply; highly competent attackers are entitled to use their full capabilities in this case. Note that an offensive effect that doesn't normally require a roll won't ever fail simply because the user fails a roll required by a guard; the guard has to resist it *successfully*. Even a roll of 18 can succeed if the attack's margin of failure is smaller than the guard's!

Finally, effects such as the Fireball spell require two rolls: one to create the missile in the user's hand, and one (most often against Innate Attack skill) to attack with it. If a guard protects against this kind of attack – and the GM may rule that a particular guard can't oppose such magic – then this usually takes the form of a Quick Contest between the guard and the effective skill used to *create* the effect, as the guard attempts to disrupt the attack's "magical structure." Guards that try to *deflect* the incoming energy oppose the *attack* roll, however.

*Example:* Caleb the Weird swigs an alchemical potion and breaths hallucinatory pain at Sandra. But she's within the protection of a Dream Sanctum ritual (p. 142), and Caleb's assault must penetrate that in order to reach her. As the potion works by imbuing Caleb's body with arcane energies, the GM calls for a Quick Contest between Caleb's HT and the effective skill used to create the Dream Sanctum.

## Screens

A *screen* also protects against offensive effects that require proper activation or targeting, but does so by giving the attacker a penalty on his roll, thereby reducing his chance of getting his attack to work. This may oblige the GM to assign a success roll to something that doesn't normally require one; in that case, follow the guidelines under *Guards* (above).

*Example:* Olaf Runescriber – knowing that his enemy, Harald Half-Finn, is coming – traces the runes Hagalaz and Perthro on the dirt floor of his hut as an emergency defense that will weaken all magic-working in this space. As Harald blasts the door down, Olaf activates the runes, making his roll by 4. The GM rules that this is the penalty on any attempt to work magic in the hut while Olaf maintains the effect. Harald attempts a Deathtouch spell, but fails due to the -4. Olaf hits Harald with an axe.

## Barriers

A *barrier* stops damage in much the same way as armor or a wall: by getting in the way and soaking it up. Thus, it's rated for its DR. This is normally considered ordinary DR, which means that effects with armor divisors can penetrate it more effectively – although some types of magic may permit DR that's effectively Hardened (see p. B47).



If a barrier isn't wrapped around someone's skin, then it may also function as a wall, preventing people from moving through a space and so on. It's sometimes possible to break down such a barrier. If a continuous flow of magical energy is available, though, then the barrier may be instantly restored.

Finally, note that some barriers can also stop effects measured in "points" other than physical damage points, such as energy drains that reduce the victim's ST.

*Example:* Septimus uses his Create (Iron) advantage to place 1/4"-thick sheet of iron across a corridor. Consulting p. B558, the GM determines that this has DR 12. A moment later, a pursuer fires a bodkin-pointed bolt from a ST 12

crossbow at Septimus, doing 1d+3(2) piercing damage. His foe rolls 8 points of damage, so  $8 - 12/2 = 8 - 6 = 2$  points have a chance of reaching Septimus. The bolt punches through, with much reduced velocity, but the hole it leaves isn't large enough to seriously damage the wall.

## Dampers

A *damper* is any of a broad category of effects that reduce someone else's power in some way. Such things most closely resemble attacks, but they can sometimes function defensively.

It's difficult to generalize about dampers, as much depends on the thing they damp and the game mechanics used for it. A damper might reduce ST (or another attribute) by a certain amount, diminish attacks by a number of dice, and so on. It's sometimes necessary to define a damper's effect in terms of character points. When the damped effect is purchased in levels, this is fairly straightforward: find the reduced point value and calculate how many levels that would buy. In other cases, calculate the proportion of the effect cost eliminated by the damper, and reduce range, number of dice, and other numeric values accordingly; e.g., a 40-point advantage that suffers 10 points of damping might lose 25% of its range, damage, etc. If an attack primarily works by producing a resistible effect, then every 10% reduction in power (round *up*) gives +1 to resistance rolls; e.g., a 60-point attack that suffers 14 points of damping loses 23% of its power and thus is resisted at +3.

*Example:* Jnrxxk the Depriver uses verb-noun syntactic magic (see Chapter 6). He typically employs Weaken Body to reduce opponents' ST or HT, but while fighting a witch, he improvises a Weaken Magic effect to deprive his foe of her magical good fortune. He makes the relevant skill rolls, and the witch fails to either dodge or resist. Had he used his normal attack, she would have temporarily suffered -2 to ST, which equates to 20 points in value. The witch has Ridiculous Luck [60]; reducing this by 20 points takes it closer to the cost of Extraordinary Luck [30], so the GM rules that's all she has for now.

## Drains

A *drain*, like a damper, takes something away from its target – but whereas a damper diminishes power rated in dice, points, etc., a drain depletes *energy*, usually measured in FP. Drains are very much attacks, but some work quickly and precisely enough to sap the energy from an incoming attack, thereby weakening it. Find or estimate the attack's FP cost – based on a similar spell if necessary, and *disregarding* reductions (e.g., for high skill with a spell) – and then reduce its damage or effectiveness in proportion to the drain, much as for a damper.

*Example:* Salome the Soul-Sucker is attacked with a 3d explosive fireball. Such an attack with the Explosive Fireball spell would cost 6 FP, so that's the number to use, regardless of whether *this* fireball was cast as a spell. Salome meets the attack with a drain defense that sucks 3 energy points from it, sapping 50% of its energy. The GM reduces the explosion to 2d-2, or about half-strength.

## Contests

Not *all* cases of opposed effects fit the “offensive vs. defensive” model. Most of the exceptions can be resolved with a contested roll – normally a Quick Contest, although the GM is free to treat an especially substantial struggle as a Regular Contest. As with guards and screens, the GM will sometime have to choose what roll to use. This will usually be obvious (e.g., a wizard rolls against his modified spell skill) or at least fairly easy to decide (e.g., an IQ roll for tasks requiring intellectual precision, with bonuses for power Talent and the Reliable enhancement). If raw power with the effect seems relevant, then levels in an advantage may give a bonus. Where range matters, the GM should assess each contestant whatever range modifier suits his ability.

*Example:* Pzarl the Pyromancer is moving a flame around. Dr. Elementus decides to snatch it. Pzarl has Shape Fire-16. He’s two yards from the flame, which would give -2 to cast Shape Fire – a Regular spell. The GM rules that this range penalty also applies here.

Elementus has Control 3 (Fire) with the Ranged enhancement, IQ 13 (which the GM decides is the relevant attribute, as it’s the one used to establish control), and Elemental Command Talent 2. The GM reckons that he can apply both skill *and* power, so he gets +3 for advantage levels and +2 for Talent. However, Ranged abilities take ranged attack modifiers (p. B550) and Elementus is 25 yards away, giving -7.

Thus, Elementus rolls  $13 + 3 + 2 - 7 = 11$  against Pzarl’s  $16 - 2 = 14$  in a Quick Contest.

# THEMES AND VARIATIONS

*Thaumatology* presents several magic systems, each with many options and tweaks. Below are a few optional rules for use with almost *any* system, and some thoughts on redefining *what magic is*, that the GM may find helpful when customizing magic for a particular genre or setting.

## ANNOUNCING CURSES

Traditionally, magic-workers in many settings *announce* curses and other magical attacks by leaving key elements (dead chickens, painted symbols, etc.) where the target will

## Otherworldly Entanglements

Magic sometimes involves beings and powers from outside the mundane world. Clerical magic and shamanism aside, any wizard who becomes interested in cosmology, Gate spells, or sources of exceptional power is likely to end up researching this sort of thing. From there, direct experience isn’t far away.

One possibility is contact with demons, who are notoriously enthusiastic and clever about exploiting magicians’ desires for power. Traditional Christian doctrines, among others, assume that all dealings with supernatural beings involve either demons (who are *bad news*) or angels (who don’t have to come when called and don’t give away much power) – making magic a bad thing from that viewpoint. However, other cosmologies feature whole orders of neutral spirits and elementals with whom an intelligent wizard can treat on a more equal footing, making deals that don’t involve selling his soul.

Magic-workers may also have to deal with paranormal incursions into the mundane world. After all, they’re acknowledged experts on the subject, and generally better equipped than most people to deal with it. Powerful wizards may become involved in dangerous but rewarding quests into otherworlds, seeking knowledge or resources; comic-book “super-mages” in particular are given to dramatic journeys through bizarre, surreal landscapes.



In a campaign that features such elements, the GM will need a reasonably extensive cosmology and a clear idea of the beings that the PCs will encounter. This is largely predefined in some settings, but the GM will sometimes have to invent many details – perhaps entire worlds. However, given that the PCs will probably be just visiting, and that these realms and their inhabitants can often be built around fairly simple themes (elements, moral principles, etc.), this isn’t always as hard as it sounds.

### Asking for Higher Favors

The PCs will occasionally want to make requests of gods, spirits, or demons. In some settings, this *may* work. If the supplicant has the being as an Ally, Contact, or Patron, then follow the rules for the advantage. If not, then it isn’t impossible that the Religious Ritual skill, Medium advantage, or Planar Summons spell – or even some well-known, minor procedure – might make contact. The Blessed advantage may help here.

The GM should bear in mind the possibility of contacting the *wrong* entity this way. Whatever being is contacted, it’s unlikely to appreciate being pestered – always make a reaction roll. Most requests will be ignored; some may lead to painful retribution. *GURPS Fantasy* discusses this further; see *Man Proposes, God Disposes* (*Fantasy*, p. 148).

find them, or through showy personal announcements of impending doom . . . even when the victim may choose to respond physically on the spot. There are several possible reasons for this.

One explanation is that the caster is using a form of magic that's subject to *Sympathy* (pp. 243-245). In that case, material components placed in the victim's vicinity or home may count as a good symbolic representation, worth +2 to skill. If the attack is defined as being activated when the caster announces it in person, then the GM *might* permit the magician to claim the +4 for casting in the subject's presence – or at least give half that bonus (+2) – even if he conducts most of the ritual safely elsewhere.

### *Undermining Defenses With Fear*

More dramatically, some magic – especially subtle curses – could work by insidiously exploiting the victim's fears and doubts. Thus, suitable announcements may weaken his defenses, at least against mental effects and magical diseases. In games where this is true, the GM decides which attacks benefit from such tactics. These *must* be effects that permit a resistance roll.



Treat the attempt – which *must* involve a significant amount of time and effort – as a Quick Contest between the caster's Intimidation skill, subject to all standard modifiers, and the target's Will plus any Fearlessness. The magician is at -4 if he isn't physically present, or at -2 if he's in sight but at a long, safe distance; bonuses can compensate for this, however. Prior use of showy magic, or simply a Reputation as a powerful sorcerer, can merit the bonus for displays of supernatural power – although in settings where all magical effects are subtle, sincerely materialistic people may view this as superstitious grandstanding, giving them +1 to +3 to resist instead! Subtler, frightening use of illusions or hallucinations can also earn significant bonuses (GM's option), but such magic is often resistible and must itself defeat the subject's defenses. If the magician somehow triggers a Phobia, then the victim has to make a self-control roll; failure means he resists at -5, and even success gives the penalty on p. B149.

If the magician wins, then apply his margin of victory as a penalty to the victim's rolls to resist one magical attack of the general type announced. This trick can backfire, though: if the *subject* wins, then he resists at a bonus equal to *half* his

margin of victory (round down, maximum +5) – the wizard gave him a better idea of what he's defending against! Either way, only one such modifier applies. Use the result of the *most recent* Intimidation attempt, regardless of whom that favors.

This ploy *never* works on someone who's Unfazeable. Instead, the would-be victim can attempt an unopposed, unmodified IQ roll. Success gives him a resistance bonus equal to his margin of success. The Indomitable advantage has the same effect, unless the magician has Empathy.

All of these effects fade if nothing happens soon. Reduce bonuses and penalties alike by one point per two full days that pass before the magical attack actually arrives.

## THE STUFF OF RAW MAGIC

Some metaphysical systems postulate an underlying principle of reality – variously known as *vril*, *vis*, *quintessence*, or *pure mana* – that can empower magic. This “Raw Magic” often appears as a form of matter or energy, and wizards may regard it as such, but it's closer to the “raw material of reality.” In settings with multiple magic systems, it can provide a conceptual bridge between different forms of magic.

Raw Magic is measured in arbitrary “points,” where a point is the smallest quantity that a wizard can exploit for a single purpose. In some settings, only individuals with special skills or advantages can use it to full effect. Supplies are generally extremely limited, but seekers may acquire it from “places of power,” where manipulating the flow might require special magic or use of an esoteric skill: Meditation to “reinvigorate the soul,” Alchemy to distill the stuff into material form, etc. The amount available in a given period depends on the location's richness, and possibly the gatherer's skill. It might be possible to extract Raw Magic from the cosmic background almost anywhere, but that should be a lengthy, difficult process, taking hours, days, or *weeks*, and yielding, say, points equal to 1/5 the margin of success on the appropriate skill roll (round *down*).

Raw Magic often takes a subtle physical form: an alchemical distillate, a glimmer of light in the depths of a crystal, strangely twisted wood from an ancient grove, etc. Some mages may be able to carry it around *within* themselves, however.

### *Using Raw Magic*

Uses for Raw Magic vary between settings. Some suggestions:

- *Energy source.* Each point expended supplies *five* energy points for the purpose of spells or other magical processes that normally cost FP. It might similarly replace additions to a wizard's power tally when using *Threshold-Limited Magic* (pp. 76-82).

- *Conductor.* By helping direct forces more precisely, or giving the user a greater margin for error, each point of Raw Magic used gives +3 to a single spellcasting, ritual skill roll, etc.

- *Fixative.* Being magic in permanent form, Raw Magic facilitates permanent enchantment. Each point counts as 100 points of energy when used in enchantments.

● *The Stuff of Creation.* Effective magical healing – perhaps only for certain injuries (e.g., those caused by fire or silver), but conceivably for *all* injuries – may *require* Raw Magic. Remaking living tissue can be tricky! Each working might need a point of Raw Magic per 3 HP healed, or 1-5 points to cure disease, depending on seriousness. This is a good way of making magical healing rare and difficult in “gritty” games.

## Flavors

In some game worlds, Raw Magic comes in “flavors,” also known as “aspects,” “tints,” etc. These are most often related to colleges, Paths, Words, Realms, or similar. Wizards can only use such Raw Magic to benefit the related type of magic. “Neutral” Raw Magic – useful for any working – *might* exist, but that’s generally rare and very valuable, weaker, or ineffective for many purposes.

Some Raw Magic may be *morally* flavored. This is useful for any working, but invariably influences the behavior of the resulting magic – for the worse, if it’s evil. Demons may offer evil-tinged Raw Magic to tempt wizards.

Flavored Raw Magic tends to show hints of its nature. The plant-flavored type might take the form of leaves or sticks of wood, the air-aspected variety could be a gas that has to be trapped in a sealed container, the luck-tinted sort may appear as dice-shaped stones, and so on. Evil Raw Magic might manifest as foul-smelling tar, dark blood, or jagged bones.

## Character Features

In a campaign involving Raw Magic, the GM may opt to permit the advantage, spells, and/or ritual below. If PCs take any of these traits, then the GM should make Raw Magic available to them *occasionally* – but with complications, costs, or strings attached! Undisputed legal title to a major Raw Magic source should be very expensive, and the owner may be subject to attacks by jealous or greedy rivals or supernatural creatures.

### *New Advantage: Raw Magic Store*

5 points/level

You can store Raw Magic within you as intangible energy bound to your soul or aura. This makes the ability to extract Raw Magic from a place of power or distill it from the ether especially useful.

You can hold one point of Raw Magic per level of this advantage. Your store starts fully charged at the beginning of the campaign. Normally, Raw Magic held in this way can’t be taken away, but the GM *might* permit theft via some potent (and likely painful) magical effect. It may even be possible to distill Raw Magic from your corpse . . .

Raw Magic Store is a supernatural advantage. It’s usually a mental trait, but might be physical in some settings.

## Insubstantial Beings Affecting the Material World

The description of the Insubstantiality advantage (p. B62) mentions that insubstantial beings can use “psi abilities and magic spells” to affect the material world, albeit at -3 to skill. Advantages with the Malediction enhancement (p. B106, p. 199) generally let incorporeal users affect substantial targets, too – also at -3. Abilities enhanced with Affects Substantial (p. B102, p. 199) can cross into the material world at *no* penalty. Individuals capable of capitalizing on any of this *must* buy their Insubstantiality with a special enhancement: Affect Substantial, +100%.

However, “psi abilities and magic spells” isn’t particularly definitive, is prone to misinterpretation, and doesn’t cover every possibility arising from different magic systems and powers. It’s better to say that insubstantial beings can use *mentally resisted* abilities (including spells, advantages, rituals, etc.) on substantial targets at -3. A “mentally resisted ability” is anything resisted by IQ, Will, or Per, whether with a simple roll or a Quick Contest. Information effects, illusions, etc., that don’t give any subject a chance to resist can usually be used freely while insubstantial – for example, nothing prevents an insubstantial wizard from working a divination – but if they have an offensive use (e.g., the Death Vision spell), then they count as “mentally resisted” for this purpose.

Someone might also become insubstantial through an effect other than the Insubstantiality advantage, such as a ritual or a syntactic magic working. This may let him use mentally resisted abilities, advantages with Affects Substantial, etc., to affect the physical world, at -3 where appropriate. In that case, the GM is free to rule that an insubstantiality effect is significantly easier to work – involving less energy, reduced penalties, smaller margins of success, etc. – if its subject *can’t* affect substantial targets. (Similarly, the GM could waive Affect Substantial on Insubstantiality for individuals whose mentally resisted abilities can’t enter the material world.)

### *New Spell: Detect Raw Magic*

Information

Tells the caster the *direction* and *approximate distance* of the nearest Raw Magic. The caster can exclude known quantities if he wishes. Likewise, he can opt to ignore any and all Raw Magic stored in intangible form within an individual.

This is a Knowledge spell and a Meta-Spell.

Cost: 3.

Time to Cast: 15 seconds.

Prerequisite: Detect Magic.

### *New Spell: Analyze Raw Magic*

Area; Information

Determines the quantity and nature of all Raw Magic – including its flavor, if Raw Magic has such variations – within the area of effect. It can also tell what form(s) the Raw Magic takes. Thus, it’s useful when sorting Raw Magic from mundane materials.

This is a Knowledge spell and a Meta-Spell.

Base Cost: 3.

Time to Cast: 5 seconds.

Prerequisite: Detect Raw Magic.

## *New Spell: Process Raw Magic*

### Regular

Works on any Raw Magic except that held in intangible form by someone other than the caster. If the caster has the Raw Magic Store advantage, then a casting can render the Raw Magic intangible and attach it to him, up to his normal limit. This spell can also perform minor transformations on Raw Magic in material form to make it more transportable: loosen it from any mundane materials to which it's attached, cause it to flow into a container if it's a liquid or a gas, etc.

This is a Meta-Spell.

*Cost:* 1 per 5 points of Raw Magic to be manipulated (round up).

*Prerequisite:* Detect Raw Magic.

## *New Ritual: Work Raw Magic*

*Effect Shaping:* Path of the Elements-7, Path of Nature-7, or Path of Spirit-5; 3d minutes.

*Energy Accumulating:* 7 points.

This ritual makes Raw Magic obvious to the caster's vision; it usually appears to glow slightly, with colors that reveal its flavor and other peculiarities. The magician can manipulate it as well – moving and shaping it with gestures and light touches – unless it's being held in intangible form by someone else. If the caster has the Raw Magic Store advantage, then this ritual can render Raw Magic intangible and attach it to him, up to his normal limit. It can also perform minor transformations on Raw Magic in material form to make it more transportable: loosen it from any mundane materials to which it's attached, cause it to flow into a container if it's a liquid or a gas, etc.

## MAGIC IS PSI

Some modern fantasy features “magic” that resembles science-fiction “psionics”: the exertion of a trained will to produce external effects. In games that emulate this, the rules for psi powers (pp. B254-257) may be more appropriate than those for spells, rituals, etc.

### *Modified Limitations*

The standard -10% power modifier for psionic powers consists of -5% because anti-powers such as Antipsi exist, and another -5% because psi is traditionally opposed by technological countermeasures such as “psi-tech” shields. The latter isn't true in many fantasy settings, though – psi-tech is impossible at the local tech level. In that case, the modifier should be only -5%.

The power modifier might incorporate other elements, however. “Fantasy psi” often demands exotic, intensive training and meditative or self-hypnotic disciplines. Represent this with a required disadvantage (see *Calculating the Power Modifier*, p. 202) – usually Vow (to behave in a particular fashion, maintain a training regime, etc.) or Disciplines of Faith. If these methods involve rituals – speaking magic words, making complex gestures,

drawing mystic symbols, etc. – then that's a form of Accessibility. Finally, such psi often requires great effort, justifying Costs Fatigue.

### *“Wizards vs. Witches”*

In campaigns that use this approach, different “magic systems” are actually distinct psi powers – either innate or developed by dissimilar training regimes. If the GM takes the customary view that psi abilities are inborn, then a given individual will only have access to a restricted set of advantages, and no amount of training will change that. In some settings, though, it might be possible for anyone, or at least any *psi*, to develop any power or unlock his potential through a suitable course of study. It's also conceivable that training systems give students the necessary focus by *suppressing* their potential for other powers, in which case anyone who masters multiple disciplines is displaying extraordinary versatility.

### *Spells, Thaumatology, and Grimoires*

If magic is psi, then the term “spell” probably means a given *use* of a specific psionic advantage – a functional application, not something written down somewhere. Thus, the Thaumatology skill isn't really relevant, as that's mostly concerned with researching and recognizing formal spells. The field *does* have scope for academic study, but that would involve Expert Skill (Psionics) (p. B194). At TL0-4, Expert Skill (Mind-Magic) might be more fitting; this can stand in for appropriate aspects of Biology, Diagnosis, History, Occultism, Philosophy, Physics, Physiology, or Psychology instead of the skills listed for Expert Skill (Psionics), and is more a matter of obscure lore than of specialized science.

Likewise, no fixed spells means no spellbooks. There can still be “books of magic,” though. These might be textbooks on the Expert Skill or training manuals for suitable psi Talents.

### *Magic Items*

Traditionally, psi doesn't imbue artifacts with lasting power; thus, games that use *just* this system probably won't feature a huge array of magic swords, wands, amulets, etc. There may still be a few items, however. One possibility is that some naturally occurring substances – herbal extracts, crystals, etc. – boost or focus psionic effects, acting as low-tech versions of science-fiction psi drugs. Naturally, these would command high prices!

For more dramatic effects, someone with many points in psi-magic powers might be able to “imprint” objects, giving them the ability to perform wonders in anyone's hands. The GM can handle this using *Devotional Enchantment* (p. 54) and *Magic Items as Advantages* (pp. 113-115). More cinematically, raw emotional power might imprint items psionically; apply *Enchantment Through Deeds* (pp. 112-113). If these items absorb some of their wielders' emotions and personalities, then *Item Drawbacks and Personalities* (pp. 116-120) might also be relevant.

## FOUR-COLOR WIZARDS

Magic often appears in “four color” superhero comics, alongside mutants, aliens, and superscience. It tends to be vaguely defined – with unlimited power in one frame and arbitrary limitations in the next – but colorful and stylish. Some of the earliest comic-book heroes used magic, and several of these are still around today. Magic also relates to the complex cosmology of many superhero universes, with countless hells, heavens, and extradimensional otherworlds acting as places to visit and sources of trouble.

Comics generally treat “magic” as a single category. Its various types can interact directly but are almost entirely unrelated to *other* super-powers. The concept of “mana” isn’t usually appropriate – location rarely diminishes a super-mage’s effectiveness, although he might have a “place of

power” where his magic works especially *well*. Likewise, simple spell-based magic isn’t a good fit. Comic-book characters sometimes talk about casting “spells,” but they rarely seem to adhere to a formal, restricted system.

Rather, the typical super-mage is a formidable figure, able to create a near-limitless range of effects, and maybe carrying a handy magic item or two. He’s still mortal, and can theoretically be hurt by mundane, even trivial attacks – but a combination of smarts, alertness, and fast-acting magic makes it hard for opponents to exploit this. Such a character needs a lot of points, and may use a combination of several different systems. In general, design personal items as gadgets (see *Magic Items as Advantages*, pp. 113-115) and treat effects that the wizard uses often as standard advantages, perhaps grouped into powers (see Chapter 7). However, the true super-mage should also have *flexibility*.

## Power Tends to Corrupt

Many worldviews associate magic with evil. It might actually be morally neutral – but it’s a form of power, which represents temptation. Moral philosophies often emphasize that raw force and interference in the affairs of others are *dangerous*, even when they’re necessary. Magic makes this problem more immediate and direct; wizards who can hurl fireballs will be tempted toward violence, while those who cast mind-influencing magic are interfering with free will.

### “The Dark”

Magic may even have a specific “dark side” – a set of techniques or effects that are explicitly evil. In some cases, this is quite overt; a system of *Assisting Spirits* (pp. 90-94) in which the spirits are overtly diabolical rewards a willingness to bend the rules. *Errors and Side Effects: Reality Bites Back* (pp. 193-194) offers another way to reflect the dangers of power; the GM can give this a strong moral or ethical slant, making Distortion Points especially likely for unethical or self-indulgent uses of magic, and having each Distortion Crisis render the wizard more demonic in appearance or manner; or destroy his Will or capacity for empathy. *Threshold-Limited Magic* (pp. 76-82) involves the threat of calamities, which can be linked to *disproportionate* use of power; again, the GM can adjust specific results to reflect personal corruption.

In other cases, magic’s moral danger is more subtle. There’s no specific part of magic that’s clearly “evil,” but it leads that way nonetheless – just as mundane power can turn a reasonable human being into a tyrant.

### Temptation

It can be hard to GM temptation subtly but effectively. If the players recognize that evil is to be avoided, then when demons show up and say, “I’ll lend you power,” it’s easy to turn them down – much easier than it should be, especially for PCs who are fighting for their lives or loved ones. Even if the demons (literal or metaphorical)

disguise themselves, players are generally cautious enough to worry about any offer of raw power that seems too good to be true. On the other hand, if the GM simply declares that a PC who has done something that seems perfectly reasonable, without harming any innocents, has somehow sold out to evil, then the players are likely to feel that the moral system is arbitrary and incomprehensible.

In truth, the players might not *want* to game out the subtleties of corruption and morality. The GM shouldn’t focus on this theme unless it’s central to the stated point of the campaign. Magic can offer the PCs a lot of power, however, and if it’s *supposed* to be morally tricky and the players know this, then they should be ready to accept the consequences of ignoring the problem. Each step ought to be quite small; the benefits, substantial. Alternatively, the PCs might be in such difficulty that accepting the price “just this once” doesn’t seem unreasonable – although they might discover later (too late!) that the tempter secretly set up the difficulty in the first place.

### After the Fall

If the PCs *do* succumb, then the consequences are a matter of campaign style. Wizards who end up permanently possessed or transformed may become NPCs, removed from player control. This should only happen if the GM spelled out clear rules for it ahead of time, though – players are *never* happy to lose their characters to GM whim. On the other hand, if fallen wizards are still basically the same people, and there’s at least a chance of redemption, then this can become the next big scenario. Many players enjoy roleplaying power-crazed maniacs, at least for a short while!

In some cases, the players may not realize that their characters have fallen to darkness. They might only get the hint when the forces of good come calling and old enemies start to treat them as friends. A danger here is that the players may not agree that their “pragmatic” decisions broke some game-world moral law – but hopefully, they’ll eventually understand.

One possibility is to take high levels of Modular Abilities (especially Cosmic Power) or Wild Talent, with limitations to reflect the magical nature of these abilities. These can give the super-mage temporary access to *any* spell, freeing him from the drawbacks that make spell-based magic otherwise unsuitable – a good mechanism for magical effects produced from nowhere. The GM who desires a more detailed approach might let super-wizards use syntactic magic (pp. 179-195); something Realm-based seems fitting. This doesn't necessarily suit any *specific* comic-book character, but it gets the general style right.

Super-mages seem to be born *and* made. Not everyone could do what they can, even with the same intensive and extensive training. Their special abilities might well involve Magery, and their techniques and many of their magic items may not work for people who lack it.

### “Dabblers”

A secondary style of comic-book magician is all too human, and indeed avoids flashy costumes and flamboyant spells. These “dabblers” don't have super-powers, but know their way around the supernatural world, often wielding a fair array of skills and getting by on wits, planning, and bluff. The best system for them is probably Path/Book ritual magic (see Chapter 5), which carries the right combination of long

casting times, indirection, and *subtle* power. Magery may be appropriate, but not Path/Book Adept.

### Creatures and Artifact-Users

Magic can also serve more simply as a source of “conventional” super-powers. The ability to hurl lightning bolts might come from a mutation or a technological gadget – or from a mystical link to an air elemental, or a relic of a storm god. In game terms, such capabilities may be defined in similar ways whatever their source, but magical powers take small modifiers to reflect their specific nature. For example, if anti-magic effects or powers exist, then this can justify a minor limitation, probably incorporated into a power modifier. Magical associations often affect the super's *style*, too; for instance, he may have bizarre, demonic enemies.

### Alternatives

A super-powered campaign doesn't *have* to follow the comics' lead. For example, the game might use the standard spell-based magic system. Enough points spent on Magery and spells will produce a suitably powerful character, and could make for interestingly divergent individuals. Even varied mana levels may be present. In fact, *any* approach to magic discussed in *Thaumatology* could work in such a game.



## WORKED EXAMPLES

These campaign and setting outlines draw on many of the rules in *Thaumatology*. The GM can use them “as is” or as inspiration for his own game world.

### THE PEOPLE OF THE OCEAN

This fantasy milieu consists of a wide-open ocean, dotted with coral atolls and small volcanic islands. The weather is mild-tropical; in some seasons, typhoon-strength winds sweep across the sea, but most of the time it's less dangerous. Many of the islands are inhabited by human beings, the Seafarers, who have a well-adapted TL0 culture with a powerful, flexible form of magic.

These people have colonized much of this vast space, although not all of it. They're excellent sailors, with TL1 in Navigation (Sea); their enormously respected navigators

also tend to have high levels in Naturalist, Survival (Island/Beach), and Weather Sense. They use great outrigger canoes, and virtually everyone is a competent sailor. But there are still uninhabited islands to discover, as well as adventures to be had at home, thanks to complex social systems of magical monarchy and the intricate taboos that rule Seafarer lives. There are also the Volcano Gods to consider – the only truly superhuman power known to the Seafarers, strange and remote, and yet sometimes all too active.

Furthermore, a new power has recently made itself known in the world-ocean. Tales speak of bizarre canoes the size of villages, with crews who claim to come from a gigantic island beyond the sunrise, and who know nothing of magic but who wield odd powers. Most Seafarers laugh at this, but some of the wiser island-kings look at the strange, glittering amulets that accompany the tales, and wonder.



## Seafarer Society

Seafarers see themselves as a single people, and their culture is indeed remarkably uniform across the whole vast ocean, although there are local variations. Each inhabited island is the home of a distinct tribe or clan, ruled by a “king” who’s most often selected by the island’s three or four leading families, from among their number, when his predecessor dies. Members of these families may act as advisors to the king, who’s well-advised to heed them – this society has no concept of divine right, and everyone knows that the king is essentially mortal, though some tribes attach odd taboos to their rulers. A king can only rarely stand down or be formally removed . . . which just means that discontented Seafarers must sometimes resort to quiet assassination (but never talk about it afterward).

Most Seafarers are members of low-prestige families, who jockey for the small but real renown that comes with being a successful fisherman or sailor. There’s no money; resources are redistributed by a combination of barter and a complex tradition of gifts and obligations. There’s also some trade between islands – mostly in decorative artworks, and land-bird feathers and meat. However, groups of discontented or ambitious individuals may pursue glory by sailing off in search of a new island. This is described as “seeking new gifts for the king,” but any substantial new island will soon become a permanent settlement with its own tribal structure, with the original founders forming the nucleus of its leading families.

War is rare but not unknown. Two islands that are close enough for regular contact often develop rivalries, which can flare into conflict – especially if one of the kings has many discontented followers who need distracting or buying off with plunder and slaves. Prisoners of war form the basis of a slave class on larger, more populous islands. These people have unhappy lives, as they can’t better themselves and are mostly assigned to erecting huge royal houses and strange carved statues to the glory of their masters, but at least they’re not much worse fed than anyone else; owning a visibly starving slave is *embarrassing*.

One other social group of some importance is *wrestlers*. Most Seafarer clans have a well-developed body of skill in this form of combat, to the point where it would rate as a serious martial art. It’s a tough, pragmatic business; it’s sometimes treated as a sport, but even then there are few rules. Minor differences between clans can sometimes be settled by a ritual wrestling match (or by a magical duel, or anything else that both parties accept), so leaders like to have a few good wrestlers around. Wrestling also serves as a way to channel personal aggression, and wrestlers are usually assumed – often correctly – to be bullies and thugs who will practice their skills on anyone who gets in their way. They’re sometimes respected, but rarely liked. Many clans have women wrestlers, who are no more liked than the men.

Oddly, some wrestlers know something about medicine, mostly in the form of bone-setting and massage. In game terms, they have a few points in Esoteric Medicine. Going to a wrestler for treatment is generally an act of desperation, but it isn’t crazy.

## Oceanic Magic

Wizards are a small but important class in Seafarer society. A significantly populated island might have two or three. More than that generally leads to rivalries and jealousy, driving some of them to follow rumors along the trade network to a community that needs wizards – or even to organize an expedition to find a new island where they can be top dogs.

Seafarer culture values wizards, although it sees them as a little strange and dangerous. Folktales usually treat them with respect, but often depict “the wizard’s wife” as a comic figure, harassed and confused, going through life trying to ignore all the strangeness around her while seeking to profit from her husband’s status. There are in fact as many female as male wizards, but they tend to marry respected and capable members of their tribes, so there are fewer jokes about their husbands.



Seafarers use Realm-based syntactic magic (see Chapter 6). Mana as such isn’t a concern, but Magery (Syntactic) is a prerequisite for magic use, and is always inborn – players can’t purchase Magery 0 after character creation. Wizards occasionally manage to sharpen their powers by practice, advancing from lower levels to Magery 3, but never higher. The few, legendary Magery 4 wizards are born with that power, and once their capabilities become clear to themselves, most become megalomaniacs. Magery adds to Realm skill.

Wizards identify potential trainees by looking for strange behaviors and sensitivities in children, and then confirm their suspicions through a long series of tests. Most like to have an apprentice or two, and take care to inculcate loyalty of some sort. Magic makes life complicated for its users, so it’s desirable to have someone watching one’s back and assisting with strange activities!

## Realms

Each Realm is divided into *four* levels:

*Level 1: Detection and Assessment.*

*Level 2: Minor Command.*

*Level 3: Minor Creation.*

*Level 4: Total Command.*

There are *five* available Realms:

*Weather:* Governs wind, waves, and rain, but only grants very limited power over lightning, which is sometimes held to imply divine presence.

*Craft:* Relates to all works of the human hand – especially boats and how to sail them.

*Fortune:* Encompasses, among other things, curing disease in humans (illness is seen as a form of bad luck) and increases in the rate of healing of physical injuries (a matter of good luck).

*Nature:* Takes in animal and plant life, but *doesn't* cover humans or their health.

*Land:* Grants *no* power over raw volcanic rock, but otherwise relates to many nonliving phenomena, including freshwater springs.

Water is seen as something whose nature depends on context. Magic to control it may fall within Weather, Land, or sometimes Nature.

This schema has *three* significant gaps. First, fire and anything directly related to volcanoes are the domain of the mostly noninterventionist Volcano Gods, the culture's only deities. Second, minds, spirits, and souls transcend magic's power. Finally, healing magic can't accomplish anything beyond the scope of natural processes – although it can speed these considerably.

Each level within a Realm costs 15 points.

## Parameter Effects

Parameters affect magic-working as follows:

- *Range and familiarity, range in time, damage, and healing* generate *skill penalties*.

- *Area of effect, changes to personal abilities, and weight affected* modify *energy cost*.

- Casting against *multiple targets* generates *skill penalties* and increases *energy cost*.

- Base *duration* of an effect is determined by *margin of success*. Extended workings aren't permitted, but it's possible to maintain a continuing effect for increments of the same duration by spending additional energy equal to half the original casting cost per increment.

- *Extradimensional* magic isn't possible in this setting. There's no "spirit world" as such. Spirits and gods are sometimes-intangible beings that dwell in the same physical world as everyone else.

## The Volcano Gods

Seafarers believe in gods, but think that the sea – an infinity of fertile chaos – predates any deity, being eternal and uncreated. Gods are always associated with volcanoes, which rise up out of the sea to provide literal islands of stability; they create order out of chaos. Humanity is variously depicted as the creation or the children of these gods

(who aren't very attentive parents). Magic *can't* affect the gods in any way.

The gods are very much *volcanoes*. They aren't automatically regarded as hostile, but only a fool wouldn't fear them, especially when they suddenly decide to become active, and only an idiot – or perhaps a truly brave man indeed – would seek to awaken the attentions of a slumbering deity. Tribes who live on active volcanic islands tend to be more religious; some of them engage in systematic sacrificial rituals, throwing things into the lava in an attempt to calm or assuage the deity (which sometimes seems to succeed). Only a handful of tribes engage in human sacrifice – and those, only rarely. "Priests" are storytellers and lore-keepers as much as anything, although a few have minor supernatural powers, usually in the form of the Oracle advantage; divine power can extend far beyond the volcanoes, especially in the form of lightning, and many omens take the form of electrical storm activity.

Seafarer mythology is vague regarding the afterlife. Most tales suggest that the souls of the dead fly to the nearest volcano and become flames or smoke in attendance of the ancestral deities. A few tribes have vague ideas about reincarnation.

## The People of the Great Eastern Shore

The newcomers on the great ocean are representatives of a powerful and completely different culture, with its own approach to magic. The confrontation that's developing could become epic.

The Great Eastern Shore is in fact a *continent-sized* land mass, far enough beyond the easternmost inhabited islands that no Seafarers have ever reached it – or at least, none have returned to tell the tale. Its human inhabitants have attained mature TL3, but have relatively little interest in sea travel. In the interior regions, they've built cities and civilizations, fought wars, and mastered the arts. Recently, however, a number of coastal cities have risen to prominence, developing a proud and extremely *heroic* culture. In their search for glory and advantages over the older inland nations, they've increasingly looked seaward.

The shipbuilding technology of these "Shore Folk" has become quite sophisticated. A kind of alchemically enhanced engineering enables them to make ships as rugged as any at TL3, and they're moving into TL4 in this one area. By comparison, their navigational science is rather unrefined – many ships' navigators rely on their default to Navigation (Land) – but adequate.

The Shore Folk's main economic interest in nautical exploration is seeking novel materials and magical substances. They use a versatile form of alchemy, and every new ingredient promises vast possibilities. When a few shore-hugging traders were blown off course, discovered some small islands, and returned with strange plants and minerals that triggered an economic boom, interest in exploration exploded. However, individual explorers also have personal motives. Glorious success in any venture can move a person up through the hierarchy of Honored Ancestors after death, producing a kind of personal immortality and also raising the power of one's family – and family is everything.

## Recreating Magic from Fiction

Some gamers like campaign settings drawn from or based on favorite works of fiction – and where these include magic, they naturally want to emulate that as closely as possible. The catch is that not all writers have strong or specific ideas about how magic works in their worlds, beyond perhaps a particular atmosphere or set of effects that they wish to create (although there are certainly exceptions). Given that magic that's useful to a story's plot and feel in one place may merely cause trouble in another, writers are also liable to introduce arbitrary and under-defined restrictions as convenient – or simply leave large inconsistencies buried in their plots. Furthermore, a setting may evolve in a writer's mind over a series of loosely related books, meaning that its concepts of magic change alongside everything else instead of remaining consistent.

Thus, it's usually better to aim to get the *flavor* of the setting's magic right – making sure that things that should logically have happened in the stories but didn't aren't *too* obviously possible – than to shoot for a perfect emulation. The GM can also assume that sometimes, fictional characters are exceptionally lucky or unlucky, perhaps even a little stupid or forgetful, rather than regard everything that happens as typical of the norm. If the PCs can easily do things that the source material claims are the preserve of the most powerful wizards or gods, then this may please the players but badly damage their suspension of disbelief. Likewise, if a simple spell could have easily derailed the original plots, then the GM will need some explanation as to why none of the characters in those tales did something similar.

An advantage of the flexible magic systems described in *Thaumatology* is that they make it fairly easy to come up with magic systems that give wizards the *potential* to emulate anything in most source material without having to define a specific spell to match every fiddling incident in the stories. This doesn't mean that flexible systems are always ideal for borrowed settings; some backgrounds explicitly have rigid structures of fixed spells. Still, many writers do seem to think of magic as a flexible, improvisational art form.

### Shore-Folk Magic

Shore Folk recognize two forms of magic. They have a word that encompasses both, but it just means something like “wonderful and supernatural.” Everybody knows that the two are totally distinct.

First, there's alchemy, which the Shore Folk regard as a practical science – albeit one involving a fair amount of mystery and some mysticism. Any of the elixirs from *GURPS Magic* might exist – although the GM is free to prohibit a given preparation, increase its price substantially, or rule that

it's *theoretically* possible but requires some as-yet-undiscovered ingredient. *Alchemical Inventions* (p. 103), *Consuming Multiple Elixirs* (p. 106), and *Alchemy and Medicine* (p. 106-107) all apply. In addition, someone with spirit-vessel powers (see below) whose personal Family Genius was a great alchemist of ages past can use *Alchemical Gadgeteering* (pp. 103-104). Shore-Folk alchemy also permits the creation of superior structural materials; as a guideline, any TL4 material is a possibility, but at 4× its normal TL4 cost. This *doesn't* mean that gunpowder is available!

Second, some Shore Folk have abilities similar to those described under *Spirit Vessels* (pp. 211-214). Their religion is a form of hierarchical ancestor worship, and the gods are in fact distant, heroic, venerated ancestors. However, more recent – but still significant – ancestors are more active in the world, lending their descendents supernatural power. Ambitious Shore Folk dream of ascension after death, ensuring honored immortality for as long as the family survives (less-successful individuals fade into a sort of cumulative ancestral mist, losing individuality over the years). The least of these spirits simply grant minor advantages with the Pact limitation, but some are truly formidable beings whose vessels wield superhuman powers.

Any Shore-Folk ship encountered on the open ocean has a good chance of having someone with spirit-given abilities in command, and maybe one or two more among the officers. It may also have a ship's alchemist, serving as an advisor and physician, or as the voyage's sponsor. An alchemist, if present, will be eager to discover new minerals, plants, and animals.

### Magical (and Other) Interactions

Seafarer and Shore-Folk magics actually interact very little – although they can, and the forces involved do seem to have something in common. Use of the Realms of Land or Nature can sometimes foil or disrupt physical alchemical potion effects, and Fortune, worked with cunning and skill, can counter almost anything. Conversely, alchemists often study the operations of Seafarer magic, and like to *claim* that they can understand it – but preparing an elixir to negate such things is hard, and rarely useful, as the Seafarer wizard can just improvise a different effect.

In truth, Shore-Folk scholars find the flexibility of Seafarer magic strange and frustrating. Spirit vessels who come into conflict with wizards often have a hard time, but therefore consider any victories gloriously heroic. For their part, wizards find it strange (and possibly blasphemous) that alchemists so often take an interest in volcanic rocks, and suspect that claimed alchemical cures for complex medical problems are mostly lies.

This mutual incomprehension is part of a wider problem. These are two very different cultures, and while the Seafarers mostly just think that Shore Folk are crazy, the Shore Folk have an advanced culture's disdain for “primitives” who don't even pay proper respect to their ancestors. The idea that someone could be descended from a *volcano* strikes them as simply silly! Still, their opinions are moderated by recognition of the Seafarers' magical power and evident navigational skill, and most contacts are peaceful, if cautious.

## Plot Seeds

*The Affairs of Wizards:* The PCs are a group of Seafarers from the same clan, probably including a junior wizard or two. Unfortunately, their clan's greatest wizard has a long-running feud with his counterpart on the next island along the chain, and the influence of the two of them over their kings and the people is dragging the clans toward war. Our heroes seek to make peace where they can and fight when they must. Eventually, it emerges that the feud dates back to an incident years ago when the wizards met on a small, probably uninhabited island some way off – but neither will say what happened. It then turns out that both have *forgotten*. The PCs must mount an expedition to find out the truth and return with evidence – or maybe even the wizards' memories. But surely, no magic can affect the human mind?

*Fire in the Deep:* A new island is rising from the depths – a volcano. Either a new god is being born or a very old one is awakening. Sensible people avoid such things until the deity and his creation have settled down, but PCs are rarely sensible – and *someone* should find out more about this latest flowering of divine creation. Also, being the first to establish a relationship with a god can be quite advantageous. Any communication with gods is tricky, as magic can't help directly, and this one may choose to test visitors against its own strange creations, and vice-versa.

*Age of Exploration:* The PCs could instead be Shore Folk – most likely the officers of an exploratory ship, possibly including spirit vessels and alchemists. Trying to make sense of Seafarer society is technically a secondary concern for them, but very important in practice. It's a lot easier to track down magically significant objects and phenomena if the locals are helping you rather than trying to kill you for violating taboos! Unfortunately, much of the most potentially interesting stuff is associated with volcanoes – and whatever landlubber theologians may say, the evidence that those deities really exist is becoming increasingly undeniable.

## THE WISDOM OF THE ANCIENT SEERS

This is a pseudo-historical (or perhaps *secret-historical*) setting. The period is the late 19th century, when the rise of modern science runs parallel to renewed

interest in matters mystical and magical. But what if the occult beliefs are *correct*?

## The Period

The late Victorian era sees the height of Western imperialism, with the last few parts of the less-developed world falling to expansion determined enough to prevail over even the climate and disease that defeated earlier conquerors. Trade and interaction with established provinces of Western empires is booming, and explorers are probing remote wildernesses such as the Himalayas. All of this is bringing strange, ancient beliefs into the heart of the world's great powers, where some individuals are taking them up with enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, science and technology are developing apace. This period marks the transition from mature TL5 to early TL6. Steam trains and steamships are commonplace, the internal combustion engine is being invented, and powered flight looks possible, although the difficulties still seem immense. However, science is also destroying old certainties. The Earth seems to be far older than anyone previously imagined, Darwinian evolution challenges ideas about man's place in creation, and experiments on the edge of physics suggest that the laws of nature may be rather stranger than they appear. Not surprisingly, early science-fiction writers are finding a profitable market niche.

Old certainties about society, too, are threatened. While jargon borrowed from Darwin is used to justify a brutal sort of unfettered capitalism, socialism and communism provide increasingly popular options for the industrialized masses. Feminists demand votes and careers for women. A string of revolutions has brought down monarchies that once thought themselves divinely appointed. Warfare is evolving toward a total, industrialized form.

In the midst of all this, the idea of mystical and psychic powers can seem like just another plausible novelty – and talk of lost civilizations with strange sciences and advanced spiritual insights can seem almost comforting. This treatment assumes that “ancient powers” do work, although they're not reliable or fully understood. It divides them into two categories: communication with explicitly supernatural, spiritual beings, and exploitation of strange sciences known only to a few scholars, and not fully understood by anyone. The two aren't actually *opposed*, and even overlap in places, but personal disagreements between individuals tend to create factions and rivalries.

*Floating past the evidence of possibilities,  
We could navigate together, psychic frequencies.  
Coming into contact with outer entities,  
We could entertain each one with our theosophies.*

– Gary Valentine,  
“(I'm Always Touched by Your) Presence, Dear”

## Spiritualism and Ritual

Work on mystical communication with spirits and higher powers borrows elements from long-established religious and folk beliefs about the afterlife, ghosts, and so on, and combines them with a veneer of rationalist “psychical research.” Some of these ideas and investigations may someday evolve into “psionic theory.” For now, though, this is mostly a matter of mediums and séances.

In fact, the spirit plane really exists, and a large number of intangible, supernatural entities inhabit it. Few deceased humans can be contacted, though; most seem to pass onto some kind of afterlife, or perhaps reincarnate – even the most powerful, knowledgeable spirits are evasive and ambiguous on this. However, most or all of the spirits that are reachable were formerly mortals, and often seem to have passed through many incarnations before attaining the particular state of enlightenment that permits and causes them to enter the spirit realm after death (or *instead* of dying, perhaps). People with the correct sensitivities can communicate with spirits, who often provide helpful if rather vague advice, and who seek to guide humanity onto what they consider “correct paths.” Some spiritualists can also use their abilities to discover secrets or enter others’ dreams, and a few have striking mental powers.

The Channeling, Medium, and Spirit Empathy advantages, and the Autotrance perk, are all available in this setting. Individuals with such sensitivity to spiritual forces are generally known as “mediums” (whether or not they have that specific advantage), and gifts like these are standard for traditional professional or gifted-amateur spiritualists. Some also have spirits as Allies, Contacts, or Patrons, or Psychometry with the ESP limitation; a few have Blessed (but *not* Heroic Feats). Healing with the Faith Healing enhancement *might* be possible, too – probably in the context of various organized cults.

More advanced adepts – many but not all of them members of the Theosophist movement – have Magery 0 unlocked by special training, and can use Effect Shaping Path/Book magic (see Chapter 5). Non-mages can attempt such magic at -5, but few bother to acquire the skills. The only widely known Paths are Dreams, Knowledge, and Spirit. Neither the Path/Book Adept advantage nor higher levels of Magery are available – although theories say that the former should be *possible* – and mana levels aren’t a concern. A few powerful individuals, some of whom claim to have been trained by transcendent spirits, have the Mind Probe advantage with the Telepathic limitation, usually along with Psychometry.

Certain factions – such as the increasingly notorious Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn – seek more powerful magic, with limited effect so far. However, some of them *claim* to have use of a few rituals from the Paths of Cunning, Health, Luck, and Protection. Rumors in the occult world suggest that various Books exist in the hands of various sub-cults, considerably broadening the scope of Path/Book magic, but this may be wishful thinking. If the GM decides that it’s true, then he can decide on the Books’ contents; see *Example Books* (pp. 163-165) for inspiration. A PC needs a 15-point Unusual Background to start play with knowledge of a nonstandard Path, and *at least* a 25-point one to have studied any Book.

It’s generally *assumed* that “primitive tribes” in remote corners of the world have their own Paths of the People (see “*Routine Magic*” Paths, p. 154), kept secret through systems of tribal initiation and thus unavailable to outsiders. Some holy men from such areas certainly display remarkable physical advantages such as Metabolism Control, Rapid Healing, and Temperature Tolerance.

## The High Science of Atlantis

As the spirits tell it, there have been many civilizations before the modern era – some of them made up of beings that we wouldn’t recognize as human. Atlantis was merely one of the most recent and most comprehensible. However, that makes it important, as scientists, researchers, and visionaries have uncovered some of the secrets of its science, which is so physically and psychically advanced that it verges on magic. In the vanguard of this work is the Anthroposophical Society, founded by former Theosophists but now locked in bitter rivalry with that group. Among other things, they’ve determined that the wiser Atlanteans, having foresworn the eating of meat, learned that living vegetable matter could provide them with highly exploitable “life energies.”

In truth, these researchers are playing with forces that they barely understand – but they *do* achieve results. A combination of caution, mockery from blinkered conventional science, the unreliability of the whole business, and the need to understand more before they speak in public makes most of them extremely secretive, however. Dedicated scholars can acquire a power (see Chapter 7), with a -10% modifier. Accounting for -5% of this is a required disadvantage, Vow (Vegetarianism). The other -5% is for channeled energy: if there isn’t a large quantity of living vegetation nearby, and the power-user hasn’t been in close physical contact with vegetation in the last hour, then the power fades into uselessness. The related Talent costs 5 points/level.

Most users of the High Science start by studying Atlantean mental disciplines, and usually acquire Eidetic Memory and Intuition in the process. They can then progress to mastering more spectacular gifts: Mind Reading, Telecommunication (Telesend), and up to eight levels of Telekinesis. Because modern humans lack Atlantean insights and training, these three advantages always have the Unreliable limitation – with an activation number of 11 – and other limitations are common.

A few of these scholars have also studied Atlantean physical sciences, which represent a radically divergent technological path. They can have up to two points in Weird Science (which almost always relates to Atlantean science and technology in this setting), but *no one* can have more than that. These people may be able to create amazingly lightweight materials if they also have both Chemistry/TL5 and Metallurgy/TL5 at 14+, and even build “force-beam weapons” linked to telekinetic powers if they know Engineer/TL5 (Psychotronics) at 17+. However, they can’t acquire a broad grounding in Atlantean engineering, and Atlantean technology isn’t so much higher as *different*, so they can’t have the High TL advantage. Instead, use the Unusual Background (Invention) advantage (p. B477), noting that most examples of Atlantean technology are of at least Average complexity; this isn’t part of the power



described above. Unfortunately, such inventions are hard to reproduce and difficult for modern engineers to understand, so it's virtually impossible to sell or patent them for profit – even if the inventor *wants* to break secrecy.

### *Reincarnation*

The spiritually aware generally hold Reincarnation to be a reality, although the principles involved are disputed and complex. Thus, a few individuals may have the Reawakened advantage – and perhaps even the Reincarnation power (pp. 206-207).

### *Strange Interactions*

The effects employed by spiritualists, Theosophists, and scholars of Atlantean science interact fairly easily, insofar as this is relevant; everyone is accessing “spiritual forces” of some kind. However, older, more powerful spirits appear to operate on a higher level of being, and no human action can compel or control them. They can slip past any known ward with ease, and mortal energies cannot harm them. This makes summoning or commanding them impossible. Such beings rarely use their powers on behalf of mortals – although they occasionally aid the especially spiritually enlightened in small ways.

In addition, the study of Atlantean lore might lead to techniques for extracting Raw Magic from certain sources; see *The Stuff of Raw Magic* (pp. 227-229). This would have many uses, the most obvious and useful of which would involve applying it to rituals.

### *Plot Seeds*

*A Reader's Privileges:* An eccentric but wealthy devotee of spiritualism learns of a Sanskrit text, held in a remote Indian temple, that's said to detail unique secrets – perhaps even the key to immortality. The PCs are recruited to seek out and acquire a copy of this writing. The sponsor may present his offer as an above-board mission, to be performed legally and courteously – but he will reward anyone who returns with the information, and won't ask how it was obtained. Merely traveling to India and dealing with the proud and suspicious Brahmin guardians would be adventure enough, but the text turns out to be *supernaturally* defended, too. Furthermore, while copying it would be easier than obtaining the original manuscript, this would involve *reading* it . . . which turns out to have strange consequences.

*Love and Duty:* A spirit of some significance requests aid through a medium (possibly one of the PCs). It has never entirely forgotten its mortal life, even through the centuries, and occasionally watches its old family. Now, the last members of that family have fallen on hard times, and it wants someone to aid them – without them knowing. The favor of such a being is valuable, and the task – while a little tricky – isn't dangerous. However, what the PCs will eventually discover is that this entity, in ascending to spiritual power, supposedly foreswore certain mortal ties forever. This act of interference in mortal destiny is a denial of cosmic law, the repercussions of which could be terrible for all, as a great spiritual balance is disturbed. But how can the PCs restore equilibrium?

*Li Mu Bai: School is meaningless, the secret manual is meaningless . . . even this sword. It is just a state of mind.*

– *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

*The Nature of the Power:* A noted scientist, known by some to conduct research into Atlantean lore, has just announced a new source of unlimited mechanical energy. While most of his colleagues mock, it does appear that he has achieved a great dream of fringe science: perpetual motion. It seems likely that he's using Atlantean lore for this. In fact, he is – *dark* secrets from *forbidden* Atlantean texts that one of his colleagues found in a ruin in Mesopotamia. The machine has, metaphysically chained within it, the spirit of a human being, captured at the moment of death and bound to draw psychic energies across the boundaries of the afterlife. Various greater spirits will soon sense the thing's wrongness; some will become angry at all of mankind for giving birth to such evil pride, while others will seek to solve the specific problem. But the scientist is accumulating great wealth and powerful human allies, and commands unlimited energy . . .

## MYSTIC CHINOISERIE

In a fantastical, ahistorical Ancient China of legend (and Hong Kong fantasy movies), a mystical underworld of wandering magicians, self-disciplined monks, enlightenment-seeking warriors, and the occasional supernatural monster exists within and alongside a bureaucratized TL2 or TL3 empire. Occasionally, its members intervene in great events – especially if renegade sorcerers are abusing their powers or some individual threatens to bring tyranny to all China. The skill *Savoir-Faire* (Mystical World) is useful in dealings with these wizards, sword-saints, pretentious thugs, and obsessive alchemists. There may also be a “spirit realm” of gods and dragons (see *GURPS Dragons*), but such beings mostly stand aloof from mortal affairs.

Most wizards and alchemists, and some great swordsmen, are Taoists; martial-artist monks are generally Buddhists; and Confucian philosophies largely govern mundane society. These belief systems don't usually come into direct conflict, unless a fanatical Confucian ruler seeks to suppress “irregular” and “decadent” ideas for the sake of social order, or a Taoist decides that his path to enlightenment requires him to pursue some great cause. Still, strong devotees of each tend to regard the others with some disdain.

The Esoteric Medicine (Taoist) skill is fairly widespread among mystics and magicians, and can achieve results roughly comparable to Physician/TL5.

## Elemental Magic and Alchemy

Spell-based magic and alchemy are available in this setting, both offering most of the options described in *GURPS Magic* – although the GM can prohibit any spell or elixir that doesn't seem to fit the background, and of course the elemental colleges follow the Chinese/Taoist structure (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water; see *Alternative Elements*, pp. 47-48). The general mana level is low, however, except on the peaks of particular mountains and in certain parched desert valleys. Moreover, the materials required by alchemy are often incredibly rare, so many elixirs cost 10 times the prices given in *Magic* for rare-magic settings. Nevertheless, wealthy and powerful men frequently sponsor alchemists, mostly demanding that they discover the fabled Elixir of Immortality.

What makes these sorts of magic more feasible is that optional modifiers – based on Chinese elemental and bagua symbolism – apply to both. See *Chinese Symbolism* (p. 86) and *Chinese Mystical Modifiers* (p. 255). Taoist wizards tend to carry a lot of amulets and scrolls bearing significant symbols, and sort through them before casting spells.

## Chi Control

Some advanced students of the martial arts have chi-control powers of the types described in *GURPS Powers* and *GURPS Martial Arts*. The Trained by a Master advantage is a prerequisite for these, and most power-wielders also have an array of esoteric martial-arts skills.

## Mystical Interactions

In a broad sense, *all* mystical effects use chi; spells and alchemy simply exploit the chi of materials or places as well as that which flows through the human body. Thus, everything interacts to some extent; e.g., the Detect Magic spell can sense chi powers and alchemical operations in action. However, Dispel Magic and similar spells work by disrupting the specific structures of magical ritual – they can't dispel chi effects produced by personal discipline and will.

## Plot Seeds

*Old Loyalties:* The PCs encounter a solitary wanderer whom they recognize as a famous sword-master – but traveling unarmed, and seeming uncertain and confused. If forced to fight, he proves quite formidable with a simple walking-staff or his hands, but he shows no enthusiasm for battle. If anyone goes to the trouble of befriending him, or finds a way to use honor to draw him out, his story becomes clear. He comes from a high-status background, and took up his life, seeking meaning and purpose, after his entire family was wiped out by a plague. He has never found it, but he at least thought that his course was honorable.

Recently, however, the sword-master has learned that his youngest brother survived after all – and has become a *wizard* of very questionable morals, obsessed with death after that early experience. This leaves the master feeling that his whole existence is based on error, and shamed for his family. To slay his brother, or to let another do so, would finally destroy the family and compound his failure – but to

let him continue is just as wrong. Solving this paradox is a righteous deed that would earn the swordsman's gratitude. (It's also possible that he has been tricked by a necromancer, who isn't really his brother – but if so, the trick has been made very convincing.)

*The Secret:* A mighty warlord, fearful of death, is sending armies north, south, east, and west in search of the alchemical secret of immortality. He's playing havoc for leagues around; every alchemist, wizard, or mystic he can capture is being dragged back to his fortress and tortured for knowledge. His forces are too great for even China's mightiest heroes to oppose directly – and truly powerful wizards are just disappearing until the trouble blows over – but a well-organized resistance might be able to wear down his power while saving various hard-working doctors and mild-mannered monks from maltreatment. Really *clever* foes might defeat him by stealth, or by playing on his madness.

*The Superior Man:* The PCs receive a request for a meeting with someone who clearly wants to keep matters secret. Their enigmatic contact proves to be the wife of the provincial governor, who arrives with a small but competent-looking bodyguard troop. Her husband is widely believed to be corrupt and self-serving, but she seems to all appearances to be acting in good faith – and given the traditional place of respectable women (as opposed to wild adventuresses), her behavior is very strange. It transpires that she feels in need of honorable outside help. She insists that her husband is a good man whose trust is being abused by cunning underlings, but that he won't believe her; in fact, she suspects that sorcery has been used to befuddle his mind. She may be right . . . or the problem could simply be the strain of office . . . or she might just have too high an opinion of her husband. But even if the governor is a virtuous man, his virtue leads him to distrust "vagabonds and rogues" like the PCs.

## THE GEM INJECTION PROBLEM

Infinity Unlimited (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds* and Chapter 20 of the *Basic Set*) has discovered something

worrying: an unlikely, undocumented, dangerous type of magic, involving a form of drug addiction, is spreading from *world to world* across Quantum 4. *Someone* is pushing a chemical (probably *alchemical*) preparation that converts high-quality gemstones into drugs. It reduces gems to a liquid form that can be injected fairly safely, producing a rush of wild sensations. This would be nothing but an insanely expensive indulgence . . . except that, for some time after the injection, the user can produce powerful magical effects, with details depending on the type of gem used.

The pushers evidently have dimension-hopping capability – presumably magical. They're shadowy, elusive figures, and third-hand reports suggest that they're not entirely *human*. Descriptions mention tall, slim figures with varied skin coloring, yellow slanting eyes with no pupils, triangular faces, high, thin cheekbones, and slightly pointed ears – and also a bizarre, baroque style of dress, a taste for ornate archaic weapons, and an arrogant, coldly cruel manner. This sounds like some sort of elf, although there are discrepancies and other problems with this identification. Still, given that elves are notoriously diverse and whimsical, that's where the betting runs.

What these pushers *want* is also unclear. However, it's probably to make a profit. It seems that the one thing this magic can't ever do is create more gems than it burns, so if they're users themselves, they'll have a use for money.

### Solving the Problem

Infinity isn't certain that all this is technically its worry – gem abuse hasn't shown up in Quantum 5 yet, and the evidence is that *no* magic ever works on Homeline. Still, there are risks here that can't be ignored. "Gem users" are damaged, confused people, and every encounter with them leads to trouble; they may come to endanger the Secret, or even reality itself. The thing's probably better stopped now rather than when it *does* hit Homeline or a major tourist timeline. Anyway, it's clearly a law-and-order problem, and I-Cops are cops.

Intelligence suggests that the Cabal (p. 84) is as puzzled and concerned by this as Infinity. It doesn't like having its monopoly threatened! Of course, the Cabal doubtless wants to handle the problem in its own risky and selfish way.





In fact, this form of magic comes from the dangerous timeline known as Madland. For details, see **GURPS Fantasy II** (for **GURPS Third Edition**). However, it will be *extremely* hard for Infinity – or even the Cabal – to trace the problem back to its root.

## Gem Injection Rules

Gem injection is a form of ritual magic (pp. 72-76) with unique features, a radically reorganized college structure, and its own type of Magery. Such Magery should by rights be very rare, but it and the associated skills and techniques can all be “learned” through experiencing the psychological effects of gem injection. Thus, it’s possible to acquire these abilities with bonus character points or through “self-teaching.” The latter involves a lot of experimentation and self-analysis while under the influence of different gems, and usually requires above-average Will to sustain it, but some addicts claim to experience radical insights while using gem-drugs. Sometimes, the first few injections seem to unlock a latent gift – or perhaps warp dormant Magery toward this application!



### Magery (Gem Injection)

Individuals who have other varieties of Magery *cannot* acquire this type – there’s a fundamental incompatibility. Price Magery (Gem Injection) like regular Magery, but with three limitations, worth -60% in all:

- **Accessibility** (p. B110): An addict has access to a *single* college at a time, depending on the gem used. He cannot mix different gems for injection. The only way to switch colleges is to take a new shot while the previous effect is still active, which is a traumatic experience: the user must make a HT-3 roll or fall unconscious for 3d minutes, during which time his new abilities may expire. Even if he succeeds, he’s mentally stunned (p. B420). He *can* safely continue to maintain spells after a particular injection has worn off, however. “One college at a time” is a -10% limitation.

- **Required Disadvantage** (see *Calculating the Power Modifier*, p. 202): Gem injection is an Addiction. It’s impossible to use the magic if one isn’t hooked – the process involves succumbing totally to the rush. The habit is very expensive, highly addictive, and causes psychological dependency, and is technically *legal* on most worlds simply because the local law hasn’t caught up with it yet; thus, the Addiction is usually worth -20 points. Some settings may react quickly or have blanket prohibitions that make it

illegal, and therefore worth -25 points. The limitation value is set at -20% for simplicity, however. Like many addicts, users fetishize the materials of their habit – bizarrely ornate hypodermic syringes – and are predictably bad at sterilization, leading to the usual secondary health problems (although the magic can sometimes cure disease).

- **Trigger** (p. B115): The need for gem-drugs to trigger the Magery is worth -30%. The addict can work magic for 2dx3 minutes after the injection.

Gem injection’s other peculiar features are considered special effects, or are assumed to balance out.

### Skills

The skills for gem injection magic are unusual: Ritual Magic (Gem Injection) is a *HT/Very Hard* skill, each gem/college is a *HT/Hard* skill, and each spell is an *Average* technique. High Pain Threshold gives +1, while Low Pain Threshold gives -4; addicts don’t describe casting magic as painful, but it’s certainly stressful. For convenience, use the standard prerequisite counts in Appendix C (the GM can adjust these for individual spells, if desired).

### Energy

Users normally spend FP to power spells, but can always spend HP if they wish.

### Critical Failures

Critical failures use the “*Reality-Warping*” Table (p. 259) – but on an 18, the caster suffers a heart attack (p. B429) instead of the usual results.

## Gemstones and Their Effects

Gem injection magic uses the following gems/colleges:

**Amethyst:** The Mind Control college, except for spells granted by emerald, garnet, or quartz; the Healing college, except for Resurrection; and Invisible Wizard Eye, Memorize, Rejoin, Repair, Telecast (but since only one gem can be used at a time, this only benefits amethyst spells), Wizard Eye, Wizard Mouth, and Wizard Nose.

**Aquamarine:** The Water college, except for Purify Water, Seek Coastline, Waves, and spells relating to water elementals. Whirlpool cannot be cast on the *sea* using this gem.

**Beryl:** The Gate college, Summon Demon, and all spells relating to elementals and the immaterial spirits of the dead. (Given how disruptive these spells can be to an Infinite Worlds campaign, the GM may choose to ban or restrict some of them.)

**Diamond:** The Earth college, except for spells relating to earth elementals. Also Create Object, Shatterproof, Stiffen, and Toughen.

**Emerald:** Copy, Duplicate, Emotion Control, Fascinate, Fear, Loyalty, Panic, and Resurrection.

**Garnet:** Bless, Curse, and Ecstasy.

**Jade:** The Plant college.

**Jet:** The Knowledge college, except for spells granted by amethyst. Also Mind-Reading and Mind-Search.

**Lapis Lazuli:** The Air college, except for spells relating to air elementals.

**Pearl:** Purify Water, Seek Coastline, Tide, Waves, and Whirlpool when this is cast on the sea.

*Quartz:* Continual Light, Glow, Great Hallucination, Hallucination, Invisibility, Light, Madness, Permanent Madness, and Shape Light.

*Ruby:* The Fire college, except for spells relating to fire elementals. Also Disintegrate, Explode, Shatter, Weaken, and Weaken Blood. While under the influence of this gem, the user gains an Obsession with seeing justice done, and won't willingly harm innocents. Unfortunately, his definition of "innocents" may be drawn very narrowly.

*Sapphire:* The Protection and Warning college.

*Sardonyx:* The Communication and Empathy college, except for Mind-Reading and Mind-Search.

*Topaz:* (Animal) Control, Beast-Rouser, Beast-Soother, Continual Light, Continual Sunlight, Hybrid Control, Light, Light Jet, Master, Repel (Animal), Repel Hybrids, Rider, Sunbolt, Sunlight, and Wall of Light.

*Turquoise:* Affect Spirits, Age, Blackout, Darkness, Decay, Gloom, Pestilence, Rotting Death, Ruin, Sense Spirit, Shape Darkness, Skull-Spirit, Stop Healing, Summon Spirit, Turn Spirit, Weaken, and all spells relating to zombies.

## ***Plot Seeds – Addicts and Pushers***

All of this would make for a relatively minor nuisance, except for the cost of gems and of the alchemical preparation. Most addicts would like just to lie around enjoying the experience, harming only themselves and their families – but the habit needs a *lot* of money. To pay for it, predictably, many take to crime. With their access to magic, they become a major social and criminal problem.

The addicts' suppliers don't seem interested in giving them much magical training, but may drop hints about what's possible with the right gems. They sometimes even offer free gems, alchemical supplies, or a little magical instruction in exchange for strange one-off missions with unknown purposes. Still, the pushers have less than no sympathy for their customers, and sometimes turn down requests with a bored half-smirk, or sit around watching an addict in the throes of withdrawal, for fun.

The beings pushing this addiction are, as a race, immortal, extremely capable, completely amoral, and often actively sadistic. They use their immortality to master a huge range of skills, although they're unfamiliar with high technology. Those whom I-Cops might encounter are also gem injection users, with high levels of skill (possibly permitting them to use spells that human users can never manage), and may also carry magic weapons and other enchanted items. Despite their problems with advanced technology, and their relative inexperience at using magic in a

low-mana environment (their home dimensions have high mana), any one of them should be a deadly opponent for a whole team of human agents. The best way to drive them off is probably to make things too inconvenient or *boring* for them – at least for the next few decades.

The Cabal will probably have even more trouble, although it's possible that some of its leadership have the cunning to negotiate with the pushers without being outmaneuvered. Gem injection magic is hard to fit into Cabalist theories, and too self-destructive and erratic for self-disciplined, egocentric Cabalists.

## **Changing Magic**

A game's magical background and campaign assumptions are *usually* stable – but that isn't guaranteed. Natural shifts that alter the rules of magic can be a campaign's driving force, or at least a major theme. These may take the form of changes in mana levels, shifts in mana aspects (see *Aspected Mana*, p. 59), or complex swings in the values of magical modifiers. Wholesale revisions of the entire magic system are probably best saved for kicking off a new campaign or marking a dramatic climax, but they aren't unthinkable.

The biggest problem with large-scale changes is that they can undermine the effectiveness of wizard PCs – or grant them huge free bonuses. Such shifts may give NPC enemies major problems or benefits, too, and generally play havoc with character concepts and effectiveness. Anything that looks too arbitrary also runs the risk of wrecking players' suspension of disbelief. Still, the shock effect *can* be quite exciting. When making major alterations mid-campaign, assess the effects on each PC individually, balancing results that logically imply a change in point value by giving the affected individuals extra bonus points, new advantages or disadvantages, etc., as needed.

### ***Emerging/Awakening/Returning Magic***

A classic fantasy theme – as either an opener for a plot or a grand climax to events – is "the return of magic" ("the dawn of magic," in a world that has never known magic). This is especially interesting if the PCs are among the first people to acquire these amazing new powers, or are ordinary folk assigned by some authority to deal with the ensuing problems using only conventional skills and smarts. A problem here is explaining how a population that has never before had access to working magic could learn how to control it effectively. The answer might involve a combination of digging through texts from past Ages of Magic, logical deduction from first principles, blind experimentation, and maybe contact with beings from elsewhere (or ancient survivors of earlier Ages). Anyone with Wild Talent with Retention can help a lot, but will have such a formidable edge – in the early days at least – that a substantial Unusual Background seems fair.

### ***Declining Magic***

The converse theme is "magic is failing." Fiction usually depicts this as a slow, drawn-out process, taking decades or centuries – although a *sudden* collapse of the mana level could make for an interesting fantasy catastrophe! The game's atmosphere might be that of a melancholy saga of decline and decay, possibly ameliorated by the rise of new ways of living and fresh hopes, perhaps more humane than what went before. Then again, dynamic magic-oriented heroes might look for ways to halt the decline, seek new, more stable forms of magic, or search for refuges where magic still works.

# APPENDIX A

# MAGICAL MODIFIERS

Modifiers and magical correspondences that might be of importance to multiple magic systems are collected here to avoid repetition.

## MAGICAL SCOPE PARAMETERS

These “modifiers” may be read as skill penalties, energy requirements (for Energy Accumulating magic, FP costs, etc.), or margins of success, depending on context; see Chapters 5 and 6. The GM can interpret them similarly in his own magic systems.

### Area Effect Modifiers

For a circular area of effect, find the circle’s *diameter* on the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550). If that gives a positive Size Modifier, use SM as the relevant modifier. Small areas *don’t* receive a negative modifier; 0 is the minimum. For example, areas of 2 yards or less in diameter have a modifier of 0, an area 30 yards across has a modifier of 7, and one 25 miles across has a modifier of 26.

For noncircular areas, use the modifier for the *smallest* circle into which the area could fit; e.g., a square area 15 yards across the diagonal would have a modifier of 5. For something like a building that’s taller than it is wide, use the longest dimension in any direction to determine the modifier.

### Damage Modifiers Tables

For damaging effects, first find the modifier for the damage *amount*:

#### Damage Amount Table

Damage	Modifier
1d-3*	0
1d-2	1
1d	2
1d+1	3
2d	4
2d+1	6
3d	8

\* Also use “1d-3” for minimally damaging effects: a spark to light a fire, a harmless tap, etc.

Past 3d, each +1 to damage adds +2 to the modifier, while each +1d adds +4. The GM may cap damage for some or all effects; 6d (modifier 20) seems reasonable.

Then adjust the damage amount modifier for damage *type*:

## Variant Durations: Conditional Termination

Optionally, the GM may have some or all magic with a duration use a different system from the *Duration Effect Modifiers Table* (p. 243). Instead of enduring for a fixed time, the effects last until a specific condition is met. Modifiers for such things depend on how likely the condition is to arise, and how soon, and should give effective times roughly comparable to those on the table. Some example modifiers:

“Until your next heartbeat”: 0.

“Until I draw my next breath”: 0-1 (*not* permitted to undead casters – and someone who dies suddenly is assumed to gasp an involuntary dying breath in the process).

“Until a sparrow next enters this ordinary garden”: 1-2.

“Until sunrise” or “Until you next sleep”: 3-4.

“Until the swallows return”: 8-9.

“Until she’s kissed by a prince”: 9-12 (assuming that princes are hard but not impossible to find, and that PC ingenuity might arrange a kiss from one).

*Seemingly* impossible conditions are worth about 16, as even the “impossible” can happen once a century or so. Highly unpredictable or ill-defined events (e.g., “Until the wind changes” or “Until he finds true love”) should generate relatively large modifiers, although the GM is then free to have them happen – or threaten to happen – surprisingly soon. This is magic to some extent tinkering with destiny, which usually leads to strangeness.

Depending on the magic’s exact nature, results may depend on the *letter* or the *spirit* of the condition being met. Traditionally, the letter is more important, and magicians must choose their words carefully. Players shouldn’t be able to twist things too far, though; e.g., a “prince” should be genuine, internationally recognized *royalty*, not some nut who has declared his street an independent state!





### Damage Type Table

Damage Type	Adjustment
Small Piercing	×0.5
Burning, Crushing, Piercing, Toxic	×1
Cutting, Large Piercing	×1.5
Corrosion, Fatigue, Huge Piercing, Impaling	×2
Explosive	×1.5

Examples: A 2d large piercing attack has a modifier of  $4 \times 1.5 = 6$ . A 4d+1 corrosive explosion has a modifier of  $14 \times 2 \times 1.5 = 42$ .

### Duration Effect Modifiers Table

Duration	Modifier
Momentary	0
≤10 minutes	1
≤1 hour	2
≤12 hours	3
≤1 day	4
≤1 week	5
≤2 weeks	6
≤1 month	7
≤3 months	8
≤1 year	9

After one year, each doubling of duration adds +1 to the modifier: up to two years has a modifier of 10, up to four years has a modifier of 11, and so on. The GM is welcome to adjust these durations for flavor: “12 hours” might become “sunrise to sunset” (or vice versa); “1 month” could mean four weeks, a lunar month, or a calendar month; “3 months” may be “a season”; “1 year” could actually be “a year and a day”; 64 or 128 years, “a century”; etc. See also *Variant Durations: Conditional Termination* (p. 242).

### Multiple Constituent Modifiers Table

Number of Constituents	Modifier
1	0
2-3	1
4-5	3
6-10	4

Past 10, every +5 to the *maximum* number adds +1 to the modifier; e.g., 11-15 has a modifier of 5.

The GM can apply further penalties for complex constituents or tasks, deep “post-hypnotic” suggestions, and other complications that stretch a spell or ritual’s use. Conversely, a lot of small “constituents” treated in much the same way may not impose as large a penalty as the table suggests; e.g., dividing a heap of

hundreds of pebbles into three smaller piles would count as involving three constituents, not hundreds.

### Multiple Target Modifiers Table

Size of Group	Modifier
1	0
2-3	2
4-5	4
6-7	6
8-10	8
11-14	10
15-20	12
21-30	14
31-50	16
51-70	18
71-100	20
101-140	22
141-200	24
201-300	26
301-500	28
501-1,000	32
1,001-2,000	36

Past 2,000, each doubling of the *maximum* number adds +4 to the modifier; e.g., 8,001-16,000 has a modifier of 48.

### Weight Affected Modifiers Table

Weight	Modifier
≤10 lbs.	0
≤30 lbs.	1
≤100 lbs.	2
≤300 lbs.	3
≤1,000 lbs.	4
≤3,000 lbs.	5
≤5 tons	6
≤15 tons	7
≤50 tons	8
≤150 tons	9

And so on. Being able to affect up to 300 lbs. (modifier 3) is usually sufficient to lift or teleport any ordinary human being.

## SYMPATHY

Wizards whose powers are subject to *Laws of Magic* (pp. 14-15) often focus their magic through objects “similar” to the subject, or perform actions similar to the desired effect. Where such procedures are optional, employing them sometimes garners a bonus. Where they’re *required*, omitting them inevitably gives a penalty.

True sympathetic links are usually physical objects used in the casting. At the GM’s option, these may be destroyed. Small items (e.g., hair samples) are normally used up, while portraits or sculptures generally *aren’t*, except when working destructive magic.

Count only the best sympathetic link among those available. Moreover, a given item or substance *cannot* serve to invoke more than one of sympathy, *Names* (p. 245), and *Contagion* (pp. 245-246). Acquiring two or three *different* elements is part of what makes such magic interesting!

### Penalties

Where sympathetic links are *mandatory*, working magic without a good symbolic representation of the target gives from -2 (if using a barely recognizable sketch of the subject) to -6 (if the subject is identified by nothing but a common, public name).

## Traditional Materials

The notion of magical “conductors,” “insulators,” and “resistors” is discussed in *Materials* (p. 87). The skill modifiers below are examples, and strictly optional in any magic system – a normal, unmodified working would be almost impossible if everything *reputed* to affect magic were to produce modifiers!

### Ashes

Completely inert matter; a line of ash can disrupt magic crossing it (-1 to -3) or define an insulating circle (+1 for magic worked wholly within it).

### Blood

A supreme conductor; “the blood is the life,” and the life-principle can be seen as the essence of magic. Having a blood connection to a target, or establishing one to a magic item, gives +3. Merely spattering one’s blood while casting magic adds +1.

### Bread/Grain

A “power sink,” transmuting magical force from supernatural to natural. Some effects can even be transferred to bread and eaten by “sin-eaters.” Fresh bread may harmlessly absorb up to three points of magical energy per loaf. Cornmeal or flour helps contain magical energy, just like ashes.

### Hawthorn

Associated with Christ’s crown of thorns, and growing over sacred wells such as that at Glastonbury, hawthorn has long been used to protect homes from fairies and witches. Casting magic across a hawthorn hedge, at someone wearing a hawthorn badge, or into a house guarded by a hawthorn wreath, is at -3 to -5. Carved hawthorn, ironically, makes a superior magic staff (+2 to magic cast using it) – possibly because the wood contains and focuses energies.

### Iron

A common, legendary resistor; iron harms faeries, drives off the Devil, and breaks charms and glammers. The blacksmith is traditionally considered holy, thanks to his constant, purifying exposure to iron. Casting magic on someone wearing iron, into a house protected by an iron cross or horseshoe, or on a blacksmith, may mean penalties as severe as -5; castings on or across

iron itself may suffer as much as -7. Iron *cannot* serve as an insulator; and any iron item intended to contain magical power must be “magically degaussed.”

In some traditions, *magnetized* iron becomes a conductor akin to blood.

Fantasy novels and games sometimes restrict these powers to “cold iron,” an ahistorical concept likely based on misremembered Kipling poetry. If the GM wishes, he may define “cold iron” as cold-rolled iron, wrought iron, or meteoric iron.

Alternatively, meteoric iron might be a conductor, since it fell from the higher spheres. In that case, “star-iron” causes no negative effects, and in fact grants +3 to +5 (depending on purity and quantity) to magic using or cast through it.

Whatever iron’s effects, the GM may rule that steel, as “impure” iron, doesn’t share them.

### Running Water

Often seen as a barrier against evil and possibly magic – likely because its lower incidence of amoebic contamination reduces the odds of disease, which is commonly associated with curses. Non-Water magic cast across running water is at -2 (for tiny creeks or apartment pipes) to -5 (for mighty rivers).

### Salt

An ancient charm against evil (probably because of its preservative effects), and traditionally magical (likely due to its “uncanny” power to restore food’s taste), salt assumes diverse roles in different traditions; what follows is just one interpretation. Rock or granulated salt is a resistor, giving -2 to -4 to castings across or into it. A pool or dish of salt water can “ground” energies; when magic is cast within scent of salt water, a critical failure only produces harmful effects if a second roll against the same effective skill also critically fails. Saltwater bodies large enough to show tides (seas, estuaries, and oceans) keep their salt in flux; therefore, magic cast on or across them is at anything from -5 to +5 (roll 2d-7). This doesn’t apply to Water magic, and the GM may also exempt other “ocean-flavored” workings.

### Silk

In fairly late traditions, silk can conduct magic or, tied in a circle, insulate it. This gives +1 or +2 for castings along a silken cord or entirely within a silken circle.

## Minimal Representations

A quick sketch, made with a successful Artist (Drawing) roll, can act as a minimal sympathetic representation, granting no bonus or penalty. Pieces of clothing or small articles belonging to the target *might* also serve here (GM’s option).

## Bonuses

Apply only the *highest* bonus:

Detailed drawing of the subject, requiring as much time as the GM sees fit and a successful Artist (Drawing) roll: +1

Model of the subject, requiring an Artist (Sculpting) roll at +3 (the third dimension adds enough similarity that a sculpture can be less successful): +1

Nail or hair clippings from the subject: +1

Symbolic representation of the magic’s effect (feather for a Flight spell, flashlight for a Light spell, etc.): +1

Formal portrait or sculpture of the subject, made with a successful Artist roll *in the subject’s presence*: +2

Good photograph or voice recording of the subject: +2

More elaborate symbolic actions relating to the magic’s effect (e.g., stabbing a model of the subject with a dirty hypodermic to cast a disease spell), at the GM’s option: +2

Hologram or clear moving picture or video of the subject (but magical illusions interfere with the magic being worked, and grant *no* bonus): +3

Subject’s twin or clone, physically present and not resisting: +3

Subject is physically present during the ritual, willing or not: +4

## Blood and DNA

A blood sample is worth +2 in most settings – but in some, blood is an exceptionally powerful magical ingredient, giving +3 or +4.

Similarly, in high-tech backgrounds, the subject's DNA – either an actual laboratory sample or a computerized diagram – might give +2 (if the GM considers it something of a second-hand symbol), +3 (if it rates as a highly precise identifier), or +4 (if magic follows the scientific principle that DNA largely defines a creature).

## Casting on Oneself

Where a minimal representation is required to avoid a penalty, casting on oneself is fine – the caster can touch his own face and clothes, and knows his own name. Wizards *can* use better representations to get bonuses here, but this should require a little effort: keeping nail clippings, commissioning portraits, etc.

## NAMES

Using the target's *name* may give a bonus. In settings where this works, assume that every sapient entity (and probably others) has a True Name by which the universe knows him.

In modern society, the subject's True Name might simply be the full legal name on his birth certificate. A Roman Catholic may be baptized or confirmed with a different name, however – the ritual *renames* him and takes precedence – and other groups have similar practices. In many tribal societies, everyone has a True Name and a public name; some also have a “secret name,” granted at coming-of-age. Wizards sometimes follow this practice to protect themselves, and True Names may be known only to parents, loved ones, priests, or magic teachers. A wizard might adopt a public name, which can become famous and feared, even powerful, in its own right (ask Merlin) – but one of its purposes is as a mask. Using such a pseudonym or a clear informal identifier *does* allow magic to find its subject (“Show me Faustus” is a legitimate, if dangerous, thing to ask of a crystal ball), but grants no bonus.

As with *Sympathy* (pp. 243-245), count only the *best* available bonus:

Pseudonym or public name: +0

Full legal name (where different from True Name), or military serial number, Social Security Number, etc.: +1\*

Private “pet” name, baptismal name, or similar secret name (where different from True Name): +2

Fully individual and almost completely unknown identifier (e.g., a superhero's secret identity when working magic on his hero guise), at the GM's option: +3†

True Name: +4‡

\* A Social Security Number or similar usually gives +1. However, if the GM wants to give magic a modern air, note that such codes define individuals more precisely than almost anything else! Two people can share a name – but this number is *unique*. Thus, it may grant a higher bonus.

† Similarly, a complete DNA sequence *might* rate as a unique identifier (disregarding identical twins and clones), and so be worth +3 if not being used as a sympathetic link.

‡ At the GM's option, a True Name may provide an even higher bonus – or ensure automatic success – with magic that calls the subject (e.g., Planar Summons or Summon Demon), and *possibly* with Mind Control spells and similar highly personal magics.

## True Name Changes

Changing one's True Name should be tricky at best, and perhaps totally impossible – remember that the *universe* has to be convinced!

A priest might be persuaded to perform a new baptism, but he'll require some kind of theological justification, even if he sympathizes with the need. Secular legal name changes involve time and paperwork, and might turn out to work only if all the original documentation can be destroyed. In other cases, an individual's close family and lovers may have to be convinced not only to use his new name, but to *think* of him by it. Changes may take effect over weeks, months, or years, with bonuses for the old True Name gradually shrinking as the new one fades in.

In some cultures, a name given at coming-of-age actually *becomes* the True Name, overriding whatever name the child's parents gave him at birth. An adult is by definition beyond the (magical) control of his parents, although he probably becomes subject to the priests. His original True Name becomes a secret name (+2) once replaced, unless the naming ceremony is powerful enough to destroy the link altogether.

## Name-Related Traits

A moderately obscure True Name (e.g., all public birth certificates quietly lost, and few people knowing one's middle name) might be a valid perk. In high-fantasy settings where True Names have great power and formal bureaucracy is light, Zeroed (p. B100) could primarily imply a True Name that's hidden from everyone but the character – or even one that's completely unknowable. The latter has the advantage that enemies can't *ever* acquire the name by luck or trickery, and the disadvantage that the nameless one's trusted allies will never get the bonus for a True Name when working beneficial magic on him.

Most people *do* know their own True Name, though. The GM may permit a wizard who doesn't know his True Name (for whatever reason), and who therefore can't cast magic on himself at +4, to take this as a quirk. He can only claim a +3 name bonus with careful preparation – perhaps by using a carefully cultivated secret name.

## CONTAGION

Contagion is rarely *required*, but can give bonuses. It works much like *Sympathy* (pp. 243-245), but uses items that have been in close contact with the target. The wizard can't use the same things to invoke both principles simultaneously.

As with sympathy, minor “contagious links” are normally consumed by the casting, while more substantial items can generally be used repeatedly – although they may lose their potency over time with all that magic swirling around them. Also as with sympathy, wizards can use contagion to claim bonuses when casting on themselves, provided that they use elements that are as personal as those required for other subjects. Something like keeping a drop of one's own blood to use in magic is quite easy – just don't let your enemies capture it! It's similarly easy to make a contagious connection to a physically present subject.

As with other laws of magic, only the *best* bonus applies:

Article of clothing or personal item with a strong link to the subject: +1\*

Skin scrapings, saliva, fingernail clippings, or hair/fur from a living subject, or a physical piece of an inanimate one (e.g., wood from a house's lintel): +2

Blood, semen, or corpse of the subject, or the equivalent from something inanimate (e.g., motor oil from a vehicle): +3

Casting the spell using the subject's *physically present*, unresisting child or spouse: +3



\* This should be something that the subject would actually miss. One dress shoe out of 10 pairs in his closet, or a pencil from his desk, wouldn't provide a bonus; well-worn underwear, or a "lucky pocketknife," would. At the GM's discretion, clothing or items of *vast* personal importance – e.g., grave earth, wedding clothes, or a magician's robe or staff – might grant a higher bonus.

## SACRIFICE BONUSES

Sacrifices sometimes aid magic by "bribing" spirits or through the release of mystical energies. If sacrifices act as energy sources, then see *Sacrifices* (pp. 54-58); if they grant skill bonuses, then use the alternative system below. Apply these guidelines:

Food, alcoholic beverages, tobacco, stimulants, incense: +1 or +2  
Artwork, jewelry, valuable goods, money: +1 to +3  
Live animals: +2 to +4  
Human beings, *if acceptable*: +1 (homeless stranger) to +5 (beautiful virgin, royalty)

Ranges represent variations in *symbolic value* and *quality*. Typically, some system of correspondences used in the campaign determines symbolic value; e.g., when using *Hermetic Astrology* (pp. 248-253) and working magic associated with Aries, sacrificing a red ram gives a higher bonus than killing a random chicken. As for quality, sacrifices should be highly flavored, notably valuable, or otherwise superior to the normal run of things; the better the item, the larger the bonus.

A *supernatural* example of a given category gives +1 over the highest bonus. For instance, one of the Golden Apples of the Hesperides would grant +3; a magical sonnet in Byron's own hand, +4; a live wyvern, +5; and a vampire king, +6.

These bonuses are cumulative, subject to some restrictions. If offering both food and animals, only the *higher* bonus applies. Sacrifice bonuses are mutually exclusive with other bonuses for the same magical ingredient; e.g., when using *Hermetic Astrology*, burning musk could count as a decanic correspondence with Sphandôr or a sacrifice to its aethyr, but not both. In any event, the GM should cap the total bonus at +6 unless he wants a sacrifice-intensive game.

Sacrifices must belong to the caster or be fully within his power to count. Notably, killing an enemy in battle is *never* an effective sacrifice.

Finally, not all magic benefits from human or even animal sacrifices! Such actions may generate negative psychic energies that scare off or disgust many spirits, or that scramble other powers. The GM should assign a penalty at least *double* the size of the listed bonus to any sacrifice that violates divine or metaphysical principles; e.g., a human sacrifice to a god of mercy and healing would give from -2 to -10.

## Complications

In modern-day settings, animal sacrifices can lead to trouble with the authorities, animal protection groups, etc. In many backgrounds, they are associated with demon worship, and raise suspicions that the magician is capable of human sacrifice as well. Some religions regard animal sacrifices benignly, but even they may have doubts about secular magicians doing the same thing.

In all but the bloodiest (e.g., Aztec-style) settings, human sacrifices attract only spirits or energies associated with harm and negative emotions. At the GM's discretion, where the spirits needed for magic are less squeamish, and respect blood and dedication, a *willing* human sacrifice can bestow a bonus where an unwilling one wouldn't.

## Self-Sacrifice

Wizards may be able to make a sacrifice of *themselves*. This is usually done only *in extremis*, for obvious reasons! If it's possible, then the magician gets +1 per full 20% of his HP spent.

Details vary. A magician might ritually shed his own blood or simply gash himself with a knife, or expend psychic energy in an extreme way that causes internal bleeding, bruises, tears of blood, and stigmata. The GM can require a Will roll. If the roll is made exactly, then the expenditure succeeds but the first roll the magician makes for the magic takes a shock penalty appropriate to the HP spent. High Pain Threshold is a good advantage for blood magicians!

Some vicious spirits may accept self-sacrifices that cause severe pain (p. B428) with minimal actual injury. This might require a Surgery or Interrogation roll as well as a Will roll, and is unlikely to grant more than +1. Failure on the skill roll inflicts a few HP of real injury.

If the ritual ends disastrously, or invoked dangerous spirits or dark energies – or if self-sacrifice is simply a *bad* idea – then the GM may require a HT roll afterward. Failure means the injuries leave livid, permanent scars or other strange, inconvenient effects. To emphasize the dangers, the GM might even require the magician to make aging rolls (p. B444), possibly without bonuses or protection from TL or advantages.

## SIGNIFICANT DATES

Yet another possible source of modifiers is *when* the magic is worked.

### Magical Dates

Some dates with possible supernatural significance in Western traditions, with associated decans for campaigns using *Hermetic Astrology* (pp. 248-253):

*Imbolc* or *Candlemas*: The harbinger of spring, the beginnings of light and fertility; February 1. (Kumeatêl, Phoubêl, Saphathoraël)

*Ostara*: The vernal equinox (around March 20), the official beginning of spring when the day and night are in balance. (Alleborith, Charchnoumis, Harpax)

*Walpurgisnacht*: May Eve (April 30), a day when the dead walk and winter takes its last blows. (Iudal, Kumeatêl, Kurtaël)

*Beltane* or *Roodmas*: The feast of fire and love, May Day. (Anatreth, Eneuth, Kumeatêl)

*Litha*: The summer solstice (usually June 21), the longest day of the year. (Alleborith, Methiax, Phoubêl)

*Lughnasadh* or *Lammas*: A solar feast of first harvest and marriage; August 1. (Isrö, Kumeatêl, Naôth)

*Mabon*: The autumnal equinox (around September 22), the second harvest and the official end of summer, balancing again the day and night. (Alleborith, Atrax, Bianakith)

*Samhain* or *Halloween*: The feast of the dead, and the beginning of winter; October 31. (Ieropaël, Iudal, Kumeatêl, Kurtaël)

*Yule*: The winter solstice (around December 21), the shortest day of the year; traditionally, the birthday of kings. (Alleborith, Phthenoth)

### Historical Dates

Dates with more modern associations might also generate modifiers.

### National Days

Many nations have a date that they call their own. For the United States, it's July 4; for France, it's July 14 (Bastille Day). Not every nation attaches quite so much significance to any particular date,

though, even if they have a few local holidays. Great workings to promote the whole nation's interests might be cast at +1 to +3 on such a day, while information magic might treat this as the nation's astrological "birthday."

### Secular Festivals

May 1 (May Day) has multiple associations. As the ancient Beltane (see *Magical Dates*, p. 246), the beginning of summer, it was a rural festival. In the late 19th century, it became associated with the movement for a shorter working day, and thus International Workers' Day – a favorite day for parades in communist states. Today, many nations treat it (or a convenient nearby date) as a public holiday, with deeper significance minimized. Still, it might give bonuses (+1 to +3) to the magic of new beginnings and radical change.

In the U.K., especially, November 5 (Guy Fawkes Night) might be a good time to cast spells to create large explosions (or to prevent them – the celebrations commemorate an *unsuccessful* attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament), worth +1 or +2.

Other public and traditional holidays might have similar associations.

### Religious Festivals

These can be significant, either because they involve direct connections to supernatural power or because so many people regard them as important. In Christian settings, it might be harder

(-2 to -10 or more) to cast diabolical magics at Christmas or Easter. Muslims would likely consider it blasphemous to cast Food spells during daylight hours in Ramadan.

### Turning-Points of the Year

Equinoxes and the like already appear under *Magical Dates*, but they could equally draw power from modern associations or numerological effects. They are times when everything (light and darkness, heat and cold) is in the balance, and a tiny nudge might evoke a thing or its opposite, giving +1 or +2 to some temporary spells but -3 or more to attempts to make an effect permanent. The spring equinox suggests growth and an end to cold, so plant magic might be at +3, the summer solstice could give +2 to +4 to heat or light magic, and so on.

### Cultural Variations

Different cultures keep different calendars. Some have simply drifted apart due to adjustments; others have completely different bases. For example, the Muslim calendar uses a *lunar* year, so its significant fasts and festivals – such as Ramadan and Eid ul-Adha – move around the longer *solar* year of the Gregorian calendar. The GM might privilege one or more calendars, assuming that they somehow access fundamental truths; limit significance to dates with clear astronomical standing (e.g., equinoxes and

## Zodiacal Correspondences

Sign (Dates)	Color	Metal	Stone	Plant	Creature	Scent	Body Part	Tool	Opposing Sign
Aries (Mar. 21-Apr. 19)	Red	Iron	Amber	Willow, Bamboo, Lily	Ram, Owl	Dragonsblood	Brain	Horn	Libra
Taurus (Apr. 20-May 20)	Brown	Bronze	Bloodstone	Chestnut	Bull	Storax	Neck, Head	Lever	Scorpio
Gemini (May 21-Jun. 21)	Orange	Copper	Agate	Holly, Lotus	Magpie, Mule	Wormwood	Chest, Ribs	Tripod	Sagittarius
Cancer (Jun. 22-Jul. 22)	Gray	Silver	Moonstone	Hazel	Crab, Crawfish, Sphinx	Balm	Stomach	Wheel	Capricorn
Leo (Jul. 23-Aug. 22)	Yellow	Gold	Carnelian	Apple, Citrus Trees, Palms, Sunflowers	Lion	Frankincense	Heart, Back	Furnace	Aquarius
Virgo (Aug. 23-Sep. 22)	Indigo	Aluminum	Sapphire	Grapevine, Snowdrop	Dove	Narcissus	Bowels	Lamp	Pisces
Libra (Sep. 23-Oct. 23)	Pink	Brass	Chrysolite	Ivy	Elephant	Galbanum	Kidneys, Hips	Scales	Aries
Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 22)	Maroon	Tungsten	Topaz	Elder, Cactus	Scorpion	Ammonia	Genitals	Whip	Taurus
Sagittarius (Nov. 23-Dec. 21)	Blue	Platinum	Zircon	Yew, Rushes	Centaur, Horse	Aloe	Arms, Hands, Liver	Arrow	Gemini
Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19)	Dark Green	Cobalt	Garnet	Rowan, Thistle	Goat	Cannabis	Lungs	Magnet	Cancer
Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 19)	Purple	Uranium	Amethyst	Ash, Olive	Peacock	Ozone	Legs	Wire	Leo
Pisces (Feb. 20-Mar. 20)	Crimson	Steel	Aquamarine	Alder, Dogwood	Fish	Ambergris	Feet, Lymph Nodes	Cross	Virgo

## Planetary Correspondences

Planet (Day)	Color	Metal	Stone	Plant	Creature	Scent	Tool	Opposing Planet
Sun (Sunday)	Gold, Bright Yellow	Gold	Diamond	Acacia, Saffron, Birch	Lion	Laurel	Orb	Moon
Moon (Monday)	White	Silver	Pearl	Mushroom, Poppy	Cat	Jasmine, Opium	Mirror	Sun
Mars (Tuesday)	Red	Iron	Ruby	Garlic, Gentian, Ironwood	Wolf	Blood, Tobacco, Gunpowder	Sword, Athame	Venus
Mercury (Wednesday)	Orange	Mercury	Opal	Lavender, Mandrake	Jackal, Snake	Sandalwood	Pentacle	None
Jupiter (Thursday)	Blue	Tin	Jade	Oak, Mint	Eagle	Cedar, Nutmeg	Wand, Scepter	Saturn
Venus (Friday)	Green	Copper	Emerald	Rose, Lotus, Cherry	Swan, Lynx	Rose	Chalice	Mars
Saturn (Saturday)	Black	Lead	Onyx	Cypress, Ebony	Crow, Raven	Myrrh	Sickle	Jupiter



solstices); or assume that dates become significant when enough people believe that they are, so that the important calendar is the one with the most users.

### The Postclassical Planets

Being based on traditional astrology, *Planetary Correspondences* (p. 247) doesn't allow for the planets discovered in the era of modern astronomy: Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto (although astronomers split hairs over Pluto's status as a planet – and over some other recently discovered bodies). The GM is free to alter things if he wants to synchronize science and magic; one possibility is to assign the postclassical planets to decans that lack colleges (see *Decanic Correspondences*, this page), and derive some new parallelisms. Some astrologers already take these planets into account. Although widely accepted rules have yet to emerge, Uranus seems to govern explosive or revolutionary change; Neptune, deep “sea changes” and massive impersonal forces; and Pluto, the metaphorical “underground” and change after death. The astrology of other solar systems is wide open for improvisation.

## HERMETIC ASTROLOGY

The following tables summarize one version of traditional Western astrological ideas, used to assess modifiers for magic-working; see *Astrological Modifiers* (pp. 83-86). The GM can alter these to match different theoretical systems or campaign styles.

### Decanic Correspondences

A *decan* is a 10° segment of the zodiacal arc; thus, each zodiacal sign contains three decans. For each decan, the table below indicates the sign, and whether the decan comes first, second, or third within in; the governing planet; the associated Qabalistic sephirah (see *The Sephiroth*, pp. 253-254); and the related spell colleges and ritual Paths, if any.

### Decanic Natures

This list describes each decan's significance and nature, indicates what aspect of reality it governs, and provides the following additional information:

*Aethyr*: Every decan has a powerful spiritual Lord or Lady, its *aethyr*, who adopts one or more appearances in visions or symbolism.

Decan	Zodiacal Position	Planet	Sephirah	College	Path
Agchoniôn	Aquarius 3rd	Venus	Netzach	Sound	–
Akhoui	Pisces 1st	Jupiter	Hod	–	Luck
Akton	Scorpio 3rd	Moon	Netzach	–	Spirit* (dealings with demons)
Alath	Libra 3rd	Mercury	Chesed	–	–
Alleborith	Capricorn 3rd	Mercury	Chesed	Meta-Spells	Spirit* (general-purpose wards, etc.)
Anatreth	Sagittarius 1st	Jupiter	Hod	Movement	–
Anostêr	Capricorn 2nd	Venus	Binah	–	–
Arôtosael	Aries 3rd	Jupiter	Chesed	Making and Breaking	–
Atrax	Virgo 1st	Mercury	Hod	Food	–
Axiôphêth	Sagittarius 3rd	Sun	Malkuth	–	–
Barsafael	Aries 2nd	Sun	Binah	–	Spirit* (dealings with enigmatic powers)
Belbel	Gemini 2nd	Venus	Yesod	–	Spirit* (dealings with ghosts)
Bianakith	Pisces 3rd	Mars	Malkuth	Body Control	–
Buldumêch	Virgo 3rd	Venus	Malkuth	–	–
Charchnoumis	Cancer 2nd	Mars	Binah	Animal	Form
Eneuth	Sagittarius 2nd	Mars	Yesod	Fire	Elements (fire effects)
Harpax	Capricorn 1st	Saturn	Chokmah	Plant	–
Hephesimereth	Aquarius 1st	Saturn	Geburah	–	–
Ieropaël	Virgo 2nd	Saturn	Yesod	Earth	Elements (earth effects)
Isrô	Aquarius 2nd	Jupiter	Tiphareth	Air	Elements (air/wind effects)
Iudal	Taurus 2nd	Mercury	Tiphareth	Gate	–
Kumeatêl	Leo 2nd	Jupiter	Tiphareth	Enchantment	Spirit* (dealings with “worldly” entities)
Kurtaël	Gemini 3rd	Saturn	Malkuth	Necromantic	Health (harmful effects)
Marderô	Libra 2nd	Saturn	Binah	–	–
Methiax	Cancer 1st	Moon	Chokmah	Illusion and Creation	Cunning
Naôth	Libra 1st	Venus	Chokmah	Communication and Empathy	–
Nêfhada	Scorpio 2nd	Jupiter	Tiphareth	–	–
Ouare	Taurus 3rd	Saturn	Netzach	Technological	Gadgets
Phoubêl	Leo 1st	Sun	Geburah	Light and Darkness	–
Phthenoth	Pisces 2nd	Moon	Yesod	Healing	Health (healing effects)
Roêlêd	Leo 3rd	Mars	Netzach	Protection and Warning	Protection
Ruax	Aries 1st	Mars	Chokmah	Mind Control	Dreams
Sahu	Taurus 1st	Venus	Geburah	Weather	Nature
Saphathoraël	Cancer 3rd	Venus	Chesed	Water	Elements (water effects)
Sphandôr	Gemini 1st	Mercury	Hod	Knowledge	Knowledge
Tepsisem	Scorpio 1st	Mars	Geburah	–	–

\* The choice of decan to invoke for a ritual from the Path of Spirit often depends on the specific working. Aside from those noted above, for example, summoning or binding an elemental may require use of the appropriate element's decan.

*Places:* Locations where magic drawn from the decan is easier to cast. Spell or ritual rolls may receive anything from +1 for simple correspondence with an otherwise normal location to +3 for a particularly old or significant locale.

*Materials:* Using any of these materials, colors, patterns, etc., in magic drawing on the decan may give a bonus: +1 for common or simple materials, +2 for rare or difficult ones, or +3 for legendary or particularly significant ones. Enormous quantities or particularly high qualities may provide *another* +1.

Note that some decans share associations – much as some magical colleges share spells.

### Agchoniôn

The decan of noise, music, and hearing, Agchoniôn naturally overlaps somewhat with its neighbor, airy Isrö. Agchoniôn doesn't convey meaning, however; languages fall under Naôth.

*Aethyr:* Hahahaal, Lord of Unstable Effort, most often takes the form of a large yellow swan or of a crowd of people talking in chorus.

*Places:* Sonar stations, opera and concert houses, wind tunnels, narrow canyons, echo chambers.

*Materials:* Bats' ears, dolphin blood, recording tape, seashells, theremin music, parrot feathers, glass shattered by sound, bright yellow-green.

### Akhoui

Akhoui energizes (if that's the term) indolence, drift, ease, and luck – especially “dumb luck” or “fools' luck.” Not stagnant like Alath, Akhoui simply “goes with the flow.”

*Aethyr:* Vevaliah, Lady of Abandoned Success, appears as an attractive red-headed woman with her hair tied up in a black velvet band, or as a collie, a raven, or a large orange carp.

*Places:* Casinos, resort hotels, some taverns, much of Faërie, fountains (with coins), wishing wells.

*Materials:* Four-leaf clovers, rabbits' feet, upright horseshoes, beer, dice, stones with water-eroded holes through them, the small bone of a sheep's head, honey, deep orange.

### Akton

Where Kurtaël's decay is most often the result of natural processes, Akton empowers decadence of the spirit or the self-created mutilation of soul, culture, or body. It instills corruption, debauchery, and the cruel and queasy joys of sin.

*Aethyr:* Naber, Lord of Illusionary Success, appears in many guises: a blonde woman in red, a kneeling man in a fur robe, a carrion crow or a black crane, and a red-eyed gryphon.

*Places:* Alcoholic wards, whorehouses, crack dens, certain temples in desert lands, slave markets, the edge of the Abyss.

*Materials:* Vomit, maggots, vitriol, cocaine, wormwood, venereal pus, pale yellow.

### Alath

Alath creates satiety, comfort, rest, the steady state, boredom, stagnation, and stasis, and may be crucial in the “damping out” of destructive energies where less-compatible decans intersect.

*Aethyr:* Kaliel, the Lord of Rest from Strife, often appears as a fat man riding on a donkey and drinking wine. Other times, he manifests as an enormous, slumbering bull with the head of a man or a leopard.

*Places:* Old-age homes, cold deserts, still tarns, ghost towns, select gentlemen's clubs.

*Materials:* Tortoiseshell, square and cubic shapes, arsenic, ether, morphine or heroin, deep wine-purple.

### Alleborith

Some see Alleborith as the essential medium of magical transmission; others, as the particulate energies of magic; and still others, as an abstraction for the portion of Barsafael and Anostêr that mages have mapped. It's the decan of *pure* magic, the “active” reflection of “passive” Kumeatêl.

*Aethyr:* Mendial, Lord of Power, most often appears as either an azure dolphin or a blue merman with a trident. His eyes are always golden yellow.

*Places:* Magical laboratories, pentacles, places of power, ley intersections, arcane realms.

*Materials:* Mandrake root, orichalcum, pyramid shapes, black cat whiskers, water from Atlantis, green moonstones, pineal glands, bright azure.

### Anatreth

While Iudal is transition, the act of crossing depends upon Anatreth, the decan of movement, evolution, progress, and speed (fast or slow). It primarily empowers physical movement, but astral or spiritual movement also carries much of Anatreth's impulse.

*Aethyr:* Nithaya, Lady of Swiftmess, most often manifests as a blurry image of wings, but sometimes coalesces into a winged dog, or a human figure with future and past images “ghosted” onto it.

*Places:* Tornadoes, airports, speedways or freeways, lightning strikes, bullet trains and their tracks.

*Materials:* Arrows, bullets, fulgurites, cobra venom, hawk or osprey feathers, methamphetamine, henbane, violet.

### Anostêr

Some mages theorize that Anostêr, by definition, cannot exist. It comprises that which cannot be done or known – the impossible, the unnamable, the reverse face of knowledge and skill, the void preceding creation.

*Aethyr:* Yeichavah, Lord of Effort, traditionally appears as a gray, blind ape, or as an enigmatic figure garbed in prismatic robes, its face hidden by a peacock fan. He takes other forms at whim; many mages remain uncertain whether they have conversed with (or even summoned) him.

*Places:* Peculiar stone circles in impossible places, a mirage city in the desert, a hot spring beneath arctic ice.

*Materials:* The noise of a cat's passage, books never written, blood from a stone, imperceptible colors.

### Arôtosael

Arôtosael drives all cyclic processes of creation and destruction, from assembling knowledge to destroying a city in an atomic blast. It irrupts most strongly during intermediate stages, when enough has appeared to make the result apparent, or a structure will fall with one good shove.

*Aethyr:* Nithael, the Lord of Perfected Work, often appears as a pale, redheaded man in a reddish-purple gown carrying a wooden staff, or as a winged man with a mirrored sword and helmet. He usually wears a golden bracelet.

*Places:* Decisive battlefields, particle accelerators, alchemical or chemical laboratories, blacksmith shops, beehives, new forests, seas of seaweed.

*Materials:* Ram's horn (and anything else in a Fibonacci spiral), flint, clay, radioactives, E above high C, hammers, sage, murex dye or anything else reddish-purple.

### Atrax

Atrax nourishes – it's the day-to-day inner strength of things renewed by sunlight (for plants), food (for animals), or worship (for deities). Atrax shades into health and healing, more as a steady state than as a process, and into decay (food for bacteria and worms).

*Aethyr:* Akiyah, Lady of Prudence, usually appears as a woman bearing an armload of fruit, grain, or bread.

*Places:* Supermarkets, bazaars, farmland, compost heaps, restaurants, gas stations, granaries, some fields with secret historical significance.

*Materials:* Bread, salt, woman's hair, storax, saliva, fertilizer, peridots, light yellowish-tan.

### Axiôphêth

Axiôphêth may serve as another "anchor" for reality, empowering gravity, weight and mass, and forces holding things in place, often including oppression for its own sake.

*Aethyr:* Arael, Lady of Oppression, appears as a woman in an indigo robe seated on rocks. Occasionally she weeps; just as often, she has her foot on a man's throat and her hand wrapped in his hair.

*Places:* Underneath tons of rock, sun-baked desert flats, labor camps, prisons, sweatshops, particularly oppressive cubicle farms, slave galleys, certain mountains in the Pamirs.

*Materials:* Lead chains, iron weights, ballast from a ship that has traveled around the world, depleted uranium, indigo.

### Barsafael

Barsafael is hidden truth, the subconscious, unconfessed primal emotions, and unknown strengths. Some wizards theorize that Barsafael underlies all the other decans; others believe that as wizards, philosophers, and scientists explore more of existence, Barsafael's essence shrinks (or continues to create more unknowns).

*Aethyr:* Hechashiah, Lady of Ancient Strength, appears as a woman in crimson and white robes with one leg uncovered, or as a crimson and white sea serpent.

*Places:* Deep beneath the ocean or in hidden caves, cities unknown to mankind, dinosaur burial grounds, fragmentary worlds long forgotten, very old mountaintops, limestone sinkholes.

*Materials:* Ambergris, petroleum, white noise, artesian water, taproots of plants, "U" shapes, crimson.

### Belbel

The decan of pain and torment, sharpness and shadow, shock and loss . . . few mages explore Belbel, but many ghostly undead draw on it.

*Aethyr:* Aaneval, Lord of Despair and Cruelty, occasionally appears as a man with the head of a raptor bird; other times, as a black dog; still others, as a man covered in fish or snake scales.

*Places:* Torture chambers, death camps, deep in the rainforest where sunlight never falls, widows' walks, shadow-burns left by nuclear blasts, the edges of the Abyss.

*Materials:* Funeral crepe, surgical steel, rust, ammonia, neurotoxins, dried blood, nettles, purple so dark that it appears black.

### Bianakith

If man is the measure of all things, then Bianakith is the template to which that measure is drawn. Humanity (at least potentially) encompasses all the decans, but must operate within the medium of meat, bone, desire, and thought established by Bianakith.

*Aethyr:* Mihal, Lord of Perfected Success, appears only in human form – sometimes, in fact, in two human forms (man and maiden), other times as a crowned king of perfect form.

*Places:* Crowded cities, human-scale statuary, portrait galleries, gymnasia.

*Materials:* Lungwort, liverwort, elm, river clay, human blood or skin, starfish, GI Joe or Barbie doll (or any other idealized poppet), ivory.

### Buldumêch

Buldumêch energizes wealth and treasure, giving gold its glitter and building stock-market castles in the air. Within its penumbra lie concepts as arcane as currency arbitrage and as basic as greed.

*Aethyr:* Murmux, Lord of Wealth, traditionally manifests as an old man leaning on a staff and wrapped in a woolen mantle.

*Places:* Banks, trading floors, gold mines, customs houses, money-changers, jewelers, treasure troves.

*Materials:* Money, anything expensive and hoarded, jackdaw or magpie feathers, cowry shells, sapphires, toad venom, gold.

### Charchnoumis

Charchnoumis imbues all animal life, bestial thoughts, predation, and pack behavior. It is thus a very powerful component of human beings, and empowers the majority of lycanthropes and other animalistic shapeshifters.

*Aethyr:* Rohael, Lord of Abundance, appears most often as a great bear, but sometimes as a composite beast such as a chimera or gryphon. When he appears as a human (a camel-driver or a beautiful woman in green), he usually has a blue head.

*Places:* Zoos, slaughterhouses, nature preserves, forests, fresh animal tracks or kills, watering holes, Mount Ararat.

*Materials:* Fresh animals' blood or skin, bloodstones, fresh game spoor, hunters' weapons, civet musk, hunting-horn music, anything dark blood-red.

### Eneuth

Fire, the untamed element; man's first mystery. As its elemental decan, Eneuth sparks not just the fires of stars and gas grills, but the lively fires of inspiration, lust, war, and demagoguery.

*Aethyr:* Yirthiel, Lord of Great Strength, most often appears as a golden man or as a three-headed dragon. He occasionally leads yellow-orange or red cattle.

*Places:* Bonfires, firestorms, tropical or subtropical deserts at midday, war-torn lands to the south, lava flows, magmatic caverns, the Plane of Fire.

*Materials:* Obsidian, asbestos, sulfur, fire opals, sodium, magnesium, rocket fuel, ash-wood wands, cones, olibanum, garlic, mustard, cayenne pepper, orange-yellow.

### Harpax

Harpax sends sap through mighty cedars and spangles ponds with algae. All things green and growing, both harmful and healing, have their taproots somewhere in Harpax.

*Aethyr:* Vishiriyah, Lady of Harmonious Change, primarily speaks out of wooden musical instruments. When she manifests, it's usually as a white dryad clad entirely in blue, red, and yellow flowers.

*Places:* Sacred groves, rainforests, algal pools, weed-ridden croplands, hedge mazes.

*Materials:* Green jade, holly, cedar, woodwind music, amanita mushrooms, ivy, coral, forest green.

### Hephesimereth

Hephesimereth is literally *nothing*. It imbues creation with defeat, emptiness, and loss. Pessimistic mages believe that eventually, every decan will fall into the sack of Aniel.

*Aethyr:* Aniel, Lord of Defeat, walks with head down, wearing a dark red, shapeless, hooded robe. Only his hands emerge, holding an empty sack.

*Places:* Open abandoned pits, former cemeteries with the bodies disinterred, frozen Antarctic desert, the intergalactic vacuum, places where the ground has been sown with salt.

*Materials:* Dead batteries, dust from an abandoned house, ashes, mistletoe, lack of all color.

## Ieropaël

Second of the elemental decans, Ieropaël helps solidly anchor reality as the fundamental principle of earth, soil, and rock, of the very concept of physicality.

*Aethyr:* Hazael, Lord of Material Gain, traditionally appears as a large man holding a jar of oil. Other common guises include a black centaur and a skin-clad tribesman.

*Places:* Mountain caves, volcanoes, up-thrust crags, gravel beds and quarries, city parks, fertile land in the north, the Plane of Earth.

*Materials:* Quartz, talc, slate, oak, lichen, worms, narcissus, orbs, dark brown.

## Isrö

Air, at peace and in storms, coheres from the energies of Isrö. Not only zephyrs and hurricanes, but also the lightning strike of genius, the airy chatter of gossips, and the windy oratory of politicians derive from it.

*Aethyr:* Rehael, Lord of Science, traditionally appears as a milk-white, winged horse or as a proud king with a long white beard wearing a white robe. Rarely, he has manifested as a proud man in a white lab coat, holding a lightning bolt.

*Places:* Windstorms, steppes, inside or atop clouds, on balloons or airships, cities atop plateaus in the east, the Plane of Air.

*Materials:* Eagle feathers, chalcedony, galbanum, white orchids, helium, bird-bone knives, aspen, pink-white.

## Iudal

Boundaries, roads, portals, rivers, bridges, and other liminal and transitional thoughts and things form from Iudal. Iudal also emerges in concepts of time, distance, and measurement, and powers bridge-trolls.

*Aethyr:* Ieilael, Lord of Eventuality, holds a key in every form, while habitually shifting between them. Three common ones are that of a long-haired man with ox's hooves, a winged man, and a gryphon.

*Places:* Bridges, crossroads, doorways (especially post-and-lintel ones), boundary markers, rivers, interdimensional gates, outdoors during an eclipse, grandfather clocks.

*Materials:* Keys, two-headed coins, juniper, alexandrites, tobacco, hollow bones, chalk, mirrors, rose-madder, cesium, cornmeal, amber.

## Kumeatêl

Kumeatêl empowers hidden contention and unknown victory, the ace up a sleeve or the corps held in reserve, as well as secrets (especially decisive ones), murmurs, and even some aspects of codes, glyphs, and runes. Where Barsafael is the Unknown, Kumeatêl is the Hidden, and thus may partially embody magic itself.

*Aethyr:* Elemiah, Lord of Victory, appears in a (literally) legendary number of forms, most characteristically as a stranger in a blue cloak and slouch hat or as a bearded knight of cruel countenance in unreadable heraldry. In neither version are his eyes clearly visible.

*Places:* Secret laboratories or military bases, hidden rooms or passages, labyrinths, lost cities, conspiratorial fastnesses, pocket dimensions, certain university libraries.

*Materials:* Artifacts with secrets, the number 13, walnuts, handcuffs, Christmas wrapping ribbon, silk cord, knots with hidden ends, rose (both the flower and the color).

## Kurtaël

Death, fear, decay, and disease fluoresce with the black energies of Kurtaël. Vampires, mummies, lichens, and many other undead draw upon its power while in the material world, even if they must admix its energies with blood or magic.

*Aethyr:* Menqal, Lord of Ruin, appears as a corpse in chainmail, a black horse, or a harlequin figure without arms, among his many forms, but seldom as a skeletal figure in a black cowl and cloak.

*Places:* Graveyards, terminal wards of hospitals, ruined buildings where people have died, plague pits, tombs, marshes, necromantic altars in Haiti, Transylvania, and elsewhere.

*Materials:* Rowan, cypress, myrrh, contaminated syringes, rats, yew, hellebore, onyx, ebony, jet, pitch, anything black.

## Marderô

Marderô energizes rebellion against comfort and anger at injustice, as well as violent reaction born from fear of chaos. It also drives mutations, changes born of crisis, and the concept of the opportune disaster.

*Aethyr:* Hokmiah, Lord of Sorrow, appears as a man with a lion's face, occasionally enthroned but more often pacing angrily with a whip.

*Places:* Revolutionary battlefields or massacres, police stations, some government buildings, meteor craters, disaster sites.

*Materials:* Hammers, sickles, human blood, pepper, tear gas, axes, five-pointed stars (but not pentagrams), gunpowder, rhino hide, white-flecked azure.

## Methiax

Where Arôtosael assembles and disassembles, Methiax *creates* – indeed, creates creation. The form of all matter is inherent within its smallest fragments, so Methiax also governs form. Methiax shapes realities and dreams equally, and empowers some shapeshifters and phantasms.

*Aethyr:* Chabuiyah, Lady of Love, rules Methiax most often as a white centaur garlanded with leaves, although occasionally she appears as a crowned, maidenly Muse.

*Places:* Artists' studios, movie theaters and sets, counterfeiters' dens, certain very old vineyards in Greece and Turkey, hallucinations and hallucinogenic spaces, induced dream states, Faërie, copy centers and scriptoria.

*Materials:* Pyrites, zircons, flashbulbs, eggs, pomegranate seeds, fractals, holograms, hallucinogens, fog, anything gray.

## Naôth

What Iudal is to the material experience, Naôth is to the conceptual one – the creator and sustainer of communication, language, imagery, symbolism, and teaching. Not only the media but the urge to communicate arises from Naôth, which connects everything on many levels.

*Aethyr:* Mebahel, Lady of Peace Restored, appears as a woman reading a book, occasionally bearing a bloody spear.

*Places:* Radio stations, printers, shared telepathic experiences, shared or archetypal dream states, universities, a few select bars, certain bookshops in London and Paris.

*Materials:* Vervain, bay leaves, "V" shapes, stringed instruments or their strings, blue-gray.

## Nefthada

Nefthada impels pleasure and delight – thrills physical and mental. It's often only perceptible at single, almost painfully perfect moments: the meadow under a rainbow, the first bite of steak, the second swallow of cognac. But its influence is in all those things forever.

*Aethyr:* Nelokiel, Lord of Pleasure, traditionally takes on the guise of a well-formed man on a richly caparisoned camel or in a luxurious tent.

*Places:* Almost nowhere – except for perfect moments in time or space. Some truly wonderful gardens achieve correspondence with Nefthada on a continuing basis, as do a very few building interiors.

*Materials:* Champagne, star sapphires, silk or satin fabrics, morning dew, pure oxygen, bright green.

### Ouare

Ouare governs constructs, machines, alloys, and vehicles. Some golems, magical cyborgs, and revenants draw on Ouare.

*Aethyr:* Heroch, Lord of Success Unfulfilled, usually manifests as a bronze clockwork lion, a mermaid (most often a warship's figurehead), a swarthy man with metal-and-ivory teeth, or a chariot-driver with serpents for legs.

*Places:* Garages, metallurgical laboratories, inside moving vehicles, virtual-reality matrices, the Autobahn.

*Materials:* Gears and clockwork, plastic, microchips, brass, aluminum, olive-green, any artificial dye such as aniline.

### Phoubêl

Phoubêl would seem to embody the Manichaeic contradiction: light cannot exist without darkness to define it. It deals equally with both, and thus also with vision, blindness, and irreconcilable conflict.

*Aethyr:* Yelayer, Lord of Strife, appears alternately clad in noble splendor on the back of a lion or caparisoned in rags riding a gray horse.

*Places:* Tropical beaches, outdoors at sunrise or sunset, tanning salons, cathedrals, stone circles, fireworks shows.

*Materials:* Heliotropes and other tropical flowers, flashlights, cinnamon, "X" or cross shapes, laurel and hazel wood, black-and-white (or black-and-red) checkerboard patterns.

### Phthenoth

Impelling cleansing, restoration, and healing – both physical and metaphorical – Phthenoth brings about the renaissance of body and spirit. Repair of *machines* is the province of Ouare, although areas of overlap may exist for golems and homunculi.

*Aethyr:* Shaliah, Lady of Material Happiness, appears in many guises, but is almost always seen as a young, noble woman regardless of garb or impedimenta (which very occasionally include the caduceus).

*Places:* Hospitals, health resorts, spring meadows after a rain, arches, fabled places of rest or healing.

*Materials:* Balm, pure water, apples, watered wine, chicken soup, potash, Greek ("+") crosses, lavender.

### Roêlêd

Roêlêd imbues walls with strength, thorns with sharpness, shields with glancing curves, antibiotics with efficacy. Along with defense and guardianship, Roêlêd drives alertness, preparation, wisdom of experience, and the "sixth sense" that tells you you're being watched. Many wraiths, and some trolls, draw on it.

*Aethyr:* Mahashiah, Lord of Valor, appears as a muscular, dark-feathered warrior holding a shield (often with a rattlesnake on it) and stabbing spear, or occasionally as a knight in armor or a watchman with a whip.

*Places:* Anywhere under surveillance or with an electric-eye grid, castles and fortresses, missile silos and radar stations, fire-breaks, guardhouses.

*Materials:* Owl or raven feathers, ox-hide, "M" shapes, dragons-blood, unicorn horn, sirens and alarms, dog barks, tiger lilies, Kevlar, chain links, bronze (both the metal and the color).

### Ruax

Ruax creates strength of will, connects perceptions to the mind, and governs sanity, drunkenness, the hotter emotions, sleep, and the material phenomena of dreams (although their content may fall within another decan).

*Aethyr:* Deneyal, Lady of Dominion, usually appears as either a dark, physically imposing giantess or a queen clad in a white robe. Either form possesses fiery red eyes. Deneyal also occasionally appears as a songbird or a cat.

*Places:* Television studios or showrooms, hypnosis clinics or performances, drug parlors and opium dens, asylums, personal dreamscapes, memory palaces, certain lamaseries in Central Asia.

*Materials:* Cathode-ray tubes, spirals, poppies, downward-pointing arrows, cerulean blue.

### Sahu

The decan of the giants, Sahu impregnates activities such as archery, hunting, and herding as well as their physical associations such as mountains, forests, grasslands, and other wild spaces. It also manifests in high stone walls – possibly as an analogy to mountains.

*Aethyr:* Orvandal, Lord of Material Trouble, appears as a giant, naked save for a belt and a bow. His color ranges from blood red to forest green to basaltic black.

*Places:* Mountainsides, the walls of famous fortress-cities, the high veldt, imposing statues or stone structures such as Mount Rushmore or the Sphinx and Pyramids.

*Materials:* Basalt, sequoia wood, subsonics, arrowheads, sinew, fresh animal blood, opals, anything red-and-black.

### Saphathoraél

Saphathoraél covers not only physical water (and liquids generally), but also *conceptual* water: that which "flows easily" or "is hard to pin down." Like the other elemental decans, it plays a key role, both underpinning physical reality and blending conceptual reality so that humans can perceive it without massive dissonance.

*Aethyr:* Muumiah, Lord of Blended Pleasure, appears most often not as some great marine creature but as a sailor with two dogs (one green and one blue). Occasionally, he holds a serpent or a stream of water in one hand.

*Places:* Oceans, lakes, ships, reservoirs, wells and oases, ice rinks, sewers, islands to the west, the Plane of Water.

*Materials:* Fish, the blood of drowned men, aquamarines and beryls, pearls, teardrop shapes, chalices, lotuses, ferns, kelp, Irish whiskey, the color blue.

### Sphandôr

Manifesting both as the sensorium and the intellect, the passive counterpart to Ruax's mental processes, Sphandôr permits intuition and divination as well as things sensed and thought (including arts and humanities).

*Aethyr:* Umibael, the Lady of Shortened Force, appears as a snake, a wolf with a snake's tail, a woman leading a roan mare and stallion, or a man with a surveyor's rod.

*Places:* Computer rooms, hexagonal spaces, paintings or images of eyes, theatrical stages (especially the Globe), libraries (especially Alexandria).

*Materials:* Agates and cat's eyes, musk, hexagons, fennel, ringing bells, russet-red.

### Tepsisem

Much as Phoubêl makes real both light and darkness, Tepsisem gives rise to beauty and its loss, and thus to transience and impermanence; steady diminution rather than the catastrophes of Marderô.

*Aethyr:* Livoyah, Lady of Loss, appears as a middle-aged woman in red, a scarlet fire-sprite, or a swift horsewoman on a red horse.

*Places:* Museums, art auction houses, badly maintained (but once attractive) buildings, eroding statues.

*Materials:* Works of art, rouge, acid rain, faded photographs, broken mirrors, velvet, sandalwood, cut hibiscus or lilies, scarlet.

# THE SEPHIROTH

The *Otz Chaim* – the Tree of Life in the Jewish Qabalistic tradition – encompasses 10 “spheres,” or *sephiroth*. These represent emanations of the divine, descending from the highest spiritual plane to base matter. Each *sephirah* can be viewed as a mystical realm as well as an aspect of God.

Mystics follow 22 linking paths to pass through the sephiroth on a spiritual pilgrimage toward enlightenment. This process *must* be taken in the correct order, which isn’t universally agreed upon. One plausible sequence is Malkuth, Yesod, Hod, Netzach, Tiphareth, Geburah, Chesed, Binah, Chokmah, Kether – although this involves a path that isn’t shown on every depiction of the Tree. Taking the sephiroth out of order – or trespassing without ritual preparation – can result in Very Bad Things. “Entry” into a sephirah can be envisioned as physically visiting a spirit realm, as traveling there in astral form, or as a purely spiritual achievement. Entering progressively higher spheres brings increasingly difficult challenges involving confrontations with guardians, tests of purity, and intellectual complexities.

A magician who has *attained* a sephirah – entering it correctly, in the proper sequence – may qualify for bonuses with some magic. The meanings of the sephiroth are usually defined in mystical terms, though, making them rather abstruse for use in secular magic systems. To resolve this, *Decanic Correspondences* (p. 248) associates each decan with a sephirah, and the descriptions below relate the sephiroth to classical elements, astrological features, and “verbs” suitable for verb-noun syntactic magic (see Chapter 6). Attaining a sephirah might permit a wizard to purchase levels of aspected Magery that give bonuses with magic related to a particular decan, verb, or planet. This can justify buying (limited) Magery well beyond campaign limits! In a setting where magical power demands mystical insight, entry into the appropriate sephirah might be *required* to use a magical verb, and the other associations of the sephiroth could form the basis of a system of Realm-based syntactic magic.

## Kether

“The Crown” comes closest to the Godhead, and manifests as a brilliant white light. Relating to perfection and the infinite, it’s the “Primum Mobile” above all planetary spheres, the unification of all the elements.

*Verb:* Create.

## Chokmah (Cochma)

“Wisdom” – related to the most basic of insights – resembles a rainbow star field, a mosaic of all colors. It comprises the entire zodiac, and is the root of elemental fire and air that form the fixed stars.

*Verb:* Sense.

*Other Associations:* Masculinity.

## Binah

“Understanding” is crucially concerned with comprehension. It can be seen as a black cave full of rich food smells. It touches the sphere of Saturn. Deep within it are the true spring of elemental water and the lush cornucopia of elemental earth.

*Verb:* Communicate.

*Other Associations:* Femininity.

## Chesed (Gedulah)

“Mercy,” the sephirah of generosity and protection, appears as a brilliant blue temple mirrored in blue airy skies. It abuts the sphere of Jupiter.

*Verbs:* Protect/Guard; Warn.

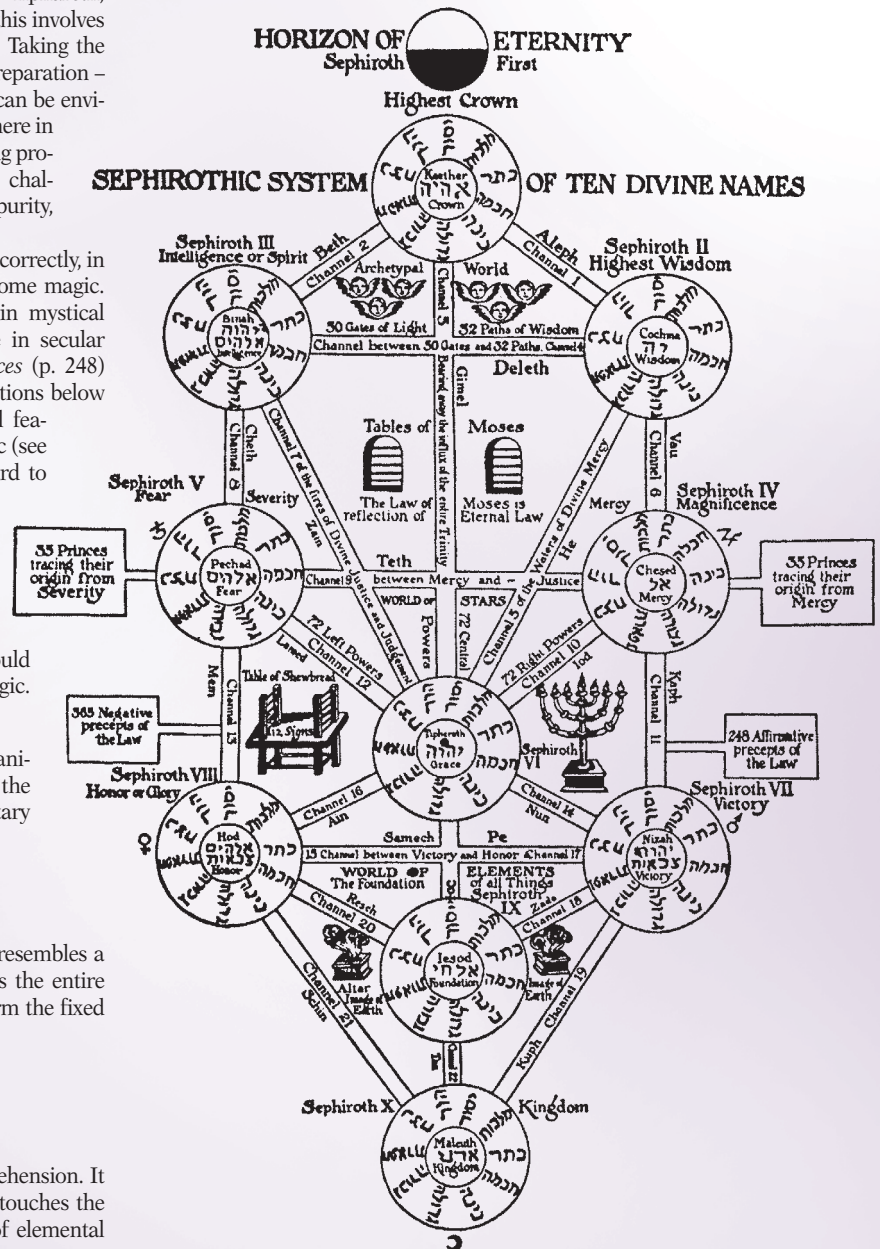
*Other Associations:* Love.

## Geburah (Pechad, Din)

“Severity” appears as an arsenal of iron chariots; the weapons, walls, and armored figures all glow with ruddy fire. It relates to violence and destruction (which *can* be used for good, but must be controlled). Obviously, it’s associated with Mars.

*Verb:* Weaken.

*Other Associations:* Strength; Justice.



## Tiphareth (Rahamin)

“Beauty” is suffused with a golden lambency, and relates to balance and moderation. Guarded by lions, it resembles ancient savannas. Its dry, shimmering heat denotes its fiery nature; its golden light emanates from the sphere of the Sun.

*Verb:* Heal.

*Other Associations:* Balance; Wholeness.



### Netzach (Nizah)

“Victory” hangs in space, a pillar of cloud and storm lashing an emerald-green sea, powerfully tied to water and related to emotion. Across its waves lies the sphere of Venus.

*Verb:* Control.

### Hod

“Splendor” shines from orderly lines and figures drawn within an infinite latticework of deep orange cloth-of-bronze, shot through with fractal, threaded patterns. The patterns ultimately resolve into the gateway to the sphere of Mercury. It holds the nodal point where the four elemental corners meet, somewhere at its center, and relates to intellect, logic, and language.

*Verb:* Transform.

### Yesod (Iesod)

“Foundation” – here referring to structures underlying the visible, not to the physical act of founding – relates to the subconscious. It’s a realm of hidden passages, hissing pistons, and levers; the motors of the world. Its ever-turning, unmappable nature reveals its ties to air; its deep purple light shines down through a million gratings and kaleidoscopic skylights from the sphere of the Moon.

*Verb:* Move.

*Other Associations:* Sex.

### Malkuth (Shekhinah)

“The Kingdom” is the root sephirah, tied not only to matter and to elemental earth, but to the material Earth. Its entrance is a chamber, deeply hidden somewhere on the material world, but most travelers enter even Malkuth astrally.

*Verb:* Strengthen.

## Daath

Daath is a hidden “11th sephirah,” lying between Binah and Chokmah. It’s “the worm that gnaws at the Tree of Life” – a terrifying enigma. Some writers suggest that entering Daath is necessary for complete enlightenment, but most believe that it leads to a deadly “anti-universe.” It’s said to be guarded by a powerful demon: Choronzon, Breaker of Thought and Form.

## THE HEBREW ALPHABET

Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has three points of potential magical significance, summarized in the table below. First, it has a numerical value, used in Qabalistic numerology. Second, it’s assigned to one of the paths linking two sephiroth (see *The Sephiroth*, pp. 253-254). Finally, it’s occasionally associated with images from an older pictogram system that some debatable theories suggest was the origin of the Hebrew alphabet.

Some occultists draw a connection between the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the 22 Major Arcana of the Tarot (starting with Aleph equated to either the Fool or the Magician). There seems to be no real basis for this, however, and little agreement about the “correct” relationship.

Letter	Name	Numerical Value	Sephiroth	Pictogram
א	Aleph	1	Kether; Chokmah	Ox or Vulture
ב	Beth	2	Kether; Binah	House
ג	Gimel	3	Kether; Tiphareth	Camel
ד	Daleth	4	Chokmah, Binah	Fish or Door
ה	He	5	Chokmah, Tiphareth	Jubilation or Window
ו	Waw	6	Chokmah, Chesed	Hook
ז	Zayin	7	Binah, Tiphareth	Manacle or Weapon
ח	Heth	8	Binah, Geburah	Enclosure or Fence
ט	Teth	9	Chesed, Geburah	Snake
י	Yodh	10	Chesed, Tiphareth	Arm or Hand
כ	Kaph	20	Chesed, Netzach	Hand or Palm
ל	Lamedh	30	Geburah, Tiphareth	Goad
מ	Mem	40	Geburah, Hod	Water
נ	Nun	50	Tiphareth, Netzach	Fish
ס	Samekh	60	Tiphareth, Yesod	Prop
ע	Ayin	70	Tiphareth, Hod	Eye
פ	Pe	80	Netzach, Hod	Mouth
צ	Sadhe	90	Netzach, Yesod	Plant
ק	Qoph	100	Netzach, Malkuth	Monkey or Back of the Head
ר	Res	200	Hod, Yesod	Head
ש	Sin	300	Hod, Malkuth	Tooth
ת	Taw	400	Yesod, Malkuth	Signature

## CHINESE MYSTICAL MODIFIERS

Chinese (primarily Taoist) mystical traditions imply many correspondences that might give magical modifiers.

## Chinese Elemental Modifiers

Element	Astrological	Direction	Color	Number	Time	Location	Paths
Fire, Element of Greater Yang	Sun, Mars	South	Red	7	Summer	Hearth	Elements (fire/heat effects)
Wood, Element of Lesser Yang	Jupiter	East	Green	8	Spring	Inside a Doorway	Health, Nature (plant effects)
Earth, Element of Balance	Saturn	Center	Yellow	5	Sixth Month	Internal Courtyard	Elements (earth effects)
Metal, Element of Lesser Yin	Venus	West	White	9	Autumn	Outside a Door	Gadgets
Water, Element of Greater Yin	Moon, Mercury	North	Black	6	Winter	Well	Elements (water effects)

Element	Body Parts	Mental	Taste/Smell	Animals	Plant	Weather	Other
Fire	Tongue, Lungs	Joy, Insight	Bitter/Burning	Fowl, Feathered Animals	Beans	Heat	Growth, Virtue
Wood	Eyes, Spleen	Anger, Overall Personality	Sour/Goatish	Sheep, Scaly Animals	Wheat	Wind	Birth, Charity
Earth	Mouth, Heart	Desire, Intelligence	Sweet/Fragrant	Oxen, Hairless Animals	Panicled Millet	Thunder	–
Metal	Nose, Kidneys	Sorrow, Speech	Acrid/Rank	Dogs, Hairy Animals	Hemp	Cold	Fulfillment of Oaths
Water	Ears, Liver	Fear, Perceptiveness	Salty/Rotten	Pigs, Shelled Animals	Millet	Rain	–

## Elemental Modifiers

The five Chinese elements have corresponding astrological associations, directions, colors, numbers, times, and locations, as summarized in the table above. Magicians may be able to exploit these connections to get bonuses when working magic pertaining to the appropriate element. The table also suggests ritual Paths that *might* be related to the elements and thus also benefit from such bonuses, but these connections are tenuous; it's usually better to select the element or trigram (see *Chinese Bagua Modifiers*, below) best suited to the particular ritual working.

Each element also corresponds to certain bodily, mental, sensory, natural, and abstract concerns, above.

Suitable elemental symbols from the first table (and perhaps the elements themselves) might give bonuses to magic related to items from the second, including Healing or Body Control spells affecting relevant body parts, Illusion and Creation or Mind Control spells producing associated sensory or mental effects, Animal and Plant spells dealing with corresponding animals and plants, and Weather spells invoking the indicated weather. The GM may let these associations run the other way and aid elemental workings, too; e.g., salt or millet might benefit Water spells. In all cases, inauspicious circumstances should give *penalties*.

Finally, each element has *political* and *historical* associations:

*Fire:* Chou dynasty, war, enlightened laws.

*Wood:* Hsia dynasty, agriculture, lenient laws.

*Earth:* The Three Kings and Five Emperors period, city administration, prudent laws.

*Metal:* Shang dynasty, justice, energetic laws.

*Water:* Ch'in dynasty, labor for the state, Legalism (stern, absolute laws).

The GM may let ingenious wizards exploit these. For example, holding a relic of the Chou dynasty – especially a weapon – could give a bonus to Fire spells, and perhaps also to spells involving the sense of taste (tongue), birds (feathered), etc. Likewise, a scroll of laws from the Ch'in dynasty may benefit Water spells, hearing-related magic (ears), rain-making rituals, and so on.

## Bagua Modifiers

Different sources define the *bagua* (eight trigrams) in various ways. The following table presents a suggested arrangement and set of associations:

## Chinese Bagua Modifiers

Name	Direction	Colleges	Paths	Associations
Li	South	Fire; Illusion and Creation; Light and Darkness	Cunning	Summer, Middle Daughter, Fire, Brightness, Connectedness, Pheasants, Eye, Sight
K'un	Southwest	Communication and Empathy; Earth; Healing	Dreams; Health (to heal humans)	Mother, Earth, Docility, Receptiveness, Acceptance, Oxen, Belly
Tui	West	Food; Mind Control; Protection and Warning	Luck	Autumn, Youngest Daughter, Marshes and Lakes, Pleasure, Joy, Attraction, Sheep, Mouth, Taste
Ch'ien	Northwest	Enchantment; Gate; Meta-Spells*	Spirit	Father, Heaven, Strength, Creativity, Pure Will, Horses, Head
K'an	North	Making and Breaking; Sound; Water	Health (to harm humans); Protection	Winter, Middle Son, Water, Danger, Change, Pigs, Ears, Sounds
Kên	Northeast	Body Control; Knowledge; Technological*	Knowledge	Youngest Son, Mountains, Stillness, Dogs, Hand, Touch
Chên	East	Animal; Movement; Weather	Health (on animals)	Spring, Eldest Son, Thunder, Movement, Initiative, Action, Surprise, Excitement, Dragons, Foot, Smell
Sun	Southeast	Air; Necromantic; Plant	Nature (for weather effects)	Eldest Daughter, Wind, Wood, Penetration, Following, Fowl, Thigh

\* When using *Alternative Elements* (pp. 47-48), assign the Void college to Ch'ien and the Metal college to Kên.

As each trigram has an "opposite" at the converse compass point, magic use *might* take penalties for the presence of symbols invoking an "opposed" trigram. On the other hand, Chinese mystical thought doesn't generally work in terms of strong oppositions.



## APPENDIX B

# ALTERNATIVE CRITICAL FAILURE TABLES

The *Critical Spell Failure Table* (p. B236) is a serviceable general-purpose tool, but its results don't suit every view of magic. Below are tables that offer alternatives for a number of magical styles. Some produce more serious effects than others; the *Comedy Table* (p. 257) is designed to amuse, although its results are often *inconvenient*, while the *Diabolic/Horrific Table* (p. 258) is about *evil*.

It's fairest to use the same table consistently. However, it's possible that casting in a "cursed" area could lead to unusual or worse-than-usual failures. It's also reasonable to vary the table used by college, Path, noun, etc. For instance, the GM might roll on the "*Celtic*" Table (below) for Animal and Plant spells; the *Diabolic/Horrific Table* or *Spirit-Oriented Magic Table* (p. 260) for necromancy; the *Illusory Magic Table* (p. 258) for Illusion and Creation, Light, and Sound spells; the "*Reality-Warping*" Table (p. 259) for Gate

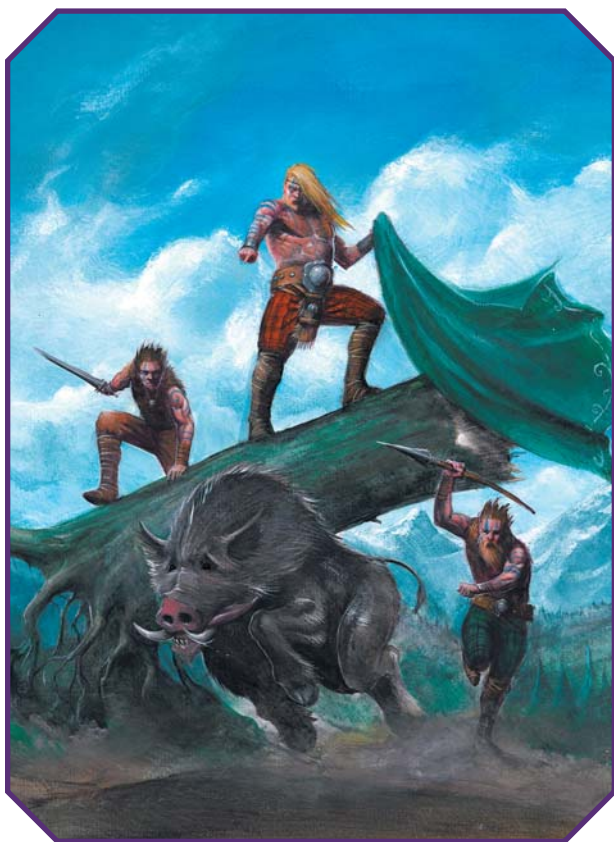
magic; and so on. This will make some types of magic more dangerous than others, which may be entirely appropriate.

Generally, the GM should make all rolls on these tables, in secret, so as to be able to surprise the caster. If the roll produces an inappropriate result – or one too useful to the caster – then roll again or improvise. Luck-related advantages can't modify the outcome; see *Critical Magical Failures and Luck* (p. 30).

### "Celtic" Table

This fits the wild and primal sort of magic seen in sources such as Celtic mythology.

- 3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1d of injury.
- 4 – Spell is cast on caster. If it's beneficial, then he's also stunned (IQ-2 roll to recover).
- 5 – Spell is cast on one of the caster's companions (roll randomly). If it's beneficial, then the target is also stunned (IQ-2 roll to recover).
- 6 – Spell is cast on a nearby foe (roll randomly). If it's harmful, then the target automatically makes any HT rolls required as a result, and is filled with hatred for the caster.
- 7 – The nearest tree or wooden object bursts into flower.
- 8 – Spell is cast on something – anything – other than its intended target. Roll randomly or make an interesting choice.
- 9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1 point of injury.
- 10 – Spell fails entirely. Caster sees a wondrous vision of a mystical otherworld, and must make an IQ roll or be mentally stunned.
- 11 – A brief rain of golden flowers falls on the caster, or over the target area of an Area spell.
- 12 – Spell produces a weak and useless shadow of the intended effect.
- 13 – Spell produces the reverse of the intended effect.
- 14 – Spell has the reverse of the intended effect, on the wrong target (roll randomly).
- 15 – Spell fails entirely. Caster temporarily forgets the spell. Make an IQ roll after a week, and again each following week, until he remembers. Studying the spell before then is a waste of time.
- 16 – Spell seems to work, but this is only a useless illusion.
- 17 – Spell fails entirely. Caster turns into a wild boar for a week.
- 18 – Spell fails entirely. Caster, his allies, and anyone else nearby are transported to a mystical otherworld, *or* an angry and powerful faerie is summoned to the scene, *or* caster loses a point of HT and gains a -10-point Divine Curse somehow related to the spell (GM's option).



## “Clerical” Table

This table suits magic that calls upon the power of a god or similar entity, whether or not the caster is truly a “cleric.” The GM *might* disregard results that benefit opponents if those foes are deeply hostile to the deity and/or the deity is paying personal attention and approves of the fight. In those cases, redirect the result in some instructive, morally appropriate way. The GM can certainly change any result that the higher power would simply *never* permit!

The assumption here is that the caster either misdirects the magic or suffers warning or minor punishment for irritating the deity, or the deity declines to act in this one case for ineffable reasons. If the GM wants to simulate a more whimsical or brutal god, or to punish serious recent transgressions by the caster, then he can substitute results such as “Caster struck by lightning for 6d burn damage” or “Caster stripped of all clerical magic until he performs a great quest.”

- 3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1 point of injury and 2d FP (in addition to spell’s cost, if any).
- 4 – Spell is cast on one of the caster’s companions (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 5-6 – Spell is cast on caster (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 7 – Spell affects someone or something other than its intended target – friend, foe, or random object. Roll randomly or (preferably) make an appropriate choice.
- 8 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1 point of injury.
- 9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is stunned (Will roll to recover).
- 10-11 – Spell produces nothing but the intense sense of a judgmental *presence* in everyone within 20 yards. Caster must make a Will-3 roll, while everyone else must roll unmodified Will; those who fail are mentally stunned.
- 12 – Spell produces a weak, momentary shadow of the intended effect (doing no more than 1 point of damage, reversing other effects after that moment, etc.). Caster and all targets have the sense of a presence that judges and chooses not to act.
- 13 – Spell produces a twisted or confused variation of the intended effect. Caster becomes unhappily aware that he attracted attention from the *wrong* supernatural being.
- 14 – Spell seems to work, but the results are subtly twisted, or may simply disappear prematurely, causing the caster inconvenience or worse. The GM should try to convince the players that the spell *did* work – but in fact, it attracted the attention of a hostile or mischievous supernatural being, which is now seeking to cause trouble.
- 15-16 – The higher powers have decided to do things their own way. A completely *different* effect is produced, probably on a different target; use spells of similar power to the one attempted to determine possible effects. This may inconvenience the caster, or help him, indirectly and strangely.
- 17 – Spell fails entirely. Caster temporarily forgets the spell. To regain it, he must perform an act of contrition and redemption (a Theology roll may help him decide what’s appropriate). This should take at least a week; require some inconvenience, expense, or modest danger; and end in a visit to an appropriate temple, church, or shrine.
- 18 – Spell fails entirely. An emissary of the caster’s god or patron spirit appears and places him under a compulsion to perform some great deed for the faith. Treat this as Obsession (9) until it’s carried out.



## Comedy Table

This table suits lighthearted and explicitly comic campaigns. Its results rarely lead to total disaster, but they can be embarrassing – and being on the receiving end of the universe’s sense of humor can *hurt!*

- 3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster suffers an essentially harmless but embarrassing and inconvenient “mark of failure,” such as a small rain cloud floating over his head, a tendency to sneeze *explosively* once per minute, or a flower growing from the tip of his nose. This effect is equivalent to Unnatural Features 5, and can’t be removed or hidden. It remains for 4d hours.
- 4 – Spell is cast on one of the caster’s companions (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 5 – Spell is cast on one of the caster’s companions (roll randomly), but *never* affects the intended target.
- 6 – Spell fails entirely. Caster forgets his own name – and forgets it again instantly if reminded of it. Make a Will roll after 24 hours, and again each day thereafter, to recover.
- 7 – Spell causes a brief dip in local lighting levels, startling (but not harmful) temperature variations for a few seconds, peculiar sound effects, etc. Meanwhile, the caster himself is drenched in water (or custard).
- 8 – Spell affects someone or something other than its intended target – friend, foe, or random object. Roll randomly or (preferably) make an amusing choice.
- 9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is surrounded by a flurry of dramatic and inconvenient multicolored sparks, which do him 1 point of injury and singe his clothing or equipment.
- 10 – Spell fails entirely. Caster curses volubly for 1d seconds, and is stunned (Will roll to recover).
- 11 – Spell produces a strange noise and 1d+1 colored billiard balls (or other trivial objects).
- 12 – Spell produces a weak and useless shadow of the intended effect *and* 1d white doves, a horde of colored frogs or fluffy mice, or other small, harmless creatures, which may swarm close to the caster in an annoyingly affectionate fashion.
- 13 – Spell produces nothing but a dramatic explosion that singes off the caster’s eyebrows, blackens his hair and/or beard, leaves his clothing ragged, and blows any headgear 3d yards away (but causes no actual injury).
- 14 – Spell appears to work, but any roll to resist it is at +3, all useful numerical values (damage, duration, HP healed, etc.) are halved, and the caster suffers the Nightmares disadvantage (with *no* self-control roll) for 1d+1 nights. These nightmares should be very surreal.
- 15 – Spell fails entirely. Caster’s hair (including any beard or mustache) instantly grows 2d yards; his fingernails, 1d inches. It’s up to the GM what problems this causes!
- 16 – Spell fails entirely. Caster temporarily forgets the spell. Make a Will roll after a week, and again each following week, until he remembers. Meanwhile, he suffers the Delusion that the spell doesn’t exist and is in fact completely impossible.
- 17 – Caster is replaced for the next 3d hours by a version of himself from a parallel world. This replacement differs from him in one major respect: sex, race, profession, sexual orientation, etc. The caster remains unaware that he was ever any different, no matter how often his comrades may tell him. (“But Magnus, you’re a giant talking duck!” “So? Are you fellows some sort of racists?”)
- 18 – Spell fails entirely and a supernatural being appears. It might be whimsical, mischievous, moralistic, pompous, incomprehensible, or plain evil (GM’s choice). It may be an intangible spirit that can possess the caster or his friends. It remains until it gets bored or is driven off, but it should certainly cause trouble before it disappears!



### Diabolic/Horrific Table

This is a set of results for magic involving – or attracting the attention of – truly *dark* forces. Even if all magic is evil, critical failures may merely trigger rolls on the standard table (p. B236), not this one. These are truly *demonic* catastrophes.

These results, even more than usual, are *guidelines*. Improvise wildly to customize the awfulness and convey the prickly uncertainty of demonic aid. A roll on this table should *never* bring about the caster's intended outcome (or accomplish it accidentally).

Any of these results can and often *will* cause observers to make Fright Checks.

- 3 – Spell seems to work, but this is only a useless illusion.
- 4 – Spell fails entirely. Somewhere else, a “backblast” does something awful to something the caster values, proportionate to the spell's power and intent.
- 5 – Caster loses a point of Will, permanently.
- 6 – Caster loses a level of Appearance, permanently, in a manner appropriate to the spell. Create Fire might cause unsightly burn scars, while Madness may subtly unhinge the caster's eye sockets, giving a wild, staring effect.
- 7 – Spell is cast on loved ones, friends, allies, innocent bystanders, or the caster (in that order) if harmful, or on foes if beneficial.
- 8 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 2 points of injury, and the wound immediately becomes infected (see *Infection*, p. B444).
- 9 – Caster must make a Fright Check at -5 as horrific visions of the afterlife of the damned fill his eyes.
- 10 – Spell does nothing except drench the vicinity in an odor of brimstone centered on the caster.
- 11 – Spell produces the reverse of the intended effect.
- 12 – Spell produces the reverse of the intended effect, on some random, inconvenient target nearby.
- 13 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1 point of injury as his arms erupt in boils.
- 14 – Spell fails entirely. The room fills with buzzing insects pouring from caster's mouth.
- 15 – Spell creates vermin – rat, giant cockroach, immense tapeworm, etc. – *inside* the caster (stomach, throat, etc.). Depending on the nature and location of the vermin, this may cause severe injuries, probably at least 2d. At *minimum*, it will be very bad for the caster's medium-term health.
- 16 – Spell fails entirely. One of the caster's hands withers.
- 17 – Spell fails entirely. Caster ages 4d years.
- 18 – Spell fails entirely. A demon, different from any demon with whom the caster has dealings, appears and attempts to wreak havoc – attacking the caster if he gets in the way. The caster may use black/demonic magic to fight it; there's little honor or fellow-feeling among such creatures.

### Illusory Magic Table

If magic twists perceptions and creates illusions, then magical disasters, too, will tend to be “sensory” in nature.

- 3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is partially dazzled for 2d minutes: -2 to defense rolls, -4 to Vision rolls, attack rolls and anything else requiring visual judgment.
- 4 – Spell is cast on caster (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 5 – Spell is cast on one of the caster's companions (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 6 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is completely deafened for 2d minutes.
- 7 – Spell affects someone or something other than its intended target – friend, foe, or random object. Roll randomly or make an interesting choice.
- 8 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is partially dazzled, as 3, but only for 2d seconds.
- 9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is stunned (IQ roll to recover).
- 10-11 – Spell produces nothing but random bizarre noises, an intricate lightshow, a strangely evocative but unidentifiable odor, etc.
- 12 – Spell produces an *obviously* illusory shadow of the intended effect.
- 13 – Spell produces the reverse of the intended effect.
- 14 – Spell appears to work, but the effects seem to have a mind of their own. They will behave extremely strangely – usually in a way that's totally useless to the caster.
- 15-16 – Spell has the reverse of the intended effect, on the wrong target (roll randomly).
- 17 – Spell fails entirely. Caster temporarily forgets the spell. Make an IQ roll after a week, and again each following week, until he remembers. Studying the spell before then is a waste of time.
- 18 – Spell produces an apparently completely *real* effect, without doing anything useful. In fact, it's “possessed” by an independent spirit, which renders the magic more “solid” to use it as a body, with powers appropriate to the spell's nature. This body may resemble an elemental creature, a mass of organic matter, a floating ball of light, etc. The creature is whimsical or seemingly insane, and may be malicious toward the caster or anyone else in the vicinity. It can't be dispelled, and is very hard to harm, as it can draw on local mana to regenerate. It will probably eventually wander off, but it will then cause trouble for everyone it meets.



## “Oriental” Table

Use this table in games that draw on oriental mythic imagery.

- 3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1 point of injury and 2d FP (in addition to spell’s cost, if any).
- 4 – Spell has the reverse of the intended effect, on the wrong target (roll randomly). If this causes injury to a foe, then he automatically makes any attribute rolls required to resist or recover from the effects, gains +2 Magic Resistance for 10 minutes, and is filled with hatred for the caster.
- 5-6 – Caster’s *yin* energies become dominant, giving him Bully (12), largely expressed through a quirk-level tendency to spiteful remarks; Lecherousness (12); noticeably clammy skin; -2 to HT rolls to resist disease; -3 to HT rolls to resist the effects of cold; and +2 to HT rolls to resist the effects of heat. If he already has either mental disadvantage, then its self-control number gets two steps worse. Anything worse than 6 means he’s completely incapable of resisting his impulses! Make a HT-2 roll after 3d hours, and again each hour thereafter, to shake off these effects.
- 7 – Spell is cast on something – anything – other than its intended target. Roll randomly or make an interesting choice.
- 8 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1 point of injury and is surrounded by a foul stench of rotting flesh for 1d hours.
- 9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is stunned (IQ roll to recover).
- 10-11 – Spell produces nothing but horrible groaning noises, flickering lights and shadows, and a foul smell of rotting flesh.
- 12 – Spell produces a weak and useless shadow of the intended effect.
- 13 – Spell produces the reverse of the intended effect.
- 14 – Spell seems to work, but this is only a useless illusion. Caster honestly *believes* that it worked, though, and was in fact one of his greatest accomplishments; treat this as a Delusion. Roll daily against Will-2 to recover.
- 15-16 – Caster’s *yang* energies become dominant, giving him Impulsiveness (12); Lecherousness (12); a quirk-level desire for easy pleasures; noticeably hot, dry skin; -2 to HT rolls to resist disease; -3 to HT rolls to resist the effects of heat; and +2 to HT rolls to resist the effects of cold. If he already has either mental disadvantage, then its self-control number gets two steps worse. Anything worse than 6 means he’s completely incapable of resisting his impulses! Make a HT-2 roll after 3d hours, and again each hour thereafter, to shake off these effects.
- 17 – Spell fails entirely. Caster’s mind is filled with strange concepts and images, giving him Absent-Mindedness, Confused (9), and a -5-point Odious Personal Habit (incomprehensible rambling), all lasting 1d+1 days.
- 18 – Spell fails entirely. A malevolent spirit appears nearby and sets out to cause trouble for the caster. It may attack him, try to tempt him to evil or corruption, assault his friends and loved ones, or adopt an alluring appearance and seduce him (or his loved ones) and then drive him mad or otherwise disrupt his life before causing him serious harm.



## “Reality-Warping” Table

If magic works by manipulating reality at a fundamental level, then magical disasters will tend to be strange, spectacular, and quite dangerous.

- 3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1d of injury in a bizarre and dramatic form: livid wounds, strangely shaped burns, etc.
- 4 – Spell is cast on caster (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 5 – One item that the caster was carrying or wearing (roll randomly) ceases to exist, permanently.
- 6 – Spell is cast on one of the caster’s companions (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 7 – All magic ceases to work within 3d yards of the caster’s position at the moment of casting, for 1d hours. Treat the area as having no mana (or equivalent). If the caster leaves the area, *he* is still unable to work magic for 1d+2 minutes.
- 8 – Spell fails entirely. Caster suffers a bizarre temporary disfigurement – a strange-colored scar, glowing eyes, large pointed teeth, a growth of fur, etc. Treat this as Unnatural Features 2. Make a HT-2 roll after 24 hours, and again each day thereafter, to see if this disappears.
- 9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is stunned (IQ roll to recover).
- 10 – Spell produces nothing but strange sounds and smells, distortions in the appearance of everything in the vicinity, etc.
- 11 – Spell produces a minor reality distortion around the caster for 1d hours – bizarre sounds, shimmering lights, etc. Treat this as Unnatural Features 5.
- 12 – Spell has no actual effect, but everyone observing the caster or the spell’s intended target becomes aware that *something* was attempted, and has a vague idea *what*. If they compare impressions, though, their ideas turn out to be contradictory.
- 13 – Spell produces the reverse of the intended effect.
- 14 – Spell appears to work. However, this is a *déjà vu* effect; after 2d seconds, revert to the moment of casting. The target and bystanders realize that nothing has happened, but may have a good idea what was attempted. Caster must roll IQ-2 *not* to proceed on the belief that the spell worked; he may retry every 3 seconds until he succeeds.
- 15 – Spell has the reverse of the intended effect, on 1d+1 different targets (roll randomly).
- 16 – Spell fails entirely. “Fortean” events ensue within 2d miles of the location over the next week – rains of frogs, minor time-slips, persistent attacks of *déjà vu* for anyone in the area, clocks running backward, etc. Furthermore, everyone in the area somehow *knows* that the caster is involved with all this. He may acquire Reputation -1 or -2 with these people for a few months as a result.
- 17-18 – The spell works, possibly in an exaggerated or misdirected form – and the universe manifests a sapient, free-willed being of superhuman power whose purpose is to dissuade the caster from manipulating reality in dangerous or excessive ways in future. This entity may order the caster to fix some problem *immediately* or suffer punishment, stay around for a few months in immaterial form and intervene occasionally to change things, or simply incapacitate the caster in some way. It isn’t omnipotent or omniscient, but raw force doesn’t work against it, and it ignores magical attacks; it must be assuaged, waited out, or outwitted.

## Spirit-Oriented Magic Table

This table assumes that magic depends heavily on dealings with free-willed spirits, which aren't generally malicious, but which take some human behavior very badly.

- 3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1d of injury and hears quiet laughter from petty spirits.
- 4 – Spell fails entirely. A spirit with powers related to the type of magic attempted manifests and makes trouble for the caster for 1d+2 seconds, and then vanishes.
- 5 – Spell is cast on caster (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 6 – Spell is cast on one of the caster's companions (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).
- 7 – Spell affects someone or something other than its intended target – friend, foe, or random object. Roll randomly or (preferably) make a plausible choice in the persona of a whimsical spirit.
- 8 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is stunned (IQ roll to recover).
- 9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster suffers the equivalent of an occurrence of the Phantom Voices disadvantage at the -10-point level, lasting 2d minutes.
- 10-11 – Spell produces nothing but a babble of incoherent voices, flickering images and lights, bizarre odors, etc.
- 12 – Spell produces a strange and useless shadow of the intended effect, as the spirits act out what was required without applying themselves.
- 13 – Spell produces the reverse of the intended effect.
- 14 – Spell seems to work, but this is a phantom illusion created by a spirit. The spirit attempts to plant the delusion in the caster's mind that he succeeded. It must win a Quick Contest of Will with the caster to do so; its Will is 14.
- 15 – Spell has the reverse of the intended effect, on the wrong target (roll randomly).
- 16 – Spell fails entirely. Caster suffers Nightmares (6) and Sleepwalker (9) for the next 1d+2 nights.
- 17 – Spell fails entirely. If the caster attempts to cast it again during the next 1d weeks, he must roll vs. HT. Failure means the spell fails and he's struck mute for 1d minutes. Success lets him cast normally.
- 18 – Spell fails entirely. An extremely powerful spirit manifests, with a dangerous attitude toward the caster (perhaps the caster exploited its friends or subjects, or made annoying waves on the spirit plane). It may simply attack, but it's more likely to set out to dissuade the caster and everyone else from such behavior. It might deliver *educational* and very public harm to the caster, take him as a slave or a pet, "invite" him to a dinner party that lasts several years, or engage him in a deadly game with his friends and enemies as playing pieces.



# APPENDIX C

# SPELL

# PREREQUISITE

# COUNTS

This table lists college(s) and calculated prerequisite counts – used in several places in *Thaumatology* (notably *The Prerequisite Count*, pp. 72-73.) – for every spell in *GURPS Magic*. Some college names are abbreviated:

**Body:** Body Control  
**Comm.:** Communication and Empathy  
**Ench.:** Enchantment  
**Illusion:** Illusion and Creation  
**Lt-Dk:** Light and Darkness  
**Mind:** Mind Control  
**Mk-Brk:** Making and Breaking  
**Necro.:** Necromantic  
**Protection:** Protection and Warning  
**Tech.:** Technological



Spell	College	Prerequisite Count
Accelerate Time (VH)	Gate	20
Accuracy	Ench.	15
Acid Ball	Water	8
Acid Jet	Water	10
Adjustable Clothing	Ench.	14
Affect Spirits	Necro.	4
Age (VH)	Necro.	6
Agonize	Body	5
Air Jet	Air	3
Air Vision	Air/Knowledge	3
Air Vortex	Air/Movement	5
Alarm	Knowledge	1
Alertness (VH)	Mind	2
Alter Body	Body	10
Alter Terrain (VH)	Earth	11
Alter Visage	Body	9
Alter Voice	Body/Sound	8
Ambidexterity	Body	4
Amulet	Ench.	Varies
Analyze Magic	Knowledge	3
Ancient History	Knowledge	5
Animal Control	Animal	1
Animate Machine/TL	Tech.	15
Animate Object (VH)	Mk-Brk	6
Animate Plant	Plant	7
Animate Shadow	Necro.	9
Animation (VH)	Necro.	2
Apportation	Movement	0
Arboreal Immurement	Plant	7
Armor	Protection	1

Spell	College	Prerequisite Count
Astral Block	Necro.	16
Astral Vision (VH)	Knowledge/Necro.	6
Atmosphere Dome	Protection/Air	9
Attune	Ench.	12
Aura	Knowledge	1
Avoid	Mind	4
Awaken	Healing	2
Awaken Computer/TL	Tech.	10
Awaken Craft Spirit	Mk-Brk/Necro.	3
Balance	Body	4
Ball of Lightning	Weather/Air	8
Bane	Ench.	11
Banish	Necro.	10
Beacon	Gate/Movement	5
Beast Link	Animal	2
Beast Possession	Animal	4
Beast-Rouser	Animal	0
Beast Seeker	Animal	3
Beast-Soother	Animal	0
Beast Speech	Animal	2
Beast Summoning	Animal	1
Berserker	Mind	2
Bind Spirit (VH)	Necro.	12
Blackout	Lt-Dk	3
Bladeturning	Protection	1
Blank Spell Arrow (VH)	Ench.	18
Bless	Meta-Spell	20
Bless Plants	Plant	3
Blight	Plant	4
Blink	Movement/Gate	5
Blink Other (VH)	Movement/Gate	6
Block	Protection	0
Blossom	Plant	4
Blur	Lt-Dk	3
Body of Air	Air	3
Body of Flames (VH)	Fire	8
Body of Ice (VH)	Water	6
Body of Lightning (VH)	Weather/Air	7
Body of Metal (VH)	Tech.	3
Body of Plastic	Tech.	4
Body of Shadow	Lt-Dk	4
Body of Slime	Plant	11
Body of Stone (VH)	Earth	6
Body of Water	Water	4
Body of Wind	Air	10
Body of Wood	Plant	7

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Body-Reading	Healing	1
Boil Water	Water	8
Boost Attribute	Body/Mind	Varies
Borrow Language	Comm.	4
Borrow Skill	Comm.	6
Bravery	Mind	1
Breathe Air	Air/Water	6
Breathe Fire (VH)	Fire	7
Breathe Radiation (VH)	Tech.	9
Breathe Steam (VH)	Water	14
Breathe Water	Water/Air	6
Bright Vision	Lt-Dk	1
Burning Death (VH)	Fire/Necro.	10
Burning Touch	Fire	6
Cadence	Body	5
Catch Missile	Protection	2
Catch Spell (VH)	Meta-Spell	4
Charge Powerstone (VH)	Meta-Spell	12
Charm	Mind	8
Choke	Body	5
Clean	Mk-Brk	2
Cleansing	Healing	12
Climbing	Body	0
Cloud-Vaulting (VH)	Movement/Weather	12
Cloud-Walking	Movement/Weather	9
Clouds	Weather/Air	4
Clumsiness	Body	2
Cold	Fire	4
Colors	Lt-Dk	1
Command	Mind	2
Command Spirit	Necro.	5
Communication (VH)	Comm.	9
Compel Lie	Mind/Comm.	4
Compel Truth	Comm.	3
Complex Illusion	Illusion	2
Conceal	Plant	4
Conceal Magic	Meta-Spell	1
Concussion	Air/Sound	5
Condense Steam	Water	5
Conduct Power/TL (VH)	Tech.	1
Continual Light	Lt-Dk	1
Continual Mage Light	Lt-Dk	5
Continual Sunlight	Lt-Dk	5
Contract Object (VH)	Mk-Brk	15
Control Creation	Illusion	10
Control Elemental	4 Diff.	9
Control Gate	Gate	12
Control Illusion	Illusion	4
Control Limb	Body	5
Control Person	Comm.	5
Control Zombie	Necro.	5
Converse	Sound	4
Cook	Food	3
Cool	Weather/Air	9
Coolness	Water/Protection	5
Copy	Mk-Brk	5
Cornucopia	Ench.	13
Corpulence (VH)	Body	16
Counterspell	Meta-Spell	0
Create Acid	Water	7
Create Air	Air	1
Create Animal	Illusion	12
Create Door	Gate	10
Create Earth	Earth	3

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Create Elemental	4 Diff.	10
Create Fire	Fire	1
Create Food	Food	5
Create Fuel/TL	Tech.	5
Create Gate (VH)	Gate	14
Create Ice	Water	5
Create Mount	Illusion	13
Create Object (VH)	Illusion	8
Create Plant	Plant	4
Create Servant	Illusion	9
Create Spring	Water	8
Create Steam	Water	9
Create Warrior	Illusion	10
Create Water	Water	2
Crystal Ball	Ench.	13
Cure Disease	Healing	5
Cure Radiation (VH)	Tech./Healing	12
Current	Weather/Water	6
Curse	Meta-Spell	20
Dancing Object	Movement	1
Dancing Shield	Ench.	12
Dancing Weapon	Ench.	12
Dark Vision	Lt-Dk	2
Darkness	Lt-Dk	2



Daze	Mind	1
Death Vision	Necro.	0
Deathtouch	Body	7
Debility	Body	0
Decapitation (VH)	Body	11
Decay	Food	1
Defending Shield	Ench.	14
Defending Weapon	Ench.	12
Deflect	Ench.	11
Deflect Energy	Fire	2
Deflect Missile	Movement/Protection	1
Dehydrate	Water	5
Delay	Meta-Spell	15
Delayed Message	Sound	3
Destroy Air	Air	2
Destroy Water	Water	3
Detect Magic	Knowledge	0
Detect Poison	Protection/Healing	1
Devitalize Air	Air	3
Disintegrate (VH)	Mk-Brk	17
Disorient	Mind	1
Dispel Creation	Illusion	11
Dispel Illusion	Illusion	5
Dispel Magic	Meta-Spell	13

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Dispel Possession	Comm.	5
Displace Spell	Meta-Spell	10
Distant Blow	Movement	1
Distill	Food/Water	7
Divert Teleport (VH)	Gate/Movement	6
Divination	Knowledge	Varies
Doppelgänger (VH)	Ench.	29
Drain Magery (VH)	Meta-Spell	21
Drain Mana (VH)	Meta-Spell	14
Draw Power/TL (VH)	Tech.	22
Dream Projection	Comm./Mind	4
Dream Sending	Comm./Mind	3
Dream Viewing	Comm.	3
Drunkenness	Mind	4
Dry Spring	Water	6
Dull Sense	Mind	0
Dullness (VH)	Mind	2
Duplicate (VH)	Illusion	15
Dye	Mk-Brk	4
Earth to Air	Air/Earth	4
Earth to Stone	Earth	2
Earth to Water	Earth/Water	5
Earth Vision	Earth/Know.	2
Earthquake	Earth	6
Echoes of the Past	Knowledge/Sound	7
Ecstasy (VH)	Mind	4
Effigy (VH)	Ench.	13
Emotion Control	Mind	3
Enchant (VH)	Ench.	10
Encrypt	Mind	2
Enlarge (VH)	Body	11
Enlarge Object (VH)	Mk-Brk	16
Enlarge Other (VH)	Body	12
Enslave (VH)	Mind	14
Ensorcel (VH)	Ench.	12
Enthrall	Mind	6
Entombment	Earth	5
Entrap Spirit	Necro.	11
Essential Acid (VH)	Water	13
Essential Air	Air	6
Essential Earth	Earth	6
Essential Flame	Fire	6
Essential Food (VH)	Food	8
Essential Fuel/TL	Tech.	6
Essential Water	Water	6
Essential Wood	Plant	6
Ethereal Body (VH)	Movement	4
Evisceration (VH)	Necro.	6
Exchange Bodies (VH)	Comm.	17
Explode (VH)	Mk-Brk	8
Explosive Fireball	Fire	4
Explosive Lightning	Weather/Air	7
Extend Object (VH)	Mk-Brk	15
Extinguish Fire	Fire	1
Extinguish Radiation (VH)	Tech.	8
False Aura	Meta-Spell	3
False Memory	Mind	7
False Tracks	Plant	5
Far-Feeling	Knowledge	0
Far-Hearing	Sound/Know.	4
Far-Tasting	Food/Knowledge	1
Fascinate	Mind	2
Fast Fire	Fire	3
Fasten	Mk-Brk	10
Fear	Mind	0
Final Rest	Healing/Necro.	0

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Find Direction	Knowledge	0
Find Weakness	Mk-Brk	4
Fire Cloud	Fire	7
Fireball	Fire	3
Fireproof	Fire	2
Flame Jet	Fire	3
Flaming Armor	Fire	7
Flaming Missiles	Fire	5
Flaming Weapon	Fire	4
Flash	Lt-Dk	2
Flesh to Ice (VH)	Water	8
Flesh to Stone	Earth	3
Flight (VH)	Movement	2
Flying Carpet (VH)	Movement	3
Fog	Weather/Water	4
Fool's Banquet	Food	5
Foolishness	Mind	0
Force Dome	Protection	10
Force Wall	Protection	11
Forest Warning	Plant	4
Forgetfulness	Mind	1
Fortify	Ench.	11
Foul Water	Water/Food	4
Frailty	Body	1
Freedom	Movement/Protection	9
Freeze	Water	4
Frost	Weather/Water	3
Frostbite	Water	6
Fumble	Body	3
Garble	Sound	2
Gauntness (VH)	Body	15
Geyser (VH)	Water	9
Ghost Weapon	Ench.	14
Gift of Letters (VH)	Comm.	5
Gift of Tongues (VH)	Comm.	5
Glass Wall	Knowledge	3
Glib Tongue	Mind	6
Glitch/TL	Tech.	12
Gloom	Lt-Dk	2
Glow	Lt-Dk	2
Glue	Movement	1
Golem (VH)	Ench.	14
Grace	Body	3
Graceful Weapon	Ench.	11
Grease	Movement	1
Great Geas (VH)	Mind	15
Great Hallucination (VH)	Mind	8
Great Haste (VH)	Movement	1
Great Healing (VH)	Healing	4
Great Shapeshift (VH)	Animal	15
Great Voice	Sound	3
Great Ward	Meta-Spell	1
Great Wish (VH)	Ench.	18
Hail	Weather/Water	8
Hair Growth	Body	5
Haircut	Body	8
Hallucination	Mind	7
Halt Aging (VH)	Healing	8
Hang Spell (VH)	Meta-Spell	16
Hardiness	Protection	1
Haste	Movement	0
Hawk Flight (VH)	Movement	3
Hawk Vision	Lt-Dk	1
Heal Plant	Plant	2
Healing Slumber	Healing	6
Heat	Fire	3



<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Hex	Ench.	11
Hide	Lt-Dk	2
Hide Emotion	Comm.	2
Hide Object	Gate	20
Hide Path	Plant	3
Hide Thoughts	Comm.	3
Hideaway	Ench.	15
Hinder	Body/Movement	1
History	Knowledge	4
Hold Breath	Body	3
Hold Fast	Movement	1
Homunculus	Ench.	15
Hunger	Body/Food	3
Hush	Sound	2
Hybrid Control (VH)	Animal	3
Ice Dagger	Water	5
Ice Slick	Water	4
Ice Sphere	Water	4
Icy Breath (VH)	Water	12
Icy Missiles	Water	4
Icy Touch	Water	4
Icy Weapon	Water	3
Identify Metal	Tech.	0
Identify Plant	Plant	1
Identify Plastic	Tech.	0
Identify Spell	Knowledge	1
Ignite Fire	Fire	0
Illusion Disguise	Illusion	1
Illusion Shell	Illusion	1
Images of the Past	Knowledge/Lt-Dk	6
Imitate Voice	Sound	2
Impression Blocker	Ench.	12
Increase Burden	Movement	1
Independence	Illusion	1
Infravision	Lt-Dk	1
Initiative	Illusion	9
Inscribe	Illusion/Mk-Brk	7
Insignificance	Comm.	8
Inspired Creation (VH)	Mk-Brk	0
Instant Neutralize Poison	Healing	2
Instant Regeneration (VH)	Healing	6
Instant Restoration (VH)	Healing	5
Invisibility	Lt-Dk	6
Invisible Wizard Ear	Sound	14
Invisible Wizard Eye	Knowledge	10
Iron Arm	Protection	4
Irradiate	Tech.	4
Itch	Body	0
Jump	Movement	1
Keen Sense	Mind	0
Knot	Mk-Brk	9
Know Illusion	Illusion	1
Know Location	Knowledge	2
Know Recipe	Food/Knowledge	4
Know True Shape	Knowledge	9
Leak	Ench.	16
Lend Energy	Healing	0
Lend Language	Comm.	3
Lend Power/TL	Tech.	1
Lend Skill	Comm.	5
Lend Spell	Meta-Spell	11
Lend Vitality	Healing	1
Lengthen Limb	Body	7
Lesser Geas (VH)	Mind	10

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Lesser Wish (VH)	Ench.	11
Levitation	Movement	1
Lich (VH)	Necro./Ench.	19
Light	Lt-Dk	0
Light Jet	Lt-Dk	2
Light Tread	Movement	3
Lighten	Ench.	11
Lighten Burden	Movement	1
Lightning	Weather/Air	6
Lightning Armor	Weather/Air	12
Lightning Missiles	Weather/Air	8
Lightning Stare (VH)	Weather/Air	8
Lightning Weapon	Weather/Air	7
Lightning Whip	Weather/Air	7
Limit	Ench.	11
Link	Meta-Spell	16
Lockmaster	Movement	1
Locksmith	Movement	1
Long March	Movement	1
Loyal Sword	Ench.	11
Loyalty	Mind	3
Lure	Mind	4
Machine Control/TL	Tech.	11
Machine Possession/TL	Tech.	16
Machine Speech/TL	Tech./Comm.	13
Machine Summoning/TL	Tech.	12
Madness	Mind	2
Mage Light	Lt-Dk	3
Mage Sense	Knowledge	1
Mage Sight	Knowledge	1
Mage-Stealth	Sound	3
Magelock	Protection	0
Magic Resistance	Meta-Spell	7
Magnetic Vision	Tech.	1
Maintain Spell (VH)	Meta-Spell	17
Major Healing (VH)	Healing	3
Malefice (VH)	Ench.	11
Malfunction/TL	Tech.	13
Manastone (VH)	Ench.	11
Manipulate	Movement	2
Mapmaker	Mk-Brk	9
Mass Daze	Mind	2
Mass Sleep	Mind	3
Mass Suggestion	Mind	6
Mass Zombie (VH)	Necro.	5
Master	Animal	1
Materialize	Necro.	2
Mature	Food	2
Measurement	Knowledge	0
Melt Ice	Water	4
Memorize	Knowledge/Mind	6
Mental Stun	Mind	2
Message	Sound/Comm.	7
Metal Vision	Tech./Knowledge	3
Might	Body	1
Mind-Reading	Comm.	3
Mind-Search (VH)	Comm.	4
Mind-Sending	Comm.	4
Mindlessness (VH)	Mind	2
Minor Healing	Healing	2
Mirror	Lt-Dk	2
Missile Shield	Protection	1
Monk's Banquet	Food	10
Move Terrain (VH)	Earth	29

Spell	College	Prerequisite Count
Mud Jet	Earth/Water	8
Musical Scribe	Sound	5
Mystic Mark	Mk-Brk	9
Mystic Mist	Protection	1
Name	Ench.	11
Nauseate	Body	5
Neutralize Poison	Healing	1
Night Vision	Lt-Dk	1
Nightingale	Protection	1
Nightmare	Mind	5
No-Smell	Air	1
Noise	Sound	3
Oath	Mind	4
Odor	Air	2
One-College Powerstone	Ench.	11
Pain	Body	2
Panic	Mind	1
Paralyze Limb	Body	5
Partial Petrification (VH)	Earth	4
Partial Shapeshifting (VH)	Animal	12



Password	Ench.	11
Pathfinder	Knowledge	2
Peaceful Sleep	Mind	5
Penetrating Spell	Meta-Spell	16
Penetrating Weapon	Ench.	11
Pentagram	Meta-Spell	9
Perfect Illusion	Illusion	3
Perfume	Body	3
Permanent Beast Possession (VH)	Animal	5
Permanent Forgetfulness (VH)	Mind	2
Permanent Machine Possession/TL	Tech.	17
Permanent Madness (VH)	Mind	3
Permanent Possession (VH)	Comm.	6
Permanent Shapeshifting (VH)	Animal	7
Persuasion	Comm.	2
Pestilence	Necro.	7
Phantom (VH)	Illusion	7
Phantom Flame	Fire/Illusion	1
Phase	Gate	5
Phase Other (VH)	Gate	6
Planar Summons	Gate	10
Planar Visit (VH)	Gate	7
Plane Shift (VH)	Gate	11
Plane Shift Other (VH)	Gate	12
Plant Control	Plant	6
Plant Form	Plant	6
Plant Form Other	Plant	7
Plant Growth	Plant	3
Plant Sense	Plant	5
Plant Speech	Plant	6
Plant Vision	Plant/Knowledge	3
Plastic Vision	Tech./Knowledge	4
Poison Food	Food	3
Pollen Cloud	Plant	3
Poltergeist	Movement	1
Possession (VH)	Comm.	5

Spell	College	Prerequisite Count
Power	Ench.	12
Powerstone	Ench.	11
Predict Earth Movement	Earth	4
Predict Weather	Weather/Air	4
Prehistory	Knowledge	6
Prepare Game	Food	3
Presence	Comm.	8
Preserve Food	Food	2
Preserve Fuel/TL	Tech.	1
Projection	Knowledge	6
Propel/TL	Tech.	8
Protect Animal	Animal/Protection	7
Puissance	Ench.	15
Pull	Movement	4
Purify Air	Air	0
Purify Earth	Earth/Plant	8
Purify Food	Food	2
Purify Fuel/TL	Tech.	2
Purify Water	Water	1
Quick-Aim	Ench.	14
Quick-Draw	Ench.	11
Quick March	Movement	1
Radiation Jet	Tech.	8
Radio Hearing	Tech.	1
Rain	Weather/Air/Water	5
Rain of Acid	Water	7
Rain of Fire	Fire	2
Rain of Ice Daggers	Water	12
Rain of Nuts	Plant	6
Rain of Stones	Earth	4
Rapid Journey (VH)	Gate/Movement	5
Rear Vision	Mind	3
Rebuild/TL	Tech./Mk-Brk	22
Recall	Knowledge/Mind	9
Reconstruct Spell	Knowledge	7
Recover Energy	Healing	1
Reflect	Meta-Spell	1
Reflect Gaze (VH)	Protection	3
Reflex	Meta-Spell	16
Reflexes	Body	5
Regeneration (VH)	Healing	5
Rejoin	Mk-Brk	7
Rejuvenate Plant	Plant	4
Relieve Addiction	Healing	2
Relieve Madness	Healing/Mind	9
Relieve Paralysis	Healing	5
Relieve Sickness	Healing	2
Remember Path	Knowledge	7
Remove Aura	Meta-Spell	14
Remove Contagion	Healing	2
Remove Curse	Meta-Spell	13
Remove Enchantment	Ench.	11
Remove Reflection	Lt-Dk	2
Remove Shadow	Lt-Dk	1
Repair	Mk-Brk	8
Repel	Movement	4
Repel Animal	Animal	2
Repel Hybrids (VH)	Animal	4
Repel Spirits	Necro.	14
Reshape	Mk-Brk	7
Resist Acid	Water/Protection	8
Resist Cold	Fire	4
Resist Disease	Healing/Protection	3
Resist Enchantment	Ench.	12
Resist Fire	Fire	3
Resist Lightning	Weather/Air/Protection	6

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Resist Pain	Body	3
Resist Poison	Healing/Protection	3
Resist Pressure	Protection	9
Resist Radiation	Tech./Protection	7
Resist Sound	Sound/Protection	4
Resist Water	Water/Protection	2
Restoration (VH)	Healing	4
Restore	Mk-Brk	1
Restore Hearing	Healing	4
Restore Mana (VH)	Meta-Spell	14
Restore Memory	Healing	3
Restore Sight	Healing	4
Restore Speech	Healing	6
Resurrection (VH)	Heal./Necro.	9
Retch	Body	7
Retgression	Comm.	6
Return Missile	Protection	3
Reveal Function/TL	Tech.	1
Reverse Missiles	Protection	2
Rider	Animal	2
Rider Within	Animal	3
Rive (VH)	Mk-Brk	7
Rooted Feet	Body	2
Rotting Death (VH)	Necro.	9
Roundabout	Body	4
Ruin	Mk-Brk	8
Sanctuary (VH)	Gate	21
Sand Jet	Earth	4
Sandstorm	Air/Earth	8
Scents of the Past	Knowledge/Food	8
Schematic/TL	Tech./Knowledge	7
Scribe	Sound	4
Scroll	Ench.	0
Scry Gate	Gate	12
Scryfool	Meta-Spell	3
Scryguard	Meta-Spell	0
Scrywall	Meta-Spell	1
Season	Food	1
See Invisible	Lt-Dk	3
See Radiation	Tech.	0
See Secrets	Knowledge	5
Seek Air	Air	0
Seek Coastline	Water	1
Seek Earth	Earth	0
Seek Fire	Fire	0
Seek Food	Food	0
Seek Fuel/TL	Tech.	0
Seek Gate	Gate	11
Seek Machine/TL	Tech.	0
Seek Magic	Knowledge/Meta-Spell	1
Seek Pass	Earth	1
Seek Plant	Plant	0
Seek Plastic	Tech.	0
Seek Power/TL	Tech.	0
Seek Radiation	Tech.	1
Seek Water	Water	0
Seeker	Knowledge	2
Sense Danger	Protection	0
Sense Emotion	Comm.	1
Sense Foes	Comm.	0
Sense Life	Comm.	0
Sense Mana	Knowledge	1
Sense Observation	Protection	1
Sense Spirit	Necro.	1
Sensitize	Body	4
Shade	Protection	1

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Shape Air	Air	2
Shape Darkness	Lt-Dk	3
Shape Earth	Earth	1
Shape Fire	Fire	1
Shape Light	Lt-Dk	1
Shape Metal	Tech.	2
Shape Plant	Plant	2
Shape Plastic	Tech.	3
Shape Water	Water	3
Shapeshift Others (VH)	Animal	7
Shapeshifting (VH)	Animal	6
Share Energy	Healing	1
Share Vitality	Healing	2
Sharpen	Mk-Brk	9
Shatter (VH)	Mk-Brk	6
Shatterproof	Mk-Brk	10
Shield	Protection	0
Shocking Touch	Weather/Air	7
Shrink (VH)	Body	11
Shrink Object (VH)	Mk-Brk	16
Shrink Other (VH)	Body	12
Sickness	Mind/Body	5
Silence	Sound	1
Silver Tongue	Sound	6
Simple Illusion	Illusion	0
Simulacrum (VH)	Ench.	18
Skull-Spirit	Necro.	4
Sleep	Mind	2
Slide	Movement	3
Slow	Movement	2
Slow Fall	Movement	1
Slow Fire	Fire	2
Slow Healing	Necro.	6
Slow Time (VH)	Gate	20
Small Vision	Lt-Dk/Knowledge	1
Smoke	Fire	3
Snow	Weather/Air/Water	7
Snow Jet	Water	6
Snow Shoes	Water	4
Soilproof	Mk-Brk	3
Solidify	Necro.	3
Soul Jar (VH)	Necro.	9
Soul Rider	Comm.	4
Soul Stone (VH)	Ench.	19
Sound	Sound	0
Sound Jet	Sound	4
Sound Vision	Sound	0
Spark Cloud	Weather/Air	7
Spark Storm	Weather/Air	7
Spasm	Body	1
Spectrum Vision (VH)	Tech.	2
Speed	Ench.	11
Speed Spell Arrow	Ench.	18
Spell Arrow	Ench.	17
Spell Shield	Meta-Spell	8
Spell Stone	Ench.	16
Spell Wall	Meta-Spell	9
Spellguard (VH)	Meta-Spell	14
Spider Silk	Animal	2
Spit Acid (VH)	Water	12
Staff	Ench.	11
Steal Attribute (VH)	Necro.	Varies
Steal Beauty (VH)	Necro.	15
Steal Energy	Necro.	3
Steal Power/TL (VH)	Tech.	5
Steal Skill (VH)	Necro.	9

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Steal Spell (VH)	Meta-Spell	13
Steal Vitality	Necro.	4
Steal Youth (VH)	Necro.	13
Steam Jet	Water	10
Steelwraith	Earth	5
Stench	Air	1
Stiffen	Mk-Brk	8
Stone Missile	Earth	4
Stone to Earth	Earth	3
Stone to Flesh	Earth	5
Stop Bleeding	Healing	2
Stop Healing	Necro.	7
Stop Paralysis	Healing	4
Stop Power	Tech.	1
Stop Spasm	Body/Healing	2
Storm	Weather/Air/Water	10
Strengthen Will	Mind	6
Strike Barren	Body/Necro.	7
Strike Blind	Body	4
Strike Deaf	Body	4
Strike Dumb	Body	2
Strike Numb	Body	4
Stun	Body	3
Suggestion	Mind	5
Summon Demon	Necro.	10
Summon Elemental	4 Diff.	8
Summon Shade (VH)	Knowledge	2
Summon Spirit	Necro.	1
Sunbolt	Lt-Dk	6
Sunlight	Lt-Dk	4
Suspend Curse	Meta-Spell	12
Suspend Enchantment	Ench.	11
Suspend Magery (VH)	Meta-Spell	20
Suspend Magic	Meta-Spell	9
Suspend Mana (VH)	Meta-Spell	11
Suspend Spell	Meta-Spell	0
Suspend Time (VH)	Gate	21
Suspended Animation	Healing	7
Swim	Water/Move	6
Talisman	Ench.	Varies
Tangle Growth	Plant	4
Tanglefoot	Body	3
Telecast (VH)	Meta-Spell	12
Telepathy (VH)	Comm.	5
Teleport (VH)	Movement/Gate	4
Teleport Other (VH)	Movement/Gate	5
Teleport Shield	Protection/Gate	7
Tell Position	Knowledge	1
Tell Time	Knowledge	0
Temporary Enchantment	Ench.	11
Terror	Mind	1
Test Food	Food	0
Test Fuel/TL	Tech.	0
Test Load	Knowledge	1
Thirst	Body/Food	5
Throw Spell (VH)	Meta-Spell	16
Thunderclap	Sound	1
Tickle	Body	2
Tide	Weather/Water	8
Time Out (VH)	Gate	21
Timeport (VH)	Gate	5
Timeport Other (VH)	Gate	6
Timeslip	Gate	6
Timeslip Other (VH)	Gate	7
Total Paralysis	Body	6
Touch	Body	0

<i>Spell</i>	<i>College</i>	<i>Prerequisite Count</i>
Toughen	Mk-Brk	11
Trace	Knowledge	3
Trace Teleport	Gate/Movement	5
Transform Body	Body	13
Transform Object (VH)	Mk-Brk	14
Transform Other	Body	15
Transmogrification	Body	32
Transparency	Mk-Brk	9
Truthsayer	Comm.	2
Turn Blade	Protection	1
Turn Spirit	Necro.	3
Turn Zombie	Necro.	5
Umbrella	Water/Protection	1
Undo	Movement	2
Utter Dome	Protection	14
Utter Wall	Protection	16
Vexation	Comm.	2
Vigil (VH)	Mind	4
Vigor	Body	2
Voices	Sound	1
Volcano	Earth	13
Walk on Air	Air	3
Walk on Water	Water	4
Walk Through Earth	Earth	4
Walk Through Plants	Plant	5
Walk Through Water	Water	4
Walk Through Wood	Plant	6
Wall of Light	Lt-Dk	2
Wall of Lightning	Weather/Air	7
Wall of Silence	Sound	2
Wall of Wind	Air	3
Wallwalker	Movement	1
Ward	Meta-Spell	0
Warm	Weather/Air	8
Warmth	Fire/Protection	4
Watchdog	Protection	1
Water Jet	Water	4
Water to Wine	Food	5
Water Vision	Water	4
Waves	Weather/Water	4
Weaken	Mk-Brk	5
Weaken Blood	Body/Necro.	5
Weaken Will	Mind	1
Weapon Self (VH)	Mk-Brk	12
Weapon Spirit (VH)	Ench.	12
Weather Dome	Protection/Weather	8
Whirlpool	Water	4
Will Lock	Mind	4
Wind	Weather/Air	4
Windstorm	Air	3
Winged Knife	Movement	2
Wisdom	Mind	6
Wish (VH)	Ench.	17
Wither Limb	Body	6
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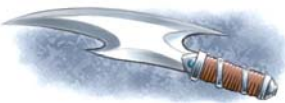


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