

OPUS

a game about wizards trying to do big, beautiful magic

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Once upon a time, magic was just for the wise.
Then for the privileged, who took it from the wise at the tip of a spear.
Then for the wealthy, who were themselves privileged.
Then for the brilliant, in towers built by privilege and wealth alike.
Then for the revolutionaries, who seized it with blood and crime and philosophy.

And now?

It's for anyone who takes it.

This game takes place in a world a lot like ours, but magic made the colors brighter, the sounds richer, and the wars considerably more explosive. The arc of history still bends pretty close to our own; we're not going to care about the specifics, because this isn't a game about naval leviathans or the potion prohibition. If you need to care about something like that—like, something comes up in the game and you need to riff—just think back to 11th grade history and assume that the folks who were in charge did a lot of the stuff they did with dark magic. You wouldn't be far off, really.

It's probably 2019. Probably. We're not going to put a name to a year, but you and your players will figure out what that means at your table. Most elected officials are shitheads, discrimination is real, and the planet is hurtling towards calamity.

Magic was this big, rarified thing that kings and popes did. Then it was this big, expensive thing that captains of industry did. Then it was academic, even bureaucratic. But about five years ago, it was given to everyone. Someone, or someones, went deep down into the substrata of reality with stolen secrets and tapped it at the source. It's in the air now, and the soil, and the sea. Magic is there for anyone who reaches for it. It's gone open source.

And here's the big dirty secret: The folks who never had it? The ones who might have lived and died on the margins of society? They're *really* good at it now. You can get good at magic, really good, by practice and willpower and expensive gewgaws. But the deepest stuff? The power that makes the world better? The kind of magic that makes a wizard's soul blaze with arcane fire?

That only comes from one thing: Love. Everyday love. Subversive love. Little acts of love, not just for a person but for people at large. If you want to feed the fire of your power, there's only one way to do it: You have to live boldly for other people.

Lots of folks still don't reach for magic, or they stop at the little stuff. Love isn't enough without skill, without work. But there are so many wizards now, folks doing big, beautiful magic that makes the world better.

The great and the grand aren't fans of this state of affairs, sure. But you can't put the genie back in the bottle, so they act like it's not a big deal. They pass laws, because they think they can regulate themselves back into control. They spread disinformation. They speak out both sides of

their mouth: Magic is too big to trust *everyone* with; but you can trust *me*. I'll do the work for you. I'll make sure that the people doing magic now stay small.

This isn't a game about staying small, although you'll do a lot of small things that shine a light into the lives of people lost in the dark places where society refuses to look.

This is a game about magic, and the world, and how you make the world a more magical place. A better place. A place where people *are* people. Where they matter.

You'll take the love you feel, and you'll weave a spell with it.

WTF is this?

It's a very small PbtA hack about a modern day world where magic is suddenly available to everyone. The magic is 100% a metaphor for privilege. Play it with 2 to 5 friends and a Master of Ceremonies.

If you want some inspiration, try *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* or *The Magicians*.

About the Reality of Fantasy

In this game, Martin Shkreli is probably a warlock.

That matters, because it's what capitalism does. It makes people into warlocks.

Well, not literally, but also yes, literally.

In this game, millionaires and politicians and the capitalist class all use magic, because it was a limited resource. It was valuable. It gave you power, but you had to already have power to get it, too. You had to have wands or gems, or own mana-rich land, or eat a diet of expensive squid-ink pasta. Now it's free, and all of a sudden they're clamoring for control.

Players: Your wizards are definitely dealing with all the stuff you deal with. You can't magic your way out of bigotry, discrimination, fear, or insecurity—not immediately, not safely, and not

forever. Make your wizard care about things. You'll pick some Troubles later on, and they need to be things that push your wizard to action.

MC: Your players are trusting you to make life interesting for their wizards. Put pressure on them, but always make sure everyone playing feels safe. The magic is fake, but the problems are real.

For everyone's safety and comfort: Put something in the middle of the table—a card with an X on it, a small flower, a basin of clean water, whatever. If someone touches or points towards the Safety Object, stop what's going on and edit it out. The person doesn't have to explain.

Be kind to one another and do something awesome.

What Do We Do?

At the most basic level, you face down Troubles, because there's a lot of bad shit going on in the City and in the lives of your wizards. You flail around with magic and try to do something good, something important. You look at the world around you and try to make it better. You'll probably fail, at least in part, but it'll take you closer to...

Look.

There's this *thing* inside of you. A true thing. An important thing. It's where your magic comes from. It's what your magic even is. You have trouble putting it into words, but a lot of the other new wizards online?

They're calling it an Opus—a big, beautiful piece of magic that wants to be spoken through you. If you can figure your shit out, maybe you can find the right words and gestures to bring that Opus out of your head and into the world.

To start the game:

- ❑ Players take a Basic Moves sheet and a Playbook of their choice.
- ❑ The MC passes around the City sheet, and players take turns marking things they're interested in and telling the group what about it interests them.
 - ❑ If anyone's uncomfortable with a topic, they should let the others know by using the Safety Object.
- ❑ Players flesh out their character on their Playbook by making a few choices under the "I am..." heading and describing 4 Talents their wizard has—mundane abilities and skills they've developed at a more-or-less professional level
- ❑ The MC asks each player to introduce their wizard, and then presents the group with a situation that requires their immediate attention
- ❑ When someone takes an action that triggers a Move...do what the Move says
- ❑ On a roll of 6 or lower, the MC has free rein to make the wizards' lives eventful and challenging

Basic Moves

Take Decisive Action

When you use your Talents and Willpower to attempt a dangerous, difficult, or dramatic task, roll with your prep. On a 7-9, pick one distinction. On a 10+, pick two.

Distinctions:

- Quick: You get it done in time for it to really matter
- Precise: You've got a lot of finesse and control over the results
- Stylish: It's impressive, flashy, or outright heroic
- Forceful: You put a lot of extra strength into it
- Subtle: You'll cause as little fuss as possible

Prep [+1 Each]:

- You've got a Talent for it
- You've got the right resources
- You've got time to spare
- You spend a point of Willpower

Lash Out

When you use magic to inflict violence, spend 1 Willpower and roll with your prep. On a 7-9, you unleash a savage attack or hideous curse. On a 10+, do as much or as little damage as you want.

Prep [+1 Each]:

- They've hurt you or someone you love
- You're not being subtle about it
- You risk great personal harm
- You've invoked ceremony and ritual

Give a Gift

When you use magic to offer someone a blessing, spend 1 Willpower and roll with your prep. On a 10+, you can give them luck, beauty, recognition, safety, or talent—your choice. On a 7-9, the MC

will offer you a complication or price for the blessing.

Prep [+1 Each]

- You're helping someone you love
- Your motives are completely unselfish
- You're making a meaningful sacrifice
- You've invoked ceremony and ritual

Take a Burden

When you use magic to ease someone's pain, spend 1 Willpower and roll with your prep. On a 10+, you heal something that's wounded their body, mind, or soul. On a 7-9, that pain has to go somewhere—the MC will tell you where.

Prep [+1 Each]

- You're helping someone you love
- You're calm and collected
- You sacrifice a part of yourself
- You've invoked ceremony and ritual

Pierce the Veil

When you use magic to discover the truth, spend 1 Willpower and roll with your prep. On a hit, name the spirit with whom you commune, or else you speak with the Nameless Powers. On a 7-9, ask 1 question and the MC will give you an honest, important answer. On a 10+, ask a follow-up question, too.

Prep [+1 Each]

- You are in an altered state of mind
- You have a symbolic link to the subject of your query
- You offer a sacrifice to the spirit with whom you commune
- You've invoked ceremony and ritual

Devise a Spell

When you **LASH OUT**, **GIVE A GIFT**, **TAKE A BURDEN**, or **PIERCE THE VEIL**, you can write down the spell you cast—its intended effect and any side-effects it may have had.

When you cast that spell again, take 1 XP. If you fail to cast it, take 2 XP instead.

When you have the opportunity to do strange experiments, learn from a mentor, commune with the supernatural, or discover useful reagents, take 1 XP.

When a spell reaches 5 XP, you can invoke it with **TAKE DECISIVE ACTION** instead, rolling to gather Distinctions. You always count as having a Talent for that spell.

You can work on devising up to 3 spells at once.

Spells	XP

Suffer Harm

When you suffer lasting harm, make a note of it. Until you find a way to deal with it, the MC might give you additional Troubles, inflict a -1 penalty on applicable actions, ask how you manage to attempt something in spite of your injury, or all three.

Your Opus

Mark 1 XP for your Opus when you...

- Share a moment of true vulnerability with someone new
- Discover something you never knew about yourself
- Own up to your greatest failures and find a way to deal
- Give up something important, even though it hurts
- Do what needs to be done, even though you'd rather do anything else



When you've marked 5 XP, invoke your Opus—a big, beautiful piece of magic. Tell the MC the feeling you're sending out into the world, and they'll tell you how everything changes in response. Then pick one:

- Your magic is gone, but you are bursting with newfound purpose
- You ascend as a spirit of magic, interceding on behalf of those who invoke your name
- You stay the same. Just...more like yourself than you ever were before

Called by Magic, a playbook

Magic washed over the world, and you heard the subtle song. It's not that magic comes easy to you, although it might—it's that your heart beats in time with magic's own. You were always missing something, until now.

I am... (pick 3 or more)

Moon-eyed

Severe

Gentle

Devoted

Whimsical

Easily worried

Curious

Spiritual

Fiercy

Obstinate

Dangerous

Sketchy

Passionate

Understanding

Patient

Willpower ○ ○ ○

Talents (describe any 4)

Instinct for the Aether

When you put your faith in magic, ask the MC what it wants you to do. If you do it, replenish 1 Willpower.

Arcane Senses

You can hear magic, see magic, taste magic. Spend 1 Willpower to ask each of the following once:

- What here is magical?
- What does this spell do?
- Who cast this spell?

Insightful

Someone who is Called by Magic can choose the following as a Distinction for their actions:

- Insightful: Your action reveals something hidden or concealed

When you roll a 12+, your action is Insightful, in addition to two other Distinctions of your choice.

Spirit Envoy

When you PIERCE THE VEIL, the MC will tell you something the spirits ask of you. If you do it, they'll answer an additional question, no rolls required.

Fighting for Magic, a playbook

It doesn't come easy. Not to you, at least. You have to scrape and struggle to make your spells work, and even then, you're still a world behind the others. But you're not giving up.

I am... (pick 3 or more)

Trying, so hard	Lonely	Glorious	Solemn	Afraid
Funny	Rebellious	Honest	Tranquil	Generous
Anxious	Active	Unconventional	Austere	Intimidating

Willpower ○ ○ ○

Talents (describe any 4)

The Struggle is Real

When you lose respect due to magic, replenish 1 Willpower.

By Sheer Grit

When you fail a roll to use magic, spend 3 Willpower and continue as if you'd rolled a 7-9 result instead.

Tear Down the Walls

When you LASH OUT at someone in a position of authority over you, take +1 Prep.

Affirming

Someone who is Fighting for Magic can choose the following as a Distinction for their actions:

- Affirming: You grow from your struggles for success, and regain 1 Willpower

When you roll a 12+, your action is Affirming, in addition to two other Distinctions of your choice.

Hungry for Magic, a playbook

You can't get enough magic. It's a beautiful feast, and you're ready to gorge yourself on it.

I am... (pick 3 or more)

Desperate	Refined	Mischievous	Shy	Unafraid
Ambitious	Brilliant	Deceptive	Imaginative	Joyful
Focused	Genuine	Political	Resilient	Cunning

Willpower ○ ○ ○

Talents (describe any 4)

Insatiable

When you turn to magic too quickly or too greedily, replenish 1 Willpower.

Devour the Arcane

When you suffer a magical effect, spend 1 Willpower to absorb its energies safely, or 2 Willpower to rebound it back against someone else.

Help from Beyond

When you **PIERCE THE VEIL**, the spirits always offer you knowledge or power to help **DEVISE A SPELL**, but at a cost.

Intimidating

Someone who is Hungry for Magic can choose the following as a Distinction for their actions:

- Intimidating: The GM will tell you who's developed newfound fear or respect for you.

When you roll a 12+, your action is Intimidating, in addition to two other Distinctions of your choice.

Afraid of Magic, a playbook

You're not sure about magic—in fact, you're fundamentally afraid of it and what it can do. What it can make you do.

I am... (pick 3 or more)

Timid	Methodical	Anxious	Brooding	Devout
Wise	Avuncular	Perceptive	Vain	Mindful
Generous	Kind	Scientific	Suspicious	Wholesome

Willpower ○ ○ ○

Talents (describe any 4)

The Hard Way

When you avoid magic despite a dire need, replenish 1 Willpower.

Baleful Anchor

When you roll a 6 or lower to invoke a spell, you can spend 1 Willpower to redirect the consequences to someone or something nearby.

Behind the Wards

When you TAKE A BURDEN, you gain +1 Prep if you do so in a place of power and safety.

Careful

Someone who is Afraid of Magic can choose the following as a Distinction for their actions:

- Careful: Your action is meticulous, and includes “else/if” statements

When you roll a 12+, your action is Careful in addition to two other Distinctions of your choice.

Born to Magic, a *playbook*

You were always going to do magic, even before it went open source. You were born to an old magic family, and you've got access to their training and resources, but this is your chance to make it on your own terms—to break free and do good.

I am... (pick 3 or more)

Witty	Urbane	Pretentious	Arrogant	Sophisticated
Naughty	Generous	Open	Thoughtless	Picky
Depressed	Mercurial	Glamorous	Proud	Rakish

Willpower ○ ○ ○

Talents (describe any 4)

Noblesse Oblige

When you share your knowledge openly and generously, replenish 1 Willpower.

Friends in High Places

You know a lot about the high society of Old Magic. Spend 1 Willpower to introduce a person or group who might have what you need.

Terms and Conditions

When you **GIVE A GIFT**, you can name a condition or a prohibition; the target must adhere to this in order to benefit from the spell.

Refined

Someone who is Born to Magic can choose the following as a Distinction for their actions:

- Refined: You conduct yourself with perfect form, and avoid giving any unintended offense.

When you roll a 12+, your action is Refined, in addition to two other Distinctions of your choice.

Changed by Magic, a playbook

When magic went free and lit up the sky, you were changed. Healed, maybe—or else transformed. You're made of magic now, at least a little.

I am... (pick 3 or more)

Frightening	Amazing	Awe-inspiring	Majestic	Fearsome
Huge	Sassy	Impolite	Moody	Controlled
Cold	Self-conscious	Distant	Exuberant	Extroverted

Willpower ○ ○ ○

Talents (describe any 4)

Show-off

When you dazzle others with your unusual abilities, replenish 1 Willpower.

Marked by Magic

Pick one tag to describe how you were changed. When it gives you an advantage to a mortal action, you get +1.

- Incredibly strong
- Hypnotic glamour
- Encyclopedic mind
- Lightning reflexes
- Impossibly healthy

Visage of Violence

When you LASH OUT, take +1 Prep if you are transformed by the magic, becoming monstrous and frightful until you're able to rest and regain control.

Overwhelming

Someone who is Changed by Magic can choose the following as a Distinction for their actions:

- Overwhelming: The action's result pushes beyond the limits of normal human strength, speed, and intellect

When you roll a 12+, your action is Overwhelming, in addition to two other Distinctions of your choice.

Natural with Magic, a playbook

The only word for you is prodigy: You're scary good at all this magic stuff, and you seem to intuitively understand how to navigate spellcraft.

I am... (pick 3 or more)

Genuine	Unassuming	Peculiar	Ditzy	Focused
Unflappable	Sincere	Arrogant	Rude	Particular
Nervous	Swift	Confident	Charismatic	Willful

Willpower ○ ○ ○

Talents (describe any 4)

A Pattern Fulfilled

When you solve a satisfying challenge, mark XP and replenish 1 Willpower.

Work in Progress

The first time you use magic in a scene, you don't have to spend Willpower.

Spellbreaker

When you TAKE A BURDEN, you gain +1 Prep to undo the effects of deleterious magic.

Harmonious

Someone who is Natural with Magic can choose the following as a Distinction for their actions:

- Harmonious: The action is mystically harmonious, and won't interfere with (or be interfered with by) other magic.

When you roll a 12+, your action is Harmonious, in addition to two other Distinctions of your choice.

THE CITY, *a shared playbook*

Before the game starts, sit down and pass this sheet from player to player. This will help to create the setting and establish what's at stake for the characters.

The Troubles (Pick 2)

The first time the sheet goes around, pick 1 of these Troubles to highlight. After everyone's had a chance to choose, pass the sheet around again and pick 1 more Trouble. These are the problems that are the most widespread and pressing in the City, although others can (and probably do) still exist.

- The cops are abusive
- The politicians don't care
- The apartments are slums
- There aren't enough jobs
- Magic is tightly regulated
- Bigotry is everywhere
- There are cameras everywhere
- Magic isn't working right
- Good folks are scattered and divided
- Everything is run-down and shitty
- Freedom of movement is curtailed
- There are shortages of a resource

The Weird Shit (Pick 1)

Pick 1 option to add a little color to the City. When you pick, tell the other players and the MC what you're picking and what you think it means; they can chime in with their ideas, too.

- Wizard drugs are on the street—what?
- Nameless Spirits haunt the parks—when?
- There's a Place of Power here—what?
- Sometimes, people dream the future—who?
- Rats can talk—how do they live?
- It's always raining—what has that done?
- There are weird cults—what do they worship?
- A local school is magic—which one?
- The forest is overtaking the City—why?
- The veil is thin in the City—how?
- There's a healing fountain—where?
- There's a gateway—where does it lead?
- Something is magically forbidden—what?

The Cast (Pick 1 to name and describe)

Pick 1 of the prompts below to create a supporting NPC. These can be people who help you, hinder you, or who are just more complicated than that. Give them a name and a short description: eg. *The One You Can Count on is Gina Vasquez, a bar owner who's always got room for her patrons.*

- The One You Count On

- The One Trying to Fix Things From the Inside

- The One Who Protects You

- The One Who Wants You to Stop

- The One Who Needs Your Protection

- The One You Learned It From

- The One Who's Going About It Wrong

- The One Who Doesn't Get It