

PYRAMID[®]



TOOLS OF THE TRADE: WIZARDS

NECROMANTIC TOOLS

by Sean Punch

**GUILDHALL OF THE
HERMETIC BROTHERHOOD**

by Matt Riggsby

TOOLING WITH CURSES

by Steven Marsh

**OUT OF THE ROUGH:
MAGIC GEMS IN RPGS**

by Andy Vetromile

“.” IS FOR FULL-STOP DRUM

by Stefan Jones

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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COVER ART

Abrar Ajmal

INTERIOR ART

*Greg Hyland
Dan Smith
Ruth Thompson*

Article Colors

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)

Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features

Purple: Other Features

Green: Recommended Reading

IN THIS ISSUE

This is the first issue of the newly revamped *Pyramid*. But we discuss that elsewhere (turn the page!). Let's instead talk a bit about what's in this magazine you now have.

The *Guildhall of the Hermetic Brotherhood* describes a mages' generic guild suitable for any large city, including four full-color maps of its building. Sean Punch's *Necromantic Tools* gives gruesome **GURPS** details on undead arms, skull-tipped wands, and zombie hordes – the perfect accessories for the necromancer with everything. *Tooling with Curses* examines three new curses suitable for most fantasy campaigns, complete with information about working these vexations into campaigns and adventures so they're more fun than oppressive. The *Wizard's Letter* provides an idea for an in-game prop. *Out of the Rough* relates a variety of background reasons for using gems in a magical world. “.” *Is for Full-Stop Drum* is a plot-device item suitable for epic **GURPS** campaigns; it's written by the author of *Alphabet Arcane*, but it's designed to stand alone . . . very alone.

This month's *Random Thought Table* looks at how to be a mysterious mage. The *Recommended Reading* articles provide inspiration for those seeking to expand their libraries with items related to this issue's wizardly themes. The *Humor* page tries to live up to its title, while the recurring *Last Word* feature asks a noted industry individual about his thoughts; this month, we chat with Chad Underkoffler.

The articles in this issue are modular and mostly generic, with a heaping helping of **GURPS** because we know our readers love that.

Editor-in-Chief ■ STEVE JACKSON
Chief Operating Officer ■ PHILIP REED
e23 Manager ■ STEVEN MARSH

Art Director ■ WILL SCHOONOVER
Production Artist ■ NIKOLA VRTIS
Prepress Checker ■ MONICA STEPHENS

Marketing Director ■ PAUL CHAPMAN
Director of Sales ■ ROSS JEPSON
Errata Coordinator ■ FADE MANLEY

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(LACK OF) LETTERS PAGE

You hold in your hands the first issue of the third “volume” of *Pyramid Magazine*. This year also marks its 15th anniversary, and this issue begins its second format change. We started out as a paper magazine many moons ago. We then moved to an HTML-based online format in 1998. Now technology has finally caught up to some of our more grandiose ideas, and we’re trying to achieve the best of both worlds: the searchable functionality and speed of electronic publication with the layout and “fun” of a paper magazine.

So, let’s go over a few ideas we’re tossing around with the new incarnation of *Pyramid*.

BURSTING AT THE SEAMS WITH THEMES

Each issue of *Pyramid* will be devoted to a theme. This issue’s theme is “Tools of the Trade: Wizards.” Next issue will focus on superheroes. And the third issue is shaping up to be something futuristic. Have ideas for future issues? Share them via our e-mail address or on our forum online.

LETTERS!

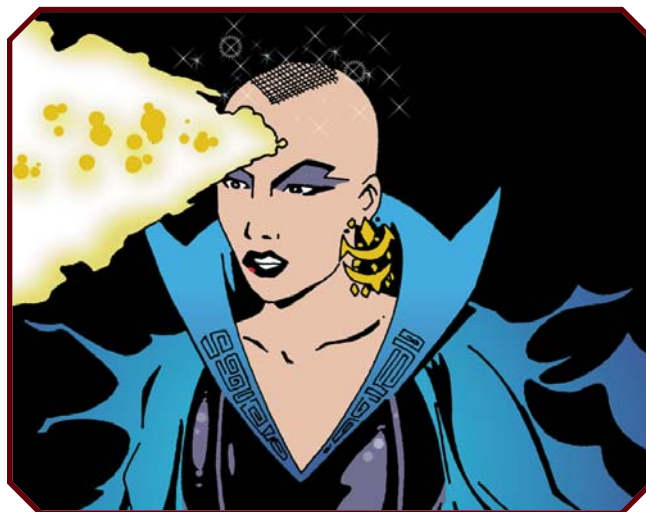
One thing we’d like to reintroduce from *Pyramid*’s paper days is a good old-fashioned *Letters* page. Help us get started by sending any comments about this issue or ideas for articles you’d like to see to pyramid@sjgames.com. We also have a message board devoted to all things *Pyramid*-related at forums.sjgames.com.

NEW TRICKS FOR OLD DOGS

If there’s an article in a past issue that you thought of a clever use for – one perhaps the authors didn’t intend – e-mail us a brief (no more than 400 words) description of what you did. For example, maybe you turned this issue’s Guildhall of the Hermetic Brotherhood into a spaceport, or a flying castle to torment kingdoms (and the heroes). Share your idea, win the adoration of fans, and maybe get a little something from us, too!

WHAT LURKS BENEATH THE SURFACE?

We’ve tried to hide an interesting cryptic challenge in this issue. Be among the first 100 to find it and follow the instructions (sending the stated requirements to pyramid@sjgames.com), and we’ll give you something worth bragging rights. (There might be some red herrings, too!)



THE WRITE STUFF

If you’re interested in writing for *Pyramid*, we’re interested in reading what you’ve got. For a list of upcoming themes we’d like to run, including how full (or not) those issues are, head over to www.sjgames.com/pyramid/wishlist.html. Send us a query letter with your idea(s), and we’ll go from there.

ENJOY!

Welcome to the first issue of our latest volume, continuing a 15-year tradition of excellence. We hope you have fun!

Otwel Ve the Mysterious suggests: “Always carry around an empty glass container and a stopper. If you’re on a budget, this set can be a used potion bottle with a cork. Wash both first!”

GUILDHALL OF THE HERMETIC BROTHERHOOD

BY MATT RIGGSBY

Magicians are not known to be a social lot, what with being prone to solitary practices, habits that drive others away in fear, and unpredictable schedules. However, not all desire to live in distant towers, and economic and political necessity may push them together to protect their mutual interests. In one well-established kingdom, significant magical activities are regulated by the Hermetic Brotherhood of the Silver Order. Or, as most people call it, the wizards' guild.

THE PURPOSE OF THE BROTHERHOOD

The Brotherhood is several centuries old, though for most of its history, it was a loose circle of magicians without any official standing or legal power, sharing information and communicating largely by letter or magical means rather than with in-person meetings. About 150 years ago, a particularly clever and powerful king moved to curb the potential problem of powerful magicians disrupting his realm. He offered the Brotherhood a charter to oversee laws regulating magic, giving them power in return for obedience to the crown. This suited the inclinations of the Brotherhood, and in a few decades, most of the kingdom's significant magical practitioners were brought under its authority.

Like other guilds, the Brotherhood regulates its trade in exchange for providing its members with a monopoly. It sets standards for training new magicians, licenses magicians to do business, collects taxes from magical practitioners, and has the power and primary responsibility for investigating and disciplining magical wrongdoers. The guild also offers official representation for magicians to the government. If a magician has a complaint about royal officials, he probably has to go through the guild to voice it.

MEMBERSHIP AND OFFICES

Technically, apprentices are not members of the guild, though they are entitled to some indirect protection. Guild rules require that members be able to provide an adequate living and education for their students, and a master can be disciplined for starving or not teaching his novices. Beyond this, the guild regards apprentices and the specifics of their day-to-day care and education as the concern of the individual master, of no more business to the guild than his furniture, diet, or livestock.

The guild consists mostly of "ordinary" members, magicians accredited as masters by the guild. They pay dues equal to about 5% of their annual income, are allowed to vote on many important matters, and may volunteer for service on committees.

Many masters are called on to sit on "tables," committees that carry out most of the guild's daily business. The *Examination Table* reviews apprentices and others aspiring to join the guild, and it issues licenses to the deserving. The *Table of the Purse* handles the guild's finances. The *Judges' Table* investigates routine crimes and punishes wrongdoing within the guild. The *Table of Art* actively seeks out magical knowledge and disseminates it among members of the guild. Additional tables are constituted as necessary. For example, the guild may create a Diabolic Table to take care of a surge in demonic issues, an Oracular Table to handle divination, or a Table of War to deal with armed conflict.

Masters who sit on the tables have greater power, but they bear a greater burden of responsibility as well. They pay higher dues (about 7.5% of their income, or 10% for "heads of the tables," selected by seniority) and spend a significant amount of time away from their own pursuits. Most serious magicians tend to avoid the tables, leaving them to the politically ambitious.

Teighte En, Second Eldest of the Clausum Cubiculum, recommends: "If possible, become magically attuned to a small, concealable weapon. A knife is a good choice, because it's a versatile tool as well." R'th Irte En, Eldest of the Clausum Cubiculum, disagrees somewhat with his younger associate: "Avoid the temptation to become magically tied to all you hold."

Positions at the tables are filled by lot from a list of volunteers. Theoretically, tables that are short of members may fill positions by lot from the general membership, but in practice, it's an unnecessary last resort.

Above these is the *High Table*, a committee of the seven most-senior members of the guild. The High Table serves as a court of last resort, deciding appeals of lower table decisions sent to them by a petition of at least a quarter of guild's membership, or under certain circumstances by appeal by any party to a dispute. They also elect the grand master, who serves for life. The grand master is the guild's nominal leader, responsible for proposing new guild regulations and declaring emergencies that require extraordinary donation or effort from the guild. He also represents the guild in official matters before the crown. The grand master is rumored to be responsible for appointing a "secret table," which carries out espionage and covert actions, though only the high membership of the guild (and, presumably, members of the table) know the truth.

PROCEDURES, CEREMONIES, AND EVENTS

Although an apprentice is likely to meet any number of guild members during his education, his first *official* contact with the guild is usually at his examination to be licensed as a master. After many years of education, a master nominates an apprentice to become a master, and the student undergoes a number of tests put to him by the Examination Table. These are divided into "the Question," an hours-long oral scrutiny during which any guild member can quiz him on any subject (though performance is judged solely by the Examination Table), and "the Demonstration," a set of spellcasting exercises determined beforehand by the table.

If the apprentice passes the tests, he is accredited as a master magician at a ceremony and banquet (which he is expected to pay for, though many apprentices get loans from their soon-to-be-former masters). The ceremony is first. The various guild masters assemble in the grand chamber in ceremonial robes before an audience of whoever cares to come. The new master, wearing a pure white robe, takes a variety of loyalty oaths in different languages and on a number of unusual objects. The oaths promise dreadful consequences should they be broken, though curiously none of them involve any kind of mystical compulsion. The guild's thinking is that a member's word should be good enough, and any magician worthy of the guild could escape whatever loyalty spells were cast on him anyway. He then changes his white robe for one that his old master finds appropriate (usually decorated with symbols indicating a particular magical school of thought) and is given a polished silver medallion indicating his membership in the Hermetic Brotherhood. An elaborate feast follows.

Most of the guild's other ceremonies follow a similar pattern: ritual in the grand chamber involving remarkable language and ritual objects but precious little actual magic, followed by a feast. On balance, this seems to attract a reasonable number of the guild's membership. Ascetic mystics take

The guild sets trade standards for magicians.

interest in the mystic symbolism of the rituals, while more worldly members are lured by the caliber of the food, which is typically high. Other regular rituals include (in ascending order of ceremony elaborateness): ascent of masters to tables, installation of new table heads, anniversary of the guild's charter, and selection of a new grand master.

More mundane business involves both less ceremony and less feasting. The tables meet at least monthly and frequently more often if petitioned with new business. Any guild member with pressing need can demand that the relevant table assemble within three days of being requested. The table meetings can get contentious, with both table members and interested witnesses all arguing in favor of pet positions and putting forward conflicting proposals. It is not unknown for particularly vehement arguments to come to blows, but guild rules frown severely on members using magic on one another outside of a formal duel.

The events that bring the most guild members to the hall, though, are the periodic colloquia. These conferences provide an opportunity to gather mystical knowledge for the academically inclined, traditional large banquets for those seeking luxury and fellowship, and an opportunity for extensive political dickering; thus, they are large, noisy affairs.

Organized by the Table of Art, gatherings are held twice a year, on the equinoxes. They typically last for two days. The first day includes presentations by a roster of guild members who have a particular topic they wish to speak on. These might be regarded as master classes, with a specialist giving instructions to learned colleagues. The second day is disputations: Two guild members with opposing positions on a topic have a public dialogue on the subject. The rule is for members of the audience to listen respectfully at all events, but in practice, hecklers abound. The second day becomes particularly boisterous.

Before the colloquia, the guildhall sees days of preparation and a constant stream of guild members and their servants into and out of the building.

FACILITIES AND ASSISTANCE

Many of the guild's services are mundane. The guild employs a permanent staff of about 10 – a mix of guards, porters, general servants, a scribe, and a chief cook, all of whom are available to assist guild members who don't bring their own servants to the guildhall. Likewise, if the upstairs chambers are not in use for official business, guild members may stay in them (for example, if they've accidentally blown up their own home in an alchemical mishap) for a nominal fee. The guild also helps with healing expenses of injured members and reassigns apprentices of incapacitated members.

Some Lightspear notes: "If you enjoyed this article by Matt Riggsby, be sure to check out GURPS Locations: The Tower of Octavius, available from e23.sjgames.com."

A more mixed benefit for members of the guild is its internal legal system and maintenance of a monopoly on magical practice. Guild members accused of wrongdoing can be charged and tried by the Judges' Table. This is usually a favorable arrangement for the magician, since he's less likely to be convicted and punished by his peers than an outside judge. Many charges against members are immediately dismissed as frivolous and obviously false, and even when magicians are found at fault, punishments are typically light. However, depending on its membership, the table can take the formal standards of the guild very seriously. Routine business for the table involves mediating trade disputes (a rain spell resulted in flooding, a healer who was paid in advance didn't bother to make an appearance until after the patient was dead, etc.). Disciplinary measures, when levied, are typically fines that are split between the guild and the plaintiff. More criminal complaints ("A magician's familiar ate my baby!") are punished with greater fines or, in extreme cases, tremendous fines, ejection from the guild, and exile from areas under the guild's jurisdiction. Confinement and other physical punishments (for example, being shrunk down and sealed in a bottle) are used only in cases where the defendant poses a severe, ongoing danger to safety.

The guild is more harsh with magical practitioners who aren't members. Though they don't have the resources to go after every fortune-teller or seller of lucky charms, the guild will catch up with anyone who tries to make a living from casting spells sooner or later (though spellcasters who work magic purely for their own benefit are technically exempt). Unlicensed spellcasters are subject to severe fines and, in extreme cases, exile, imprisonment, and other physical punishments.

Most systematic magical knowledge is still contained in the notebooks and minds of individual (and inevitably individualistic) wizards, but the guild's archives, particularly the proceedings of the colloquia, record a great deal of technical information. Reading the archives won't teach any spells, but they can speed research on new spells and provide useful, if very scattered, information on spiritual realms, far-off countries, and the distant past.

In addition to the library, the hall provides a state-of-the-art observatory . . . which, granted, isn't saying much at roughly medieval technology, but it is equipped with preternaturally accurate instruments. Several rooms also have pentagrams and similar mystical restraining devices for the safe summoning and containment of demons and other supernatural entities. The hall has an alchemical laboratory (users must pay to replace broken or exploded vessels, of course), and members also club together to obtain alchemical materials, sometimes commissioning mercantile expeditions to buy them in bulk from far-away suppliers.

Finally, the hall is itself magically fortified, offering a secure location for members to meet. The site as a whole is protected against all kinds of teleportation and magical telepresence, and many rooms have even greater protection. The stones in its walls have also been magically fused, giving it increased resistance to physical damage; the building's wooden structural members have been fireproofed; and locks to rooms with

Reading the archives can speed research on new spells and provide other useful information.

contents of any value have been enchanted to require a spoken password as well as a key.

THE GUILDHALL

The guildhall started its life as a fortified family residence, but it has since been taken over and heavily rebuilt over the years. It serves as a gathering place for guild meetings, offices and archives for internal business, a laboratory for approved research, and a temporary residence for visitors from far away.

Maps of each floor are on pp. 9-12. Each hex represents one yard.

First Floor (see map on p. 9)

1. *Gate:* The gate to the courtyard faces a major street. It is a large arch of carved stone set with an elaborate gate made from wrought iron. A small stone booth just outside the gate provides shelter for a guard or porter in poor weather. The gate is enchanted to glow softly in the dark.

2. *Courtyard:* Though a physically unremarkable paved area, the courtyard has a small enchantment on it. With the right command, guild masters can prevent rain from falling there, making it much more convenient to step outside for some air during inclement weather.

3. *Grand Chamber:* This apsidal room is used for the guild's largest ceremonies and meetings. It boasts elaborately carved marble walls and stained glass windows decorated with mystical symbols. The vaulted roof is nearly 30 feet from the floor.

4. *Entrance Hall:* Most visitors enter the guildhall here, going upstairs to the gallery or immediately into the grand chamber.

5. *Covered Court:* This section is more a sheltered extension of the courtyard than a separate room. Screened by the upper stories, the covered court gives visitors in poor weather a spot to shake off the rain and snow before entering the building and a place to leave mounts with the servants.

6. *Stables:* The guildhall isn't equipped to handle the demands of large numbers of riders, but it does have a few stables to keep animals for important visitors.

7. *Laundry, Kitchen, and Workshop:* This section of the first floor provides facilities for servants to look after the needs of the guildsmen. The kitchen is the most-frequented section, but the laundry sees considerable use in times of political turmoil when the bedchambers are occupied, and the workshop is frequently busy with repairing the results of magical work gone slightly awry.

Nth Ree advises: "Carry a pouch with sand in it. You can use it to mark locations, the pouch makes a good adjustable weight, and – in a pinch – you can bludgeon foes with the sack or blind them with the sand therein."

8. *Guard Tower (Floor 1)*: The watchtower at the northeast end of the building is, for some reason, completely isolated from the rest of the building. This area serves as an armory and all-purpose room for the guards.

Second Floor (see map on p. 10)

1. *Gallery*: The gallery takes up about half of the second floor. It acts as a casual meeting place and a lounge used between ceremonies and lectures during major gatherings. It has railed balconies overlooking the grand chamber and the entrance hall. It is decorated with tapestries and paintings brought back from all corners of the world (and beyond) by guild members. The room also is lit liberally with magical chandeliers that are dark during the day but become bright around sundown and slowly dim to a faint glow over the hour before midnight.

2. *Table Chambers*: These rooms are employed primarily for private meetings of the tables. Though there are more tables than rooms, they meet infrequently enough that the rooms are sufficient most of the time, and other rooms can be pressed into service when they aren't. When the rooms are not in use for their main purpose, members may occupy them for small presentations, private mediations, formal teaching, and whatever else they might need them for.

3. *Guard Tower (Floor 2)*: This floor of the tower has been adopted as private chambers for the guards.

Third Floor (see map on p. 11)

1. *Alchemical Laboratory*: The laboratory has no particular mystical defense, but it is well-protected against physical threats. It is divided into semi-open cells by thick walls. Each cell is equipped with a small vent overhead, leading out through the roof. That and the large (and magically shatterproofed) windows make it one of the best-ventilated rooms in the building.

2. *Trophy Room*: This room contains notable artifacts from the guild's history. Many are purely mundane: letters from early members of the Hermetic Brotherhood, robes and other relics of notable guild members, the guild charter and copies and proclamations related to it. Others have supernatural aspects but aren't themselves magical tools or directly potent substances: dragons' teeth, bottles of uncanny liquids and strange earths from faerie realms and higher planes, a few demons' heads preserved in wine, and other materials.

3. *Hell Chamber*: Though a bit more exciting than the Chamber of Mysteries (below), this room, intended for diabolical research, is mystically reinforced to withstand the strongest demons. It contains a pentagram inlaid in stone surrounded by a magic circle inlaid in steel, and the room itself has the usual protections against scrying and magical transportation. Both of the magical barriers are nigh-impossible for mystical creatures to break through, and their physical manifestations are extremely tough. Moreover, the stone layer under the magical barriers has, like the wall, been fused into a single thick slab, so even the destruction of the building wouldn't necessarily break the barriers.

4. *Chamber of Mysteries*: This well-appointed room is less grandiose than it sounds. It doesn't contain any specific

secrets. Rather, it's a chamber employed for particularly secret deliberations by the tables and the grand master. The chamber has additional magical defenses against spies. Just as the building site is reinforced against scrying and magical transportation from outside, the room is protected so that it can't be magically spied on even from within. Additionally, while lit, a magical lantern fixed to the ceiling can darken the windows and cause any sounds made inside the area inaudible outside of the place. The furniture is otherwise utterly mundane but extremely comfortable.

5. *Public Court*: The grand master has, in effect, two offices. This larger room is used for meetings and councils in which he is involved, as well as a good deal of ordinary business. The grand master sits in a chair on a slightly raised platform facing the other occupants of the room, who may be seated (if they are guild members) or must stand (if they are not). Custom holds that if the king visits and is received in the public court, he must be provided with a chair set on a temporary platform an inch higher than the grand master's. In addition to candles and lanterns as necessary, the room is lit by seven silver spheres that slowly revolve over the grand master's chair.

6. *Private Court*: This smaller, cramped room is the grand master's private office. Most of the space is taken up by shelves of documents and a rather too large desk. Only the grand master and members of the high table are allowed in the room without the specific invitation of the grand master. Since servants are not allowed in to clean up, a small enchantment has been laid on the room. At dawn and dusk every day, a whirlwind-like breeze swirls around the room, picking up dust and small bits of rubbish and depositing them in a bin just outside the door, leaving papers undisturbed.

7. *Guard Tower (Floor 3)*: This room has become a place of storage. Objects that are never used but not quite worthless enough to throw away often make their way here.

Fourth Floor (see map on p. 12)

1. *Observatory*: The observatory is more an open-air platform than a room, but since the entire site is protected by the anti-rain charm, a roof is ultimately unnecessary. A set of cabinets contain a set of uncannily accurate quadrants, astrolabes, and other astronomical equipment. A few also superimpose the shapes of constellations and known courses of stars over the user's field of view. They are connected to the cabinets by chains that magically extend themselves as the user carries an instrument around the rooftop, but they stretch no farther. The southwest corner also has a set of four sundials. Each sundial represents a different city and is enchanted so that when exposed to light, they cast a shadow reflecting the position of the sun at that location regardless of where the actual light source is.

2. *Private Chambers*: Most of the rooms on this floor are bedchambers for temporary use by guild members and special guests. Most of the rooms are furnished simply but comfortably, with thick mattresses and magical temperature control. Particularly senior or important guests may be ensconced in suites, which have an antechamber as well as a bedchamber.

D'twen Tyn'ine sticks with the basics: "I never leave my tower without a pestle and mortar."

At the gatherings, ascetic mystics take interest in the mystic symbolism of the rituals, while more worldly members are lured by the caliber of the food.

3. *Guard Tower (Floor 4)*: This floor is also used for long-term storage. The tower actually extends a bit higher than this floor. Above the fourth floor is an open crenellated parapet, the highest point in the building, albeit only slightly higher than the nearby roof over the private chambers.

THE GUILDHALL IN THE CAMPAIGN

To have a magician's guild at all supposes that there are enough spell-casters in the setting to make them worth organizing, but not so many that magic use can be a distinct profession. If magic use is on the rare end of that scale, the guild may have a few tens of members scattered across a large kingdom. On the more common end of the scale, it could have hundreds, perhaps all local to the city and its surrounding countryside.

The guild can be a useful patron, and the guildhall an occasional base of operations for spellcasters. A PC whose home is constantly being burned down by magical backfires and attacked by random enemies and angry spirits might take up semi-permanent residence in the private chambers while he's between domiciles.

The guild provides a minimum of material support, but it does serve as a lynchpin for getting magical contacts, and it could become an impetus for adventures. For example, younger (or at least more physically active) members might volunteer to lead mercantile expeditions seeking alchemical ingredients, or to head academic expeditions to search for lost artifacts or examine unusual phenomena.

As the point of contact between the government and the magical community, the guild might also serve as a recruiting agency for official use of magic; in addition to connections to other magicians, the guild might offer opportunities for magicians to serve as auxiliaries to the military, consultants for diplomats, and advisors to officials and royalty.

The guild could be a significant complication for traveling heroes, though there are a number of ways to make it more accommodating for several classes of character.

Travelers: As with fortune-tellers and charm-sellers, the guild has better things to do than to track down every last visitor to the city capable of casting a spell. It mostly concerns itself with commercial use of magic, and the powers of the guild are sometimes overridden by other charters issued by the crown. For example, short-term foreign visitors who arrive

with a mercantile voyage or religious pilgrimage may have the official sanction of the crown, the church, or some other powerful organization. In that case, spellcasters might be allowed to use magic for the direct benefit of their group's members (for example, casting healing spells on them or magically creating food), though they could not be hired by the city's natives. Of course, a traveler who decided to become a long-term resident would need to become a member of the guild to continue with his profession.

Minorities: Permanent minorities, such as a Jewish enclave in a predominantly Christian or Muslim city during the Middle Ages or an elvish neighborhood in a predominantly human fantasy city, could have an exemption similar to that for official travelers. Members of that minority visiting the city would have to follow whatever conditions governed his fellows, but at least he wouldn't be subject to guild rules.

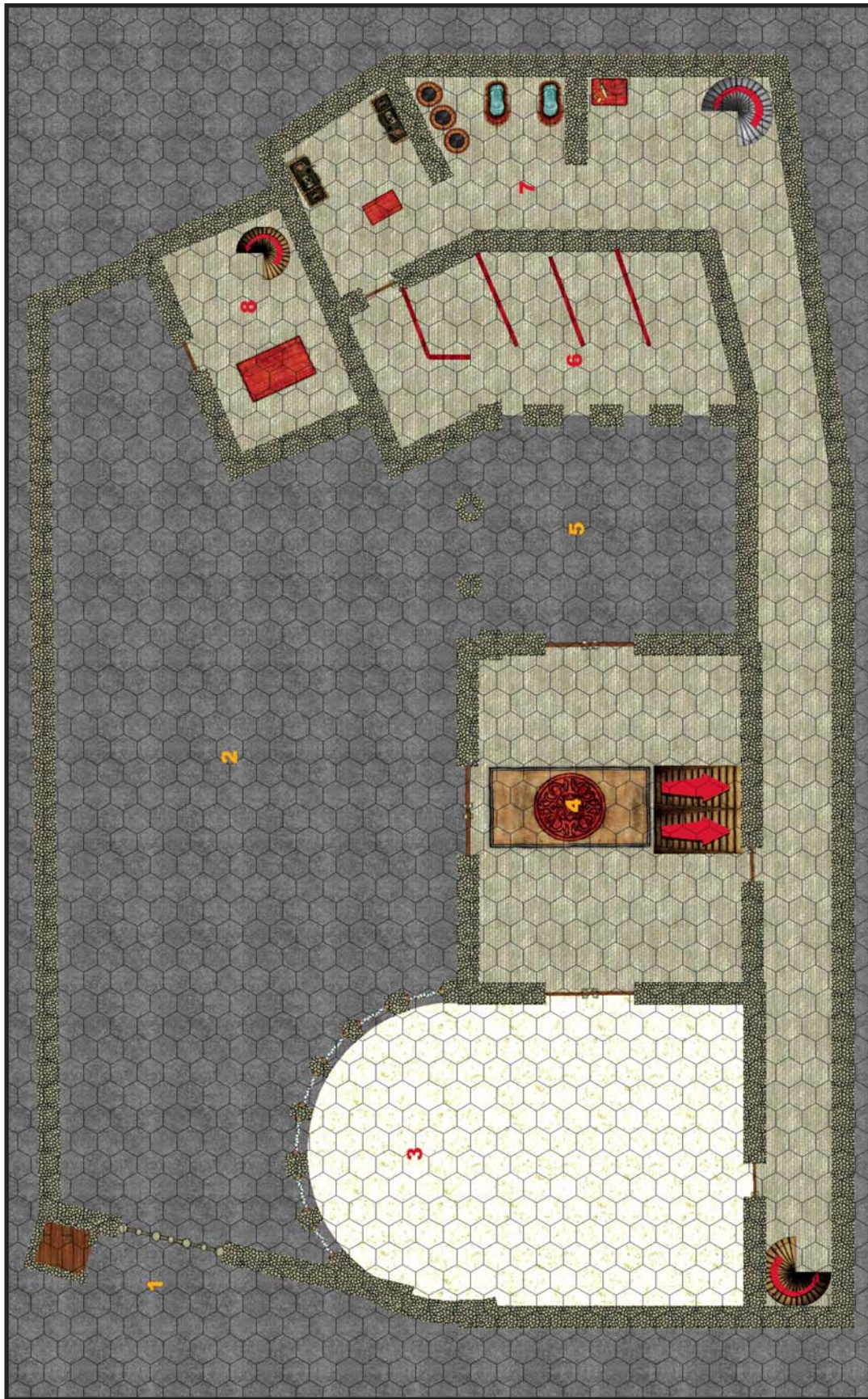
Aristocrats: The guild's charter and powers may extend only to the activities of commoners. Members of the nobility and the royal family may be tacitly released from its restrictions, so long as they don't cause too much trouble. If they do, they're likely to face the king's justice, though the king may have to call in the guild to do the dirty work of apprehending the aristocratic miscreant. However, if the Duke of Earl decides to spend his evenings researching demonology at his villa, the guild will be discouraged from stopping him.

Exempt Trades and Individuals: The guild might only concern itself with "true" spellcasting, ignoring certain magically related trades. For example, full-time alchemists, who compound potions but never cast a spell themselves, might be beneath the guild's notice. The same might be true for petty fortune-tellers and for individuals who have magical abilities (for example, semi-dragon humanoids who can breathe fire, divinely touched people with gifts of prophecy, or little guys with an uncanny ability to detect sloping passages) but no actual spellcasting abilities.

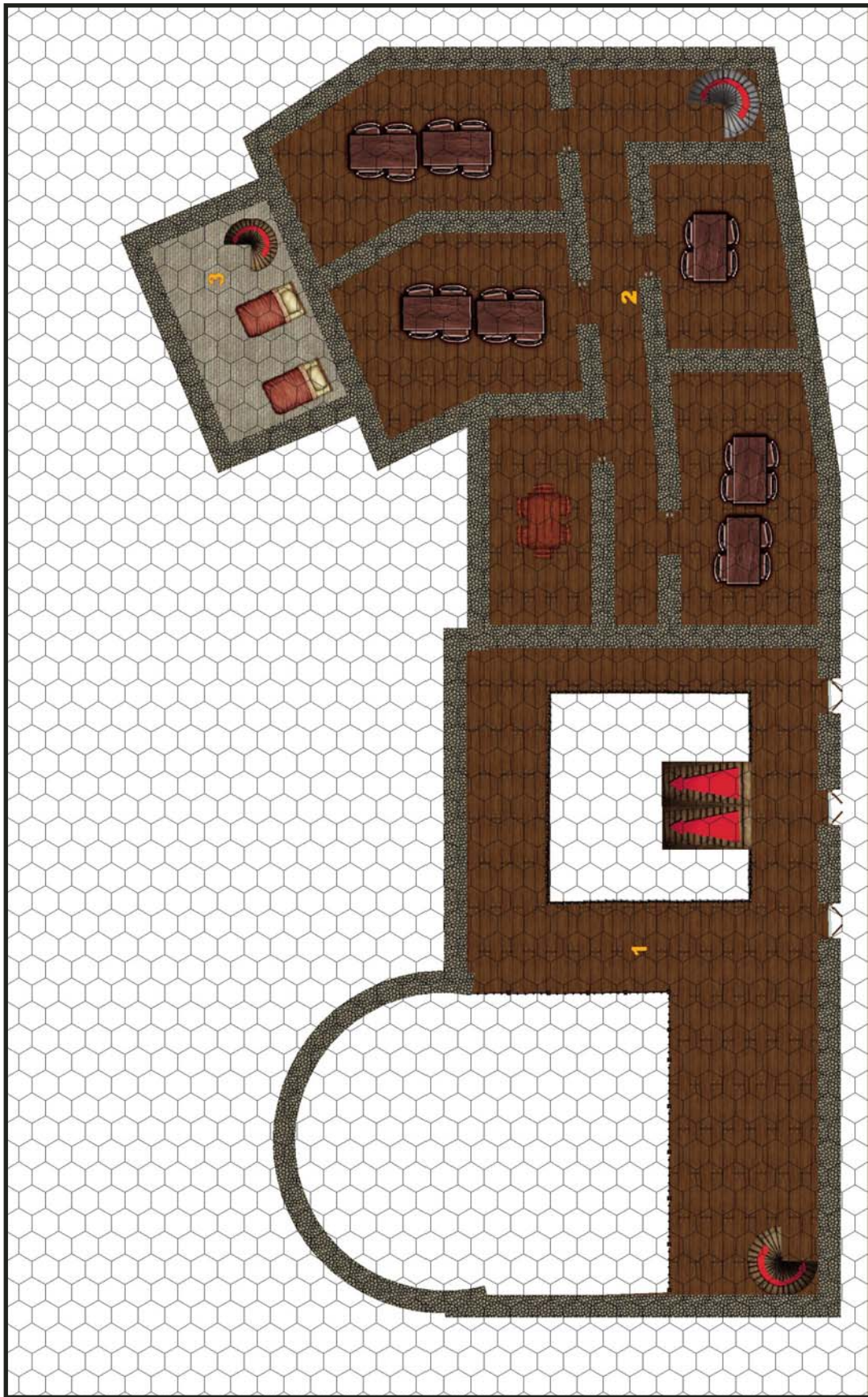
Finally, the guildhall itself can be a setting for adventure. Ambitious magicians may want to rise to the top of the ladder through service at the tables or influence with those already there. Politics within the guild will have an academic complexion (famously vicious because the stakes are so low), so even more ambitious characters may want to use that as a stepping stone to royal influence. Because of all the enchantments preventing magical information-gathering, the site is also a place where a mystery adventure can't be short-circuited by someone waving a crystal ball around.

Jth Irty wants to make sure everyone knows: "There's an invitation to the Guildhall of the Hermetic Brotherhood on p. 25 of this document. Print it out and use it to bluff your way into that stuffy establishment."

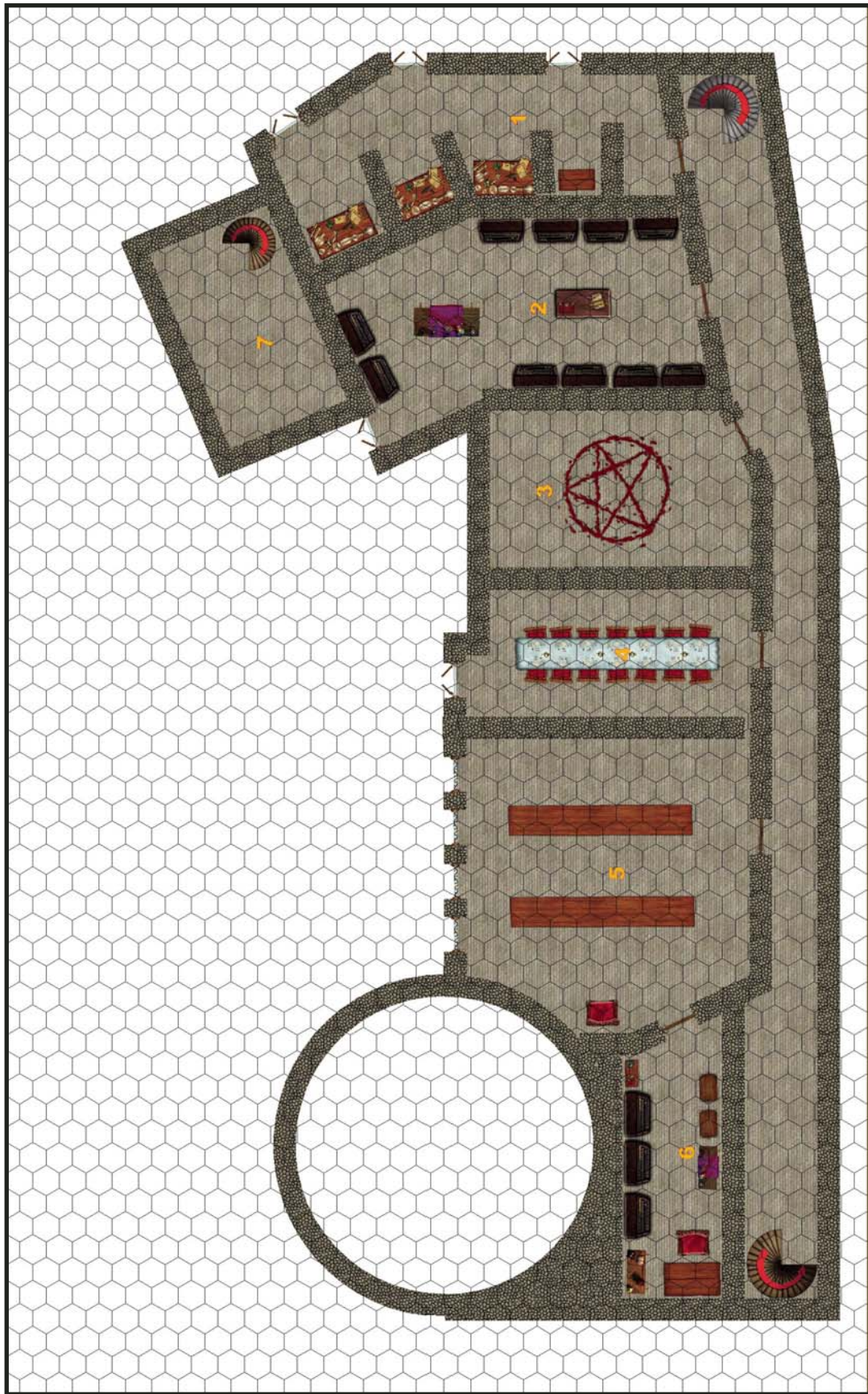
First Floor



Second Floor



Third Floor



Fourth Floor



NECROMANTIC TOOLS

BY SEAN PUNCH

Necromancers traditionally use many creepy tools in their trade. While the GM is free to treat all such gear as enchanted items bought with cash – and undead friends, as spoils of battle – it's often more balanced to charge points for this stuff. Below are some classic resources for necromancer PCs in *GURPS* to buy when learning more spells has lost its cachet.

FOUL UNDEAD ARMS

Fantasy is full of necromancers who've lopped off an arm in order to replace it with an undead body part that provides useful abilities. It's up to the GM where undead arms come from. Getting one might be as simple as defeating an undead creature and hacking off its limb! Alternatively, a secretive guild may sell specially prepared parts for as much as \$500 per character point worth of advantages involved, regardless of *disadvantages*.

Off With the Old . . .

To attach an undead arm, you must first amputate your current one. If done by an assistant, this requires a Surgery roll at no special penalty beyond that for TL (p. B424): -5 in a TL2-3 fantasy world, or -4 in a TL4 one. If done by the necromancer himself, the Surgery roll becomes *Will*-based, and there's a -4 for doing at least part of the deed one-handed.

Any success removes the arm with minimal trauma and bleeding. At this stage, the necromancer has the disadvantage One Arm [-20] (plus a big piece of meat).

Failure still lops off the arm, but it's a rough cut. The necromancer gains One Arm, as above, suffers 2d HP of injury, and starts to bleed; see *Bleeding* (p. B420). Attaching the undead arm will be trickier.

Critical failure *mangles* the arm. The necromancer gains One Arm, immediately goes to 0 HP, and begins to bleed. If he's working alone, he may pass out and bleed to death before he can cast a healing spell! He can still try to attach an undead arm – at a massive penalty.

It's up to the GM whether pre-TL6 surgery runs the risk of infection (p. B444). If so, then it's good to have a Cure Disease spell or an Elixir of Health handy.

. . . And On With the New

The next step is to sew on the undead arm. This is fairly straightforward. The limb is *dead*, and magic – not surgery – will address such trivialities as making sure bones and nerves “line up.”

Make another Surgery roll. Again, TL modifiers apply, and the roll is *Will*-based and at -4 if the necromancer is his own surgeon. Apply a further -5 if the roll to sever the arm failed – or -10 if it was a *critical* failure.

Any success attaches the arm. Congratulations! Go to the next step.

Failure means the necromancer suffers 1d HP of injury. He may retry if willing and able, with this or another undead arm. Alternatively, he can give up and go through life with One Arm, unless he can procure a Regeneration or Instant Regeneration spell, or an Elixir of Regeneration.

Undead arms can offer many advantages . . . and disadvantages.

Critical failure means 2d HP of injury and the stump is *ruined*. The necromancer has One Arm for good and cannot attach an undead arm on that side. To try again, he must first regenerate his arm and then chop it off anew.

Bringing It to Unlife

Once the arm is properly attached, the final step is to activate it. The usual way to do so is via a spell. Restoration costs 15 energy points and activates the limb in one month. Instant Restoration costs 50 energy points but works instantly. The Lich spell costs 100 energy points – but it might be all a necromancer knows, and it's instant as well.

Any success means the arm works after the requisite time period. Any failure means the subject ends up with a worthless, withered limb: One Arm. Critical failure means the horrid arm also *festers*; treat this as infection (p. B444).

Zni Net-Een reminds us: “In GURPS, many necromantic tools or minor abilities can be represented with perks. See GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks – also by Sean Punch – for over 100 ideas; define them as ‘necromantic’ or ‘magical’ in origin, and you’re set!”

Undead Arm Perks

Many undead arms have one or both of these perks:

Dead Arm: You have an arm that isn't alive. It's no less resistant to pain, but it (and only it) has Injury Tolerance (No Blood) – it won't bleed or carry blood-borne disease or poison into your body. It might have maggots, but it's unappealing to blood-sucking bugs.

Pestilent Arm: Your arm is dirty and foul, with gore-caked claws, pus-oozing sores, etc. Should you injure a living person with it through an unarmed attack, he must check for infection (p. B444) at -3, just as if he had been wounded in a locale with a special infection.

Alternatively, and more safely, the necromancer can treat the arm with an Elixir of Reanimation. This activates the limb instantly and without error.

Undead Arm

Variable

Once the limb is attached, the necromancer gains one of the packages below *instead of* unmodified One Arm. These constitute a set of meta-traits.

Many of the advantages and disadvantages in these meta-traits have the limitation Magical, -10%, which means that they don't apply if there's no mana. Remember that Energy Reserve (Magical) and Magery effectively have this drawback built in. All of these packages also incorporate One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; thus, when the necromancer is in a no-mana area, he has a limp, dead arm!

These rules give you *one* undead arm. It's easy to extrapolate the stats to pairs of arms if the GM allows such: replace One Arm with No Fine Manipulators (p. B145), increase the base cost of any Arm DX or Arm ST (p. B40), and make the Partial limitation on DR worth -20% instead of -40%.

In some settings, there may also be a Social Stigma for having visible proof of darkest necromancy welded to your shoulder. This ranges from -5 points (equivalent to Criminal Record or Excommunicated) to -15 points (equivalent to Monster).

Demon Arm: Arm ST 7 (Single Arm; Magical, -10%) [19]; Damage Resistance 5 (Magical, -10%; Partial, Arm, -40%) [13]; Magery 1 (One College Only, Necromantic, -40%) [6]; One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; Sharp Claws (Magical, -10%) [5]; Unnatural Features 2 [-2]. *Notes:* This strong, tough, clawed limb gives +1 to Magery with Necromantic spells. It's grotesquely unnatural and *not* entirely dead – it bleeds ichor if cut, which is just as bad as regular bleeding. 35 points.

Ectoplasmic Arm: Frightens Animals (Magical, -10%) [-9]; One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; Telekinesis 10 (Magical, -10%; Reduced Range, 1/10, -30%; Reflexive, +40%; Temporary Disadvantage, One Arm, -20%) [40]. *Notes:* This is a ghostly arm. Invisible and intangible, it can do everything that a meat arm can do, but terrifies animals and has a flat ST 10.

The necromancer can coordinate this with his physical arm, but has -4 on two-handed tasks if for whatever reason he cannot make them work together; e.g., when reaching through a solid object. 25 points.

Ghoul Arm: Arm ST 2 (Single Arm; Magical, -10%) [6]; Damage Resistance 2 (Magical, -10%; Partial, Arm, -40%) [5]; Dead Arm [1]; Pestilent Arm [1]; One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; Sharp Claws (Magical, -10%) [5]; Unnatural Features 2 [-2]. *Notes:* This limb has the main advantages of being modestly stronger and tougher than a natural one, with nasty claws. It's also obvious and putrid. 10 points.

Lich Arm: Dead Arm [1]; Energy Reserve 10 (Magical) [30]; Magery 1 (One College Only, Necromancy, -40%) [6]; One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; Unnatural Features 1 [-1]. *Notes:* If you can't become a lich, destroy one and steal his power by affixing his spellcasting arm to your body. This grants +1 to Necromantic spells and 10 points of magical energy (the GM can modify this for powerful or weakling liches). This trait assumes a mummified, well-preserved lich; modify accordingly for a skeletal one. 30 points.

Skeleton Arm: Arm DX 2 (Single Arm; Magical, -10%) [22]; Dead Arm [1]; One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; Unnatural Features 2 [-2]. *Notes:* A bony arm that's *much* nimbler than a meat arm, but creepy-looking. The +2 DX applies to *that arm*, which is of greatest value to sword-swinging necromancers. 15 points.

Vampiric Arm: Arm ST 6 (Single Arm; Magical, -10%) [17]; Leech 1d (Magical, -10%) [34]; One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; Uncontrollable Appetite (12) (Life Force) [-15]. *Notes:* A physically powerful and (mostly) natural-looking arm that can heal the user – Leech steals 1d HP per second from a *helpless* victim on contact, healing 1 HP per 3 HP stolen. 30 points.

Wraith Arm: Arm ST 5 (Single Arm; Magical, -10%) [14]; Damage Resistance 4 (Magical, -10%; Partial, Arm, -40%) [10]; Dead Arm [1]; Fatigue Attack 1d (Cosmic, Irresistible Attack, +300%; Freezing, +20%; Magical, -10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%) [38]; One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; Unnatural Features 2 [-2]. *Notes:* Another powerful, resilient model – this one with a dire chilling attack that harms foes through any armor. Its icy aura of doom *cannot* be hidden. 55 points.

Zombie Arm: Arm ST 1 (Single Arm; Magical, -10%) [3]; Dead Arm [1]; Injury Tolerance (Independent Body Parts; Magical, -10%; Partial, Arm, -40%) [18]; One Arm (Mitigator, Mana, -70%) [-6]; Pestilent Arm [1]; Unnatural Features 2 [-2]. *Notes:* A squidgy, disease-ridden arm. Its special Injury Tolerance lets you remove your arm, which operates as an ally with your ST for striking or strangling, halved for grappling or dragging; your DX and HT; your HP/2; Move of your ST/4; Dodge of your DX/2 + 3; and your SM-2. Round fractions *up*. To reattach it, hold it in place for a minute. 15 points.

SKULL-TIPPED WANDS

The skull-tipped wand is to the well-acquainted reanimator what the little black dress is to the chic seductress: a professional necessity and a fashion statement. You *could* stop at a generic stick with a Staff enchantment . . . but all manner of potent abilities might be focused through a wand!

Sfi Ve the Dark gave this cryptic comment: "The most versatile tool I can envision is a firstborn."

Skull-Tipped Wands Table

This table summarizes the important stats for skull-tipped wands. It's a weapon table like the ones on pp. B271-274, with two differences:

Cost isn't paid initially; you receive your first wand when you pay the points for your abilities. This is a *replacement* cost should the wand be broken or stolen. It gives you an ornate weapon made of rare materials suitable for attunement.

Limitation is the sum of Breakable and Can Be Stolen, and modifies the cost of any advantage bought through the wand.

Wand	Damage	Reach	Parry	Cost	Weight	ST	Limitation
AXE/MACE (DX-5, Flail-4, or Two-Handed Axe/Mace-3)							
Hefty Wand	sw+2 cr	1	0U	\$200	5	12	-45%
BROADSWORD (DX-5, Force Sword-4, Rapier-4, Saber-4, Shortsword-2, or Two-Handed Sword-4)							
Rod	sw cr	1	0	\$80	2	9	-50%
or	thr cr	1	0	-	-	9	
KNIFE (DX-4, Force Sword-3, Main-Gauche-3, or Shortsword-3)							
Slender Wand	sw-1 cr	C, 1	-1	\$20	0.5	5	-45%
or	thr cr	C	-1	-	-	5	
SHORTSWORD (DX-5, Broadsword-2, Force Sword-4, Jitte/Sai-3, Knife-4, Saber-4, Smallsword-4, or Tonfa-3)							
Long Wand	sw cr	1	0	\$40	1	6	-50%
or	thr cr	1	0	-	-	6	
Slender Wand	sw-1 cr	C, 1	-1	\$20	0.5	5	-45%
or	thr cr	C	-1	-	-	5	
SMALLSWORD (DX-5, Main-Gauche-3, Rapier-3, Saber-3, or Shortsword-4)							
Long Wand	sw cr	1	0F	\$40	1	6	-50%
or	thr cr	1	0F	-	-	6	
STAFF (DX-5, Polearm-4, or Spear-2)							
Rod	sw+1 cr	1	+2	\$80	2	6†	-50%
or	thr+1 cr	1	+2	-	-	6†	
Staff	sw+2 cr	1, 2	+2	\$160	4	7†	-50%
or	thr+2 cr	1, 2	+2	-	-	7†	
TWO-HANDED SWORD (DX-5, Broadsword-4, or Force Sword-4)							
Rod	sw+1 cr	1	0	\$80	2	8†	-50%
or	thr+1 cr	1	0	-	-	8†	
Staff	sw+2 cr	1, 2	0	\$160	4	9†	-50%
or	thr+1 cr	2	0	-	-	9†	

Skull-tipped wands are gadgets with limitations from pp. B116-117. Points spent on a wand serve to attune it to its owner. Wands are assumed to be repairable and replaceable. If your wand is broken or stolen, you can fix or replace it by paying the cash cost on the *Skull-Tipped Wands Table* for suitable materials, and then meditating for hours equal to points in abilities (see *Wand Abilities*, below) to attune it.

Breaking Wands

All wands have the Breakable limitation. They *aren't* machines that can break down and they *can* be repaired, so

this limitation depends only on DR and SM, which vary by wand design:

Hefty Wand: A wand with a life-sized skull at the end, suitable for braining people. SM -4, DR 4, HP 14. -30%.

Long Wand: A short, balanced club with a more modest skull-shaped cap. SM -4, DR 2, HP 8. -35%.

Rod: A balanced cane with a skull-shaped cap. SM -4, DR 2, HP 10. -35%.

Slender Wand: Tiny and hard to grab, with a dainty skull carving or a small jeweled skull. SM -5, DR 2, and HP 6. -30%.

Staff: A long, gnarled staff with one end carved into a grotesque death's head. SM -3, DR 2, HP 13. -35%.

D't Wentyt Wo produced a cylinder wrapped in a long, two-inch-wide thin fabric, incredibly sticky on one side and slightly reflective gray on the other. He offered no other comment.

Taking Away Wands

Wands also have the Can Be Stolen limitation. In combat, a wand can be taken away like any other weapon, through various Contests. This is usually worth -30%. However, because wands are attuned to specific users, they won't work for the thief, reducing the limitation to -15%.

Staff Attunement

Necromancers with at least 1 point in skull-tipped wand abilities may select the following perk:

Staff Attunement: When you attune yourself to a skull-tipped wand, it gains the equivalent of the Staff spell in addition to its other abilities. It isn't actually enchanted, and only works this way for you.

Wand Abilities

As symbols of death, skull-tipped wands provide the entirely mundane benefit of an Intimidation bonus when used to perform foul necromancy. The understated slender wand, long wand, and rod give +1. The more impressive staff and hefty wand give +2.

Wands can also function as if enchanted with the Staff spell. A necromancer may put this enchantment on his wand or pay someone else to do it (add \$30). Alternatively, he can take a special perk; see *Staff Attunement* (box).

Most important, though, the necromancer can buy any of the following:

- Energy Reserve (Magical; Gadget Limitations, -45% or -50%) [Varies]. Work out the Energy Reserve at 3 points/level and then apply the limitations.
- Magery 1-3 (Gadget Limitations, -45% or -50%; One College Only, Necromantic, -40%) [2/level]. This gives from +1 to +3 to Necromantic spells cast with the wand. Note that the limitation is treated as -80% (see p. B110).
- Medium (Gadget Limitations, -45% or -50%; Magical, -10%; Specialized, Ghosts, -50%; Universal, +50%; Visual, +50%) [10 or 9]. This lets the user sense, speak with, and see any undead spirit.

ZOMBIE HORDES

Any necromancer's top tool is an army of walking corpses. You can get such a horde by casting Mass Zombie or a bunch of Zombie spells. However, the GM may not allow a "free" group of Allies acquired this way – and anyway, as written, those spells do little but produce sword fodder.

As an alternative, necromancers can have magically created undead as Allies. These zombies should be superior to the *GURPS Magic* variety. After all, why would you want generic

-168-point zombies as Allies when equal points could buy special friends worth up to 25% of your point value?

Since few GMs will allow players to go crazy designing custom undead, these rules offer a compromise: "improved zombies," fine-tuned to 0 points.

Improved Zombie

0 points

Specific improvements include:

- The ability to generate three points of magical energy to share with a wizard within two yards. In battle, the necromancer could draw energy from any of 18 undead arranged in two concentric rings around him and still have room to maneuver. The zombie lending him energy must take a Ready maneuver (*not* fight!) to do so. He can only draw on *one* zombie's energy at a time – so he gets 3 energy per turn, once per zombie, and not (3 × number of zombies) all at once.
- A head and chest cavity stuffed with preservatives, giving superior ST and Injury Tolerance, and preventing rot. This halts Bad Smell and the gradual transformation into a skeleton, allowing the zombie to pass as "human" if wearing hooded robes.
- Magical defenses against undead-control spells, in the form of perks that justify removal of features standard for undead in most worlds.
- A more potent spirit providing the mind, manifesting as the absence of IQ penalties and Cannot Learn. This lets the zombie follow complex orders and improve in step with its master.

The well-behaved zombie is a professional necessity.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+5 [50].

Advantages: Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Energy Reserve 3 (Magical; Affects Others, 1 person, +50%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%) [18]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Immunity to Mind Control [30]; Indomitable [15]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Vitals, Unliving) [35]; Single-Minded [5]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15].

Perks: Unaffected by Control Zombie [1]; Unaffected by Turn Zombie [1].

Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Automaton [-85]; Dependency (Mana; Very Common; Constantly)* [-25]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

Features: Affected by Pentagram; Sterile.

R'sixte En carries a tiny volume of limericks with him. "If I'm ever in doubt whether I'm in the real world or trapped in a dream, I open this book to a random page; the mind cannot compose a good limerick on the spot."

* Dependency treats mana as “Very Common” and not just “Common,” as in *GURPS Magic*. Generally, mana is uniformly present in worlds where necromancers can acquire hordes of zombie energy donors!

Zombies as Allies

Referring to *Allies* (pp. B36-38):

Ally's Power: Zombies like these are base 1-point Allies for any necromancer worth at least 0 points himself. That's *most* necromancers! Retaining up to 1/4 of their master's point value in abilities possessed in life (e.g., 25 points for a 100-point mage), most often combat skills, won't change this.

Horde Size: Zombie hordes consist of vast numbers of interchangeable Allies; don't individualize them. The most common horde sizes are ones that can completely encircle the necromancer in a combat situation; see *Horde Table* (below).

Frequency of Appearance: Because zombie hordes are supernaturally attached and at their master's beck and call, use the “Constantly” level: $\times 4$ cost. The horde isn't literally *attached*, but in practice, a PC necromancer is unlikely to be without his horde unless it's killed off.

Modifiers: Zombie hordes are Minions with Slave Mentality (part of the Automaton meta-trait), for +0%. They *don't* have Special Abilities; the price of their loaned energy is paid in full already, so don't raise their value for this benefit. Similar logic explains why they don't have Magical, either. Finally, these undead don't have Summonable; if their master needs them, he must shout for them!

Recruits and Replacements

The *Zombie* and *Mass Zombie* spells *can* create improved zombies bonded as Allies. For *Zombie*, energy cost is 34, not 8; for *Mass Zombie*, base cost is 33, not 7. Either calls for a properly preserved corpse. This requires a day and a Professional Skill (Mortician) roll per zombie.

If the necromancer can manage this, he can grow his Ally group. For the sake of game balance, the GM should impose two limits on this:

1. The improved zombies' immunity to *Control Zombie* extends to the necromancer's basic control over his horde. He

Horde Table

Rings: The number of concentric rings of zombies – one zombie deep – that surround the necromancer on a combat map. Packed more densely, neither he nor they could fight effectively.

Horde Size: The total numbers of zombies in *all* of those rings.

Group Size: The standard range used to price Allies (see p. B37).

Group Multiplier: The multiplier to Ally cost for that group size.

Cost: The final point cost given the above assumptions: base cost 1 point, multiplied by the group multiplier, $\times 4$ for frequency of appearance.

Rings	Horde Size	Group Size	Group Multiplier	Cost
1	6	6-10	$\times 6$	24
2	18	11-20	$\times 8$	32
3	36	21-50	$\times 10$	40
4	60	51-100	$\times 12$	48
5	90	51-100	$\times 12$	48
6	126	101-200	$\times 14$	56
7	168	101-200	$\times 14$	56
8	216	201-500	$\times 16$	64
9	270	201-500	$\times 16$	64
10	330	201-500	$\times 16$	64
11	396	201-500	$\times 16$	64
12	468	201-500	$\times 16$	64

can have as many improved zombies as he likes *while he concentrates*, but when he focuses his mind elsewhere, the zombies leave his control for good. To prevent this and have a full-time horde that can operate autonomously, he must “bond” his undead by paying points for the desired Ally group, as shown on the table.

2. *Magery* limits horde size. Necromancers can't just pick the largest group that their points could buy. Use the line on the table corresponding to *Magery* level; e.g., a wizard with *Magery* 4 cannot have more than four rings of zombies, totaling 60 undead, for 48 points. He would need *Magery* 5 to control 90 undead, even though they would cost no more as Allies.



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TOOLING WITH CURSES

BY STEVEN MARSH

Many campaigns with magic feature curses. In some campaigns, such as those with ties to fairy tales or mythology, they are often the central point of a story.

But coming up with good curses can be a real challenge. From the GM's point of view, it's hard to design a curse that is both a suitable obstacle yet isn't so crippling that the players feel like they're better off crumpling up their character sheets and starting over. For players running PCs with a suitably epic bent, it's challenging to come up with a curse for a foe that can teach them a lesson or is thematically appropriate (since those curses are the ones most often granted by the Powers of the Universe).

Here, then, are a few ideas for creative curses, designed as tools for wizards, witches, and warlocks, and the GMs and players who run them. Each curse is designed to build a character concept, adventure, or even campaign around. As such, each is presented with ideas for why the curse might be applicable, along with an idea or three about how to incorporate them into the setting.

FOOTPRINTS OF BLOOD

The cursed one leaves bloody footprints wherever he goes. How, exactly, this manifests may depend on how realistic the campaign is. In a true-to-life setting, the victim might exude a layer of blood on his feet, akin to sweat that accumulates there normally. In this case, were the victim to walk barefoot, he would leave bloody prints with each step; with porous material – such as leggings, stockings, or socks – the unfortunate will find his coverings quickly soaked, leaving blotted prints. And with waterproof footwear, the fluid might merely accumulate within the shoes or boots themselves, no doubt smelling awful and causing inconvenience when the time comes to remove them.

In a less realistic campaign, this ichor manifests regardless of the desires or intentions of the victim; each step leaves behind the victim's footprint, formed perfectly in blood. (For an even creepier effect, the gory footprint might be of the literal bare-foot-with-toes variety, regardless of the foot covering applied.) The wretch might be able to escape the footprints in this case by taking extraordinary precautions: perhaps walking

backward and wiping constantly, or by flying or swinging from place to place.

Regardless of which version is used, the victim will almost certainly be easier to track, either because of the prints themselves or the extraordinary precautions necessary to trap the blood.

Although the fluid does belong to the accursed (which can be verified if the campaign has the means of testing it), the production of ichor does not actually result in any blood *loss* for him. Whether the body is generating additional serum specifically for the situation or retrieves the blood from elsewhere is unknown, but the answer to that might provide a clue for how to remove the curse. (“The only way to remove this curse is to travel to the Lands of Elemental Blood and sever the link between it and you!”)

Those who spend significant time in nature or around animals would find this curse particularly damning, since so many animals instinctively react to blood.

Thematic Uses

The Footprints of Blood are perhaps most appropriate for someone who is thought to have been too sneaky or circumpect. It's the cursed equivalent of tying a bell around a cat's neck. For example, the god of a paladin who favors direct action might afflict him with this curse after he had been listening to the party thief one too many times, sneaking from place to place or striking from the shadows time and again. Likewise an enemy spy might be cursed with this and released, with the intent of following him back to his base of operations or his masters. It also makes a good punishment for a criminal or one who sought to evade punishment from a crime. (From a game-balance point of view, it's a poor choice to make this curse a long-standing subplot for a PC that bases his *raison d'être* on sneaking, primarily thieves. Far too many aspects of such a character would be crippled until the curse was resolved.)

The Footprints of Blood are also appropriate for those who find themselves tracking down Things Humanity Was Not Meant To Know; in this case, the detective becomes the trailed. Can he discover what afflicted him with the curse in the first place, while avoiding any mundane or supernatural forces that would hunt the party down?

Ffift Een, Keeper of the Book of Sorrows, advises: “Craft a map that leads to some dangerous creature or threat. If you're ever trapped by an enemy, you can strike a bargain and give it to them, pretending it's a treasure map.”

Plot Points

Of course, one of the most obvious uses for the Footprints of Blood is that the adventurers need to track someone who has been so cursed. As a climactic reversal of a classic plot element, the heroes might be following the footprints, feeling secure about their abilities to remain in pursuit, only to discover the tracks abruptly end! (The victim has walked backwards along his own prints, and is now behind the investigators, waiting to strike . . .)

For a truly disturbing concept for a pair of characters, one of the duo might be afflicted by the Footprints of Blood while the other is a vampire; the accursed can accumulate enough blood from the pads of his feet to keep his companion sated. Who is more damned: he who leaves a trail of humours, or he who lives apart from the sun but can keep his hungers in check?

Finally, this is the only curse in this article that's truly easy to forge. For example, the heroes might come across a charlatan who promises to remove this malediction from his cohort (an otherwise mundane man with a penchant for dipping his stockings in cow's blood), and offers similar curse-removal services from others in the region. In this case, when the ruse is discovered, the affliction of this hex upon him would be a truly just punishment!

THE FEATHER'S WEIGHT

When this curse is at its most "mundane" and literal, those afflicted with the Feather's Weight find that they do, in fact, weigh as much as a feather while naked. This doesn't affect many people too greatly, since the cursed is still otherwise "normal"; his strength is the same (although feats of strength that rely on leverage won't work with his own body mass), his body resists damage as normal, and so on. However, if he were to strip down to minimal clothes, he would find himself drifting away in a strong breeze; if he went swimming, the current would carry him as if he were a leaf. This is a challenge in some circumstances, but doesn't affect many day-to-day interactions, especially among the adventuring class; the act of donning heavy boots and armor makes the underlying weight of the person therein almost inconsequential. In fact, some people find the Feather's Weight to be a boon, in some circumstances; for example, a lightly clad rogue might convince one of his allies to throw him atop a roof (or he might be able to jump there himself), knowing that he'll make as little noise as a feather; a tunic, and breeches when he lands. Likewise someone with a feather's weight will fall like a feather; in steadfast defiance of Newton's laws, as if the afflicted had somehow been infused with the "Platonic ideal" of a feather. Of course, such "abilities" come at a cost; what enables an ally to throw the accursed someplace useful also enables someone else to throw him an unbelievable distance in a bar brawl!

Z'twe Ntys IX (of Fotenshire) recommends popcorn: "It can serve as a filling snack in some circumstances, and near-undetectable marbles or rollers in others."

Why Curse, Darn It?

Of course, if you have the power to make your foe waste away into nothingness, or be incapable of telling anyone else about his emotions, or any such shenanigans, why not kill him? You probably have the power to do that, right?

Well, probably. First off, curses are a physical representation of an idea of vengeance: Death is too easy an escape for someone truly cursed. With highly creative (and destructive) hexes, the cursed one may find himself longing for the Grim Reaper's embrace, as he sees doom befall his family, loved ones, country, and so on; suicide is often an obvious end to such tales. (Although, in some cases, curses are actually symbolic of the power of *redemption*; for example, a fairy-tale curse where the hero is doomed to roam the land as a monster until he can get someone to love him is much more merciful and redemptive than simply killing the poor lout.)

Alternatively, the curser may be forbidden from outright killing his victim. This is often a condition of the meddling of gods in the affairs of mortals. Of course, in this case, some cosmic force (read: the GM) needs to be sure that he's not allowing a loophole where he's indirectly killing the afflicted one; a curse where the victim is weightless isn't an automatic death sentence, but a curse where the victim finds himself 10 miles above the ground in freefall *does* ensure a near-certain death . . . even if it'll be a minute or so before he knows it.

Finally, the curse-slinger might gain additional benefits for the invocation of a curse. For example, consider a cosmology where the power of the gods is directly proportional to the number of people who are aware and reverential toward him. In this case, who is a better advertiser of the god's abilities: some doomed soul who roams the land for decades, his skin cursed each day to flake off fully by the noontime sun, only to regrow entirely at the height of the moon . . . or some guy you struck with lightning decades ago?

Regardless of their use for good or ill, maledictions are almost always a sign of creativity by their invokers. As such, as a jinxer (or GM), it's good to be as thoughtful as possible, striving to make sure the vexed remember their curses and – if applicable – know *who* cursed them.

A stronger version of this curse has the victim literally weightless; if he were to remove his clothes, he could "jump" up high into the sky, where he would promptly be "stuck"; air resistance would slow his velocity until he had no motion at all, but he wouldn't have any weight to drag him back to solid ground.

Finally, the strongest versions of this affliction give the person *negative* weight; in other words, if he were to remove his clothes, he would float away! The strength of the curse affects how much weight is needed to keep him grounded; for example, if the effect is such that he weighs "negative 100 pounds," then it would take 100 pounds just to reduce him to the middling form of this curse, and additional weight beyond that to approximate the weight of a "normal" person.

This is the most dangerous form of the Feather's Weight curse, since carelessness would result in the person being lost forever to an off-planet void, falling eternally upward. However, it also presents the most opportunities: For example, tie a rope to the legs of the accursed, and you have aerial surveillance or the means of scaling the slickest tower. (Just make sure neither end of the rope lets go!)

Those who are victims of this powerful curse find themselves tethered to the earth by a variety of means, including weighted boots, heavy clothing, cords when sleeping, and so on. For inspiration of what such a poor soul might look like, consider the character of Berthold from Terry Gilliam's movie *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*.

Each form of this curse can exist independently, and each is distinct enough that they can even appear in the same campaign; having the "soul" of a feather is pretty different from falling upwards! Nevertheless, they also work well as a series, serving as a progression of "weight loss." As one possibility, the accursed loses half his weight each day until he gets to one ounce or less; the next day he goes weightless, and the day after he begins registering negative weight. Here is how such a progression would look on a 200-pound victim. (For those wishing to keep things simple and use this chart for other characters, just assume that the first day of the curse knocks the victim down to 100 pounds – or start with the current weight, if less than that – and progress from there.)

Day	Weight	Day	Weight
0	200 lbs.	13	-1 oz.
1	100 lbs.	14	-3 oz.
2	50 lbs.	15	-6 oz.
3	25 lbs.	16	-13 oz.
4	12.5 lbs.	17	-1.6 lbs.
5	6.3 lbs.	18	-3.1 lbs.
6	3.1 lbs.	19	-6.3 lbs.
7	1.6 lbs.	20	-12.5 lbs.
8	13 oz.	21	-25 lbs.
9	6 oz.	22	-50 lbs.
10	3 oz.	23	-100 lbs.
11	1 oz.	24	-200 lbs.
12	0 lbs.		

The length of the curse's escalation can be tweaked according to the needs of the campaign. For example, for those desiring this to be a long-term character element, each "day" might represent a month or even a year; assuming a year, a newly adventuring 18-year-old would worry about the day in his 30s when his weight vanished altogether. For faster-paced campaigns, each "day" might represent 12 hours, or even six; the victim could be at negative weight in less than a week!

Thematic Uses

The curse of the Feather's Weight can have a number of thematic uses. In the *Tales from the Darkside* episode "Fear of

THE FEATHER'S WHAT?!

For those of a more scientific bent, the Feather's Weight curse reduces the value of "g," the local gravitational field, as it relates to the victim's body. For example, someone whose weight is at half its expected value on an Earth-like world is being affected as if g were 16.1 feet per second squared instead of 32.2 feet per second squared.

Likewise the more advanced stages of the curse render the value of g for that person as 0, or even in a vector opposite to what is expected, "falling" upward. It's like he's in his own private spaceship, at least as it applies to his own being. Objects he holds and items attached to him still retain their normal g.

Of course, none of this makes a remote bit of sense in a realistic world, but curses aren't the epitome of logic to begin with.

Floating," a person who had a hard time telling the truth found his weightlessness tied to his honesty; in other words, the more full of "hot air" he was, the more buoyant he became. Of course, the jinx would be good to inflict on anyone obsessed with weight. This curse also can be used against anyone who has their "head in the clouds" or isn't "down to earth." For PCs, this would be a suitably epic curse to inflict on anyone who sought a position of power or prestige unjustly: "You desire to elevate your position? So mote it be!" Finally, this is an excellent malediction – especially for trickster gods and those who align themselves with such – for those who are felt to need more levity, or who act as if the weight of the world rested upon them.

Plot Points

The heroes reach a town whose vain inhabitants are gloating about their new weight-loss method. The heroes don't notice their appearances being particularly svelte, but everyone swears they lost half their weight almost overnight! One wise elder has grown concerned, having realized that, for some of the early adopters, they haven't stopped losing weight . . . (This plot seed is well-suited for an extended-period incremental curse; if each step on the chart represents a half-week or week, then the town they visited on the way to one adventure may be in grave danger by the time they get back!)

The adventurers encounter an inverted dungeon built up into a mountain (or an upside-down castle); doors are on the tops of walls, levels "descend" upwards via stairs in the ceiling, and so on. All the inhabitants of this structure are vexed by this curse. Thus the heroes might need to figure out first how to navigate this unusual structure, and also how to remove the affliction from the place . . . perhaps, in the process, allowing themselves to be afflicted so they may better navigate.

Rt. Wen-Ty Eight-Chants suggests: "Invent your own language or code. Then, use it to make copies of your spell books or other important research. Keep these copies in various hidden locations throughout your domain, confident that the encryption makes them safer."

THE SHARED PAIN

Some who acquire the curse of the Shared Pain may view it as a blessing . . . at first. This is especially true if the victim lives a life of adventure or danger. One so afflicted still feels pain like everyone else; he simply feels *less* of it. A part of all damage that one with the Shared Pain takes is transferred to someone else, one specific person who is linked to the accursed for as long as the affliction remains. Worse, that person has a supernatural understanding of who is causing the damage (although *not* why), and will know the exact location of the cursed, becoming able to track the person unerringly for an hour after the pain is inflicted.

The amount of damage transferred varies; for some versions of the Shared Pain, it is a fixed constant – such as one-tenth or one-fifth of all damage. For others, a progression is followed, which gets steadily worse as time goes on. One common value is 1% of damage is transferred per day, rounded however it's convenient for the RPG. (For example, after two weeks of being afflicted with the curse, 14% of all damage inflicted upon him would transfer to the linked person.) Note that, in this variant, it's possible for damage to continue increasing, inflicting *additional* damage! Thus in the 1%-per-day version, after 200 days, each blow to the accursed would render him unharmed, but would transfer doubly to the linked individual. This version of the Shared Curse makes even the most sedentary lifestyle dangerous; after all, given sufficient time and enough amplification of damage, even a paper cut or stubbed toe could be fatal to the linked!

Curiously, unless the accursed is informed of his status, he doesn't intrinsically know of the linked victim's plight, and may not even know he is cursed. As a result, he may use his newfound damage resistance unthinkingly . . . if he even notices. (This is especially true in a game with secret damage rolls; the difference in most RPGs between 10 points and eight points of damage is slight to all but those most attuned to their bodies.)

Should the accursed be killed, this does *not* automatically kill the linked one unless the damage transferred would do so. (For example, if one-tenth of all damage is being transferred and a human can take 10 points of damage before dying, then it would take 100 points of damage to the accursed to transfer that 10-point fatal blow to the linked.) Likewise should the linked one deal any damage to the accursed, *none* of that damage is transferred over! Finally, if the original blow is enough to kill the accursed but the transferred damage isn't enough to kill the linked one (or if the original damage was *caused* by the linked one), then the malediction is lifted from the linked.

The person linked to the accursed has an intrinsic understanding of all this; although the curse itself does not stoke any homicidal tendencies beyond what may already be present, the linked person may nevertheless be driven to violence to rid himself of the random force that's indirectly dealing him damage. In fact, this is what makes the Shared Pain so dangerous

His Curse Is My Curse, Too

The three curses presented here are perhaps most immediately suitable for an individual character. However, with PC groups, there's nothing to keep the curse from affecting *everyone*. In fact, such an affliction would be a great hook for why a party of disparate adventurers travel together in the first place; "The Heroes of the Crimson Step" or "The Weighty Souled Lightfeet" are evocative names for those cursed as a group. Even better, if everyone in a point-based game has the same hex, then everyone has the same point-value deduction because of it.

Should the gaming group go down this route, it's probably a good idea to decide whether the curse is designed to be lifted, or is a permanent fixture of the campaign. (Of course, even if it's possible for the curse to be countered, it may take a *long* time to do so!)

– not the curse itself, but the fact that the linked victim stands a very good chance at summoning every force in his power to kill the accursed.

Sadly for the accursed, should the linked one die as a result of transferred damage, the curse is *not* lifted; rather, it is transferred to someone close to the linked, either a relative, friend, or ally. Additionally, whoever becomes linked in this way is usually of equal or better ability to deal with the accursed. Should such a transferal occur for an accursed whose damage is increasing incrementally, this event causes the damage to reset to its initial value (1%, in the case of the previous example). In no instance is the link of Shared Pain reciprocal; the linked victim can never transfer damage dealt to him to the accursed (without other magics or curses, of course).

Most primary recipients of the Shared Pain find themselves linked with somebody they do not know, but who is of roughly equal stature and ability, and within 100 miles of him. (In other words, your standard PC adventurer won't find some of his damage transferred to a random scrawny peasant who's on the other side of the world.) However, the Shared Pain has many variations, and it's possible to be vexed with versions that are more inconvenient or dangerous. For example, the accursed might be linked to someone of whom he is a vague acquaintance or even ally; likewise, it's possible to be joined to someone who's more powerful than the heroes, either in ability or resources; pity anyone who becomes cursed with the Shared Pain that finds himself linked to a prince or king!

It's not recommended that the Shared Pain ever result in two people in the same adventuring party transferring damage; such an effect might actually be very useful! However, a smooth-talking accursed hero might be able to convince his linked damage-mate that it's in their best interests to team up and work together to put an end to the curse via some other methods.

T'ten advises: "Keep a waterproof scroll case handy. The larger in diameter it is, the more length of parchment it can hold, but the bulkier it is."

The Case of the Cursed Character

In many point-based systems, such as *GURPS*, characters who have something significantly bad befall them have applicable disadvantages applied, and the character points recalculated. In some cases, this seems perfectly just; if you get in a sword fight and your arm is chopped off, then you knew what the risks were ahead of time. But with curses, the whole process seems so arbitrary, especially if utilized as part of a plot point. The GM decides to curse your character, and poof! He's worth fewer points now. Is that fair?

Well, yes and no. All the curses presented here are intended to be used in one of two ways: as creative (temporary) obstacles to be overcome, or "permanent" difficulties that are taken as full-fledged disadvantages at character creation. (Of course, the permanent form can be bought off eventually via bonus character points.) So, while the temporary version does lower the value of the character in the short term, they're not intended as a permanent fixture . . . unless the hero doesn't bother trying to get rid of it, of course!

But still, isn't smiting a character with a curse from the blue unfair? Again, yes and no. Many players enjoy the challenge of trying to work around the limits imposed by a curse, and since the purpose of a game is to have fun, such players definitely come out ahead! But for those who need

a more substantial reward, the core *GURPS* rules provide just that. Curses offer the vexed character – and he alone – with an additional challenge to overcome, and additional opportunities to roleplay. Thus, at the end of each session where the curse is endured but where progress is made toward lifting it, the player is eligible for an extra bonus character point reward. When he finally gets rid of the affliction, he should get *another* bonus! In this way, curses act as an in-game "gamble"; the cursed character has placed some of his "self" on the line, but at the end he might end up worth *more* character points than his unafflicted cohorts. So, sure, the character might be valued at (say) 50 fewer character points for three adventures, but he might be worth four more than normal at the end.

This assumes he survives the curse in the meantime, of course . . .

From the other side of the adversarial equation, if the heroes inflict a creative curse on an enemy instead of killing him outright (if they would have been able to), they should get a bonus character point or two for their "compassion." The PC who did the actual cursing might even get an *extra* point; after all, the enemy will be targeting him if and when he's lifted the curse!

In fact, if there are any "celebrity" characters in the game world, this might be a great way to introduce them to the party; if one of the PCs starts transferring damage to renowned hero Conicus the Barbarian, he'll find the heroes fast . . . although whether it's to kill the accursed or team up and solve the problem another way is up to the heroes.

Thematic Uses

Ironically, the Shared Pain works just as well as a curse for one who is callous regarding the suffering of others ("See the consequences of your unthinking ways!") as it does for one who already feels a strong sense of duty to others ("You take the weight of the world upon you?! Then taste what it is to be truly joined to your fellow man!").

The Shared Pain can be an interesting challenge to a monastic or peaceful character, especially those with vows. How would one who has sworn never to intentionally harm another react to news that he has been so cursed?

Finally, the Shared Pain has much potential as the basis for a romantic subplot. After all, what better way to meet someone new than to have that person tracking you down, intent on killing you? Whether this subplot veers towards comedy or tragedy depends on how much damage is involved, and whether or not the curse can be lifted.

Plot Points

The Shared Pain is a rarity among curses from a gaming standpoint, in that it's possible for a PC to be connected with this curse but *not* the primary victim! It's an interesting possibility for an adventure or subplot to have one of the heroes be told, "You suddenly feel a sharp pain in your side; you know that it was caused by Jacob Fincher, a mercenary who is 37.5 miles north-northwest of your current position."

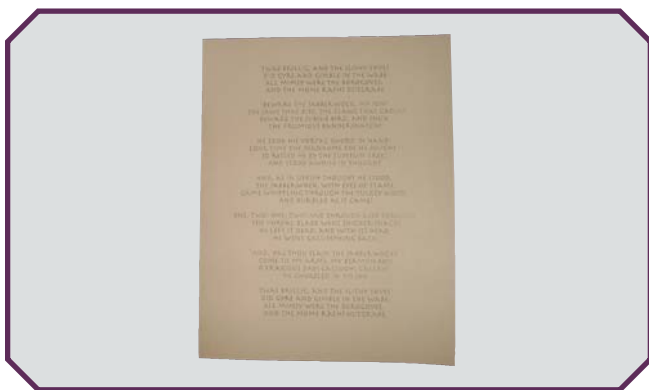
Similarly the heroes may find themselves in an odd situation of being hired by a linked curse victim, using him as a divining rod: "Hopefully, our prey will become injured again soon, so we can use your pain to track him down!"

For campaigns that allow "deals with the devil," a hero might be offered the choice of having this curse be inflicted upon him before a truly dangerous or significant adventure. After all (the silver-tongued offer goes), if you fail at saving the world, the potential linked victim will die anyway. In fact, if the entire party became so cursed, this could form the basis for a campaign; here the heroes would be pariahs, having made an impossible choice to preserve the world at the expense of a few strangers . . . strangers who will continuously hunt the heroes until the end of days. Can the PCs limit the damage done to themselves as much as possible while still knowing they can withstand more damage than an average person? Is it possible to use such an evil curse for the greater good?

Kthirt Ytwo the Scribe remembers the genie who said that he would grant his friend any single wish, but all he requested would be given doubly to the friend's worst enemy. The friend's response? "Very well; I wish for you to beat me half to death."

WIZARD'S LETTER

Letters make great props for any campaign, and folding a letter into an interesting shape can turn even a mundane “Visit me at the Wizard’s Tower” note into an item of mystery.



1. Start with any note you like; you can either handwrite it or generate it on a computer. (The sample invitation on p. 25 has a blank space after the list of recipients so that you can include your own PC guests, while the parchment-colored box on p. 26 is intentionally blank, allowing you to compose your own letter.) Make sure it's a standard-sized sheet of paper (either 8-1/2" x 11" or A4, depending on where you are.) The example shown here was printed on a laser printer using thick cardstock purchased from a copy supply shop.



2. Either make light fold divots at the half-way mark or fold another sheet of paper in half and use it as a guide. (You could fold the paper in half and unfold it to serve as your guide, but the final result looks better with as few excess creases as possible.)



3. Turn down one corner to the center guide.



4. Fold the opposite corner to the center line as well (which should be defined by the edge of the first fold you did).

Special thanks to Rob Ives and Flying Pig for permission to use and modify their original idea, which can be found at www.flying-pig.co.uk/pages/v/envelope.html.



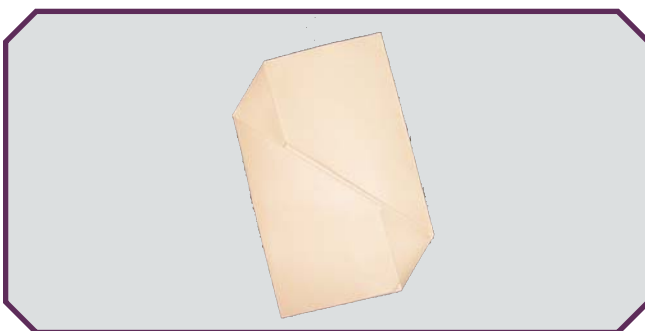
5. Fold the right rectangular part (the bit where you can still see text) in half so the right edge touches the edge of the top triangle. Repeat for the left rectangular part and the bottom triangle.



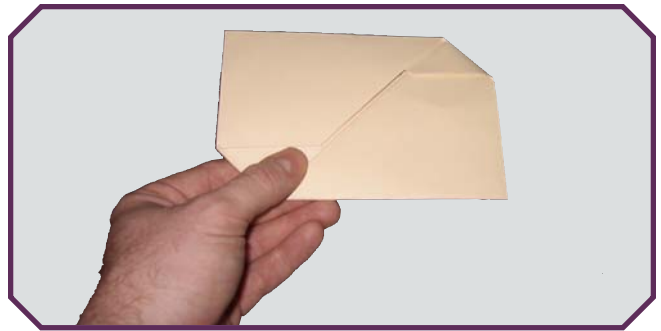
6. Now fold the right edge of your construct down toward the original center line. Do it again for the left edge, up toward the center line.



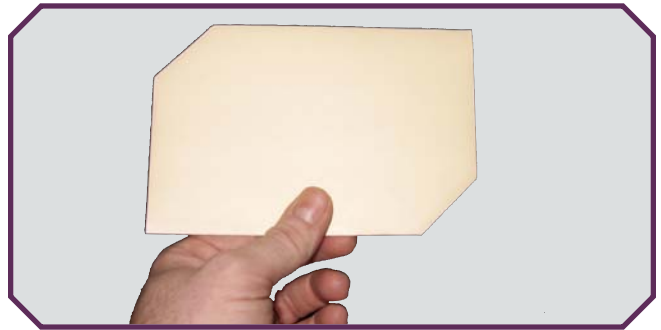
7. You should have something that looks like this!



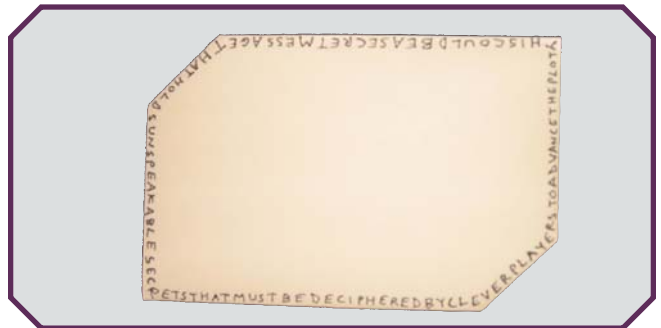
8. Next, tuck the loose corners underneath the other corners, like so.



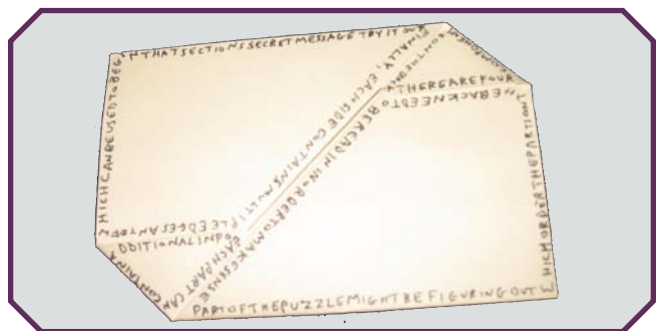
9. The back of your completed project; put some tape or a seal along the seam, if you'd like.



10. The front of your envelope-letter. You can put an address and stamp on this side and mail it (especially if you used heavier cardstock and tape). It's quite a treat to receive an actual prop in the mail!



11. If you want to make it more special and arcane, you can put mystic runes, sigils, or messages around the outside edges.



12. On this side, too!

To
Third Marshal Druugen
Green-and-Gold Initiate Wu Xian
Her Grace Callana, Priestess Of The Aerial Principle

Saint Malrother's Day, third year of the reign of His Majesty Naserias
Rex, at the Hall of the Brotherhood

From Kyrill of Bressograd, grand master of the Hermetic Brotherhood of
the Silver Order, to the acknowledged masters of the order, nobly born
grandees of the realm, and notables with honorable interest in our trade
and tradition, including those named above, most warm and fraternal
greetings.

It is the time-honored tradition of our brotherhood to come together at
regular and auspicious times to expand on the mysteries of which we are the
keepers. One month hence, at the vernal equinox, we shall again gather for
our colloquium for the discussion of all things having to do with magic, and
it would give the brotherhood pleasure to receive all those above named.
Those masters of the order who wish to expound upon their studies may
apply to the Table of Art and wait upon their pleasure. It would do much
honor to the brotherhood for all others to give their kind attendance and
thereafter partake of our small hospitality.

Kyrill



OUT OF THE ROUGH

MAGIC GEMS IN RPGs

BY ANDY VETROMILE

They're pretty and shiny and some are even a girl's best friend (and conversely some men's worst enemy). However, beyond a desire to add some sparklies to the treasure hoard, why are gems chosen as adjuncts to some of the best magic items, if not the basis for the same?

The reasons may be entirely cosmetic. Magic can reside in any item stashed in the dragon's pile, and a gem just makes more attractive packaging for enchantments than, say, a handkerchief, no matter how fancy the embroidery is. The mage responsible could be (ahem) casting about his lab for something, anything to plug magic into, and he still needs his chair for sitting in, so his great aunt's ruby cameo makes a better, more saleable item. Perhaps it's not even a question of value to his consumer, but of appearances – if he's currying favor with the king, the mage would rather present his highness with a gem of magical power than a broomstick that flies, that being more suited to his dignity. Any magician not using gems for his work might have his reputation reduced to that of a hedge wizard, cobbling together artifacts from pathetic household objects.

Durability could be the key. Many gems are hardy items and will be here long after the creator is gone – after all, many such things take centuries to create naturally. For some mages, this still means value (“You will wield this gem, and one day so shall your heirs”). For others, it offers a form of immortality: “This is the Sapphire of Eudicus the Wise, dead these many years, but his craftsmanship lives after him.” And while it isn't necessarily a point you wish to bring up too early or too often when closing the deal, a gem that can outlive the party – indeed, it might be the only thing left of them when the dragon's breath recedes from the cavern – has a lot of appeal, especially to those members used to backing the party from the rearmost position.

The GM may instead decide a stone's value is dependent on, or plays into, an esoteric element of the campaign. That is, what if it's the pretty intangibles that make a gem the vessel of choice? This could mean many things:

Color: Different forms of magic resonate better when placed inside something that reflects their essence. If spells are sympathetic in nature, putting water magic into a blue stone – perhaps a lapis lazuli – nets better results. Some substances come in a wider variety of colors than one might think (the best sapphires, for example, are typically blue, but some are far darker and still others are without color), so it's up to the Game Master to decide how, if at all, the change might affect its performance.

Name: Few gem names are as evocative as the bloodstone – it already sounds like something out of a fantasy novel. They're so named because the veins in the greenish rock appear to be spotted or streaked with blood. This might be a “chicken and the egg” issue; it could be that the substance was called this because some fantastic property of the rock allows it to better accept blood-based spells, or the gods or forces that set this universe in motion decided sympathetic magic makes using the two together a good fit. After a cataclysm, in a neighboring nation, and several generations hence, the next culture might make a different association, and the magic might respond in kind.

Timing: In the real world, each month has one or more birthstones applied to it, and traditionally, if someone wants to gift a precious gem to another person, it should coincide with the designated month's stone. What if these “rituals” were exactly that? One's birth makes a particular rock more useful to them in their work – born in the month of Adrajan, the mage is forever mystically tied to the power of the forest-stone. Even if the mage doesn't enchant his own gems, his birthstone might afford him advantages in spellcasting that another substance does not.

Rarity: In this case, the universe has created this useful and uncommon thing called magic, and it similarly instilled a like, ephemeral quality into the minerals of that world. Magic is a precious commodity, and so are gemstones. If the mage really wants the spell to “take,” he must use the best materials available; magic just “wants” it that way. Spells cast into lesser vessels may still work, but with some quirks or disadvantages.

Ntwen Tyone said, “Curiously, despite my cohorts’ jeers, the pouches of salt and pepper I carry have saved me more than once.”

Peer Pressure: The mage doesn't care what medium carries his work, but he's stuck using the same carrier as all the mages before him, and gems have the right pedigree. He can become a master of sword magic, but the mystic community at large might look down their noses at his work. All the best wizards utilize gems in their work, so anyone wanting to make sales had better follow suit. Conversely . . .

A Motif: A mage's castings can be as individual as his signature, and each user of the craft "signs" his work a different way. It may be that everything a caster does he places inside a ruby, and that becomes the gem for which he is known. Everyone covets those rubies (assuming he's good at his job), and straying too far from that theme is tantamount to committing career suicide.

Value: Since it's a fantasy setting, nothing says a culture has to hold precious the same things the real world does. Gems could exist as a simple curiosity to most people, perhaps even to well-traveled merchants. This might be the result of an abundance of that material or simply a lack of need. Diamonds are valuable in most societies because they're rare and have many uses, but a medieval village with access to vast stores of them that makes its living selling quality wooden tools and implements wouldn't think twice about the rocks. Ordinarily the stuff of costuming, dresses, and personal adornment, only when a stone has been empowered through a mage's attentions does the piece become something others are willing to adventure, die, or kill for.

An Unspoken Contest: Reputations and livelihoods are on the line. Every mage wishes to be the best there is at forging magics, but they need some common expression of their ability. Stones of power were long ago decided on as the vessels of choice for these competitions, the currency by which mages compared their relative skills. This could lead to friendly wagers or ongoing games of one-upmanship, and GMs can have fun designing all manner of NPCs ready to give their fellow mages a run for their money. One rival might be the aging odds-on favorite, another the cocky newcomer, and another the spiteful spoiler with no friends and few compunctions about cheating. Once a year, the king holds a contest to see which mage performs the best castings or the most creative work in gemstones.

Some of these situations may work together to lend flavor to a game. For example, consider a world where gems are worthless in and of themselves. Why mages select them as opposed to any other useless material for enchantment is therefore still an open question the GM must answer for his setting. He may choose one of the other elements discussed – that's the way it's always been done, gems are the only thing that work, etc. – or he may come up with a mythology all his own.

THE FALLOUT OF FAILURE

So what if a mage decides not to follow the pack? There's no rule that states a wizard must work with gems, so unless the GM wants to specifically limit enchantments to stones as some sort of control measure (or to ease his bookkeeping), he could allow the character to use another form of container for his

mana. How the rest of the gem-centric world reacts makes the setting seem that much more believable.

For one thing, folks probably wouldn't buy from a mage who doesn't make use of precious stones as his medium; they'd always be wondering if his wares are quite the equal of the more traditional witch two booths over. If a mage has no intention of selling or promoting the fruits of his labor – he'll use everything he produces to power his own spells and research – this sort of prejudice won't matter a jot to him. But if he wants his creations to live after him or seeks the approval of other mages, expressed financially or otherwise, forgoing the application of gems in his undertakings means he faces an uphill battle.

Second, no one would take such a mage seriously. Again, it depends on the flavor of the world as the GM has created it, but working entirely with, say, wands may relegate the spellcaster's products to a position of meaningless historical curiosity. The GM could promote the value of certain mystical venues, and make it clear the wizard won't be asked to speak at any of the colleges, cannot serve on the boards of any magical "think-tanks," and won't get invited to any of the really good parties. Establishing a whole series of rewards (to one's ego, at least) may rekindle the wizard's competitive spirit, or professional ostracism may give the player a hook upon which to hang many of his maverick mage's roleplaying challenges.

SYNTHETICS

With advances in science, the modern world has managed to duplicate many types of gems. Forming the stones requires fancy scientific processes and equipment. If the GM wants alchemy to be more than just a colorful alternative to traditional spellcasting, he might allow wizards to develop their own methods of creating gems from base materials. For example, contemporary means allow certain kinds of emeralds to be "grown" in the lab using other minerals as a foundation; this wouldn't be so far removed from some of the works alchemists are purported to do. Simply change some of the nomenclature and give everything a mortar-and-pestle sheen and players may find it perfectly palatable in a lower-tech fantasy campaign.

The GM has to decide whether the new breed of rocks is distinguishable from the natural materials. The more reliable the magic is, the more reasonable it is for the two to be completely interchangeable. Magery that produces lesser results has to be qualified: Is it the enchantment quality that suffers, the monetary value of the gem, or both? Whatever it is, it alters how the process and how its creations are viewed by third parties.

Note that it's also possible an invented gem exceeds a regular one by anyone's measure. With the benefit of spellcasting behind it, stones could display absolute perfection in their matrices, eliminating all occlusions and flaws. At the same time, the gem could have an increased capacity for mana, and reduce the chance of failure when trying to fill it with burgeoning levels of power. Such a stone might be a fluke, and one much sought after; but if the experiment can be duplicated, it would threaten many interests. If the secret got out, it could restructure the campaign world. Wars have started for less.

Re Ight carries a lodestone on a string. "It helps with finding large deposits of some metals."

Even if crafting jewels only produces a serviceable result, it doesn't mean everyone automatically should get behind such whole-cloth innovations. The new stones may operate at half the efficiency, or not at all. They could come with all sorts of side effects. It may not be a question of if such an artifact will fail, but when. Anyone who knows up front what they're getting into when they obtain these items won't have anything to complain about (not if they're reasonable, anyway), but a mage who passes off the gems he forges as the real deal may have to stay one step ahead of his customers. Gemologists may be able to tell an artificial rock from a true one, and a capable mage might divine whether a gem is just an accident waiting to happen. Once they share this appraisal with someone not in possession of all the facts, trouble heads for the responsible party.

Even if all they rule over is each other within their limited community, a group of mages with some sort of governing power (such as the Guildhall of the Hermetic Brotherhood, pp. 4-12) might not look kindly at this "progress." They may think the inventor is one step away from actually creating the perfect version of the stone and that would rock their culture back on its heels. Thus, even a lesser prototype threatens the existing system. A truly repressive society might think it's the witchcraft of witchcraft, something that upsets the "natural" order by turning magery on its ear. What's next: Spells that create other spells?

SPECIFIC GEMS

Powered stones need not simply be generic gems that shine brightly and offer extra energy to a wizard. (For Powerstones in *GURPS*, see *GURPS Magic*, p. 20 and p. 69.) There are several real, familiar gems on the market today, and dozens more that may be less recognizable, that can add more characterization to the spellcasting process. Further, gems are seldom perfect; most of them have flaws, cracks, and occlusions. Like a poorly performed casting when creating an enchanted stone, these physical shortcomings can interfere with the proper functioning of the artifact. The effects of using a gem don't have to be limited to the mechanics of the game system or the quirks of an unsure enchantment. Magic is a fickle thing, and the GM would be well within his rights to make the characters' lives a bit more . . . interesting . . . by generating unforeseen side effects based on a specific stone's blemishes or back-story. Some possibilities:



- Gems with cracks can power the effects of a spell, but at some point they'll shatter, perhaps violently. Damage could be limited to shrapnel, or there may be a release of mystic energy as well.

- Imperfect stones "leak." This may amount to discovering at the worst moment the gem has been running on fumes and has almost no power left, but a devious GM might devise a sickness that results from improper mana release.

- The gem's former owner is somehow linked to the stone, and as the party travels closer to his neck of the woods, the archmage begins scrying the team through the stone (or he tracks their movements). He may want his rock back. Worse, he may have gotten rid of it and moved away

for a reason, and now here come these idiots dragging the cursed thing back to within spitting distance of his doorstep.

- This type of jewel is the purview of a god, and he's been monitoring the user's activities for some time. Whether the wizard has respected the tenets of the being's faith determines if the hero is to be approached, rewarded, or punished.

This isn't the sort of thing that should constantly torment the players – their characters should be able to count on their equipment to some degree and not be harried by endless pitfalls just for trying to cast a lousy spell – but the defining qualities of a stone could provide good roleplaying fodder.

For example, the GM could drop a stone in the mage's lap that he knows is going to explode with too much use, but he does not tell hero. Eventually, the adventurer's luck runs out and the item breaks, causing damage to everyone within several yards. Even better, the GM might give the spellcaster a really powerful gem and inform him of the perils of its use. Now it's up to the wizard: Is it really worth relying the artifact in this dire instance? Just how far does he push his luck? And what if he finds a way to employ the flaw as a one-time weapon?

Wise individuals in such cases brush up on their gemology skills if they want to know more about a particular substance before they employ it in an emergency. How much of what they discover is true in the game (and how much can be uncovered through simple research without resort to trial and error) is up to the GM. After a few centuries of use, most general facts probably passed into the scholarly works of several wizards, but people might be rattled by discovering new information or new explanations for commonly held beliefs about a gem's properties. Of course, it wouldn't be much of a fantasy world if the GM couldn't throw a few completely new rocks into the equation. He can give them their own cool names, new effects, histories, and legends, and then see what the party does with their discovery.

Cse Ven offered this tip: "In a pinch, you can scratch a word or short sentence on your arm using a stylus or a slightly sharpened fingernail. It remains for an hour or two, and it disappears until you rub it later."

Different gems occur under different conditions, and each set of conditions might offer some additional roleplaying adventures or even form the basis for an entire campaign. Below are several types of gems and minerals and a little gemology 101 to spark the imagination. It is by no means an exhaustive list of species, and the material included only scratches the tough surface of the story behind each stone listed. Further research will offer more ideas.

Aquamarines

Clear stones with a hint of the colors of the sea, aquamarines are scientific relatives of the emerald. Thought to be wards against poison, seamen believed mermaids had aquamarines in place of scales, and slept with the stones to ensure safe passage. Many believed that aquamarines maintained the wearer's youth and offered foresight.

Diamonds

Diamonds are typically found beneath stable continental plates, formed by high pressure and heat. They may also be formed from the impact of meteorites, though this produces microdiamonds or nanodiamonds. These smaller samples might be better suited to a modern game; as an artifact in a fantasy campaign, they offer a new take on precious stones to adventurers who are used to seeing big, vulgar gems atop a dragon's hoard.

If an impact crater was the origin for a diamond, the GM may decide such stones – while useful in their own right – also carry the resonance of destruction. Take the impact that killed the dinosaurs: They may not have been sentient beings, but the loss of so much organic life may taint the magics produced by the ill-gotten gems. Had it been sentient life, the offense might have produced even more spectacular vibrations.

Some diamonds have also been found on or within the meteorites themselves, making them of extraterrestrial origin. Any GM who wants to really confound his group's expectations can produce a whole new species from the core of a space rock, or devise a form of spirit or psionic entity living within the minerals – some perhaps waiting for a host.

Emeralds

These green minerals aren't as tough as many of their counterparts, and it's expected one will find more flaws and cracks in an emerald than most other gems. Various legends state they were the tears of an early Indian woman; that they improved the user's health in several ways; that they mystically elevated the wearer's perceived importance; that each contained a goddess; and that they might protect from spells or offer insights into the future. In some legends, the Holy Grail was thought to be made of emerald.

Pearls

These aren't gemstones, scientifically speaking, but that won't keep anyone from killing a dragon to get to them (in fact, the ancient Chinese thought they were created in a

dragon's brain). They form inside a shelled mollusk as the creature layers valuable nacre over some irritating particle. Most are white or cream, though some are softer colors or even black, depending on the species and its environment, and they can easily be dyed. They may appeal to inhabitants of a fantasy world insofar as they can be cultured (meaning someone can try to force mollusks to make a pearl), a process that takes anywhere from a year to almost a decade, depending on the size, species, and type.

Rubies

Only diamonds are harder than rubies among naturally occurring stones; however, it's unlikely there's going to be much synthesizing of gems in a medieval roleplaying game (but see p. 28). Traditionally red, some are blessed with a star effect called an asterism that shows when light passes through it, and the GM could use that as an excuse to make rubies one of the gems weighted toward astrologic or astronomic magics.

Sapphires

Though typically blue, sapphires – which are similar to rubies, including some specimens that boast the "star" effect – can come in just about any color (and some less flattering varieties like gray or black). These variations affect price and desirability in the real world, but in a fantasy game setting, the GM might rule the wide variety of hues makes these gems more useful or appropriate for the many "colors" of magic. It may be that the colors correspond to a particular college or style of magic, or spontaneously offer other bonuses when power is channeled into the stone.

EFFECTS IN THE CAMPAIGN

The standard fantasy campaign usually assumes gems are valuable, and some have – or are given – magical properties by mages or perhaps even more primal forces (i.e., creator gods and such). Instead of having them simply appear in treasure chests and the marketplace, GMs can add details about mining gems and their place in society, which in turn adds playable realism to the game.

Who's in Charge Here?

The ruling body in a kingdom controls who may use its land, but how the situation develops can make a difference in the story. If there's a royal family, they may be able to maintain control in part because of the wealth of the land. A diamond mine somewhere within the kingdom's borders offers some way to pay its debts and ransoms, as well as field an army and promote any improvements they need. For a mage, this means if they want diamonds for use in their enchantments, they'll have to buy the stones on the open market (assuming that's legal) or get them from the family. (If the mages actually work for the rulers, as their court magicians for example, access to the diamonds probably won't be a problem unless it's an issue of personal vs. state use of the resources.)

Ose Vente-En is partial to a silk purse: "If you're going to be dabbling in numerous gems, you need something to carry them in."

Why are gems chosen as adjuncts to some of the best magic items, if not the basis for the same?

On the other hand, no one ever made a gem *less* valuable by imbuing it with spells or other magical qualities, so the ability to not only mine precious stones but make them sources of power could elevate mages to the throne. Entire kingdoms might be ruled by magically inclined members. That may still mean a single family in whose lineage magery runs deep, but it could also mean a cabal calls the shots, or a series of governors elected from the colleges of magic, or even a single, possibly ruthless, mage whom no one dares challenge.

The establishment of such a nation may just be for color; fantasists do so love their long histories, so it may have been this way for centuries and the party need not sweat a historical footnote. If he wants to involve his group in the workings of government, though, the GM could base a power struggle on the dispensation of gems. It might be a personal quest for the heroes, trying to stop a sorcerer who seeks to conquer their home kingdom by turning the nation's own resources against the current ruling body. But one need only look at the real-world situation in places like Sierra Leone to know wars fought over a nation's wealth can consume its people even if they have no direct connection whatsoever to the power struggle. The party might be refugees who only wish to survive another day against a bleak backdrop that's beyond their control, and doing so when their Powerstones are contraband in the eyes of every faction is tough.

National Identity

The more effective powered stones are in a magic system, the more notable an effect the stones themselves produce in that world. A country may be well known not just for the gems they mine but the magics the rocks encompass. If a ruby is the best vessel for a fire spell and the nation of Urbenor has the world's greatest stores of rubies, it's only reasonable that the whole nation is known for its creative and professional use of fire magic.

This could divide up magic and the world in interesting ways: The dwarven nation mines jasper and imbues most of it with earth magic, while the humans have most of the emeralds and use them to excel at magically manipulating plant life. Anyone wanting to use or learn those forms of magic would be better off going to the appropriate nation. Unless the world is an oppressive one, there's not much anyone can do to make the dispersal of magic more cosmopolitan – they'd be fighting history and natural monopolies. Then again, the opportunity to shake things up exists if the GM wants it.

The elves might discover a heretofore unknown vein of lapis lazuli that threatens the markets and the fauna colleges of the minotaurs, and the minotaurs might be inclined to protect

their interests. Of course, now they'd be fighting fire with fire, magically speaking, but allies against the elves wouldn't be too hard to find if the right promises were made. Hostilities could take any number of forms, from an attempt to conquer the enriched lands to an attack to destroy the mines themselves, depending on whether the GM wants to run a war campaign or a form of fantastic industrial espionage. Whatever shape the problems assume, the underlying magics should be employed generously (the minotaurs charge down the valley astride great ensorcelled beasts, while the elves seek to turn the same magic against the hybrid minotaurs themselves), or the whole point is lost. Either side might like to recruit (or enslave) a party's mage if he's a prodigious user of the contested magic.

The GM may also use this as an excuse to play against type. Everyone likes to think of the dwarves as the crusty miners and the most likely candidates for earth magic – and the dwarves themselves might prefer to be thought of that way as well – but if fate hands them a monopoly on a set of stones that produces wondrous love spells, well, they might be forced to play that hand just to make a go of things. Not that the dwarves are proud of the fact, or respond kindly to being reminded of it . . .

Where Do They Get Those Wonderful Gems?

The gem trade may make millionaires of the country where the mines are located, but only the most liberal of societies is going to share that wealth with the citizenry. That doesn't mean having the minerals has no effect on the people, it just means that's where most of the nation's – and therefore the commoners' – income comes from.

Operations to keep the mines going use the concordant magic as best it can. Earth magic would be the most useful, of course, but when all you have is a hammer, all your problems start to look like tiny fairies. Divination spells locate veins, and animal control could not only make beasts of burden more docile, it allows the use of creatures not normally utilized in mining operations (snakes, spiders, mastodons, etc.). The plant college could thrust powerful tree trunks and roots through areas that explosives and brute force haven't been able to crack. Deft use of mystic fire would not only melt away some of the detritus surrounding the precious stones (called the host rock), it might improve the quality of the gems themselves. (The application of heat is a common method to enhance many rocks in the real world, but where it's generally looked down on here, most lower-tech kings won't be as discriminating).

Esix the Dragonbairn looks sad as he says, "Note that diamonds burn at about 1,320° F in pure oxygen and about 1,560° F in normal air. Don't assume the best loot survives the hottest fire."

And the most dire use of magic? Slave labor. Few circles would be more vicious than using magic to force an unruly populace to dig out more of what the government uses to keep them under the gun. While the applications of mind controlling spells is somewhat questionable, it does have worthwhile applications (calming crazed criminals, for example).

However, if an entire nation was built on the phenomenon, any decent-minded party would justifiably consider taking action against such tyranny. Eventually, such an amoral empire will turn its hungry eyes to its neighbors. If the heroes learn about the kingdom in its early stages, they could stop the greed before it causes war. The adventurers would be facing serious odds, though, with the potential for an entire nation to be turned against them (and the equally present danger of falling victim to such magics if found out). At the same time, any rebellion that develops among the people would also rely on the college that uses their stones. It could become a giant chess game of trying to use the right spells against exactly the right targets at the right moment.

And once the party has lead the faction to victory, they still have to contend with the destiny of a country sitting atop an explosive mother lode.

Personal Best

Gems can play a big part in any party's adventures without involving nations or even dungeon crawling per se: It could be a simple treasure hunt. Mages can spend a lot of gold getting gemstones at the market, but an enterprising young wizard might choose to cut out the middleman.

That kind of initiative shouldn't be discouraged, but there are pitfalls. The obvious problem with such an arrangement is that, if a mage makes a big find, he could disrupt the campaign. If the gems are worthwhile on their own, money is removed as an obstacle for the character; if they're good for castings, the mage stands to become much more powerful in a short time, with or without developing the PC's stats. Below are some ways to make such a game an ongoing and playable experience rather than a campaign killer; however, the suggestions should not be interpreted as ways to punish someone with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Physical Dangers: Mining is a hazardous job in the best of instances, and the average primitive fantasy setting is not the best of circumstances. Just getting the minerals out could involve back-breaking labor, cave-ins, mechanical failures, and unexpected discoveries. ("The good news is we found a rich, lost tomb while searching for the gems. The bad news is, the owner isn't willing to part with them.") Some of these aren't all that interesting to roleplay ("roll to avoid a hernia"), so they should be used as the occasional bit of color more than anything else.

Other Interests: Banditry is probably the greatest cause for concern. If the team scores a find and doesn't keep their mouths shut, they'll soon have company. Some foes might even be a step ahead of the explorers, following characters who carry a particular kind of equipment or who turn over rocks in a certain stretch of valley, all in hopes of stealing their claims out from under them. Selling a lot of any one thing, especially a valuable mineral, draws unwanted attention, so it's wise to offer only a little at a time; hawk the stuff at a variety of fairly distant locations; or make sure most of what the mine produces is "consumed" by the party's own activities.

I'll Just Take That: Nothing succeeds like excess. A worthwhile find by the party may produce a lot of goods, but in a medieval setting, a ruler who catches wind of it will want a cut as well. Chances are the law of the land demands a certain amount of profit go to the crown anyway, but even a scrupulous leader who honors the claim may start his own excavations nearby, literally surrounding the heroes with much larger and more successful operations with which the group cannot compete. The devious ruler, of course, simply removes the party and plants his own flag – assuming the team hasn't gained so much, materially and magically, that such forceful tactics can be repelled by the team's increased power.

That's Not What I Was Looking For: The only thing worse than not finding the treasure (which should be avoided – if this is the game the players want, they have to succeed eventually) is finding something else. The aforementioned tomb is one example, as are old gateways, old beings, and unpleasant substances. There's always the danger of releasing something better left pent up, and while irradiated material isn't likely in a fantasy game, some basic building block of matter that isn't done cooking can cause problems.

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“.” IS FOR FULL-STOP DRUM

BY STEFAN JONES

GURPS Alphabet Arcane is a collection of material for *GURPS Fantasy* campaigns, available from Steve Jackson Games as an e23 publication. Each of *Alphabet Arcane's* 26 sections contains an adventure seed, an unusual spell, a magical artifact, or peculiar person.

“.” *Is for Full Stop Drum* began as part of one of the entries, “C” *is for Coyote Helm*. But it stands on its own, so it is presented here for the enjoyment of *Pyramid* readers.

A NEW LAND

Far over the sea is a rugged, thinly settled island continent of baking deserts, forbidding mountains, dismal swamps, and gloomy trackless forests called Su-Dwar. Ancient ruins hint that the land was once home to a thriving civilization. But now, outside of a few primitive settlements, there is naught but vast expanses of wilderness roamed by dangerous beasts and bands of fur-clad savages.

Paralleling the far shore of this land is a mountainous peninsula. At the north end of the gulf between this spit and the mainland is a vast expanse of bayou country, home to the feuding clans of the Dhuli.

THE DHULI

This quarrelsome folk live on the great bayou. They tend to be tall and sharp-featured, with pale yellow skin, short curly white hair, and dark brown eyes. They dress in clothing made from tanned reptile hide and a fabric made from woven, dyed bark. When traveling away from their native bayou, they wear wide conical hats woven from straw and a sort of sunblock made from vegetable dye, grease, and white ashes.

Economy

Dry land is a precious commodity in the bayou. Islands are intensively cultivated (primarily with beans and gourds) and home to craft industries, such as bark weaving and fish drying. The Dhuli themselves live in tree houses, to better avoid the insects and venomous serpents that swarm the land by night.

Each clan controls several islands and vaguely defined expanses of wetlands. The constant low-level feuds between the clans erupt into open warfare several times a decade; islands may change hands frequently during these conflicts, resulting in times of famine and deprivation.

Culture and Character

Men of the race tend to be loud, boastful, and vain. Skilled hunters and fishermen, they glide through the swamps on boats made of giant leaves cemented onto bamboo frames with an exotic resin. They use bamboo spears with obsidian heads to gaff fish, giant amphibians, and water reptiles. Because of the near-constant feuds between clans, most hunters are also warriors, skilled in silent movement, snares, and ambush.

When they are not hunting, Dhuli men favor colorful clothing studded with copper and silver amulets. When tensions between the clans are low, men of different tribes occasionally gather to hold *brag-poem* contests. Before pairing off, the contestants don gigantic costumes with stilts built into their legs. The winner gets the loser's amulets, as well as his youngest sister or daughter. (While unpleasant, this custom has prevented the Dhuli from becoming inbred.)

Dhuli women dress more conservatively than the men, and are far more reserved, even stoic. “Island work” is performed almost exclusively by women.

W-twen Tyfour keeps a vial of his own blood. “It's useful for homing spells, tricking predators, and making bargains with certain entities. Keep it preserved magically, if possible.” Etwo the Knowing warns: “If you do start dabbling in your own blood, be careful it doesn't end up in unscrupulous hands. Very dangerous.”

Religion and Magic

Dhuli religious affairs are conducted by male shamans. They are masters of folk-hexes, control of venomous creatures, and water magic. Shamans also maintain the lore of the clan and of the Dhuli people as a whole. Apprentice shamans must memorize tales of the "God Times," which are set in an ancestral homeland. More recent but still ancient tales recount a flight over the sea in the face of attacks by fire serpents, the conquest of the great bayou, and the sanctification of the shamans by dark and powerful local spirits.

While greatly influential in clan affairs, women are forbidden from becoming shamans. Unknown to the men, they have their own magical traditions, centered on the healing arts, manipulation of fire, and agricultural charms that promote fertility and fight pests.

Relations

Dhuli rarely venture beyond their home bayou. They are uniformly hostile to "familiar" outsiders (Dhuli of other clans; nearby mainland tribes), but they treat strangers with wary and grudging hospitality until a shaman can be summoned to examine and question them. They maintain tenuous contacts with mainland tribes, trading dried fish and medicinal plants for copper, gold, and obsidian.

The Dhuli language is unrelated to those spoken by mainland tribes. It contains some loan words, but is otherwise quite distinct. Scholars will note intriguing similarities to Far Eastern languages.

THE ISLAND OF SHRINES

Hidden deep in the bayou is a thickly forested island dotted with ancient ruins. It is at the center of several clans' territories, but it's claimed by none. Few visit the island except on holy days, when the shamans bring offerings to shrines containing idols of chipped obsidian, carved bone, and blood-stained clay. These shrines are guarded by a dozen *burnt-gaunt men* (see box).

Even a cursory examination of the island's ruins suggests that the structures date from two periods, one far older than the other. The older buildings, composed of cyclopean blocks of crudely dressed granite, are so thoroughly wrecked that no clue as to their original purpose remains. They have been repurposed as foundations for the later construction. The younger structures – the remains of grand palaces and impressive temples – are far more elegant, built from expertly cut marble. There are no inscriptions on any of the ruins; in fact, it appears that someone took great pains to chisel away any image or writing.

At the island's highest spot is a leveled area bordered by a low wall of the early-period stones, apparently the base of what was once an especially large structure. Unlike the other ruins, it appears to have been deliberately razed; its component blocks strewn over the surrounding slopes. At the center of this

Burnt-Gaunt Men

These are zombies of non-undead variety; living men transformed by dark magic into fearless, silent, obedient servants. They guard shrines, conduct sacrificial victims to altars, and do unpleasant or illicit jobs for Dhuli shamans.

Gaunt-men stand about 7'6". They have hatchet faces, gleaming yellow eyes, and unnaturally long, thin limbs. Their skin is jet black and their hair red. They cannot talk but communicate among themselves with signs and gestures. They use horns to alert each other over long distances.

Most of the burnt-gaunt men are condemned prisoners, but a few are acolyte shamans who volunteer as an act of religious devotion. These volunteers have slightly more initiative than gaunt-men made from prisoners, and they act as sergeants to groups of the creatures. Those who survive two years of service are transformed back to fully living men, and they are held in high esteem.

Burnt-gaunt men wield wooden clubs studded with jagged obsidian "teeth" (treat as a light club, +1 damage), nets, and whips. They are not especially skilled warriors, but they are merciless and relentless. Their preferred technique is to track intruders until they tire. They swarm upon any stragglers they can overtake, subdue them, and then torture them so their screams can demoralize the victims' fellows.

ST 14; **DX** 10; **IQ** 8; **HT** 11.

Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 20; Will 8; Per 12; FP 14.

Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 7; Dodge 8.

SM +1; height 7'6"; weight 240 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous); Cannot Learn; Cannot Speak (Mute); Duty (Guard shrines; Involuntary; Always); Fearlessness 4; Gigan-tism; Hard to Subdue 2; High Pain Threshold; Incurious; Social Stigma (Inhuman servant).

Skills: Brawling-13; Broadsword-12; Climbing-11; Gesture-10; Jumping-11; Swimming-13; Tracking-13; plus Net-11 or Whip-13.

Equipment: Spiked club; signal horn; obsidian knife; rope; large net or whip; sack with dried fish; water skin.

artificial plateau, in a hollow that might have been a subbase-ment of the structure, is a cairn of sorts. It is 50' tall and built of stones the size of peasants' cottages. While clearly artificial, the mound has been there a *long* time; full-sized trees have grown around, through, and on the pile.

The mound and the area around it are a taboo place, a source of nervous whispers and an inspiration for terrifying stories. No sane Dhuli would approach the place, and even the insensate burnt-gaunt men stay away. Despite this, the shamans saw fit to create a guardian for the place: a monstrous badger.

At Wen Ty Academy, all first-semester students are given the same sum of money to purchase their initial supplies, but they are not told what to buy. They are judged by their choices.

BENEATH THE ISLAND

Beneath the cairn is a smooth-sided tetrahedral pyramid, apparently made of a single piece of obsidian. It is about 35' high. In each side is a circular opening, about 7' wide, leading to a dome-shaped chamber. In its floor is a fourth opening that leads to a shaft dug deep into the roots of the island. The damp chamber, which is lined with unornamented blocks of crudely dressed stone, is about 30' wide and 110' deep.

At the bottom of the shaft is a gigantic drum, about 23' in diameter and 40' high. It is made of semi-petrified wood; the drumhead, lacing, and braided strap are of some immensely tough pale leather.

It takes quite a wallop to get some sound out of the drum. A small boulder dropped from the top of the shaft would do it. When the drum does speak, it can be heard *everywhere*, all over the world. Everyone, including the stone deaf, can hear it, and they become so filled with dread and apprehension that they stop what they were doing and stare skyward in numb wonder. Further beats cause the physically weak and spiritually sensitive to convulse and possibly die; those under the night sky see stars sputter and fall to the earth.

Thumping the drum more than a few times results in something *formidable* being summoned . . .

Something strong enough to *pick up* the obsidian pyramid with one hand.

Something *big* enough to reach down into the shaft and pull the drum out by its strap.

Something so beyond human ken, and so assured of its power, that it will simply leave after securing its property.



At Wen Ty, three-faced statues carry the inscription, "Your future depends on your present understanding your past."

Gaunt Black Badger

This bear-sized badger is unnaturally strong, agile, and intelligent. Sparse tufts of gray and tan fur dot its taut black hide; its saucer-sized eyes are milky white. While a ferocious fighter, the badger prefers to ambush and pick off stragglers and lone scouts. It has dug a series of burrows in the meadows surrounding the cairn, and it uses them to sneak up on prey and to avoid pursuit.

ST: 19	HP: 19	Speed: 5.00
DX: 9	Will: 12	Move: 10
IQ: 5	Per: 12	Weight: 600 lbs.
HT: 14	FP: 14	SM: +1

Dodge: 12	Parry: N/A	DR: 3
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Bite (13): 2d cutting damage. Reach C.

Claws (13): 2d+2 cutting or impaling damage. Reach C.

Traits: High Pain Threshold; Long Talons; Night Vision 3; Quadruped; Sharp Teeth; Tunneling (Move 1); Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-13; Running-14; Stealth-12.

Notes: Can dig new tunnels at a rate of 1 hex per turn in soft earth.

The Drummer

The Drummer was a minor figure in a pantheon worshipped by a long-dead civilization. (These vanished peoples were responsible for the island's older ruins.) He was stationed in the underworld, where he oversaw a team of demons who ground the souls of the damned beneath a giant pestle. The Drummer had another duty, set out in the civilization's grim end-time prophecies. When another god (Lesser Coyote; see "C" is for Coyote Helm in *GURPS Alphabet Arcane*) determined that the time was right, the Drummer would retrieve his instrument and signal the other actors in this obsolete eschatological drama to destroy the world. But this will likely never happen; the gods and monsters dwindled and disappeared long ago, due to a lack of observance. The Drummer only survives because he has a physical anchor: his drum.

The Drummer is a roughly man-shaped figure who stands over 100' high. The eyes of mortals have a hard time focusing on him; he appears as a monstrous, looming darkness that blots out the sky. He is utterly immune to any attack that mortals can dish out. However, he in turn can do nothing to directly harm them; the Drummer's role in the human world is carefully defined, and the ancient prophecies say nothing about him terrorizing the world *before* the end times. However, he can act to protect his drum. Characters trying to stop him from retrieving his property might suffer bruises and even broken limbs as he casually brushes them aside.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

SERIOUSLY MYSTERIOUS

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Some wizards wear robes while others don trenchcoats. Some witches stir cauldrons while others throw kisses. Some warlocks adventure in dungeons while waving around wands and others dance naked in the moonlight . . . err . . . waving around wands. But there's one tool of the wizard's trade that – if not universal – is at least so ubiquitous that the lack of inclusion in a wizardly character is enough to make that character unique.

And that tool is – dramatic pause – mystery.

Really, no other classic fantasy (or even modern) trope dwells in mystery like the wizard. When faced with a question like, “How did you just hack those six goblins in one swing?” your sword-swinging mercenary doesn't respond with, “The arts involving my manipulation of hardened steel would no doubt be incomprehensible to your untrained mind.” He's likely to wipe a bit of goblin gore from his cheek and quip, “When you spend sunup to sundown training for months on end, you'd better be good at something!” Likewise if you express even the slightest interest in how an adventuring priest does what he does, he's likely to try to convert you.

But mages – for the most part – keep that air of mystery around them. From harnessing arcane energies that cause arm hairs to curl to sneaking off into the woods and answering nature's call, mages are likely to impart the simplest of actions with a sense of gravity and import.

One reason is that the learning curve for magic is usually portrayed as much steeper and more explosive than those of other professions. Going back to our mercenary, if an impressionable boy were to see a swordsman swinging around a longsword and became inspired enough to try it himself, there's a real chance that he'd thwack his foot, twist his wrist, or otherwise hurt himself quickly but (hopefully) non-permanently. But someone who manages to poke around a spellbook will have many hours ahead of him where nothing happens, then nothing happens, and – after a long while – nothing happens. Right after that, everything explodes. (Depending on how

powerful magic is, the “everything explodes” step might be pushed up a fair bit.)

But the bigger, more important reason to maintain an air of mystery is that mages are (for the most part) weaker and more inconsistent than their other adventuring brethren. From the dawn of time, magicians of all stripes have relied on the art of misdirection to advance their careers if not protect their lives. Almost all magic tricks have limitations. For example, in the real world, the ability to make a small ball or pea disappear does not naturally translate to the power to get an elephant to vanish. (And, in fact, if the same illusionist also has the power to make an elephant disappear, it's almost certainly using a different style of trickery than that used on the ball!) The same applies to those in magical worlds with access to more arcane powers: The ability to make a foe burst into flames doesn't necessarily translate to the power to make a campfire . . . and vice versa.

What About Ninja? Aren't They Mysterious?

Ninja are *too* mysterious. Wizards will at least talk to you and let you know in words that they'd prefer you not know their secrets. Ninja would prefer you not even know they exist, and usually let you know this via a throwing star in the back.

Which is to say, like so many things, it's possible to be too mysterious. If you're playing a wizard, consider having some approachable or human traits; that will make the streak of mystery even tastier.

D.F. Ourteen notes: “Many times, a mysterious reputation is the result of a mysterious event. See GURPS Mysteries for ideas about crafting noteworthy pasts for PCs or enigmatic adventures starring inscrutable NPCs.”

Do I Need to Be Mysterious?

Of course, the question comes up, “Do I need to be mysterious if I’m a wizard?” Of course not! We’re talking stereotypes here. If you’re looking for a great twist on a classic trope, imagine any of your standard wizardly types who won’t keep quiet about the “mysteries” he wields. Perhaps he’s a mage who is afraid that his specific school of magic will die out. Maybe he believes all information should be free. For a darker alternative, maybe he gets something out of it (“As more minds tap the Darkspells, my master comes closer to his day of *freedom!*” “What did you

say, sir?” “Err, nothing, Timmy. Let’s go over today’s lesson again.”)

Of course, such a character should also be fully prepared to accept the consequences of his free-information tactics. Enemies would be more likely to know the scope and limitations of his powers, and may even utilize the teachings to become formidable foes themselves. And some outsiders might view entrusting magic to the mundanes to be as ludicrous as giving lightsabers to little kids (if one can fathom such a ridiculous concept).

So what tools can a wizard use to protect himself to enhance his sense of mystery and misdirection?

A New Identity: Few really mysterious wizards have nephews. No, at best all a magician tends to have is an evil brother or father, and maybe a child if he lives long enough. Although, obviously, a wizard with heavy familial ties is a neat character concept, having kin is also a liability to the truly inscrutable wayfarer. If need be, devote time and resources to scrubbing any references to a previous life. (Why do you think so many wizards have long hair and flowing beards? It’s the medieval equivalent of the Witness Protection Program.)

Unnecessary Foci: For a particularly nasty trick, carry around a wand you wave before every spell or always wear a hat that glows with an unearthly light . . . but make sure you don’t need either one. That way, if a foe thinks he’s disarming you by taking a precious action to snatch the wand or hat, he’ll not only have wasted his time but he’ll also be completely surprised when you zap him!

A wizard has several tools that can enhance his aura of mystery.

Hideouts: For a campaign tied to one region of the world, invest in a secret hideout somewhere (an abandoned keep, an elaborate treehouse, a glowing illuminated cave . . . wherever). For a world with a wider expanse, try to have a place to hang your cloak wherever you go. For a game system with suitably flexible backgrounds, you might consider buying a number of “unallocated” hideouts, so that you can establish one once you get to place where it would be reasonable you might have such a place. Nothing screams “mysterious!” more than looking like you already have a handle on the location or geography. (“Wow! No one from our kingdom has been here in

generations!” “Quite; well, come along . . . I believe there’s an inn down this street where I have a room that’s permanently reserved for us.”)

The Ability to Bluff: In game systems that allow it, consider buying up any skills that help with bluffing, trickery, or other misdirection. (Choose these over intimidation; intimidation usually requires a show of force and – as a wizard – if you have the force required to get the results you want, you usually don’t need the intimidation.) At best, the ability to bluff can turn the tables on an impossible situation. And at a minimum, it should buy you some time while you think of another plan or try to let your powers or an allies’ abilities recharge.

A Deliberate Style of Speaking: To quote Captain America from the immortal *Tales of Suspense* #92, “Only one of us is gonna walk out of here – under his own steam – and, it won’t be *me!*” Nothing deflates your sense of mystery quicker than saying something nonsensical. As a playing tip, think very carefully before saying anything; know how a sentence you begin is going to end before you start speaking it. The nice thing about being mysterious is that, if you don’t say anything, people will assume you’re simply deep in contemplation. (If the game system permits, you might want to consider purchasing “Common Sense” or similar abilities, with the limitation “Only applies to speaking mysteriously.” This will let the GM give you a do-over if you fumble a line or say something completely off-base.) Some good phrases that can help:

“It is a sign of true intellect to admit that one knows nothing.” (A mysterious way of saying, “Darned if I know!”)

“To deny the body is to punish the mind.” (“Let’s eat!”)

“Our future destinies can only be charted differently if we live long enough to plot the course.” (“Run away!”)

“If we intend to succeed, it is best we remember that the art of conversation is what elevates us above the animals.” (“Let’s ask for help!”)

Far too many tools of a wizard can be taken away, but a sense of mystery is permanent. In a pinch, it will get you out of an amazing number of tight spots. And if it doesn’t work, simply nod with quiet contemplation, as if all is going according to plan. Then keep thinking about what that plan might be.

Othir Tyone, former Emperor of the Universe, says, “Envision ahead of time what you would do with one wish; choose your exact phrasing carefully. Do the same thing with three wishes. Those are the only numbers you need to worry about.”

HUMOR

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



IN *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*
4th Edition (Wizards of the Coast),
DRINKING A HEALING POTION WILL
ACTUALLY SLOW DOWN THE HEALING
RATE OF ANY CHARACTER WITH 44 OR
MORE HIT POINTS!
-Frederick Brackin-

#2008
#5707

Got a *Murphy's Rule* of your own? Send it to murphy@sjgames.com

FNORDPLAY



The sorceress decided to tackle the
"shiny coat/wet nose" problem one bit
at a time . . .

Think you can do better? Send your caption
for this illustration to pyramid@sjgames.com.

Items Found in a Dead Wizard's Satchel

- Aftershave that doubles as a marinade.
- The exact means of exploiting the weaknesses of whatever threat the heroes faced last adventure.
- Lit candles.
- A book entitled *Complicated 12-Step Rituals (Shareware Edition - Steps 1-6)*.

Ethir Tyth-Ree made sure we noted: "Each issue of *Pyramid* will have at least one page of humor, and maybe more! Check out our *Wish List* online (see p. 3) and send your short-short quips or jokes about future topics!"

RECOMMENDED READING

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

BY ANDY VETROMILE

There are plenty of fantasy games out on the market, of course, but when taking just the wizard's view of things, the field narrows. Not that having the full team diminishes a game's potential use – wizards are usually part of a pack, after all – but distilling the experience from a wider array takes more work.

When the phrase “beer-and-pretzels game” crops up in conversation, people are talking about **WizWar** (Jolly Games, www.silcom.com/~tomjolly/). This perennial favorite hit tables back in 1985 and quickly became a mainstay. (It's now in its seventh edition, and the promised eighth has yet to materialize. It used to go for \$18 a pop, but the best place to get it now is either as the occasional eBay find or by following the leads in the many on-line fan resources at www.wizwar.com.)

In **WizWar**, players take the roles of competing wizards trapped in a self-contained dungeon-style map. Starting out with two treasures, each mage tries to steal two of someone else's treasures to bring back to their starting position. The boards show interconnected corridors and fit together geometrically. They also wrap around – that is, where the board gives way to the dining room table, the doorways abstractly “connect” to the opposite end of the map. This puts everybody too close to one another for comfort, and perfectly forces everyone to watch his back.

Characters draw spell cards and number cards from a central deck and use them to do just about everything. While the spells let the wizard pull off cool stunts, the number cards can add duration or power to any action. A wizard can't move that fast on his own, but he can add a number card to boost his speed. Damage done increases with a number, and since enchantments default to lasting only one round, their duration can be extended a number of rounds equal to the added card.

Some spells are pretty standard – like bolts of lightning – but some get weird, even bizarre. A rosebush is an odd thing to summon, but it blocks the corridor pretty effectively. Traps,

monsters, and walls of water begin to populate the already congested complex, making every move an adventure. The action gets slapstick-silly sometimes, but the selection of cards is so cleverly designed that there are usually a couple ways around (or through) a problem. Some spells seem horrible in their effects (“You mean I take damage *every step I take?*”), but events easily rise to this level of ridiculous for all concerned, and finding a way to save oneself from Almost Certain Death demands amusing and creative problem-solving.

For anyone who thinks spellcasting should be fast and furious and not the sonorous, heavy-handed ritual it is in most RPGs, **WizWar** is a light-hearted alternative. The deck itself could be used as a “wild card” form of magic that brings out unexpected results – effects the PCs or GM would have to improvise on and deal with, depending on who ends up casting what. A set of **Magic: The Gathering** cards (Wizards of the Coast, www.wizards.com) could produce similar results. Play can also be likened to **Strange Synergy** (\$29.95, Steve Jackson Games, www.sjgames.com), and while the card use is more stagnant there, once the action is underway, the deck itself offers several powers that might inspire.

If it's the medium that makes the wizard, players may mix things up with the style of magic used by the character. As one roleplaying example, **Deadlands: Reloaded!** (\$39.99, Pinnacle Entertainment Inc., www.peginc.com) bases its spell use on the cards drawn from a standard deck – everyone finds himself at the mercy of a poker hand as to how powerful their spells might be. Expanding the conduit through which one operates, **Unknown Armies** (\$39.95, Atlas Games, www.atlas-games.com) offers a wizard all the power he needs or wants – so long as he's willing to pay the price. If he uses money as his mojo, he gains strength by burning a hundred-dollar bill or even robbing a bank. The more spectacular the stunt, the more the mage has to work with, and the more problems he may generate for himself.

Wele Ven the Writer says, “If you're trying to build a reputation, carry around some kind of trademark item . . . roses, tarot cards, parchments with poems, and so on. Give them to those you rescue.”

Descent: Journeys in the Dark (\$79.95, Fantasy Flight Games, www.fantasyflightgames.com) is another game steeped in magical goodness, though its characters run the gamut of fantasy tropes. Using the same system they pioneered in **Doom**, the designers have created a more tactical game. Players take on one of several roles – 20 of them, though more become available in every supplement purchased – and delve into the buried lair of the Overlord. One player is the bad guy and tries to trash his erstwhile friends with traps, a fiendish selection of monsters, and varying card effects. A campaign booklet offers different board layouts and creature combinations, and as the team ventures onto the map, they uncover more of the terrain (and more enemies).



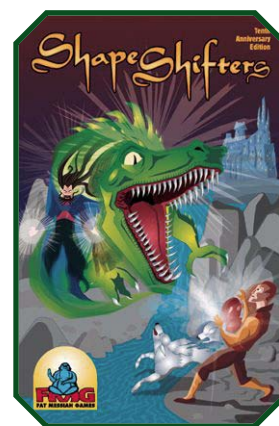
Each character possesses a different arrangement of skills and special powers, so playing the game depends more on a strategy that's fine-tuned to the specific heroes in use than did **Doom** and its cookie-cutter space marines. However, for anyone wishing to glean the full wizard experience from the game, simply do away with the random draws and custom-build the hero team. Using nothing but the mystically inclined personae brings the game's magical elements to the fore. Allying, say, Runewitch Astarra, Andira Runehand, Mad Carthos, and Landrec the Wise (as an extreme example – the ones with the highest scores in magic skill) gifts the party with all the magic they could want, and pretty much assures a few of the familiars are employed as well.

Marrying board or card game elements with RPGs opens new possibilities.

This does run the risk of making the party weaker in some respects, namely the ranged and hand-to-hand combat skills (and their subterfuge will reek, too). This may not be as crippling as it sounds; magic is another form of attack, and the heroes can still field surges and other effects to improve their dice rolls and achieve some devastating assaults. They'll just have to shore up their shortcomings with increased team interactions. Overlord cards don't necessarily target "the character with the best subterfuge skill," and the Overlord player may be convinced to allow additional trade-ins on skill cards or even trades among the players and their characters. (The party mentioned above would use all the available wizardry cards anyway, so without the normal chance to trade skill cards in for new ones, specifying which character got which card wouldn't be too outrageous an request.)

Players could even use the set to try duplicating their adventures. Building a scenario map with the pieces is fairly easy, and while not every RPG character maps perfectly to one of the in-game personas, picking something close isn't too tough (again, added sets would add options for both characters and board pieces). It takes longer to play a game than to run a combat in most RPGs, but if a group doesn't mind the bookkeeping, it also offers a better level of strategy than many tabletop roleplaying systems.

Fat Messiah's **Shapeshifters** (\$12, now on its 10th anniversary edition, www.fatmessiahgames.com) is a tidy little game of dueling magicians. They may cast traditional spells at one another, but their primary power here is the ability to change into various animal and fantasy creature forms. The game uses two "boards," the first of which is a standard map that tracks the "normal" action: where the characters are, how fast they move, and the terrain they move over. But the other board . . .



Here is displayed a sort of flowchart, showing similar animals near each other. Like some medieval evolutionary record, characters track their form on this panel, with small changes costing a little in the way of magical energy and larger expenditures allowing severe alterations – if the player has enough power saved up and the skill (wisdom) to pull it off. (Changing from an ape to a man isn't nearly as tough as going from bird to alligator.) Victory requires balancing which shape one uses at which point on the board to gain winning conditions for the chosen scenario.

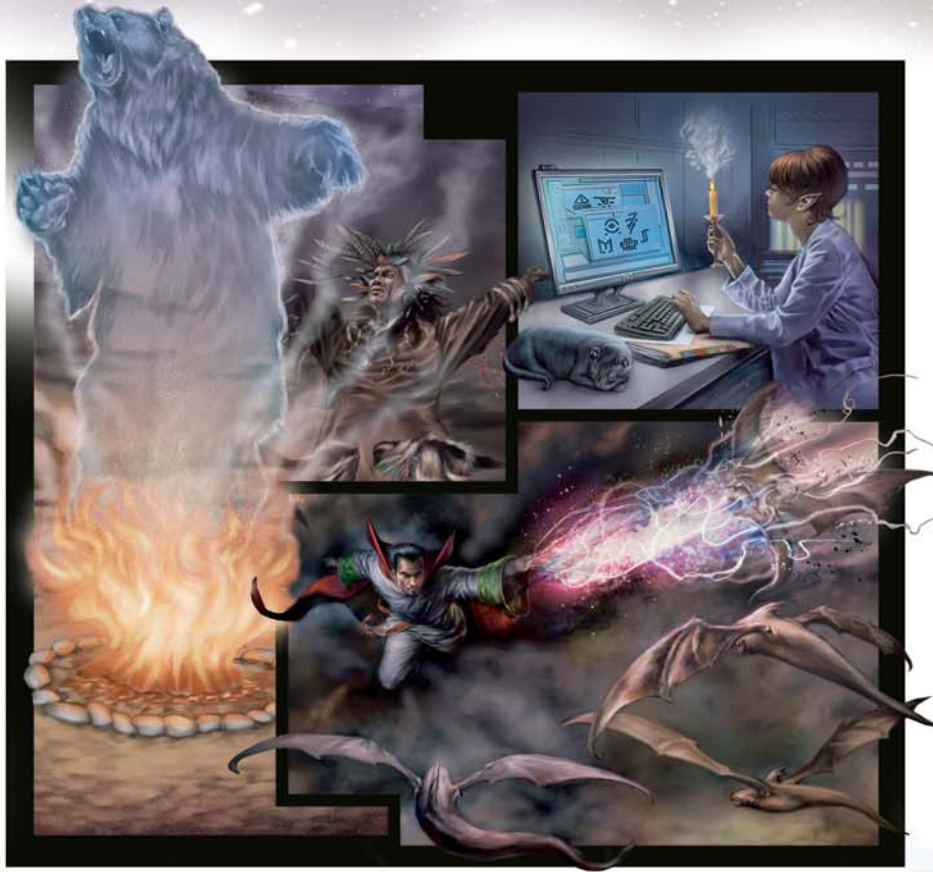
Even if players aren't looking to duplicate this particular fantasy battle theme, the idea of a separate board for tracking changes in a wizard has its own appeal. A graphic representation of the wizards, one that can indicate who's flying, who is still affected by a particular spell (his own or the bad guys'), and who has how much power left takes a lot of strain out of the note-taking. (Dragonfire Signs, www.dragonfiresigns.com, does something similar with its **Werewolf Form Buttons**, \$15; these allow players of the popular **White Wolf** game, www.white-wolf.com, to indicate the shape their character currently occupies.)

Marrying board or card game elements with RPGs is nothing new as the current uptick in miniatures of various sorts indicates, and for wizards, it shouldn't be tough either. It's all in how the tool is used.

At Wen Ty, seven days are spent teaching a few of the most famous short poems and ballads of the land. The logic goes that being able to recite works of beauty demonstrate culture in the wizard's lands, and they can be useful for establishing contact in outside realms.

GURPS Fourth Edition

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RECOMMENDED READING

WIZARDS AND

GAMING

BY MATTHEW POOK

Magic and wizards have been with us for as long as there has been roleplaying, and whatever the name of that first game, it was the wizard that was its real top gun. After all, any clodhopping sheep herder can swing a sword or pray to the gods, but it takes someone with intellect, aptitude, and acuity to master the arcane arts and so levitate, fill a room with sticky webs, or launch those oh-so-important great balls of fire.

Of course, that first game was *Dungeons & Dragons*, and even 30 years on, it still is. The all-new *Dungeons & Dragons Fourth Edition* (\$34.95 and up, Wizards of the Coast, www.wizards.com/dnd/) really is all new because among many, *many* others, it makes one big change – it all but dumps Vancian magic. Originally inspired by the fiction of author Jack Vance, spells in *Dungeons & Dragons* took up a wizard's head space in a “fire and forget” format. Cast that helpful handy *lighting bolt* and unless he had another memorized, a wizard could not cast another until tomorrow, and even then, he still had to rememorize the spell. This was only made worse by just how low powered his spells were right out of the starting gate and how a wizard had to wait level after level before gaining access to the really big guns. The combined effect reduced a wizard to nothing more than an ambulatory artillery piece with supply problems, because when all of his spells had been exhausted, the wizard was emasculated.

All that changes with the advent of *Dungeons & Dragons Fourth Edition*. Straight out of that gate, the wizard, along with all of the classes – including the new Warlock class – has powers he can cast at will. Now that archetypal low-level *Dungeons & Dragons* spell *magic missile* becomes a “cast and roll to hit” power, rather than a foe-seeking “cast and forget until tomorrow” spell. Some Vancian elements remain, though, because in addition to the At Will and Per Encounter powers, a wizard also possesses spells that he can cast only once per day, such as *acid arrow* and *sleep*, old favorites both. Nevertheless, although the new rules up-guns the wizard class,

every class under *Dungeons & Dragons Fourth Edition* has its own range of At Will, Per Encounter, and Daily powers. What sets the wizard apart in the new game? The wizard gets Rituals.

Outside of gaming, the classic wizard of yore has always been about the prolonged ritual rather than the flashy show of raw power. In *Dungeons & Dragons Fourth Edition*, the Ritual is home to the wizard's (and the cleric's) more utilitarian and most definitely non-combat spells, such as *Comprehend Languages* and *Tenser's Floating Disk*. As a non-combat spell, the Ritual is cast outside of the game's encounter-based flow of play and represents a divide that core *Dungeons & Dragons* comes late to (but then, the game has never been the one to innovate). Despite this, third-party publishers for *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* provide other possibilities via a variety of sourcebooks. These options are divided between the more generic and the themed, suggesting schools of magic, spells, and classes anew. *The Book of Eldritch Might* (\$10.95, Malhavoc Press, www.montecook.com/mpress.html) and its sequels are among the best representatives of this generic approach with plenty of new magic. Equally good, *Penumbra: Occult Lore* (\$29.95, Atlas Games, www.atlas-games.com) offers game write-ups of numerous traditions, including alchemy, astrology, geomancy, herbalism, and sympathetic magic, all complete with adventure seeds. Its approach to magic is definitely far from flashy, making it the perfect companion to the *Redhurst Academy of Magic* (\$29.99, Human Head Studios, www.humanhead.com/adventure/), the only place to learn magic across at least eight worlds, including Freeport (*The Pirate's Guide to Freeport*, \$34.95, Green Ronin Publishing, www.greenronin.com) and the *Seven Cities* (\$21.95, Atlas Games), and, naturally, your own campaign. The *Redhurst Academy of Magic* is not just a place to visit – often difficult since the campus teleports from one world to another – but, as a place of learning, it is perfect for

D'fo Ur offered this advice: “Feeling lonely? Get a familiar. Or, if your magics do not work through creatures, get a pet, and call it a familiar.” Eni Ne’ adds to the suggestion of a pet: “If you have a familiar and do a lot of dungeon-exploring, pack the poor thing food and bedding! Not all creatures are able to explore the depths easily.”

the one type of RPG involving wizards that fans have not yet been allowed to have: one set at a place like Hogwarts.

Themed sourcebooks are more focused, dealing with the wizard's role under particular circumstances or in a particular setting. *When the Sky Falls* (\$13.95, Malhavoc Press, www.montecook.com/mpress.htm) and *Requiem for a God* (\$12.95, Malhavoc Press) are actually "Event Books," designed to explore the consequences of two campaign-altering events: the first a meteorite strike, the second the death of a deity. Both suggest entirely new types of magic, one powered by fallen meteors, the other by chunks of the dead god's flesh. Both are interesting if radical options, perhaps overly so.

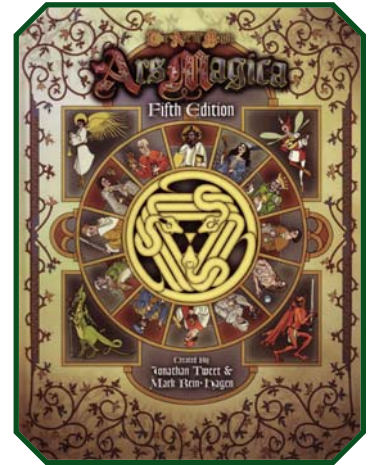
The *d20 System* allowed any number of great settings, certainly too many to go into here, but all calling for the role of the wizard (and the definitely less learned sorcerer). For the most part though, the changes required for the wizard to fit his role in the setting are minor and more flavor than anything else.

If you still want your magic to remain Vancian, then you can keep playing earlier versions of *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Castles & Crusades* (\$19.95, Troll Lord Games, www.trollord.com), or the *Pathfinder Roleplaying Game* (\$49.99, Paizo Publishing, www.paizo.com), the *not-Dungeons & Dragons 3.75*. But if you really want to do Vancian magic justice, then there is no finer game than *The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game* (\$29.95, Pelgrane Press, www.pelgranepress.com). More "Wizards & Witticisms," the game is set during the fleeting days of Earth's 21st Aeon, its swollen sun threatening to splutter and go out with mankind engaged in esoteric pursuits or not-so-engaged in lavish indolence. Magic replaces sciences with anyone able to learn a little or a lot of the arcane art as is their wont. The game is pitched at three levels. In the Cugel-level campaign, characters are mere Dabblers, able to learn only simple cantrips that have minor physical effects or grant a simple short-lived boon or bane. True Magicians can cast proper and entertainingly named spells in a Turjan-level game, such as *Arnhoul's Sequestrous Digitalia* and *Phandaal's Gyrator*, as well as create enchanted items and build a manse to study in. At the Rhalto-level, the Archmagician commands all of these spells and more, can travel time and space, and make vat-grown life, all the while trying to outdo

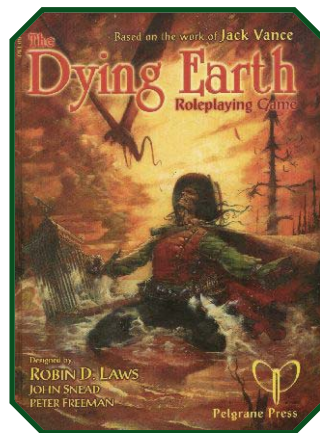


his rivals or struggling to keep from boredom. Each of these campaign levels has its own supplement that offers a sybarite approach to playing with great (and not-so-great) power.

As with *The Dying Earth Roleplaying Game*, wizards or magi come to the fore in *Ars Magica* (\$35.00, Atlas Games, www.atlas-games.com), even though its troupe style of play has the players take the role of both the mage and his followers. Magi are blessed with The Gift and can study Hermetic Magic Techniques and Forms to manipulate natural phenomena. Given that Techniques and Forms are expressed in Latin, it is no surprise that the "Arts" or magic of *Ars Magica* is eminently studious. Although the mage and his companions face the threat of peasant superstition and the jealousy and distrust of the church and nobility, his own magic can be dangerous too. If he loses control of his casting or lives too long exposed to a strong magical aura, a mage will invariably acquire small flaws, but he can also be thrown into Wizard's Twilight, a timeless state that can last minutes or years. If he can comprehend the nature of this Twilight, a mage can learn new spells or gain a positive Twilight Scar. Of course, the reverse will happen if the mage fails to comprehend his true state. What *Ars Magica* offers is a more learned and richer approach to magic, making it more a science than art, but then the clue is in the name.



The idea of magic as science and having side effects is brought almost up to date with the *Edge of Midnight* (\$39.99, Edge of Midnight Press, www.edgeofmidnight.com), wherein an alternate post-World War II *Film Noir* America is threatened by criminal warlocks, capable of commanding the natural forces of Electricity, Gravity, Kinetics, Magnetism, and Tensile and Thermal Energy. Here magic is not only tightly controlled and virtually illegal, but it's also addictive and can quite literally leave a Mark when overused, if the warlock does not burn out first. Equally flashy, but more contemporary, is the street magic of Jason L. Blair's *Wyrd Is Bond* (\$20.00, Key20 Publishing, www.key20.com). Here inner-city gang members get their Wyrd and so can sling various spells to protect both their word and their gang. Quite literally Wyrd is not just power, but a slinger's word. Just as with *Dungeons & Dragons'* wizard, the slinger is still the game's top gun, the difference being just how the powers get dressed up.



Itwen Tyfi-Ve suggests: "Atlas Games' Penumbra: Occult Lore is available to purchase from e23.sjgames.com. The Ars Magica 4th Edition Core Rulebook is also available from that site, but not to purchase . . . it's a free download!"

LAST WORD

WITH CHAD UNDERKOFFLER

For the *Last Word* in each issue of *Pyramid*, we'll chat with someone in the game industry known for their work in the topic field. For the inaugural *Last Word*, we tracked down Chad Underkoffler, internationally renowned, Origins-award-nominated, and ENnie-award-winning creator of many independent RPGs, including *Dead Inside*, *Truth & Justice*, and *The Zorcerer of Zo*.

PYRAMID: Chad, what is your Last Word on wizards?

CHAD UNDERKOFFLER: Awe.

Awe? Not the sympathetic sound, I take it . . .

Well, it could be, if you're talking about Galstaff, Sorcerer of Light, or Presto from the old *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon . . . just drop the "e."

Heh. But seriously . . . why is "awe" the last word on wizards?

Well, even those relatively lame wizards generate incredible, wondrous, ridiculous effects. Awe is the reaction to someone grabbing the laws of physics and reality and bending them out of true. It doesn't matter if we're talking about Presto or Harry Dresden or Gandalf or Big Daddy Merlin; wizards make things happen. Wonderful things. Terrifying things. Ludicrous things. Whether it's animating a jillion broomsticks or making Stuff Blow Up Good, folks look at that sort of power with awe . . . that mix of wonder and fear that requires one's attention.

Yeah, wizards aren't usually portrayed as having subtle "Force-like" powers, are they?

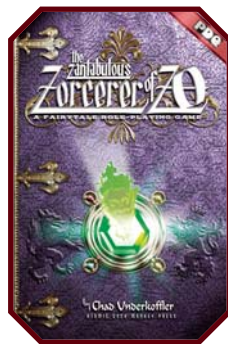
Few wizards do subtle, true. But even the subtle ones, when you look at the sort of changes they can wreak upon the world and the people in it, are pretty damned impressive.

So anything you can do to make a wizard awesome – in both senses – is a Good Thing, right?

Absolutely. Wizards should be interesting in some way; if not in appearance or (magical) application, then definitely in terms of personality. I mean, juggling primal forces of the universe will tend to make the juggler a bit cracked in the brainpan. Think Egg Shen, from *Big Trouble in Little China*. Think Vlad Taltos, from Brust's work. Think Miracle Max, from *The Princess Bride*.

Awe-some, all. (Well, I'm not sure about Miracle Max, but it's a low-key "awesome" . . .)

Maybe Max is one of those "subtle" types, huh?



Could be. Do you think the right tool or prop can turn someone who'd otherwise be a bookworm with glowing hands into someone more worthy of awe?

I'd say it's characterization that's the tool or prop here, far and away beyond any mystic dingus or shiny ring. That's really not to disrespect your basic magical thingamabobs. It's very nice to be walking around carrying the freaking lesser Eye of Amagatto and a spiffy red Levitating Cloak. I mean, having the latter would certainly help out with my daily commute to the day-job. Then again, regularly having to deal with the Dread Dormammu? Not fun.

Awe.

– Chad Underkoffler

So what projects are you working on now?

Right now, I'm working through *Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies*, a swashbuckling fantasy RPG. We're talking Musketeers, Dread Pirates, creepy mystical dudes, and flying sailing ships. It's been a long-term project, but the manuscript is finally coming together. With a highly detailed setting, and a riff on the basic PDQ rules used in my other games, this is going to be a hefty book. In addition to that, I just finished doing a huge amount of heavy-lifting on the setting text of Evil Hat Production's upcoming *The Dresden Files RPG*, which is currently in playtesting.

Who's more awe-some? Your *Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies* mystical dudes or Harry Dresden?

Hmm . . . tough call. I'd say that Harry's more awesome to watch, but the koldun of *Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies* are more awesome to play.

It's always best to be diplomatic when dealing with magic-wielders.

Well, remember: a cunning philosopher once said, "No matter how subtle the wizard, a knife between the shoulder blades will seriously cramp his style."

Information on the *Dresden Files* RPG can be found at DresdenFilesRPG.com. To learn more about Chad Underkoffler's games, including *Swashbucklers of the 7 Skies* and *The Zorcerer of Zo*, check out AtomicSockMonkey.com. Electronic versions of Chad Underkoffler's offerings are available from e23.sjgames.com, and paperback versions or paper/PDF bundles are at IndiePressRevolution.com.

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GURPS rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book.

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