PYRAMID

MAGIC ON THE BATTLEFIELD

THE SOCIETY OF SIEGE SORCERERS
by Sean Punch

PERFECT DEFENSE
by Kelly Pedersen

THE VULTURE SQUAD
by Brian Rogers

MAGIC AND NAVAL WARFARE
by Demi Benson

OUR WYRDS AT WAR
by J. Edward Tremlett

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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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

In this month of romance, you'd think that *Pyramid* would focus on love being a battlefield. Not so! However, if you love **GURPS,** you'll love this issue, packed with four **GURPS** articles, including three using **GURPS Mass Combat.**

Ultimate **GURPS** sage Sean Punch reveals the secrets of *The Society of Siege Sorcerers,* an ideal group for battle-ready mages in a war-torn setting; it includes information for **GURPS Mass Combat** and **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles.** Kelly Pedersen expands on the guidelines found in **GURPS Powers-Ups 1: Imbuements** and takes the ideas to armor; now you can have the *Perfect Defense!* When the battle is over, the **GURPS**-statted *Vulture Squad* descends to uncover magical loot in the debris, as told by Brian Rogers. Our game aid this month takes some of the rules from **GURPS Mass Combat** and puts them on ready-to-print cards.

Demi Benson's *Magic and Naval Warfare* examines how the **GURPS Magic** system would affect control of the seas, with special attention given to **GURPS Mass Combat** details. J. Edward Tremlett ponders the nature of war, wizards, and world design in the generic *Our Wyrds at War,* while Steven Marsh ponders what happens when you combine the realistic and fantastic with war and magic in his *Random Thought Table.* Our highly trained specialists make suggestions for other inspiration in a pair of *Recommended Reading* articles.

Once the peace treaties are signed, everyone can relax and chuckle with the *Odds and Ends* section. Finally, the *Last Word* comes from Jeff Vogel, founder of Spiderweb Software and creator of the magical-battlefield-themed **Geneforge** and **Avernum** shareware computer games.

FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of *Pyramid* is something of an experiment, in that it ties more closely into recent **GURPS** projects than any previous issue. In fact, Sean Punch's article *The Society of Siege Sorcerers* uses **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles,** which was released on the same day as this issue! Likewise we had a (hopefully) clever idea for the insert for this issue (see p. 18), which ties in to the very popular **GURPS Mass Combat** system.

Since this is an experiment, we'd love to get your feedback on what works and what doesn't. You can write to us at **pyramid@sjgames.com**, or – for comments intended as part of a larger discussion – you can post to the Steve Jackson Games Forums at **forums.sjgames.com,** under the *Pyramid* sub-forum.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

We love to get your feedback! Please feel free to send letters and comments to the address above. In addition, we're looking for "New Tricks for Old Dogs"; did you think of a clever use for an article in a past issue? Maybe you use the Vulture Squad as a PC group for a one-shot, or maybe the *Perfect Defense* imbuements inspired an entire campaign focused on magical armor. If so, e-mail us a brief (no more than 400 words) description of what you did and how well it worked.
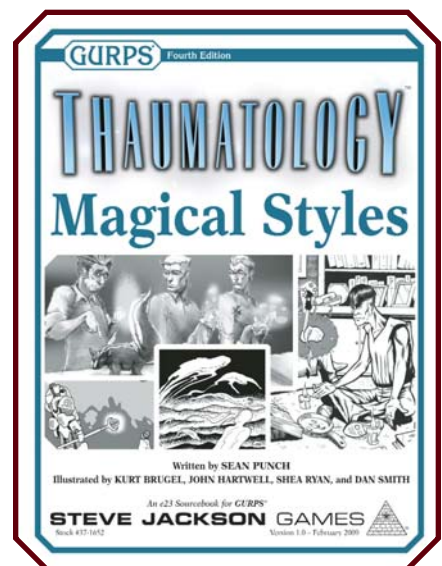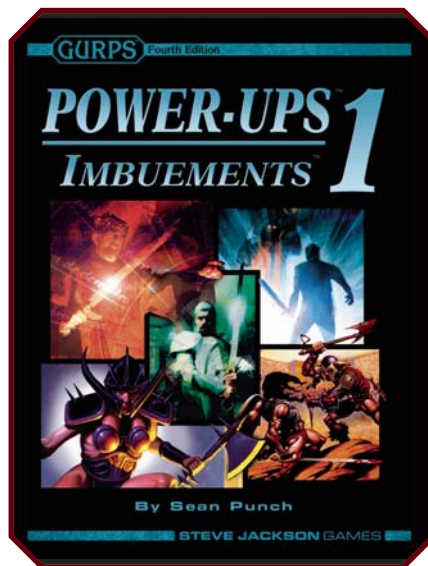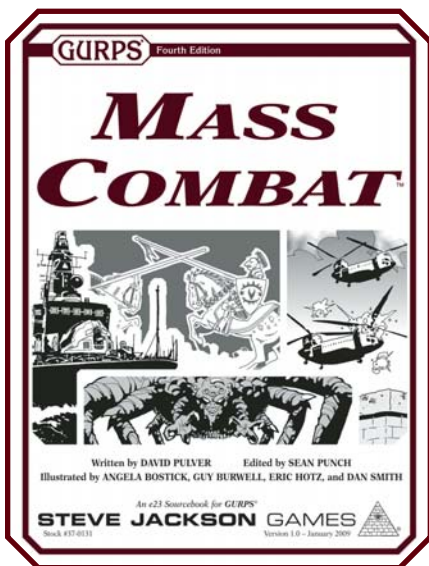
> *I am very enthusiastic about the new version of **Pyramid** and hope this incarnation succeeds and surpasses all expectations . . .*
>
> *– Griffin, MIB, on the Steve Jackson Games forums*

THE SOCIETY OF SIEGE SORCERERS

BY SEAN PUNCH

The Society of Siege Sorcerers (less formally, "the Society" or "S^3") is a brotherhood of magicians suitable for TL3 fantasy. A wizards' guild and a mercenary company, they sell the service of magical siege warfare – both the giving end and the receiving end.

The Society works best in settings where magic and mercenaries are legitimate, allowing the guild to function as a low-tech private military corporation. If either wizards or private armies are restricted, then S^3 might instead serve a lord or more-powerful figure full-time. And where *both* are tightly controlled, then *unless* S^3 is part of a genuine army, they're likely a dangerous criminal gang that's in the business of holding towns or even cities for ransom!

In a world with significant power blocs that rely on numbers and aggression – but *not* magic – to remain a credible threat, the Society will doubtless be wealthy and feared. Siege-magic might enable civilization to compete against hordes of unsophisticated-but-brutal "monsters," such as orcs, earning S^3 respect and social clout. In a background where the armies on both sides of any conflict of note have detachments of wizards, the Society may merely be one guild among many offering similar services. And if wizardly warfare simply *isn't done,* then – once again – S^3 becomes criminal, and should run when a *real* army shows up.

While the Society could be almost any size, it works best if it can field dozens, even hundreds of wizards. Siege-magic is less viable without the energy that large circles of wizards can generate. Thus, S^3 makes the most sense in a setting where numerous other magicians' brotherhoods exist – some dedicated to enchanting big Powerstones, others to seeing to the logistic requirements of TL3 fantasy civilizations with TL5+ population densities.

Because the Society's circumstances vary so much with setting, details such as bases, manpower, and individual leaders have been left to the GM, who should fill in the blanks to suit his campaign. A legitimate, wealthy guild might have an enchanted keep manned by a dozen wizards in every major city, and impressive fortresses on the borderlands. A marginal one might only boast a dozen magicians in total, wandering from one potential job (or target) to the next.

However, two features give S^3 much of its character, and can fit into most settings with a little work. One is the Society's paramilitary organization. The other is its style of magic: the Six Strengths of Siegecraft. Both are discussed below, the Six Strengths using terms and rules from ***GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles.***

Abbreviations

A&T: Automata and Transport.
B&D: Breaching and Demolition.
CM&CCM: Counter-Magic and Counter-Counter-Magic.
M1, M2, M3: Magery 1, Magery 2, Magery 3.
S&I: Signals and Intelligence.
S^3: 1. Society of Siege Sorcerers. **2.** Six Strengths of Siegecraft.

ORGANIZATION

The Society is organizationally ahead of its time in some ways, using concepts and terms rarely found before TL5 or TL6 in non-fantasy worlds. This has nothing to do with anything as outré as time travel. The fact is, wizards love terminology that baffles the mundanes – and *these* wizards are a bunch of well-educated military engineers, which only amplifies that tendency.

Campaign idea: A multinational treaty has banned the use of spell-slinging on the battlefield. The heroes are magical investigators charged with ensuring the treaty is followed. Can they investigate combat areas for mystical misdeeds and keep from using magic (or getting caught)?

Ranks

The smallest viable size for the Society is 8-12 wizards – enough magicians to pull off ceremonial magic capable of raising the energy needed to affect some small part of a siege. This element's leader is styled *captain*; his assistant, *lieutenant*. The senior wizard among those remaining, and third-in-command, is customarily called *sergeant*.

If the Society is large enough to have several such elements, then each is known as a *tower* – a fanciful reference to a siege tower or a fortified keep. Four towers (40-50 men) is a *fortress*, led by a *high captain*, who might actually operate out of a fortress. Units larger than a fortress are ad hoc, and like all of S^3 fall under the authority of the guild's master, the *general*, who as a rule appoints an assistant, or *adjutant*.

In game terms, this structure is defined through the Guild Rank perk [1/level] defined in **Magical Styles.** This is a Magic Perk, so higher levels correspond directly to greater magical learning. Maximum Guild Rank depends on the Society's size – although in a small organization with nothing higher than Guild Rank 3, the leader *will* have enough points in spells to qualify for many more than three Magic Perks!

S^3 Rank Table

Rank	Title	Notes
0	Soldier	Ordinary guild member
1	Sergeant	Senior tower soldier
2	Lieutenant	Assistant tower commander
3	Captain	Commander of one tower
4	High Captain	Commander of four towers
5	Adjutant	Assistant guildmaster (no formal command)
6	General	Guildmaster

Fortes

The style name "Six Strengths of Siegecraft" refers to the Society's views of the core *military* capabilities needed to succeed at siege warfare – principles that they dub the six *fortes.* These are:

● *Automata and Transport:* Moving equipment and troops . . . including "automated" troops such as elementals and zombies.

● *Breaching and Demolition:* Knocking down opposing fortifications.

● *Counter-Magic and Counter-Counter-Magic:* Dealing with enemy siege-wizards.

● *Defense:* Protecting friendly fortifications and camps.

● *Signals and Intelligence:* Gaining a communications and security advantage, either by boosting friendly capabilities or intercepting enemy ones.

● *Weapons:* Making life miserable for rival *troops.*

These aren't "occupational specialties." An S^3 wizard is expected to become capable in all six areas with time – siege warfare works best with ceremonial magic, ceremonial magic is most potent when everybody knows the spell, and even a high-magic world lacks enough mages to make this work if each adopts but a single specialty. Still, martial casters die in battle and recruits take time to train, so in practice, most Society soldiers *are* somewhat specialized. Where towers must operate independently, captains seek to balance all six fortes within their unit. But if the Society has lots of wizards on hand, a high captain or a general may reorganize them to yield ad hoc towers or even fortresses specialized by forte.

Note that none of the fortes address such crucial matters of siege warfare as healing and provisions. This is intentional! The Society leaves these problems – which they view as "non-military" – to more-pacifist orders, which in S^3 thinking is a way of ensuring that the guild remains a well-paid and *feared* striking arm, not "an army of chefs and nurses." It bears mentioning that this philosophy has more than once led to disaster, and that not every Society member agrees with it – pointing out that the Six Strengths include *other* ancillary roles, such as transportation and scouting.

Support Staff

If the Society is a large organization that can field dozens or hundreds of mages, then it will almost certainly employ mundane servants and staff: cooks, medics, teamsters, and everything else that a force needs in the field. And while every S^3 member knows how to fight, mages require bodyguards to cover them when working ceremonial magic in battle. In most settings, this means well-armed men adept at melee combat. Finally, because their magic as much *enhances* siege warfare as carries it out directly, they'll need siege engines, their crews, and miners.

In **GURPS Mass Combat** terms, every S^3 Wizards element (see box) comes with one element apiece of Heavy Infantry and Miners. Every *two* S^3 Wizards elements also bring along one element of Heavy Artillery. Finally, all of this comes with its own land logistic force. The entire unit is TL3, unless the GM rules that "magi-tech" exists and justifies TL4+ in his game world.

If the Society is merely a small band, on the other hand, little of the above is likely to be true. Instead, individual Society members are going to be above-average warriors *and* wizards – and some will be trained in field medicine, handling beasts, etc. That is, they'll be a lot like a group of PCs! In **Mass Combat** terms, such a band would constitute a lone element of wizards, albeit with both equipment *and* troop quality boosted by at least one level, plus the associated logistic capability.

SIX STRENGTHS
OF SIEGECRAFT

12 points

Style Prerequisite: Magery 1 (*not* One College Only).

The Six Strengths of Siegecraft (*also* called S^3) constitutes the Society's core magical training. Any mage with sufficient

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How much effect should one average magician have on the battlefield? It depends on the campaign . . . but firmly visualizing the answer is useful to determining how powerful mages should be.

New Elements: S³ Wizards

S³ Wizards: One tower of S³ Wizards, with all six fortes represented in equal proportion. These stats also describe a standalone band (make equipment and troop quality at least Good).

S³ Wizards (A&T): One tower of S³ Wizards, focusing on A&T spells.
S³ Wizards (B&D): One tower of S³ Wizards, focusing on B&D spells.
S³ Wizards (CM&CCM): One tower of S³ Wizards, focusing on CM&CCM spells.
S³ Wizards (Defense): One tower of S³ Wizards, focusing on Defense spells.
S³ Wizards (S&I): One tower of S³ Wizards, focusing on S&I spells.
S³ Wizards (Weapons): One tower of S³ Wizards, focusing on Weapons spells.

Element	TS	Class	WT	Mob	Raise	Maintain	TL
S³ Wizards	5	Art, C3I, Eng, Rec	1	Foot	200K	40K	3
S³ Wizards (A&T)	6	Rec, T1*	1	Foot, SA	200K	40K	3
S³ Wizards (B&D)	6	Art, Eng	1	Foot	200K	40K	3
S³ Wizards (CM&CCM)	6	(C3I, Rec)	1	Foot	200K	40K	3
S³ Wizards (Defense)	6	(Art, Eng)	1	Foot	200K	40K	3
S³ Wizards (S&I)	6	C3I, Rec	1	Foot	200K	40K	3
S³ Wizards (Weapons)	6	Art, F	1	Foot	200K	40K	3

* Thanks to the scalability of ceremonial magic, this transport capacity can be combined; e.g., two elements count as T2.

talent who passes the "security screening" (everything from prying questions to magical investigation) is welcome to train in all six fortes. Students can opt to pay tuition at the going rate for magical training in the setting, but most pay in service, typically serving for one year per year of study. The latter option might be the only one if the Society is part of somebody's army.

Initial magical training is relatively light: one spell of each forte. Accompanying this is significant education in martial matters – battlefield survival, tactics, and an overview of common military technology. All Society wizards also learn enough engineering to target fortifications intelligently and to create stable earthworks when using magic. As well, they're taught how to deploy volatile alchemical pastilles and other magical elixirs as weapons.

Advanced training includes more spells, some of them extremely potent. Experienced mages also learn thaumatological tricks useful in siege warfare: avoiding "friendly fire" incidents with Area spells, putting magical enhancements on large siege engines without breaking a sweat, using magical energy more efficiently, etc. "Alchemical warfare" is important, too, with some wizards learning to manufacture alchemical acids and poisons, others working on countermeasures (and elixirs that aid military leadership), and a few developing resistance through exposure. If the Society is a large force, senior members are likely to develop their mundane military skills, becoming artillerists, quartermasters, and spymasters, and even learning to lead entire armies.

Loyal Society members may also be trusted with secrets: seven secret spells, along with the surprising revelation that these aren't used to assault fortifications (it's difficult to improve on Create Door, Earthquake, and Rive), but to *defend* friendly operations. These are "Great" versions of Deflect Energy and Deflect Missiles, and "Mass" versions of five "Resist" spells. Used strategically, they let S³ wizards strike from a position of relative impunity. There are rumors of Mass Missile Shield and Mass Reverse Missiles, but this magic has never been confirmed by observers.

All of this supports the Society's battlefield tactics. These vary from battle to battle, but include:

● Moving wizards, support personnel, and siege equipment into position using Apportation, Flying Carpet, and Animation – and even zombies and elementals as beasts of burden.

● Gathering intelligence on enemy fortifications using Earth Vision, Find Weakness, Glass Wall, Hawk Vision, Projection, etc.

● Striking directly at stone structures with Earth to Air and Shape Earth, wooden ones with Create Fire and Essential Flame, and *anything* with Reshape and Rive.

● Getting friendly forces *past* enemy fortifications using Create Door (anywhere), Lockmaster (for locked gates), Shape Earth (for stone and earthen walls), and Shape Plant (for wooden gates).

● Harming enemy personnel – directly with Earthquake, Poltergeist, Stench, Storm, etc., and indirectly with mundane siege weapons that launch Flaming Missiles, or sling alchemical pastilles or Essential Acid. Pestilence is useful in *long* sieges.

● When defending, repairing stone structures via Create Earth, Shape Earth, and Earth to Stone; protecting wooden ones with Extinguish Fire; and fixing almost anything with Repair.

● Screening these operations behind Fog, Smoke, Mystic Mist, Pentagram, Scrywall, Force Wall, and Utter Wall – and protecting troops with "Deflect" and "Resist" spells, and their superior secret versions.

● Coordinating the above efforts through Great Voice, Message, Mind-Sending, and Telepathy.

Nothing says, "Target me first!" like wizardly robes and sparkly ephemera above a combatant's head.

One thing that the Society *doesn't* teach is small-scale self-defense magic, except as a steppingstone to strategic magic. Players of wizards who just want to sling Fireball spells and zap enemies with Deathtouch should find another style.

Required Skills: Engineer/TL3 (Combat *or* Mining); Expert Skill (Military Science); Hazardous Materials/TL3 (Magical); Soldier/TL3; Tactics.

Required Spells: Apportation; Counterspell; Ignite Fire; Magelock; Sense Foes; Shape Earth.

Perks: Area Spell Mastery*; Combat Ceremony*; Continuous Ritual*; Elixir Resistance (any elixir that exists in pastille form); Far-Casting 1-5*; Guild Rank 1-6; Huge Subjects 1-2*; Immunity to S^3 Pastilles of Death†; Immunity to S^3 Pastilles of Sleep†; Intuitive Cantrip (Avatar, Kindle, Pebbles, Reinforce, *or* Spark); Limited Energy Reserve 1-5 (S^3); Mass Magician (S^3); Mighty Spell (Poltergeist); Power Casting 1-2*; Precision Recharger; Psychic Guidance (Poltergeist); Reduced Footprint 1-2*; Rote Alchemy (Alkahest, Charisma, Death, Healing, Leadership, Paut, Sleep, *or* Universal Antidote); Sanctum 1-5; Secret Spell (Great Deflect Energy, Great Deflect Missile, Mass Resist Acid, Mass Resist Disease, Mass Resist Fire, Mass Resist Lightning, *or* Mass Resist Poison); Secret Words 1-5; Special Exercises (FP can exceed HT by 100%); Spell Duelist (S^3); Spell Hardiness 1-6 (any damaging spell on list).

Secret Spells: Great Deflect Energy; Great Deflect Missile; Mass Resist Acid; Mass Resist Disease; Mass Resist Fire; Mass Resist Lightning; Mass Resist Poison.

* For any applicable spell on the S^3 spell list.

† Grants total immunity to Elixir of Death or Elixir of Sleep, as applicable, when prepared in pastille form by an S^3 member using Rote Alchemy.

Optional Traits

Secondary Characteristics: Improved FP.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Energy Reserve; Fearlessness; Military Rank.

Disadvantages: Flashbacks; Missing Digit; Nightmares; One Eye; Wounded.

Skills: Administration; Alchemy/TL3; Architecture/TL3; Armoury/TL3 (Heavy Weapons); Artillery/TL3 (Catapult); Engineer/TL3 (Artillery, Combat, or Mining); Gunner/TL3 (Catapult); Intelligence Analysis/TL3; Leadership; Melee Weapon skills; Strategy; Thaumatology.

Spell List

The Society regards none of its spells as "useless," and therefore encourages members to study whatever their earlier training permits. The only condition is that they must learn the style's six required spells first.

Automata and Transport (A&T)

These 13 spells concern themselves with conjuring mindless or minimally intelligent spirits to move machinery, dig earthworks, hurl projectiles, and even transport men and materiel on flying carpets. Some S^3 wizards also reanimate corpses, using spirits that are neither "demonic" nor "evil" – although this is frowned upon in some quarters.

Spell	Prerequisites
Animation	M2, Dancing Object *or* Poltergeist
Apportation	M1
Control Earth Elemental	Summon Earth Elemental
Control Fire Elemental	Summon Fire Elemental
Control Zombie	Zombie
Create Earth Elemental	M2, Control Earth Elemental
Create Fire Elemental	M2, Control Fire Elemental
Dancing Object	M2, Apportation
Flying Carpet	Animation
Poltergeist	Apportation
Summon Earth Elemental	M1, any eight S^3 spells
Summon Fire Elemental	M1, any eight S^3 spells
Zombie	Dancing Object, Poltergeist, Animation

Breaching and Demolition (B&D)

The 14 spells of the B&D forte concern themselves with defeating fortifications, from simple earthworks and palisades, through stout doors and walls, to mountains! They use the controlled application of force to shape matter without regard for its nature, making the principles behind them different from those taught by "traditional" schools.

Spell	Prerequisites
Alter Terrain	M3, Earthquake, Geyser, Volcano
Create Door	M3, Lockmaster, Reshape
Earth to Air	Stone to Earth
Earth to Water	Earth to Air
Explode	Rive
Lockmaster	M2, Apportation
Move Terrain	Alter Terrain, Create Earth Elemental
Reshape	Shape Earth, Weaken
Rive	M2, Shatter
Shape Earth	Apportation
Shape Plant	Shape Earth
Shatter	Weaken
Stone to Earth	Earth to Stone
Weaken	Earth to Air

If magicians are able to significantly alter a battle, then there might arise a cottage industry in disguising mages.

Counter-Magic and Counter-Counter-Magic (CM&CCM)

While the Society defers to dedicated thaumatologist-warriors for wizard vs. wizard combat, it regards basic capability in this area as essential in the fog of war. These 13 spells offer specific and general countermeasures, and magic for manipulating mana – tools the Society regards as the necessary minimum for war.

Spell	Prerequisites
Counterspell	M1
Dispel Creation	Dispel Illusion, Earth to Air
Dispel Illusion	Counterspell, Great Ward, Hawk Vision
Dispel Magic	M2, Counterspell, two spells from each S^3 forte
Dispel Possession	M1, any five A&T spells
Drain Mana	Dispel Magic
Great Ward	M2, Ward
Pentagram	M2, five A&T spells, five CM&CCM spells
Restore Mana	Drain Mana
Scryguard	M1
Scrywall	Scryguard
Teleport Shield	M2, Watchdog, five CM&CCM spells
Ward	M1

Defense

The Society is best-known for its offensive B&D and Weapons fortes, but often finds itself charged with *stopping* besiegers or providing security for its siege train in the field. Its members wield these 24 spells to shore up earthworks, seal gates, extinguish flames, ward areas, and repel enemy attacks.

Spell	Prerequisites
Create Earth	Earth to Stone
Deflect Energy	Deflect Missile
Deflect Missile	Apportation
Earth to Stone	Shape Earth
Extinguish Fire	Ignite Fire
Fireproof	Extinguish Fire
Force Wall	M2, Deflect Energy, six *other* Defense spells
Great Deflect Energy	M2, Deflect Energy
Great Deflect Missile	M2, Deflect Missile
Magelock	M1
Mass Resist Acid	IQ13+, Resist Acid
Mass Resist Disease	IQ13+, Resist Disease
Mass Resist Fire	IQ13+, Resist Fire
Mass Resist Lightning	IQ13+, Resist Lightning
Mass Resist Poison	IQ13+, Resist Poison
Mystic Mist	M1, Fog *or* Smoke
Repair	M2, Reshape
Resist Acid	Create Acid
Resist Disease	Pestilence
Resist Fire	Fireproof
Resist Lightning	Storm
Resist Poison	Smoke
Utter Wall	M3, Force Wall, five CM&CCM spells
Watchdog	Sense Foes

Signals and Intelligence (S&I)

Experience has taught the Society that relying on external runners, scouts, and spies is *risky* in battle. These 18 spells provide basic information ("How heavy is that gate?" and "Where's the nearest lumber suitable for a trebuchet?"), secure communications, and details about weaknesses in enemy defenses.

Spell	Prerequisites
Earth Vision	Seek Earth, another S&I spell
Far-Hearing	M1, any "Seek" spell
Find Weakness	Glass Wall
Glass Wall	Earth Vision
Great Voice	Any three S^3 spells
Hawk Vision	M1, any "Seek" spell
Measurement	–
Message	M1, Great Voice
Mind-Sending	M1, Great Voice
Projection	Six S&I spells, including Far-Hearing *and* Hawk Vision
Seek Earth	–
Seek Fuel/TL3	–
Seek Pass	Seek Earth
Seek Plant	–
Sense Foes	–
Sense Observation	M1, Sense Foes
Telepathy	Mind-Sending
Transparency	M1, Glass Wall

Weapons

These 15 spells differ from those of the B&D forte in that they're effective against troops, not just structures. Some are for filling oil cauldrons and adding extra nastiness to siege-engine loads. Others generate freestanding barriers of burning or toxic substances. A few blast wide areas with devastating effects.

Spell	Prerequisites
Create Acid	M1, any seven S^3 spells
Create Fire	Ignite Fire
Create Fuel/TL3	Create Earth, Create Fire
Earthquake	M2, three B&D spells, three Weapons spells
Essential Acid	M2, Create Acid, Essential Flame
Essential Flame	M2, Create Fuel/TL3
Flaming Missiles	M2, five Weapons spells, including Create Fire
Fog	Any four S^3 spells
Geyser	M2, five B&D spells, five Weapons spells
Ignite Fire	–
Pestilence	M1, any seven S^3 spells
Smoke	Create Fire
Stench	Create Fire
Storm	M2, five B&D spells, five Weapons spells
Volcano	M2, seven B&D spells, seven Weapons spells

A wizards' guild and a mercenary company, the Society of Siege Sorcerers sells the service of magical siege warfare – both the giving end and the receiving end.

Secret Spell: Great Deflect Energy

Blocking

Works identically to Deflect Energy (p. B246), but protects an *area.* This is valuable when the target isn't obvious, or when an attack bombards everything in the area. In the latter case, it screens against an *entire* rapid-fire attack or volley. Assess the energy cost exactly as for an Area spell.

Base Cost: 1. Minimum radius 2 yards.
Prerequisites: Magery 2, Secret Spell (Deflect Energy), *and* Deflect Energy.

Secret Spell: Great Deflect Missile

Blocking

As Great Deflect Energy (above), but extends Deflect Missile (p. B251) over an area instead.

Base Cost: 1. Minimum radius 2 yards.
Prerequisites: Magery 2, Secret Spell (Deflect Missile), *and* Deflect Missile.

Secret Spells: Mass Resist (Effect)

Area

This isn't one spell but a set of spells that protect multiple subjects in an area while counting as a single spell "on." There's a Mass version of each of Resist Acid (*Magic,* p. 190), Resist Disease (*Magic,* p. 90), Resist Fire (p. B247), Resist Lightning (*Magic,* p. 196), and Resist Poison (*Magic,* p. 91). In all cases, the effect is cast on people in the area at the moment of casting, not on the area itself.

Duration: As regular Resist spell.
Base Cost: As regular Resist spell. Minimum radius 2 yards.
Time to cast: 1 second per energy point.
Prerequisites: IQ 13+, Secret Spell (Mass Resist (Effect)), *and* Resist (Effect).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every **GURPS** product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of **GURPS** *Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the **GURPS Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created **GURPS Powers** (with Phil Masters), **GURPS Martial Arts** (with Peter Dell'Orto), and the **GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy,** and **GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . and the list keeps growing.

Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, cooking, and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie. They have two cats, Banshee and Zephyra, and a noisy parrot, Circe.

PERFECT DEFENSE

BY KELLY PEDERSEN

The knights fell back, utterances of dismay and fear audible even through their full helms. Two of their number were already fallen, blood pouring from rents in their heavy plate armor.

The demonologist facing them brandished a rapier – black, and edged by red tongues of hellfire. His chilling laugh echoed through the shadowy cave. "Fools!" he shouted. "My blade was forged in the Pit itself! It can tear your paltry armor like parchment!"

The eldest knight stepped forward, touching the crucifix engraved on his breastplate and whispering a prayer. His foe grinned, rapier poised to run him through . . .

Imbuement Skills, introduced in **GURPS Power-Ups 1,** are a novel addition to the **GURPS** toolkit. They allow someone to pick up and improve any otherwise-normal weapon – an ability that had previously been difficult to model.

Weapons aren't the only equipment that legend and fiction have portrayed as being enhanced by an individual's personal power, though. Consider the sorcerer who enchants his simple robes to be more resistant to flames, or the electrokinetic psi who prevents his metal armor from conducting a current, or the holy warrior who calls on the power of his god to extend the protection of his shield to his companions. These are all excellent examples of *Defensive Imbuements* – Imbuement Skills for armor and shields.

In general, Defensive Imbuements function like the Imbuement Skills in **Power-Ups 1.** Like those skills, they can only affect an object you have ready, cost FP for each use, and require a skill roll every turn. However, several special rules apply.

Specialties

Defensive Imbuements don't require specialization by specific armor or shield type. For instance, the Fireproof Armor skill lets you make leather armor and plate armor fire-resistant with equal facility. However, several skills require you to specialize in Armor or Shield (see below). These two specialties default to one another at -4.

Categorization

Defensive Imbuements are a new functional category, distinct from the Enhancement Skills and Transformation Skills of **Power-Ups 1.** This category is further split into three classes on the basis of items affected:

General: Both the Armor specialty *and* the Shield specialty exist.

Armor: Only the Armor specialty exists.

Shield: Only the Shield specialty exists.

> *The sorcerer who enchants his simple robes to be more resistant to flames is a perfect example of using a Defensive Imbuement.*

Using Defensive Imbuements

As with Imbuement Skills for weapons, using a Defensive Imbuement is a free action that requires no concentration. You can activate it on your turn, and it will remain active until the beginning of your *next* turn.

Unless you took an All-Out Attack maneuver on your turn, you can also activate a Defensive Imbuement in response to any attack you're aware of. To do so, roll against (Imbuement Skill/2) + 3, adding +1 for Combat Reflexes. Once you activate a Defensive Imbuement this way, it remains active until the start of your next turn, aiding against all later attacks – even those you're *not* aware of!

For *armor,* there are no additional rolls. Your Defensive Imbuement automatically provides its benefits. Some effects depend on "damage stopped," which is always the lower of the damage rolled and the armor's DR.

Shields require an additional step. To benefit from an imbued shield, you must make a successful block defense with it. This means that it's of no value against attacks that you cannot block. Imbued shields are generally more effective than imbued armor, however. If you successfully block with an imbued shield, it usually stops and has the appropriate imbuement effect on *all* of the attack's damage, unless this would be sufficient to destroy the shield (see *Damage to Shields,* p. B484).

On the battlefield, there could be greater emphasis placed on magical abilities that are invisible or hard to detect.

DEFENSIVE IMBUEMENTS

Without further ado . . . the skills!

Blinding Defense

General; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 2.

Your armor or shield flares brilliantly when struck, emits light-warping energy that traces the path of the attacks it stops, or otherwise momentarily blinds attackers. Treat this as Obscure (p. B40) directed at vision. The Vision penalty equals *half* the damage stopped (round down), to a maximum of -10.

Against a melee attack, this affects everyone within a two-yard radius of you after you're struck. Against a ranged attack, it affects a two-yard radius around your distant foe instead. These effects last until your next turn.

Modifiers: You can add the Defensive modifier (the Vision penalty doesn't affect *you*) by rolling at -5.

Blunting Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

This skill enables armor to more effectively resist being cut. Perhaps spirits dull the attack's edge, or maybe you reinforce the armor with your chi, making it impossible to slice apart. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against *cutting* damage.

Modifiers: -5 to *triple* DR, or -10 to *quadruple* DR.

Dancing Shield

Shield; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

You can remove your shield and let it hang in the air, where it defends you without further action on your part. This is like any other use of an Imbuement Skill: It takes no preparation, requires 1 FP, and calls for a skill roll at the usual modifiers. You cannot "stack" Dancing Shield with any other Imbuement Skill, though, because once you activate it, the shield isn't ready in your hand!

On the turn you activate Dancing Shield, the shield hovers in the air and blocks attacks directed at you, with a Shield skill equal to your Dancing Shield skill. This leaves you free to do something else with your shield arm. The shield cannot travel beyond arm's reach and keeps up with you at all times. It can only make block defenses against attacks from a 180° arc (three hex-sides). Choose this facing at the start of your turn.

Enemies can attack the shield at penalty equal to its SM. It can block these attacks just as if they were directed at you, or dodge at (Dancing Shield/2) + 3, at -1 per defense after the first. Use its usual DR and HP to determine breakage. If a foe manages to seize it (a grapple with DX or an unarmed grappling skill, still with SM penalties), the imbuement ends immediately and the shield ceases to be animated.

On later turns, you may pay 1 FP to keep the shield defending . . . or not. If you don't, the shield's effective skill drops by one, cumulative from turn to turn. Should skill ever fall below 3, the imbuement ends and the shield falls to the ground. The only way to erase the skill penalty or "revive" the shield is to grab it and reactivate the skill.

This skill's animation effect allows you to release the shield as a free action, even if it would normally take one or several Ready maneuvers to remove normally. Likewise, if you command the shield to return while it's still animated, it only takes a single Ready maneuver to return to your hand.

Modifiers: You can make the shield capable of defending other people, too! Specify a radius within which it can travel and make blocks for allies. The shield can only defend one person at a time, whom you must designate at the start of each turn. Your roll is at -1 per yard of radius.
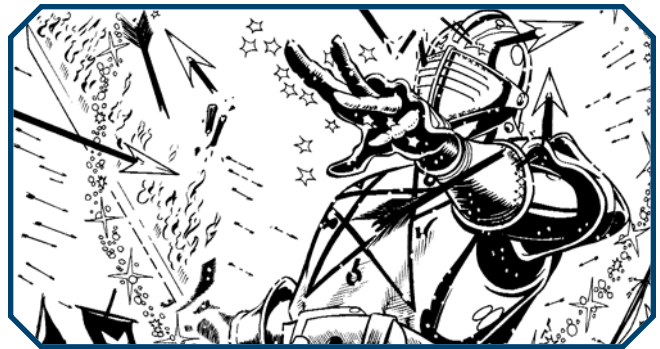
Energizing Defense

General; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

You absorb the energy that your armor or shield stops, and you use it to improve yourself. Each point of damage that your armor's DR stops – or the *full* damage of an attack that you successfully block with your shield – becomes one character point that you can use to improve your traits (anything but skills), exactly as per the Absorption enhancement on p. B46. The maximum number of points you can store equals your armor DR or *half* your Energizing Defense skill, whichever is higher. You lose these points at the rate of one per second, starting with unused points. Improved traits disappear as the points drain away. You can also use points to heal lost FP (3 points per FP) or HP (2 points per HP); healing doesn't drain away, but the points are immediately removed from the pool.

Make a roll against Energizing Defense (Armor) when you're hit and your DR stops damage. Roll against Energizing Defense (Shield) after a successful Block roll. Success means the damage stopped is added to your pool as explained above (for this purpose, your attacker rolls damage even on a successful block). No modifiers ever apply to this roll to convert stopped damage into points.

To *use* stored points, declare how many you're allocating and make another Energizing Defense roll.

Mages might start wearing gear and equipment associated with common soldiers, to avoid being detected.

Modifiers: No modifier to heal HP or FP; -2 to improve HP or FP over your normal level; -4 to improve attributes or other secondary characteristics; -6 to improve anything else.

This roll doesn't cost FP, but failure means the points you wanted to spend are *gone*. Success means you spend the points to improve the target trait as desired. You cannot reallocate points once they're spent.

You cannot combine this skill with Vengeful Defense (p. 14).
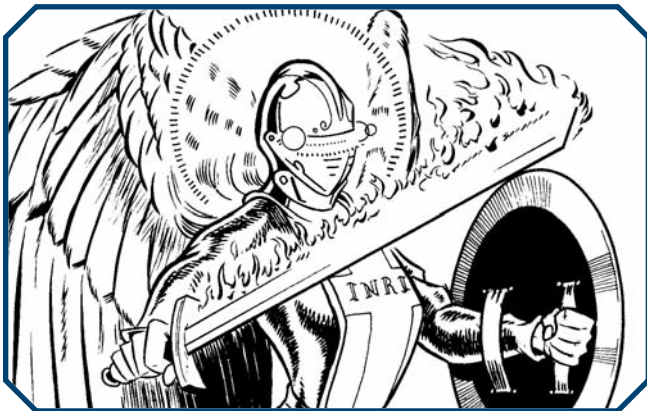
Expand Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 1.

You can expand the coverage of a single piece of armor to protect more of your body. This might represent physically stretching the armor, generating a force field anchored on it, or diverting attacks so that they hit it instead of other locations. You can extend the DR of the chosen armor to some or all of your unarmored locations, increase the DR of a less-armored location to that armor's DR, and/or remove chinks in all of your armor. The more you try to do, the larger the penalty.

Modifiers: The smaller the chosen bit of armor, the more challenging it is to extend: no modifier for torso armor; -1 for paired leg or arm armor; -2 for full head protection (skull, eyes, *and* face), armor on *one* leg or arm, or paired hand or foot armor; or -4 for armor on just the skull, eyes, face, neck, vitals, groin, or one hand or foot. The further you extend the armor, the tougher the roll: Add -1 *per hit location* to protect skull, eyes, face, neck, vitals, groin, hands, or feet; -2 for arms, legs, or the full head; or -4 for the torso. If a location is already armored and its DR would no more than double, halve its penalty (minimum -1). Optionally, add -3 to eliminate *all* chinks in armor.

Example: Sgt. Flynn is on leave in a down-market spaceport bar when he's attacked by a pistol-wielding thug. Flynn was expecting trouble, so he's wearing a DR 12 reflex bodysuit that covers his torso, groin, and limbs, as well as DR 10 armored

shades over his eyes. Seeing this, the thug targets Flynn's unarmored areas.

Luckily, Flynn is a psi-trooper with Expand Armor. He creates a psychokinetic force field that transfers the energy of his enemy's attacks to his armored areas. He's extending his torso armor, which gives no modifier. He wants to cover his hands (-1), feet (-1), neck (-1), and entire head (-2). None of these penalties are halved, as the locations are unarmored and going from DR 0 to 12 more than doubles DR. The total penalty is thus -5.

If Flynn had extended his armored shades to shield his entire head, he would have started at -4 for minuscule eye-only armor. To this he would have added -2 for full-head coverage. This would have given him -6, and only his head would have been protected – and only with DR 10!

Fireproof Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

This skill makes your armor more resistant to heat and flame by magically cooling it, materially transforming it into something more heat-resistant, etc. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against *burning* damage. In addition, treat the armor itself as if it were one flammability class harder to set alight (see *Making Things Burn,* p. B433).

Modifiers: -5 for *triple* DR (and two flammability-class shifts), or -10 for *quadruple* DR (and three flammability-class shifts).

Healthful Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

You surround your armor with spirits of good health, wrap it in bio-psychic healing energies, or otherwise enhance its resistance to poison and disease. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against *toxic* damage that it would normally affect – and apply 1/4 of its DR even against toxic attacks that usually *bypass* armor, including blood, contact, follow-up, and respiratory agents.

Modifiers: -5 for *triple* DR (and half DR vs. toxic damage that bypasses armor), or -10 for *quadruple* DR (and full DR vs. toxic damage that bypasses armor).

Impenetrable Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

Your armor resists punctures, perhaps by hardening or freezing around the incoming strike. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against *impaling* and *piercing* damage.

Modifiers: -5 to *triple* DR, or -10 to *quadruple* DR.

If magicians aren't able to wear armor or use weapons, then someone might develop "fake" armor that looks like the real thing and disguises a mage.

Insulated Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

Your armor gains a rubber lining, electrokinetically diverts currents away from you, or otherwise becomes more electricity-resistant. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against electrical damage and attacks enhanced with Surge (p. B105). If the armor is metal, *don't* reduce its DR to 1 against such attacks (p. B432). All armor gains a level of Hardened (p. B47) against the armor divisor of electrolaser, particle, antiparticle, and plasma weapons.

Modifiers: -5 for *triple* DR (and Hardened 2), or -10 for *quadruple* DR (and Hardened 3).

Lighten Armor

General; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 1.

You can reduce your armor or shield's effective weight for encumbrance purposes – perhaps by magically lightening it or telekinetically supporting it. On an unmodified roll, reduce weight by 20%.

Modifiers: -2 per additional 20% weight reduction, to a maximum of -8, which makes the armor or shield completely weightless.

Nullifying Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

This skill strengthens your armor against damaging effects generated by a particular class of powers. You must specialize by *source:* Nullifying Armor (Magic), Nullifying Armor (Psionic), Nullifying Armor (Spirit), etc. Source specialties have no defaults between them. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against damage of the chosen source.

Modifiers: -5 to *triple* DR, or -10 to *quadruple* DR.

Padded Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

Your armor becomes more resistant to blunt impacts. Perhaps you surround it with a rubbery force field, or call up protective spirits that learned their art when people fought with fists, rocks, and sticks. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against *crushing* damage.

Modifiers: -5 to *triple* DR, or -10 to *quadruple* DR. Roll at -3 to treat your armor as non-flexible against falling damage, eliminating blunt trauma in that one specific case.

Reinforce Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 2.

Your armor becomes particularly hard, acquires a force field that blunts penetrators, or gains another effect that allows it to resist armor divisors. This gives it the Hardened enhancement (p. B47). The basic level is Hardened 1, but you can improve this by taking a penalty to the roll.

Modifiers: -2 per level of Hardened past the first.

Resilient Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 2.

You can repair structural damage to your armor instantly, or transform it so that it's difficult to ablate in the first place. This negates the Semi-Ablative limitation (p. B47) and reduces the Ablative limitation to Semi-Ablative. This won't restore points of DR lost while the Resilient Armor skill wasn't active.

Modifiers: -3 to remove the Ablative limitation entirely.

Restorative Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

Your armor defends against insidious attacks against your energy, magically turning aside essence-draining strikes, using your chi to defend against attacks on your body's resources, etc. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against *fatigue* damage that it would usually affect – and apply 1/4 of its DR even against fatigue attacks that normally *bypass* armor.

Modifiers: -5 for *triple* DR (and half DR vs. fatigue damage that bypasses armor), or -10 for *quadruple* DR (and full DR vs. fatigue damage that bypasses armor).

Rigid Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 1.

Your flexible armor becomes rigid. It's no longer subject to blunt trauma (p. B379) and provides its DR against grappling maneuvers such as Arm Lock and Neck Snap (see pp. B403-404).

Sovereign Armor

Armor; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

You can supernaturally rebuild your armor, or alter it to be less susceptible to acid, disintegration, etc. On an unmodified roll, *double* your armor's DR against *corrosion* damage, and use only 2/3 of the damage roll to compute DR loss.

Conversely, armies might try to protect their mages by having some or all soldiers dress in the manner of wizards, becoming decoys.

Modifiers: -5 for *triple* DR (and 1/2 damage to find DR loss), or -10 for *quadruple* DR (and 1/3 damage to find DR loss).

Spiritual Defense

General; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 1.

Gives the armor or shield the Affects Insubstantial enhancement (p. B102), allowing it to block or protect against the attacks of insubstantial creatures such as spirits.

Subtle Defense

General; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 1.

Your armor or shield becomes difficult to spot, as if it had Low or No Signature (p. B106). Perhaps it grows transparent, changes color to match your flesh, or confuses viewers' minds. Observers must make a Perception roll at -2 even to notice that it's there.

Modifiers: -1 per additional -2 to Perception rolls, to a limit of -4 to skill giving -10 to Per.

Even if an attacker makes his roll to see your armor or shield, the concealment may help you. If you imbue your shield, increase its Defense Bonus by 50% (round down) or +1, whichever is better. If you imbue your armor, attackers must add half the Per penalty above to the usual penalty to target chinks in armor.

Thunderous Defense

Defense; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 1.

Your armor or shield rings loudly when struck, magnifies the sound of blocked blows back at attackers, emits a psychic scream on contact, or otherwise briefly deafens assailants. Treat this as Obscure (p. B40) directed at hearing. The Hearing penalty equals *half* the damage stopped (round down), to a maximum of -10.

Against a melee attack, this affects everyone within a two-yard radius of you after you're struck. Against a ranged attack, it affects a two-yard radius around your distant attacker instead. These effects last until your next turn.

Modifiers: You can add the Defensive modifier (the Hearing penalty doesn't affect *you*) by rolling at -5.

Vengeful Defense

General; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

Your shield magically returns arrows to the shooter, your armor psychokinetically redirects some of the force of incoming blows back at the source, or something similar. Your armor or shield reflects the damage that it stops back on your attacker, exactly as per the Reflection enhancement (p. B47). The attacker gets no active defense the first time this happens, but defends normally thereafter.

You cannot combine this skill with Energizing Defense (pp. 11-12).

Widen Shield

Shield; DX/Very Hard

Prerequisite: Imbue 3.

Your shield stretches, a force field extends out from its edges, attacks are pulled in toward it, etc. This allows it to provide you and possibly others cover from explosions, cones, and area-effect attacks. On an unmodified roll, your shield widens just enough to afford cover to *you* and anybody within a step of you who successfully dives for cover (p. B377). You can make the cover larger – enabling more-distant allies to dive for it – by taking a penalty.

Modifiers: -3 to extend the shield to cover a two-yard radius around you, and -3 per doubling of radius thereafter.

Unlike most Imbuement Skills for shields, Widen Shield doesn't absolutely require a successful block to be useful. If you use the skill *on your turn,* choose an initial facing for the cover it provides. Against attacks from that direction, you're considered to be behind cover without requiring a defense roll! This makes Widen Shield useful against normally unblockable attacks, such as beams and bullets.

To change the facing in response to an attack from another direction, however, you must make a Block roll. You must also do this when you use Widen Shield defensively. In either case, success at the block defense counts as a successful attempt to dive for cover.

Those behind a shield affected by this skill enjoy cover DR; see p. B408. Work this out normally for the shield. It isn't invulnerable!

> *The knight stepped forward, touching the crucifix engraved on his breastplate, and whispering a prayer.*

The demonologist laughed and struck – and his laugh choked off unfinished, as his rapier's point screeched harmlessly across his target's breastplate. "How?" he wailed, as the knight stepped forward, longsword raised for a counterstroke.

"No matter how deep your blade was forged, apostate, the force that defends me is beyond its reach." Then the longsword dropped, cutting off the demonologist's head as abruptly as his laugh . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Pedersen lives and works in Saskatoon, Canada, where he continues to search for a job that will both pay for gaming books and allow him enough free time to participate in gaming sessions. He feels that writing for *Pyramid* is a good step toward fulfilling both of these goals. He enjoys a wide range of game systems and styles, but he remains committed to annoying his friends by pointing out, "You know, we could do this with **GURPS.**" In his free time, he bothers his cat.

THE VULTURE SQUAD

BY BRIAN ROGERS

Once the battle is over, all but the most virtuous or disciplined of triumphant armies loot the bodies of the fallen. Weapons, jewelry, and even boots are scavenged. After the bodies are picked clean, the Vulture Squad shows up. They search the bodies for the important things: the heart of a boy killed by a single blow, the thighbone of a righteous warrior, and other prizes. These ghoulish objects have value on the ritual magic market, and their original owners don't need them anymore.

Gervasio Cortina started the Vulture Squad. He spent his childhood as the lookout for a gang who had once been hired by a necromancer to get them the skull and heart of a recently deceased businessman. Gervasio remembered the digging, the guard dog's viciousness, and the penalty for robbing a cemetery – but he also remembered that the night's work paid more than the gang had made in months. Conscripted by authorities who wanted warm bodies in uniform rather than prison, Gervasio had an epiphany after his first skirmish: There was *money* here, just lying around for the taking!

Promising his squad mates a cut in the proceeds if they distracted the officers, Gervasio salvaged several hearts and skulls, labeled their owners' names and type of demise as best he could, and smuggled them back to his old client with a request for commission. In return he got a nice pouch of coin with notes on what to look for next time. After paying off his allies he secured promises from them of more help later, drawing them deeper into his activities. They were his now, bound by money and guilt, but Gervasio was savvy enough to lead with the carrot and leave the stick to the imagination.

Gervasio then purchased a case of brandy to secure the services of Anadée the Elf. Anadée had suffered a personal cataclysm a century earlier – something so bad his family publically disowned him. He had crawled into both a bottle and the human army's animal service, tending to the horses, dogs, and pack animals. His natural gift for animal magic served him well enough to earn food, lodging, and liquor. By promising more and better alcohol, Gervasio recruited the person best suited to supply dogs and horses and keep them calm amid the stench of blood and rot.

After the next battle, Vulture Squad was in business. They sneaked past their officers and hunted for items on the magician's list: arrowheads sliced from eyes for clairvoyance spells, mud from the lungs of a drowned man, and the like. No component was too grotesque for Gervasio to ignore. That haul bought him a promotion to sergeant, which made life easier. Now if only he could find a pliable officer . . .

Fortune smiled on him then, via a letter from his buyer indicating that a young magician named Roque Dávilo had just been drafted. Being lettered and (by all appearances) the by-blow of some nobleman, Roque had been made a lieutenant. Gervasio didn't hesitate to spread some silver to get Vulture Squad posted under the boy. Roque was unsure in battle, but he knew enough necromancy to educate Gervasio on where the real profit was: dying tears and last breaths and other metaphysical prizes. Better still, his head held a list of other ritual magicians, necromancers, and alchemists who might also be interested in the Squad's unique product line.

In war, come what may,
there is this much I can say,
if a man has two hands
gold will surely roll his way.
– Bartolome Torres Naharro,
Soldadesca

A campaign could be built around a group of non-magical PCs dressed as magical decoys, separated from the group.
Do they continue the charade, or do they try to prove they're less powerful?

USING THE VULTURE SQUAD

The most likely time for the heroes to encounter the Vulture Squad is if they too need something from the battlefield – a lost object or the body of a friend ("we can give you *most* of his body"). Alternately, the corpse mutilation might have been noticed and the adventurers tasked to stop it. Or perhaps Gervasio and his allies, with their air of corruption and access to funds, are rivals in a wartime campaign. The Squad has advantages in the form of more money and better gear, but they are likely not as skilled as the heroes .

The above assumes that the items Vulture Squad deals in are unsavory and even illegal, and that their actions occur without their superiors' knowledge. It is possible that a few more officers are skimming off the profits and providing support, or that the army has a ritual magic arm with the Squad as an established entity (a 10-member squad – plus the Lieutenant, Sergeant, and Anadée – will likely outnumber the PCs). This works best if Gervasio initiated the idea, earning his sergeant's stripes and ritually skilled lieutenant.

Unsavory as the Vulture Squad's business is, they are filling a need. War is messy, and entrepreneurial soldiers have a long history of finding profit streams, even ones that are literally blood and tears.

GERVASIO CORTINA

103 points

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 9; Block 9.
5'9"; 165 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: Spanish (Native/Broken) [-2].

Advantages

Acute Hearing 1 [2]; Acute Vision 1 [2]; Fearlessness 2 [4]; Military Rank 2 [10]; Patron (First client; 6 or less) [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Disadvantages

Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Callous [-5]; Duty (Army; 12 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-15]; Greed (12) [-15]; Reputation -2 (Lax soldier; Army; 10 or less) [-2].

Quirks: Careful; Distinctive Features (perpetual stubble). [-2]

Skills

Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Broadsword (A) DX [2]-12; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-12; Forensics/TL3 (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Knife (E) DX [1]-12; Merchant (Necromantic Components) (E) IQ+2 [4]-14; Search (A) Per+1 [4]-13; Shield (E) DX [1]-12; Smuggling (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Soldier/TL3 (A) IQ [2]-12; Stealth (A) DX [2]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-12; Teamster (equines) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

ELF

70 points

Attribute Modifiers: ST-1 [-10]; DX+1 [20].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: Per+1 [5].
Advantages: Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Magery 0 [5]; Perfect Balance [15]; Telescopic Vision 1 [5]; Unaging [15]; Voice [10].
Racially Learned Skills: Connoisseur (Natural Environments) (A) IQ-1 [1]-9.

ANADÉE

86 points

ST 9 [0]; **DX** 11 [0]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 8 [-20].
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 8 [0].
Basic Speed 4.75 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0]; Dodge 7; Parry 8.
5'11"; 120 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Western [0], Elven [2].
Languages: Elvish (Native) [0]; English (Broken/None) [1]; French (Broken/None) [1]; Spanish (Broken/None) [1].

Advantages

Animal Friend 4 [20]; Elf (above) [70]; Rank (Military) 1 [5].

Disadvantages

Alcoholism [-15]; Bad Temper (15) [-5]; Chronic Depression (15) [-7]; Code of Honor (Professional, toward the animals in his care) [-10]; Duty (Army; 12 or less) [-10]; Social Stigma (Publically Disowned) [-10].

Skills

Animal Handling (Dogs) (A) IQ+3 [1]-15*; Animal Handling (Equines) (A) IQ-1 [1]-15*; Bow (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Packing (A) IQ+3 [1]-15*; Riding (Horse) (A) DX+3 [1]-14*; Ritual Magic (Elven) (VH) IQ-1

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*As mentioned on p. 37, magic has a number of similarities with modern-day armaments. The **GURPS WWII** line has information on the biggest large-scale modern war. Read for parallels!*

. . . by then my fellow molchileros had joined in, along with local peasants who knew no band other than their greed, and even some vivandiéres, whores and sulters who had migrated to Oudkerk, drawn by the smell of booty. They followed after the soldiers, plundering anything that was left, a flock of crows leaving in their passing nothing but naked corpses.

– *Arturo Perez Reverte,* **The Sun Over Breda**

[4]-11; Ritual Path of Communication and Empathy (VH) IQ-1 [4]-11.; Shortsword (A) DX [2]-11; Survival (Woodlands) (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Teamster (Equines) (A) IQ+3 [1]-15*; Veterinary/TL3 (H) IQ+2 [1]-14*.

* Includes +4 from Animal Friend

ROQUE DÁVILO

100 points

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 7.
5'8"; 105 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: Spanish (Native) [0]; Farsi (Accented/None) [2]; French (Broken) [2]; Latin (Native) [6].

Advantages

Contact Group (Ritual Necromancers; Skill-15; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [10]; Magery 1 [15]; Military Rank 3 [15]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].
*Perks:* Alcohol Tolerance; No Hangover. [2]

Disadvantages

Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Duty (Army; 12 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-15]; Greed (12) [-15]; Overconfidence (15) [-2]; Post-Combat Shakes (12) [-5]; Selfish (15) [-2]; Sense of Duty (Gervasio) [-2]; Skinny [-5].

Skills

Alchemy/TL3 (VH) IQ-3 [1]-10; Broadsword (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Forensics/TL3 (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Knife (E) DX [1]-10; Politics (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Riding (Horse) (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Ritual Magic (Necromancy) (VH) IQ [4]-13*; Ritual Path of Body Control (VH) IQ-1 [2]-12*; Ritual Path of Necromantic Magic (VH) IQ [4]-13*; Soldier/TL3 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12.

* Includes +1 for Magery.
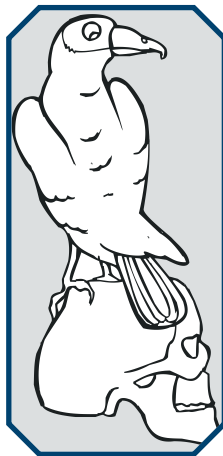
BASIC VULTURE SQUAD MEMBER

47 points

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 11 [5]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 9; Block 9.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: Spanish (Native/None) [-3].

Advantages

Fearlessness 1 [2]; Military Rank 1 [5].

Disadvantages

Duty (Vulture Squad; 6 or less; Involuntary; Nonhazardous) [-2]; Duty (Army; 12 or less; Extremely Hazardous) [-15]; Greed (15) [-7]; Reputation -2 (Lax soldier; Army; 10 or less) [-2].

Skills

Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Broadsword (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Carousing (E) HT [1]-11; Crossbow (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Forensics/TL3 (H) IQ-2 [1]-8; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Search (A) Per+1 [4]-12; Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Soldier/TL3 (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Stealth (A) DX [2]-11.

Notes

This character has $1,300 in gear, magical items, and currency. New player characters using these stats as a template must spend an extra 3 points to receive this 30% additional starting wealth (see pp. B26 and B27).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Rogers is disturbed that writing this article did not disturb him. Or perhaps did not disturb him any more than he is already disturbed. In any event, it's likely that eight years of writing for *Pyramid* has caused some fundamental changes to his brain, such that it might now be used as a spell component for ritual magic. Brian lives in Connecticut with his wife and daughter, where he works in human resources and is deathly afraid that someone will come by asking for a cup of gray matter because they have to finish a "terror" spell.

BATTLE STRATEGIES

BASED ON *GURPS MASS COMBAT* BY DAVID PULVER

GURPS Mass Combat is just the thing for those who want to incorporate huge battles into their **GURPS** games, and this issue of *Pyramid* includes a game aid ideal for using that supplement.

Two sets of cards are given. First are the Battle Strategy cards, which show the military strategies available in the **Mass Combat** rules. The second are the Risk Modifier cards, which help players remember their chosen values. These cards are designed to be visible across a game table, but allow players and the GM to *select* their strategies and risks in secret.

Print pp. 18-20 on cardstock, making sure that your machine is set to print in black and white (sometimes called "grayscale"). Cut out the cards. For durability, or if you can only print on paper, slip each card into a trading-card sleeve.

Print one set of cards per player, plus a set for the GM. If desired, print a second set of cards for each player as a Desperate strategies deck. Either print these on different color cardstock (if the cards will be obscured in trading-card sleeves); or mark the cards, such as writing a "D" on the cards with a highlighter, so that everyone knows of the difference.

The deck also includes a Desperate card. If you decide to create a separate Desperate deck, discard this card. Otherwise, after everyone has selected a Battle Strategy but before revealing their cards, anyone who wants to turn his strategy Desperate places the Desperate card on top of his strategy choice. No strategy cards may be changed once the Desperate card is placed.
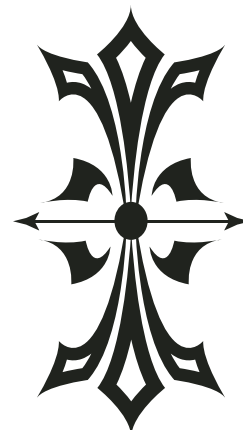

BATTLE STRATEGY — ALL-OUT ATTACK

Category: Attack
Strategy Skill: +2
Special Rules: Inflict +5% casualties on win; suffer double casualties

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BATTLE STRATEGY — ATTACK

Category: Attack
Strategy Skill: 0
Special Rules: None

BATTLE STRATEGY — DESPERATE

Category: None
Strategy Skill: additional +4
Special Rules: May only be played with another strategy; may not be used with Deliberate Attack, Deliberate Defense, or Skirmish; suffer 10% more casualties; Misfortunes of War rolls at +1

BATTLE STRATEGY — ALL-OUT DEFENSE

Category: Defense*
Strategy Skill: +2
Special Rules: Reduce own PB loss by 1; suffer double casualties
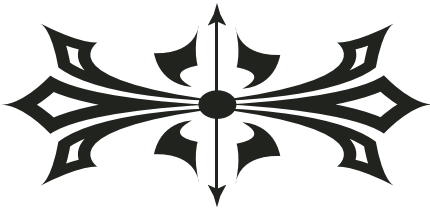
* Defense strategies allow DB but cannot gain PB.

BATTLE STRATEGY
DEFENSE

Category: Defense*
Strategy Skill: +1
Special Rules: None

   * Defense strategies allow DB but cannot gain PB

BATTLE STRATEGY
DELIBERATE ATTACK

Category: Attack
Strategy Skill: +1†
Special Rules: Halve defender DB; surrenders initiative

   † Modified for special class superiority and other factors; see description.

BATTLE STRATEGY
DELIBERATE DEFENSE

Category: Defense*
Strategy Skill: +1†
Special Rules: Inflict +5% casualties on win/tie; surrenders initiative
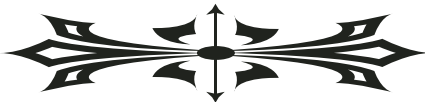
   * Defense strategies allow DB but cannot gain PB.
   † Modified for special class superiority and other factors; see description.

BATTLE STRATEGY
FIGHTING RETREAT

Category: Retreat
Strategy Skill: +3
Special Rules: Escape on win/tie; logistic casualties and give enemy extra +1 PB on loss; halve enemy casualties

BATTLE STRATEGY
FULL RETREAT

Category: Retreat
Strategy Skill: +8†
Special Rules: Escape; suffer 10% fewer casualties; take logistic casualties; inflict no casualties

   † Modified for special class superiority and other factors; see description.

BATTLE STRATEGY
INDIRECT ATTACK

Category: Attack
Strategy Skill: -3†
Special Rules: Double margin on win; repeated attempts penalized

   † Modified for special class superiority and other factors; see description.

BATTLE STRATEGY
MOBILE DEFENSE

Category: Defense*
Strategy Skill: 0†
Special Rules: Enemy gains extra +1 PB; suffer 5% fewer casualties
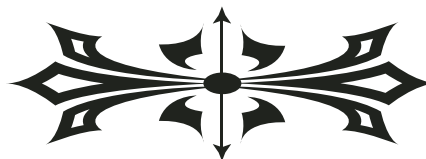
   * Defense strategies allow DB but cannot gain PB.
   † Modified for special class superiority and other factors; see description.

BATTLE STRATEGY
PARLEY

Category: Defense*
Strategy Skill: 0
Special Rules: Surrenders initiative; Defense at -1 if rejected

   * Defense strategies allow DB but cannot gain PB.

BATTLE STRATEGY
RAID

Category: Raid and Skirmish
Strategy Skill: 0†
Special Rules: Can only reduce enemy PB; may inflict logistic casualties on win

   † Modified for special class superiority and other factors; see description.
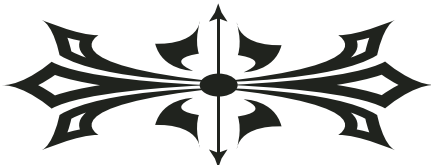
BATTLE STRATEGY
RALLY

Category: Defense*
Strategy Skill: -2
Special Rules: Allows Leadership-2 roll to end confusion.

   * Defense strategies allow DB but cannot gain PB.
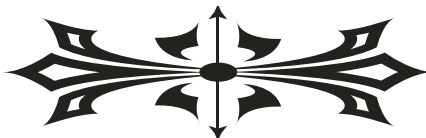
BATTLE STRATEGY
SKIRMISH

Category: Raid and Skirmish
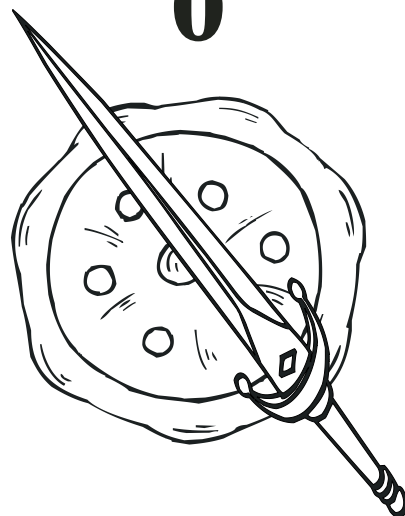*Strategy Skill:* +2†
Special Rules: Halve margin on win; can't gain PB; suffer 5% fewer casualties

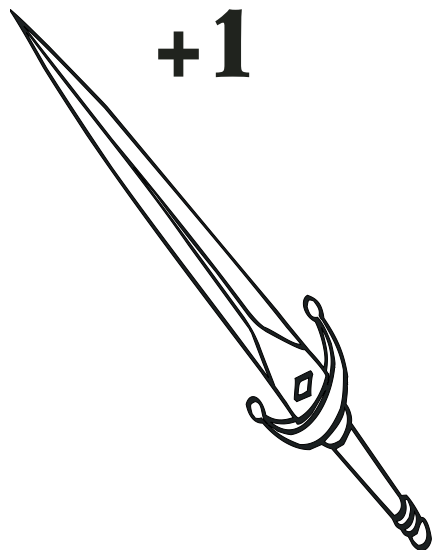   † Modified for special class superiority and other factors; see description.
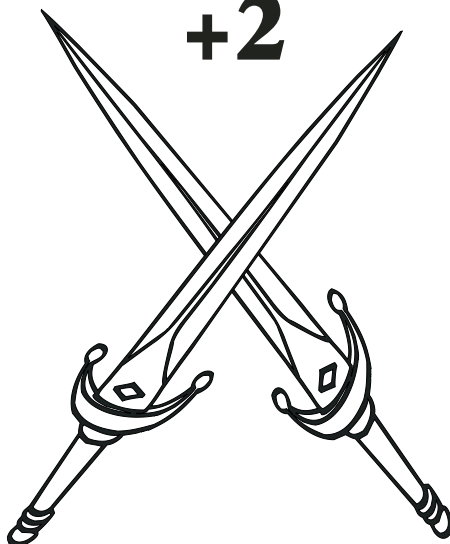
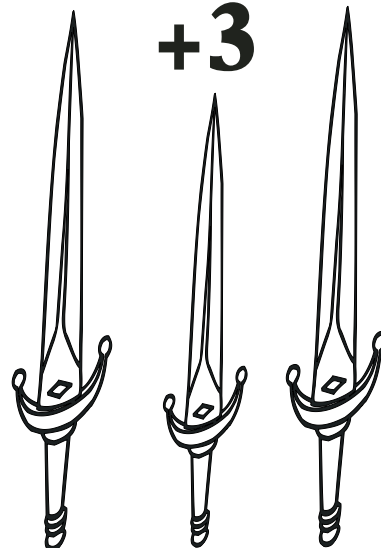## RISK MODIFIER
0

RISK MODIFIER
+1

RISK MODIFIER
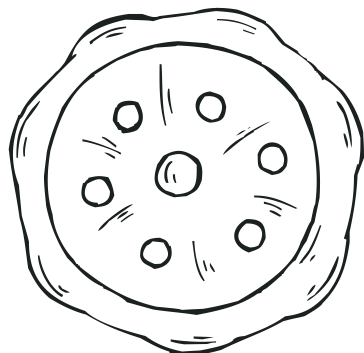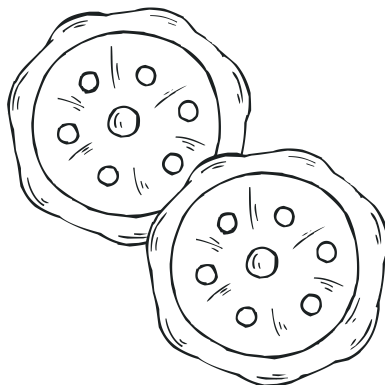# +2

RISK MODIFIER
+3

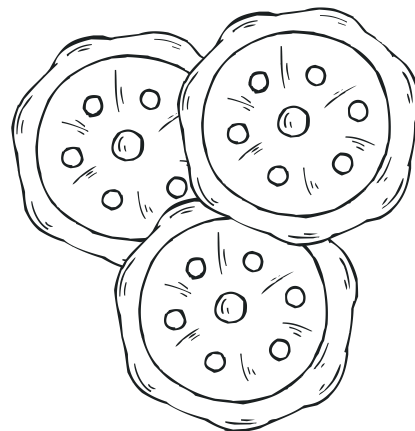## RISK MODIFIER
-1

RISK MODIFIER
-2

RISK MODIFIER
-3

MAGIC AND NAVAL WARFARE

BY DEMI BENSON

Like the steam engine, magic will fundamentally change naval warfare. Whereas the common foot soldier will still rely on muscle-powered weapons to defeat enemies – and there's only so much improvement you can make to a spear – naval battles are settled by the clash of *machines.* Many magical effects emulate technology's advance by improving materials science, sidestepping physical limits, and accelerating build times. With enough magical improvements, the warships become functionally equivalent to those of higher TLs.

Using GURPS Mass Combat

Certain magical improvements affect *GURPS Mass Combat* stats. Simple changes appear in each section, but if a ship enjoys the magical enhancements under all of *Making the Fleet, Armoring the Fleet, Arming the Fleet,* and *Moving the Fleet,* then treat it as a higher-tech vessel. Use the stats for a TL6 ship, but treat each TL as having two "half-steps" – an "early" stage and a "late" stage – and divide the vessel's TS by 2 per half-step by which its true TL is below TL6.

MAKING THE FLEET

The first area of improvement is in the building of ships. Ships are made of wood, and the Plant college allows stronger materials and faster construction. The combination of Essential Earth (for planting soil) and Bless Plants results in trees growing at six times their usual speed. Ship-quality timber can be grown in record time without further use of magic.

Steady applications of Shape Plant and Plant Growth can induce the tree to form itself into more readily usable shapes without the need for joins or supports. Structural members and planking can be grown as a single unit, which is the important limiting factor for casting Essential Wood. Essential Wood is the key to making bigger and better ships – it triples wood's HP, DR, and load capacity. This allows better streamlining without sacrificing as much space to internal structure, a real-world feat that required high-tech construction methods and industrial production of steel. Essential Wood can be cast ceremonially on every piece of the ship – even a single piece of SM +11 or smaller (the size of a WWII-era cargo ship!) requires less than 100 energy points.

Ships like this become tougher and harder to ignite, and have superior streamlining. When using *Mass Combat,* they add 10% to TS. In vehicle stat blocks, triple DR and HP, and add 10% to Top Speed.

Such magic also makes it possible to create vessels faster and with less waste. By trading money for magical energy, a ship can be built in half the usual time for double cost, or in 1/3 the usual time for triple cost. Both construction crews and ship designers *must* be familiar with the wizardly techniques discussed above to reap these benefits.

Style Pointers: Making the Fleet

In high fantasy, if mages take part in shipbuilding, the ships will *look* fantastic, with great swooping curves, frightening gargoyles and figureheads, and the structure built into mystically resonant forms. People might look at a ship and think, "A wizard built that."

In low fantasy, ships will look unusually advanced, with plated hulls and streamlining, and a cultural uniformity of appearance.

ARMORING THE FLEET

Even with entire ships built of Essential Wood, navies might want better armor with no chance of flammability. Shape Earth and Earth to Stone fill this niche by allowing wizards to rapidly form stone or metal plates in any desired shape . . . although enemy Spell Arrows loaded with Stone to Earth can undo this! Starting with Essential Earth triples the resulting DR and HP. A Transparency enchantment makes true armor into portholes and eliminates the need for vulnerable windows, combat shutters, and periscopes – although the air might be stuffy in such a well-sealed ship.

When using *Mass Combat,* vessels with such protection add 15% to TS.

*It may seem cliché, but Sun Tzu's **Art of War** is a classic to get in a military frame of mind. There are many resources online for this one book.*

The End State

Eventually, matters might escalate to use of the ultimate protective spells: Force Wall and Utter Wall. Both spells can be made permanent, and sections can be applied to the sides of a vessel piecemeal. The only way to pierce such magical cladding is for a mage to cast Suspend Enchantment or Remove Enchantment, neither of which can be loaded into a Spell Arrow. The GM should probably avoid this outcome – it makes for boring battles!

Style Pointers: Armoring the Fleet

High fantasy will have ships with an Age of Sail feel. Defenses will be minimal.

Low fantasy will have armored sailing ships. More heavily armored vessels would tend toward the look of early ironclads and monitors, with deep drafts and sloped armor . . . and hot, stuffy interior spaces.

Spell Defenses

Some of the attacks delivered by Spell Arrow (see *Spell Weapons,* p. 23) have simple defenses, where casting on the ship also defends the crew; e.g., Resist Fire cast on a ship protects everything it carries, including rigging and anyone aboard. These defenses can be cast as needed by mages or by enchanted items implanted in the deck (which even non-mages can trigger). Remember to adjust Regular spells for the ship's SM.

The most useful spells here are Resist Acid, Resist Fire, Resist Lightning, and Resist Sound. Others are valuable in specific situations: Blur just before combat, to reduce the enemy's chance to hit; Hide, Invisibility, and Mage-Stealth, to avoid detection while foes sail past; and so on. Missile Shield is the ultimate defense against artillery, but its high energy cost makes it unlikely for large vessels.

When using *Mass Combat,* vessels defended this way add 10% to TS.

ARMING THE FLEET

A proper arms race calls for weapons as well as armor. Magic can help out here, too.

Traditional Weapons

The various "Essential" spells allow naval engineers to create weapons equivalent to those of higher TLs. Applying the techniques discussed for shipbuilding to bow-type naval artillery gives more power for the same weight. Add 30% to range and damage, and 50% to cost.

A weapon like this could be enchanted with Dancing Object and Link, allowing it to cock itself with ST 15. Use multiple enchantments for larger weapons. Halve the number of loaders required (round up), but double cost to account for the enchantments.

When using *Mass Combat,* vessels armed like this add 10% to TS.

New Weapons

Clever engineering along with Earth and Water spells can result in functional steam cannon that launch solid shot or Spell Arrows. The magical metallurgy discussed in *Armoring the Fleet* (above) can yield a sturdy boiler and fast, steam-proof valves. The barrel might be made of regular stone, metal, or wood – but Essential versions would be stronger or lighter.

The boiler would use the Boil Water spell, activated by a built-in wand or control jewel. It might have Transparency enchanted into the sides to enable the crew to check water levels and cast without penalty. A built-in exclusive Powerstone would triple the efficacy: 4 energy points from the Powerstone would convert a cubic yard of water into steam at 1,200 atmospheres – more than enough to last out an entire battle.

Use the stats for cannon of the same TL, but double cost. Steam cannon will replace gunpowder ones. Gunpowder is flammable and explosive, and doesn't work when wet!

When using *Mass Combat,* vessels with such weaponry add 25% to TS.

Style Pointers: Arming the Fleet

High fantasy artillery will be minimal. Mundane pieces might fire enhanced ammunition (enchanted with Flaming Missiles). Completely magical weapons would be designed for a single use that delivers overwhelming destruction (a colossal Storm, Whirlpool, or Windstorm).

Low fantasy will focus on improving the weapons available to non-mage crew. Use everything in this section!

MOVING THE FLEET

When ships are laden with stone armor and magical cannon, magical propulsion is also likely.

Traditional Methods

Sail-powered craft benefit greatly from Weather spells. Every ship's wizard will know Wind, and most will know Current. Spells such as Waves, Rain, and Storm can reduce the effects of inclement weather. When using *Mass Combat,* ships that have a dedicated ship's wizard aboard gain the All-Weather feature and count as one TL higher for travel speed.

Oars can be made lighter and longer courtesy of Shape Plant and Essential Wood – and it wouldn't be long before someone tried Dancing Object on them! Applying the same to gondola-style sculls is actually more efficient than rowing.

If *all* of the ship's muscle-powered propulsion has been magically augmented, add 15% to TS *and* count it as one TL higher for travel speed.

Battlefield communications are one way magic would greatly alter medieval-style warfare; in the real world, instant updates from dozens or hundreds of miles away don't happen until the 20th century.

New Methods

A burst of ingenuity would lead from oars to paddlewheels, from sculls to propellers. A crankshaft could be powered by Dancing Object. Adding the appropriate Link would let this be turned off – and a TL4 clockwork gearbox would let it run in reverse. A TL5 transmission and gearbox would turn a magically powered crankshaft into a modern propulsion system capable of different speeds, ahead or astern.

When using **Mass Combat,** ships like this add 25% to TS.

Style Pointers: Moving the Fleet

High fantasy will keep sails and rowers because ship's wizards can tame the wind and waves.

Low fantasy might keep oars, but is more likely to mechanize them into paddlewheels and propellers. Sails are still useful, but they'll be the first targets in battle.

FLEET ACTIONS

Magic will, in addition to creating formidable fighting ships, change how fleets look, operate, and fight.

Ship-to-Ship Combat

The biggest change resides not in more powerful mundane weapons but in the ability to cast spells at enemy ships and crew. Even with Spell Arrows, most ships will be too sturdy to be disabled by damage alone. A ship that cannot move or maneuver is unlikely to win a battle or land an invasion force, so destroying rigging and propulsion would be the top priority, just as it was in the real world. Since people are needed to sail, operate magic engines, and fire artillery, disabling the crew is the second-best way to stop a ship (see *Spell Weapons,* box).

Ramming might remain viable for longer than it did historically because of magical propulsion. Armored ships are likely to be hard targets, however. Ramming will instead aim for propulsion systems.

In ship-to-ship combat, attacks will come in waves. The first volley will attempt to take out rigging and oars, using a combination of conventional artillery (grapeshot or chain shot) and continuing area-damage spells. The second will try to disable the crew. The third will deliver more area-damage spells. Further actions would be calculated to take advantage of battle situations.

Style Pointers: Ship-to-Ship Combat

In high fantasy, few navies would have stacks of Spell Arrows. They would instead rely on shipboard battle mages to act as artillery.

Spell Weapons

Spell Arrows make an ideal spellcasting mechanism, whether launched by artillery or dropped as darts by flying cavalry, but are expensive for large effects. Few spells have both a low enough energy requirement to be cost-effective *and* effects that are useful even when cast over a small radius. Most are designed to disable, disorient, or distract crew, but a few (fire, acid, and lightning spells, and Rejuvenate Plant) have a chance of affecting a vessel. Penetrating Weapon on the arrow itself might enable the carried spell to activate *inside* the enemy ship.

Below, effects are divided up into three broad groups. Which types of Spell Arrows are available should be culture-specific! The Island Nation of Yaluway might aim to capture ships intact with their crew, and so prefer incapacitating and confusing weapons, while the Kingdom of Tilom may care more about eliminating enemies quickly, and so favor continuous-damage weapons.

When using **Mass Combat,** vessels armed this way add 15% to TS.

Ongoing Damage

- Create Acid. Countered by Resist Acid.
- Fire Cloud. Countered by Resist Fire.
- Hail.
- Rain of Acid. Countered by Resist Acid.
- Rain of Fire. Countered by Resist Fire.
- Rain of Ice Daggers.
- Rain of Stones.
- Spark Cloud. Countered by Resist Lightning.

Instant Damage

- Concussion. Partially countered by Resist Sound.
- Destroy Air.
- Fireball/Explosive Fireball. Countered by Resist Fire.
- Lightning/Explosive Lightning. Countered by Resist Lightning.
- Rejuvenate Plant.

Incapacitating or Confusing Crew

- Blackout. Countered by Dark Vision.
- Complex Illusion.
- Darkness. Countered by Dark Vision.
- Destroy Air.
- Devitalize Air. Countered by Hold Breath.
- Fear. Countered by Bravery.
- Flash. Countered by Bright Vision.
- Gloom. Countered by Dark Vision.
- Hail.
- Lure. Countered by Avoid.
- Mass Sleep. Countered by Awaken.
- Silence. Countered by Converse.
- Thunderclap. Countered by Resist Sound.
- Wall of Silence. Countered by Converse.

A great use for a setting's large-scale overland maps is as a means of showing the position and relative size of armies.

Submarines

Submarines are possible, although surface warfare would already have advanced into the "ironclad" stage. Manufacture would require all of the advanced magical construction and propulsion methods discussed so far, plus Purify Air and Shape Air items with enough power to run continuously. Stat such vessels as equivalent surface ships with half Move and five times cost.

Style Pointers: Submarines

In high fantasy, there are no submarines!

In low fantasy, subs will be used as sneaky ship-killers (releasing divers under the ship to wreak havoc), stealthy transportation (dropping commandos on the beach), or overt transportation for invading underwater realms.

In low fantasy, battle mages take part but provide C3I and defense. They use magic to observe and outmaneuver the enemy, and to assist the crew with "buff" spells.

Carriers

Magic and fantasy creatures make flying forces possible. Every large warship is likely to have an air wing – if only a single recon pilot on a flying carpet. Aerial forces will go through the progression seen in our world: reconnaissance, light strafing and bombing, defensive fighters, bombers, bomber escorts, multipurpose fighter-bombers, etc. Air combat will depend on how many clashes of flyers and air cavalry the setting has seen.

Of the traditional flying craft, carpets are good bomber platforms – they can carry two people plus munitions, be toughened with Fortify, and roll up for storage. A cauldron makes a better fighter; it comes heavily armored, can be fitted with a lance, and can ram flying animals and craft without the pilot being knocked off. Any flyer can be made stealthy with Blur, Hide, or Invisibility.

An advanced, magically industrial society would eventually devise special-purpose aircraft only vaguely reminiscent of the original forms. If there are natural or alchemical substances that defy gravity (natural liftwood, alchemical "infusion of aether," etc.), these will form the basis of future craft.

Style Pointers: Carriers

For high fantasy, there will be no flying-carpet formations, just knights astride flying animals: pegasi for light cavalry, griffons for medium cavalry, and dragons for heavy cavalry. Flying carpets will remain rare – playthings of the rich.

For low fantasy, the reverse is true: animals only for scouting and specialized roles, but manufactured craft will see extensive use for military purposes.

Boarding Actions

Boarding enemy vessels is sometimes the only way to achieve military goals. Marines can be heavily armored without fear of drowning thanks to Essential Wood armor formed with Shape Plant. Any bronze plate or scale (but not mail) armor can be had in wooden form – lower weight by 25%, reduce cost by 60%, and halve DR, but the armor becomes flammable and is usually seen as lower-class if metal armor is available. Turning it into Essential Wood doubles cost and triples DR. Wooden armor floats and provides 20% of its weight as excess floatation. Cloth armor (including the padding under heavier armor) can be made of shaped cork instead of cloth batting, which floats and provides 100% of its weight as excess floatation. Essential Wood shields can be either lighter or sturdier – 1/3 weight with all other stats unchanged, or double cost with triple DR and HP.

For attacking crew on deck or in the rigging, pushing them overboard is an effective disabling technique. A Spell Stone loaded with a 3-point Air Jet good for two seconds costs only 120 energy to enchant and does 6d of knockback each turn. Most of the spells from *Spell Weapons* (p. 23) are even more effective as Spell Stones in the hands of boarders, and many more become practical: Panic, Terror, Mental Stun, Drunkenness, Rooted Feet, Tanglefoot, Pain, Stun, and so on. Anyone with Magery 0 might be issued an enchanted staff and wield magic items, Powerstones, and any number of offensive spells. Navies will try to have at least one mage in every squad.

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*If you use map software such as **Campaign Cartographer** for a setting's maps, it's trivial to resize and zoom as needed.*

In **GURPS Martial Arts** terms, marine fighting styles should be similar to Armatura, Quarterstaff, Shortsword Fighting, or Sword-and-Shield Fighting – all with Innate Attack and Swimming as optional skills, and Naval Training as a Style Perk.

Style Pointers: Boarding Actions

Since high fantasy is geared toward heroes outshining the common man, most marines will not have spell weapons. They might not even have decent armor. Battle mages will assist from the safety of their own ship, with especially heroic ones leading boarding actions.

Low fantasy will put spell weapons in every squad and enhanced armor on every body. Battle mages will be used wherever their talents apply.

In either case, whether marines are taught a formal fighting style is a cultural factor.

Amphibious Assault

Whether storming a beach or crossing a river, the goal is to move soldiers across a body of water and onto dry land. Aside from the expected ways (small boats, landing craft, and swimming), magical means include Walk on Water and Walk on Air to move soldiers under their own power, and Air Vortex, Teleport, and Gate to bridge the watery gap. Teleport and Gate are possible because target areas can be well-researched before the assault thanks to Divination, Wizard Eye, and Hawk Vision. Most defenders won't be able to cast Teleport Shield on a whole beach, so they'll concentrate their defenses in entrenched positions.

Assaulting forces should be outfitted like marines (see *Boarding Actions*, above). Two spells are highly prized here: Shrink Other makes soldiers easier to transport. Enlarge Other lets soldiers wade across rivers on their own and, in **Mass Combat** terms, act as Giants elements.

Style Pointers: Amphibious Assault

High fantasy will favor Air Vortex, Teleport, and Gate to move soldiers to the beach, and Delay with Enlarge Other could turn a squad into formidable foes.

Low fantasy amphibious assaults should use the advice for boarding actions.

FLEET LOGISTICS

Logistics, boring though it may be, is in many ways where magic offers armies the most radical gains.

Food and Water

Essential Food is highly compact, never spoils, and provides perfect nutrition. Purify Water lets sailors drink seawater instead of expensive alcohol. Navies will stock ships with nothing but Essential Food and Purify Water devices if they can – although some might take morale into account and include spices, fresh food, and alcohol for occasional use. Magic logistics means that ships can sail long distances and are limited only by what the crew can stand.

Resupply

A permanent Gate could instantly connect a ship to its home port. Such a Gate would be enchanted with a specific energy cost, giving it a maximum range; e.g., a Gate with less than a 1,000-mile range would cost 10,000 energy points to enchant. Maintaining a Beacon spell for the entire enchantment process would halve both the energy cost and the skill penalty for distance suffered by the enchanters (like the -7 for that 1,000-mile Gate). If the ship travels beyond the Gate's range, then the Gate simply stops working – it's effectively closed until they return.

A side benefit of permanent Gates is that a single ship can have a near-infinite supply of ammunition and marines. Fresh troopers could march from home port onto the ship in an instant, limited only by how fast they can run.

Escape Craft

A permanent Gate works well here, too. A Teleport device that sends people back to a "refugee room" costs 2,000 energy points to enchant but works from *anywhere* – fleeing sailors simply need to grab the device to be transported. A slightly more conventional approach would be a permanent Shrink Other on a full-sized boat with an enchanted Link to turn it off when needed ("Turn off Shrink Other when in the water").

Style Pointers: Fleet Logistics

In high fantasy, resupply is an invisible detail. Ignore this whole section, except possibly the expanding escape boat.

Low fantasy will see the benefits of Gates on large ships. Smaller ships will use Essential Food and Purify Water.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Demi Benson lives in Boston, the hub of the universe. After trying her hand at rocket science, she's now a mild-mannered computer security specialist, with occasional forays into motorcycle hooliganism and writing for gaming companies.
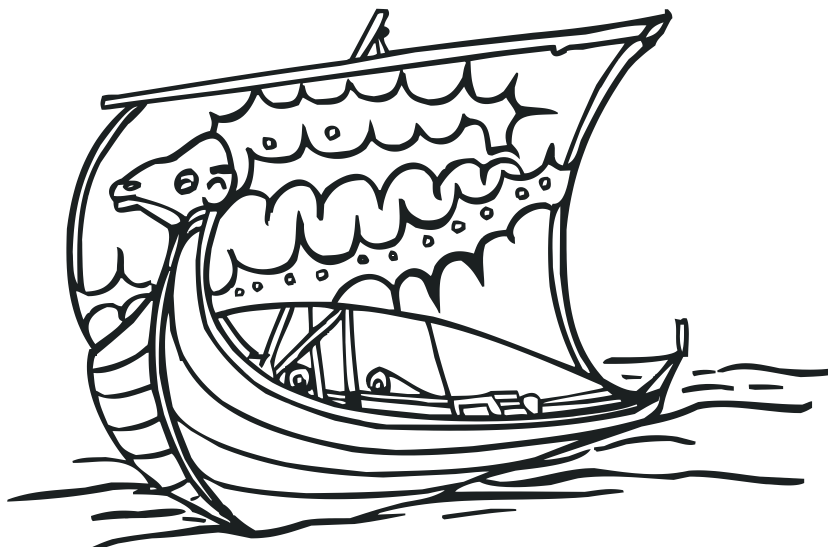
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Our Wyrds at War

by J. Edward Tremlett

When two armies face off in battle, they do not fight in a vacuum. The civilizations they represent fight alongside them, and the unique character of those peoples will color what they bring to the battle, and how they fight it.

So what would the field of war look like if few people knew there was magic to be used – or if *everyone* could use it? What would the effect be if magic was reliant on demonic bargains, or if gods walked among the people? What would those societies be like outside the battlefield? And how would the long-term effects of weaponizing magic affect the societies themselves?

This article is intended to help answer those questions, looking at societal backgrounds based on how much magic they contain and what kind they use, then extrapolating how they'd go to war with it. It targets non-specific fantasy settings, both high and "realistic," but the ideas could be easily tailored to more modern campaign worlds and alternate timelines.

The World at War

The first question is how much magic is actually in the game world? Is it the sort of place where only a relatively small group of people have the secrets needed to use magic, or the will to wield it? Is magic commonplace, though not everyone has the knack to make to work? Or does just about everyone have a little magic in them, even if it's just a parlor trick or two?

In worlds where effective magic is rare, governments tend to be either the chief employers of the magical or else the pawns of wizards. This is done out of self-preservation: Either the government realizes it needs to control the magic for internal and external security reasons, or the magic users realize they need to control the government in order to maintain their autonomy.

Regardless of who controls whom, the chief duty of the magically adept is often to protect and maintain mundane society. They would be on hand to foresee crises, prevent disasters, scry paths to prosperity, and safeguard the lives of the rulers against external and internal threats. Magic items and artifacts would most likely be locked up for safekeeping, readily available to only the highest-ranking officials; everyone else would be assigned their use, and then only temporarily.

Magic might be allowed out in the open to keep the population in order or it might be hidden away to keep the people from getting spooked or pondering ideas above their station. On worlds where magicians rule openly, wise wizards may bring peace, stability, and justice, but avaricious warlocks may rule though fear, intimidation, and horror. There may also be special squads of guards openly looking for magical criminals and other mana-wielding rogues, or enforcing the registry of magicians with the rulers. The harsh enforcement of such laws could push some people into joining an enemy or becoming one.

When such societies go to war, magicians would most likely never be on the front lines, as they would be deemed too valuable to lose. They would tend to remain back with the rulers and high commanders, instead, and be casting defensive and offensive spells over the entire battlefield. They might also be used to protect the leaders from magical assassination attempts, and use their arts to gain intelligence on the enemy's plans. Magical weapons and items could be made available, but would most likely be little-understood luxuries found only in the hands of the elite.

On rare-magic worlds where its existence no secret, soldiers would be subject to the same fear or awe as the populations they fight for. They might be encouraged to fight hard, knowing that their allies watch over them, or they might be threatened with curses and fates worse than death for failure. And there could be a constant threat from spies, traitors, and terrorists, who would join with the other side to escape magical conscription, or to get back at the magicians that ruined their lives.

In cases where magic is fairly commonplace, societies could tend to look like they're presented in most fantasy games. Magic would be a part of everyday life, no different than any other skill, and those with the potential for it may sell their talents to an employer, set themselves up as a shopkeeper or freelancer, or go adventuring. Magic items would be sold in stores or passed down in families, with only the more powerful ones being locked away for the rulers. Spells would be seen much like swords: In some locations their use may be restricted or prohibited entirely, but the existence of such tools can never be fully quashed.

Magical information possibilities include telepathy, scrying, teleporting messages, and so on. Even an animal link with a carrier pigeon would be much more reliable than nonmagical methods.

Secret World, Secret War

Another option in a world where magic is rare is that no one *except* the magicians knows that it's real. The highest levels of government would be unknowing pawns to the magical elite, who would use nations as pieces for the games they play in their quest for mystical supremacy.

The nations might not be interfered with all that often, of course, and might battle or war with one another independently of their true masters' intentions. But when a *true* war broke out between wizards, the fighting would take place on two levels: the mundane and the magical. Mere mortals would fight and die in their cumbersome way while wizards dueled and clashed across an entirely different plane of reality.

Such a war could involve cloak-and-dagger spellcasting, extra-planar assassinations, and the clandestine conjuration of war machines too maddening to describe. Entire battles take could place in the astral plane or alternate worlds, and with such ferocity that a war might be decided in one day, even if it takes years – and millions of wasted lives – for mortal governments to act out the conflict. Alternatively, a nation might win on the ground, yet its unknown patrons might lose the true war because of some strange, magical considerations unknown to any but the wizards themselves.

The important thing about such a campaign is that its true nature will be kept secret at all costs. If normal people knew that effective magic was real, they'd want it for themselves, and that would tip the balance of power away from the magicians. So there are constant, massive clean-up and denial campaigns in motion to keep kings, soldiers, and civilians ignorant of the magic of war. Those who see too much are mind-wiped, euthanized, or brought into the fold to help keep the secrets.

When societies with commonplace magic march to war, the mages could be quite evident on the battlefield and treated as specialists, mostly operating by themselves but sometimes with human "shields" protecting them from mundane threats. Important units might have a magician of some kind within it, casting defensive, offensive, and healing spells. Some units might be made of nothing but spellcasters, taking the place of "heavy artillery" and casting terrible conjurations that smite swaths of the enemy. Most magical weapons and items could be in the hands of leaders and champions across the field (though, as mentioned previously, some items might be family heirlooms in the hands of commoners). The commanders and kings would most likely have truly awesome and terrible creations at their disposal, the better to defend their lives and clash with the deadliest foes. On the other hand, the magicians might demand to hold onto those prized artifacts on the pretense that only they could operate them safely, just to keep the rulers from getting too many ideas.

On worlds where *everyone* has some kind of useful magical ability, civilized society might be a complex, careful thing. There could be many layers of etiquette to avoid angering someone who could turn out to be more powerful than you might realize, and no one would want to rashly pick a fight for fear of winding up ensorceled. Serious scores could be settled though social censure, intermediaries, and conjured creatures at best, or slow-acting curses at worst.

Political power would probably reside in well-established dynasties that are all but unshakable, even if the person on the throne changed regularly (or appeared to). Magic items would become like mundane tools in nonmagical societies, able to be made by everyone for just about every use imaginable. Charms of protection against harmful spells would probably be everyday wear out in civilization, much like carrying an umbrella in a rainy climate.

War in a civilized, pan-magical world could be ritualized and noble, or horrible and total. An idealized form of national combat could arise where rival countries agreed to set champions, or entire armies, against one another in massive arena; victory for one side would lead to a new agreement between nations, or series of changes, so the populations would remote-view the battle, seeing it as both sport and international affairs. Outside interference in the fight would probably be forbidden, but there'd be no shortage of those who'd try. On the other hand, maybe such "cheating" would be acceptable as long as no one was caught.

But ritualized combat does not always solve the problems, and there is no guarantee that the other side would agree to proper terms. So there remains the awful possibility of an actual war: a nation rising armies up against its neighbor, or mobs of magically adept civilians raging through the cities. Monstrosities could be summoned to break down walls and towers, storms of spells could be created to raze entire blocks, and one or both sides of the conflict could be changed almost overnight.

However, would-be conquerors should be careful of so-called doomsday spells. Such horrible, world-shattering curses could be set to go off when the kingdom, or its ruling family, is destroyed. A "mutually assured magical destruction" could arguably be the end result of all magical arms races.

Of course, in a pan-magical world there might be *no* civilization to speak of, as no one would trust one another enough to form one. People might live in large tribes that saw all outsiders as rivals at best and enemies at worst, with non-aggression treaties sealed by marriages. Such tribes could defend their territories with conjured creatures and defensive spells, and any attempt to circumvent either would be seen as an act of war.

For those looking to lessen the impact of magic on the battlefield while still allowing for powerful dungeon-dwelling mages, consider coming up with a reason why battlefield magic doesn't work.

War between tribes would most likely be carried out long-distance, using wide-area curses, summoned monsters, and created armies to fight. Both sides would pit their magic against the other, until one weakened and faltered. And the war would probably result in total annihilation of the other tribe, as no one would want to spare a life for fear of eventual magical retribution.

The Color of Combat

Another question is what type of magic the society practices, either by choice or because it's the most efficient or powerful (or even the only type available). Is it so-called "high magic," with elaborate rituals and evocations, or are snappy conjurations the norm? Are the majority of the magicians in the kingdom using necromantic spells, making bargains with entities to give them and their objects innate powers, or summoning servants to do their bidding? Does some strange mixture of science and magic hold sway in that kingdom, or do they perform miracles by the power of faith alone?

The main kind of magic practiced by a society should color it heavily. In many fantasy settings, the cornucopia of magical styles available to a relatively small number of magicians tends to create a cosmopolitan, semi-medieval setting where anything's available and nothing dominates. But in societies where *one* style is predominant, it will most likely permeate the very core of that society, to the point where it would be fairly obvious what they practiced.

That's because – in most worlds – magic isn't just a tool you pick up when needed and then put down; it's a lifelong calling that demands the adoption of a certain mindset in order to truly understand it and make it work.

As an example, places where commonplace nature-based magic holds sway should tend to be close to nature. They might have giant trees in place of houses and towers, weapons and tools would be grown instead of made, and there would be little or no metal around. The rulers might have seasonal representation, with one family ruling in spring and summer, and another taking over from autumn to winter. Or perhaps there is a king who is "born" in spring, lives out the year and then "dies" in winter, only to be "reborn" the following season. In such a place, people might be farmers and garden-keepers first, and other professions second; life would be placid, sweet, and largely predictable.

In war, this society could unleash the full fury of nature. The entire forest could be brought to deadly life, with swarms of insects and hordes of dangerous beasts let loose against the foe. Trees could be turned into walking war machines, and creatures grown to monstrous sizes might charge into battle. The power of the seasons could also be unleashed upon the field, delivering torrential spring rain and lightning, the high winds of autumn, or the killing cold of winter upon the enemy. The earth itself might crack wide and swallow lines of soldiers, or vines could sprout up and hold them fast.

But, as easy as it is to envision regions with a predominant kind of magic, there is also something to be said for going *against* the obvious when designing a magical kingdom.

A society where necromancy is the chief form of magic might be all moldering black robes and tall bone towers, with pale, diseased families of grave-robbers ordering clattering lines of armored skeletons to the battlefield. Then again, maybe they look and act fairly normal when compared to their neighbors. They simply don't accept that death is the end of one's service to the community, so they stitch their deceased into Frankenstein monsters to toil in the fields and watch their borders; when war comes they fight alongside their own dead, harvesting enemy casualties to make even more soldiers.

Other than that, they're perfectly "normal."

The Gods Walk Among Us

Another question is where the gods are in all this. Are they remote beings taking very little interest in mortal affairs or incapable of interfering, or do they send their blessings to the faithful and vengeance upon their enemies? Do they take form and interact with their followers, appearing in person to speak, receive worship, and see that their will is done? This becomes very important when war is declared, as having divine power on your side, or utilized against you, can easily make or break a conflict.

If the gods are very much in the background – or possibly not even real – their worship may affect the workings within a society, but probably wouldn't give a direct advantage on the field of battle. However, canny heads of state can use faith to whip up the faithful and send them off to war, as religious zealotry is a wonderful motivator. Magicians might be used to create signs and "miracles" for armies to follow. Such plans can fail, though, if outside agents successfully target the magicians or use other signs to confuse the audience, possibly creating religious schisms at the front.

> *What would the world look like if magic was reliant on demonic bargains, or if gods walked among the people?*

Gods who are capable of interfering could have an ongoing effect on society; people are (arguably) more likely to obey laws and avoid trouble if they know that a god might literally smite them for their shortcomings. Then again, some of the members may follow a god to whom evil is good, and good evil, and therefore be blessed for lies, theft, and murder.

People may be called upon to do the will of their gods. If fervent worship isn't commonplace, the majority – who go to the temple only on holidays and pray only in emergencies – could see these visionaries as zealots or lunatics. If it is commonplace they may look at these people as heroes and paragons to be emulated.

Maybe magic's effectiveness is reduced the more sapient beings are nearby. In this case, hermit mages would be at maximum power; dungeon-dwellers, the baseline; and battlefield mages, weaker.

Wag the Divine Dog

A wise sage once said, "There's a problem with having the gods on your side – you can't dismiss them when they betray you." Gods have their own needs and agendas, and can be very fickle with their favors. They can also be legendary for abandoning their people out of spite or jealousy, though official mythologies often lay the blame on backsliding worshippers.

Worse still, the gods may actually *engineer* emergencies, disasters, and wars to get more tribute, or because they're bored. They may steer cities and kingdoms into battle to settle scores with other gods. And when one pantheon rattles its blades at another, entire continents may pay the price in blood for a war they had no say in.

In times such as these, demigods may be able to approach their parents and beg for an end to the unnecessary conflict. Being of two worlds, only they have the privilege to directly address gods on such matters, but even they have to be careful. Divine parentage is no defense against disobedience, or perceived treason.

Alternatively, they may rejoice in the chance to defeat the soldiers of the god who rivals their divine parents. Such combat monsters care nothing for the mortals who fight and die alongside them in the demigods' quest for glory and possible apotheosis. They may even spark the wars themselves, knowing (or hoping) that their parents will back them up.

In war, meddling gods can give bonuses to armies under their command (especially units who are complementary to their aspects), funnel power through their zealots, and possibly even curse the enemy. They probably won't bestow these blessings lightly or without cost, as they'll expect worship, praise, sacrifice, and tribute, either in return or before the war even begins. They may require portable shines be brought out to observe the battle, or need constant battlefield praise and sacrifice in exchange for their help. This, of course, makes holy objects, zealots, and priests a legitimate target for the enemy, requiring them to be defended by soldiers, clerics, or monks.

And then there are gods who not only send blessings, but also walk the earth with mortal men, charging into battle alongside them. A city with living deities is usually a city where mortal rulers cannot fully rule, and the people cannot be certain of anyone. Human life could be a privilege to be revoked at any moment by an angry, capricious god, and people would most likely live in awe and fear, knowing that incalculable power lives among them.

When gods do battle, war can become a true ordeal, for it is a terrible thing to raise your sword against them; only the comfort of having one at your back will drive most soldiers forward. Normally, to strike a god is to invite curses and eternal punishments, but in war there's usually an understanding that it's not personal. A soldier may die at a god's hand, but any truly epic pain will be suffered by the commanders and kings . . . and possibly the losing gods.

Having gods walk the world provides other benefits – and drawbacks – in the form of demigods. The spawn of mortals and the gods are usually gifted with strength and powers, and often showered with treasures and favors from their divine parents once they come into their own. They may found or conquer kingdoms, and rulers with any sense do whatever they have to in order to get such beings on their side, or at least placate them enough so they won't attack.

In war, it is often the demigods who are commanders of armies, or the armies' chosen champions. They cannot help but bring the favor of the gods upon their side when they fight, as they will be rightly proud of their children. However, a god's child also brings the unwelcome attention of rival gods, and their parents' troubles soon become their own.

Advancements and Endgames

Finally, we have to ask how advanced the society is in its ability to wage war with magic. Are the previously mentioned nature-lovers actually capable of raising the entire forest to fight on their behalf, or can they only summon a few beasts of the field at a time? Can they bend trees into mighty, walking siege engines, or are a few, animated saplings the best their arts can do for now?

The details may add flavor to an army, and ultimately help engineer a victory – or a defeat. But it presents a sobering question: What does it mean when magic, itself, becomes a reliable weapon worthy of the battlefield? It's impossible to stipulate what might happen on every world where wizards and boneshakers would march off to war, as leaders or soldiers, but history and human nature provide a troubling answer – escalation.

Weapons do not sit still in time, but are advanced and improved. Concepts that don't work are amended or weeded out, and those that do work are further refined. Weapons research and development are well-funded, highly secret things that decide the fate of nations in war. And if their products are impressive enough, they may act to keep the peace, due to the fear of having such weapons unleashed on the world.

Why, then, should magic be any different? The notion of magical research and refinement is well-established, with hoary old wizards spending lifetimes discovering, uncovering and creating new spells. It is conceivable that similar research into weaponizing magic could be ongoing, as could making already-offensive spells deadlier.

How far could it go? How far would some power-hungry leader or bloody-minded general want it to go? How far would a researching magician, eager for gold and to get his name attached to something big and terrible, let it go? And what would happen if it did?

If magic requires spellbooks, protecting their mages' tomes should be an utmost priority for an army.

The previously mentioned "mutually assured magical destruction" doesn't just protect dynasties from assassination, or kingdoms from takeover. It can also extend to the worst magical weapons ever devised or conceived, laid in place in the event of a looming loss on the battlefield, or the end of all that's held dear. There could be spells that open portals full of deadly monsters all around the world, raise the dead on a planetary scale, curse or kill entire populations, summon titanic death gods that cannot be stopped, crack the planet in half, hurl it from orbit, or totally erase its existence, so that it was never there at all.

That such spells would no doubt require mind-shatteringly massive amounts of power and preparation should go without saying. And one would hope that no lone spellcaster could perform them on his own with the mere flick of a wand, however elaborate the groundwork. One would also hope that such spells would be entirely fictional: made-up doomsday weapons that one kingdom might leak the "existence" of to its rivals, just to stave off a possible war.

But by the time that djinn is out of the bottle, a magical society may have come as far as it can go in terms of actual, open warfare. Once magical kingdoms have stretched up to meet one another, absorbing lesser kingdoms and empires on the way, the consequences of war with an equal or greater rival would most likely become too terrifying to consider, except to the most deranged of rulers. To the victor belong the spoils, yes, but if the rumors of doomsday spells aren't just rumors, the spoils might more bitter than sweet.

Confronted with mutual destruction, it's likely a society would become less enthusiastic about making war. A standing army would probably be kept in order to maintain defenses at the walls and order within them, but there would not be any real plans to employ it at the "true" enemy for fear of what might happen. It could grow or shrink depending on the budget, and might be sent out to do small "police actions" on wayward duchies, clusters of bandits, or the occasional giant monster. To do more would be to risk all.

The true battles, then, would most likely be covert. Magical espionage and spycraft would take over from flung lightning and summoned storm giants, and a pair of eyes and ears in the right place would be worth more than a thousand swords. If actual fighting broke out it would probably be a proxy battle, where either side of a third party conflict was funded, equipped, and possibly commanded by a larger empire eager to see things go their way, as well as depriving their chief rival of a new ally.

On the other hand, the fighting might take a more ritualized bent, as mentioned previously: Strategically locked nations could have champions, or entire armies, battle under controlled conditions to determine disputes. Whether this happens in front of an audience or off in some pocket dimension depends on the capabilities of the wizards, and also how willing they are to risk a defeat in front of an audience.

In the end it might just be more sensible to sit down with one's enemies and talk over problems. But such wisdom is usually generations in coming, and only after the invention of numerous, terrible spells, and the massive taking of lives. It's a sobering consideration, but one rarely heeded in the heat of the day when two armies stand ready to crush one another with swords, spells, and summoned creatures.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. Edward Tremlett is a magician, or so they say. By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, he takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He's been the editor of *The Wraith Project* and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.

When two armies face off in battle, the civilizations they represent color their actions.
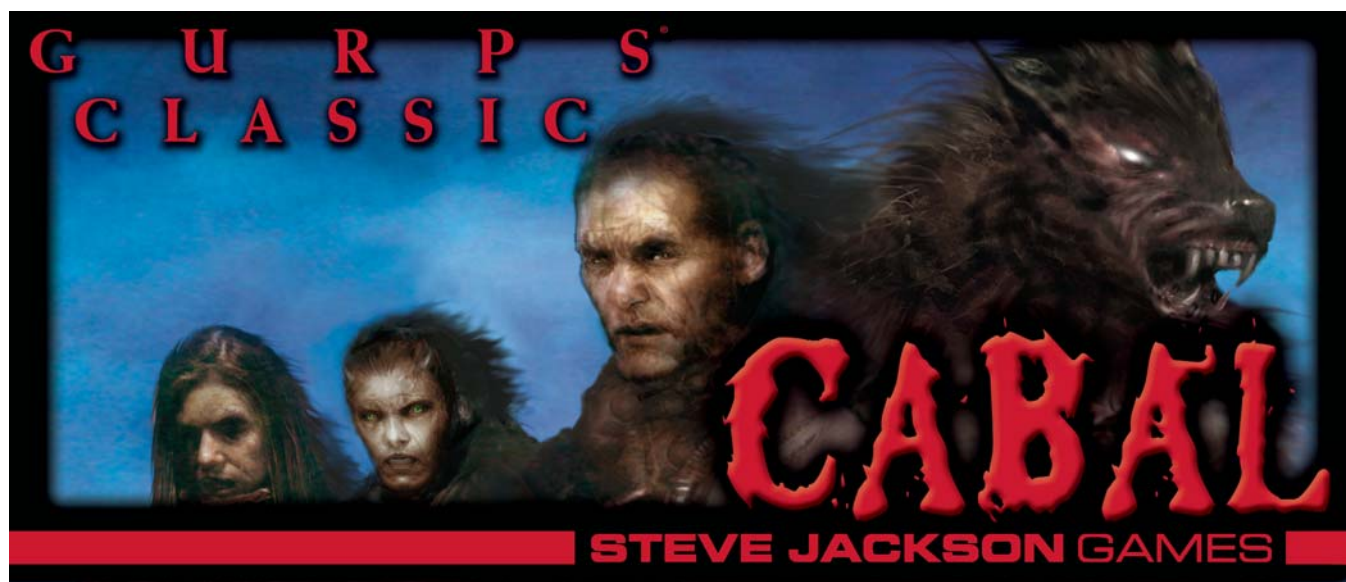
Random Thought Table

Magic on the Battlefield (and Other Imponderables)

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of "magic on the battlefield" is that the theme itself consists of two parts that are considered, by most, to be in diametric opposition. Almost by definition, magic is fantastic and chimerical. The battlefield – at least all those we are familiar with on our world – is perhaps the most realistic, least whimsical expression of human ingenuity that we've yet devised . . . besides toaster pastries, of course.

So the very phrase "magic on the battlefield" is a veneer that, in some fashion, covers an underlying oxymoron. It's like trying to wrap your mind around "The Goofy Side of Immolation."

But following the notion through a bit, we can perhaps extract some nugget of insight from our overcontemplation. Let's look at one dynamic – the realistic/fantastic dichotomy – apply each toggle to our magic/battlefield nouns, and consider the four possibilities.

Realistic Battle, Fantastic Magic

I suspect this is what most people have in mind when they envision "magic on the battlefield." You've got your (more or less) realistic battles, with death, dismemberment, and soldiers clashing like the movie *Braveheart*. On top of this, add dragons, fireballs, flying carpets, and anything else magical. You're probably going to end up with something like the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, or – really – most other published epic fantasy battles.

Since this is probably considered the default assumption of many campaigns, we're not going to spend too much time on this. If you can wrap your mind around nameless soldiers dying in the mud of a Welsh-named battlefield while goblins and orcs advance with powerful war machines and fireballs explode in the distance, you can wrap your mind around this combination.

Fantastic Battle, Fantastic Magic

What is "fantastic battle"? Taking "fantastic" to mean "unrealistic," I posit that fantastic battles are those that are contrary to the realities of warfare. The best example is perhaps the *G.I. Joe* cartoon series from the 1980s (although most "violent" kid-targeted cartoons of the era qualify). The members of G.I. Joe were all American soldiers, going up against an incredibly well-funded terrorist organization. Yet no one on the cartoon ever died – or even got wounded. Their guns didn't seem to fire bullets but instead used what seemed to be lasers (usually color-coded so you could tell who was on which side). I don't recall anyone on either side ever getting shot, and certainly not dying. Both sides used enough explosives to reduce the moon to a fine powder, but – again – no human beings ever got permanently *hurt* from them on the show.

In consulting with several veterans, I've discovered that the experiences of the G.I. Joe team seem contrary to the experiences of those who have undergone real-life combat situations. In addition, apparently the Navy doesn't make wisecracking parrots part of the standard loadout.

Star Wars is another good way to look at "fantastic battle." Sure, there's death in that universe, but it's almost entirely bloodless and neat, moralities are clearly defined, and you're almost certain to know that you're fighting on the "right side."

Perhaps looking at it another way, in "fantastic battle," there is often a right course of action, a correct side to be part of, and an ultimate purpose. In realistic warfare, there can often be none of these.

Taking an extreme example, the *Godzilla* series of movies features almost no death whatsoever, despite the realistic implications of what would happen if a giant freaking monster were to start stomping through a city. Why?

You can come up with your own "truth table" for just about anything with two sides; try it for campaign inspiration!

Probably because no one *is* getting killed; the people of Japan know to get out of the way and relocate so they don't get hurt, and – outside of some extremely busy crisis managers at insurance companies the next day – there aren't any long-term consequences. (If your city has a Giant Monster Protocol, it's almost certainly engaging in fantastic warfare.)

In these settings, combining fantastic magic is trivial, since the world is *already* fantastic. What is the Force in *Star Wars* but an odd kind of magic? The Godzilla universe has a number of psychic/psionic-tied entities, and – again – that's a pretty fantastic force. And once Destro assembles a weather-control satellite to attempt to stop the Joes (it didn't work), it's a small step to him trying to get the five parts of the ritual he needs to summon a dragon (which won't work, either).

As a final thought exercise, consider whether the Matrix trilogy takes place in a world with fantastic bloodless battle and fantastic "magical" effects.

REALISTIC BATTLE, REALISTIC MAGIC

So what is realistic magic, then? Well, if magic exists (which is unlikely), it's probably an inexact, perilous, weak force. It's quite possibly dirty and demanding, and it may be little better than technology (depending on how good tech is, of course).

In this case, a "battle mage" may be little more than someone who can bestow minor blessings (which may or may not work), receive future omens or premonitions (which are always sketchy and vague), and heal minor wounds (which, if it involves herbalism and bandages, may be indistinguishable from what a real medic would do). In this case, envision a campaign that combines the battle sensibilities of the first scenes of *Saving Private Ryan* with such minor magical effects: It's difficult for one person to have an effect on so great a conflict as the Normandy invasion, and it's just as tough for the trifling powers of magic to influence great changes on the battlefield.

Or maybe, in this case, "realistic" magic refers to ritual magic, which relies on specific components and conditions and can take hours (or more) to bring a spell to fruition. For example, consider something like 1998's *The Thin Red Line,* with its focus on the suicidal task of claiming Hill 210 for its supposed strategic necessity. What if that hill was necessary because of the location's utility for some arcane ritual or spell effect? That wouldn't make the sacrifices any less senseless or bloody, but the reasoning behind them could be entirely different.

FANTASTIC BATTLE, REALISTIC MAGIC

As a final possibility, completely invert the expectations associated with realistic battle and fantastic magic. In this case, warfare might resemble a glorious, exciting, relatively bloodless affair, with unreliable magic and mystical effects

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I Find Your Realistic Fantastic!

Of course, it should be noted that "realistic" and "fantastic" are not absolute labels, but rather, they help define two extremes of a continuum. This is to say, it's entirely possible to have mostly realistic warfare with a few fantastic elements, or highly cinematic magic that contains a few gruesome aspects. Likewise, there's probably a fair bit of debate about whether or not the warfare in Tolkien's trilogy is realistic or fantastic.

In addition, viewpoints can vary: One person might see warfare as grim, absurd, and always unnecessary, while another might believe that there is a certain valor or nobility to be found in fighting the "good fight." This goes for player perceptions, too! Provided that everyone's on the same page about what a campaign is going to be like, this shouldn't cause problems, but be aware that one player's "war is hell" is another's "battle to victory!"

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providing an odd diversion to the "fun." As an example, imagine something like many 1950s WWII movie – with its glamorous warfare, noble heroes, and bloodless enemies – combined with realistic magical effects. The hero in such a tale might find himself needing to capture the last breath of his fallen comrade in a canteen and make sure that canteen gets home again, to fulfill his buddy's last wish.

Or, as a slightly more deconstructionist example, consider a setting that begins with the "harmless" ethos of the *G.I. Joe* world. Have someone discover a slow, painful kind of magic that involves blood and self-mutilation; the forces these rituals unleash have the power to "snap" people out of the bloodless world in which they reside. Someone who shoots at a foe with a bullet dipped in ritual magic blood can actually *kill* him! Vehicles chanted over in a runic circle and anointed with blood find their munitions now have realistic consequences. In the hands of the enemies, this force becomes as much of a world shaker as any loss of innocence can. In the exclusive hands of the heroes, this presents a powerful dilemma: They have the power to, once and for all, make a lasting impact against their merciless foes. Can they do so? *Should* they do so? (As an example of this shift of outlook, the *Transformers* universe was entirely without lasting consequences of violence for the first 65 episodes of its cartoon series, but then the movie happened and a dozen or so characters died.)

THE TRUTH TABLE SHALL SET YOU FREE

We started with an observation – there's a kind of conflict in "magic on the battlefield" – and explored the implications of affirming and rejecting the underlying assumptions. In so doing, perhaps we've provided a few more campaign ideas, or a new outlook, or a confirmation of values you already hold.

If nothing else, it might give your mage something to think about while he's sitting in his siege tower, waiting for just the right moment.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to RPG releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for almost nine years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana.

ODDS AND ENDS

BATTLEFIELD COMPLICATIONS

Roll two dice and consult the chart below. If the heroes would be in a position to keep the rolled effect from happening, roleplay their efforts to do so.

Roll	Effect
1-2, 1	Exceptionally clear day; improve all long-range vision rolls.
1-2, 2	Exceptionally unclear day; penalize all vision rolls.
1-2, 3	Unseasonal weather (heat wave, hail, etc.).
1-2, 4	Rain/snow.
1-2, 5	Heavy rain/snow/sandstorm.
1-2, 6	Monumentally heavy rain/snow/sandstorm.
3, 1	Tainted food/water affects one side.
3, 2	Tainted food/water affects *both* sides!
3, 3	Problem with provisions on one side (running low, stolen, etc.).
3, 4	Problem with provisions on *both* sides!
3, 5	Problem with supply chain on one side.
3, 6	Disruption in alcohol ration!
4, 1	Morale inexplicably low on one side.
4, 2	Morale inexplicably low on both sides.
4, 3	Rumor of good news from home front for one side (may or may not be true).
4, 4	Rumor of bad news from home front for one side (may or may not be true).
4, 5	News of coming reinforcements for one side (may or may not be true).
4, 6	News of coming reinforcements for both sides (may or may not be true).
5, 1-2	Leader! A cult of personality is rising around a second-in-command (for better or worse).
5, 3-4	Loser! Confidence is faltering in one second-in-command.
5, 5	Desertion! A sizable faction tries to flee when it can.
5, 6	Revolt! A small group within one side's army wants to take over.
6, 1	Supernatural weirdness (someone's bitten by a werewolf, rumor that a soldier can't see his own shadow, etc.)
6, 2	One side thinks it experiences an omen (good or ill).
6, 3	Reagents or important magical components are stolen or damaged.
6, 4	Rain . . . of frogs (or other "miracle")!
6, 5	Mana flare, roll 1 die. 1-3: mana lowers by one level; 4-6: mana raises by one level.
6, 6	Mana gone! Access to mana is gone for the duration of the battle.

Weak Battle Cries

- To the draw!
- Remember the tea kettle!
- Out with the old!
- To paradise for all but the atheists!
- Our force is marginally better equipped!
- Glory! Glory! Bo-bory! Banana-fana . . .
- There's cookies and punch just past those guys!

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND

IT'S OKAY! I CAN REACH!

FOR PURPOSES OF PULLING THEMSELVES UP ONTO OVERHANGING BARS AND PLATFORMS, ALL CHARACTERS IN *GURPS DUNGEON FANTASY* (Steve Jackson Games) ARE ABLE TO REACH 18 INCHES OVER THEIR HEAD, INCLUDING *PIXIES*, WHO ARE 6 *INCHES* TALL.
—W.M. Cavanagh—

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

WHAT YOU NEED FOR THE BATTLEFIELD

BY ANDY VETROMILE

This article examines various games that can help you with an assortment of battlefield scenarios.

GIANT MONSTERS

Consider those armies that add some great beast of burden to their ranks. This usually turns into the battle's setpiece, a moment where the thundering dinosaur, dragon, or cave troll is let loose to stomp the army, with its humanoid handlers on cleanup duty, wiping out any survivors. Kaiju (Japanese giant monster) games fit well here: *The Massive vs. the Masses: Gamorzilla vs. the Army* ($60, World Domination LLC, **world-domination-llc.com**), *Monsters Menace America* (going for about $25-$30 on auction sites, Wizards of the Coast, **wizards.com**), *Monster Island* ($9.95, Firefly Games, **firefly-games.com**), and *Giant Monster Rampage* ($11.95, Mystic Eye Games, **mysticeyegames.com**), to name just a few. All fine games, these not only let you design the monsters (so they're closer to your standard fantasy beastie), they abstract a lot of the action. Players not anxious to spend weeks with miniatures working out all the details can determine the effects of the fight in a couple of hours.

MUNDANE FORCES

Ditch the monsters if you don't need them, and let it all hang on the "mundane" fantasy forces. *Siege of Jerusalem* is a grognard favorite (original copies of the Avalon Hill edition go for about $150; the Multi-Man Publishing and Historical Perspectives editions clock in at a more reasonable $40). It recreates, well . . . the siege at Jerusalem, which is good for duplicating those Alamo-like scenarios. It lacks the huge monsters, though players could repurpose some of the siege engines as fantasy creatures or powerful mages if they were so inclined.

Pulling the camera view out even further, *Mighty Empires* (over $100 via auction sites, Games Workshop, **games-workshop.com**) alows players to choose a scale and have it out at that level. Although battles become even more abstract and may shrink the meaning right out of the conflict for some, it has rules for extended explorations, campaigns, and kingdoms. A war need not be a one-time thing . . . it's possible to chart the course of nations using this game.

If the group doesn't mind really getting down to details, other games from Games Workshop – *Warhammer Fantasy Battles, Titan Legions,* and *Man O' War* (various prices, though only the first is still regularly in print, so be prepared to get out the checkbook if you come across an original) – offer other scales, and these can be exchanged to some degree with *Mighty Empires.* (*Titan Legions'* genre is science fiction, not fantasy, but players could call the machines "clockworks" or sand off their serial numbers and use them in a manner similar to the aforementioned kaiju games.)

*Additional reviews for most boardgames can be found at **BoardGameGeek.com**.*

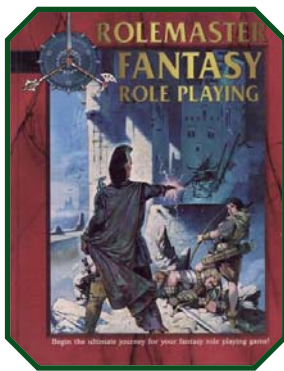*Magic can take a central role in a massive dust-up between huge forces.*

SPELLS

There's a reason veterans warn new adventurers to "take out the wizard first": He changes individual encounters in games drastically. He can do the same on the battlefield, but only if the GM offers him the right tools. (After all, tossing a few sleep spells at an oncoming wall of warriors isn't going to turn the tide like it would in a dungeon, especially if those spells don't work on some races.) But everything on the battlefield works on a macro-level anyway, so it's not like the mage has to carry the day. He just has to ply his trade smarter.

Modern Magic ($17.95, The Game Mechanics, **thegamemechanics.com**; and Green Ronin Publishing, **greenronin.com**) is a good place to start. The material was written with a *d20 Modern* game in mind, but the spells – which are clever enough in their own right – are chock full of suggestions that could play out well in a war. The GM needs to do some tweaking if the modern era is not his chosen time period, but altering the spells is an obvious process. A wizard doesn't have to take out a lot of people, just the right someone, and shots that can mystically pass through others and only tag the target is just one of the tricks in this book. Other equally clever ideas include destroying a war wagon's weak spot (goodbye, wheel), changing a vehicle's color (easily adapted by GMs as a switcheroo on, say, an identifying banner), or making a craft propel itself without a driver.

Even if magic doesn't take center stage, it can at least take a central role in a massive dustup between huge forces, although this is somewhat constrained by the magic systems offered in most RPGs. An average wizard is expected to pop open locks, turn people invisible, and occasionally kill someone with a well-placed supernatural bolt. Nonetheless, those same magic systems that try to keep mages balanced with the rest of the party by limiting offensive spells to rare and less effective fireworks are usually fairly cavalier about how those same spellcasters can affect the world around them.

Put another way, designers don't want mages killing enemies by the dozen with superspells, but they pay less attention to the consequences of other enchantments. They figure if the wizard is going to wow anyone with his ability to, say, move dirt, he should be able to move a whole lot more of it or else it's just a parlor trick. This makes most magic systems quite useful on the battlefield for the clever spell slinger. *Rolemaster* ($20-$30 per volume, Iron Crown Enterprises, **ironcrown.com**) is good at offering its magic users ever-increasing degrees of control over the elements and animals, among other things. *Rolemaster* was originally created as a supplementary system for other games, especially *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons;* if the GM and his players use it, or can come to some agreements over how to meld their systems, a decent mage can turn an entire embankment to a mudslide under his enemies' feet. The mechanics focus on giving a mage access to a laundry list of associated spells, which he buys by the chunk. A wizard can cast above his level if he's willing to chance melting his own brain.

MAGICAL SUPPORT TROOPS

Nothing stops the team from just cutting loose with power, especially if the whole party is a coven of magic users built particularly for the purpose of supporting "ordinary" foot soldiers and troops. Good resources for this kind of high-level hoodoo include *Amber Diceless RPG* (Diceless by Design – **dicelessbydesign.com** – has taken up the mantle from Phage Press – **phagepress.com** – and has promised a new edition; in the meantime, look for collectors' copies to go for over $50 via auction sites. Based on the late Roger Zelazny's popular book series, a cult following exists to help newcomers figure out how best to adapt the freeform system to their campaigns. In all likelihood, a game using this system becomes all about the heroes and their powers, so GMs unwilling to share a lot of their world with the players should approach it with caution. Players of *Amber Diceless RPG* builds their characters using a bid system, and it's not a question of whether the heroes are the best in the world, it's which *one* of the team is the best.

MINIATURES

Finally, if the miniatures are getting the way, *Battleground: Fantasy Warfare* ($14.95 a pack, Your Move Games, **yourmovegames.com**) helps to clean up the tabletop. Cards are used to represent many types of army or forces, and with the many groups represented (everything from the elves to the undead), magic in many forms can be folded into the combat system without having to track some kind of magic points or stress levels for the various mages.
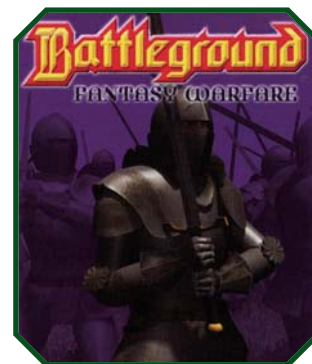
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Vetromile is a freelance writer and editor with an insatiable taste for games. He's been reviewing them for over 10 years and still can't wait for the next release. He has also edited several *GURPS* books.

SUFFICIENTLY ADVANCED MAGIC IS INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM ARTILLERY

BY MATTHEW POOK

The title of this piece is perhaps a tortuous way it begin an exploration of the place of magic on the battlefield. It paraphrases Niven's Law – "Any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology" – which is itself the converse of Arthur C. Clarke's Third Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." But the main idea is this: The use of magic on the battlefield is analogous to technological advances such as fast movement and quick deployment of air cavalry and mechanized infantry (with **Dungeon & Dragons** spells like *flying troops* and *rapid march*), fortification (*barricade of iron* or *dig*), camouflage (*vale of mist* or *hallucinatory mist*), UAV reconnaissance drones (*flying eyes*), command and control (*battle fury* or *of one will*), and of course, artillery (take your pick from *lightning web* and *rain of fire* to *rain of magic missiles* and *meteor swarm*).

Of course, battlefield magic offers myriad options beyond these obvious analogies to contemporary military technology. Even more possibilities exist when you consider the number of books on the subject of war in our inspiration and stamping ground, **Dungeons & Dragons.** Just two supplements for that game provide the spells given above, while also letting a battlefield spellcaster improve a troop unit's morale (*bless*), command the elements (*control weather*), demoralize the enemy (*fear*), call for reinforcements (*shadow troops*), or create them instantly (*animate army*)! Within our toy box of soldiers that is **Dungeons & Dragons,** we will start out small at the tactical level before clambering up the scales to the strategic and the international, all before making a leap into another box all of its very own.

Modern Magic ($17.95, The Game Mechanics, **thegamemechanics.com**; and Green Ronin Publishing, **greenronin.com**) is actually written for the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game** with the **Urban Arcana Campaign Setting** ($39.95 each, Wizards of the Coast, **wizards.com**), which mixes the fantasy of **Dungeons & Dragons** with the modern era. It is a magical medley that includes new spells (such as *fingernailgun*, useful in combat and construction; and *flashpoint*, for that instant "pimp my ride" effect); new types of magic (mundane, ritual or Wiccan, and Voudon); new equipment like the "derringer ring," which transmutes instantly from jewelery to gun and back again; and campaign ideas such as "MSI: Magic Scene Investigation" for when the GM wants to run a **Dungeons & Dragons** game *CSI*-style. A chapter is devoted to military magic, specifically as a Military Occupational Speciality (MOS) in the United States military. It offers new spells such as *mine detector* and *dud*, which are both useful to the bomb disposal squad; and *jury rig*, a perfect spell for when your unit needs a device (and wants to imitate *The A-Team*). It also includes somewhere to put those and other spells: the Military Issue Spellbook, which come as a binder, a pamphlet, or a PDA.

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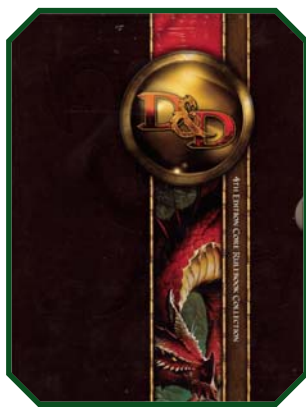
*To expand on the "battlefield magic is like modern armaments" trope, check out **GURPS Steampunk** and (especially) **GURPS Steam-Tech**. Replace "steam" with "aether"!*

The supplement also provides the new class Magical Grunt, as well as the Arcane Spec-Op and Thaumaturgical Specialist prestige classes, each of which plugs into a different campaign model. In "Rare and Secretive," the Arcane Spec-Op is cast as an elite spellcasting commando operating in a world where magic is little known. The mystical arts are better known and understood in "Available and Specialized," where the Thaumaturgical Specialist is a support spellcaster attached to another unit, his training or MOS giving him access to more powerful spells plus metamagic feats he can use to manipulate those spells.

If an army has Magical Grunts (in addition to normal ones), then it is no surprise that magic is "Common as Dirt," a campaign model that mixes the wizard and the modern day warrior. This campaign model allows for the possibility of Magical Grunts progressing into the Arcane Spec-Op and Thaumaturgical Specialist roles, but unfortunately none of the three campaign models gets beyond the confines of the base and onto the battlefield. There is the basis for a military magical campaign here, but the GM will need to develop it himself. Even then, he is still confined to small-scale military magic.
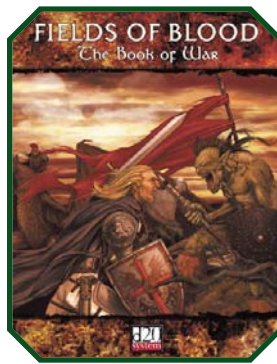
To really get out onto the battlefield, a GM will have to turn to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons,* where it was expected that once a character reaches a high-enough level, he should establish a stronghold, church, or some other base of operations. The first game to really look at and support this kind of play was the *Birthright Campaign Setting* ($4.95 electronically, Wizards of the Coast, **wizards.com**), which cast the players as characters who literally rule through divine provenance and birthright. Inheritors to the blood of old gods, these Regents govern "Domains," of which there are many on the continent of Cerilia (the setting for *Birthright*), and Holdings, the various important elements of a Domain, such as guilds, temples, and magical Sources. Played in three-month-long turns, *Birthright* becomes a game of diplomacy, politics, trade, construction, and (of course) war, all on a grand scale. The obvious and challenging campaign has every player take the role of a Regent; at a lower and more restrained scale, one player could be the Regent while others possess a Holding according to character class.

Birthright adds two levels of magic to that found in *Dungeons & Dragons* – Realm and Battle. Realm Magic lets a wizard cast spells like *royal façade* and *death plague* that can affect whole regions, even at a distance, along Ley Lines. Although Battle Magic spells are listed, *Birthright*'s inference is that a wizard will undertake research to upgrade a spell normally used down a dungeon; for example, he might start with *web* and turn it into *web of war*, a spell that will entangle and immobilize one or more military units. This is perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Birthright's* treatment of Battle Magic; the setting prefers to abstract somewhat both its battle and its magic.

More recently, a number of *d20 System* supplements detailing war came out for *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition.* Among the best are the official treatment of the subject in *Heroes of Battle* ($29.95, Wizards of the Coast, **wizards.com**), which works hard to get the player characters involved in the actual fight, and *Cry Havoc* ($21.95, Malhavoc Press, **montecook.com**), one of Monte Cook's excellent Event Books. (The latter explores the happenings and effects of the conflict before, during, and after.)

Alternatively, *Fields of Blood: The Book Of War* ($30, Eden Studios, Inc., **edenstudios.net**) covers much of the same material as *Birthright,* but without the folderol of divinely inspired characters. This means a loss of flavor, but it also means that the DM is free to use the rules with a setting of his choice or devising. Indeed, the only "setting" given is an example of how to adapt an existing one to the *Fields of Blood* rules.

With greater utility and greater detail comes greater complexity, starting with the numbers of options for governing Realms and determining the number of Realm Points to spend on them. Various elements of *Fields of Blood's* design were obviously inspired by the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. These inspirations show in battlefield maneuvers like "Swarm Special Unit," for those troops brave enough to attack a rampaging dragon or oliphaunt; and in the Dreadlord prestige class, which comes complete with the Great Cleave feat and Aura of Terror class feature. Similarly, the Battlefield Magus prestige class can cast his magic with a terrible aspect that can shatter enemy morale. *Fields of Blood* provides everything necessary to take a campaign up onto a larger playing field.

Having scaled the limits of the *Dungeons & Dragons* toy box, we leap to another, one simply far more complete. *BattleLore: Epic Fantasy Adventures* ($80, Days of Wonder, **daysofwonder.com**) is a board game that combines the fantasy miniatures game and the fantasy board game; it comes with miniatures and flexible terrain. Its core is a game of medieval warfare (its sample battles come from the Hundred Years' War) over which it lays fantasy elements such as dwarves, goblins, giant spiders, and – of course – magic. Like other Richard Borg designs, *BattleLore* is card driven, the cards describing weapons, units, orders, and magic . . . or as *BattleLore* terms it, Lore. This includes Lore for Clerics, Commanders, Rogues, Warriors, and Wizards; each player uses Lore resources to cast Lore, and players generate this resource from dice rolls, killing creatures, capturing locations, and so on. It is spent for effects such as *Invoke Lore*, *Eagle Eye*, and *Magic Missiles* (both giving more dice to roll on ranged attacks), and *Creeping Doom* (a mass attack affecting several hexes). This is a simpler method of handling magic than in RPGs, but within the confines of the very well-appointed and easily expanded *BattleLore,* it delivers its artillery and more.

Of course, the last word on artillery should go to Napoleon Bonaparte: "God fights on the side with the best artillery."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Pook resides in Birmingham, England, with the requisite pair of black cats and a perky Goth (not obligatory, but fun, nonetheless), plus more games than he can eat. A pedant and proofreader by day, a reviewer by night, he has been gaming for nearly 30 years. He has been saying mostly good things about those games for almost 10 of those years now.

LAST WORD

WITH JEFF VOGEL

For the *Last Word* in each issue of *Pyramid,* we chat with someone in the game industry known for his work in the topic field. For this issue, we talked with Jeff Vogel, founder of Spiderweb Software and creator of the **Geneforge** and **Avernum** shareware computer games.

PYRAMID: Jeff Vogel, benevolent overlord of Spiderweb Software, what is the Last Word on magic on the battlefield?

JEFF VOGEL: Terrifying and destructive . . . that's how I picture magic on a medieval battlefield. When I design a battlefield, everything always ends up shattered by gouts of fire and lightning bolts.

So you've considered this before, then?

I really try to put a lot of this sort of thought in my games; it's a great thought experiment. After all, military history is such an extensively researched topic, with tons and tons of what-if scenarios. So there is a lot of precedent for playing with this stuff: what effect fireballs or charm spells would have, and so on.

> *Terrifying and destructive.*
> *– Jeff Vogel*

When looking at magic on the battlefield, I often start by dialing things way back from what we're used to in reality today. After all, much of what happens on the battlefield today is already magic.

That's true . . . not a huge difference between "fireballs" and "Scud missiles" . . .

I think there's a heck of a difference between fireballs and Scud missiles. You can lob a Scud missile into another country. It lacks that immediate visceral face-to-face thing that makes fantasy so awesome.

Fantasy is about heroes. Putting magic on the battlefield gives a chance for more spectacular, pyrotechnic heroics. Get those M-1 tanks out of there. Using a tank is cheating.

So, when looking at magic on the battlefield, do you build in a point where gamers can say, "If I'm trying to think of what magic is like on the battlefield, here's where it began"?

Fortunately, giving the player a mental reference point is pretty easy. Most of the stuff I deal with (charms, dragons, bolts of fire) is pretty easy to imagine. Then, once the player understands what is going on, I try to make it immediate for him . . . try to give him a feeling for what is going on. After all, it's the player's game; I want a lot of the way magic works on the battlefield to be displayed by him using that power on enemies.

*Right; the **Geneforge** series starts with the player as a tightly leashed mage given instructions like, "I'm your instructor . . . don't do anything I don't tell you to!" And then the instructor dies almost immediately and the hero's attacked. Think fast!*

I love taking the new, green character, giving him the basic bits of information, and then stranding him, lost and alone, as quickly as possible. The first ability I like to give is the ability to make your own horde of fanatically loyal custom-made mutant monsters; my two favorite awesome things are charm spells and summoning allies.

My favorite part of *Lord of the Rings* was the good guy king who got charmed by the enemy. How do you deal with *that*? I totally ripped that off in **Geneforge 3.**

Experts steal from the best!

So, with magic on the battlefield, sieges would still happen, I think, because a bolt of fire or lightning still wouldn't, in my opinion, be as effective as a cruddy old trebuchet stone. And sieges make for awesome fantasy fiction, because they're even scarier when your enemy can sometimes fly. Differences like that make for interesting settings and thus interesting games.

I try to use magic to give players a more interesting story in the middle of a more conventional military setting.

So what's new and exciting or in the works for Spiderweb Software?

February, we're releasing **Geneforge 5: Overthrow** for Windows. (It's already out for the Macintosh.) Since that game takes place in the middle of a war that's been going on for quite a while, I provide many juicy examples of how war can totally trash a magic-based world. Lots of refugees, burned-out cities, and carnage. Plus you can have your own army of fire-breathing dragons.

Who wouldn't love that?!

Grownups play my games for the stories. And eight-year-olds just like having an army of dragons.

The nice thing about it is that, since it's shareware, players can get hours of magical-army action before deciding to buy it!

I am very proud of the fact that I never stick anyone with a lousy game. I don't want to take their money until they're sure they like it.

*Information about Spiderweb Software's games, including **Geneforge**, can be found at **SpiderwebSoftware.com.***

About *GURPS*

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

New supplements and adventures. GURPS continues to grow – see what's new at **gurps.sjgames.com**, or visit **www.warehouse23.com**.

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Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at **www.sjgames.com** for errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. To discuss *GURPS* with SJ Games staff and fellow gamers, come to our forums at **forums.sjgames.com**. The *Pyramid* web page is **pyramid.sjgames.com**.

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

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

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.