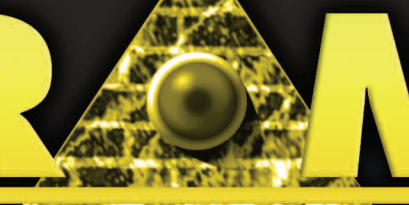


# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/25 November '10

## EPIC MAGIC

**ALL THE  
EPIC WAYS**

by **Mark Gellis**

**ESSENTIAL MAGIC**  
by **Antoni Ten Monrós**

**AL-ABYAD'S ASTROLABE**  
by **C.J. Miozzi**

**THE WORLD MAKER**  
by **J. Edward Tremlett**

**THE SKYSTONE CASTLE  
AND OTHER WONDERS**  
by **David L. Pulver**

**QUARTERMASTER MAGE**  
by **Marcus Connors**

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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## Article Colors

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

*Pale Blue:* In This Issue

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

*Dark Blue:* GURPS Features

*Purple:* Other Features

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# IN THIS ISSUE

Beyond the usual, beyond the ordinary . . . it's epic! This issue packs in an assortment of methods to make your magic bigger and bolder – in ways you may not have considered!

*All the Epic Ways* examines various tacks for creating an epic magic system for your campaign. As a bonus, it provides outlines for four example systems, drawing on inspiration from *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles* and the core *Thaumatology* supplement.

David L. Pulver – co-author of *GURPS Fourth Edition* and author of the *GURPS Spaceships* series – uses the latter system to detail game stats for *The Skystone Castle and Other Wonders*. This trio of enormous devices push the definition of “spacecraft” and push the limits of imagination!

*Essential Magic* shows what happens when you build off the foundation of the Essential elemental forces from *GURPS Magic* to unknown avenues of the arcane. With 25 spells and tips for creating even more, elemental mages who want more from their magic should consider this article to be *essential*.

The custodians of the curious invite us to take a look at another bizarre creation, in *Warehouse XXIII: Al-Abyad's Astrolabe*. Change night to day, move the stars, or alter someone's life! Although tied to the world of *GURPS Banestorm*, this impossible artifact could be found in just about any world there's a sky. This feature also comes with cards to help celestial calibrators keep track of the horoscopes they create.

If tampering with time and destiny over a localized region isn't enough for you, then consider trying to find *The World Maker*. Highly sought after (for obvious reasons), this instrument of creation does exactly what its name implies. Regardless of your game system or setting, the world could be yours!

He might seem mundane compared to grander magics, but with the right commander, the *Quartermaster Mage* can turn a battle from ordinary to epic. This *GURPS* article features the effects of popular spells on the battlefield, a ready-to-use template, and a sample character.

Consider just what constitutes “epic magic” with Steven Marsh, editor of *Pyramid*, in his *Random Thought Table*. Then head over to *Odds and Ends* for some bonus ideas and a laugh with *Murphy's Rules*.

This issue cranks arcane awesomeness to the next level. You'll never look at the impossible the same way again!

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## ON FLYING CASTLES AND FIREARMS

Epic magic is a lot like a handgun. Wait; hear me out on this!

See, the effect a handgun has on a story depends on the nature of the story. If it's a four-color super-hero story, then most guns exist merely for the hero to knock out of criminals' hands (or to allow bullets to bounce off ineffectually). If it's a gritty crime story, then a handgun is an escalation; the story is ratcheting up at that point. If it's a Hong Kong shoot-'em-up, then one handgun is mostly an appetizer; there will be more.

Epic magic is similar. For example, take the gargantuan Skystone Castle from p. 11. In a game that's low on magic normally, the Castle can be a symbol of how powerful magic can be (or once was). In a high-powered campaign, they might be a rare-but-awesome sight, akin to how our world treats aircraft carriers. (Even though I know those ships are "mundane," I still consider them to be modern-day engineering masterpieces.) Curiously, in a world that's otherwise devoid of arcane arts, a feat of epic magic might seem *less* spectacular; after all,

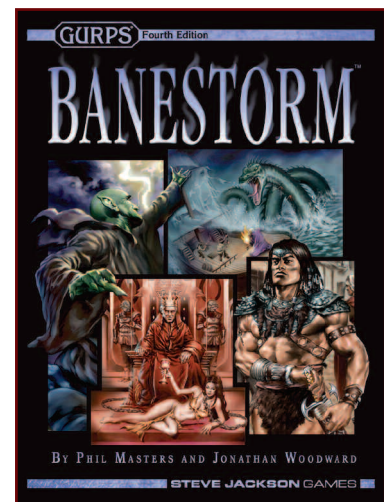
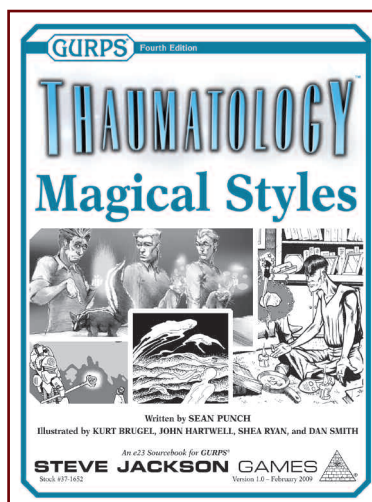
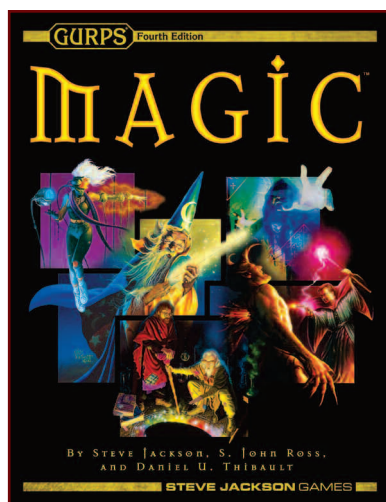
if you don't know you're looking at magic, what differentiates a flying castle from a volcano or the moon? (Of course, now I'm envisioning a world where the moon and all volcanoes are magical constructs . . .)

I think that's one of the things that makes epic magic so interesting: It can plunge some worlds into war (see the One True Ring as an example), or it can serve as the cornerstone for a fantastic world where amazing magical constructs are a part of daily life.

Hopefully this issue will open up some ideas for bringing the possibilities of epic magic into your game, whether you're using *GURPS Magic*, *Thaumatology*, *Spaceships*, or something *weirder!*

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Is there anything we did this issue that you think is the dawning of a new era of greatness? Or something that should be tossed into the volcano that forged it? Whether we're full of epic win or epic fail, we'd love to hear from you. Send your electronic scrolls to [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or visit our legendary gathering spot at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



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# ALL THE EPIC WAYS

BY MARK GELLIS

The word “epic” implies a number of things. First, whether it is subtle or flashy, epic magic has wide scope or, if it is directed at a single subject or a small group, an extraordinary level of effect. In fact, to be considered epic magic, a spell often needs nothing beyond being a kind of supernatural artillery.

Along with its sheer power, epic magic usually has some kind of “wow” factor. It does not just obey the “rule of cool” – it is flesh of its flesh and bone of its bone; it is the coolness of the effect that frequently clinches whether or not a piece of magic can be called epic in the first place. The scene from *The Fellowship of the Ring* where Saruman conjures up a storm by chanting at the sky from the top of his tower is an example of this kind of epic magic.

Interestingly, one way to describe the coolness of epic magic is to draw upon the work of Edmund Burke, 18th-century philosopher, politician, and writer. In Burke’s terms, epic magic is *sublime*. While *systems* of magic are often orderly, balanced, and elegant (what Burke would call “beautiful”), epic magic itself is not about elegance. Instead, epic magic evokes all the wonder and terror we feel when we see or think of vast, immeasurable things like oceans and mountain ranges or the depths of space or the eons of time before human history – things that dwarf our fragile little lives. Sometimes, they are simply too wondrous to bear. Sometimes, they are so powerful that they might kill us in an instant without any effort or even thought – not because we were in any way worth killing but because we simply were not able to get out of the way quickly enough.

Epic magic is not about pulling rabbits out of hats. It is about summoning gods, shaking down cities with earthquakes, and making the sun afraid to come over the horizon.

## WITH GREAT POWER . . .

The enormous power of epic magic often means that it tends to have lasting consequences. Some epic spells or magic items can affect the history of an entire setting. Drawing once more from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the Ring is an excellent example of how a single piece of epic magic can affect a campaign. The Ring makes anyone who uses it invincible and irresistible (the invisibility it grants is really just the icing on the cake). The price is that such power corrupts; any being that

uses the Ring will eventually become another version of Sauron. This is the point Gandalf and Elron try to make to those who wish to use the Ring: Even if Sauron could be defeated with it, the win would be a pyrrhic victory because Middle Earth will have only traded one monster for another.

More important to the discussion is what such an item might do to a campaign: Take a moment and imagine what would happen if the average adventurer had a magical item that gave him the power to dominate most beings, bending them to his will so they would feel compelled to follow his orders, and that also gave him both the skill and the luck to conquer anyone he could not dominate. Now imagine he could use this power any time he wished, simply by expending 3 or 4 FP. It is probably fair to say that such magic could easily derail an entire campaign.

In short, like the old formula of playability and realism, balance times epic equals a constant. The more epic magic becomes, the less reliably it can be moderated by a set of rules.

*Epic magic includes at least one of the following elements: scope, cool, consequence, and rarity.*

A related issue is that epic magic can bring new meaning to the “healthy or dead” problem that sometimes plagues *GURPS* combat. Epic magic is so powerful that, unless someone can resist it entirely, it is quite possible that a single hit will reduce him to ashes. While this certainly obeys the rule of cool, it may violate the rule of fun. No one wants his hero simply snuffed out with one bad dice roll. And if an adventurer can disintegrate the Big Bad with a no-fail shot, it is likely to render an adventure rather anticlimactic.

*For more thoughts on the implications of defining and using epic magic in a campaign, check out this month's Random Thought Table (pp. 36-37).*

Fortunately, one final aspect of epic magic can reduce this problem. For a variety of reasons, most epic magic is quite rare and difficult to achieve. In fact, this not only helps avoid campaign balance problems, but it keeps epic magic cool. Rarity is one of the foundations of cool; it helps epic magic stand out. After all, if *everything* is epic, is *anything* epic?

Thus, all epic magic draws on at least one of the following elements: *scope*, *cool*, *consequence*, and *rarity*. Using these concepts, the GM can adapt existing magic systems, turning them into something epic.

*Dorukan: Only the most epic magic can defend the gates.*

*Soon: Magic? Your magic can be dispelled or disrupted. Only the honor of a Paladin is unbreakable.*

*Girard: Honor, yeah. That and a silver piece will get you a hunk of cheese.*

– Rich Burlew,  
*The Order of the Stick*

## SIX DEGREES OF EPIC MAGIC

*GURPS* still a variety of options for those who wish to play or use epic mages in their games. Six of them are examined here, including how to overcome or work around problems they could cause.

### *The Long and Binding Road*

The first option is some flavor of Path/Book magic. While several paths have already been worked out in detail in *GURPS Thaumatology*, it is a simple matter to create entirely new kinds of Path/Book magic that employ entirely unique spells. These can easily be epic in scale and effect. A new type of Path/Book magic can have unique paths where some of the rituals not only take hours to complete, but are extremely difficult to complete successfully; however, those who can complete them can produce staggering effects. For example, the Ways of the Norse Gods might have the Path of Thor, the Path of Freyja, and so on. Each of these paths could include rituals that allow a mage to summon titanic elemental energies associated with those divine beings. Thus, the Path of Freyja might

include a ritual that would insure the slow destruction of any structure, perhaps even an entire city, as endless tendrils of vines and the roots of trees insidiously and relentlessly worked their ways into and over its stones and wooden beams, hour after hour, day after day, almost as if they knew what they were supposed to do.

### *Point-illism*

The second option is to build epic magic as powers, with each spell being a separate ability. Here, two important aspects can be kept in mind. The first is that almost any spell, at almost any level of power can be built, although doing so is likely to cost a lot of points. The second is that there can be several kinds of power-based magic, each one with its own unique style.

Most magic systems in *GURPS* presume a dependence on either mana or sanctity. Power-based magic, however, allows for a wide range of power sources, each creating its own special opportunities and restraints for the user. The most common “magical” power sources are chi, cosmic, divine, elemental, magical, moral, and nature (see *GURPS Powers*, pp. 26-28 for more details). These should be sufficient to create a wide variety of epic forms of magic, each with their own style (and style, properly roleplayed, is the mother of cool). However, if none of these suit the new kind of magic, or model a certain character concept, the GM can add other kinds of power sources; examples include alchemical, coronal, feral, geomantic, or possibly even necrophagous (i.e., eating carrion to gather the energy to perform magic). Almost any source is imaginable!

Power-based epic magic is especially useful for making big, flashy things happen – and happen fast – as they often do in comic books and anime. It may be expensive in terms of points, but it is often simple in terms of game mechanics to give something a tremendous range, radius of effect, ability to penetrate armor, or duration. With the standard spellcasting system, the powerful and demonic 500-point lich king might raise a few dozen zombies; with powers, he can radiate dark and deadly energies with Toxic Attack 10d (Area Effect, 128 yards, +350%; Cosmic, Irresistible Attack, +300%; Emanation, -20%; Magical, -10%) [288] and then build an army in a matter of moments from the corpses of those he has killed with Allies (1,000 zombies; Built on 25% ; Magical, -10%; Minion, +0%; Summonable, +100%; 15 or less) [99]. Armies fall before him . . . and then the soldiers rise as mindless thralls, still wearing their old faces but with neither intelligence nor souls, ready to do his bidding.

### *Everybody’s Heard About the Word*

The third option is to use Words of Power (see *GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 178-179). In fact, this is one of the best options: Words of Power are the embodiment of the raw energy of creation. They are – practically by definition – epic. The difficulty and danger in using them adds to their dramatic appeal. Unless the user is a god, or godlike in power, he cannot simply use a Word of Power whenever he wishes.

*For an interesting source of “epic magic” using this system, consider modifying GURPS Psionic Powers. Simply tweak the origin to one of the ones listed above (chi, cosmic, divine, etc.).*

## *Do It With Style!*

A fourth option is to take an existing style of magic normally associated with the standard spellcasting spells or alchemy elixirs and incorporate epic elements by treating it as a magical style (see *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles*), with secret spells and secret materials. This is very similar to the first option, in that the GM adds new spells, elixirs, perks, and so on to an existing framework. Here, one challenge is to make sure the epic elements of the style do not unbalance the campaign.

## *Realms of Reality*

A fifth option closely related to the previous one is to use a form of Realm magic (see *GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 188-192). Realm magic is so flexible that it is not difficult to make it “epic.” Perhaps the simplest method is to take the basic three-level version of Realm magic (Detection and Measurement, Control and Suppression, and Creation and Destruction) that is described in *GURPS Thaumatology* and add a fourth level, “Transcendent Power.” This last level is the level of truly epic magic, the magic of the gods . . . and of any mortal who dares to use magic like a god.

In addition, it can be helpful to combine Realm magic with the rules for magical styles. Although *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles* (p. 32) suggests that flexible magic-working should not be limited by restricting which Realms can be mastered by different schools, there is another way to employ the style rules here. Each style of Realm magic covers all aspects of creation that can be affected by magic, but each style implies a different way of perceiving the universe and then breaks reality up into different categories. This approach also helps with “bookkeeping” by providing a simple method for distinguishing between styles of magic. For example, Western Elemental Realm Magic might allow casters to manipulate four realms:

Earth, Air, Water, and Fire. Chinese Elemental Realm Magic, however, might have *five* realms: Earth, Air, Water, Wood, and Metal. To prevent confusion about who can manipulate what when practitioners of each style appear in the same campaign by requiring different mages to take different Style Familiarity perks, such as Style Familiarity (Western Elemental Realms) for one, and Style Familiarity (Chinese Elemental Realms) for the other.

## *When Symbols Clash*

A sixth option is to use a form of Symbol Drawing. Normally, Symbol Drawing employs verbs and nouns, combinations of which can be employed like spells from the standard system. However, one could also use a variant on the “whole-word” version of Symbol Drawing (see *GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 177). Here, each symbol is a spell, perhaps one totally unknown outside this particular magical school. Each of these spells could have epic effects. This is very similar to the Path/Book magic approach, although the mechanics are somewhat different. Perhaps the most important difference is that – as written – Symbol Drawing can be used by anyone, as long as the local mana level can support magic. One does not need to be a mage to use Symbol Drawing magic, and levels of Magery do not improve one’s skill with drawing symbols.

Symbol Drawing has a built-in “cool” element in that it requires time and artistry. It is a natural place for players and the GM to work in melodramatic or creepy roleplaying. Some types of Symbol Drawing magic might even require special materials like skin or silver, or special conditions like having to carve the magical glyph inside a particular cave to make the magic work. As with other kinds of magic drawing on the existing spellcasting system and its variations, a GM will have to be careful to create spells and symbols that are playable and balanced with the rest of the campaign world.

# THE SEVEN SONGS OF APOLLO

For each example of epic magic presented here, the basic concepts and mechanics are described. In some cases, a single ritual, spell, or elixir also is detailed. The rest is left to the GM.

For the purposes of these examples, the Greek god Apollo is assumed to be connected with seven fundamental themes, concepts, or kinds of energy: Sunlight, Knowledge, Harmony, Medicine, Plague, Music, and Poetry.

## **PATH/BOOK MAGIC: RITUAL MAGIC (APOLLONIAN SONGS)**

The Apollonian Songs immediately lend themselves to use as a variety of Path/Book magic. Ritualists first need the core skill Ritual Magic (Apollonian Songs). Then they could learn

individual paths based on Apollonian themes, such as the Path of Sunlight, the Path of Harmony, and so on.

As a 0-point feature, the rituals are sung. It is left to the GM to determine whether a Singing roll is necessary to complete a ritual.

As with all kinds of Path/Book magic, individual rituals are techniques defaulting to one or more of the Paths. The GM must develop most of the rituals, although he could include some existing ones, such as Sooth, Dose, and Succor from the Path of Health to the Path of Apollonian Medicine. The GM also needs to decide whether to use the Path of Knowledge as is or to design a separate Path of Apollonian Knowledge with its own special rituals. As one example, the new epic ritual on p. 7 could be included in the Path of Apollonian Knowledge.

*Using an existing power framework (like GURPS Psionic Powers) has the advantage of following many of the tenants of this month's Random Thought Table: They're different enough to hang a plot on, they follow the rules, and they don't break the game by their inclusion (at least, no more so than any other injection of character points).*

*“This,” she said, presenting the rod, “is a caduceus, like that given Mercury by Apollo. It is the symbol of an enlightened spirit.”*

*– James Reese, **The Book of Shadows***

### **The Truth Is What I Say It Is**

*Effect Shaping: Path of Apollonian Knowledge-7; Path of Knowledge-9; four hours.*

*Energy Accumulating: 12 points.*

The ritual allows the performer to change the truth. It *must* be cast on a global scale; for Earth, this translates to an additional -41 to skill or 41 energy. If successful, the ritual alters consciousness across the entire world! Over a period of 24 hours, what people know and believe will gradually change, so gradually that they do not notice. One piece of knowledge is created, modified, or erased in the minds of anyone who might be connected to that piece of knowledge. In addition, all references to that knowledge (newspaper articles, etc.) change, too. The new consciousness even includes a plausible explanation, if one is necessary. The caster may choose this explanation himself as part of the changed knowledge or he may allow the magic to randomly create one or more explanations in the minds of those affected. If these explanations are mutually exclusive, the people affected are likely to defend their beliefs and even attack one another rather than work together to figure out the truth.

Any critical failure during the casting causes the caster to permanently gain a Delusion. The GM determines the nature of the Delusion, but it should be related somehow to what the caster was trying to do to the rest of the world. The character's point value should be reduced accordingly.

The ritual does not actually change what happened. If it was possible to discover externally verifiable facts that proved the truth was something different than what people believed, those who discovered those facts could set about changing what people knew and thought.

Eventually, once a critical mass of the population has unlearned the false truth, references that had been magically changed would magically restore themselves, again so gradually that no one would notice.

As an example, someone could use this ritual make everyone in the world, even the people involved in the attack, believe that Japan had not attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, but that it had instead been a sneak attack by the Soviet Union. America declared war on Japan a day later for other reasons, and eventually, the Soviets switched sides and fought with America against the Nazis. But the people of America would never forget or forgive what happened – *Remember the Arizona!* – and they wait for a chance to take revenge.

In other words, a single casting of a single spell can change history. Not the past itself, just history. But that is sufficient for a person to shape the future if he knows what to do with the falsely remembered past.

Naturally, the more complicated a piece of knowledge is, the less likely it is that the ritual will work for a very long period of time. With the example given above, too many bits of history do not add up, and eventually someone would look at the wreck of the *Arizona* and of other ships and realize that it must have been Japan that attacked Pearl Harbor. Even after the general reversal of belief, however, the false truth might remain popular with fringe groups and conspiracy theorists. And it would be exactly the sort of thing someone could use to attract mentally unbalanced individuals so that he could turn them into fanatics. Or assassins.

## **THE SEVEN APOLLONIAN WORDS**

Almost as obvious as the Path/Book approach, the Seven Songs of Apollo could be a form of magic employing Words of Power. Each Word opens a conduit to the fundamental energies associated with the god Apollo. Anyone who knows any of these Words of Power and who is able to use them can produce staggering magical effects.

With Sunlight, someone can bring the sun out in the middle of a storm – or even the middle of the night. Knowledge lets someone answer any one question or learn any secret, past, present, or future. Harmony settles disputes and renders all those who hear it willing to pursue peace; using it on a battlefield can bring a war to an end. Medicine can heal whoever hears it, while Plague can kill anyone who hears it. Music and Poetry inspire songs and symphonies so beautiful they can change the world.

Being able to use these Words successfully is, of course, more difficult than it sounds. *GURPS Thaumatology* (pp. 178-179) makes it clear that Words of Power do not bend themselves to the will of a caster simply because he happens to know them. Only a critical success allows the user to control the effects; any other success is dictated by the GM. Moreover, any attempt to use a Word of Power can hurt or kill a caster – a successful attempt burns 36 fatigue points!

*If using the examples built in this article, GURPS Greece can be useful for flavor. It includes information on the god Apollo, as well as details on other Greek deities. It could be interesting to extrapolate additional epic magic abilities based on other gods!*

When a mage needs to check against death every time he casts a spell, and may spend a week in a coma even if he does not die, he might keep his abilities secret and he might look for ways to avoid using magic whenever possible.

In terms of game mechanics, this is a remarkably simple magical system. The mage must first learn Hidden Lore (Apollo). This by itself could be the source of many adventures as it could include secrets about artwork, magical weapons, and so on.

To actually learn a new Apollonian Word, the inquirer must first have appropriate resources (e.g., access to a library of magical tomes, etc.) and then make a skill roll. Each attempt requires one week of study. On a *critical* success, the wizard has the opportunity to take one of the Words (e.g., Apollonian Word of Harmony [10]) as a new advantage. On a regular success, the mage gains no new advantage but may learn something interesting or useful. A failure means that the time spent studying was wasted. A critical failure means that the mage suffers an injury similar to that experienced whenever by rolling a critical failure while actually speaking a Word of Power.

There are no other skills, techniques, Style Familiarities, or perks. The system of magic consists entirely of one skill and seven 10-point advantages that can kill the caster each time he tries to use one of them.

Apollonian Words of Power are the stuff of raw creation. They can be used by anyone who learns them; Magery is not a prerequisite. In addition, they will work anywhere, and are unaffected by mana levels. The only requirement is that the god Apollo is part of the universe where they are being used; should a mage travel to a plane of existence or alternate world where the laws of reality are so different that Apollo does not and perhaps cannot exist, the Words become useless.

## MAGICAL STYLE: APOLLONIAN SPELLCASTING

Magical styles can be useful for including some epic magic in a campaign without risking a loss of game balance. Each piece of epic magic is a secret spell or a secret material, which means that PC – and even powerful NPCs – are unlikely to know many of them.

The magical style for the Seven Songs of Apollo should cover the following concepts, the details of which are determined by the GM. The minimum prerequisite skills to learn the style include: Alchemy, First Aid, Musical Composition, Musical Instrument (Any), Pharmacy (Herbal), Poetry, Singing, Thaumatology, and Theology (Greek Polytheism). The spell list draws heavily on the colleges of Communication and Empathy, Health, Knowledge, Light and Darkness, and Sound. What makes it worth studying as a style is that it includes secret spells and secret materials that allow a mage to perform epic magic. This is because Apollonian Spellcasting uses more conventional spells to “toughen” mages so they gradually

become able to comprehend and then use thaumaturgical substitutes for divine energies.

In short, this is not divine magic. It uses an understanding of both theology and thaumaturgy to mimic divine magic with spells.

This has certain advantages. While a person does need to be a mage to cast spells (unless one is in a high mana zone or very high mana zone), he does not need to be a priest of Apollo, or blessed by Apollo, to do so. In fact, a mage does not even really need to worship or believe in Apollo, as long as he can understand those magical principles that can simulate the divine abilities.

Of course, since this only works in a universe where Apollo is real, there is always the risk of drawing his attention when doing this. Someone who uses these spells in a manner that seemed openly disrespectful to Apollo (e.g., if one attacked one of his temples with these spells), the god might notice it and be deeply offended. Of course, offending Apollo rarely ends well for the mortals involved.

As an example of how Apollonian spellcasting can include epic magic, a sample secret material is described below.

*Here the blood is clearly the blood of the sun from which the fern seed is thus directly derived. Thus it may be taken as certain that the fern seed is golden because it is believed to be an emanation of the sun's golden fire.*

– William Tyler Olcott,  
**Sun Lore of All Ages**

### **Secret Elixir: Blood of the Sun**

A ferociously powerful elixir, rare and very dangerous to use, the Blood of the Sun is also capable of turning anyone into a hero. It is literally a small piece of the energies surrounding Apollo, magically drawn from the skies and harvested and processed into something that mere mortals can use. Anyone who uses the elixir must make an HT roll. On a critical failure, he bursts into flame and takes 24d of burning damage. Whether he succeeds or fails, if he survives taking the elixir, he gain 24 points of protean ability for 24 hours (“a cycle of the sun”).

*Campaign idea: The heroes learn that the Seven Songs of Apollo are required to resolve a thorn situation. However, as the heroes investigate the situation, they realize there are many forms of epic magic going by that name! Will any of them work, or do they need to find the right one?*



The points may be spent on any combination of Apollo-related skills or advantages, such as +1 to IQ and four points in skills, or Charisma +4 and four points in skills, or an IQ/VH skill like Surgery at IQ+4, or any six IQ/H spells at IQ+Magery. The points may be reassigned to new skills or abilities as often as the user likes. The GM determines if a particular application of points is “Apollonian” or not. If the game mechanics are needed, the ability may be treated as Cosmic Modular Ability 24 (Apollonian powers only, -10%; Magical, -10%) [192].

After the elixir wears off, the subject loses 24 FP; remember that below 0 FP, each FP lost *also* causes 1 point of injury. The user recovers normally. For most people, this means a few hours of unconsciousness, then a few weeks of healing.

*Duration:* 24 hours.

*Form:* Potion only.

*Cost:* \$24,000/\$48,000.

*Recipe:* \$4,800; 24 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-6; any failure causes 1d burning damage to the alchemist; a critical failure causes a divine servitor of Apollo (e.g., a demi-god from Greek mythology) to appear and punish the alchemist for poaching from the cosmic energies that are rightfully the property of the god.

## THE SEVEN GLYPHS OF APOLLO

What makes Symbol Drawing (Apollonian Glyphs) such an interesting kind of magic is that anyone can use it. A nonmage who invests the time necessary to learn how to create and use the glyphs can combine them as effectively as any mage to produce extraordinary effects. There is a cost, however, in that the artist must burn a great deal of FP to use these glyphs, and a critical failure can have dire consequences – those who fly too close to the sun, after all, sometimes catch fire and fall.

There are only seven glyphs: one for each of the seven powers of Apollo. Each glyph is an IQ/VH skill. Creating a glyph, either on a portable token or carved into some surface, takes 24 hours; a one-time scroll (which bursts into flame once it is used) takes 12 hours to create. Activating any glyph takes 24 seconds of Concentration and costs 24 FP.

Stopping the effects of a glyph requires obliterating it. An Apollonian glyph with the opposite effect can then be affixed to the spot, to turn around the results of the original glyph.

One of the Glyphs is described below.

### *Glyph of Plague*

Plague is the dark face of Apollo. It is the means by which he inflicts his wrath on those who have offended him. The Glyph of Plague has only one real use: It creates disease of one kind or another.

When the glyph is successfully inscribed on the surface of a structure (tavern, well, etc.), those inhabiting or affected by that structure suffer an outbreak of plague in 1d days. Once the first outbreak has past, everyone is, for as long as they remain there, at a permanent increased risk of illness (treat this as a -1 to the local Hygiene rating, if using the rules from *GURPS City Stats*, and a -1 to all relevant HT rolls). One of the best places to apply the glyph is, of course, a well, food supply, or some means of public transportation, as it will spread disease to the largest possible number of people.

The effect of the glyph is limited to its placement. This must be roleplayed; the GM determines whether or not the plague affects only a few people or an entire city. This is where the epic potential of the Glyph lies. Properly used, a single casting of one spell could kill thousands.

### A Pox on This Adventure

A plague has broken out, and the city’s leaders have reason to believe that its source is magical. Whoever has attacked the city seems to have found an excellent place to affix the Glyph of Plague, however; as hundreds are either sick or dying, but no one has been able to find the markings. The only clue is that a few of the searchers have ended up dead – obviously, they got too close. The heroes are asked to help.

Even if someone can locate and destroy the glyph (which is done by obliterating it and then affixing a Glyph of Medicine on the spot where it was located), finding out who used it may prove difficult as Symbol Drawing can be employed by non-mages. Fighting this kind of magical terrorism may involve combat but certainly involves solving mysteries.

*The purpose of the magical operation set out in these pages is to generate libidinal energy, and then transmit that energy into a chosen glyph. The glyph then acts as a doorway, channelling energy to the entity associated with it.*

*– Julian Vayne and  
Greg Humphries,  
Now That’s What I  
Call Chaos Magick*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Mark Gellis teaches professional communication, literature, and humanities, and advises a chapter of the Delta Chi fraternity, at Kettering University. He lives in Flushing, Michigan, with his wonderful wife, Sandra (“She Who Must Be Obeyed”); their lovely and talented daughter, Elizabeth; and their beloved but criminally insane cat, Miss Spock. He squanders much of his free time playing *GURPS* and computer games such as *Harpoon*, reading pretty much anything he can get his hands on, and watching far too many old movies and far too much anime.

# THE SKYSTONE CASTLE AND OTHER WONDERS

BY DAVID L. PULVER

Epic magic doesn't always follow expected rules. These fantastic enchanted vehicles were constructed using the guidelines found in *GURPS Spaceships; Spaceships 4: Fighters, Carriers, and Mecha*; and *Spaceships 7: Divergent and Paranormal Tech*. None of these are actually *spacecraft*. Rather, they represent magical buildings or machines far beyond the capabilities of ordinary enchanters.

*A magic far beyond all we do here!*  
– J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter  
and the Sorcerer's Stone*

## THE SKYSTONE CASTLE (TL^)

This is a magical aerial castle built of skystone, a miraculous blue-white aetherial mineral with antigravity properties. The Skystone Castle is 200' across (unstreamlined, SM +9) and masses 3,000 tons. It has three towers surrounding a small central keep; each tower is topped with a lightning rod. The castle is not self-propelled, drifting slowly with the wind as it floats across the land, although it maintains a constant altitude of 3,000'.

The Skystone Castle was originally built by a storm giant as a wedding present for his bride. According to legend, he had been fishing and caught a great whale, and inside the leviathan

was an iron flask that held a mighty djinn, the Princess of the North Wind. In exchange for freedom, the djinn built the castle, using skystone quarried from her home plane. The giant lovers flew up to the castle astride a pair of great rukhs (later installed in a aviary). They and their growing number of children (and birds) dwelt amid the clouds for many years, until their clan's habit of launching raids on the human lands below (and kidnapping humans as slaves and servants) mortally offended a mighty emperor. After a lengthy aerial siege, the Skystone Castle eventually fell (largely thanks to the construction by the emperor's wizards of the horrid Orichalcum Dragon; see p. 13). The castle (somewhat the worse for wear due to dragon fire) was then occupied by the empire.

Its new owners refurbished its interior to fit humans, but much of it (such as rooms and corridors) remains out of scale, sized for 18'-tall giants. This inconvenience dissuaded the emperor from his initial plans to convert it into a flying summer palace; eventually, he granted it to his chief mage, who founded a royal academy for the study of magical arts.

Many decades later, Skystone Castle became a "typical" magician's school, occupied by distinguished wizardly professors, strange wonders, earnest students, and libraries of arcane lore. Novices are overwhelmed by the immense size of the doors, hallways, and chambers. A dozen students may be housed in a single bedroom, with four more bunking in its closet. The giant-sized stairs often require their own separate stepladders or levitation. While many oversized rooms have been subdivided with screens and hanging drapes, numerous items of original giant manufacture still remain, often repurposed. Thus, a giant's teacup may be used as a cauldron, or a handkerchief as a tablecloth, and residents sometimes swim laps in pool-sized bathtubs.

*Epic battle: The Skystone Castle versus the Tower of Octavius (from the GURPS book of the same name).*

The former rukh aviary now houses human-sized aerial riding beasts such as griffins and winged horses, although flying carpets and broomsticks are also popular.

While the academy's initial goal was to train mages who would serve the empire, since then, the focus of "Skystone Academy" has become one of arcane philosophy and thaumaturgical scholarship. Its aerial location has insulated it from the mundane world, fostering an "ivory tower" mentality and, perhaps, a bit of arrogance. Rather than lead to isolation, however, the drifting academy has evolved into a haven for those wizards who harbor unusual, deviant, or radical philosophical, magical, or social views.

Such freethinkers have gained control of the academy's hierarchy, purging more orthodox teachers. While no single philosophy is dominant, struggles between rival philosophical-occult schools and their partisans have become far more important than the process of educating mages in sorcery. Wizards educated at Skystone Academy tend to be highly skilled, especially in the rarefied arts of air magic (in part thanks an extremely good library on this subject), but equally often they leave with their own acquired baggage of radical social or philosophical beliefs . . . somewhat to the despair of those would employ them as traditional "court wizards."

*The first stop for magical knowledge.*

#### Front Hull Systems

- [1] Skystone Armor (dDR 7, 1/3G lift).
- [2-4] Stone Armor (total dDR 6)
- [5] Habitats (10 luxury cabins; 10 labs; magical life support).
- [6] Hangar Bay (100 tons).

#### Central Hull Systems

- [1] Skystone Armor (dDR 7, 1/3G lift).
- [2-4] Stone Armor (total dDR 6)
- [5!] Habitats (one chapel, six cabins, four briefing rooms, 12 bunkrooms, four-bed sickbay; 30 tons steerage; magical life support).
- [6, core] Open Space (great hall; 0.2 acres).

#### Rear Hull Systems

- [1] Skystone Armor (dDR 7, 1/3G lift).
- [2-4] Stone Armor (total dDR 6).
- [5] Habitats (one craft shop, eight briefing rooms, three labs, four bunkrooms; 50 tons steerage; magical life support).
- [6] Cargo (150 tons).
- [core] Habitat (bunkroom, 7 cells or cages, lab; 75 tons steerage; magical life support).

The Skystone Castle is inhabited by about 100 students; a dozen masters; and a few servants, magical animals, and experimental subjects. Labs are primarily devoted to thaumatology, meteorology, and alchemy.

TL	Vehicle	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	dDR	Range	Cost
^	Skystone Castle	100	-	12	0	3,000	317.8	+9	128ASV	13	-	\$32.7M

## THE JUGGERNAUT (TL^)

Shaped like a gargantuan six-legged sphinx (a winged lion with a woman's head and torso), this mobile terror is believed by most mages to be a truly enormous stone golem, although its magical signature is unusual. It is 520' tall at the shoulder, and about 900' long (SM +13), massing over 300,000 tons. It strides across the land, leaving a path of destruction in its wake. Hovels of peasants, churches of the pious, and castles of great lords have all been ground to rubble under its remorseless tread.

It first emerged two centuries ago in a trackless desert on the edge of civilization, dragging itself out of the sand in a cloud of dust so vast it blotted out the sun. Some say it was created by the gods to humble man. Others hold that a lost subterranean supercivilization of gnomes and dwarves built it as a magical war machine to conquer the surface world. A few claim it's the creation of a forgotten guild of artificers and technomancers, driven underground by rival magi, who labored in secret chambers for generations to shape an instrument that would overthrow their surface rivals.

In the time since it emerged, it has lumbered slowly across the world, rarely moving at full speed, but taking a winding

path that is difficult to predict without divination. It does not communicate, seeming to be an automaton – no one has ever been able to detect any mind or soul within it. Some scholars think it follows the movements of the stars (and hence can be best forecast by astrology), while others say its actions follow a complex geometrical formula. To many, it seems to move at random, or obeys orders given it by its creators. Planning or sentience clearly directs it to some degree, as it has yet to plunge into any deep lakes or seas, or batter itself to pieces against an impassible mountain range. Its ultimate objective is unknown.

Many religions believe it is drawn to sin, to punish the wicked, for it does not turn aside from the works of man. It has crushed one major city, a few castles and forts, and numerous villages and towns. Occasionally, its actions have even proven beneficial: Once, it smashed a path through a trackless monster-haunted forest that cleared a way for profitable settlement. Another time, it terrified two warring states into making a frightened peace. As the Juggernaut approaches a territory, a cottage industry often springs up with fortune tellers and diviners predicting which way it will move and what settlements might be at risk.

*Sin eaters (Pyramid #3/19: Tools of the Trade Clerics) could be instrumental in keeping the Juggernaut at bay.*

Due to its great size and power, efforts to stop it with brute force have normally proven utterly fruitless. On one or two occasions, however, it has been turned aside in the face of truly epic earth magics that have warped the very geography in its path . . . though some scholars claim this was less out of fear than because whatever internal map it carried was confused.

The interior of the Juggernaut contains many hollow spaces. There are openings in the mouth, nostrils, ears, and rear torso of the construct that lead into a multi-leveled labyrinth: hundreds of passages and rooms of varying size and shape, all connected by stairs, ramps, and pits.

Old legends say the Juggernaut was initially uninhabited (save for nesting birds, plus a few spiders and scorpions) but this state did not persist for long. Its first passengers were a tribe of daring mountain brigands who, after their village was crushed, used ropes and grapnels to board it as it crossed a high pass. Perhaps they sought to revenge themselves on whoever they believe lived inside the Juggernaut. Instead, they found nothing but empty stone (at least, according to some stories), but soon realized that as villagers or towns that found themselves in its path were evacuated by their panicked residents, they could descend to loot the abandoned dwellings. Over the next couple of years, these hillmen soon amassed a sizable hoard of treasure and a reputation as wealthy and flamboyant “land pirates.” Then they attracted the attention of a dragon . . .

That was only the beginning! In the centuries since it rose from the sands, the Juggernaut has been raided and occupied several dozen times, serving as a mobile stronghold for colorful bands of pirates, exiles, refugees, and mercenaries . . . and to the adventurers and monsters who arrived to prey upon *them*. Although humans require considerable effort or magic to board it (see below), many flying beasts such as wyverns, griffons, gargoyles, and giant eagles have also landed and nested in it – evicting the last passengers, or existing in symbiosis with them.

Besides monsters and brigands, many scholars and mages have at various times fought or tricked their way in and taken residence, often seeking to unravel its mysteries or attempting to control it. Priests and worshippers have also arrived, some in a failed attempt to exorcise it, others building temples within the Juggernaut, either claiming it as a creation of their own gods or worshipping it as a deity in its own right. Some cults were passengers long enough to even entomb their dead there, transforming chambers deep within the Juggernaut into burial catacombs (some of which are now rumored to be haunted by undead).

Despite cycles of periodic looting and monster-occupation, much of the interior of the Juggernaut today bears the trappings of civilization: barracks, armories, dungeons, treasure rooms, cisterns, granaries, chapels, and so on. Some long-term passengers have even beautified parts of the interior, adding carvings, painted frescos, and statuary. A number of great treasures, often taken by its occupants from cities or castles destroyed by its passage, are believed to have been hidden in secret rooms within it. There are even persistent tales that certain of its inhabitants have discovered the location of secret rooms, runes, or rituals that reveal truths about the Juggernaut’s mysterious creators, or permit the Juggernaut to be controlled.

Due to its height, speed, and lack of any access points in its legs, entering or leaving the Juggernaut is best achieved by flying creatures or magic. It is also possible to jump or swing onto it when it is moving by a high tower or cliff side. Due to the gradual weathering and natural roughness of the stone, a highly skilled mountain climber might be able to clamber 173 yards up its legs to the top with proper tools, but this is *very* difficult due to their movement (Climbing rolls at -6 in addition to other modifiers). Once aboard the vessel, a would-be passenger will find its sheer size and relatively slow speed makes it a somewhat stable platform, although it’s still like living aboard a ship being tossed in stormy weather, especially when the construct is moving over anything but the smoothest terrain! (The GM may wish to apply penalties of -1 to -4 to most tasks. The few children who’ve been born aboard often seem to have Perfect Balance.)

#### **Front Hull Systems**

- [1-3] Stone Armor (total dDR 30).
- [4] Habitat (10 briefing rooms, four establishments, thaumaturgy laboratory, 80 cabins, 100 bunkrooms, 200 cells; 9,000 tons steerage cargo).
- [5-6!] Robot Legs (magic powered).
- [core] Control Room (no control stations, pre-radio, C4 “computer”).

#### **Central Hull Systems**

- [1-3] Stone Armor (total dDR 30).
- [4] Habitat (10 establishments, 100 bunkrooms, 60 cabins, 10 luxury cabins, 200 cells; 9,000 tons steerage cargo).
- [5-6!] Robot Legs (magic powered).
- [core] Mana Engine (one magical Power Point).

#### **Rear Hull Systems**

- [1-3] Stone Armor (total dDR 30).
- [4] Habitat (one briefing room, four craft shops, four establishments, 83 cabins, 180 bunkrooms, 120 cells; 9,000 tons steerage cargo).
- [5-6!] Robot Legs (magic powered).

The Juggernaut has total automation. The “computer” in its core is actually not alive, but rather an inner maze of complex passages that forms a giant circuit board. Damage represents disruptions of these passages.

Its legs *collectively* require one Power Point. Legs are normally limited to SM +7 or less. Being a magical construct, the Juggernaut exceeds these limits. While it is shaped like a sphinx, only its legs are capable of movement. As such, it does not qualify as having the winged feature or posses a maw system.

The Juggernaut’s habitats lack any life-support capabilities; this has the effect of increasing the cabin space as described for the magical life support option (see **GURPS Spaceships 7: Divergent and Paranormal Tech**), but without environmental protection.

It’s up to the GM who or what, if anything, is living in the Juggernaut. It might even be a form of “mobile dungeon” with several different groups of humanoids, brigands, and monsters (plus treasures) presently dwelling inside.

*As this article’s use of GURPS Spaceships shows, technology can be a good source of “epic magic” (see p. 38).*

TL Vehicle dST/HP Hnd/SR HT Move LWt. Load SM Occ. dDR Range Cost

**DRIVING/TL^ (MECHA)**

^	Juggernaut	500	0/5	13	10/30	300,000	27,406.6	+13	4,066A	30	-	\$13,149.5M
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Top speed and Hnd/SR are for movement on the ground.

## THE ORICHALCUM DRAGON OF TELEK XAUL (TL^)

The “oridrake” was constructed by the legendary warlock-engineer Telek Xaul. A grand master of the colleges of Earth, Enchantment, Necromantic, and Fire magic, she was the chief engineer of a would-be “dark lord.” After escaping her master’s inevitable destruction at the hands of a small party of adventurers, she duplicated his lich-spell, made herself immortal, and went freelance, eventually forming her own mercenary company: the Bloody Key.

Specialists in magical siege warfare, the warriors of the Bloody Key have boasted there is no city or citadel that can stand its assaults. Although already famous for her diabolic engines and low tricks (such as her undead siege elephant, iron golem-powered ram, clockwork fireball-throwers, and tunneling hordes of zombie badgers), the Orichalcum Dragon is by far Telek’s greatest feat of necromantic combat engineering.

It was commissioned for the aerial assault on the floating Skystone Castle (pp. 10-11) of a clan of storm giants. They had spirited away the emperor’s bride from the heart of his citadel (by magic beanstalk or giant winged rukhs, depending on the account) on the eve of the royal wedding, and they held her for ransom. After several months of failed negotiations, and the humiliation of an embarrassingly botched rescue mission by the royal guard, the emperor had had enough. He turned to Telek Xaul and the Bloody Keys, nearly begging the royal treasury in the process.

To make the Orichalcum Dragon, four iron golems under Telek’s command worked in the forges for 40 days and nights, as Telek and her circle of mercenary acolytes drank mana (and sacrificial lives) like water in a frenzy of quick and dirty enchantment. The main source of the orichalcum metal was the magical plate armor of the 99 knights of the imperial bodyguard, which were melted down (with the disgraced knights still in them). Their sacrifice powered Telek’s summoning of a high seraphim, an angelic fire spirit, which she chained inside an adamant globe in the dragon’s metal heart.

TL Vehicle dST/HP Hnd/SR HT Move LWt. Load SM Occ. dDR Range Cost

**PILOTING/TL^ (ORNITHOPTER)**

^	Oridrake	30	+5/5	12	5/200	100	0.8	+6	2+6	12	-	\$7.33M
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Hnd/SR and Move (in yards per second) are for its air movement. On the ground, it is Hnd/SR 0/5 with Move 10/20.

Its bound celestial fires, amplified by its impotent rage, were tapped to power the dragon’s mechanical muscles and flame. The final construct massed 100 tons (SM +6, unstreamlined) and was 60’ long (with a 120’ wingspan).

The Orichalcum Dragon, ridden into battle by Xaul and the emperor, spearheaded the final assault on the castle, restoring imperial honor and reducing most of the impudent giants to ash. (Unfortunately, the emperor’s bride was also lost in the resultant holocaust, but Xaul was able to transfer her soul into a beautiful jade-and-gold puppet-automaton). The dragon and Xaul vanished soon after that, occasionally reappearing to write another bloody chapter in the pages of history.

**Front Hull Systems**

[1-2]	Orichalcum Armor (total dDR 12).
[3]	Maw (31d-1 cr damage or 3d cr dDam).
[4!]	Major Battery (fixed 30 MJ Heat Ray, magic powered).
[5-6!]	Robot Legs (magic powered).
[core]	Control Room (two control stations, pre-radio, no computer).

**Central Hull Systems**

[1-2]	Orichalcum Armor (total dDR 12).
[3!]	Digestive System (magic powered).
[4-5!]	Ornithopter Wings (magic powered, total 0.5G).
[6]	Passenger Seating (six seats).
[core]	Caged Spirit (five magical Power Points).

**Rear Hull Systems**

[1-2]	Orichalcum Armor (total dDR 12).
[3]	Maneuver Enhancement.
[4-5!]	Robot Legs (magic powered).
[6]	Striking Tail (33d cr damage, or 3d+1 dDam).

The Dragon has the winged design feature. (Note that, because streamlining would make the vehicle unduly fast, it is not required for designs with ornithopter wings.) It is operated by a crew of two from a small, cramped cockpit in the head; they peer out through a pair of adamantine crystal “eyes.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid SF fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*. Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has

worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating *Transhuman Space*, co-authoring the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* anime RPG, and writing countless *GURPS* books, including the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*, and the recent *GURPS Spaceships* series.

*Special thanks to Kenneth Peters for his review.*

# ESSENTIAL MAGIC

BY ANTONI TEN MONRÓS

*The dark cultist was performing a blasphemous ritual when a fireball emerged from the shadows, hitting him squarely. Shrugging, he turned, only mildly inconvenienced.*

*"You call that a fireball? My master protects me from such puny magics! You dare interrupt my ritual? Your blood shall be added to its sacrifice!"*

*"I think not, foul creature," answered the hidden mage. "So you like to play with hellish creatures? Let's see how you like the taste of hellfire!"*

**GURPS Magic** features over 800 spells, useful for a broad number of circumstances. However, it lacks high-powered elemental spells often found in sword-and-sorcery literature and in other RPGs. Even though it features Essential (Element) spells – higher powered versions of the standard Create (Element) spells – they are dead ends in the prerequisite trees; no spell has them as a prerequisite, and no spell becomes more powerful if you know them.

These optional spells extend the prerequisite trees from the Essential element spells, and are mostly powered up versions

of the standard **GURPS Magic** offensive elemental spells. As such, the GM might want to restrict their access (see *Limiting Access to Essential Spells*, p. 15) beyond their already restrictive prerequisites. Furthermore, some genres – such as **Dungeon Fantasy** – may instead need their own powered-up versions (see *Under the Hood: Essential Spells*, p. 20).

*Magic is believing in yourself. If you can do that, you can make anything happen.*

– Goethe

## ESSENTIAL SPELLS

An Essential element spell is one whose name starts with "Essential" followed by the name of the "element," such as Essential Flame or Essential Water. An Essential spell is defined as a spell with an Essential element spell as a prerequisite. All Essential spells require Magery 4 and often the spell they're an upgraded version of.

Some of the following spells use new damage types, for clarity and to avoid repetition. These damage types are based on basic types but include some extra effects. See the college descriptions for further details.

### Spell Costs

The cost of Essential spells that deal damage is usually composed of two parts: a fixed part and a variable part. The fixed part is the energy required to render the spell Essential, and the variable part represents the cost per dice of damage. In the

case of missile spells, the fixed cost is only paid in the first round of the casting.

*Example:* Phlogiston Discharge has a fixed cost of 3 plus a variable cost of 1 per 1d-1 of phlogiston damage. A caster with Magery 4 who wanted to charge 12d-12 damage would pay  $3 + 4 = 7$  energy during the first second, then 4 energy per round for the next two seconds, for a *total* of 15 energy.

In the case of area spells, only the variable cost is multiplied by the radius. The fixed cost is factored in only once.

*Example:* Hellfire Rain has a fixed cost of 12, plus a variable cost of 1 per 1d-1 of hellfire damage per yard of radius. A caster with Magery 4 who wanted to cast a three-yard-wide Hellfire Rain that dealt 4d-4 damage per second would pay  $12 + (1 \times 4 \times 3) = 24$  energy.

*The spells in this article are ideal for powering up otherwise mundane-seeming magicians. Even jaded players are likely to go "What the heck?!" as seemingly new (and deadly) forms of magical damage rain down on their heroes.*

## Limiting Access to Essential Spells

The spells presented here are very powerful, and can overshadow the lesser versions they're based upon. The GM who finds them too powerful has multiple tools at their disposal to restrict access to them, if he feels that their prerequisites are not enough of a limit. Since they all require Magery 4, restricting starting Magery to 3 makes them off limits to new characters. Improving Magery might require a quest, a Wish spell, or an Unusual Background (Archmage, worth 10 points per level of Magery over 3).

Another option is to restrict the access to the Essential element spells, since they form the gateway to the more advanced Essential spells. Maybe learning any Essential element spell requires a 5-point Unusual Background (Master of the Elements), or maybe each Essential element

spell is a secret spell, and learning it requires a Secret Spell perk and a quest to obtain the grimoire that teaches it. For more information on Magic Perks, see *GURPS Thumatology: Magical Styles*.

The last option to limit the access to Essential spells, is to make *each* Essential spell require its *own* Secret Spell perk.

Additionally, mastering Essential spells might be dependent on mastering the base spell they're based on, listed as the third prerequisite for each spell. If so, then the Essential spell skill level is capped at the base spell skill level. It might also be that the spell is limited by the skill level of the Essential element spell – possibly *in addition to* the base skill level cap. This makes high level skills in Essential spells very costly!

## AIR SPELLS

Essential Air spells based on lightning are called phlogiston spells. They deal phlogiston damage, defined as burning damage with the Surge modifier, and treat metallic armor as DR 1. Resist Lightning only reduces phlogiston damage to half, instead of granting immunity. Also, anyone injured by a phlogiston spell must make a HT roll, at -1 per 2 points of penetrating damage (-1 per 4 points of penetrating damage with Resist Lightning), or be stunned (roll HT each turn to recover). Those who critically fail this HT roll – or fail it by 5 or more – are instead paralyzed for a number of minutes equal to their margin of failure.

*Phlogiston is a very subtle matter  
capable of penetrating the densest  
substances . . .*

– G.E. Stahl

### Phlogiston Discharge

#### Missile

The caster's hand becomes charged with the essence of lightning! Treat as Lightning (*GURPS Magic*, p.196) but dealing increased phlogiston damage.

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per 1d-1 of phlogiston damage. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level, per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds; effects as per Lightning.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Air, and Lightning.

#### Item

As per Lightning, but triple energy and material costs.

### Phlogiston Arc

#### Regular

A strand of the essence of lightning forms in the caster's hand. Treat it as Lightning Whip (*GURPS Magic*, p. 196), but dealing 1d phlogiston damage.

*Duration:* 10 seconds.

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per two yards of reach (maximum of twice the caster's Magery, in yards) to cast. Half to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 2 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Air, and Lightning Whip.

#### Item

As per Lightning Whip, but costing three times the energy to create.

### Phlogiston Detonation

#### Missile

A sphere of phlogiston forms in the caster's hand, and explodes on impact. Treat it as Explosive Lightning (*GURPS Magic*, p. 196), but dealing increased phlogiston damage.

*Cost:* 3, plus 2 per 1d-1 of phlogiston explosive damage. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level, per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Air, and Explosive Lightning.

#### Item

As per Explosive Lightning, but triple energy and material costs.

*If the heroes survive an encounter with an enemy's Essential arsenal, this can be the basis to begin a quest seeking these high-powered spells themselves. "That which does not kill us gives us ideas."*

## Phlogiston Sphere

### Regular

Conjures a phlogiston sphere that moves under the will of the caster. Treat it as Ball of Lightning (*GURPS Magic*, p. 197) but dealing increased phlogiston damage.

*Duration:* 1 minute.

*Cost:* 3, plus 2 per 1d-1 of phlogiston explosive damage. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level, per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds; effects as per Ball of Lightning.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Air, and Ball of Lightning.

### Item

As per Ball of Lightning, but triple energy and material costs.

### Essential Spells in *Dungeon Fantasy*

In *Dungeon Fantasy*, the spells presented here might only be available to elementalists (see *Dungeon Fantasy 9: Summoners*), as part of their power-up, or might be available to everyone that meets the prerequisites. In the case of void elementalists, add Elemental Influence (Void) 6 as an alternate prerequisite for Void Bolt.

## Phlogiston Stare

### Regular

The caster shoots phlogiston arcs from his eyes! Treat it as Lightning Stare (*GURPS Magic*, p. 198), but dealing increased phlogiston damage.

*Duration:* 1 second.

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per 1d phlogiston damage. The number of dice of damage is limited by the caster's Magery level. Range is 2 yards per dice of damage.

*Time to cast:* 2 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Air, and Lightning Stare.

### Item

As per Lightning Stare, but triple energy and material costs.

## Phlogiston Touch

### Melee

The caster's hand becomes charged with phlogiston, ready to be discharged by touch. Treat it as Shocking Touch (*GURPS Magic*, p. 196), but dealing increased phlogiston damage.

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per 1d+1 phlogiston damage. The caster can charge up to his Magery in dice of damage.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Air, and Shocking Touch.

### Item

As per Shocking Touch, but triple the energy cost to create.

## EARTH SPELLS

Essential Earth spells create effects that rely on adamant or orichalcum. Adamant results in a deadlier magically created rock, while orichalcum increases the effectiveness of existing metallic weapons.

## Adamant Missile

### Missile

As per Stone Missile (*GURPS Magic*, p. 52), but the projectile is made of adamant instead of stone, increasing the damage and adding armor divisor 2. The projectile turns to sand after hitting.

*Cost:* 5, plus 1 per 1d+1 of crushing damage. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Earth, and Stone Missile.

### Item

As per Stone Missile, but triple the energy cost to create.

## Adamant Hail

### Area

As per Rain of Stones (*GURPS Magic*, p. 53), but the projectiles are made of adamant, gaining armor divisor 2. They turn to sand after hitting.

*Duration:* 1 minute.

*Cost:* 5, plus 1 per 1d-1 of crushing damage per yard of radius, to cast (see *Spell Costs*, p. 14). The maximum number of dice is the caster's Magery level. Same cost to maintain.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Earth, and Rain of Stones.

### Item

As per Rain of Stones, but triple the energy cost to create.

*When the spell ends, magical adamant turns to simple sand.*

## Flesh to Adamant

### Regular; Resisted by HT

As Flesh to Stone (*GURPS Magic*, p. 51), but turns the target into an adamant-like statue, tripling its weight and hardness when compared to normal stone. Remove Curse, Flesh to Stone, and similar spells that reverse this effect have their energy costs doubled, and are at -5 unless the caster knows Essential Earth.

*"Sire, we've discovered this statue of a monstrous beast. It's made of pure adamant! We've stuck it in the royal chambers. Oh, and there's an odd glowing amulet on it; we thought we'd let you take it off. . ."*



*Duration:* Permanent, unless reversed. Any parts that break off turn to sand.

*Cost:* 20 to cast. For double cost, the subject can be changed into an orichalcum-like statue instead.

*Time to cast:* 2 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Earth, and Flesh to Stone.

#### Item

As per Flesh to Stone, but triple the energy cost to create.

### Orichalcum Edge

#### Regular

Turns the surface of a metallic weapon into orichalcum, giving it a brassy tinge, and increasing its base damage by 1. Despite the name, this works even with crushing and impaling weapons. Also, the weapon gains +1 to rolls to avoid breaking when parrying heavy weapons, and has its DR doubled.

*Duration:* 1 minute.

*Cost:* 5 to cast. 2 to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Earth, and Earth to Stone.

#### Item

A weapon can be enchanted to coat itself with orichalcum when used, at no energy cost for the user. *Energy cost to create:* 2,000.

### Orichalcum Missiles

#### Regular

Like Orichalcum Edge (above), but cast on a missile weapon that fires projectiles that are at least partially metallic. Its projectiles' metallic parts become coated in orichalcum when fired, for +1 base damage.

*Duration:* 1 minute

*Cost:* 5 to cast. 2 to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 3 seconds

*Prerequisites:* Orichalcum Edge.

#### Item

Any missile weapon that fires projectiles that are at least partially metallic can be enchanted to fire orichalcum covered projectiles. *Energy cost to create:* 3,000.

## FIRE SPELLS

Elemental Fire spells deal hellfire damage. Hellfire damage is burning damage that treats any targets as if they were two steps more flammable (see *Making Things Burn*, p. B433). If a target catches fire (p. B434), the Essential Fire does an extra +1 damage; e.g., 1d-3 per second instead of 1d-4 if only partially on fire. Essential Fire can only be extinguished with magic, or with Essential Water. Resist Fire does

not protect against hellfire damage unless it has been cast at the second level of protection.

### Hellfire Orb

#### Missile

As Fireball (*GURPS Magic*, p. 74), but dealing increased hellfire damage.

*Cost:* 12, plus 1 per 1d hellfire damage to cast. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Flame, and Fireball.

#### Item

As per Fireball, but triple energy and material costs.

*It was Dark Magick at its most powerful. If only his mother could see him now, he thought. She would be so proud of him. Only a few wizards in all the world had mastered hellfire, and now he was one of them.*

*– Amanda Ashley,  
Night's Touch*

### Explosive Hellfire Orb

#### Missile

As Explosive Fireball (*GURPS Magic*, p. 75), but dealing increased hellfire damage.

*Cost:* 12, plus 2 per 1d hellfire explosive damage to cast. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Flame, and Explosive Fireball.

#### Item

As per Explosive Fireball, but triple energy and material costs.

*If the heroes use hellfire-powered effects, someone might attempt to convince them that tapping into that energy endangers their souls. (This is an especially credible threat in settings with defined heaven and hell.) Is the threat real, or is it an effort to psychologically deprive the heroes of one of their potent powers?*

*The “universal solvent” of medieval alchemy really can eat through anything: laboratory glassware, pure gold, or magical materials such as adamant.*

## – GURPS Magic

### Hellfire Rain

#### Area

As per Rain of Fire (*GURPS Magic*, p. 74) but dealing increased hellfire damage.

*Duration:* 1 minute.

*Cost:* 12, plus 1 per 1d-1 of hellfire damage per yard of radius, to cast (see *Spell Costs*, p. 14). The maximum number of dice is the caster's Magery level. Same cost to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 1 minute.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Flame, and Rain of Fire.

#### Item

As per Rain of Fire, but triple the energy cost.

### Hellfire Jet

#### Regular

A blaze of hellish fire extends from the caster's palm. Treat it as Flame Jet (*GURPS Magic*, p. 73), but it deals increased hellfire damage.

*Duration:* 1 second.

*Cost:* 12, plus 1 per 1d hellfire damage. The number of dice of damage is limited by the caster's Magery level. Range in yards is equal to the number of dice. Same cost to maintain.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Flame, and Flame jet.

#### Item

As per Flame Jet, but triple energy and material costs.

### Hellfire Breath

#### Regular

As Breathe Fire (*GURPS Magic*, p. 76), but dealing increased hellfire damage.

*Duration:* 1 second.

*Cost:* 12, plus 1 per 1d+1 hellfire damage. The number of dice of damage is limited by the caster's Magery level. Range is 2 yards per dice of damage. Cannot be maintained.

*Time to cast:* 2 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Flame, and Breathe Fire.

#### Item

As per Breathe Fire, but triple the energy cost and the price of the ruby.

## WATER SPELLS

Essential Water frozen with the Freeze spell becomes Essential Ice. Essential ice is as strong as normal stone, and does not melt naturally. Only Essential Fire can melt Essential Ice.

Essential Acid is called alkahest (see *GURPS Magic*, pp. 220-221). Alkahest spells that inflict damage leave a lingering effect that deals 1 point of corrosion damage per second, for a number of seconds equal to the number of dice. This effect can only be removed by rinsing the targeted zone with Essential Water. Resist Acid only halves the damage of alkahest spells, instead of rendering the target immune.

### Stygian Touch

#### Melee

Covers the target in crystalline Essential Ice. Treat as Icy Touch (*GURPS Magic*, p. 188), but double the DR of – and ST penalty imposed by – every 1/4” of ice. Also, the ice won't melt unless exposed to Essential Fire.

*Duration:* Permanent.

*Cost:* 2, plus 3 per 1/4” of ice; must affect the entire subject, not just a part of it! Every 1/4” will inflict 1d of damage to flame creatures.

*Time to cast:* 1 second per 1/4” of ice.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Water, and Icy Touch.

#### Item

As per Icy Touch, but triple the energy cost to create.

### Stygian Ice Sphere

#### Missile

Creates a ball of pure Essential Ice. Treat this as Ice Sphere (*GURPS Magic*, p. 186), except that on hitting, it explodes into razor-sharp shards that inflict 2d cutting damage and can hit anyone within 10 yards of the impact point, as per *Fragmentation* (p. B104).

*The Essential spells can prove invaluable to seafaring sorcerers who are looking to strengthen ships or speed up wind-powered craft. For more information and insight, check out Magic and Naval Warfare from Pyramid #3/4: Magic on the Battlefield.*

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per 1d crushing damage to cast (minimum 2d). The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Water, and Ice Sphere.

#### Item

As per Ice Sphere, but triple energy and material costs.

*A Stygian cold  
Creeps thro' my limbs,  
and loosens every joint.  
The hot blood freezes in  
its arteries,  
And stagnates round the  
region of the heart.  
A cloud comes up from  
sooty Acheron,  
And clothes mine eyelids  
With infernal night.*

*– Edward  
Bulwer-Lytton,  
Clytemnestra*

#### Stygian Ice Dagger

##### Missile

Creates a barbed, razor-sharp icicle of Essential Ice. Treat it as an Icy Dagger (*GURPS Magic*, p. 188), but it doesn't melt until extracted; extracting it requires a ready maneuver and inflicts half as much damage as it inflicted going in. Until it is removed it causes 1 point of injury per second.

*Duration:* Permanent, or until extracted.

*Cost:* 4, plus 2 per 1d-1 of impaling damage to cast. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Water, and Ice Dagger.

#### Item

As per Ice Dagger, but triple the energy cost.

#### Stygian Cold

##### Regular; Resisted by HT

Makes the victim suffer the icy temperatures of the Styx. Treat this as Frostbite (*GURPS Magic*, p. 189), except that the damage is increased and the victim also suffers -3 DX due to stiff joints and muscles for a minute after taking damage. Resist Cold does not protect against this spell, unless it's been cast at the second level of protection.

*Duration:* The damage is permanent, the DX penalty lasts for a minute.

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per 1d toxic damage. The number of dice of damage is limited by the caster's Magery level.

*Time to cast:* 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Water, and Frostbite.

#### Item

As per Frostbite, but triple energy and material costs.

#### Alkahest Sphere

##### Missile

Creates a projectile of alkahest, the universal solvent. Treat this as Acid Ball (*GURPS Magic*, p. 191), except it deals alkahest damage.

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per 1d alkahest damage. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Acid, and Acid Ball.

#### Item

As per Acid Ball, but triple the energy cost to create.

#### Alkahest Jet

##### Regular

A jet of alkahest is projected from the caster's hand. Treat this as per Acid Jet (*GURPS Magic*, p. 192), except that it is made of alkahest.

*Duration:* 1 second.

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per 1d-1 of alkahest damage. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery. Range is equal to the number of dice

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Acid, and Acid Jet.

#### Item

As per Acid Jet, but triple the energy cost to create.

*Plot idea: The heroes find a grimoire with the secret spell they've longed for. Unfortunately, there's a complication: There are dozens of versions of the same spell! After trying one or two (with disastrous results), the PCs realize that they'll need a better system to find the truth. This may involve a quest to determine which one is correct!*

## Under the Hood: Essential Spells

The GM who wishes to add more essential spells may notice that the presented spells have been created, for the most part, by adding a base energy cost that then adds some special effects to the attack. This energy cost has been loosely derived from the rules for adjustable spells (*GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 39), but without the skill penalty, and at +1 energy per +10% worth of enhancements (rather than per +5%). This change is somewhat offset by the need for an additional spell prerequisite and the loss of flexibility compared to adjustable spells . . . but it's also to ensure that these spells remain viable options when compared to standard spells!

For example, Hellfire adds Incendiary 2, +20%; and Cosmic, Lingering Side Effect, +100%, for a total of +120%, or 12 energy. Phlogiston adds Secondary Effect, Paralysis, +30%, to the built in Side Effect, Stunning, of the lightning spells.

### Rain of Alkahest

#### Area

As Rain of Acid (*GURPS Magic*, p. 191), but the acid is actually alkahest.

*Duration:* 1 minute.

*Cost:* 3, plus 3 per 1d-1 of alkahest damage per yard of radius, to cast. The maximum number of dice is the caster's Magery level (see *Spell Costs*, p. 14). Same cost to maintain.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Acid, and Rain of Acid.

#### Item

As per Rain of Acid, but triple the energy cost to create.

### Spit Alkahest

#### Regular

As Spit Acid (*GURPS Magic*, p. 192), but you spit alkahest.

*Duration:* 1 second.

*Cost:* 3, plus 1 per 1d of alkahest damage. The number of dice of damage is limited by the caster's Magery level. Range is 2 yards per dice of damage. Cannot be maintained.

*Time to cast:* 2 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, Essential Flame, and Spit Acid.

#### Item

As per Spit Acid, but triple the energy cost to create.

## META-SPILLS

### Void Bolt

#### Missile

Channels pure magical energy into the target. While charging the spell, the caster's hands are surrounded by a black aura that seems to leech ambient light. The bolt has 1/2D 50, Max 100, Acc 4, and deals cosmic crushing damage that affects incorporeal spirits as if they were corporeal, ignoring all DR and protective spells.

*Cost:* 2, plus 4 per 1d of cosmic crushing damage. The caster can charge a number of dice equal to his Magery level, per second, for up to 3 seconds.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds

*Prerequisites:* Magery 4, four Essential element spells of different colleges, and 4 missile spells, one per college of the Essential element spells taken as prerequisites.

#### Item

Staff or wand – the bolt is fired from the end of the item. Usable only by a mage. *Energy cost to create:* 5,000.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Antoni Ten is an IT specialist, database administrator, and Java developer from Alboraya, Valencia, Spain. He's seriously thinking about jumping into Android development, and dreams of writing a full-length book for Steve Jackson Games in the future. He has gamed for over 15 years, and now has two regular gaming groups. He wishes to thank Ze'Manel Cunha and Emily "Bruno" Smirle for proofreading this article.

*This blueprint of personal growth may be adapted to any tradition or magical style, according to the intelligence of the individual. Any number of other exercises may be substituted, which accomplish the same goals as the following. The ambitious magician must always work according to the laws of his or her own being.*

– W.I.T. Frater, *Advanced Enochian Magick*

# WAREHOUSE XXIII

# AL-ABYAD'S

# ASTROLABE

BY C.J. MIOZZI

Astrologers gaze upon the heavens in search of divine guidance. Travelers seek familiar stars for more mundane direction. Everyone relies on the position of the sun to approximate the time of day. But someone in possession of al-Abyad's Astrolabe regards the sky not as a source of answers, but as a mutable canvas to be rearranged to his desires.

An artifact that blends science with magic, al-Abyad's Astrolabe creates an illusory sky that simulates any position of the celestial bodies. Within a five-mile radius of the instrument, onlookers could witness night changing to day, a lunar eclipse, or unfamiliar constellations. Although this ability can be put to military, religious, and other creative uses, the Astrolabe is not merely a bauble capable of elaborate illusions; by drawing upon mana, the instrument invokes horoscopes to alter fate itself.

*All say, "How hard it is that we have to die" – a strange complaint to come from the mouths of people who have had to live.*

– Mark Twain

## HISTORY

A superstitious man, Pasha of Three Horsetails Hakim ibn-Walid al-Abyad took soothsayer predictions of his untimely death to heart. For years, he sought blessings and tokens of good

fortune, hoping they would ward off death for another season, but he knew that no amount of luck would change his fate.

Nearing his 30s and believing he only had a couple of years left to live, Hakim resorted to what some in al-Haz (see *GURPS Banestorm*) would consider sacrilege: magic. As discreetly as he could in his growing desperation, he searched for a mage capable of helping him. Desperation led to carelessness, and word of Hakim's search spread to Vizier Omar al-Acayib – a secretly practicing mage. Omar approached the pasha with a warning to be more clandestine about such matters, but offered his assistance.

When Hakim explained that he sought a magical means of cheating fate, Omar devised an instrument that would manipulate the source of the astrological divinations that predicted the pasha's death. He assembled a team of trusted astronomers and wizards to work secretly on the magic astrolabe in the safety of the pasha's castle in al-Abyad. Because Vizier Sharif ibn-Ali al-Abyad showed his home city no preference, no one questioned Omar's frequent visits, and Sharif never felt the other vizier was encroaching on his territory.

However, the Balikites – the fanatical group that declared a jihad against practitioners of magic – got wind of the migration of "specialist craftsmen" to al-Abyad. Because Omar had always pressed for more action against the Balikites in the past, his sudden increased presence in the city further raised the fanatics' suspicions.

One of the astronomers working on the project grew averse to the notion of altering fate, believing it was "going too far." He leaked information to the Balikites, who executed him under suspicion of being a mage. Work progressed on al-Abyad's Astrolabe with nervous haste, and Balikite assassins killed one mage and two astronomers before the instrument was completed. Their work done, the mages fled from al-Abyad, while the astronomers stayed behind to maintain the Astrolabe's calibration.

*The Astrolabe isn't just for GURPS Banestorm; it works fine with a setting where there are powers assigned to astrological signs. In a setting without Earth-like astrological symbols, however, come up with its astrological system before this is introduced. (To make things easier, it's a good idea to mimic Earth and have a dozen zodiac signs.)*

As rumors spread that the stars above al-Abyad's sky had changed, the Balikites fed Pasha Hakim a deadly poison, and the astronomers abandoned their duties for fear of suffering the same fate.

Vizier Omar couldn't risk being linked to the Astrolabe, and he exposed Hakim as a mage. Before Pasha Ayyub ibn-Madawi was instated to replace Hakim, the vizier had the instrument transported to a neighboring land where its use would not incur the Balikites' wrath. Its current whereabouts, and how long ago it left al-Abyad, are presently not a matter of public record. Omar may have given it to a trusted Muslim baron in Cardiel, where its use disturbs the local Pagans. Or he might have handed it over to the Megalans, because the Balikites would not expect him to send it to a rival nation. Or perhaps the vizier sent it to the dark elves of the Blackwoods, who have been searching for a means to fight off Megalos.

## EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES

Al-Abyad's Astrolabe creates an illusory sky visible to anyone within a five-mile radius of the instrument. The positions of the sun, moon, planets, and stars are determined by the device's configuration.

The instrument's effects could be subtle, such as the shifting of a few stars to throw off travelers – something that would go unnoticed by most people. But the Astrolabe could also be put to dramatic effect: transforming night to day by making the sun appear, or vice versa.

Because the Astrolabe's effects are illusory, temperature remains unaffected. The "true" sun will still warm an illusory night, and an illusory sun will not warm a "true" night. Thus, the instrument cannot be used to influence the seasons; even the brightest summer sun won't melt snow. Further, the Astrolabe cannot create illusory clouds or weather patterns, nor can it render clouds invisible; the illusory sky is displayed above all meteorological conditions.

### *Radius of Effect*

A traveler moving but a few inches either into or out of the five-mile radius would witness the sky change instantly. It is not the illusory sky itself that stretches five miles; rather, anyone within the radius is witness to the illusion. Thus, an adventurer inside the radius would see the illusory sky stretch onward in all directions, well beyond five miles. Likewise, if he were outside of the illusion's range, he would see the regular sky overtop the area within the radius.

This can lead to interesting paradoxes. For instance, a thief hiding in the shadows of the night outside of the instrument's range may be seemingly sneaking around in broad daylight to a guard inside the range, only 10' away.

The Astrolabe's radius extends upward as well, forming a dome, so anyone with flight – or inside a Babel-esque tower – who are near the edge of the effect may be witness to a different sky than pedestrians a few hundred feet below, due to the zone's curvature.

Someone inside the Astrolabe's range cannot determine the instrument's location, and someone at the border can only deduce that he is five miles away – provided he is privy to the knowledge of its five-mile radius. Determining the instrument's exact location from the border would require mathematics and instruments uncommon to standard adventurers.

The Astrolabe is not showy; a person may be standing five yards from the instrument and not realize it is the cause of the illusory sky. It bears the appearance of a mundane, albeit sophisticated, astrolabe.

*Human beings are  
the astrolabe of God,  
but a real astronomer  
is required to know how  
to use the astrolabe.*

*– Andrew Harvey,  
Light Upon Light*

### *Operation*

While in use, the Astrolabe must remain in a fixed position. It is mounted atop an elaborate tripod with a clamp to lock the instrument in place and a swivel that allows for a full range of rotation. If the astrolabe is significantly disturbed from its calibrated position, it will deactivate and require recalibration.

An astronomer calibrating the instrument needs a clear view of the sun, moon, or stars. Therefore, moderate cloud cover renders the instrument useless. One side of the Astrolabe must be calibrated to the current position of the celestial bodies; the other side is then calibrated to the desired illusory positions. A dial "locks in" the calibration and displays the illusion.

It takes one minute and an Astronomy roll to calibrate the Astrolabe. The illusion then lasts for 10 minutes before the positions of the true celestial bodies shift too far out of alignment with respect to their positions at the time of calibration. Thus, to maintain an effect, uninterrupted, for more than 10 minutes, the instrument needs to be recalibrated at most every nine minutes.

As long as sky conditions remain relatively clear, and the Astrolabe is not disturbed, an illusion can be maintained indefinitely provided someone adjusts the instrument's calibration at the appropriate interval.

*The astrolabe might be a potential MacGuffin for cultists who are waiting for the Stars to be Right. If the astrolabe can make the stars align (or at least make them align enough to allow Something Awful into this world), it could be the key to the end times.*

“And so,” he concluded, with quiet propriety, “by this little brass disc, and some mathematics, we may discern the still greater motion of the **Primum Mobile**, and the hand of God Himself.”

– Edward Rutherford, **London**

### Applications

Al-Abyad’s Astrolabe finds use in any number of ways. It can transform night to day to shed light on a fleeing assassin, force enemy archers to face the sun during a war, brighten a dark night with a Blood Moon to allow hunters to better track their prey, cause an eclipse in order to perform a magic ritual, or even help coordinate an attack on two fronts by serving as a signaling device. But these uses are incidental to the Astrolabe’s original purpose: to alter fate.

Although astrology on Earth may be pseudo-scientific at best, mana levels on Yrth render astrological predictions accurate – provided the astrologer is not a con man. When the Astrolabe is not in play, it is unnecessary to track the impact of horoscope readings on PCs; it is safe to assume that good and bad fortune balance each other out over the course of a year. However, when the instrument is being used to manipulate horoscopes, members of certain zodiac signs may find themselves either more or less lucky than usual. Because Yrth’s stars are the same as Earth’s (see **GURPS Banestorm**, p. 6), the zodiac signs are identical.

Invoking a horoscope requires an Astronomy roll, as described below, in addition to the skill roll for calibrating the Astrolabe (see above). If this roll fails, no horoscope is invoked. On a critical failure, a random horoscope is invoked. A favorable horoscope for one zodiac sign always results in an equally unfavorable horoscope for another sign.

The following horoscopes may be called upon:

- +1 to skill rolls for a specific skill. Requires an Astronomy roll.
- +1 to skill rolls tied to either Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, Health, Perception, or Will. Requires an Astronomy roll, with a -2 penalty.
- +1 to all skill rolls. Requires an Astronomy roll, with a -4 penalty.

The degree of fortune can be increased from +1 to +2, +3, etc. by adding a -1 penalty to the skill roll per point of increase. For instance, to invoke a horoscope that grants a +5 bonus to skill rolls tied to Intelligence, the manipulator needs to roll an

Astronomy roll with a -6 penalty (-2 for skill rolls tied to Intelligence, and -4 for increasing the bonus from +1 to +5).

The unfavorable horoscope that results from invoking the favorable horoscope receives a penalty of equal value to the same skill rolls. In the above example, the unfavorable horoscope would be a -5 penalty to skill rolls tied to Intelligence. The unfavorable horoscope applies to a randomly determined zodiac sign unless the calibrator wishes to select the sign, in which case a -2 penalty is added to the Astronomy roll.

Only one horoscope may be invoked per zodiac sign. If the calibrator wishes to invoke two or more horoscopes at the same time, a successful check is required for each. A critical failure results in ruining the calibration of all previous successfully invoked horoscopes for that grouping. A maximum of six horoscopes may be invoked at any time, resulting in six zodiac signs that are positively affected and six that are negatively affected.

To determine which zodiac sign is randomly affected by an unfavorable horoscope, roll 1d. For a result of 1-3, roll on the table *First Point of Aries*. For a result of 4-6, roll on the table *First Point of Libra*.

First Point of Aries		First Point of Libra	
Roll	Zodiac Sign	Roll	Zodiac Sign
1	Aries	1	Libra
2	Taurus	2	Scorpio
3	Gemini	3	Sagittarius
4	Cancer	4	Capricorn
5	Leo	5	Aquarius
6	Virgo	6	Pisces

Astrological horoscope use of the astrolabe is most effective when focused on only one or two people – one person and his adversary, be it political, martial, or otherwise. Attempting to grant an entire army good fortune would likely result in good and bad luck spread out evenly between the opposing armies, effectively canceling each other out. However, undesired consequences can arise even if only one man and his rival are targeted, as the man’s allies may be negatively affected, or his adversary’s allies may be positively affected.

*Of course, even if the astrolabe can’t make the stars align well enough for Dark Things’ efforts, that wouldn’t stop some cultists from trying at least once. (They are mad, after all.) If the PCs don’t know the bad guys’ efforts will be fruitless, it could lead to a full and bloody confrontation between heroes and cultists.*

*Thereupon he bade one of his servants bring his magic astrolabe, whereby he was enabled to read future events.*

*– Angelo S. Rappoport, **Myth and Legend of Ancient Israel, Volume 2***

The effects of a given illusory horoscope only last as long as the Astrolabe remains calibrated. Thus, long-term horoscopes are difficult to maintain, such as those that would grant a man a long and prosperous life. No rules are offered to govern these long-term horoscopes due to their impractical nature and because campaigns seldom last long enough for their effects to be noticed. However, a GM wishing to implement them should keep the specifics of horoscopes nebulous and apply one of the aforementioned horoscopes; most horoscopes predicting success and prosperity can be represented by a bonus to all skill rolls.

### **Societal Consequences**

For those who do not directly benefit from the effects of al-Abyad's Astrolabe, the instrument can be a nuisance. Travelers using the stars as guidance will become lost or disoriented. Unable to determine the true position of the sun and moon, most people would not know the time of day. The Astrolabe's most dramatic effect, turning night to day or day to night, can interrupt sleep cycles and confuse wildlife. Day workers suddenly plunged into darkness with no time to light torches or lanterns would undoubtedly be annoyed, perhaps even afraid, and merchants would be at the mercy of thieves.

Excessive use of the Astrolabe in a city can lead to civil unrest. Extended use of it within city limits may see the citizens learn to adapt, such as by always having torches or lanterns at the ready, and using shutters and heavy curtains to block out any sunlight during night hours. Sundials would fall out of favor, water clocks would rise in popularity among the wealthy, and church bells would ring on the hour during the day.

Those who do not realize that the Astrolabe's effects are illusory may believe that godly magic is at play and could be awestricken, terrified, or driven into frenzy.

### **Religious Consequences**

Religions that somehow pertain to the celestial bodies would be affected by use of the Astrolabe, especially those involving the sun or the moon. These could be religions that actually worship the celestial bodies, or religions that rely on the celestial bodies for worship, such as through prayer at dusk or dawn.

Practitioners of these religions may be offended by the mistreatment of their objects of worship, and may even consider use of the Astrolabe sacrilege. Alternatively, they may covet the Astrolabe, believing it to be a religious artifact that can allow them a deeper connection, or a means of communication, with the divine.

### **Political Consequences**

The citizens of any neighboring towns within the Astrolabe's five-mile radius may resent having their sky modified at the whims of a city that benefits from the device. The leaders of such towns may argue that because the Astrolabe affects them as well, they should have some say in its use, and request to have the Astrolabe calibrated to their purposes during certain days of the week. If their terms aren't met, they may demand the banning of the instrument. Friendly neighbors may be stirred into revolt, and rival nations may even go to war either to claim the device for themselves or to put a stop to its use.

## **ADVENTURE SEEDS**

Al-Abyad's Astrolabe can either serve as the focal point of an adventure, or could be a tool used to grant either the heroes or the villains an edge. For campaigns not set in the **GURPS Banestorm** world of Yrth, the instrument could originate from a nation that believes in destiny, fate, horoscopes, or any form of divination.

### **Sacrilege**

Although paganism encompasses a number of different religions, what most of these have in common are rituals tied to phases of the moon. As word spreads that a device in Cardiel is seemingly altering the lunar phases, pagans rally together in face of this sacrilege with a common goal: to destroy al-Abyad's Astrolabe.

After the Balikites killed Pasha Hakim, Vizier Omar handed the Astrolabe to Baron Amalric ibn-John at-Ten-Tiri of Cardiel, a trusted fellow Muslim. Because the country does not share al-Haz's stigma against magic, the vizier deemed Cardiel a safe haven for his creation. The baron made public use of the instrument, illuminating every night with a full moon to increase the safety of his people against thieves and thugs.

*Hey, let's crank up the madness a bit! Cultist Group 1 knows the astrolabe can't summon anything, but they tell Cultist Group 2 that it can – and then they tell the PCs about the other cultists' plans. Why? Because the first cultist group needs a large and senseless bloodbath to summon their dark master – and their plan actually has a shot at succeeding.*



With pagans now rallying in upheaval, the Baron publicly announces that he will have the Astrolabe transported to a distant land where it will be buried forever; in actuality, he is sending it to a mage guild for safekeeping, with the vizier's authorization. Three caravans guarded by soldiers are sent in different directions: one carrying the Astrolabe, the other two bearing decoys intended to divide the unknown number of pagan forces and increase the odds of the instrument safely arriving at its destination.

The leader of the pagan movement, Torc Edris, stirs his followers with speeches of desecration of the sanctity of their beliefs and a healthy dose of propaganda. A strict adherent to the Old Religion, the elderly Torc knows it won't be long before the Horned God of death takes him, and wishes to make a martyr of himself by inciting the soldiers of Cardiel to kill him.

Adventurers can be on either side of the struggle – as soldiers or hired guards defending the caravan, or as pagans or hired mercenaries tasked with destroying the device. For a diplomatic twist, this adventure could involve trying to persuade the pagans that the Astrolabe simply creates an illusion and that their beliefs are not being desecrated – an act that would foil Torc's plans.

For campaigns not using the *GURPS Banestorm* setting, the pagans could be replaced by worshippers of any religion that focuses strongly on the celestial bodies.

*The Astrolabe could from any country that believes in destiny, fate, horoscopes, or any form of divination.*

## Lunar Army

Megalos stands as the greatest adversary to al-Haz's power, and the elves of the Blackwoods have a foothold within Megalan territory. The vizier decided to help the dark elf cause by offering al-Abyad's Astrolabe; he knew the Megalans would not suspect the instrument originated from al-Haz, given the legendary power of dark-elf mages.

The Astrolabe proved to be the magical wonder-weapon dark-elf leaders had been desperately searching for to even the odds against Megalos. Arodiel, one of these leaders, is assembling a lycanthrope army to supplement the werewolf defenders of the Blackwoods. These defenders are in full control of their hereditary curse, but now the many feral werewolves can be kept tame by manipulating the lunar phase. With a growing lycanthrope army, Arodiel plans to march his troops into Megalan cities and display a full moon to unleash the fury of his beasts – on soldier and citizen alike.

The heroes are hired to infiltrate the dark-elf camp and retrieve the Astrolabe before the werewolf massacre occurs. An ethical dilemma is introduced when the heroes are ordered to use the instrument to let loose the dark-elven werewolves on the citizens of the Blackwoods – do they prevent one slaughter only to initiate another?

For campaigns not set in Yrth, the dark elves can be substituted for any race, nation, or guerilla faction that either

includes a great number of werewolves, or is actively recruiting (or breeding!) werewolves.

## Vampire Crusade

A device that can turn night to day is the bane of vampires, and the Astrolabe's illusions affect vampires as though its sun was real. In Megalos, the Church has decided to use the instrument to spearhead a crusade against these creatures of the night. Because vampirism is incurable, and due to the Christian belief that vampires have no souls, the Church wishes all vampires destroyed, without exception. Although the Astrolabe likely won't directly kill many vampires, it will force them into hiding and give the crusaders the upper hand by limiting the undeads' mobility.

While the Hospitallers were abhorred by the idea of using a magical device such as the Astrolabe, the Templars had no such reservations and agreed to undertake the crusade. Sir Edward of Teridar, a young knight-errant, has taken command of the campaign. Raised as a spoiled, rich boy, Sir Edward is eager to earn his lot in life through his own accomplishments – and ridding the world of vampires would be quite the achievement. Despite his steadfastness, he is not as pious as his fellow Templars and may be persuaded that vampires have a right to exist.

Damila Jadefire is the head of a small group of vampires who only infect willing people. Her group negotiates trade deals with small villages for blood and despises the savage vampires who cannot control their hunger – or worse, who willingly inflict suffering on others. If someone could mediate a deal between Damila and Sir Edward . . .

The adventurers might be knights-errant or Templar mages on the holy crusade, forced to decide whether all vampires deserve death when they encounter Damila. Alternatively, they could be guards hired by Damila. This may be an interesting opportunity to have one or more vampires in the party.

For campaign settings other than Yrth, the crusade could be headed by the fanatics of a sun deity ridding the world of creatures of darkness, a nature deity destroying unnatural abominations, or a goddess of death punishing the undead.

## Horoscope Cards

Use the cards on pp. 26-27 to keep track of the effects of a successfully invoked horoscope. First, print the pages on (or affix them to) sturdy cardstock, and cut out the cards. Then, pick out the Astrolabe Horoscope Primary Sign effect that you want and the sign you wish to gain the benefit. Finally, roll for the opposite sign (see p. 23), and put the corresponding Astrolabe Horoscope Opposite Sign with the designated zodiac sign.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Based in Montreal, Canada, C.J. Miozzi is a scientist and freelance writer with a passion for art, fiction, and gaming. He has been interviewed on local radio, and has over a decade of Game Mastering experience he wishes he could put on his resumé.

# ASTROLABE HOROSCOPE

## *Primary Sign*

*Effect:* +1 to skill rolls for a specific skill.

*Invocation roll:* Astronomy.

# ASTROLABE HOROSCOPE

## *Primary Sign*

*Effect:* +1 to skill rolls tied to either Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, Health, Perception, or Will.

*Invocation roll:* Astronomy-2.

# ASTROLABE HOROSCOPE

## *Primary Sign*

*Effect:* +1 to all skill rolls.

*Invocation roll:* Astronomy-4.

# ASTROLABE HOROSCOPE

## *Opposing Sign*

*Effect:* -1 to skill rolls for a specific skill.

# ASTROLABE HOROSCOPE

## *Opposing Sign*

*Effect:* -1 to skill rolls tied to either Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, Health, Perception, or Will.

# ASTROLABE HOROSCOPE

## *Opposing Sign*

*Effect:* -1 to all skill rolls.

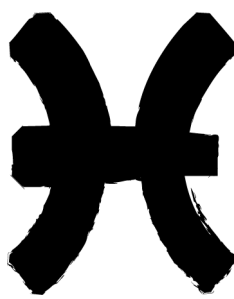
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January 20 –  
February 18



# PISCES

February 19 –  
March 20



# ARIES

March 21 –  
April 19



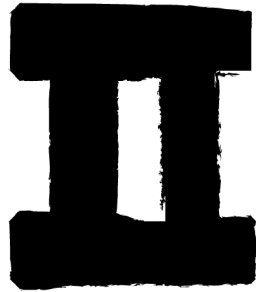
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May 20



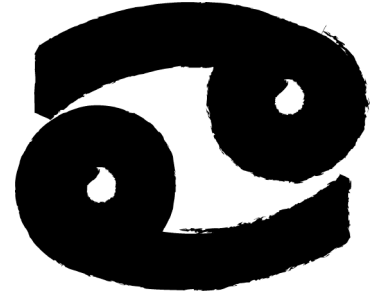
# GEMINI

May 21 –  
June 20



# CANCER

June 21 –  
July 22



# LEO

July 23 –  
August 22



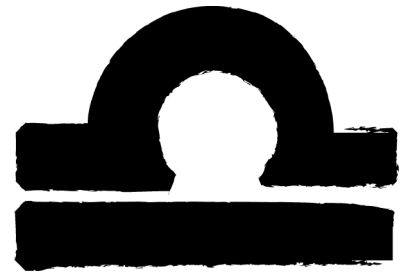
# VIRGO

August 23 –  
September 22



# LIBRA

September 23  
– October 22



# SCORPIO

October 23 –  
November 21



# SAGITTARIUS

November 22  
– December 21



# CAPRICORN

December 22  
– January 19



# THE WORLD MAKER

## AN EPIC ARTIFACT OF PLANETARY PROPORTIONS

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

In ages long past, primal sorcerers shook the world with their puissance. These amazingly powerful beings were the first to blaze trails into the magical realms – discovering the basic principles and rules of the Art, along with how to break them and yet survive. Their names are not all remembered in this day, and neither are all their deeds and fates known, much less understood. Many have become little more than legends and myths.

One such legend is Joonas of Barthro, also known as the Toymaker. The stories say he populated villages, castles, and entire kingdoms with beings of wood, bronze, gears, and clay, setting them into motion with a wave of his hand. They speak of a vast mechanical island of his own devising, which swam

the oceans in a never-ending circuit and protected him from all foes.

The tales also speak of the World Maker – a fantastic device that allowed Joonas to create entire *planets*, and enter or leave them as he chose. They say those worlds were actually alive, and not merely filled with clockwork simulacra. Whispers from ancient eras hint that the passage of time on these worlds could be slowed, sped up, or stopped at his whim.

Darker hints say that things could be brought out of them as well, and not always for the good . . .

The World Maker is a piece of truly epic magic, and something that many wizards, scholars, rulers, and evil overlords would like to get their hands on. This article assembles what information is known about the Toymaker and his greatest creation, and how it actually operates. It also gives clues on where it might be rediscovered, and ideas for finding it, and using it once it's been found.

*Toymaker, Toymaker, where have  
you been?*

*Where is your palace that no  
man has seen?*

*Toymaker, Toymaker, where shall  
we play?*

*What new worlds have you  
made today?*

*– Ancient nursery rhyme*

### FABLES OF THE CONSTRUCTION

Very few sources of concrete information exist about Joonas of Barthro. He left no records or monuments, and founded no schools or colleges. No noble family of that kingdom ever claimed him, no wizards are said to have been his mentor, and if he bore any children, they wrote nothing of it.

A few extant magical journals of certain hoary archmages mention their having known him, though most simply knew *of* him. As is to be expected, their stories often contradict one another: He is described as a kind man, a monster, a generous soul, and a terrible thief. His genius, however, is never in dispute.

*Many of the curiosities in GURPS Alphabet Arcane could be repurposed as items created by the Toymaker.*

Many spells used in the creation of high-functioning magical items are attributed to the Toymaker, in full or in part. However, there is no way to know whether he actually had a hand in their creation. Like the unfortunate Archmage Biggles the Omnipresent, he may have had his good name appropriated by lesser conjurers to add unwarranted weight to their own creations.

The most detailed description of the man and his work comes from *The Testament of Zygon the Elder* – the go-to source for all information from the ancient times. Zygon claimed to have travelled the length and breadth of the ancient world, and chronicled all that he saw. Unfortunately, he wasn't above slight prevarication if a story needed some panache, and he willingly took the half-truths of others as gospel if he wanted to believe they were true. Everything Zygon states needs to be taken with quite a bit of salt – sometimes an entire mine's worth.

With that in mind, Zygon's journals state that the Toymaker's skill at designing and animating objects imbued with intelligence – possibly even *life* – was extraordinary. He built elaborate mechanical tableaux as gifts for friends, and set deadly war machines against rivals as punishments. He curried favor with kings and potential enemies by giving them clockwork soldiers on steam-driven horses, but should those "friends" become foes, the gifts would turn on their would-be commanders.

By the time Zygon the Elder caught up with the Toymaker, Joonas was living on a mechanical island that swam the oceans in a never-ending, totally random path. He was in his 200th year by this time, and worried that his enemies were scheming and plotting against him. He had holed himself up in the center of a deadly, clockwork labyrinth, so he might perform his "private researches" in a secure location.

The World Maker is thusly described:

*In the greatest room of the floating palace, brilliantly lit by the Sun, the Toymaker had built what at first seemed an orrery, but was revealed to be not a model at all. It was a brass sphere some 40 lengths in diameter, with an ornate door in its center, and a concavity above that door. A twisting maze of large silver tubes was wrapped about that orb, going to and fro in many strange, inter-linking directions.*

*The Toymaker pressed buttons and pulled levers connected to that nest of silver. There was then the sound of many heavy things rolling and colliding with another, like balls in a lawn game. A line of large, multicolored spheres – each perhaps the size a man's head – rolled by that concavity, one by one.*

*The Toymaker may have needed the purest materials available to construct his works – which might mean that he needs Essential elements. Thus an encounter with the mysteries of the World Maker might lead to uncovering secrets of new Essential spells (pp. 14-20) . . . or vice versa.*

## Clues to an Invisible Mystery

*The Testament of Zygon the Elder* is easily accessible. Libraries in magic-friendly academies should have at least one on hand, and many mages are likely to have a heavily annotated copy. Whether the mages in question would let random adventurers have a look at it is another matter.

The journals and spellbooks of ancient wizards would have to be won through hard work. Those who have made extensive studies of Joonas' spells and workings may have come across some information as to his whereabouts and written it down. These clues may be long past having any worth, of course.

Every so often, one of Joonas' machines is uncovered, either by adventurers who run afoul of them, or those who seek out lost pieces of antiquity for their own researches. Many are little more than piles of gears and cogs, but some work as well as ever: Steam-powered knights still guard underground crypts, mechanical beasts continue to thunder down passageways, and innocent-looking dolls found among treasure breathe poison on those who pick them up.

There is a map, though it is deceptively innocent. Countless heirloom toys across the world are actually things Joonas created before he took up residence on the mechanical island, and gave away to wealthy parents for their darling children. Each and every one has a small portion of a magical map that, if enough toys are brought together and turned on, will show the current location of the island, no matter what shape it's in. However, if the wrong toys are brought together, they will start fighting the would-be treasure seekers.

*Finally, a suitable sphere came into view. With the touch of a button and pull of a lever, it was fixed into position, and the machine began to make whirling, whipping noises, and to glow. The sphere rotated on a slightly askew axis, and began to glow in time with the machine that held it.*

*"You spoke of what was possible and impossible, my dear Zygon," the Toymaker said, opening the door. A blast of fresh, spring air flew past us, carrying with it tiny, white butterflies. "Step inside, and see this world I have made."*

Beyond the door was an entire world, with humans, beasts of the field and skies, and massive forests and mountains. The door they had just entered closed behind them, standing in space like a remnant of an otherwise-vanished house. It would not open for Zygon, but would for the Toymaker, who led his guest back out after a time.

Joonas then used the machine to show Zygon five more worlds – each one different, each one amazing. There were silver-and-black worlds peopled by dragons, water worlds filled with merfolk and sunken kingdoms, and worlds so strange that Zygon could only describe them as "perfectly impossible."

The Toymaker bragged that his planets could be stopped in time, or allowed to progress normally, swiftly, or slowly. But the energy it took to keep a world spinning for long periods was great, so most of them were frozen in time. Unfortunately, Zygon wasn't able to get more information on the operation of the device, and instead set to describing the toy soldiers, clockwork beasts, and bronze maidens the Toymaker built to keep himself company as he created world after world.

After Zygon left, he mentioned Joonas only once more. The foolish ruler of a coastal kingdom sent his entire navy out to attack the island, throwing hundreds of warships, dozens of water mages and their attendant elementals, and a few indentured sea monsters at the target. The assault was not only routed, but answered with such overwhelming violence that the kingdom's entire defenses were picked clean. Its covetous neighbors gladly finished the job.

*Old friends become bitter enemies on a sudden for toys and small offenses.*

*– Robert Burton*

## WONDER'S RICH REALITY

Zygon wasn't exaggerating when it came to the powers of the Toymaker, the mechanical island he resided upon, or the World Maker he created. Joonas existed, and had and did everything the chronicler attributed to him. Furthermore, the island is still out there, and the World Maker – its greatest treasure – is still in working order.

The World Maker looks exactly like Zygon described it, but he saw only the tip of the iceberg. The orb is powered by massive, magical engines that are as large around as the island itself, and require immersion in water to be sufficiently cooled. The resulting steam helps power other, simpler devices throughout the island.

The secret is in the smaller, multicolored spheres. While Joonas was immersed in his studies to place more intelligence and "life" into his mechanical creations, he discovered that there was no upward limit to the amount of power he could imbue an object with. The more "blank" magical energy he placed into an object, the greater the amount of empty spiritual space was created, to the point where he could make an entire world within a mere bauble.

If he then added the essence of something, living or inanimate, a mirroring signature was created within the space. Soon he discovered that if he was willing to sacrifice a thing's entire essence to the working, he could create multiple signatures within an object. A rock became mountains, a drop of water became oceans, a plant became fields of them, and a person became a kingdom's worth of people – all slightly different in form and personality.

Once he had those principles established, creating the spheres was rather simple, though they required several overlapping spells and a massive amount of energy to make.

They adopted color patterns depending on the various essences placed within them, and these could be seen to move and shift ever so slightly, even at rest. The actual structure of the worlds themselves, including the construction and architecture of their cities, was put into place by the person performing the spells, but caution was necessary: Subconscious desires or fears would be made manifest – sometimes subtly and sometimes obviously.

Creating the machine that would allow him and others immediate entry to the spheres – and activate time within them – was a much more challenging prospect, but by the point Zygon visited the World Maker was all but perfected. The machine allows for things and people to be taken into these worlds through the door, and things and people from within these worlds to be taken out the same way. However, anything that is generated within the spheres must return to its home world within 30 days, or else they "evaporate" in this world and reform in its own. This happens whether the sphere is currently spinning or not.

The machine allows one sphere to be fully active at any given time. So long as it's in the forward position, people from outside can enter and remain there as long as they care to, provided no one on the outside turns the machine off or moves the current sphere from its position. If the sphere moves, the visitors become stuck between moments, just like the normal inhabitants of the spheres.

There are three other spots where spheres can be spun without being entered – allowing time to go forward in those worlds. They can be spun normally, or up to 100,000 times faster or slower. Joonas would use this to conduct experiments in how societies evolved without his direct involvement. Sometimes the answers were amazing . . . and at other times, horrific.

## WORLDS FOR THE TAKING

A truly epic item of magic, the World Maker could be the ultimate prize at the end of a massive, worldwide search campaign. It could also be the goal for powerful patrons (or their enemies) who want the adventurers to secure the item for their own uses, or else destroy it so that no one can lay claim to its untold powers. Whichever way the party uncovers it, if finding it seems a major undertaking, learning to use it should be an adventure unto itself, and holding onto it could be the most difficult thing they've ever done.

### *The Map of Toys*

One of the Toymaker's greatest secrets was that he *wanted* to be found, eventually, but only by the right people. The heroes learn of this legend as they investigate the brutal thefts of old (but still working) toys from the richest houses in the kingdom. An age-old conspiracy – hatched by the descendants of Joonas' worst enemies – is scouring the world for the toys the Toymaker left behind to find the pieces of the map. They have employed the talents of singularly evil team of assassin-mages to do the actual gathering, and that team has ambitions of their own for the World Maker.

*As another crossover possibility, the world-hopping nature of this campaign idea might be somehow tied into the secret masters of GURPS Big Lizzie – meaning an encounter with either could lead to the other.*

## Toymaker, Toymaker, Where Have You Been?

It has been untold thousands of years since Zygon the Elder chanced upon Joonas and saw the wonders inside the mechanical island. While the World Maker is still operating, anything could have happened to the island, its mechanical defenses, or Joonas himself. Likewise, the fantastic machine might be employed in any number of ways.

### *The Island Is . . .*

- Still in perfect working order, and still moving in its never-ending circuit. Ships see it every so often, and adjust their charts, but are mystified to find it gone the next time they sail by.

- No longer moving, having broken down countless centuries ago. Sailors call it the Island of Death, and advise against landing on it.

- Sunken under the waves, as it was designed to, in order to keep its creator's secrets safe. Aquatic creatures see it moving and think it some strange, massive sea-beast better avoided.

### *The Palace Is . . .*

- Still in perfect working order, with a labyrinth full of playful deathtraps; legions of clockwork knights standing guard; carnivorous, giant, stuffed animals hiding in corners; and pretty, bronze, knife-wielding maidens all in a row.

- Broken down and in ruins, with only a handful of functioning clockworks guarding the World Maker at the center of the mostly caved-in maze.

- Buried underground on the island, which crashed to shore untold ages before now. The land, which belongs to a nearby kingdom, was settled long ago, and sports a thriving community, including a keep and naval dock. Hundreds of people live their lives above Joonas' magnificent creations, with no idea of what goes on below them.

### *The World Maker Is . . .*

- Spinning the world where Joonas went to live his remaining years in normal time. He has long since died, and a peaceable kingdom based on play and joy has grown up around his grave. People there have no concept of war or hate, and will not be able to defend themselves from hostile invaders, or comprehend why the adventurers need weapons.

- Quickly spinning a world Joonas imperfectly created on his dying day, where malformed monsters march across a broken landscape, and plot untold conquests. Thanks to their sped-up time, the world has evolved amazingly, with magics more powerful than the adventurers' mentors could ever comprehend. If the door is opened, they will seek to conquer this new world, and all those beyond.

- Slowly spinning a world Joonas created as his time capsule. Rather than face his foes, and their armies, he has slowed down time around him in order to outlast them by a factor of eons. When the door is opened, he will return to the world he left behind, and pick up where he left off – creating mechanical gods and monsters for a new and unsuspecting audience.

Can the party discover the secret and find a way to outpace their enemies, or will they arrive at the island too late to stop its reactivation?

### *March of the Clockwork Soldiers*

Around the world, ages-old caches of wind-up weapons are coming to life. Massive boxes spring open to reveal legions of mechanical knights, clockwork monsters, and killer kites, which then descend on the nearest towns, slaughter everyone, and march to the next. No one is certain why they are attacking now, of all times, but the adventurers' patron thinks it's the work of the near-mythological Toymaker, and figures that the only way to stop more boxes from opening is to find him. That is, of course, much easier said than done – especially when their patron's enemies realize what they're up to. Hoping the soldiers hurt his holdings worse than their own, they seek to stop the heroes from succeeding in their quest. Searching for ancient scraps of information, harried by assassins, and beset by the questionable friends of their clockwork enemies, will the team even live long enough to find the mechanical island? What will they find when they get there?

### *Treasures Within Worlds*

Legends are pernicious things. One of the more enticing ones about the Toymaker was that he created multiple World

Makers, and put them inside one of his worlds for safekeeping. Not content to have just *one* World Maker, and Joonas' old spheres, the adventurers' paymaster wants them to go into the worlds and find out where this treasure trove of elder artifacts may lie. This will entail doing planet-wide searches on dozens of worlds, some of which may reveal marvels well beyond what they were expecting to find, and some of which may bring dangers they never dreamed of. The Toymaker's imagination was both grandiose and grotesque, and he built his worlds with fantastic wonders and horrifying menaces, creating drama for his populations and ensuring that unguided tours by outsiders were dangerous affairs indeed.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett 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 is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid*, has 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.

# QUARTERMASTER MAGE

## A NEW MAGICAL FORCE ON THE BATTLEFIELD

BY MARCUS CONNORS

Sages and enchanters live their quiet, solitary, and safe lives. Court mages have their fine clothing and intrigue. Healers correct the damages caused by conflict or mishap. Battle mages live life on the edge, diving headlong into combat, looking to reap a great reward for their risk. Yet, while the front-line battle mages might get all the glory, they also run a much greater risk of having a couple of feet of steel shoved between their ribs.

However, battle mages aren't the only magical persona present in wars. The quartermaster mage serves as a force multiplier. His focus is not on the individual, but on keeping the troops he is entrusted with fully functional and combat effective. By utilizing spells that provide food, water, shelter, and protection, the mage's troops are able to travel lighter and move faster.

Quartermaster mages are usually considered odd by their magical counterparts. Being of a military nature, they have no use for either the mysterious personas of sages, or the flamboyant stylings of court mages. If not for the occasional necessary trappings, quartermaster mages would blend right in with the troops they support. Typically, they hold a rank equivalent to a junior officer. When combat is entered, quartermaster mages can fight right beside their comrades, with an eye open for an appropriate time to cast spells that provide a tactical advantage, or he can be held back to provide magical support after the battle.

*Supporting Victory.*

– *Motto of the U.S. Army  
Quartermaster Corps*

Theirs is a life of efficiency. Their primary goal is to enable highly trained soldiers to enter into combat with the least amount of logistical problems. If only one or two quartermaster mages are available, they are most likely be assigned to the best troop of soldiers. A smart, practical, or lucky military leader who has a sufficient resource for mages would institute a recruitment and training program for quartermaster mages. Due to the great amount of organization and examination of troop needs, all quartermaster mages must possess the Administration skill.

The primary effectiveness of the quartermaster mage comes from coordinating ceremonial magic (p. B238), with the troops providing additional energy. He also knows spells that complement the logistical needs of the military unit.

The main need for almost every standing military force is food and water. While scavenging and looting can allow a force to resupply while moving through hostile territory, it is not always reliable, and not a good option while defending its own lands. The solution relies either on mundane (supply lines) or magical methods. Especially if the force in question is conducting long-range patrols, scouting missions, or guerrilla strikes, the quartermaster mage allows for faster movement (due to a reduced amount of consumables that need to be carried) and greater protection (physically and magically), which can lead to a longer time in the field.

An additional benefit with the quartermaster mage is that, by gaining experience with a few more spells, his versatility improves. By learning Essential Water and Essential Food, not only do his troops gain high-quality, low-weight sustenance, but his efficiency at providing it improves by 100% for water. With expanded healing knowledge (Minor and Major Healing), he can keep the unit operating at peak combat efficiency. Add in a couple of Earth spells (Shape Earth, Earth to Stone, Earth to Air, Essential Stone) along with Engineer (Combat), and temporary fortifications, traps, and mountain travel are a breeze.

*GURPS Mass Combat offers an abstract system to represent supplying and maintaining armed forces.*



## Ceremonial Casting in Action

Using ceremonial magic with 100 willing participants and no other magical assistance, a quartermaster mage could create the following effects:

*Cool:* Reduce the temperature in a 250-yard radius by 40° F, for a comfortable camp in hot climates. *Casting time:* 40 minutes.

*Create Earth:* Create 50 cubic yards of earth out of nothing, or firm up 100 cubic yards of swampy or muddy ground (to provide a tactical advantage). *Casting time:* 10 seconds.

*Create Food:* Create 50 meals from organic material (edible but not tasty). *Casting time:* 5 minutes.

*Create Spring:* Create a freshwater spring flowing at 20 gallons per hour (useful in a secured position). *Casting time:* 10 minutes.

*Create Water:* Create 50 gallons of water (enough for 100 soldiers for a day). *Casting time:* 10 seconds.

*Earth to Air:* Transform 20 cubic yards of earth to air. *Casting time:* 20 seconds.

*Earth to Stone:* Transform 33 cubic yards of earth to stone. *Casting time:* 10 seconds.

*Earth to Water:* Transform 50 cubic yards of earth to water (creating over 10,000 gallons of fresh water). *Casting time:* 10 seconds.

*Essential Food:* Create 33 meals of Essential Food (very light and tasty). *Casting time:* 5 minutes.

*Essential Water:* Create 33 gallons of Essential Water (enough for 200 soldiers for a day). *Casting time:* 10 seconds.

*Message:* Send a message 4.25 minutes in length at 100 mph, trading energy for a +5 bonus to cast. *Casting time:* 42 minutes, 30 seconds.

*Mystic Mist:* Covers a 100-yard radius (about 6.5 acres). *Casting time:* 50 minutes.

*Rain:* Cause 1" of rain to fall in a 1,000-yard radius (about 649 acres, or one square mile), to provide a tactical advantage. *Casting time:* 10 minutes.

*Repair:* Repair 85 pounds of equipment, trading energy for a +5 bonus to cast (making up for the penalty for missing pieces). *Casting time:* 850 seconds (14 minutes and 10 seconds).

*Shape Earth:* Move 100 cubic yards of earth, or 50 cubic yards of stone (great for pesky mountain passes or setting up defensive positions). *Casting time:* 10 seconds.

*Warm:* Raise the temperature in a 200-yard radius by 50° F (for a comfortable camp in cold climates, or to put the enemy at an environmental disadvantage). *Casting time:* 50 minutes.

*Watchdog:* Know if anyone with hostile intent approaches within a 100-yard radius (about 6.5 acres). *Casting time:* 100 seconds.

*Weather Dome:* Provide protection from the elements over a 34-yard radius (about 3/4 acre). This area can shelter approximately 350 troops. *Casting time:* 10 seconds.

*Creating a barrier:* Two castings of Create Earth, three castings of Earth to Stone, and two castings of Shape Earth will create and shape 100 cubic yards of stone. *Total casting time:* 70 seconds.

*Healing spells:* Cast healing spells such as Great Healing, Instant Restoration, and Instant Regeneration (keep the troops combat effective). *Casting time:* 10× the spell's normal casting time.

## PREFERRED SPELLS

The overall effectiveness of the quartermaster mage is based on the use of a large amount of energy that can be provided by participants in ceremonial magic. This tactic allows the mage to utilize an available renewable power source, rather than the more limited resources tapped by other wizards (personal fatigue or Powerstones.) Most spell casting occurs when the force is encamped. While on the move, additional supplies in lower quantities would be made as needed, or after the units have secured a location for the evening. This would limit any impact on combat effectiveness that might occur if battle were to be engaged during time on the march.

The most basic of these spells is the ability to create and provide fresh food and water. One gallon of water weighs approximately 8.33 lbs. With the average daily water requirement of two quarts (1/2 gallon) per person, just the weight of water for a few days in the field can start out being greater than the soldier's armor. While using natural resources found in the field is always an option, it is not guaranteed – and may even be poisoned as a

defensive measure. Using conventional means, a wagon or pack caravan would be necessary, slowing travel. A person's daily food weighs considerably less than his water requirement, but also has a greater daily cost (something to be considered by anyone maintaining a substantial military force).

Although the Food college is his most important, the quartermaster mage also finds other spells useful in broadening the scope of assistance he can provide. For example, the Earth college has a number of useful spells for the quartermaster mage. Shape Earth, Earth to Stone, Create Earth, Earth to Air, Earth to Water, and Essential Earth can quickly move the military force past various geographic obstacles and create defensive fortifications. The mage who wants to best utilize these spells would be well advised to have skills such as Engineer (Combat) and Engineer (Civil) to properly design and construct projects. A mere 100 cubic yards of stone would allow for a wall 214 yards long, 8' tall, and 6" thick (DR 78\*, HP 74). This could enclose a 34-yard radius area, large enough to hold up to 350 soldiers without overcrowding issues.

*Pyramid #3/4: Magic on the Battlefield is loaded with articles about supernatural warfare, including an article by the GURPS line editor, Sean Punch.*

The Weather college has spells such as Rain, Warm, and Cool. These can either make a more pleasant camp environment for the troops, or make it very uncomfortable for the enemy.

The Protection and Warning college offers Weather Dome, to keep the soldiers comfortable (and even possibly reduce the need for tents and bedding), Watchdog to protect from surreptitious entry or attack, and Mystic Mist to provide a tactical advantage in defending the position.

The Sound college has the Message spell, which can allow information to be sent back to central command at a fairly high rate of speed. Adding Teleport, Gate, Mind-Sending, Telepathy, or Communication can make it instantaneous.

If the quartermaster mage is also a talented healer (a rare quality), he could salve small wounds obtained in battle or cast Instant Regeneration to put soldiers back into the fight. Such a mage would be highly protected by his troops!

## *Abundantia Copiae (Abundant Supplies to Troops).*

*– Motto of the  
485th Quartermaster  
Battalion, U.S. Army*

## QUARTERMASTER MAGE

175 points

Sure you're a mage, but if someone gains your attention in a fight, you are more likely to swing a sword than sling a spell. Oh, and the 10 soldiers backing you up are a big help too! With your magical support removing a lot of the drudge work for your fellow soldiers, as well as providing some great tactical advantages, you rarely have to look long before finding a comrade willing to help.

**Attributes:** ST 11 [10]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 14 [80]; HT 12 [20].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

**Advantages:** Magery 3 (Ceremonial Magery, -40%; Solitary Ceremonial, +10%) [25]. • 36 points chosen from among IQ +1 [20]; HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20]; Ally [Varies]; Animal Empathy (Magical, -10%) [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Courtesy Rank [1/level]; Damage Resistance 1 or 2 (Limited, Elemental, -20%; Magical, -10%) [4 or 7]; Detect (Magical, -10%) for all plants [18], all animals [18], or anything alive [27]; Fit [5]; Hard to Kill [2/level]; Military Rank [5/level]; Mind Control (Animals Only, -25%; Magical, -10%) [33]; Plant Empathy (Magical, -10%) [5]; Signature Gear

[Varies]; Speak With Animals (Magical, -10%) [23]; Speak With Plants (Magical, -10%) [14]; Terrain Adaptation (Magical, -10%) [5] for ice, mud, snow, or other weather-related conditions, Wealth [Varies], or spend 14 points to remove the Ceremonial Magery limitation from Magery 3.

**Disadvantages:** Duty (12 or less) [-10]. • -35 points chosen from among Bad Temper [-10\*], Bloodlust [-10\*], Chummy [-5], Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10], Compulsive Carousing [-5\*], Compulsive Gambling [-5\*], Honesty [-10\*], Sense of Duty [-2 to -10], or Workaholic [-5].

**Primary Skills:** Administration (A) IQ [2]-14; Engineering/TL3 (Combat) (H) IQ-1 [2]-13; Tactics (H) IQ-1 [2]-13; and Thaumatology (VH) IQ+1 [2]-15†. • One of Broadsword, Spear or Staff, all (A) DX+2 [8]-12. • One of Shield (E) DX+2 [4]-12; or Broadsword, Spear or Staff, all (A) DX+1 [4]-11.

**Secondary Skills:** Leadership (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ [1]-14; and Soldier/TL3 (A) IQ-1 [1]-13.

**Background Skills:** One of Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-11 or Riding (A) DX-1 [1]-9. • Two of Carousing or Swimming, both (E) HT [1]-12; Knife (E) DX [1]-10; or First Aid (E) IQ [1]-14.

**Spells†:** Cook, Create Air, Create Earth, Create Fire, Create Food, Create Water, Earth to Air, Earth to Stone, Ignite Fire, Purify Air, Purify Water, Seek Earth, Seek Food, Seek Water, Shape Earth, Stone to Earth, and Test Food, all (H) IQ+1 [1]-15. • One of the following packages:

1. **Communications:** Great Voice, Message, Seeker, Sound, Thunderclap, and Voices, all (H) IQ+1 [1]-15.
2. **Cook:** Destroy Water, Distill, Essential Food, Mature, Purify Food, Season, all (H) IQ+1 [1]-15.
3. **Equipment:** Clean, Find Weakness, Rejoin, Repair, Restore, Weaken, all (H) IQ+1 [1]-15.
4. **Guardian:** Mystic Mist, Sense Danger, Sense Foes, Sense Observation, Watchdog, Weather Dome, all (H) IQ+1 [1]-15.
5. **Weather:** Air Vision, Clouds, F13og, Rain, Shape Air, Weather Dome, all (H) IQ+1 [1]-15.

\* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† Thaumatology and spells include +3 for Magery.

## Captain Auric of Craine

345 points

Auric of Craine was born into a family of builders and craftsmen. His dusky features do more than hint at his mixed heritage, with ancestors on both sides being the result of many invasions and occupations by al-Wazif (see **GURPS Banestorm**). Auric was prepared to follow in the family tradition of being a builder, but fate intervened, and his magical talents were discovered by a wizard working for the Duke of Craine. Auric was soon taken in as an apprentice, and upon the discovery of his warrior tendencies, his training became more focused on abilities useful on the battlefield. He has been attached to the duke's premier force of 300 spearmen for the last 10 years. He has earned the soldier's respect as an excellent military mind, as well as for not being afraid to engage in physical combat. At 46 years old, he currently holds the title of captain.

*Adventure idea: One of the PC spellcasters is recruited to become a quartermaster mage. It's time to learn some new skills and responsibilities – you're in the army now!*

With the great amount of time he spends with the troops, Auric has more than a bit of disdain for “dandified” mages. He has very little use for fine clothing, but he does own a magical spear and magical armor. He uses both with much greater frequency than his troops would like. During a brief border clash, he gained a battle “reminder” from an al-Wazifi scimitar running from the corner of his left eye to his neck. The injury and recuperation time did not dull his love for battle, but he now tries to balance that with consideration for his troops.

Auric is 5'10" and 170 lbs. He has black hair, brown eyes, and dusky skin.

**ST** 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 12 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10\*; Parry 11\* (Spear).

## Social Background

*TL:* 3.

*CF:* Christian region [0]; Muslim region [1].

*Languages:* English (Native/Native) [0]; Arabic (Accented/Native) [5].

## Advantages

Allies (Group of 10 soldiers; Built on 50%; 12 or less) [24]; Born War-Leader 2 [10]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Eidetic Memory [5]; Fit [5]; Hard to Kill 2 [4]; Lightning Calculator [2]; Magery 3 [35]; Master Builder 1 [5]; Military Rank 3 [15]; Reduced Sleep 2 [4]; Status 2 [0]†; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

*Perks:* Deep Sleeper; Form Mastery (Spear); Grip Mastery (Spear); Style Familiarity (Quarterstaff with spear option). [4]

## Disadvantages

Chummy [-5]; Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]; Colorblindness [-10]; Compulsive Gambling (12) [-5]; Duty: Military (12) [-10]; Honesty (12) [-10]; Sense of Duty: Megalan Military [-10]; Susceptible: Ingested Poison (HT -5) [-5].

*Quirks:* Dislikes “dandy” wizards; Imaginative; Large facial scar; Military bearing; Practical. [-5]

## Skills

Administration (A) IQ+1 [4]-15; Architecture/TL3 (A) IQ [1]-14‡; Area Knowledge (Western Megalos) (E) IQ [1]-14; Carousing (E) HT [1]-12; Carpentry (E) IQ+1 [1]-15‡; Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Engineer/TL3 (Civil) (H) IQ-1 [1]-13‡; Engineer/TL3 (Combat) (H) IQ+1 [4]-15‡; First Aid/TL3 (E) IQ [1]-14; Forced Entry (E) DX+1 [1]-12‡; Gambling (A) IQ [2]-14; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-11; Intelligence Analysis/TL3 (H) IQ [1]-14§; Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-10; Knife (E) DX [1]-11; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [1]-15§; Masonry (E) IQ+1 [1]-15‡; Naturalist (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Public Speaking (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Riding (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ+2 [1]-16§; Soldier/TL3 (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Spear (A) DX+3 [12]-14; Staff (A) DX+3 [8]-14¶; Strategy (Land) (H) IQ+1 [2]-15§; Swimming (E) HT [1]-12; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [2]-15§; Thaumatology (VH) IQ+2 [4]-16\*\*.

## Spells\*\*

Armor (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Awaken (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Clean (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Clouds (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Cook (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Create Air (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Create Earth (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Create Fire (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Create Food (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Create Water (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Decay (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Earth to Air (H)

IQ+1 [1]-15; Earth to Stone (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Earth to Water (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Essential Food (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Essential Water (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Find Weakness (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Force Dome (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Force Wall (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Forest Warning (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Great Voice (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Haste (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Heal Plant (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Hide Path (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Hush (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Identify Plant (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Ignite Fire (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Know Location (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Lend Energy (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Lend Vitality (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Mage-Stealth (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Major Healing (VH) IQ+1 [2]-15; Measurement (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Message (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Minor Healing (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Missile Shield (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Pathfinder (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Purify Air (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Purify Food (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Purify Water (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Rain (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Recover Energy (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Rejoin (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Repair (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Reshape (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Restore (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Seek Earth (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Seek Food (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Seek Plant (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Seek Water (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Seeker (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Shape Earth (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Shape Plant (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Shape Water (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Shield (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Silence (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Sound (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Tell Position (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Test Food (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Test Load (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Thunderclap (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Umbrella (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Voices (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Water Vision (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Weaken (H) IQ+1 [1]-15; Weather Dome (H) IQ+1 [1]-15.

\* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

† Includes one level from Military Rank and one from Wealth.

‡ Includes +1 from Master Builder

§ Includes +2 from Born War-Leader.

¶ Bought up from default of Spear-2.

\*\* Thaumatology and spells include +3 from Magery.

## Equipment

Fine enchanted spear (+1 Accuracy; +1 Damage; 2d imp; two-handed); enchanted heavy leather armor, (+1 DR; 25% lightened). *Total equipment weight:* 18.25 lbs.

*Non Sibi, Sed Omnibus (Not  
For Self, But For All).*

*– Motto of the 101st  
Quartermaster Battalion,  
U.S. Army*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marcus Connors is a law enforcement officer living in northern Nevada. He has tried a number of gaming systems, but has stuck with **GURPS** since the mid-1980s. When not gaming, he spends his free time creating character sheets for his romance-novelist wife, sometimes just to annoy her. He and his wife have two children, two dogs, and one seriously disrespected cat.

# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

## MIGHTY-OR-MIGHTY-NOT MAGIC

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

My first exposure to *Dungeons & Dragons* was in middle school – during class, in fact. (We had a really cool civics teacher.) Early on, I was fascinated by the multi-level magic system in there. Giving spells a level implies a hierarchy, with higher-level spells being really cool, and the highest-level spells being . . . well, really *really* cool. (This feeling was enhanced within me because, for the first several years, I only encountered the game via the basic-edition boxed sets; the existence of the *Expert Set* – with its spells that dared to go above the second level – blew my pre-teen mind.) Once I got the *Player's Handbook* for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, many of the most powerful spells therein had abilities that just made me doodle on my Trapper Keeper in excitement.

So, during the *Third Edition* of *Dungeons & Dragons*, I was again prepared to have my mind suitably blown, by the introduction of epic magic within the *Epic Handbook*. These were spells that broke all preconceived notions of what the most powerful spells could do, going well above and beyond the power level promised by mere ninth-level spells. Recreating my childhood, I immediately raced to see what the most powerful magic was in the *Epic Handbook*. Quickly, I found it: Vengeful Gaze of God.

As I read its description, I felt my heart sink. This spell – um – does a lot of damage . . . 305d6 to the target, and 200d6 to the caster. *This* was the coolest, most awesomest, most powerful magic spell they could devise?! I mean, there's a bit of interesting flavor text about the caster's eyes bleeding and some such, but mechanically it wasn't any more interesting to me than – well, slinging a fireball.

That *Epic Handbook* disappointment from 2002 (almost a decade ago; where did the time go?!) was a good catalyst to try to get me to formulate what, exactly, I expected from epic magic.

### PLOTTED PLANT

In my mind, some of the best magic that most properly wears the “epic” label can form the basis of a plot all by itself. I formed this opinion around the time I first saw the *Player's*

*Guide for Vampire: The Masquerade*. This contained the most powerful magic available to vampires (although, *ironically*, not PCs), and its most powerful abilities can certainly be considered epic. In fact, practically each one of the most-powerful abilities can form the basis of an adventure by itself. Examples from that book include:

- “Memory's Fading Glimpse” – completely remove all evidence of the vampire from the world, and from all memories.
- “Invulnerable Weakness” – make the vampire immune to fire and sunlight.
- “Best Intentions” – the target will act in the vampire's best interests; he just *knows* what the vampire would want him to do.
- “Heart of the City” – the vampire can make everyone in a city feel an emotion (in a subtle way).

Really, if I were strapped for an adventure (in *Vampire* or just about anywhere else), I could flip to those most-powerful abilities and go from there: “Okay; the heroes fight an adversary who has extensive knowledge of them and their abilities, but nobody in the party has ever heard of him, and certainly no one *remembers* all these past encounters . . .”

Really, “epic magic equals plot hook” is the default assumption of most magic-using settings. If the adventure would benefit from some crazy magical effect, then it's assumed that Someone Else figured out how to pull it off. Flying castles? A dungeon where half the rooms have gravity reversed? A spell where everyone in the kingdom falls into a deep slumber, unless/until the MacGuffin of MacGuffin is sufficiently DeMacGuffined? Players love it!

However, it can be very useful from a world-building standpoint to have powerful spells or magical abilities defined before they're used as a plot point. Mentioning the legendary Flying Castles of Floon six months before one appears in the campaign can make the world seem huge, like a student who's only heard of Egypt in *National Geographic* who suddenly goes on an adventure in the Great Pyramid of Giza.

At the very least, learn not to say no immediately to PCs (or NPCs) who wish to implement crazy magical ideas of their own. Sure, the GM might be inclined to say that making a flying castle is “impossible” (or require spending eleventy-jillion gold pieces and 50 years of gaming life), but where’s the fun in that? If the required time and resources were lower – allowing a dedicated hero to spend 10 years and 99% of the fortune he’s gained over the years as an adventurer – then it can make a truly epic accomplishment for a long-running campaign. Or the hero might decide he has better things to do, but at least knows it’s possible. (This cost/benefit kind of thing happens all the time in the real world. A couple of times a week I see something amazing on YouTube and go, “Wow! What would it take for someone to do that?” Then I’ll do the mental math to calculate the skill/time/talent/cash involved, and decide it’s not worth it for me – but it’s not like there’s some kind of invisible force telling me those YouTube videos are the works of the ancients, utterly untouchable by mere mortals.)

If your game setting or system of choice doesn’t have epic magic already defined, consider coming up with a dozen or so abilities. These don’t need to be tightly defined; a mere name or evocative description can be more than enough.

## THE FIRST RULE OF EPIC MAGIC CLUB . . .

I’ve already touched this, but epic magic is unapologetic about how it breaks the rules. It can usually accomplish feats that are impossible (or highly improbable) in the standard magic system.

Yet, curiously, these items follow their *own* rules. Sure, the One True Ring corrupts people in a way that other magic items don’t (rule: broken), but it has a defined way of destroying it (toss it into the Easy Bake Oven of Doom – use finger to make sure it’s finished).

Coming up with the ways that the epic magic item is breaking the rules – and what rules it *is* following – can suggest plot possibilities. It can also suggest additional magical items or effects. For example, let’s say you have your typical Arthurian sword that bestows the right to rule upon whomever pulls it from its stone. This might suggest that there are other mythic magical weapons available to would-be monarchs . . . or it might suggest how the throne could be relinquished by such a ruler (put the weapon back in the stone).

### *The Rule of Magic*

Here’s a paradox. In many settings, epic magical items respond to lower forms of magic, but generally they don’t respond to *more* powerful forms of magic; the more powerful the opposing magic, the less likely it is to be effective!

Here’s a common hierarchy:

- Effects that detect the presence of magic – these usually work on epic-style magic or effects.
- Effects that detect the type of magic – less likely to work, although it may still reveal a broad category.
- Effects that counter or suppress magic – almost certainly don’t work, although powerful magic might be able to suppress the symptoms of a magical effect. (For example, an epically magical heat source can’t be dispelled, but it might be possible to create magical ice to mitigate its effects for a period.)

- Effects that destroy magic permanently – not gonna happen.

Taking the next step and coming up with a justification as to how the magic is breaking the rules could lead to adventure challenges. One logical method suggested by the above hierarchy is that the epic magic contains inherent protections; it’s these protections that are being detected. Similarly, the ways that the epic magic affects the real world might only extend to the cause of the effect – not its continuation. This is why (say) magical ice might be able to cool down an epically magical heat source. However, this *isn’t* a given! Damage caused by an epically magical sword might be cured by magical or mundane healing (its damage is normal, even though its cause is magical); or it might ooze an unearthly ichor that preternaturally infects all wounds, forbidding any form of healing.

Understanding how an epic magic effect is breaking the rules can go a long way toward understanding its effects on the world (and on adventures), and for coming up with the logic it *is* following.

## THE MAGIC WORDS ARE “OB-LA-DI, OB-LA-DA”

As a final point of consideration, much of “epic magic” (ironically) doesn’t dramatically alter the nature or balance of the game world. Or, perhaps to rephrase that idea in something a bit pithier, the existence of *any magic* has a bigger effect on nearly all settings than the existence of *epic magic*.

Part of this is merely the rules of dramatic structure (or game balance) being enforced. If there does exist a Ring of Kill Any Number Of Beings Instantly Just By Pointing At Them, then there’s very little potential for dramatic tension. If the good guys have it, then they mow down any opposition; if the bad guys have it, then the heroes get wiped out immediately.

There are two big ways that epic magic is reined in:

- It’s more “interesting” than “powerful.” This is where most epic magical effects fall. The One True Ring isn’t terribly efficacious (a rain of arrows in the general vicinity of an invisible enemy has a good shot at working), but it’s obviously interesting enough to hang a quest on. Similarly, there’s nothing inherently unstoppable about a flying castle, but it’s got that gee-whiz factor that makes epic magic so grand.

- It’s incredibly powerful, but with restrictions. This is the tack of magic like the protection of Achilles, whose weakness became synonymous with epic limitations.

These two facets can combine, too. For example, Achilles’ power was powerful-with-restrictions, and – in some ways – not too useful; he was fully protected, but this didn’t alter his martial abilities. One well-placed trap, and Achilles would’ve been the world’s most protected guy whimpering for help at the bottom of a pit.

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards.

# ODDS AND ENDS

## SIGNS A MAGIC ITEM IS EPIC

• *It doesn't detect as magical.* Admittedly this idea also applies to most nonmagical items. That's where context clues can come in handy. Let's say you find a room that's obviously been scorched from floor to ceiling by numerous sources of impossibly hot fires. Everything in the room has been converted to course ash, except for one immaculate glove in the center of the room, which detects as a plain old, nothing-to-see-here nonmagical glove. Don't believe it.

• *It gives you a reputation that no one can peg down.* Like, if you find a magical headband and none of the sages you visit can give you any information on it, but every tough monster you face from then on calls you "the Bearer of the Band" or "the Headbandian," that's a big clue. It's a bigger clue if you can't find any tough monsters after you find the item, because (you discover) they're too busy running away.

• *It's tied to a personality or geographical locale no one has heard of.* If the weapon is clearly marked as being the Sword of Barfoo, but no one knows who/what/where Barfoo is, that's a good sign there's something unique going on with it . . . unless it just belonged to a nothing-special guy named Barfoo who liked to label his stuff.

## Epic Is as Epic Does

It's worth noting that "epic" is relative. In a low-powered world, modest abilities would meet the criteria. The Lord of the Rings trilogy milked a relatively mundane "ring of invisibility" for great dramatic results, because its effects were suitably epic for the world. If someone showed up with a helm that could read thoughts in our world, it'd be considered pretty darn epic.

Similarly, in a high-magic world, *technology* is often an "epic magical" force! (It seems every computer roleplaying game from 1980 to the end of the millennium had robots/time machines/spaceships as its endgame mystery.)

However, even these outliers for "epic magic" follow the ideals outlined here. They usually form the basis of the plot or dénouement, they break the known rules (while still adhering to rules of their own), and they don't destroy the game world by their very existence.

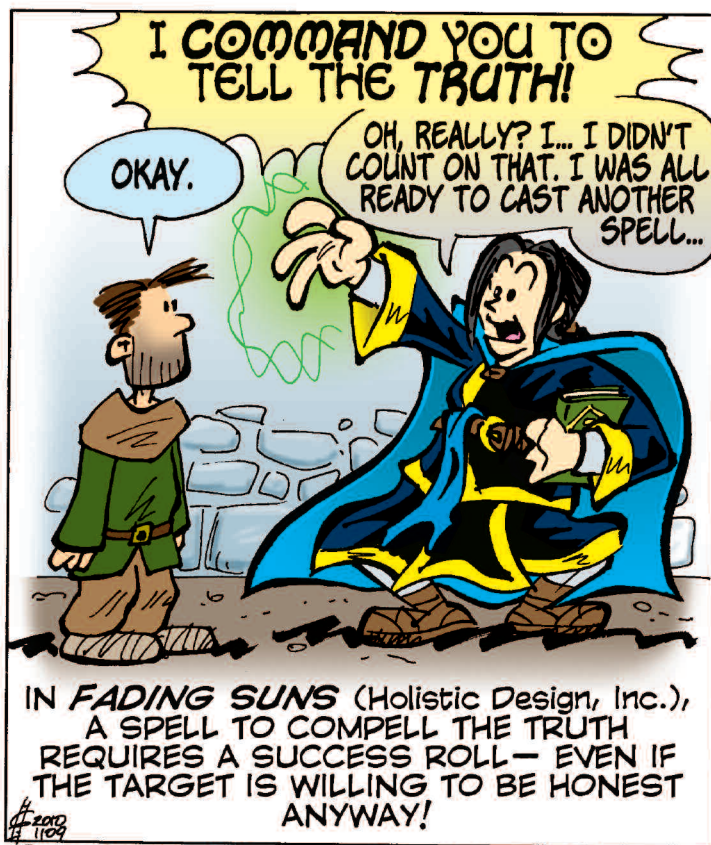
• *It's invulnerable.* Epic magic items are categorized by their inability to be destroyed. Really, "it's invulnerable" is so useful, it can be enough to be a potent magic item right there. Who cares that the heroes never find reason to use their flying carpet? Stand it up with a pole and turn it into a tent as a dragon rains fire from above!

• *It's worthless . . .* but sages keep offering to take it off your hands anyway.

• *It has wings.* If a magic item has wings it otherwise doesn't have a use for, it was probably made by some mad wizard who thought they were cool. The same goes for otherwise unrelated auras of fire, frost, or foreboding.

## MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



Got a Murphy's Rule of your own? Send it to [murphy@sjgames.com](mailto:murphy@sjgames.com)

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