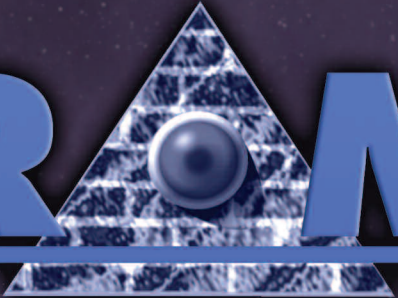


PYRAMID



Issue 3/28 February '11

THAUMATOLOGY II



IT'S PURE CHEMISTRY!

by **Christopher R. Rice**

YELLOW GOBLIN MAGIC
by **Mark Gellis**

**CEREMONIAL MAGIC
MADE EASY**
by **W.A. Frick**

THE PROMETHIANS
by **J. Edward Tremlett**

**TEN WAYS TO DESTROY
THE WORLD WITH MAGIC**
by **Andy Vetromile**

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

COVER ART

Bob Stevlic

INTERIOR ART

Greg Hyland

IN THIS ISSUE

Everyone can use more magic. With this thaumatology-themed issue, you'll spice up your ceremonies, enlighten your labs, and maybe destroy the world once or twice.

Alchemists are constantly looking for new ways to improve existing potions or create entirely new ones. *It's Pure Chemistry!* provides expanded guidelines for **GURPS Magic** alchemy, including 10 new elixirs, three new techniques, and a new spell of interest to potion-pushers. **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** delvers may find the options for expanding elixir effects to be particularly helpful.

Goblins are well-known on **GURPS Banestorm's** Yrth for their fascination with magic. Although most are simple hedge mages, a few enterprising enchanters have designed their own bag of tricks. Created with the rules from **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles**, *Yellow Goblin Magic* presents its titular style and its nine secret spells – including the awesomely powerful Sunburst!

Do you want to cast ritual magic, but don't have the patience or pals to make it happen? *Ceremonial Magic Made Easy* develops a method for enabling the average – and sometimes solitary – **GURPS** spellcaster to tap into this power.

Some people think that everything should be freely available to everyone. A shadowy subset of that high-minded group has the power to make this happen. Learn how *The Promethians* are working to make magic accessible to everyone – whether the world wants it or not. This article includes light game info for introducing these potential friends or foes into a **GURPS** campaign, but the ideas can be ported to any paranormal period.

Not all magic is beneficial. *Ten Ways to Destroy the World With Magic* explores various ways that tampering with supernatural forces can result in doom for everyone. Each of the 10 systemless doomsdays contains ideas for the before, during, and aftermath of these arcane armageddons.

This month's *Random Thought Table* explores some ways to develop the educational story arc of an arcane academic. Learn how to overcome delusions or dependency on external tools, and find out the pros and cons of on-the-job training.

Do you know how hard it is to find a good moon when you need one? Discover this little-known "fact" with *Murphy's Rules*, then uncover a few other magical tidbits in *Odds and Ends*.

With magic, you never know what you'll witness next. With this thaumatology-themed issue, believing is seeing!

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FROM THE EDITOR

MAGIC IS SCARY CHRISTMAS

Let's say you're face-to-face with some new tattooed warrior wielding an odd-shaped weapon and fearsome-looking armor. If you're not magically minded, your thoughts are likely not to extend any further beyond, "Uh-oh."

Or in modern times, let's say you're an expert safecracker, about to tackle the VaultMaster 6X. As you approach, all kinds of lasers start crisscrossing around the VaultMaster, and an ominous-looking camera begins turning toward you. Again, there is nothing but danger.

However, in a world where magic is real, you approach a glowing dagger. As you touch it, it splits into three individual blades, pivoting around an ethereal center. You hear it whispering your name – your true name – and it feels like it wants to be thrown. You sense it wants to drink deeply of blood.

Sure, you might be scared, but you're probably thinking, "Cool!"

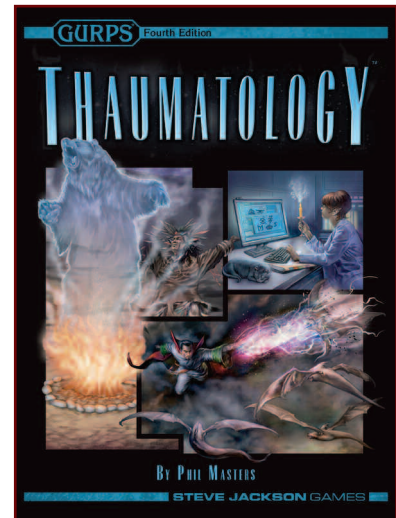
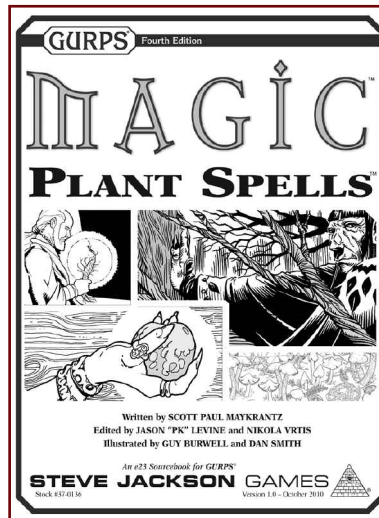
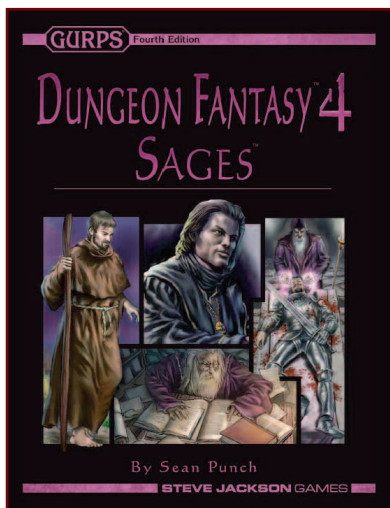
In this way, magic is like "scary Christmas." Yes, an unfamiliar magical effect often represents a potential new threat,

but just often enough it's powerful, useful, or just plain weird. Even if the magical effect *is* dangerous, there's a good chance it can be harnessed – if it can be survived.

Most of the articles in this issue follow the lead of *Thaumatology*, *Plant Spells*, *Dungeon Fantasy: 40 Artifacts*, and the like. They present new facets of arcane arts and magical mysteries that present danger *and* opportunity. Maintaining that spine-tingling "scary Christmas" thrill is a delight for players and GMs alike, each time a new magical effect is encountered. Enjoy!

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of delights in every bite, did this issue contain a particularly meaty magical morsel? Or was there a bit of gristle that made an article fizzle? You can send your private runes of reproach or renown to pyramid@sjgames.com, or post your public points online at forums.sjgames.com.



Additional Material: Phil Masters and Jonathan Woodward

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IT'S PURE CHEMISTRY!

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

GURPS alchemy can be potent stuff, capable of healing wounds, enhancing battle prowess, or even bringing back the dead! This article expands these capabilities even further with

alchemical enhancements, new elixirs, new preparations, and more detailed rules on how spells can influence the whole process of brewing elixirs.

OPTIONAL RULES

The following optional rules are designed to allow more flexibility and variation when creating an alchemy elixirs – but at a cost in time or resources, sometimes both. The GM should know the rules well enough to spot possible abuse and clearly forbid combinations that are strange or produce extreme results.

“I’m sort of a scientist,” she repeated wearily, “but part of my science is old. It ties up with alchemy.”

– Margaret Mahy, *Alchemy*

MALLEABLE ALCHEMY

Ever wished that potion of Stealth would last just a bit longer? Or maybe you’d like to be able to use that potion of Gambling without it showing up on those pesky Detect Magic scans? Well now you can . . . for a price.

Alchemists are experimenting and inventing all the time; that’s how new elixirs come about. However, sometimes they don’t invent an entirely new formula but instead vary an existing one, rather like a cooking recipe. The basic methodology is simple: Alchemists can add advantage enhancements to change the properties of a given elixir by accepting additional penalties to the skill roll, as well as an increase in production time and ingredients. Each -1 to the Alchemy skill roll and 10% increase in production time and ingredient cost allows +5% worth of enhancements

Example: A -4 to skill and 40% increase in production time and cost would allow an alchemist to add the Extended Duration x3 enhancement (+20%) to his potion of Endurance, allowing it to last 3d hours, not 1d. Of course this would cost an additional \$120 of ingredients and would take 59 days to brew, not 42.

The GM should decide which enhancements (pp. B102-109) he feels suits a given elixir: Not all of these are a good fit; in particular, Rapid Fire, Side Effect, Symptoms, and most other “attack” modifiers are explicitly off limits. Especially useful enhancements are Area Effect (for pastilles only), Extended Duration (to whatever level the GM is comfortable with), and Delay. Cosmic is permitted; e.g., Cosmic, Irresistible attack (+300%) removes the roll that those with Magic Resistance get to resist the elixir.

There is one new enhancement designed to be used with these optional rules.

Extra Dose

+50%/level

This special-use enhancement allows an alchemist to create an elixir with a dose restriction higher than normal. If all the consumed elixirs have this enhancement, it increases the maximum number of doses that can affect a target by 1 (for elixirs that state a maximum number of doses).

Example: Normally, you may only gain the benefits of three potions of Speed at a time. If you were to consume a fourth nothing would happen. However, if all four potions had this enhancement, you could gain the benefits of all four (+4 Basic Speed and Move).

Adventure idea: A climactic battle takes place in an alchemist’s stockroom. If the heroes can resolve the battle with minimal collateral damage, they’ll be rich. If there’s too much damage, then the entire lab might explode . . .

Techniques

The GM might allow an alchemist to improve each combination of elixir and enhancement as a Average technique, with a maximum level being the underlying elixir's skill level. Improving a technique doesn't affect the cost or production time at all.

Example: A potion of Gambling with the No Signature enhancement (+20%) is a technique that defaults to the elixir technique for Gambling at -4. Raising Gambling/No Signature to skill-1 would cost 3 points, and cannot exceed the base elixir technique. However, no matter how much you raise the technique, the time to brew and the cost for ingredients are always 40% more.

Some enhancements come in levels, in which case the alchemist may choose how many levels he uses before brewing his elixir. However, his effective skill cannot exceed that of the basic elixir technique.

Example: An alchemist with 8 points in Endurance/Extended Duration could brew a potion of Endurance with the Extended Duration, x3 enhancement (+20%, -4) or x10 (+40%, -8) at his full skill; one with x30 duration (+60%, -12) would be at a net -4, one with x100 duration (+80%, -16) would be -8; and so on.

Requirements

The GM could give everyone with the Alchemy skill access to the above rules, but this will make them much more powerful for no actual point cost. A better idea might be to charge alchemists a perk apiece for each elixir they can apply these rules to ("Elixir Variation") or one per enhancement that they can apply to any elixir ("Elixir Enhancement"). The latter may be a better fit to most campaigns, as it allows the GM to decide which enhancements are available in his campaign ahead of time. The GM could also be more restrictive and charge a perk for each combination of elixir and enhancement: "Enhanced Elixir (Endurance, Extended Duration)." If any of these options are too restrictive, the GM might instead offer an Unusual Background (Alchemical Prodigy) allowing an alchemist *any* enhancement on *any* elixir, charging whatever he feels is appropriate to his campaign.

Example: In a modern-day secret magic campaign that requires one perk per elixir, Annalise Sloane has the perk Elixir Enhancement (Extended Duration). After failing to get past a guard earlier in the week, she decides to brew a potion of Drunkenness with three times the normal duration. This costs more than normal (an additional \$40), takes an extra 29 hours to brew, and is at a -4 to her Alchemy roll, but will last 3d hours, not 1d.

Ramifications

These rules can put alchemists on par with spellcasters, with pastilles that can affect huge swathes of a battlefield or potions of battle lasting longer than normal. The GM should take this into account if he chooses to use these rules.

MAGICAL ALCHEMY

While *GURPS Magic* doesn't go into detail about using magic with alchemy, it does give vague guidelines about certain spells that might help with brewing elixirs. Although useful, it doesn't offer any concrete numbers. The GM should decide how many spells that a mage knows that might apply to a given elixir; e.g. Create Water, Essential Air, and Distill could be used in a potion of Water Breathing, but Essential Earth could not. While you don't need to cast the spells, you do need to make a roll against your best one during the brewing process.

I will give you a fundamental axiom, that unless you turn the aforesaid copper into white, and make visible coins and then afterwards again turn it into redness, until a Tincture results, verily, ye accomplish nothing.

– Arthur Edward Waite,
trans., *Alchemy:
The Turba Philosophorum*

Below is a chart expanding the options a wizard-alchemist might have.

Discounts for Spells

Name	Time Reduction	Cost Reduction
Essential Spell*	-15%	-15%
	per applicable spell	per applicable spell
Distill	-10%	–
Mature	-5%	–
Cook	–	-10%
Create Spell†	-5%	-5%
	per applicable spell	per applicable spell
Specific Spell‡	-15%	-15%

* Spells such as Essential Flame, Essential Air, etc. This is not cumulative with the Create spells reductions.

† Spells such as Create Fire, Create Air, etc. This is not cumulative with the Essential spells reductions.

‡ If a given elixir mimics a specific spell, and you also have that spell, you get a discount for brewing that elixir. For example, a mage who has the Fear spell and is brewing a potion of Fear can gain a reduction of 15% on time and cost.

Essential Magic from Pyramid #3/25: Epic Magic offers additional spells that build off the foundation of the Essential elemental forces from GURPS Magic. They can also form the foundation of a world-ending boom (pp. 27-34).

Other spells might not provide a reduction in time or cost but are still useful. For instance, the Know Recipe spell would allow the preparation of any alchemical elixir without knowledge of it by having an example potion to “reference” with this spell. This ignores the -6 penalty for trying to brew an elixir without a formula (GURPS Magic, p. 211). The GM should feel free to devise new ways spells like this might apply to alchemy.

Regardless of how many spells apply to a given elixir, neither the cost *nor* time may ever be reduced below 80%. In addition to the Alchemy skill roll that must be made, a roll against the *lowest* skill of the spells used during the brewing process must be made, with a modifier of -1 per spell used after the first.

Example: Annalise Sloane is brewing another potion of Drunkenness but needs it fast this time, so she decides to use the Mature, Distill, Cook, Essential Food, and Drunkenness spells. This results in a net 45% reduction on time and 40% discount on ingredients. She still has to make her Alchemy skill roll at -1, and roll against the lowest skill among the spells she used at -4.

If using the optional rules under *Malleable Alchemy* (pp. 4-5), this becomes slightly more complex. First, apply all the enhancements that are going to be added to the elixir, then subtract all the discounts given for using spells above, use the resulting number as the cost and time multiplier:

Example: Annalise Sloane decides to brew a third potion of Drunkenness, but she needs it as potent as the first and as quick as the second. Since she has the perk Elixir Enhancement (Extended Duration) and several useful elixir brewing spells, she sets to work. She decides to make her potion last three times as long; this increases the cost and time by 40%. However, she also has the Mature, Distill, Cook, Essential Food, and Drunkenness spells. This results in a 45% reduction on time and 40% discount on ingredients. Totaling the two modifiers gives +40% for both time and ingredients from increasing the duration, but -45% (for time) and -40% (for ingredients) for using additional spells. This results in a net modifier of -5% for time and +0% for ingredients. Annalise thus devises a potion that takes 68.4 hours to brew but costs the same as a normal potion of Drunkenness.

Going Green

Most of these options pertain especially to the Alchemy skill, but that doesn't mean Herb Lore can't get in on the action! For instance, maybe tattoo elixirs (p. 7) are *only* available to those with Herb Lore, or the Elixir Enhancement (Extended Duration) perk (see p. 5) can only be taken by a Taradashar witch who knows of secret herbs that can lengthen the duration of a given brew. With a little imagination and some work, the possibilities are endless.

Both the preparation and the ingestion of external alchemical elixirs equally depend on the guidance of an enlightened teacher with a great deal of experience.

– Chen Kaiguo and
Zheng Shunchao,
Opening the Dragon Gate

Using these rules, alchemists who also know magic become *much* more effective than others who do not. The GM could use these rules setting wide or restrict them to those with an appropriate trait, though he shouldn't charge more than a perk or modest Unusual Background if he does.

FASTER! BETTER! WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY!

A common complaint about Alchemy is how much effort it takes to produce an elixir, since recipes are usually measured in weeks. Still, the benefit can far outweigh the time spent if you make the right elixirs. For instance, a potion of Healing is *always* going to be useful . . . but how often would you use a potion of Music? There might be a time when you really need that Music potion, and you need it *now*. Barring advantages like Gizmo or Gadgeteer, this could prove a problem for an adventuring alchemist. The GM could allow the rules for *Long Tasks* or *Time Spent* (p. B346) to be applied to Alchemy brews for shorter creation times (minimum of one working day). Alternatively, by taking *more* time, an alchemist can ensure that a given elixir is successful, especially if he has the time to spare.

DIMINISHING RETURNS

Another way to create an elixir in a short span of time is to create a less powerful version of it, reducing it in every way. For every 10% by which *either* the brewing time *or* required ingredients cost are reduced (up to a maximum of 80%), the value, duration, and all effects of the potion are reduced by 10% as well. For instance, a potion of Fetching and Carrying could have the brewing time reduced by 50%, being made in only three and a half days, but would still cost \$200, would only last 1d-2 hours (minimum of 1), and would let you carry up to 2 times as much as your normal encumbrance. The GM has the final say on what elixirs can be reduced in this manner and how much they can be reduced. Also if *Malleable Alchemy* (pp. 4-5) or *Magical Alchemy* (pp. 5-6) are used, *this* rule is applied last.

Magic item: Deep Bottle. This container is the same size and shape as a regular potion bottle, but it can store up to six doses. Unfortunately, it's impossible to tell how many doses remain; it's only possible to tell if it's “full” (one or more doses) or “empty” (no doses). It's reusable, though careless heroes who find one may not know that!

EXPANDED ALCHEMY

The small section in *GURPS Magic* leaves a lot of room for expansion, giving fairly good examples of how to make custom elixirs, charms, and so on. *GURPS Thaumatology* further expanded this but didn't have many ready-to-use elixirs, preparations, etc. for game play; the following expands the elixirs available to alchemists.

MORE ELIXIR FORMS

Some variations on the standard elixir forms exist.

Combination Potions

This isn't really a new elixir so much as multiple elixirs created in such a way that all of their effects occur at once and last for as long as the shortest duration of all the combined elixirs. If one or more of the components has a duration of Instant or Permanent, the effects of the *other* components last for the shortest non-instant duration, *halved*.

Examples: A Combination potion of Endurance/Fetching and Carrying would allow a subject to feel no fatigue and multiply his encumbrance levels by 4; it would last up to 1d hours. A potion of Healing/Celerity (see p. 8) would instantly heal 1d damage and give the benefits of Celerity for 3d minutes.

A Combination retains its power for half as long as its normal type (see *GURPS Magic*, p. 213), so a potion would last 12 hours if left open or mixed with something else.

Combinations are hard to make. Roll against the average of your skill (round down) with the elixirs involved, with a -2 penalty per elixir. You may only combine two elixirs if you know Alchemy at IQ or less. At IQ+1, you may combine three, at IQ+3 you may do four, at IQ+5 you may combine five, and so on. The cost of a Combination elixir is equal to the sum of the elixirs' costs, multiplied by 1.8. The time required to create one is equal to the single *longest* time required among all the elixirs, multiplied by 1.2 for two elixirs, 1.4 for three, 1.6 for four, and so on.

Grenade Potions

This is an offensive form of elixir, similar in nature to a potion. However, instead of being drunk, it only needs to hit the target's bare skin, making it a contact agent. Typically, a grenade potion elixir is put in a small, breakable bottle (DR 1, HP 2; \$2, 0.5 lbs.). The resultant "grenade" weighs 1 lb., is targeted at -5, and breaks on 1-4 on 1d on a fall. Hurling it is an attack with the Throwing skill: Acc 0, Range ST×2, and Bulk -2. It shatters on striking DR 3+, such as armor (affects wearer, unless Sealed), a shield (affects shield), or the ground (area effects, if any, only). It will bounce off unarmored (or more lightly armored) targets.

Despite the name, a grenade elixir can be used in many other ways. For example, in a modern setting, it could be dispersed with a handheld sprayer, a squirt gun, or a paintball

gun! Or it can simply be uncorked and splashed on a target; use Throwing at -2 to hit, with Range 1. All of these methods are effective against unarmored victims.

Grenade elixirs cost 1.5 times normal to create, but do not increase production time. Only elixirs that have potion listed as one of their forms can use this option.

Tattoo Elixirs

A new form of preparation that might be available in a setting, especially to primitive tribesmen or other nature types (see *Going Green*, p. 6), tattoo elixirs can take the form of any *beneficial* elixir type. Rather than drinking them, rubbing them on, or the like, they are instead tattooed onto the skin of a subject. While the preparation cost doesn't change, there is an additional \$50 worth of inks, needles, etc. that are needed to tattoo a given elixir.

These accoutrements must all be prepared along with the potion and are as integral to the process as the elixir itself, though they may be reused for the same potion later (reducing the cost of future applications to a mere \$10). After the preparation is created, the alchemist (or someone else) must then use Artist (Body Art) to create the actual tattoo; the tattoo may take any form, but it's usually indicative of the type of elixir it is. To activate a tattoo elixir, you need only *think* about it and take a Ready maneuver; the elixir takes effect immediately as the tattoo glows briefly then fades, leaving bare skin.

You may only have one tattoo elixir per limb, with one on the head (face is typical), two on the torso (one on the chest, one on the back).

Tattoo charms use the same rules as above but cost \$500 for the inks. They are otherwise identical to regular charms as far as recharge rates, cost, etc. Even if the GM doesn't allow Herb Lore to create alchemical charms, it's an excellent skill to permit the creation of tattoo charms.

NEW ALCHEMY TECHNIQUES

Some new techniques for Alchemists may prove useful.

Batching

Hard

Default: Any elixir technique. See below.

When making an elixir, an alchemist may accept a -1 penalty to his skill to brew another elixir of the same type, making a "batch" of that elixir. With this technique, you may buy off this penalty for making larger amounts of a given elixir. You must specialize by elixir type *and* form, which defaults to the base elixir technique; for example, Batching (Endurance/Potion) would be valid but Batching (Endurance) would not. While this technique has no actual limit, you would use the *lower* of this technique or the unmodified elixir technique when making elixir batches (you can't get a bonus for making *fewer* potions).

Plot idea: The heroes find alchemical formulae that don't describe what they do – only how to make them.

In our opinion, Alchemy is the single most powerful skill in GURPS. With the Alchemy skill, you can create any of 68 different magical elixirs, many of which have extremely powerful effects.

*– Adam Griffith, Bjoern-Erik Hartsfvang,
and Stuart J. Stuple, GURPS for Dummies*

Identify Magical Item

Default: Alchemy-2. Cannot exceed Alchemy+2.

When identifying a possible magical item through Alchemy rather than magic (*GURPS Magic*, p. 212), use this technique instead.

Hard

Identify Elixir

Default: Alchemy. Cannot exceed Alchemy+4.

When identifying an elixir (*GURPS Magic*, p. 212), use this technique instead of your Alchemy skill if higher.

Hard

Alchemical Ink comes in two parts: The first is the actual ink, which functions *exactly* like regular ink until a special dust is poured over it. At that point, the ink gains the above properties. (See *GURPS Low-Tech* for more information on writing, scrolls, and books.) One dose is enough to write 1,000 words' worth of information. It may also be used as a means of permanently marking someone by writing on *them*; however, the victim must be either helpless or willing.

When used with the *Tattoo Elixir* optional rule (p. 7), Alchemical Ink *automatically* counts as reused materials; the artist need only retrace the tattoo that is already there. This reduces the cost but not the time! You must still brew the elixir to reapply it.

Duration: Permanent.

Form: Special.

Cost: \$100/\$150.

Recipe: \$50; 3 days; defaults to Alchemy-1.

Less Boom, More Cowbell

Because Alchemy is so closely related to Chemistry, a GM might allow a alchemist who knows both skills to use the *Salvaging Critical Failures* (*GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 40) rule. This would permit a alchemist who knows Chemistry at 15+ to make a skill roll to avoid blowing himself (or his lab) up by turning a Critical Failure on his Alchemy roll into a regular failure.

While Herb Lore (see *Going Green*, p. 6), doesn't usually produce explosions, Naturalist might serve a similar purpose in avoiding other catastrophes.

Animal Friendship

Alternative Name: Pan.

The subject gains the Animal Empathy advantage (p. B40) for the duration. It has no effect on those who already have this advantage.

Duration: 2d hours.

Form: Any but pastille.

NEW ELIXIRS

An alchemist can always use more elixir recipes! Not all elixirs are useful all the time, but in a pinch, an alchemist might know how to brew something that could save the day. Below are a few new elixirs.

Cost: \$250/\$400.

Recipe: \$50; 1 week; defaults to Alchemy-1.

Alchemical Ink

Alternative Name: None.

Alchemical Ink is easy to make, nearly indelible, and cheap; thus it is a scribe's best friend. It is immune to being leached out by liquids if used on paper but can be scrubbed off a harder surface given enough time (usually an hour per 100 words).

Celerity

Alternative Name: Haste, Quicksilver.

Much like Speed, an Elixir of Celerity quickens the user's reactions. When consumed, one dose grants the Extra Attack or Enhanced Move (Ground) advantage (user's choice). Two doses give him a level of Altered Time Rate *instead*, while three doses grants a second level of Altered Time Rate but forces the user to make a HT after the elixir wears off; failure means the imbiber *permanently* loses 1 HT.

Pyramid #3/1: Tools of the Trade – Wizards has good additional resources for alchemists. The Guildhall of the Hermetic Brotherhood has an alchemical laboratory, and Out of the Rough gives information on gems and their properties that might prove useful to alchemists.

Duration: 3d×2 minutes.

Form: Any but pastille.

Cost: \$5,400/\$10,000.

Recipe: \$800; 20 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-4.

Combustion

Alternative Name: Conflagration.

This is a vitriolic liquid that, if drunk, causes the imbibor to *burn* from the inside out, just as if he had been affected by a Burning Death spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 76). If used in grenade form it does 3d burning to the target until its duration expires. In either form, it treats the target's flammability class as if it were one step lower, allowing it to catch fire quicker. If left exposed to the air, there is a chance (9 or less) every minute that it may burst into flame, affecting whatever is within one yard exactly as if it had been thrown.

Duration: 2d seconds.

Form: Potion or grenade potion.

Cost: \$900/\$1,600.

Recipe: \$200; 3 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-2.

Dream Walking

Alternative Name: Oneiroi.

This elixir allows the subject to send his mind into a sleeping target's dreams. This functions exactly like the Dream Projection spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 46) except – to project yourself into your target's dream – you roll against the better of your IQ, your Dreaming skill, or the alchemist's skill with the potion.

Duration: 3d×4 minutes.

Form: Any.

Cost: \$600/\$1,150.

Recipe: \$150; 2 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-2.

There are many different ways to obtain the Three Essentials and many preparations for use along the alchemical path – each with unique medicinal and initiatory powers.

*– Robert Bartlett,
Real Alchemy*

*Adventure idea: The heroes awaken in a strange dungeon without gear. Their bodies are covered with unusual magical tattoos that have powers (tattoo elixirs). They don't know what the tattoos do, but can figure it out by trial and error.
Goal: Escape!*

Under the Hood: Elixir Costs

The new elixirs in this article make use of the same convention that those in *GURPS Magic* do: They round to the nearest multiple of 25, and decrease the value slightly for “popular,” easily sellable elixirs. This makes the math much easier when buying or selling elixirs, and is easier to remember. Still, there might be those who want a more *accurate* number; if so, simply figure out how many days it would take to make a given elixir, then multiply by \$33 (or the campaign's cost for Slow and Sure enchantment) and add the cost of the recipe's ingredients. For “rare” magic campaigns, simply multiply by \$66 (or *double* the campaign cost for Slow and Sure enchantment) to get the appropriate cost. Thus, an elixir of Grooming (below) would cost \$281/\$512 using the more detailed rules.

Greater Healing

Alternative Name: None.

This elixir works like a regular elixir of Healing but heals 3d HP instead of 1d – or if HP is full, restores 3d of lost FP. Repeated doses have full effect.

Duration: Instant.

Form: Any but pastille.

Cost: \$500/\$850.

Recipe: \$150; 3 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-2.

Grooming

Alternative Name: Glamour.

The subject must rub the elixir onto his body, taking 1d-1 minutes to do so (minimum 1 minute). This then causes the potion to take effect, giving the subject a “make-over”: trimming and styling his hair, giving him a manicure, exfoliating his skin, etc. Outwardly this mimics the Haircut spell (*GURPS Magic* p.39) but also gives a +1 reaction bonus for the duration of the elixir.

Duration: 2d hours.

Form: Ointment only.

Cost: \$300/\$500.

Recipe: \$50; 1 week; defaults to Alchemy-1.

Nightmares

Alternative Name: Phobetor.

The next time the subject sleeps, he is affected as per the Nightmare spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 140), including a resistance roll against the skill of the alchemist who made the elixir.

An elixir of Nightmares might be tailored to a specific person to take advantage of the bonuses listed under the spell. While this increases neither cost nor production time and doesn't call for any extra rolls, it does require that you have a working understanding of the subject's fears and phobias (typically a Psychology skill roll) or have a blood or hair sample.

Elixirs brewed like this makes it harder for a specific person to resist the effects (-2 penalty). All others have a +4 bonus to resist a potion brewed for a specific subject.

Duration: As Nightmare.

Form: Any.

Cost: \$225/\$400.

Recipe: \$50; 1 week; defaults to Alchemy-1.

Adding Magery to Alchemy

Magery adds to Thaumatology, so why not Alchemy? If Alchemy is a skill that only mages (or those who understand the principles of magic) can learn, then the GM might allow Magery to add to the skill itself, though it should then require Thaumatology as a prerequisite. This means that talented mages would also be talented alchemists – an outcome not suitable in all campaigns.

Shadow Form

Alternative Name: Umbra, Shade.

The subject gains the Shadow Form advantage (p. B83) for the duration of the elixir. He may also choose to transform up to his Medium encumbrance worth of gear with him when he drinks the potion; the gear remains on his person when the duration ends.

Duration: 2d hours.

Form: Any but pastille.

Cost: \$3,000/\$5,200.

Recipe: \$600; 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-3.

Sleeplessness

Alternative Name: None.

This elixir grants the subject the Doesn't Sleep advantage for the duration. Additional doses after the first add a base +2 *days* to the duration up to three doses total, for 1d+5 days. Any dose after the fourth requires a HT roll vs. the alchemist's skill; failure causes the subject to suffer 1d FP that can only be regained through sleep. Critical failure means the subject goes into a coma.

As a fact, a strong and determined Will can arrive in a short time at absolute independence, and we are all in possession of the chemical instrument, the great and sole Athanor which answers for the separation of the subtle from the gross and the fixed from the volatile. This instrument, complete as the world and precise as mathematics, is represented by the sages under the emblem of the pentagram or five-pointed star, which is the absolute sign of human intelligence.

– E. Levi, Transcendental Magic

Duration: 1d+1 days.

Form: Any.

Cost: \$1,150/\$2,000.

Recipe: \$150; 4 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-2.

NEW ALCHEMY-RELATED SPELL

Alchemists with access to certain spells can do a lot to improve their production capacity and cheapen their costs. There are even a few spells (such as Know Recipe) that have explicit uses when it comes to alchemy. Here is one more.

Internalize Elixir (Meta-Spell)

Special

This spell allows a mage to bind the magical essence of a beneficial elixir (Healing, Battle, and the like) to himself in an intangible form to be used at a later on. Once bound, the elixir itself becomes inert, just as if it had been exposed too long to air becoming useless. Each elixir bound in this way may be activated by a Will roll; this takes a Concentrate maneuver. Success means the elixir takes effect instantly; failure means the elixir is lost and has no effect whatsoever. Critical failures are *bad*; the elixir has the opposite intended effect, or all bound elixirs are rendered inert, or something equally disastrous – the GM should be inventive.

Duration: Permanent until elixir is used.

Cost: 2 per \$500 cost of the elixir being bound.

Time to cast: 1 minute per elixir.

Prerequisites: Magery 1, Detect Magic, and Know Recipe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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YELLOW GOBLIN MAGIC

BY MARK GELLIS

Many specialties of magic exist on Yrth, some native to that world and some “imported” by the races who were brought by one of the Banestorms. No one is quite certain where Yellow Goblin Magic came from, and in truth, relatively few people even know of its existence, but it is a potent school that is well worth the attention of certain kinds of mages.

Goblins are often impulsive, and this lack of patience frequently makes it difficult for them to learn more than a few spells. However, something about the occult logic of Yellow Goblin Magic appeals to the goblin psyche, allowing its students to focus their impulsiveness into a kind of frenetic obsession with their studies, plunging into its rituals, formulae, and lore with gusto. Pursuing any kind of magical knowledge with gusto tends to be risky, but critical failures of the explosive and the incendiary varieties are seen as weeding out those goblins who were never meant to become master mages.

*Backwards up the mossy glen
Turned and trooped the goblin men,
With their shrill repeated cry,
“Come buy, come buy.”*

– Christina G. Rossetti,
“Goblin Market”

THE POWER OF YELLOW

Yellow Goblin Magic is focused on the occult aspects of the color yellow. One does not need to be a goblin to learn the style; it is simply that its earliest masters were all goblins. Some goblins masters are a little reluctant to teach the style to non-goblins, but this is mostly because they see it as one of their cultural treasures. Any petitioner who demonstrates respect for goblins and goblin society – perhaps by performing a couple of minor quests or similar tasks – will probably be able to earn a place in one of the schools that teach the style.

Yellow, as an occult color, is commonly associated with air, masculine energies, communication, the sun and sunlight, and the mind. Its cardinal direction is the east, its cardinal number is three, and its favored tools are the wand and the sword.

In the standard spellcasting system, yellow is most commonly associated with the colleges of Air, Communication and Empathy, and Mind Control. Other spells related to sunlight, masculine energies, and movement through the air are taught as well. These form the thaumaturgical foundation for several secret spells known only to advanced students and masters of the style.

Those who know much about the style believe that the original reason why Yellow Goblin Magic was developed was because certain goblin mages thought such a school would be useful to traders and to those who wished to lead merchant guilds. The other aspects of the style (some of which might seem odd for goblins to find interesting) were just natural outgrowths that developed over the centuries as masters of the style gained insights from their scholarly labors about how different kinds of magic were connected to each other.

It is probably obvious that no practitioner of Yellow Goblin Magic may suffer from Blindness or Colorblindness while learning its spells. (Should he gain the disadvantage after learning the spells, the GM determines which spells can still be cast; many should remain available to the mage.) In addition, since one of the basic spells taught by the school – Foolishness – requires an IQ of 12+, this is also a requirement to study Yellow Goblin Magic.

Yellow Goblin Magic is not a *secret* style. Its practitioners are not forbidden to speak about it to others. It is simply that it is not a very common style, and so most people, even mages, have never heard of it. If someone has heard of it, and wishes to discuss it with one of its practitioners, those practitioners would be free to talk about its theories, general methods, and so on. In fact, its senior practitioners are usually the kind of people who are more than happy to discourse about magical theory with anyone willing to listen (and often anyone not willing to listen but unable to escape). Truth be told, they are often outspoken and even prickly individuals with very definite opinions not only about magic but pretty much everything else. The only true secrets in Yellow Goblin Magic are the

Even though the adventure background here is for Yrth, there's nothing that prevents this magical style from being used elsewhere. (Obviously, in a world without goblins, it'll need slight tweaks – including a name change!)

actual rituals for its secret spells, shortcuts to power, and so on (in other words, anything involving a style-related perk or Magic Perk); these may only be taught to a mage studying the style and anyone violating this trust is likely to be punished for his betrayal.

The number of masters, schools, students, and so on in existence is left to the individual GM. The assumption made in this article is that there are only two or three schools on Yrth where Yellow Goblin Magic is taught, and the term “school” is used loosely; it might be nothing more than an informal group that meets at the home of one of the master mages. It is further assumed that one of these schools is in or near Yibyorak, and that there is perhaps a grand total of eight or 10 mages belonging to the Fifth Circle, and about 50 or 60 other mages in the various lower Circles.

***Yellow Magic:** This is the magic of the mind and nervous system. It includes, therefore, matters of the mental sciences, such as mathematics, logic, and philosophy. . . .*

It is the color of Thaumaturgy.
– Isaac Bonewits,
Real Magic

YELLOW GOBLIN MAGIC

11 points

Style Prerequisites: IQ 12+. Cannot have Blindness or Colorblindness.

Required Skills: Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy); Meditation; Public Speaking; Thaumatology.

Required Spells: Create Air; Daze; Foolishness; Purify Air; Sense Emotion; Sense Foes.

Perks: Better Magic Items; Convenience Casting (any); Extra Option (Monochromatic Casting, Yellow); Magical Weapon Bond; Shortcut to Power (Cloud-Walking, Cloud-Vaulting, Enchant, Remove Curse, Sunlight, or Sunbolt); Secret Spell (Alter Gender, Androgyny, Dye Yellow, Sense Goblin, Sense Man, Spark of Eros, Sunburst, True King, or Trusted Fellow); Secret Words (1 level); Special Exercises (IQ or Magery); Staff Bond; Standard Operating Procedure (Magical Lawyer); Willful Casting.

Secret Spells: Alter Gender; Androgyny; Dye Yellow; Sense Goblin; Sense Man; Spark of Eros; Sunburst; True King; Trusted Fellow.

Optional Traits

Attributes: Improved DX, IQ, and HT.

Advantages: Charisma; Cultural Adaptability; Eidetic Memory; Empathy; Intuition; Musical Ability; Silence; Single-Minded; Smooth Operator; Social Chameleon.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Greed; Heliomania*; Jealousy; Lecherousness; Megalomania; Overconfidence; Pyromania; Selfish.

Quirks: Always wears a lot of yellow clothing (-1 to Shadowing rolls; +1 to anyone trying to recognize the character); Chauvinist; Collects yellow objects; Loves being in the sun†; Loves talking about magical theory; Mistrusts women; Outspoken; Prickly; Proud.

Skills: Acting; Administration; Aerobatics; Artist (Painting); Body Sense; Breath Control; Broadsword; Detect Lies; Diplomacy; Fast-Talk; Flight; Gesture; Innate Attack (any); Intimidation; Knife; Law (any); Leadership; Lip Reading; Merchant; Mental Strength; Mind Block; Musical Instrument (any); Observation; Occultism; Research; Savoir-Faire (any); Sex Appeal; Shortsword; Singing; Staff; Tactics; Teaching; Two-Handed Sword; Ventriloquism.

Techniques: Disarming (Broadsword, Shortsword, or Two-Handed Sword); Feint (Broadsword, Shortsword, or Two-Handed Sword); Retain Weapon (Broadsword, Shortsword, or Two-Handed Sword).

* *Heliomania* is an intense passion for sunlight and the sun. It manifests most often with the person enjoying sunbathing on sunny days (to the point of having to make a control roll to avoid being distracted from other tasks) and stopping to appreciate the sun, often exclaiming aloud how lovely it is, at moments when it is particularly beautiful (e.g., dawn, sunset, sun showers, beams of sunlight breaking through clouds after a storm, etc.) regardless of whether or not this is a good idea. Like all Mania disadvantages (see *GURPS Supers*, p. 33), it has a base cost of -5 points.

† This is a quirk-level version of Heliomania, so no one cannot take both the quirk and the disadvantage.

Spell List

Yellow Goblin Magic has five levels (or “circles”). Goblins being rather pragmatic folk, the five circles are simply called “Circles.”

First Circle

The lowest level of Yellow Goblin Magic is the province of those students who are still exploring the style’s six basic spells. All six of the following spells must be learned before the student can move on to the Second Circle.

Create Air	Foolishness	Sense Emotion
Daze	Purify Air	Sense Foes

*For detailed guidance on fleshing out the perks and benefits of your own magical schools, see **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles**.*

*Rosa could tell that Desmond was between spells, because the woven bands of sinister murky-yellow magic around her were – well, **finished off** was the best way she could describe it.*

*– Mercedes Lackey, **The Sleeping Beauty***

Second Circle

Once a practitioner of Yellow Goblin Magic has mastered the six basic spells, he must learn six more of the following spells to move to the Third Circle. Any six of these spells will be sufficient to prove his worthiness.

Air Jet	Mind-Reading	Sound
Apportation	Seek Air	Thunderclap
Forgetfulness	Shape Air	Truthsayer

Third Circle

In the Third Circle, the practitioner of Yellow Goblin Magic is exposed to some of its basic secrets, including three of its secret spells. More important to many of the mages studying this style is the special knowledge that allows them to learn certain spells without having to master the ordinary prerequisites. To progress further, to the Fourth Circle, they must know 10 of the following spells.

Air Vision	Mind-Search
Body of Air	Mind-Sending
Command	Mindlessness
Counterspell	Permanent Forgetfulness
Disorient	Permanent Madness
Dispel Magic	Scroll
Dye Yellow (p. 14)	Sense Goblin (p. 15)
Emotion Control	Sense Man (p. 15)
Enchant	Sleep
Fascinate	Soul Rider
Flight	Staff
Great Voice	Sunlight
Levitation	Voices
Madness	Walk on Air
Mass Daze	Wall of Wind
Mass Sleep	Weaken Will
Mental Stun	Windstorm

Fourth Circle

Once a practitioner has entered the Fourth Circle, he may study any of the remaining spells in the colleges of Air, Communication and Emotion, and Mind Control. However, to earn admission to the Fifth and highest Circle, he must also learn at least 10 of the following spells. These must include Androgyny, Great Voice, Trusted Fellow, and Sunbolt. Following this, he

must then be formally invited to the Fifth Circle by a mage who already holds that honor.

One of the easiest ways to earn an invitation is to show one's usefulness to the style of Yellow Goblin Magic by excelling either as a teacher or a theorist; most mages in the Fourth Circle put a healthy number of points into Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy), Occultism, Teaching, and/or Thaumatology.

Accuracy	Manastone
Amulet	Name
Androgyny (p. 14)	Password
Continual Sunlight	Powerstone
Deflect	Quick-Draw
Fortify	Remove Enchantment
Graceful Weapon	Resist Enchantment
Great Voice	Spark of Eros (p. 15)
Hawk Flight	Sunbolt
Hex	Suspend Enchantment
Lesser Wish	Talisman
Lighten	Temporary Enchantment
Loyal Sword	Trusted Fellow (p. 16)

Fifth Circle

Admission to the Fifth Circle permits the mage to learn its three ultimate mysteries. It also allows him to learn a few spells not otherwise available without the special knowledge granted by initiation into the Fifth Circle. Since each of these requires a Magic Perk, masters often spend much of their time learning new spells from lower circles or improving their existing spells.

Alter Gender (p. 14)	Remove Curse
Cloud-Vaulting	Sunburst (pp. 15-16)
Cloud-Walking	True King (p. 16)

In addition to existing spells, the mages of Yellow Goblin Magic are rumored to be researching new spells and new shortcuts to power. Little information exists, as these efforts are mostly secret projects of mages in the Fourth and Fifth Circles, but they are believed to include shortcuts to certain Body Control spells like Might and Vigor, and the development of a Potency spell, which would act in a manner similar to the Fertility elixir, although only with male subjects.

A long-time ally of the heroes is hiding a secret: "She" isn't female at all, but a secret practitioner of Yellow Goblin Magic disguising her (his) true form via Alter Gender. So many lies . . .

NEW SECRET SPELLS

Masters of Yellow Goblin Magic have access to a number of secret spells.

Alter Gender

Regular; Resisted by HT

The subject, if male, is transformed into the woman he would have been if he had been born female; if the spell is cast on a woman, she will be transformed into the man she would have been if she had been born male. Weight does not change, but height may vary by a few inches as the body reshapes itself (GM's discretion).

This makes for an effective disguise, as the subject is now physically a different person. (It is particularly useful in societies where men or women may be barred from certain locations or professions, or if the caster simply wants to play bizarre pranks on people). He will have a very strong resemblance to his original form, though; anyone looking for the subject may believe that the "new person" is the subject's sibling or cousin.

Attractiveness (or the lack thereof) is unchanged (i.e., a man of average attractiveness will be transformed into a woman of average attractiveness). It is impossible for a man who has taken a female form to become pregnant in that form unless it has been made permanent.

Duration: One hour unless made permanent. May be removed by Alter Gender or Remove Curse.

Cost: 7 to cast, 5 to maintain. May be made permanent, as an enchantment, for an energy cost of 175.

Time to cast: 2 minutes.

Prerequisite: Androgyny.

Item

Jewelry. *Energy cost to create:* 3,500.

Androgyny

Regular; Resisted by HT

The target retains his original gender, but his physical appearance is altered. If male, he becomes less masculine in appearance; if female, she becomes more masculine in appearance. In some societies, this may have specific social benefits or consequences.

If the subject's Appearance is Attractive or better, he should be treated as being Androgynous (see *Basic Set*, p. 21). If his appearance is Average or worse, he automatically gains the Androgynous perk (see *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 4) for the duration of the spell.

As with Alter Gender (above), the subject is now physically a different enough person that he can easily pass as someone else, but anyone looking for the subject may believe that the "new person" is the subject's sibling or cousin.

Duration: One hour unless made permanent. May be removed by Remove Curse.

Cost: 7 to cast, 5 to maintain. May be made permanent, as an enchantment, for an energy cost of 175.

Time to cast: 2 minutes.

Prerequisite: Sense Man and Great Voice.

Item

Jewelry. *Energy cost to create:* 3,500.

*I ask for so little.
Just fear me, love me,
do as I say and I will be
your slave.*

*– Jareth
the Goblin King,
in Labyrinth*

Dye Yellow

Regular

Changes the color of any object, living or unliving, into one or more shades of yellow. For the purposes of the spell, "yellow" includes amber, gold, light shades of yellow such as beige and cream, green-yellow shades including chartreuse yellow, and orange-yellow shades like dark goldenrod and golden poppy. If the mage wishes to be elaborate (such as anything more than one shade), make an Artist (Painting) roll after casting the spell to determine whether or not the result is attractive or hideous. Use the margin by which the Artist (Painting) roll succeeds or fails as an extra reaction modifier; cumulative with all others, with a maximum result of +1 to Appearance and a maximum penalty of -2 to Appearance. If a negative reaction is caused by strange coloration, it is most likely to be in the form of laughter and contempt, although mild nausea is also possible.

Duration: 2d days. May be made permanent at a cost of 100 times the normal cost of the spell for an object, creature, or being of this size.

Cost: SM of the object, creature, or being +5 (minimum 1).

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Any 12 spells from the school of Yellow Goblin Magic.

Adventure idea: The heroes discover one or more secret spells, but find themselves unable to learn them using their traditional methods. What's going on? (This can be a good way to introduce the idea of magical styles to the campaign.)

Sense Goblin

Information

Tells the caster the *direction* and *approximate distance* of the nearest goblin. If other goblins are within 20 yards of the nearest goblin, the spell will also tell the *approximate number* of goblins in that area. Use long distance modifiers.

Cost: 3.

Time to cast: 10 seconds.

Prerequisites: Any 12 spells from the school of Yellow Goblin Magic.

Item

Staff or wand. Usable only by mages. *Energy cost to create:* 100.

Sense Man

Information

Tells the caster the *direction* and *approximate distance* of the nearest sapient male being (IQ 6+). If other sapient male beings are within 20 yards of the nearest sapient male being, the spell will also tell the *approximate number* of sapient male beings in that area. Use long distance modifiers.

Rumors exist that other magical schools have developed a Sense Woman spell, but few details are available.

Cost: 3.

Time to cast: 10 seconds.

Prerequisites: Any 12 spells from the school of Yellow Goblin Magic.

Item

Staff or wand. Usable only by mages. *Energy cost to create:* 100.

*Magic horn is mine, mine, mine!
Now all creatures will love the night,
and worship goblins as divine.*

– Blix, in *Legend*

Spark of Eros

Regular; Resisted by HT

The subject is endowed with the spirit of manly physical love. Gives +4 to reactions from those attracted to members of the subject's sex, and +4 to the subject's Erotic Art and Sex

New Magic Perk

Practitioners of Yellow Goblin Magic have access to a new Magic Perk.

Extra Option (Monochromatic Casting, Yellow)

A ceremonial casting *led* by a caster with this Magic Perk will gain the following modifiers: +1 if cast at during the hour of noon *and* in direct sunlight; +1 if the caster and all assistants (not spectators) are male; +1 if all material components are yellow (or dyed yellow), gold, amber, or semi-precious yellow stones like topaz; +1 if the caster and all assistants (not spectators) make a successful Meditation roll before beginning the ceremony.

Other magical styles may have some kind of Monochromatic Casting, but each kind is a separate Magic Perk.

Appeal rolls. This applies across species. Specific details are left to the GM (although, in the interests of good gaming taste, it's probably wise to err on the side of caution). The spell will have no effect if it is cast on a female subject.

Rumors exist of a Spark of Venus spell taught in other magical styles.

Duration: One hour unless made permanent. May be removed by Remove Curse.

Cost: 8 to cast. 6 to maintain. May be made permanent, as an enchantment, for an energy cost of 1,000.

Time to cast: 2 minutes.

Prerequisite: Trusted Fellow.

Sunburst (VH)

Missile

This spell creates a sunbolt that does impaling damage to whatever it hits, remains in quasi-solid form (but cannot be removed – it will simply flow like quicksilver if anyone makes an attempt to grab or teleport it), and then explodes after a three-second delay. During the delay, whatever has been hit – or, if is destroyed outright by the bolt, the area where it was located – will glow with a yellow-white light, which will ominously increase in brilliance and intensity until the explosion takes place. The explosion itself is similar to a blast from an Explosive Fireball (in other words, divide damage by 3 times the distance to the center of the blast, rounding any fractions down). As with Sunbolt, Sunburst has 1/2D 75, Max 150, and Acc 2. A struck target takes full damage from the bolt *and* the explosion. If the bolt misses its target, the explosion can still injure people; in such situations, use the rules for *Attacking an Area* and *Explosions* (pp. B414-415) to determine what actually gets hit.

What makes the Sunburst particularly dangerous is that there is *no limit* to the amount of energy a caster may put into the spell. A sufficiently large powerstone (or a suicide casting where a mage burns through FP *and* HP) can produce effects similar to modern artillery pieces.

Plot hook: In a campaign world with no known sapient nonhumans, someone manages to find (or learn) Sense Goblin. Shortly after casting it for the first time, the magic indicates that there are many, many goblins – less than 20 yards below the casting area. Surprise! The world potentially got a lot more complicated.

Like anything creating an explosion, a Sunburst has an incendiary effect and possesses the potential to set things on fire. Aiming one at combustible targets such as straw, logs, lamp oil, or people who have been covered with tar is a good way to maximize its effect.

Cost: The bolt does 1d-1 impaling damage and creates a low-up explosion doing 1d burning explosive damage for every 3 energy points put into the spell. If it sets anything on fire, this “secondary explosion” of fire will burn normally.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisites: Sunbolt.

Item

Staff or wand; the bolt is fired from the tip of the item. Usable only by mages. *Cost to create:* 1,600 and a sunstone worth at least \$2,000.

True King

Regular; Resisted by HT

The target is endowed with the spirit of kingship, who can lead in war or in peace. Gives the subject +4 to Administration, Broadsword, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Intimidation, Leadership, Public Speaking, Savoir-Faire (any), Shortsword, Staff, Strategy (any), Tactics, and Two-Handed Sword. The spell has no effect if it is cast on a female subject.

Rumors exist that other schools have developed a True Queen spell, a Perfect Damsel spell, a Warrior Maiden spell,

and a Righteous Maiden spell. However, few details about these spells are available.

Duration: One hour unless made permanent. May be removed by Remove Curse.

Cost: 8 to cast. 6 to maintain. May be made permanent, as an enchantment, for an energy cost of 1,000.

Time to cast: 2 minutes.

Prerequisite: Trusted Fellow.

Item

Crown, Jewelry, or Sword. *Energy cost to create:* 4,000.

Trusted Fellow

Regular; Resisted by HT

The subject is endowed with the native ability to bond with other male characters. Gives +4 to reactions from any sapient males with whom the subject is able to speak or make eye contact. The spell provides no benefits with females or non-sapient creatures and has no effect if cast on a female subject.

Rumors exist that other schools have developed a True Sister spell, but few concrete details exist.

Duration: One hour unless made permanent. May be removed by Remove Curse.

Cost: 8 to cast. 6 to maintain. May be made permanent, as an enchantment, for an energy cost of 1,000.

Time to cast: 2 minutes

Prerequisite: Sense Man and Great Voice

Thousands of men; how they hurried and fought!

Finally they scattered up the foothills and plateaus; then to the prince-peaks; then to the king.

And those who touched the gray rocks were of men no more.

“Why did they come?” asked a crag eagle.

The yellow goblin chuckled.

“Gold,” he said.

– L.H. Bickford, “The Palace Of Poverty”

CAMPAIGN IDEAS

Yellow Goblin Magic is well-suited to campaigns involving politics or intrigue. A magical style that focuses in part on communication and mind control spells allows practitioners to covertly learn secrets and subtly discern lies from truth. Such mages would make excellent spies, thieves, merchants, or diplomats. The ability to fly, telekinetically move objects at will, make random sounds or voices, change appearance or even gender, and gain the trust of strangers are also useful tools. Among other abilities, it is easy to reach or effect escapes from

otherwise inaccessible windows and rooftops, arrange distractions, or attack someone from behind with any random loose objects that might be lying around. Finally, the style’s affinity for music and public speaking gives mages engaged as spies a means to travel without drawing a lot of attention – a wandering minstrel or storyteller, after all, has a perfect excuse to go almost anywhere and to say practically anything (as part of a song or tale) to almost anyone.

The Society of Siege Sorcerers (Pyramid #3/4: Magic on the Battlefield) would be keenly interested in the Sunburst spell; anything that can make a big-enough boom would be a boon (or bane!) for these martial-minded mages.

Yellow Goblin Magic is less suited to someone who wants to be a battle mage, but its focus on the sword would make it appropriate for a mage who wished to be skilled with edged weapons. It is also suitable for someone who wishes to be a military or political leader. Its affinity for skills like Leadership and Diplomacy result in many of its mages becoming highly capable politicians. In addition, more advanced students are able to learn spells such as Hawk Flight, Mass Daze, Sleep, and Sunbolt, making them both effective scouts and fearsome opponents in fights between small groups.

One option for an adventure would be if the heroes were hired to seek out and capture a former member of the school who has betrayed its secrets to outsiders. Naturally, such an opponent will make a challenging foe, as he is likely to be a very powerful mage.

SAMPLE CHARACTER: JANDIG POKAGI

150 points

Jandig is a bit of a surprise to those who know anything about the world of magic. Yellow Goblin Magic is open to anyone who wants to study it (assuming they learn about it and can find someone to teach them), but it is very definitely a male-dominated style. It draws upon masculine energies, and some aspects of the style do not even work for female mages. However, Jandig is the daughter of a Fifth Circle mage, and it was obvious very quickly that she was magically gifted, so she had little trouble becoming a student of the style.

Now 20 years old, Jandig has reached the Third Circle and is busily learning more advanced spells. Eventually, she hopes to be a teacher of magic or work as part of a noble's entourage – she knows that being able to detect lies and read minds would make her valuable to anyone with wealth and power.

Some people relate the colors of the rainbow to each day of the week, and this then gets related to the planet of the day:

- Sun: Red (Sunday)
- Moon: Orange (Monday)
- Mars: Yellow (Tuesday) . . .

– Richard Webster,

Color Magic for Beginners

Plot hook: The heroes are approached by a dragon who wants a favor: Destroy this very powerful wand. Do the heroes dare cross a dragon by keeping or selling it?

The Yellow Rod of the Sunburst

Rumors tell of the wondrous magical item called the Yellow Rod of the Sunburst. It is a six-foot staff of honey-colored wood with a very large sunstone at its tip. It is enchanted with the Sunburst spell (pp. 15-16) at Skill-20 and Power 3, sufficient to fuel 1d-1 imp + 1d burn ex Sunbursts indefinitely. Any mage wielding the Yellow Rod of the Sunburst who wishes to make more powerful attacks need only spend some of his own fatigue points. It would be risky but possible to make attacks in the 6d-6 imp + 6d burn ex range – enough to fill most small rooms with blinding, fiery death, or enough that a direct hit could kill a small- or medium-sized dragon. As the spell has a full effect range of 75 yards and a maximum range of 150 yards, it offers anyone who controls the Rod a weapon of fearful power.

No one is sure how much the Rod is worth, but a reasonable guess is about \$200,000.

While anyone could use the Rod, someone familiar with Yellow Goblin Magic would be likely to have an understanding of the Sunburst spell, even if they do not know it themselves, letting them employ the Rod more effectively in far less time. This might be where the PCs come in, either forming a party to find the Rod or hired by someone else who is interested in it.

As the Rod is a weapon capable of harming even dragons, it is possible that it is currently in the possession of a dragon, possibly less because he wishes to use it against his scaly brethren than that he wants to make sure it is not used against him.

However, she would not mind taking a break from her studies if some appropriate project or task came along, or if the right group of companions presented themselves. Like any good goblin girl, she would be particularly interested if whatever her new companions were doing was likely to increase the number of coins in her purse. Jandig does not suffer from Greed, but she is certainly not going to turn up her little green nose at an opportunity to make herself wealthy.

She is a rather ordinary-looking goblin woman – pretty enough in her green-skinned, bald-headed, sharp-toothed way – but nothing special. Nonetheless, she is pretty enough that plenty of goblin men (and the occasional non-goblin, to her surprise and amusement) are happy to get to know her.

Jandig does suffer from a bad temper. When things do not go her way, she is very likely to berate those she considers responsible. Other goblins who know her family know that her father is exactly the same way, so they shrug their shoulders, remark that at least she came by it honestly, and then do what they can to make sure they do not annoy her.

Her father is a powerful patron, but knows better than to indulge his daughter too much. His being available on 9 or less is not an indication of whether or not Jandig can speak to him (she can almost always manage to do this) but whether or not he is likely to actually do anything when she asks him for a favor.

Even if he does, he often gives her less than what she asks for because he does not believe she really needs what she has requested. Sometimes, he just gives her something else that he thinks will be more useful to her in the long run.

If Jandig's father needs to be brought into the story for any reason, assume he is an extremely capable mage, built on about 250 points, with ST 9, DX 11, IQ 14, HT 12, Magery 3, all necessary skills at 15-, and all necessary spells at 17-. (If anyone wishes to have him as a Contact, assume he is Usually Reliable and has an effective skill level of 18-.)

A 250-point version of Jandig suitable for a **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** campaign could be designed by raising her DX and IQ by 2 (which would raise many of her spells to 15- or 16-) and spending the remaining 20 points on new spells, perks, and Magic Perks.

ST 8 [0]*; **DX** 11 [0]*; **IQ** 13 [40]*; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [3].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Shortsword).
5'0"; 100 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].

CF: Christian [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0]; Dwarvish (Broken) [2]; Elvish (Broken) [2]; Latin (Accented) [4].

Advantages

Goblin [19]; Magery 2 [25]; Night Vision 9 [0]*; Patron (Father; 9 or less; Minimal Intervention, -50%) [5].

Perks: Extra Option (Monochromatic Casting, Yellow; p. 15); Secret Spell (Sense Man, p. 15); Style Familiarity (Yellow Goblin Magic). [3]

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (15) [-5]; Impulsiveness (12) [0]*; Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10].

Quirks: Amused when non-goblin men think she is attractive; Frisky when intoxicated (and often regrets it afterward). [-2]

*But as for the gold of the
Goblin Men, it was only
yellow leaves when the clock
struck twelve.*

*– G. Rayleigh Vicars
and Edith Vicars,
A Torquay Marriage*

Goblins

For more information on the goblin people, see **GURPS Banestorm** (in particular, p. 192). The racial template is repeated here for your convenience.

Attribute Modifiers: ST-2 [-20]; DX+1 [20]; IQ+1 [20].

Advantages: Night Vision 9 [9].

Disadvantages: Impulsiveness (12) [-10].

Skills

Animal Handling (Equines) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Area Knowledge (Yibyorak) (E) IQ [1]-13; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Breath Control (H) HT [4]-10; Carousing (E) HT [1]-10; Climbing (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Current Affairs/TL3 (Yibyorak) (E) IQ [1]-13; Detect Lies (H) Per-1 [2]-12; Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-14; House-keeping (E) IQ [1]-13; Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1]-12; Leadership (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Meditation (H) Will-2 [1]-11; Public Speaking (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Riding (Equines) (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Shortsword (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Singing (E) HT [1]-10; Teaching (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Thaumatology (VH) IQ+1 [4]-14†.

Spells†

Apportation (H) IQ [1]-13; Body of Air (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Counterspell (H) IQ [1]-13; Create Air (H) IQ [1]-13; Daze (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Fascinate (H) IQ [1]-13; Foolishness (H) IQ [1]-13; Forgetfulness (H) IQ [1]-13; Levitation (H) IQ [1]-13; Mind-Reading (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Purify Air (H) IQ [1]-13; Sense Emotion (H) IQ [1]-13; Sense Foes (H) IQ [1]-13; Sense Man (H) IQ+1 [2]-14; Shape Air (H) IQ [1]-13; Sleep (H) IQ+2 [4]-15; Sound (H) IQ [1]-13; Thunderclap (H) IQ [1]-13; Truthsayer (H) IQ+1 [2]-14.

* Includes traits and modifiers from Goblin.

† Thaumatology and all spells include +2 from Magery.

RESOURCES

A variety of online sources on the occult discuss magical color correspondences; as one might expect, they do not agree on all points. The site most frequently referred to during the writing of this article was *Wicca*, at magicspells.in.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Mark Gellis teaches professional communication, literature, and humanities, and advises a chapter of 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 two beloved pets: Miss Spock (a beautiful but dangerously insane black cat) and, a new arrival, Daruma (a sweet and cheerful Shiba Inu). Dr. Gellis squanders much of his free time playing **GURPS** and computer games like *Harpoon*, reading pretty much anything he can get his hands on, and watching far too many old movies and far too much anime.

CEREMONIAL MAGIC MADE EASY

BY W.A. FRICK

With the many requirements and limitations on ceremonial magic (p. B238, and *GURPS Magic*, p. 12), it tends not to see a lot of use in faster-paced fantasy games. Between the increased casting time, the necessity for assistants, and the higher chance of critical failure, most mages don't even consider the possibility of ceremonial casting "in the field" (or dungeon or crypt . . .). However, the notion of using the trappings and accoutrements of occult ceremony – arcane chanting, ritual tools, magic circles, and the like – to improve the magic of even a solitary caster are quite well-known in the genre.

To be rich in worldly goods, to trample on one's enemies and to gratify the desires of the flesh – such are the ends, variously qualified and variously attained, of most Ceremonial Magic; hence also the Rituals abound in Venereal Experiments.

– Arthur Edward Waite,
The Book of Ceremonial Magic

Here, then, are optional ways to bring these possibilities into the standard *GURPS* magic system, making ceremonial magic a more viable and useful option for the adventuring spell-caster. Adapted from ideas in the *GURPS Action* line (namely *Complementary Skills* from *Action 2: Exploits*, p. 5) and *GURPS Thaumatology* (*Magical Modifiers*, p. 242), the system presented here seeks to create a streamlined means of incorporating some

of the power and mystery of ceremonial casting into an adventure-ready tool in a wizard's repertoire. It's ideal for a *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign, or any other game that uses the standard *GURPS* spell-magic system – all that's required is the desire to give casters a potent and flavorful new option.

GURPS Thaumatology introduced the possibility of *Solitary Ceremonial Magic* (p. 28), presented there as an enhancement to *Magery* (+10%). These rules assume that all mages can use solitary ceremonial magic, at no extra cost, if they have the appropriate skills. (At the GM's option, all casters can benefit from these rules, including those with *Power Investiture* or other advantages that allow spell use, such as *Bardic Talent*, *Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*, p. 21.) If the GM wants to charge extra for this ability, he can use the enhancement from *Thaumatology*, adding 1 point/level to the cost *Magery*, *Power Investiture*, and the like.

WHY USE CEREMONIAL MAGIC?

The first question that must be answered is why would a mage use ceremonial casting instead of the (much more convenient) normal casting procedure? By the default rules, the answer is "to gather a lot of energy for large spells." This is done by linking multiple casters, all of whom may contribute energy to the casting, resulting in spell effects as large and expensive as the group's combined energy allows.

For a solitary caster, this is useless . . . and by the default rules, solitary casters can't even attempt ceremonial magic. However, by permitting a solitary caster to use ceremonial casting, he could gain bonuses to skill, and possibly even generate additional energy for larger effects. Given extra time and sufficient magical resources, a mage can bring about more powerful effects than he can produce with a normal casting.

Since these ceremonial rules are based partly on GURPS Action, it's useful to have an action-minded ethos in place when encouraging their use. The heroes are attempting to do something cool? Don't say no; let them try!

CEREMONIAL MAGIC SKILLS

To distinguish ceremonial magic from normal casting, as well as to require a few specific skills (and point expenditures) from those who would benefit from it, this system makes use of the often-overlooked **Ritual Magic**, **Symbol Drawing**, and **Thaumatology** skills. In addition to the various traits of a successful wizard, a ceremonial magician needs points in one or more of these skills. For all purposes related to ceremonial casting (including ritual preparations and the like), Magery adds its level to each skill.

By the rules in the *Basic Set*, Ritual Magic and Symbol Drawing are both specialized by magical tradition; the rules here ignore that requirement and consider both of those skills (as well as Thaumatology) to apply to “magic in general.” In campaigns that feature several distinct kinds of magic (wizards, holy, druidic, etc), or where the GM wants to limit group ceremonies to mages of the same tradition, specializations for some or all of these skills might be required. (For holy ceremonial casters, see *Religious Ceremony*, box.)

Religious Ceremony

Ceremonial casters with Power Investiture instead of Magery rely on **Religious Ritual** in place of Ritual Magic, **Theology** instead of Thaumatology, and **Symbol Drawing** specialized for the kind of magic used (Holy, Druidic, etc). In settings where there are multiple faiths or different kinds of clerical magic, each specialization of Power Investiture requires a corresponding specialization of Religious Ritual, Symbol Drawing, and Theology. The exact number (and compatibility, for group ceremonies) of these specializations is up to the GM.

Clerical casters normally *can't* use standard magical materials (p. 21), but may gain similar bonuses by using (un)holy objects (icons, water, incense, relics, scripture, etc) in the ceremony. Whether or not the Laws of Magic (p. 21) and sacrifice bonuses (p. 21) apply to religious magic is up to the GM; many magically inclined religions feature them in some form.

MAGICAL MODIFIERS

Among the primary benefits of ceremonial casting, particularly for a solitary caster, are the skill bonuses provided by a well-prepared ceremony. By spending some time to set up a proper ritual space, by employing magically potent ingredients, and by taking advantage of certain underlying thaumatological principles, a mage (or group) can net several bonuses with a ceremonial casting. Except where noted, all of the following bonuses add in the caster's final skill.

At the GM's option, some of these modifiers might apply to normally cast spells. In particular, magical materials (p. 21) are easy to visualize being used in regular (even combat) casting – for example, a ruby-tipped wand used to enhance fire spells.

You may wish to use a method such as imagining your aura surrounded by cleansing white fire, or a waterfall clearing away any unbalanced energy of the day. Prepare and focus your mind for the ritual.

– Tess Dawson,
Whisper of Stone

RITUAL PREPARATIONS

Making preparations for a ceremonial casting might entail marking off a ritual space, drawing relevant runes and wards, banishing outside influences, and aligning oneself to the local mana conditions, “thaumaturgical energy flows,” etc. To accomplish this, a wizard (or any skilled participant in a group casting) may make one roll each against **Ritual Magic**, **Symbol Drawing**, and **Thaumatology** before a casting. Each attempted roll takes five minutes; each success grants a +1 to the caster's final skill (+2 for a critical success; -1 for a failure; -2 for a critical failure). Only one attempt at each skill may be made per spell . . . but in preparation for a group ceremony, each task can be attempted by a different participant, and they may work concurrently (for example, saving prep-time by having one assistant draw the magic circle and another perform the banishing, while you attune your personal aura to the spell at hand). All ritual preparations must be completed before the casting is started.

Taking extra time to make ritual preparations can result in additional bonuses; spending at least an hour (instead of five minutes) on any of the above rolls gives a +5 to the preparation roll itself. Spending an entire day (12+ hours) also increases the final bonus to the caster's *spellcasting* roll by +1 (thus providing +2 on a normal success, +3 on a critical; +0 on a normal failure, -1 on a critical). Higher bonuses may be possible (by planning the ritual for a particular anniversary or astrological event, etc.), but this could take months or years to set up, and is left in the GM's wise purview.

If you need ominous-sounding chanting for a big ritual, check out standard Latin placeholder text “lorem Ipsum” (info online at lipsum.com). Alternatively, just recite the “Hokey Pokey” backwards: “In foot left your put you . . .”

There is only one true law of magic: He whom has power makes the laws.

– Matthew David Brozik and
Jacob Sager Weinstein,
*The Government Manual
for New Wizards*

MAGICAL MATERIALS

Certain materials have a metaphysical resonance with certain kinds of magic, and a knowledgeable caster can make use of these correspondences. As listed in *GURPS Magic* (p. 222), each of the colleges of magic (and a few other particular groupings of spells, such as “Seeking”) have associated “magically potent materials.” These materials are divided into those that are *consumable* (and thus usable in only one casting) and those that are *reusable* in multiple castings. (The “objects” listed with each college tend to be reusable, and are treated as reusable materials here.)

When used in a ceremonial casting, these materials provide bonuses to the caster’s final skill. In general, this bonus will be +1 for common or simple materials, +2 for rare or expensive ones, or +3 for unique or mystically significant ones. Enormous quantities or exceptionally high qualities may provide another +1. If multiple suitable materials are available for a spell (for example, casting a Mind Control spell with a bunch of poppies, an amethyst, and a garnet), use the highest bonus for all available *consumable* materials, plus the highest bonus for all available *reusable* materials (and objects). Likewise if a spell falls into more than one College or category – for example, Seek Magic is both Knowledge and Seeking – use the best of all available bonuses, but apply only one each for consumable and reusable magical materials.

THE LAWS OF MAGIC

Metaphysical connections and affinities can also be used to empower ceremonial magic cast on particular targets. The so-called Laws of Magic include the *Law of Sympathy* (similarity creates a connection), the *Law of Contagion* (once connected, always connected), and the *Law of Names* (names give power over the named). Rather than working with a certain kind or College of magic, these connections work only on the specific subjects to which they are associated. Any given item has relevance only to a

single subject or person (*possibly* to close relatives or a small group of associates, if it’s a very powerful connection), but the bonus functions for *any* spell cast on that subject.

Such items can provide bonuses similar to those for magical materials above, depending on the quality of the connection used: A recognizable drawing or small sculpture of the subject gives a +1 for Sympathy, while a detailed, life-sized statue made by a gifted sculptor would net a +3 – possibly a +4 if the sculptor was secretly in love with the subject! The subject’s favorite jacket yields a +1 for Contagion, while a vial of his blood yields a +3. (A vial of his *brother’s* blood might give +1, or +2 if they were twins; his brother’s favorite jacket would grant nothing.) Using a person’s full legal name gives +1, while speaking an entity’s Secret True Name gives +4. If multiple suitable connections are available, use only the best connection for each Law – e.g. one Sympathy bonus, one for Contagion, and one for Names.

For more on the Laws of Magic, see *GURPS Thaumatology* (pp. 14-15 and 243-246).

SACRIFICE BONUSES

Many fantasy mages – often dark sorcerers and demoniac cultists – have been known to offer up sacrifices to empower their magic. Depending on the mage’s tradition, beliefs, or particular moral bent, a sacrifice can range from various goods (food, incense, money, valuables, etc.) to live animals, even humans and other sapient races. In a sense, the consumable magical materials mentioned above are a kind of sacrifice, since they are expended in the course of a casting.

As with other magical modifiers, the quality of the sacrifice determines the bonus: common goods or small donations might get a +1, while valuable material sacrifices might get as much as +3 (+4 if mystically significant). Live sacrifices – if they work at all in a given magical tradition or religion (GM’s call) – might provide anywhere from +1 (chickens) to +5 (beautiful virgin princess). Supernatural sacrifices give a *further* +1 (a beautiful *vampire* princess is worth +6!). The GM is free to limit live sacrifices to necromancers, unholy clerics, and NPC villains.

For more on sacrifice bonuses, see *GURPS Thaumatology* (pp. 54-58 and 246).

Thaumatological Know-How

In many campaigns, benefiting from the bonuses described in this section – especially from magical materials (above) and the Laws of Magic (above) – requires the Thaumatology skill, representing the necessary knowledge of the underlying metaphysics of magic needed to make use of these principles. If this is the case, the GM should deny magical modifiers to mages without Thaumatology 15+, except perhaps those from sacrifice bonuses, and possibly ritual preparations done using only Ritual Magic and Symbol Drawing skills.

Plot hook: The heroes hear a group of cultists obviously wrapping up Something Big on the other side of the door. Do they kick down the door and try to stop it, or run away before it completes?

In traditional Wicca and ceremonial magic, casting a circle is a powerful process designed to create an energetic barrier for advanced magical work.

– Carl McColman,
The Complete Idiot's Guide to Paganism

CEREMONIAL CASTING

These optional rules for ceremonial magic are based on those presented on p. B238 (and *GURPS Magic*, p. 12), but differ in several details. Use the standard rules, except as noted below. (Remember, Magery adds to Ritual Magic for these purposes.)

- In addition to knowing the spell in question at level 15+, a mage must know the Ritual Magic skill at level 15+ in order to use ceremonial magic.

- Anyone wishing to contribute to a group ceremony must likewise know both the spell and Ritual Magic at 15+; those who don't are considered unskilled participants.

- When rolling for the spell, the caster's base skill level (before any magical modifiers are applied) is the *lower* of his skill in the spell and his Ritual Magic skill.

Find all applicable magical modifiers, and add them to the caster's base skill for that ceremonial casting roll:

- Up to one use of each Ritual Preparation skill.
- The best available bonus from *each* category of magical materials (one consumable, one reusable).
- The best available bonus from *each* Law of Magic connection (one Sympathy, one Contagion, one Name).
- The best bonus from all sacrifices.

Trading Skill Bonuses for Extra Energy

If the GM permits this option, a caster may trade some or all of the skill bonuses from magical modifiers for extra energy to help pay the spell's cost. For each +1 bonus sacrificed, the caster gets 1 free energy toward the final cost of the spell. Only the bonuses from magical modifiers may be sacrificed this way, and doing so cannot result in a net penalty to skill (for example, if you have +5 from magical modifiers, you can't get more than 5 free energy through this method). In a group ceremony, only the bonuses to the lead caster's final roll can be used this way.

This option is mostly appealing to solitary casters, allowing them to cast slightly more powerful (or less expensive) spells by taking extra time. This technique can't be used at the same time as converting extra energy into skill bonuses.

SOLITARY CEREMONY

A solitary caster uses the normal rules, save that he ignores the bonus to Will to avoid distractions, as well as the increased chance of failure and critical failure – solitary ceremonial magic has neither the benefits nor the drawbacks of group castings. A solitary caster *may* pay extra energy to get a skill bonus, as in a normal ceremonial casting.

GROUP CEREMONY

Group ceremonies function much the same as in the default rules – specifically, they have the bonus to resist distraction, and the increased chance of failure normally associated with ceremonial magic. Modifiers to casting skill, including the various bonuses listed earlier, apply only to the lead caster's final skill.

If there are several kinds of magic in a campaign – wizardly, holy, druidic, etc. – only participants who use the same magical source as the lead caster may act as *skilled* contributors to a ceremonial casting. For instance, a cleric may sit in as an unskilled supporter to a wizardly ceremonial casting, but he can't contribute more than 1 FP (and *not* from a Holy Energy Reserve!), even if he knows the clerical version of the same spell at 15+. In a campaign where Ritual Magic has required specialties, only mages with the same tradition may cooperate (unless the GM allows for cross-tradition defaults . . .).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

W.A. Frick (Alex or Lex to the friends he keeps close, and the enemies he keeps closer) lives with a cat and a crazy Scottish lady. Neighbors say he mostly keeps to himself, and he has always seemed like the quiet type. His hobbies include *GURPS* (which he's played and game-mastered for a decade and half), watching looped playback of *MST3K* and *The Prisoner*, and collecting rare web links.

THE PROMETHIANS

A META-MAGICAL CONSPIRACY

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Consider magic – the way to ultimate power, but not a path that all can follow. A lucky few have the knack for the Art, but most do not. All attempts to harness thaumaturgical power come at a price, sometimes rather steep, and those who pay that price are generally unwilling to share all their hard-earned knowledge.

Such is the way of the world, they say – but not everyone agrees.

There is a magical conspiracy afoot, led by a group of revolutionaries who think that the way things are is an imperfection. These self-styled Promethians say that magic should be the birthright of all intelligent life, not just a few, lucky people. They say there should be no secrets – and no property – and that even the most hazardous of magics should be available to any and all who can fathom their workings.

They also say that there is a way to fix the world so that all people, everywhere, can have access to magic, now and forever.

For this “lunacy,” they are labeled as dangerous cranks, and outcast from magical society. Their theories are barred from polite conversation, and mere mention of the thrice-banned *Principia Descriptoria* is enough to cause a violent argument. They are even wanted for questioning by mundane authorities, and treated as insane criminals when caught.

*Pockets full of morning-glory seeds
Stolen from gravity, plucked from
the weeds*

*Of serpented and roseblood clay . . .
– Helen Carlson, “The Junkie
Promethian Unbound”*

But the fire they have lit is not going to go away anytime soon.

This article describes the Promethians as an underground, meta-magical movement that would work in any *GURPS*-fantasy setting with normal mana levels and the Magery advantage. With a little tinkering, they could also be used in a more modern setting, or a world with lower mana or different magic rules. The group’s questionable history and unique philosophy are given, along with their code of conduct and tactics, guidelines for *GURPS* character creation, and ways to use them within a campaign.

BURNING FOR YOU

The Promethian conspiracy is tiny but widespread. It extends into every major city in the land and has quietly infiltrated magical society across the world. Wherever there are magicians, there are Promethians, trying either to recruit individuals, trick their leaders, or steal and redistribute their closely guarded researches for “the greater good.”

The exact details of their creation are uncertain, but the basic story is known. Five magicians involved in meta-magical studies came to the simultaneous conclusion that the world, alterable by magic, was actually *made* of magic. Every object and force in the universe was ultimately composed of words and descriptions – all set into motion by an unknown creating power, and allowed to go on their way. Those forces or objects could be used as described to create physical or spiritual change, or else magic could be used to temporarily or permanently rewrite the descriptions.

All well and good – but if the world, itself, was made of magic, then did it not follow that all things within that world had a *right* to magic? If not, then why not? Could magic be used to rewrite magic itself, so that all sentient beings could enjoy their natural birthright?

In the modern world, “information wants to be free” is a fairly common meme. What if it was originated by the Promethians? Or what if the Promethians have piggybacked onto “cyberpunk” culture? Strange allies . . .

These were not popular ideas. Magicians – ever a proud and secretive bunch of jealous power-hoarders – condemned the idea as lunacy at best, and treason at worst. So the five, chased off by an angry mob, erased themselves and went underground. To this day no one remembers who these so-called “Firegivers” are, where they studied, or what they looked like. All the authorities know for certain is that these Promethians seek to bring the fire of magic down for all humanity to share in, whether they are ready for it or not.

They also know these heretics are slowly amassing the power and knowledge needed to try to rewrite magic itself on a cosmic scale. If they succeed, magical society’s time-honored control over the Art will be broken. But if they fail, the consequences could be catastrophic; they might rip the structure of the universe to pieces if they get a single word wrong.

That is why the Promethians are hounded, hunted, and described as extremely dangerous – almost on par with diabolists and evil necromancers. Regardless of how noble their aims may be, they are seen as monkeys playing with dangerous chemicals in a very flammable laboratory.

Hey, You – Read This Book!

The chief philosophical tract of the Promethians is the *Principia Descriptoria*. It is a small booklet that uses a humorous dialogue between two magical researchers – complete with comical illustrations – to explain *everything*. How the universe was made, how it works, how magic alters it, and how magic can remake its laws are detailed within. It also includes off-color jokes, pleas for intercultural cooperation, and a magnificent recipe for turnip soup.

According to the Promethians, reality is made of magical descriptions of objects and forces – “words” they refer to as *Gramarye*, with something of a wink and a nod. Magic changes the Gramarye values, either permanently or temporarily, in order to effect change in the world.

As an example, a bowl of the aforementioned turnip soup has several Gramarye values describing it: color, taste, texture, amount, temperature, and so on. A cold bowl of soup can be made hot by magically changing the Gramarye value that describes its temperature. It could also be turned green, or be made to taste terrible, but who would want to do that?

The *Principia* goes on to explain that magic, itself, has Gramarye values. As currently “written,” only a precious few can work the Art, but those values should be rewritten so that all sentient life can have a chance to practice it. This will require a lot of study, work, and research, and the *Principia* encourages those who read it to “pick up the fallen fire,” and join the Promethians in making a better, fairer world for all.

CITIES ON FIRE

The Promethians are arranged into cells, ideally numbering five persons. With fewer than five, they need new recruits; with more than five, one or two of the older members leaves to start a new cell. Ideally, members of a single cell should not know the entire membership of another cell; that way, only one cell goes down if a member is captured and forced to reveal all he knows.

Some cells are permanently assigned to specific cities or regions, while others move wherever they’re needed.

The group’s hierarchy is remote, but directly felt. The Firegivers – the first Promethians – make their wishes known through cryptic, purposely vague dreams that are sent to all members of a cell. “Go to the new city, and seek out the one who kills,” “find the dying queen, and bring her a new life,” and “find and return the book of dead names” are typical orders. When they are carried out, the dreams stop.

Above the cells, and directly below the Firegivers, are the Apprentices. Promethians who have achieved mastery over a particular magical path or technique are often encouraged to leave the cell structure and act on their own. Apprentices can be summoned by cells for special needs, difficult jobs, and training new members whose areas of expertise are not mirrored by the rest of the cell. They are also the ones who are sent to pick up certain “redistributed” items from cells, so that the Firegivers can have them for study, or else send them on to where they’re needed the most.

The daily activities of a Promethian cell could include meta-magical research, fomenting revolution, stealing (“creatively redistributing”) tomes and artifacts, or annoying the authorities through surreal subversion. They could be infiltrating magical society in order to plant their ideas, possibly getting everyone to read the *Principia* without realizing it. They could also be rescuing captured Promethians from oubliettes, or writing scurrilous graffiti about where the king’s chief wizard gets his familiars.

Promethians recruit by seeking out magically oriented persons who are out of sync with their fellow travelers: weirdos, iconoclasts, and dreamers – the younger the better. They find a way to put a copy of the *Principia* in his hands, and then watch what the potential recruit does. Ideally, he reads it, gets accused of heresy for asking troubling questions of his betters, and has to be rescued by the cell. This doesn’t always happen, of course, but it’s predictable enough to be a time-honored tactic.

There’s no exact formula for induction, but they generally explain to the recruit what they’re doing, and why. Then they ask if he really wants to go back to his life, now that he knows what they know. If the recruit

wants in, he’s invited to surrender all property – including his name – and take on a role within the group. Those who refuse to join are allowed to go their own way, but if they choose to tell the authorities what they know, a dormant spell ensures they will promptly forget all incriminating evidence and remember something terribly silly instead.

All members of the conspiracy are expected to hold themselves to three rules: no property, no secrets, no killing.

“Promethian” is easily confused with “Promethean” (the more accepted spelling of something inspired by Prometheus, the legendary Titan who stole fire from Zeus and gave it to humanity). If there are two cults – the Promethians and the Prometheans – whose goals conflict, there’s the potential for big complications.

These sound simple, but sometimes become problematic when applied to contentious and dangerous situations.

No Property

The Promethians do not recognize private ownership of anything. Everything they have belongs to the group and can be shuffled from person to person as befits the needs of the moment, or the good of the whole. They even give up their names upon fully joining, and do so knowing that the name they take can be passed around, too, if needed.

This rule tends to get them in the most trouble with others, as they don't recognize the private ownership rights of those *outside* the group, either. If hungry, they take bread; if they need shelter, they invade a house. They often try to take only from those who can well-afford the loss, or clearly deserve some "creative redistribution." However, if they're in a tight spot, all bets are off.

No Secrets

The Promethians equally do not recognize private ownership of facts or ideas. Everything they know belongs to the group, and should be offered if needed, unless the answer will cause direct harm to themselves or another. In that case, they can lie like rugs, erase memories, and implant "suggestions" as much as they need to. Such "Scheherazade maneuvers" have often extended captive Promethians' lives enough for their fellows to mount a rescue.

This rule also gets them into a lot of trouble – mostly with elder wizards, who aren't happy to have their mystical researches pilfered from their sanctums, copied, and passed around to complete strangers. Nor are politicians, rulers, spymasters, or ordinary folks happy to have their secrets uncovered in the name of total honesty. As with property, the group tends to take secrets only from those who have them to spare, but they aren't above spilling someone's beans to teach them a lesson, however deserved.

No Killing

Promethians believe that one's life is the only thing one can truly own, and to take it would be true theft. Even their enemies, and those who would kill them, are not to be done away with. This makes certain challenges even more challenging – especially when the life in question is that of an evil sorcerer or angry dragon – but no one said this conspiracy would be easy.

BURNING FOR YOU

Starting Promethians should be made at the Heroic power level. An expertise in certain Paths or techniques is not necessary to be considered for induction – even raw novices can make the grade, provided they're of a mind to tune in, turn on, and drop out.

All Promethians have a 50-point disadvantage package: Code of Honor (Promethian) [-10] to represent the group's three rules, and Enemies [-40] to reflect having all of polite magical society – and their mundane allies – set against them. Those who are

Friendly Fire

Some of the more (in)famous Promethian Apprentices are:

Po: This diminutive, elderly, and lecherous Asian sorcerer is an undisputed master of Movement and Gate spells. He has been observed in several different places at once within the same fight, which makes up for his apparent frailty and poor grasp of martial arts.

King Pumpkinhead: Tall, gangly, and unquestionably insane, this Apprentice exhibits a supreme understanding of Mind Control, and gives terror and madness to the deserving. He wears a carved pumpkin over his head, so that no one can see his face – said to be truly hideous.

Mathias: A subtly mischievous master of the Weather college, his presence causes hair and metal to crackle with electricity. They say the blue-haired magician's control over lightning is so total that he can *become* a bolt of it at will, but no one has seen this.

Apprentices can buy Rank at varying degrees; they can also take Duty (Promethians; 12 or less) [-10], as the Firegivers are infamous for interrupting their lives with some new errand.

As for other advantages, Promethians tend to lose all Status, Allies, Clerical Investments, Legal Immunity, Patrons, and Social Regard when they join up. It is possible to retain these through Alternate Identities, provided the cell needs them to maintain a double life. Some Apprentices have been Zeroed by means of spells, so as to allow these ultra-notorious characters easier passage through certain areas.

One advantage to having a Promethian campaign is that, being a worldwide conspiracy, they have members in other cultures around the globe. As a result, players are not practically restricted to character choices from the setting's immediate cultural milieu. It is entirely possible to have a party made up of two wizards, a Chinese alchemist, a witch doctor, and a fakir. So long as appropriate disadvantages for being strangers in strange lands are taken, it works fine.

It's generally best if all the PCs are Promethians. It's possible to have a campaign where one or more of the heroes are Promethians who are temporarily allied with the rest of the adventurers, but their ideas and ethics might not mesh well with others ("why do you keep stealing my sword, and why won't you kill anyone with it?").

It's also possible to have one or more Promethians in a deep cover situation, with the rest of the heroes not knowing their true loyalties. However, this can lead to inter-party friction along the way and may destroy the party when the gig is up.

JUMP IN THE FIRE

What do you do with a group of Promethians? What can't you do? A repressive city needs its secrets spread. A dream orders them to steal every single book out of the best magical library in a kingdom, but – as they're not certain which library is the "best" – they'll just steal from them all.

The Promethians want magic to be free, while the Prometheans want to give humanity as much fire as possible!

Plenty of Room Around the Fire

The often-chauvinistic sorcerers of traditional, European-analogue fantasy settings tend to believe their understanding of magic to be much superior to that of foreigners. Witch doctors, shamans, ascetics, and the like are seen as “backward” and “lacking,” and their insights, while quaint, are rarely taken seriously.

However, the Promethians’ theory of Gramarye says that the magic of willworkers from other lands, however strange and alien, is no better or worse than anyone else’s. It doesn’t matter what words the magician uses, or how that magician learned magic, or where, a “heat my turnip soup” spell affects the same Gramarye value, and turns the soup hot. And soup was made to be shared.

It is for this reason that the Promethians are urged to foster cooperation between different magical cultures. They may have different ideas and concepts, or lack certain concepts altogether, but a different path to the same location is as good as any other – it may even be faster, or more fun. Also, different cultures may have clues to the Promethians’ final goal of changing the rules of the universe to allow for universal magical dominion, and cannot be overlooked.

A promising recruit needs to be spirited away from a dangerous wizard they’ve tangled with before, which will entail sneaking back into a metropolis they never wanted to return to, and dealing with a city guard that still wants them dead. The fun never ends!

Picking up the Pieces

For once, the Firegivers aren’t being cryptic. The cell needs to go to a certain location and retrieve a cache of “redistributed” artifacts that another cell stole, and deliver them to a safer location. But there’s one big problem: the Apprentice who was supposed to do this was captured and made to tell everything by a powerful willworker – the one who wants his things back. Can they get there, pick up the package, and run before he and his powerful allies descend upon them? What’s so special about these artifacts anyway?

The Schismatic Subversive

The unthinkable has happened. A powerful Apprentice has turned traitor and is going to the near-legendary Council of Wizards with all he knows. Because they’ve worked with the rogue before, the Promethian heroes have been given the unpleasant job of going to intercept him. But as the chase continues, the PCs have cause to wonder about his sincerity.

Why won’t he kill them when they fight? Why can’t the Firegivers stop him? Is this really treason, or just a ruse? If so, then who’s fooling whom?

The Gods’ Mistake

The PCs are Promethians from different cells, brought together by dreams to discover what happened to a research cell. The missing magicians were trying to trace the primal act of creation back to the first Gramarye values. Unfortunately, they seem to have been interrupted – an act that may have cost them their lives – and whoever interfered with the spells also took their magical diaries.

The Firegivers want those diaries back. They also want the miscreants responsible tracked down and questioned. But as the search deepens, the investigators get the uncomfortable feeling the interlopers had divine orders – possibly even divine help. Are they ready to tangle with powerful clerics and their unamused gods?

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.

Dance Beside the Flame

This merry bunch of subversives also makes for great allies, enemies, or background noise.

Scene Setting: The invisible fire that works in secret leaves burn marks everywhere. The characters might see their strange graffiti on city walls (“Learn to Burn,” “Pick Up the Fallen Fire,” “Eat More Soup”) or be roused by city guards looking for a cell matching their description. They might overhear high-powered wizards complaining about their antics. Worse, a copy of the *Principia* could be dropped into their hands by persons unknown – do they read it, burn it, or go to the authorities?

Friends: Need a peek at the well-guarded tome of Albrecht the All-Powerful? The Promethians are happy to share, so long as the heroes are willing to help them get it, however tangentially. They are also undisputed masters of meta-magic, in case someone needs a curse removed, or to be Zeroed beyond all finding. The real trick is finding them, but they say the Firegivers leave clues for the worthy.

Enemies: Not everyone digs a revolution. Powerful heroes could be legitimate targets for “creative redistribution,” or – being part of a city’s defense – not be amused by the divulging of secrets. The Promethians might steal magical items that are essential to the welfare of the kingdom, or the world. The Firegivers’ surreal mischief might be hiding a more sinister goal – who knows who or what they really are? The investigators might also have uncovered the fatal flaw in the revolution’s goals, and need to stop it before irreparable damage is done to reality itself.

TEN WAYS TO DESTROY THE WORLD WITH MAGIC

BY ANDY VETROMILE

Magic is a common tool for most adventuring parties, and their enemies get plenty of mileage out of it as well. But when everyday practice gets out of hand – sometimes *because* of everyday practice – there’s no telling how much havoc it can wreak. Herein are 10 ways (or more) to create utter devastation in the game world with ill-considered spells of mass destruction.

THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS . . .

Each entry starts with a description of the spells used or the nature of the magics. This is a broad categorization and may include several enchantments or even an entire college – seldom does the world end with one small and simple fireball.

Before

This section discusses the lead-up to the cataclysm. It may be a prophecy or simply a series of unfortunate incidents involving magic, or maybe mages who practice this brand of spellcasting are sensing a problem within their community. It conveys ways for the GM to immerse his group in the affair and how to present the growing troubles throughout.

During

Once it becomes clear the spell is out of control, this section suggests how the world reacts to the burgeoning threat. There may not be much to be done, and efforts to stop it could be hampered by riots or other breakdowns in the social order.

After

Or hereafter, if things are that dire. This section describes how the world is different in light of the suffering everyone has encountered. It’s always possible, of course, that the *During* part was the last, best hope for a good result, and the GM finds this segment unnecessary, but if there’s still a world for the heroes to adventure in after the “worst case,” it gets detailed here.

It’s the End of the World But No One Knows It

Okay, so the title of the article is just a bit misleading. Obviously if the world was truly destroyed by magic, there wouldn’t be anyone around to appreciate the nature of the problem, but at the least the instigators have achieved a near-insurmountable advantage. Hopefully by presenting the disasters at various stages as they unfold, the heroes have a chance to do something about them while they’re still a gameable threat. Indeed, they can suffer an entire campaign as they investigate the problem, combat its effects, and perhaps try to reverse the damage should they be less than successful.

THE ELEMENTS

Starting from basics, most mages learn something about the four classical elements: earth, wind, fire, and water.

Having a firm idea of “before, during, and after” for disasters can help make proceedings more realistic. It feels less arbitrary to players if it seems that events are leading to a natural conclusion (even if it’s an unpleasant one).

Depending on the system of magical belief, cultures may add in things like metal, light, dark, space, time, or the void, but those first four are the ones most often cited. As these are all by definition fundamental to a mage's knowledge of spells, at least from an academic point of view, they are also the most practiced and advanced colleges, so achieving world-changing effects is a lot easier.

Sound and Fury, Signifying Nothing

If meteors fall from the sky and burn craters into the farms, everyone knows something is up. Subtle effects might not be noticeable to those not in the mystic community or who aren't sensitive to differences in the mana level. In a case like this, the campaign might take on elements of a conspiracy, at least for the duration of the crisis. Only a handful of people know what's going on, and if any of them are talking about it, others might try to paint the doomsayers as lone nuts. The groups trying to keep the lid on the problem may not even be the ones responsible. They could be the proverbial ostriches, burying their heads in the sand and ignoring the issue, or perhaps they just make their living from the toxic spells and don't want their gravy train to end. If made aware of the true depth of the situation, they'd head for the hills like everyone else.

Before

Tapping primal elemental forces is either the subtlest or most ham-fisted way to bring about destruction. On the one hand, its base nature means the spells employed are blunt instruments, blasts of raw, elemental power tearing through even the greatest targets. On the other, finding a new and unfamiliar use for the oldest possible spells requires either a lot of dedication or a lot of research.

If an enemy employs an obvious strategy, there won't be much mistaking it. Fire lights up the mountains or rivers swell with both water and mana, or maybe wizards using air-based enchantments find their spells are easier to cast and harder to control. Detection spells might have a hard time seeing even localized natural phenomena when a competing elemental effect is also close by. Zeroing in on the cause presents little challenge (unless the catalyst mage wants to disguise his involvement even at this late stage, perhaps because revving up to full power takes time); going up against such an enemy is a little more perilous. The heroes have seen someone tossing or calling down blasts of energy, but there's a lot of ground to cover between here and there without getting zapped.

The path of subtlety presents more of a mental exercise. The GM can drop plenty of hints before the adventurers realize what they're up against. Someone kidnaps the king's old mage and asks him questions about the most rudimentary enchantments. Another party is looking for an artifact, one said to possess a seemingly unimpressive power such as creating walls of water;

the item is remarkable not for its abilities but its *age*. Circles of cultists are found gathered to cast spectacular spells like . . . fireball?! Hours of rote recitation for one fireball? Soon the pieces come together and the adventurers realize large numbers of newcomers are delving into elemental magic, and markets are being looted for related tables.

During

What this apocalypse looks like depends on the element employed. Fire would leave a charred cinder where food is increasingly difficult to find, animals without a food source are driven to attack humanoids, and vegetation – when it can be found – is a treasure worth more than gold. Crevasses that spew fire and lava crisscross the surface of the world, making travel impossible for sojourners who lack the agility to avoid such hazards.

Water floods the world, making empires of even the smallest island. Mold is a constant issue, and the weather brings rains nearly every day. Holes of any depth fill with water, turning dungeon crawls into diving expeditions. Potable water is plentiful, but farming in turn depends on crops that make good use of the new environment such as cranberries and rice. Game gives way to extensive fishing, and kingdoms lucky enough to have larger inland lakes produce more freshwater seafood. They also host bigger sea monsters, ones that have learned to make the transition between freshwater and seawater with equal facility. They may also be amphibious, causing more problems for intrepid adventurers.

Without constant upkeep, protection, or innovation, plains left blasted by wind erosion cannot long sustain crops or habitations. Denizens may harness the magic and take to the skies in exotic machines, all in an attempt to keep ahead of the worst of the storms, but eventually stronger winds take out even the hardest craft.

Should the world end with an out-of-control earth spell, mountains become the dominant feature of most land masses. Travel is blocked not just by breathtaking hills but by regular rockslides and mighty natural obelisks that weren't there even the day before. The dwarves are happy to see their holdings increase and improve with no real effort on their part – that is, until the continual parting of the stonework releases ancient and forgotten enemies from the subterranea beneath them.

After

The heroes become stewards of the earth (and then some), trying to find a balance in nature even as they try to repair the damage done by these new and dominant features. With three elements in regression in favor of the fourth, the PCs have to find ways to use that terrain to their advantage.

“Destroying” the world could actually mean “changing it in a fundamental way.” After all, a previously traditional world that’s been reverted to a piraty world of interlocking islands pretty much counts as “destroying” the world. If the heroes uncover this sneaky redefinition of “destroy,” then the players might be more inclined to think the GM will actually carry out the threat!

For example, a world overcome by earth magic means any attempt to level the playing field (or at least get some use out of non-earth-based spells) requires a mage or mages to delve deep into caverns in search of a flow of magma to tap fire magic or an underground river for water, or climb high up in a mountain pass filled with whistling wind.

DARKNESS

In this scenario, an angry mage literally wants to plunge the world into darkness. His spell either creates everlasting night or – worse – removes all light from the world. Humanity is left to see only by the stars or perhaps not at all. In the former case, people are always on their guard: Thieves have the perfect conditions in which to work around the clock, and everyone has to adjust to a sleep cycle bereft of visual clues (clocks, if they didn't exist before, see a sharp spike in their development curve). Monsters and dwellers in darkness (such as vampires) are given free rein, while plants and trees are stunted or die out entirely.

Before

The pendulum swings for light- and dark-aspected mages, and does not return to a position of equilibrium. Depending on how endemic the GM wants the problem to be, the entire affair may center around the celestial bodies (in other words, only the sun/moon/stars are losing their light), or it may affect light sources of any kind wherever they may be. The latter possibility means dungeon crawls become more hazardous as torches and the like lose potency, and wood may go at a premium as citizens attempt to build bigger and better bonfires with which to stave off the inevitable. Light and dark carry heavy emotional tolls as well; a powerful ennui might overcome anyone regardless of whether they possess any form of magery. In the long term, ailments such as rickets and depression become far more common.

During

The light either fades out slowly everywhere, or the darkness starts to spread from a few central points until it covers everything. In the former case the sun dims, much to the chagrin of farmers and sun-aspected mages, providing less light with each day. In the latter, the people arise en masse in search of new homes in unaffected areas. Well-lit land goes for a premium. While some may try to extort money from refugees, it won't be long before military might tries to maintain order. The pressure of the desperate mob overcomes any resistance as a rebellion born of fear overtakes everyone.

After

Hastily fashioned cults dedicated to reviving the sun or pleading with the dark for mercy take shape. Everyone wants to be saved but not all allow a band of would-be saviors to anger their new gods. The catalyst mage becomes an avatar, and those

who cling to his skirts for protection will, in turn, guard their dark master against intruders. The heroes can enlist the aid of the sun cult, so long as they don't mind being at the center of a religious war; they might even be able to win some darkness-aspected spellcasters to their side (just because they use this magic doesn't mean none of them miss the sunlight).

This Article Contains No Ys

It's a classic trope – the enemy who wants to destroy the world – but the villains aren't in the spotlight here. The GM has to come up with his own reasons why the bad guy is willing to blow up a planet (or an elephant-borne disc) he's standing on. He could be part of a death cult or just mad from power, but the focus in this piece is on the spells and their effects on the campaign world.

UNDEAD PLAGUE

The sea isn't the only one giving up its dead. Necromancers fill the world with their slain slaves, and the graveyards ring with the work of busy ghouls and wights. Like a magical version of a *Living Dead* film, scores of flesh-eaters now pound at the doors of thatched huts in pursuit of their next meal.

Before

When a loved one's corpse disappears from the local churchyard, grave robbers are suspected. A mass exodus of bodies leaving coffins would give away that something more is going on, but a single open grave can be written off as a collection made by some crazed doctor for experimentation. Someone close to the heroes might pull them into the quest to track down the body; as a difficult choice, the possibility of returning a departed loved one when they uncover the ties to necromantic magic might be a temptation for the hero. Elsewhere, reports come in that villagers have seen long-dead family members roaming at night – something they might not be upset about at first, thinking they've been given a second chance with their beloved. They might even work against the investigators, lest the meddling heroes try to deny them this opportunity.

During

Depending on the game the GM wants to run, hordes of undead could be a horrific experience akin to an apocalypse – it's every adventurer for himself, scavenging for supplies, holing up in fortified keeps, or braving caves in the hope that there's nothing there but orcs. A proud noble is likely to wage a campaign against the creatures, and he's unwilling to let his kingdom be laid waste by an army that doesn't have the decency to draw breath. Sweeping battles can ensue (see *GURPS Mass Combat* for possibilities), with the protagonists leading the charge against the necromancer in the throes of his spell.

Good information on ending the world can be found in Pyramid #3/3: Venturing into the Badlands – Post-Apocalypse. Of particular note is information on the speed of human repopulation; and Name that Apocalypse, which provides world-ending questions to consider.

An Unsustainable Blood Economy

Lots of dead things may crawl up out of their tombs at the bidding of necromantic magic, but the big exception is vampires. This isn't to say the bloodsuckers aren't subject to the effects of magic (most owe their very existence to some mystic curse or another), but in most worlds, they're already established as a threat, even a centuries-old problem. The GM might use the magic of the dead to introduce them to a setting where vampires were heretofore unknown, but a ritual that creates a global infestation of them out of nowhere is somewhat extreme (and maybe a bit cheesy). It takes away one of the biggest assets of this breed of undead: their past. A good vampire comes with a name, a history, and maybe a series of plots and schemes. Anonymous corpses with their (un)lives and a blood thirst thrust upon them suddenly would be more confused than

confrontational. Further, if they arose in numbers that could threaten the world, they'd soon be out of blood. The best part of such a nightmare – when the vampires ran out of victims and turned on each other – would be a spectacle with no spectators. An existing vampire could be the instigator, but the GM would have to justify why it wanted more bloodsuckers to compete with than the ones he creates the old-fashioned way. Imagine a vampire lord whose spell goes awry and who has to call upon the services of intrepid knights to help him kill other vampires!

Mummies might fall into the same category, though there are plenty of traditional justifications for numerous bandage-wrapped thugs. Indeed, even historically, one might find hordes of them buried with a ruler's body just to serve it in the afterlife.

After

If it wasn't a post-apocalyptic game before, it is now. The dead haunt the now-ravaged wasteland world, and the PCs are left to skulk in the shadows. Even the dead have weaknesses and fears, and these must be exploited to reduce the undead population to manageable levels. However, if someone finds a way to reverse the results of the magical effect that brought this about, will there be enough people to reclaim the world for the living . . . or will the dazed survivors be the new walking dead?

DIMENSIONAL GATEWAYS

Someone has been tampering with the walls between dimensions. They're there for a reason, but a mage wants to see them rent asunder. Alternately, spellcasters may find teleportation and dimensional-travel enchantments really useful, to the point of overuse. Something fundamental to the cosmos wears thin and – like the very earth during a quake – the fabric of reality peels apart.

Before

The heroes have trouble with travel. At first, it's a trip cut short when they find themselves transported to the other side of an island, but soon they cannot take even the shortest jaunt to the pub without stepping through one or more worlds and suffering attacks by odd creatures or surprised foes. Locks become quaint frivolities, there is no security, and the only thing worse than the draconian measures taken by the king are the unpredictable reactions of frightened townsfolk. Paranoia becomes a cold reality.

During

Depending on how far the doors reach, visits may be to alternate histories with different versions of the heroes, or

weird parallels where things are strange even by the standards of a fantasy world. If there's an intelligence behind this assault on existence, the perpetrator might use his shifting spaces to monitor of his pursuers or to keep them at bay – well at bay. If he discovers how to cut more than space in twain with his portals, he may be unstoppable.

After

There are no longer easy ways to navigate the setting. One must hope to show up somewhere hospitable if he travels any distance – and some doors may no longer stay in one spot, sweeping across the landscape, scooping people up, and dropping them elsewhere (as with *GURPS Banestorm*). If there are regular patterns, banks of scholars are employed full time to track and predict the movements of the anomalies. Investigators with a talent for calculations can find work doing this, and those with combat abilities might escort them as they do their duties. In the absence of patterns, those with good guide skills or high intuition become invaluable. No doubt some percentage of the population has an innate propensity for finding their way along the torturous paths; these people are always in demand, enslaved, or leaders of their own small kingdoms. Barter takes the place of most forms of currency, languages default to pidgins as populations homogenize, and there's a psychological toll as the very concept of "home" destabilizes.

TIME TRAVEL

Much of what was said about *Dimensional Gateways* (above) applies to issues of time travel. In this scenario, reality is under siege not by apertures forming in the walls but by time out of joint. Unlike those doors, however, one temporal casting gone wrong is sometimes all it takes to completely undermine a world. Nonexistent people are now born and others "un-die."

GURPS Infinite Worlds is a great primer for game effects of time travel (including what can go wrong when you muck with causality).

If the problem is the result of multiple such spells, the enchantments may find themselves butting heads as they try to affect the world simultaneously (if that word still has any meaning). If two things cannot occupy the same space and time, which one takes precedence? Or are both pushed out, leaving a vacuum wherein there is nothing? History gets folded onto itself like an old blanket, again and again until the whole of the world becomes a singularity with no beginning or end. Or maybe there are just a lot more dinosaur attacks.

Before

Elements from throughout history start to appear in the here and now. They haven't begun to stack up in bewildering variety, but cavemen and bug-eyed monsters now stand beside mages and knights. The heroes may find they suffer "lost time." That may not seem so different from a night at the tavern, but if the team enters a dungeon for a day and find a week has passed when they emerge, they'll know something is unusual. Long-time enemies of the PCs may "suddenly" have a new advantage, with plots that have advanced past what seems reasonable.

During

Leadership of everything from households to nations is placed in doubt when the current patriarch is thrown into competition with three preceding generations of sires thought long-dead. It's easy to think you'd stick with the one you had before these events, but what if one-quarter of the people now "remember" your grandfather as the contemporary and have no idea why his son has ascended to the throne?

While We're on the Subject

As long as the corridors of time are still open for business, the GM can use the time-period divisions to establish hot-spots for changes to the timeline. If a party with access to temporal spells fails to stop an enemy caster who has found the Eye of Elemental Fire, they can go back to get it from the temple before he does; intervene at the climax of his ritual; or, if they survive the world's end, bring him before a cobbled-together court of justice amid the ashes. It all depends on the GM's ruling about the nature of time.

After

It is, in all probability, the very picture of madness. If there are no banks to contain the river of time, reality floods in on itself. Traveling back to repair an incursion in the past may no longer be the solution. That event may no longer exist, depending on what happened and what the catalyst spellcaster's intent was. Instead the heroes are called upon to keep on top of a problem that doesn't end, applying magical duct tape to a dripping hose that never stops springing temporal leaks.

"Father," Dunham asked, "are you telling us that the stone is trying to find a perfect person, someone completely without sin?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I am saying. And if it ever finds this perfect person, the apocalypse will begin!"

– Pete Earley,

The Apocalypse Stone

War is almost a constant. There are external enemies like dead demigods, but those who cleave to existence fight for what is, and that's a target that changes from week to week. (Unlike most other apocalypses, there are always resources, just no certainty about what they will be.) Think your ancestors were barbaric? Imagine what occurs when they show up again, given another chance to fight their wars – only this time they know how things turned out. They cannot countenance that their empires did not stand the test of time, so they're determined to create something that lasts the thousands of years it takes to achieve immortality. Monsters and enemies long extinct reappear, and if they're killed, they may appear once again. If navigating the timestream is still possible, causality may no longer apply. Events happen for reasons no one can detect, and actions peter out without having the expected result.

MAGIC ITSELF

Mana may be a part of the natural world in a fantasy setting, but that doesn't mean everyday application is part of magic's fickle natural order. It's possible the use, or overuse, of spells could make its mark on the environment. It may be a particular enchantment is popular and its repeated casting forms a "rut" in the mystical landscape, or the wrong combination brings about an unexpected result, or just too many high-powered rituals mar the tapestry.

Before

Mages attempting to cast certain spells end up getting a sort of "busy signal," and it never happens at a good time. Soon "adjacent" or prerequisite spells from that college sputter and fail. While this happens, magic is making up its own mind and casting random hexes near high-mana areas. Mages gather in conclaves to figure things out, out of the public eye and away from villagers and gossipmongers who have begun stirring up popular opinion against the sorcerous community.

Combining deterioration brought by time travel with one of the other crises is a good way to build in an "undo" function to an otherwise hopeless-seeming scenario.

During

Edicts go forth from a panicked crown, instructing that anyone found to be using magic without royal assent is to be arrested (or worse, as the situation deteriorates). Limits are placed on how many people can work rituals, and most of the casting is done in an effort to understand and reverse the problem. Despotism might exploit the crisis to crack down on those mystics who would oppose them; they don't use magic to solve their realms' problems, which makes any heroes who work for the greater good rebels in the eyes of the government.

After

Magic is dead. Depending on the GM's ecology, this may mean no more spells can be cast or it may have even farther-reaching effects on the world. Magical artifacts stop working, and fantastic plants and animals that depend on mana to live die out. Even these oddball losses to the environment cascade as the food chains are disrupted. A new source of magic must be found . . . or is this one of the cycles for this world, and the power will replenish itself? If that's the case, all that's needed is time – though mages will probably try to jump the gun the moment they see any mana reappear, in hopes of establishing the first new power base.

Two Scoops of Adventure

The GM may want to combine elements from two or more of apocalypses. Summoning (see below) is a good example of how this might work. A demon could arrive on this world without assistance from some infernal mortal mage if he found a portal suddenly opening to this dimension (see *Dimensional Gateways*, p. 30). Liberal use of the Create Gate spell isn't inherently problematic, but when one overlaps with a hell dimension and looses something hideous, taking out that entity is only the first in a line of unfortunate exploits.

DEATH, WAR, FAMINE, AND PLAGUE

Horsemen may not actually show up, but these are the vicissitudes that test people during times of hardship. Usually they're harnessed by nations at war, with battle mages sending waves of magically induced disease through the enemy camp, spoiling food stores, and disintegrating everyone's general well-being. Like a modern-day arms race, there's always a push to create these effects on a bigger and better scale, which eventually plunges everyone into a death spiral.

Before

A simple case of dysentery amid the army won't surprise anyone, and trying to detect magic reveals that, yes, a spell is behind it. But when the effects spread too fast, when the

"It's another stage of the apocalypse," Giles explained. "In many mythologies there is a series of plagues that affect only the wicked. Boils is a popular one."

*– Laura J. Burns
and Melinda Metz,
Buffy the Vampire Slayer:
Apocalypse Memories*

opposing troops seem to fall victim to illness just from skirmishing with their enemies, and when the progression recurs like the ringing of a bell, it's clear something is out of control. Food supplies might spoil, even those in fields where the fight takes place – there's no need for a scorched-earth policy when crops wither on the vine. Spells cast to purify food and water, or to clear up disease among the troops, are reduced in effectiveness or fail altogether.

During

Promulgating well beyond the battlefield, the spell effects sweep through crops and populations. Even those in the cities find there's no safety behind castle walls. Hunger and rioting are rampant, and the conflicts become smaller and smaller as even villagers become combatants over diminishing spoils. The real armies are reluctant to come home, even if their rulers would let them, for fear of bringing the scourge with them. Perhaps the heroes can offer their services as messengers, keeping the many towns of the kingdom in contact with each other, as well as bringing words of hope.

After

Starvation kills some, plague kills others, and the infighting over rationed foodstuffs makes murderers of the rest. It's only a question of time before the last of the food runs out. If the heroes are to make any difference, they must shepherd what remains of the population together lest they no longer be concentrated enough to allow reproduction. Even then, they must make it through the season so that new crops may be placed, and if the effects of the mage's spells persist, there's real danger that the harvest will die. They may need to find new supplies of grain and cast counteragent magic of their own on them.

SUMMONING

The details of this spell rest with the GM, but the précis is that someone has called up something horrible to threaten the entire world. If there's any kind of "standard" being, it's usually a demon or other foul denizen from some hellish dimension.

From a game standpoint, a zombie plague with concurrent temporal anomalies means that – even if the world is wiped out – the PCs might be able to harness the choral energy to put things right.

The thing then goes on a rampage, crushing enemies and fortifications alike, and conventional weapons have little or no effect. This type of apocalypse doesn't preclude infestations of smaller but still formidable monsters or animals like dragons, minotaurs, or lions, or even something so subtle the dangers aren't immediately obvious. Something seemingly basic such as locusts or rats could do serious damage to crops, the food chain, and perhaps people.

As if it wasn't bad enough that the Angel of Death was missing, but with the five scrolls gone as well . . . Remy shuddered, trying to force thoughts of the Apocalypse from his mind.

– Thomas E. Sniegowski,
A Kiss Before the Apocalypse

Before

The lord's gamekeeper needs help with some sort of unruly wildlife. He doesn't know what's been nibbling at the vegetable patches, but undergrowth is disappearing at a surprising rate. As the team investigates, it becomes clear this isn't so small a problem – either something big is eating everything, or dozens of small somethings are hacking away at the land. If a bigger beast is at work, the heroes may be the ones who find the first enormous tracks deep in the woods, before it finds civilization . . . or they might be the witnesses to its arrival in whatever dungeon they're exploring.

During

Most efforts are focused on stopping the rampage. Having witnessed the creature's predations firsthand, the PCs are asked to serve in a sort of government think-tank to stop it. Clever ideas are no less needed if the assault comes from out-of-control rodentia, though the tactics change. It's possible many folks don't even care about the infestation until they recognize its far-ranging and devastating effects and realize these aren't temporary things.

After

The demon no longer needs its home dimension – he has created Hell on Earth. The mage responsible for the incursion enjoys certain, er, "creature comforts" as his right-hand vassal. Reversal of the situation might entail another summoning spell; everything has an

opposite number or a natural enemy, and putting the two of them together might mean a win. However, it might mean a bigger fight, fewer trees, and more space in which to bury the additional victims. Smaller scourges are easier to recover from, but like the effects of war (see *Death, War, Famine, and Plague*, p. 32), once the food supply has been trashed, it's every man for himself.

ILLUSION

Ostensibly one of the least harmful forms of magic, the power of illusion might nonetheless wreak havoc once it's out of control. It may be less believable as the work of an individual, but it works well as a methodology that's gotten out of hand. If the mages tell the manasphere something long enough and often enough, it may start to believe them, and illusions begin to take over.

Before

"Ghost sightings" become more common, offering plenty of work to clerics sought for their blessings and to the medieval versions of ghost investigators. Soldiery and city watches have their hands full chasing down intrusions and bizarre happenings that no one can confirm but everyone has seen, leaving holes in security for exploitation by real criminals. The protagonists can choose which side they fall on, depending on their current finances.

During

Old friends reluctantly turn on one another. Even family members no longer know if they're living with their spouse or a remarkable simulacrum. Villains riding through veritable clouds of deceit can run roughshod over their foes, true, but they might also be targeting the wrong road or castle. They might not even have the right valley. Detection spells and anti-magic effects become highly sought after, and the PCs become shepherds of the lost – at least until the illusions course-correct again for their efforts and try to point them to the wrong artifacts.

This Is All Your Fault

Evil mages and an ignorant populace might not be the problem. What if the heroes, however innocently, were the ones to ruin the world? If the GM is tired of the team using the same magical tactics again and again, see how they fare when their best weapon gains a second edge. If anyone finds out the party is responsible, they might be mauled by a mob, but it could also be another opportunity. Not only are they the most learned casters of the faulty spell (and thus the best chance the king has for solving the conundrum), if they spin it right, it could lead to a job in the college, a position on a council, or the chance to troubleshoot throughout the realm. Or the mob may breathe a sigh of relief and *then* run them out of town on a teleport spell.

Adventure hook: Run a one-shot in a new setting! Translate the PCs, and start the adventure by having them "wake up" in this new world. What's going on? Illusions are destroying creation; this adventure is a "symptom."

After

Unable to discern between the real and the artificial, people cleave to their homes in hopes of maintaining a hold on something, anything they believe they can count on. Unexpected visitors are met with crossbow bolts, just to be on the safe side. They were an illusion after all, yes? Even if the images never take on a tactile component their worst result is the maddening grind they create in the mind. If the world can manipulate everyone's senses, is that really so different from insanity? It may be a logic problem for the heroes to work out. ("How do we convince the merchant that we – and indeed, our gold – are real?" or "Let's hire the blind beggar as our guide; maybe he's not affected.") Constantly checking everything as though it were a lie will eventually crush a person's spirit.

Did I Do That?

Not every apocalypse on this list has to be the work of some ill-intentioned sorcerer with a hatred for the whole world. It's even more plausible that some forms of magic have just gotten out of control or have seen overuse. (See *Dimensional Gateways*, p. 30, as one example; after all, what kind of goofball develops a master plan that involves "dooring" the world to death?) Going this route lets the GM build events up to the tipping point in a variety of ways and lets the adventurers fight against fate, or at least investigate, as evidence of the problem mounts. It need not focus on the lich-of-the-week.

MIND AND BODY CONTROL

Among the most insidious spells, those that allow someone to disrupt voluntary movement or even take over the target's mind and make them dance like a marionette are invasive and frightening. Scarier still is the possibility that at some point, there might not be anyone at the other end . . .

Before

Someone ramps up body and mind spells – a likely occurrence on the battlefield, but useful for disabling enemies of any stripe. Physically, people begin spasming, losing control of personal bodily functions, or jerking about as though infected with St. Vitus' Dance. Soldiers can no longer hold weapons (or worse, cannot target enemies specifically), doctors find it difficult to help patients, and artisans cannot practice their craft.

His lips move along with mine and Bec's, his magic mingling with ours. Our voices rise. The sky turns black, red, white. Rocks are ripping out of the ground, shooting upward, burning, turning into birds, cows, cars, people, then back into rocks. . . . The world is coming apart. Everything's being destroyed.

– Darren Shan, *The Demonata #6: Demon Apocalypse*

The heroes may have to serve as the eyes and ears (and arms, etc.) of their liege at some important summits, or retrain the army. Perhaps they can find ways to get the troops to move in a more concerted fashion, somehow allowing each one to assist the man beside him – new techniques might allow two people to work as one.

Taking on the mind itself may be more subtle but far more ruinous. The victim is forced to perform acts not of his own volition – not unlike how such spells are used normally, but if these castings are now running on automatic, the command to do anything else may never come. Others must tend him lest he starve himself, and if the party comes upon such a person in their travels but cannot identify his fellows, it may be up to them to find his family or uncover what he was doing out on the road before he shut down. It might have been something important.

During

Lost in their own worlds, everyone is replaying old movements. Children are still playing games, mill workers churn out piles of flour (until such time as the flour dust hits a torch and the entire structure goes up), and hikers continue to walk. The actions may not even be current – they could be reliving childhood memories or pursuing what they planned to do the next day. Saving their entire village could take the team days, and they have to triage what they handle in what order. Once they're "infected" themselves, it's that much harder.

After

Knights on the battlefield are caught in a pattern. They attack castle walls that have since fallen, or swing at foes who have lain dead at their feet for days. The same potter's wheel spins but with little clay left for the dazed artist to work. Some actions may be "fortunate" enough to continue the desired effect, like pulling fish from a stream, but most are the continued efforts of doomed men. Some knights move into the bazaar, hacking away at shoppers with their swords, while others have lost their minds and no longer have even a basic drive. If unaffected, can the heroes arrange a Rube Goldberg-style alignment of the victims' activities that ultimately benefits them – or at least minimizes their plight?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Vetromile is a freelance writer, editor, and reviewer with an insatiable taste for games. He has worked with Steve Jackson Games, White Wolf, and Holistic Design, among others. Barbecue is his friend, and he wishes he, too, had world-altering magic.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

EVERYTHING I KNOW I LEARNED FROM MORDOR

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

For most character concepts, “character growth” is not usually equated with “learning.” In many game systems – including *GURPS* – a master swordsman hero doesn’t necessarily grow in power or ability as the campaign progresses. Sure, the master swordsman can (and will) get *better*, but it’s usually pretty easy to start with a skill level that tells the world, “Hey! I’m one bad mothah with a sword!”

Conversely, the act of learning is intrinsic to many magical character concepts. The most obvious example is the apprentice or neophyte wizard, who slowly grows in power and ability as the campaign progresses. (Fans of the old *Dungeons & Dragons* cartoon – I can’t be the only one, can I? – recall that Presto was the only member of the heroes with significant room to grow.)

The reason for this actually makes sense from a game-design standpoint. Usually, the number of points required to achieve “competent virtuoso” level of mastery for most mundane activities – swordplay, thievery, persuasion – is relatively low; if you spend 32 points on a skill in *GURPS*, you can be fairly assured at being pretty darn competent in that ability.

It’s hard to reconcile “I know everything” with “I want to learn more.”

Conversely, magic is a bottomless pit into which helpless character points are tossed, their tiny forms disappearing into the inky darkness. There will *always* be new abilities, spells, powers, and tricks that a wizard can spend points on.

This isn’t a bad thing; to the mundane world, “I can conjure a tiny flame in my hand” sets a wizard apart as much as “I can swing my weapon four times in a second!” sets apart a

swordsman. However, the wizard and the swordsman both know that additional learning will someday make that tiny flame grow brighter, stronger, and deadlier.

So, assuming that learning is an integral part of most wizardly character concepts, how can that be applied to our gaming? Here are a few life lessons that a willworker might acquire as the years go on.

THE MORE I LEARN, THE LESS I KNOW

As the old adage goes, “Hire a college student . . . while they still know everything!” This same principle applies to mages in many settings – the more they learn about the underlying power of the universe, the more they realize they don’t know as much as they thought they did. (For the GM, ensuring that mystery remains an integral component of a campaign setting was something I touched on in my column *Of Mundane Magic and Middle-School Munchkinry*, from *Pyramid* #3/13: *Thaumatology*.)

To emulate this, a wizard might take a Delusion: “My knowledge of the arcane arts is without peer!” or “I’m a master magician!” This can be an amusing quirk, a deadly debilitating defect, or something in between. (At sufficiently serious levels, the GM should probably require the hero to buy the Delusion down before allowing him to spend points on new spells or abilities; it’s hard to reconcile “I know everything” with “I want to learn more.”)

From the GM’s point of view, this adage can be strengthened by making sure the hero’s knowledge of magic is self-contained but incomplete. For example, the PC might have a perfectly valid understanding of the standard *GURPS Magic* system, but then encounter someone using Path/Book magic from *GURPS Thaumatology*.

*When the player thinks his wizard knows everything, introduce new spells, such as those from *GURPS Magic: Plant Spells*.*

True Innovation Comes From the Field

“Hey!” you exclaim. “This ‘truism’ is in a box! The author must be trying to draw attention to it!” You are correct, my raven-eyed reader:

Many magical tales emphasize that the best learning comes from “on-the-job training,” where a wizard must make use of his sorcerous skills in a do-or-die situation. (See the exploits of Harry Potter and friends for an archetypical example.) However, at least as many stories – and, especially, the dungeon-fantasy genre – emphasize that learning happens best in labs, libraries, or otherwise locked away safe and sound in a tower. In these worlds, adventuring mages are the wackos, since they’re giving up all that glorious research time.

Still, for folks who want to emulate this trope, it’s relatively easy to do. One good way is to allow the spending on improving magical abilities only when confronted with a

direct need to do so; you can’t buy up Fireball after the adventure is over . . . but if you’re about to be slaughtered by an ice golem, you can buy it up at the same moment you’re casting it. (This option doesn’t work as well for new abilities – unless they’re specifically tied to existing ones. The trope usually manifests in the form of doing something the hero kinda-sorta knows how to do, only he’s finally able to do it well when he *really* needs to.)

Alternatively, the GM might allow the player some kind of bonus (say, a 20% discount on the character point cost) on abilities if he tries to purchase or improve them while in significant danger and he needs them to survive. Although “bonus” character points should always be cautiously granted, this benefit is probably offset by the need to be in mortal danger and the relative inability to buy *exactly* what he might want.

WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY

Wizards are seemingly more prone to turning evil than other adventurous occupations. Sure, there are evil clerics, but to go from “cleric of a good deity” to “cleric of an icky deity,” most folks need to go through the intermediate “ex-cleric of a seriously ticked-off good deity” – and the issue usually sorts itself out there. Similarly, you can be an evil fighter, but there’s only so much mischief you can get into swinging your sword wildly and cackling. And if a thief turns evil . . . well, I’m not sure if anyone would notice. However, wizards frequently feel the call of the dark side.

If the player would like to emphasize this aspect of eldritch life lessons, he can wax philosophical about the lure of the darkness, contemplate seriously whenever new avenues of power are open to him, and the like. Disadvantages such as Code of Honor or Vow (“Never use power irresponsibly,” for example) can provide a tangible source of this struggle, as well as an immediate punishment if the hero strays off the path.

From the GM’s point of view, he can provide opportunities of quick-and-easy power . . . for a price. He might also show wicked wizards who were once on a path similar to the hero, until they strayed.

I Am Not My Tools

I’m an unabashed fan of White Wolf’s old *Mage: The Ascension* RPG. In that setting, all mages belong to a school (or “tradition”) of magic. Thus, some mages require shamanic trappings, others need pointy hats and wands, still others need the focus of Eastern mysticism, and so on. However, as mages advance in their understanding of magic, they realize that these foci they’ve “needed” to work their wills on reality are actually a crutch – the most powerful mages realize that, to attain true ascendancy, they need to leave their tools behind.

In fact, this is such an awesome moment, I try to work it into just about any campaign I run where there’s magic

involved. Magic frequently features trappings – but to think that magic *is* its trappings is to fall into a trap.

The GM can play up this in a number of ways. Perhaps the powerful putrefied wizard is not as helpless as he seemed when the heroes snatched away his wand. Maybe he only *pretends* to use such an arcane device, to give the heroes something to lash out at. As a twist on this, perhaps the focus is incredibly powerful . . . but it’s also seemingly corrupting. Stealing it from a foe might allow him to recover – but the focus might also prove a temptation to the hero. And what if the villain is only faking his conversion of heart?

From a player’s point of view – especially if he’s looking to stress this learning aspect in a campaign – it’s good to emphasize the physical ties that are “required” to make magic work. Then, as the campaign progresses, see if/how you can taper off the reliance on them. (If I’m your GM, I would almost certainly allow you – at a dramatically appropriate moment – to spend the points required to buy off the need for some physical component: “You think you have me bound, Lord Blackmore, but I do believe I can cast a simple spell to summon aid *without* my hands!”) For added fun, the points required to buy off a focus might come partly or fully from a Delusion: “I have achieved complete mastery over magic!”

For a series of even modest length, it’s assumed a wizardly hero will not be the same person at the end of the campaign as he is in the beginning. Most often, this character growth is related to magic and other forms of learning. With a bit of forethought, the player and GM can lay the groundwork for making a memorable mage – one who realizes he knows less at the end of his career than he thought he did at the beginning.

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 nine years; during that time he has won four Origins awards.

ODDS AND ENDS

REALLY META-SPILLS

GURPS Magic already provides information on meta-spells (p. 121-132). However, some players may want spells that are even more meta than that. Here are some new spells you might be able to trick your GM into letting you use.

If the gaming group likes these ideas but wants to make them feel less “meta,” simply give them different names. For example, End Scene might become “Refresh.”

Preemptive Experience (VH)

Special

Generally only castable on PCs, this spell immediately gives the target the bonus character points he would have received at the end of the session. These points can be spent immediately, as desired. Alternatively, the GM might restrict their application to abilities or uses that don't require training – such as spending a character point to declare an injury a “flesh wound” (p. B417).

In the event that the GM awards too many character points (for example, by giving one for being a good sport, only to endure an unsportsmanlike tantrum from the player later in the session), the player incurs a character point debt that must be repaid 2 for 1 from future bonus character-point awards.

Cost: 20.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

End Scene (VH)

Special

This spell causes the scene to end for game-effect purposes only. Time continues normally, as per the GM's plans.

This spell is useful for abstract abilities that can only be used “once per scene,” “once per battle,” etc. Upon a successful casting of End Scene, those abilities can be used again. Of course, if the heroes are facing any adversaries with abilities limited in a similar temporal fashion, they can regain use of theirs, too!

This spell has no effect on abilities that require a specific amount of time to recharge (“one hour,” “once a day,” etc.).

Cost: 10.

Time to cast: 5 seconds.

THE INFINITE BOOK

The infinite book is actually a class of books, and a slightly unusual way to store information. This book naturally opens to the center of the volume. Any attempts to open it to earlier or later pages in the volume feel like they succeed, but the book eventually “settles” so that – roughly – the same number of pages are on either side of the opened pages.

The *contents* of the book are cyclical. If you were to start reading in the beginning of the book and keep turning pages, you'd eventually reach the end of the text. If you kept reading, you'd immediately be at the *beginning* of the text again. If you

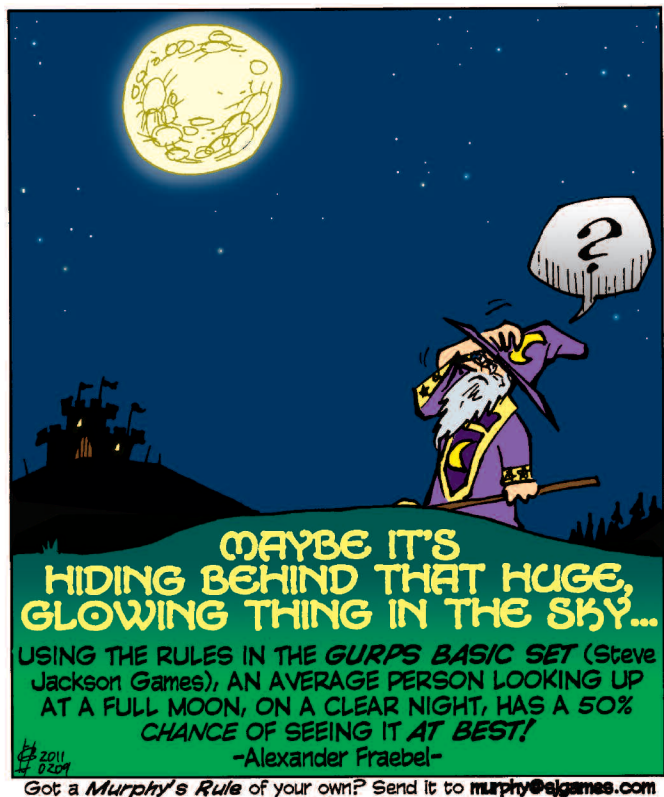
started at the beginning of an infinite book and flipped backwards, you'd hit the end of the text (dangerous for mystery novels!). Despite the name, an infinite book contains no more or less text than a regular book of the same size (although there are rumors of “space-saver” infinite books that are smaller).

An infinite book remembers where each reader left off. The first time the book is opened, its text starts at the beginning (although – again – the book itself appears to be opened to the middle). You can read over someone's shoulder to discover what point of the book he's on, but if you open the book yourself – or approach it while it's open and readerless on a table – the text starts at the beginning.

This quirk reveals the infinite book's biggest advantage: No one else has an easy way of discerning what you were reading. Anyone who views the reader can only see that he is somewhere in the “middle” of the book.

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



ABOUT *GURPS*

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

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

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