


PYRAMID



Issue 3/48 October '12

SECRET MAGIC

MAGICAL TRADECRAFT

by Christopher R. Rice

BIBLIOMANCY

by David L. Pulver

ONOMANCY

by Jason "PK" Levine

THE WAY OF THE KEEPERS

by Michele Armellini

**THE STREET SIGN
OF THE FOUR**

by Loki Carbis

THE FIRST RESISTANCE

by David Lichtenstein

THE ACCIDENTAL MAGUS

by Jason Brick

**THE GUARD OF
THE BLACK LANDS**

by J. Edward Tremlett

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CONTENTS

IN THIS ISSUE

FROM THE EDITOR 3

MAGICAL TRADECRAFT 4
by Christopher R. Rice

THE WAY OF THE KEEPERS 10
by Michele Armellini

THE STREET SIGN OF THE FOUR 16
by Loki Carbis

EIDETIC MEMORY: BIBLIOMANCY 20
by David L. Pulver

THE FIRST RESISTANCE 24
by David Lichtenstein

THE ACCIDENTAL MAGUS 27
by Jason Brick

THE GUARD OF THE BLACK LANDS 30
by J. Edward Tremlett

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE:

FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED 35
by Steven Marsh, Pyramid Editor

ODDS AND ENDS 37
*featuring Murphy's Rules
and an article by William H. Stoddard*

APPENDIX Z: ONOMANCY 38
by Jason "PK" Levine

ABOUT GURPS 39

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:* Systemless Features

COVER ART
Pat Morrissey

INTERIOR ART
Greg Hyland

Any sufficiently concealed magic is indistinguishable from reality, and secrets and sorcery both like to dwell in the shadows. This month's *Pyramid* is devoted to the world of hidden hocus-pocus, with secret magic!

In a magical world, assassins and spies might utilize subtle spells and potions to practice their *Magical Tradecraft*. Using the Ritual Path magic system presented in the **GURPS *Monster Hunters*** series, this article describes 23 new spells, four new potions, and tips for designing secretive snoops who dabble in the wizardly field.

Why don't we have direct proof of magic? Perhaps because it's deliberately being kept secret. Learn *The Way of the Keepers*: the importance of their underappreciated efforts (including lenses for different eras), the process for becoming a Keeper, and the details of their **GURPS** magical style – including a new **GURPS Magic** spell!

Where murderous mages dwell at the corners of their most horrific crime, you will find *The Street Sign of the Four*. Investigators can unravel this modern-day mysterious setup – including a final confrontation with four **GURPS** elemental mages.

Grimoires have long been favorite spell-storing spots for mages. Some wizards take this love affair one step further and focus on *Bibliomancy*, the latest Eidetic Memory offering from **GURPS Basic Set** co-developer David L. Pulver. Unleash your inner librarian with these 14 new **Magic** spells!

In a land where magic is suppressed, there is *The First Resistance*. This loose affiliation of wizards keeps the secrets alive while trying to undermine the conquering kingdom. Along with suggestions for using the group in **GURPS *Dungeon Fantasy*** campaigns, this article describes their methodology in **GURPS *Thaumatology: Magical Styles*** terms.

Not everyone sets out to be a mage, and some who do have forgotten their pasts – there are many ways to become *The Accidental Magus*. Although useful with any system, this article provides specific **GURPS** examples.

Magic is *haram* – forbidden – to Islamic peoples, and *The Guard of the Black Lands* ensures that residents and visitors of Egypt follow those precepts. This fictive Middle Eastern anti-magic organization is particularly suitable for **GURPS *Monster Hunters*** campaigns.

Giving of yourself completely can reap great rewards, as **GURPS *Psionic Powers*** author Jason "PK" Levine demonstrates in *Appendix Z: Onomancy*. Discover a trick employed by some die-hard "roleplayers" as you learn of their new take on secret identities and the Zeroed advantage.

This month's Random Thought Table explores how to use precognitive abilities *post-emptively*, while Odds and Ends includes a *weighty* Murphy's Rules plus a new, suppressed path to power for your **GURPS *Locations: Worminghall*** students.

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FROM THE EDITOR

SECRETS AND SORCERY

Is magic secret? It's the kind of question that comes up for an editor as he ponders an issue devoted to a "secret magic" theme. Let's suppose for a moment that magic is real in our world. This means one of two possibilities.

- *Magic is a terrifically kept secret.* After all, no one has conclusively demonstrated that magic exists, despite millennia of many of the world's smartest folks trying to show it's real. If magic does exist, then somehow it's been phenomenally good at keeping its secret.

- *Magic is a really, really badly kept secret.* Look at it from the other point of view: Even if we don't conclusively know that magic exists, we all know what it is. Let's say a guy with a pointed hat suddenly waved a wand and pointed it at you, resulting in you levitating 10' off the ground or turning into a newt. Your initial thoughts would probably drift more toward "That's *magic!*" more than "That is likely to be some form of advanced technology causing outcomes that I cannot distinguish from seeming violations of natural law!" Secrets are only

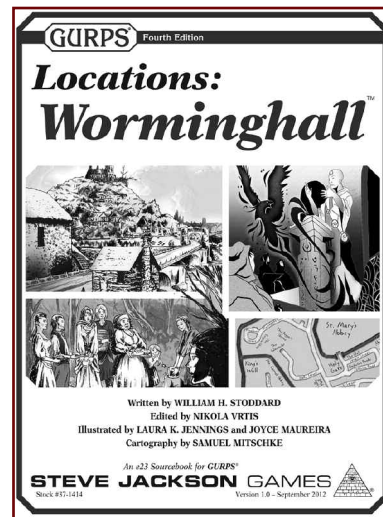
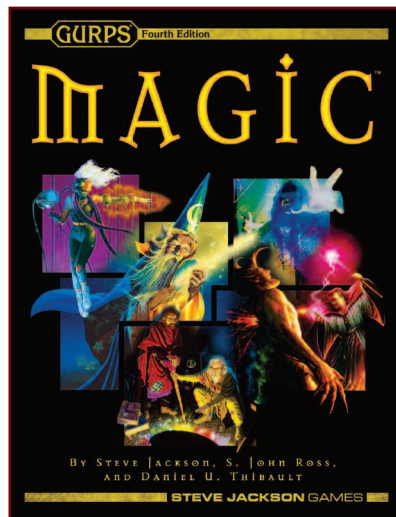
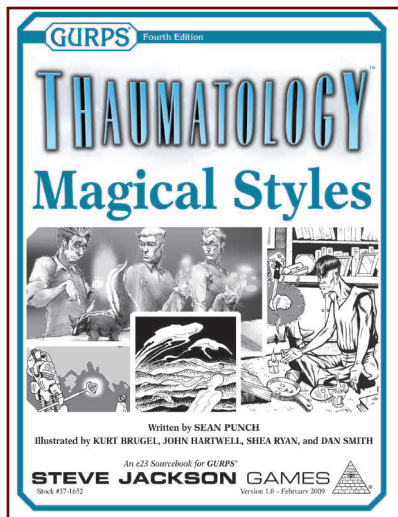
secrets if no one actually knows about them; if everybody in Gotham City knows that Bruce Wayne is Batman, then it's not a secret – even if you've never seen the billionaire playboy don his bat-themed body armor in front of you. The fact that everybody would immediately recognize and identify magic points toward it *not* being a secret.

Of course, the Occam's razor answer to this is that magic does not – in fact – exist. But where's the fun in that?

It's in this spirit of pondering the logistics and implications of secretive magic that we present this issue of *Pyramid*. We hope it contains enough inspiration to get your cauldron churning . . . quietly.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of quiet conjurers and private prestidigitator premises, how did this issue do at summoning something stealthily? Let us know how we're doing privately at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the quasi-confidential community at forums.sjgames.com.



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MAGICAL TRADECRAFT

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

Spies in the real world have many tricks, methods, and techniques that allow them to ply their trade. From dead drops to wetwork, these methods are varied and commonly called “tradecraft” by clandestine operators. Much of tradecraft is based on older techniques that have been used for *centuries*. In a world where magic exists, it naturally becomes another tool in the spy’s bailiwick. Whether it is Tim Powers’ *Declare* or Charles Stross’ *The Laundry*, it is obvious that the supernatural and spies mix quite well! This article makes use of Ritual Path magic (Chapter 3 in *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*) and the Ritual Path magic alchemy rules from *Pyramid* #3/43: *Thaumatology III* (pp. 13-16).

A TRADE LIKE ANY OTHER

Ritual Path magic assumes that magic can be learned by anyone; in fact, this is one of the core precepts! Given this fact, it’s not a blind leap of logic to assume that if a government (or any large powerful organization) knows magic is real, they will want to train members of their intelligence agencies. From there it is a hop-skip-and-a-jump to assume that certain types of spells will be favored over others by such intelligencers. Spells that gather information, keep messages secret, etc. will be preferred over direct damage, curses, and so on.

In addition to Magery, Path skills, and Thaumatology, the following mundane skills are also useful for spies with magical capabilities: Area Knowledge, Body Language, Cryptography, Detect Lies, Disguise, Electronics Operation (especially Electronic Warfare, Medical, Security, and Surveillance), Fast-Talk, Filch, Forgery, Holdout, Intelligence Analysis, Interrogation, Lip Reading, Lockpicking, Observation, Photography, Propaganda, Pickpocket, Poisons, Research, Savoir-Faire, Search, Shadowing, Smuggling, and Stealth.

The following advantages are also useful: Absolute Direction or 3D Spatial Sense, Acute Senses (any), Combat Reflexes, Contact Group, Contacts, Craftiness (*GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents*, p. 9), Cultural Adaptability, Danger Sense, Eidetic Memory or Photographic Memory, Flexibility or Double-Jointed, Gizmos, Intuition, and Language Talent. Ritual Adept is not specifically included for the simple fact that this might not even be *appropriate* for magically trained intelligence agents! That much training (or talent if it is inborn) takes time, and that is a luxury most in the espionage field cannot afford. This would mean that most agents would make heavy use of charms, relying on their magic in the field

only when necessary. For a few new traits, see the box *Spies Like Us* on p. 9.

WHY MAGIC INSTEAD OF MUSCLE?

This particular question is highly important to games that feature both covert operatives and magic. Why do things with magic instead of more mundane and widely accessible methods? The answer could be any number of things, but the one that springs to the top is the one fiction writers and game designers have been using for years: because magic is easy and it lets you do the impossible. For spies and spooks, magic could let them do things that would require advanced technology or luck to pull off. For example, being able to hear the conversations of your enemy without actually being near them would be a huge advantage. Of course, this advantage disappears and creates another problem entirely when *all* sides have access to magic! A magical cold war or arms race could happen, especially in a magic-rich environment. The *GURPS Technomancer* game setting has several excellent views and information on this subject, though it makes use of standard spell magic and not Ritual Path magic.

NEW SPELLS

The subsequent new spells are useable by any mage and in any setting, but especially suit secret-magic campaigns or settings where spies or other intelligence agents make use of magic.

Analyze Data

Spell Effects: Lesser Strengthen Mind ×2.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Trait, Oracle (Digital) + Bestows a Bonus, Intelligence Analysis.

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

The information spies gather is meaningless without the analysts who make sense of it. With this spell, it is possible to perform a detailed analysis in the field. For the next hour, the subject of this spell gains +5 to all Intelligence Analysis rolls (including defaulted ones). He also can analyze “live” data – the Internet, news feeds, etc. – and spot items of hidden *mundane* significance. Roll against Research skill for discovery (if needed) and Intelligence Analysis skill for interpretation. To use this ability, you must have access to unprocessed data (the GM decides how much you actually need).

Typical Casting: Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Altered Trait, Oracle (Digital)* (15) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to Intelligence Analysis rolls (16) + Duration, 1 hour (3). *40 energy (40x1).*

* This variation of the Oracle advantage is from *GURPS Powers* (p. 65).

Assassin's Blessing

Spell Effects: Greater Strengthen Body.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Bonus, certain rolls (see below).

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

This spell gives the caster (or the subject of his choice) +3 on all rolls involving the assassination of a *specific* target, who must be named when the spell is cast. This bonus includes attack rolls, damage rolls, rolls to track the target, Disguise rolls to get close to the target, as well as anything else the GM deems sufficiently related to the demise of the target. These bonuses last for three hours.

Typical Casting: Greater Strengthen Body (3) + Bestows a Bonus, certain rolls (20) + Duration, 3 hours (4) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *90 energy (30x3).*

Bane Blade

Spell Effects: Greater Strengthen Matter.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Bonus, attack and damage rolls against a specific target.

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

The bane of dictators and tyrants all over, a weapon enchanted with the Bane Blade spell aids both attack and damage rolls against a specific subject. (The weapon need not be an actual blade.) Normally cast as a conditional spell (with the trigger being "when I attack this person with this weapon"), it gives the person wielding the weapon +3 to rolls to hit with it and on all damage rolls with it.

Typical Casting: Greater Strengthen Matter (3) + Lesser Control Magic (5) + Bestows a Bonus, attack and damage rolls against a specific target (8) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Subject Weight, 30 lbs. (1). *60 energy (20x3).*

Black Bag

Spell Effects: Greater Destroy Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Traits, Blindness, Deafness, No Sense of Smell/Taste, and Numb.

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

This spell temporarily muffles the subject's senses, making it impossible for him to see, hear, smell, taste, or feel anything for the next 30 minutes. This spell doesn't interfere with other "non-human" senses like Detect. Casters who wish to transport the subject by other means but do not wish him to know where he is going typically use it. The ritualist must physically touch the subject to use this spell on him. Like the "head bag" this spell is named for, most spies allow themselves to be afflicted under the condition that it is negated when they've reached their destination.

Typical Casting: Greater Destroy Mind (5) + Altered Traits, Blindness, Deafness, No Sense of Smell/Taste, and Numb (19) + Duration, 30 minutes (2) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *87 energy (29x3).*

Charm School

Casting actual spells in the field might be difficult for those without Ritual Adept or simply against the rules and regulations of an operative's organization. This makes conditional spells, as well as charms and potions, especially important. Use the following table to figure out the added cost of turning a spell into a conditional spell, charm, or potion. For spells that are already cast as charms like Camera Eyes (below), this value is already included and should be ignored.

Extra Energy Cost

Greater Effects	Conditional Spell or Charm	Potion
0	+5	+6
1	+15	+18
2	+25	+30
3	+35	+42
4	+45	+54
+1	+10	+12

Burn Notice

Spell Effects: Greater Destroy Chance.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Penalty, certain Influence rolls.

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

This nasty curse gives the subject -5 to *all* Influence rolls when requesting aid or information (pp. B559-562) for the next month. This includes making requests to Patrons, when using rank, etc. While not *outright* dangerous, the effects can be downright hazardous in the long run to the unwary. Lost paperwork, delayed requisitions, and late backup are all possible outcomes of failed Influence rolls. Part of the spell itself is the fact that it does not *reveal* what is going on to the one so afflicted – essentially the subject just seems to be having a bad run of luck. To use this spell on a target, the caster must first touch him; a handshake is traditional.

Typical Casting: Greater Destroy Chance (5) + Bestows a Penalty, -5 on certain Influence rolls (32) + Duration, 1 month (11). *144 energy (48x3).*

Camera Eyes

Spell Effects: Lesser Control Matter + Lesser Strengthen Body.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Bonus, Photography.

Greater Effects: 0 (x1).

This spell is cast as a charm, usually on a roll of film or similar disposable image-capturing medium. Once activated, whenever the subject blinks *and* desires a picture of what he is looking at, a snapshot of what he sees is magically transferred to the film roll (or other medium), and an image is created.

The user of the charm also gets +5 on all Photography rolls when using this mystical photographic transference. The charm object *must* be carried to access the benefits.

Typical Casting: Lesser Control Matter (5) + Lesser Control Magic (5) + Lesser Strengthen Body (3) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to Photography (16) + Duration, 3 hours (4) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 36 energy (36×1).

I knew it, as soon as you two left. You ain't FBI. Who are you? Who are you working for, huh? The Men in Black? You working for the Mandroid?

– Ronald Reznick, in
Supernatural #2.12

Code-Breaker

Spell Effects: Greater Strengthen Mind + Lesser Strengthen Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Traits, Compartmentalized Mind, Efficient (Cryptography), and Focused Code-Breaking + Bestows a Bonus, Cryptography.

Greater Effects: 1 (×3).

All good spies know a thing or two about codes, particularly breaking them. This spell magnifies that capability to godlike proportions. For the next 24 hours, the subject has +6 on all Cryptography rolls to break a code or half that bonus (+3) for general Cryptography rolls. When code-breaking, however, he is *extremely* focused, suffering -5 to *all* other rolls, similar to Single-Minded (p. B85)

In addition to the above, the spy multiplies the time required to crack a code by 0.8 – or he can pay 1 FP per minute to put his mind into overdrive, multiplying it by 0.08!

Typical Casting: Greater Strengthen Mind (3) + Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Altered Traits, Compartmentalized Mind 4 (Accessibility, Breaking codes only, -40%; Massively Parallel only*, -60%), Efficient (Cryptography), and Focused Code-Breaking (42) + Bestows a Bonus, +3 to all Cryptography rolls (4) + Duration, 1 day (7). 177 energy (59×3).

* This limitation functions exactly like the Massively Parallel limitation from **GURPS Supers** (p. 26) except that it only *allows* you to set up a large number of non-combat mental compartments.

Conjure Eavesdropper

Spell Effects: Lesser Control Spirit + Lesser Create Spirit.

Inherent Modifiers: None.

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell conjures a semi-sentient spirit that exists only to secretly listen to conversations – an “eavesdropper.” It is

considered to have IQ 6, a Hearing roll of 14 or less, Mimicry (Voice Library), and Parabolic Hearing 2. It is *only* capable of spying on others’ conversations and reporting back to the caster what was said. (There is no way to get it to adventure or fight for the user, and a single point of damage destroys it.) It exists for a day before dissipating.

Typical Casting: Lesser Control Spirit (5) + Lesser Create Spirit (6) + Duration, 1 day (7). 18 energy (18×1).

Cover ID

Spell Effects: Lesser Create Matter + Lesser Strengthen Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Trait, Alternate Identity + Bestows a Bonus, Forgery.

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell creates a plausible cover identity that is near perfect and that lasts for one month or until it is discovered to be false. To determine the quality of the identity, roll against your IQ-1 or your Forgery+5 (whichever is greater).

Typical Casting: Lesser Create Matter (6) + Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Altered Trait, Alternate Identity (15) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to Forgery rolls (16) + Duration, 1 month (11). 51 energy (51×1).

Dead-Letter Box

Spell Effects: Lesser Sense Chance + Lesser Strengthen Chance.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Bonus, Smuggling.

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell is cast on a specific package, weighing no more than 10 lbs., which must be present during the ritual. The caster gains +5 to Smuggling when hiding this package for pickup. He *must* name a specific person. This person will be able to find the package without any rolls whatsoever *if* it’s within the next 24 hours. After that, he must make Search rolls against the caster’s improved Smuggling skill.

Typical Casting: Lesser Sense Chance (2) + Lesser Strengthen Chance (3) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to Smuggling (16) + Duration, 1 day (7) + Subject Weight, 10 lbs. (0). 28 energy (28×1).

Eye in the Sky

Spell Effects: Greater Control Mind + Lesser Strengthen Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Bonus, Observation.

Greater Effects: 1 (×3).

This spell allows the caster to get a bird’s-eye view of the immediate area, as if he were floating 100 yards in the air. The caster can switch between this view and his own but this requires a Ready maneuver. He must still make Observation skill rolls to pick out targets of particular interest but gains +3 on all such rolls when using this spell to spot them. This spell lasts for an hour.

Typical Casting: Greater Control Mind (5) + Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Bestows a Bonus, +3 on Observation rolls (4) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Range, 100 yards (10). 75 energy (25×3).

False Bottom

Spell Effects: Lesser Transform Matter.

Inherent Modifiers: None.

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell allows the caster to turn an innocuous object like a book, soft-drink can, or desk lamp into a temporary hiding place for another object. Both objects must weigh less than 10 lbs. and be held in the caster's hands for the spell to work. Afterward, the hidden object can only be detected by magic, and only removed by the original caster, or by another use of this spell. The spell will protect the hidden item for up to 10 years, and the finding of such an object may be the goal – or *trigger* – of an entire adventure!

Typical Casting: Lesser Transform Matter (8) + Duration, 10 years (31) + Subject Weight, 10 lbs. (0). *39 energy (39×1).*

False Flag

Spell Effects: Lesser Transform Matter.

Inherent Modifiers: None.

Greater Effects: 0 (×3).

False flag operations are covert actions that try to lay the responsibility on some other nation or group. They may be designed to frame someone else, to fool someone else's operatives into cooperation, or simply to add an additional layer of obfuscation in case of discovery. When cast, this spell affects all targets within 10 yards of the caster, including himself. Their clothing and accouterments shift so they are wearing the appropriate uniforms, insignias, etc., for the nation of the caster's choice. This spell lasts for six hours.

Typical Casting: Lesser Transform Matter (8) + Area Effect, 10 yards (8), + Duration, 6 hours (5) + Subject Weight, 100 lbs. (2). *23 energy (23×1).*

Forger's Blessing

Spell Effects: Lesser Strengthen Mind ×2.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Bonus, certain rolls (see below).

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This ritual temporarily gives the caster (or subject of his choice) +5 to all rolls to forge, falsify, or counterfeit papers, documents, even *currency*.

Typical Casting: Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to certain rolls (32) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *44 energy (44×1).*

Honeypot

Spell Effects: Lesser Strengthen Body + Lesser Transform Body.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Trait, Appearance + Bestows a Bonus, Sex Appeal.

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell greatly increases the subject's physical appeal. For the next half-day, the subject's Appearance increases by two levels, to a maximum of Very Handsome/Beautiful; he also gains +5 on all Sex Appeal rolls.

Typical Casting: Lesser Strengthen Body (3) + Lesser Transform Body (8) + Altered Trait, Appearance (Handsome/Beautiful) (12) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to Sex Appeal rolls (16) + Duration, 12 hours (6) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *48 energy (48×1).*

Instant Interpolation

Spell Effects: Lesser Control Mind + Lesser Strengthen Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Bonus, Interrogation.

Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

When cast, the caster may ask a single question. If the subject fails to resist, he is compelled to answer. However, while this spell is an amazing time-saver, it is not powerful enough to force the truth. Roll a Quick Contest of the caster's Interrogation (at +5) vs. the subject's Will; if the subject loses, he answers truthfully. Use the guidelines under the skill description for Interrogation on p. B202. The subject must be within two yards of the caster and be able to understand his question (e.g., if speaking, he must be able to hear, and the caster must be speaking a language he understands).

Typical Casting: Lesser Control Mind (5) + Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to Interrogation rolls (16) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *27 energy (27×1).*

Like the famous mad philosopher said, when you stare into the void, the void stares also; but if you cast into the void, you get a type conversion error. (Which just goes to show Nietzsche wasn't a C++ programmer.)

– Charles Stross, The Fuller Memorandum

License to Kill

Spell Effects: Greater Control Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: None.

Greater Effects: 1 (×3).

This spell allows the caster to get away with murder . . . but only for those who saw him actually do it. This spell affects everyone who saw the caster while he was attacking one specific subject (who must be determined when the spell is cast). Those affected believe, however erroneously, that the caster was in the right when he attacked the subject – he was defending himself, he was protecting someone, etc. This spell must be cast within 10 minutes (before or after) of actually attacking the subject; otherwise, the effect is wasted.

Typical Casting: Greater Control Mind (5) + Duration, 10 minutes (1) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *27 energy (9×3).*

Magic Bullet

Spell Effects: Greater Control Matter.

Inherent Modifiers: Damage, External Huge Piercing 3d (Armor Divisor (2)).

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

This spell is cast as a charm on a projectile, usually a bullet. Once the projectile hits the target, he immediately takes 3d+3(2) pi++ damage. This is considered a linked attack, not a follow-up, and has to penetrate any DR the subject has on its own. However, since the subject has already been hit, he does not get a chance to dodge or block the spell! If the shot misses the target, the charm is still expended.

Typical Casting: Greater Control Matter (5) + Lesser Control Magic (5) + Damage, External Huge Piercing 3d+3 (Armor Divisor (2), +50%) (12). 66 energy (22x3).

*You know spies. Bunch of
bitchy little girls.*

– Sam Axe, in *Burn Notice*

Managram

Spell Effects: Lesser Create Magic + Lesser Sense Magic.

Inherent Modifiers: None.

Greater Effects: 0 (x1).

This spell allows you to instantly send a message of 200 words or less to another mage (one who possesses the Magery advantage) anywhere on the planet. The recipient knows who sent the message and may “decline” it if he wishes.

Typical Casting: Lesser Create Magic (6) + Lesser Sense Magic (2) + Range, 8,000 miles (41). 49 energy (49x1).

Mole

Spell Effects: Lesser Destroy Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Penalty, Caster’s Influence skills.

Greater Effects: 0 (x1).

While under the effects of this spell, the subject resists the caster’s Influence skill rolls at -5 for the next month. This is especially handy when cultivating an asset or (obviously) a mole within a organization.

Typical Casting: Lesser Destroy Mind (5) + Bestows a Penalty, -5 to resist caster’s Influence skills (32) + Duration, 1 month (11). 48 energy (48x1).

Sorcerous Silencer

Spell Effects: Greater Control Energy.

Inherent Modifiers: None.

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

For one hour, this spell completely silences its target firearm.

Typical Casting: Greater Control Energy (5) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Subject Weight, 30 lbs. (1). 27 energy (9x3).

Tin-Foil Hat

Spell Effects: Greater Strengthen Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Traits, Immunity to Mind-Affecting Magic.

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

This spell is cast as a charm (usually on some form of head-gear) and makes the subject completely immune to all mind-affecting magic for the next hour.

Typical Casting: Greater Strengthen Mind (3) + Lesser Control Magic (5) + Altered Traits, Immunity to Mind-Affecting Magic (30) + Duration, 1 hour (3). 123 energy (41x3).

Waterboard

Spell Effects: Greater Create Matter.

Inherent Modifiers: Affliction, Choking

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

This spell conjures water in the subject’s airway, causing him to choke; the subject may do nothing but fall down. While the spell persists, the target suffers the effects of suffocation (p. B436). This may be stopped by the caster ending the spell, or by having an ally try a First Aid roll to clear the subject’s airway (roll at -2 before TL7). Each attempt takes two seconds. Subjects with Doesn’t Breathe or Injury Tolerance (Homogenous) are not affected.

Typical Casting: Greater Create Matter (6) + Affliction, Choking (20) + Duration, 10 minutes (1) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 90 energy (30x3).

SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED

These new potions are especially useful to undercover operatives, who often mix them into other innocuous things like drinks, yogurt, etc. The costs do not include the energy discount associated with potions; this must still be calculated by the caster in accordance with the ingredients he uses.

Blood Cipher

Spell Effects: Lesser Sense Mind x2.

Inherent Modifiers: None.

Greater Effects: 0 (x1).

This special elixir is not drunk. Instead, it is used to write a message to one or more people. When preparing to write the message, a drop of the recipients’ blood must be added to the potion. After the message is composed, the magic takes effect and turns the writing into coded gibberish. From that point on, only those whose blood was mixed into the ink can comprehend the note; it appears garbled to everyone else. This effect lasts for a year, after which time, the message can be read by anyone.

Typical Form: special.

Typical Ingredients: abacus bead, chalk dust from a teacher’s blackboard, feather from a raven, iron gall ink, slide rule, writer’s quill.

Typical Brewing: Lesser Create Magic (6) + Lesser Sense Mind (2) + Lesser Sense Mind (2) + Duration, 1 year (21). 31 energy (31x1).

Surreptitiousness

Spell Effects: Lesser Strengthen Chance.

Inherent Modifiers: Bestows a Bonus, all contested rolls when trying to remain hidden.

Greater Effects: 0 (x1).

When drunk, the imbiber gains +5 on all contested rolls to remain hidden, unseen, etc. for the next hour. These definitely include Stealth and Shadowing, but also rolls to elude a pursuer when using the *Chase* rules (found **GURPS Action 2: Exploits** and **GURPS Monster Hunters 2: The Mission**).

Typical Form: any.

Typical Ingredients: claw of a cat, fingernail from a thief, fox fur, snake skin, spider web.

Typical Brewing: Lesser Create Magic (6) + Lesser Strengthen Chance (3) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 on all contested rolls when trying to remain hidden (32) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 47 energy (47x1).

Torturer's Bane

Spell Effects: Lesser Enhance Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Traits, Immunity to Torture.

Greater Effects: 0 (x1).

Once drunk, this potion makes the imbiber completely unwilling to answer questions while tortured, though he still must endure the physical effects. For instance, if the person is on the rack or is waterboarded, he still suffers damage from having his joints stretched or suffocating. This potion essentially makes him immune to Interrogation, Intimidation, and other skills that use threats or physical violence to extract information from a subject. This does not mean he is immune to psychological trauma! Having your fingers clipped off one by one can cause issues all by itself. The effects last for a month.

Typical Form: any.

Typical Ingredients: iron nails, pieces of an actual torture device, white rose petals.

Typical Brewing: Lesser Create Magic (6) + Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Altered Traits, Immunity to Torture (10) + Duration, 1 month (11) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 33 energy (33x1).

Truth Serum

Spell Effects: Greater Control Mind.

Inherent Modifiers: Altered Traits, Truthfulness.

Greater Effects: 1 (x3).

Once consumed, this potion forces the drinker to tell the truth to anyone who asks it for the next 10 minutes. If he does not know the truth or is suspicious of what he does know, he will be forthcoming about his uncertainty. Furthermore, he suffers -5 to Fast-Talk and Acting (but only when the purpose is to deceive someone) for the duration of the potion.

Typical Form: elixir or powder.

Typical Ingredients: applejack, bluebell flowers, sodium pentothal, well water, white cloth.

Typical Brewing: Greater Control Mind (5) + Lesser Create Magic (6) + Altered Traits, Truthfulness (no self-control roll) (3) + Duration, 10 minutes (1). 45 energy (15x3).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice can neither confirm nor deny that he is a spy. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he wears tinfoil hats to keep the CIA from scanning his brain. He dreams of being able to write full time one day, or at least eking out a living doing it. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group, his good friend Antoni Ten Monrós, and Beth "Archangel" McCoy, for being most excellent soundboards.

Spies Like Us

The following are new traits appropriate to spies, intelligent agents, and other spooks.

Expert Skill

see p. B193

In addition to Expert Skill (Military Science) and Expert Skill (Political Science), the following new Expert Skill would also be useful for spies to possess.

Tradecraft: General expertise on all things espionage. It can stand in for Cryptography for recognizing a given cipher (but *not* solving it), Electronics Operation (Security or Surveillance) for answering a question on a device's capabilities, Holdout when looking for the best place for a dead drop, etc. Remember that this skill only answers questions! It does not allow the actual actions to be performed – for that, get the required skill. It can also be used (at the GM's discretion) for any actions that a trained spy could perform but does not also have a skill that could cover it.

Quick Gadgeteer

see p. B57

Cinematic spies can buy this advantage with an Accessibility limitation. Keep in mind that someone can still use the *Time Spent* rules (p. B346) to further reduce the listed times, even taking a -10 to perform a given task instantly!

Spycraft: You don't actually invent anything, but you can quickly improvise devices or solutions for espionage-related problems. Minor tasks take 10 minutes and a skill roll – create a listening device from a cell phone, make a lighter by using a battery and a piece of wire, or anything similar. Improvising something from parts takes an hour and a skill roll – create a phone-tap from component pieces, retask an old television set into an oscilloscope, and so on. The GM should be lenient when deciding what this advantage can make or create, spies learn a *dizzying* array of skills! Both the GM and players should check out *Burn Notice* on the USA Network for inspiration. -50%.

THE WAY OF THE KEEPERS

BY MICHELE ARMELLINI

If a man has thrown a curse upon another man, and it is not justified, the layer of the curse shall be slain.

Code of Hammurabi, Law #1

Wizards exists. Maybe supernatural creatures, too. Yet, why is it that most of the world doesn't know? It can't be accidental. If magic is secret, that's because someone is working hard at keeping it that way. For a very good reason.

THE BEGINNING OF THE SECRET

Once upon a time, everybody believed that magic was a fact of life, not unlike lightning. They believed that because it was true. They also feared magic for the same reasons they feared lightning – both were dangerous forces. Unlike lightning, magic could be controlled, but those who had that capability were dreaded, too. Most ancient law systems added provisions against witchcraft.

While some magic-users were indeed a threat, the vast majority were not. They just wanted to pursue their arcane studies, or to make a living helping others with their rare abilities. Nonetheless, sooner or later, they would be put to death.

That is why they resorted to unobtrusive wizardry. They began favoring potions over flashes of uncanny mana-light. They preferred playing games with their opponents' minds over summoning firestorms, and stealthy curses over flesh-melting incantations. We don't read about battle mages hurling thunderbolts on the battlefield, but we all have heard about omens improving the troops' morale, unexplainable pestilences weakening the enemy armies, and city walls falling for no reason.

THE BEGINNING OF THE KEEPERS

Wizards worked increasing harder to avoid public attention. That was easy for those of an academic bent. But many were healers, hedge witches who protected the crops, or town enchanters selling low-powered items to the wealthy. They had willing non-wizardly customers. The spells involved could be discreet, but those transactions prevented magic from becoming truly secret.

Nobody knows who came up with the solution. The Keepers have their own legend (see *The Exceedingly Wise*, p. 11), which is part of their mystique. Regardless of the facts, some mages established an order whose mission was to keep the secret. They were aware that magic could never be wiped away from

humankind's collective memory, yet they thought they could convince non-mages that it was nothing but superstition, and actually never worked.

*We dance round in
a ring and suppose,
but the secret sits in
the middle and knows.*

– Robert Frost

THROUGH HISTORY

The Keepers' mission has always remained the same, but the means have evolved. In antiquity, they used a plurality of gods as decoys and "fronts." They claimed that supernatural help only came from supernatural beings. At the same time, they passed off their own organization as a mystery religion.

Later on, in areas where a single faith gained the upper hand and persecuted infidels, they set up their own "religious orders" and infiltrated the rest of that church's hierarchy. They outwardly disparaged witchcraft, but made sure they had plenty of scapegoats to burn, who actually were unlucky non-mages.

Once the Enlightenment arrived, the Keepers espoused the movement wholeheartedly (or maybe they promoted it in the first place!). Only the gullible believe that witchcraft works! The last few centuries have been comparatively easier for them.

The Exceedingly Wise

The Keepers believe that their founder was Atrahasis (“The Exceedingly Wise”), also known as Utanapishtim (“The Remote One”) and Zi-Ud-Sudra (“He Who Found Long Life”). These are names in several Mesopotamian languages, indicating a king and epic hero whose experience, in several ancient literary works, parallels that of Noah.

He is best known as a character in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. He is the survivor of the god-sent flood who King Gilgamesh consults in his quest for immortality. Atrahasis tells the king that he received that gift from the gods, but an extremely rare seaweed can bestow eternal life to others. Gilgamesh retrieves the magical plant from the bottom of the sea, but a freak accident deprives him of it – and that chance – forever.

At least, that’s the version non-mages believe. The Keepers maintain that Atrahasis was (or is?) a powerful wizard and the founder of their order. He achieved “long life” through magic, but used “the gods” as a convenient alibi. Then he sent the hero on a fool’s errand. When Gilgamesh did get out of the sea, Atrahasis had plan B ready – what happened was no accident. As far as the Keepers are concerned, Atrahasis achieved complete success: The dangerously inquisitive and resourceful Gilgamesh gave up, contenting himself with the “immortality” of monuments and poems. The general populace was made to believe that the supernatural comes from the divinities, while magic, for one reason or another, never works.

Meanwhile, Atrahasis and his disciples remained alive and active.

THE KEEPERS TODAY

The Keepers continue to the present, working for the same end.

QUID PRO QUO

The “this for that” upon which the Keepers built their success is founded on most other magical schools acknowledging that this special order is a necessity. Therefore, most other mages are willing to give the Keepers what they need, so long as they can call them up in case of emergency. Academic wizards may provide the Keepers with access to their knowledge, famous healers prolong the senior Keepers’ lives, and enchanters frequently offer magical items. In turn, the Keepers protect them all from inquisitors, government agencies, journalists, crusaders, and assorted busybodies.

Generally, the Keepers can broker deals between the order and other groups. Less often, individual Keepers or local chapters (in recent times, called “Branches”) may enter agreements for their group’s own benefit only.

*Three may keep a Secret, if two
of them are dead.*

–Benjamin Franklin,
*Poor Richard’s
Almanack (1735)*

DECEIVE AND PROTECT

The order has developed its own code of conduct. The mission is to convince non-mages that magic does not exist,

or that it’s fickle, ineffective, based on superstition, or against the gods’ will. They encourage people to believe that, though strange things happen, they don’t depend on any person’s intentions. Mass hysteria, delusions, and “mind tricks” are equally favored explanations.

The Keepers rely much more on persuasion than on anything else. However, sometimes the threat of a massive disclosure is too great for. Even in these cases, the Keepers’ policy is to employ no more force than is strictly needed. This is ingrained in their own Code of Honor.

Code of Honor

see p. B127

Keepers’: Work diligently to keep the secret of magic from non-mages; never cause more harm than is strictly necessary. –10 points.

DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

The Code of Honor is not mandatory. In fact, throughout history, some Keepers thought little of not hurting non-mages. These contradicting outlooks clash, sometimes, both in reasoned discourse and more concretely.

Nowadays, most Keepers believe that their actions not only defend mages from renewed witch-hunts, but also the other way around. The Tunguska event of 1908, believed to be a meteorite impact, actually is the most recent major occasion in which the Keepers “policed” other mages. They prevented a coven of very powerful demon summoners from doing as they pleased – just in time.

Obviously, some wizards strongly resent the notion that other mages should be entitled to order them around.

Crisis Ahead

Since the 1970s, some of the younger members of the order have begun questioning their magical style. They complain that it has not been updated for centuries, while technology has improved immensely. They say that Technological spells are needed, and it's unconscionable that members are not even required to be able to operate a computer! The nearly immortal leadership, however, is slow to innovate.

Modern Deception

One aspect that was reformed, around 1875, was the general appearance of the order. Until that time, the interior of their "Lodges" looked like a medieval wizards' den, and their jargon seemed to be advertising "arcane mysteries here!" So the Keepers switched to the outward appearance of a trading company. They abandoned titles like "Initiate," and adopted a bland terminology. Their order became "the Firm," which has regional Networks. The secret of magic is now "the Trademark," and disclosing it is an "Error," while those who threaten the revelation of magic are "the Competition." Non-mages are "the Customers." In modern times, the "Branches" now look like nondescript offices, and wands are laser pointers. If there's a pentagram inlaid in the floor, it's covered by carpets.

CURRENT PRACTICES

The Keepers operate most effectively when the group follows long-standing policies.

Organization

The Keepers now have several front companies. The core is named Agmen Ltd., a shipping company, but the order owns controlling interests in activities that are ideally suited to keeping tabs on the Customers, such as security, computer security, media companies. Often, the Keepers insert members in key positions within non-owned companies or organizations. It's traditional practice to infiltrate law enforcement agencies, churches, and other institutions.

The specific organization of the regional Networks depends on the local political situation. The individual Branches, however, all look the same, even when belonging to different front firms. They are stand-alone buildings in industrial neighborhoods, with modest-looking offices, but protected by exceptional mundane and magical security. They have extensive warehouses with internal truck-loading bays, and underground cellars.

Being a Keeper can be a full-time job, but it's not mandatory. It's possible to be an academic wizard who carries out occasional service. Characters who are members have a Duty, which ranges from -2 to -15 points. It's also a Secret, with the value depending upon the historical and local context (today, it's -20 in most places).

The order is not a Patron to any member. Even CEOs are expendable, and they will get help only insofar as it is necessary to accomplish a mission.

Advertising

This is the Keepers' name for their main activity of propaganda and disinformation. The first line of defense is making

sure that if someone claims a magical event happened, he'll find deaf ears and contempt. Trainees spend hours spreading standard skeptical boilerplates and sifting through media sources for signs of Error outbreaks. If needed, key opinion makers can be magically influenced.

Vaporware

The weirdest and least believable conspiracy theories have been sown by the Keepers. The whole obsession with alien abductions, for instance, covered a vampire epidemic. Whenever the Error happens, it's easy to link the claim with something false and unbelievable. Illusions and mind-meddling help here. The Keepers call this "Vaporware."

Negative Campaigning

Sometimes, witnesses, scientists, or journalists can't be bought or threatened into silence. The next step is to have them discredited. Mundane smear tactics are popular, as are spells making them behave foolishly, drunkenly, or madly. Making them unsure of their recollections and planting false memories is effective, too.

Low Mana

One more reason why magic is secret may be that it's rare, and most of Earth has a low mana level. Thus, not only is casting spells more difficult, casting them without noticeable rituals requires very high skill! Keeper characters should boast high Magery, have high skill levels, favor "low signature" Perks like No Incantations, or all of the above.

Even in a low mana world, there exist normal mana locations; these will be known or suspected as places of power. Mages will flock to those places, and so will witch-hunters and, therefore, the Keepers.

Leverage

Sometimes, physical evidence exists that could be divulged, tracts are ready to be printed, or Internet sites attempt to spread the Error. This is when "Leverage" is used – wizardly invisible burglars, or arson, or other forms of direct attacks against property.

Assignments

Frequently, Keepers are hired as on-site security by academic wizards and others. Would-be interlopers at the Druidic ceremony will be distracted by misdirections, bonfires on the wrong hill, or illusory apparitions; intruders caught in the sage's tower will find themselves naked on the heath at dawn, with no recollections of the night.

Buyouts

All precautions notwithstanding, the horse may have bolted – the witnesses have talked, the evidence is on the Web. The Keepers' way to lock the stable door after the event is to correct the past, by "buying out" witnesses and evidence.

The whole array of mundane and magic measures comes into play: blackmail, corruption, and threats. Witnesses permanently forget the events they have described *and* get their

reputation destroyed. Sources presenting the evidence get censored or have their credibility undermined. Something will linger, but very few people believe it.

We do not need magic to change the world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: We have the power to imagine better.

– J.K. Rowling, speech to Harvard Alumni Association, 2008

THE MAGICAL STYLE

Although a very old style, the titles of the levels within the order reflect the modern terminology adopted to better hide their intentions. Over the years, the Keepers also developed a new spell, Confuse Memory (pp. 14-15), to aid their “employees.”

THE WAY OF THE KEEPERS

14 points

Style Prerequisites: IQ 11; Magery 1 (not One College Only).

The order is picky. Recruits must be smart, practicing mages. They must know some of the basic spells of the style. They must have witnessed or experienced the consequences of the Error – which is what motivates most mages to join the order. If this event doesn’t happen accidentally, then the Keepers arrange an elaborate set-up in which the candidate is offered substantial rewards if he commits the Error. To pass the exam, the prospective member must avoid the pitfall and, ideally, neutralize the Competition.

The spells taught to *trainees* are the stepping stones for the main areas of interest of the Keepers: mind and emotion control, distraction, and threat identification. The Keepers also teach a broad array of mundane skills. Their philosophy is not to use magic if the intended effect can be achieved by ordinary means that won’t endanger the Trademark. Many Keepers think that most problems can be tackled by means of some radical, worldly solution – like arson.

Some trainees are not bright enough to proceed further in the order’s hierarchy; they remain valued sidekicks, branching out in other spells beyond the style, and learning other useful skills. Those who are intelligent enough, however, become *junior salesmen*. These employees are both able to intervene on unwanted guests while a magical ritual is going on, and to use smear tactics on these witnesses afterward. To be promoted, they must not only learn their level’s seven spells and an optional skill, they also need substantial experience in the field.

Senior salesmen may specialize. Some of them favor further spells intended to meddle with minds. Others stick to the Illusion and Creation college, so that they can create Vaporware, disguise themselves, or pass off necromantic paraphernalia as innocuous trinkets. Light and Continual Light are steps toward Invisibility, and Choke is useful for defense. Apportation comes in handy to remove objects from where they shouldn’t be.

Some experienced senior salesmen who lack the prerequisites to access the fourth pay grade are taught the Keepers’

secret, Confuse Memory. They will remain intermediate-level employees, mainly tasked with teaching trainees and overseeing operations against lower-level Competition.

Only the very brightest and most magically endowed become *marketing directors*. Their trademark is Permanent Forgetfulness, the Keepers’ preferred way to deal with witnesses if salesmen cannot plug a leak otherwise. The Sound spells are useful both for distraction and to create better illusions. Darkness hinders observation, and it’s another stepping stone to Invisibility; further mind-control spells are recommended.

Executive officers are exceptionally experienced Keepers. They’re free to study whatever they want, and they often call in favors to get other orders to teach them life-prolonging spells. The minimum standard for their level is Invisibility.

The Firm has no more than a handful of *CEOs*. They work all over the world, and they have no mandatory spells . . . probably. They all know False Memory.

The Phantom Visible Effect perk is explained on p. 15. The other magical perks for this style are described in **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles** and **GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks**.

Required Skills: Acting; Explosives/TL (Demolition); Intimidation; Propaganda/TL; Thaumatology; and one Easy melee weapon or unarmed combat skill.

Required Spells: Detect Magic; Fear; Itch; Panic; Sense Emotion; Sense Foes; Simple Illusion.

Perks: Brotherhood (Mages); Far-Casting (any spell in style); Forgettable Face; Good with Conspiracy Theorists; Good with Mages; Mundane Magic (for any spell in style); No Gestures (any spell in style); No Incantations (any spell in style); Phantom Visible Effect (any spell in style); Secret Mage; Secret Spell (Confuse Memory); Shortcut to Power (Charm).

Secret Spell: Confuse Memory.

Optional Traits

Attributes: Improved IQ.

Advantages: Alternate Identity; Claim to Hospitality; Contacts; Legal Enforcement Powers; Legal Immunity; improved Magery; Security Clearance; Unfazeable.

Disadvantages: Callous; Code of Honor (Keepers’; p. 11); Enemy (Investigators of the occult); Secret; Sense of Duty (Keepers or All wizards).

Skills: Alchemy; Detect Lies; Fast Talk; Hidden Lore (any); Hypnotism; Occultism; Psychology; Public Speaking; Ritual Magic (any); Savoir-Faire.

Spell List

Prospective employees must already know at least four of the spells for the first pay grade before being approached. They will remain trainees until they know them all.

First Pay Grade (Trainee)

These are the basic spells defining the magical style.

Detect Magic	Sense Emotion
Fear	Sense Foes
Itch	Simple Illusion
Panic	

Second Pay Grade (Junior Salesman)

Access to this second circle requires IQ 12 or more. Learning the following spells is mandatory before a junior salesman is considered for promotion.

Clumsiness	Persuasion
Complex Illusion	Sound
Daze	Spasm
Foolishness	

Third Pay Grade (Senior Salesman)

Senior salesmen learn at least seven of the following spells, before being considered for promotion.

Apportation	Forgetfulness
Choke	Illusion Disguise
Confuse Memory	Illusion Shell
Continual Light	Light
Dream Sending	Sleep
Drunkenness	Truthsayer

Fourth Pay Grade (Marketing Director)

Magery 2 and IQ 13 or higher are required to become marketing directors. The employees of this pay grade, before being considered for promotion, must learn at least seven spells, including Permanent Forgetfulness, from the following list.

Charm*	Mental Stun
Complex Illusion	Permanent Forgetfulness
Darkness	Sound
Emotion Control	Suggestion
Madness	Thunderclap
Mass Sleep	

* Requires Shortcut to Power perk *or* prerequisites from outside of the style.

Fifth Pay Grade (Executive Officer)

All of these spells are mandatory to gain this level.

Blur	Hide
Flash	Invisibility

Sixth Pay Grade (CEO)

The one spell all CEOs are known to master.

False Memory

NEW SPELL

This spell was researched by the Keepers as a simpler alternative to Permanent Forgetfulness, not requiring IQ 13. Employees who can't become marketing directors because they have IQ 12 or less usually learn this spell.

Secret Spell: Confuse Memory (VH)

Regular; Resisted by Will

This spell causes the subject's awareness of a single fact or event to become confused. The subject will remember, but his recollections will have a dreamlike quality, and minor details will be hazy and possibly inconsistent. Every time the subject thinks or talks about the event, he will need to make a successful roll against Will to be sure that what he remembers isn't a dream or hallucination, and to keep the details consistent.



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If he was successful the last time he rolled, every subsequent roll will be at +3. Once he fails, every subsequent roll is at -3.

Remove Curse and Restore Memory can eliminate this effect; Confuse Memory resists.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost: 10.

Time to Cast: 1 hour.

Prerequisite: Forgetfulness.

NEW PERK

For more information about perks, see p. B100-101.

Phantom Visible Effect†

You must specialize by spell, and the spell must have visible effects. If the spell is Fireball, for example, the effect (a fireball forming in your hand!) will be visible, but it will have a phantom-like, translucent appearance. If noisy, the sound will be muffled. Characters witnessing these effects may be fooled into thinking they're some sort of smoke-and-mirrors trick, and they might try to *disbelieve* what they see, as if it were an illusion (see *GURPS Magic*, p. 95), thus wasting a turn. On a critical failure on their Will roll, they will actually believe that the Fireball is an illusion – until they receive further evidence that it isn't. Note that if you hit a haystack with the Fireball, the ensuing bonfire will be natural, and normally perceived.

LENSES

The order as presented in this article is meant for TL6 to TL8, though it can be adapted to other settings. Here are some variations.

TREE IN THE FOREST

In early Roman Republican times, witches were killed by the hundreds. Now the emperor rules Rome, and the persecution has slackened, but the Keepers haven't forgotten their treatment. Their nice front is a secretive religion, the Unnamed Mystery, just one of many trendy novelties from the East. It's selective, and its unwitting non-wizardly members join for the assemblies' debauchery and because it's fashionable. They don't know that the inner circles, the Keepers, use the cult to keep tabs on them, the court, and the aristocracy.

Apart from the style's mainstays, members are fond of all-out control (such as Soul Rider and Possession). Given the mundane medicine of the time, they also know many Healing spells. Public Speaking and Savoir-Faire are necessary, and other important skills include Connoisseur, Philosophy, Religious Ritual, and Sex Appeal.

FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE

It's the late Middle Ages, and witches and heretics are again hunted mercilessly. The Keepers have created their own fake Christian order of St. Voltergius, complete with an entirely fictional holy founder. Its monasteries serve safe houses for them and other mages. They have infiltrated the Church hierarchy in order to preempt threats. The worst inquisitors happen to die of sudden illnesses or unfortunate accidents.

In this era, the average nonmage wholeheartedly approves of witch hunts, so he's not considered an innocent bystander to be spared. Many Keepers are accomplished necromancers or demonologists. Common skills include Interrogation, Naturalist, Poisons, and Religious Ritual.

MIBs (MAGES IN BLACK)

In a wacky alternate reality, absent-minded academic wizards *often* have showy, but not terribly harmful, critical failures. Demons hatch unspeakable plans, but have obvious,

ridiculous weaknesses. Bumbling government agents investigate clumsily. The Keepers, in their spiffy black robes, save the day – though not without a funny blunder or three.

The Keepers' trademark is an article of clothing enchanted with Permanent Forgetfulness. However, for some reason, it's always horribly garish and hopelessly mismatched. The Keepers have to convince the Opposition to wear it for at least a day! Preferred spells include Clumsiness and Drunkenness. They also add Grease, Fumble, Hair Growth, Nauseate, Strike Dumb, and Undo to the standard the Way of the Keepers choices.

NOT WITH A BANG BUT A YAWN

It's TL9, and magic is so retro; technology can do nearly everything, including an immortality of sorts. If people worry about monsters, they think of AIs, bioroids, cyborgs, or aliens. The Keepers still exist, but they have dwindled in power and numbers (like all mages). They now have little to do; it's uneventful sentry duty. They are all part-timers, thinking about folding it all, and bored as hell. That is, until aliens show up and kill technology with EMP-like effects . . . or a Technomancer event (see *GURPS Technomancer*) happens . . . or worse.

The Keepers of the future have added some Technological spells to their style. They also know Computer Operation, Computer Hacking, and Expert Skill (Memetics).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michele Armellini lives in Udine, Italy, with his very understanding wife, Silvia. He maintains that magic doesn't exist, and if it does, he knows nothing about it. He makes a living out of foreign languages, but he loves dabbling with and studying the obscure and the uncanny – and trying to convert them into game mechanics! Apart from things he has published in Italian, he has written for *Pyramid*, and he is the author of *GURPS WWII: Grim Legions*. He is also the author or co-author (with Hans-Christian Vortisch) of several other e23 products: *GURPS WWII: Their Finest Hour*, *GURPS WWII: Doomed White Eagle*, and *GURPS WWII: Michael's Army*.

THE STREET SIGN OF THE FOUR

BY LOKI CARBIS

It's just a suburban street corner – a standard four-way intersection that's busier than some but still fairly quiet. It has unrestricted visibility in all directions, the streetlights are in perfect working order, and even the weather there is pretty good on average, although notably unpredictable. So why do an average of 23 people a year (and rising) die there?

Cursory magical investigation will easily discover that the intersection is a high mana region, death-aspected to an unusually strong degree compared to the surrounding area. Of course, that tends to happen in any area with a lot of deaths over a long period, so it might not seem suspicious. The fact that the four basic elements are in suspiciously perfect balance around this area, with concentrations in the appropriate elemental directions, still might not arouse suspicions. Even so, it is a strange coincidence.

To learn the answer to that question, you'd have to go inside the four corner houses, and have a good look around. You'd have to find the binoculars and scoreboards that are hidden, yet near at hand to the one-way glass front windows of each house. And to really work it out, you'd have to find the grimoires.

HISTORY

Decades ago, when this was a new housing development, four mages bought the corner houses. They were four friends, determined to stay together. Roger Ciro – a specialist in Fire magic – was the leader of the group. Trevor Emlyn was a Water mage, moody but loyal to his friends. Damian Aswad was skilled with Earth magic, and not a man to shirk his job, however dirty his hands became. Hugo Waldron was a student of Air magic, studying it with the cold rationality he brought to every task.

It was Roger who had first hit upon the idea of killing their teacher, the elemental Master Tonio. Hugo planned the crime, Damian did the deed, and Trevor covered it up. After dividing up their master's possessions – each according to his abilities – the four swore a pact of blood brotherhood. They feared Tonio's dying prophecy that he would return and exact a terrible vengeance on them.

It was no accident they bought the houses they did. Each structure faces the correct elemental direction, and the crossroads is a place of power (although how well-known this is depends on the setting). Furthermore, they had buried Tonio under the intersection's center, and none of them wanted to turn their backs on him – or the others.

However, suburbia's no place for magic these days. No one believes in it or wants it, even in a high mana area like their corner. As time has passed, they've let their talents atrophy, their wills weaken, and their spirits grow cynical. The fact that all but the simplest spells they had learned required long and complex rituals was another disincentive to keeping in practice. However, they all knew that they *should* keep their abilities honed. Thus, when Roger suggested the contest (as they called it), they realized that this was something that could keep them in fighting trim while they prepared against Tonio's eventual return.

The rules of the contest are simple. In turn, each mage uses his talents to create dangerous situations, preferably fatal ones. The accidents they cause must be because of driver error, mechanical failure, or road conditions, so that investigators will not grow too suspicious. They must maintain a degree of discretion – no one can be allowed to suspect that magic is involved, or that the four men have anything to do with the problem. So far, it's all going according to plan; the blood sacrifices power the wards that stop Tonio from resurrecting himself. However, no plan is perfect.

ROGER CIRO, FIRE MAGE

205 points

As hot-headed as his chosen element suggests, Roger is perhaps the most friendly and welcoming of the mages. He is certainly the most likely to give their secret away in his conversational babble. All enthusiasm and affability, Roger is inconstant and unreliable when it comes to following through. If it weren't for the continued threat to his life to give him some direction, he'd likely have gotten bored and wandered off years ago. Of the four, Roger is the only one who regularly interacts with people outside the group. Nonetheless, although he has a wide circle of acquaintances, he has no close friends.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 9 [-10].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0];
FP 9 [0].
Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Charisma 2 [10]; Magery 3 (One College, Fire, -40%) [23].

Disadvantages

Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Impulsiveness (12) [-10]; Secret (Homicidal mage) [-30]; Vow (Prevent Tonio's return) [-10].
Quirks: Imaginative. [-1]

Skills

Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ+2 [4]-15; Cooking (A) IQ [2]-13; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-11; Fire Eating (A) DX+2 [8]-13; Innate Attack (Beam) (E) DX+4 [12]-14; Innate Attack (Projectile) (E) DX [1]-11; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Occultism (A) IQ [2]-13; Thaumatology (VH) IQ+3 [12]-16*.

Spells*

Cold (H) IQ+3 [4]-16; Control Fire Elemental (H) IQ+5 [12]-18; Create Fire (H) IQ+5 [12]-18; Create Fire Elemental (H) IQ+3 [4]-16; Essential Flame (H) IQ+3 [4]-16; Extinguish Fire (H) IQ+5 [12]-18; Explosive Fireball (H) IQ+5 [12]-18; Fireball (H) IQ+5 [12]-18; Fireproof (H) IQ+6 [16]-19; Flame Jet (H) IQ+6 [16]-19; Flaming Missiles (H) IQ+5 [12]-18; Flaming Weapon (H) IQ+5 [12]-18; Heat (H) IQ+7 [20]-20; Ignite Fire (H) IQ+7 [20]-20; Phantom Flame (H) IQ+7 [20]-20; Resist Cold (H) IQ+4 [8]-17; Resist Fire (H) IQ+5 [12]-18; Shape Fire (H) IQ+3 [4]-16; Summon Fire Elemental (H) IQ+6 [16]-19.

* Thaumatology and all spells include +3 for Magery.

TREVOR EMLYN, WATER MAGE

246 points

Although wracked with guilt over everything he and the others have done, Trevor never lets it cloud his vision. He realizes that the sacrifices must continue, at least until Tonio is put down more permanently. It's possible that Trevor could be induced to crack and confess all – but you'd have to get him well away from the other three first.

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

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Empathy [15]; Magery 3 (One College, Water, -40%) [23].

Disadvantages

Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Manic-Depressive [-20]; Secret (Homicidal mage) [-30]; Sense of Duty (Fellow mages) [-5]; Vow (Prevent Tonio's return) [-10].

Skills

Alchemy/TL8 (VH) IQ [8]-11; Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ [1]-11; Diplomacy (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-11; Innate Attack (Beam) (E) DX+3 [8]-14; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Occultism (A) IQ [2]-11; Thaumatology (VH) IQ+4 [12]-15*; Swimming (E) HT+2 [4]-12.

Spells*

Body of Water (H) IQ+3 [4]-14; Control Water Elemental (H) IQ+7 [20]-18; Create Water (H) IQ+3 [4]-14; Dehydrate (H) IQ+3 [4]-14; Destroy Water (H) IQ+7 [20]-18; Essential Water (H) IQ+3 [4]-14; Fog (H) IQ+8 [24]-19; Freeze (H) IQ+4 [8]-15; Frost (H) IQ+4 [8]-15; Ice Slick (H) IQ+7 [20]-18; Melt Ice (H) IQ+8 [24]-19; Purify Water (H) IQ+4 [8]-15; Seek Water (H) IQ+4 [8]-15; Shape Water (H) IQ+6 [16]-17; Summon Water Elemental (H) IQ+3 [4]-14; Water Jet (H) IQ+7 [20]-18.

* Thaumatology and all spells include +3 for Magery.

*Julie James: Please . . .
it was an accident!*

*Ben Willis: I know all
about "accidents," and let
me give you some advice:
When you leave a man for
dead, make sure that he's
really dead!*

*– I Know What You
Did Last Summer*

DAMIAN ASWAD, EARTH MAGE

224 points

At first glance, Damian appears to be the calm one in the group. However, appearances can be deceptive. More than any of the others, he has come to enjoy the murders for their own sake. His passion for killing is only getting stronger. Of the four, Damian is the most likely to expose what's going on, particularly since he's now decided that the intersection's killings are not enough for him. He is ranging further afield in search of more prey.

For just one second, look at your life and see how perfect it is. Stop looking for the next secret door that is going to lead you to your real life. Stop waiting. This is it: there's nothing else. It's here, and you'd better decide to enjoy it or you're going to be miserable wherever you go, for the rest of your life, forever.

*– Lev Grossman, **The Magicians***

ST 14 [40]; **DX** 9 [-20]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Fearlessness 5 [10]; Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [2]; Magery 3 (One College, Earth, -40%) [23].
Perks: Deep Sleeper. [1]

Disadvantages

Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Intolerance (Non-mages) [-10]; Secret (Homicidal mage) [-30]; Sense of Duty (Fellow mages) [-5]; Uncontrollable Appetite (Murder) (12) [-15]; Vow (Prevent Tonio's return) [-10].

Skills

Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ [1]-10; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX+2 [8]-11; Gardening(E) IQ+4 [12]-14; Innate Attack (Projectile) (E) DX+1 [2]-10; Knife (E) DX+6 [20]-15; Occultism (A) IQ+4 [16]-14; Thaumatology (VH) IQ+5 [16]-15*.

Spells*

Body of Stone (VH) IQ+5 [16]-15; Control Earth Elemental (H) IQ+4 [8]-14; Create Earth (H) IQ+3 [4]-13; Create Earth Elemental (H) IQ+6 [16]-16; Earth to Stone (H) IQ+6 [16]-16; Earthquake (H) IQ+3 [4]-13; Earth Vision (H) IQ+1 [1]-11; Entombment (H) IQ+8 [24]-18; Flesh to Stone (H) IQ+1 [1]-11; Seek Earth (H) IQ+3 [4]-13; Shape Earth (H) IQ+7 [20]-17; Stone Missile (H) IQ+7 [20]-17; Stone to Earth (H) IQ+6 [16]-16; Stone to Flesh (H) IQ+1 [1]-11; Summon Earth Elemental (H) IQ+5 [12]-15.

* Thaumatology and all spells include +3 for Magery.

HUGO WALDRON, AIR MAGE

204 points

Of all the mages, only Hugo has retained an interest in developing his powers. Realizing that the supernatural can

potentially keep him alive forever, he seeks to free himself of this arrangement and pursue life extension magics. He wants out not because it is wrong or evil, but simply because it is inconvenient. Hugo doesn't wish to be here his entire life, although he still fears the return of Tonio too much to just leave. In the meantime, he seeks out magical knowledge when he can, although he errs on the side of caution where the other three are concerned – he doesn't want to have to share power with any of them.

ST 8 [-20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 14 [80]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 10 [0].
Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Intuition [15]; Single-Minded [5]; Magery 3 (One College, Air, -40%) [23].

Disadvantages

Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Callous [-5]; Intolerance (Non-mages) [-10]; Nightmares (12) [-5]; Secret (Homicidal mage) [-30]; Vow (Prevent Tonio's return) [-10].

Skills

Alchemy/TL8 (VH) IQ+1 [12]-15; Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ [1]-14; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-10; Innate Attack (Beam) (E) DX+4 [12]-14; Knife (E) DX+2 [4]-12; Occultism (A) IQ+2 [8]-16; Research (A) IQ+1 [4]-15; Thaumatology (VH) IQ+4 [12]-18*.

Spells*

Air Jet (H) IQ+5 [12]-19; Control Air Elemental (H) IQ+6 [16]-20; Create Air (H) IQ+3 [4]-17; Destroy Air (H) IQ+5 [12]-19; No-Smell (H) IQ+4 [8]-18; Odor (H) IQ+4 [8]-18; Purify Air (H) IQ+3 [4]-17; Shape Air (H) IQ+5 [12]-19; Stench (H) IQ+5 [12]-19; Summon Air Elemental (H) IQ+6 [16]-20; Windstorm (H) IQ+5 [12]-19.

* Thaumatology and all spells include +3 for Magery.

CAMPAIGN USE

The four mages have surprisingly little in common . . . and don't even like each other that much. In fact, the most likely way that the players will find out about these mages is one at a time. Roger and Hugo are the two most likely to be encountered – Hugo while researching, Roger while out socializing. Trevor might be encountered doing something mundane (like

*The saw worked
excellently, but
the wand didn't.*

*– Alfred Hitchcock,
Alfred Hitchcock
Presents #7.39*

shopping), but he is far more difficult to befriend. Investigators encountering Damian are more likely to do so as a result of his extended serial killing than for any other reason.

Any of them could possibly become a Contact, Ally, or even Patron to the heroes – even as another member of the quartet becomes an Enemy of the party.

Individually, any of these mages could be a match for a lone hero, or for a whole party of weaker adventurers. As a group, the wizards are perhaps more suitable as a major (if not *the* major) opponent in a whole campaign. To defeat them, the heroes will need to be smart: For typical heroes, these mages will be difficult to beat in a straight-up battle, but they have other, less obvious weaknesses. The group has tensions within it that could be played upon by cunning players – and there's always the chance that the heroes may learn of Tonio's existence, perhaps gaining him as an ally.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Loki Carbis has written for *Pyramid* since the last century. He's also written for Atlas Games and Pagan Publishing, among others. Loki is a proud resident of the suburb of Batman (but then, who wouldn't be?). He strongly urges you to always take care to look left, right and every other way before crossing the street.

Adventure Seeds

An Accident Waiting to Happen: Through happenstance or design, the heroes offend one of the four mages. Knowing that it is the turn of one of the other three, the mage in question decides to forgive and befriend the PCs, inviting them around frequently. Of course, he hopes the other mage will kill them for him, but can he manage it before the heroes realize that he is a mage, and worse yet – one with a deadly secret?

Never Again: Authorities have decided to do something to reduce the death toll at the intersection, most likely by installing traffic lights or a roundabout. Naturally, the four mages won't stand for this, but how can they fight it without giving away their secret? (If the authority has decided to install a roundabout instead of traffic lights, the mages face the added problem that someone will almost certainly unearth Tonio's body.)

Birds of a Feather: After the heroes display a particularly successful use of magic, Hugo Waldron approaches them in hopes of exchanging knowledge. Anticipating their questions, he explains that he routinely scans his vicinity for other magicians, and suggests that a neutral ground be established to meet at – a local university or college library with private study rooms, perhaps. He doesn't mention the other three, nor does he ever suggest meeting at his own place. Over time, this may come to seem suspicious to the party. If they follow him, they'll find his home easily enough – they may even see Hugo (or one of the other three) in the act of spell casting.

One Down, Three to Go: Damian Aswad is something more than just a mage – he's a serial killer. The other three aren't aware that Aswad has branched out in his murders, but when they learn his secret, Roger and Hugo decide that the smart thing to do is abandon him to his fate. Trevor disagrees, and suddenly, the mages are split down the middle. Soon, the PCs somehow become caught in the crossfire of a fight to the death between mages of opposing elements. And such a battle may only a prelude to . . .

When All the Lights Turn Green: The long-awaited happens: Tonio arises from the dead, seeking vengeance. He also leads a veritable army of undead – all those blood sacrifices that were supposed to keep him down. As a thunderstorm throws the suburbs into darkness, the heroes may face their ultimate challenge. This could be played with them just caught in the middle, or they may get the chance to reason with Tonio, possibly turning him into a useful ally. Alternately, Tonio – still a powerful elemental and now also an undead necromancer and zombie master – may turn out to be an even worse threat than his former students. Tonio should be a revenant, with many necromantic spells, as well as knowing most – although not all – of the spells that his four former students use. His stats are not specified so that he can be tailored to the needs of the campaign. Tonio need not be evil – he might just as easily have been the innocent victim of the four mages as he could be the one who corrupted them. The one factor that is unchanging is that he will be able to defeat the four elementals, if only because of their fear of him.

EIDETIC MEMORY

BIBLIOMANCY

BY DAVID L. PULVER

In the beginning was the word . . . The associations between magic, the written word, and books themselves are long and deep. Many wizards have large libraries containing, not just spell books, but also both tomes of hidden lore and occult knowledge. Some mages go beyond this and become specialists in the magic of books and words themselves. These arcane arts – sometimes collectively known as bibliomancy, after the practice of divination through books – are a set of subtle spells that are most often mastered by magic-using librarians or mages of a literary bent.

These book-magic spells do not form a college in themselves, although the GM may so designate them if desired. (If so, consider adding the Gift of Letters and Encrypt spells; see *GURPS Magic*, pp. 46 and 135 respectively.) Their college affiliations are shown below. “Book” as used in these spells can refer to any written work in physical form, such as a book, magazine, comic book, or scroll.

College Affiliation

Spell	College
Absorb Book	Communication and Empathy
Bedtime Reading	Communication and Empathy
Book Binding	Protection and Warning
Compel Written Truth	Communication and Empathy
Compulsive Reader	Enchantment
Divination (Bibliomancy)	Knowledge
Essential Paper	Plant; Technological
Illuminated Writing	Communication and Empathy
Literary Hunger	Mind Control
Live Libram	Enchantment
Narrative Conveyance	Enchantment
Retro-Reading	Knowledge
Speed Reading	Mind Control
Writer’s Block	Mind Control

Absorb Book

Regular

This spell lets the user devour the knowledge of a written work. After casting it, over a period of several minutes, the writing in the book gradually fades away (at a rate of 10% per

minute), leaving blank pages. The mage retains the information exactly as if he had carefully read the book. If the book describes how to do something, it provides information approximately equivalent to the Read the Manual ritual (*GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 147).

Duration: Permanent.

Cost: 1 per 32 pages or fraction of the work.

Time to cast: 4 seconds.

Prerequisite: IQ 13+ or Gift of Letters.

Bedtime Reading

Regular

Cast on a particular book, scroll, or other written work the user is touching before he goes to sleep, this creates a dream analog of the work, which he may continue to read as he sleeps and dreams. This can allow the user to count sleep time as study time. Additionally, if the book is one that provides comfort – such as a child’s favorite bedtime story or a religious work – it provide a palliative against nightmares.

Duration: One period of sleep.

Cost: 3.

Time to cast: 10 seconds.

Prerequisite: Dream Viewing or Sleep.

Book Binding

Regular; Resists Lockmaster Spell

This seals a book so that its cover cannot be opened unless the opener touches it and speaks a particular password that is selected when the spell is cast. The password must be one that appears within the pages of the book itself. Counterspell and Lockmaster can both counter this spell.

Base cost: 1.

Time to cast: 2 seconds.

Prerequisite: None.

Item

Well-made paper or leather bookmark, ribbon, or a thin golden chain that must be placed in or wrapped around the book. *Energy cost to create:* 100.

Compel Written Truth

Regular; Resisted by Will

The subject becomes unable to write down (or type) what he believes is a lie for the duration of the spell. He can still *speak* an untruth.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 3 to cast, 1 to maintain.

Prerequisite: Magery 2+ and Truthsayer.

Item

A writing implement or medium, such as a pen, type writer, computer keyboard, or a medium such as a notepad or paper. If the user writes a falsehood using it, it will automatically and unconsciously change the words into what he believes to be true. *Energy cost to create:* 300 for an implement; 8 per page of writing material (minimum 120).

Compulsive Reader

Enchantment

This ritual enchants a book so that a person who reads even a word inside it will feel a strong compulsion to continue studying it until he has read the entire thing. It has no effect on someone who cannot comprehend the language the book is written in.

The victim gets a Will resistance roll against the skill used to enchant the book. If he fails, he is compelled to do nothing but read until finished. He may make one additional resistance roll if his life is in immediate danger (e.g., someone attacks him or his house is on fire). He will resist removing the book using his own Strength, but if the book is destroyed or snatched away from him, the effect is broken.

Energy cost to cast: 2 per page of length (minimum 60).

Prerequisite: Enchant; any three Mind Control spells or Writing 15+.

Divination

Information

See *GURPS Magic* (p. 108) for more about Divination.

Bibliomancy requires either a lengthy and poetic or literary work containing a wide variety of knowledge, stories, and parables (such as the Bible, Elder Edda, or other sacred scriptures); a complex and obscure work of literature; or a more focused work associated with the question being asked. The spell will provide a passage from the book that answers the question, or at least provides a clue to that answer.

Prerequisites: Any five book spells from this article; Literature-12+ can substitute for one spell.

Essential Paper

Regular

This transforms any intact paper into the magical essence of paper. Essential Paper is three times as strong as and has twice the HP of regular paper. It is one step harder to ignite, but if lit burns three times as long. It does not become moldy even in damp, and thus is immune to the depredations of booklice and similar pests.

Anyone using Writing, Poetry, Typing, or Artist (Drawing or Illumination) to compose a work on a page, book, or parchment that is made of Essential Paper adds +3 to his skill. The created work often seems unusually alive, ready to leap off the page. Paper airplanes made from essential paper fly three times as far as usual.

Cost: 1.

Time to cast: 2 seconds.

Prerequisite: None.

*The Nature of my
Work is Visionary or
Imaginative; it is an
endeavour to Restore
what the Ancients
call'd the Golden Age.*

– William Blake

Illuminated Writing

Regular

If a person reads a work enhanced by this spell, whatever he reads comes to life in his head as if he were experiencing with all his senses. This is not dangerous – the experiencer remains an observer rather than a participant to any situation – but it could trigger a Fright Check. Any self-study that is performed with the aid of Illuminated Writing counts as twice as much study time as usual; any Research rolls are made at +3.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 2 per 32 pages or fraction of the work.

Time to cast: 10 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery 2+, one of Mind-Sending, Fascinate, or Writing 12+.

Item

A book, etc. *Energy cost to create:* 2 per page of writing material (minimum 60).

Literary Hunger

Regular; Resisted by Will

This spell causes the victim to lose 1 to 3 FP, after which he feels a longing for a good book. This FP can only be recovered by a day of reading a work of literature that the person has never read before. The spell has no effect on someone who cannot read.

Duration: Until recovered.

Cost: 2 per FP inflicted (maximum 3 FP).

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery 1

Live Libram

Enchantment

A book with this enchantment will automatically turn its pages without its reader having to touch them after he opens it and begins reading. It automatically matches the reader's pace. It always opens to the place where its owner last stopped reading it, if he is still doing so. If he has finished it, but later consults it to find a particular passage he recalls, the book will instantly open to the correct page (+4 on any Research roll if the GM believes the book has particular information he needs). If the user is passing by a spot where the book is shelved and wishes to consult it, the book will fall or jump into his grasp (provided he is within two yards of it).

Energy cost to cast: 50 for a small book like a mass market paperback, a scroll, or a magazine; 100 for a mid-sized book like a typical trade paperback or hardcover; 150 for an oversized book.

Prerequisite: Enchant, Apportation.

Narrative Conveyance

Enchantment

This must be cast on a passage in a book that *vividly* describes another world, time, or place. It is up to the GM what level of literary merit is required. The description must be long enough that it takes at least several minutes to read. When someone reads the enchanted text in the book, he will be transported bodily to that place if he fails to resist (using Will) against the skill used to create the enchantment. If it is an imagery place, it will be an alternate parallel world (as per Plane Shift) where the place is real. If it is a historical work he will shift in time.

Energy cost to create: 1,500.

Prerequisite: Plane Shift, Timeport, and Writing 15+.

Retro-Reading

Information

This spell lets the caster receive an impression of the *last* person to read a particular book, or passage in a book, which must be read by the mage during the casting. The spell

reveals which section of the book was read and a sense of the person, including his name and his emotional state when reading it.

Cost: 2

Time to cast: 10 seconds.

Prerequisite: Trace.

Speed Reading

Regular

The user may read and absorb written information at 10 times his normal pace.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 4 to cast, 2 to maintain.

Time to cast: 4 seconds.

Prerequisite: IQ 12+ or Gift of Letters.

Writer's Block

Regular; Resisted by Will

This spell curses someone so that his Writing skill rolls that succeed become failures, and those fail become critical failures.

Duration: 1 day per energy expended.

Cost: 1 to 3.

Time to cast: 3 seconds.

Prerequisite: Magery 1

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid SF fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*. Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating *Transhuman Space*, co-authoring the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* anime RPG, and writing countless *GURPS* books, including the *GURPS Basic Set*, *Fourth Edition*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and the *GURPS Spaceships* series.

Call upon the spirits of Sappho and Kerouac, of Plath and Dickenson, Keats and weiss. Ask these poets, in the name of Polyhymnia, to guide you to the words that will open your mind's eye to the literal world of metaphors.

*– Amber Guetebier and Brenda Knight,
The Poetry Oracle*

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THE FIRST RESISTANCE

BY DAVID LICHTENSTEIN

The War of Conquest ended with the Battle of the Horns, and the armies of the Middle Kingdom scattered, leaderless. The Middle Kingdom was conquered by the Severans, and that marked the end of the Third Age. Even without their army, the people there determined to resist the occupying forces. However, unlike the recently conquered, neighboring Sredni and Ravnin, they chose not to leave their cities for a life of desperation and hunger. Instead, they pretended to become loyal subjects of the new conquerors while building secret cells of resistance.

Any resistance was fraught with danger during those first years. The Severan occupation force outlawed the possession of any weapons other than knives and the practice of any magic other than the most simple food and healing spells; scores of wizards were publicly executed for no crime other than knowing now-illegal spells. The Severan wizards were merciless in their use of Mind-Reading and Compel Truth spells to seek out any Midlanders who sought to win back their freedom with arms or magic.

The organized resistance movement had to be very subtle. Those with no talent for magic tried to stockpile weapons or poison the Severans' food supplies, but their successes were limited. It is said that the first teacher of the First Resistance style was the great wizard Ruth the Elder who went into hiding in the City of Umber when it was first conquered. She taught her magic to those who wished to learn to resist the occupation using stealthy magic. The unique elements of the style developed into their present form under the hands of her first students, Liam the Black and Cybelle Shadowhand.

Little discrimination exists among those who resist the Severan occupiers. The First Resistance style is taught to anyone who wishes to learn it and who is committed to making the lives of the occupying army more difficult. Humans and dwarves tend to be the plurality practitioners, but many other races have been represented among the students of the First Resistance.

First Resistance in Dungeon Fantasy

The history behind the creation of the First Resistance style and the culture that might lead to an adventurer learning it is a significant addition to a *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign. However, it may be relatively easy for such a background to be explained by having the person be from a distant land questing to find artifacts or allies to help free his country.

In a *Dungeon Fantasy* setting, the First Resistance style is certainly not limited to humans and dwarves. Any race whose background allows them to have learned the style may take it.

A character using the wizard template in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers* should not take 30 points in spells. Instead, they need Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1], Camouflage (A) DX-1 [1], Stealth (A) DX-1 [1], Style Familiarity (First Resistance) [1], Far-Casting (Daze) [1], Limited ER 1 (First Resistance) [1], and Secret Mage [1], for 7 points. The also should have the following 23 spells (H) IQ+1 [1] or (VH) IQ [1]: Apportation, Boost IQ, Bravery, Daze, Delay, Extinguish Fire, Fear, Find Weakness, Foolishness, Ignite Fire, Keen Hearing, Mind Reading, No-Smell, Panic, Persuasion, Purify Air, Seek Earth, Sense Emotion, Sense Foes, Sense Life, Truthsayer, Weaken, and Wisdom. Such a wizard would be of the second stripe, just shy of earning his third stripe.

STEALTHY SPELLCASTING

The First Resistance style is the magic practiced in secret by the Midlander resistance in the cities of Umber, Sallisburg, Tzavolgorod, and other places in the Middle Kingdom. It focuses on persuasion, mind reading, and other subtleties. Experienced practitioners of the First Resistance could be formidable battlefield mages, but they almost never show their power in such a blatant way.

Those who practice the First Resistance style still have to live under the heel of the Severan occupation, and thus keep their magic use and rebellious activities a secret. Nearly all such mages have other, more mundane vocations used to deceive the Severans. Liam the Black was an apprentice cooper, and Cybelle Shadowhand went unnoticed as a street beggar.

FIRST RESISTANCE

7 points

Aside from the style's perks, First Resistance training does offer one major benefit that most other styles do not. Students of this style are exempt from spell prerequisites from outside of the college of the spell they are currently learning.

For example, Reshape requires Magery 1 and Weaken, but the caster need not have learned Shape Earth, Shape Plant, nor any other spells from outside the Making and Breaking college. Likewise, neither Fear nor Find Weakness have any prerequisites to a student who possesses the Style Familiarity perk for this magical style.

First Resistance members often become information brokers or leaders in urban resistance movements against their occupiers. They learn stealth very quickly, and Secret Mage is usually their first Style Perk. Find Weakness, Weaken, and similar spells are used to damage the tools and structures of the occupation, making additional work for them. The few Fire spells are useful to make sure that any arson attempts do not harm valuable resistance buildings. The various mind-affecting spells are beneficial not only for telling friend from foe, but also for subtly bending bystanders into sympathizers and sympathizers into allies.

High-level leaders teach their novices to be creative and subtle in their use of magic, since the worst thing that can happen to someone is capture by their oppressors. Keen Hearing and Keen Vision are excellent aids for spying, but Seek Earth can also be used to locate specific materials of the enemy. No-Smell is particularly valuable in fooling animals that track by scent, and Foolishness can hamper any skills that rely on IQ, including Tactics or Intelligence Analysis. Clever members of the First Resistance are continuously finding new ways to apply the spells that their style teaches.

The rank titles refer to the secret marks that practitioners place on their belts in order to show their level of advancement to other members of the First Resistance. Some non-mages have learned or been taught to discern the patterns, but since Resistance mages dress no differently from common citizens of their cities, they are by necessity subtle. Generally, the symbols take the form of black stripes on a dark brown belt; the bands of the highest ranks are merely a set of wider stripes. Novices wear a plain belt of the correct shade of dark brown.

Required Skills: Camouflage; Fast-Talk; Stealth.

Required Spells: Find Weakness; Keen Hearing *or* Keen Vision; Sense Foes.

Perks: Attribute Substitution (Sense Emotion based on Per; Sense Life based on Per); Far-Casting 1-2 (Daze); Improvised Items 1-2; Intuitive Cantrip (Reinforce); Limited ER 1-5 (First Resistance); Rule of 17 (Daze, Forgetfulness, Truthsayer); Secret Mage; Spell Resistance (Compel Truth, Foolishness, Truthsayer).

Optional Traits

Attributes: Improved IQ.

Secondary Characteristics: Improved Will; improved Perception.

Advantages: Acute Senses; Charisma; Languages; Magery; Silence; Voice.

Disadvantages: Gregarious; Intolerance; Secret (Criminal); Selfless.

Skills: Body Language; Carousing; Holdout; Politics; Slight of Hand.

Techniques: Choke Hold (any).

Spell List

The First Resistance style has six levels of spells that are distinguished by their rank titles as described above. Progress

through the ranks of the First Resistance is by ability alone; nepotism or other trading of favors for rank is not tolerated.

*All secrets are deep.
All secrets become
dark. That's in the
nature of secrets.*

*– Cory Doctorow,
“Someone
Comes
to Town,
Someone
Leaves Town”*

Novice

This is the level of the lowest students of the First Resistance style. Novices are not even considered to be practicing the style until they have learned the three required spells. They are permitted to earn their first stripe when they have learned seven of the Novice-level spells.

Find Weakness	Keen Hearing	Seek Earth
Foolishness	Keen Vision	Seek Water
Ignite Fire	Light	Sense Foes
Inspired Creation	Purify Air	Sense Life

First Stripe

Students of the First Resistance who have earned their first stripe are recognized as full members of the style. They may earn their second stripe when they have learned seven spells of the first stripe level.

Alertness	No-Smell	Truthsayer
Daze	Persuasion	Weaken
Extinguish Fire	Purify Water	Wisdom
Fear	Restore	
Hide Emotion	Sense Emotion	

Second Stripe

A practitioner of the First Resistance who has two stripes is usually a respected agent of a resistance cell. He may earn his third stripe by learning eight spells of the second stripe.

*Those who make peaceful revolution impossible
will make violent revolution inevitable.*

– John F. Kennedy

Apportation	Forgetfulness	Panic
Boost IQ	Hide Thoughts	Rejoin
Bravery	Mass Daze	Shape Fire
Delay	Mental Stun	Sleep
Dream Viewing	Mind Reading	Strengthen Will
Dye	Odor	

Third Stripe

A practitioner who has reached the third stripe is often viewed as a leader in resistance cells, though he is not quite at the level of the style’s teachers. Once a First Resistance member

has learned nine spells of the third stripe, he becomes Banded and is permitted to begin teaching new students.

Berserker	Locksmith	Reshape
Compel Truth	Loyalty	Smoke
Copy	Madness	Soul-Rider
Dream Sending	Mass Sleep	Stiffen
Emotion Control	Message	Terror
False Memory	Mind Sending	

Banded

Banded First Resistance members are sometimes addressed as “Master” if they have taken students. They are highly respected and highly valued in resistance undergrounds. When a member has learned seven Banded spells, he is presented with a second band and permitted to learn the highest level spells of the style.

Command	Knot	Shatter
Communication	Lockmaster	Suggestion
Control Person	Manipulate	Wallwalker
Dream Projection	Mind Search	Weapon Self Repair

Double-Banded

Double-Banded members of the First Resistance are usually addressed as “Grand Master.” They are the most respected and most potent members of any resistance movement.

Charm	Insignificance	Rive
Distant Blow	Lesser Geas	Telepathy
Explode	Mass Suggestion	Toughen
Hallucination	Permanent Madness	

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Lichtenstein has been a role-player since 1979 and a devoted fan of *GURPS* since 1991. His gaming library is gradually taking over his house, but he foolishly thinks this is a good thing. He is married to another gamer, and he works as a professional sign-language interpreter in the Washington, D.C. area to help support their two cats and his addiction to gaming books. The prognosis for his addiction seems terminal since he refuses to admit he has a problem.



THE ACCIDENTAL MAGUS

BY JASON BRICK

Not every slinger of spells studies for years to attain unlimited cosmic power. Some are born to the craft, possessing a natural talent that impresses (and annoys) scholarly wizards. Some are even born without any knowledge of the untapped ability lying within them. These accidental magi can be some of the most entertaining to play.

Depending on the tone of a campaign or character, accidental magery takes many forms. It can be a developing theme for an adventurer discovering his magic. A light-hearted campaign might include a comedic curse that makes spells unpredictable. In a horror campaign, unknown magical powers could be evidence of demonic possession, or of an investigator's slow descent into madness and depravity.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

The first question to ask when creating an accidental magus is why he doesn't know about his abilities. The reasons for this can be as varied as the flavor of the campaign he's a part of. Here are just a few examples of how a wizard might acquire some accidental magery.

Reincarnation: In the adventurer's most recent life, he was a powerful user of magic, with abilities that lingered beyond death. This may have been an accidental side effect of eldritch exploration, or it might have happened on purpose – to an agenda also unknown by current version of the person.

Amnesia: This plays a lot like reincarnation, with the mage discovering powers he never knew he had. The root cause is different, and may or may not be apparent at the beginning of play. Did a car accident cause brain damage, or was this the machinations of a dangerous conspiracy?

Superheroic Discovery: Half the origin stories in comic books revolve around a once-normal human discovering powers after some kind of experiment or accident. An accidental magus could have similar experiences, ultimately coming into his powers or simply remaining plagued by magical weirdness throughout his adventuring career.

Cursed by the Gods: Some mages get all the luck, but this person is not one of them. The curse can work in one of two ways. The gods might have cursed a powerful caster by hiding his knowledge of spells and spellcraft, or they might have given a normal person magic as revenge or a joke.

Background Noise: This kind of accidental mage is fully aware of his supernatural nature, and may have some spells he controls completely. Unfortunately, he also has supernatural traits that operate uncontrolled and poorly understood.

Perhaps these are peripheral effects of specific spells, or a general aura that accompanies his supernatural talent.

Character Arc: If the focus of your accidental magic is on the adventurer himself, it may not be important how the powers exist and why they are hidden. It might never be discovered, or could be revealed over the course of the campaign. Either way, it doesn't need to be decided at the beginning of play.

*That's the thing with
magic. You've got to
know it's still here,
all around us, or it just
stays invisible for you.*

– Charles de Lint

CREATING AN ACCIDENTAL MAGUS

There are as many options for designing accidental wizards as there are reasons for them to exist. This article identifies four methods for building and crunching the numbers of character creation. It's best, though, to consider this a continuum rather than a set of discrete methods. Mixing and matching concepts will be the best way to build the exact accidental magus you want.

Special Effects

With this method, the player builds a mage the same way he would a wizard in full control of his abilities. All the math of character creation and play works normally, and the "accidentalness" of the magery is strictly a role-playing factor. Instead of building someone as an accidental magus, the player makes it appear accidental "on screen" with descriptions and decisions during play.

Curses

Accidental magic doesn't have to be a benefit. The GM can have hours of fun at adventurer expense by inflicting one or more unknown supernatural effects. This can be a way of funding magical traits "on credit," or simply an aspect of the campaign.

Some spells that work well for this include Clumsiness, Continual Light (at inopportune moments), Foolishness, Itch, Spasm, Stench, and Truthsayer.

Disadvantages that mesh well with this idea include Cursed, Compulsive Behavior, Divine Curse, Frightens Animals, Increased Consumption, Lifebane, Nightmares, Phantom Voices, Sleepwalker, Unluckiness, and Weirdness Magnet.

Any kind of wizard works for this build of accidental magery, though it functions better in light-hearted or high-adventure campaigns where larger than life imagery work with the tone. The descriptions of this kind of caster skew toward the comedic and over-the-top, which can be lethal to the feel of a dramatic or horror game.

Pros of this method include:

- Simple character creation, requiring no house-ruling or other modifications to the rules as written.
- Increased flexibility for character creation.
- Players get the character they want with no restrictions.

Cons of this method include:

- No game mechanics to "enforce" the accidental nature of the magic.
- One character might get more time "on screen" than others, since longer and more colorful descriptions of action are key to the method.

Example: Jim wants to play an accidental magus in a high-fantasy adventure campaign. He stats out a normal wizard, complete with an arsenal of Air and Fire spells to lay down the eldritch smack on whatever monsters are handy. In play, though, Jim always follows up his firestorms with unusual Air spells – to reflect that he doesn't really get how his powers affect the environment around him. He also makes a voluntary

Will roll once per session, and casts a minor Fire or Air spell at inconvenient moments whenever he fails.

Great advantages and disadvantages for this method are those that abet the accidental roleplaying. Some advantages include Channeling, Clerical Investment (for divine casters or vampire hunters), Danger Sense, Destiny, Oracle, Telekinesis, Unusual Background, and Wild Talent. For disadvantages, try Clueless, Compulsive Behavior (possibly attached to triggers for spellcasting), Destiny, Divine Curse, Frightens Animals, Klutz (with the clumsiness triggered by magic, not lack of physical dexterity), Magic Susceptibility, Nightmares, or Weirdness Magnet.

Spell Selection

Building an accidental magus with this method still uses normal creation rules. Instead of relying on description, you choose spells or powers that could theoretically happen accidentally. Super power advantages often work well for this kind of wizard, since they can have more of an "accidental" feel while looking like a spell in play. The aegis remains on the player to make powers look and feel accidental. The build just makes it easier to do this consistently from session to session.

Like the special effects method, this works for most play styles but fits best in comedic and action-oriented campaigns. If using this for a darker or grittier game, it's best to choose subtle powers for the accidental magic. The adventurer's ignorance is more realistic when he's getting the occasional supernatural push rather than chucking fireballs around. It also makes his magic less noticeable to whatever enemies are lurking behind the secrets of the campaign.

Pros of this method include:

- Character abilities are chosen specifically to mesh with the idea of an accidental wizard.
- Character creation remains simple.
- On-sheet powers provide easy inspiration for in-play descriptions.

One con of this method is that the player may feel constrained by limited options.

One way can be learned by starting to see the magic in everything. Sometimes it seems to be hiding but it is always there. The more we can see the magic in one thing, a tiny flower, a mango, someone we love, then the more we are able to see the magic in everything and in everyone. Where does the mango stop and the sky begin?

– Joshua Kadison

Example: Carrie is playing a private investigator in a paranormal investigations campaign, with a supernatural origin for her successful career as a development arc for the game. She selects Danger Sense as an overt ability she can control, and spends points on Magery to give her accidental access to Sense Emotion and Truthsayer. Carrie and her GM decide that her hero has no idea that she casts these as spells, instead believing she's simply a gifted interrogator. If and how she discovers the truth, and what it means, will be a milestone in their game.

The best advantages for this method are subtler, or the kind of abilities most people write off as either cynical scams or harmless superstitions, such as Blessed, Clairsentience, Dominance, Empathy, Mana Damper, Mana Enhancer, Sensitive, Special Rapport, Spirit Empathy, and True Faith.

Good disadvantages can be the same kind of subtle effect, or a character trait that explains why a mage might not have full knowledge of his powers. Consider Clueless, Confused, Delusions (giving a "logical explanation" for what's happening around the adventurer), Frightens Animals, Mundane Background, Phantom Voices (which may or may not be real entities), and Weirdness Magnet.

Amnesia

When a mage takes Partial Amnesia (p. B123), the GM can reserve up to -30 points in secret disadvantages. For an accidental magus, he should reserve the points gained from those disadvantages and buy advantages, skills, and spells to reveal over the course of play. (This does not change the value of Partial Amnesia.)

With Partial Amnesia, assume that the person has specifically forgotten (or was never made aware of) everything to do with his magical abilities – and likely that magic even exists! – but is aware of the "mundane" aspects of his life. Alternatively, he could take Total Amnesia and be unaware of *anything* about his past.

Pros of this method include:

- Solid game mechanics supporting the character concept.
- In-game method for "buying off" access to powers as the adventurer discovers and masters his abilities.

One con of this method is that it involves a restrictive character build.

Example: Nanda is joining a martial-arts campaign. He and his GM decide his hero will play a "chosen one" role in the arc of the story. To this end, he takes Amnesia. The GM reserves -15 points for a horrible Destiny and then uses those points to buy appropriate magical powers for Nanda's adventurer to discover as his identity and role in the story are revealed.

Amnesia (Partial or Total) is the obvious disadvantage for this method, but Split Personality or even Cursed can be spun to achieve the same goal. Other good disadvantages provide hints about or problems resulting from the person's lost knowledge, such as Duties, Enemies, and Reputations he doesn't know about. Flashbacks and Nightmares can also provide hints and hindrances to add further fun and confusion.

Good advantages for an amnesiac accidental mage include the weird but subtle, traits that suggest something strange is going on but that don't spell out exactly what the adventurer is capable of. Some examples include Magic Resistance, Mana Enhancer, Plant Empathy, Psi Static, and Serendipity.

Limited Caster

Mages built using this method aren't mages at heart, but have some magical talent that helps them excel at their primary role. Players should use 70% to 80% of their character points to build an adventurer with a different theme, like a pirate, politician, or barbarian. Set aside the remaining points for supernatural advantages, super powers, and spells. Spend those points using one of the other methods above, as best fits the campaign and the player's plan for the character.

Pros of this method include:

- Hidden abilities aren't the only thing the adventurer can do.
- "Splits the difference" between game-mechanic control and creative expression.

The downside of this method is that doing two things at once often means doing neither well.

Example: Suki's newest character in a swashbuckling campaign is a raging bar fighter and brigand with the bulk of her points spent on fighting and athletic skills. However, she wants a deeper explanation for how she survives such reckless behavior in such dangerous environments. She sets aside 20 points for the GM to choose spells she accidentally activates under stress, using the amnesiac method. Her character doesn't know she does it, and the GM will handle the casting times and other minutia "behind the screen."

Appropriate advantages and disadvantages for this method are unlimited, determined mostly by the primary concept for the adventurer.

The Delusional Magus

It's possible to create a character with a suite of abilities that aren't magical, then tack on a Delusion that says they are. Imagine someone with Super Luck who *knows* he has to spend a full minute after invoking his ability thanking the voodoo spirits with an elaborate ritual. The delusion might require expensive "spell components," or simply give a penalty to reactions in any conversation where he might talk about his magic. In this case, it's not the magic that's accidental, it's the mundane causes of what the "wizard" can do.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Brick is a freelance writer whose 30-year gaming habit has included all four versions of *GURPS* and countless other systems. His work can be found in magazines worldwide. In his spare time, he enjoys travel, martial arts, and time with his family. Read more at his blog, brickcommajason.com.

THE GUARD OF THE BLACK LANDS

A MIDDLE-EASTERN ANTI-MAGIC ORGANIZATION FOR MONSTER HUNTERS

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

"Rakim, why are we here?" the young operative asked his team leader, obviously impatient to be watching the nighttime conflagration across the street. "This is a job for the fire brigade, surely. I have paperwork . . ."

"You have a date with a young lady, Mahmoud Hichem," the older man said, calmly sipping at the Styrofoam cup of tea he'd purchased from a nearby vendor: "And she will have to wait, as will you. This night may be quite illuminating."

"How so?" he asked, sighing.

"Consider the one fellow we have been watching? Foad Sulieman, whom we stopped from buying certain antiquities merely a month ago?"

"That sorry frog of a man? What of him?"

"That is his other apartment that burns, there," Rakim said, pointing to the top floor, now fully ablaze. "I have it on good authority that he succeeded in purchasing something he was looking for this very day."

"What was he trying to get?"

"Something they found in a tomb outside of Kom Ombo, well before either of us were born. The workers had the good sense to rebury it after the foreigners met an ugly end in the eastern deserts, but not before certain things were taken away. Among them was a curious stone egg . . ."

"You don't mean . . ." Mahmoud began to ask, but then the roof of the building collapsed, sending a massive gout of fire and sparks upward. In the traceries of bright light, one could almost make out the face of a large, birdlike animal, stretching its wings and opening its beak with what was either a trick of the fire, or a newborn roar.

"I do," Rakim said, handing the cup of tea to his flabbergasted subordinate, and then taking out his cell phone. "We will need to call for reinforcements, I think. A newly hatched benu bird in downtown Cairo could cause many problems. But after tonight, you will be able to say you sprayed fire retardant at a phoenix and lived, my young friend."

"Insha'Allah," Mahmoud Hichem said, having a sip of the older man's tea.

In Islam, magic is *ḥarām* – forbidden – and not without good reason. Magic often brings nothing but pain and suffering to those around the magician, and eventually hellfire to his soul. It corrupts, destroys, perverts, and debases. It must be rooted out, contained, and stopped at all costs, before its evil infects the minds of others with its seductive lure.

If the existence of magic must be hidden from the world, the Guard of the Black Lands (*El Haras al Khem*) are just the people to do it. The Guard formed in Egypt to deal with the strange things that crawled up out of that country's sands from time to time. The group has also ventured into other places in the Middle East and elsewhere. Wherever they go, the goal is the same: Seek out magicians and monsters, stop them by any means necessary, confiscate and collect whatever artifacts they can for study or destruction, and destroy all proof that anything happened.

Of course, this is much easier said than done, and the Guard has the personnel turnover to prove it, providing an "in" for PCs from that area to get involved. The GM could use the Guard in his monster-hunters campaigns as the PCs' organization, a group of allies or rivals, or even an enemy, depending on how magical – or inhuman – the players' monster hunters are.

A history of the group and details of their current operations are included in the article, along with character-creation tips, and some starter stories for the GM to use.

OUT OF THE SANDS

Egypt's storied antiquity has always been something of a double-edged sword for its people. The rich treasures of its past have brought international fame and millions of tourists, but it's rather galling for a predominantly Muslim country to have to rely on pagan artifacts for a great deal of their tourism industry. Some highly pious people have gone as far as to declare that the temples of old should be stomped down into the dust, so that Egypt can finally escape its spiritually dangerous past.

If only they knew how dangerous it actually was.

The truth is that the sands of Egypt aren't just full of hidden gold, imposing statues, and expertly preserved cadavers. The area has been a nexus point for otherworldly energies since before the time of the first pharaohs. Some of these eldritch powers were investigated, and shaped the myth cycles of the ancient peoples of that area, but some of them were judged too aberrant and dangerous to be dealt with.

The mightiest of the pre-pharaonic sorcerers put up long-standing wards against the more terrifying and soul-destroying of energies, and hid them up and down the Nile. The plan was that special guardians would tend to them, and see that their powers were renewed and replenished. Unfortunately, as the centuries went on, and records – and the ones who kept them – were obliterated by proud, new pharaohs intent on erasing one another from existence, the increasing ignorance meant that fewer of the wards were properly maintained.

When the gradually weakened wards would temporarily falter during certain times of the year, loathsome tendrils of the Darkness would slip through. They would impregnate minds susceptible to evil temptations with visions of magic, and rouse hidden and hungry monsters from their slumber. Time and again these incursions would be fought by what magical champions could be mustered, but the ferocity of the battle meant that not all survived to tell of what they knew. So the ignorance festered.

The last written record of where all the known wards lay vanished not long after the fall of the pharaohs, and the stories were handed ear to mouth. They became prone to exaggeration or falsity. Most of the descendents of the pharaonic sorcerers' youngest apprentices willingly forgot such things when they wholeheartedly embraced Islam. Many of those who wished to retain their old ways fled ahead of the men of the Prophet – taking their pagan magic with them.

Some, however, learned to mask their mysticism within the voluminous folds of the faith. These Arabian sorcerers walked a dangerous line, holding to the faith in public and maintaining their true nature at night, in secret. Meanwhile, the more knowledgeable and brave among them tended to what few wards they could still find, ensuring that they held against the Darkness, and preventing those touched by that Darkness from damaging them further.

ANCIENT DARKNESS, MODERN LIGHT

This state of affairs held for ages, until the later parts of the 19th century, when foreign scientists and historians began the wholesale exploitation of the hidden riches of Egypt's past. The few remaining sorcerers of the land did their best to keep the wards safe, but even they could only do so much for so long – especially when the archaeologists were aided by Darkness-touched humans.

A few long-hidden tombs and monuments were yet preserved, but the damage was done. More tendrils of the Darkness than ever before slipped into the world, and much more often, so that many more humans were infected with sinister dreams and dangerous magics. Monsters walked the earth again, seeking to find and kill the sorcerers who had dared stand against them.

It would not be until halfway through the 20th century, when Egypt's independence was finally won from foreign powers, that a possible cure for the evil powers would be found. In the turmoil and intrigue of the new republic, as numerous factions vied for power or influence, Gamal Abdel Nasser – one of the leaders of the revolution and current prime minister – was secretly contacted by a well-placed, but highly secretive man who wished to warn him against a dangerous organization he knew nothing about.

At this meeting, the charismatic fellow, who introduced himself as Farooq bin Abdullah al Din, told Nasser the story of the ancient Darkness and the sorcerers who fought against it. He spoke of the many people who had been touched by that acidic evil, and were working to destroy what he and his fellow revolutionaries had just created.

Finally, he introduced him to a man – Faisal – whom he claimed was one of those sorcerers. The prime minister was quite skeptical, and the subsequent fiery demonstration of what they were up against enraged him, rather than quelled his doubts. Farooq could only swear before Allah, the Prophet, and all things seen and hidden that he spoke only the truth.

No Magicians Here, My Friend

Under Islamic law, “sorcery” is an actual crime. It is this point of law that gives the Guard of the Black Lands its authority. People are generally free to practice what they will, in their own homes at least. However, when someone uses “magic” for money, it becomes a prosecutable offense akin to charlatanism or low-grade medical fraud. It is often punished with jail time, though some Muslim countries put convicted magicians to death.

In Egypt, where jail awaits the convicted sorcerer, the police have their hands full trying to investigate reports of magic use. Many Egyptians refuse to seek psychiatric help, because of the social stigma of insanity, so sorcerers can make a lot of money “treating” people's minor complaints. Most of these “cures” are physically harmless, occult-flavored flummery, but every so often, the real deal can be found, and may not always be done out of enlightened self-interest.

Further, he told Nasser that, within three days, an attempt would be made upon his life by a deluded servant of the Darkness, but that he would be protected from what would otherwise be certain death.

The meeting took place on October 23, 1954. Three days later, at a massive speech in Alexandria, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood fired eight shots at Nasser while he was speaking. The gun was only 25' away, and yet each bullet missed. As Nasser collected himself and called for calm, he saw the sorcerer, Faisal, standing in the crowd. The man saluted him and then vanished, leaving Nasser to launch into one of the most important speeches of his career and Egypt's history.

Not long thereafter, during the inevitable post-assassination-attempt crackdown, Farooq was given a position within the General Intelligence Service, and ordered to report directly to Nasser. Rather than get comfortable at the GIS' offices, Farooq took funds, information, and material, and set up shop at an old family holding in Giza, not far from the Great Pyramid itself. Once in the estate, now known as the Fortress of the Faith (*Al-Qasr Al-Din*), Farooq named his group the Guard of the Black Lands – referencing one of the many names of Egypt (Al-Khem).

He also recruited and trained his first group of lieutenants, who then brought in the operatives needed to truly make the Guard. The fledgling group soon handed Nasser a great deal of actionable material, which the president used when it was politically expedient. Eventually, however, he requested that he only be alerted if it was extremely serious, a direct danger to his administration, or bound up in foreign relations.

When Nasser died, in 1970, the newly installed Anwar Sadat enacted a policy of ridding his government of ardent Nasser loyalists. Thankfully, the Guard had made a number of very high-placed friends, and they ensured that Farooq and his men disappeared into the bureaucracy of the GIS. He also had the good fortune to have worked with newly installed Vice President Hosni Mubarak when the man was commander of the Egyptian Air Force. After Sadat's unfortunate

assassination in 1981, Hosni Mubarak became president, and the Guard enjoyed a long period of being in officially unofficial favor.

EMBRACING YOUR CALLING

The Guard is still very much an artifact of 1970s, Cold War Egyptian realpolitik, though a few modifications have been made to fit the changing times.

They primarily recruit male Muslim Arabs, mostly from the ranks of Egypt's police, emergency services, military, and intelligence agencies. They also look for quiet but dedicated academic types and unorthodox but sensibly silent religious students for their analysis wing. In recent years, they've started recruiting women and non-Arabs, especially for their work in Europe, but they remain firm on the requirement that they be Muslim.

Their ideal candidates are young, pious, and do not have much in the way of family ties – the last being something of a rarity in this part of the world. They prefer them to be politically neutral, even apathetic, with no ties to organized crime or questionable organizations. They also like people who were – or are about to be – removed from their posts for having seen something weird and not being willing to let it go when their superiors tell them to just forget it.

Such persons are vetted by a lieutenant of the Guard. This consists of following the selectee and making discreet inquiries among friends, contacts, and co-workers. Truly ideal candidates soon realize they're being watched, and try to turn the tables on their watcher, which leads to a quiet meeting with Farooq's chief lieutenant, Muzzammil. Even if they don't notice, they might still be granted an interview to determine if they're suitable, or should merely be threatened into silence.

The interview involves leading questions, not-so-gentle queries about what got them in trouble with their former bosses, and lots of tea. As the interview progresses, the candidate is urged to speak of the strange things he saw.

The Leaders of the Guard

Farooq bin Abdullah al Din is an old man now, but he moves and speaks with the vigor of someone only a third of his age. He wears his silver hair short and close-cropped, prefers form-fitting black suits with roomy, leather vests, and walks with a silver-inlaid cane he really doesn't need. Woe betide anyone who thinks him frail or weak-minded: He can hit a bullseye with a silver knife from 50' away (he carries 10 on his person, in his vest) and can accurately finish other people's sentences for them. He also has an uncanny way of knowing the things someone would rather not say, as though he could see into their minds.

He has 10 lieutenants, few of whom have been with him for more than 15 years, given massive attrition. Muzzammil al Ghali is his senior lieutenants of 30 years, and best resembles a bull that was turned into a man but got stuck somewhere along the way. His thuggish exterior hides a quick mind and an eye for detail, both of which probably account for his uncanny longevity in this dangerous profession.

Faisal Nizar Abdul-Musawwir bin Rahim al Zaki, the leader of the Guard's family of sorcerers, is a rail-thin fellow with what could be called pharaonic features, and burning, hollow eyes. Like all members of his small family, he is of indeterminate age; no one could say how old he, his wife Muna, their children Mohammed and Taslim, or his cousin Thawban truly are.

The sorcerers speak a language that was dead before the raising of Heliopolis, seemingly go for minutes without blinking, and occasionally hiss at one another when they're angry. They supervise the Guard's sages as they catalogue the books, scrolls, objects, and creatures that the operatives bring back to them. However, when they descend into the bowels of the Fortress to lock up or destroy those same things, they do so alone. They leave the Fortress only to replenish the known wards (once a year, like clockwork), try to locate lost ones, and deal with things too powerful, dangerous, or large for others to handle.

An ideal contender refuses to do more than obliquely hint at what was seen, or tries to subtly trick Muzzammil into revealing what *he* knows.

Farooq always listens in by remote, and will signal to Muzzammil whether to let the candidate go, make him a genuine offer, or string him along as a possible dupe. Those who make the cut are told that “they” will be in touch, quietly observed for another week, and then called out of the blue, picked up, and taken to the Fortress. If they can make it through the tour without losing their minds, or looking too enraptured with what they see, Muzzammil, will introduce them to Farooq for a final look-over, and then hopefully welcome them to the Guard, so that training can begin.

THE WORK OF THE RIGHTEOUS

The primary goal of the Guard sounds deceptively simple – make certain that the masses never know how endangered by magic they really are. Doing this requires specialized knowledge, as well as government, police, and intelligence contacts. It also requires a finger on the pulse of the Middle East, and the long-lost, last remaining, and sadly incomplete map of the ancient wards. Between himself and his lieutenants, Farooq has this mostly covered, though his government contacts aren’t what they used to be anymore. (See *The Spring of Troubles*, p. 34)

An ideal situation goes as follows: An investigation into sorcery turns up something more than charlatanism, the Guard’s sages sense something otherworldly, or someone is sighted doing something magical. Operatives are sent, both to deal with the problem and gauge how many people actually saw it. The problem is dealt with, and the evidence is taken back to the Fortress for analysis, containment, and possible destruction. Whatever cannot be taken back is eradicated in the field, and witnesses are silenced one way or another. Needless to say, things rarely go that smoothly, but fortune favors the bold and the righteous – sometimes.

Generally speaking, if police investigating charges of sorcery encounter something more than mere swindling, the Guard is contacted. Operatives come in and take the case from the overworked officers, and then take the accused to a special holding facility in the near-endless basements of the Fortress. The Guard then reviews witness testimony, sifts through the evidence, and turns the home of the accused upside down to look for real magic.

Depending on what they find, the accused will either be summarily dealt with, locked up for a long time, or let go with a stern warning to mend his ways, and a promise that the Guard will be in touch. Such unfortunates may be used as dupes in future busts, or merely watched to see where their paths may lead.

When operating in other countries in the Muslim Middle East, the Guard cannot simply stride in and take over an investigation. They occasionally act under the aegis of the GIS in order to expedite matters, but they will have to couch their activities in such a way that the GIS can legitimately explain their presence. For example, hunting a flesh-eating *ghul* through

Making GURPS Monster Hunters

The Guard can best be described as a strike team operation, with most of its operatives being out in the field, dealing with situations, and a few researchers remaining at the Fortress to analyze, contain, or destroy what they bring back.

Guard PCs invariably have the operative lens (*GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*, p. 8), with Secret [-10] and Sense of Duty (Organization) [-10]. The Guard is their Patron, which has Light Influence and a Large Budget [20]. Prior to the Arab Spring turning Egypt’s government upside down, they enjoyed a Heavy Influence with that same budget [30].

Most field operatives are commandos, crusaders, sleuths, or warriors. No inhumans, psis, or witches will be considered. They string along experiments and use them as dupes. They have sages and techies, though they tend to stay back at the Fortress. They only venture into the fray if their talents are needed on something too big to move, or too time-sensitive to wait for a retrieval.

The mysticism of the crusaders is always couched within the framework of Islam. Any of the Mysticism abilities listed in *Monster Hunters 1* (pp. 43-45) that smack of necromancy might be hard to justify to Farooq, though not impossible.

Tripoli would be nearly impossible to convince local authorities about, so they must say he’s an anti-governmental activist with a penchant for serial murder instead.

When in non-Muslim countries, they have to keep a very low profile, and operate with the understanding that they have nothing to fall back on if they’re caught. Usually, they only travel to such places to follow leads within the Muslim communities, pursue fugitives or dangerous creatures hiding within them, and buy, steal, or destroy extremely unsafe artifacts from museums, private collections, and secret auctions. On such trips, they often masquerade as religious scholars or nosy tourists, depending on their qualifications and the overall investigation.

In truth, the real battle is not with magicians, creatures, or the events themselves, but with the minds of the actual witnesses. Ideally, those who see extraordinary events will be so freaked out that the operatives can tell them just about anything. Unfortunately, that doesn’t always work so well – especially when the incident leaves a ruined home or dead family members.

In the old days, prior to the Arab Spring, witnesses who wouldn’t swallow the story, and refused to keep quiet, would be bribed, threatened, and finally locked up indefinitely on trumped up charges. After some time in prison, they might be willing to be silent, or else have been so traumatized by the ordeal that their memories would have become quite pliable.

While brutal, this was seen as a preferable alternative to murder, which operatives still only do as an absolute last resort – “blood calls for blood,” as they say. But these days – with the police less willing to lock up a man who insists his wife was smashed flat by a *jinn*-possessed statue of Thutmose III – the best alternative with those who will not forget is to try and bring them into the Guard somehow. This has led to a number of “charity prisoners” at the Fortress, who will either be staying there until their deaths, or else find a way to work for Farooq in some capacity.

TALES OF THE DESERT NIGHTS

One of the great things about running a monster-hunters campaign in Egypt is that it could be a truly cosmopolitan one, given that the area has always been a crossroads of countries, continents, and cultures. In addition to the “normal” creatures you’d expect from such a setting (mummies and *jinn* and *ghuls*, oh my!) and the tendrils of Darkness that the Guard have been fighting all this time, it’s an ideal stomping ground for all kinds of entities.

The Mediterranean brings creatures of Greek and Roman mythology, and beyond that old Europe with its many strange beings – some now more mobile than ever before. Northern Africa is home to countless native monsters and myths, as is the Sub-Saharan area of the continent, and the eastern portions of Asia are not that far away, either. All of them could be attracted to the Darkness, either to serve it obediently, or else see what it has to offer them.

The Healer of Old Cairo

The police have arrested an old woman for sorcery, but a few things in the case don’t add up. While she appears to be nothing but a charlatan, she *did* heal the arresting officer of her gout on the way down the stairs. When interrogated by operatives, she swears that she started this trickery to make money, at first, but soon realized she was healing people and simply doubled her fee.

Does she unknowingly possess a charm of some kind? Is a *jinn* (or something else) hanging around her apartment? Has she been blessed by Allah, or touched by the Darkness? Or is something in her old, run-down apartment building to blame? The operatives will have to find out.

The Spring of Troubles

Prior to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, Farooq had a reliable influence in Egypt’s government and intelligence community. Hosni Mubarak was an ally, and many within his administration were happy to slip him information, hide inconvenient facts, and get the wheels spinning – or stopped. The Guard also had allies in the State Security Investigations Service (SSIS), who kept Farooq apprised of strange occurrences, both foreign and domestic, and made certain that anything too weird was sent to him to deal with.

Unfortunately, after the revolution, allies outside of the GIS mostly evaporated. Farooq has tried his best to make “friends” in Egyptian Homeland Security, which replaced the SSIS, but it’s been slow going. Worse, every time he thought he had a handle on the new government, the story changed, and with it the placement of the allies he was grooming.

As of recent months, the situation seems to have gelled enough that he can begin making friends with the new president’s people. He’s a bit worried, given that the fellow is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, but he’s relying on the discretion of the people who surround him to see the Guard through this latest change of fortune. So long as the GIS remains mostly intact, the Guard will continue, *insha’Allah*.

Mummy Season

They say you can’t dig anywhere along the Nile without hitting a tomb, and some days, they’re right. A late-night construction crew in 6th of October City (a suburb 19 miles from downtown Cairo) dug into a very large mass burial chamber. While the foreman was calling the government to inform them, the occupants awoke and started eating the workers. It appears the mummies were cursed for some reason.

Farooq ordered the police to declare a toxic spill and evacuate the entire area, but the awakened cadavers didn’t all care to stay near their tomb. The operatives will have to fan out through the subdivision, and hunt down what might be over 100 intelligent, unhappy, and very hungry mummies. They’re going to need luck, the blessings of Allah, and shotguns – lots of them.

*The Guard of the Black Lands
may be a splinter group of
the Keepers (see pp. 10-15).*

Finding the Eye of Ptah

Long ago, a magnificent artifact was unearthed from a tomb some distance from Abu Simbel, along the Nile: a blue gem in a gold setting said to represent the eye of Ptah, the god that created the world. A stunningly beautiful piece, it was quickly snatched up by the archaeologists. They were robbed in turn, and then those thieves were robbed, and those thieves again, until no one could say where the Eye was.

Faisal has just received word that the Eye has at last been found, and it’s being auctioned in Paris in a week’s time. The private auction house reputedly caters to well-to-do art collectors who aren’t always concerned about the legality of their acquisitions. The place is crawling with guards, has the best electronic security money can buy, and has apparently paid Interpol to look the other way.

The sorcerers want the Eye of Ptah, as it is said to be one of the lost wards. So a team of operatives will be traveling to Paris to retrieve it, however they can. They won’t be alone in this, though. The Darkness knows that the Eye is there, and will be sending its own infernal agents to destroy it, which has made this mission a true race against time.

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.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys allowed for the possibility of players guiding the course of the game. Here, then, is another idea inspired by the philosophy of that expansion (and making use of it in the certain specifics) that is particularly apt in many secretive-magic games.

*The universe is full of
magical things patiently
waiting for our wits
to grow sharper.*

– Edén Phillpotts,
A Shadow Passes

COMMON (FUTURE) SENSE

Everyone who's ever seen a fortune-teller shop with an "out of business" sign on it has probably thought, "They should have seen it coming." This same idea arises in-game: Why is someone with a far-seeing precognitive ability often taken by surprise by life? Here is one way to rectify that, in a way that should be balanced enough not to be disruptive, but interesting enough to prove useful.

If someone has an ability that permits modifying future actions based on glimpses of his potential fate, the GM may permit him to use it *retroactively*. This would enable him to mysteriously, yet explicably have what he needs to deal with a specific bit of misfortune. Obvious abilities for which this option would apply are Precognition (p. B77), Divination (*GURPS Magic*, p. 108), Retrocognition (*GURPS Psionic Powers*, p. 38), and Path of Chance (for Ritual Path magic, from the *GURPS Monster Hunters* series). Danger Sense would *not* apply, since it doesn't allow enough of a gap between the sense that something's going to go awry and when it happens. This isn't a

comprehensive list, and any player whose hero has an ability, item, or resource that might enable him to use this method can broach the possibility with the GM; get creative!

Here are some broad strokes to use this method. The GM should tweak the specifics depending on the precognitive ability being used.

1. At any point a hero finds himself in trouble, he can say that he tried to see this coming, and make a roll on his future-seeing method. This roll should generally require a *critical success*; it's happening outside the usual bounds of space-time – from the player's perspective – and it's giving the player a large amount of control over specifics of the GM's adventure. (Here is where *Buying Success* from pp. 4-5 of *Power-Ups 5* should prove invaluable.) If the ability doesn't normally need a roll, the GM may well require the hero to make an IQ roll or similar check, to see if he interpreted the omens correctly. (It's the GM's discretion whether this not-usually-needed roll requires a critical success or just a regular one.)

2. If that future-seeing roll is successful, the player can describe any *reasonable* preparations he would have made to address this (present-time) situation based on that ("past") information. Again, it's the GM's discretion what "reasonable" is, but "able to be explained in a single lungful of air" is a good benchmark. "My vision tells me to have worn a bulletproof vest today" is perfectly fine, but "My vision gives me enough insight to hire a contracting crew, dig elaborate pits in my yard, acquire six tigers, train them to attack on command, and . . ." is outside the bounds.

3. Once the *immediate* situation has passed, any expenses or component costs for the future-seeing ability and the physical preparations retroactively made because of it must be paid immediately (if possible). This includes any fatigue or other self-damaging costs incurred by the divination method – such are the vagaries of time-space. If the precognitive method cannot be paid immediately, the GM and player should sort out how the hero resolves this! Again, it's the GM's discretion for what the *immediate* situation is, but as a guideline, paying for that precognitive ability shouldn't place him in a *worse* situation than the one he faced before he did his future-seeing flashback! Even though costs are paid in the "present," those costs are based on the circumstances where the diviner made his divination roll.

For example, if the future-seer retroactively says he made his roll in his workshop in a high-mana area and the GM agrees with it, then costs are based on those circumstances . . . not the low-mana improvised hellhole he finds himself in.

Sauce for the Goose . . .

Even though this is a powerful use of precognition, it would also make a good ability for villains in many campaigns. How do they escape time and again to harass the heroes? It's like they *knew* what was going to happen . . .

LIMITATIONS

There are a few limiting factors.

- The precog *must* have had an opportunity to have used the future-seeing ability at some point in the past, within the ability's limitations. Thus, if the hero acquires a ritual that enables him to see the future on the night of the full moon, he can't use this method until he's actually experienced a full moon (and thus had some period in his past to inject the flashback).

- Similarly, the precog must have had the time and opportunity to actually perform the preparations in question; the GM may require any rolls needed to provide his future-self with aid. As an example, the standard Precognition advantage only allows for visions up to a week in the future (since the power of the critical success is being "used" to power the flashback). If the hero is captured and kept in a jail cell for a month and then attempts a jailbreak, he is limited to squeezing in aid from a week he was in jail. That might still be enough to convince the guard to hide a weapon for him (although that'd probably require a successful Persuasion roll).

- Finally, any "future aid" provided can't contradict the gaming world already experienced by the hero, GM, and other participants. Thus, "I make sure to keep a dagger hidden in my boot" would probably be fine, as would "I visited this warehouse a week ago and hid a block of C4 in the rafters." However, "I make sure I'm carrying around a satchel of explosives" probably wouldn't be, since the other PCs (and GM) would have had an opportunity to notice that the hero had a bag of bombs before his "flashback" introduced them.

EXAMPLES

Example 1: During a dungeon adventure, Tim is bitten by a highly venomous snake; he has only seconds left to live! Fortunately, Tim is a Fire mage who also has a Divination spell. He asks the GM if he can use Divination retroactively, and the GM agrees. Tim receives the critical success he needs with his pyromancy ability. He says when the heroes were at camp yesterday, he took the opportunity to cast a divination on himself and discovered he would be bitten. Then, when everyone was shopping in town before today's adventure, he stopped by an apothecary and requested an anti-venom for this specific type of snake. The GM agrees that this is reasonable, and doesn't see any conflicts with how everyone experienced

the adventure. He requests a social-interaction roll from Tim to see how suspicious he made the apothecary (which won't have any affect on his immediate situation, but might make life more challenging when they return to the village). Back in the present, Tim pulls out the antidote he "coincidentally" had and takes a drink; his immediate danger having subsided, he now needs to pay the mana cost on the Divination.

Example 2: Cassandra Marie-Sue is a psychic who finds herself betrayed by her long-time lover, Trey Tor. The wicked man now wields a ceremonial dagger and is intent on sacrificing her to his dark gods. Cassandra gets the critical success she needs on her Prognostication 1, and claims she had a vision about five days ago that something like this might happen. She wants to have given herself some weapons and protection ahead of time, but the GM can't see an opportunity for that; Cassandra and Trey have been together for the past several days and intimate during that time, so he would have seen armor, weapons, etc. She then asks if she could have called some allies instead, asking them to arrive at this spooky mansion in a nick of time. The GM rules this is reasonable and doesn't contradict what's gone before. Suddenly, Cassandra's cavalry bursts through the door, surprising Trey and causing him to drop his dagger. The immediate threat dispelled, Cassandra needs to pay 2 FP (for her successful Prognostication) . . . and the battle is joined!

GAME USE

Even if the GM permits the use of retroactive precognition, he can still instill any types of limitations needed to keep this from getting out of hand. Perhaps being able to do this is a perk (which explains why all precogs don't micromanage their lives). Perhaps it's limited in some fashion – say, only once per *adventure*. It might even require the spending of character points even if the hero rolls the required critical successes naturally; see *Power-Ups 5* for a more general discussion on influencing the game world and controlling the flow of points.

The GM might also temper the need to control it based on how often it's relied upon. Using this as a one-off way to keep the heroes in the game might be free, but as a regular part of their arsenal, it might require more restrictions.

The GM should remember that heroes with future-seeing abilities often spent a number of points on them – points could have been spent instead on other abilities that might have proven more useful or more disruptive to the campaign. By permitting retroactive preparations, the GM should not think that he's letting a hero "get away" with something if the character has already spent 20+ points laying the foundation to do so!

ABOUT THE EDITOR

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

ODDS AND ENDS

ANYTHING FOR POWER

by William H. Stoddard

Students at Worminghall University (*GURPS Locations: Worminghall*) pursue the medieval tradition of *image magic*, a scholastic approach, where Symbol Drawing (Image Magic) is used to gain bonuses to spell casting rolls. Each spell has its own diagram, representing the planetary influences and other affinities that favor it, and calling upon them.

Some mages aren't content with this slow, safe approach. They look for shortcuts to power – and sometimes find them in the grimoires of *ritual magic*.

Symbol Drawing (European Ritual Magic) isn't a *boost* to magical power; it's a *source* of magical power (see p. B224 for the distinction). Its symbols are the names or the sigils of spirits. Casting a ritual magic spell means invoking a spirit and asking for its aid. The ritual represents, among other things, the formal courtesies required for such a request. If the request isn't presented acceptably, the aid will be denied (a failure) and the request may even be punished (a critical failure, and often a cause for Fright Checks). The effective skill of the caster is the lesser of his skill with the particular spell and his skill with Symbol Drawing (European Ritual Magic).

This form of Symbol Drawing can be aided by taking extra time (p. B346); given the dangers, ritualists who are even partly sane do take that time! Spirits also respond to sacrifices. These amount to bribes, and provide bonuses equal to those from a bribe offered to a Contact (pp. B44-45). However, each spirit wants bribes in a specific form, and with appropriate presentation, which demands a Ritual Magic roll. The darker spirits expect blood sacrifices! Bonuses from sacrifices, unlike bonuses from extra time, benefit *both* the Symbol Drawing roll and the roll to cast the spell.

Ritual magic can be used, in principle, to cast most of the standard spells. But most practitioners prefer to cast spells that aren't part of image magic: necromantic spells, curses, and Divination (Crystal-Gazing or Gastromancy) – see the appendix to *Worminghall* for the full list.

Necromantic spells, in particular, offer ways to communicate with spirits and thus to recruit new spirits into one's service. (Identifying an appropriate servant may call for a roll against Hidden Lore (Demon Lore or Spirit Lore.) Such research can also be conducted by questioning a person who acts as a voice for the spirit, through the benefit of Channeling or Medium, or by being the subject of the spell Divination (Gastromancy).

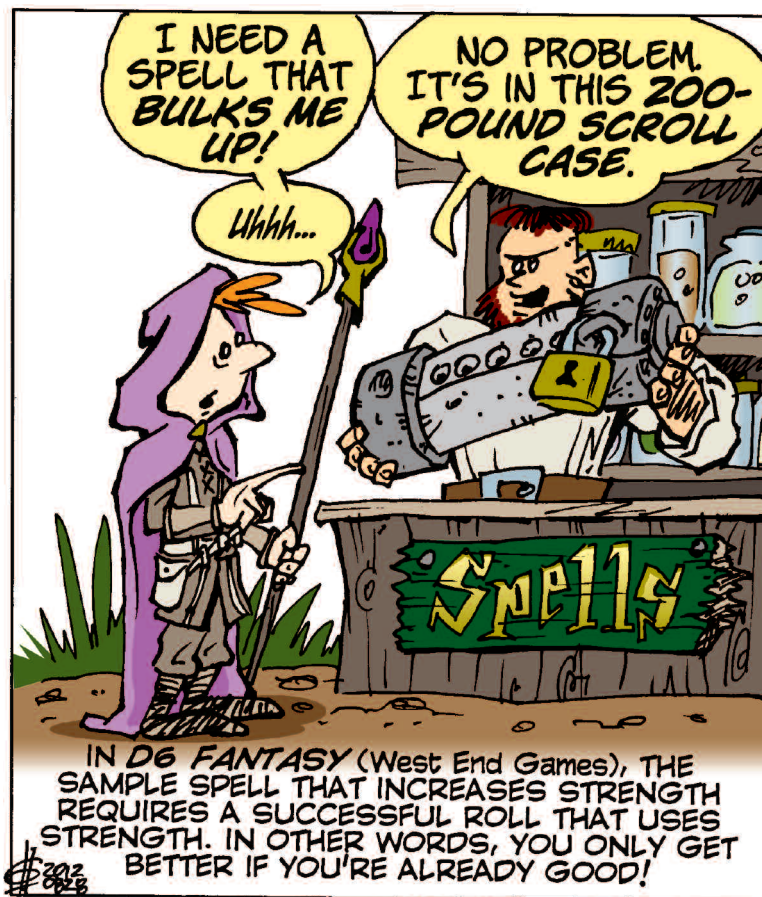
Getting the spirit to leave again can be a problem! Ritual mages often study Exorcism for their own

protection, even though few of them avoid the -4 penalty for lacking holy support.

The Church forbids ritual magic because it involves "praying" to spirits for help and even offering them sacrifices – violating the commandment against worshipping other gods. This condemnation also applies to mediums and channels. Some theologians consider the ritual mage's Magery, which enables him to make spirits listen to his prayers, as a specialized form of mediumship. Orthodox doctrine holds that all the spirits who answer such appeals are demons and deceivers. Despite the risks and costs, some mages will do anything to gain knowledge or power.

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



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

APPENDIX Z

ONOMANCY

BY JASON “PK” LEVINE

“But I unsaid the name. You don’t need to die now.”

*“I do. My time is done.” Jaqen passed a hand down his face from forehead to chin, and where it went he **changed**.*

– George R.R. Martin, *A Clash of Kings*

Identities have power. Most people are tied to a single *self*, living their entire lives in a fixed mold. But some are free of such restrictions, able to live apart from society and without a name or a known face. For these “ghosts,” identities are voluntary – a costume or mask to put on, used, and discarded at will . . . or maintained, to build great magical power via *onomancy*.

In addition to Magery, *onomancy* requires Zeroed (p. B100) with the special enhancement *Cosmic, Onomancy* (+300%). The latter allows the “ghost” to relinquish false identities *thoroughly* (as explained below), while the combination of the two grants him potent magical energy from doing so.

WEARING THE MASK

As with any zeroed character, an onomancer does not have to maintain any sort of identity . . . but may *choose* to do so, committing to it for the long term. This does not magically supply documentation, records, or memories; the onomancer is responsible for coming up with fake ID, hacking government systems, and so on. Until this identity has been maintained for 25 consecutive days without issue, there is nothing special about it, and the rules under *Removing the Mask* (below) do not apply.

While living as a given identity, he must adopt it *thoroughly*; though the whole thing is technically a lie, it’s a lie that he must live in full. If asked for his name, he cannot give a different one, nor can he even hint to anyone else that this identity is false or that he’s been known by different names. If the onomancer accidentally breaks these rules, his current identity loses any metaphysical power it had stored. Should he want to reestablish it, he must maintain it for *another* 25 days without making such a mistake.

REMOVING THE MASK

Once an onomancer has kept up an identity for 25+ days, he may take a Concentrate maneuver to shed it *or* he can abandon it as a free action at the end of casting a spell (when the energy is required). Doing so grants him energy for *this* spell equal to (number of consecutive days the identity was maintained properly)-25; e.g., an identity maintained for a year would grant 340 energy!

However, the identity is relinquished *to the universe itself forever*. The onomancer is forgotten by *everyone*, even friends, foes, and family. He maintains his appearance, but memories, records, and everything else are retroactively altered to remember the old identity as being a different person. This even applies to any false names or temporary identities he may have used in the past; he loses *all* ties with the world.

There are exceptions. Anyone who can clearly see the onomancer when he drops his identity may roll against the better of Will or Per. Success means they remember who he is, and have an idea of what just happened. (Thus, a PC onomancer should try to *always* drop his identity when the rest of the party is present!) As well, if the “re-zeroed” onomancer is in a situation that could only have applied to the old identity (e.g., if he drops his identity while in a prison cell), anyone realizing this gets the same roll.

Social Traits

Things get complicated when the onomancer has Allies, Dependents, Enemies, or Patrons, as those traits may no longer apply. (But they may; e.g., if they saw the onomancer drop his identity and made their rolls *or* if the onomancer had told them ahead of time to shift their loyalty to this “new person.”) Some Dependents still apply even if they’ve forgotten the onomancer, if he still has an obligation to protect them (GM’s call). Status and Reputation are *always* lost, as may be traits like Social Regard and Social Stigma, depending on the specifics.

Total up the point value of all social traits that are no longer relevant. If negative, it’s the GM’s responsibility to come up with new Enemies or other social disadvantages equal to the value (or close to it). If positive, the onomancer is allowed to later “re-spend” those points on new Allies, Patrons, Status, etc., if he can justify doing so in play. For more on building relationship advantages, see *GURPS Social Engineering*. Alternatively, the GM may allow (or require!) the player to devote points from those social traits to the spell being cast; if so, each character point spent (which is then gone forever) adds 25 energy.

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Reverend Jason “PK” Levine is the Assistant *GURPS* Line Editor . . . right now. Who he was in previous days is none of your concern.

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