


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/68 June '14

NATURAL MAGIC

THE MAGIC DESERT by Matt Riggsby

MAGIC OF THE SHADED WOODLANDS
by Paul Stefko

ARS METALLICA
by William H. Stoddard

GREEN POWER
by Michele Armellini

DARK OF THE WOODS
by David L. Pulver

DESIGNER'S NOTES:
WILDERNESS ADVENTURES
by Sean Punch

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The “cycle of life” can be magic, viewed from a certain way . . . and so can magic be viewed as part of the cycle of life! This month’s *Pyramid* ponders the intersection of the natural and magical worlds.

The dunes of the *Magic Desert* sparkle with more than sunlight. Join your guide Matt Riggsby – author of *GURPS Locations: Hellsgate* – as he reveals the secrets of the supernatural sands, including flora, fauna, weather, landscape features, and *GURPS* stats for a half-dozen threats your fantastic heroes might encounter.

The mysteries of the *Magic of the Shaded Woodlands* are finally revealed to outsiders! Learn a new magical style, new magic items, and three new spells for the dark elves of *GURPS Banestorm* (and applicable to any sinister forest denizens). Become acquainted with one of the style’s practitioners – with full *GURPS* stats – and get adventure hooks to add the Defenders to your domains.

Gain the grace of copper, the swiftness of mercury, or the might of tin by enhancing the natural abilities and affinities of metals from master magician William H. Stoddard, author of *GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers*. Discover the key skill variation plus 40 magical *GURPS* effects that pursuers of *Ars Metallica* can create from the seven “planetary” metals.

The new regime and the old order collide in the *Dark of the Woods*, this month’s Eidetic Memory from *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* author David L. Pulver. History, current events, and key people are described in this systemless adventure outline featuring a wealthy merchant’s daughter and a nature-worshipping cult.

Michele Armellini – author of *GURPS Locations: St. George’s Cathedral* – uses the *GURPS Powers* framework to present 14 new forest-related abilities that draw on *Green Power*. It also provides the forest guardian lens, suitable for those who watch the wilds.

The wilderness is always better with a guide! Sean Punch – author of the mega-popular *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures* – points out the perils and potential of outdoor adventuring in *Designer’s Notes: Wilderness Adventures*. You’ll also get new elemental druid, high druid, and life-force wizard lenses for *Dungeon Fantasy*, plus tips on variant Talents, determining nature’s strength, and distinguishing each new character type.

This month’s Random Thought Table looks philosophically at how to ramp up the power of natural magic, while Odds and Ends shows how not to go *too* far. Gird your loins and grab your camping gear; when you’re exploring the power and possibilities of natural magic, it’s likely to be *in tents!*

Article Colors

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

- Pale Blue*: In This Issue
- Brown*: In Every Issue (humor, editorial, etc.)
- Green*: Columnist
- Dark Blue*: *GURPS* Features
- Purple*: Systemless Features

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FROM THE EDITOR

NATURE SAYS, “WE HAVE YOU SURROUNDED!”

If you notice nature, it’s generally for one of two reasons:

- It’s amazingly good. (“Such a beautiful sunset! What lovely weather we’re having today!”)
- It’s amazingly bad. (“So many insects/floods/earthquakes! We’re gonna die!”)

Obviously, when it comes to *Pyramid*-related matters, we strive for the “amazingly good” classification. We plan to spend a boatload of money for our forthcoming prime-time advertisement campaign with the theme of “*Pyramid*: It’s far better than being attacked by fire ants.”

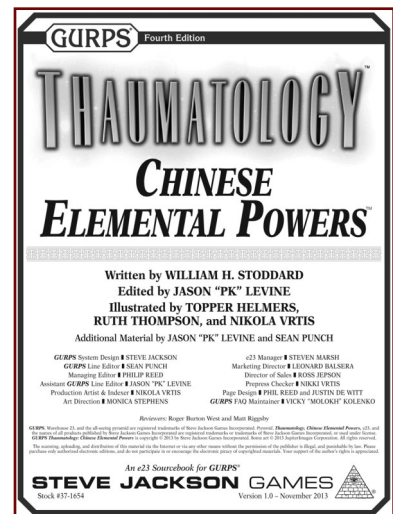
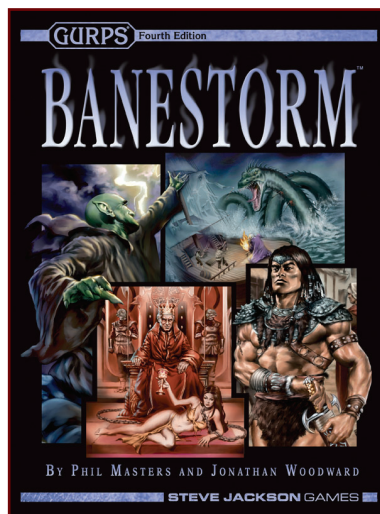
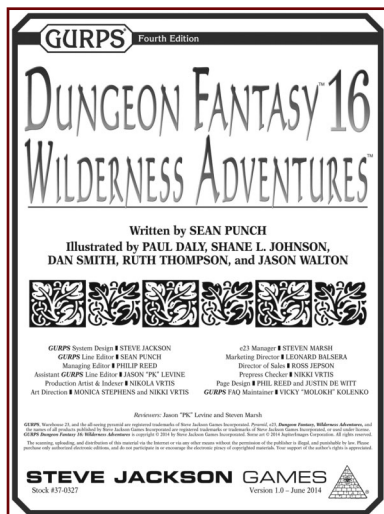
More to the point, this issue of *Pyramid* – like so many – strives to show you something different about its topic. In this case, while we’re checking out “natural magic,” we’ve pushed our preconceived notions of what is natural. (Our lead article on pp. 4-8 is about a desert; take *that*, forest mages!) The natural world is all around us, and looking at it from alternate viewpoints leads to interesting possibilities. Everything from

sudden death (pp. 35-36) to the elemental properties within metal (pp. 12-16) can be considered aspects of nature. If you prefer your druids focused on plants and doe-eyed animals, however, there’s no loss; these cool abilities can be easily handed to someone else to help define *their* niche.

Topping off the fun, this month features Designer’s Notes from Sean Punch for the just-released *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures*. We love to tie in *Pyramid* articles to recently released items; it’s a challenge, because schedules can always change, and we don’t want to have support for supplements that haven’t been released yet. However, we think it’s worth it (especially when the results are as cool as Sean’s).

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Was this issue one with the natural world and filled your soul with blissful harmony? Or was something herein an unnatural abomination that must be hunted down with pitchforks and torches? Let us know by sending us a virtual message in a bottle to pyramid@sjgames.com, or commune with nature in a larger setting by joining our simulated Stonehenge at forums.sjgames.com.



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THE MAGIC DESERT

BY MATT RIGGSBY

At first glance, a certain desert, which certain adventurers might find themselves in, looks as dead as any other: rolling dunes here, fields of gravel there, and occasional green oases or sites of former ones now featuring stands of dead plants. Life in the desert consists of occasional swarms of insects, small animals going from oasis to oasis to sustain themselves on a bare minimum of water and vegetation, and the occasional predator or scavenger. Save for a faint, pearlescent sheen to the sand, it resembles any other dry wasteland at first glance.

Viewing this particular desert through the lens of mysticism reveals something rather different. The desert sands are magical, and the flora and fauna who live there consume not just water and nutrients derived ultimately from the soil but also the magical energy around them. This has resulted in an entire magical ecosystem. The desert holds a range of naturally enchanted substances and entities, but their value to outsiders is matched by the dangers of naturally magical monsters and weather.

FLORA

The basis of the magical ecosystem appears to be the magical sand, which radiates mana of a slightly unusual raw character. It supports a number of unusual plants, many of which have supernatural effects.

Freezing Nettles: As a defense against both fire and animals, freezing nettles have pods that burst when struck, releasing intense cold. Anyone passing through a patch of freezing nettles must roll against 18-(yards moved that turn) for each square yard moved through. For each failure, the target takes 1d burn damage with no incendiary effect; if the target is on fire, this will also put out the flames. If carefully harvested and dried (make a DX-based Herb Lore roll), they may be put into pots as a sort of grenade, doing 1d burn damage and putting out one square yard of fire per pound.

Managrass: Pedants will point out that this isn't a single plant, but rather a number of grasses that resemble one another, much as wheat, oats, and barley resemble each another. What they have in common is that their seeds act as reservoirs of magical energy. Eating at least a half-pound of them a day (they may be prepared as any other grain, for example as bread or gruel) reduces the time necessary to recover a point of Fatigue lost to spellcasting by 25%. This is cumulative with the Recover Energy spell, but not with potions and other effects that directly restore FP. Managrass is known to have unpredictable if modest and usually cosmetic side effects, such as changing the color

of the user's eyes, making his fingernails glow, or making his skin scaly.

Mirage Flowers: These naturally drab weeds produce a remarkable set of full-sensory illusions, giving them the appearance of an extraordinary profusion of colors and sweet scents. Anyone in a patch of mirage flowers is at +3 to Stealth and -3 to Per rolls. The illusion persists if the plants are cut, fading slowly over time; they thus have been used for interestingly spectral corsages.

Obscure Grass: Growing up to waist-high (on most humanoids), this grass produces a mild pattern of magical interference, which provides -2 to any magical attempts to find things in or under patches of it. It retains something of this effect if dried; treat containers made from obscure grass as baskets (*GURPS Low-Tech*, p. 34) with +9 CF.

Siren Weed: This is a carnivorous plant with faint mind-control properties. Anyone who moves within three yards must roll against Will+4 to avoid running toward a patch of it (the subject rolls once per passage within range). This lure is fairly weak, but is followed by a subtle attack. Anyone who remains still in a patch of siren weed for 10 minutes or more is attacked by blood-drinking tendrils that drill into the target's body. They drain 1 FP and 1 HP per 10 minutes. The tendrils are protected by magical pain dampening, requiring the target to roll against Per-4 to notice. They become immediately apparent if the target attempts any significant movement (for example, walking or changing posture). Once noticed, the target must cut through the tendrils or win a Quick Contest of ST to rip free; the weed's effective ST and HP equal the number of minutes spent drinking blood (maximum 14). Though travelers can usually recognize and avoid siren weed, it remains a significant threat to beasts of burden, who are drawn to it, lie down to rest, and never get up again.

Striding Tamarisk: This low-growing (rarely more than 10' high) and gnarled evergreen tree matures in dense stands. Its most notable property is movement; the roots slowly churn through the loose soil, propelling the tree after water sources. Striding tamarisks have a Move of 1. Canny desert nomads, who can predict where the trees are going (roll vs. Naturalist) may hang belongings on them, or even hammocks and cloth partitions so they serve as makeshift mobile treehouses. An individual tree has a ST of 90.

Wineroot: This sought-after tuber can be pressed for an intoxicating liquid. Most are equivalent to a wine or strong beer, though are somewhat sweeter. However, some wineroots induce hallucinations, and others provide prophetic visions.

Other Plants: Other magical plants in the desert with less immediate or useful effects include bone trees (structures of slowly growing living bone that can be cracked open for their marrow or tapped for blood); crystal scrub (a prickly shrub whose long thorns are an opalescent mineral sometimes used as blowgun darts); and singing reeds (which produce slowly shifting musical chords).

FAUNA

Many animals of the magic desert have adapted to their environment by acquiring magical abilities. For example, a number of animals turn to stone during the day, which preserves water and works as a defense against predators, and back to flesh at night. Certain insects are believed to cast paralysis spells on their prey, although they are unable to affect anything bigger than a mouse. Here are some of the larger and more dangerous or valuable animals of the desert.

Deadening Monitor

The deadening monitor is a large, predatory lizard, resembling an oversized, muscular iguana with a pebbly brownish hide allowing it to hide easily in the sand. They usually hide in the dunes, partly covered with sand, and ambush their intended prey. Though a lethal enough animal because of its physical attacks, it is particularly dangerous because it is a walking no-mana zone.

Monitors aren't particularly social creatures, but they tolerate one another's presence at watering holes and along migration routes, so they're often found in small groups.

ST: 13	HP: 14	Speed: 6.25
DX: 12	Will: 12	Move: 6
IQ: 2	Per: 12	Weight: 170 lbs.
HT: 13	FP: 13	SM: +0
Dodge: 9	Parry: N/A	DR: 2

Bite (13): 1d-1 cutting. Reach C.

Traits: Cold-Blooded (65°); Mana Damper 3 (Area Effect, 3 yards); Wild Animal.

Skills: Camouflage-13; Stealth-13.

Dry Toad

Unassuming and, indeed, nearly invisible against the sandy soil, dry toads are one of the more irksome hazards of the desert. They are small and difficult to find, but disproportionately dangerous if they attack with their unnaturally long tongues.

Though not particularly social animals, they do tend to cluster around seasonal sources of water, such as creek beds and depressions that become ponds after the very rare rains. Thus, where there's one dry toad, there are probably more.

ST: 4	HP: 4	Speed: 6.00
DX: 11	Will: 10	Move: 6
IQ: 2	Per: 10	Weight: 8 lbs.
HT: 11	FP: 11	SM: -3
Dodge: 9	Parry: N/A	DR: 1

Tongue (16): 1d-6 crushing + follow-up Thirst (see below). Reach C-2.

Traits: Cold-Blooded (65°); Wild Animal.

Skills: Camouflage-15; Jumping-15.

Notes: Dry toads survive in the dry desert by absorbing moisture out of just about everything. Notably, their flickering tongue, if it strikes a target's skin, acts as the Thirst spell (*Magic*, p. 38) cast with a skill of 16 at no FP cost to the toad; toads aim for chinks in armor if at all possible and have a long enough reach that they can touch unarmored faces without problems.

Flickering Jackals

These pack-hunting predators' movement is assisted by a limited form of teleportation. They are usually found in packs who hunt in a coordinated fashion. They swarm weaker targets, striking and retreating if necessary, to wear them down.

ST: 10	HP: 10	Speed: 6.00
DX: 12	Will: 11	Move: 9
IQ: 4	Per: 14	Weight: 120 lbs.
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: -1
Dodge: 12	Parry: N/A	DR: 1

Bite (14): 1d-2 cutting. Reach C.

Claw (14): 1d-2 cutting. Reach C.

Traits: Discriminatory Smell; Jackal Teleportation (see below); Night Vision 2; Quadruped; Temperature Tolerance 1; Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-14; Tactics-10; Tracking-12.

Notes: As they walk or run, flickering jackals also teleport very short distances, rarely more than a yard or two at a time. They appear to flicker in and out of existence for fractions of a second as they go. As a practical matter, this makes them difficult to hit because it's impossible to know whether they'll be there when the blow lands. In addition to their high Dodge score, they may pass through occupied hexes without penalty because they can simply "blink" past obstacles.

Shifting Sands

From time to time, changing flows of magical energy cause the landscape itself to move, sometimes even expanding or reducing the desert's reach. Rocky outcrops, hills, and stony watering holes can move. Navigation skill is usually sufficient to find a way from one place to another, but Tracking skill may also need to be employed to locate landmarks that have moved.

Fossil Ceratopsians

The magic desert has a *very* long history of supporting life. Some of those organisms have died and come back, spontaneously reanimated by magic. The fossil ceratopsian, the animate stony skeleton of a horned, shield-headed dinosaur, is typical; see *Fossil Monsters* (p. 6) for more ideas.

Fossil ceratopsians are nominally herbivores and spend their days chewing on plants, not realizing that they no longer need to eat. Though isolated individuals can be found, they typically travel in small packs of fewer than a dozen. They're usually safe if left alone, but exceptionally dangerous when provoked.

ST: 35 **HP:** 35 **Speed:** 5.50
DX: 10 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 5
IQ: 2 **Per:** 10 **Weight:** 5,250 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** 35 **SM:** +3 (3 hexes)
Dodge: 8 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 5 (10 on head)

Bite (10): 4d-2 crushing. Reach C.
Horn (10): 4d+2 impaling. Reach C.

Traits: Bad Temper; Dependency (Mana; Constantly); Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Eyes, No Vitals, Unliving); Quadruped; Temperature Tolerance 10; Unaging; Vacuum Support; Fragile (Brittle; Unnatural); Unhealing (Total); Vulnerability (Crushing Attacks; x2); Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-10.

Fossil Monsters

The ceratopsians aren't the only stony monsters to be found in the magic desert. This meta-trait can be applied to other prehistoric creatures.

Fossil Monster: A long-dead creature, its bones turned to stone and reanimated by magic. Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; DR 5 [25]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Eyes, No Vitals, Unliving) [40]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Vacuum Support [5]; Dependency (Mana; Constantly) [-50]; Fragile (Brittle; Unnatural) [-65]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Vulnerability (Crushing Attacks; x2) [-30]. 10 points.

Lightning Jaguar

This large cat is one of the desert's most feared predators. It magically absorbs the static electricity generated by blowing sandstorms, which it taps to power lightning-quick attacks.

ST: 15 **HP:** 15 **Speed:** 6.25
DX: 14 **Will:** 11 **Move:** 11 (or 21)
IQ: 4 **Per:** 12 **Weight:** 400 lbs.
HT: 11 **FP:** 11 **SM:** +0
Dodge: 10 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 1 (11 vs. lightning)

Bite (16): 1d+1 cutting + follow-up 1 point of burning damage that ignores metal armor. Reach C.

Claws (16): 1d+1 cutting + follow-up 1 point of burning damage that ignores metal armor. Reach C.

Lightning Form (N/A): When in use, 1d burn to anyone touching or attacked by the jaguar. Metal weapons count as "touching" and metal armor is treated as DR 1.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Lightning Form*; Quadruped; Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-16, Stealth-11.

Notes: The lightning jaguar crackles and sparks slightly when it moves. It has the distinctive aroma of an approaching storm, giving it a lower Stealth than might otherwise be expected. In addition to naturally high speed, it can briefly

transform itself into a ghostly, semi-material body of electricity, closing on its prey with tremendous speed and burning it with a crackling aura of lightning. However, it's very tiring for the jaguar and the a near-blinding light defeats any attempt at stealth, so it usually saves that technique for its final approach to its prey.

* Basic Move+10 + Burning Attack 1d (Aura; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP; Melee Attack, Reach C, Cannot Parry; Surge, Arcing) + Injury Tolerance (Diffuse; Affected fully by energy attacks; Nuisance Effect, Brightly lit).

Obsidian Serpent

The desert contains a few extinct volcanoes. Beneath them, lava pipes filled with volcanic glass have absorbed enough energy to take on a life of their own. They swim through the ground like it was water, and they appear to filter-feed on the magical sands. They are truly fearsome if aroused. However, they usually take no notice of smaller and organic creatures. Most of their interaction is fighting one another; obsidian serpents are quite territorial.

Almost impossible to hurt, the typical obsidian serpent is best avoided. However, clever adventurers may find a use for it by following the tunnels it leaves in the ground or angering it near an enemy's position. Rumors have it that obsidian serpents contain gemstones and could be mined at great profit, should one survive to tell the tale

ST: 455 **HP:** 455 **Speed:** 6.25
DX: 10 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 6
IQ: 3 **Per:** 9 **Weight:** 738 tons
HT: 11 **FP:** 11 **SM:** +7
Dodge: 9 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 1,250

Bite (10): 46d+1 crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Dependency (Mana; constantly); Injury Tolerance (Unliving); Tunneling (Move 6).

Notes: This is a typical obsidian serpent, about four yards in diameter and 30 yards long.

Sand Mites

These are something between a swarm of stinging gnats and tiny earth elementals. A swarm has Move 8 and does 1d-2(2) cor damage per turn. They're dispersed after losing 10 HP. They are also vulnerable to the Move Earth spell, and can be moved around at will with it.

Other Animals

Not all of the creatures of the desert are so dangerous.

Metal Scarabs: These beetles have shells made from swirling layers of various metals. The least impressive have thin carapaces of copper and iron, while progressively rare ones have bronze, silver, and even gold-coated exoskeletons. A small iron/copper scarab, perhaps 1/2" long and weighing a few grams, will still fetch up to \$5 from artisans who use their carapaces in elegant decorations. A large gold one, up to 6" long and weighing about three ounces, can be sold for \$4,000 or more depending on how attractive its carapace is.

Prophetic Vultures: These scavengers are notorious bad omens. They gather and circle over areas where something will die.

They do this up to a day before the event, even if the doomed creature (or person) has yet to be even wounded.

True Camel: This special breed of camel, native to the magic desert, resembles any other, but it has Doesn't Eat or Drink. They are rare and extremely expensive (at least CF +19) when available for sale at all.

WEATHER AND LANDSCAPE

The magic desert is mostly a high mana area, with a number of spots with very high mana. It also has a great many mana basins. Most retain no more than five points, but basins with more than 50 have been found. While mana basins are sought after eagerly by magicians, most are temporary, "drying up" after a few months. However, where one basin vanishes, another is likely to appear nearby eventually. Theory has it that these changes are the consequence of ebb and flow in underlying magical energies, resembling tides and seasonal climate patterns. However, it's still almost impossible to predict when and where any given mana basin will appear or vanish. Mana basins are also relatively hazardous, since many of the region's mana-dependent creatures flock to them, attracting predators with them.

The region is known for other unusual geographical and atmospheric conditions. Some are beneficial; others are not.

Grasping Sand: Quicksand is bad enough, but grasping sand actively pulls its victims in. When a victim steps in grasping sand, it sinks 1d inches per turn. If the victim can hold on to something solid, he can roll a Quick Contest of ST (treat the sand as ST 12) each turn, getting back 1" per point of margin of success. With helpers, roll against the highest ST with +2 for every additional helper.

Oases of Healing: Small watering holes may be found throughout the desert, usually hidden in small valleys between rocky hills. Each day spent at an oasis of healing gives +3 to any medical skill and any roll to recover lost HP, and allows healers to make twice as many rolls to heal patients.

Oases of Indolence: The heat of the desert creates a natural lethargy, with is magnified in some places. Upon resting in an oasis of indolence, travelers are subject to the Laziness disadvantage and must make a successful Will roll (only one roll per day!) to leave.

Oases of Strength: Within an oasis of strength, FP recovery rates for visitors are doubled. This *does* apply to magically assisted recovery of FP over time, such as Recover Energy skill, but it does not apply to potions and other effects that instantly restore FP, nor does it speed charging of Powerstones and other items that provide FP.

Petrifying Wind: The dust and sand blown by a petrifying wind adhere to any surface, caking on in ever-thickening layers. After five minutes in a petrifying wind, adventurers must roll against ST+5 to crack the layer of accumulating sand in order to keep moving. The roll is at -1 for every additional five minutes the character is exposed to the wind.

Scouring Wind: Particularly harsh winds grind away at every surface. These terrible sandstorms do 1d corrosive damage per hour.

Traveling Wind: This wind lightly warps time and space. Although wanderers don't notice themselves moving any faster, long-distance travel rates are increased by 1d × 10%.

Wind of Confusion: With a roaring noise, blinding dust, and the impact of strong winds, the wind of confusion makes it

nearly impossible to think. In addition to whatever sensory penalties the GM may impose for being in a sandstorm (see *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures*, p. 30, for suggestions), all IQ-based rolls are at -1, and penalties to IQ-based rolls are doubled. Absolute Direction, Absolute Timing, and Eidetic Memory do not function. On a failed Navigation roll, anyone who attempts to travel through the winds of confusion has gone very quickly in an unintended direction (travel speeds are increased as with a traveling wind), and on a critical failure, the traveler is displaced 1d6 days into the future as well.

ADVENTURES IN THE MAGIC DESERT

Though dangerous, travels into the magic desert can be immensely lucrative. Just about anything that comes out of it is likely to be of some value to an enchanter or alchemist, and any number of substances have more general value, either as utilitarian goods or curiosities. What imperial ruler wouldn't want a fossilized monster in his treasury?

The shifting magic of the region also means that the borders of the desert aren't entirely stable. The edges of the desert may be littered with the remains of caravans and the ruins of villages suddenly caught up in a hazardous and unpredictable magical landscape. Adventurers might be tempted to travel into the desert in order to recover loot or track down missing loved ones.

Truly determined adventurers might take it head-on, going into the desert to establish a presence. Anyone who could situate a stronghold near one of the many mana basins, perhaps on the site of a beneficial oasis, would be in a formidable position, but getting and defending that position would be extremely difficult.

Here are a few other adventure possibilities.

Advancing Sands: Consultation of historical records indicates that the magic desert is slowly but steadily growing. This threatens surrounding areas not just with desertification, but with dangerous encounters with the supernatural. Someone brave enough to face the dangers must penetrate the heart of the desert to find out what's happening and how to stop it.

The Lost Enchanter: An enchanter believes he has found a way to fuse the sands of the magic desert into low-cost magical batteries, even producing a few samples. But he had to go deep into the desert to find a suitable place to perform further experiments, and he hasn't been heard from for months. Following clues he left behind, adventurers can track him into the wasteland in search of his makeshift field workshop and perhaps a powerful magical secret.

Shortcut: To many merchants, the magic desert might be regarded as a dangerous obstacle, requiring long, expensive routes to get around. But someone who can go straight across it could reduce travel times and therefore costs enormously, undercutting his competitors. The adventurers are engaged as guards for a caravan making the dangerous trip.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby is trained in anthropology and archaeology but, like everyone else in the 1990s, went into computers. He now works for the medical division of a large corporation. He lives with his wife, son, and a number of dogs.

MAGIC OF THE SHADED WOODLANDS

BY PAUL STEFKO

A thousand years ago, the history of Yrth was reshaped by a small, degenerate cabal of elves. Calling themselves the Defenders of the Shaded Woodlands (*GURPS Banestorm*, pp. 6-7, 18, 81), this group believed that they could mold the natural world into an idealized form through their magic. This didn't begin or end with the cataclysmic Banestorm, however. To this day, the dark elves practice a style

of magic designed to shape and enhance their woodland domains.

The Perfecting Rites of the Shaded Woodlands is a magical style known only to dark elves. The spells and tricks of the style give practitioners powers that would be considered peaceful and even holy in the hands of other wizards. To the dark elves, they are the righteous tools of elven primacy.

A HIDDEN STYLE

As secretive as dark elves are, they protect their magical style even more. Only the most knowledgeable outsiders are even aware of the Perfecting Rites, while most others just speak of "strange magics" used by dark-elf cabals.

The biggest reason for this is that Defenders don't make much use of the style where others can see them. Many of the Perfecting Rites are infrastructure spells used to disguise and protect dark-elf communities. Only a few are directly applicable to combat. Dark-elf wizards will use other magics to dispose of their enemies; many are accomplished students of more commonly known styles as well.

For explanation of the magical style format and rules for the Style perks, see *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles*.

PERFECTING RITES OF THE SHADED WOODLANDS

10 points

Style Prerequisites: Elf; Magery 1 (may be Plant College Only).

Dark elves believe their race to be the ultimate expression of the Eternal. While other elves adapt their lifestyle to the natural world around them, the Defenders are always making adjustments, through magic whenever possible. They cultivate plants they find useful, especially those that bear poisons dark elves can inflict on their enemies. To protect their forest settlements from intruders, they create labyrinths with permanent Tangle Growth and Forest Warning spells and use Hide Path to cover their tracks.

As *Defenders* of the Shaded Woodlands, of course, the dark elves developed spells for fighting off their enemies, not just confusing them. These include spells that create poisons as well as the disturbing Plant Zombie. While the dark elves teach the normal prerequisites for this spell, many Defenders learn Plant Zombie through the Shortcut to Power perk, as they find Necromantic spells as distasteful as any other elf would.

Dark elves never teach this style to outsiders. "Outsiders" include elves who are not members of the sect. They will stop at nothing to erase any knowledge of their magic that is loose in the world. However, the Defenders are a shrinking faction of a dying race, and others stumble on their writings now and again. It may be possible for a PC elf to learn the Perfecting Rites, with GM permission.

Required Skills: Gardening; Naturalist; Poisons/TL3.

Required Spells: Blossom; Create Plant; Heal Plant; Identify Plant; Plant Growth; Shape Plant.

Perks: Intuitive Cantrip (Friendly Undergrowth); Immunity to Naturally Administered Plant-Based Toxins; Limited Energy Reserve (Perfecting Rites of the Shaded Woodland) 1-5; Secret Material (Cialan Orchid); Secret Spell (Plant Zombie); Secret Spell (Poison Thorns); Secret Spell (Rain of Thorns); Shortcut to Power (Plant Zombie).

Secret Spells: Plant Zombie; Poison Thorns; Rain of Thorns.

Optional Traits

Advantages: Green Thumb; Plant Empathy; Resistant to Poison.

Disadvantages: Fanaticism (dark elves); Intolerance (Total).

Skills: Esoteric Medicine; Farming/TL3; Herb Lore/TL3; Survival (Woodlands).

Spell List

Animate Plant; Arboreal Immurement; Bless Plants; Blossom; Create Plant; Death Vision; Essential Wood; Forest Warning; Heal Plant; Hide Path; Identify Plant; Lend Energy; Lend Vitality; Plant Growth; Plant Zombie; Pollen Cloud; Poison Thorns; Rain of Nuts; Rain of Thorns; Rejuvenate Plant; Shape Plant; Summon Spirit; Tangle Growth; Walk Through Plants; Walk Through Wood; Zombie.

MAGIC ITEMS AND MATERIALS

Defenders of the Shaded Woodlands make use of a few specialized magic items, and legends among the dark elves speak of a powerful staff lost at the time of the Banestorm and quested after ever since. Finally, adherents of the style may learn the secrets of growing the Cialan Orchid, a flower which distills mana in its nectar.

Essential Wood Weapons

Defenders use wooden weapons almost exclusively, and the Essential Wood spell increases their durability and effectiveness. Any Essential Wood weapon has DR 3 and triple the normal HP. Treat such a weapon as weighing three times as much when Parrying weapons.

Defenders will almost always cast Essential Wood on their own weapons. For someone who is in a hurry or hasn't learned the spell, Essential Wood weapons may be available for purchase or a wizard may be hired to cast the spell. This increases the price of a wooden weapon by \$8. (For those running *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* or otherwise using the Cost Factor rules for modifying weapons, treat Essential Wood as +1 CF.)

Amber Powerstones

Dark elves make heavy use of amber Powerstones for both aesthetic and practical reasons. Defenders often make do with One-College Powerstones for the Plant college because they are slightly less expensive and almost totally useless if stolen.

The maximum Power of a Powerstone is determined by the value of the enchanted item (see *GURPS Magic*, p. 20), which for a gemstone is based on weight. To determine the weight (in carats, C) for an amber Powerstone of a given Power (P), use the following formula:

$$C = \text{the square root of } (4 + (10 \times P^2 + 40 \times P) / 25) - 2$$

The *Powerstone Strength Table* gives weight (in carats) for several common sizes of amber Powerstone.

When transplanting this style to a *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign, dark-elf Powerstones are "power items" (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*, p. 28) that can be used by anyone with the correct type of magic.

Powerstone Strength Table

Powerstone Strength	1	2	3	4	5	10	25	50
Size (in carats)	0.45	0.97	1.52	2.10	2.69	5.75	15.15	30.92

Shadestaff

This artifact is a very-fine-quality Essential Wood quarter-staff that allegedly belonged to the dark-elf archmage Zaielan, who fell during the Banestorm cataclysm. In the centuries since, its location was rumored many times, and some claimed to have found it, but no one has offered the Shadestaff for examination.

The Shadestaff is a smooth, dark-stained staff with a small knot at one end holding a piece of amber enchanted as a 20-point dedicated Powerstone. Whoever holds the staff is cloaked in magical gloom that imposes -3 to Vision and attack rolls made against them. This darkness cannot be penetrated by any magical or natural light, nor by Night Vision or Darkvision.

The staff is enchanted with Staff, Power 2, and Speed 1, as well as the following spells at Power-20: Animate Plant, Plant Sense, Plant Zombie, and Rain of Thorns. A Limit enchantment means the Shadestaff can only be used by elves (although they need not be Defenders).

If the Shadestaff were discovered, it would be priceless, although its owner would soon draw the attention of dark elves, who would go to any length to recover it.

Expanding the Style

Those with access to *GURPS Magic: Plant Spells* may want to incorporate the rules and spells introduced in that supplement. Chapter 1 is especially useful in campaigns featuring Defenders. The following spells are suggested additions to the Perfecting Rites:

Capturing Vines, Fast Plant Growth, Forest Defense, Grasping Branch, Green Death, Harvest, Invoke Fence, Join Plants, Resilient Vegetation, Run Across Treetops, Toxic Plant, Tree Bark Armor, Undergrowth Ambush, Wood Golem.

Secret Material: Cialan Orchid

Stylists with the Secret Materials perk have learned how to grow the extremely rare Cialan Orchid. This flower possesses a natural ability to distill ambient mana in its nectar. The nectar is then brewed into a tea that restores a caster's FP.

The Cialan Orchid requires patience; growing one to maturity takes a year and a day. The flower then yields enough nectar for a single dose of tea. For every additional year, the flower produces another dose. The flower must be tended for at least eight hours every month, and each year of growth requires a Gardening-2 roll. The flower must be harvested and all doses of tea brewed at once. The tea will retain its potency for one month after brewing, unless exposed to air.

The amount of FP restored by a dose of tea depends on the mana level where the orchid was grown. Tea from a low mana area will restore 1d-1 FP (minimum 1). Normal mana tea will restore 1d+1 FP. Tea distilled from a high or very high mana orchid will restore 1d+3 FP.

SECRET SPELLS

These spells are secrets of the Perfecting Rites of the Shaded Woodlands style. Even with a stylist's notes, an outsider cannot learn them.

PLANT SPELLS

Plant Zombie

Regular

You animate a dead plant as a bizarre form of undead. The target must be a relatively complete dead plant. Use the skeleton template on p. 152 of *GURPS Magic* and apply the Body of Wood meta-trait on p. 165 of *Magic*. Treat the "original body" as having ST 10+(2×SM), 10 in DX, IQ, and HT, and no skills. Otherwise, this spell functions exactly as Zombie.

Plant Zombie is also a Necromantic spell.

Duration: The plant zombie remains animated until destroyed.

The Blackwoods

The Blackwoods (*GURPS Banestorm*, pp. 18, 99) have been home to large numbers of dark elves since the time of the Banestorm. In the last decades, however, an entity appeared which has the power to corrupt the woods, causing them to spread at an unnatural rate and turning them against their old Defenders.

It is not unreasonable to suspect a connection between this being and the Perfecting Rites. Perhaps a dark-elf archmage suffered a critical failure that summoned *something* which now haunts the forest. Entire campaigns could be run about Defenders who fight against the entity and eventually drive it from the world.

Cost: 8.

Time to cast: 1 minute.

Prerequisites: Zombie and at least four Plant spells. (Most practitioners of the Perfecting Rites of the Shaded Woodland will learn this spell through the Shortcut to Power perk.)

Poison Thorns

Regular; Resisted by HT

When you touch a plant, it sprouts poisonous thorns. (A sentient plant resists with its HT.) Any creature coming into contact with these thorns takes 1d-3 pi-, with a follow-up poison with a 10-second delay and a HT roll to resist. The poison inflicts 1d-1 toxic damage at 30-second intervals for four cycles.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost: 3 to cast. 2 to maintain.

Prerequisite: Magery 1 and at least six Plant spells.

Item

A non-sentient plant can be permanently enchanted for the length of its natural life. *Energy cost to create:* 50 energy per hex of ground the plant covers (minimum 150).

Rain of Thorns

Area

Causes a rain of 1"-long, poisonous thorns that deal 1d-3 pi- to everyone within the area, with a follow-up poison with a 10-second delay and a HT roll to resist. The poison inflicts 1d-1 toxic damage at 30-second intervals for four cycles.

Duration: 1 second.

Base Cost: 4. Half to maintain.

Prerequisite: Poison Thorns.

SAMPLE CHARACTER

The following character is a master of the Perfecting Rites of the Shaded Woodland and can serve as a villain for a *Banestorm* campaign that involves contact with a dark-elf community.

FENDARIL THELATHALURIEN

345 points

Fendaril Thelathalurien was born in 1687 A.D. in a dark-elf village in the Coffinwood in Western Megalos. In his youth, the dark elves were threatened by the perpetual tensions between Arvey and New Jerusalem. Fendaril left the Coffinwood around 1710, entering a world he had been taught to hate. Nothing he encountered made him feel otherwise.

For five decades, he wandered in the guise of an elven pilgrim. He saw humans and their assimilated races expand

across Ytarria, clearing, planting, and squabbling over the land. He searched for a way to push mankind back and restore the once continent-spanning woodlands. His journey led him to the Blackwoods and its ancient dark-elf mages.

Over the next 200 years, Fendaril studied the Perfecting Rites and developed his aptitude for plant magics. He was especially drawn to the secret, more offensive spells of the style as a way to take the fight to the humans.

Fendaril has spent the last several decades waging a secret war. He targets remote settlements, close to woodlands. He spends days creating plant zombies before unleashing them on the poor town. Using a Flight elixir, he observes the attack from the air, and he'll block escape attempts with areas of Rain of Thorns. Fendaril never kills directly; if he needs to dispatch someone specific, he'll use plant-based poisons such as belladonna and hemlock (see *GURPS Low-Tech*, pp. 128-129).

Fendaril Thelathaluriën is an average-looking elf with shoulder-length silver hair and green eyes. While he understands English perfectly, and could speak it quite eloquently, he pretends to barely understand a word of it to throw off his enemies. He is adept at eavesdropping in this way.

ST 10 [10]; **DX** 12 [20]; **IQ** 15 [80]; **HT** 12 [20].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 15 [0]; Per 15 [0];
FP 15 [9].
Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9; Parry 12
(Staff).
5'4"; 120 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Elf [0].
Languages: English (Native) [6]; Elven (Native) [0].

Advantages

Dark Elf [31]; Green Thumb 2 [10]; Magery 1 [10]; Magery 2 (One College Only, Plant, -40%) [12]; Plant Empathy [5].
Perks: Limited Energy Reserve 4 (Perfecting Rites of the Shaded Woodland); Magical School Familiarity (Perfecting Rites of the Shaded Woodland); Secret Spell (Plant Zombie); Secret Spell (Poison Thorns); Secret Spell (Rain of Thorns); Shortcut to Power (Plant Zombie); Staff Bond. [10]

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Megalomania [-10]; Paranoia [-10].
Quirks: Affects Broken English; Avoids killing directly if possible. [-2]

Skills

Acting (A) IQ [2]-15; Area Knowledge (Megalos) (E) IQ [1]-15; Disguise/TL3 (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Farming/TL3 (A) IQ+1 [1]-16*; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-15; Gardening* (E) IQ+2 [1]-17; Herb Lore (VH) IQ+1 [4]-16*; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-15; Merchant (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Naturalist (H) IQ [1]-15*; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-14; Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Pharmacy/TL3 (Herbal) (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Poisons/TL3 (H) IQ [4]-15; Psychology (H) IQ-2 [1]-13; Research/TL3 (A) IQ [2]-15; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-15; Sociology (H) IQ-1 [2]-14; Staff (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Stealth (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Survival (Woodland) (A) Per [1]-15; Thaumatology (VH) IQ [4]-15†.
Techniques: Flight (H) Herb Lore-2 [2]-14; Healing (H) Herb Lore [2]-16; Invulnerability (H) Herb Lore-2 [3]-14; Sleep (H) Herb Lore [2]-16; Speed (H) Herb Lore [2]-16; Stealth (H) Herb Lore [3]-16.

Spells†

Arboreal Immurement (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Blossom (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Create Plant (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Create Water (H) IQ [2]-15; Decay (H) IQ [2]-15; Destroy Water (H) IQ [2]-15; Distill (H) IQ [2]-15; Essential Wood (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Heal Plant (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Hide Path (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Identify Plant (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Lend Energy (H) IQ [2]-15; Lend Vitality (H) IQ [2]-15; Mature (H) IQ [2]-15; Plant Growth (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Plant Zombie (H) IQ+5 [12]-20‡; Poison Thorns (H)

IQ+5 [12]-20‡; Purify Water (H) IQ [2]-15; Rain of Thorns (H) IQ+5 [12]-20‡; Recover Energy (H) IQ [2]-15; Seek Water (H) IQ [2]-15; Shape Plant (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Spasm (H) IQ+1 [4]-16; Test Food (H) IQ [2]-15; Walk Through Plants (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡; Walk Through Wood (H) IQ+2 [2]-17‡.

* Includes +2 from Green Thumb.
† All spells and Thaumatology include +1 for Magery.
‡ Includes +2 from Magery (One College Only, Plant).

Equipment

Fendaril is never without his bonded staff, an Essential Wood quarterstaff set with a 12-point amber Powerstone and enchanted with Staff, Accuracy +1, and Penetrating Weapon (Armor Divisor 2), all at Power-20. His typical outfit is either a plain brown robe or a set of pants and vest of light leather (DR 1 against cutting). Whatever he wears is enchanted with Fortify 2 and Deflect 1 (not included above).

He normally carries an assortment of herbal elixirs of his own creation. A typical load might be: one potion of Flight, two potions of Healing, one potion of Invulnerability, three potions of Speed, and one potion of Stealth. These are held in dried gourds stoppered with varied colored waxes and worn hanging from his belt.

Adventure Hooks

The Defenders of the Shaded Woodlands are classic villains for any *Banestorm* campaign.

Flower Power: Nero, a wealthy Megalan noble, wants a Cialan Orchid, and he's willing to pay handsomely for it. Unfortunately, the only place he knows to find one is a zealously guarded dark-elf village.

Lost and Found: The protagonists learn the location of the Shadestaff, perhaps on a centuries-old map leading to the ruins of Autheuil (see *Banestorm*, p. 135). Unfortunately, a number of dark elves also learn this secret. The group (or a wealthy benefactor) cannot let the Defenders acquire the artifact. A race begins, with the dark elves using their magic to slow down or kill the treasure hunters along the way.

The Magnificent: The adventurers hear rumors of villages in a remote region disappearing, seemingly swallowed by grass and shrubs. Investigating, the PCs encounter Fendaril Thelathaluriën. The elf is able to escape, but he leaves behind clues to his next target. The party have only a day to prepare the villagers for an onslaught of undead plants and fearsome magic.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Stefko would rather study Food spells than Plant. He lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he and his wife enjoy visiting the plants seemingly shaped by magic at the local conservatory. In addition to his work in *Pyramid*, Paul has written for *The Unspeakable Oath* and Atomic Overmind Press. He would like to give thanks to the Pyramid Write Club, but the first rule of Write Club is "we do not talk about Write Club."

ARS METALLICA

BY WILLIAM H. STODDARD

In novels, movies, and games, the word *alchemy* evokes images of bubbling cauldrons and mysterious potions. The usual medium of alchemical processes is water, or perhaps alcohol; the usual ingredients are organic substances. The **GURPS** rules for alchemy reflect this, with an alchemist's main skill being the concocting of potions for adventurers to drink.

But historical alchemists dealt with a wider range of substances and processes! Their art relied on fire as much as water, in smelters, kilns, and furnaces. In particular, many of them worked with metals, from Chinese sages turning cinnabar into mercury and back (discussed in **GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers**) to medieval Europeans pursuing the transmutation of metals. In **GURPS** terms, the skill of alchemy was a precursor not only of Chemistry but of Metallurgy.

Unlike Chemistry, Metallurgy goes back to the Bronze Age as a skill. Early metallurgists aren't forced to rely on a default from Alchemy to refine or alloy metals. But alongside metallurgy as a mundane skill, it's possibly to define a mystical art of metals, based on such things as their affinity for the "planets" of geocentric astronomy. This can be represented in **GURPS** by modification of two skills, plus several new effects for items.

Alchemy (Metallic)

IQ/Very Hard

Defaults: None.

This version of Alchemy (pp. B174-175) works with metals and their ores, and in its advanced forms, with the transmutation of metals. It can create metallic substances and objects with magical effects, drawing on the power inherent in natural materials and on their affinity for the celestial bodies. As with standard (or Organic) Alchemy, those without Magery can learn and use Alchemy (Metallic), and Magery confers no benefit.

In a game with this skill, Metallurgy also defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-3. These two skills are appropriate for metalworkers (such as most fantasy dwarves) in settings where metalworking and magic are linked.

Create magical effects, transmute metals, and more!

ARS METALLICA

The *ars metallica* has two main classes of magical effects. On one hand, it can produce metals with special properties. On the other, it can attune metals to relevant mystical or cosmic forces and make them sources of magical or supernatural effects, somewhat like elixirs or potions.

Enhancing Metals

The usual example of modifying the properties of metals is making them harder and more resistant to damage. This requires a roll against Alchemy (Metallic) at -1 per level of improvement. For each level of improvement, the DR of anything made of the metal is increased by 20%, rounded to the nearest whole number (halves round up). This improves the quality of personal and vehicular armor. Each *two* levels of improvement raises the quality of a metal weapon by one step, from cheap, to good, to fine; improvement beyond fine is not possible. Applied to armor, each *two* levels of improvement give one level of Hardened, enabling it to lower the armor divisor of an attack by one step.

When applied to armor, this modification can be used to gain a higher DR, or to make the armor lighter while keeping the same DR. With weapons, only the first option usually makes sense – lightening the weapon tends to lessen its impact.

Other changes in properties could also be pursued. For example, a metal's natural luster could be enhanced, making it reflect light more brightly. In a technomagic campaign, a metal's electrical conductivity could be enhanced, lowering its resistance 20% for each level of improvement, to as low as 20% of normal resistance; this would allow the same thickness of wire to carry up to 5x the electrical current at a given voltage.

Magical Affinities

The other class of effects involves bringing out the magical affinities of different metals, and enabling them to confer magical benefits on a person in physical contact with the metal. To maintain contact, an empowered metal typically is put in a wearable form, such as a ring, on which runes or planetary sigils or other signs are then inscribed.

Such a device functions like an alchemical charm or talisman, as defined in **GURPS Magic** (p. 220). It grants effects with a certain duration, and then must recharge for a longer duration, during which it is dormant. Dormancy lasts one day for each five weeks required to make the device.

The specific effects must be appropriate to the metal, based on magical analogies to its metallurgical properties, on the supernatural lore of the metal, or on its astrological affinities or other correspondences. The metals described on pp. 13-16 are the seven metals recognized by medieval European thought, each associated with one of the "planets" of geocentric astronomy (the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). They're listed in Ptolemaic order, from nearest to Earth to farthest away. At the GM's discretion, the use of Symbol Drawing to inscribe a ring with a suitable planetary sigil and other designs may grant a bonus to skill.

THE SEVEN PLANETARY METALS

For details on how to impart magical abilities on metals, see p. 12. Although most items are shaped as rings or comparable devices, a few abilities require a form (such as a disk or liquid) that more closely relates to their benefits.

For most talismans, the wearer simply needs to desire the effect to activate. However, some abilities specify rolls that must be made to tap into the power. No energy is spent to activate the charm.

Some of the effects afflict another person with a disadvantage. Treat such afflictions as Maledictions (p. B106), resisted by HT or Will, as specified. The range modifier is -1 per yard of range, unless otherwise stated.

SILVER (ARGENTUM)

Silver, one of the two precious metals, is associated with the moon, one of the two great lights of heaven.

Fertility

Because of the influence of the moon over the cycles of women's bodies, silver can ensure fertility in a woman who desires it. Any woman who is naturally fertile can will the ring to take effect, and on a successful roll vs. HT, she will conceive a child in any sexual act performed under its influence. Even an infertile woman – so long as she is anatomically whole – can conceive on a roll vs. HT-5, or a critical success. (It's also possible to make a ring to prevent fertility, but many societies regard this as a curse.)

Duration: 24 hours.

Cost to make: \$1,500; 100 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-5.

Illumination

As the most reflective of metals, silver is associated with light. A ring of silver can surround the wearer with cool light filling a two-yard radius, allowing a Vision modifier of -4 (brighter than candlelight, but dimmer than torchlight). The wearer cannot see anything outside this radius. Outside observers seeing such light against a dark background are at +10 to Vision rolls, but at -7 to see anything outside its radius. However, the light is gentle enough not to blind those who gaze upon it.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$250; 5 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic).

Lunacy

Grants the wearer the ability to afflict another character with the condition of Lunacy, with effects varying with the phase of the moon (see p. B143). This requires a Quick Contest of Will vs. the target's HT.

Duration: 24 hours.

Cost to make: \$200; 5 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Tides

The moon rules the tides, making the ocean higher or lower. This ring has a similar effect locally, within a radius of 30 yards. To activate it, roll vs. Will at a penalty equal to the desired change in water level in feet. A successful roll can either raise or lower the water level. Despite its name, this effect can work on any body of water with a radius of at least 30 yards and a depth of at least the desired change in water level.

Duration: 1d×10 minutes.

Cost to make: \$200; 25 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Vision

This effect must be created on a smooth, flat, highly polished disk of silver. Looking in this surface can reveal distant places or events, as if the observer were physically present (that is, it can't show things that are buried or immured, and visibility is limited by the light level at the desired place and time). Focusing on the desired scene requires a Will roll. Only the person holding the disk can direct its focus, but everyone present can see what it shows, with a Per roll to see clearly. How easily the scene can be interpreted depends on the size of the disk: IQ-3 for a disk 4" in diameter, IQ for a disk 1' in diameter, and IQ+2 for a disk 2' in diameter.

Duration: 1d minutes.

Cost to make: 4" diameter, \$200; 20 weeks. 1' diameter, \$2,000; 600 weeks. 2' diameter, \$8,000; 120 weeks. Defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-4.

MERCURY (MERCURIUM)

Mercury is associated with the planet of the same name. In both Western and Chinese alchemy, it is regarded as a highly potent alchemical catalyst.

Obviously, it's difficult to make jewelry out of a liquid! Many alchemists work on the liquid state, keeping it in flasks until it's needed; this form is comparable to an elixir in that it can only be used once (usually externally). However, it can also be subjected to alchemical refinement (see *Enhancing Metals*, p. 12), that improves its surface tension to a point where it maintains its cohesion and its shape; after three levels of refinement, it can be made into rings or other "solid" objects.

Escape

The wearer gains from one to five levels of Slippery (p. B85).

Duration: 3d×4 minutes.

Cost to make: \$100×(level of effect squared); 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-4.

Greed

The wearer can afflict another character with the condition of Greed (p. B137). This requires a Quick Contest of Will.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$200; 50 days; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.



Invention

The wearer gains a mental flexibility that makes him Versatile (p. B96). Because of the affinities of Mercury, this inventiveness benefits linguistic creativity, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Poetry, Public Speaking, Teaching, and Writing.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$500; 25 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic).

Light Fingers

This ring enables the wearer's fingers to make small movements swiftly and unobtrusively, giving +2 to Filch, Pick-pocket, and Sleight of Hand.

Duration: 1d×10 minutes.

Cost to make: \$500; 30 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Panacea

This form of liquid mercury has been modified to serve as a medication. A single dose of it is one fluid ounce, weighing 0.9 lb. Administering it requires a roll vs. Esoteric Medicine to judge the proper time and condition of the sufferer. On a success, the substance allows a roll vs. HT at +5 to recover from any one illness, injury, or poison. On a failure, it confers no benefit. On a critical failure, or if the roll to create the potion was a critical failure, the panacea acts as a poison, with effects similar to those of arsenic (p. B439); however, the HT roll to resist is at -5!

Duration: Immediate; curative benefits are permanent.

Cost to make: \$800; 18 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-5.

Swiftiness

This ring gives from +1 to +4 to Basic Speed and Basic Move.

Duration: 3d×4 minutes.

Cost to make: \$200×(level of effect squared); 15 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-1.

Tongues

The effect conferred by this ring is comparable to that of Language Talent, but more general. To a Native speaker of a language, it grants Native fluency in any dialect of that language that the speaker has been exposed to for at least two hours. To an Accented or Broken speaker, it enhances fluency one step. To a nonspeaker, it allows gaining Broken fluency in two hours of exposure. The benefits apply only to the spoken language, and are lost when the effect ends.

Duration: 6 hours.

Cost to make: \$600; 15 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-1.

Transmutation

This activated form of liquid mercury facilitates chemical and alchemical processes, giving +4 to Alchemy, Chemistry, or Metallurgy rolls. A single dose (eight fluid ounces) weighs 7 lbs. and can aid any small-scale process yielding up to a cubic foot of product (120 doses of potion). Mercury can be extracted from the residues of such a process and reactivated; this

reduces the materials cost to one-fifth normal but adds two weeks to the preparation time.

Duration: As needed for the process.

Cost to make: \$5,000; 24 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-6.

Draw out the magical affinities of metals.

COPPER (CUPRUM)

Copper is associated with the planet Venus.

Attractiveness

Grants one level of Appearance (p. B21). A wearer who is already Transcendant gains no further benefit; beauty exceeding human comprehension is not enhanced.

Duration: 2d+1 hours.

Cost to make: \$600; 15 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-1.

Concord

Aids the wearer in reaching agreement with others. The ring must be willed to work on a particular person or group. On a successful IQ roll, it gives +3 to any skill roll to find common ground – most often Diplomacy, but it can also apply to such skills as Carousing or Sex Appeal, or to the reaction roll to any proposal seeking cooperation or toleration. The GM may offer a hint as to what kind of offer might be accepted.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$400; 35 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic).

Grace

Improves physical coordination in whole-body movement of the wearer, conferring +2 to Acrobatics, Dancing, and Erotic Art, and +1 to Dodge.

Duration: 2d×5 minutes.

Cost to make: \$300; 15 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-3.

Lecherousness

Allows the wearer to afflict another character with the condition of Lecherousness. This will not necessarily make the other character attracted to the wearer! This requires a Quick Contest of Will.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$200; 50 days; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Love

When the ring is put on, the wearer falls in love with the next person of appropriate sex and age that he sees. The effect is permanent unless cancelled with the Remove Curse spell.

Harsh treatment by the loved one will not destroy the love but may lead to insane jealousy, stalking, suicide, or vengeance.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost to make: \$600; 30 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-4.

GOLD (AURUM)

Gold, one of the two precious metals, is associated with the sun, one of the two great lights of heaven.

Focus

Generates a point of intense light at the outside of the ring, comparable to that created by a lens under full sunlight. This can set fire to a super-flammable or highly flammable object in one second, or to a flammable one in 10 seconds. If applied to a living creature, it inflicts 1 point of burning damage.

Duration: 1d uses, each lasting up to 10 seconds.

Cost to make: \$500; 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Foresight

The wearer sees a vision of the next major turning point in his life. If there is danger ahead or an important decision to be made, it's reasonable for the vision to refer to it.

Duration: Instant.

Cost to make: \$500; 70 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-5.

Illumination

As for silver (p. 13), but the light created is equivalent to full daylight, with no Vision modifier. Creatures that are affected by sunlight will be vulnerable to it.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$500; 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic).

Incorruption

Preserves the wearer against aging and degenerative diseases, granting the effects of Longevity (p. B66). The effect is permanent, so long as the ring is worn.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost to make: \$6,000; 5 years; defaults to Alchemic (Metallic)-9.

Principality

This ring gives +4 to Leadership skill and all Group Performance skills.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$400; 35 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-1.

Vainglory

Allows the wearer to afflict another character with the condition of Overconfidence (p. B148). This requires a Quick Contest of Will.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$300; 50 days; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

IRON (FERRUM)

Iron is associated with the planet Mars.

Constancy

This ring adds 1d to Will for the purpose of resisting external influence or control, such as persuasion, fear, or mind control.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$1,200; 25 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-5.

Fortitude

The wearer gains the benefits of High Pain Threshold (p. B59).

Duration: 1d-1 hours (minimum 1).

Cost to make: \$300; 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-1.

Fury

Confers the wearer with the ability to induce a Berserk (p. B124) state in himself. Going berserk can be done with a Concentrate maneuver and a Will roll; regaining self-control cannot be done voluntarily – it happens when the activation period ends, or can be induced with Remove Curse.

Duration: 3d minutes.

Cost to make: \$200; 5 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic).

Invulnerability

Hardens the skin into DR 3 armor. This protection can be layered with other forms of protection. It does not protect the eyes.

Duration: 1d+1 hours.

Cost to make: \$1,000; 30 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-4.

Panic

Allows the wearer to inflict intense fear in a battle situation, requiring anyone who sees him to make a Fright Check at -4, adjusted by the range modifier for how far away he is. Success means a victim need not roll again for *this* activation; failure has the usual consequences, after which the victim is still vulnerable to this effect (though further Fright Checks are at a cumulative +1).

Duration: 3d minutes.

Cost to make: \$500; 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Striking

Provides Striking ST 4 (pp. B88-89) – or raises Striking ST by 4 – allowing infliction of more severe injuries in combat.

Duration: 3d×4 minutes.

Cost to make: \$100; 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-1.

TIN (STANNUM)

Tin is associated with the planet Jupiter.

Gluttony

Allows the wearer to afflict another character with the condition of Gluttony (p. B137) by winning a Quick Contest of Will.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$100; 50 days; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Majesty

Gives the wearer +3 to Law, Leadership, and Public Speaking when the skills are used to command the actions of others rather than to persuade or entertain, as well as +3 to any reaction rolls involving the assertion of authority.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$200; 50 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-4.

Might

Adds 1d to the wearer's ST. This increases encumbrance, weapon damage, and other capabilities, but does not give added HP.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost to make: \$100; 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Opulence

Allows temporary transformation of the wearer's clothing and possessions to forms appropriate to higher Status. For the duration of the effect, each item's worth is multiplied by 5. Personal cleanliness and grooming is adjusted to match the new appearance.

Duration: 2d hours.

Cost to make: \$800; 40 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-4.

Toughening

Adds 2 to the DR of any metal armor worn by the wearer. It does not confer any benefit to bare skin, clothing, or non-metal armor.

Duration: 1d+1 hours.

Cost to make: \$500; 15 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-3.

LEAD (PLUMBUM)

Lead is associated with the planet Saturn.

Aging

Allows the wearer to inflict increased age on another person, who becomes a year older in an instant. This requires a Quick Contest of Will vs. the target's HT.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost to make: \$300; 15 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-1.

Corrosion Resistance

Makes the wearer and his garments immune to the loss of DR under a corrosion attack.

Duration: 1d+1 hours.

Cost to make: \$600; 15 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-3.

Heaviness

Allows the wearer to inflict greater encumbrance on another person, restricting his movements, with a Concentrate maneuver and a Quick Contest of Will vs. HT. Encumbrance is raised one level for each 2 points margin of victory (minimum one level); if this would go beyond extra-heavy encumbrance, the target is immobilized. A critical success on the Will roll immobilizes the target automatically.

Duration: 1d+1 hours.

Cost to make: \$400; 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Resistance

The wearer's density is *effectively* increased, without actually altering his weight. He suffers knockback based on half the basic damage rolled, and takes half injury from all attacks.

Duration: 1 hour.

Cost to make: \$300; 20 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic).

Sloth

Allows the wearer to inflict Chronic Depression on another person, making the target nearly incapable of action for the duration of the effect. This requires a Concentrate maneuver and a Quick Contest of Will.

Duration: 1d+1 hours.

Cost to make: \$500; 15 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William H. Stoddard is a professional copy editor, specializing in scientific and scholarly books in fields ranging from aerospace technology to archaeology. Fortunately, he likes reading nonfiction; his research library is threatening to take over his apartment, and he regularly visits the nearest university library for supplemental reading. His other pleasures include cooking, reading science fiction and alternate history, and running and playing in roleplaying games; he has been doing the latter since 1975, when he first encountered *Dungeons & Dragons*. His previous work for Steve Jackson Games includes writing the award-winning *GURPS Social Engineering*, the latest editions of *GURPS Supers* and *GURPS Low-Tech*, and *Pyramid* articles on such subjects as formal dances and sexual situations in roleplaying games. He lives in San Diego with his cohabitant Carol, two cats, two computers, and far too many books!

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EIDETIC MEMORY

DARK OF THE WOODS

BY DAVID L. PULVER

In this systemless scenario outline for a fantasy campaign (even *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*), the authorities seek help to defeat the rising power of a vengeful druidic cult.

THE MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER

Guy Talbot (age 40) is a traveling merchant who deals in antiques, gems, and jewelry, and the occasional magic item – just the sort of fellow that will buy the loot you haul out of a dungeon! He achieved his wealth by acting as such a middleman, and should be someone who has dealt favorably with the party before – if there's no time to set him up properly, the GM could introduce him as “the merchant who bought your last haul.” Goodman Talbot is well-dressed, with a neatly trimmed beard, expensive clothes, plenty of gold rings on his fingers, and a hulking bodyguard.

Talbot meets with the adventurers at their favorite local tavern. He treats them to a good meal and explains the situation: While Talbot is certainly now well off, he comes of common stock and wanted his family to rise in station. About 16 years ago, he arranged for his pretty daughter, Alyssa, to marry an adventuring knight he knew. This worthy, Sir Gringamore, was nearly landless (which is why he was willing to marry a merchant's daughter) but was of good family and a proven warrior. Talbot had hoped the young man would rise in his liege-lord's service, and so it proved.

Over the last 15 years, Talbot received occasional letters from Alyssa telling of the birth of her son Galloran and her daughter Isilda, and Sir Gringamore's gradual rise in the service of his liege-lord. Then, just last year, Sir Gringamore was rewarded with grant of the vacant fief of Swyngate Forest, a border region whose prior lord had died without an heir. Talbot was exultant – his daughter had become Lady Alyssa of Swyngate.

Her initial reports were positive but guarded: The people were rustic, with quaint customs. Sir Gringamore was kept busy suppressing highwaymen and hanging poachers (who had proliferated while the fief was vacant). The fief's lands were undeveloped but had plenty of promise. However, the locals were superstitious and afraid to venture into the deep woods, and Gringamore had to hire new foresters to clear

land. The hunting was excellent, for many of the forest beasts had little fear of men!

Her last letter revealed a far different tale. If Talbot trusts the party, he will let them see (or will read aloud) his daughter's letter (see p. 19). Otherwise, he paraphrases it and pleads for their help.

HISTORY

Swyngate Wood was a small remnant of a once-mighty oak forest that long ago covered the region. Like many such woods, it had been inhabited since before history began by a wide range of creatures: wild beasts, nature spirits, fey creatures, a few sylvan monsters, and a scattering of humans.

Among these people was a small cult of nature worshippers, essentially druids, who maintained a sacred grove deep in the wood's heart. With the passing of elder races, they assumed the role of the wood's protectors. They held rites in the sacred groves and at the standing stones that crowned the surrounding hills. The populace joined in druid rites, and some sons or daughters were pledged to the cult's service. In exchange, the druids used their spells to help mitigate nature's wrath when it manifested as a drought, devastating storm, or plague, and permitted some use of younger parts of the woods for human purposes.

Over the centuries, more humans settled in the region, and Swyngate Wood became part of Swyngate Manor, a feudal holding that came to encompass the manor itself and the nearby village of Lower Swyngate (population 450 today). The nature cult's power diminished as many villagers converted to the nondruidic faith of their feudal overlords. Still, the villagers respected the druids' wisdom (and feared their powers), and never entered the woods or used the wood's resources without the druid cult's permission. It was quietly understood the manor lord's authority ended at the forest's edge.

Gradually, the number of druids diminished, until there was but one left: The sole surviving archdruid of Swyngate Grove, an orphaned goatherd named Rhedyn, now in his 50s. He had himself been the final disciple of the last high druid.

While not a misanthrope, Rhedyn had far more interest in nature and sylvan creatures than in his fellow humans.

Even so, members of a few families, who still followed the old ways, occasionally come to him, seeking his counsel or to be initiated into secrets of his magic.

After teaching them the rudiments of his faith, he halted because he saw in them only a lust for power over things of man – control of crops and weather and harvests – and not a true love of wild nature. Instead, he simply warned them against certain things – old powers that slept in the earth that should not be disturbed – and told them they were not ready for the deep faith. When they protested, he shifted himself into an owl and retreated into the depths of the woods, using his spells to hide his path.

Then came the great famine. Severe storms ruined the manor's crops for two years in a row. Father Ogen, the backwoods cleric who ran the village church, could heal wounds and sickness, but his prayers were ineffective against a disaster of such magnitude. Some villagers sought out archdruid, but he was hidden in the deeps of the wood and could not be found. In truth, Rhedyn had barely noticed the heavy storms, for they were just one more natural cycle. He was far more concerned with learning the secrets of trees and animals, the contemplation of the stars, and the company of his beloved owls, spiders, and nature spirits. He was also spending his time with one Whisperwind, a shapely dryad he admired, often turning himself into a tree for lengthy periods to sleep next to her in the fall.

Unable to find their master, the druid students tried to save the crops themselves, but while they had knowledge, they lacked the magical energy to do so. In desperation, they turned to older

rites – half-understood rituals the archdruid had warned them against: blood magic and the sleeping powers of the earth. A sacrifice of a sacred king and queen: the young “spring queen” of the village's innocent spring rites, and with her, a king – none other than the manor's own young lord, the 20-year-old Sir Dafyd.

The romantic Sir Dafyd was lured into the woods by one of the cultists with a false tale of a mystic artifact guarded by a dragon that lived under a hollow hill. He was led to believe that he would find treasure that could buy food for his starving people. Instead, he was trapped and woke up in a giant wicker cage. There he found himself dubbed the “rain king” and saving his people in another fashion.

That year, the ritual burning of the spring queen and the rain king brought the nascent cult the power they needed to end the famine. But it also ended another line, for young Dafyd, with his pure heart, died without leaving an heir.

RECENT EVENTS

Thus it was that Swyngate Manor passed for the first time in centuries to a new lord who was also a complete outsider – in this case, Sir Gringamore, a lesser knight who received it as a reward from his local feudal magnate in recognition of his battle prowess in some foreign war or other.

Sir Gringamore loved hunting; war; his teenage son, Galleron; and, perhaps, his devoted wife, Alyssa. New to the parish, Sir Gringamore was contemptuous of the warnings and taboos the locals placed on the use of the “his” estate.

Alyssa's Letter

A version suitable as a prop for players is on p. 23.

Dearest Father,

I have long been blessed with good fortune, but now, as Pastor Bardas would say, the worm has turned, and I have bitter news indeed. My eldest son is dead, and my husband lies in miasma of bleak despair, for it was his own hand that slew him! A terrible hunting accident – or a horrid curse of black magic? My heart is heavy and I can scarce credit the report of the bizarre and ungodly transformation that befell my son, though there were credible witnesses. He is dead, and surely black magic was behind it!

Let me start again. It seems a sinister cult has for many centuries lurked in the dark woods north of our new estate. In recent months, they have risen again, allied with fell creatures such as giant spiders, hideous bears, and werewolves. The cult's leader is one Rhedyn, former goatherd who is now an unholy priest; my husband had scorned his prior threats and posturing as mere words, but his power is very real and his reach is long.

With my husband no longer riding on patrol, the roads that pass the outskirts of Swyngate Forest have reverted to haunts of outlaws and robbers. Brigands waylay travelers, then vanish into dens in the wood, to consort with a witch-cult that offers them sanctuary where our foresters fear to tread. I have also heard whispers that the country folk at the forest's edge now pay tribute to the cult. On the same

day my son Galleron was murdered, lightning smote the village church. And others report an apparition in the hills, a foul idol or giant that some villagers now sacrifice to for fear of death!

My lord and I still remain safe in our castle, protected by our retainers and hired men. Yet my anguished heart cries for vengeance for my firstborn, and I fear for the lives of the villagers and my daughter who is but 13 years old. With my lord succumbed to a malignant despondency, I have no one but you to turn to.

Father, I know you consort with many adventurers, as you have often enlivened your letters to me with tales of their valor. I implore you to prevail upon some of these stalwarts to journey to Swyngate Castle and come to my aid! I stand alone against a rising tide of darkness and chaos. While I am not rich, neither am I poor in goods, and surely the robbers and cultists must now be sitting on a mound of ill-gotten gains that might tempt such men. Too, I have heard tales that Rhedyn makes his lair amid ancient barrows filled with treasures (it was apparently seeking one such that cost the last lord his life).

Indeed, my lord's desire for vengeance is such that he would even consider some kind of alliance with the worthy gallant who slays the dark master and liberates our land from fear.

Your loving daughter,
Alyssa of Swynwood

Soon after establishing himself, he and his son began to regularly flout their powers with hunting expeditions and new permits issued to clear the land.

Rhedyn might have cared little for what his followers did, but there were some things he was not willing to tolerate, and that was one of them. However, his warnings – howling beasts, sudden rainstorms, paths that appeared and vanished – were dismissed by the hardheaded Sir Gringamore as pagan trickery.

“Too long has this wood filled with foul beasts and heathens been allowed to grow unchecked,” the lord told his wife. “Perhaps it should be cleared! Your father’s letters say there is a market for wood for ships. With the price of wool going up, we also need more grazing land for sheep.”

When Sir Gringamore’s foresters next entered the wood, they came with axes and fire. Elder groves were violated. Ancient trees were felled or burned. Standing stones were toppled. The audacity of their onslaught took Rhedyn by surprise – and worst of all, one of their victims was the birch tree that housed his close friend, the dryad Whisperwind.

Rhedyn felt rage, grief, and a desire to protect his charges. His first impulse was to transform himself into a terrible beast and besiege Sir Gringamore’s castle, leading a company of several of his fiercest sylvan allies, bears and wolves. Yet he realized he had little experience at such warfare, and as he contemplated the injuries his animal friends would suffer, he balked at risking their lives for his own vengeance.

At this moment of indecision, he was visited by a delegation of villagers. It was Sister Owl, his former student, and two of her followers. While he, the archdruid, might have forgotten them, Sister Owl said, they had not forgotten their debt to him. She understood his grief: She too had been scorned by Sir Gringamore, who had often trampled their fields while pursuing game, and had raised their taxes to pay for his foresters and the pretty fineries his wife loved. Well, she had a plan – and if Rhedyn would listen to his old student, they could have a fitting revenge upon Sir Gringamore without endangering any of their charges . . . her only price was that he acknowledge her existing role as leader of the village’s cult.

Rhedyn’s Revenge

Acting under Sister Owl’s advice, Rhedyn did not strike back. Instead, he urged those beasts and entities under his care to retreat deeper into the wood, and made preparations of his own.

As Sister Owl suspected, Sir Gringamore noted the seeming hesitation and retreat of his foe. He exalted in what seemed an easy victory over this rustic enemy.

To celebrate, Sir Gringamore decided to hold a hunting party, accompanied by Galleron, several retainers and foresters, and a pack of fierce hounds. During the hunt, a beautiful white deer was spotted. Young Galleron, who had boldly ridden ahead, went after it, only to be separated from his father and the rest of the party by a sudden growth of bushes, the inexplicable disappearance of the trail, and a mysterious mist that sprang up.

A few minutes later, the mist cleared. As the party tried to find each other in the woods, Sir Gringamore thought he heard his son’s cry. He sounded his horn, only to see, moments later, a handsome white stag he had evidently surprised! Thoughts of his misplaced son (doubtless just behind the trees a few hundred yards away) were driven from his mind by the desire for the chase; he sounded his horn and charged. The startled

stag froze, then suddenly turned and fled! After a few minutes of frenzied pursuit, his hounds ran down the stag, tearing bits out of its flanks. He plunged his spear through the beast himself, finishing it off. As he cheerfully sawed off its antlered head, he absent-mindedly ordered his retainers to call out for his son. What a trophy it would make for the manor’s wall, and a pleasing meal of venison for his evening feast!

A moment later, his joy turned to ashes. The dead stag shimmered, and its body – and the bloody head in his hands – transformed into that of his son. He screamed.

The druid had his revenge. As Rhedyn used his spells to distract the hunting party, Sister Owl had used her own weaker animal magic to seize mental control of Galleron’s horse. Unable to ride, he had tried to flee on foot, only to be tripped and snared by animated vegetation. It only took Rhedyn a half-minute to follow Sister Owl’s suggestion and transform the youth into a stag. The former man was released, and the mist was dispelled – just as Sir Gringamore’s hunting party regained their bearings. As the druids faded into the woods, the now panicked Galleron ran toward the familiar sound of his father’s hunting horn – and met his doom.

Thanks to Sister Owl’s plan, Rhedyn had achieved his revenge and the nature cult gained many believers.

Dazed and in a state of shock, Sir Gringamore allowed his terrified men to lead him home to his castle, where they broke the horrible news, as best they understood it, to his wife Alyssa. It took him several days to recover his wits, during which he did not eat or sleep, and could only mutter “. . . the stag. I killed the stag.” He would eventually regain himself, and vow revenge upon the cult, but forever after he was a haunted, broken man.

Meanwhile, word of Galleron’s fate spread among the manor and villagers. As the nights filled with the howls of wolves and the shrieks of owls; giant shapes were seen to move in the woods at twilight. Then came a terrible storm; lightning blasted down, striking the church and destroying its holy symbol. People locked their doors and shutters.

Yet those villagers who had secretly been druid cult members were exalted that their master, the great druid, had finally showed his power. They spread the word: The old *true* faith had returned. If the clerics of the new faith could not protect their lord’s son, who would be safe? Only those who returned to the old ways! They would walk in the woods without fear, by day or night. Their crops would grow strong, without storms or pestilence to ruin them.

Yet there was a price. To remind the villagers of how they had turned from their forefather’s faith, and its consequence, there would be a payment exacted upon those who had strayed. Beginning with the next festival of spring a few weeks hence, there would be a lottery, to fairly determine who would appease the gods of wood and harvest.

And the villagers awoke to find a great shape looming on the distant hill overlooking the village green: the form of a giant man, 30’ tall, made of wicker, as had been present in the days of yore, in the time before the druid faith was forced underground . . .

SWYNGATE MANOR AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

This is a forested and hilly border region near ancient woodlands.

Ibareth Aranel

This is the secret ancient name of the druid cult (blood-sworn of the earth), which claims a connection to rituals lost in time. Their exact level of power is up to the GM.

Archdruid Rhedyn: He's a powerful druidic spellcaster with several animal allies. Thanks to his druidic spells, he is very hard to catch, but he cannot fight alone. In addition to numerous plan and animal spells, he can shapeshift into deer and owl forms. He is presently eager for vengeance, but he has little interest in human politics, outsourcing those decisions to the cult leadership.

The Mother Bear: Rhedyn has several animal allies, but among his closest is an old female grizzly bear he befriended many years ago when he saved her cubs from a forest fire. She leads a pack of other beasts, including two giant owls, three bears, and five wolves.

The Tree Spider: A cunning giant spider that makes its lair hundreds of feet up in the branches of a grove of ancient pines, spinning her webs between them and catching unwary birds just like flies! She can talk and is a friend of Rhedyn, who is a master of all forms of poetry, an art she loves. She also extends some of her webs downward into the forest floor. The Tree Spider will sometimes spare a victim who gives her a fresh verse.

Starkad Silverstring: This tall, strong minstrel's satirical songs and dalliance with a powerful border-lord's wife led to his being outlawed. Starkad became a successful leader of a band of outlaw-bards, the Mourn-Singers. That lasted until the full-moon night when his camp was attacked by a hungry werewolf. After a fierce struggle, Starkad garroted the man-beast with a silver harp string, but was himself infected. Following his first change, he fled his band and disappeared into the woods. There he met Rhedyn, who took pity on him, gave him sanctuary until he could learn to master his urges and survive as a werewolf. A grateful Starkad now follows the druid with a doglike devotion, treating him as a sworn liege-lord. Starkad has contacted

his former associates – a half-dozen hardened brigands – who have joined their forces to that of the druid.

The Village Cultists: The cult has been operating in secret for about 20 years. They largely do so autonomously, for the Great Druid of the Woods have little interest in the village. When they meet, cult members wear brown robes, hoods, and animal masks of forest animals (rabbit, wolf, goat, crow, pig, weasel, dog, owl, bear, badger, etc.) and address each other that way (e.g., Brother Rabbit or Sister Badger). Unknown to the archdruid, the cult began performing human sacrifices five years ago, ever since unseasonable storms ruined crops and led to several deaths from hunger. There are five committed initiates who have joined the cult. Members keep their animal masks hidden in their homes, but their identities are secret – and up to the GM.

Sister Owl and Brother Fox: The two leaders of the newly revived "druid cult" who claim to be the deputies of the archdruid. Their specific identities within the cult are unknown, but they are presumably natives of the village or the manor. Actually, they are opportunists and liars. For several years they have been trying to get Rhedyn to teach them true druid magic. He'd refused, so they turned to human sacrifice, augmenting the weakness of their own spells with ceremonial magic and extra energy from blood sacrifice. The other members of the cult believe Rhedyn is supporting them, but in reality he is unaware of their agenda. Their particular version of the sacrifice ritual requires that the victims be "pure" youths (under 21), be burnt alive on a sacred date such as an equinox or full moon, and either be born of high status or be ritually designated as such (e.g., as a "spring queen" for a festival). Are the powers they call upon the same as Rhedyn's? (In *GURPS* terms, they have mastered a Sacrifice spell – see *GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 54-58. This allows them to spend one energy but, by killing their victim, receive back energy equal to the victim's IQ, provided he is sapient, times the lower of his HP or HT. This energy bounty must be spent within 10 seconds of casting.)

High Road: A well-traveled road that runs from wherever the party came from (e.g., the nearest large town) to Swyngate Manor. The terrain gradually changes from pasture (with the occasional shepherd) to light wooded hills and then denser, untamed forest.

Swyngate Manor: The manor itself stands on a low hill overlooking the High Road and a stream, the Swynbrook. The keep itself is a small stone tower encircled by a moat and a wooden palisade. A simple gatehouse, always guarded by alert watchmen and archers, provides access. Inside is a well and a courtyard surrounded by timber buildings. The terrain around the manor is dotted by small farmsteads.

Buildings: Outside the keep but inside the palisade are the smithy, the kitchens and bakery, the kennels (with the lord's hounds), the foresters' barracks, and Zendel's Store (a trader's shop). Just outside the walls where the moat meets the Owl River is a mill and a gallows.

The Keep: This is a simple three-story stone tower. The first floor is without outside openings and is used as storeroom, and,

if necessary, a dungeon. The second floor can be reached by outside stairs. It is a drafty great hall with a fireplace and a trapped door to the first floor; the lord's guards also sleep here. The third floor contains the lord's personal chambers, a small room for his son, and a private chamber for the lady, her daughter, and their maidservants.

The Manor's Residents

Lady Alyssa (age 32): A merchant's daughter who married into the gentry, she has strong attractive features, a sharp chin, sad green eyes, and long, curly, black hair. She dresses in clothes perhaps a bit too fashionable for a rural estate (gifts from her father) but despite her slight vanity, is a practical administrator who is doing her best to keep things together after her husband went off the deep end. Recently she has written to her father for aid, but she has also had the idea of putting up bounty for the druid.

Isilda (age 13): A mirror of her mother as a maiden, Alyssa's daughter is a spirited child who used to like playing in the woods with her maid, Violet Gunderson, before the recent unpleasantness.

Sir Grigamore (age 37): A skilled warrior and experienced huntsman who is now suffering from nightmares and black depression. He has developed a phobia against eating meat, but like many gentry, dislikes vegetables, and so has lost a lot of weight, and now appears rather cadaverous. He spends most of his days locked in his son's former room or in his small study, reading an ever-growing library of works on natural magic to try and understand the horror that befell him. As he has some residual magic aptitude, it's likely not long before he will start meddling in things he shouldn't. Every so often, he orders a large party of men into the forest in search of the druid or, sometimes, "to find my son" forgetting, temporarily, that he had slain him.

Zendel (age 41): A local trader, with connections to the Talbot family business. He imports a variety of goods and exports furs and wood.

The Servants: The manor's retinue include Pastor Bardas (steward and cleric-sage), Martin the Forester (a scout and archer); Hobart Blackwulf (his guard captain); Quin (the lord's squire), six men-at-arms (with chainmail and horses), 12 foresters (bowmen), Tara the Minstrel-Maiden (a bard), Yoric the Cook (who could be better), and 15 servants, maids, and pages.

LOWER SWYNGATE

Farmhouses and barns are clustered around a well, a timber-framed church, and an inn/tavern, the Owl and Maiden. Most of the villagers live here in some 40 thatched houses, huts, and cottages (population 450). Another 50 or so villagers are scattered in outlying farmsteads or cottages. Most of the buildings have attached sheds for cattle, chicken coops, and pigsties. Those who don't work in the village or fields travel to the manor to labor or visit the smithy, carpenter, and miller.

The farmland spread out to about 500 yards of the village itself, nestled between the High Road and the forest. The fields grow barley (to make bread and ale) and oats (for porridge). Half the fields are left fallow each year and used for grazing cattle and pigs.

Woodsmen live in huts or cottages on the fringes of the forest. They include charcoal burners, rope makers, and forest beekeepers. Most of these folk are supporters of the Druid cult.

The Smallwood: This light "managed" woodlands is managed by the village as their main source of firewood. Wildflowers and herbs can be found here, pigs forage here seeking acorns, and a few deer occasionally stray into it.

Owl Hill: The nearest of two hills overlooking the village has a huge (120' high) prehistoric stick-figure drawing cut into the turf that is visible from the village. The outline vaguely resembles a bigheaded horned and winged creature. Locals say it's a giant owl, though some feel it's a demon. The top of the hill is lightly wooded.

Spider Maiden Hill: The second hill sports another geoglyph that suggests a female rider on an eight-limbed, horned horse. The top of the hill is barren save for an ancient lightning-blasted oak tree. It provides an excellent view. There are old stones forming a circle. It is here that the cult erected its wicker man –

a 30'-tall stick giant – for the next sacrifice they plan, which they hope to use to bless crops over the entire village.

The Horn Gate: A tall dike and hedge mark the gap between the Owl and Maiden Hills into the Swyngate Forest (below). A track runs through the forest for a mile or so, leading to a glade, before splitting into several different paths.

The Villagers

The villagers are a mix of indentured peasants and yeomen. There are a few notable persons.

Grim Morrack: The village blacksmith and a widower, his pretty daughter Mara was chosen as Spring Queen 10 years ago . . . and vanished the next day, following the festival. Some items she had worn were found in the remains of a wicker man on Sleeper's Hill (see below). His wife later drowned herself in the Owl Brook (see below).

Swen Gunderson: The village headman, who is the richest freeman and has several parcels of land he rents to other tenants. His wife Maruna is an infamous gossip but a skilled healer. Violet is their 14-year-old, bright, and cheerful daughter, a bit of a chatterbox who loves hunting mushrooms in the woods. Violet is also the maid of the lord's daughter.

Jon Brewer: Owner of the Owl and Maiden tavern with his wife, Gwen, who is also a noted cook. They have a handsome young son, Markus. Of late, their tavern has been host to various strangers drawn to the village.

Father Ogen: An aging and somewhat senile cleric at the village church.

The Widow Libby: A successful farmer, her children and her grandfather died during the great famine 10 years ago.

SWYNGATE FOREST

This heavily wooded deciduous forest is about seven miles wide and eight miles long. The trees grow tall. The wildlife includes deer, wolves, bears, and owls.

Owl Brook: A stream that crosses the forest track and winds deeper into the woods.

Whisperwind's Grove: An outer grove, now only stumps and ashes.

The High Grove: Located deep within the heart of the woods near the old hollow hills. It is here – or perhaps under Sleeper's Hill – that the archdruid can be found.

Sleeper's Hill: Located about two miles deep in the forest, said to be ancient burial mound. Atop the hollow hills is another stone circle, a place of sanctity for the druids.

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.

Dearest Father,

I have long been blessed with good fortune, but now, as Pastor Bardas would say, the worm has turned, and I have bitter news indeed. My eldest son is dead, and my husband lies in miasma of bleak despair, for it was his own hand that slew him! A terrible hunting accident – or a horrid curse of black magic? My heart is heavy and I can scarce credit the report of the bizarre and ungodly transformation that befell my son, though there were credible witnesses. He is dead, and surely black magic was behind it!

Let me start again. It seems a sinister cult has for many centuries lurked in the dark woods north of our new estate. In recent months, they have risen again, allied with fell creatures such as giant spiders, hideous bears, and werewolves. The cult's leader is one Rhedyn, former goatherd who is now an unholy priest; my husband had scorned his prior threats and posturing as mere words, but his power is very real and his reach is long.

With my husband no longer riding on patrol, the roads that pass the outskirts of Swyngate Forest have reverted to haunts of outlaws and robbers. Brigands waylay travelers, then vanish into dens in the wood, to consort with a witch-cult that offers them sanctuary where our foresters fear to tread. I have also heard whispers that the country folk at the forest's edge now pay tribute to the cult. On the same day my son Galleron was murdered, lightning smote the village church. And others report an apparition in the hills, a foul idol or giant that some villagers now sacrifice to for fear of death!

My lord and I still remain safe in our castle, protected by our retainers and hired men. Yet my anguished heart cries for vengeance for my firstborn, and I fear for the lives of the villagers and my daughter who is but 13 years old. With my lord succumbed to a malignant despondency, I have no one but you to turn to.

Father, I know you consort with many adventurers, as you have often enlivened your letters to me with tales of their valor. I implore you to prevail upon some of these stalwarts to journey to Swyngate Castle and come to my aid! I stand alone against a rising tide of darkness and chaos. While I am not rich, neither am I poor in goods, and surely the robbers and cultists must now be sitting on a mound of ill-gotten gains that might tempt such men. Too, I have heard tales that Rhedyn makes his lair amid ancient barrows filled with treasures (it was apparently seeking one such that cost the last lord his life).

Indeed, my lord's desire for vengeance is such that he would even consider some kind of alliance with the worthy gallant who slays the dark master and liberates our land from fear.

Your loving daughter,
Alyssa of Swynwood

GREEN POWER

BY MICHELE ARMELLINI

In addition to the wondrous array of magical effects concerning nature, plants, and wilderness in the form of spells (chiefly Plant and Weather spells) of the standard magic rules, **GURPS** offers another way of handling “natural” magic: supernatural advantages. This option is particularly useful for naturally, inherently magical beings, who can work magic because that’s the way they are. It comes in handy for adventurers who aren’t priests of a deity of nature but are nevertheless specially attuned with Mother Nature herself and are therefore bestowed with extraordinary powers. Likewise, this solution is perfect for settings in which there seems to be no standard body of learned magic, but natural phenomena that science can’t explain do take place, such as in some present-day horror campaigns.

A number of special powers are particularly suited for characters that are in tune with nature and plant life. Those beings manifesting these abilities may or may not be sapient. Their abilities work best in forests or wooded areas, but the GM could modify at least some of these ideas to permit their use in other locales – provided that they are natural environments. The abilities are consistent with **GURPS Powers** (which is recommended reading for those who want to make the most of these suggestions).

Most of these new supernatural advantages have a very significant limitation: They can only be used in the right environment. They mostly make use of living, existing mundane plants, so vegetation has to be present in the first place! Anyone relying on these abilities will find himself much weaker if he strays to a city.

Additionally, just like magic spells, many of these powers cost Fatigue Points or have some other restriction.

HOW POWERFUL?

The powers suggested here are not world-shaking. They are designed for starting PCs or average NPCs. A hero will be able to recruit the assistance of existing, mundane plants in their natural environment, and to have them carry out basic feats. However, he won’t be able to cause a magical, giant, carnivorous sapient plant to spring up from a paved city square. Obviously, the GM is welcome to tinker with these ideas and to power them up, if so wished!

IMPORTANT TRAITS

The supernatural advantages presented here stem from a mystical attunement with pristine nature. There are several **GURPS** mechanics to represent this.

Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience.
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Environmental

Variable

Environmental (see p. B40) is a canonical special limitation for the Binding advantage, but it might be considered as a special form of the general Accessibility limitation (see p. B110). Since natural magic is inherently and closely linked with the actual environment, most of its manifestations amount to an innately transcendental manipulation of mundane, natural objects.

In the case of the powers suggested here, this means that the target or the subject must be standing on fertile ground; this is worth -20%. More stringent variations are worth more; for example, being among any vegetation is worth -30%, while being among specific plants (such as under a tree or among blooming flowers) is worth -40%. The GM may adapt these capabilities to natural magical beings who live in specific kinds of environments, such as swamps, deserts, and so on.

The GM might allow attempts to use these powers in a marginally suitable environment at a penalty on the success roll. For instance, if “dense vegetation” is required, -2 might be exacted in a sparse wood, or -4 in a thinly planted city park.

Mana Sensitive

-10%

This is an optional limitation for the powers listed here. It makes them closer to actual magic than the abilities presently are. With this limitation, the powers become dependant upon mana (see p. B34); they will not work in no-mana areas. Being optional, this discount is not included in the calculations, but the GM may wish to add it.

Pact (Forest Guardian's)

-20%

All of the abilities include this limitation (see p. B113). A specific form of Pact is suggested here: complying with the mental disadvantages dictated by the forest guardian lens (see p. 26). The GM may choose any other combination of disadvantages adding up to -20 points, or he can substitute the Nature power modifier (see below). Alternatively, remove this limitation from the powers and recalculate the point values.

Power Modifier: Nature

-20%

For more information on this alternative to the Pact limitation above, see **GURPS Powers** (p. 28). This provides flavorful restrictions similar to the Code of Honor and Vow required by the Pact. It would give an enemy NPC weaknesses that the heroes can possibly exploit.

Plant Control Talent

5 points/level

Since these abilities are based on some *limited* form of control on mundane, nonintelligent plants, they are influenced by the Plant Control Talent (**GURPS Powers**, p. 132).

*Magick is nothing else
but the survey of the
whole course of Nature.*

*– Giambattista Della
Porta, Natural
Magick*

ATTACK POWERS

These natural-magic powers can be used against the enemies of nature when they foolishly trespass in the forest.

Dead Branch Falling

21 points

You lure your victim under a tree limb. Uncannily, it can barely be heard as it cracks and crashes down on the target. An already dead branch would be preferable, but a living one can be used. Target the effect using Innate Attack (Gaze).

Statistics: Crushing Attack 4d (Accurate +2, +10%; Costs Fatigue, 4 FP, -20%; Damage Modifier, Double Knockback, +20%; Environmental, Target must be under trees, -40%; Increased Range, 1/2D range only, x10, +15%; Low Signature, +10%; Overhead, +30%; Pact, -20%) [21].

Poisonous Creepers

20 points

You can use this insidious attack against targets who are sleeping outdoors. Sneak close to them and have poisonous creepers grow and touch their unprotected skin. Target the effect using Innate Attack (Gaze).

Statistics: Toxic Attack 2d (Area Effect, 8 yards, +150%; Contact Agent, -30%; Cyclic, 1 day interval, 2 cycles, +10%; Environmental, Targeted area must be fertile ground, -20%; Extended Duration, 10x, +40%; No Signature, +20%; Onset, Exposure Time 1 minute, -30%; Pact, -20%; Persistent, +40%; Preparation Required, 1 minute, -20%; Reduced Range, 1/2x, -10%; Symptoms, 2/3 HP, Irritant, Moderate Pain, +20%) [20].

Pollen Cloud

26 points

All flowers in the target area release a sudden, disproportionate, thick cloud of pollen, affecting anyone breathing. Target the effect using Innate Attack (Gaze).

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Area Effect, 4 yards, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Drifting, +20%; Environmental, Target must be in blooming vegetation, -40%; Inaccurate, -1, -5%; Irritant, Sneezing, +20%; Pact, -20%; Persistent, +40%; Respiratory Agent, +50%) [26].

Rotten Stench

31 points

Fruits and other vegetal material in the area decay at once, releasing a sudden, powerful nauseating stench. Target the effect using Innate Attack (Gaze).

Statistics: Affliction 2 (HT-1; Area Effect, 4 yards, +100%; Costs Fatigue, 4 FP, -20%; Dissipation, -50%; Environmental, Target must be in vegetation, -30%; Inaccurate, -1, -5%; Irritant, Nauseated, +30%; Pact, -20%; Respiratory Agent, +50%) [31].

Skin of Nettles

22 points

Your skin instantly grows stinging hairs that inject powerful irritating chemicals on contact with the bare skin of your victims. Determine accuracy of your touch with DX or Brawling.

Statistics: Affliction 2 (HT-1; Aura, +80%; Contact Agent, -30%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Irritant, Moderate Pain, +20%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Pact, -20%) [22].

Wall of Thorns

22 points

The vegetation in the area suddenly sprouts large thorns, leaves' edges become razor-sharp, and branches move and whip nearby targets. Target the effect using Innate Attack (Gaze).

Statistics: Cutting Attack 1d (Area Effect, 8 yards, +150%; Costs Fatigue, 3 FP, -15%; Environmental, Target area must be in vegetation, -30%; Extended Duration, 3x, +20%; Pact, -20%; Persistent, +40%; Wall, Permeable, Any Shape Desired, +60%) [22].

Willful Vines

27 points

Thick vines grow with impossible speed and entangle the legs of anybody in the area, rooting them in place. Target the effect using Innate Attack (Gaze).

Statistics: Binding 12 (Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Environmental, Target must be in vegetation, -30%; Pact, -20%; Persistent, +40%; Preparation Required, 1 minute, -20%) [27].

Gift of Water

19 points

All nearby plants immediately drop all water they have gathered on leaves or inside storage bodies, and release a huge amount of humidity, giving a sudden cold shower that may surprise anyone but you. Roll a Quick Contest of your Will vs. their HT; victory stuns them. Additionally, the water forms a short-lived barrier that reduces any damage you might suffer from flames or heat sources. This lasts for one minute after your use of Gift of Water.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP, -10%; Emanation, -20%; Environmental, Subject must be in dense, damp vegetation, -50%; Link, +10%; Malediction 1, +100%; Pact, -20%) [16] + Damage Resistance 3 (Environmental, Subject must be in dense, damp vegetation, 50%; Force Field, +20%; Limited, Heat/Fire, -40%; Link, +10%; Pact, -20%) [3].

Forest Guardian Lens

8 points

You have a rare mystical attunement with nature. This gives you both extraordinary powers and peculiar responsibilities. These traits, however, do not dictate who you are, exactly. You could be a druid-like holy man who doesn't follow an organized nature religion; a spirit of the woods; an elven mystic; or a sapient plant life form.

Suitable accompanying disadvantages for forest guardians, although not mandatory, are Sense of Duty (Whole of nature) [-15] and Odious Personal Habit (Refuses to use everyday tech gadgets) [-5]. The latter is a possible social consequence of the Vow (see below).

For details on the Pact, see p. 25.

Forest Guardian (+8 points): Absolute Direction (Environmental, p. 24, Only in wooded areas, -20%; Pact, -20%) [3]; Code of Honor (Forest Guardian's)* [-10]; Green Thumb 1 (Pact, -20%) [4]; Plant Control Talent [5]; Plant Empathy (Pact, -20%) [4]; Speak With Plants (Pact, -20%) [12]; and Vow (Only use outdated technology)† [-10].

* Know, respect, serve and protect wild nature; this applies anywhere you go, but especially in your home region and in particular to plant life. Killing animals and cutting trees is allowed, as death is part of nature, but only if it is necessary for survival, if it is done respectfully and as swiftly as possible, and if it doesn't unbalance the environment.

† As the production of technological devices harms nature *somewhere*, up to TL4, you will only use equipment one TL behind the prevailing one in the setting. This goes to *two* TLs at TL5-6. At TL7 and above, you will simply not use anything above TL5. This is not the Low TL disadvantage: You might well know how computers or telephones work; it's just that you won't use them.

Parrying Branch

5 points

When you touch a tree trunk, a suitable branch moves with impossible flexibility and without warning to whip a foe. Unfortunately, it only does 1d-3 crushing damage. The branch is weak as an attack, but it works well for parrying your foe's sword, when you have no weapon in hand and you don't want to risk a bare-handed parry! Target the effect using DX.

Statistics: Crushing Attack 1d-3 (Environmental, Among trees, -30%; Melee Attack, Reach 1-4, -15%; No Signature, +20%; Pact, -20%) [1] + Enhanced Parry 1 (Branch; Environmental, Among trees, -30%; No Signature, +20%; Pact, -20%) [4].

Skin of Bark

12 points

Your skin takes on traits of a tree. Your hardened, bark-covered hands and feet work as blunt claws. The chameleon aspect works best when naked; any clothes should be camouflaged. Contact or "blood" agents, as well as spells, that affect plants, will also be effective on this bark-like skin. Although this power does not make sense for any creature that is already is a sapient plant, it could be used as inspiration for creating a new one.

Statistics: Blunt Claws (Extended Duration, 3x, +20%; Limited Use, 3/day, -20%; Link, +10%; Pact, -20%; Temporary Disadvantage, Ham-Fisted 1, -5%) [3] + Chameleon 2 (Environmental, Subject must be in a forest, -30%; Extended Duration, 3x, +20%; Limited Use, 3/day, -20%; Link, +10%; Pact, -20%) [6] + Damage Resistance 2 Extended Duration, 3x, +20%; Limited Use, 3/day, -20%; Link, +10%; Pact, -20%; Semi-Ablative; Tough Skin) [3].

COMBINED POWERS

These abilities combine two or more functions and can be useful for a variety of purposes.

Forest Guardian's Stealth

10 points

The chameleon aspect works best when naked, but if clothes are used, then they should be camouflaged. Any noise you might make blends in with the background forest noise.

Statistics: Chameleon 2 (Environmental, Subject must be in dense vegetation, -40%; Link, +10%; Pact, -20%) [5] + Silence 2 (Environmental, Subject must be in dense vegetation, -40%; Link, +10%; Pact, -20%) [5].

Unwelcome Walkers Below

28 points

You can cause one of two effects to torment wanderers in a forest: Either a rain of acorns, twigs, and other lightweight vegetable matter suddenly falls on the area, surprising and possibly stunning any targets; or hard nuts or large, soft fruits drop rapidly, causing crushing damage. In either case, so many leaves fall down in the area at the same time that they reduce visibility. Target the effect using Innate Attack (Gaze).

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Area Effect, 8 yards; +150%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Environmental, Underneath suitable trees, -50%; Link, +10%; Pact, -20%) [19*] + Crushing Attack 1d (Area Effect, 8 yards, +150%; Bombardment, Skill 14, -5%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP, -5%; Environmental, Underneath suitable trees, -50%; Increased 1/2D, 10x, +15%; Overhead, +30%; Pact, -20%) [3*] + Obscure 3 (Vision; Environmental, Underneath suitable trees, -50%; Link, +10%; Pact, -20%; Ranged, +50%) [6].

* Affliction and Crushing Attack are alternative attacks. Whichever one is used is then linked to Obscure.

OTHER POWERS

These are more tricks for forest guardians.

Forest Mist

21 points

All the plants in a wide area around you release their humidity, creating a mist that affects everybody's vision except yours. Target the effect using Will.

Statistics: Obscure 4 (Vision; Area Effect, 32 yards, +200%; Costs Fatigue, 5 FP, -25%; Defensive, +50%; Environmental,

Subject must be in dense, damp vegetation, -50%; Pact, -20%) [21].

Undergrowth Distraction

9 points

You can rattle bushes and sway stalks of grass. Although it cannot be used for throwing things at enemies, it's ideal for distracting foes with small movements and faint noises in the undergrowth around them!

Statistics: Telekinesis 3 (Accessibility, Cannot punch or throw, -30%; Accessibility, Living plants only, -20%; Increased Range, 10x, +30%; Pact, -20%) [9].

*In nature, there are neither rewards
nor punishments; there are only
consequences.*

– Robert B. Ingersoll

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michele Armellini lives in Udine, Italy, with his very understanding wife, Silvia. Michele 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! He has written for *Pyramid*, and he is the author of **GURPS WWII: Grim Legions**. He is the author or co-author (with Hans-Christian Vortisch) of several digital products: **GURPS Locations: St. George's Cathedral**, **GURPS WWII: Their Finest Hour**, **GURPS WWII: Doomed White Eagle**, and **GURPS WWII: Michael's Army**.



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DESIGNER'S NOTES

WILDERNESS

ADVENTURES

BY SEAN PUNCH

The top question about *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures* has to be “What took you so long?” *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers* kicked off the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series with not one, not two, but *three* outdoor professions – barbarian, druid, and scout – yet only the scout could hold his own wherever he traveled, thanks to being an “arrow machine gun.” The barbarian (with almost 60 points sunk into Outdoorsman and related skills) and druid (who realizes his full potential only in pristine wilderness) came up a bit short. They were overdue for a little favoritism!

What delayed this was the fact that the great outdoors is *big* – much bigger than the dungeons that are the main focus of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1-15*. And that meant I needed a good chunk of writing time to do the task justice. I finally got my chance when the *GURPS* schedule was held up by *Ogre* (the board game, not the hulking goon from *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level*) . . . whereupon I discovered how right I was. At 60 pages, only *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables* ended up longer, and only because tables are an extravagant use of space. Counting words, *Wilderness Adventures* weighs in 60% heavier than *Treasure Tables* – that is, I found a lot to say.

AROUND THE WORLD IN 60 PAGES

Many topics demanded in-depth exploration in *Wilderness Adventures*. For specifics, see the supplement! For insights into *why* what's there is there, keep reading . . .

Outdoorsmen

The catch with putting barbarians, druids, and scouts in starring roles is that almost everyone else becomes supporting cast. The hardest challenge I faced wasn't coming up with new and expanded rules (*Outdoor Tasks*, below), but pointing out ways to make all the *other* professions – especially the nerdy artificer, mentalist, scholar, and non-druidic spellcasters, and the civilization-loving bard and innkeeper – useful (yet *not too* useful) outdoors. In doing so, I realized that some groups would have few or no outdoorsmen, so I had better offer a lens to tack wilderness abilities onto the pastier shade of deliver.

And since many heroes would sooner dump the hard work on native guides and summoned pets than go back to school, I concluded that I should also expand the roster in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 15: Henchmen* with a new breed of henchman, and discuss outdoorsy Allies. The results ended up filling a dozen pages.

Outfitting

Naturally, since outdoorsmen require gear for camping, climbing, trekking, and the like, I had to include several pages of *that*. Rather than count beans for realism-obsessed survivalists, I took a hack 'n' slash approach, the spirit of which is captured by a pair of two-word quotes: “Doom Cleats” and “Machete Table.” And as long distances demand mounts and vehicles, those made the cut as well – in this case simplified by focusing on price, speed, and carrying capacity.

A little favoritism for our favorite barbarians, druids, and scouts.

Outdoor Tasks

If I had a recipe for the bulk of this supplement, it might be: “Start by taking the brief sections on camping, foraging, tracking, etc. in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons* and expanding each to a page or three. Add outdoor extensions of the rules for mapping, scouting, signaling, physical stunts, and so on. Top up with a few pages apiece on natural hazards, outdoor traps, and wilderness battlefields.”

Writing all that was the heart of the project – about half of it. My primary goal was to ensure that each and every situation required at least one of the so-called “useless” skills that barbarians, druids, and scouts start with. The results make such abilities essential to the party that doesn't want to end up frozen, stung, sunburned, starved, and stampeded to death before reaching the dungeon! I promise that if you use these rules, you *will* gain a new appreciation for the barbarian with “wasted points” in Outdoorsman 4 and the druid who's “worthless” underground.

Outdoor Adventures

The second-hardest part of this writing project was the chapter on setting adventures and even entire campaigns outdoors. That's because I couldn't "cheat" and use existing templates, gear lists, and rules to jump-start my brain. Indeed, when I asked a few colleagues for feedback on the outline, and Steven Marsh suggested adding a short chapter on this topic, my mind was blank at first. But then the ideas poured in like a flood: ambushes en route to the dungeon; adventures built around escorting caravans, tracking bad guys, and mapping the frontier; "dungeons" with trees and cliffs in lieu of walls; accidents such as getting lost or shipwrecked; and more. Though I included a few rules, my *real* aim was to help GMs with big-picture issues like mapping, planning encounters, and coping with delvers who want to explore a sandbox.

And Natural Magic?

Wilderness Adventures lends considerable thought to interactions between Nature and magic. It examines spellcasters' roles in natural settings and recommends helpful spells – both in general and for specialized situations. It talks about reimagining clerics as nature priests, for gamers who would rather not play druids. It suggests familiars, wilderness spirits, and summoned beasts that would make valuable Allies in the great outdoors. It explores the supernatural reaction of Nature to despoilment. And *Nature's Strength* (*Wilderness Adventures*, p. 53) proposes granting druids bonuses in places of natural power, to compensate for the frequent penalties they suffer elsewhere.

All of this is incidental discussion, though. *Wilderness Adventures* doesn't set aside a chapter for variant magic rules. That oversight is easily remedied!

DRUIDIC LENSES

Not all druids work like the "classic" one in *Adventurers*. The GM may opt to change things up in a campaign where wilderness spellcasters play a bigger role.

Elemental Druid

Like the classic druid, the *elemental druid* (or *arcane druid*) pulls magic from natural forces – but he goes "one level up," tapping elemental energies directly instead of asking spirits to do so. He generates supernatural effects by exploiting the connection between Earth-aspected mana and the soil and mountains, Air-aspected mana and the skies and winds, Fire-aspected mana and volcanoes and the sun, and Water-aspected mana and the rivers and rains. He can manage this only because his gods have attuned him to these specific aspects – he cannot sense or use mana in general, and isn't a mage. This has several ramifications:

1. The advantage underlying his supernatural gifts is Elemental Influence (Druidic) (below). This *completely replaces* Power Investiture (Druidic).
2. His training includes an increased knowledge of magic and magical beings, at the cost of a weaker understanding of natural phenomena.

Magical Talents for Wilderness Spellcasters

The casters described in *Druidic Lenses* (pp. 29-32) and *Wilderness Wizards* (pp. 32-33) rely on variant forms of the usual traits such delvers possess.

Elemental Influence (Druidic)

10 points/level

This unusual variety of Elemental Influence (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 9: Summoners*, p. 10) works exactly like Power Investiture (Druidic) when learning druidic spells and rolling to use Druidic abilities (for which it serves as a power Talent). It also permits a (Per + Elemental Influence - 3) roll to sense the mana level pertinent to Earth, Air, Fire, or Water spells – which might not correspond to the *general* mana level in regions of aspected mana. Though bestowed by the higher powers worshipped by druids, and therefore tied to druidism, this trait isn't intrinsically "holy"; it doesn't count as Power Investiture in situations where that advantage aids prayers to or reactions from nature gods or spirits, or enable rolls to notice areas blessed or cursed by such entities.

Magery (Life-Force)

5 points for Magery 0, +10 points/level

This trait works just like standard Magery (p. B66) in most ways. Notably, it counts as a prerequisite for wizardly

spells and adds to IQ when learning them; allows a (Per + Magery) roll to detect enchantments; and enables use of mage-only items. And like ordinary Magery, it bestows no special facility with blessings or holy items, and no rapport with spirits or gods of any kind. It differs from other Magery in only two ways:

1. It adds to Naturalist skill *instead of* Thaumatology.
2. The (Per + Magery - 3) roll on p. 6 of *GURPS Magic* allows the mage to sense shifts in Nature's strength, not mana.

Power Investiture (High Druidic)

10 points/level

This new variety of Power Investiture (p. B77) is interchangeable with Power Investiture (Druidic) for the specific purposes of druidic spells and abilities (for which it acts as a power Talent). However, the High Druidic variety behaves as *clerical* Power Investiture for "incidental" effects like sensing unholy altars and shifts in sanctity level, and performing exorcisms. It doesn't count as such for learning clerical spells, though – nor is it considered Power Investiture (Druidic) where *that* trait is called for by name to represent attunement to local nature spirits (who rarely appreciate an agent of the senior management throwing his weight around).

3. His lists of spells and abilities are likewise altered to reflect a bias toward magical elements and away from living things.

4. His spells and abilities are influenced by mana level *instead of* Nature's strength. They work equally well in pristine wilderness, dungeons, and urban wastelands *as long as there's mana*. In low mana, all rolls are at -5 (if there's no roll, ability effects are at half strength). Without mana, the druid is powerless!

Elemental Druid Lens

Elemental Druid (+0 points): Replace Power Investiture (Druidic) with equal levels of Elemental Influence (Druidic), at identical cost. • Remove Spirit Empathy from advantage options (it's available as a special ability; see below). • Add Thaumatology (VH) IQ [8]-14 to primary skills. • Reduce Esoteric Medicine (Druidic) (H) Per [4]-14 to Per-1 [2]-13; Herb Lore (VH) IQ [4]-14† to IQ-1 [2]-13†; and Naturalist (H) IQ [2]-14† to IQ-1 [1]-13†. • Replace all secondary skills with Hidden Lore (Elementals) (A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Religious Ritual (Druidic) (H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Theology (Druidic) (H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Weather Sense (A) IQ-1 [1]-13, and any *four* of the following choices: Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-14; Animal Handling (any), Disguise (Animals), or Hidden Lore (Faeries or Nature Spirits), all (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Mimicry (Animal Sounds or Bird Calls), Pharmacy (Herbal), or Veterinary, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; or Survival (any) (A) Per-1 [1]-13. • Add all unselected secondary skills to background skill options. • Pick spells and abilities from the lists below.

Elemental Druidic Spells

Elemental druids learn the spells that druids normally learn – they can combine these in the same ceremonies, read them from the same scrolls, and so on. What differs is how the elemental druid powers this magic: he bypasses invisible nature spirits and uses his gods-given gift to manipulate elemental mana personally. Thus, his castings function as *elementalist* spells (see **Summoners**) when working out magical interactions. The main game-mechanical differences are:

- They're affected by mana, not Nature's strength.
- They require Elemental Influence (Druidic), not Elemental Influence (One Element or All Elements) or Power Investiture (Druidic).
- They use a rearranged version of the druidic spell list:

EI 1: Detect Magic, Extinguish Fire, Find Direction, Fog, Frost, Hawk Vision, Know Location, Mystic Mist, No-Smell, Pathfinder, Predict Earth Movement, Predict Weather, Purify Air, Purify Earth, Purify Water, Quick March, Recover Energy, Seek Coastline, Seek Earth, Seek Pass, Seek Water, Shape Air, Shape Earth, Shape Water, Tell Position, Umbrella, Wall of Wind, Weather Dome, and Windstorm.

EI 2: Beast-Rouser, Beast-Soother, Breathe Water, Clouds, Detect Poison, Freeze, Identify Plant, Master, Melt Ice, Rain, Remember Path, Resist Cold, Resist Lightning, Resist Pressure, Seek Food, Seek Plant, Sense Life, Snow, Snow Shoes, Summon Elemental, Swim, Water Vision, Waves, Whirlpool, and Wind.

EI 3: Animal Control, Beast Link, Beast Seeker, Beast Speech, Bless Plants, Body of Water, Body of Wind, Control Elemental, Create Spring, Cure Disease, Dispel Magic, Dry Spring,

Frostbite, Hail, Heal Plant, Hide Path, Light Tread, Lightning, Neutralize Poison, Plant Growth, Plant Vision, Pollen Cloud, Purify Food, Repel Animal, Rider, Rider Within, Sandstorm, Shape Plant, Spider Silk, Storm, and Tide.

EI 4: Alter Terrain, Animate Plant, Beast Summoning, Blossom, Conceal, Create Elemental, Create Plant, Entombment, False Tracks, Forest Warning, Instant Neutralize Poison, Plant Control, Plant Sense, Plant Speech, Protect Animal, Rain of Nuts, Rejuvenate Plant, Tangle Growth, Walk Through Plants, and Walk Through Wood.

EI 5: Beast Possession, Blight, Body of Slime, Body of Wood, Create Animal, Earthquake, Geyser, Move Terrain, Plant Form, Shapeshifting, Strike Barren, Volcano, and Wither Plant.

EI 6: Arboreal Immurement, Partial Shapeshifting, Permanent Beast Possession, Permanent Shapeshifting, Plant Form Other, and Shapeshift Others.

Elemental Druidic Arts

This variation on the standard druidic power has the following differences:

- Power modifier is Elemental, -10% rather than Druidic, -10%. This works just like Mana Sensitive (p. B34).
- Talent is Elemental Influence (Druidic), not Power Investiture (Druidic).
- Abilities are Allies (Elementals; Built on 25-100%; 12 or less or 15 or less; PM, -10%; Conjured *or* Summonable, +100%; may be Minion, +50%, and/or Unwilling, -50%) [Varies]; Amphibious (PM, -10%) [9]; Damage Resistance 1-4 (Limited, Elemental, -20%; PM, -10%) [3.5/level*]; Detect (Elemental Entities; PM, -10%) [9]; Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Absorption, -25%; PM, -10%) [13]; Medium (PM, -10%; Specialized, Elemental Entities, -50%) [4]; Pressure Support 1 or 2 (PM, -10%) [5 or 9]; Speak Underwater (PM, -10%) [5]; Spirit Empathy (PM, -10%; Specialized, Elemental Entities, -50%) [4]; Temperature Tolerance 1-8 (PM, -10%) [1/level]; Terrain Adaptation (PM, -10%) [5] for ice, mud, snow, or other weather-related conditions; Walk on Air (PM, -10%) [18]; and Walk on Liquid (PM, -10%) [14].

* Multiply cost by the number of levels being purchased and then round *up* to the next whole point.

Elemental Druid Power-Ups

Elemental druids may spend earned character points on anything on their (modified) template, including more of the spells and abilities listed above, and Elemental Influence (Druidic) up to 6 [10/level]. They have access to only a limited subset of standard druid power-ups (**GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 11: Power-Ups**, pp. 24-25): Close to the Earth [5/level]; Energy Reserve 1-20 (Druidic) [3/level]; Extraordinary Luck [30]; and Eye of the Storm [1]. However, they may also buy several elemental power-ups (**Power-Ups**, pp. 25-27): Alternate Forms (Elemental; PM, -10%) [Varies]; Filter [1]; Flight (PM, -10%) [36]; Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction 2; Limited, Fire and Heat, -40%; PM, -10%) [25]; Kindle [1]; Magic Resistance (Improved, +150%) [5/level], with *no* upper limit; Pebbles [1]; Permeation (Earth; Extended, Stone, +20%, PM, -10%) [44]; Permeation (Ice/Snow; PM, -10%) [9]; Rinse [1]; and Vibration Sense (Air *or* Water; PM, -10%) [9].

High Druid

The *high druid* receives power from the apex gods of Nature. All druids are priests, but the high druid comes closest to being a ceremonial, temple-dwelling cleric – though his ceremonies are outdoors and his temple is a grove or a henge. He focuses less on the practical, more on ritual and theology. He differs from the classic druid in that his spells and abilities rely on demonstrating respect for the Great Powers (Thunder God, Volcano Goddess, Sea God, et al.) rather than on negotiations with spirits on close-to-equal terms, while he diverges from the classic cleric in that he serves no single patron deity and works magic that concerns Nature rather than healing and protection. In game terms:

1. The advantage behind his supernatural gifts is Power Investiture (High Druidic) (p. 29). This *completely replaces* Power Investiture (Druidic).

2. His education includes an increased knowledge of formal religious matters at the expense of getting his hands dirty.

3. His lists of spells and abilities are also slightly altered to reflect this bias.

4. His spells and abilities are influenced by sanctity level *instead of* Nature's strength. Generally, he's affected as a cleric – not as a druid – by the holiness of the surroundings. The purity of Nature only matters where it reflects sanctity; e.g., if Elder Things deny an area to the gods, it will wither *and* lose sanctity, which will in turn affect the high druid.

High Druid Lens

High Druid (+0 points): Replace Green Thumb 1 [5] with Clerical Investment (High Druidic) [5], which grants all the upsides noted for standard Clerical Investment in *Dungeons* (cheap holy water, access to a “temple,” etc.).

- Change all instances of Power Investiture (Druidic) to Power Investiture (High Druidic), at identical cost.
- Change available Green Thumb levels from 2-4 to 1-4 in advantage options.
- Add Exorcism (H) Will [4]-14 to primary skills.
- Reduce Herb Lore (VH) IQ [4]-14† to IQ-1 [4]-13 and Naturalist (H) IQ [2]-14† to IQ-1 [2]-13, to reflect missing Green Thumb.
- Replace all secondary skills with Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Religious Ritual (Druidic) (H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Theology (Druidic) (H) IQ-2 [1]-12, and any *four* of the following choices: Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-14; Animal Handling (any), Disguise (Animals), Hidden Lore (Elementals, Faeries, or Nature Spirits), or Weather Sense, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Mimicry (Animal Sounds or Bird Calls), Pharmacy (Herbal), or Veterinary, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; or Survival (any) (A) Per-1 [1]-13.
- Add all unselected secondary skills to background skill options.
- Pick spells and abilities from the lists below.

Nature's Strength Revisited

Per p. 19 of *Adventurers*, druidic spells and abilities suffer penalties outside of unspoiled natural settings. Almost by definition, most adventures in the typical *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign take place in a dungeon, meaning that druids are penalized much of the time – at least, more often than wizards and clerics face mana and sanctity troubles. *Elemental Druid* (pp. 29-30) and *High Druid* (above) offer ways to resolve this asymmetry. However, the GM may want to make the *classic* druid competitive.

In an outdoor campaign, this is a trivial matter of declaring that the modifier is 0 in the wilderness and then setting every adventure there. However, in a game that bounces between town, wilds, and dungeon, this won't do – druids will still *average* a penalty. *Wilderness Adventures* suggests a simple solution: grant druids occasional bonuses, too. The goal is to make the mean modifier 0. One possible scheme:

*Indoors (building, dungeon, etc.)**: 0 if construction consists entirely of simple natural materials (mud, thatch, etc.); otherwise, a penalty equal in size to its TL. Ancient sites, like most “forgotten” dungeons, give -1 or -2 (flip a coin if unsure); quasi-medieval castles and dungeons give -3; and Elder Thing labyrinths and fancy dwarven fortresses give -4.

*Settlement**: 0 for a hamlet, -1 for a village, -2 for a town, -3 for a city, and -4 for a huge metropolis.

*Works (road, mill, mine, etc.)**: A penalty equal in size to its TL. That's -1 or -2 for ancient civilizations, -3 for early medieval ones, and -4 for late medieval ones (usual in *Dungeon Fantasy*). Add another -1 for incidental supernatural pollution if spells or alchemy are involved but not specifically to blight the land.

*Supernatural Blight**: Penalty depends on the strength of the power backing the despoilment: -10 for a clerical/wizardly curse in very high sanctity/mana, -6 for high sanctity/mana, -3 for normal sanctity/mana, or -1 for low sanctity/mana.

Distance†: If *none* of the above apply, the modifier is 0. Leaving the structure, town limits, road, etc. usually suffices. If the nearest despoilment severe enough to give -1 or worse isn't just a few steps away but truly distant, though, there's a bonus: +1 if 30 miles away, +2 for 100 miles, +3 for 300 miles, or +4 for 1,000+ miles.

Nature Worship†: A grove or a henge long used for worship by druids, elves, faerie, or spirits grants a bonus: +1 if used for 20 years or more, +2 for 50 years, +3 for 100 years, +4 for 500 years, or +5 for 1,000+ years.

Sanctity†: +3 in an area of high sanctity to high druids; +5 if very high sanctity for such druids.

Aspected Mana†: +3 if the region has high mana for Animal or Plant spells; +5 if very high mana. Where expressed as a modifier, use that value instead. This is regardless of the spell or ability used – all of the classic druid's powers flow from life.

* Penalties aren't cumulative! If multiple situations apply, use the *worst*. A druid can take an hour and roll vs. Religious Ritual (Druidic) to “purify” a camp-sized area enough to remove -1. One attempt only.

† Bonuses aren't cumulative! If multiple situations apply, use the *best*. Bonuses *can* offset penalties, where both would logically apply.

Effects of bonuses mirror those of penalties: they add to rolls for druidic spells and abilities, and where an ability requires no roll, each +1 gives +10% to effect.

High Druidic Spells

High druids use the standard druidic spell list for the most part, and can share scrolls, items, and ceremonies with other kinds of druids. However, the high druid calls upon the power of gods – not merely local nature spirits – to cast spells, so his magic is considered *clerical* for the purpose of magical interactions. In game terms, the important differences are:

- They're affected by sanctity, not Nature's strength.
- They require Power Investiture (High Druidic), not Power Investiture (Druidic).
- They include nine clerical spells as well as all the standard druidic spells (this could be considered the *real* benefit of Clerical Investment):

PI 1: Final Rest.

PI 2: Turn Zombie.

PI 3: Dispel Possession and Oath.

PI 4: Banish and Suspend Curse.

PI 5: Remove Curse.

PI 6: Bless and Curse.

High Druidic Arts

This variant on the standard druidic power differs as follows:

- Power modifier is Holy, -10% rather than Druidic, -10%. This works exactly as for clerics (*Adventurers*, p. 22), except that the "moral code" is -10 points of disadvantages from the *druid* template, most often Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism) [-10], but possibly a combination of Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism) [-5] and Vow (Vegetarianism) [-5], or Vow (Never sleep indoors) [-10]. The druid may pick Sense of Duty (Wild Nature) [-15]; in that case, he gets no extra discount for picking a harsher set of rules, but penance is less formal: a week of fasting, a \$250 sacrifice, a minor quest, etc.

- Talent is Power Investiture (High Druidic), not Power Investiture (Druidic).

- Abilities become Allies (Divine servant of equal points; 12 or less; PM, -10%; Summonable, +100%) [19] or (15 or less) [29]; Blessed (PM, -10%) [9]; Channeling (PM, -10%; Specialized, Nature Spirits, -50%) [4]; Damage Resistance 1 or 2 (Limited,

Elemental, -20%; PM, -10%) [4 or 7]; Detect (PM, -10%) for nature spirits [9] or supernatural beings [18]; Intuition (PM, -10%) [14]; Oracle (PM, -10%) [14]; Medium (PM, -10%; Specialized, Nature Spirits, -50%) [4]; Patron (Deities; 6 or less; Highly Accessible, +50%; PM, -10%; Special Abilities, +100%) [36] or (9 or less) [72]; and Serendipity 1 (PM, -10%) [14].

- It enables Exorcism alongside Esoteric Medicine (Druidic) and Herb Lore.

High Druid Power-Ups

High druids may spend earned points on any capability on their (modified) template, including more of the spells and abilities described above, and Power Investiture (High Druidic) up to 6 [10/level]. They have access to only a limited number of standard druid power-ups (*Power-Ups*, pp. 24-25): Close to the Earth [5/level]; Damage Resistance 3 or 4 (Limited, Elemental, -20%; PM, -10%) [11 or 14]; Energy Reserve 1-20 (Druidic) [3/level]; Extraordinary Luck [30]; New Realm [Varies]; and Reincarnation [20/level]. However, they may also purchase several cleric power-ups (*Power-Ups*, pp. 21-24): Dismissive Wave [10]; Focused Exorcist [1]; Great Prayer [30]; and Ridiculous Luck [60]. Finally, they can buy Serendipity (PM, -10%) [13.5/level*], with *no* upper limit.

* Multiply cost by the number of levels being purchased and then round *up* to the next whole point.

WILDERNESS WIZARDS

Druidic Lenses (pp. 29-32) discusses druids who draw upon mana and sanctity, while *Wilderness Holy Folk* (*Wilderness Adventures*, p. 6) and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 7: Clerics* provide guidance on clerics who rely on Nature's strength. What about *wizards* whose powers flow from Nature instead of from mana? This isn't as bizarre as it sounds . . . wizards do have a knack for despoiling wild places with curses, explosions, zombie armies, and so on, but fantasy portrays many grimoire-reading masters of the arcane as depending on the land – not some invisible field of pure magic – for their machinations.

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Life-Force Wizard

The *life-force wizard* is identical to the standard wizard except in one vital regard: he uses Nature's strength – not mana – to power his spells. He differs from the druid in that his magical abilities are inborn, not bestowed by nature spirits or gods in return for faith and a respect for living things. Thaumaturgists consider this gift to be a deranged form of magical aptitude that taps “the wrong supernatural frequency.” It's worth noting that when a life-force wizard preserves Nature, it's typically out of a selfish desire to preserve his powers; consequently, many druids regard such wizards as vampires of sorts (and some are!). In game terms, the differences are:

1. He casts spells using Magery (Life-Force) (p. 29) instead of standard Magery, which is a one-for-one swap.

2. His aptitude leads him to make knowledge of nature a higher priority than usual for a wizard.

3. His spells and abilities are influenced by Nature's strength *instead of* mana level. They work equally well in no mana through very high mana, as long as there's natural power present. He *does* receive the bonuses under *Nature's Strength Revisited* (p. 31) for nature worship and sanctity (regardless of personal faith) and for aspected mana (despite his usual insensitivity to mana), because these things elevate Nature's strength.

Life-Force Wizard Lens

Life-Force Wizard (+0 points): Replace Magery with equal levels of Magery (Life-Force), at identical cost.

- Replace the advantage option of Spirit Empathy with Outdoorsman 1-3 [10/level].
- Remove Pyromania as a disadvantage option (life-force wizards know better than to burn down forests) – but the GM may replace it with Lifebane [-10], if he believes he can make this a genuine problem for a PC.
- Replace Thaumatology (VH) IQ [1]-15 $\frac{1}{2}$ with Naturalist (H) IQ [1]-16 $\frac{1}{2}$ in primary skills.
- Change primary Hidden Lore options to Elementals, Faeries, or Nature Spirits (all of the usual options remain available as background skills).
- Add Thaumatology (VH) IQ-3 [1]-12 to secondary skills.
- Reduce number of background skill choices from nine to eight.

Life-Force Wizard Spells

The life-force wizard uses the standard wizardly spell list, and can share scrolls, teachers, and ceremonies with ordinary wizards. While he draws energy from Nature, that's all he does – though he has a sixth sense for how to keep Nature's strength up, his grasp of magic is still that of a wizard. Siphoning life force is somewhat inimical to living things (often leading to Frightens Animals and Lifebane), pushing spells for controlling animals and plants even *further* beyond his reach. His spells are subject to just two differences:

- They're affected by Nature's strength, not mana.
- They require Magery (Life-Force), not regular Magery.

Life-Force Wizard Power-Ups

Life-force wizards may spend earned character points on anything on their (modified) template – especially further

wizardly spells and Magery (Life-Force) up to 6 [10/level]. They can have any standard wizard power-up (**Power-Ups**, pp. 36-37) except for Mana Enhancer; however, the Magical Bolt, Power Reincarnate, and Secret Teleportation Spell abilities replace Mana Sensitive, -10% (p. B34) with Nature Sensitive, -10%, a limitation functionally identical to Druidic, -10% (**Adventurers**, p. 22). In addition, they can have Blood Healing [1] (**Power-Ups**, p. 36), Life-Force Burn [1/level] (**Power-Ups**, p. 24), and Vampirize [25] (**Power-Ups**, p. 31); the latter requires Magery 6 (Life-Force) and replaces Necromancy, -10% with Nature Sensitive, -10%.

Who's Who

The biggest problem with *Wilderness Holy Folk* (**Wilderness Adventures**, p. 6), *Druidic Lenses* (pp. 29-32), and *Wilderness Wizards* (pp. 32-33) is that they blur lines that were formerly clear. A brief “cheat sheet” is in order!

Spellcasting

When assessing whether spells can be cast:

- *Mana* affects spells cast with **Elemental Influence (Druidic)** and standard **Magery**.
- *Nature's strength* affects spells cast with **Magery (Life-Force)** and **Power Investiture (Druidic)**, though some forms of mana and sanctity may influence Nature's strength (see *Nature's Strength Revisited*, p. 31).
- *Sanctity* affects spells cast with standard **Power Investiture** and **Power Investiture (High Druidic)**.

Everything Else

For the purpose of what kinds of scrolls a spellcaster can read, what items he can use, which ceremonial magic rituals he can participate in, and who he can learn spells from:

- Anybody with standard **Power Investiture** is considered to be a *cleric* – even if he serves a nature god.
- Anybody with **Elemental Influence (Druidic)**, **Power Investiture (Druidic)**, or **Power Investiture (High Druidic)** is considered to be a *druid*.
- Anybody with standard **Magery** or **Magery (Life-Force)** is considered to be a *wizard*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean “Dr. Kromm” Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every **GURPS** product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of **GURPS** *Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the **GURPS Basic Set**, *Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created **GURPS Powers** (with Phil Masters), **GURPS Martial Arts** (with Peter Dell'Orto), **GURPS Zombies**, and the **GURPS Action**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, and **GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . among other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie.

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RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

WHEN NATURE CALLS, YOU BETTER ANSWER

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Author Peter David – a former writer for the *Aquaman* comic book series – has offered many defenses for why the character should be respected more than he is. (For example, the author has pointed out that Aquaman’s domain is 70% of the Earth.) However, one that stuck with me is his noting how versatile the character is, and adaptable to all situations. As Mr. David put it: “Drop Aquaman in the middle of Gotham City with nothing but the clothes on his back, and he’ll be fine. Drop Batman in the middle of shark-infested waters or off the Marianas Trench, and you’re not going to hear from him again.”

Magic that affects – or interacts with – the natural world has had a similar reputation problem in the gaming world. I’m tempted to place the blame at the feet of the original *Players Handbook* for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*. I suspect I wasn’t alone by trying to define heroes based on their more powerful aspects; thus, for all the spellcasters, I immediately turned to their mightiest spells. The highest-level magic-user spells include the ability to stop time, create an impenetrable multichromatic sphere, or invoke wishes. Meanwhile, druids at the pinnacle of their abilities can confuse creatures, turn metal into wood, or reincarnate someone who’s recently dead. (“Oh, I’m a badger now? You shouldn’t have. No, really.”) It’s hard to compete with that *wish* spell:

“I turn the metal into wood!”
“Or I can just *wish* it away . . .”
“I can reincarnate Grimfoot!”
“Or I can *wish* Grimfoot weren’t dead . . .”
“Why you gotta steal my thunder?!”

This lack of respect for natural forces extended into other games. When we were looking at *Torg* while I was working at West End Games, we kept struggling with how underpowered the nature-based magic of the Living Lands were. We’d joke that their powers included rituals like Transmute Seed Into Plant, or Conjure Mighty Warrior (components needed: two willing casters – one female, one male; casting time: 18 years . . .). It’s hard to take nature mages too seriously when their offensive capabilities are poison-tipped darts, while those

“unnatural” mages are tossing around fireballs capable of leveling armies.

Still, I suspect the tendency to underpower natural mages is older than that. Perhaps it’s because druidic and natural-minded traditions have been among us in the “real world,” and we *know* they’re not earth-shattering abilities. (Indeed, skeptics might argue that their magic is so subtle, it’s like it *doesn’t exist*.) However, nature-themed mages don’t *need* to be underpowered; in fact, the strongest reason to keep natural magic underpowered might be because to start exploring its true potential means they’d risk *overpowering* a campaign.

THE NATURE OF NATURE

Before looking at the possibilities of natural magic in a campaign, it’s important to understand what we have in mind . . . which is easier said than done. We know they’re not in control of necromantic forces, because they don’t deal with the dead. Well, except they kinda do; death is most assuredly part of the cycle of life, and one of the defining aspects of life is arguably that it will one day stop living. So any magical effects that can extend, reduce, enhance, or diminish the lifeline of a living entity could conceivably be considered “natural.” At the very least, we know that natural mages won’t be bringing folks back to life. Oh, except that people declared dead are revived all the time in the modern era . . . and we presume most doctors aren’t necromancers. (Indeed, the line between life and death was so poorly understood that folks in times past would use various means to try to double-check the departed, and even in modern times, it’s common enough for someone declared “legally dead” to get better.)

So, if death is part of the natural order, what’s more striking (from a roleplaying POV) is that sudden, quick, and easy death is all part of the natural order. People keel over every day, via effects ranging from heart attacks to cancer to aneurisms . . . all of which are called “natural deaths.”

So, nature-minded mages could cause anyone to die from any number of reasons. But can they do anything else?

It's important to realize that humanity doesn't just utilize nature – it's a *part* of the natural order. While certain aspects of humans are arguably outside the natural order (it's hard to think of automobiles or skyscrapers as part of nature), we still have a great deal in common with the animal world. In modern times, we make frequent use of animal parts and resources in our medical procedures, we share vast amounts of our emotional and biochemical reactions with “lesser” primates, and many of our underlying biological systems have their origins even further back.

So, the ability to affect any kind of animal systems could logically apply to all human systems that don't directly tie to sapience. Thus, any abilities that can cause animals to sleep, flee, panic, fall blind, become consumed by reproductive urges . . . all could reasonably apply to the human animal. If mankind *isn't* directly affectable, then it's because an underlying aspect of magical reality protects humanity; if so, that's okay . . . but we're not done yet.

Bacteria are definitely part of the natural order; they're some of the simplest life forms, and a necessary part of the world's cycle. Bacteria cells also are present in all humans; in fact, bacteria cells in a person outnumber the host's cells by 10 to 1. In other words, even if nature mages can't affect humans directly, they can still make other people's lives miserable by mucking with the bits of life growing therein. Speaking from personal experience, if your guts get out of balance, you might *wish* you were just struck by a fireball instead. If your army ticks off that druid, your troops might spend the remainder of the campaign expelling every awful effluvia the human body can devise.

IT'S AN ANIMAL PLANET

Speaking of ticks, the entirety of the animal kingdom – big and small – is remarkably common. I admit as a kid I dismissed those who could control animals, because I reasoned, “What's a druid gonna do, summon a wolf or an owl? Whoopdee-doo! I've fought owlbears, zombies, and dragons; an angry possum isn't going to be much of a challenge.” However, I'm *much* more creative now.

Cinematic masterpieces such as *The Birds* and *Birdemic: Shock and Terror* have demonstrated the terrifying possibilities of the mundane avian kingdom, and other productions have shown the potential of everything from spiders to rabbits. Still, regular animals have the potential to make life pretty rough. Again, speaking from personal experience:

- A chipmunk found the wiring of our new car irresistible, shorting out the onboard computer and making it dangerous to drive until we got it fixed (expensively).
- Efforts to rid the house of ants and spiders are cyclically unsuccessful; we have two “spider cups” at different corners of the house, ready to scoop up overly curious arachnids.
- Some areas of our neighborhood are more-or-less unpassable, owing to the presence of noisy (and possibly dangerous) dogs.

I'm not likening any of these to the immediate danger of a thaumaturge's lightning bolt, but merely pointing out that animals are able to make our lives inconvenient and expensive to fix *without even trying*. If they were controlled by a human intelligence or otherwise given directives, the damage potential is even greater. All humans need to sleep at some point, and

insects can get to get into the most seemingly impenetrable locales. Try sleeping with ants – venomous or otherwise – crawling on you at all hours; heck, try sleeping while *thinking* about ants doing such. And this doesn't even count the possibilities of microbes and other invisible threats that are very much part of the natural order. It's not glamorous, but an army infected with a venereal disease will turn the tide on a long enough war . . . and whole civilizations have fallen due to the spread of disease.

ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL

We're not even getting into the *nastier* bits of nature. There's a joke that points out that even though processed food indicates it's “all natural,” that also applies to horse manure, cobra venom, cyanide, arsenic – even radiation is arguably part of the natural order.

Lightning is natural. So are earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, volcanos, fires – all capable of destroying cities (at the very least). If one views global warming and cooling as natural forces, a determined nature mage with a long enough timeframe could destroy the *planet*.

We'll also mention in passing the observation that comets, meteors, and solar flares may all be considered “natural” . . .

THE NATURAL WORLD

This should all be food for thought for aspiring mages (and would-be mages), GMs, and those who are crafting a world that features natural magic. Why are nature mages and druids often portrayed as weaker and less capable than other forms of magic? Perhaps it's because they *have to be*; to allow a mage the full potential of working within the bounds of the natural world would make him arguably the most dangerous force the setting has ever known. Kings and queens die of heart attacks, armies starve, coastal cities wash away with the tide, and all manner of vermin make life an unending nightmare for any survivors.

This doesn't mean a natural mage *must* be the most powerful practitioner of magic on the planet . . . but it gives everyone a fair bit of latitude to amplify the power levels of parties involved. Perhaps taming the forces described above require additional effort, training, mana, or other resources in order to utilize them to their utmost. But even a glimmer of this potential can ramp up the threat level of nature mages.

Forget sending trained ferrets into battle. Imagine a campaign world where arcane forces engage in battles with each other, but the most feared and respected mages are the druids; the king has a standing order to behead anyone messing with them. And – elsewhere in the great caves – the grand druid plots to become the greatest threat the world has ever known . . .

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

REINING IN NATURE MAGES

If you're tinkering with expanding the notion of what it means to be a "natural" mage (see pp. 35-36) – and ramping up the power level – you might face a situation where suddenly they have the potential to be *too* powerful. Here are some ideas that can help you come to grips with these potential masters of the earth.

Before the Campaign: Planting the Seeds Responsibly

- More esoteric aspects of natural magic require *knowledge* of those aspects. Although germ theory in our world didn't evolve until pretty late in the game (look up "germ theory" on Wikipedia), there's no need for it to be that way in any fantastic world . . . even the miasma theory of illness was closer to the truth than not. However, it's not unreasonable to require a natural mage to spend character points to amp up his understanding of the natural world before he can tap previously unconsidered powers. Maybe levels of knowledge in biology, human physiology, geology, etc. serve as the cap to keep druids from inflicting germ warfare, heart attacks, or earthquakes. The point is to drain character-building resources; if a mage is twice as powerful as before he improved himself because he needed to spend twice as many points . . . well, that's fair.

- Worlds with more subtle magic (such as the spellslingers from White Wolf's *Mage: The Ascension*) form a perfect basis for limiting otherwise all-powerful natural mages. Reality might make it hard-to-impossible for a druid to make a hale and hearty king keel over from a stroke, or to inflict lightning strikes in deserts. This doesn't mean it's impossible, but it might require greater abilities (which tend to cost points – again, see above).

- Natural practitioners of magic might believe in the natural order and refrain from using the full extent of their powers for

fear of upsetting the balance. (Indeed, the notion of "balance" is integral to many games' understandings of nature mages.) Sure, you can cause an earthquake, but if it means there's a chance that 100 other angry mages will descend upon you . . . perhaps being subtle when possible is better. And wouldn't a campaign of "good druids" versus "evil druids" be awesome?!

Other Natures

In campaigns that involve a lot of world-hopping, nature-lovers might feel left out when they are far from their "normal" environments. Instead of relegating them to a support role or leaving them home, allow druids and the like to swap what they can affect for equivalent aspects of the local ecosystem. For example, in an infernal locale, spells that influence animals could instead act on hellhounds and similar local animal-like beings: "I have a new fire-breathing friend, and his name is Fluffy!"

During the Campaign: Weed Control

- The notion of balance can be good to coax a natural mage back to the path of righteousness. If causing an army to keel over from intestinal distress resulted in a plague that causes untold collateral damage, it might make the practitioner think twice before mucking with such forces again.

- Perhaps the world allows for a certain amount of "unnaturalness" from a mage, then exerts more and more backlash as he gets increasingly contrary to the natural order. This would allow such a mage to have his occasional "I zap *you* with lightning!" moments of glory, without worrying that such lightning blasts will be Plan A in all encounters.

- Similarly, the world tends to evolve to thwart our efforts at taming it. If you summon every insect in creation to make some target's life hell, then there may not be as many available to perform their function within the ecosystem the week after. And if you wipe out the bees, we're all doomed . . .

Narrator: To get a close look at a wild bird or animal is a rare experience.

Mike Nelson: . . . that most of us only have nine or 10 times a day for 80 years.

– RiffTrax, "Safety With Animals"

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