



SUPPORTING CAST

Virginia Wade: A Thoroughly Modern Mage

For *GURPS*

by Mark Gellis

Everyone has neighbors. Some of them change your life.

When Virginia Wade was a little girl, she knew Ruth Fitz as the old lady with wispy silver-white hair who lived in a big house at the end of her block. Mrs. Fitz was a nice neighbor. Her husband had died years ago and she did not go out much, but sometimes you would see her gardening. She would always say hello to Virginia and her mother if they saw each other at the grocery store, and she always had good candy on Halloween. But there was something funny about her . . . something which Virginia could never put her finger on.

The years went by and Virginia was in high school. Mrs. Fitz still lived down the block. Virginia got involved in her high school's "Meals on Wheels" program. She wasn't sure why she joined; it just felt like the right thing to do. Naturally, they assigned her to visit the senior citizens in her neighborhood. Including Mrs. Fitz.

She liked visiting Mrs. Fitz. The old lady was frail, but her mind was sharp, and she loved talking to Virginia. They talked about everything from television to politics. Over time, the conversations started to become more and more philosophical. Mrs. Fitz, it seemed, knew quite a bit about magic. Not stage magic, but real magic.

At first, Virginia did not believe magic actually worked, but she thought what Mrs. Fitz had to say about it was interesting.

One day, she asked Virginia if she would like to see something. Virginia nodded. Mrs. Fitz took out a candle, muttered a few words, and the candle lit itself. Virginia stared at the flame until Mrs. Fitz said a few more words and the flame put itself out.

Virginia asked how she had done that. Mrs. Fitz responded by asking if she would like her to teach her to do it herself. When Virginia wondered aloud if that was possible, Mrs. Fitz smiled, as if she had been waiting for years to answer that question, saying, "Oh, child, of course you can. Like me, you have the Gift. You just needed someone to teach you how to use it."

In fact, she *had* been waiting for years. She had known from the first time she saw Virginia in her stroller that the little girl had the Gift. So she had waited until Virginia was old enough to be told, and "arranged" for her to start visiting so she could decide if the girl was someone she wanted to teach.

Virginia was one of the smartest girls in her class. She was pretty, but skinny, and had braces. She was proud of how well she did in school, and she had friends, but a lot of the time she felt somewhere between invisible and ugly . . . especially when she realized that, once again, she had been talking too much and people were laughing at her. And now someone wanted to teach her how to pull the secret strings of reality. Did she want to learn magic? She nodded eagerly.

And that was how Virginia Wade started her education in magic. She finished high school. She went to college. She went to graduate school. She got a job. But she stayed close, never living more than 50 miles from her home town. She would call Mrs. Fitz every few days to talk, and also visited Mrs. Fitz once a week to study together.

It was more than just the magic, though. The two women became close friends. Mrs. Fitz came to all of her graduations. Virginia called her "Grandma Fitz." Eventually, so did the rest of her family. (Ginny has never told them that she is a mage and that Mrs. Fitz was her teacher. To this day, they know only that Mrs. Fitz was a sweet old lady who lived down the block. Which, of course, was quite true.)

Ginny learned how to make potions. She learned the physics of magic, what Mrs. Fitz called Thaumatology. And she learned about the world of magic, of the people who had the Gift, and of the other things that had and used magic, hiding in the shadowed places, of wood and stone and even steel, some of them friendly, some of them monstrous.

She learned that spells -- real spells -- were difficult to use in our world, because there was little magical energy available. There were other worlds, Mrs. Fitz said, and some of them had a lot of mana, but opening a gate to those worlds could be a risky business.

A few years after Virginia started her first teaching job, Mrs. Fitz died, quietly in her sleep, at the age of 81. In her will, she left Virginia a small collection of books and a silver ring with a ruby in it. The books were mostly about magic and astrology. The ring was completely ordinary; it had been a gift Mrs. Fitz's husband had given her many years ago and Virginia had always admired it. Virginia considers it one of her most precious possessions and wears it most days on her right ring finger.

Virginia, or Ginny, as she likes to be called, is now 30. She has an M.A. in Foreign Languages and teaches at a local high school. She is a good teacher and quite popular with her colleagues, except for her tendency to just keep talking sometimes, mostly about completely trivial topics, long after a conversation has run out of steam. (The one exception to this is that she never talks about magic unless she knows someone else is a mage. And, for some reason, she never babbles when she is talking about magic.) This gives some people the impression that she is ditzy when they first meet her, and they are often surprised to see how intelligent and competent she really is. Most of her students like her, too. The girls think she is nice and smart, if a little ditzy; the boys think she is nice. And pretty. And a little weird . . .but definitely pretty.

Ginny lives in a small house within walking distance of the school where she teaches. She lives quietly, spending much of her free time reading, gardening, and listening to music. She continues to study magic, mostly on her own, although she sometimes corresponds with other mages. She has been thinking about approaching a powerful mage she met some years ago and asking if she could study under his tutelage. Whether he will accept her as a student, and what he will ask for in return, is left to the GM.

Using Ginny In A Campaign

At 100 points, Ginny could be used as a PC in any modern-day campaign that allowed magic, from a light "urban fantasy" to a far more serious story, such as *GURPS Horror* or *GURPS Cabal*. She could also serve as an ally or contact for heroes (perhaps they are working for the mage with whom she wishes to study; his "tuition fee" is that Ginny helps them out on occasion). Or, she could be a client, initiating an adventure by asking the player characters for their help, and then providing whatever assistance the GM considers appropriate.

As a player character, ally, contact, or client, Ginny could be quite useful to a team of adventurers. She is a capable linguist who speaks and reads five languages. She knows quite a bit about literature, history, and the occult, and is a skilled enough researcher to be able to find out what she does not already know. Her magical abilities, while limited, are still fairly impressive. What Ginny cannot do very well is fight. She has studied karate so she can defend herself (and because it is good aerobic exercise), but this is her only combat skill. (It would be a simple matter to replace Karate with a Gun skill, but it is not clear why a person like Ginny would learn to use a firearm, unless she has already been involved in some dangerous situations.) In adventures involving serious combat, her limitations need to be taken into consideration.

Alchemy is probably her most powerful magical ability. Potions take longer to make in low mana zones and the effects do not last as long, but the ability to make potions and their effects remain the same. Ginny is also a competent herbalist and astrologer. She knows several spells, but because she lives in a low mana world, her effective skill is at a penalty of -5. This means that many of her spells require long, elaborate castings, and about half of the time they still do not work.

Ginny knows other mages, and could get in touch with them if she needed to, but she is not close to any of them, so they do not count as Allies or Patrons. (The exception would be if she had started studying with the aforementioned senior mage; the cost of the Patron advantage would then need to be balanced with Duty, Sense of Duty, Enemies, or other disadvantages to keep her at 100 points, if someone wanted to use her as a PC.)

Despite her many positive traits, it would be fair to say that Ginny is also a bit of a flake. As such, she offers an excellent opportunity for players who want to play a character who is a little on the eccentric side, and good for some comic roleplaying, but who is still competent and capable.

One of her long term goals is to become more knowledgeable about magic. Naturally, this creates possibilities for adventures. Ginny might learn of a rare book of magic and try to locate it. But someone else (or something) is also looking for the book, and willing to do anything to keep her from getting to it first. Or Ginny might accidentally uncover some eldritch secret, which would make her the target of those interested in making sure that secret was never revealed. Another possibility is that one of Ginny's connections in the world of magic (perhaps the senior mage with whom she wishes to study) might invite her to join in some project, and there are many ways in which such things can go terribly wrong, ranging from releasing something horrific into our world by accident to drawing the unwanted attention of rivals or enemies.

It would be easy to adapt her for other locations (simply change the Area Knowledge skill) or other periods in the 20th century or late 19th century (probably replacing Computer Operation with Typing, and perhaps replacing Driving with Riding, Karate with Judo or Bow, etc.). She might, for example, be working as a language and literature teacher at an elite girl's school during the Cliffhanger era, or as a translator and occult specialist helping protect the home front in a Weird War II campaign.

Another possibility for a campaign would be to play a group of youngsters -- students at the school where Ginny teaches -- who happen to have unusual talents, becoming her protégés. Ginny knows what it means to be unusual and have a secret, and to have a special talent that needs to be nurtured. She would guide them while they solved mysteries and battled evil. Characters for a "Welcome to Adventure High" campaign might be built with a budget of 75 points. Ginny would gain an Ally Group, available on 12-, and worth 10 points; she would also gain a Secret (Teacher encouraging students to dabble in dangerous activities) [-10]; she probably would not go to jail if her secret came out, but she might be fired and have to start over in another town. Ginny is still worth only 100 points, so she would count as a 5-point Ally, available on 12-, and worth a total of 10 points when designing the youngsters (who would probably have a 5-point Sense of Duty (to Ginny) to reduce the cost). The GM should determine whether their powers would be limited to occult advantages and spells or if they could include psionic or super abilities.

One last possibility for a scenario is if Ginny learned that her beloved mentor Mrs. Fitz had not died of natural causes. Mrs. Fitz was a practicing mage for more than 50 years (she was probably a 150- to 200-point character, with at least half of that in spells and magic-related skills) and may well have crossed paths with some truly unsavory individuals. The books she left Ginny included some of her personal notebooks on the subject of magic. Perhaps they will provide a clue to solving the mystery, if it is a mystery, of her death.

Virginia Wade

Female; Age 30; 5'5", 120 lbs.; Hair: Strawberry Blond, Eyes: Brown, Skin: White

ST: 9 [-10] **DX:** 10 [0] **IQ:** 14 [45] **HT:** 10/9 [-5]
Speed: 5.00 Move: 5 Dodge: 5 Parry: 6

Advantages: Attractive [5]; Contact (Other mages Ginny knows, effective skill 15-, available on 9-, usually reliable) [4], Magery 2 [25]

Disadvantages: Odious Personal Habit (Babbling) [-5]; Secret (Mage) [-10]

Quirks: Has a large collection of hats (and loves wearing them) [-1]; Likes to be called "Ginny" [-1]; Loves plants (and often talks to them) [-1]; Prefers to sleep naked [-1]

Skills: Alchemy-13 [4]; Area Knowledge (Long Island)-13 [1/2]; Astrology-12 [1]; Computer Operation-13 [1/2]; Cooking-13 [1/2]; Driving (Automobile)-10 [2]; Gardening-13 [1]; Herbalist-12 [1]; History-12 [1]; Karate-10 [4]; Literature-12 [1]; Occultism-13 [1]; Professional Skill (Housekeeping)-12 [1/2]; Research-13 [1]; Teaching-13 [1]; Thaumatology-13* [1]
*includes bonus from Magery

Languages: English (native)-14 [0]; French-14 [2]; Italian-13 [1]; Latin-13 [1]; Spanish-14 [2];

Elixirs: Aesculapius-12; Apollo-13; Chiron-13; Delphi-12; Epmetheus-13; Eros-11; Melampus-13; Odysseus-10; Orpheus-12; Phobos-13; Prometheus-12; Tantalus-13; Tyche-11

Spells: Extinguish Fire-17 [6]; Ignite Fire-17 [6]; Illusion Shell-14 [1]; Mind-Reading-17 [6]; Sense Emotion-15 [2]; Sense Foes-14 [1]; Shape Fire-16 [4]; Simple Illusion-14 [1]; Truthsayer-14 [1]

Total Points: 100

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