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DIGITAL HERO

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EDITOR'S NOTE

With ten issues per year, that means that twice a year, *Digital Hero* skips a month. With the holidays coming up, we won't be publishing again until February. In the meantime, Merry Christmas!

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Information Thaumaturgy

by James Jandebour

Introduction

In most settings, magic and technology are, at least to some extent, exclusive. Characters in science fiction settings rarely use magic, and fantasy settings are usually technologically primitive. One notable exception to this is superhero settings, where magic mingles freely with science and even super-science. However, superheroic magic is very different from fantasy magic, being flashier, less restricted, and more powerful. Another option for modern day, or even near future, magic is Urban Fantasy, in which gunplay and spell slinging work side by side. The magic in these settings is closer to that of more typical fantasy, though the way it interacts with technology needs to be addressed.

This article lists several possible spells for such a setting. Magic and science are defined as compatible as well as coexistent, able to affect and even enhance one another in certain ways. For instance, enchanted firearms (and even heavier weapons) exist, and dedicated computers can carry out some magical rituals. For ease of use, *Turakian Age* concepts and general construction rules are used, though because magic tends to be rarer in Urban Fantasy it may not be appropriate to divide the Real Cost by 3 in order to get the final cost. Of course, any of this can be easily modified.

HIDDEN WARS AND DIVERGENT TIMES

The HERO Universe does not currently contain a published Urban Fantasy setting. However, it is easy enough to run games in the subgenre without changes to the time line. For example, in the *Champions* era, there exists a shadow war of mystic forces, and some of them could easily use Urban Fantasy style spells. Robert Caliburn is known to use enchanted firearms, and although this specific feat is rare or even unique, it demonstrates the possibility of similar magic. The city of Vibora Bay is a hotbed of underground mystical activity and odd events. Thus, there is plenty of room in the modern era of the HERO Universe for Urban Fantasy.

However, after 2020, magic fades from the Earth's universe, so if Urban Fantasy is to be used after then it will probably be a departure from the standard timeline. The easiest detail to change is the aftermath of Witchcraft's last spell (see *Galactic Champions* for details). For whatever reason, instead of the magic dying out, it is actually strengthened. This creates a mix of *Fantasy* and *Cyber HERO*, where cybernetic mercenaries work with mystics to accomplish their tasks.

SCIENCE AND MAGIC

Though these articles assume some compatibility between magic and science, there are other options. If they are incompatible, magic is most likely unchanged by technological advance. In this case, simply take spells straight from *Fantasy HERO* and its various supplements. If they actually interfere with each other's functioning, give them Limitations to represent this. For example, a spell might be weakened if in the presence of large amounts of technology (such as in a lab or factory), so take the Limitation *Works At Half Strength In Places Of Science*. Conversely, technological equipment might suffer from an Activation Roll (or even a Burnout or Jam Roll) if too much magic is being used in the vicinity: cars stop running when gasoline spontaneously turns to salt, and sensory equipment gets random and scientifically absurd readings.

Another possibility is for science to be replaced by magic in the modern day. The world looks much like ours, but magic is the basis. Daemons and elementals are controlled by skilled drivers to build skyscrapers, communications crystals replace telephones, and carpets replace cars. The drawbacks of civilization are there, too, with hordes of imps replacing stray animals and micro-fractures in the fabric of reality replacing pollution. It is not always a fair trade.

In this case, magic is common enough to be bought as Equipment or Skills rather than Powers. Magic Skills are the equivalent of Science Skills, with Wizard the Skill Enhancer that reduces the cost, and Magic Research replaces Inventor for expanding the body of commonly usable magic. This type of game can easily be played for comic effect (as in Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* series, which has a strong element of modernity in it of this type), but it certainly does not have to be (see several novels by Harry Turtledove for examples of a serious take, most especially *The Case of the Toxic Spell Dump*).

The Temporal League

by James Jandebaur

Introduction and Background

In the year 2050, Doctor Andre Washington, a brilliant physicist, was working toward defining the structure of space and time. He was employed by Harmon Research, a small company that had broken off from Harmon Industries some years before. In spite of budget reductions and other setbacks, he made his greatest discovery: a form of energy he dubbed “chronon radiation”. This energy was everywhere, and he postulated that it was responsible for holding things in their proper time and place. He further predicted that it would some day allow travel in time as well as space.

Unfortunately, Harmon Research did not have the resources of its parent company, and spent very little on security. A team of mercenaries, hired by mega-corporation Duchess Industries, broke in, badly injured Dr. Washington, and stole the research notes. This could not be proven, and Duchess covertly created the Time Branch, the purpose of which was to develop a working time travel device. In 2056, they succeeded.

What followed was a time, if the word had any meaning, of chaos and change. Duchess used their newest weapon to alter history in order to increase their power and wealth. Although they were cautious, as they did not want to damage their interests, they found history very difficult to predict. Eventually, their plans were uncovered and the Time Branch brought down, but by then great damage had already been done.

In the modified history, Duchess was much more successful in their plans, as was VIPER before it. This meant that the world’s superheroes and governments were in a much poorer position to resist when Tyrannon the Conqueror invaded. The Time Branch succeeded in making Duchess more powerful, but at the cost of two billion lives, with possibly more to come due to heightened international tensions. When Duchess’ Time Branch was shut down, extensive notes on the pristine time line and interim ones were found. It was decided that this kind of tampering had to be prevented from ever happening again.

The United Nations, still maintaining significant influence in the new time line, chose to resurrect the organization UNTIL, now standing for United Nations Temporal Investigations League. This became known simply as the Temporal League, to differentiate it from the original UNTIL. By UN order, they were to be the only ones allowed to research time travel, with the express purpose of controlling it. Journeys into the past would be allowed for

research, with supervision by the League, but for no purpose other than policing the time line.

The League’s duties ultimately proved impossible. The events were too well publicized, and though it required genius to discover time travel, it only required brilliance to recreate it. History was changing too quickly to keep up with, and further catastrophe was inevitable. The League settled on a radical solution. Using technology filched from the far future, they established the Citadel, their base of operations. They actually captured a singularity, which serves two purposes. It powers the Citadel and all of its equipment (see Singularity Power, *Star HERO*, page 173; this particular plant provides 800 END/800 REC). More importantly, it stabilizes the existence of the League in time. As a result, changes in history leave the Citadel and the League untouched, which is essential to their mission.

Once the League’s existence was assured, they altered a single event. When Dr. Washington was beginning his collegiate studies, they posed as several counselors and teachers, steering him onto a new course. While still becoming a brilliant and acclaimed researcher, his great discovery and all that came of it simply never happened.

The Temporal League now exists without a history of its own. The sacrifice was successful, however, and the time line is only threatened by a few villains, rather than dozens or hundreds. Of course, these villains are beings such as Istvatha V’han, so the League still has its work cut out for it. To counter the great power of these enemies, they have continued to recruit from history (both the “correct” one and alternate ones), and have researched a variety of devices and tricks for their agents’ use.

The Citadel is in the Solar System, but it does not remain long in a given time. It moves from the past to the future, and sometimes into alternate time lines, in order to be difficult to find. The League knows very well that if their enemies are ever allowed to bring significant forces against them, they would be destroyed. The singularity at the heart of the Citadel makes it difficult to move it in space, but Research is working on this to provide more options.

TEMPORAL LEAGUE PLOT SEEDS

The standard League adventure: An alteration to history has occurred, one that the PC’s (whether members of the League itself or specialists recruited for one mission) are the best suited to deal with it. They must travel (or be transported) to the appropriate time, discover what happened, and correct the problem.

The Oversight Committee has ruled that Captain Chronos (from Conquerors, Killers, and Crooks) is to be avoided by field teams. Is he somehow involved with the League, or is something stranger going on?

It is decided that a hero from the past (or the future) is to be recruited into the League. Typically, just before his death or disappearance, the team must make contact, convince him of who they are, and transport him back, all without disrupting history. What happens if the hero does not wish to go, even if it means his death?