

GURPS®

Fourth Edition

# MAGIC™



BY STEVE JACKSON, S. JOHN ROSS,  
AND DANIEL U. THIBAUT

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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*GURPS Magic* requires the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*.  
The spell ideas in this book can be used with any fantasy game.



Based on *GURPS MAGIC* by Steve Jackson

and *GURPS GRIMOIRE* by S. John Ross and Daniel U. Thibault

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**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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## About GURPS

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*Bibliographies.* Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to let you buy the books that interest you! Go to the book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.



# INTRODUCTION

*Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.*

– Clarke's Law

*Any sufficiently advanced magic is indistinguishable from technology.*

– Murphy's reformulation of Clarke's Law

The very first roleplaying was *fantasy* roleplaying, and fantasy is still the most popular type of RPG. Magic brings power and wonder to the gaming table. Yet all too often, fantasy campaigns seem trite and predictable, trapped by their sources in Tolkien and Arthurian England.

It needn't be that way. Magic and magical worlds can have infinite variety, and so can magical heroes. A wizard might be the stereotypical gray-beard with a pointed hat . . . but he also might be a palace cook with a couple of minor but useful food spells, a plane-hopping mage who roams the timelines looking for people in trouble, or a battle-hardened soldier whose mastery of magic has brought empires to their knees. With **GURPS Magic**, you can play these spellcasters and many others.

The meat of this book comprises 24 spell colleges with hundreds of spells . . . but there's much more! Within these pages you'll also find expanded rules for magic use and enchantment, alternate magic systems, and a full treatment of alchemy, ready to drop into your game.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the third edition of **GURPS Magic**; it has been revised to the **GURPS Fourth Edition** rules. We hope that's not overly confusing. The oldest material here dates back to the first edition of **GURPS Fantasy** (which covered magic as well as fantasy world-building). The second edition of **Magic** added more spells and the Improvisational Magic system created by Brett Slocum and Steffan O'Sullivan. This edition adds the entire contents of **GURPS Grimoire**,

by S. John Ross and Daniel U. Thibault, plus the Black Magic system created by S. John Ross. Many others created material or suggested spells for one or another of these volumes; see the credits on p. 2. And Michael Suileabhain-Wilson converted the entire collection to Fourth Edition standards.

**Grimoire** (1994), the collection of spells which is incorporated into this book. He is one of gaming's first commercial electronic publishers, the founder of Cumberland Games & Diversions. His home on the Web is also the home of **Risus: The Anything RPG**, the **HexPaper** font, and **Sparks** paper miniatures. His home in the



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Steve Jackson played his first RPG when there was only one title on the market. It was fantasy. His first professional job was developing a fantasy RPG (**Monsters! Monsters!**). His second game design was a tactical game intended to be used with fantasy RPGs (**Melee**). His first *big* design was a fantasy RPG (**The Fantasy Trip**). He wrote the first editions of **GURPS Fantasy** and **GURPS Magic**. One might conclude that he likes fantasy RPGs. He doesn't get to play them as much as he likes, though, since being president and editor-in-chief of Steve Jackson Games continues to demand huge chunks of time. Anyone feel like GMing a **GURPS** campaign in Austin?

S. John Ross wrote the Black Magic rules (p. 156) and co-wrote **GURPS**

*physical* world is Austin, Texas, where he games weekly and snuggles daily with his wife, Sandra. In addition to his **GURPS** and other work for Steve Jackson Games, he's written, edited, mapped, and cartooned his way across the gaming industry, including work for Wizards of the Coast, White Wolf, TSR, Guardians of Order, Last Unicorn Games, and Flying Buffalo.

Daniel U. Thibault was a graduate student in computer science when he submitted spells for the first edition of **GURPS Fantasy**. He then proceeded to ransack books, movies, bulletin boards and his imagination to produce **GURPS Grimoire**. He also collaborated on several other **GURPS** books. Meanwhile, he became a scientist with Defence R&D Canada, got a spouse, cats, dogs, and a child, and moved multiple times. All this has put severe limitations on his roleplaying time, but things are getting better.

# LEARNING MAGIC

Anyone can learn most spells – although in some worlds, you must be a mage to *use* the spells you know. Some spells specify a particular level of Magery as a prerequisite: if you lack the required Magery level, *you cannot learn the spell*.

Each magic spell is a separate *skill*, learned just like any other skill. Most spells are IQ/Hard skills, but a few potent spells are IQ/Very Hard. Spells have *no default* – you can only cast spells you know.

Add your Magery to IQ when you learn spells. For instance, if you have IQ 12 and Magery 3, you learn spells as if you had IQ 15. In addition, reduce the

time required to learn spells (but *not* the point cost) by 10% per Magery level, to a minimum of 60% the usual time at Magery 4; e.g., Magery 3 would let you learn spells in 70% the usual time.

The maximum level of Magery available in your world is up to the GM. Most GMs will want to limit PCs to Magery 3 or 4.

If you know more than a few spells, you may wish to make a “grimoire.” This is a list of the spells you know and your skill with each, along with the energy cost, time to cast, duration, etc. for each spell. This will save a lot of reference time in play! A form is included on p. 240.

## FINDING A TEACHER

The difficulty of learning magic depends largely on the role of magic in a setting – and especially on its prevalence. In a world where magic is common, wizardry is likely a trade like any other, learned through apprenticeships or in schools. If magic is rare, on the other hand, prospective teachers may be cloistered in far-off monasteries or isolated towers. If magic is illegal, those mentors will be in hiding.

Once the would-be wizard finds a teacher, he must convince the teacher to take him on as a student. Some teachers give lessons for a fee; others demand service in exchange for training. Still others ask for nothing in advance, but expect their students to know their duty when the need arises.

If no instructor is available, an aspiring wizard may study magic without a teacher, like any other intellectual skill. However, lone study demands that the wizard has access to good texts on magic, in a language he can read. Even then, his progress is only half as fast as it would be with a mentor, taking 400 hours for every character point of progress (though Magery will offset some of this; see *Magery*, pp. B66-67). What’s more, finding those texts may be just as hard as finding a teacher.

In a world with improvised magic (p. 201), there may be no magic teachers at all; wizards might learn by experimentation and lots of hard knocks.

## PREREQUISITES

All but the most basic spells have one or more *prerequisites*: requirements you must meet in order to learn the spell. If the prerequisite is another spell, you must have at least one point in the prerequisite spell before you can study the advanced spell. Not all prerequisites are spells. Some spells require a minimum Magery level; for instance, “Magery 2” means you must have Magery 2 or more to learn the spell. A few spells require a minimum basic attribute score, an advantage, or even a mundane skill.

## Mana

Mana is the ambient energy that empowers magic. Magic will work only if the *mana level* of the game world or specific area allows it, as follows:

*Very High Mana:* Anyone who knows spells can cast them. A *mage* who spends FP to cast a spell on his turn gets those FP back at the start of his *next* turn. However, all failures are treated as critical failures – and actual critical failures produce spectacular disasters! Very high mana is extremely rare in most settings.

*High Mana:* Anyone who knows spells can cast them. This mana level is rare in most worlds, but some game worlds have high mana throughout.

*Normal Mana:* Only *mages* can cast spells. These spells work normally, according to all rules given in this chapter. This is the default mana level in most fantasy settings: mages use magic, others don’t.

*Low Mana:* Only mages can cast spells, and all spells perform at -5 to skill, for all purposes. (Magic items are similarly affected; see *Power of a Magic Item*, p. 17.) However, critical failures have mild effects or no effect at all.

*No Mana:* No one can use magic at all. Enchantments and permanent magic effects are suspended and do not function while within a no-mana zone, but resume when taken to an area with mana. Temporary and lasting spells (p. 10) are dispelled when they enter a no-mana zone. This mana level occurs in isolated spots in magical worlds. Some entire game worlds can lack mana, making magic use impossible.

In most regions, mana is uniform and static. However, in some locations mana may favor certain types of magic, or fluctuate over time. Some powerful spells can even change the mana level of an area (p. 127). **GURPS Fantasy** discusses more possibilities for the magical properties of a world.

### Sensing Mana

Mages cannot automatically sense the mana level of an area, but they may sense the change when they cross a boundary between levels. When a mage crosses such a boundary, roll vs. Perception + Magery-3. Add 3 to the roll if the mage was explicitly searching for the boundary.

# USING MAGIC ITEMS

Magic items follow the rules for the spell(s) they contain. Many give the user the power to cast the spell – perhaps only on himself, possibly on any subject. Some are usable only by mages; that is, they only work for users who possess Magery. If an item has *any* “mage only” effects on it, only a mage may use the item’s powers.

A spell’s description will explain if it can be placed into a magic item. Unless specified otherwise:

- *There is no ritual.* The user just wills the item to work.
- *Casting time is as described for the spell.* High Power doesn’t affect this.
- *Energy cost is the same as for a normal casting of the spell.* High Power does not affect this (but the Power spell *does* – see p. 57).
- *Determine success normally.* Use the item’s Power as the caster’s *base* skill and apply all the usual modifiers for the kind of spell being cast. Power is at -5 in low-mana areas. A Resisted spell allows a normal resistance roll; use the item’s modified Power as the caster’s skill in the Quick Contest.
- *Only one person at a time can use the item.* If two people attempt to use it, only the first to touch it can use it. If one *can’t* use it – for instance, the item is usable only by mages and he lacks Magery – his touch doesn’t count.
- *All other effects are as usual for that spell.*

## Identifying Magical Items

The new owner of a magic item may not immediately learn its powers. “Always on” items (see below) or items with Link spells are the easiest to figure out. Other items will not work until they are willed to do so, and the user must will the correct effect. Thinking “Do something!” at a magical item will not activate it.

Some effects (increased attributes, for example) are obvious once the item is activated. Others (water breathing, skill augmentation) will not be apparent until a situation occurs where they can take effect. In these cases, the GM should try not to drop

too many hints about the item’s nature.

The Analyze Magic spell (p. 102) reveals any enchantments on an item.

## “Always On” Items

Certain magic items are “always on.” For the item to work, the user must wear or carry it in the usual manner (a ring on a finger, a sword in a hand, and so on). These items don’t let the wearer cast the spell – they automatically cast the spell *on the wearer* at no energy cost.

If an arrow or dart is enchanted with hostile magic, it may be carried without harm; in this case, only a person stuck with the projectile qualified as “wearing” it. The effects continue until the item is removed by a successful Physician or First Aid roll (requires one minute) or is ripped out

(doing the same damage that it did going in).

For all “always on” items, unless specified otherwise:

- *Ritual, casting time, and energy cost are all irrelevant.* The item does not let the wearer cast the spell – it puts the spell on *him*, at no cost, as soon as he wears or wields the item. An “always on” item can be designed to phase in its effects over a few minutes, so that the source of the effect is not obvious; this does not affect cost or difficulty, and is often used on hostile items intended as traps.
- *The effects last as long as the item is worn or carried.*
- *All other effects are as usual for that spell.* If the wearer desires (as in the case of an item with a bad effect), he may make a resistance roll against the item if the spell in question can normally be Resisted.

## Controlling Magic Items

Plentiful magic items are not appropriate to every campaign, and GMs may wish to limit the number of magic items in circulation. The simplest way to do this is to restrict Quick and Dirty Enchantment – either prohibiting it outright, or changing its parameters to require a *day* of enchanting per 100 energy points, rather than an hour. This makes minor magic items much more tedious and costly to produce.

Alternately, the GM can institute setting elements to restrain the availability of magic items, such as the following:

*Disorganization:* Enchantment on any large scale typically requires ample assistance. If enchanters are rare, or if wizards don’t often get along, the resources may rarely come together for an enchantment.

*Fragility:* Enchantment confers no particular durability to an item, and owners of magic items often insist on bringing them into dangerous situations. Since a magic item loses its power when damaged, breakage inevitably reduces the quantity of magic items in circulation.

*Limiting spells:* Many magic items have limiting spells cast upon them, and do not work for anyone but their intended user.



*Harassment:* It’s not hard to disrupt an enchantment. A Slow and Sure Enchantment can be disrupted easily by organizing a distraction. Delaying one member can throw off a circle of Quick and Dirty enchanters. If enchanters’ rivals and enemies are in the habit of trying to disrupt enchantments, dealing with these disruptions drives the cost of magic items up and the supply down.



## Control Zombie

Regular; Resisted by **Zombie spell**

Take control of an undead creature raised with the **Zombie spell** by some other wizard. If the caster wins a Quick Contest of Spells with the original **Zombie spell**, the undead in question will obey the caster as if he had raised it. The **Zombie spell** resists at +2 if the original caster is within 100 yards, and at -2 if he is dead.

*Duration:* Permanent.

*Cost:* 3.  
*Prerequisite:* **Zombie**.

### Item

Staff, wand, or jewelry. Usable only by a mage. It does not give the ability to cast the spell, but gives +2 skill to one who knows the spell. *Energy cost to create:* 500.

### Turn Zombie

#### Area

Inflicts 1d of injury on anything in the area that was animated using the

**Zombie spell**; DR does not protect. In addition, roll 1d for each zombie. On a 1, it turns and flees from the caster.

*Duration:* Successfully turned undead will avoid the caster for one day.

*Base cost:* 2. Cannot be maintained; must be recast.

*Time to cast:* 4 seconds.

*Prerequisite:* **Zombie**, or "holy status" (GM's discretion).

## Undead Templates

The following templates demonstrate three possible types of undead created with the **Zombie spell**. A normal dead body produces a zombie; a corpse rotted away to bones produces a skeleton (indeed, zombies rot away to skeletons over time); and a desiccated cadaver, or a properly embalmed body, becomes a mummy.

### Mummy

-107 points

*Attribute Modifiers:* ST+1 [10].

*Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:* HP+4 [8].

*Advantages:* Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Immunity (All mind control) [30]; Indomitable [15]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brains, No Vitals, Unliving) [35]; Single-Minded [5]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15].

*Disadvantages:* Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Automaton [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Mana; common, constantly) [-50]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Fragile (Combustible) [-5]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

*Features:* Affected by **Control Zombie**, **Pentagram**, and **Turn Zombie**; No mental skills; Sterile.

### Skeleton

-162 points

*Attribute Modifiers:* ST-1 [-10]; DX+2 [40]; IQ-2 [-40].

*Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:* Basic Speed+1 [20].

*Advantages:* Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; DR 2 [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Immunity (All mind control) [30]; Indomitable [15]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brain, No Eyes, No Vitals, Unliving) [40]; Single-Minded [5]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15]; Vacuum Support [5].

*Disadvantages:* Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Automaton [-85]; Cannot Learn [-30];

Dependency (Mana; common, constantly) [-50]; Fragile (Brittle) [-15]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; Mute [-25]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Skinny [-5]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Vulnerability (Crushing Attacks; x2) [-30]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

*Quirks:* Cannot Float; Sexless. [-2]

*Features:* Affected by **Control Zombie**, **Pentagram**, and **Turn Zombie**; No mental skills; Skull has only 2 total DR.

### Zombie

-168 points

*Attribute Modifiers:* ST+1 [10]; IQ-2 [-40].

*Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:* HP+4 [8].

*Advantages:* Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Immunity (All mind control) [30]; Indomitable [15]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving) [25]; Single-Minded [5]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15].

*Disadvantages:* Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Automaton [-85]; Bad Smell [-10]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Dependency (Mana; common, constantly) [-50]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].

*Quirks:* Sexless. [-1]

*Features:* Affected by **Control Zombie**, **Pentagram**, and **Turn Zombie**; No mental skills; Will become a Skeleton.

## FORMS OF ELIXIR

There are four physical forms of elixir, each with different properties:

*Potion:* Liquid form, taken by drinking. One dose of potion affects one man-sized creature instantly. Potions lose their power in a day if left open or mixed with other things.

*Powder:* Solid form. A powder must be eaten in food, or dissolved in drink, to be effective; it takes effect in 2d minutes. Powders can last a long time; there is only a 50% chance per year that a given powder loses its power while exposed to air. Powders mixed with food or drink last a month.

*Pastille:* A thumbnail-sized tablet, kept in a sealed vial. When lit, it instantly flashes into flame and begins to fill an area 3 yards across and 8 feet high with smoke. Indoors, this smoke lingers about a minute; outdoors, it disperses within about 10 seconds. Anyone within the affected area suffers the elixir's effects in 2d seconds. To avoid the smoke's effects, hold your breath (see *Holding Your Breath*, p. B351). An unburnt pastille lasts a month if exposed to air, but is destroyed instantly upon contact with water.

The creation of elixirs in pastille form requires double the usual time and cost.

*Ointment:* A cream or jelly. If touched, it sinks into the skin, taking immediate effect – a dose of ointment on a weapon or doorknob only affects the first person to touch it. Lasts a week if exposed to air; neutralized by water.

## MAGIC RESISTANCE

Anyone with the Magic Resistance advantage gets a resistance roll of HT+MR when dosed with any elixir – even a beneficial one. If he rolls HT+MR exactly, the potion takes half effect (the GM determines the details). If he rolls less than HT+MR, the potion has no effect!

## COST AND AVAILABILITY

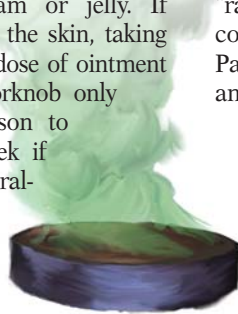
Like magic items, elixirs generally cost about \$33 for each day they took to make, plus the cost of the materials. (Of course, this varies by setting; for a “rare” magic campaign, double the cost for time.) Some very common types are cheaper because they are made in batches.

Each description includes a suggested cost for “common magic” campaigns, and a second, higher cost for “rare” magic campaigns. This is retail cost, assuming PCs are buying. Pastilles take twice as long to make and therefore cost twice as much. PC alchemists (or PCs who come into possession of potions) may not always be able to sell their goods for as much as they would like. Very rare potions like Youth and Resurrection, of course, are always salable, but may attract unwelcome attention from those who would rather take them without paying!

Elixirs are not always easy to find, especially in small towns. The GM may determine exactly what elixirs, in which forms, are available as he sees fit.

Certain alchemical elixirs might be illegal, or allowed only to the ruling class. These include all poisons, other “hostile” elixirs, and all elixirs (especially elixirs of invisibility) that would be of use mainly to thieves and assassins.

A good alchemist is hard to find in most settings. The Alchemist's Guild is selective, the pursuit of alchemy is grueling, and the work is on the dangerous side. Many cities prohibit the practice of alchemy within 100 yards of a public place, lest a critical failure wipe out a bustling marketplace . . . or worse.



# TYPES OF ELIXIRS

The elixirs are divided here into rough categories based on the effects they have.

Each elixir description begins with the generic name for the elixir and any alternate names by which it may be known in some locales. Next, it gives the details of the elixir's effect. Finally, it gives the elixir's duration, its retail price in common-magic and rare-magic settings, and the time, cost of materials, and default penalty required to make the elixir.

## ANIMAL CONTROL

### Beast-Speech

*Alternative Names:* Melampus, Vociferous Beast.

The subject can speak to animals, as per the Beast Speech spell.

*Duration:* 2d minutes.

*Form:* Any but pastille.

*Cost:* \$850/\$1350.

*Recipe:* \$300; 3 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-1.

### Bird Control

*Alternative Name:* Ibycus.

The subject may control birds, as per the appropriate Animal Control spell (p. 30), with no energy cost or skill roll required.

*Duration:* 3d×5 minutes.

*Form:* Any but pastille.

*Cost:* \$550/\$900.

*Recipe:* \$200; 2 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-1.

### Dragonslaying

*Alternative Names:* Balsam of St. George, Cadmus, Fafnir.

The smoke from this elixir does 5d damage to any reptile. It can also affect dragons – but only if it is ignited by a dragon's breath.

*Duration:* See Pastille above.

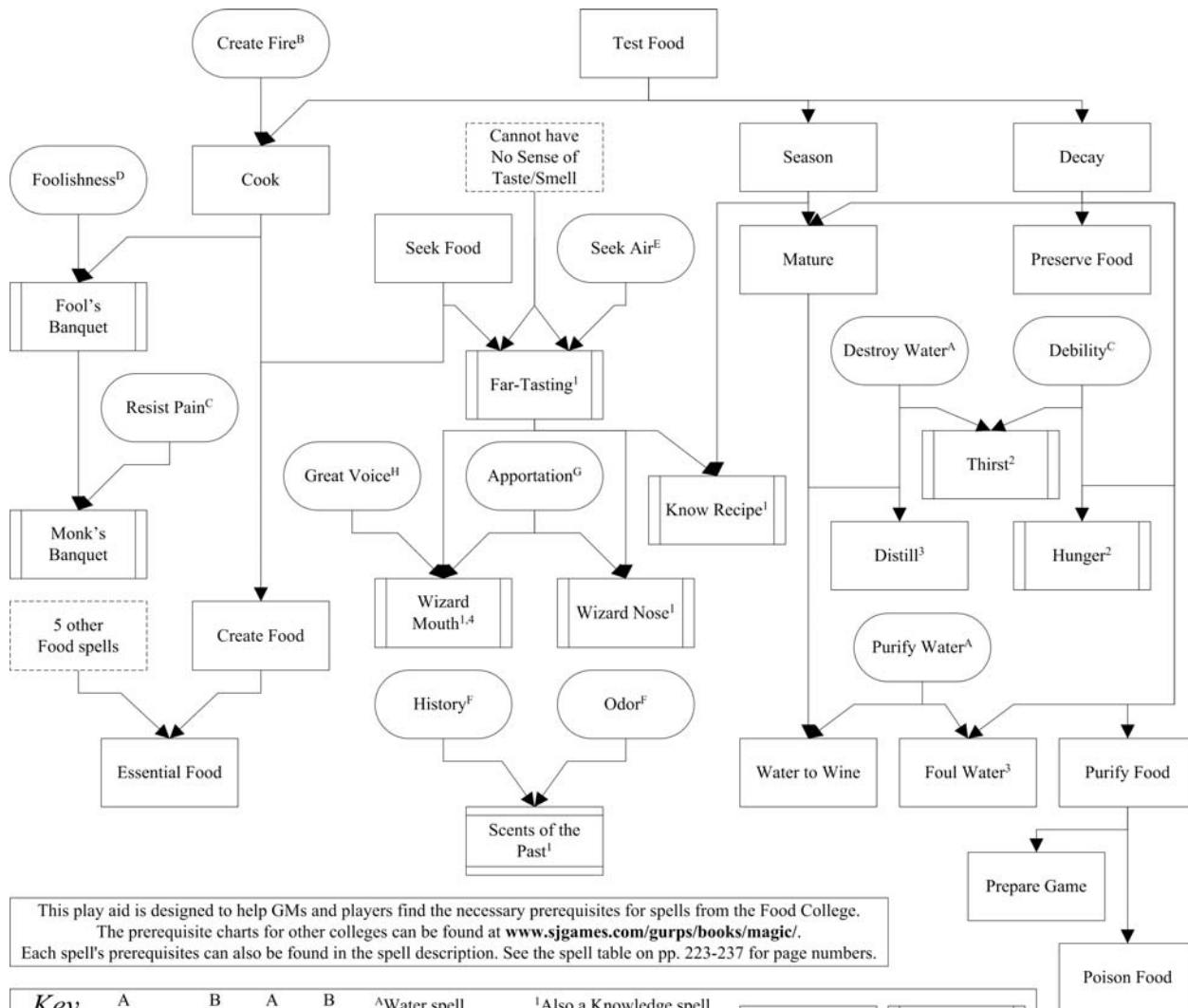
*Form:* Pastille.

*Cost:* \$1,300/\$2,000.

*Recipe:* \$100, plus one drop of blood from a dragon's heart, which costs at least \$500 if it is available at all; 4 weeks; defaults to Alchemy-1.



# SPELL PREREQUISITE CHART – FOOD COLLEGE



**Key**

		<sup>A</sup> Water spell	<sup>1</sup> Also a Knowledge spell		
		<sup>B</sup> Fire spell	<sup>2</sup> Also a Body Control spell		
		<sup>C</sup> Body Control spell	<sup>3</sup> Also a Water spell		
		<sup>D</sup> Mind Control spell	<sup>4</sup> Also a Sound spell		
		<sup>E</sup> Air spell			
		<sup>F</sup> Knowledge spell			
		<sup>G</sup> Movement Spell			
		<sup>H</sup> Sound Spell			

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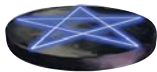
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