Fantasy settings are defined by their magic . . . so different worlds need different magic systems. GURPS Thaumatology has GURPS Fourth Edition updates of the best Third Edition magic variants, plus many all-new options. This mighty tome includes:

- Minor tweaks for the spell-based magic of the Basic Set: restructuring prerequisites and colleges, modifying Magery and mana, new magical energy sources, adapting spells on the fly, and more.
- Radical revisions of spell-based magic, including detailed versions of the clerical and ritual magic options hinted at in the Basic Set, and the return of that Third Edition classic, “unlimited mana.”
- Traditional alternatives to spells, such as ceremonial, spirit-mediated, and runic magic.
- World-shaking freeform magic.
- Magic as inherent powers.
- An in-depth look at material magic, with new alchemy, herbalism, and enchantment options; rules for free-willed items and magical gadgets; and guidelines for “the stuff of raw magic.”
- Notes on adapting real-world occult concepts – such as the Laws of Magic, astrology, and traditional material components – to any magic system.
- Guidelines for running magic-oriented games, advice on combining magic systems, and detailed outlines for four distinctly different fantastic campaigns.

GURPS Thaumatology requires the GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition. GURPS Magic is recommended but not required. The discussions of different magical styles would enhance any game that features magic.

By Phil Masters
Edited by Sean Punch
Cover Art and Illustrations by Igor Kieryluk, Aaron Panagos, Bob Stevlic, and Chris Wood
Magic . . . Intuitive art or numerical science? Insanity or perfect control? Quest for divinity or demonic blasphemy? Take your pick. Maybe it’s everything at once.

Every myth, fantasy story, and anthropological study has its own ideas on the subject, which makes life complicated for anyone who wants to incorporate evocative ideas about magic into RPGs. The problem is how to handle such visions in game terms – how to make them work as imagined but also in a consistent and playable way. The purpose of *GURPS Thaumatology* is to offer solutions.

Often, RPGs are accused of tying up magic in strict rules, losing its truly fantastical, magical essence. *Thaumatology* certainly presents rules – but by offering a wide range of options, it aims to restore a sense of freedom to game magic and to enable the GM to make it an integral part of a setting, not just a handy box of tricks. Still, the specifics are there for those who value them.

**ABOUT THIS BOOK**

All *GURPS* books are tool kits – you use the parts you like and change or ignore the rest. This is especially true of *Thaumatology*. Its many rules and systems are designed to enable the GM to set up games where magic works exactly as envisioned, providing the perfect atmosphere and balance of probabilities. It also includes worked examples and ready-to-use implementations, but even these can be modified.

As with any toolbox, you shouldn’t try to use everything simultaneously – and by “you,” we mean whoever is responsible for designing and maintaining the campaign, usually the GM. Pick and choose only what suits your purposes. Not every concept belongs in every game; if you try to use it all, you’ll probably go crazy and, worse, your campaign will collapse! All of *Thaumatology* is one big suggestion. For example, the point costs for abilities reflect the author’s views of effectiveness and balance – but as the GM, you’re free to disagree and change the numbers, perhaps to encourage or discourage particular player choices. Just bear in mind that such tinkering will have consequences in the game.

This doesn’t mean that *Thaumatology* is only for GMs. On the contrary, any player whose character uses a magic system or mechanism from this book will need access to it to see how things work and what’s possible. But if the GM decides that a section or even a chapter doesn’t apply, then that’s final.

Player or GM, you should consider reading the entire book before making any decisions. A given magic system might draw most heavily on one chapter, but many ideas transfer easily between chapters. You’ll also want to compare several possible mechanisms before settling on those that best represent your game’s (or character’s) version of magic. Finally, the appendices (pp. 242-267) apply to many options.

**PUBLICATION HISTORY**

*Thaumatology* features something old, something new, and quite a lot borrowed. One of the design goals was to integrate the many magic rules published over the course of two decades of *GURPS* and bring them into line with *GURPS Fourth Edition*, polishing and enhancing them in the process. This means the book owes debts to more people than we can list here – but a few names and titles really must be mentioned.

The spell-based system described in the current *GURPS Basic Set* dates to the earliest days of *GURPS*. It has been adapted for specific purposes many times over the years. Treatments of fictional and mythical sources added and removed spells, reorganized the college structure, and imposed special requirements on spellcasters. For example, Ken and Jo Walton’s *GURPS Celtic Myth* added powerful “High Celtic” imagery, while *GURPS Religion*, by Janet Naylor and Caroline Julian, refitted the system for clerics and adopted rules for shamanic spells from Kirk Wilson Tate’s *GURPS Ice Age*. 
Spell-based magic has also been subject to more radical modifications. In particular, S. John Ross’s “Unlimited Mana” rules – first printed in Pyramid #9, subsequently reprinted in GURPS Best of Pyramid Volume 2, and adapted on pp. 76-82 – showed what could be done with a simple-but-fundamental change to the core system. Later, Ken Hite’s GURPS Cabal demonstrated what adding modifiers from real-world occultism could achieve.

Some GURPS supplements offered completely new models of magic. Notably, C.J. Carella’s GURPS Voodoo provided a potent, subtle system of ritual magic (called “Path/Book” magic in Thaumatology; see pp. 121-165), which Stephen Kenson subsequently revised and expanded in GURPS Spirits. Other books developed flexible improvisational systems or rules for powers that, while not explicitly magical, were ideal for representing particular views of magic. Numerous Pyramid articles offered further variations and combinations.

All of these ideas were reviewed, updated, and integrated to produce Thaumatology. This book simply wouldn’t have been possible without those predecessors. It attempts to bring the richness and range of options developed for the first three editions of GURPS into GURPS Fourth Edition, putting all the material in one place for convenience.

Current Cross-References

As much as possible, GURPS supplements are designed to stand alone. They never need books other than the Basic Set to be useful. Because Thaumatology is a tool kit, though, it involves more cross-referencing than usual.

Much of Thaumatology – notably Chapters 2 and 3 – modifies the standard spell-magic rules. This system is covered in adequate detail on pp. B234-253, but GURPS Magic offers a lot of additional material, especially spells! Thus, Magic is recommended for anyone planning to use magic, in particular anything based on the spell system, in a GURPS campaign.

Thaumatology is also designed to complement GURPS Powers. Either volume stands perfectly well on its own and can help you set up magic of various kinds for a wide range of campaigns, but the two books work well together. Chapter 7 specifically examines “magic as powers,” summarizing the essential rules while offering specific applications, but Powers provides many more advantages, enhancements, limitations, and systems.

Finally, GURPS Fantasy is likely to be of interest. It provides extensive guidelines for setting up fantasy games, including treatments of magic. Its Magical Arts chapter offers many good ideas, some of which Thaumatology has borrowed and expanded.

About the Author

British games writer and notorious Professor-William-Headley-look-alike Phil Masters tweaked the basic spell system when he wrote GURPS Arabian Nights in 1993, and has barely looked back since. His other GURPS credits include work on The Discworld Roleplaying Game, GURPS Castle Falkenstein, GURPS Atlantis, The Hellboy Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game, GURPS Banestorm, GURPS Dreaming Cities, GURPS Illuminati, GURPS Voodoo, GURPS Arabian Nights, and GURPS Powers, to name just a few items.

Phil has also worked on lines and products such as Mage: the Sorcerers’ Crusade for White Wolf, Ars Magica for Atlas Games, Dying Earth Roleplaying for Pelgrane Press, and Dreaming Cities for Guardians of Order; all of which involved thinking about magic systems. That said, he has worked on Transhuman Space material for SJ Games and Champions for Hero Games, among other things, and had articles in more magazines than he can count. His website is www.philm.demon.co.uk.
STATIC POWER SUPPLIES

External energy sources don't have to be portable. Some may be fixed in place, making specific locations quite literally “places of power.” Such static sources could be marked by miracles and wonders, crackling energies, or a feeling of almost tangible power obvious to everyone . . . or be utterly unremarkable, needing spells and enchantments to unlock them. They might also be a mana level or two higher than their surroundings.

In game terms, a source should be defined by how much energy it supplies (e.g., “10 points available for castings every second”), perhaps with a random element (e.g., “1d+7 points”). Some kind of roll – probably IQ + Magery – may be needed to draw upon the supply, with the option of critical success gaining more (possibly at the risk of “burning out” the source temporarily or permanently) and critical failure making it impossible to tap the site for a while. There could also be an upper limit on how much energy can be used in total per hour, day, month, etc.

If two or more wizards try to access a site simultaneously, then the “flow” might be divided equally between them. However, it’s more fun to have them engage in a magical struggle for control – perhaps a Contest of Will + Magery, with long-term residents and those who’ve analyzed the site rolling at a bonus. The winner might gain control for an extended period, or every turn could require its own Quick Contest.

Ley Spells

A way to make ley lines (p. 12) significant and interesting without necessarily making them crucial is to introduce a few spells that exploit them as a useful but subsidiary feature of magical reality. There could be a spell to locate them, plus spells equivalent to Mind-Sending, Telepathy, Haste, Apportation, etc., that only work for communication or movement along them, but at half the energy cost (or less) of the usual versions. The GM who doesn’t want to invent new spells might allow the standard versions to enjoy reduced energy cost when cast along leys.

Another option is to give spells increased range when cast along ley lines. Possibilities include dividing effective distance by 2, 10, or more before figuring range penalties; assessing a mere -1 per intervening node; and ignoring range penalties. Such effects will turn a ley network into a useful communication and transportation system. Any faction that controls it will wield considerable power. For extra color, attempts to cast magic across a ley line could suffer significant penalties.

Finally, ley lines could serve as “power channels” that can be tapped using appropriate spells (or just an IQ + Magery roll) for energy to power other magic. The amount of energy supplied determines how useful a given line is. See Static Power Supplies (above) for a related topic.

In some settings, ley lines (p. 12) may serve as the magical equivalent of electrical power lines, channeling energy between high mana sites (“nodes”). By virtue of their own high mana nature, these might delineate the magical geography of the countryside and perhaps mark the borders of areas of differently aspected mana (see Aspected Mana, p. 59). See GURPS Fantasy for further discussion.

MEDITATION, HOLINESS, OR STUDY

If magic is an outgrowth of prayer, religious study, or meditation (see Supernatural Inspiration, p. 17), then the GM can rule that – for practical purposes – these behaviors provide the equivalent of energy. Optional rules for this appear below. To use them, a magic-worker must be Very Blessed (p. B41) and have at least a -10-point version of Disciplines of Faith (p. B132) determined by his chosen faith.

Every eight hours (or “working day”) of prayer or sanctified meditation generates the equivalent of an energy point that the practitioner can spend to create supernatural effects or items. This makes Devotional Enchantment (below) roughly as efficient a use of time as Slow and Sure Enchantment (p. B481). Hours spent in religious study accrue “energy” at half speed. The strict conduct of a virtuous life amasses it at quarter speed. Important meritorious acts (pilgrimages, joining a monastery, etc.) might grant the equivalent of 25 energy points apiece, while lesser acts (such as sacrificing valuable items or memorizing a sacred text) give a smaller amount – all at the GM’s option. If evil cults have access to this process, then especially vile acts or bloody sacrifices might be considered “meritorious”; it’s the god’s rules that count. Indeed, vicious deeds that leave the cultist hunted and despised might be worth even more – evil gods appreciate the value of incentives!

The practitioner can hold this “energy” in reserve for as long as he wishes – typically until a specific, usually virtuous use appears for it, at which time he spends it to perform magic. However, what’s created and held isn’t energy as such, although it uses the same units for game convenience. It’s a backlog of divine favor, temporary insight, or good standing with higher powers who can be asked for aid. Thus, it can’t be combined with FP, energy from Powerstones, etc., to cast spells.

The GM may wish to restrict how much “energy” anyone can hold in reserve; 2 × (Will + Power Investiture) is a plausible maximum. This isn’t required or recommended, though. Divine miracles rarely have size limits!

Learning and casting spells work normally in this system. Usually, the holy man uses Clerical Spell-Magic (pp. 65-71), and so possesses Power Investiture rather than Magery, and learns spells from a restricted list. Adherents of abstruse meditational systems, who don’t invoke gods, might still use standard Magery-based magic.
The Cabal (see p. B543 and *GURPS Infinite Worlds*) likes to claim a monopoly on *all* magic, but it has its own distinct style, based on astrological influences. It applies these broadly – Cabalists, or at least Cabalist factions, have access to almost every spell in *GURPS Magic*, and certainly know about every college. The Cabal sometimes incorporates non-astrological methodologies into its theories, but only with caution and difficulty.

Trained Cabalists are supreme experts at exploiting complex modifiers. They can usually find more than enough bonuses to compensate for a -5 penalty, and thus can work very efficiently in low mana, even benefiting from the reduced risk of disaster should they make serious mistakes. Thus, Cabalists mostly prefer to operate on low mana timelines. They regard worlds with no mana as beneath their interest, of course.

Normal and higher mana worlds aren’t only uncommon, but actually deprive Cabalists of their biggest single advantage. Worlds like this often have numerous magic-workers. If the Cabal operates in such places at all, they find themselves just one faction among many. Their special knowledge is rarely an overwhelming edge, and they’re more likely to be detected. While few Cabalists would admit it, they often feel rather uncomfortable in such settings, only going there to acquire resources or conduct “high energy” research.

The Cabal teaches decanic secrets to all members who study spell-based magic. Students are also inculcated with the importance of secrecy, and told bloodcurdling stories about the consequences of betrayal. While the Cabal can tolerate the occasional nonmember with some kind of magical lore, any outsider who seems to have even a partial grasp of these special methods is usually offered a choice between membership and death. Certain Cabalists go straight to the second option. The empty decans (p. 85) are an interesting mystery to Cabalists, and many dream of identifying whole new forms of spellcraft, which would grant both renown (within the Cabal – the only sort that’s supposed to count) and power.

The Cabal’s grasp of spells certainly includes enchantments. However, with penalties for inappropriate materials tripled, problems with using Powerstones to full effect, and the ever-present threat of jealous rivals stealing or breaking their best toys, most Cabalists prefer to rely on personal abilities. On the other hand, they’ll go a long way (and commit a lot of crimes) to get hold of ancient items of power.

### Other Magics and the Cabal

Cabalists also exploit the laws of magic (see *Magical Laws*, pp. 86-87), materials unrelated to astrological correspondences (see *Materials*, p. 87), and magical languages (p. 87-88). They’re aware of other modifier systems, too, but mostly regard them as inelegant. The Cabal finds that decanic astrology gives the most reliable results.

The Cabal knows all about *Assisting Spirits* (pp. 90-94). In their experience, though, the only spirits that will aid much are demonic; thus, using this shortcut invariably implies falling to supernatural evil. The Cabal has few rules against *any* magical practice – daring and power are the organization’s watchwords – but diabolism is lazy, and leads to trouble for everyone. Cabalists call demon-aided magic “casting black,” and grow very suspicious of colleagues whose powers seem to develop too quickly.

The Cabal is acquainted with *Words of Power* (pp. 178-179), and a few Cabalists even know a Word or two. This is wild, uncontrolled magic, though, and Cabal doctrine says that the group’s purpose is to control magic for advantage. Some Cabalists also study alchemy; see *The Cabal and Alchemy* (p. 101).

A small number of Cabalists use other styles, such as mental disciplines that lie closer to psionics. The rules permit this, and researchers work to integrate all magic into Cabalist theory, but these individuals are often seen as freaks or eccentrics, or suspected of allying with forces beyond the Cabal’s authority. And some Cabalists are actually supernatural beings – vampires, elves, werewolves, etc. – with innate powers.

### The Mage’s Edge

In games such as those featuring the Cabal, a wide range of bonuses exist to aid wizards, but the correct use of these modifiers is a well-guarded secret of one faction. Initiates might have to purchase advantages such as Illuminated, Rank, Security Clearance, or Unusual Background, or accept a Duty, and will certainly have secrets to defend – but they can cast spells much more reliably than anyone else. The PCs can be conspiracy members . . . or desperate rivals seeking to learn the inner secrets of the zodiac, True Names, the arcane calendar, etc.
This is an example of a simple set of "quick-creation" magic items, intended for use alongside Tree Magic (pp. 42-47). Each of that system's "trees" is linked to a body of magical lore. Anyone with Rank 1+ in the Druidic Order, or who has a 10-point Unusual Background ("Talisman Lore Training") and knows Naturalist at 12+, can cast a specific spell by correctly preparing a piece of the appropriate tree. Vowel tree spells also require Magery.

**Finding the Plant**

Roll against Naturalist to locate the correct plant, if necessary. In campaigns set in the British Isles or somewhere similar, most such plants are fairly easy to find:

- **Bramble** never requires a roll, except in the sparsest wasteland.
- **Gorse**, **heather**, and **rowan** are fairly easy to find.
- **Birch**, **reed**, and **oak** can only be found near water, usually within 2d minutes.
- **Gorse**, **heather**, and **rowan** usually take just 2d minutes, and the roll is at +2.
- **Birch**, **reed**, and **oak** can only be found near water, usually within 2d minutes.
- **Alder** and **willow** take half as long to find when searching near water.

**Preparation**

Roll against Naturalist (again), or Artist (Woodworking) at -4, to cut and prepare the talisman. This takes five minutes.

**Casting**

The roll to cast the talisman spell is 12 + Magery, at -1 per full day since the talisman was cut. Success "uses up" the talisman; it cannot be reused, although continuing spells last so long as they’re maintained. The following table gives the talisman spell(s) for each tree, with the talisman(s) required:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tree</th>
<th>Spell</th>
<th>Talisman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alder</td>
<td>Ignite Fire</td>
<td>Peeled twig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash</td>
<td>Flight</td>
<td>Broomstick length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspen*</td>
<td>Shield</td>
<td>Hefty branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birch</td>
<td>Simple Illusion</td>
<td>Bark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder</td>
<td>Lend Vitality</td>
<td>Flowers, berries, or twig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorse*</td>
<td>Ward</td>
<td>Twig with flowers (-2 to cast without flowers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawthorn</td>
<td>Curse</td>
<td>Any part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>Invisibility</td>
<td>15' pole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>Seek Water</td>
<td>Forked rod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazel</td>
<td>Truthsayer</td>
<td>Nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather*</td>
<td>Remove Curse</td>
<td>Flower or straight twig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holly</td>
<td>Bless</td>
<td>Any part</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivy</td>
<td>Lend Language</td>
<td>Leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak</td>
<td>Shape Earth</td>
<td>Acorns or twig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reed</td>
<td>Fasten</td>
<td>Straight, unbroken reed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowan</td>
<td>Magic Resistance</td>
<td>Berries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver Fir*</td>
<td>Enchant</td>
<td>Twig with bark intact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vine</td>
<td>Tanglefoot</td>
<td>4’ length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willow</td>
<td>Death Vision</td>
<td>Forked twig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yew*</td>
<td>Decay</td>
<td>Berries or straight rod</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Vowel tree – requires Magery.

Most talismans weigh between 1/4 lb. and 1 lb., but 15’ poles, broomstick lengths, and hefty branches are a lot heavier. A person may carry any number of talismans, but aside from the need for fresh items, these things are vulnerable; individuals who are jostled, attacked, soaked, or otherwise subjected to typical adventuring hazards may lose them, at the GM’s whim.
SCHOOLS OF ALCHEMY

In both fiction and reality, the term “alchemy” is used for several different practices that, while they may owe something to each other, have distinct methodologies and goals. This suggests that the Alchemy skill might require specialization. Cross-defaults depend on the degree of communication and shared assumptions between groups of alchemists.

In a game based on real-world history, Alchemy (European) and Alchemy (Islamic) might default to each other at -2; they share ideas and texts, but come from notably different cultures. Both derive from Alchemy (Ancient Hellenic), which mystics would say has its share of lost secrets, so both default to and from that specialty at -2.

Tech-Level Modifiers (p. B168) may also apply; European and Islamic alchemists generally operated at TL3-4, while the Hellenic world was TL2. If Alchemy is primarily a mystical process rather than a science, though, then it might not be a technological skill. Historically, the tools and techniques did evolve – but perhaps not as radically as some technologies.

Alchemy (Chinese) and the above specialties differ so much that there may be no default between them. If a default exists, then it’s likely to be at -6 or worse. Alchemists from these cultures might be able to learn something from each other, but they’d have to break down huge barriers of language, imagery, and assumptions.

There’s some evidence of an Indian version of alchemy. Certainly, ancient India had useful practical chemistry. Alchemy (Indian) might default to and from Alchemy (Hellenic) at -6 and Alchemy (Chinese) at -4.

Alchemy as a Spiritual Discipline

Some modern writers claim that alchemy – in its most sophisticated form, anyway – was really a spiritual discipline. They theorize that the creation of gold from base metals and the attainment of immortality were metaphors for the quest for spiritual perfection. Certainly, some quite early alchemists claimed that the mental disciplines involved were more important than the practical chemistry, and Western alchemy came to include a fair amount of Christian symbolism, while the Chinese version had longstanding links to Taoism. Alchemical processes were often described in obscure terms (to protect the craft’s secrets from “unworthy” readers), and incorporated many rituals (ensuring repeatability and controlling timing). Still, most alchemists seem to have had distinctly material goals.

An alchemist who is pursuing spiritual goals should study the Meditation skill (p. B207). If spiritual perfection is necessary, then he must enter a meditative trance before attempting any major alchemical process. He may also need a degree of “spiritual improvement” to achieve high levels of Alchemy skill. For instance, Alchemy at 14+ might require Will 10+, no worse than -15 points in “bad” mental disadvantages (as defined by the GM, or simply anything not tied to spiritual purity), and no disadvantage self-control number below 12; Alchemy at 18+ could call for Will 14+, no unsuitable disadvantages at all, and no self-control number below 15 in any event. The philosopher’s stone might only be found by an alchemist who’s a model of self-control, balance, and virtue – and may cure mental problems as well as creating gold or granting immortality.

Alchemy as an Aspect of Other Subjects

If magic is a complex academic discipline, of which alchemy is one branch, then the Alchemy skill may be part of any competent wizard’s repertoire. It might even be a prerequisite for other magical activities, and the wizard who doesn’t understand the basic interaction of magical forces with matter – alchemy – doesn’t have a hope of getting a spell to work. This could be a general restriction, or apply only to elemental colleges, spells requiring contact with the spirit realm, etc.

Alchemy could also be a vital part of wizards’ academic training, providing a symbol system or basic theory. The Alchemy skill may be a prerequisite for Thaumatology or Ritual Magic. In some settings, those skills might be unable to exceed Alchemy by more than a couple of levels – the more advanced the grand theory, the more underlying knowledge is required. Conversely, if alchemical ideas arise naturally out of abstract magical studies, then Alchemy might default to Thaumatology at -4 or so.

LABORATORY PROCEDURES

Historically, alchemy involved lengthy, repeated processes: heating, sublimation, distillation, etc. Alchemists invented much of the standard equipment known to modern chemists, and used it heavily. Fantasy alchemy may be less tedious, but Alchemy is definitely a laboratory-based skill, and the effective alchemist will need a well-stocked lab. Setup costs and other statistics are as follows:

Home Lab: No skill modifier. Fills a sturdy table. $1,000.

Professional-Grade Lab: +1 to skill. Fills 100 square feet. $5,000.

Excellent Lab: +1TL/2 to skill (round down). Fills 200 square feet. $20,000.

Analysis by Taste and Scent

Real-world alchemists assessed substances, not only by chemical tests and by sight, but by smell and sometimes even by taste. The risks involved – given all the natural poisons, heavy metals, mercury fumes, etc. – should be obvious. Competent alchemists doubtless knew that some materials were too dangerous for this, but their view of procedural safety would rarely pass in a modern laboratory.

The logical consequences here only have a place in the most grimly realistic of games – especially if anyone wants to play an alchemist. A sickly, hallucinating, short-lived, brain-damaged PC isn’t much fun. Emphasizing that alchemy is one branch, then the Alchemy skill may be part of any competent wizard’s repertoire. It might even be a prerequisite for other magical activities, and the wizard who doesn’t understand the basic interaction of magical forces with matter – alchemy – doesn’t have a hope of getting a spell to work. This could be a general restriction, or apply only to elemental colleges, spells requiring contact with the spirit realm, etc.

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The logical consequences here only have a place in the most grimly realistic of games – especially if anyone wants to play an alchemist. A sickly, hallucinating, short-lived, brain-damaged PC isn’t much fun. Emphasizing that alchemy involves a certain amount of eccentric risk-taking might be amusing, though, and could justify an assortment of disadvantages. Alchemists could also benefit from advantages acquired through careful training and gradually acquired resistance, including Acute Taste and Smell, Discriminatory Taste (for individuals who’ve achieved cinematic degrees of refinement), High Manual Dexterity, and Resistant to Poison – and maybe Combat Reflexes and Danger Sense for those whose laboratories explode especially often.
The GM should be cautious about letting Powerstones or other power sources benefit from these rules – they could easily gain considerable power over the centuries. It's easy to justify a veto, though: because a Powerstone soaks up energy from its surroundings by recharging, there's none left to enhance it. If such things do improve over time, then they should probably gain major quirks, too; "Will only recharge on the spot where it spent 200 years" would be fine.

**Enchantment Through Deeds**

Noteworthy deeds may enhance already-enchanted items and/or grant magical power to mundane objects through a process similar to but faster than *Enchantment Through Age* (pp. 110-112). In particular, enchantment through deeds shares the property of allowing artifacts to gain power by being used in great events, perhaps because of their symbolic significance or because of the associated emotional energies (especially when death and destruction are involved) – most fabled magic items are said to have been present at historic incidents. While there are no simple rules to cover this effect, the following examples provide rough guidelines:

- Killing someone with a weapon – enchanted or not – can grant power, provided that the killing was a goal in itself. For instance, assassinating a ruler would count, but not merely eliminating another guard (although slaying 100 guards might be noteworthy enough to confer some dark power). This may grant from 20% to 100% of the victim's character-point value as energy points; 100% is the recommended default. Defeating monsters, spirits, etc., also qualifies, if they're famous or important, and not just another minor incident in an adventuring career.
- Stealing the crown jewels using a cloak of magical stealth or a lockpick inherited from a master thief could be worth dozens of energy points – or hundreds, if the general public learns some of the details. Stealing a flagon of wine from a shop would be worth nothing, unless the act became a key part of the legend of a great romantic rogue.
- Negotiating peace between two kingdoms is potentially a legendary deed, although one that tends to be overlooked in stories. Doing so with the aid of a mind-control device cheapens the accomplishment, however, and so would only be worth a few points. The circlet worn by one of the kings involved, mentioned in ballads and depicted in a famous painting of the event, could gain some points toward a charisma-enhancing enchantment, or one that helps in assessing or calming others' emotions.
- The act of creating an item can itself be a significant or famous deed. The smith who forges a very fine blade for the founder of the empire, or the jeweler who carves a huge gem into an uncannily lifelike shape, may find that he has imbued his work with magic. Optionally, any time a craftsman rolls a critical success for an important act of creation, roll again. A second critical success gives the item a noteworthy enchantment of the GM's choice, as well as ensuring that it's of the best possible quality. (If subsequent rolls are required, and any are critical failures, then the enchantment can gain a significant quirk.) Ordinary success on the second roll may give the object a minor enchantment, at the GM's option.

In all cases, divide energy by 25 if you need character points for the enchantment.

This approach is easy to combine with enchantment through age: an item can have a long history of dedicated use that includes some special incidents, and together these grant it substantial power. It's also possible to use this system in concert with *Magic Items as Advantages* (pp. 113-115); simply take the character-point value of the deed or incident for this purpose.

**Naming Objects**

It may help enchantment through deeds if the item involved has a name. Unlike other aspects of the effect, this can be consciously controlled – although famous objects may also pick up informal nicknames. To be magically effective, a deliberately given name has to be decided while the artifact is being made. During the crafting process, the maker must inscribe the name on his work; this requires a Symbol Drawing roll, by either the craftsman or somebody who can instruct him. Alternatively, if the GM uses *Talents as Magic* (pp. 198-199), he might allow craft skills aided by magical Talents to produce named items. In all cases, the creator must be literate in order to mark the name correctly.

If the GM decides that the name is appropriate, the object looks the part and works very well (which usually requires it to be of at least fine quality), and the owner makes an effort to make the item famous (bribing bards to mention it in tales, brandishing it and saying its name in public whilst making a Public Speaking roll, etc.), then the item might receive 3d energy points immediately. The process then continues as above, under GM control. The item should have a good chance of eventually developing some kind of powers, however.

Generous GMs may even make this a primary method for enchanting items. In that case, a PC who uses famous, named items on an adventure gets bonus character points equal to what he earned for himself to divide equally among those items; multiply by 25 to get equivalent energy points. Less-generous GMs can give items only 1/2 or 1/3 as many points. The GM still controls what enchantments develop, but the wielder may be able to influence this by how he uses the item, using Divination spells or astrology to determine the influences at work on it, or carefully casting temporary spells through it.

**Traumatic Enchantment**

A variant of enchantment through deeds is enchantment through an emotionally or psychically significant incident – which may be more failure or disaster than “deed.” This often involves a death, with the individual's life force being converted into magical energy; for example, a hero cut down while attempting a task that he had sworn on his life to accomplish may imbue his weapon with the power of his determination. Death isn't absolutely required, though; for instance, a betrayed lover might leave rage and spite imprinted on the necklace that he bought as a love-gift before he learned of the infidelity. And death might not be enough if it's ordinary – even a soldier dying in battle doesn't necessarily release appropriate psychic energies.
Rituals are invariably complex and tricky things. Working them effectively requires a long process of study and training. They’re no less intricate for the advanced adept who can work them without visible effort – he has simply internalized the complexity. Each ritual should feel like a significant event in play!

In game terms, a ritual consists of an extended series of Concentrate maneuvers. If the magician is attacked or injured during this time, then he must make a Will-3 roll to continue. Someone who interferes sufficiently with the magician’s equipment or the ritual space can disrupt any casting.

**LEARNING PATH/BOOK MAGIC**

Students must normally learn the Ritual Magic skill from a teacher. Depending on the nature of the campaign world, would-be magicians may be apprenticed or accepted as members of a magical order, and then taught Ritual Magic. However, self-teaching (p. B293) is a possibility – albeit at half speed, as usual – if sufficient information is available. The GM might even allow individuals with Magery to develop a certain instinctive level of skill (which should never exceed IQ), with no points in specific rituals.

**The Paths or Books**

The prerequisite for all Path or Book skills is the Ritual Magic skill. Furthermore, no Path or Book skill can exceed the practitioner’s Ritual Magic skill – to advance, he must first improve his core knowledge. Ritual Magic provides a basic understanding of how magic works and the cosmology of a magical tradition. It may in fact give the student the potential to conduct rituals without further training, although it’s usually best to study some specific details.

**Magical Steps**

Magical rituals – especially in spirit-oriented magic – are often described as having five “steps.” Some traditions change the elements or the order, but the underlying pattern is usually consistent. Gamers defining magical traditions can consider what form each step takes, for flavor:

1. **Preparation:** The magician readies himself, the ritual’s subject, and the location where the ritual will take place. This includes things like drawing or painting mystical symbols on the walls and floor (using Symbol Drawing); ritually cleansing the area with a broom, water, or incense; anointing participants with special oils; ritual baths; and meditation or prayer. Shamans often use dancing, chanting, and drumming to raise their energy. Magicians may also prepare the working area with rituals intended to protect participants from harmful forces.

2. **Invocation:** The magician calls on any necessary powers or spirits. This process often begins during the preparation but continues beyond it – the chanting or ritual activity is repeated throughout the ceremony. During the invocation, the names of any and all powers involved will be spoken, and symbolic representations may be displayed.

3. **Intent:** The magician expresses what he wants the ritual to accomplish. This can be a simple, direct petition (“destroy this enemy”), or something more complicated, such as linking a symbol of an effect with the ritual’s subject; e.g., during a harmful ritual, the magician may destroy or damage a representation of the victim, while some exorcisms use a ritual bath, symbolizing the cleansing process. The invocation generally continues while such symbolism is being enacted.

4. **Offering:** Spirit-oriented or religious rituals frequently add an offering to satisfy the spirits or appease the deities. This can be a sacrifice, a gift of food or drink (which may be consumed by the participants or left out for the spirits), or something less tangible, like a pledge of servitude or a prayer of thanks.

5. **Dismissal/Dissipation:** The ritual concludes with the dismissal or dissipation of the invoked powers. Spirits may be sent away; excess accumulated energy or mystical power may be safely “grounded.” This is usually straightforward – but some magicians deal with hostile spirits that may resist and turn dangerous, or juggle vast, unstable forces. This is a crucial component of harmful rituals, because the magician must take steps to shield himself and his client from the effects of the magic.
More dramatic concepts of shamanism add the capacity to assume the shapes of totem animals via Alternate Form. Others let the shaman enter the spirit realm physically, using Insubstantiality with Projection (Powers, p. 56) – typically combined with Invisibility with Substantial Only, Switchable, and Accessibility, Only in spirit form (-10%). Some shamans also have Blessed, but this isn't considered part of the power; as it already incorporates restrictions analogous to the power modifier, and as special aptitude at dealing with minor spirits (Shamanic Talent) doesn't help in dealings with higher powers.

**Soothsaying**

Soothsaying is the power to foretell the future and discern hidden truths. While most soothsayers are limited to a single method, they can often acquire more than one sort of useful information this way – and some have a broader sensitivity to signs and portents. Soothsayers often know what to do so instinctively that they appear uncannily lucky, and well-controlled soothsaying can aid skill performance by anticipating problems.

**Soothsaying Talent**

If the soothsayer receives his guidance from a god, uses clerical spells from the same source, and has Power Investiture, then the GM may let him treat his Power Investiture as Soothsaying Talent when using Soothsaying abilities.

**Soothsaying Abilities**

Absolute Direction; Blessed, but not Heroic Feats; Clairsentience, but not with Reduced Time; Danger Sense; Detect, for supernatural beings and/or phenomena; Empathy; Intuition; Luck, with Active (a quick look at the immediate future); Oracle; Precognition; Psychometry; Serendipity; Spirit Empathy; Super Luck; and Visualization.

If the soothsayer acquires the Blessed advantage through his power and has a power modifier that requires him to follow his god's rules or commandments, then the restrictions that the modifier imposes must be noticeably more severe than those already built into Blessed. Mortals entrusted with knowledge of the future and hidden truths are held to very high standards by higher powers!

**Freeform Folkloric Magic**

Any game system that offers rules for magic inevitably has to restrict it, limiting it to what the rules permit. That doesn't necessarily “feel” the same as magic as it appears in myths and stories, however: There, it's often depicted as an unrestricted but unreliable, whimsical force, beyond the comprehension of the story's point-of-view protagonists. Thus, in “folkloric” or “fairytale” games, the GM may prefer to rule that magic is essentially the preserve of NPCs, who can just do things as the tale demands, without worrying about game mechanics – and without making excuses when the story requires them to remain inactive. This doesn't necessarily mean that magic is entirely inaccessible to PCs, though: one of the things that magical NPCs sometimes do is grant magical gifts to heroes, either as payment for services rendered or out of enigmatic benevolence. Some of these boons may take the form of advantages with modifiers suitable for magic; see Magical Advantages (pp. 197-201). Others will be one-off rituals, intended to accomplish a single effect that meets a specific need; e.g., so long as the PC follows some specific instructions correctly, he can travel to another dimension, or walk unharmed through molten lava. These rituals are generally highly specific, and probably won't work outside of a particular time and place, so there's no need to charge points for them.

That said, while the powers of magical NPCs are mostly enigmatic, some of their abilities may be predictable and consistent; e.g., all wizards can fly, or change shape, or travel to the Nine Hells. Likewise, such figures might be powerless in a church, or vulnerable to silver weapons regardless of any precautions. This gives them a degree of controllability in plot terms, and offers the PCs clues as to how to deal with them if they turn hostile.

In general, this approach works best in a “narrative-heavy” campaign where an interesting plot counts for more than PC dominance, and where the players trust the GM to play broadly fair and spin a good tale, without too many ego issues.
The Sephiroth

The Otz Chaim – the Tree of Life in the Jewish Qabalistic tradition – encompasses 10 “spheres,” or sephiroth. These represent emanations of the divine, descending from the highest spiritual plane to base matter. Each sephirah can be viewed as a mystical realm as well as an aspect of God.

Mystics follow 22 linking paths to pass through the sephiroth on a spiritual pilgrimage toward enlightenment. This process must be taken in the correct order, which isn’t universally agreed upon. One plausible sequence is Malkuth, Yesod, Hod, Netzach, Tiphareth, Geburah, Chesed, Binah, Chokmah, Kether – although this involves a path that isn’t shown on every depiction of the Tree. Taking the sephiroth out of order – or trespassing without ritual preparation – can result in Very Bad Things. “Entry” into a sephirah can be envisioned as physically visiting a spirit realm, as traveling there in astral form, or as a purely spiritual achievement. Entering progressively higher spheres brings increasingly difficult challenges involving confrontations with guardians, tests of purity, and intellectual complexities.

A magician who has attained a sephirah – entering it correctly, in the proper sequence – may qualify for bonuses with some magic. The meanings of the sephiroth are usually defined in mystical terms, though, making them rather abstruse for use in secular magic systems. To resolve this, Decanic Correspondences (p. 248) associates each decan with a sephirah, and the descriptions below relate the sephiroth to classical elements, astrological features, and “verbs” suitable for verb-noun syntactic magic (see Chapter 6). Attaining a sephirah might permit a wizard to purchase levels of aspected Magery that give bonuses with magic related to a particular decan, verb, or planet. This can justify buying (limited) Magery well beyond campaign limits! In a setting where magical power demands mystical insight, entry into the appropriate sephirah might be required to use a magical verb, and the other associations of the sephiroth could form the basis of a system of Realm-based syntactic magic.

Kether
“The Crown” comes closest to the Godhead, and manifests as a brilliant white light. Relating to perfection and the infinite, it’s the “Primum Mobile” above all planetary spheres, the unification of all the elements.

Verb: Create.
Other Associations: Masculinity.

Chokmah (Cochma)
“Wisdom” – related to the most basic of insights – resembles a rainbow star field, a mosaic of all colors. It comprises the entire zodiac, and is the root of elemental fire and air that form the fixed stars.

Verb: Sense.
Other Associations: Masculinity.

Binah
“Understanding” is crucially concerned with comprehension. It can be seen as a black cave full of rich food smells. It touches the sphere of Saturn. Deep within it are the true spring of elemental water and the lush cornucopia of elemental earth.

Verb: Communicate.
Other Associations: Femininity.

Chesed (Gedulah)
“Mercy,” the sephirah of generosity and protection, appears as a brilliant blue temple mirrored in blue airy skies. It abuts the sphere of Jupiter.

Verbs: Protect/Guard; Warn.
Other Associations: Love.

Geburah (Pechad, Din)
“Severity” appears as an arsenal of iron chariots; the weapons, walls, and armored figures all glow with ruddy fire. It relates to violence and destruction (which can be used for good, but must be controlled). Obviously, it’s associated with Mars.

Verb: Weaken.
Other Associations: Strength; Justice.

Tiphareth (Rahamin)
“Beauty” is suffused with a golden lambency, and relates to balance and moderation. Guarded by lions, it resembles ancient savannas. Its dry, shimmering heat denotes its fiery nature; its golden light emanates from the sphere of the Sun.

Verb: Heal.
Other Associations: Balance; Wholeness.
**“Clerical” Table**

This table suits magic that calls upon the power of a god or similar entity, whether or not the caster is truly a “cleric.” The GM might disregard results that benefit opponents if those foes are deeply hostile to the deity and/or the deity is paying personal attention and approves of the fight. In those cases, redirect the result in some instructive, morally appropriate way. The GM can certainly change any result that the higher power would simply never permit!

The assumption here is that the caster either misdirects the magic or suffers warning or minor punishment for irritating the deity, or the deity declines to act in this one case for ineffable reasons. If the GM wants to simulate a more whimsical or brutal god, or to punish serious recent transgressions by the caster, then he can substitute results such as “Caster struck by lightning for 6d burn damage” or “Caster stripped of all clerical magic until he performs a great quest.”

3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1 point of injury and 2d FP (in addition to spell’s cost, if any).

4 – Spell is cast on one of the caster’s companions (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).

5-6 – Spell is cast on caster (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).

7 – Spell affects someone or something other than its intended target – friend, foe, or random object. Roll randomly or (preferably) make an appropriate choice.

8 – Spell fails entirely. Caster takes 1 point of injury.

9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is stunned (Will roll to recover).

10-11 – Spell produces nothing but the intense sense of a judgmental presence in everyone within 20 yards. Caster must make a Will-3 roll, while everyone else must roll unmodified Will; those who fail are mentally stunned.

12 – Spell produces a weak, momentary shadow of the intended effect (doing no more than 1 point of damage, reversing other effects after that moment, etc.). Caster and all targets have the sense of a presence that judges and chooses not to act.

13 – Spell produces a twisted or confused variation of the intended effect. Caster becomes unhappily aware that he attracted attention from the wrong supernatural being.

14 – Spell seems to work, but the results are subtly twisted, or may simply disappear prematurely, causing the caster inconvenience or worse. The GM should try to convince the players that the spell did work – but in fact, it attracted the attention of a hostile or mischievous supernatural being, which is now seeking to cause trouble.

15-16 – The higher powers have decided to do things their own way. A completely different effect is produced, probably on a different target; use spells of similar power to the one attempted to determine possible effects. This may inconvenience the caster, or help him, indirectly and strangely.

17 – Spell fails entirely. Caster temporarily forgets the spell. To regain it, he must perform an act of contrition and redemption (a Theology roll may help him decide what’s appropriate). This should take at least a week; require some inconvenience, expense, or modest danger; and end in a visit to an appropriate temple, church, or shrine.

18 – Spell fails entirely. An emissary of the caster’s god or patron spirit appears and places him under a compulsion to perform some great deed for the faith. Treat this as Obsession (9) until it’s carried out.

**Comedy Table**

This table suits lighthearted and explicitly comic campaigns. Its results rarely lead to total disaster, but they can be embarrassing – and being on the receiving end of the universe’s sense of humor can hurt!

3 – Spell fails entirely. Caster suffers an essentially harmless but embarrassing and inconvenient “mark of failure,” such as a small rain cloud floating over his head, a tendency to sneeze explosively once per minute, or a flower growing from the tip of his nose. This effect is equivalent to Unnatural Features 5, and can’t be removed or hidden. It remains for 4d hours.

4 – Spell is cast on one of the caster’s companions (if harmful) or on a random nearby foe (if beneficial).

5 – Spell is cast on one of the caster’s companions (roll randomly), but never affects the intended target.

6 – Spell fails entirely. Caster forgets his own name – and forgets it again instantly if reminded of it. Make a Will roll after 24 hours, and again each day thereafter, to recover.

7 – Spell causes a brief dip in local lighting levels, startling (but not harmful) temperature variations for a few seconds, peculiar sound effects, etc. Meanwhile, the caster himself is drenched in water (or custard).

8 – Spell affects someone or something other than its intended target – friend, foe, or random object. Roll randomly or (preferably) make an amusing choice.

9 – Spell fails entirely. Caster is surrounded by a flurry of dramatic and inconvenient multicolored sparks, which do him 1 point of injury and singe his clothing or equipment.

10 – Spell fails entirely. Caster curses volubly for 1d seconds, and is stunned (Will roll to recover).

11 – Spell produces a strange noise and 1d+1 colored billiard balls (or other trivial objects).

12 – Spell produces a weak and useless shadow of the intended effect and 1d white doves, a horde of colored frogs or fluffy mice, or other small, harmless creatures, which may swarm close to the caster in an annoyingly affectionate fashion.

13 – Spell produces nothing but a dramatic explosion that singes the caster’s eyebrows, blackens his hair and/or beard, leaves his clothing ragged, and blows any headgear 3d yards away (but causes no actual injury).

14 – Spell appears to work, but any roll to resist it is at +3, all useful numerical values (damage, duration, HP healed, etc.) are halved, and the caster suffers the Nightmares disadvantage (with no self-control roll) for 1d+1 nights. These nightmares should be very surreal.

15 – Spell fails entirely. Caster’s hair (including any beard or mustache) instantly grows 2d yards; his fingernails, 1d inches. It’s up to the GM what problems this causes!

16 – Spell fails entirely. Caster temporarily forgets the spell. Make a Will roll after a week, and again each following week, until he remembers. Meanwhile, he suffers the Delusion that the spell doesn’t exist and is in fact completely impossible.

17 – Caster is replaced for the next 3d hours by a version of himself from a parallel world. This replacement differs from him in one major respect: sex, race, profession, sexual orientation, etc. The caster remains unaware that he was ever any different, no matter how often his comrades may tell him. (“But Magnus, you’re a giant talking duck!” “So? Are you fellows some sort of racists?”)

18 – Spell fails entirely and a supernatural being appears. It might be whimsical, mischievous, moralistic, pompous, incomprehensible, or plain evil (GM’s choice). It may be an intangible spirit that can possess the caster or his friends. It remains until it gets bored or is driven off, but it should certainly cause trouble before it disappears!
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