

**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# THAUMATOLOGY™



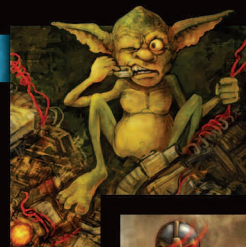
By PHIL MASTERS

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

# FEEL THE POWER!

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

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**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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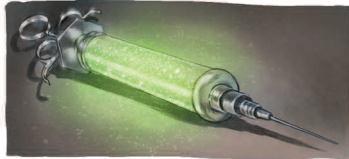
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# INTRODUCTION

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*

## About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. We can be reached by email: [info@sjgames.com](mailto:info@sjgames.com). Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

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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.

*Sourcebook and Roleplaying Game, GURPS Banestorm, 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.

## 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;  $2 \times (\text{Will} + \text{Power Investiture})$  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.





## Example: The Cabal

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 can 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.

## Celtic Tree Talismans

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.

- In woodland, finding anything but *gorse*, *heather*, or *reed* usually takes just 2d minutes, and the roll is at +2. The GM may make exceptions; e.g., in an old oak forest, the seeker might not have to roll to find oak, but need 1d hours to locate silver fir.

- In cleared scrubland and on hillsides, a roll is always required. It takes 2d minutes to find *gorse*, *heather*, or *rowan*, but 1d hours to find everything else but *reed*.

- *Reed* can only be found near water, usually within 2d minutes.

- *Alder* doesn’t grow anywhere complete dry. *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:

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

\* 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:* +TL/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 grittily 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.

# PATH/BOOK MAGIC IN OPERATION

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.

## Extended Rule of 20 – Again

The rules for Path/Book ritual magic – like those for spell-based ritual magic – may reward magicians who buy an extremely high Ritual Magic skill and run everything off defaults. This may please some GMs but annoy others. A possible solution is that described under *Extending the Rule of 20* (p. 73): treat any Ritual Magic skill greater than 20 as 20 for the purpose of default calculation, so that Paths never have a default greater than 14.

## 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 Modifier

#### Variable

A soothsayer typically has to focus on his power to the exclusion of a normal life, implying Disciplines of Faith as a required disadvantage: Ritualism (-5%), if he merely needs to follow various procedures scrupulously; Mysticism (-10%), if he must spend much of his time contemplating omens; or Asceticism (-15%), if he has to detach himself almost entirely from the here-and-now. Alternatively, if the power is god-given, then he may have to follow a code represented by a different self-imposed mental disadvantage,

such as Honesty or Code of Honor. Typically, loss of the power comes quickly but not in a dangerous way (+0%), and restoration requires only a minor quest or moderate sacrifices (+0%).

In some cases, the power “descends on” the soothsayer *despite* his wishes and efforts. This may imply completely different limitations. Uncontrollable is likely, perhaps with Unconscious Only, and very possibly also Nuisance Effect or Temporary Disadvantage (Odious Personal Habits, Noisy, etc).

### Soothsaying Talent

5 points/level

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.

## 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.

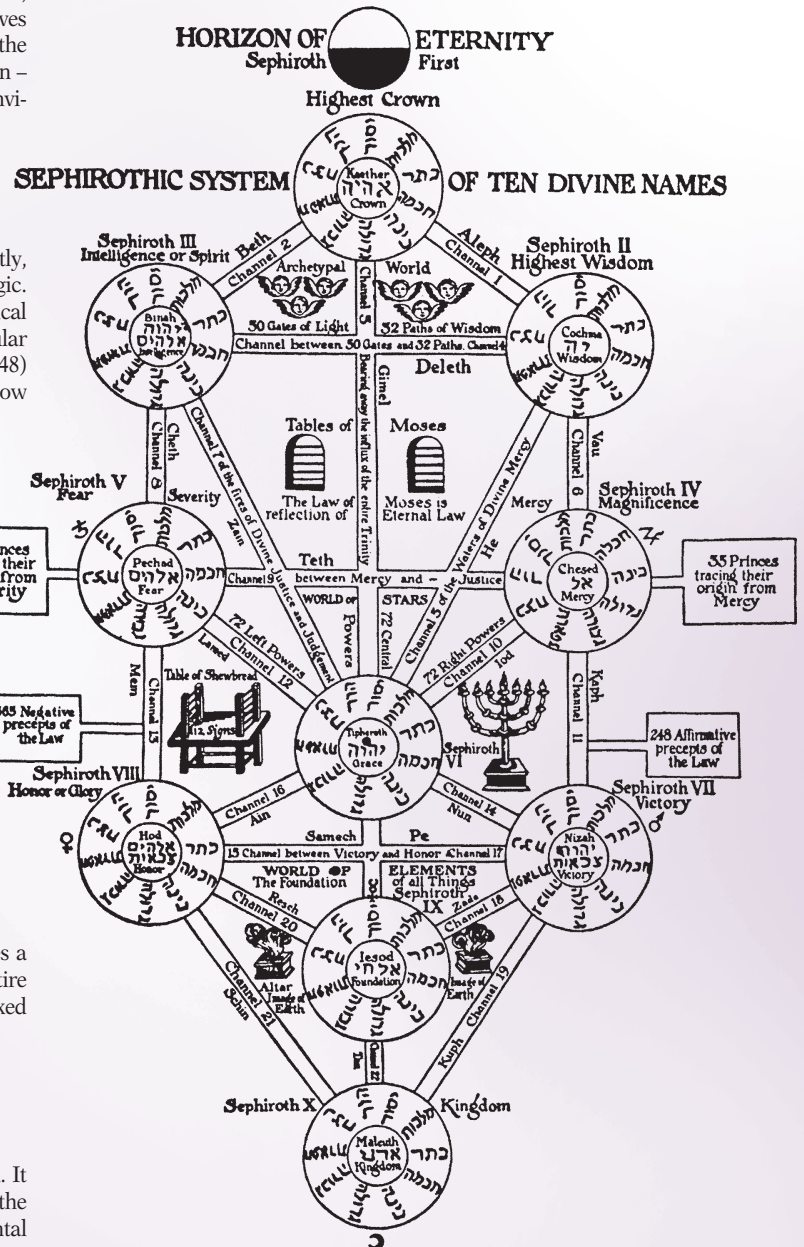
*Other Associations:* Love.

## 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 off 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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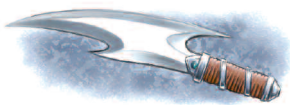


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