

THE STUFF HEROES ARE MADE OF

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I'm Back!

Well, I completely missed the last issue (darn that real life stuff interfering with my hobbies) but I'm back for this issue, and hopefully on track for the rest of the issues of the year. This will be a rather short issue for, really just one article (on topic with the theme of this quarter's Haymaker though), but hopefully it won't bore you.

Once again, I take pen to paper (or in this case I guess fingers to keyboard would be more accurate) in my never-ending quest for the perfect *Fantasy Hero* magic system. Hmm... That's not really true, my interest isn't really in making the "perfect system", I just enjoy playing with the rules. Anyway, this being the case, here we go again...

Hermetic Magic

Abstract

From the name you might guess that this is a conversion from Atlas Games' *Ars Magica* role playing game - well, you're close, but not quite. I've never actually played the game (although I came close once); but I have read it, and talked with people who have played it, and what I've learned about it's magic system sound keen. What I have attempted to do herein is detail a system for handling magic in *Fantasy Hero* based on what I heard and read about the *Ars Magica* magic system - I guess you could call this a system inspired by *Ars Magica*.

The Basics

Hermetic magic (as this particular style of magic will be referred to from now on) is purchased as a series of skills, which are basically the Required Skill Roll for the activating the various spells (powers) built through the character's Variable Power Pool. Hermetic mages must buy, as a minimum, the base level of one Hermetic Form and one Hermetic Technique. Experienced Hermetic Mages will have dozens of points in these skills. When casting any Hermetic spell, the mage character will be required to make two skill rolls, a Hermetic Technique roll and a Hermetic Form roll. Both skill rolls must be successful, and the Hermetic Form skill must be made by at least the level of the spell (the Hermetic Technique skill may be used as a complementary skill to the Hermetic Form skill.)

Example: Ranger Bob has a small amount of animal magic. He has one Hermetic Form skill: Bestia (12 or less) as well as the Hermetic Technique skill of Gnosis (13 or less). He needs to talk to a passing rabbit, so he casts his Rabbit Speak spell. First he rolls the appropriate

Hermetic Technique skill (Gnosis) as a complementary skill [he rolls a 11, which makes the roll by 2]. Then he rolls the appropriate Hermetic Form skill (Bestia) [he rolls an 11, which with the +1 from making the Gnosis roll by 2 makes the roll by 1]. The Rabbit Speak spell was a level 1 spell so he is successful at casting the spell and can now talk to the rabbit.

The Skills

Hermetic Forms and Techniques

Each Hermetic Technique and Hermetic Form skill is a 3 points skill, based on INT (unless the GM agrees that for a specific character a different stat would be more appropriate), +1 to the skill costs 2 points. There are a total of 15 individual skills that a Hermetic Mage may possess (an experienced Hermetic mage will possess most of the these skills).

Hermetic Forms

- **Animál** (An) "animal" - Animál concerns animals of all kinds, from the fish of the sea to the birds of the air. Animál spells cannot affect people, for they have souls whereas animals do not. Pronounced 'an-nee-MAHL.'
- **Aquam** (Aq) "water" - Aquam concerns all types of liquids. Through this Art, one accesses the might of a roaring flood or the gentleness of a clear pool. Pronounced 'AH-kwahm.'
- **Auram** (Au) "air" - Auram is the Art of air, wind, and weather. True flight is only possible through this Art. Pronounced 'OW-rahm.'
- **Corpus** (Cp) "body" - Corpus is the Art of humans and humanlike bodies. It governs the intricate interactions that occur in those bodies with souls, as well as those that once had souls. Pronounced 'COR-poos.'
- **Herbam** (HE) "plant" - The Form concerns plants and trees. This includes plant mater of all types, including that which is no longer. Pronounced 'HAIR-bomb'.
- **Ignem** (Ig) "fire"- The form of magic which affects fire. Pronounced 'IG-nem'.
- **Imáginem** (Im) "image" - The form of magic that affects images. Pronounced 'EE-ma-go-nem'.
- **Mentem** (Me) "mind" - The form of magic which affects the human mind. Pronounced 'MEN-tem'.
- **Terram** (Te) "earth" - The form of magic which affects earth and stone. Pronounced 'TARE-rum'.
- **Vim** (Vi) "power" - The form of magic which affects magic and demons. Pronounced 'WEEM'.

Hermetic Techniques

- Creo (Cr) "I create" – The technique of magic which creates anything.
- Intéllego (In) "I percieve" – The technique of magic which provides information.
- Muto (Mu) "I transform" – The technique of magic which changes or mutates things.
- Perdo (Pe) "I destroy" - The magus who understands the Art of Perdo knows that all objects and creatures in the temporal will inevitably cease to exist this, and uses magic to control the universal process whereby things are destroyed. Aging, disease, decay, and dissolution are all properties inherent to objects and living things and can be drawn out through this Art. Pronounced 'PARE-doe.'
- Rego (Re) "I control" - The Art of Rego allows a magus to regulate matter or compel the actions of living things. One kind of Rego spell might lift someone into the air, and other might make a person act a certain way. Pronounced 'RAY-go.'

Other Skills

Ritual – This skill allows mages to combine their spell casting efforts to facilitate the casting of larger and more complex spells. A successful skill rolls allows the mage to add his magic pool into the collective. The mage character will be at -1 to the roll for every 10 points he is attempting to add into the collective. This skill may also be used in a skill vs.. skill manner if a member of a ritual collective tries to wrest control of the casting away from the ritual leader - simply have the mages involved in the struggle roll their skill, whoever makes the skill roll by the most has control of the casting.

Cost: 3/2, Based on EGO

Spell Research - Model after the *Inventor* skill. This skill allows the mage character to create new spells. A mage character may only create spells that fall into a Form/Technique combination that the character possesses. Base time to create a new spell is 1 Turn. Character suffers a penalty to roll of -1 per level of spell being researched. Character may take extra time and receive +1 per step down the time chart to roll. If character fails to make skill roll he may not try again until some appropriate (as defined by the GM) circumstance has altered (example: character acquires a book containing new information pertinent to the spell)

Cost: 3/2, Based on INT.

The Schools

In addition to the Forms and Techniques there are innumerable schools of magic. The schools represent differing traditions and illustrate the various "trappings" of spell casting (the silly things the mage does in order to cast the spell). Some schools learn to cast through spoken spells, some through arcane hand gestures, others may work through item sympathy (i.e.. To cast a flight spell a mage may need a bird feather), and yet others may work though

combinations of these or even completely different traditions not described herein. Within the game mechanics, these traditions are represented by a standard set of modifiers applied to all spells the mage learns to cast. In order to help encourage a “magic feel” as opposed to a “superpower feel” it is recommended that a school be represented by limitations adding up to at least $-\frac{1}{2}$ and, although probably no more than $-1\frac{1}{2}$. This is merely a suggestion and you may opt to go higher than this range, but remember that the type of spell casting (Spontaneously, Formulaicly, or Ritually – see Building Spell below) will also add its own set of limitations.

Note: Mages who of different traditions may still perform ritual magic together. All magic involves manipulation of the same force (or vim), the traditions merely represent how various mages learn to focus and call upon this force.

Examples

Tradition 1 - Arcane gestures learned over time, yet always difficult to execute are needed for this tradition.

Gestures ($-\frac{1}{4}$) and Concentration [$1/2$ DCV] ($-\frac{1}{4}$). Total = $-\frac{1}{2}$

Traditions 2 - A raw and reckless school of sympathetic magery, mages of this tradition rely on their knowledge of the innate magic locked with select items.

Obvious Accessible Focus (-1). Total = -1

Tradition 3 – Forgoing the flashy show that some mages prefer, deep introspection and a calm mind are the teaching of this school.

Extra Time (1 level) ($-\frac{1}{2}$), Concentration [0 DCV] ($-\frac{1}{2}$). Total = -1

Tradition 4 – With but a simple gesture and an arcane phrase, mages of this school are able to call forth great magiks.

Gestures ($-\frac{1}{4}$) and Incantations ($-\frac{1}{4}$). Total = $-\frac{1}{2}$

Tradition 5 - The power locked within certain very special items carried by the caster at all times (most often in the form of some type of enchanted jewelry) is released by speaking a phrase known only to the caster.

Obvious, Inaccessible Focus ($-\frac{1}{2}$) and Incantations ($-\frac{1}{4}$). Total = $-\frac{3}{4}$

The Spells

The Magic Pool

The Magic Pool for Hermetic Magic is a Variable Power Pool with a set of standard modifiers applied to the control cost. The pool may be of any size (per GM approval of course). The standard modifiers are:

- Can Change Powers as 0-phase action (+1)

- Spells limited to effects known and allowed by Hermetic Technique and Hermetic Form skills possessed by character (-1/2)
- School (Tradition) Limitations (as appropriate for school) (-1/2 to -1 1/2)

Spell Level

This system makes repeated references to spell levels. Level, of course, has no meaning in the Hero System; and this term is used purely as a way of roughly describing the relative power-level of a spell. A spell's level is equal to its Active Cost (discounting the standard *Delayed Effect* required for Formulaic casting) divided by 10 (rounded to the nearest whole number). Furthermore, although inspired by the system described in *Ars Magica*, this level bears no relationship or similarity to the spell levels referred to in that game.

Building Spells

There are three types of spells (casting methods) found in Hermetic Magic, in all cases, the Requires Skill Rolls is a mandatory limitation:

- **Spontaneously** - specify the effect you want and attempt to achieve it - this can be quite tiring and difficult. All spells are created with, at the very minimum, *Requires Skill Roll*.
- **Formulaicly** - The mage has pre-studied a specific effect and memorized the best way to achieve it. All spells are created with, at the minimum, *Requires Skill Roll*, three or more levels of the *Extra Time* limitation, and the *Delayed Effect* advantage.
- **Ritually** - A group of mages get together to combine forces, generating a much greater effect than any one of them could have achieved alone. All spells are created with, at the minimum, *Requires Skill Roll* and four or more levels of the *Extra Time* limitations. All mages involved must have the *Ritual* skill. Ritual spell casting allows the mages to combine their active points of magic pool into one big pool under the control of one mage (the leader of the ritual).

Although Hermetic Mages may change the spells available in their pool at anytime, they can only cast spells that they have learned. In other words, Hermetic Mages do not create spells on the fly. Mages may learn spells through various means. Purchased or acquired spellbooks and scrolls is a common method, as is researching to create spells. It is the player's responsibility to maintain the character's spellbook. Casting Methods allow for minor exceptions to this rule. In Ritual magic the mage who is leading the ritual may cast higher level (greater active point) version of a spell he already knows, and any mage may elect to cast any spell he knows Formulaicly (simply apply the additional modifier to the spell). Spell effects follow the basic rules for powers built within the framework of a Variable Power Pool. In addition, the standard *Tradition* limitations must be applied, as well as the appropriate limitations for the casting method used (Spontaneously, Formulaicly, or Ritually).

Examples

Sample Character

Bozo the Healer Mage		
School (Tradition) Limitations: Gestures (-¼) and Concentration [1/2 DCV] (-¼). Total = -½		
STR: 10	DEX: 12	CON: 13
INT: 15	EGO: 10	PRE: 10
PD: 2	ED: 3	SPD: 3
		BOD: 10
		COM: 10
		REC: 5
		END: 26
		STUN: 20
<i>Cost</i>	<i>Ability</i>	<i>Roll</i>
5	Hermetic Form: Corpus (body)	13 or less
7	Hermetic Technique: Muto (I transform)	14 or less
5	Hermetic Technique: Creo (I create)	13 or less
3	Hermetic Technique: Perdo (I destroy)	12 or less
3	Spell Research	12 or less
3	Ritual	11 or less
40	Mage Pool (45) - Can cast up to 4th level spells	
22	Control (22) - Can Change Powers as 0-phase action (+1), Spells limited to effects known and allowed by Hermetic Technique and Hermetic Form skills possessed by character (-½), School (Tradition) Limitations (-½)	
	Spells known by Bozo	
[15]	Basic Healing [CoMu] [level 3, 30 Active] - 3d6 Aid* as Healing. Gestures (-¼) and Concentration [1/2 DCV] (-¼), Skill Roll Required (-½)	
[20]	Limb Restoration [CoCr] [level 4, 40 Active] - 4d6 Minor Transformation (Living being with missing limb into same being not missing limb). Gestures (-¼) and Concentration [1/2 DCV] (-¼), Skill Roll Required (-½)	
[7]	Flesh Rot [CoPe] [level 1, 15 Active] - 1d6 RKA. Gestures (-¼) and Concentration [1/2 DCV] (-¼), Skill Roll Required (-½)	
[5]	Toughen Skin [CoMu] [level 1, 10 Active] – Force Field 5PD/5ED. Gestures (-¼) and Concentration [1/2 DCV] (-¼), Skill Roll Required (-½)	
[18]	Cure Disease [CoCr] [level 4, 37 Active] – Dispel 10d6 Affects any single Power of a certain special effect (+¼). Gestures (-¼) and Concentration [1/2 DCV] (-¼), Skill Roll Required (-½)	
	* Per Steve Peterson: The cost of Aid should be 10 points per die. Change to be reflected in the next edition of Hero Rules (5th Edition).	

Sample Spells

This list is by no means complete or by any stretch of the imagination exhaustive. These sample spells were designed to give the reader just an idea of how to build spells. All of the spells listed are based (vaguely) on spells described in the *Ars Magica* base rule book. Other good spell ideas can be found therein.

Modifiers applied.

All of them have been spells built with same assumed School (Tradition) Limitations, in this case I have chosen *Tradition 1* from my examples above. As different mage characters could use different Schools, the costs for spells could conceivably vary slightly (or maybe not so slightly) from character to character.

School (Tradition) Limitations:

- Gestures (-1/4)
- Concentration [1/2 DCV] (-1/4). Total = -1/2

All of these sample spells have been written up to show their real cost for the three different forms of casting: Spontaneous casting, Formulaic casting, and Ritual casting. Each set of costs has been calculated to include the standard modifiers for each casting type.

Standard Casting Type Modifiers:

- Spontaneously: Requires Skill Roll (-1/2)
- Formulaicly: Requires Skill Roll (-1/2), Extra Time (-1 1/2), Delayed Effect (+1/4)
- Ritually: Requires Skill Roll (1/2), Extra Time (-2), Must have Ritual skill (-1/4)

Spell Levels

Some spells have specified levels, others have a level of "general". A general spell can be learned and used at any level the caster is capable of using. A spell with a specified level is considered to be of "fixed" power level, as such it must be learned and used and that specified level (if a character wishes to have a similar spell of a different level, he/she would have to research and create the new spell). For more information of levels see "Spell Level" in the chapter above.

Animál Spells

Animál Spells effect all natural things that are not plans or humans, doing to animals what Mentem and Corpus do to people. Animál Spells may effect any animal-like mind or body.

Creo Animál (AnCr) (Create Animal)

Full Health of Beast and Bird (General)

Cancels or mitigates the effect (short of death) of an attack made against an animal (not for use on people).

Aid (as Healing). 1d6 per level. Only usable on animals (-1/2)

	Level	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Spontaneously		4	8	12	16	20	24	28	32	36
Formulaicly		3	7	11	14	17	20	23	28	30
Ritually		2	4	6	8	11	15	16	17	19

Weaver's Trap of Webs (Level 4)

Causes a huge net of spider webs to grow in the targeted area.

Entangle. 2d6, Area of Effect Radius (2")

	Level	4
Spontaneously		20
Formulaicly		13
Ritually		9

Intéllego Animál (InCr) (Perceive Animal)

Image of the Beast (Level 3)

Gives you a mental image of an animal you have an arcane connection to.

Mind Scan, 6D6, Only vs. an animal you have an arcane connection to (-1).

	Level	3
Spontaneously		10
Formulaicly		8
Ritually		6

Muto Animál (MuCr) (Change Animal)

Growth of the Creeping Things (Level 6)

Causes an insect, mouse, toad or other small creature to grow four times its normal size. *(Note, this spell does not confer upon the caster any level of control over the newly created “rodent of unusual size”. To accomplish that would involve some type of Rego Animál spell).*

Growth, 6 Levels, Usable against others.

	Level	6
Spontaneously		30
Formulaicly		19
Ritually		14

Ignem Spell

As fire is volatile and dangerous, so are these spells. Light and heat also fall within the domain of this Form. It's important to remember that heat also includes the relative absence of heat, giving this Form access to the full spectrum (both hot and cold) of temperature related effects. This Form could also be used to work with an absence of light as well, allowing for the possibility of using this Form with “Darkness” related effects.

Creao Ignem (CrIg) (Create Fire)

Moonbeam (Level 1)

Causes a gentle light, bright enough to read by, to shine down from above, illuminating the area directly around the caster.

Change Environment (Light), 2 Hex radius, no range.

	Level	1
Spontaneously		5
Formulaicly		3
Ritually		2

Ball of Abysmal Flame (Level 6)

This spell creates an apple-sized ball of fire in our hand. When thrown, it burst into flame upon striking its target (or anything else).

Energy Blast, 8d6 Explosion

	Level	6
Spontaneously		30
Formulaicly		20
Ritually		14

Intéllego Ignem (InIg) (Perceive Fire)

Shadows of the Fires Past (Level 2)

Allows you to see where fires have been in the past lunar month.

Detect (a spot where a fire was in the past lunar month), 360 degree, Ranged .

	Level	2
Spontaneously		9
Formulaicly		6
Ritually		4

Imáginem Spells

Imáginem is the Form of sensations and illusions. By using Imáginem you can alter what others perceive. Imáginem, however, means image not illusion. Thus, one creates, transforms, perceives, destroys, and controls images, not necessarily illusions.

Creo Imáginem (CrIm) (Create Image)

Phantasmal Animal (Level 4)

Creates and image of any animal or beast up to the size of a horse.

Images, Sight and Sound, +6 PER Bonus, x2 Radius (2").

	Level	4
Spontaneously		20
Formulaicly		14
Ritually		10

Conclusion

Using this system

This system was envisioned and designed with a specific type of campaign I mind, but can easily be adapted for use with other genres.

- Fantasy: This is the genre this magic system was designed for, and what it will best for.
- Pulp: For a magic-heavy pulp-era campaign this system can be used pretty much as is with no modifications.
- Modern: No changes needed for use in a modern fantasy campaign (ala *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer* or *Charmed*).
- Sci-Fi: For my tastes, magic and science-fiction have never mixed well. As such, I find it difficult to give any meaningful suggestions on how to use this system with this genre.
- Superheroes: Probably not a good system for player character heroes to use, as it tends to be intrinsically low powered for a single mage. However, as a way of creating a magic based enemy group or organization it would serve well used as described herein. A handful of “evil” mages, each with a 40-50 point magic pool, could use the Ritual casting method to create really big effects.
- Other: With minor semantic changes, and a few restrictions placed on Spontaneous casting, this system could also be easily used to emulate a voodoo-style of magic.

A few caveats about this system

While I have put a great deal of time and thought into how this magic system would work, I have not yet had the opportunity to actually play-test the silly thing yet. I have no real idea whether or not it balances (spell caster power levels vs. non-spell caster power levels) in game play. I do, however, feel that at the very least it is probably just as well balanced as the oh so painfully generic system described in the *Fantasy Hero* books published by Iron Crown Enterprises during their “Hero hay-days”.

If anyone does feel compelled to actually try this system out in their game I would be very interested in hearing from them (john.desmarais@attglobal.net) as to how well it worked out for them. In addition, if you would like more spells, I am still writing up more (I do plan on using this system one of these days) and would be glad to send you any additional ones I've written up.

Additionally, if you are looking for other magic systems for Fantasy Hero I have created several others (generally all quite different from each other) which can be found on my web site at <http://www.sysabend.org/champions/rules>. I'm rather pleased with them and hope other may find them useful (or at least entertaining).

Closing Note

I hate missing submission deadlines on things like this (heck, if not for the good graces of our coordinator I would have missed this one). Hopefully, I'll be able to get may act together in the furure and start getting my material ready in a more timely fashion from now.

You may also have noticed the rather "plain" format of this issue. Dave and I had several problems with my last issue. I'd export .rtf and send it to him, but when he would bring it into his program things would look different. Hopefully, this issue will export/import cleanly for us.

Next Issue

The theme for Haymaker #29 is "Crime Doesn't Pay: the cops 'n' robbers". Look for package deals for good guys and bad guys, and maybe a few other neat things.

"The weed of crime bears bitter fruit..."

Also, I'll get my \$%^& together and start commenting on the neat stuff that other people are writing for Haymaker.

Send all comments and insults to John Desmarais (john.desmarais@attglobal.net).