### Runic Magic

Magic power comes from foci called Runes. Each Rune has certain rituals to bind the Rune to the mage, spells the mage can cast and disadvantages associated with the binding. Runes are somewhat like mystical tattoos, marking the mage in exchange for power.

Some runes are just that, tattoos. The First Equation of the Mathematicians is a rune whose form and symbols is known by the highest in their mystical order. When a mage is ready to gain this rune, the order gathers for a ceremony where the acolyte mage is tattooed with the rune. The act of marking the mage, coupled with the ritual, is sufficient to imbue the mage with the new magic skill and the first circle (beginning) spells.

Other runes are ancient symbols and are tied to only one place. Elemental runes are generally found in ancient sites of power called rune sites. The nature of these sites always mirrors that of the rune it holds. Thus a fire rune may be found at the heart of a volcano; an ice rune in the cold northern wastes. Mages come to these lonely places and attempt to bind the rune to their bodies, often having to undergo some sort of trial to do so.

#### Acquiring Runes

Gaining a rune is not an easy task. Runes are symbols of ancient elemental power. Many rune sites are located in remote and dangerous locations. Difficult and painful rituals are often necessary to bind the rune to the mage. Quite often, a test of will, spirit or intelligence will be required for successful binding. However, the acquisition of certain runes is so painful or physically grueling that strength and toughness may be tested.

If some sort of test is involved, its difficulty will be listed in the rune description. Failure often means the mage is not yet ready to gain the rune and can attempt again at a later time. In some cases however, there are permanent effects, perhaps even injury and death. These effects are also listed in the rune descriptions.

If the character succeeds in the test (or if one is not required), the character has bound the rune. He will gain the magic skill associated with that rune. In general, starting level of the magic skill is half the calculated skill (see section on Learning New Skills), though the GM could allow characters to begin new runes at their full skill as figured by the stats. The new mage will be able to cast spells of the first circle.

#### Runes and Magic Skill

Once bound to the mage, each rune is a separate magic skill. All skill losses and gains discussed in the rules below apply separately to each rune the mage has. It is possible for a mage to suffer skill loss in one rune, yet have no such loss in another.

Characters who buy magic skill start with a Rune. Since each rune is represented by its own magic skill, a PC who wants to start the game with more than one rune will have to purchase the magic skill more than once. The starting skill level of the mage will determine the circle of spells the mage will be able to cast. In general, if the mage has sufficient skill for a circle, it should be assumed that he has met any conditions for that circle and can cast spells from that circle.

#### Spell Circles

Spells in each rune are divided into four circles. These circles represent the power of the spells in the rune. First circle spells are weak, while fourth circle spells represent spells of considerable power and effect. When a mage begins his learning of a rune, he can cast only first circle spells. Later, as he increases his skill level, he can cast spells of higher circle.

A mage is "ready" for a circle when his skill level in the rune is of a certain level. The minimum skill level for each circle is shown in the table below.

###### Spell Circle Skill Requirements

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Spell Circle** | **Minimum Skill** |
| First | 1 |
| Second | 11 |
| Third | 16 |
| Fourth | 21 |

In addition, many runes have conditions or tests so the mage may prove he is ready for the new circle. Often, these conditions have to do with the purpose of the rune and become more difficult as the mage progresses. For instance, a rune with the purpose of slaying undead creatures might make a would-be second circle mage defeat a simple undead creature (a skeleton or zombie) single-handedly. For the third circle, he may have to defeat an intelligent undead (wraith or specter) and for the fourth circle a greater undead (vampire) may have to be challenged.

Conditions and tests are different for each rune and are listed in the rune descriptions.

#### Casting Spells

Casting a spell is a skill test with the player's magic skill acting against the difficulty of the spell. A success means the spell is cast. A failure means the spell is not cast. A particularly poor result may cause the spell to backfire in some random fashion. As the mage casts spells, he expends power and his control of his rune begins to wane. This loss of control is affected by a temporary reduction in the mage’s magic skill as he attempts spells.

###### Spell Success/Failure Table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Skill Test** | **Effect** |
| Success by 3+ | Spell succeeds and no skill loss. |
| Success by 0-2 | Spell succeed, mage loses 1 skill level. |
| Failure by 1-2 | Spell fails and mage loses 1 skill level. |
| Failure by 3-6 | Spell fails and mage loses 2 skill levels. |
| Failure by 7-9 | Spell fails and mage loses 3 skill levels. |
| Failure by 10+ | Spell fails; mage loses 3 skill levels (possible spell backfire) |

##### Skill Loss

Mages temporarily lose levels in their magic skill as they cast and fail to cast their spells. This has the effect of making subsequent spells harder to cast. A mage can cast spells until his magic skill drops to 0. However, casting at such low skill levels is dangerous, as most spells will backfire.

##### Fatiguing Spell Levels

Some spells cause their caster to fatigue spell levels. These spells are so tiring that the caster loses extra levels in addition to those lost based on their degree of spell casting success or failure.

**Example of Fatiguing Spell Levels**: Sister Grace is casting the spell Sacred Immersion on an injured Templar. The spell requires her to fatigue two spell levels. She rolls to cast her spell and succeeds, but just barely. Normally, she would lose a single spell level, but because of the spell’s fatigue, she loses 3 levels from her Sacred Falls rune.

##### Investing Spell Levels

Some spells require investiture to cast. This means that if the spell is successfully cast, the mage loses levels in his rune permanently. These levels can be regained through experience.

**Example of Investing Spell Levels**: Toman has Marsh Song at level 25. He casts the spell Create Marsh successfully. This spell requires the investiture of one spell level so after he casts, his level in Marsh Song is only 24.

##### Burning Hit Points

In lieu of losing skill levels for casting, mages may choose to take damage to their hit points instead. A mage loses 3 hit points for each magic skill level they would have lost. This damage cannot cause wounds, but it can cause unconsciousness or death. This damage can only be healed over time, or by magic or a physician.

##### Recovering Magic Skill

Each full night of rest gives a mage 2d4 levels in each of his runes. A mage that has his rest interrupted gets only 1d4 for his rest. A mage that gets no rest gains no magic skill levels.

##### Meditation

A mage can gain skill levels if he can meditate for an hour. The levels gained are based on his degree of success in a meditation test vs. DL 12.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Degree of Success** | **Effect** |
| Failed Skill Test | No levels are gained |
| Success by 0-2 | 1d3 levels are gained |
| Success by 3-6 | 1d4+1 levels are gained |
| Success by 7 or more | 1d6+1 levels are gained |

##### Casting Spells in Combat

Spells that can be cast in combat have casting times of **combat** or **not engaged**. Casting a spell in combat is a full action. However, it works differently than a normal action. On his initiative, the mage declares his intention to cast a spell. He prepares the spell for a round. The spell goes off on the mage’s initiative for the **next round**. Releasing a spell is a no time action. Thus, directly after releasing his spell, the mage may take his full action.

**Example of Casting a Spell in Combat**: Tangent and his band are facing a horde of undead. Tangent does not have a lot of combat spells, but he can aid his companions by casting his speed spell on them. His speed spell has a casting time of combat, so Tangent can cast this spell. On round 1, Tangent has the highest initiative and goes first. He declares his intention to cast speed. Tangent spends the rest of the round casting. The undead and Tangent’s friends all get to act. On round 2, Tangent’s initiative comes in the middle of the round. When it is Tangent’s action, his spell is cast and he releases it. Since releasing a spell is a no time action, Tangent has a full action to work with. He decides to declare he is casting his blur spell. It will finish on Tangent’s initiative next round.

##### Defending While Casting

While the caster is in the process of casting his spell, he cannot parry. He can dodge, and takes no penalty to do so. However, a casting mage may take no special defensive maneuvers. This means he can only defend with his dodge and not “all-out dodge”, or “give ground”.

If the caster takes damage while he is casting, he must succeed at a WIL test to maintain his concentration enough to continue his spell. The DL of this WIL test is equal to the damage taken + 5. In addition, a mage who is grabbed, otherwise restrained, silenced or knocked to the ground will have his spell casting interrupted.

##### Mode of Delivery

All spells have a mode of delivery. Touch spells require the mage to touch his opponent. Bolt spells fire a thin ray at the target. Ball spells are balls of energy that are thrown at the target. Finally, direct spells automatically hit their targets.

Bolt spells use the combat: magic skill to determine the mage’s chance to hit. Ball spells use either combat: magic, or combat: throwing to determine the mage’s attack skill. Touch spell require an unarmed combat attack.

##### Holding a Spell

A mage can hold a spell for three rounds after casting it. Only spells with casting times of combat or not engaged can be held. Holding a spell requires that the mage have a hand free in which to hold the magical energy. The mage can act normally in the rounds he is holding the spell. He can attack and defend with a weapon in his other hand, move or perform any actions he could otherwise perform one-handed. A mage holding a spell cannot cast other spells. If a mage holding a spell takes damage, he must make a WIL test to keep the spell held. This WIL test has a DL equal to the damage taken + 5.

Releasing a held spell takes no time and once the mage releases the spell, he can take his full action.

##### Saving Throws

Many spells allow the target a chance to ignore or reduce the spell’s effects. Spells that allow such a saving throw will have one or more statistics and difficulty levels listed in the spell summary. The target must succeed an appropriate attribute test against the listed DL to save. If this test fails, the target takes the full effect of the spell. If the test succeeds then the effects of the spell are ignored or reduced. Each spell has details in its description.

##### Casting Times

Instead of listing specific casting times, Bostonia breaks casting times into rough categories. These categories indicate when the spell can be cast and approximately how long it takes to cast. A description of the casting times follows.

###### Combat

Combat spells take only a few seconds and require no special preparation. A few key words and gestures are all that is necessary. These spells take a round to cast and may be interrupted. A caster can only dodge while casting a combat spell.

###### Not Engaged

The spell can be cast in combat, but it takes a bit more effort and concentration. Not Engaged spells take one round to cast, just like combat spells. However, the caster cannot be engaged when he declares this spell. In addition, the caster can only use his base defense to defend against incoming attacks. If the mage is hit and takes any damage, the spell will fail. The normal WIL save does not apply.

###### Very Short

A very short ritual takes less than a minute to complete. The gestures and phrases required are not too complex and there are only minimal preparations, if any. Still, this spell cannot be cast in combat. However, if there is a break in the fighting - even a brief one - the spell can be cast.

###### Short

The spell takes a couple of minutes to cast and the caster may need to get a few trinkets from his inventory, or draw a rune in the ground. Combat of any sort is too much distraction for this spell to be completed. If the caster is in the next room, behind a closed door, he may still cast. However, if his friends are valiantly holding a line in front of him, then a short ritual cannot be made.

###### Long

The spell takes major preparation and concentration. The spell takes up to an hour to cast. Any disturbance will cause this spell to fail. The caster must be in quiet and peaceful surroundings.

###### Very Long

The requirements of this spell will usually be listed in the spell description. This spell is like a long ritual, only worse.

##### Maintaining Spells

Certain spells are maintainable. This means that the caster can continue gaining the benefit of the spell without having to take the time to recast it.

The DL to maintain a spell is 2 less than the DL to cast it. Each time the spell duration runs out, the mage can choose to maintain it. All he needs to do is make the magic skill roll at the maintaining DL. The mage rolls and checks the spell success chart. If a loss of levels is indicated, then the mage must lose the levels (or hit points) to maintain the spell, or deactivate the spell.

**Example of Maintaining a Spell**: Tangent is maintaining his warp space spell. The DL of the spell is 14 so the maintain DL is 12. Tangent has a magic skill of 15. He rolls a 2 on his d12 and adds his magic skill for a total of 17. The GM rolls a 7 on his d12 and adds the DL of 12 for a total of 19. Tangent fails the skill test by 2 points. Consulting the spell success chart, we see that Tangent must lose 1 magic level.

This means Tangent has three choices. He can lose the level and maintain the spell; he can lose 3 hit points and maintain the spell; or he can deactivate the spell and lose nothing.

##### Maintaining Multiple Spells

Maintaining more than one spell poses a problem. Generally, a mage will cast many different spells, each with different durations. Keeping track of when each spell ends and needs maintained would be a bookkeeping nightmare.

Instead, a caster maintaining two or more spells divides the spells into two groups: short duration spells and long duration spells. Short duration spells have their duration listed in **rounds**. Long duration spells have their duration measured in **minutes, hours** or **days**. The maintenance of each group of spells is calculated and rolled separately.

To maintain each group of spells, the caster adds the maintain DL of the most difficult spell and half the maintain DLs from the rest of the spells. This is the DL for maintaining the entire group of spells. This maintenance roll must be made each time the spell with the shortest duration expires. The mage determines the result of his maintenance test by consulting the spell success chart. If a loss of levels is indicated, then the mage must lose the levels (or hit points) indicated, or deactivate spells to reduce the DL of the skill test such that no levels would be lost.

*Example of Maintaining Multiple Spells: Zoltar the Oddly Named has three spells active:*

DL: 10, Maintenance DL: 8, Duration: 10 rounds

DL: 12, Maintenance DL 10, Duration: 6 rounds

DL 14, Duration: 3 hours

These spells are divided into two groups. The first two are short duration spells and the last spell is a long duration spell. Let’s determine the maintenance DL for the short duration spells first. The most difficult short spell is the second spell with a maintenance DL of 10. So Zoltar’s maintenance DL starts at 10. He then adds half the maintenance DL of the other spells in the short duration group. The first spell is the only other spell in this group and its maintenance DL is 8. Half of this is 4. The total short duration maintenance DL is 10 + 4 = 14. This must be rolled when the shorted duration spell ends. This means Zoltar must maintain his short duration spells at a DL of 14 every 6 rounds.

The long duration spell is simple. There is only one of them. Thus the maintenance is DL 12 every 3 hours.

**Another Example of Maintaining Multiple Spells**: After 6 rounds, Zoltar must maintain his short duration spells. He rolls badly, failing his maintenance test by 3. Looking at the chart, we see Zoltar must lose 2 levels, or 6 hit points to maintain the spells. Alternately, Zoltar could deactivate one of the spells in an attempt to reduce the DL of his maintenance test from 14 to 8 (remember, it is not enough to succeed the maintenance test; you must not lose levels).

If he deactivates spell #1, then spell #2 will be the only spell to maintain. Its maintenance DL is 10. This would not bring the DL down enough. However, if he deactivates spell #2, then spell #1 will be the only spell to maintain. Its maintenance DL is 8. This would meet the requirements.

##### Clever Use and Alteration of Spells

Nearly all of the spells listed have a specific effect listed in their description. However, there will be times when a mage will want to use a spell for a different purpose than the author intended. He may want to use his fog spell to dampen a growing fire or his stinging insects that normally distract spell casters to cause a ladder-climbing enemy to fall.

In general, the GM should encourage this clever thinking and allow a new effect if he deems that it is in the spirit of the original spell description. Read the spell description and determine the spell’s effect and how it achieves that effect. If the power of the new effect is similar, and the GM is comfortable with the use of the spell, then he should allow it. However, he should maintain as closely as possible the intended effect of the spell as well as its duration, area of effect, range and saving throw.

**Example of a Clever Use**: An ice mage has a spell that coats the ground and makes it slippery. The spell has an area of effect of 4 hexes and targets must make an AGI save vs. DL 14 to not slip. The character wants to use this spell to coat the rungs of a ladder to make it hard to climb. This is a no-brainer as the only difference between this use and the written description is on what surface the spell is cast. The GM should use the same saving throw (perhaps changing the AGI to DEX) that the original spell uses to determine if someone can climb the ladder. In addition, he should translate the area of effect to cover 4 hexes of vertical ladder.

**Another Clever Use**: A character is lost in the woods, but knows his friends will be out looking for him. He casts his faerie lights spell on a rock and tosses it into the air. The GM reads the description and determines that since the spell allows a target to be tracked up to 200 hexes away, then the glowing rock could be used as a sort of flare and can be seen from a similar distance.

In some cases, a mage might want to alter a spell to produce an extended or slightly different effect than the standard spell. In general, mages can alter spells to increase their range, area of effect, accuracy or damage. A summary of these standard alterations is below.

##### Spell Alteration Table

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Alteration** | **+ to DL** |
| Spell that affects self now affects single target. Note a self spell must get this alteration before it can have a range or area of effect. | +3 |
| Give ball, bolt or direct spell a 1 hex area of effect. | +3 |
| Give area of effect spell 2x area of effect. | +3 |
| Give radius spell +1” radius. | +3 |
| Give touch spell 5” range. | +3 |
| Reduce casting time by one level. Spells with casting times of very short or combat cannot be reduced. | +3 |
| Give ranged spell 2x range. | +2 |
| +1 to hit (up to +3). | +1 per +1 to hit |
| +1 point of damage per die. | +2 per +1 damage |
| +1 to DL of saving throw. | +2 per +1 save DL |

Other alterations must be adjudicated on a case-by-case basis. A good idea is to use the DL of the spell being cast and add from 2-6 to the DL. The GM can increase this penalty or reject the spell altogether if he thinks the alteration could imbalance the game if used too often. No spell alteration can create an effect of a higher circle spell in the same rune.

**Example of Spell Alteration**: An evil alchemist attacks a practitioner of the rune Gale of Teeth and his band. The alchemist tosses a potion that spews poison gas into the midst of the group. The mage could easily cast the spell Good Breath (DL 6) to save himself, but want to save his companions as well. His companions are close to him (within 1 hex), so he attempts to alter the spell by making it affect others (+3 DL), giving it a 1 hex area of effect (+3 DL), then increasing the area of effect to 2 hexes (+3 DL). The final spell allows everyone in the caster’s hex and all surrounding hexes to breathe in the gas. The final DL of the altered spell is 15.

**Another Alteration**: A practitioner of the Eye of the Hurricane is facing a heavily armored opponent. He wants to use his large bolt spell to fuse the armor joints and render the target immobile. The GM rules that this is an appropriate alteration and assigns a DL penalty of 4 to it. This makes the final DL for the altered spell 20.

#### Creating New Spells

Mages may create new spells. Unlike impromptu spell alterations, created spells become a part of the mage’s spell list and become easier to cast over time. To create a new spell, the mage must spend experience to purchase the talent Unique Spell. The checks spent to buy the talent represent the time spent in study and meditation.

Once the Unique Spell talent is purchased, the mage has a revelation and discovers the desired spell. Because the spell is not yet bound to the mage’s rune, it is more difficult to cast. The first time the mage casts the spell, it is at a DL+4. Once the mage successfully casts the new spell, its difficulty drops by one until it reaches its normal DL and the spell is permanently bound to the rune.

Created spells are available to the creating mage. When the mage returns to his rune site to gain a new circle, he transfers his created spells to the rune. Other mages with the same rune will now receive that spell when they return to the rune site. First through third circle spells are transferred this way. Fourth circle spells are only given to the rune site when the mage dies and he must be at the site at the time of his passing, otherwise the spells are lost.

#### Rune Knowledge

The skill rune knowledge gives the mage an understanding of runes, their powers and limitations. Part of this information is gained by rote memorization of the way various runes look and how they behave. Much of the information comes from a general understanding of runes and the elemental or spiritual power they represent. Some of the many uses of rune knowledge are listed below.

##### Identifying Inscribed Runes

Certain runes and arcane spells allow a mage to inscribe a rune on an area or item. These runes might be left as a ward or alarm or to store the power of a spell for later release. A mage that can succeed in a rune knowledge test can identify inscribed runes and the spells they hold.

###### DLs and Modifiers for Identifying Inscribed Runes

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **DL** |
| Identifying a 1st circle spell | 8 |
| Identifying an 2nd circle spell | 12 |
| Identifying a 3rd circle spell | 16 |
| Identifying a 4th circle spell | 20 |
| Character is of a lower circle than the spell | +2 |
| Character is of a higher circle than the spell | -4 |
| Character can cast the spell himself (not cumulative with same or similar rune bonus) | -8 |
| Character has the same rune (not cumulative with same spell or similar rune bonuses) | -4 |
| Character has a similar rune (not cumulative with same spell or rune bonuses) | -2 |
| Character has never seen the rune in question or one of its practitioners | +2 |
| Spell is created recently or unique | +4 |
| Rune is well known (mathematician or Sacred Falls) | -2 |
| Rune is obscure | +2-4 |

##### Identifying a Mage’s Powers

All runes leave telltale signs on their practitioners. In some cases, the rune is tattooed, etched or burned onto the mage. Some runes give the mage a deformity such as an extra eye or a clawed hand. Others are subtler and change the mage mentally and emotionally. A character with rune knowledge can make a skill test to tell what powers a mage might have by seeing the marks left on his body by the rune binding process. Mages with very high rune knowledge might not even need to see the mage’s rune to identify it. The behavior of the mage, his voice, eye or skin color may be enough to deduce his powers.

###### Suggested DLs and Modifiers for Identifying a Mage’s Powers

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **DL** |
| Character can study the target’s markings | 12 |
| Character can get a glimpse of the markings | 16 |
| Character cannot see the target’s markings | 20 |
| Character has the same rune (not cumulative with similar rune bonus) | -10 |
| Character has a similar rune (not cumulative with same rune bonus) | -4 |
| Character has never seen the rune in question or one of its practitioners | +2 |
| Rune is well known (mathematician or Sacred Falls) | -4 |
| Rune is obscure | +2-4 |

##### Detecting Magical Influences

The environment can have an effect on spell casting. Mages with rune knowledge can detect these effects and use them to their advantage. For instance, a mage using a fire rune would be at a severe disadvantage if he were casting spells in the middle of a blizzard, or knee deep in water. However, that same mage might get a bonus when he casts in the middle of a dry and blighted forest, or standing in a bonfire. For elemental runes, the environment can be a huge factor in the success or failure of a spell.

###### Suggested DLs and Modifiers for Detecting Magical Influences

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **DL** |
| Detecting influences for your rune | 10-12 |
| Detecting influences for other runes | 12-14 |
| Other rune is obscure | +2-4 |
| Other rune is well known | -2-4 |

The GM must decide when a rune gets a bonus or penalty due to the environment. In general, the bonuses and penalties should be limited to 1 or 2 points. The GM should try to be fair and reasonable and watch for abuses. For instance, it is probably not reasonable for a fire mage carrying a torch to get a +1 to his spell skill. However, come first frost, he should not get a penalty either. These modifiers should occur only when extreme conditions are present.

###### Elements and the Environment

The presence or lack of the element, or the presence of an oppositional element always affects elemental runes. An earth mage buried underground is much happier than one on a ship at sea. Lightning mages cast more efficiently if it is storming or at least cloudy.

###### Special Locations

Certain runes may be tied to specific locations or a class of locations. Runes tied to a saint may be stronger when on holy ground or when there is a likeness of that saint nearby. Some runes are associated with a certain region and will generally gain power when used in that region. Others are tied to a terrain type such as a swamp or mountain rune. Most runes associated with rune sites will be more powerful when the caster is at the site.

In addition, certain places may weaken the power of a rune. The effect of necromantic magic might be lessened when the caster is near a church, or on holy ground. Runes that are tied to the energy of the woodlands tend to suffer in cities or on farms.

###### Dates and Times

Runes tied to night and day will certainly get modifiers depending on when they are used. Runes tied to saints may gain power on the saint’s birthday. In addition, it is said that various heavenly bodies have an effect on some runes and their power ebbs and flows with the position of those bodies in the sky.

###### Material Components

Most runic magic does not require material components for spell casting. However, many materials have magical properties and can affect the casting of spells. Healing spells may benefit from the use of giant or troll blood. Spells that deal with magnetism are enhanced when lodestone is present. Spells of decay may be accelerated by the presence of acid.