

HIGH FANTASY MAGIC

A SIMPLE MAGIC SYSTEM FOR FATE CORE & ACCELERATED



POWERED BY
FATE

NATHAN HARE

G. MICKLEBY
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FANTASY MAGIC MADE EASY

High Fantasy Magic is a simple, freeform magic system designed for *Fate Core* and *Fate Accelerated*. It is a drop-in magic system with a high fantasy tone that sticks closely to Fate Core and provides the same amount of flexibility in character creation and progression. There are no spell lists. Instead, the players can choose which types of magic they can use via a list of magic disciplines. Then, the players are encouraged to use the power they have in whatever creative ways they can think of. The freeform nature of this magic system allows for simple adjudication of the rules and a low barrier to entry. Whether you use it in its entirety or pick it apart as a toolkit, this book is a great resource for magical, fantasy settings.

In this book you'll find:

- Simple rules to handle a wide variety of magical abilities
- A list of magical disciplines
- Tips for managing the varying potency of magic
- Rules for animating creatures to your aid
- Example stunts for magic users
- Tons of examples

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Writing - Design - Layout

NATHAN HARE

Editing

MEGHAN HARE

Cover Art

NICK KIENZLE

Interior Art

**NICK KIENZLE
& NATHAN HARE**

Special thanks to the following for their playtesting, feedback, and support: Rory Bracebuckle, Denis "Firkraag" Kotenko, James Garrett, Bobby Hare, Meghan Hare, David Lowell, Linda Rouleau, Carl Satterberg, Andy Snyder

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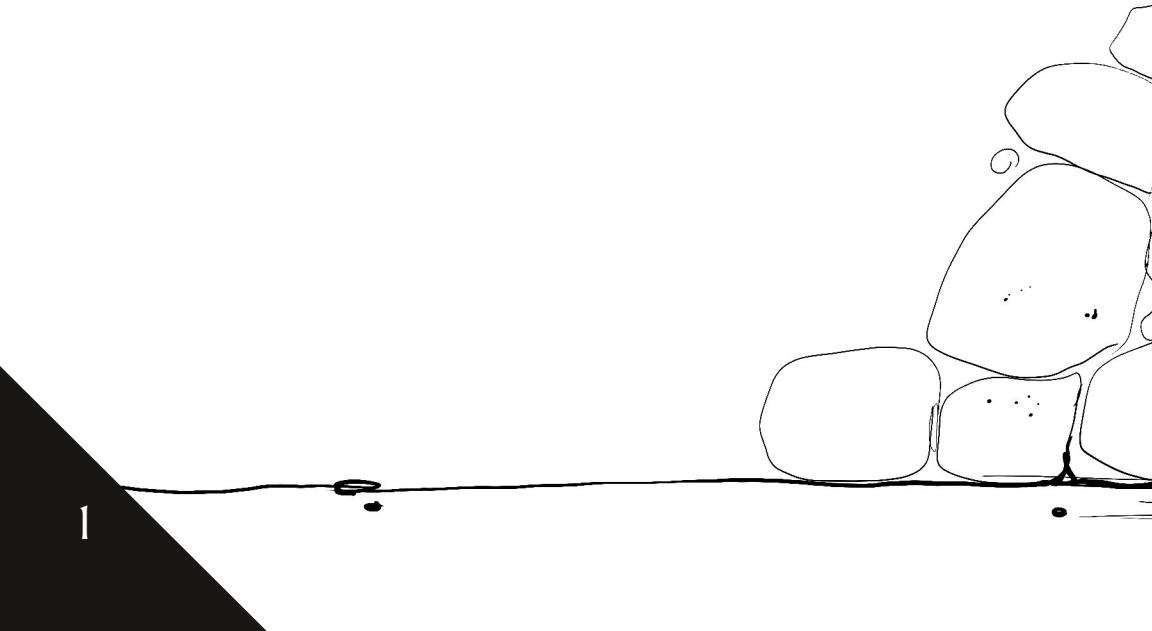
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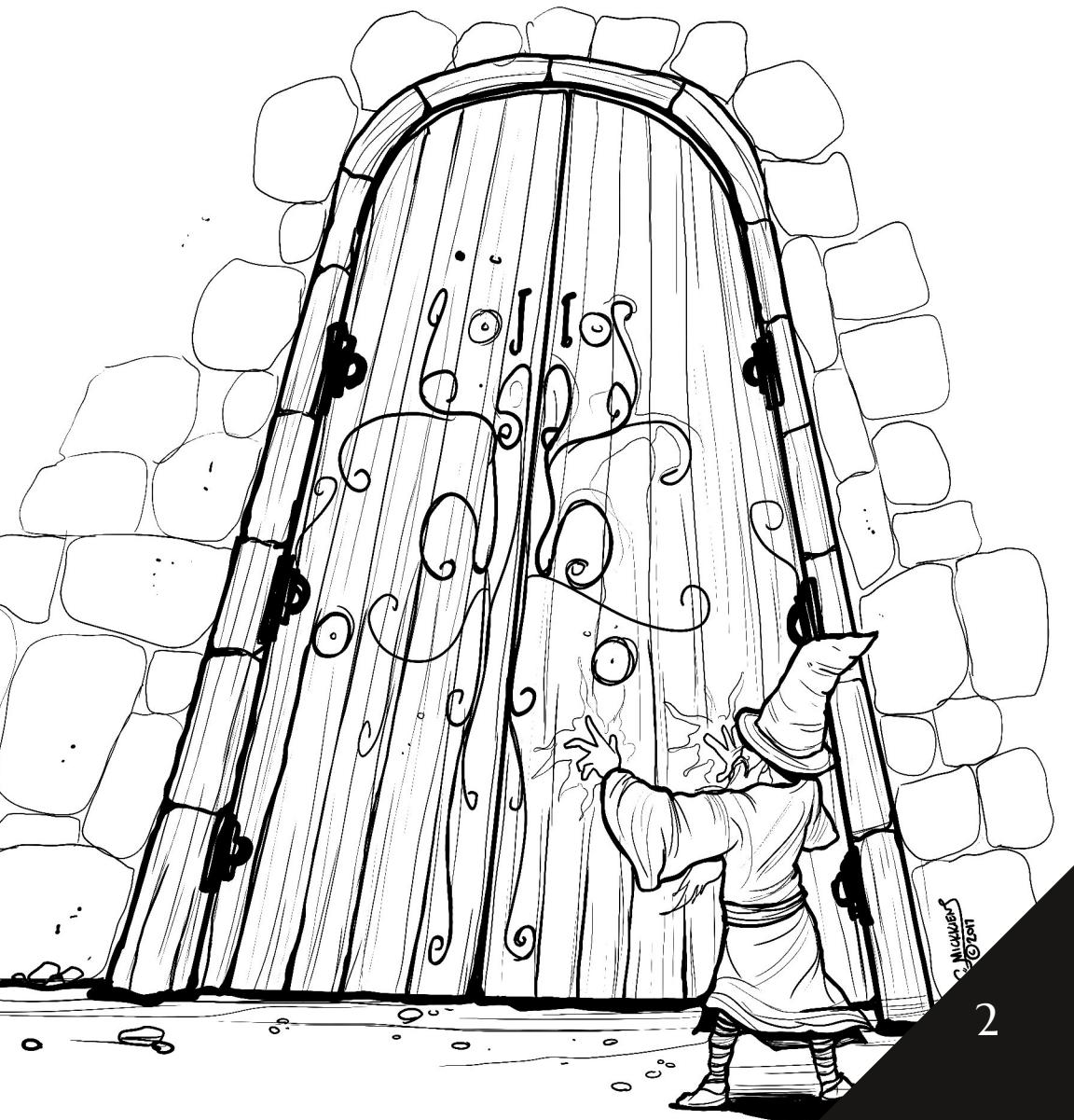
INTRODUCTION

The adventurers slowly creep down a dimly-lit corridor. The damp stonework glistens in the dancing of their torches. Then ahead of them they see it: the entrance to the long-forgotten throne room. The thief makes her way forward to inspect the door, but when she reaches out to touch it, blue, translucent light shimmers across its surface and blasts her back into the hallway behind her. She gets back up, shakes off the pain, and gives a nod to her unlikely ally. Knowing what he has to do, an old man with a long white beard steps forward and begins muttering forgotten words under his breath. He methodically waves his hands in a circular pattern. "I've moved mountains with magic, slain mighty beasts, and calmed the fiercest of storms." He sighs as he thinks to himself. "But today, today I must open a door." A familiar blue energy pulses from his hands and ripples across the door's surface. Then, after a moment, the light dissipates into the air around them. With a click, the door slowly opens, revealing the treasures and dangers that lie ahead.



INTRODUCTION

High Fantasy Magic is a simple, freeform magic system designed for *Fate Core* and *Fate Accelerated*. Its goal is to be a drop-in magic system with a high fantasy tone while sticking closely to *Fate Core* and providing the same amount of flexibility in character creation and progression. There are no spell lists. Instead, the players can choose which types of magic they can use via a list of magic disciplines (pg. 15). Then, the players are encouraged to use the power they have in whatever creative ways they can think of. The freeform nature of this magic system allows for simple adjudication of the rules and a low barrier to entry.



OVERVIEW

PERMISSION & COST

To be a magic user, your character must have a permission aspect to justify their magical abilities, as well as any number of magic disciplines (pg. 15) to allow usage of each type of magic.

Permission Aspect

All magic users must have an aspect to justify their use of magic. Whether it is included in an existing aspect or a new one all together, your permission aspect must include the source of your magic in some way. The source of your magic is how you obtained your powers. Your source gives the group more information about your character and her powers, but it also serves as a flaw for your GM to compel. Each source includes a casting skill, which is talked about in more detail in the *Important Skills* section, later on. Choose one of the three following sources and incorporate it into one of your character aspects.

Ancestral Heritage

Casting Skill: Rapport or Flashy

Common Titles: Sorcerer

Your ancestors were magically gifted; their power flows through your veins. As a result, you have naturally inherited their abilities. Magic users with the *Ancestral Heritage* have not gone through all of the training of a wizard or a sage, and their magic tends to occasionally go haywire as a result. This can result in spells affecting the wrong target or even producing random results. Example aspects: *Arrogant Elven sorcerer, Descendant of the Great Mazul*

Divine Patron

Casting Skill: Empathy or Careful

Common Titles: Acolyte, priest, cleric, shaman, warlock

You are a disciple of a deity or some other-worldly being. In return, you have been blessed with magical abilities. You can occasionally communicate with your patron, but when you do, the responses you receive are generally vague and puzzling. Magic users with the *Divine Patron* source are subject to the whims of their deity. Patrons may require their disciples to act according to a certain code of ethics, or aid in specific quests. They also may weaken or take away magical abilities if a disciple is not obeying their laws. Example aspects: *Dwarven priest of Thanin: The Just, The last disciple of Argoth*

Relentless Training

Casting Skill: Lore or Clever

Common Titles: Mage, wizard, sage, scholar

You have not inherited your magical abilities, but instead, you have trained long and hard to do what you do. Years of your life have been spent studying old tomes and testing magical theories. Magic users with the *Relentless Training* source are usually holed up somewhere while they perfect their abilities. Wizards and the like know a great deal, but most of their non-magical knowledge is just that: knowledge. They have not had many chances to apply that knowledge in the real world. Example aspects: *Snoody human wizard, Apprentice of Hezir: The Magnificent.*

Magic Disciplines

Magic disciplines represent the types of magic that you are able to use, regardless of how you obtained the ability. Once you have a permission aspect, you must choose one or more magic disciplines in order to use magic. For a list of the available magic disciplines, see page 15.

USING MAGIC

Once you have a permission aspect and one or more magic disciplines, you can use magic. This is done via your existing skill list. When you would like to use magic to solve a problem, ask yourself the following questions: "What is the character doing?" and "Why is it worthy of a roll?" Once you have answered these questions, use the answers to help determine which skill should be used.

For example, I have a character named Radcliff "Rad" Longfellow. In order to use magic, Rad has the aspect *Grumpy old wizard*, and the disciplines: Energy, Fire, and Illusion. If I want to have Rad shoot a fireball, I can roll Rad's Shoot skill. If I want him to create a force field out of Energy, I might roll his Crafts skill, since he is creating a barrier. If I want him to trick someone with an Illusion, I can roll Deceive. Then any narration that comes out of that action can be a magical one.

FATE ACCELERATED

All of the examples used throughout this guide reference *Fate Core* skills rather than the approaches from *Fate Accelerated*. This is because using magic with approaches is much easier to grasp. You can still use this system with *Fate Accelerated* by applying the same principles.



IMPORTANT SKILLS

All skills are still important for magic users, but the following two tend to come up especially often when dealing with magic.

Casting Skill

Each of the sources of magic above brings with it a casting skill. The casting skill is simply the skill that you use to perform magic. Generally, you will be using whichever skill that best represents the challenging part of the current action. However, sometimes it is clear that a roll is needed, but no skill fits the action perfectly. Other times, the difficult part of an action is casting the spell itself. In these cases, use your casting skill.

Will

The Will skill is more important for all characters than usual, because it is used for resisting most hostile magical effects. It can also be used by Magic Caster to maintain a spell. If someone wants to overcome a magical effect that you created, you can roll Will to defend against it, if it makes sense in the narrative.



BALANCING MAGIC

SETTING DIFFICULTIES

Now, the question of how difficulties are set may be running through your head. Don't worry, we've got you covered! You can use the rules you already know from *Fate Core*, along with a few additional tips.

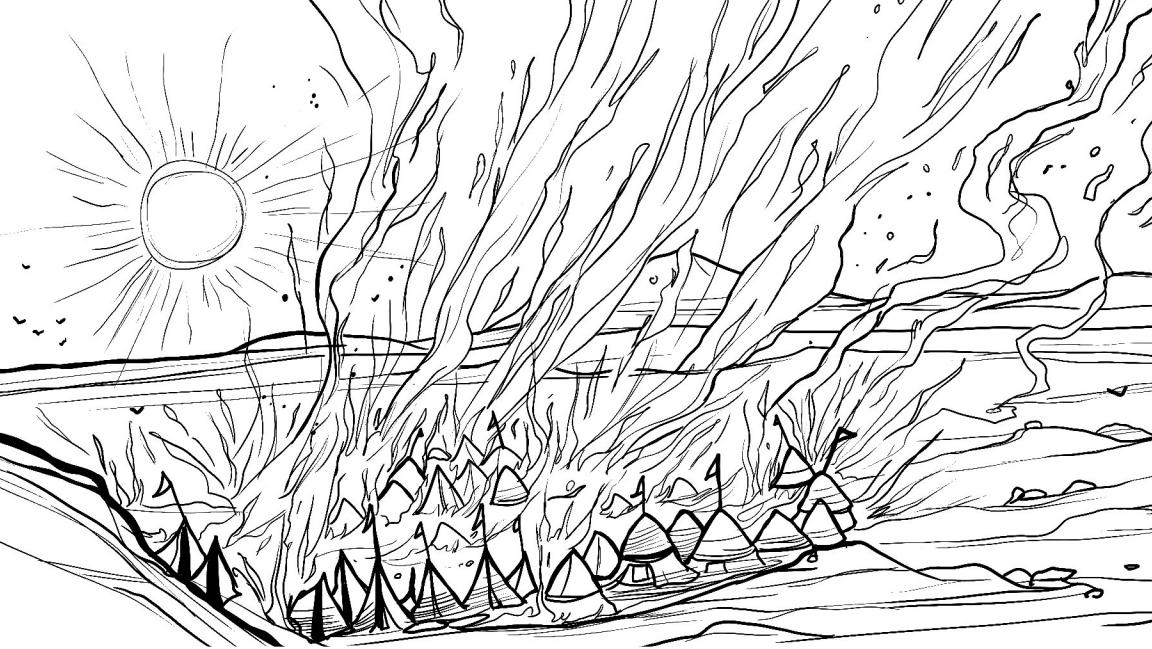
GM Tools

Before we talk about specifics, let's go over the tools at your disposal. The most obvious way to set a difficulty is when we have passive opposition. The game master (GM) picks a number that represents the difficulty. This works for unopposed actions, but it doesn't help when there is someone actively working against the action.

For opposed actions, the opposition generally sets the difficulty of a spell by rolling an appropriate skill to oppose it. If Rad shoots a fireball at a goblin, the goblin rolls Athletics to evade. In that case, nothing else is needed. However, if Rad instead wanted to transform the goblin into a blue whale, the goblin's Will skill probably isn't an adequate difficulty for such a powerful spell.

The simplest tool you have for something like this is setting passive opposition anyway. Then, take the higher of the two, both active and passive oppositions. This means the goblin can still roll Will to defend, but if his result is less than the passive opposition, Rad's roll would have to beat the passive opposition instead of the goblin's roll.

The second tool you have is really a list of tools that we will call resolution mechanics. The list of resolution mechanics, roughly in increasing order of length and difficulty, is as follows: no roll needed, single roll, aspect needed to roll, challenge, contest, conflict, session, scenario, story arc. If something a player is trying to do is too easy with a single roll, just use the next appropriate resolution mechanic. Maybe I'll let Rad transform a goblin into a blue whale, but he's going to have to spend a whole scenario making preparations for such a massive spell. The goblin can even oppose some skill rolls along the course of the scenario, if it makes sense in the narrative. Feel free to use a combination of resolution mechanics and other options as well.



Potency

This magic system is designed to be used by some or all of the player characters (PCs) in your party, so magic spells should require roughly the same amount of effort as non-magical actions that produce similar outcomes. That is to say that, if Rad and another non-magical character are both trying to reach the top of a cliff, they can both roll Athletics against the same difficulty to reach the top. If Rad succeeds and knows the Air discipline, he can then narrate himself creating a gust of air to throw him to the top, while the other character may have climbed the cliff face.

You can scale this to larger actions using the tools listed above. Rad, our dear *Grumpy old wizard*, may wish to wipe out an army with a single fireball, but that is going to require a lot of preparation and planning. If a mundane character were trying something similar, she might try creating a landslide to wipe out an army. To do this, she would have to find a place with potential for a landslide, get the army next to it somehow, trigger the earth to move, and then get the heck out of there before she is crushed. Likewise, Rad would probably have to take a session, or even a full scenario creating advantages and completing challenges, to rain fire down from the heavens on an entire army.



There is no exact science for this, but try to compare the magical effects to mundane ones. A spell to mentally freeze another character in place sounds simple enough, but it is similar to a non-magic user causing paralysis. Taking complete control of another character removes their player agency and isn't very fun for that player. With that in mind, a spell like that might make more sense as the goal of an entire conflict than a single roll within one.

Some actions can be a little vague when dealing with magic as well. If Rad wants to create a shield out of Energy, one could easily ask what exactly that shield does. If the shield is just an aspect that can be invoked on defense rolls, this can have a fairly low difficulty. If it provides full cover, requiring it to be overcome before the enemies can attack him, this would be a little more challenging. If Rad is also able to shoot his enemies through the shield while remaining in full cover, this will be even more difficult. Scale the difficulty of a spell based on the effects it has. Some more examples of potency can be found in the magic discipline descriptions as well.

SPECIAL SITUATIONS

OPPOSING A SPELL

You can oppose spells in the same ways that you can oppose any other action in Fate. For spells that are not hostile—an enemy teleporting to safety, or healing themselves—any other spellcaster can use magic to provide active opposition, if they are within a zone of the spell being cast and can narratively justify it. Additionally, any character can provide active opposition, if they can justify making a spell more difficult to cast.

To defend against a hostile spell in place of the target, handle this as stated in *Fate Core* (pg. 159). If you choose to defend for someone else, any negative effects of failing or tying are now placed on you instead of the target.

BORROWING A MAGIC DISCIPLINE

There may be times that you wish to use a magic discipline that you don't have. Maybe your studies touched upon the discipline, or you have seen it used by others. In those cases, you can either wait until you reach a milestone to buy the discipline with your available refresh, or you can spend a fate point to borrow the discipline for a single scene. This allows you to use magic that you are not as skilled in, for a price.

ANIMATED CREATURES

Some magic users have been known to create mindless beings to do their bidding. Getting a creation like this to aid them in what they're already doing generally doesn't take much effort, but if a magic user focuses, they can improve the construct's effectiveness or even act through the construct itself.

At its simplest, created beings are represented by an aspect and nothing more. If a construct takes an action that requires a roll, it is at Mediocre (+0). If it takes a single point of stress, it is taken out and removed from the scene.

When you create a creature, you are essentially creating an advantage. So if Rad decides to create a fire elemental with the Fire discipline, he can roll Provoke to focus the fire into a humanoid being. We'll give the fire elemental the name of Scorch and write that on the notecard as our aspect, with however many free invokes Rad received. Scorch can now act in one of the following three ways, each exchange.

- **Individual Action:** You can have the creation act on its own, rolling its own skills. This does require your concentration though, and replaces the caster's turn with its own.
- **Affect Multiple Targets:** You can split the shifts of a roll among two targets, if you can justify the created being taking action on one of the targets. To do this, take the total roll and divide the amount of shifts among the targets. Each target defends individually.
- **Teamwork Bonus:** If the creature is able to help you or another character with an action and has the appropriate skill at Average (+1) or better (via the Animator stunt), it can give you a +1 teamwork bonus to add to your roll. (*Fate Core* pg. 174)

ENCHANTED ITEMS

Many magic disciplines allow you to create advantages on items, to make them more or less effective. Generally, these modifications will only last for a scene or a session at most, but these effects can be made permanent. It is very difficult to enchant an item, and it usually takes a lot of time, resources, and sometimes collaboration. If the protagonists are enchanting items, it would probably be in their "off screen" time and will take some time to complete. Most of the time, though, they should be running into enchanted items as gifts, rewards, or forgotten loot. These items can be represented using the "Fate Fractal" (*Fate Core*, pg. 270): "In Fate, you can treat anything in the game world like it's a character. Anything can have aspects, skills, stunts, stress tracks, and consequences if you need it to."

The most useful tools for creating enchanted items are aspects, stunts, and stress tracks. Aspects show story significance and allow for invokes and compels. An item can require a character aspect slot, or it can have a flaw aspect, such as: *Cursed blade*, *Useless against blunt objects*, etc.

Stunts allow an item to show its mechanical benefits on a consistent basis. Items with stunts can either require one refresh per stunt, or each stunt can be activated for the rest of the current session by spending a fate point.

Lastly, stress tracks allow you to limit the uses of an item. Items with stress tracks generally don't require a flaw or refresh, as the limit is usually enough of a hindrance. Give the item as many stress boxes as you see fit. Each time it is used, check off one stress box. When the item has no more available stress, it is depleted.

ALCHEMY

Unlike enchanted items, magical potions are much easier to create because the magic can be cooked right into the liquid. An alchemist can make potions with magical effects from any of the magic disciplines, provided she has at least 10 minutes (depending on the desired effect) to prepare it and the proper ingredients. This too can be handled as a Create an Advantage roll.



DRAGONTONGUE

(Cost: 1 refresh/fate point)

Forged with the searing breath of a trapped dragon, the blade of this weapon is forever scalding hot. When you succeed with style on an attack against a target covered in fur or wearing a flammable material, you may choose to create the aspect *On Fire*, with one free invoke, instead of a boost.



POTION OF PLANT ELEMENTAL

(Cost: none)

Pour this potion on a bush or sapling to automatically create the advantage *Plant Elemental*. The plant uproots itself from the ground and will follow its creator's commands as best as it can. It gains either one skill at Average (+1) and a one-point stress box or a free invoke.

Uses:

DISCIPLINES & STUNTS

MAGIC DISCIPLINES

Magic Disciplines represent the fields of magic that you have trained in or have abilities in. The first discipline you take is free. After that, each discipline costs one refresh. Disciplines function much like stunts in this way. The difference is that they give your character narrative permission to use magic in new ways. These are designed to be very freeform, but you can only use the types of magic within the disciplines your character has taken on. The examples used in each description are not exhaustive and are provided as guidelines rather than rules.

Air

You have mastered control over the air. This discipline allows you to fly for short bursts (Athletics), push and pull the air (Physique/casting skill), and even attack with it (Shoot). You can create an advantage to allow yourself or someone else to fly for longer periods of time (casting skill). The difficulty for creating an advantage to allow flight should be around Fantastic (+6). You can also animate the air into a creature capable of following commands (Provoke), starting at a Good (+3) difficulty.

Death

You have mastered control over death and the dead. You can shoot blasts of green necrotic energy (Shoot), weaken your enemies (casting skill), and animate the dead (Provoke), starting at a Good (+3) difficulty—although this doesn't quite make them "living" again.

Earth

You have mastered control of stone and dirt. You can move earth (Physique), shape it (Crafts), and attack enemies at range (Shoot). You can animate piles of rocks or dirt into a creature capable of following commands (Provoke), starting at a Good (+3) difficulty.

Energy

You have mastered the control of magical energy. You can manipulate energy into various sparkling blue, translucent forms, like a key to unlock a door (Burglary), a large hand to lift something out of your way (Physique), a shield for protection (Crafts), or a lightning bolt to attack someone at range (Shoot). You can animate objects (excluding what is covered by other disciplines)—such as armor, weapons, and rugs—into a creature capable of following commands (Provoke), starting at a Good (+3) difficulty.

Fire

You have mastered the control of fire. You can create fire out of thin air (casting skill) and use it to attack your enemies (Shoot). You can animate fire into a creature capable of following commands (Provoke), starting at a Good (+3) difficulty.

Illusion

You have mastered control of what is seen. You can create convincing illusions (Deceive) and even manipulate whether or not something is visible at all (Stealth). You also have the ability to light up dark areas (casting skill) and frighten your enemies with terrifying projections (Provoke).

Life

You have mastered the power of life force itself. With it, you can begin the healing process on consequences (casting skill), create wards of protection (Crafts), and even temporarily focus the energy into weapons (Crafts) and angelic beings (Provoke), starting at a Good (+3) difficulty.

Mind

You have mastered control of the mind. You have the ability to read surface thoughts (Notice), deeper emotions and intentions (Empathy), and place thoughts in the mind of a being (Provoke). You can also take complete control of less-intelligent beings.

Nature

You have mastered control over nature. You can grow plants from nothing (casting skill), grab enemies with vines and tree limbs (Physique), fire thorns at a foe from range (Shoot), and secrete poisonous toxins (Lore). You can animate and command plants to do your bidding (Provoke), starting at a Good (+3) difficulty.

Sight

You have mastered control over what you see and perceive. You can uncover hidden secrets (Investigate) and discern illusions from reality (Empathy). You can also look or listen in on places, people, or objects that you know well, no matter the distance (casting skill). These spells should increase in difficulty due to a lack of familiarity with the target and greater distances.

Teleport

You have mastered the art of teleportation. You can teleport to a location that you know well or can see (Athletics). Destinations that are farther away and/or not as well known to the caster call for higher difficulties. You can also teleport other beings and objects to your location or a location near you (Provoke/casting skill) and open portals (casting skill).



Transform

You have mastered the art of shapeshifting. You can transform yourself (casting skill) or another being (Provoke) into the form of another creature or person that you are familiar with. This is a Create an Advantage action. Transforming into creatures significantly smaller or larger than the target make the spell much more difficult. Changing portions of a target is easier than changing its whole self (i.e. - give the target gills rather than turning it into a fish). You can also transform objects, allowing you to mend them, weaken them, or alter their shape.

Water

You have mastered the control of water. You can create water out of thin air (casting skill), create items and barriers out of ice (Crafts), or throw blasts of water and ice at your enemies (Shoot). You can animate water into a creature capable of following commands (Provoke), starting at a Good (+3) difficulty.



MAGIC STUNTS

Below is a list of stunts relevant to this magic system. Some provide added bonuses to the magic disciplines above, while others might be taken by anyone. Each stunt below costs one point of refresh. This list is meant to spark ideas and is not intended to be exhaustive.

- **Animator.** (Requires: Any discipline that allows animation) When you animate something, your animation now starts with one skill at Average (+1) and a 1-point stress box. You can also exchange any free invokes received for both a skill at Average (+1) and a 1-point stress box for your animated being. If an animated being has multiple skills at Average (+1), they can be combined to increase their power, as can stress boxes. So, if you exchange two free invokes, you can receive one Skill at Fair (+2) or two skills at Average (+1), along with one 2-point stress box or two 1-point stress boxes.
- **Animation Specialist.** (Requires: Animator) When you successfully animate something, gain an extra free invoke. This free invoke can be spent to improve the created creature, as stated in the Animator stunt.
- **Blast.** Once per session, you may attack everyone in a single zone with Shoot. Apply your roll to each target in the zone, and they can each defend individually.
- **Counterspell.** Once per session, you can force a single magical action to fail without a roll. This does not apply to rituals and spells that take time to cast.
- **Magical Backlash.** Once per session, you may deal yourself a consequence in exchange for a +4 on your roll, when performing a magical action.
- **Shapeshifter.** (Requires: Transform discipline) When you transform into another creature, you may choose a skill. All actions taken with that skill, while you remain in that form, now gain a +2.
- **Stress Reducer.** (Requires: Life discipline) Once per scene, you may deal two stress to yourself in order to clear a character's stress track of the same type (physical or mental).

CHEAT SHEET

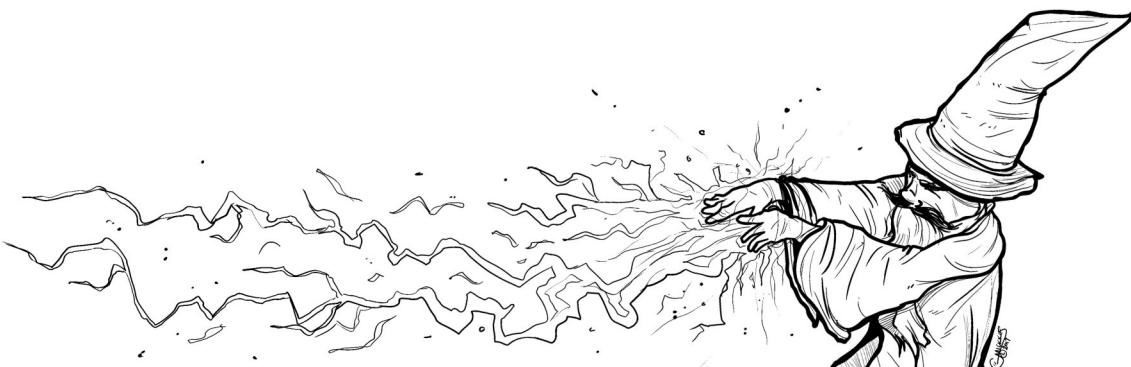
TO USE MAGIC, YOU NEED:

- A Permission Aspect - An aspect that describes the source of your magic. Available sources:
 - Ancestral Heritage* - Rapport/Flashy (Sorcerer)
 - Divine Patron* - Empathy/Careful (Acolyte, cleric)
 - Relentless Training* - Lore/Clever (Wizard, sage)
- One or more Magic Disciplines

MAGIC DISCIPLINES:

(Cost: first is free; 1 refresh for each additional)

- Air - Control, and animate air
- Death - Control necrotic energy and animate the dead
- Earth - Control and animate stone and dirt
- Energy - Control arcane energy, and animate objects
- Fire - Control, create, and animate fire
- Illusion - Control what is seen
- Life - Control life force and begin healing process
- Mind - Read minds and place thoughts in them
- Nature - Control, create, and animate plants
- Sight - Discern truth from deception and look in on a target
- Teleport - Teleport yourself and/or others
- Transform - Change the shape of yourself, others, or objects
- Water - Control, create, and animate water and ice



HIGH FANTASY MAGIC

LOOKING FOR MORE FANTASY?

Check out my ongoing web serial, *Sprig*!

Sprig is a fantasy story about a girl, named Kaia, who is searching a mysterious land for her people. Meanwhile, war brews around her. The story takes some cues from this magic system, with each race having their own magic discipline. So if you enjoy fantasy and sprawling stories, I think you'll love *Sprig*!

A new chapter of *Sprig* is released for free on my author website every five days. Currently, I have written over 100,000 words (roughly 375 pages) and I write more everyday. You can find the link below. I hope I'll see you there!

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