Ars Magica Rules Briefing

Rolling Dice

All die rolls in **Ars Magica** are made using a ten-sided die. There are three types of rolls that are made. The first is a *simple roll,* and the only oddity is that the zero counts as a ten. On a *quality roll,* incredible success is possible but great failure is not. Read a zero as a ten, but if a one comes up, roll the die again and double that result. If another one comes up, roll the die a third time and quadruple, and so on. On a *stress roll,* great extremes of success and failure are possible. Read a one as for a quality die. If a zero comes up, though, it counts as zero. In addition, you must roll a number of additional dice, called botch dice. You will usually roll one of these, but may have to roll more (at the storyguide's direction) if you were attempting a particularly difficult or dangrous task. Each zero that comes up on a botch die makes the failure that much worse.

When in doubt about which type of die roll is called for, use a simple die. The storyguide will instruct you when any other type of roll is called for.

Basic Activities

All characters have two important types of statistics: *Characteristics* and *Abilities.* Charactersistics are inborn levels of competence, and the numbers assigned to them range from +5 to –5. Abilities indicate learned proficiency at some activity. Abilities only have positive numbers. There is no theoretical maximum score for an Ability, but a score of five or six indicates a professional level of ability.

For most activities, a die roll is added to the sum of a Characteristic and an Ability. That total is compared to an ease factor set by the storyguide. If the total is higher than the ease factor, the attempted activity succeeds.

The meanings of the Characteristics and Abilities are fairly self-evident. Characteristics like Perception, Strength, and Communication mean just what you think they do, as do Abilities like Magic Theory or Scribe Latin. Some Abilities may be a little more obscure. If you have a rulebook, you can look them up on pages 50-59. If not, don't worry about them for now.

Magic

There are fifteen magical Arts that each magus knows: five *Techniques* and ten *Forms.* Techniques are like verbs — things you do — while Forms are like nouns — what you do things to. All spells are described by one Technique and one Form (with some complications that are neglected here). As a general guide, a score of 0–4 in an Art is weak, 5–15 is respectable, 16–25 is good, and over 25 is excellent.

The Techniques are *Creo* (create), *Intéllego* (learn about or detect), *Muto* (change), *Perdo* (destroy), and *Rego* (control). They are normally abbreviated Cr, In, Mu, Pe, and Re, respectively.

The Forms are *Animál* (animals and animal products), *Aquam* (water), *Auram* (air and weather), *Corpus* (humans and humanlike bodies), *Herbam* (plants and plant products), *Ignem* (fire), *Imáginem* (images and illusions), *Mentem* (human or humanlike minds), *Terram* (earth, rock, and metal), and *Vim* (magic itself).

As an example, to create a ball of fire, a magus would use a Creo Ignem spell. To destroy a person, he would use a Perdo Corpus spell. To find out about an animal, he would cast Intéllego Animál.

The rules for using magic are a little more complicated than most activities. First of all, magi can use their magical Arts to cast two types of spells: spells that they know, called *formulaic spells,* and ones they make up on the spur of the moment, called *spontaneous spells.* No matter which kind of spell is being cast, it has a level, which tells how powerful it is. A level 5 spell cannot do much, while a level 20 spell will have substantial effects and a level 50 spell would create effects talked about for years.

The formulaic spells that each character in this scenario knows are listed on his character sheet. To cast a formulaic spell you know, roll a stress die + Technique + Form + Stamina. If you exceed the spell level, it goes off. If you are under the spell level but within 10, it goes off, but you lose a Fatigue level. If you miss the spell level by more than 10, it doesn't go off and you lose a Fatigue level. If you botch, the storyguide makes up something nasty that happens to your character. You can cast as many spells as you like, and the same spell as many times as you like, as long as you are not unconscious from fatigue.

To cast a spontaneous spell, first decide roughly what you want to achieve and which Technique and Form you will use. Then roll a stress die + Technique + Form + Intelligence. If you choose to spend a Fatigue level, divide this total by two. If you choose not to, divide it by 5. The level of the spell you have cast is the total after division. The **Ars Magica** rulebook has a lengthy set of guidelines for determining what a given level of spell will do. Refer to it if you have a copy. If not, the storyguide should simply use his best judgement to determine what happens. You'll have plenty of opportunity to experiment with spontaneous spells in other scenarios.

Fatigue

Fatigue caused by spellcasting (and other factors) is measured in *Fatigue levels.* Most characters have six Fatigue levels (fresh, winded, weary, tired, dazed, and unconscious), each with a corresponding penalty that is subtracted from all rolls a character makes (0, 0, –1, –3, –5, and incapacitated, respectively). Each time your character takes a level of fatigue, check off a next box on his fatigue track. The corresponding penalty now applies.

Fatigue levels are recovered by resting. Recovering from unconscious to dazed takes two hours, from dazed to tired 60 minutes, from tired to weary 30 minutes, from weary to winded ten minutes, and from winded to fresh two minutes.

Fighting

Although less complex than many roleplaying systems, **Ars Magica's** rules for combat are too lengthy to detail here. This is less a problem than it might appear, though. Most magi are wholly unsuited to physical combat anyway, and this scenario shouldn't require fighting.

If a physical situation develops, the combatants should simply describe their combat actions and compare totals on either a stress die + Strength or a stress die + Dexterity.

Ars Magica Background Briefing

Characters

Ars Magica, being a game primarily about magic, focuses on characters called *magi,* wizards of great power, in a medieval Europe where all the legends are true.

There are other types of characters in **Ars Magica:** *companions,* who are specialists in all manner of trades, and *grogs,* who protect the other characters from mundane dangers. In this scenario all of the players will play magi, leaving the companions and grogs for another day.

Player character groups (which are composed of magi, companions, and grogs) live in *covenants.* The word covenant connotes both the idea of a group and of a location: a covenant is one part university, one part adventuring party, one part political alliance, and one part magical laboratory. The magi in this scenario belong to the covenant of Libellus.

The Order of Hermes

All magi are members of the mystical *Order of Hermes,* an organization of wizards which spans Europe, but which is not without internal divisions. The members of the Order are governed by the *Code of Hermes*, an oath which they all must take.

There are two other ways that magi of the order are divided up. First, the Order is divided into *tribunals.* These are regional divisions, each of which covers parts of Europe. For example, the Stonehenge Tribunal, of which Libellus is a part, covers England and Wales.

Second, each individual magus (the singular spelling of magi) belongs to a particular *house.* All but one of the twelve houses is a group of magi who can trace teacher-pupil relations back to one of the founders of the Order. Members of each house are found all over Europe. Members of each house tend to inherit their masters' idiosyncracies, and so the members of each house tend to think and act in a similar manner.

House Bonisagus contains those descended from Bonisagus, the inventor of Hermetic magic, and Trianoma, the politician who founded the Order. As a result, it has a great deal of prestige. Its members are usually either theoreticians who study magic or politicians who work to keep the Order together.

House Bjornaer have a particular affinity with animals, as each member has the ability to take the shape of one at will, and to change back to human form similarly. They tend to be concerned with preserving the wilderness from the advance of civilization.

House Criamon are mystics and philosophers, renowned for being almost totally incomprehensible and tattooing themselves with strange markings.

House Flambeau prefer direct solutions to problems, usually involving fire. They do not, however, fight for its own sake, merely seeing it as a good solution to most problems.

House Jerbiton are closely associated with the mundane world, maintaining contacts with the nobility and patronizing art and mundane learning.

House Mercere are an oddity. Most members have no magical ability, and devote themselves to delivering messages to covenants. They are regarded as magi by the Code, however, and are accorded a strong degree of protection.

House Merinita are concerned with the faeries, and are generally regarded as little less strange than the Criamon.

House Quaesitor are the judges of the Order. They investigate alleged breaches of the Code and take the evidence to Tribunals. If they find overwhelming evidence, however, they may impose summary justice, and rely on the Tribunal backing them up. It usually does.

House Tremere are a very well-organized house, and they seek political power. Members excel in the use of *certámen,* a nonlethal magical duel, and base their hierarchy on it. They are in disgrace at the moment, as a substantial portion of the house were found to be vampires. All the vampiric magi were killed, but the stigma remains.

House Tytalus believe the best way to learn is through conflict. Accordingly, they seek conflict in all things.

House Verditius spend their time creating magical items, a task at which they are supremely skilled.

House Ex Miscellanea contains everyone else: wizards adopted into the Order from outside, and the followers of traditions which joined after the founding.

The Code of Hermes

I, [name], hereby swear my lifelong loyalty to the Order of Hermes and its members.

I will not deprive nor attempt to deprive any member of the Order of his or her magical power. I will not slay nor attempt to slay any member of the Order, except in a justly executed Wizard War. I understand that a Wizard War is an open conflict between two magi, who may slay each other without breaking this Oath, and that should I be slain in a Wizard War, no retribution shall fall on the magus who slays me.

I will abide by the decisions made by fair vote at Tribunal. I will have one vote at Tribunal, and I will use it prudently. I will respect as equal the votes of all others at Tribunal.

I will not endanger the Order through my actions. I will not interfere with the affairs of mundanes and thereby bring ruin upon my sodales. I will not deal with devils, lest I imperil my soul and the souls of my sodales as well. I will not molest the faeries, lest their vengeance catch my sodales also.

I will not use magic to spy on members of the Order of Hermes.

I will train apprentices who will swear to this Code, and should any of them turn against the Order and my sodales, I will be the first to strike them. No apprentice of mine shall be called magus until he or she first swears to uphold this Oath.

I shall further the knowledge of the Order and share with my sodales all that I find in my search for wisdom and power.

I request that should I break this Oath, I be cast out of the Order. If I am cast out, I ask my sodales to find me and slay me that my life may not continue in degradation and infamy.

The enemies of the Order are my enemies. The friends of the Order are my friends. The allies of the Order are my allies. Let us work as one and grow strong.

This I hereby swear on [date]. Woe to them who try to tempt me to break this Oath, and woe to me if I fall to the temptation.