

With or Without Rhyme and Reason

A diegetic magic system based on consensus

To cast a spell you have to read it aloud, meaning you need to find a written version of it in the world. This could be in a book, on a scroll, tattooed on an elderly person's back or written in the bark of a tree.

You can identify the spell by reading it without saying it aloud. You can have this process take as long as you want, depending on how long spells are. In my games it would probably take about 10 seconds (or 1 turn in moment to moment play).

Because magic is written in the Chaotic Tongue, the meaning of the words change with every casting. Depending on your spell list, you could roll to randomly select the spell, or you could generate spells using tables like those found in *Maze Rats* (which is what I plan to do).

Magic is Chaos, you need to handle it carefully or risk disastrous consequences. Corresponding with this there are two ways of casting magic:

Methodical/Ritualistic Casting:

Based on whatever spell you are using you can perform a ritual to determine the effectiveness of the spell, its area of effect, its duration and its range. The sort of ritual required for the desired effect should be agreed upon by the GM and the players who want to cast it, though the creative input should come as much as possible from the players' side. When a ritual makes intuitive sense to get the desired result, it is said to have Rhyme and Reason.

Example of Play:

Joshua: Isabel has a magical tome that currently holds 'Fireball'. Could I throw a piece of coal while chanting in the middle of the hoard to have the spell hit as many zombies as possible? Coal is flammable as well as the result of fire, so I think it is a fitting ingredient.

The GM: Yes that has Rhyme and Reason, however Fireball is a very strong spell and like this, the ritual is very simple. So how about this: For every turn you spend chanting the spell's power will increase with the total amount turns you have already spend. So casting it on the first turn does d6, on the second turn 3d6 and on the third turn 6d6, etc.

Joshua: Sure that sounds fair. I'll try to chant the spell for three full turns.

Because magic doesn't require any innate ability or training, anyone can participate in a ritual. Doing so will either speed the ritual along, or make a spell more effective. To complete the ritual faster, perform one of the tasks that needs to be done while repeating after the person reading the spell. To make the spell stronger, hold hands with the person reading aloud and repeat after them.

Example of Play:

Sylvia: Emilia wants to ensure the spell goes off before the horde of zombies can get to us. Could she chant along to cut the time it takes to get to full power?

The GM: The ritual is incredibly simplistic, you can't cut any time, but Emilia could increase the power of the spell by 1d6 per turn chanted, if she holds Isabel's hands and repeats after her. This would make the spell do 5d6 after only 2 turns.

Sylvia: That sounds like the best option.

Again, Magic is Chaos. All spells are powered by chaotic energy represented by d6s. If a ritual meant to control a spell is disrupted, roll all d6s invested in the spell up until that point, exploding on a 6. If any doubles occur, the spell miscasts. Use your favourite miscast table to resolve miscasts.

Example of Play:

GM: From the hoard of zombies a sprinting ghoul emerges, it charges towards Emilia and Isabel. Do you cast the spell prematurely, or do you risk the ritual getting disrupted to hope for a stronger effect?

Mike: Michael could try to hold the ghoul back, to protect the spell.

Sylvia and Joshua agree.

A roll of the dice seals their fate: Michael can't hold the ghoul back and as it rams into Isabel, the spell is disrupted. 2d6 has been invested into the spell so far. 1, 6 and due to the exploding dice, 1. Doubles. Sylvia cusses as the GM rolls on the miscast table.

Desperate/Spontaneous Casting:

If you are in a desperate situation, you might not have the time or resources to perform a ritual but still want to cast a spell. Doing so is risky, but totally possible. Read the spell aloud and roll 2d6 to determine how effective it is.

When casting without rhyme or reason you always risk miscasts. The d6s explode on a 6 and doubles cause a miscast (as if the ritual was disrupted, had the characters cast the spell carefully).

Example of Play:

Joshua: Isabel is glad to have survived the miscast, but is desperate to stop the zombie horde. She reads the words in her magical tome aloud, risking another miscast to hopefully slow the zombies with the Web spell that is now in her tome.

GM: A 2 and a 5, no exploding dice and no miscasts: Magical webs cover the path between them and the zombies buying them 7 combat turns to deal with the ghoul.

Inspiration:

[Knave](#) for magic as items

[Maze Rats](#) for random spell generation

[Ars Magicka](#) for multiple ways of casting spells

[Goblin Laws of Gaming](#) for magic dice and doubles as miscasts

[Dungeon Nobodies](#) for collaborative spellcasting

[The Nine and Thirty Kingdoms](#) for the idea of conceptual magic

[The Chilling Tales of Sabrina](#) for chanting, holding hands and ritualistic magic (the last episode of that series is such a shame. They literally introduced a death mcguffin!).