

Esoteric Arts for Wizardly Know-it-alls

By Baz Blatt

Astrology, alchemy, geomancy, numerology, batraquomancy (look it up), chalcography (look that one up as well), all are arts and sciences on the curriculum of the Arcane College your Wizard probably studied at or that he has ponderous tomes about in his lab. All are part and parcel of the spell-singers repertoire and can enhance and personalise his use of spells and give him something useful to do when he has cast all of his memorised magic for the day.

Astrology

This art has several uses. Natal charts we are all familiar with and a GM may create a table for determining the birth sign of a PC at creation and assigning minor bonuses to stats or other abilities. The exact details will depend on how far the GM wishes to take it, using just sun signs or a whole plethora of moons and planets, houses and aspects. Taking our real world European astrological system, a simple table for sun-sign bonuses might be:

1	Aries (The Ram)	+1 level in combat ability (eg 1 st level fights as if 2 nd level of whatever class)
2	Taurus (The Bull)	+1 Strength
3	Gemini (The Twins)	re-roll any characteristic and take higher score
4	Cancer (The Crab)	+1 save vs Breath Weapon
5	Leo (The Lion)	+1 Charisma
6	Virgo (The Virgin)	+1 save vs Magic
7	Libra (The Scales)	+1 Intelligence
8	Scorpio (The Scorpion)	+1 Charisma if Evil, +1 save vs Poison if Good
9	Sagittarius (Centaur the Archer)	+1 Dexterity
10	Capricorn (The Sea-Goat)	+1 Constitution
11	Aquarius (The Water Carrier)	+3% bonus to experience
12	Pisces (The Fishes)	+1 Wisdom

These bonuses might be permanent or might only apply during the month the sun is in your sign at the GM's whim. The skies of your fantasy world may not be the same as our of course, and Astrologers need not divide them into 12 signs or houses.

Once a wizard who knows a bit about astrology knows a persons date of birth and has access to a set of Ephemerides (tables of planetary locations) he can start working out lucky and unlucky days. If a wizard rolls his intelligence or less on a d20 he can spot the next lucky or unlucky day in the ephemerides for a given person. This process takes an hours worth of calculation and messing about with abacuses per use, and is best not done in the wilderness or in a dungeon where the immanent danger of being eaten by monsters

disturbs the concentration (+2d6 to the roll). The next lucky day is 3d6 - wizard's level days away, the next unlucky day is the same. If the two coincide they cancel each other out. On that day the PC may re-roll any one dice roll made for any circumstances for good luck, or have the GM force him to re-roll a success to reflect bad luck.

Certain spells may also have especially good or bad times to be cast. Demon summoning magic is notoriously tricky and can often only be done at all 'when the stars are right', Charm spells may be especially effective when the moon is in the victims sun-sign and/or Venus is above the horizon (-2 or even -4 saving throw), lightning spells may be especially dangerous (+1d6 damage) when Jupiter is at the zenith and so on. The GM will adjudicate on each individual spell and whether the Wizard is knowledgeable enough to take advantage of these fluctuations in effectiveness. For a more abstract 'on the fly' system a GM might allow a wizard to spend a night poring over books and waggling his astrolabe to see if he can get an astrological bonus of some kind that day. To succeed he must roll under his Intelligence on a d20 with modifier of +2 per level of spell and -1 per caster level. If he fails the GM may impose a penalty to the effects of the spell for the 'stars being wrong'.

Finally there is the predictive from of astrology. A wizard can determine from a birth chart and the current state of the heavens the most likely cause of a PCs death. The lower the roll vs Intelligence the more accurate the prediction, from the highly vague 'I'd avoid sharp things if I were you', to the penetratingly accurate 'Poison needles from trapped chests may figure prominently in your future fate'. Such predictions are good for the next 1d6 months and when the hazard is encountered the PC has a -4 modifier to his saving throw or defence class against it. On the plus side if he meets his death due to any other means if he can roll the predicting wizards level or under on a d20 he is luckily saved so that he can go on to meet his predicted fate.

For example Mezlo the Thaumaturgist has an Intelligence of 14. He rolls 7 when predicting the fate of his comrade Sir Harlan the Brave; not vague, but not exactly accurate either. He looks up from his arcane tomes saying 'The cause of your death will be green!' Sir Harlan checks out the colour of the dragon he is off to slay and finds to his relief that it is red. On the way the party is caught in a landslide. Things look bad for Harlan when a massive boulder hits his destrier, but (since Mezlo's level is 5 and Harlan's player rolls 4 on his d20 'fate' roll) the rock is grey, and though the horse is killed fate spares him for a green death elsewhere. He understandably stays well back when the party meet a gang of goblins, but in the dragons lair Sir Harlan wades in with his longsword, secure in the knowledge that red things are not going to cause him harm! He is duly toasted (fate roll of 12, way above Mezlo's level) when he slips and catches the dragon's fiery breath full blast. The cause of the slip was a smear of dragon snot left on the cavern floor from when the unhygienic beast caught orc-flu the week before, and thus fate has the last laugh.

Geomancy

This is the art of detecting the channels of mystic power running through rocks, soil and

plants and making use of them to preserve health and ensure good fortune. The usual equipment is an enchanted pendulum which wobbles in a way detectable only by the user when power flows are changed.

The most common use of geomancy is dowsing, using the pendulum to detect substances nearby such as water, or even gold and gems, if he has a pendulum made of the same substance (such as a water filled glass phial or a large uncut diamond), and he can detect magic if has a mithril pendulum. The geomancer can only detect such materials within 1d3x10 feet per level and will get a sense of vague direction. He will also only pick up the closest such matter, not the largest source. If he is after gold he must divest himself of all valuables and have an assistant take them far away.

Another common use is siting and planning buildings, placing them on good power flows to ensure good fortune for the residents, making sure evil vibes from the garderobe are dissipated out of the windows and the emanations of wealth from the treasury are reflected back around the building using carefully polished silver mirrors and not out of the door. An astute geomancer will use this on his own home to gain a variety of bonuses to his spells and/or saving throws depending on what room he or his servants are in, such as +1 AC on the battlements due to strategically placed haematite floor tiles, and have a few global bonuses such as +2 on saves vs disease for all residents while anywhere in the building thanks to ubiquitous planters full of aspidistras.

This feng shui can even be applied to campsites, as long as the party are willing to follow a muttering mage waving a pendulum around for an hour or two looking for the right site. A properly located camp with everyone sleeping with their head and feet aligned to beneficial power flows can add +1 to the number of hit points regained over night, reduce the chances of a night time encounter or allow wizards to regain one extra levels worth of spells.

Finally for the most elaborate ritual magic the right location is an absolute must. Ley lines flowing in and out of long lost holy sites can put off or encourage demons depending on alignment and standing in the right vantage point when cursing an army or a city can greatly enhance the range and number of people affected.

Numerology

All letters have a number, and all numbers can theoretically be turned into words. To derive the key number from a word use the table below. An extra step sometimes used is ‘consolidation’ adding the digits of the derived number together to make yet more numbers until you get one digit. Thus:

Tiamat = 200+9+1+40+1+200 = 451 and then 4+5+1 = 10 and then 1+0=1

[illegible]

number 180. On the 180th day after his death it should be possible to resurrect poor Harlan even from the pathetic scraps of carbonised bone left after the dragon was finished with him. Pity that date fell last month... never mind, we'll wait for the 180th anniversary instead, or maybe well get a minor bonus to success on the $1+8+0=9^{\text{th}}$ anniversary.

The Orc king is called Phatgutt, number 986, consolidated to 23, then 5. Mezlo reckons this odious but nearly unkillable thickhead and his entire tribe will be easily over come if he can field 986 men-at-arms to do the job, no more and no less, or maybe he will succumb to being stabbed 23 times in the back by assassins, or he could be made automatically vulnerable to a fifth level spell like Hold Monster. But Orcs are illiterate so there may be several possible spellings and numbers that are the true ones, and what if Phatgutt is a pseudonym? The king might have been advised by a smarter than average Shaman to hide his true name. Mezlo is going to have to do more research into Orcish linguistics and lore before he makes his move.

Alchemy

Alchemy is about more than just potions. About 50% of spells need material components, and an alchemically trained wizard can enhance these spells by improving the materials used. As a rule of thumb, a spell will require $\text{Level}^2 \times 10\text{gp}$ in basic components which will be good for $5+2d6$ castings; thus to cast Protection from Evil, a wizard needs a stick of chalk with powdered silver in it. Doubling the cost of the component adds 50% to the spells range or duration, adds 1 caster levels worth of effect for variable spells like fireball or gives -2 saving throw for the target. Thus making a more expensive stick worth 20gp with gold dust adds 3 turns to the duration of the Protection of Evil, a 40gp stick with platinum dust adds 6 turns. The GM may wish to impose an upper limit on what alchemy can do to enhance a spell lest extremely rich wizards take too much advantage, or make the wizard and his henchmen risk their lives questing for the rarest and most potent ingredients.

Spheromancy

This word refers to the use of crystal balls, but other arcane adjuncts such as enchanted bowls of Elf-wood spring water, skulls sawn in half and filled with mercury and mirrors made from dragon scales work in the same way. These enhance the use of information gathering spells such as Locate Object, ESP, Clairvoyance and Clairaudience. The scryer concentrates for an extra round then rolls his Intelligence + level or less on a d20 to increase the amount of information gained; thus ESP detects not merely minds beyond a solid barrier, but how intelligent they are; Locate Object gives a distance as well as direction, and so on. If the scryer tries for another round and rolls half his intelligence + level or less he gets another extra element of information. Further concentration and further rolls, each time halved give yet more information. An expert spheromancer can in addition tell when magic or scrying has been used to observe him if he rolls a save vs magic with a bonus of +1 per level. If this skill is used I suggest not using the magic item crystal ball as detailed in Monsters and Magic, but having a version that gives +1 to +4 to the use of the spheromancy skill and increases the range of a Clairvoyance spell by 100% per +1 bonus.

Cartomancy

The use of Tarot cards can be simulated by, obviously enough, the use of Tarot cards. Issue the player of the cartomantic wizard with a set and let him shuffle and deal and try and convince the DM that what he turns up will have an effect. You can also use the following abstract system. The wizard spends an hour or so examining the cards and trying to glean information about the immediate future; shuffle the greater trumps only, then take his Intelligence – 2d6 + level and allow him to deal that many cards, numbered 0 (The Fool) to 21 (The World), face down. This is his fate hand, and whenever he is required to roll a d20 he has the option of playing a card instead and using its number as the score. He cannot make another reading until all of the cards in his hand have been played, no matter what the score. Playing card 0 enables him to force a GM controlled character or monster to accept one of his fate cards as the score of a d20 roll, playing card 21 means he can regain a card he has just played and put it back in his hand.

Another way of using the cards is for the player to get one-use bonuses or penalties to rolls for each card to be used as they are played; for example the Fool may allow a magician one re-roll of any dice, playing the Chariot means his next saving throw is reduced by 1, and Temperance will temporarily make his alignment neutral. Only one card may be played at a time, and again all cards must be played before another reading can be made.

Your world need not use the same trumps as ours; below is a table with a couple of optional decks;

	‘Standard’ Trumps	Tolkeinesque Trumps	Carcosan Trumps
0	The Fool	The Hobbit	Polychromatic Man
1	The Magician	The Wizard	The Bone Man
2	The High Priestess	The Elven Queen	Our Lady of Similarity
3	The Empress	The Steward	The Solid Queen
4	The Emperor	The King of Men	The Fluid King
5	The Hierophant	The Elven King	The Lord Mutant
6	The Lovers	Beren and Luthien	Torment
7	The Chariot	The Prince of Men	The Spaceship
8	Strength	Durin the Firstborn	The Dinosaur
9	The Hermit	Orthanc	The Greys/Momentum
10	Wheel of Fortune	Earendil’s Ship	Larceny
11	Justice	Numenor	Murder
12	The Hanged Man	The White Tree	The Psychic
13	Death	The Dragon	Death
14	Temperance	The Shire/The Forest	Inertia/Timelessness
15	The Devil	Morgoth	Banishing
16	The Tower	Minas Tirith	Imprisonment
17	The Star	The Seven Stars	Binding

18	The Moon	The Moon	Invocation
19	The Sun	The Sun	Conjuration
20	Judgement	Mount Doom	The Mummy's Brain
21	The World	Arda	The Void

The suits of the lesser trumps, numbered Ace to ten plus the Page, Knight, Queen and King, are:

Standard	Tolkienesque	Carcosan
Swords	Swords	Swords
Pentacles	Anvils	Gems
Cups	Leaves	Skulls
Wands	Rings	Lasers

Thingomancy

There are dozens of other arts the mage might try, mainly dedicated to foretelling the future. For example scapulomancy is the art of divining the future from the marks left on the shoulder-bones of burnt sacrifices, while amniomancy foretells a newborn child's fate by looking at the afterbirth. See <http://phrontistery.info/divine.html> for a list of techniques, but in game terms most will use the same procedure as predictive astrology above unless the player can come up with a creative method of using it to enhance his spell casting. For example a pyromancer who can see the future in the flickering of flames might be able to convince a GM that he is entitled to a bonus in using any fire related spell, as long he never uses any watery or cold related ones, an amniomancer could be able to use the dried and ground up remains of the afterbirth to create especially effective magic potions for the person (if he knows alchemy as well), while a spatilomancer, who divines the future by examining faeces, could attack people secretly from afar by obtaining their stools and moulding them into figurines that act as targets for his spells.

Gaining para-magical skills

All first level wizards will know one of these skills and I suggest they be allowed to learn another one at 5th, 9th, 13th and 17th level and every 4 levels thereafter. The GM should make sure that the wizard finds a suitable teacher or grimoire to learn from and if he is going to use one of these skills that he has the appropriate equipment to hand. An astrologer is not going to get far without his astrolabe or a numerologist his abacus.

Combining these skills should be allowed if the player can tell you how this will work in detail, but GMs should note that they are all somewhat time consuming and will become extremely so if the wizard gets carried away with it. This might be appropriate in some circumstances, a wizard ought to spend several years amassing the materials and planning the spells to summon a demon lord or to level an enemy city's walls, but for most day to day adventuring activities the effects will be minor.

Clerics may also gain these skills if appropriate to the deity - one can easily imagine a priest of the god Apollo using rhapsodomancy, the art of divination by opening books of poetry at random, but a more appropriate skill in most cases will be Theology. This works as per the finding of lucky days mentioned under astrology above. By perusing the holy books it is possible for a cleric to find holy days upon which the light (or darkness) of his deity is especially strong and on which he and his fellow worshippers will be blessed. Alternately he may wait for such a holy day and spend the day engaged in suitable rituals and making sacrifices to his god and extend the period of luck by one day per level. He may also look out for festivals where he can get bonuses to specific spells. Note that this still requires rolling against Intelligence to do the appropriate research, but the GM may allow higher luck bonuses to high wisdom clerics.

Another option is to have the various practitioners of these arts as NPCs hired by the wizard to assist in the same way as he might employ an alchemist. A wizard's stronghold will be a rookery of eccentric sages, gawking at the contents of chamber pots, annoying the cook by stealing the best pig carcasses to burn for scapulomancy, having fights between myomancers and ailuromancers etc. Most will be charlatans of course, others will prove to be hopeless cowards when taken on expeditions to boost their masters powers in action and all will demand funds to pursue their own esoteric arts and threaten to quit if denied.