

Essential Information for Players on Ars Magica, 5th edition*

Excerpts from the Definitive Edition

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1 Background

The Gift The ability to use almost any form of magic, with proper training. All magi have The Gift. The Gift makes people around a character uneasy.

The Order of Hermes An order of wizards stretching across the whole of Mythic Europe, bound by an oath that keeps them from fighting each other or trying to rule the mundanes. One of the most central organizations in the game. It has about 1200 members, living in thirteen Tribunals which divide up the continent. In the magical realm, no single group can even think to challenge the Order as a whole.

The Foundation of the Order The Order of Hermes owes its existence to Bonisagus, without question the greatest magical genius yet to live. He made two great discoveries: The first was the discovery of the Parma Magica; the second was the theory of Hermetic Magic. In 767 the thirteen wizards gathered at Durenmar in the Black Forest, and swore to the Code of Hermes, creating the Order of Hermes at the first Tribunal. Only one of them, Trianoma, did not found her own House.

Parma Magica The first of Bonisagus's great discoveries, Parma Magica is a ritual learned by all Hermetic magi at the conclusion of their apprenticeship, which allows them to resist magic. The Parma Magica also protects from the social effects of the Gift. It takes two minutes to perform the Parma Magica ritual, and it lasts until sunset or sunrise, whichever comes first.

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The Code of Hermes The foundation of the Order of Hermes as an organization is the Code of Hermes. This short text, also called the Hermetic Oath because all members of the Order recite and swear to it when they are admitted, sets the structure of the Order and fixes certain limits on what its members may do. It was drafted to give magi as much freedom as possible, while protecting them from each other.

The code protects members of the Order, as it is forbidden to scry on them, to deprive them of their magical power, or to attack them outside of a formally declared Wizards' War. It protects the Order by forbidding to interfere with the affairs of mundanes, deal with devils, or molest the faeries. It also provides a basic governance: Members are required to abide by the decisions made by fair vote at Tribunal, train apprentices, and concede to members of House Bonisagus the right to take their apprentice.

Covenants In the strict sense a covenant is a group of magi bound together by an agreement going beyond the Code of Hermes. By extension, the place where those magi live, and all the other people who live there with them.

Tribunals The term means one of the thirteen areas into which the Order of Hermes divides Mythic Europe, but also the formal meetings of the magi in one of those areas, normally held once every seven years.

Houses The Order of Hermes is divided into twelve Houses, all but Ex Miscellanea descended in some way from one of the Twelve Founders, the first magi of the Order. The twelve Houses fall into three groups. Four (Bonisagus, Guernicus, Mercere, and Tremere) are true lineages, made up of those trained by someone trained by someone (etc) trained by the founder of the House. It is not possible to join those Houses later. Four (Bjornaer, Criamon, Merinita, and Verditius) are Mystery Cults, and magi can join those Houses by being initiated into the cult. The last four (Ex Miscellanea, Flambeau, Jerbiton, and Tytalus) are gatherings of magi with common interests. It is relatively easy to join these Houses after training, and magi who feel that they do not fit in to their old Houses often do.

Redcaps One of the messengers of the Order of Hermes. Most do not have The Gift.

Quaesitors The investigators of the Order of Hermes, they find Hermetic criminals and present evidence of their crimes at Tribunal.

The four Realms Four realms of power exist: Magic, Divine, Faerie, and Infernal. There also exists the mundane, that which is not supernatural. Each realm has a distinctive aura, which covers some areas of the world. Within an aura, one realm is stronger than the others, and this local strength affects the use of the powers of other realms. These auras vary in strength, and some only appear at particular times or under particular circumstances.

2 Mechanics

Simple Die Roll a ten-sided die. Each number counts for its value, except that a zero counts as ten.

Stress Die For a stress roll, roll a ten-sided die.¹

- On a roll of zero (ten), roll again and add the number rolled until you roll something other than a ten.
- On a roll of one, check for a botch: Roll a number of ten-sided dice determined by the situation, called the botch dice, and if any of them show a zero, you have botched. If you roll no zeroes on the botch dice, the die roll is simply a zero.
- The other numbers count for their value, as normal.

Botch On a botch, your **total** for the roll is never any higher than zero, in addition to any other consequences. The number of botch dice that come up zero determine how badly something has gone wrong.

Ability checks Abilities represent the things that a character has learned over the course of her life. They increase over the course of a saga, as people continue learning all the time. Abilities are normally used by adding Characteristic + Ability + die roll, and meeting or exceeding an Ease Factor. In principle, any Characteristic can be used with any Ability, but some pairings are rare.

Specializations Each Ability of a character (except *Spell Mastery*) should be assigned a specialization. When you are using an Ability in a way that incorporates your specialization, you act as if your score were one level higher than it actually is.

Abilities with no score Characters may use certain Abilities even though they have no score in them. They may use them as if they had a score of zero, but rolling three extra botch dice.

Hermetic Magic All player magi use the Hermetic theory of magic. There exist non-Hermetic magi from European traditions, and from further afield.

Hermetic magic uses a system of fifteen Arts (section 3), which are divided into five Techniques and ten Forms — two classes of magical disciplines that work together in spellcasting. Techniques govern the essential manipulations that magic can perform; Forms, the essential natural phenomena that magic can manipulate. Techniques and Forms have Latin names. A Technique is referred to by a verb, and a Form by a noun. You combine one Technique and one Form to cast a spell, and together their names indicate the spell's general function.

¹The mechanics for the stress die are modified from the standard rules.

Vis Raw magic power, known as vis, is sometimes found in physical form. Vis trapped in some substance is called raw vis, and magi have many uses for it. Raw vis is always associated with a particular Technique or Form.

Raw vis can be used in many applications. Examples include strengthening a spell, performing a ritual, creating a magical enchantment, or aiding in the study of the magical Art to which it corresponds. Because of its utility, vis is greatly prized by magi. They often use it as a form of currency, measuring it in units called pawns.

Spontaneous Magic Spontaneous magic involves the production of effects which do not correspond to a spell the maga knows.

Formulaic Magic Formulaic magic is the use of spells that the maga already knows.

Ritual Magic Ritual spells are like Formulaic spells, but they take longer to cast, and involve both elaborate rituals and the expenditure of raw vis.

Magic Resistance Hermetic magi have a base Magic Resistance equal to their score in the Form most applicable to the spell cast (e.g. *Ignem* in the case of magical fire). In case of doubt, Vim is a safe default.

Parma Magica adds Magic Resistance equal to five times the maga's score in the Ability to the resistance based on her Forms. A magus can suppress his Parma by concentrating, and this also suppresses his Form resistance. This suppression lasts for as long as the magus concentrates, which takes the same effort as concentration on maintaining a spell, and leaves him with no Magic Resistance against anything. An unconscious magus may not suppress his Parma, and thus has his full resistance against all magic, even helpful magic. His Parma will go down naturally at sunrise or sunset, at which point he has only the resistance based on his Forms. There is no way for an unconscious magus to lower his Form resistance.

A magus may also protect one other person for each point in Parma Magica, with their consent. He must touch each person to start the protection, and it lasts as long as at least one character can see the other. The magus may cancel the protection at will, at any distance. While a magus is protecting others, his effective Parma Magica score is reduced by 3 points, both for himself and for the other people he is protecting.

Penetration The maga's casting total measures the total amount of power that she can channel to the spell. The spell's level determines how much power is needed to create the intended effect. Any excess power is used to overcome, or Penetrate, magical defenses.

The Penetration Total may be zero or negative. In that case, the spell cannot affect any target with Magic Resistance, even if the score of the Magic Resistance is 0. However, it can still affect targets with no Magic Resistance. If the Penetration Total exceeds a target's Magic Resistance, the spell affects that target. If a spell is targeted at several individuals who have different levels of Magic Resistance, it is possible for the spell to affect some but not others.

3 The Hermetic Arts

3.1 Techniques

Creo makes things that exist independently (substances such as people, trees, and rocks, but not include colors, weights, and sizes) into better things of their kind, which includes bringing them into existence from nothing. Creo can thus both create and heal things.

Intellego is the Art of perception. It allows a maga to gather information directly from the forms of things. This information does not deal with the appearances of things, unless Intellego Imaginem magic is used. Rather, it provides information about the actual nature of a thing. Thus, Intellego magic is not deceived by mundane disguises.

Muto can grant or remove properties something cannot naturally have. Thus, Muto can give a person wings or turn her skin green, or turn a person into a wolf. The difficulty of the magic depends on the extent of the change, so that turning someone's skin green is easy, but turning someone into a golden statue is difficult.

Perdo makes things worse examples of the kind of thing they are. It is the opposite of Creo. Perdo magic can simply destroy things, removing them completely from existence, or it can destroy aspects of a thing, like its weight. Perdo alone can only destroy the whole of a natural property; making fire able to burn only wood would be Perdo with a Muto requisite. Perdo can only make something a worse example of what it is. You cannot sharpen a sword with Perdo, even though sharpening involves removing some of the metal.

Rego allows a maga to change the state of a thing to some other state that the individual thing can naturally have. Any changes that a mundane craftsman can make can also be made by Rego magic. In this case, a Finesse roll is required to determine the quality of the outcome. Since all things can naturally have any location, Rego magic allows a maga to move things around. Rego can also make a tree blossom out of season, put a person to sleep, shape a piece of stone into a statue, or weave thread into a tunic.

It cannot make an animal appear young again, because mature animals cannot naturally become young (although Muto could do this). Rego also cannot make an animal old, because aging is decay away from the form (so Perdo could do this). Similarly, although Rego can make a tree bear fruit out of season, that fruit would not contain seeds, as the seeds are separate substances (potential trees), and thus creating them would require Creo. Equally, Rego cannot turn a brown dog black, because while dogs can naturally be black, the brown dog in question cannot naturally take on that color.

3.2 Forms

Animal concerns animals of all kinds, from the fish of the sea to the birds of the air, as well as animal products such as wool or silk.

Aquam concerns water and all manner of liquids, as well as properties of liquidity.

Auram is the Art of air, wind, and weather. It also governs gaseous forms in general.

Corpus is the Art of human bodies. This Art affects dead bodies and the bodies of magical or faerie creatures that look human, as well as those of living humans.

Herbam concerns plants and trees. This includes plant matter of all types, including that which is no longer alive — like dead wood and linens.

Ignem concerns fire, heat, and light.

Imaginem concerns the things in the world that the senses respond to. Natural philosophy calls them species. All things constantly give off species for each of the senses. Those for touch and taste do not travel far, while those for sight require light to get any distance from the originating body. Imaginem spells normally affect the process by which species are produced, rather than the species themselves. Thus, the species emanating from an illusion are not themselves magical. Note that Imaginem cannot create actual solidity, although it could make something 'feel solid' until you accidentally put your hand right through the surface. Touch illusions are much more effective at changing the way that an already solid surface feels; making a wooden table feel like stone, or a knife feel blunt. Imaginem only changes the appearance that an object presents to the world. It does not change the actual effects of the object. Imaginem could make a fire feel cool, but the fire would still burn.

Mentem concerns minds, thoughts, and spirits. Mentem can also affect the "bodies" of noncorporeal beings, such as ghosts, as these are maintained in the physical world directly by a spirit's will.

Terram concerns solids, especially earth and stone.

Vim concerns raw magical power. This Art refines the use of magic itself, allowing magi to assume even greater control of their spells ("meta magic"). Vim also affects magical, infernal, divine, and faerie creatures.