

Every great
wizard starts
with a dream.

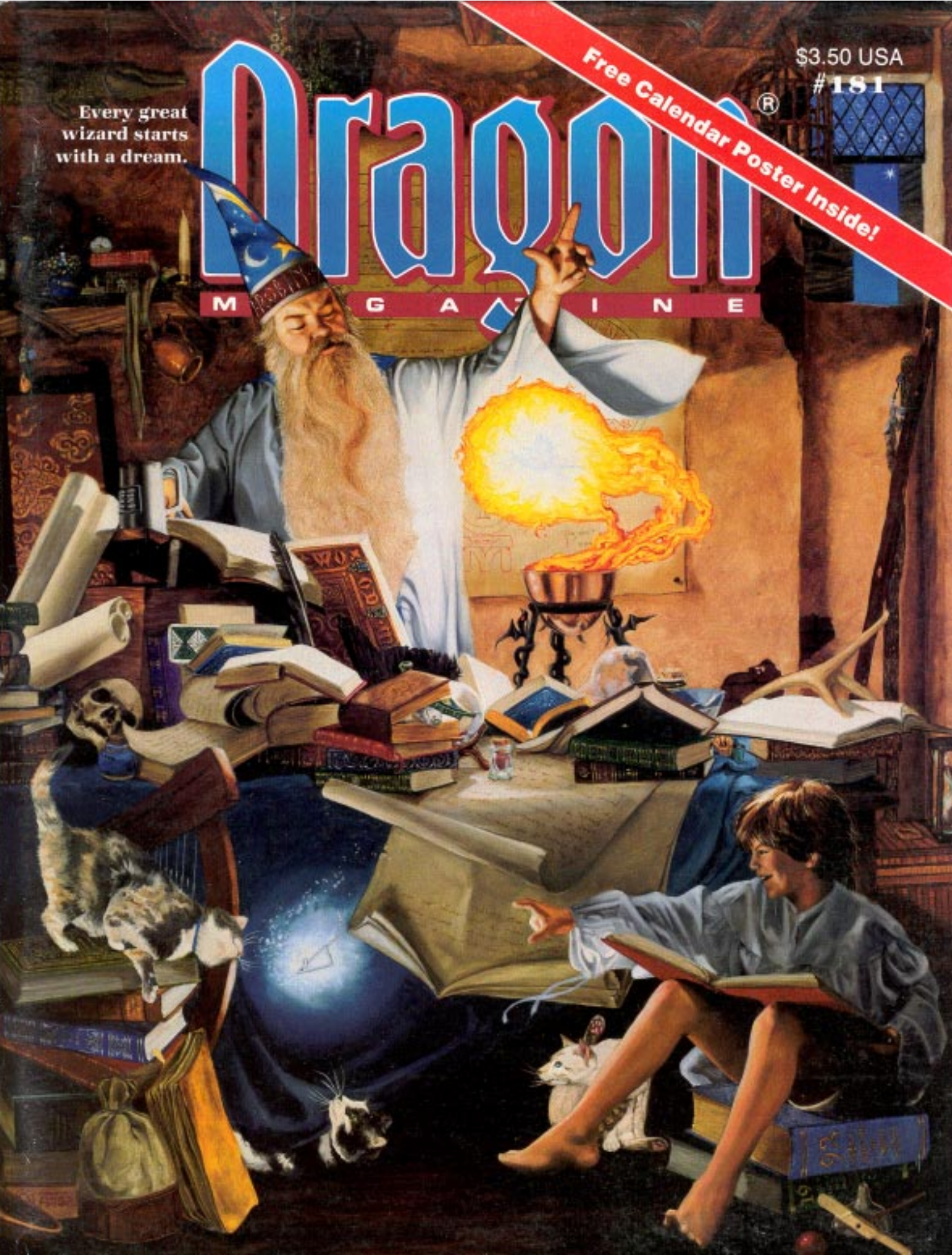
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Crimson fire lit the battlefield then we warriors charged, pell-mell, straight into the scorched flank of the enemy I laid about me right and left, felling the scorched ogre-kin. After our first flush of success, the fighting grew desperate indeed, for our enemies had the advantage in both size and numbers. But no ogre could touch the sorceress, Morgana. Time and time again, her incantations rang over the din of the battle. Each cry brought down another volley of death upon the foes – and that was what sustained us: the power of her magic and the regular, reassuring staccato of her voice.

Magic sets the pace of a fantasy battle. The firepower of magic alone qualifies wizards as the artillery of their world. To use the jargon of the 20th-century military, a sorcerer also performs the tasks of logistics, reconnaissance, strength multiplication, and fire suppression. Therefore, wizards, more than any other character class, need a grasp of the principles of war.

This article describes the strategy and tactics of magic. Unless the Dungeon Master routinely intervenes in battles, players who use wise tactics can expect more

Sorcery & Strategy

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Magical tactics on the fantasy-game battlefield

victories. Furthermore, DMs themselves can use these ideas for nonplayer-character magicians. The use of opponents who are low in level but quick of mind demands intelligent planning from the players as well. Although individual examples refer to the AD&D® game rules, these maxims apply well to other fantasy RPGs, especially the D&D® game.

Maxims of magic

Principles of battle always sound simple. However, as the strategist Carl von Clausewitz once said, in war the simplest things are difficult. The chaos that reigns when a typical party of adventurers attempts to coordinate any battle plan should illustrate this point. Therefore, the best advice on tactics does not consist of arcane revelations or elaborate plans for every contingency. It consists of quick reminders about what makes a plan work. The following maxims of magic provide such reminders for wizards.

Maxim #1: The aim is to disarm the enemy. Battle is not primarily about killing the enemy; battle is about keeping the enemy from killing you. There is a direct connection between damage caused and damage received, because the more

wounds one suffers, the fewer one can inflict in return. Therefore, anything that reduces the foe's ability to fight contributes to the battle. In a protracted battle, a *grease* spell that disarms a giant has more effect than a *fireball* that merely causes the giant damage. The warriors in the party can hack away hit points. Save spells for more surgical attacks.

Maxim #2: The best offense is a good defense. Defensive spells have two advantages over offensive enchantments. First, they always work. Whereas most attack spells allow saving throws, magicians casting defensive magic enjoy the luxury of willing targets. Second, most defensive spells last for a prolonged duration, while the hottest *fireball* burns but once. Note that *stoneskin* and *armor* last forever until used. Any wizard who begins an expedition without using both spells as liberally as possible deserves whatever he gets.

One should never scorn protective sorcery as the resort of a coward. As mentioned above, something that reduces the enemy's ability to cause damage is as useful as something that actively harms the foe. Even if a sorcerer does nothing beyond fortifying himself and absorbing

enemy blows, he has drawn those attacks away from other targets in his party. Once a wizard neutralizes enemy attacks, warriors can cut down the foe.

Personal-enhancement spells share all the advantages of defensive magic. Enchantments such as *strength* and *haste* also involve willing targets and last for prolonged periods of time. Some game systems contain far more spells of this nature, making magical augmentation of fighters one of a wizard's primary roles. One prime example would be FASA's SHADOWRUN* game where spells such as Increase Attribute +4, Armor, or Combat Sense can make an ordinary warrior superhuman (and it is always to one's advantage to make one's allies superhuman).

In some circumstances, a magician can avoid attacking altogether. *Charmed* and *summoned* creatures can provide offensive firepower, while the wizard can devote his spells to augmenting allies. Those who favor this strategy should consider the possibility of remaining *invisible* throughout a battle; a clerical *sanctuary* would be valuable as well.

Despite the value of defensive and augmentation spells, wizards need not use

them to the point of obsession. Against inferior opponents, wizards should not waste these precious resources. When the party contains a number of warriors, wizards can sometimes count on destroying their foes without taking damage anyway. In these cases, one should use offensive sorcery to bring the battle to a rapid decision.

Maxim #3: Know the enemy. Wizards have any number of ways to gather reconnaissance. They should use them aggressively because magicians, more than any other class, cannot afford to let their enemies take them by surprise. A warrior is always ready for combat, but magicians need time-time to cast defensive spells, time to clear friendly forces out of the way of their *fireballs*, time to ready scrolls, components, and similar items. Wizards must also know what they will be fighting, because spells that devastate one sort of enemy may have no effect at all on another. A *death* spell can destroy armies of orcs, but it is worthless against undead.

Intelligent wizards use friends, spies, and rumors to gather intelligence about the foe. Those lucky enough to possess *crystal balls* or other long-range scrying magic use it carefully. When actually on an expedition, the prudent spell-caster travels behind a screen of scouts. A familiar can often serve as a discreet spy, especially if invisible. *Wizard eye* and *clairvoyance* function as alternatives in hazardous situations. Finally, wizards can armor themselves against a treacherous blow. *Stoneskin* spells, *cloaks of displacement*, *bracers of defense*, and so on soften the blow of an ambush.

Maxim #4: Set the tempo. One can think of a battle as having three phases. In the first, both sides probe the other, assessing the nature of the fight. Suddenly, one or both sides abandon caution and hurl themselves into the fight. This brings on the second phase, the phase of resolution. Here, the enemies fight with all the firepower at their disposal until one side or the other suffers irreparable harm. Finally comes pursuit, where the winning side presses success into whatever victory it can. One can win a fight only in the second phase, but every portion of the battle can become a debacle.

Sorcerers, with their firepower and reconnaissance abilities, can often set the timing for a battle. They must develop a sense for the tempo most suited to their side's strategy. Rash fighters commit themselves to melee at once and often pay an awful price. However, too much caution merely gives the enemy time to strike a fatal blow. Ideally, a wizard's reconnaissance gives friendly forces the intelligence information they need to develop a winning plan before the enemy does. Then, the wizard can precipitate the combat phase by launching devastating spells.

The blast of offensive magic changes both the physical and psychological tone of the battle. With any luck, deadly spells

cripple their targets and upset the enemy's plan. The survivors must react to the wizard or die. Furthermore, the discharge of magic almost inevitably rallies one's own side for a charge. Once spells start flying, few warriors can resist their lust for combat.

In the final stage of a battle, magicians may wish to save their spells. However, all warriors must take care that victory does not slip from their grasp. A final volley of spells may prevent beaten enemies from escaping alive. When the party's goals are more complex than simply exterminating the enemy, a wizard can use *forget*, *charm person*, *polymorph other*, or *mass suggestion* on surviving foes.

Maxim #5: Choose your target and choose your weapon. Since wizards avoid the chaos of melee, they usually enjoy the luxury of choosing their targets. Use this freedom wisely. As always, a wizard's goal is to neutralize the maximum amount of enemy firepower as fast as possible. One must achieve a balance between striking the most dangerous opponents and the most vulnerable ones.

On general principle, wizards should concentrate their first attacks on those most likely to succumb. One does more damage by killing warriors than by wounding their leader. The truth of this becomes obvious when one considers that in the AD&D combat system, wounds have no effect on a character's ability to fight. *Fireball*, the favorite tactic of countless wizards, does a beautiful job of clearing away weak forces.

In many cases, the enemy has a few unusually powerful forces. Obviously, one should destroy them as quickly as one can. When deciding which spells to memorize, reserve a few for neutralizing powerful individual opponents. When choosing these spells, it becomes more important than ever to pick sorcery that does something other than merely drain hit points, because such powerful victims can usually survive their wounds. One must also remember that such a powerful opponent is likely to pass an unmodified saving throw.

Often, low-level spells can hurt powerful opponents as much as stronger ones. *Spook* involves a saving-throw penalty and, when successful, immediately removes the foe from combat. As noted before, *grease* can deprive the strongest giant of his club. *Magic missile* causes only damage but hits automatically, offering a sure way to disrupt a hostile wizard's spell.

When choosing a target, wizards should pay attention to what their comrades can do. There may be a danger that only spells can counter, and an enemy wizard protected by warriors would be one obvious example. Obviously, a sorcerer should concentrate on destroying such a threat.

In less clear-cut cases, a wizard must make decisions which, whether the other adventurers realize it or not, shape the party's strategy for the rest of the battle.

Does the wizard assist faltering party members? Or does he help powerful fighters achieve a quick kill? The first strategy may save weaker fighters from ruin, but the latter improves the chances for a sharp victory. In some cases, helping the strong win the battle is the quickest way to help the weak. Furthermore, in this situation, the personalities of the wizard and the party must play a role. Wizards must resolve these dilemmas on their own.

Maxim #6: Know your strategy. To exercise any strategy whatsoever, a wizard must memorize the needed spells in advance. Furthermore, since few battles end in a single round, one must have enough spells to sustain a plan throughout several turns. It is often wise to have one or two standard battle tactics and concentrate exclusively on them. Those who memorize too many unusual spells risk being unable to effectively use any of them. It is equally true that one must be able to modify one's tactics for unusual situations. Wizards must find a balance between diffusion and dogmatism.

Sample spell lists

The following section shows the spells routinely memorized by three sample NPCs. They provide an example of the principles in action. Each one carries a mix of defensive, offensive, and special spells designed for use in combination for maximum effect.

Nuanda (4th-level mage): *magic missile* (× 3); *flaming sphere*, *mirror image*.

With the few spells available at 4th level, Nuanda has no room for frivolous magic. She carries one powerful defensive spell, *mirror image*. With luck, it can prevent an enemy from hitting her and disrupting any of her other spells. The relatively long duration of *mirror image* means that one casting should last through an ordinary battle unless Nuanda suffers an inordinate number of attacks.

For offensive magic, Nuanda carries two spells. *Flaming sphere* can wreak havoc against a massed group of enemies. *Magic missile* does a respectable amount of certain damage. Also, by having plenty of *magic missiles* available, Nuanda insures her ability to support a protracted combat.

Cybelline (5th-level enchantress): *charm person* (×2), *color spray*, *hypnotism*, *spook*; *alter self ESP*, *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter*; *hold person*, *wraithform*.

Cybelline's study as a specialist gives her more spells per level than a 5th-level generalist mage enjoys. Therefore, she can afford to memorize enough spells for two different fundamental strategies. These allow her to function either in urban environments or against monsters in the countryside.

In an adventure of social intrigue, Cybelline attempts to meet her opponents on friendly terms. Her high charisma and gentle manners make her welcome in almost any circle, while her varied non-

weapon proficiencies allow her to assume a number of different identities. If necessary, she can use *alter self* for a perfect disguise. Once Cybelline meets her targets, she may *charm* or *hypnotize* them. Alternatively, she may use *ESP* and a few carefully worded remarks to learn whatever information her victims know. She can infiltrate guarded areas using *wraithform*.

During more rugged expeditions, Cybelline can adapt her spells for open battle. *Hold person* is an effective combat spell, and Cybelline's victims suffer a -1 on their saving throws. By casting this spell on a single opponent, she can inflict a -3 saving-throw penalty. *Spook*, *color spray* and *Tasha's uncontrollable hideous laughter* have similar effects. Cybelline can use *ESP* as a reconnaissance spell, to sense presences behind doors, in darkened rooms, etc.

Undead and similar creatures are immune to most of Cybelline's spells. Against those creatures, she must rely on *wraithform* to avoid attack.

Cybelline does not routinely memorize many defensive spells. Her skills at infiltration take their place. For combat adventures, she owns *bracers of AC 4* and has a high dexterity. In an emergency, she can escape battle under *wraithform*.

Khalif (10th-level mage): *magic missile* (× 3), *spook*; *mirror image* (× 2), *invisibility*, *spectral hand*; *slow* (× 2), *vampiric touch*; *improved invisibility*, *phantasmal killer*; *monster summoning III*; *summon shadow*.

Khalif can cast enough spells to make himself invulnerable against weak opponents. He knows *armor* and *stoneskin*, and casts both before any expedition. With judicious use of *invisibility* and *mirror image*, he can make his other defensive spells last through many days of normal adventuring. Therefore, he need not memorize them regularly.

Khalif also has an owl familiar named Pallas. Pallas performs nearly constant scouting duty after dark. Khalif sometimes coaxes the bird aloft during daylight with special treats. The wizard takes care to keep Pallas armored with *stoneskin*. In some circumstances, Khalif turns Pallas *invisible* as well.

Khalif likes to attack from ambush, ideally without the foe ever knowing of his existence. He keeps himself *invisible* for as much of the time as possible. This allows him to avoid enemy attention while he casts *mirror image*, brings his *spectral hand* into existence, and takes up a position for a rear attack. Unseen *mirror images* are useless, but when Khalif breaks his *invisibility* by attacking, he is glad to have them. Khalif can also conjure shadows or monsters while remaining *invisible*, and he lets them do the fighting.

Phantasmal killer makes an effective tool for Khalif's ambushes. This attack can kill even a powerful opponent. Surprised victims suffer a saving-throw penalty, and even those who survive the attack may

have to knock themselves unconscious to be saved. *Phantasmal killer* also has the advantage of not firing any visible missile to reveal Khalif's position—although, sadly, it does end his *invisibility* spell.

Few ambushes can resolve the entire battle. Therefore, Khalif carries a number of straightforward combat spells. By using *spectral hand* and *vampiric touch* in his initial ambush, he can fortify himself for later blows. *Slow* hamstring the enemy, allowing Khalif, his summoned monsters, and his comrades enough breathing room to cope with the foes. The -4 penalty on saves against *slow* allows it to work on Khalif's opposition. Khalif memorizes *spook* for the same reason. At his level, victims suffer a -5 penalty to save.

Magic missile gives Khalif simple firepower. With four missiles doing 2-5 hp damage each with no saving throw, he can inflict an average of 14 hp damage per spell. By comparison, *fireball* does only 3½ points more if the enemy makes his saving throw, and Khalif's opponents are usually powerful enough to make that save.

Khalif's normal spell list lacks area-effect artillery spells. He could, of course, memorize those enchantments if he had them in his spell books and saw a definite need for them. At his level, he might also have a magical item to replace this sorcery. He could find a *wand of fire* quite helpful. He would also enjoy some of the quirkier

magical items, to give him unexpected powers for his ambushes. The abilities to fly, change shape or create illusions would all be useful.

Conclusion

What applies to ADD game wizards applies to any game featuring magic. FASA's SHADOWRUN game, for instance, lavishly rewards the magician who attends to personal enhancement and suppression of selected targets. The Houses Flambeau and Tylatus of White Wolf's ARS MAGICA* game probably study tactics assiduously.

The suggestions in this article describe the framework of magical strategy. Implementing these suggestions is both a science and an art. The science lies in learning what game rules (and individual DMs) allow. The art lies in timing and combinations: A master of sorcery has favorite spell tactics, but never uses them quite the same way twice; the reasons include tactical details, personal preference, or great political or social reasons in the game. One must learn when to use speed and when to use caution, when to use stealth and when to use force. Ω

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