THE FORGE

A GENESYS RPG PODCAST

Episode 16 - De-mystifying the Mystical (Part 5)

The Forge Podcast is all about bringing new creations to the table, and the Genesys RPG provides us all with a powerful set of tools to do so. When it comes to designing a setting, the Skills and Talents provided for players to use during character creation and while playing in the campaign, help players immerse themselves in the setting. The following are a series of rules both familiar and new that you can use in your campaign.

DIE CASTING (TALENT: SHAPESHIFTER)

We get many requests to explore many Talents, but none are more unique as the two Shapeshifter talents from REALMS OF TERRINOTH. These pair of unusual talents provide strong (some might say overpowered) mechanical benefits that represent some of the more classic tropes in fantasy, horror, and weird fiction: the ability to shapeshift into another creature. Both talents appear in the REALMS OF TERRINOTH setting book (pg. 84 and 89). It may appear that both were designed solely for a fantasy setting, but as you'll see, the Shapeshifter and Shapshifter (Improved) talents are applicable to just about any setting.

In this document we'll ask the questions:

- How do these talents work?
- How can you (and should you) properly represent them in your games?

We hope to explain that there is a right and a wrong way to utilize these talents in a balanced way. Our aim is also to show clever GMs how you can make their use an exciting focal point to a campaign especially when your main antogonist suddenly transforms before the PCs!

SHAPESHIFTER

The Shapeshifter talent is obviously designed to represent characters who possess a supernatural ability to change themselves into something hideously powerful. This is the realm of Lycanthropy, but can extend to transformative superpowers like The Hulk in Marvel comics, innate magic abilities like Professor McGonagall in Harry Potter, and mutations like in every Resident Evil game. In true GENESYS fashion, the talent is purposefully generic to allow a character to narrate where their ability comes from.

Is your character a were-wolf? Perhaps a were-bear or even a were-turtle? That last one could be a stretch, but with GENESYS, anything the narrative and setting allows for, your character can fit that niche. However, if you compare this to DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, with its radically different templates and abilities for every were-creature in existance, you can see the "upscale" simplification that GENESYS is known for. It keeps the reason for having this ability simple by allowing the "thing" you shapeshift into be whatever you want narratively, be it a wolf, bear, or tiger. Mechanically, though, there's a simple, uniform benefit.

BENEFITS

The following are the benefits of this talent:

- **Cost:** At 5XP (Tier 1), the talent recovers all spent strain when your character exceeds their strain threshold
- **Attributes:** You gain +1 to Brawn and Agility turning you into a tougher, faster foe
- **Attack:** Gain a +1 damage to all unarmed attacks and gain a Critical rating of 3, which provides your character with a deadly natural attack.

SETBACKS

Initially the benefits seem to make this talent over powered, however, this talent is one of the few times we see a narrative drawback to what is a mechanical boon.

Being a shapeshifter is supposed to be scary, frightening, and looked down upon. If it became public knowledge what your character is, you could expect a visit from a torch-wielding mob in very short order. Even worse, the transformation is involuntary and it does not end until 8 hours have passed, or the character passes out. This can alienate a PC from the rest of the party in some cases, especially if the others are unaware the party member has this talent.

This talent is best suited for a "break glass in case of an emergency" type situation, rather than the first thing you do in combat. GMs should make careful notes on who sees a character use this talent, for its constant use should certainly return to haunt the weilder of this powerful ability.

SHAPESHIFTER (IMPROVED)

Although the Shapeshifter talent's overuse can create complications in the game for a character with the ability, the assumption is that, eventually, any who have this power can control it. The Improved Shapeshifter talent is a natural progression of the base talent,

assisting that exact function. It represents the shapeshifter gaining a modicum of control over their beastial change and allows them a chance to exert their will to start or stop their transformation.

The talent ensures that the Discipline skill is high on the player's "must buy" list, mainly so their character can make an attempt to control their ability. This is as much narrative as it is mechanical since it represents the character spending time and effort learning how to control the "beast within".

A **Hard (◆◆◆) Discipline check** is also not an effortless task, especially since the GM can use multiple ♲ and ⊗ to reveal a character's secret and thereby creating even more complications.

USING SHAPESHIFTER IN YOUR GAMES

It goes without saying that any fantasy game, or even a modern or future game with horror elements like weird war, can shoehorn in the shapeshifter "condition" (and talents) nicely. But there are some other points to raise mechanically and narratively that can help give a reason for this talent's presence at your game table.

CHARACTER OPTIONS

- Mechanically speaking, the character who is a melee machine is going to really benefit from this talent and may even actively seek it out.
- The "second wind" of Strain Recovery is useful to anyone, especially spell casters.
- The boost to Brawn, Agility, and natural attack can benefit a combat when a situation is dire.
- You "don't care" about the lack of magic or ranged attacks.
- "Physically weaker" characters have a 5 XP method to be a terrifying physical combatant when the chips are down!

GM OPTIONS

- Giving the Shapeshifter talent to an adversary is a fantastic and scary idea that just keeps on giving!
- The introduction of "shifting organizations" (both benevolent and malicious) into a campaign!

OTHER RESOURCES

There are other options available should these suggestions not be to your liking. There are several amazing products available on the GENESYS FOUNDRY that support this talent and those of the transformatively challenged.

Scott Zumwalt's SOMETHING STRANGE setting, and Guillame Tardiff's INQUISITION setting have some amazing Werewolf talents within their pages. If the Shapshifter and Shapeshifter (Improved) talents don't provide you with what you need for your campaign, and you really want to expand Lycanthropy and shape-shifting into a major set of real character options that a PC can build their entire concept around, then you should simply purchase one of those settings from the GENESYS FOUNDRY. They have scores of talents that give real teeth to this kind of concept, and are both products that are well worth the buy.

NEW TALENTS

For those who need even more options for your games, THE FORGE PODCAST has you covered. The following are a series of talents that expand on the Shapeshifter and Shapeshifter (Improved) talents to enhance what already exists in REALMS OF TERRINOTH.

SHAPESHIFTER BRUTE

Tier: 2
Activation: Passive
Ranked: No
Your character must have purchased the Shapeshifter talent to benefit from this talent. While shapeshifted, your natural attacks gain an additional +1 damage, as well as the Pierce 1 and Vicious 1 qualities.

SHAPESHIFTER HERITAGE

Tier: 2
Activation: Passive
Ranked: No
Your character must have purchased the Shapeshifter talent to benefit from this talent. When you purchase this talent, select one of the abilities below. While shapeshifted, your character gains this extra ability.

- **Beast Hide:** Your character increases their Melee and Ranged Defense by +1.
- **Night Vision:** Your character ignores any ■ on skill checks due to darkness or low-light.
- **Nimble:** Your character does not suffer strain to take a second maneuver on their turn.
- **Scent:** Your character gains □□ on any check made to track a target where your character can reasonably follow the target's scent or unique smell.

SHAPESHIFTER (SUPREME)

Tier: 4
Activation: Active (Incidental)
Ranked: No
Your character must have purchased the Shapeshifter (Improved) talent to benefit from this talent. Using the Shapeshifter (Improved) talent now requires only an **Average (◆◆) Discipline check** as an out-of-turn incidental, and may be attempted once per encounter, instead of once per session.

THE FURNACE (MAGIC RESKIN PART 5)

Back in episode 12 and 14, we began the process of a fresh, new, reskin - turning "Magic" into "post-apocalypse Mutations". There we went through the first four steps:

STEP 1 - ROUGH OUT YOUR CONCEPT

We conceptualized and defined what Mutations were.

STEP 2 - DEFINE YOUR SKILLS

We decided on 3 skills:

- **Psionics (Presence):** Used for Psychic powers.
- **Metabolics (Willpower):** Used for bodily mutations that "enhance" what the body already does, naturally.
- **Aberrantics (Cunning):** Used for physical mutations that provide entirely new "non-natural" capabilities. The "weird".

STEP 3 - DEFINE YOUR "SPELLS" AND TALENTS

From the key effects we identified in Step 1, we settled on the concrete effects we wanted represented in "spells" (which we re-christened as "Powers") and in talents.

STEP 4 - DETAIL OUT THE "SPELLS" ("POWERS")

We went hardcore and fully designed and fleshed out the base effects (both narrative and structured encounter) of our Powers, and the additional effect tables for each one!

- **Block (Metabolics, Psionics):** A defensive power similar to the Barrier spell.
- **Enhance (Metabolics):** A self-buffing power similar to the Augment spell.
- **Strike (Aberrantics, Psionics):** A "deal damage to others" power similar to the Attack spell.
- **Survive (Aberrantics, Metabolics):** A brand new power the aspects of the Heal spell, that is also about reducing or ignoring dangerous environmental conditions.
- **Telekinesis (Psionics):** A brand new power reskinned from the brand-new Telekinesis spell we created in Episode 8.
- **Weird (Aberrantics):** A generalist power similar to the Utility spell.

The last two steps are the most exciting as it gives us the opportunity to explore the nature of the powers we created and the results of when things go wrong.

STEP 5 - DETAIL OUT THE TALENTS

Once finished with Step 4 (**Detailing out your "Spells"**)which we covered in Episode 14, we turn our attention to our talents! It's important to note (as we said back in Episode 12), that these steps are not always sequential and GMs may need to tackle them both at the same time, as one informs the other.

REVIEW YOUR ORIGINAL CONCEPTS FROM STEP 1

Now is the time to go back to step 1, where you laid out all the ideas and abilities you wanted your "power source" to accomplish. Because when it comes to talents related to your reskin of magic, they should typically focus on one of two things:

- **Modify or Enhance the usage of "Spells" ("Powers"):** Remember that talents are often designed to break the balanced choices you made in core mechanical design. But it's going to cost the player extra character XP to do it.
- **Provide Generic or Static benefits related to your "Power Source":** This is for those times that you want your power source ("magic" - in our case "mutation") to provide a benefit that's not something a normal person can do; but isn't as powerful or discrete as an actual Spell (or in our case, "Power"). And our talents are no exception, as you'll see.

Also, when it comes to creating your own talents for a reskin, the following precepts are those we consider "best practice", some of which may sound familiar.

BEG, BORROW, AND STEAL

This means literally filing the serial numbers off an existing talent. Many talents in official and Foundry products are well playtested and balanced. Simply put, change as little as possible.

K.I.S. (KEEP IT SIMPLE)

Gamers often overcomplicating things to maintain "hyper-accurateness" or to "account for every scenario". Work against that desire and simplify talents by hand-waving away edge-case scenarios. Simpler is better.

DON'T GO CRAZY

There is a tendancy of creators to create more talents than are necessary. We recommend not taking this approach as playtesting each talent is time consuming and can cause a loss inaccuracy when playtesters report on their findings.

Additionally, your audience can often experience overload. With scores of talents already in print, both

from Fantasy Flight Games and the Genesys Foundry, your sweet spot is twelve or fewer talents that relate specifically to your "magic" reskin. This doesn't include the overall talents for your setting, but aiming for under twenty new talents is best.

NEW TALENTS

So let's apply those best practices discussed throughout this document for our Post-Apocalyptic Mutations. We've provided our personal notes on each talent for clarification and our reasonings for taking certain directions.

TIER 1

ABERRANTIC INSIGHT

Tier: 1
Activation: Active (Incidental)
Ranked: No
When a mutation power you manifest with Aberrantics adds a quality to your character's power with a rating determined by your character's ranks in Discipline, your character may use their ranks in Survival instead.

METABOLIC INSIGHT

Tier: 1
Activation: Active (Incidental)
Ranked: No
When a mutation power you manifest with Metabolics adds a quality to your character's power with a rating determined by your character's ranks in Discipline, your character may use their ranks in Resilience instead.

PSIONIC INSIGHT

Tier: 1
Activation: Active (Incidental)
Ranked: No

When a mutation power you manifest with Psionics adds a quality to your character's power with a rating determined by your character's ranks in Discipline, your character may use their ranks in Cool instead.

> *These three talents are reskins of the Dark Insight talent from* REALMS OF TERRINOTH, *with each talent providing a different power skill with a different secondary skill. This "breaks" the advice we gave that led to using Discipline for additional effects in the first place. This is the purpose of this talent, however. Survival for Abberantics made sense as a still-not-overpowered secondary skill option due to the nature of Abberantics. Likewise Resilience for Metabolic, and Cool for Psionics.*

HEALING FACTOR

Tier: 1
Activation: Passive
Ranked: Yes
When your character has a full night's rest, in addition to the one wound healed, your character heals an additional 2 wounds for each rank of this talent.

> *A brand-new talent designed to represent "passive" mutant healing capability.*

TIER 2

EVOLVED MUTATION

Tier: 2
Activation: Passive
Ranked: No
When your character gains this talent, decide on one evolved mutation power for them, consisting of a particular mutation power action and a specific set of one or more effects. When your character manifests their

evolved mutation (consisting of the exact combination of action and effects previously chosen), reduce the difficulty of the check by one.

> *A straight reskin of Improved Signature Spell from* Realms of Terrinoth. *The talent represents the character developing one of their mutations, allowing it to evolve with excessive and practised use.*

LATENT MUTANT

Tier: 2
Activation: Passive
Ranked: No

Select one mutation skill (Aberrantics, Metabolics, or Psionics). That skill and Discipline are now career skills for your character.

> *This talent accounts for characters evolving into mutants later in life. Maintaining balance, the talent only provides a single career skill and access to one Powers skill. It also provides Discipline as a career skill as it is the default secondary skill used to calaculate additional effects. The 10 XP cost for being Tier 2 along with the expenditure of 10XP to qualify for this talent makes it very similar in flavor to the Bard and Runic Lore talents from* Realms of Terrinoth.

MUTANT TRAINING

Tier: 2
Activation: Active (Incidental)
Ranked: No

When your character manifests a mutation power, you may spend one Story Point to use this talent to add ⋀ equal to your character's ranks in Discipline to the results.

> *A reskin of the Brilliant Casting talent from the* Expanded Players Guide. *As a ranked tallet, this allows charcters to utilize the effects they incurred the difficulty to manifest.*

WASTELAND MUTANT

Tier: 2
Activation: Passive
Ranked: Yes

Your character gains ▫ per rank of this talent on any non-mutation skill check made to avoid or reduce the effects of radiation, contamination, toxic atmosphere,

and similar post-apocalyptic environmental hazards (per GM discretion).

> *An all-new talent that represents minor mutations that aren't so "flashy," but all-too-common to deal with irradiated food and water, biological contamination, and other wasteland hazards.*

TIER 3

HEALING FACTOR (IMPROVED)

Tier: 3
Activation: Passive
Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased at least one rank in the Healing Factor talent to benefit from this talent. When your character has a full night's rest, they may attempt a Resilience check to recover from one Critical Injury. This check is performed using the same difficulty as the weekly check detailed on page 116 of the Genesys Core Rulebook.

> *This is a brand-new talent designed to represent "passive" mutant healing capability and builds upon the lower Tier talent created for our setting. The addition of Critical Inuries illustrates the improvement.*

STEADY MUTANT

Tier: 3
Activation: Passive
Ranked: No

Your character does not add ■ to mutation skill checks for distraction or being encumbered.

> *This talent is inspired by Battle Casting from* Realms of Terrinoth.

TIER 4

EVOLVED MUTATION (IMPROVED)

Tier: 4
Activation: Passive
Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Evolved Mutation talent to benefit from this talent. When your character manifests their evolved mutation, reduce the difficulty of the check by two instead of one.

FAST MUTATION

Tier: 4
Activation: Active (Maneuver)
Ranked: No

Once per encounter, your character may spend a Story Point to perform a mutation power action as a maneuver.

TIER 5

ABERRANT TRANSFORMATION

Tier: 5
Activation: Active (Incidental)
Ranked: No

Once per session, your character may spend a Story Point as an incidental to attempt a **Hard (◆◆◆) Aberrantics check**. If successful, your character transforms into a mutant monster gaining one of the following ability sets:

- **Ooze:** All unarmed attacks gain +2 damage and the Ensnare quality. Additionally, your character gains the ability to ignore difficult terrain and can pass directly through solid objects which are porous or have cracks (per GM Discretion) without penalty.

- **Brute:** All unarmed attacks deal +2 damage per uncancelled ☼, and your character's soak increases to 10.

Your character reverts to their normal form at the end of the current encounter or if they become incapacitated (for instance, by exceeding their wound or strain threshold).

TABLE 16–1: PENALTIES WHEN MANIFESTING POWERS

CONDITION	PENALTY
The character requires a free hand or appendage to manifest the power easily (such as firing beams of radiation from a hand) and is restricted in some way (per the GM's discretion).	+ ■
The character is heavily restrained or encumbered (the pain and bodily exertion make it hard to focus).	+ ■
The character is in circumstances that interfere with their ability to concentrate, such as when suffering emotional turmoil or being buffeted by environmental effects.	Upgrade the difficulty once (or more at your GM's discretion).

STEP 6 - DETERMINE PENALTIES AND ⬙ & ⬦ RESULTS

We can now shift our attention towards the final touches of this reskin. Determining the penalties for characters to cast magic and what the ⬙ and ⬦ mean to your characters is a vital element to your reskin construction. It helps to inform both GM and players what the stakes are for your setting. It provides context on how magic operates and the dangers involved in using that power (as we discussed back in Episode 8). It also provides the balance to magic and any corresponding reskin.

DETERMINE YOUR PENALTIES

In Episodes 8 and 10, we cover the use of **Table III.2-3: Penalties When Casting Spells** on pg. 210 of the GENESYS CORE RULES. In essence, the intention of Magic is that it's hard and the difficulties you've assigned to your spells assumes that "everything is perfect". You have a free hand and unencumbered body to make arcane gestures, you have a clear voice to speak the magic words, and you've got the ability to concentrate easily.

In an actual encounter, nothing is ever perfect. Adding ■ in any of the aforementioned circumstances is not only expected, it is crucial to the balance of the system. As such, you have to represent it in your reskin.

Think about how your "spells" are manifested. What is needed? Words of Power? Mystical Gestures? Strong concentration? Then think about what could hinder how you manifest your "spells". Examples include being gagged if you need to speak words and not having a free hand if you need mystical gestures. Does lack of concentration or being distracted or stressed matter? The short answer to that is that it should.

All of this should inform you of a few penalties when casting the "Spells" of your reskin. The following is our take on what the requirements are for our Mutation Powers. These can be found on **Table 16-1: Penalties When Manifesting Powers** found on page 8 of these Show Notes.

DETERMINE ⟳ & ⊗ RESULTS

We spoke about this at-length in Episode 10, so give that a re-listen for clarification. You can also reference **Table III.2-4: Spending ⟳ and ⊗ on Magic Skill Checks** on pg. 211 of the Genesys Core Rules.

In episode 10, we talked about how this is another critical balance point for the magic system. Result for ⟳ and ⊗ must be much worse than they are for combat checks. Be sure you give that section of Episode 10 a re-listen before you do this for your reskin because all the same principles need to apply.

For a reskin, you should keep the penalties similar or in the same degree of negative impact, but it's really important to also give some "flavor" to your reskinning of the effects compared to the magic penalties for ⟳ and ⊗. Make the flavor (and perhaps the effect, itself) reflective of the power source for your reskin.

Your can find our version in **Table 16-2: Spending ⟳ and ⊗ on Mutation Power Skill Checks** below.

FEEDBACK

We recommend playtesting the contents of this document before using them in your game. Feedback is always appreciated.

You can contact us through any of our social media channels by searching @forgegenesys or via e-mail at forgegenesys@d20radio.com.

TABLE 16—2: SPENDING ⟳ AND ⊗ ON MUTATION POWER SKILL CHECKS

COST	RESULT OPTIONS
⟳ or ⊗	Metabolic exertion exhausts or damages the character, and they suffer 2 strain or 1 wound (controlling player's choice). This character and all allied characters within engaged range add ■ to any skill checks they make until the end of the controlling player's next turn.
⟳⟳ or ⊗	The power doesn't take effect until the start of the next round, or after a minute in narrative gameplay. The character manifesting the power experiences biochemical feedback, and is Immobilized until the end of their next turn. There is minor collateral damage (depending on the power type). A nearby innocent NPC suffers 2 strain or 1 wound, or a nearby piece of important equipment is damaged by 1 step.
⟳⟳⟳ or ⊗	The power is stronger than expected. One character of the GM's choice is also targeted or otherwise affected by it. The character enters a momentary state of metabolic rejection, and is Staggered until the end of their next turn.
⊗	The character suffers metabolic shutdown and is unable to manifest mutant powers for the rest of the encounter or scene. The GM picks the target of the character's power. If the power is manifested by an NPC, the controlling player picks the target of the power, instead.
⊗⊗	The character endures metabolic trauma, immediately suffering one Critical Injury. There is major collateral damage (depending on the power type). A nearby piece of important equipment is completely destroyed, or an innocent NPC is physically or mentally damaged in a major way (such as being left comatose, catatonic, etc.).

CREDITS

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