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THE FORGE

A GENESYS RPG PODCAST

EPISODE 12 - DE-MYSTIFYING THE MYSTICAL (PART 3)

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 is a discussion about existing rules and ways to expand them to benefit your campaign or GENESYS FOUNDRY product.

DIE CASTING (TALENT: SIGNATURE SPELL)

Two of the most powerful talents in the game are Signature Spell and Signature Spell (Improved). These talents befit any spell-caster who aims to specialize with a specific theme. Both talents allow magically attuned characters access to spells normally hazardous, by reducing the difficulty to cast them. Although this may seem unbalanced at first, the specificity that a caster must adhere to is what makes the talent so much more interesting. It is also what makes it intimidating.

In this section we explore both talents, how they operate, and how to ensure maximum benefit in your game. Plus we provide a few talents of our own to supplement some of the features of these two talents.

SIGNATURE SPELL & SIGNATURE SPELL (IMPROVED)

The Signature Spell talent, found on page 89 of the REALMS OF TERRINOTH setting book, makes casting excessively large fireball spells or healing multiple targets a reality, even for beginning characters. The talent reduces the difficulty of a specific spell cast once. The limitation, however, is that the spell chosen requires a specific combination of a spell type and effects, selected when the player first selects the talent.

The talent's more powerful counterpart is Signature Spell (Improved). This talent reduces the difficulty of the spell chosen for Signature Spell twice instead of once. It is for this reason that when choosing the spell for the initial talent, you should consider spells that gain escalating benefits from additional ⚡ and ▲ as your character advances in experience.

Over time and with specific implements, the number of uncanceled ⚡ increases while the difficulty remains static (unless you take the Improved talent). The same applies to ▲ since their use powers many of the effects applied to the spell chosen. Examples include the number of targets, and resource recovery such as Wounds or Strain.

The Signature Spell talent has several questions surrounding its use. During the episode, we pondered many of those questions, and here we provide our responses.

How do you design the spell?

Choose the spell type (eg. Attack, Barrier, etc), then choose a number of effects that add to the difficulty of the check. When doing so, the difficulty of the spell cannot exceed **Formidable** (◆◆◆◆◆). Our recommendation is to choose spells with an **Average** (◆◆) or **Hard** (◆◆◆) difficulty.

How do you balance the spell selected so that you don't feel like you're wasting the talent?

The rule here is to choose a spell combination that provides immediate usefulness, yet versatile enough to maximize its effects at higher levels. Spells then gain additional benefits with more ▲. Examples include:

- **Barrier + Additional Target Effect:** Increase the number of targets protected by the spell to two and then another one for each ▲ rolled.
- **Conjure + Additional Summons Effect:** Increase the number of summoned creatures, items, or weapons for every ▲▲ rolled.
- **Heal + Additional Target:** This spell gives two advantages. Firstly it increases the number of targets healed by the spell from one to two and then another one for each ▲ rolled. Secondly, the difficulty of the spell remains constant meaning that as the caster's skill increases, on average, the number of ★ and ▲ rolled increases. Since the number of Wounds healed is equal to the number of ★ and the number of Strain healed is equal to the number of ▲ rolled, the effectiveness of the spell also increases over time. Additionally, when a character purchases the improved version, the difficulty drops again thereby leaving even more ★ and ▲ to use in the same way.

Why can you only get this talent once?

Signature Spell is a non-ranked talent. Like all non-ranked talents, you can only gain the talent once. Could this be an opportunity to design an advanced talent that allows you to gain this talent for a second spell? The short answer is no, we would not recommend it.

Does the spell have to "look the same" every time you cast it?

No. The talent itself is purely mechanical. Narratively, the spell can take whatever form suits your character's theme. Feel like using Conjure where the creature you need is made of rock? Or perhaps the barrier is a wall of flame? Anything is possible, provided it stays within the realm of the spell and the effects chosen for it.

Is this talent affected by Implements?

Yes and no. Some implements, like rings, allow your character to add an effect without increasing the difficulty of the spell. However, the spell selected for Signature Spell must conform to a specific "formula" of spell and spell effects. This cannot be modified. Therefore, the part of the implement that adds an effect cannot modify the spell. The part of the Implement that adds damage to the spell, however, does add to the spell as that benefit does not modify the spell's formula in any way.

Can you swap out effects?

No. The effects must remain the same throughout the career of the character.

TALENTS

Although a spell chose for Signature Spell cannot change, this limitation does provide a window of opportunity for several talents that can make Signature Spell more versatile and enticing to a talented Wizard or Master of Magic:

MANIPULATE SIGNATURE SPELL

Tier: 3

Activation: Active

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Signature Spell talent to benefit from this talent. When you choose this talent, select an effect applicable to this spell type no greater than +◆. When your character casts their signature spell, they may spend 2 strain to swap out this effect for another of an equal difficulty increase.



MANIPULATE SIGNATURE SPELL (IMPROVED)

Tier: 5

Activation: Active

Ranked: No

Your character must have purchased the Signature Spell talent to benefit from this talent. When you choose this talent, select an effect applicable to this spell type no greater than +◆◆. When your character casts their signature spell, you may spend 4 strain to swap out this effect for another existing effect that is no greater than the chosen effect's difficulty increase.

THE FURNACE (MAGIC PART 3: RE-SKIN #1)

Have you ever looked at the GENESYS Magic system and thought how wonderful the system could translate into a Post-Apocalyptic, Psi-Cop, or Superhero setting? We here at the Forge have!

Due to the popularity of our first two episodes relating to magic in GENESYS, we felt that teaching listeners how to re-skin the system for their own setting would be of great benefit. As a result, in this episode we discussed the positives and negatives of doing a re-skin of the magic system including the identification of the pitfalls associated with it. We even create one to use as a guide.

WHY DO A FULL RE-SKIN?

Simply put, if your setting has a system of powers or supernatural abilities that can't (or shouldn't) be handled by other skill check options, then it's a candidate for re-skinning. Examples of setting elements that the Genesys Magic System could represent are:

- Elemental Powers
- Mutant Abilities
- Psychics or Psionics
- Super powers

GOALS

When commencing a re-skinning of the magic system, you should consider the following points:

1. You've got a need for discrete "power" effects that imitate spells or spell-like effects.
2. The use of such abilities has a cost such as strain or wounds.
3. Such abilities have a chance of failure when using them including making a skill check.
4. Increasing the difficulty to use the ability can affect the effectiveness and versatility of the ability.

RULES OF THUMB

Something to remember is not everything falls into the goals above. Creators and GMs shouldn't fall into the trap of trying to "magic-ify" every cool new mechanic you'll want to represent. Instead a new talent set can work just as effectively.

HOW TO RE-SKIN THE MAGIC SYSTEM

When it comes to a "process" to follow for a magic re-skin, there's no set or precise way to do it. We do, however, have some strong recommendations that we've learned do apply to this process through playtesting and creating our own settings since the release (and perhaps before) of the GENESYS ROLE PLAYING GAME. As such, we recommend adopting this process when building your very own re-skin. Of course, there is no better way to explain this process than by example.

We do wish to point out that you don't have to follow our process in whole, in part, or even in order. But this is what we've found works the best for us.

STEP 1 - ROUGH OUT YOUR CONCEPT

This may seem obvious, but going through the effort of exploring and recording your thoughts can heavily inform your later decisions in a positive way. There are two questions you should consider:

1. WHAT IS (ARE) THE SOURCE(S) OF THESE POWERS?

- Do they come from the Mind (e.g. "learned abilities")?
- Are they the result of biological mutations?
- Do those who possess these abilities come with specific genetic markers?
- Is it powered by a mystical energy field or perhaps some type of cosmic radiation?

The answers you come up with may include several of these origins. Just remember to keep to your theme.

2. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THESE POWERS?

Don't think of this in terms of defining the "spells" right now as this is a process contained in a later stage of this process. Sketch out your ideas at a very high level, giving some consideration to how these effects play into specific "powers" (e.g. "spells").

You may also consider how these "spells" integrate into talents to provide extraordinary effects. The recommended thought process here is to go high-concept and what enhancements might these powers receive.

EXAMPLE: STEP 1 - ROUGH OUT YOUR CONCEPT

We've decided our re-skinned magic system should fit a post-apocalyptic setting. We decide that the world suffered some catastrophe. Whatever the calamity, it caused wide spread mutations in the human population.

1. WHAT IS (ARE) THE SOURCE(S) OF THESE POWERS?

Obviously our source is that of the mutation of human beings, likely due to radiation or biological contaminant which ultimately led to or was the byproduct of the aforementioned apocalypse. Its also possible that these mutations were caused or "forced" on the survivors in the aftermath of the apocalypse. Or perhaps the powers-that-be or some secret group of scientists conduct experiments on those survivors to "breed" a new version of humanity that can survive in the now-blighted world. In any case, we have some excellent ideas to explore as we build our setting.

2. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THESE POWERS?

The types of effects should remain fairly broad, but the mutations should both be obvious and subtle. For example, psychic powers and other subtle physical abilities are common mutations as are extreme physical alterations that border on terrifying. These abilities should also allow for the following to occur:

- **Attacking:** Causing damage without using a weapon such as psychic powers or something physical but still weird like acidic vomit, porcupine-like spikes, blasts of radiation, etc.
- **Telekinesis:** Moving things with your mind.
- **Improved Durability and/or Defense:** Adding defense to a character or increase soak.
- **Improved Physical and/or Mental Abilities:** Super-strength and/or super-intelligence.
- **Super-fast Healing:** Regrowing limbs and recovering quickly from wounds sustained.
- **Survivability in Strange Circumstances:** Breathing toxic atmosphere normally, radiation immunity, amphibious breathing, etc.

Some of these may appear as discrete "spells" while others as talents. These secondary elements play a larger role later in the process where we create talents to enhance the powers provided.

STEP 2 - DEFINE YOUR SKILLS

Step 2 is about defining your skills, taking heavy lessons from the "Magical Rules of Thumb" explained in Episode 8.

1. BASED ON YOUR CONCEPT, DEFINE THE SKILL(S) NEEDED TO ATTEMPT THESE ABILITIES.

There are several different tactics you can take here to help figure out how many skills you should create. It might just be one or it might end with four or five. We find that answering two simple questions about your concept helps mould your choice:

- *Is the ability to perform this type of spell ("power") rare?*

In this question, "rare" indicates that the ability is unlikely to appear among the PCs rather than an abundance of them in the setting. Establishing how often a character would have these abilities gives you a clear indication as to how widespread your skill list should be.

If you expect one PC in the party to use the ability then you should have a shorter skill list, perhaps even a single skill shall do. However, if you expect half the party (or more) to have access to such abilities, then 3 or 4 skills is wise.

- *Does your Concept have different "power sources" for these abilities?*

While not always the case, unique power sources translate to unique skills.

2. FLESH OUT THOSE SKILLS

You'll need to flesh out those skills including associating one of the six characteristics to each skill logically (ie. based on the source of the power). Then you name the skills!

Additionally, you should take note of our Magical Rules of Thumb:

- Try very hard to avoid using Brawn or Agility as associated characteristics.
- If possible, promote character diversity by trying to use different characteristics for each skill (if you have multiple skills).

It's also important to note that although this is Step 2, this phase of the process occurs simultaneously with Step 3. As we flesh out Step 3, you'll see how often you'll come back to Step 2 to make adjustments to the skills you'll use in the setting.

EXAMPLE: STEP 2 - DEFINE YOUR SKILLS

We decided that our "power source" comes from mutation, although this is just a single power source. For our post-apocalyptic setting, mutations are fairly common, especially with PCs. Our expectation is that half the party would have these abilities in some form or fashion.

1. BASED ON YOUR CONCEPT, DEFINE THE SKILL(S) NEEDED TO ATTEMPT THESE ABILITIES.

Since mutations are not going to be a rare thing and we expect half the party to have such abilities, our setting needs more than one skill. While it's tempting to just have a single "Mutation" skill, it would quickly become the campaign's "master skill", leading to a shallow distribution of XP.

Ideally, we should aim for 3 or more skills. With only one "power source" (mutations), an easy choice is to have separate power sources equating to using separate skills. Mutation is the "general" power source like "Magic" is a power source, but just like magic, we can subdivide mutation into a few sub-sources and translate them into skills.

Using our Concept, we have skills to cover psychic abilities and physical mutations, but to make our three skill system, we need to split physical mutations into two separate skills. We decided that there are extreme physical mutations and then more subtle ones.

Of course there is no reason a focused mutant build may have ranks in two or maybe all three skills. However, given the thematic focus of characters in our setting, a character should remain focused on one skill, but we can revisit this when we get to Step 3.

2. FLESH OUT THOSE SKILLS

In step 1 we decided on 3 mutation skills: one for psychic powers, and two for physical mutations (both subtle and extreme). The three skills are:

- Psionics
- Metabolics
- Aberrantics

We can now expand on these further by exploring each skill including a high level approach to the "spells" or "powers" that each skill controls:

PSIONICS (PRESENCE)

Psychic powers due to mutations in your brain.

Unlike something like arcane magic, Psionics isn't about learning a skill or memorizing spells, but an innate and raw force of mind.

It was tempting to use Intellect for this skill since Psionics is all about the mind. We even explored the use of Willpower considering its definition in the Genesys Core Rules. However, Presence is about a character's "force of personality" and their ability to convince people to do things. We had other plans for Willpower anyway.

METABOLICS (WILLPOWER)

Mutations of the body that directly impact the body's functions in an enhanced fashion.

This skill represents extreme physical mutations. Examples may include making the body stronger or able to heal faster, both things that the body does naturally, but this skill improves upon.

While it was tempting to use Brawn as the associated characteristic, the choice would make Brawn a "super-statistic". Since the intention is to will about a change, Willpower is a better pairing.

ABERRANTICS (CUNNING)

Mutations of the body that provide entirely new abilities, not "enhancements" of existing capabilities.

Stemming from the word Aberrant meaning to depart from an accepted standard. The word is our creation and represents subtle physical mutations that accomplish "weird" things.

Aberrant mutations might be the ability to breathe underwater, or fire porcupine quills from your spine. Considering the "instinctive" or "natural" type of abilities the Aberrantics skill controls, pairing it with Cunning makes the most sense.

STEP 3 - DEFINE YOUR "SPELLS" AND TALENTS

When determining what your "spells" do, let your prior choices inform you of what abilities they invoke and what skills power them. But this step isn't just about "spell" definition and skill linkage, it's also about high-level talent definition. You should therefore consider these following points.

1. DETERMINE FROM YOUR CONCEPT HOW YOUR EFFECTS BREAK OUT INTO BOTH TALENTS AND "SPELLS".

This element is highly important. It's pretty obvious that you need to come up with the varied "spells" for your re-skin, but before that, you have to remember that not everything a character can do should fall into the "spell" category.

As the **EXPANDED PLAYERS GUIDE** highlights in many places, such abilities may also present better as talents. The key design differences between talents and spells are:

- *A spell effect is only available to a character with a single skill rank in the relevant skill.*
- *A talent need not force a skill check from the character.*

Use these distinctions heavily in your design. Your ability effects identified in Step 1 might apply to both spells and talents. Ask yourself, for each effect:

- *Do I want to reserve this effect for more experienced characters?*
- *Do I want this effect to apply without forcing a skill check?*

2. AT A HIGH LEVEL, CATEGORIZE YOUR SPELL-WORTHY EFFECTS INTO SPECIFIC "SPELL" NAMES.

Remember the Magical Rules of Thumb from Episode 8. Keep your "spells" broad, and categorized by their "effects". Do your best here to keep the number of spells minimal, but still discrete. This is also the time to associate your Skills to your "Spells".

3. BEG, BORROW, AND STEAL.

The existing mechanics for magic are already intensely playtested, and well-balanced. A re-skin of the magic system means just that. It's perfectly okay to "file off the serial numbers" and rename or modify an existing spell or magical talent. In fact, this is often the preferable method since it reduces the effort to create your re-skin.

This is the most important point of Step 3, and one that we'll come back to heavily in both **Step 4: Detailing "Spells"** and **Step 5: Detailing Talents**.

4. COME UP WITH A BETTER NAME THAN "SPELLS."

This small step is both fun and important. To save confusion, we shouldn't call these abilities "spells", but rather something else like powers, manifestations, or even chants. Flex those creative muscles and come up with a good label to replace "spells."

EXAMPLE: STEP 3 - DEFINE YOUR SPELLS & TALENTS

Okay, so back in step 1, we identified a few key effects we wanted to see from Mutation:

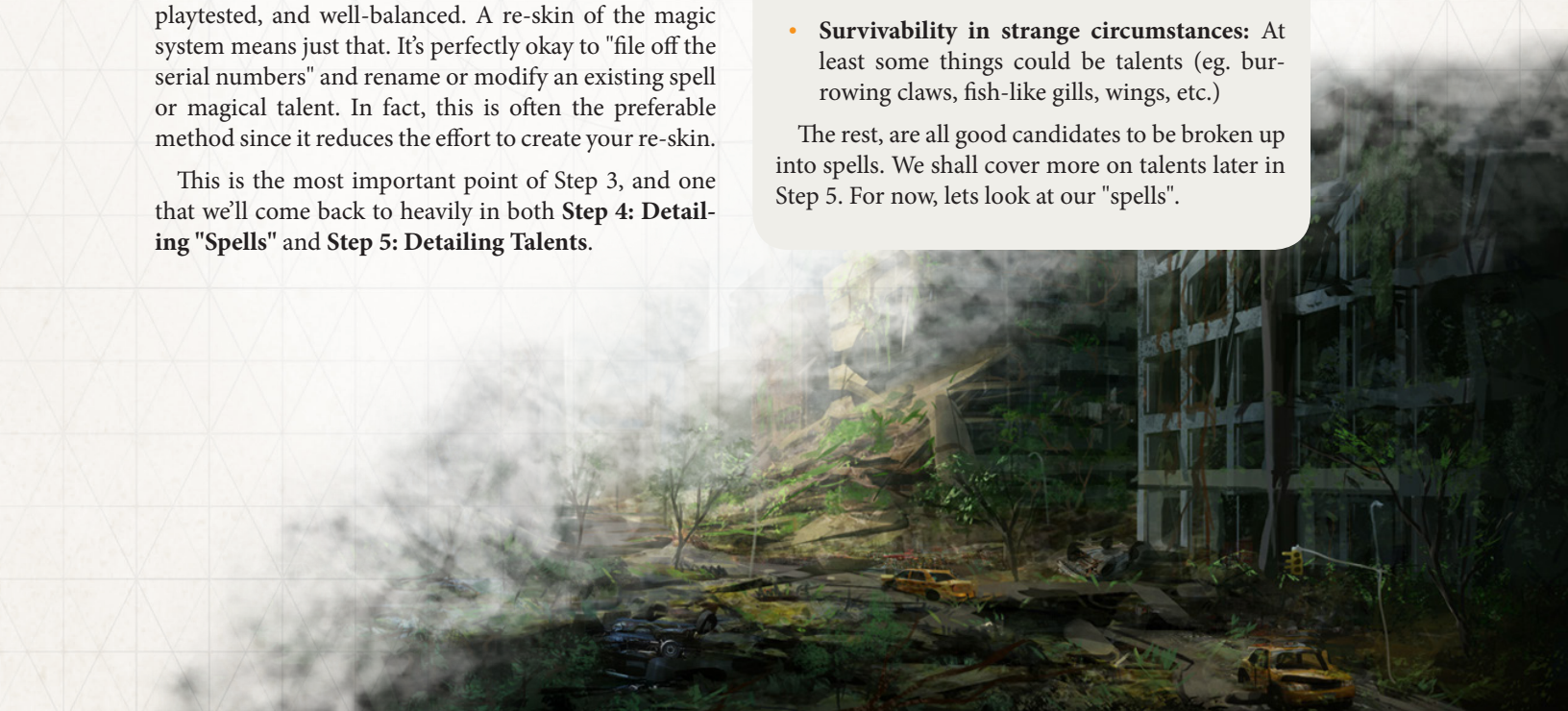
- **Attacking:** Causing damage without using a weapon such as psychic powers or something physical but still weird like acidic vomit, porcupine-like spikes, blasts of radiation, etc.
- **Telekinesis:** Moving things with your mind.
- **Improved Durability and/or Defense:** Adding defence to a character or increase soak.
- **Improved Physical and/or Mental Abilities:** Super-strength and/or super-intelligence.
- **Super-fast Healing:** Regrowing limbs and recovering quickly from wounds sustained.
- **Survivability in Strange Circumstances:** Breathing toxic atmosphere normally, radiation immunity, amphibious breathing, etc.

1. DETERMINE FROM YOUR CONCEPT HOW YOUR EFFECTS BREAK OUT INTO BOTH TALENTS AND "SPELLS".

Several of these immediately scream "talent" instead of spell. These include:

- **Super-Fast Healing:** Perfect for a multi-tiered Talent set.
- **Survivability in strange circumstances:** At least some things could be talents (eg. burrowing claws, fish-like gills, wings, etc.)

The rest, are all good candidates to be broken up into spells. We shall cover more on talents later in Step 5. For now, let's look at our "spells".



2. AT A HIGH LEVEL, CATEGORIZE YOUR SPELL-WORTHY EFFECTS INTO SPECIFIC "SPELL" NAMES.

Based on what's left in our desired effects from Step 1, we've decided upon six "spell" types, and named them appropriately:

BLOCK

Skills: *Psionics, Metabolics*

This will be similar to Barrier, and is about improved durability and/or defense.

ENHANCE

Skills: *Metabolics*

Similar to Augment, this is about improved physical and/or mental abilities.

STRIKE

Skills: *Psionics, Aberrantics*

This covers our attack actions in all its varying forms.

SURVIVE

Skills: *Aberrantics, Metabolics*

This is an entirely new "spell" and unique to our post-apocalyptic setting. These represent Mutations that increase a character's survivability in unusual circumstances. "On-the-fly Adaptations" is likely the best description.

TELEKINESIS

Skills: *Psionics*

Let's borrow a page from Episode 8, where we already created a Telekinesis spell! It's totally fitting for mutation powers.

WEIRD

Skills: *Aberrantics*

So, mutations often provide a host of small, but beneficial mutations in weird and strange circumstances. Honestly, it's like a "Utility" spell.

Our aim for this re-skin was to make each "spell" balanced and within theme. We ended up with the following balancing factors:

- The six powers operate using one or two of the skills
- Each skill has a unique power that only it can perform.
- Each skill can access only three of the "spells".

3. COME UP WITH A BETTER NAME THAN "SPELLS."

We likely don't need to get too creative here, so we've decided on "Powers" since we've referred to them as such of the course of our decision making process.

We recommend playtesting these Talents and Re-skinning process before using them in your game.

You can leave feedback about this document via e-mail at forgegenesys@d20radio.com or you can visit us on any of our social media platforms by searching @forgegenesys.

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