


PYRAMID[®]



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NATURAL MAGIC

THE MAGIC DESERT by Matt Riggsby

MAGIC OF THE SHADED WOODLANDS
by Paul Stefko

ARS METALLICA
by William H. Stoddard

GREEN POWER
by Michele Armellini

DARK OF THE WOODS
by David L. Pulver

DESIGNER'S NOTES:
WILDERNESS ADVENTURES
by Sean Punch

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The “cycle of life” can be magic, viewed from a certain way . . . and so can magic be viewed as part of the cycle of life! This month’s *Pyramid* ponders the intersection of the natural and magical worlds.

The dunes of the *Magic Desert* sparkle with more than sunlight. Join your guide Matt Riggsby – author of *GURPS Locations: Hellsgate* – as he reveals the secrets of the supernatural sands, including flora, fauna, weather, landscape features, and *GURPS* stats for a half-dozen threats your fantastic heroes might encounter.

The mysteries of the *Magic of the Shaded Woodlands* are finally revealed to outsiders! Learn a new magical style, new magic items, and three new spells for the dark elves of *GURPS Banestorm* (and applicable to any sinister forest denizens). Become acquainted with one of the style’s practitioners – with full *GURPS* stats – and get adventure hooks to add the Defenders to your domains.

Gain the grace of copper, the swiftness of mercury, or the might of tin by enhancing the natural abilities and affinities of metals from master magician William H. Stoddard, author of *GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers*. Discover the key skill variation plus 40 magical *GURPS* effects that pursuers of *Ars Metallica* can create from the seven “planetary” metals.

The new regime and the old order collide in the *Dark of the Woods*, this month’s Eidetic Memory from *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* author David L. Pulver. History, current events, and key people are described in this systemless adventure outline featuring a wealthy merchant’s daughter and a nature-worshipping cult.

Michele Armellini – author of *GURPS Locations: St. George’s Cathedral* – uses the *GURPS Powers* framework to present 14 new forest-related abilities that draw on *Green Power*. It also provides the forest guardian lens, suitable for those who watch the wilds.

The wilderness is always better with a guide! Sean Punch – author of the mega-popular *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures* – points out the perils and potential of outdoor adventuring in *Designer’s Notes: Wilderness Adventures*. You’ll also get new elemental druid, high druid, and life-force wizard lenses for *Dungeon Fantasy*, plus tips on variant Talents, determining nature’s strength, and distinguishing each new character type.

This month’s Random Thought Table looks philosophically at how to ramp up the power of natural magic, while Odds and Ends shows how not to go *too* far. Gird your loins and grab your camping gear; when you’re exploring the power and possibilities of natural magic, it’s likely to be *in tents!*

Article Colors

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

- Pale Blue:* In This Issue
- Brown:* In Every Issue (humor, editorial, etc.)
- Green:* Columnist
- Dark Blue:* *GURPS* Features
- Purple:* Systemless Features

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FROM THE EDITOR

NATURE SAYS, “WE HAVE YOU SURROUNDED!”

If you notice nature, it's generally for one of two reasons:

- It's amazingly good. (“Such a beautiful sunset! What lovely weather we're having today!”)
- It's amazingly bad. (“So many insects/floods/earthquakes! We're gonna die!”)

Obviously, when it comes to *Pyramid*-related matters, we strive for the “amazingly good” classification. We plan to spend a boatload of money for our forthcoming prime-time advertisement campaign with the theme of “*Pyramid*: It's far better than being attacked by fire ants.”

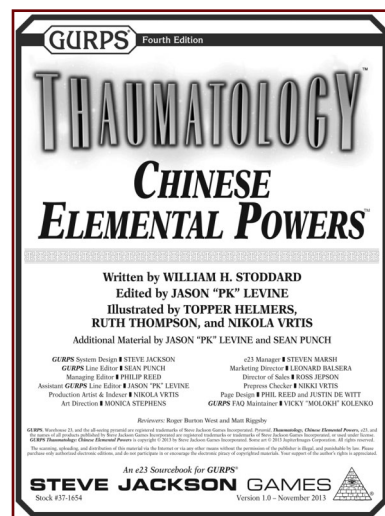
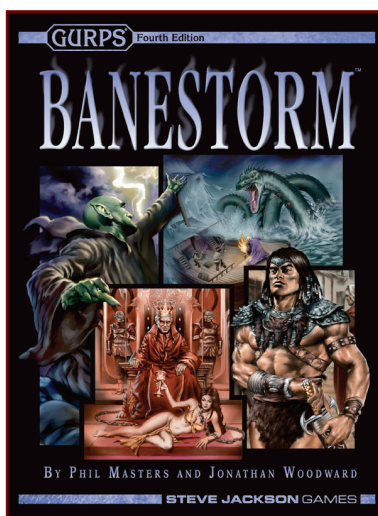
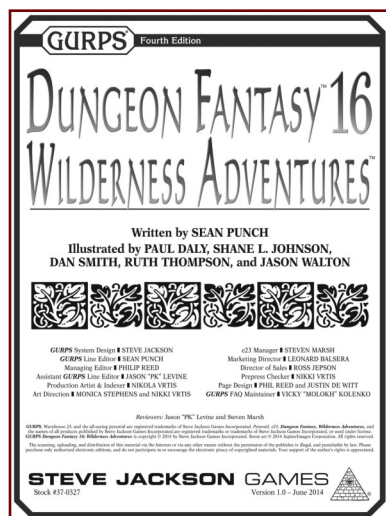
More to the point, this issue of *Pyramid* – like so many – strives to show you something different about its topic. In this case, while we're checking out “natural magic,” we've pushed our preconceived notions of what is natural. (Our lead article on pp. 4-8 is about a desert; take *that*, forest mages!) The natural world is all around us, and looking at it from alternate viewpoints leads to interesting possibilities. Everything from

sudden death (pp. 35-36) to the elemental properties within metal (pp. 12-16) can be considered aspects of nature. If you prefer your druids focused on plants and doe-eyed animals, however, there's no loss; these cool abilities can be easily handed to someone else to help define *their* niche.

Topping off the fun, this month features Designer's Notes from Sean Punch for the just-released *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures*. We love to tie in *Pyramid* articles to recently released items; it's a challenge, because schedules can always change, and we don't want to have support for supplements that haven't been released yet. However, we think it's worth it (especially when the results are as cool as Sean's).

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Was this issue one with the natural world and filled your soul with blissful harmony? Or was something herein an unnatural abomination that must be hunted down with pitchforks and torches? Let us know by sending us a virtual message in a bottle to pyramid@sjgames.com, or commune with nature in a larger setting by joining our simulated Stonehenge at forums.sjgames.com.



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Other Plants: Other magical plants in the desert with less immediate or useful effects include bone trees (structures of slowly growing living bone that can be cracked open for their marrow or tapped for blood); crystal scrub (a prickly shrub whose long thorns are an opalescent mineral sometimes used as blowgun darts); and singing reeds (which produce slowly shifting musical chords).

FAUNA

Many animals of the magic desert have adapted to their environment by acquiring magical abilities. For example, a number of animals turn to stone during the day, which preserves water and works as a defense against predators, and back to flesh at night. Certain insects are believed to cast paralysis spells on their prey, although they are unable to affect anything bigger than a mouse. Here are some of the larger and more dangerous or valuable animals of the desert.

Deadening Monitor

The deadening monitor is a large, predatory lizard, resembling an oversized, muscular iguana with a pebbly brownish hide allowing it to hide easily in the sand. They usually hide in the dunes, partly covered with sand, and ambush their intended prey. Though a lethal enough animal because of its physical attacks, it is particularly dangerous because it is a walking no-mana zone.

Monitors aren't particularly social creatures, but they tolerate one another's presence at watering holes and along migration routes, so they're often found in small groups.

ST: 13	HP: 14	Speed: 6.25
DX: 12	Will: 12	Move: 6
IQ: 2	Per: 12	Weight: 170 lbs.
HT: 13	FP: 13	SM: +0
Dodge: 9	Parry: N/A	DR: 2

Bite (13): 1d-1 cutting. Reach C.

Traits: Cold-Blooded (65°); Mana Damper 3 (Area Effect, 3 yards); Wild Animal.

Skills: Camouflage-13; Stealth-13.

Dry Toad

Unassuming and, indeed, nearly invisible against the sandy soil, dry toads are one of the more irksome hazards of the desert. They are small and difficult to find, but disproportionately dangerous if they attack with their unnaturally long tongues.

Though not particularly social animals, they do tend to cluster around seasonal sources of water, such as creek beds and depressions that become ponds after the very rare rains. Thus, where there's one dry toad, there are probably more.

ST: 4	HP: 4	Speed: 6.00
DX: 11	Will: 10	Move: 6
IQ: 2	Per: 10	Weight: 8 lbs.
HT: 11	FP: 11	SM: -3
Dodge: 9	Parry: N/A	DR: 1

Tongue (16): 1d-6 crushing + follow-up Thirst (see below). Reach C-2.

Traits: Cold-Blooded (65°); Wild Animal.

Skills: Camouflage-15; Jumping-15.

Notes: Dry toads survive in the dry desert by absorbing moisture out of just about everything. Notably, their flickering tongue, if it strikes a target's skin, acts as the Thirst spell (*Magic*, p. 38) cast with a skill of 16 at no FP cost to the toad; toads aim for chinks in armor if at all possible and have a long enough reach that they can touch unarmored faces without problems.

Flickering Jackals

These pack-hunting predators' movement is assisted by a limited form of teleportation. They are usually found in packs who hunt in a coordinated fashion. They swarm weaker targets, striking and retreating if necessary, to wear them down.

ST: 10	HP: 10	Speed: 6.00
DX: 12	Will: 11	Move: 9
IQ: 4	Per: 14	Weight: 120 lbs.
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: -1
Dodge: 12	Parry: N/A	DR: 1

Bite (14): 1d-2 cutting. Reach C.

Claw (14): 1d-2 cutting. Reach C.

Traits: Discriminatory Smell; Jackal Teleportation (see below); Night Vision 2; Quadruped; Temperature Tolerance 1; Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-14; Tactics-10; Tracking-12.

Notes: As they walk or run, flickering jackals also teleport very short distances, rarely more than a yard or two at a time. They appear to flicker in and out of existence for fractions of a second as they go. As a practical matter, this makes them difficult to hit because it's impossible to know whether they'll be there when the blow lands. In addition to their high Dodge score, they may pass through occupied hexes without penalty because they can simply "blink" past obstacles.

Shifting Sands

From time to time, changing flows of magical energy cause the landscape itself to move, sometimes even expanding or reducing the desert's reach. Rocky outcrops, hills, and stony watering holes can move. Navigation skill is usually sufficient to find a way from one place to another, but Tracking skill may also need to be employed to locate landmarks that have moved.

Fossil Ceratopsians

The magic desert has a *very* long history of supporting life. Some of those organisms have died and come back, spontaneously reanimated by magic. The fossil ceratopsian, the animate stony skeleton of a horned, shield-headed dinosaur, is typical; see *Fossil Monsters* (p. 6) for more ideas.

Fossil ceratopsians are nominally herbivores and spend their days chewing on plants, not realizing that they no longer need to eat. Though isolated individuals can be found, they typically travel in small packs of fewer than a dozen. They're usually safe if left alone, but exceptionally dangerous when provoked.

THE SEVEN PLANETARY METALS

For details on how to impart magical abilities on metals, see p. 12. Although most items are shaped as rings or comparable devices, a few abilities require a form (such as a disk or liquid) that more closely relates to their benefits.

For most talismans, the wearer simply needs to desire the effect to activate. However, some abilities specify rolls that must be made to tap into the power. No energy is spent to activate the charm.

Some of the effects afflict another person with a disadvantage. Treat such afflictions as Maledictions (p. B106), resisted by HT or Will, as specified. The range modifier is -1 per yard of range, unless otherwise stated.

SILVER (ARGENTUM)

Silver, one of the two precious metals, is associated with the moon, one of the two great lights of heaven.

Fertility

Because of the influence of the moon over the cycles of women's bodies, silver can ensure fertility in a woman who desires it. Any woman who is naturally fertile can will the ring to take effect, and on a successful roll vs. HT, she will conceive a child in any sexual act performed under its influence. Even an infertile woman – so long as she is anatomically whole – can conceive on a roll vs. HT-5, or a critical success. (It's also possible to make a ring to prevent fertility, but many societies regard this as a curse.)

Duration: 24 hours.

Cost to make: \$1,500; 100 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-5.

Illumination

As the most reflective of metals, silver is associated with light. A ring of silver can surround the wearer with cool light filling a two-yard radius, allowing a Vision modifier of -4 (brighter than candlelight, but dimmer than torchlight). The wearer cannot see anything outside this radius. Outside observers seeing such light against a dark background are at +10 to Vision rolls, but at -7 to see anything outside its radius. However, the light is gentle enough not to blind those who gaze upon it.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$250; 5 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic).

Lunacy

Grants the wearer the ability to afflict another character with the condition of Lunacy, with effects varying with the phase of the moon (see p. B143). This requires a Quick Contest of Will vs. the target's HT.

Duration: 24 hours.

Cost to make: \$200; 5 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Tides

The moon rules the tides, making the ocean higher or lower. This ring has a similar effect locally, within a radius of 30 yards. To activate it, roll vs. Will at a penalty equal to the desired change in water level in feet. A successful roll can either raise or lower the water level. Despite its name, this effect can work on any body of water with a radius of at least 30 yards and a depth of at least the desired change in water level.

Duration: 1d×10 minutes.

Cost to make: \$200; 25 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.

Vision

This effect must be created on a smooth, flat, highly polished disk of silver. Looking in this surface can reveal distant places or events, as if the observer were physically present (that is, it can't show things that are buried or immured, and visibility is limited by the light level at the desired place and time). Focusing on the desired scene requires a Will roll. Only the person holding the disk can direct its focus, but everyone present can see what it shows, with a Per roll to see clearly. How easily the scene can be interpreted depends on the size of the disk: IQ-3 for a disk 4" in diameter, IQ for a disk 1' in diameter, and IQ+2 for a disk 2' in diameter.

Duration: 1d minutes.

Cost to make: 4" diameter, \$200; 20 weeks. 1' diameter, \$2,000; 600 weeks. 2' diameter, \$8,000; 120 weeks. Defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-4.

MERCURY (MERCURIUM)

Mercury is associated with the planet of the same name. In both Western and Chinese alchemy, it is regarded as a highly potent alchemical catalyst.

Obviously, it's difficult to make jewelry out of a liquid! Many alchemists work on the liquid state, keeping it in flasks until it's needed; this form is comparable to an elixir in that it can only be used once (usually externally). However, it can also be subjected to alchemical refinement (see *Enhancing Metals*, p. 12), that improves its surface tension to a point where it maintains its cohesion and its shape; after three levels of refinement, it can be made into rings or other "solid" objects.

Escape

The wearer gains from one to five levels of Slippery (p. B85).

Duration: 3d×4 minutes.

Cost to make: \$100×(level of effect squared); 10 weeks; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-4.

Greed

The wearer can afflict another character with the condition of Greed (p. B137). This requires a Quick Contest of Will.

Duration: 1d hours.

Cost to make: \$200; 50 days; defaults to Alchemy (Metallic)-2.



High Druid

The *high druid* receives power from the apex gods of Nature. All druids are priests, but the high druid comes closest to being a ceremonial, temple-dwelling cleric – though his ceremonies are outdoors and his temple is a grove or a henge. He focuses less on the practical, more on ritual and theology. He differs from the classic druid in that his spells and abilities rely on demonstrating respect for the Great Powers (Thunder God, Volcano Goddess, Sea God, et al.) rather than on negotiations with spirits on close-to-equal terms, while he diverges from the classic cleric in that he serves no single patron deity and works magic that concerns Nature rather than healing and protection. In game terms:

1. The advantage behind his supernatural gifts is Power Investiture (High Druidic) (p. 29). This *completely replaces* Power Investiture (Druidic).

2. His education includes an increased knowledge of formal religious matters at the expense of getting his hands dirty.

3. His lists of spells and abilities are also slightly altered to reflect this bias.

4. His spells and abilities are influenced by sanctity level *instead of* Nature's strength. Generally, he's affected as a cleric – not as a druid – by the holiness of the surroundings. The purity of Nature only matters where it reflects sanctity; e.g., if Elder Things deny an area to the gods, it will wither *and* lose sanctity, which will in turn affect the high druid.

High Druid Lens

High Druid (+0 points): Replace Green Thumb 1 [5] with Clerical Investment (High Druidic) [5], which grants all the upsides noted for standard Clerical Investment in *Dungeons* (cheap holy water, access to a “temple,” etc.).

- Change all instances of Power Investiture (Druidic) to Power Investiture (High Druidic), at identical cost.
- Change available Green Thumb levels from 2-4 to 1-4 in advantage options.
- Add Exorcism (H) Will [4]-14 to primary skills.
- Reduce Herb Lore (VH) IQ [4]-14† to IQ-1 [4]-13 and Naturalist (H) IQ [2]-14† to IQ-1 [2]-13, to reflect missing Green Thumb.
- Replace all secondary skills with Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-13, Religious Ritual (Druidic) (H) IQ-2 [1]-12, Theology (Druidic) (H) IQ-2 [1]-12, and any *four* of the following choices: Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-14; Animal Handling (any), Disguise (Animals), Hidden Lore (Elementals, Faeries, or Nature Spirits), or Weather Sense, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Mimicry (Animal Sounds or Bird Calls), Pharmacy (Herbal), or Veterinary, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; or Survival (any) (A) Per-1 [1]-13.
- Add all unselected secondary skills to background skill options.
- Pick spells and abilities from the lists below.

Nature's Strength Revisited

Per p. 19 of *Adventurers*, druidic spells and abilities suffer penalties outside of unspoiled natural settings. Almost by definition, most adventures in the typical *Dungeon Fantasy* campaign take place in a dungeon, meaning that druids are penalized much of the time – at least, more often than wizards and clerics face mana and sanctity troubles. *Elemental Druid* (pp. 29-30) and *High Druid* (above) offer ways to resolve this asymmetry. However, the GM may want to make the *classic* druid competitive.

In an outdoor campaign, this is a trivial matter of declaring that the modifier is 0 in the wilderness and then setting every adventure there. However, in a game that bounces between town, wilds, and dungeon, this won't do – druids will still *average* a penalty. *Wilderness Adventures* suggests a simple solution: grant druids occasional bonuses, too. The goal is to make the mean modifier 0. One possible scheme:

*Indoors (building, dungeon, etc.)**: 0 if construction consists entirely of simple natural materials (mud, thatch, etc.); otherwise, a penalty equal in size to its TL. Ancient sites, like most “forgotten” dungeons, give -1 or -2 (flip a coin if unsure); quasi-medieval castles and dungeons give -3; and Elder Thing labyrinths and fancy dwarven fortresses give -4.

*Settlement**: 0 for a hamlet, -1 for a village, -2 for a town, -3 for a city, and -4 for a huge metropolis.

*Works (road, mill, mine, etc.)**: A penalty equal in size to its TL. That's -1 or -2 for ancient civilizations, -3 for early medieval ones, and -4 for late medieval ones (usual in *Dungeon Fantasy*). Add another -1 for incidental supernatural pollution if spells or alchemy are involved but not specifically to blight the land.

*Supernatural Blight**: Penalty depends on the strength of the power backing the despoilment: -10 for a clerical/wizardly curse in very high sanctity/mana, -6 for high sanctity/mana, -3 for normal sanctity/mana, or -1 for low sanctity/mana.

Distance†: If *none* of the above apply, the modifier is 0. Leaving the structure, town limits, road, etc. usually suffices. If the nearest despoilment severe enough to give -1 or worse isn't just a few steps away but truly distant, though, there's a bonus: +1 if 30 miles away, +2 for 100 miles, +3 for 300 miles, or +4 for 1,000+ miles.

Nature Worship†: A grove or a henge long used for worship by druids, elves, faerie, or spirits grants a bonus: +1 if used for 20 years or more, +2 for 50 years, +3 for 100 years, +4 for 500 years, or +5 for 1,000+ years.

Sanctity†: +3 in an area of high sanctity to high druids; +5 if very high sanctity for such druids.

Aspected Mana†: +3 if the region has high mana for Animal or Plant spells; +5 if very high mana. Where expressed as a modifier, use that value instead. This is regardless of the spell or ability used – all of the classic druid's powers flow from life.

* Penalties aren't cumulative! If multiple situations apply, use the *worst*. A druid can take an hour and roll vs. Religious Ritual (Druidic) to “purify” a camp-sized area enough to remove -1. One attempt only.

† Bonuses aren't cumulative! If multiple situations apply, use the *best*. Bonuses *can* offset penalties, where both would logically apply.

Effects of bonuses mirror those of penalties: they add to rolls for druidic spells and abilities, and where an ability requires no roll, each +1 gives +10% to effect.

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