DESIGN NOTES: SPELL GUIDELINES

I always knew that revising the spell guidelines would be an important part of the new edition. They are, after all, the heart of Ars Magica. The spell guidelines define what all the numbers in the magic system *mean*, so mistakes and problems here can have very wide-ranging consequences. Further, the existence, and importance, of spontaneous magic means that they have to be quick and easy to use, while still being comprehensive enough to cover the vast range of effects possible with Hermetic Magic.

There were a number of known problems with the ArM4 guidelines. The most glaring issue was that invisibility was far too easy. This was an easy problem to fix. Other problems were not so easy to handle. One was the "level shaving" problem, for example. Under ArM4 it was often possible to reduce the Range, Duration, or even Target of a spell, and then get a very powerful spell at very low level. Another problem was the wide range of base Range, Duration,

and Target for different Art combinations. Further, some Arts, such as Auram, just didn't fit the old system very well, and whole classes of spells, most notably wards and magical senses, seemed to be constant exceptions. Finally, the playtesters, by going on about it repeatedly, convinced me that it should be harder to affect larger targets, in most cases.

At one point during the revision process I recruited a small group of playtesters and threw completely different ideas for revising the spell system at them at a rate of one every other day. After a couple of weeks, I settled on one of the less radical proposals, to minimize the change for experienced players. After a quick check with a playtester outside the initial group, to make sure it was comprehensible, this revision was included in the last few rounds of the playtest.

All Technique and Form combinations now have the same base Range, Duration, and Target, and all are

based on the lowest available level in each category. Thus, creating a spell from scratch only involves counting up, now. Magical sense spells have their own target categories, based on the kind of sense that they grant, and wards have been substantially clarified.

There are now five levels of each of Range, Duration, and Target, with additional level modifications if the target is larger than normal for the Form in question. This has meant rewriting spells that used categories that no longer exist, and a few spells have been deleted because they no longer made sense, given the new guidelines. On the other hand, a few new spells have been added, to make use of particular features of the new guidelines. Quite a lot of spells have changed level, sometimes because they were too easy or difficult before, and sometimes because they had simply been added up wrong for ArM4. Some spells have even changed Arts, as ArM5 has clarified exactly what you can do with the various Arts, and as a result some spells were found to be in the wrong place. Most of the ArM5 spells will still look very familiar to old hands, though.

One thing that won't look familiar, but which I think will be very useful, is the design breakdown. Every spell lists, at the end of the description, the base level for the spell, and the magnitude adjustments applied for Range, Duration, Target, size, and any other reason, to reach the final level. These were originally included to make it easier for playtesters to check my arithmetic, and make sure that all the spells were at the right level. However, they were so popular that they are now part of the line style, and all future spells and enchanted items will include them. You should get to see the first examples in characters from Semita Errabunda, in the near future.

Overall, then, the new spell guidelines are more consistent, easier to use, and more clearly presented than previous versions. Which should make games of Ars Magica flow even more smoothly than they did in the past.

That's it for the Ars Magica 5th Edition design notes, but I hope you've enjoyed them and gotten a taste for what the new edition of the game has to offer!

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