

Example: The Cabal

The Cabal (see p. B543 and *GURPS Infinite Worlds*) likes to claim a monopoly on *all* magic, but it has its own distinct style, based on astrological influences. It applies these broadly – Cabalists, or at least Cabalist factions, have access to almost every spell in *GURPS Magic*, and certainly know about every college. The Cabal sometimes incorporates non-astrological methodologies into its theories, but only with caution and difficulty.



Trained Cabalists are supreme experts at exploiting complex modifiers. They can usually find more than enough bonuses to compensate for a -5 penalty, and thus can work very efficiently in low mana, even *benefiting* from the reduced risk of disaster should they make serious mistakes. Thus, Cabalists mostly *prefer* to operate on low mana timelines. They regard worlds with *no* mana as beneath their interest, of course.

Normal and higher mana worlds aren't only uncommon, but actually deprive Cabalists of their biggest single advantage. Worlds like this often have numerous magic-workers. If the Cabal operates in such places at all, they find themselves just one faction among many. Their special knowledge is rarely an *overwhelming* edge, and they're more likely to be detected. While few Cabalists would admit it, they often feel rather uncomfortable in such settings, only going there to acquire resources or conduct "high energy" research.

The Cabal teaches decanic secrets to all members who study spell-based magic. Students are also inculcated with the importance of secrecy, and told bloodcurdling stories about the consequences of betrayal. While the Cabal can tolerate the occasional nonmember with some kind of magical lore, any outsider who seems to have even a partial grasp of these special methods is usually offered a choice between membership and death. Certain Cabalists go straight to the second option. The empty decans (p. 85) are an *interesting* mystery to Cabalists, and

many dream of identifying whole new forms of spellcraft, which would grant both renown (within the Cabal – the only sort that's supposed to count) and power.

The Cabal's grasp of spells certainly includes enchantments. However, with penalties for inappropriate materials *tripled*, problems with using Powerstones to full effect, and the ever-present threat of jealous rivals stealing or breaking their best toys, most Cabalists prefer to rely on personal abilities. On the other hand, they'll go a long way (and commit a lot of crimes) to get hold of ancient items of power.

Other Magics and the Cabal

Cabalists also exploit the laws of magic (see *Magical Laws*, pp. 86-87), materials unrelated to astrological correspondences (see *Materials*, p. 87), and magical languages (p. 87-88). They're aware of other modifier systems, too, but mostly regard them as *inelegant*. The Cabal finds that decanic astrology gives the most reliable results.

The Cabal knows all about *Assisting Spirits* (pp. 90-94). In their experience, though, the only spirits that will aid much are demonic; thus, using this shortcut invariably implies falling to supernatural evil. The Cabal has few rules against *any* magical practice – daring and power are the organization's watchwords – but diabolism is *lazy*, and leads to trouble for everyone. Cabalists call demon-aided magic "casting black," and grow very suspicious of colleagues whose powers seem to develop too quickly.

The Cabal is acquainted with *Words of Power* (pp. 178-179), and a few Cabalists even know a Word or two. This is wild, uncontrolled magic, though, and Cabal doctrine says that the group's purpose is to *control* magic for advantage. Some Cabalists also study alchemy; see *The Cabal and Alchemy* (p. 101).

A small number of Cabalists use other styles, such as mental disciplines that lie closer to psionics. The rules permit this, and researchers work to integrate all magic into Cabalist theory, but these individuals are often seen as freaks or eccentrics, or suspected of allying with forces beyond the Cabal's authority. And some Cabalists are actually supernatural beings – vampires, elves, werewolves, etc. – with innate powers.

The Mage's Edge

In games such as those featuring the Cabal, a wide range of bonuses exist to aid wizards, but the correct *use* of these modifiers is a well-guarded secret of one faction. Initiates might have to purchase advantages such as Illuminated, Rank, Security Clearance, or Unusual Background, or accept a Duty, and will certainly have secrets to defend – but they can cast spells *much* more reliably than anyone else. The PCs can be conspiracy members . . . or desperate rivals seeking to learn the inner secrets of the zodiac, True Names, the arcane calendar, etc.