

Shamanism for Fun and Prophets

By Bruce Mason, Gary Goldman and Pete Nash

"My songs are paths" said a shaman, "Some take me a short way — some take me a long way. I make them straight and I walk down them. I look about me as I go — not a thing escapes my notice. I call but I stay on the path."

— (Townsend, Graham. Song Paths, The Ways and Means of Yaminahua Shamanic Knowledge, L'Homme, 1993: 33:p454)

I'll tell you what shamanism's all about. It's the quickest way to get your brains scrambled short of falling off a cliff.

— Praghos the Cursed.

RuneQuest II introduces a new, free-form system of Spirit Magic mixing a blend of academic realism and fantasy. The rules provide a toolkit of ideas that can be used to create many different kind of **animistic** traditions but the openness of the system can make it hard to know where to start or how to fit spirit magic into your own campaign. This article provides answers to questions that have been asked and tools to help bring spirit worship to life in any campaign. This is the first of two articles: the second will expand upon the range of spirits and spirit encounters available to spirit worshippers.

Animism is the broadest term for a worldview in which the world is infused by spirits, and shamanism is just one type of animism. *RuneQuest II* focuses on shamanism but the rules can accommodate most forms of animism. For example, Shinto or 'folk Hinduism' can be seen as animistic practices as can ancestor worship among the Romans and ancient Greeks. And, as can be seen in any bookshop, many new age beliefs are fundamentally animistic. *RuneQuest II* spirit magic is as applicable to the modern world as it is to the ancient.

Spirit Cults & Traditions

Although most spirit worshippers will be a member of a cult, the organisation is unlikely to be anywhere near as formal as a divine cult or sorcery school. Spirit cults are

more likely to be loose affiliations or may simply consist of members of single family or clan or **tradition** of veneration of spirits. Such traditions share one simple insight: the world is alive. Each rock, plant, animal and each cloud, pool and storm has its own spirit. Such spirits themselves, especially the spirits of ancestors, may also be members of a tradition or be friendly towards a particular tradition. Other spirits may simply have no interest in the mundane world. Some may be actively hostile to members of a particular tradition.

Because there are so many ways to approach spirit worship, cults tend to be diverse but as a rule of thumb each spirit cult tends to have access to five or six types of spirit with whom it is friendly and when added up, these spirits will usually offer 7-12 different benefits. Smaller spirit cults have access to fewer friendly spirits.

Nearly all cults will have access to ancestors and guardian spirits plus a number of nature spirits depending on the cult's background. Cults with particular elemental affiliations will have access to elemental spirits. Curse and bane spirits are not usually part of a tradition and any spirit magician attempting to bind them into service is taking a serious risk.

Defining Spirits

The denizens of the spirit plane are varied and diverse. Spirit magic allows practitioners to approach spirits in two ways: as beings with which they can communicate and as entities which can be bound to service. A spirit magician's most frequent interaction with spirits will be through the use of the Spirit Walking skill to communicate with them. In this respect spirits are non player characters who can be interacted with during game sessions. Spirit Binding is the skill of persuading or forcing a spirit into service or protecting oneself from harmful spirits. *RuneQuest II* provides a basic breakdown of spirit types and how to quantify what benefits a bound spirit might provide. The two key elements

anyone wishing to bind a spirit needs to know about it are its **Intensity** and its **attitude** towards the spirit mage.

Intensity

Intensity is an **attribute** of spirits. When it comes to Spirit Magic, the Intensity of a spirit measures the benefit it can give to the spirit's controller as well as how difficult it is to command. The greater a spirit's POW, the greater its Intensity. A spirit's Intensity can be calculated from the following table.

Spirit Intensity Table

Intensity	POW	POW Range	Typical POW
1	1D6+6	7-12	10
2	1D6+12	13-18	16
3	1D6+18	19-24	22
+1	+6	+6	+6

You do not always need to know a spirit's Intensity to know the scale of its effects but the attribute is always there and is also used to measure how much it 'costs' to bind a spirit.

Occasionally spirits can be found which for mythical or historical reasons break the rules. The system here is simply a default covering most normal cases. Exceptions will always occur.

Attitude

Each spirit has an attitude towards magicians who approach it. Some will be friendly, others neutral and some hostile. Spirits belonging to the magician's *tradition* will most likely be friendly. Neutral spirits consist of both those belonging to traditions which are not hostile to the shaman as well as those not considered part of any tradition. Hostile spirits are those belonging to enemy traditions or are inherently antagonistic due to mythic, runic or elemental oppositions. For example, Bane spirits are hostile to almost all non-Chaotic traditions while a tradition

with wolf spirits will find that most prey animal spirits are distinctly hostile to it. The attitude of a spirit towards a spirit magician affects how it will react to being approached, to being bound and what it might do if it ever escapes a binding.

Binding Spirits

The *RuneQuest II* rules leave it up to the players and Games Master in any campaign to determine the precise procedures for gaining spirits with the assumption each campaign will generate its own guidelines. There are, however, some common elements that are likely to underlie most Spirit Magic traditions.

Worshippers of a spirit cult gain spirits through undertaking a ritual in collaboration with a shaman to bind a spirit into a *fetish*. The shaman searches the spirit plane for a suitable spirit for the supplicant, defeats it in spirit combat and then binds it to a fetish that has been prepared by both shaman and supplicant. While the shaman journeys, the supplicant fasts and mediates, purifying himself in preparation for the gift of the spirit. The bound spirit counts against the owner's limit, not the shaman's. Although there is nothing stopping a non-shaman undertaking the search and binding a spirit by himself, the task is dangerous and would be frowned on by other members of the community.

Shamans will usually only provide spirits to members of the same tradition or in recompense for great favours and they will only bind friendly spirits associated with their cult in this manner. The fetish costs the recipient one Improvement Roll per point of Intensity of the spirit. This cost represents the time and personal development needed for a spirit worshipper to make themselves worthy of the gift. The ritual usually takes a week and at the end of the week the player should roll the spirit's characteristics randomly based on the spirit's Intensity. It is possible the spirit gained may be too powerful for the adventurer to control.

Spirits with an Intensity of 5 or more are likely to have a POW of over 30 and a

spectral combat skill of 150% or more meaning that only the greatest of the High Shamans can defeat them in spirit combat unless several shamans join together in a Concert (See *Spellcom*). Such actions should be played out rather than relegated to Down Time.

Once bound to the mundane plane in a fetish a spirit can no longer regenerate Magic Points nor can it perceive the world around it so the spirit lies quiescent until either temporarily released or the fetish is broken. In previous editions of **RuneQuest**, magic items featured spirits being used as Magic Point batteries, spell storage repositories and spell casters. These items were generally an aspect of game balance and do not feature in spirit magic in *RuneQuest II*. Clearly though you can reintroduce them to your own games as you see fit.



Thorgeld's saga

Thorgeld The Bold has approached the clan shaman, Four Tooth, and respectfully requested his help to gain some wolf magic: in this case the "track by scent" trait. A simple trait like this merely requires an Intensity One spirit: a good job because Thorgeld's Spirit Binding is only 32%. Four Tooth agrees to help so Thorgeld's player marks off one Improvement Roll and gifts Four Tooth with a wolf hide that has been treated to be used as a drum skin. He decides the fetish will be a highly polished piece of wolf jaw Thorgeld keeps in a medicine bag hung around his neck. The Games Master has ruled there are several weeks of game time between sessions so Thorgeld has plenty of time to journey to a sacred precipice and undertake the purification and rituals needed under Four Tooth's guidance. The shaman binds the wolf spirit into the fetish and dedicates it to Thorgeld, thus the spirit counts against Thorgeld's limit and not the Shaman's. Thorgeld's player then rolls the spirit's characteristics. It turns out to have a POW of 8 with the INT and CHA of an average wolf.

An adventurer may 'upgrade' the spirit in a fetish to a more powerful spirit of the same type by paying the difference in Improvement Rolls. For example an adventurer with a fetish containing an Intensity 2 Nature spirit can upgrade it to an Intensity 3 Nature Spirit by paying 1 Improvement Roll. They can also replace the spirit with the same type of spirit of the same Intensity if they wish and they can persuade a shaman.

Remember shamans are not magic item factories. Each shaman is a combination of priest, doctor, teacher, lawyer, undertaker and spiritual border guard for their community. Most of their time is taken up with mundane affairs and they have very little time for the extensive work required for creating fetishes. Most community members may gain a fetish as an adulthood ritual and maybe at one other rite-de-passage. Shamans have more important things to do than provide magic items for wandering adventurers.

Using fetishes

A bound spirit must be *released* from its fetish in order to use its ability. To release the spirit the magician simply spends a single Combat Action: this does not

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cost any Magic Points and automatically succeeds without any skill test required. *Commanding* a released spirit is more difficult. The spirit magician must use a *free action*, spend one 1 Magic Point and succeed at a Spirit Binding skill test in order to make a successful *Spirit Command Test*. The Magic Point is spent regardless of whether or not the Spirit Binding skill roll is a success. A free action is an action that can be performed at the same time as a regular Combat Action. Generally, one free action can be performed per Combat Action. Therefore a spirit magician can spend 1 Combat Action to release the spirit and, as part of the same action, try to Command the spirit. This is how a spirit magician normally attempts to control their spirits because a spirit released from a fetish without being commanded can act as it sees fit until it is brought under control. If the spirit is a hostile one, such as a curse spirit, it may take the chance to immediately attack the owner of the fetish.

A critical success when trying to Command a spirit means the attempt costs no Magic Points. A failed attempt to Command the spirit means that the spirit magician must wait until their next Combat Action to try again. While a spirit is under the owner's control it will perform its orders to the best of its abilities but if the owner wishes it to perform a new action, he will have to make a new Spirit Command Test. There is always the possibility of losing control of a spirit and the more powerful a spirit is, the more dangerous it is likely to be if the owner loses control.

Commanding a spirit currently under its owner's control to return to its fetish automatically succeeds and does not cost any Magic Points; this is an effect of the binding ritual. If however the owner *does not have control of the spirit* he will have to make a successful Spirit Command Test to order the spirit back into its fetish. Given the potential risk of uncontrolled spirits it is no surprise shamans will only provide their followers with friendly, easy to control spirits.

A fetish created by a spirit magician can only be used with the Spirit Binding skill. Should someone come into possession of a fetish but not have the Spirit Binding skill then they will not be able to use the fetish. However he could take the risk of breaking the fetish and hoping that the spirit will be grateful. As an optional rule it is possible to release a spirit from a fetish by spending 1 Magic Point. This does not naturally give any control over the spirit but fans of Sinbad tales may see ways to utilise this rule creatively. The supplement *Spellcom* also presents some options for enchantments that hold spirits which can be used alongside these rules in your game.

A fetish holding a spirit will take on some of the spirit's essence over time. So a bear tooth holding a bear spirit may seem dozy in winter or take on bearish odour. Fetishes holding curse or sickness spirits may emit a miasma inducing minor symptoms in the holder, making such fetishes extremely unpleasant. On the other hand, a stone holding a Salamander Spirit will be warm to the touch, which may occasionally be useful.

Breaking a fetish immediately frees the spirit it contains and allows it to return to the spirit plane. A freed spirit may attempt to flee back to the spirit plane or, if hostile, possibly attempt to attack the owner who imprisoned it. Malicious shamans sometimes trap places with easily broken fetishes containing dangerous spirits. Disease masters in Glorantha have been known to throw rotting logs binding disease spirits into wells or lakes and let nature take its course.

The visual effects of using a fetish will vary depending on the setting. In a pseudo-historical setting the spirit's effects would be invisible to the naked eye. In fantasy setting the magician might take on certain visual cues or the shadow might change. In an epic fantasy campaign perhaps the snarling figure of a wolf might surround the magician, seeming to lash out at enemies. Your Fetish Will Vary.

Thorgeld's saga

Realising he risks losing the trail of the foreigner responsible for the death of his family, Thorgeld holds his fetish to the air and calls on the aid of the spirit. As part of the Combat Action he spends 1 Magic Point and attempts to use his Spirit Binding skill of 32%. The spirit is released but the skill roll fails. Thorgeld's player marks off 1 Magic Point and Thorgeld realises he has not managed to control the spirit. He has not used his Spirit Walking skill so he cannot see the spirit but at least it does not seem to be attacking him. Unsure what to do, he spends another Combat Action trying to control it, deducts another Magic Point and fails his Spirit Binding again. Realising this may not end well, Thorgeld's player states that he will 'take 10 times as long as normal' in order to get +60% to his skill (RuneQuest II Rulebook p31). Normally it takes 1 Free Action to make the roll but as an adventurer can only take one Free Action per Combat Action, it takes Thorgeld 10 Combat Actions worth of concentration. Closing his eyes, he contemplates the lessons Four Tooth taught him for the best part of 30 seconds and makes his roll successfully. When he opens his eyes he realises he can almost taste the scent of his quarry. The hunt is resumed! As he runs off he does not notice the nearby lake reflects the image of a wolf rather than his own body.

Shamans and spirits

The previous section looked at how to gain and use a fetish provided by a shaman. This section examines how a shaman can gain spirits by journeying to the spirit plane and binding spirits to service. Using Intensity as a measure of a spirit's power, the table below shows what the shaman's required minimum skill in spirit binding along with the cost in Improvement Rolls to bind a spirit.

Spirit Hunting Table

Intensity	Spirit Binding Skill minimum requirement	IRs
1	61%	1
2	81%	2
3	121%	3
4	141%	4

For friendly spirits, the minimum skill requirement is reduced by 20%. In addition, a shaman may pay 1 additional Improvement Roll for friendly or neutral spirits in order to reduce the minimum spirit binding skill requirement by another 20%. So, a shaman spending 4 Improvement Rolls and approaching a friendly spirit of Intensity 3 needs a minimum spirit binding skill of 81% rather than the usual 121%. These figures are based on shamans acquiring spirits during Down Time and represent a minimum of risk and maximum guarantee of success. It takes 1D6 days

of Down Time to find and bind a friendly spirit, 2D6 days to find a neutral spirit and 2D6+6 days of careful planning to safely find a hostile spirit that can be bound.

The Spirit Binding Skill requirement to find a spirit on the spirit plane and defeat it in spirit combat is not the same as the requirement needed to control a spirit already bound into a fetish. A spirit magician with a Spirit Binding skill of 40% is able to control a bound spirit of up to POW 12. However that same spirit will probably have a spectral combat skill of 60% (POW*5%) and would be likely to defeat the magician if he attacked it in spirit combat. It takes a higher skill to find and bind a spirit than it does to merely control one already bound in a fetish.

Of course players can have their shaman characters undertake quests to find spirits during play sessions. In this case there is no

Improvement Roll cost involved and they can tackle more dangerous spirits with help from allies. Such sessions are full of roleplaying opportunities.

The Shaman's Fetch

Not every Shamanic tradition features fetches and those that do vary in the nature of the fetch. In some traditions the fetch is the awakened "other half" of the shaman. In this case the fetch and shaman are two sides of the same soul with the fetch perceiving the Spirit Plane while the shaman exists on the mundane plane. In other traditions the fetch is a spirit (often an animal guide) who is drawn to the shaman to become their spiritual partner. In both cases the prospective shaman must undertake a successful **Vision Quest** in order to gain the fetch. As the *RuneQuest II* Rulebook notes (page 139) this is a dangerous ritual, and it may cripple or kill the shaman if he fails to complete it successfully.

The precise abilities of a fetch vary widely between traditions. The *RuneQuest II* Rulebook (pages 144-45) provides a list of the most common abilities but many more exist. In cases where the fetch is the shaman's other half the fetch often provides the shaman with the ability to shapechange (see *Vikings for RuneQuest II* as an example). If the fetch is an animal guide then the shaman may gain the ability to communicate with such animals, control them or gain traits of the animal; this is commonly the case with the animal nomad shamans in Glorantha.

A fetch is never bound into a fetish. In some cases a shaman may create an item referred to as a fetish, which is used to focus their relationship with their fetch but this is generally a matter of tradition and does not usually have a game effect.

Spellcom also introduces the notion of concerts and states that it is possible for a shaman and their fetch to form a concert. This is potentially a huge advantage and Games Masters will have to decide whether concerts exist in their campaign and how easy it is to find a teacher for the



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Concert skill. By default it is rare skill and it is recommended you do not introduce it into a game until you feel comfortable with spirit magic.

Spirit Allies

Over time a shaman gradually makes contact with many spirits. Rather than binding them all to service, most Shamans attempt to strike bargains; they provide something the spirit wants and the spirit undertakes some service. In game terms, such spirits are effectively *contacts* and act as non player characters. Some spirits are willing to enter into a more formal arrangement by providing the Shaman with their *name*, becoming an *ally* of the shaman. In response the Shaman agrees to undertake some sort of repeating task or to uphold a geas or compulsion. On the most abstract level assume the task will cost the shaman one Improvement Roll per year to represent the service or inconvenience.

Summoning a spirit contact or ally requires the shaman to make a Spirit Walking skill test and spend 1 Magic Point; this takes a single Combat Action and the Magic Point is spent even if the skill test fails. It will usually take 1D6 minutes before the spirit arrives. If the spirit is a contact then the shaman must succeed at the Spirit Walking skill test or else the spirit does not appear. If it is an ally it will appear regardless of the skill result unless the Shaman fumbles. In either case, if the skill test is a critical success the spirit will appear at the end of the Combat Round.

Some allies may be willing to undertake tasks for the magician or even fight for him by disincorporating an enemy but this should be a relationship that unfolds over time in play. Most spirits are no more capable of interacting with the mundane world than mortals are capable of interacting with the spirit world. A shaman can however use their Spirit Walking skill to summon a consenting spirit to the mundane world. A High Shaman can use their Spirit Walking skill to forcibly drag a spirit to the mundane plane if he overcomes the spirit's Persistence.

Spirit Powers

There are four ways in which a spirit magician can use a spirit's powers. The simplest and safest way is the **augmentation** provided by nature and guardian spirits. The spirit gives the magician a benefit by impressing itself upon the magician's soul and is easily returned to a fetish. Elemental spirits however require **embodiment**, a harder and more demanding act. A weak magician who incautiously embodies an elemental spirit risks being consumed by it. Finally, ancestor spirits **possess** the magician, taking complete control. Should an ancestor not wish to depart there is little the unfortunate magician can do. Finally some spirits such as curse and sickness spirits are **freed** to attack a victim. The danger in this act is that if the magician is weak the spirit may turn on him instead.

Ancestor Spirits

Unlike the other spirits which are generally bound for their abilities, ancestors are venerated by spirit magicians and their aid is requested. If the ancestor agrees to aid it possesses the spirit magician's body. As the spirit magician's body is the link to the mundane plane no fetish is required, instead there must be a blood link between the host and the ancestor. The ancestor may agree to inhabit the body of a willing third party provided a blood link exists.

Some ancestors are prepared to temporarily inhabit an item of great significance to the ancestor in order to be manifested for some purpose. The item might be an altar, family sword, a crown or even a significant place such as a tree in a secret grove. The ancestor will voluntarily enter the item as if it were a fetish and wait to be released when it will perform one agreed upon service. Being bound in this way is extremely unpleasant so the expectation is that this will only last a few hours. Any longer and the spirit may extract penance at the first possibility. Regardless of whether the ancestor is inhabiting a body or object it counts against the number of spirits able to be controlled by a spirit magician.

Although ancestor spirits of Intensity 1 exist they tend to be too weak and too little known to be venerated outside of maybe a small family shrine. All venerable ancestors tend to be Intensity 2 or greater and were notable heroes in their time. Since they died, the veneration they have received is likely to have further enhanced their POW. The *RuneQuest II* rulebook gives examples for an Intensity 2 ancestral spirit so we will present a simple system for designing ancestor spirits of any Intensity.

All ancestor spirits know the Lore and Culture skills of their people and region at 90% plus their POW. They also know Persistence at POWx4%, and Spectral Combat at POWx5%. In addition, for each level of Intensity an ancestor spirit can choose one additional skill which it knows at 90% plus its POW and pick twice from the following list:

- another skill at 90% plus POW;
- Disincorporate skill at POW*5%;
- one Heroic ability;
- one Common Magic spell at the maximum Magnitude it can memorise (as well as Common Magic skill at 90% plus POW if it is not already known);
- has a fetch. (The ancestor is a shaman. The Fetch's characteristics are equal to the ancestor's +1D6-1D6. For example an ancestor with a POW of 20 has a fetch with a POW of 20-1D6+1D6.)
- has a spirit ally of one less Intensity than the ancestor which will appear within 1D3 Combat Rounds of being summoned by the ancestor through use of the Spirit Walking Skill. These allies will not themselves usually bring allies. That said, ancestors of Intensity 6 or greater may control a whole army of spirits.

These abilities will cover most options but, of course, players and Games Masters should feel free to be as creative as they want in designing ancestor spirits to fit the needs of their campaign. Remember as well that the most common interaction with ancestors is likely to be the use of Spirit

Walking to talk with them or request aid other than possession. Over the period of a campaign, some ancestors may become recurring non player characters, with their own agendas.

Thorgeld's saga

Realising that his quest to find the seven fingered man will founder unless he can find some way to break into a heavily guarded tower he decides to journey to his clan's holiest ground to quest for inspiration. The sacred pool provides +40% to his Spirit Walking skill and Thorgeld's player asks if the Games Master if he can find an ancestor who can help. The Games Master says that if he makes his Spirit Walking test he can find Uncle Spider, an ancestor who can find his way into any building (and does not mention that he just invented Uncle Spider on the spot). Uncle Spider is an Intensity 2 POW 14 spirit knowing Athletics 104%, Perception 104%, Stealth 104%, the spells Bandit's Cloak and Coordination at Magnitude 5 and the heroic ability Wall Leaping. Thorgeld's Spirit Binding is still only 51% so he would struggle to prove his worthiness so the GM Games Master asks Thorgeld's player to make a Culture roll for his clan. When he succeeds, he tells him that Uncle Spider loves gem stones and witchy bugs. Bringing some of both will provide +20% to his Spirit Binding. It still will not be easy but Thorgeld's player decides to give it a go.

Pavis Rises uses **ancestral intensity** to measure the power of ancestor spirits which reflects the fact the longer an ancestor has been venerated, the more powerful it becomes. The two systems are broadly similar as the four bands of ancestral intensity are roughly equivalent to spirits of Intensity one through four.

Curse, Sickness and Bane spirits

Although these spirits can be bound for later use they are never used to augment the spirit magician, rather they are sent

against an enemy. They are hostile to all traditions save those perverse enough to revere them. The Intensity of Curse & Sickness spirits measures the number and severity of the conditions they can inflict on a target once they have possessed the victim. Each condition requires one or more points of Intensity, so an Intensity 2 Curse spirit can inflict two Intensity one conditions or one Intensity two condition. Diseases tend to be a package of conditions so you can assess the Intensity of the Disease spirit carrying a particular disease by looking at the conditions it causes.

- Intensity 1: Blindness, Confusion, Contagious, Deafness, Dumbness, Exhaustion, Fever, Hallucination, Maiming, Mania, Nausea, Unconsciousness.
- Intensity 2: Agony, Bleeding, Paralysis, Sapping.
- Intensity 3: Asphyxiation, Death.

See *RuneQuest II* (page 56) for a description of the effects of each condition. Unlike 'normal' diseases, conditions caused by spirits do not recover naturally even with application of healing skills. Some Higher Magic spells may work for a while if their Magnitude is greater than the spirit's Intensity. Thus a Divine Spell to cure blindness of higher Magnitude than the possessing spirit's Intensity will work but unless the spirit is driven out, the effects will gradually return.

Elemental Spirits

The differences between the elementals summoned by priests and wizards and the elemental spirits bound by Shamans are subtle but significant. An elemental is summoned to the mundane plane and embodied within the appropriate source. A shaman is capable of **embodying** an elemental spirit, which means that shaman's body itself becomes the elemental. While elementals are dumb fragments of the elemental rune from which they derive, elemental spirits of high POW are often intelligent and self-willed. As with any spirit, the potency of the embodied elemental spirit depends on its Intensity.

A Spirit Magician can bind an elemental spirit into a fetish in the normal manner but the fetish must be chosen carefully for even while bound some of the elemental spirit's power is manifested. A Salamander spirit must be bound into a fetish capable of withstanding heat while an Undine spirit's fetish will become damp and clammy.

When the spirit magician releases an elemental spirit from a fetish it does not need any source material but while uncontrolled it will gravitate to the nearest source of its element within range of the binding object. By itself it is just a spirit and has no significant effect on the mundane plane. The spirit's power does not truly manifest until the spirit magic controls and *embodies* it through use of the Spirit Binding Skill. As with any control attempt, the spirit magician must succeed at the skill and spend 1 Magic Point as a Free Action. If the spirit magician succeeds, their body itself becomes the elemental. A spirit magician embodying a sylph transforms into a vortex of buffeting winds while a one embodying a gnome will sink into the ground as if they were some type of earthen whirlpool.

While embodying an elemental spirit, the spirit magician cannot turn off or dampen the effects. Furthermore, returning the elemental spirit to the fetish is far more difficult than for other spirits as the magician must make a successful Command Roll in order to successfully force the spirit back into the fetish. Finally, while in his elemental form, the spirit magician is vulnerable to opposing elements just as an elemental is. For all these reasons, embodying a powerful elemental spirit is never lightly undertaken.

A spirit magician embodying an elemental spirit essentially becomes an elemental of size based on the spirit's Intensity as outlined on the table on the next page.

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Elemental Spirit Size Table

Spirit Intensity	Elemental Size
1	1 cubic metre
2	3 cubic metres
3	6 cubic metres
4	10 cubic metres
5	15 cubic metres
+1	+6, +7 and so on cubic metres

[[[Box text]]]

This table produces more powerful elemental spirits than the *RuneQuest II* rulebook (page 144). This is a deliberate change as there were some inconsistencies between elementals and elemental spirits. Games Masters wishing weaker spirits should stick to giving spirits 1 cubic metre per point of Intensity.

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The magician's STR, DEX and Hit Points are replaced by the spirit's values (which are rolled as normal for an elemental of its SIZ when first encountered) and he gains all the abilities (including its weaknesses) of the elemental. When the elemental spirit is returned to the fetish, any damage done to the magician while embodying the spirit is divided evenly between all his Hit Locations (rounding up as usual). For example if a human took 23 points of damage while in elemental form then he would take 4 points of damage to each of his 7 locations once he returned to human form.

Shamans forming concerts to control huge elemental spirits face particular problems. Although a concert with 300% in Spirit Binding could theoretically control a bound elemental spirit of 90 POW the leader of the concert would have to embody an elemental of some 120 cubic metres. Remember that all concert members need to be within a few metres of each other, which means they risk being incinerated, drowned or otherwise affected due to the sheer scale of the elemental. Furthermore, if the concert breaks down as well as the potential backlash the shaman embodying the elemental spirit will no longer be able to control it.

Although embodying an elemental spirit can be extremely impressive it also opens the magician up to new problems. Like an elemental, a magician embodying an elemental spirit will take double damage from the opposing element and can be neutralized by an opposing elemental of the same size or bigger in cubic metres. Reducing the magician to 0 Hit Points while embodying the elemental spirit instantly breaks the fetish and frees the spirit, possibly also killing the magician in the process. Spells able to dismiss elementals (such as the divine spell Dismiss Elemental or the sorcery spell Banish) will free the elemental and destroy the fetish if the effect is great enough to affect an elemental of the appropriate size or POW.

A common optional rule is to allow elementals to mutually annihilate each other. Generally Fire and water cancel each other out while Earth and Air also oppose each other. Different settings have different elemental cosmologies, for example Glorantha is unusual in having Darkness as an element. Opposed elementals can annihilate each other by inflicting damage equal to their Hit Points directly to each other. Alternately any attacks launched by an elemental inflict double damage to their opposed element. For example, a sylph with 21 Hit Points is grabbed by a gnome with 32 Hit Points. The sylph takes 32 Hit Points damage and is dispersed while the gnome suffers 21 Hit Points damage; it has been severely knocked about by the sylph but still standing.

Nature Spirits

These spirits *augment* the spirit magician's abilities exactly as described. It is possible to augment Combat Actions but that requires a minimum Intensity of 2, giving +1 Combat Action per point of Intensity after the first (so an Intensity 3 spirit gives +2 Combat Actions). Magicians cannot command their spirits to augment others' abilities: it is the bond between magician and spirit that allows the augmentation.

When designing Nature and Guardian spirits for non player characters there is no need to determine all its skills and

characteristics in advance as they can always be figured out on the fly. Usually it is enough to write something like: Armour Points +2 (Bear spirit, Intensity 2, POW 14).

Finally, nature spirits do not have to be bound to be useful. Higher Intensity spirits will be fully sapient and can be negotiated with to undertake tasks, gather information or come to the spirit magician's aid.

Spirit Combat

Spirit combat occurs only on the spirit plane and requires both participants to be there. High Shamans can disincorporate corporeal beings through spending one Magic Point and pitting their Spirit Walking skill against the target's Persistence as a Combat Action. The target has to be within range of the skill (the Shaman's POW in metres). Spirits using the Disincorporate skill likewise must spend one Magic Point and a Combat Action to disincorporate a corporeal being whose soul they can perceive and who is within their POW in



metres on the spirit plane. Naturally they can keep trying for as long as they have Magic Points but if the target successfully resists with a critical then it is reasonable to assume the target is immune to being disincorporated by that particular shaman or spirit for at least a week. As disincorporation is an extremely powerful ability then one option is to increase the cost for multiple attempts against the same person by one Magic Point each time. So the first attempt at disincorporation costs 1 Magic Point, the second costs two, the third costs three and so on. This will prevent spirits from simply trying over and over again until they succeed.

Once both participants are on the spirit plane Spirit Combat may continue until one side has been reduced to zero Magic Points. At that point the winner may perform various actions as listed in the *RuneQuest II* Rulebook (page 142). The winner does not have to take advantage of the loser and it is important to remember that spirit combat can represent any kind of contest from a battle of wits to an artistic performance; it does not always have to be a grim battle to the end. The same mechanic is used but how it plays out depends on the beings involved.

Spirit Combat and bound spirits

Spirit combat happens on the spirit plane and a fetish (or other binding object) binds a spirit to the mundane plane so it follows logically that a spirit bound in a fetish cannot be commanded to attack an opponent in the spirit plane. A spirit magician wishing to use a curse, sickness or even bane spirit this way must therefore free the spirit by breaking the fetish. Of course, breaking the fetish frees the spirit from the magician's control so there is no obligation for the spirit to do what the magician wants. Indeed there is now nothing stopping the spirit from turning on the person who freed it. Generally the procedure is that the magician points the fetish at the victim and promises the spirit freedom if it attacks the target. Usually it will agree because its nature is to attack and possess corporeal beings and also because usually the magician who bound it is more

powerful than the spirit. If, however, the owner is weaker than the spirit the spirit is completely free to attack its owner instead. This is yet another reason shamans are reluctant to provide these types of spirits to worshippers in their tradition.

In game terms, assume that a spirit with a lower POW than the magician will attack the intended target. Optionally, call for a Spirit Binding roll opposed by the spirit's Spectral Combat Skill. If the magician fails to win, the spirit simply departs. If the magician fumbles, or if he fails while the spirit succeeds and the spirit is of greater POW than the magician, it will turn on him instead.

Generally a spirit magician does not bind an aggressive spirit like a curse spirit to a fetish as the risks are high and the fetish is unpleasant to handle. Instead, if the magician wishes to send such a spirit against an enemy the usual procedure is to journey to the spirit plane and defeat the appropriate spirit; once defeated the shaman can compel the spirit to one service. A possession or part of the target is burnt or otherwise consumed in order to identify the target. Once the spirit has regained its Magic Points it will journey to the target and attack it. Alternately the shaman may command the defeated spirit to perform one service in the future. Such a spirit will act like a spirit contact and come within 1d6 minutes of a successful Spirit Walking skill test to attack an opponent.

The most fearsome shamans are those from traditions with friendly curse and sickness spirits. Such spirits may become allies and willingly attack victims nominated by the shaman. Once the victim is dead, the ally will return to the shaman to beg for more victims.

If spirit combat happens on the spirit plane, what does it look like back on the mundane plane? The answer to that depends on the victim's Spirit Walking skill. Someone with no ability in the skill has no way of controlling their physical body while they are on the spirit plane so when they are attacked they might writhe around and show symptoms of the attack. Someone

being attacked by a sickness spirit might break out in boils and cold sweats or might vomit endlessly depending on the conditions they are fighting against. Someone who has training in Spirit Walking may be able to mostly control their body showing just small signs of stress. A shaman with a Fetch will be able to sit serenely, their body undisturbed while on the spirit plane the struggle ensues.

In campaigns with a lot of spirit combat various questions come up about how exactly fights occur and whether it is possible for one side to flee. Generally speaking, if a spirit magician is looking for a spirit to bind he must hunt the spirit, sneaking close enough to it to be able to attack it. Spirit walking corporeal beings as well as natural spirits can attack anyone within their POW in metres. While adjacent the combat looks like two enemies exchanging blows while enemies distant from each other appear to aim missiles or simply leap at each other. Like normal combat, spirit combat can generate Combat Manoeuvres although many will be effectively meaningless. The Change Range manoeuvre (or action) can be used to disengage and flee. If the fleeing spirit has a higher POW than the other spirit then once it has successfully performed a Range Change it can flee automatically. If the other spirit has a higher POW then it will be able to hunt down the fleeing spirit, though that might take some time. As a rule of thumb spirits and spirit walking mortals travel at a speed equal to their POW on the spirit plane. Unfortunates on the spirit plane without any kind of spirit walking skill are virtually trapped as they can move but can not follow a direction so they tend to drift aimlessly. Such characters trying to defend themselves in spirit combat through using half their Persistence skill (*RuneQuest II* page 142) are also unable to gain Combat Manoeuvres.

Characters who have Dedicated a large amount of their POW can be very vulnerable to spirit combat. One option is to rule the cost to disincorporate a character with Dedicated POW is one Magic Point plus one Magic Point for each point of Dedicated POW of the target. A spirit wishing to

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discorporate a character who has 4 points of Dedicated POW would have to spend 5 Magic Points to make the attempt. This represents the difficulty of transferring the Dedicated element of a person's soul to the spirit plane. Discorporating a character with a large amount of Dedicated POW may also draw the attention of spiritual guardians tasked to protect the faithful.

One of the primary tasks for shamans is to exorcise spirits possessing the faithful. The most common technique is to use Spirit Walking to find the spirit within its body. At this point a High Shaman can use their Spirit Walking skill to forcibly discorporate the spirit and then either he or his fetch can battle it on the spirit plane. More junior shamans will have to rely on their fetch to discorporate the spirit. In both cases it is usually the fetch that battles the spirit, leaving the shaman free to perform physical actions acting as a complementary skill for the fetch's combat skill. Usually this will be the use of the Healing skill but it may also include drumming, singing, dancing, burning of herbs to make the spirit drowsy and so on. That said, once the spirit has been discorporated it may attempt to flee if the shaman or his fetch clearly overmatches it so it is often up to the shaman as to whether he wishes to pursue it.

A spirit possessing a body is trapped on the mundane plane and therefore cannot regenerate Magic Points. This is why spirits tend to possess people who are already weakened and cannot adequately fight back because it minimises the risk of the spirit losing Magic Points. Like any predator, spirits tend not to attack healthy, dangerous victims. If you wish spirits to be able to regenerate Magic Points while possessing a host then allow them to leech off the host's life force and regenerate Magic Points at a slower than normal rate, such as 1 Magic Point per 10 hours. A person with all of their POW dedicated to another entity cannot be leeches in this way.

Spirits & Society

In societies where Spirit Magic is the main form of spirituality, spirits and fetishes are ever-present and a shaman fulfils the same role as a priest. It can be easy to forget that spirits are not just "power ups" or resources to be used, unless of course you are a God Learner. The spirits are not tools, however, they are part of the society. Most people will have a shrine to revered ancestors, a fetish holding a totem spirit and will take part in ceremonies of remembrance and revitalisation. In general, animists regard spirits in one of three ways.

- they *revere* their honoured ancestors and totem spirits;
- they *respect* the power of the spirits of the world around them;
- and they *fear* the malevolent spirits of their enemies.

Player characters who walk the spirit plane, binding spirits against their will and generally treating them as weapons and armour will soon gain a poor reputation both in the mundane world and on the spirit plane.

Most members of the society will know enough Spirit Walking to see the spirits around them when they meditate and enough Spirit Binding to use their fetishes properly provided they take time. It is highly unlikely they will ever engage in a life and death battle on the spirit plane (that is what the shaman is for) so for them the Binding skill represents the proper means of address, the proper visualisation and proper state of mind needed to invoke the power of the spirit within the Fetish.

The shaman is the bridge between the mortal world and the spirit world. He lives a life in two worlds and with the shaman's help, the members of the tribe can pass through to the spirit world to converse with those who have gone before. Naturally a powerful shaman tends to attract attention on the spirit plane. When viewed on the spirit plane, the shaman's soul echo is often at the centre of many spirits eager for attention. This can be highly distracting and may attract the attention of predators

but a powerful shaman should have built a strong enough web of allies that most predators would rather hunt less powerful prey. Player character shamans, however, should expect occasional very unpleasant surprises....

Trapped Spirits

Some spirits occasionally get accidentally bound to the mundane plane and become *Haunts*. The spirits of the dead who did not receive the proper funeral rites or who have died violently may be incapable of leaving the mundane plane. Other mortals may have been cursed or may have died before an important vow was completed or died full of hatred and rage and become bound to the mundane world. Such spirits may be bound to the bones of their corpse, a tree from which they were hung or maybe a cliff from which they jumped to commit suicide. By definition Haunts are trapped on the mundane plane and cannot discorporate victims in an attempt to possess them. In fact most such spirits can do little but bewail their fate. Some, though, may have acquired certain powers. The list should be limited only by your creativity but some include.

- Telekinesis: the spirit has a STR equal to its Intensity, which it can use to move items around.
- Miasma: the spirit can induce feelings of dread and despair, maybe even fear and terror. The Magnitude of the effect depends on the spirit's Intensity. An Intensity 4 Haunt may be able to induce a level of Fear that is potentially lethal.
- Wraith form: the spirit is able to physically damage corporeal beings. The spirit can physically attack with a skill equal to its POW*3% doing Hit Point damage equal to its usual Spirit Damage ignoring all physical armour. For example a spirit with a POW of 18 usually has a spectral combat skill of 90% meaning that it normally does 1D10 damage to Magic Points. When attacking physically it attacks at a skill of 54% and does 1D10 damage to Hit Points in a location ignoring all physical armour. Magical

armour such as Protection still works however.

- Glamour: the spirit can engender illusions, which are experienced by all within a range of the spirit's POW in metres of the item the spirit. This glamour is a mental illusion that works in a similar way to the sorcery spell Phantom (Sense). See the *RuneQuest II* Rulebook page 134.
- Cast magic. Becoming a Haunt usually severs the spirit from any form of higher magic but some may retain the ability to cast Common Magic. An awful lot of Haunts consist of spirits casting magic such as Befuddle, Disruption, Demoralise, Fanaticism and so on.

Like bound spirits, Haunts cannot regenerate Magic Points normally but they are able to *tap* Magic Points from the natural world around them, a process that inevitably creates an unsettling area shunned by animals and where the plants are stunted and withered. A Haunt can tap the POW of any animal or plant with lower POW than the Haunt's Intensity to provide it with Magic Points up to the limit of its normal POW. Generally most Haunts must manifest in order to use any of their abilities. While a Haunt is manifested it becomes vulnerable to magical damage, however destroying it with damage simply drives it back to its binding until it has regained Magic Points through tapping its surroundings.

Dealing with a Haunt is not easy. Spirit Walking or magical senses may reveal the location of the binding object. Sometimes destroying the binding object is enough to release the Haunt but usually any attempt to release the Haunt requires determining why the spirit became bound in the first place and undoing the effects.

The supplement *Necromantic Arts* provides several additional options that can be used for Haunts. It is recommended, however, that you do not allow spirits trapped on the mundane plane to attempt to possess corporeal beings.



Fighting Wraiths

A manifested Wraith Spirit has only one hit location and it has a number of Hit Points equal to its POW. Reducing its Hit Points to zero will temporarily drive the Wraith back to its binding for 24 hours, after which its Hit Points will be fully regenerated. The weapon the spirit uses depends on its Intensity. Each point of Intensity counts as one rank of Size and Reach so an Intensity 3 spirit could use a spectral weapon with a Size of Large and Reach of Medium. As the spirit is intangible parrying the attack has no effect normally but if a weapon is affected

by some form of weapon enhancing magic then it can usually block 1 size equivalent for each point of Magnitude. As with any kind of combat both participants can generate Combat Manoeuvres where they are appropriate; being impaled by a spectral dagger is every bit as nasty as being impaled by a real one.

With that cheery thought in mind, read the second part of this article next month for a bestiary of spirits, quests and traditions.