

# Learn magic by the month

## DRAGONQUEST™ rules for studying spells

by Craig Barrett

Most player characters (PCs) begin a DRAGONQUEST™ game campaign already adept in a magical college. That's the way the rules work, and since the rules also restrict PCs to membership in a single college at a time, there seems little point in knowing how a PC can enter a college *after* the campaign has begun.

However, things don't always run as smoothly as they first start out, even in role-playing games. Some players will elect to start their PCs as non-adepts (see "The warrior alternative," DRAGON® Magazine #86). Others will see their PCs stripped of magical power, either voluntarily or involuntarily, during the course of the campaign (see rules 34.5, 44.0, 46.0, etc.). Some GMs will draw from Eric Goldberg's article in Chaosium's THIEVES' WORLD™ game, which suggests allowing adepts to belong to more than one college at a time.

In all of these cases, a PC will enter a college *after* the campaign is already under way, and that brings up a major problem: In order to learn magic, a PC will have to spend six to twelve months of game time out of action, studying. This means an extended period of real time during which you, the player, have a choice of fascinating activities. You can twiddle your thumbs, count raindrops on a pane of glass, or watch your fellow players happily pursuing their own PCs' careers — you can do anything except *play*, which is what you came to do.

The purpose of this article is to provide a viable solution to that problem. Although a PC's education in magic may have to proceed in uninterrupted monthly increments (rule 34.5), nothing says those increments have to be consecutive. If a given study-month can be separated from the study-months before and after it, both you and your PC can be set free to enjoy yourselves. While your PC's colleagues are improving their skills or practicing their abilities, your PC can be studying his magic. When they're off adventuring, your character can adventure right along with them — and you can be in on the action, too.

But in order to make this procedure work, you have to have some knowledge of where a PC can go to study magic and how much magic he can learn during a given month of study.

### Monastic schools

I favor the suggestions provided in the DRAGONQUEST rules to determine the placement of monasteries, though each GM is free to organize the magical societies of

his world as he sees fit. The best way to deal with monasteries is to establish them per branch (rule 34.0) rather than per college. Having only three kinds of monasteries rather than twelve means that your world isn't going to be hamstrung by an overabundance of religious institutions. Of course, some care will have to be taken in deciding which masters and novices are inhabiting a monastery at any given time — but this has more to do with inter-college conflicts than with inter-branch differences. After all, fire mages and water mages may be incompatible in terms of the magic they *practice*, but they ought to be able to study side by side without too many problems. However, the same may not be true of pacifistic earth mages and druidic earth mages. (The answer to this is to keep pacifistic earth mages out of monasteries altogether. As individualists, they keep to themselves.)

Tuition fees are the same for all monasteries: 200 silver pennies per month actually spent in the monastery, plus 100 SPs per month that your basic magical education extends, from the first day of the first month to the last day of the last month. Payment is due at the start of each increment of monthly study, and should include arrears if you've been away from the monastery (in which case part of a month counts as a full month).

This is little enough to pay for the priceless magical education your PC is getting, and the real profit to the monastery comes in less tangible areas: the chance to spread the knowledge that the monastery exists to preserve; the services of willing novices, for assistants are always needed as each master works to further his own personal studies; the addition of new names to the list of those already loyal to the monastery. In the uncertainties of a DRAGONQUEST game world, loyal friends are priceless, and even after your "graduation," your master or your monastery's abbot may call upon you periodically for some service.

During the time of his education, your PC will be required to give strict devotion to his studies. Each monthly increment should be uninterrupted, and an interrupted month is a lost month, with both SPs and EPs forfeited. (GMs should be reluctant to allow uncontrollable outside factors to interfere with the studies of a dedicated novice. Anyone who is honestly trying to abide by the rules should be allowed to do so. Also, short missions for your PC's master or abbot are considered part of the

discipline, and shouldn't count against study time.)

The period of time your PC can spend away from the monastery between increments, whether on a mission or not, is limited to a maximum of 90 days, since successful study requires a measure of continuity. For each day by which a PC fails to meet this deadline, one week of additional study or 150 additional experience points (GM's choice) are added to his next increment's requirements. Obviously, a severely or habitually delinquent student will soon reach the point where he might as well abandon his present studies and start over.

During his time away from the monastery, however, your PC will be gathering fresh experience points. Whether he can begin his studies with insufficient EPs to complete them, as rule 87.1 allows, is up to your PC's master. But if your PC uses a magical ability during an adventure, the resulting EPs can be applied toward ranking that ability. No magical ability of the college currently being studied can be ranked higher than 3 until all basic study for that college is completed.

### Curriculum

When your PC enters a thaumaturgical, elemental, or entital monastery, part of the first month's general study involves letting his teachers determine which particular college he's best suited for. (You know ahead of time, but *he* doesn't.) How much of the college's magic your PC can learn during any given one-month increment will depend not only on which college he's studying, but also on whether or not it's his first college.

(Note: Time and experience-point costs given below are taken directly or by extrapolation from Eric Goldberg's article in Chaosium's THIEVES' WORLD game.)

If your PC is learning the general knowledge of his first magical college, it will cost him nine months and 6,500 experience points — 1,300 EPs for the first month of study, and 650 EPs for each succeeding month of study, "payable" at the start of each month. The entire course must be completed within a given three-year period, beginning on the first day of the first month.

In the first month, your PC learns rituals 32.1 and 32.2, as well as the fundamentals of the college. In the second month, he learns the two counterspells of the college and further fundamentals. Each succeeding month he'll learn a group of the college's talents, spells, and rituals, with the specific

abilities learned being determined by the GM as follows:

Divide the college's talents, spells, and rituals as evenly as possible into seven equal groups, so that all talents will be acquired before all spells, and all spells before all rituals; and so that talents, spells, and rituals are acquired in the order given in the rule book. Some flexibility should be allowed. For example, an enchanter may request to learn one ritual in each of the last four months of study, along with one of the last four spells, rather than having all four rituals grouped in the last two months of study. Any groups of abilities smaller than the others should be among the early months of study; any groups larger than the others should be among the later months. In some colleges, perhaps no abilities will be learned in the third or fourth month of study because of the small number of basic abilities in the college. There's no help for that.

If your PC is already an adept and is learning the general knowledge of an aligned college (see 34.0 and 34.1), it costs him six months and 5,000 EPs — 1,500 EPs for the first month and 700 EPs for each succeeding month of study. The entire course must be completed within a given two-year period. Your PC already knows rituals 32.1 and 32.2, so he learns the college's two counterspells in the first month of study. The curriculum of succeeding months

should be determined as for his first college, above, using a five-month base.

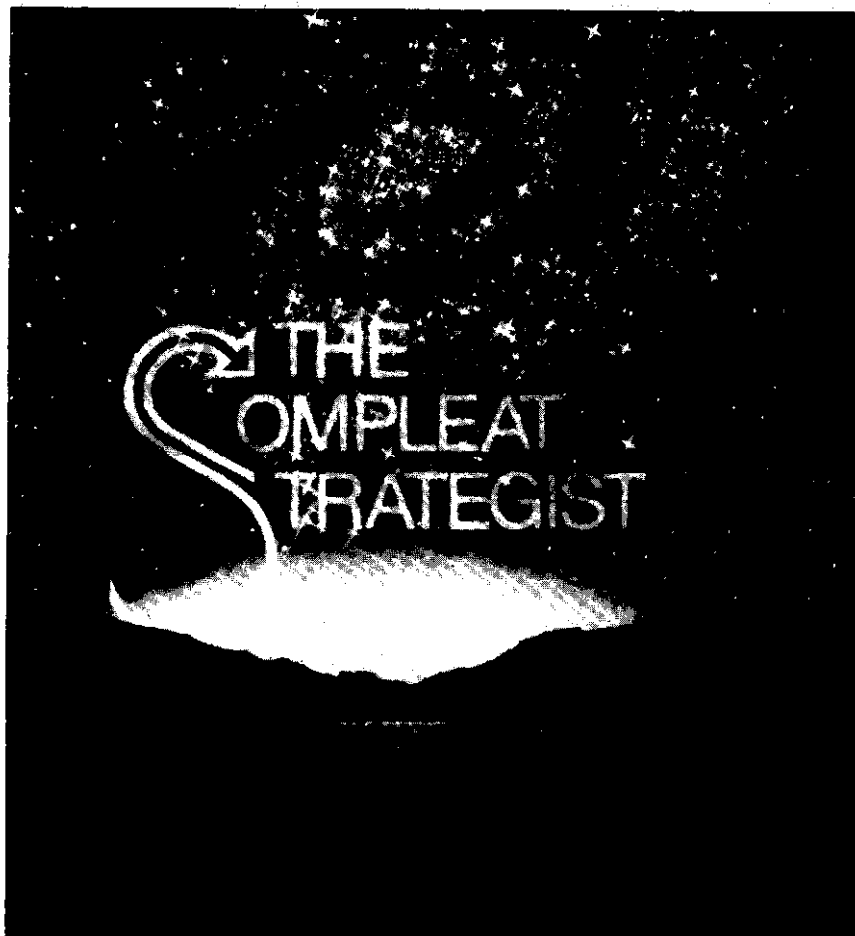
If your PC is learning the general knowledge of a non-aligned college (which can happen only twice, once for each non-aligned branch), it costs him 12 months and 7,500 EPs — 900 EPs for the first month and 600 EPs for each succeeding month of study. The entire course must be completed within a given four-year period. Your PC already knows rituals 32.1 and 32.2, so he learns the college's two counterspells in the first month of study. The curriculum of succeeding months should be determined as for his first college, above, using an eleven-month base.

If your PC fails to meet the deadline for completing the entire course of study for a college, he is immediately reduced by one rank in any ability of that college that he's succeeded in raising above rank 0, and he can never advance past rank 2 with any magical ability of that college. For this reason, the GM should give the dedicated student every possible chance to complete his studies — acting as the abbot of the monastery, he may even give a PC some form of magical dispensation if the deadline has passed because of circumstances beyond his control. But extensions of the deadline should always be linked to a quest assigned by the abbot, to be performed immediately upon completion of the PC's studies. The only other solution to a missed deadline is

to start studying all over again, sacrificing all time, EPs, and SPs already spent.

There may be many reasons why a PC (and that character's player) would prefer longer periods of study in place of the one-month increments. With a sufficient stockpile of SPs and EPs, a character may feel that the long winter months of a Scandinavian-like environment would be an excellent time to study magic; no one's doing much of anything anyway. . . . Or perhaps your GM has things arranged so that players lend him a helping hand periodically. If you're busy doing something besides running your PC but still involved in the game, that's a wonderful time for your PC to be usefully occupied (if everyone agrees to allow this sort of "double duty"). But if your PC is unable to complete his magical education in a single continuous time span, whether for lack of time or EPs or SPs, the system of monthly increments is a useful one to adopt. Just don't forget the 90-day maximum break between increments; this pertains to all cases.

One final point: Rules 34.6 and 34.7 apply at the beginning of magical study. Your PC may be allowed to accumulate the experience points he needs during the hiatus between increments, but not the magical aptitude required. However, the ritual of spell preparation (32.1) should never be counted against the magical aptitude, since it cannot be ranked. 112

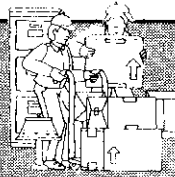


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