

The Magic of the Wild

Various spells & cantraps related to the Great Outdoors

A Background Article for DERPG

by Ian Thomson

Wefkin Illustration - Carrie Walters

(If possible please print in Duplex mode to save paper)



Introduction

Once upon a time a Dying Earth Bestiary was mooted. Ah it was to be a fine and wondrous thing, combining multiple descriptions, adventure hooks, poetry and the wisdom of arch-mage Grashpotel. Alas, its greater elder brother – the DE Gazetteer – took over, and the Bestiary was no more. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the treasures from the Bestiary will no doubt appear in other places. A few scatterings have made it to the Footsteps of Fools scenarios, much has attained position in the next forthcoming edition of the XPS magazine, my DE Weapons piece (also available at Violet Cusps) was a Bestiary submission, and here is another. One or more further articles may appear here, should they find no other home. Note that the full rules for Cantraps are also available in a free article on the Violet Cusps page.

Cantraps

Charap's Inquisitive Imp

Function: This small invisible imp appears inside a pack, voluminous pocket, wicker basket or any other indicated container that is capable of making a noise and moving (even if only slightly). It then rummages through whatever else is there, or simply lurches about in annoyance if the container is empty. Its primary purpose is one of distraction.

Gestures Required: Flicking one's fingers in the direction of the target, and speaking the imp's name.

Variations in Effect: On an IS the imp is capable of giving a painful (non-damaging) bite to any fingers in its proximity. The imp is very shy and will return instantly to its home dimension if the space it is occupying is subjected to direct scrutiny.

The Digital Indicative

Function: When losing the trail of a beast or person you are following (using the Tracking ability), you can divine the way that they went. (You must be no more minutes behind them than a number equal to your Magic rating.)

Gestures Required: Hopping on the spot and flailing your arms. At the apex of the cantrap your right arm points boldly in the direction your quarry departed.

Variations in Effect: On a DF the cantrap gives an incorrect direction, but the caster believes the cantrap worked.

Dozzak's Dust

Function: A spray of bright dust flies into the face of any creature or person looking directly at you. Any such target that uses physical eyes to see is blinded for a round and then suffers a penalty of 1 to any action requiring sight over the next two rounds. (The dust is illusory and vanishes immediately.)

Gestures Required: The caster shouts the activation word and flings out a hand towards the target's face.

Variations in Effect: On a DF the dust obscures the caster's vision instead. If the target rolls an IS with their Athletics or Defense (Dodge) they duck aside without effect. (This is attempted with a single roll, at a bonus of 1 of the defending ability is three or more points greater than the caster's Magic rating, and at a bonus of 2 if the rating is six or more points greater.) If the caster rolls an IS, the target is blinded for three rounds and then at a penalty of 1 for three more rounds; on a successful avoidance roll this effect is reduced to that of a normal success.

Ezendort's Feral Identifier

Function: Identifies the producer of detritus left upon the trail

Gestures Required: The caster must pick up a portion of the material in question and rub it in between their fingers, whilst regarding it at close range.

Variations in Effect: This cantrap accesses a catalogue of creatures from several centuries ago, and so is not unerringly accurate in its pronouncements. It's answer is always simple, and consisting of two phrases, such as 'Erb Excrement; less than an hour old', but for less common creatures it may use names that are no longer in use. (On an IS the identification will always be recognizably accurate. On a DF the 'facts' revealed will be plain wrong, but not so wildly that the caster suspects that the cantrap has failed.)

Friend to All Creatures

Function: Makes you more persuasive when dealing with the semi-sentient.

Gestures Required: Sighing and rubbing the back of one's neck.

Variations in Effect: This cantrap works on corporeal creatures that are semi-sentient. (IE not dumb animals, and not humans or half-men.) It provides a bonus of 1 to the first two rolls of Persuasion contests with them. On an IS the effect is a bonus of 1 for the first four rolls. On a DF, the effect is a boon of 1 to the creature's Rebuff for the entire contest.

Hoolart's Pelgranic Distraction

Function: Confuses pelgranes.

Gestures Required: The caster pulls at their throat and chuckles oddly.

Variations in Effect: This can last for several minutes, as long as the caster keeps up their efforts. The chuckling noise so produced mesmerizes any pelgrane that hears it, causing them to stare at the producer of the noise, and make no other meaningful action. Other people nearby may move slowly, and although the beast may glance at them it is incapable of acting against them unless physically threatened. On a DF the beast becomes violently annoyed with the caster's efforts.

The Lesser Interstitial Restorative

Function: Restores 1 Health pool point lost through injury from any magical toxin that is fully or partially of otherworldly origin (not natural toxins). This includes the toxins exuded by basil, erb, sime and basilisk. (Note that if this restoration is not useful, then it restores health to the victim as if their roll to resist the poison were one better than actually occurred.)

Gestures Required: Pointing at the injury (or injured person) at close range, and reciting a brief blessing.

Variations in Effect: An IS restores 2 Health pool points.

Madlock Mating Call

Function: Replicates the mating call of the female madlock exactly.

Gestures Required: The caster must assume a hunched stance and call out garbled sounds whilst flapping their arms.

Variations in Effect: This sound travels for a mile or so under relatively calm conditions, and will draw the interest of male madlocks. An IS increases range. On a DF the caster is stuck in the posture for 3 minutes and unable to speak coherently.

Quilp's Fleeting Brand

Function: The target (which must be a living being of substance – i.e. not a sylph, nymph or other directly otherworldly creature) experiences a momentary sensation of extreme heat, as if a branding iron were placed against their bare flesh. This normally evokes a howl or squeal, and sudden lurching movement, and is followed by a round of startled incapacity.

Gestures Required: Hold out your hand towards the target's specific anatomical location, and give a series of low grunts.

Variations in Effect: On an IS target feels a painful afterburn for up to a minute. On a DF the caster is the one 'branded'.

The Startling Frogfall

Function: A small dimensional portal opens a few feet above your victim's head (lower if the ceiling is not that high) and a slow shower of several dozen large and extremely slimy frogs cascades over their skin and into their clothes and hair.

Gestures Required: Puff out your cheeks, croak softly like a frog and shrug your arms towards the intended target.

Variations in Effect: On a DF the frogs appear in the caster's clothing and make great pains to free themselves, croaking loudly in anxiety. In any event the frogs will make their way into hidden nooks and crannies about the place individually disappearing over the next few minutes with loud popping noises. (They also vanish in a like manner if struck with force.)

Tell-Tale Tracks

Function: A nature spirit attaches to the sole of your shoes, or feet, and leaves a false trail of half-men footprints. Can be useful in creating the illusion that you were attacked, or followed, IE in diverting the blame for something you did.

Gestures Required: Shuffling one's feet on the spot, hunching and glowering.

Variations in Effect: The effect of this cantrap lasts for a minute or so, long enough to leave a significant trail if you run. On a DF your feet actually stretch painfully to become like those of a deodand or erb. This effect lasts only a moment or so, but typically leaves one in too much pain to walk for the next few minutes. (May also irreparably damage your best boots.)

Wiznak's Illuminative Alert

Function: Calls a glowing overworld essence with the brightness of a candle-flame. It flickers wildly if half-men or demonic beings (or persons with more than 9 points of Demonic Taint) are within a number of yards equal to your Magic rating.

Gestures Required: Blowing upon one's fingers in a precise pattern.

Variations in Effect: The essence flickers more violently the closer to the demonic being it is. On an IS the essence remains for a number of minutes equal to half the caster's Magic rating. Its range is limited, but is useful in identifying those with demonic taint/blood who are posing as regular humans. (Note that many vat creatures have a minimal amount of demonic essence in their make-up, but this amount is insufficient to activate the alert.)

Wulio's Asmic Protector

Function: Prevents asms from attacking your person.

Gestures Required: When crossing the Plain of Standing Stones north of Cuirnif, at the first opportunity take up a pebble the size of your fist and make the trigrammatic sign upon it. If then attacked, hold high the pebble and cry out: 'Stand aside! I carry a sacred object!' At the first sarsen you come across, deposit the stone and select another from the pile, again make the sign and carry it to the next sarsen, and so across the plain.

Variations in Effect: This cantrap is of an ancient variety and affixed to one geographic area. On an IS the following three attempts will automatically succeed on that journey. On a DF, the following three attempts are at a penalty of 1. (From 9-14 attempts are required depending on which direction one crosses the plain.)

Spells

Edlatral's Communicator

Range: Near

Duration: Feat

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Insightful

Summary: Allows you to communicate with non-sentient and semi-sentient beings.

Description: When cast on a terrestrial creature without the ability to communicate in language, the caster, and the creature alone, can understand its grunts, and make their own requests understood by the creature. (This does not mean that a full conversation can be had with a being unable to cognize. In such cases only general ideas are transferable.)

Spell Failure: Caster cannot communicate verbally for an hour or more. (Caster can only make animalistic grunts and growls.)

Expeditious Arboreal Traversal

Range: Touch

Duration: Feat

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Daring

Summary: Allows one to move speedily through the branches of trees.

Description: Caster/recipient can leap, clamber, even run, through branches; and leap from tree to tree (over a reasonable distance in a fairly dense woodland). This spell is of course not popular amongst sober magicians, but is still known by a few hunters and other experienced dabblers who have an occasional need for such an odd form of locomotion. The basic effect is to allow speedy locomotion where travel would normally be slow at best, and next to impossible at worst.

Spell Failure: The spell appears to work, but abruptly expires after anywhere between 1-6 rounds.

Grashpotel's Vegetative Disclosure

Range: Special (a mile or two)

Duration: Concentration

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Curious

Summary: Allows the caster to locate any plant of which they have a sample.

Description: The caster stands in a natural setting and holds aloft the sample (which can be dried or old, but must be more substantial than a single fiber or ashy fragment) of vegetation. When the spell takes effect, the caster knows where the nearest large naturally growing concentration of this plant is (or a small concentration if that is all that exists).

Spell Failure: The spell gives a wildly erroneous reading.

The Lesser Servitor

Range: Near

Duration: Hours

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Forceful

Summary: Allows the magician to control the will of a single being of less than full sapience.

Description: The caster can cast this spell on a being within range that can also be seen. It must be of animal intelligence or only semi-intelligent. Standard targets include those listed for the Complex spell 'Morreion's Minions' (see next), plus all anthropophages (as listed in this book) and Basilisks, Dintraji, Fanticules, Keaks, Oasts, Simiodes, Sindics, Thawns, and Visps. (It is unclear why it fails to work on others.) The creature may attempt to resist in the standard fashion if it has a Magic rating. If it fails to resist, the caster speaks a short series of instructions (which it telepathically understands even if it has no language). The being must then attempt to follow these instructions to the letter, though cannot be impelled to injure itself or to move into an area/situation where significant injury would be the obvious consequence of doing so. Should the interaction with a target who is not present when the spell is cast be part of the instructions, the caster must provide some object such as a piece of their clothing or lock of their hair. Note that creatures controlled by this spell can be commanded to attack single armed targets provided the instructions are carefully worded: 'Hide in cover, wait until their back is turned, then pounce on them and rip them apart.'

Spell Failure: The beast takes an immediate intense dislike to the cut of your jib, and acts accordingly.

Morreion's Minions

Range: One mile per full 5 points in the caster's Magic rating

Duration: Twelve hours

Difficulty: Complex

Style Affinity: Studious

Summary: Brings a semi-intelligent being under your control.

Description: The magician decides which species they wish to bring some members of into their control. Usually one of: Clevenger, Gargoyle, Madlock, Laharq, Shamb, Tasp or Wypen-Imp, but could be others at the GM's discretion. (NB: the spell won't work on creatures with Magic rating 9+.) The caster must preferably know such beings are within range, usually by either observing them from hiding earlier or having them in captivity. A small ceremony is performed and the caster sacrifices Magic pool points equal to the number of creatures they wish to summon. These beings may individually make one resistance roll if they have a Magic rating, and resist on an IS or PS if their rating is 6-8, but only on an IS if it is less. Those that fail come at a run to the presence of the caster. If something physically prevents them, they become confused and without major volition for the spell's duration. (NB: If some obstacle is presented that can be overcome they will do their best to get by.) The caster then issues specific instructions, which the summoned beings must obey to the best of their capacity. These may not include self-injury or orders that lead to apparent certain death. Also, if any target takes more than one injury in the course of following these instructions the spell effect loses dominance over them.

Spell Failure: You magically annoy a small number of the beings you intended to summon (or some similar beings), and they vow some crafty revenge upon your person or property.

Nature's Relation

Range: Self

Duration: Concentration

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Devious

Summary: Caster becomes a plant (to the senses of all natural creatures).

Description: The caster instantly takes on the form of a bush or woody plant that is common in the area (or otherwise does not look out of place). No natural creatures can tell that this plant is not real, although the mindless foliage eaters are repelled by subtle unremarkable odors. Even beings like half-men cannot tell that this is not a real plant, unless they have special magic powers. The caster is able to slowly move around at will, and does not need to concentrate very hard to maintain the illusion, but cannot cast other spells or act violently without ending the effect. The illusion also extends to tactile deception. Certain magical creatures, and beings that can see auras, will be aware that this plant is not what it seems.

Spell Failure: The illusion takes hold, but caster is unable to move for twenty minutes; after which the spell abruptly ends.

Piscinatory Respiration

Range: Self

Duration: Hours

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Forceful

Summary: Allows an air-breather to survive under water.

Description: The user of this spell can freely breathe water during the spell's duration. They can also emerge into air without the spell expiring during this time.

Spell Failure: Caster is short of breath for an hour, as if injured. Can be reversed by such magics as the First Retrotropic.

Qelmot's Posterial Transformative

Range: Self

Duration: Hours

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Daring

Summary: Gives the user the tail of a merperson.

Description: The recipient grows the tail of a merman (but fortunately does not assume the bestial upper torso). This is fully-functional and may be used to propel them at speed through water. (Unfortunately, it does not grant the ability to breathe water instead of air.)

Spell Failure: The tail does not function, and cannot be dispelled for an hour. (Except by magic like the First Retrotropic.)

Rhialto's Expansion of the Senses

Range: Special (See description)

Duration: Concentration

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Curious

Summary: Allows you to discern the presence of living beings nearby.

Description: The caster must stand calm and serene at a place in nature (IE not in a town or city where human activities clog the effect) and open their senses. As the spell takes effect, the caster can discern all living things larger in size than a mouse within a distance from his position equal to 10x their Magic rating in yards. It takes a few rounds to refine these sensations and differentiate larger lifeforms from the background milieu. (NB: the spell also detects sentient beings smaller than a mouse but bigger than a grasshopper – i.e. twk-folk.)

Spell Failure: The caster is bombarded by sensations, and incapable of coherent thought or speech for several rounds.

Tozyp's Orientation

Range: Self

Duration: Instant

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Curious

Summary: Caster finds their bearings.

Description: In an instant the caster knows how far they are from any place or person named in the spell; which they must know well. (In the case of a person, they must also have been in physical proximity to them within the last year.) The spell also reveals what direction the target is in. If the focus of the spell is a being that is dead or in some other dimension or planet, then the spell gives a confusing result

Spell Failure: An incorrect reading is given; either direction or distance.

Voorman's Herbaceous Impedance

Range: Near

Duration: Hours

Difficulty: Complex

Style Affinity: Forceful

Summary: A barrier of vegetation blocks pursuit.

Description: The caster must be in a place redolent with vegetation of some kind, something more substantial than mere long grass – at least a wide area of thin woodland with underbrush. On casting this spell, and indicating direction, a mass of thick, sturdy, and sinewy vegetation bursts forth into life, spreading half a mile each side of the caster, and growing to become a hundred yards deep. This is impassable by normal means, slow to chop one's way through with ordinary weapons, and resistant to easy flammability.

Spell Failure: The caster (and any companions) is instead imprisoned in a small clearing at the center of this effect.

Wadwort's Respiratory Aegis

Range: Self/Touch

Duration: Concentration

Difficulty: Straightforward

Style Affinity: Forceful

Summary: Protects against air-born toxins.

Description: This magic instantly heals a person from the effects of a toxin that has entered the body via their lungs. This might be the fetor or 'taint' of some creature, or a poison gas. Not only does it instantly expel such a toxin from the system, but continues this effect for a minute or so afterwards. (The caster can further maintain its protection for an even-longer period through concentration.)

Spell Failure: Target instead takes a penalty of 1 on their first resistance roll.