ILLUSION

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Theory and Practice

For All FRP Games

If you are interested in a spell system for using illusions, please see "Illusion Magic" in Different Worlds 16.

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In the various role-playing systems of today, various forms of illusion are common. Whether the player is defending against the wiles of an attacking Jinn or leaving a spacecraft to explore a new world, he must be prepared to face many forms of illusion.

This article deals with illusions in many forms. It is intended to serve as a supplement to the basic descriptions that your game might provide, and, perhaps, to present a new way of thinking about illusions.

The forms of illusions fall into two classes. The first of these include *Active Illusions*. The second include *Passive Illusions*.

An active illusion is mobile, created to attack and inflict damage on any believing perceiver, and requires the control of the caster or device that created it.

In general, any illusion that poses an immediate threat to the perceiver through the simulation of a mobile, physical attack is an active illusion. Examples would include armored warriors, arrows flying toward the perceiver, violent whirlwinds, etc.

To maintain the illusion, the caster or projector of the illusion must be within a given distance of the party being

attacked and the place that the illusion is seen to originate from. During the illusion's duration, the caster or projector may do nothing except control its actions. Any break in the required concentration will dispell the illusion.

Passive forms of illusion are defined as immobile, in the sense that they are focused to operate in a particular place or on a particular object (or person) and will not move from this focus's location. Passive illusions are also designed to hide reality from the perceiver or to bar the perceiver's progress by an obstacle, camouflage, or threat. These are cast with a time duration that does not require the caster (or the projector) to maintain control.

The major differences between active and passive illusions are the mobility of the illusion and the control required over the illusion. Where active illusions are usually used to directly engage the perceiver's attention (whether by combat or otherwise), passive illusions are used to camouflage reality or to contest the perceiver's intended course of action. As such, passive illusions may now be further divided into major and minor families. These are:

Glamours used to camouflage (change) the physical appearance of animate beings or objects. (Minor form.)

Illusionary barriers and obstacles, illusions concealing the true appearance or existence of large structures or areas, and illusions that, by their very appearance, threaten the perceiver. (Major form.)

The division given above is not one of importance. It indicates the difficulty of the actions. As a general rule, the major forms require more power or expertise than the minor forms do. For any given wizard, the chance of creating a believable minor passive illusion should be greater than the ease of creating a major passive illusion. This should be reflected in the game by the gamesmaster.

With the above definitions complete, we should now look at some examples of illusion, the parameters that a referee shoud apply to adjudicate them, and the performance attributes of illusion in action. Example of an active illusion is given below:

Gunter Deadkiller, the greatest warrior of the Albaran kingdoms, was dispatched by the Vizier of the

High King to desecrate an altar in the hidden temple of Mastema. After months of misadventure, Gunter and the two remaining members of his platoon found the temple. They entered and, with difficulty, reached the inner sanctum of the temple's master. There, they found a hidden stairway.

At the stairway's base, they came upon a wide corridor. It stretched a hundred feet, and ended at a door of solid gold. As they marched down the hall, statues of lesser demons set in alcoves along the way appeared to take flesh and attacked the party. Gunter and one of his comrades were not misled by this illusion. The other warrior gave it credence, and felt himself being torn into strips by the monsters. His corpse dropped to the floor. Gunter and his remaining ally moved on, ignoring the attack of the deadly shadows.

The example above typifies a philosophy of illusion that is in opposition to one generally held view. The premise held by these is that if an illusion comes into contact with a real person it will dissolve immediately. I do not accept this concept.

I feel that whether an illusion is believed or not, the fact remains that power has been expended to bring it into being. Likewise, contact with or by a real object does not negate the presence of the power that was applied. It seems folly to operate under the assumption that it does, especially in the case of those illusions created for the express purpose of attacking the perceivers.

In all cases, as long as the power behind the illusion remains in force or continues to be applied, the illusion will remain visible.

This is, of course, only an argument in philosophy. When it comes to illusion, what the player does or does not see is not the crucial question. The important question is: Do you believe it is real?

All forms of illusion gain their ability to affect the perceiver from the perceiver's belief in the illusion's reality. If the illusion is not believed, it has no substance and can be ignored. It does not dissapear — it is ignorable. If the perceiver believes that the vision is real it is given substance by his belief in it. In his eyes and mind, it will possess all the strength and power he would normally attribute to the genuine article. This belief can kill.

In essence, the application of power by the caster or projector gives the illusion its form. He shapes the power to meet his needs and this shape can be seen regardless of belief or contact. However, it is the belief of the perceiver that gives the illusion its ability to affect him. In the example, Gunter and the surviving warrior did not believe. As a result, they were untouched by the illusion. The other warrior believed. He died.

To adequately referee this power, the referee must consider the factors influencing the strength and believability of the illusion. These are:

> *The power or expertise of the illusion's creator.*
> *The experience and intelligence of the perceiver.*
> *The expectations of the perceiver; i.e., his current situational biases.*
> *The circumstances of the illusion's appearance.*

The first two categories above have obvious relevance. A more potent caster will be better able to create a complete illusion and direct its movements skillfully. Likewise, a perceiver with high intelligence and/or experience will be more likely to see the falsity of an illusion.

The expectations of the perceiver set his psychological attitude. If the illusion is of some danger that the perceiver fears, or that he expects to encounter in the current environment, he is more likely to believe in its reality. On the other hand, an illusion of something that the perceiver could not possibly believe would be in the current environs, or that stretches the limits of his imagination, will find the perceiver predisposed to disbelieve. The chances for the illusion's success should thus be less.

The final factor refers to the actual appearance of the illusion on the encounter scene, i.e., how it appears, where it appears from, etc. An illusion appearing on the scene in an unlikely or impossible manner is not as believable. This factor does not include the actual physical appearance of the illusion, which is a function of the caster's power and experience.

The referee should apply these four items as modifiers for the chances of a given perceiver making his saving throw. If the illusion is not believed, the character can ignore its presence. If it is believed, the player is affected by it.

As the encounter continues, the referee must monitor all those player-characters believing in the illusion. The fact that they start the encounter believing in it does not mean that they will believe it throughout the entire encounter.

In any encounter, after initial belief is established, the subsequent events will give the believing perceivers opportunities to doubt the illusion.

The main events of significance for producing doubt are:

Unreal Actions — Each time that the illusion does something that it should not be physically capable of performing, in the eyes of the perceiver.

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Contact — Each time that the perceiver hits the illusion or the illusion touches the perceiver, doubt may be produced — this does not automatically dispell belief, but it may provide a chance to do so.

Until an opportunity to doubt arises, there is no chance for the believing characters to do so. Doubt may arise only through the interaction of the perceiver and the illusion. It is not influenced by other events.

While an illusion is believed, the perceiver is affected by any damage he thinks he suffers at its hands. Additionally, his belief will tap his mind in an effort to give the illusion reality. While belief persists, the target's own mind will inflict actual damage on his body in the areas that he believes have been affected. For example, the dead warrior in the example was bruised before dying. His mind created contusions in the effort to simulate the demons' rending claws.

If a victim believes that he loses a limb, he will lose the use of that limb and suffer contusions along the believed line of separation. When he subsequently discovers that the illusion is false, or is cured, the limb will regain its full potency.

When a player is damaged by an illusion, and not slain, the damage will heal at a faster rate than normal damage. How much quicker should be determined by the attributes of the individual, the amount of damage actually inflicted by his mind, and the referee.

When the referee is dealing with passive illusion, these same modifiers are used. In addition, each family (major and minor) have modifiers of special relevance to that family. The referee should take these into account as well as the general modifiers discussed previously.

For minor passive illusions, the greater the separation of the illusory form in appearance, race, or size, from the normal form of the affected being or object, the more power and skill needed on the part of the caster. Thus, the chance that the perceiver will not believe the illusion is directly related to the power and expertise of the magician, the separation of the forms, and the perceiver's familiarity with the illusion — i.e., what the item or person is being made to appear like. For example:

The lady Haro, a conjurer of A'Korchu and member of the thieves' guild, determined that her career would not be complete until she had stolen the scepter of the King of Solame.

In Solame, the king and all his posessions are protected from all unworthy eyes. His entire life, after coronation, is spent in an impenetrable castle surrounded by a moat of liquid fire. He is served by hereditary servants who never leave the castle, and are born and die there. The only outsiders granted entry to this cloister are the princes of the royal blood.

Haro has decided that the only way to enter this fortress is to disguise herself and her thug partner.

After reaching the sacred castle, she performed magical rites giving herself the sembalce of one of the royal blood. and giving her partner the semblance of a horse. She then seated herself upon her partner's shoulders and rode up to the guard. She was upset

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when the sergeant of the guard told her that she must dismount her peasant before crossing the bridge. (When one of the armsmen told the sergeant "It looks like a horse to me, sir," the sergeant luckily replied, "They all do.") Haro crossed over, and her peasant/horse ran for the hills.

In the example above, Haro cast two illusions. The first caused her to look like a Prince. The second attempted to make her partner look like a horse. The first succeeded, and had a greater chance for success, because the forms of any two humans, even if they are male and female, are quite similar. This illusion was relatively easy. The second illusion was a partial failure, because the human and equine forms are dissimilar. It is more difficult to make a man appear to be a horse than it is to make a woman look like a man.

When illusions of this type fail, the disbeliever will see the enchanted object as it really is. If he has any talent in magic, he will also see a pale aura about the object.

In illusions on inanimate objects, the same rule of similarity still applies — a long, thin object like a spear may be more easily given the appearance of another long, thin object, like a pillar, than it could be made to look like a round object.

The major family of passive illusions is used to hide architectural structures (doors, corridors, etc.), create illusory obstacles, or make false terrain. It does not require some other object to be used as a foundation for the spell, as does the minor type of passive illusion. A house could be made to appear from nothing, or a floor created above an open pit, etc. It is also used to create threatening barriers with the potential of damaging the perceiver if he believes in it — such as walls of flame or poisonous briars.

The chance for belief is determined with a limited number of modifiers, these are:

The power and expertise of the caster.
The intelligence and experience of the perceiver.
Any applicable situation biases.

The rules of similarity of appearances does not apply, because these illusions, in general, require extensive ritual preparation to carry out and put in place. Thus, they are there long before any potential perceiver arrives.

To detect these illusions, the perceivers must have cause to inspect them to look at it curiously, have the ability to detect magic, or otherwise doubt it. If they do not, then they may not give the illusion the attention necessary to see that it is false. Anyone that does see the illusion's falsity will see what is really there. Others see only the illusion.

Threatening barriers have the ability to inflict damage on a believing perceiver, if entered. For example, if a perceiver believes that a wall of flame is real, and enters it anyway, he is burned. If the illusion is capable of producing damage, and is contacted, the perceiver may check for disbelief again. However. non-damage causing illusions will not be doubled by viewers unless a perceiver does something, in relation to the illusion, that he should not physically be able to do. □