


# *The Ultimate Super Mage*

*by Dean Shomshak*



**HERO**  **PLUS**™

# *The Ultimate Super Mage*<sup>TM</sup>

Version 1.0

*by Dean Shomshak*

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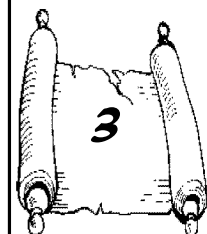
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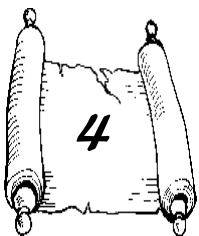
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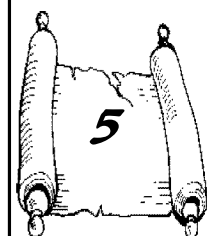
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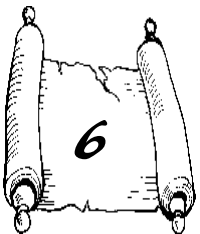
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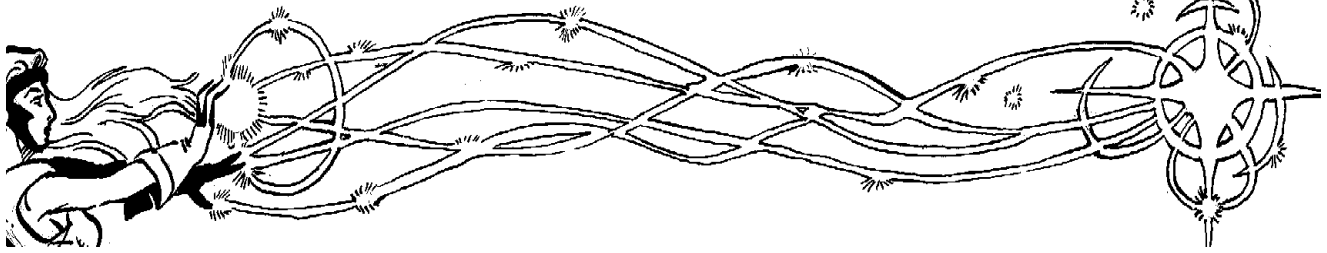
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# Introduction



*Only the impossible has any real charm. All things that can happen have been vulgarized by happening too often.*

— Clark Ashton Smith

Strange dimensions of myth and magic, where legends are real and humanity a dream...

Mighty rituals, talismans and incantations to command all the powers of Heaven and Earth...

Sinister demons, foulness incarnate, scheming to corrupt the souls of mortals...

A secret world of wizards and gods, battling for the destiny of mankind...

This is the world of the superheroic mage—the Super-Mage! Welcome to The Ultimate Supermage, or USM for short, another book in Hero Games' "Ultimate" series of source books exploring different comic-book archetypes. Although the super-mage has never been an especially common archetype in the comics, it is one of the oldest: indeed, the very first comic-book hero to wear a gaudy costume was a magician called Dr. Occult.

USM is not the Hero System's first exploration of comic-book magicians and their adventures. Back in 1989, there was *Mystic Masters*. That book, however, is long out of print. Hence, USM. While this book owes some of its ideas to *Mystic Masters*, the author and Hero Games hope it goes beyond MM, and into a whole new realm. Still, thanks are due to Allen Varney, for taking the first steps down this path.

## How To Use This Book

The Ultimate Supermage is a guide to creating magic-based characters and using them in Hero System campaigns. While the focus is on CHAMPIONS campaigning, the material in this book should be useful in any genre involving sorcery and the supernatural.

USM is more than just characters and spells, though. Magical characters are defined less by game mechanics than by their style and milieu. Therefore, USM also describes the world of the wizard: the mystic dimen-

sions, secret cults, artifacts, and forbidden lore. USM is not complete. No guide to the Magical World ever could be. USM is just a beginning. With help from USM, GMs can create a Magical World for their own campaigns. The dimensions, schools of magic and other background material in USM can be taken whole into one's campaign, as a basis for further developments; or the USM material can be used as a pattern and example for creating one's own milieu for adventures of modern-day magic.

Although some parts of USM can easily be used without reference to the rest of the book, GMs really should read the entire book before they try using the material herein. The Magical World is all interconnected. Unfortunately, it was not practical to publish USM in hypertext. References back and forth have been kept to a minimum. Sometimes this means repeating what has been said in another chapter. So be it. It is better to be repetitive than to be obscure. If any term remains mysterious, there is a glossary in the back of the book.

One can use USM, then, in several ways. It is most valuable if one wants to run a campaign that centers around magical heroes. Many sorts of magic-based characters are described, including special types of villains for magical campaigns. One can also use USM to add magic to a regular superhero campaign. Players may want to play a supermage in a regular campaign. GMs can get ideas for magical villains and adventures, as a change of pace from more worldly villains.

## A Personal Disclaimer

Magic is unusual among super-powers in that many people believe it actually exists. Nobody thinks there really are people flying around in powered armor, or mutants who fire energy beams from their eyes, or people who became super-strong from exposure to radiation. While the martial arts are "really real," even their greatest enthusiasts can tell the difference between unusual but real abilities (like breaking bricks) and pure legend (like bouncing bullets). Thousands of people, however, seriously claim that they can do real magic: that they can read minds, summon spirits, tell

Since we have a new format, we have a new look for two old stand-bys.

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These symbols will help you quickly spot things to watch out for.

the future, and do other miracles. Billions of people—a large fraction of humanity—believe in evil spirits and witchcraft. Writing a source book about magic-based adventures, then, becomes a ticklish operation, for people’s beliefs about magic are strongly tied to their beliefs about religion.

Because of this, I would like to make one thing perfectly clear. The magic described in this book is not real. In fact, magic itself is not real. There are no real wizards casting real spells: it’s all a delusion. Yes, some of the material in USM is based on authentic magical beliefs, but it has all been greatly changed. Make-believe based on research is still make-believe. The fact is, the “real” occult is un-gameable. Most of it is tedious. While searching for ideas worth stealing, I’ve read a lot of occult literature, from ancient grimoires to the latest New Agers, and I must say that some occultists are either half-wits or lunatics. They aren’t very imaginative, either: after all the fancy talk about Divine Power and Cosmic Wisdom, few promise anything more novel than love-spells, good-luck charms, and a curse or two to give enemies bad luck. Oh yeah, and “visions”: apparently, these guys haven’t heard of television. It’s rather sad that such threadbare stuff has such a grip on the human imagination. The make-believe magic in comic books and fantasy novels is much better than anything the occultists can offer.

So if your religion frowns on magic—don’t worry. Nothing in this book can hurt you. It’s no more real than the Land of Oz. And if you religion embraces magic, don’t take offense at what you find here. And if you’re looking for occult wisdom and magic power—sorry, not here. What did you expect? It’s a game. Read the book anyway: you might improve your judgment.

## Summary Of Contents

USM begins where every storyteller must begin: with characters. Chapter One discusses the various sorts of magic-based characters available. Actual mages receive the most attention, but spirits, mythological gods, and other sorts of characters are not ignored. The career path of the archetypal mage is described, as well as some mystic philosophies a mage might follow.

Chapter Two is devoted to expansions and clarifications of the *HERO System* rules. New Skills, Perks, Powers and Disadvantages are introduced, although as always each GM has final say on what is allowed in their campaign. Most notably, this chapter has a full discussion of a famous super-mage Power, the Astral Form.

Chapter Three covers an important aspect of the Magical World: other dimensions. Wizards often travel to other planes of existence in their adventures. Now GMs have places for them to go, with suggestions for designing universes of magic.

Chapter Four gets to the heart of the super-mage, with a look at magic itself. Several styles of magic are described in detail, with dozens of spells for each. The

chapter continues with discussions of magic items and artifacts and the wizard’s headquarters, the “Sanctum Sanctorum.”

Chapter Five introduces the special, secret subculture of magic, the Occult World. Its peculiar inhabitants are described, from cultists to cosmic entities.

Chapter Six is the Source book, laden with villains, monsters, cults, and a complete alien dimension. This is no bald list of characters, though. Villains are presented as examples of classic villain types. The chapter concludes with several examples of magical heroes ready to play, including a revised version of Solitaire.

USM concludes with a glossary of arcane terms and a bibliography of inspirational reading.

## Credit Where It’s Due Dept.

Many people and books contributed ideas to USM, but I would like to make special mention of William Blake. You may wonder what a poet, artist and printer of the early 19th century has to do with comic-book wizards. Nothing, directly—but in his “Prophetic Books,” Blake invented a really cool mythology as a way to explore mystical ideas. Both his mythology and his mysticism have been virtually ignored by fantasists. At most, a few writers have cribbed names from Blake’s mythology while ignoring the ideas and principles they represent.

That’s a real shame, because Blake’s mythology was strikingly original and his insights sometimes profound. In adapting the “Four Zoas”—personifications of cosmic principles—into something that gamers could use I’ve had to change them a lot, but I hope Blake’s central ideas have not been mangled too badly.

Blake deserves a nod for another reason too. The Prophetic Books were not just poems. Blake meant them to be read as he had printed them, with his own full-color illustrations on every page. They weren’t comic books—but they were something close to it! Even Blake’s style of art, with color added to printed drawings, was like a comic book. So who better to supply a mythology for a comic-book world? I am pleased to offer this small tribute to a neglected comic-book pioneer.

