

# War of the Mountain King

## A alternate-history RPG fantasy campaign setting

### #4 Magic

#### Magic

The existence of magic as a measurable, tangible force that is not accessible to the entire population has had any number of effects on Pasalan thinking, and the Americans would be the first to tell you that those effects were universally negative. The Pasalans naturally disagree, and can themselves point out any number of areas where Americans are guilty of fairly appalling behavior because of their *lack* of magical ability. On balance, the Americans are closer to being right - but not by as much as they think.

Pasalan magic theory itself is straightforward: there is a constant Source of magical fuel that can be used to 'ignite' spells and 'warm' magical items. The Source is not in itself good, or evil, or anything except a Source; all questions of ethics and morality are tied into the magician's intent and, to a lesser degree, results. This particular attitude makes it easy for even 'good' mages to freely study spells and schools of magic that assume disgusting spell components and/or horrific rituals; as long as the aforementioned 'good' mages are not the ones holding the knife, or just not *happy* about being the ones holding the knife, society will overlook some of the nastier things done in the name of organized magical research.

Generally speaking, there are only two real restrictions on what types of spells can be expected to show up in a campaign: nobody knows how to resurrect the dead, and nobody can visit alternate planes of existence. Pasalan mages have been steadily studying how to do the former since the death of the True Emperor, who utterly suppressed life-extension sorceries. Research into dimensional travel is more recent - and considerably more

driven than even the search for immortality. The Americans cast a long shadow. A long, frightening shadow.

Spells are not the only things that incorporate Source; items, places, and sometimes unlucky creatures do, too. Pasalans have been creating permanent (enchantment) and temporary (alchemy) magical items for thousands of years; the techniques are not complex, but there is a critical manpower shortage that keeps them from being common. Some geographical locations have particularly potent Source; they are invariably taken over and used as locations for mundane and arcane places of power. As for creatures... if their ability to provide Source is inheritable, they are kept as renewable resources; if not, they're killed the next time a mage needs a boost in power.

Magicians themselves are not rare, but powerful ones certainly are. While the dividing point in society is between those who can cast spells and those who cannot, the dividing point for the upper classes is between those who can cast spells, and those who can create magical items. Any recognized mage can expect to have a relatively comfortable life, but enchanters and alchemists will swiftly find themselves in positions of wealth and power.

One interesting thing about Pasalan magic is that it has no real clerical equivalent. Pasales has any number of religions, although they're almost invariably a mutated version of the original Indo-European pantheon worshiped by the True Emperor. But clergy do not become mages; more accurately, mages do not become clerics. It is considered... vaguely dangerous and taboo.

## **Magic and Americans**

Simply put, many spells simply bounce off of Americans. Illusions and mind control automatically fail. Curses and blessings do not bite. Detection spells treat Americans as transparent and intangible. Direct healing spells

do nothing. You *can* use a spell to hurt an American, but also not directly. Example: a thrown fireball will still burn. A spell that simply causes a person's skin to combust will not. Pasalan mages are still trying to work out what does and does not work on Americans; it's slow going, especially since what passes for the Pasalan scientific method is woefully unsuited for the job.

The Americans have the opposite problem; they can probably come up with any number of useful spells that take advantage of having a working knowledge of physics and chemistry, only they can't actually run any experiments themselves. Not every American is immune to magic; but the USA has yet to find a potential mage who is also a trained scientist.

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