

Mother Gilman's Practical Family Grimoire

This cheerful-looking hardcover book [the title is usually abbreviated to "*Mother Gilman's*"] is printed on remarkably stain-and-damage resistant paper; the dust jacket is still crisp and there is no indication of yellowing. While the publishing information lists a well-known publisher and a publication date of 1964, there is no record of this book or the author in the publisher's own archives. Interestingly, the alleged illustrator *can* be tracked down; she will readily admit that the interior art is done in her early style, but she never drew anything like this and she certainly never got paid for it, either. Needless to say, there is no record of this book existing on the Internet.

Mother Gilman's consists of a combination of cheery, yet heavily condescending anecdotes; some rather saccharine cultural folk-wisdom (circa pre-Beatles America); and precise and accurate instructions on how to cast a variety of beginner's spells. The book is divided into two parts: the first is called "Magic for Beginners!," and it is remarkably unconcerned about teaching the spells below [spell names in brackets are taken from

GURPS Magic, and are used to give an idea of the magic being taught]. The chapters are:

- “Clear the Air” [Purify Air]: Get rid of that stinky cigar smoke!
- “Sit, Rover!” [Beast-Soother]: Is your pooch acting up? This will keep him calm!
- “Up on the Roof” [Climbing]: Cat up a tree? Well, go get her!
- “Where are the Kids?” [Sense Life]: You’ll never have the kids later for dinner again with this simple spell!
- “Find the Pipes” [Seek Earth]: Never worry about Hubby putting a hole in the septic pipe again!
- “Got a Match?” [Ignite Fire]: Stop fretting about getting the stove lit! It’s a snap!
- “Sniff it and See” [Test Food]: You can never be too sure about the food you feed your family!
- “Visualize!” [Simple Illusion]: Want to see how that new dress will look on you? Now you can!
- “Home Economics” [Measurement]: Now you can get those cookies just right! Or help little Bobby with his Science Fair project!
- “Glowbug” [Light]: Hubby deep in the guts of the carburetor? Give him a light and a hand!
- “Mom Hears All” [Keen Hearing]: All mothers already know this spell: now give it a boost!

- “Mama Bear” [Haste]: For when you need to get to your kids right now!
- “How Does Your Garden Grow?” [Seek Plant]: Looking for the mint plant? Look no more!
- “Call Your Kids” [Sound]: Little Bobby and Suzie can’t say now that they didn’t hear you calling for dinner!
- “Where Are the Wires?” [Seek Power/TL7]: Give Hubby a hand by telling him where **not** to nail!
- “Dowse” [Seek Water]: A fun party trick!

And then there’s the second part of *Mother Gilman’s*, called “Being a Magical Mom.” This section is a bit less cheery, but it nonetheless gives no indication that some of the more advanced spells might be dangerous (although it cautions that not all readers will be able to cast them). Chapters include:

- “Perfect Picnic” [Create Air, No-Smell, Shape Air, Predict Weather]: Worried about those rain clouds? Worry no more!
- “Lock the doors” [Magelock]: Protect yourself; protect your **family**!
- “This is **My** House!” [Banish]: For when the priest is still five minutes away!

- “Mama Make It Better” [Remove Curse]: Because you won’t have any curses getting tracked into *your* house!
- “Weakest Link” [Find Weakness]: Is that fence post rotten? Well, find out!
- “Mother’s Touch” [Lend Energy, Lend Vitality, Minor Healing]: Save the emergency room for emergencies!
- “Magical Stitches” [Enchant]: No, this isn’t witchcraft! This is just stitching magic into everyday items! A fun hobby!
- “Bring in the Brownies!” [Planar Summons {Brownies}]: This spell is hard to ‘mistress,’ but once you do: you’ll never be without housework helpers again!

...all of which are accompanied by a variety of stylized illustrations of an American housewife of the 1950s [plus cape and pointed hat], typically performing various incantations and summonings with a smile and a wink. The text of the book, by the way, only seems to reluctantly admit that males can do magic, and heavily drives home the ‘suggestion’ that women discourage them from learning any; there’s a Do and Don’t section at the beginning of *Mother Gilman’s* that highlights some of the practical complications that come from using magic spells, and every illustration for the Don’ts shows a hapless man

being rescued by his wife. That this potentially jars horribly with the tacit assumption that a Lady Magician's Place Is In The Home is not really addressed in the text, possibly because whoever wrote it apparently did not recognize that there might be a contradiction.

In a world without formalized esoteric study, this grimoire can provide a basic magical education - and a sufficiently motivated researcher should probably be able to reverse-engineer a working theory of magic from its spells. There's nothing in it that can be used directly in combat, but a suburban hedge-witch trained from *Mother Gilman's* can make for a surprisingly competent opponent in any situation involving evasion or trickery. And, of course, a *Mother Gilman's*-trained mage could (entirely self-taught) banish demons.

The sudden appearance of *Mother Gilman's* into a campaign will probably be destabilizing, if for no other reason than the fact that doing so assumes that magical training is at best rare and at worst nonexistent. The flavor of destabilization depends on how many copies exist: if there's just one, it's probably going to end with gun battles in darkened warehouses as various factions fight over it. If, instead, enough crates of the latest edition have been shoved through dimensional portals that there's no

chance of suppressing them all, well, that's a whole different issue. And, probably, campaign.

The material presented here is my original creation, intended for use with the In Nomine and GURPS systems from Steve Jackson Games. This material is not official and is not endorsed by Steve Jackson Games.

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