The Laws of Magic — Casting Rules Card

Shattered Earth: The Age of Legends · *v1.4 Playtest Edition · the laws of all casting, and the six that keep free magic honest*

Law 0 — Specific always trumps general. These laws hold unless a particular spell, rite, or style signature explicitly overrules them — the exception is part of that spell's design and its price. Every **"cannot"** below is a deliberate hook: future perks and abilities may buy a specific, named exception. This card is baseline magic, and the baseline stays as written.

The Caster	The Casting	The Cost	The World	Cantrips
Laws 1–3	Laws 4–9	Laws 10–15	Laws 16–20	C1–C6

I The Caster

Who may cast, how deep, and how wide.

1. Sight. You must see your target to affect it — directly, or through magical sight such as scrying. A blinded mage cannot cast on others; magic on your own body and mind needs no sight. Sensing is broader than affecting: a sensing effect uses whichever sense its method employs (a touch can feel a fever), but **affecting any target other than yourself always requires sight**. Ceremony is the standing exception: it targets what is properly Named.

2. Magery. One number sets four things: the highest Casting Level you can cast · the maximum total magic dice per round · your cantrip range in hexes · your rank as a mage in society. Magery 6 is not learnable. At character creation, **Magery 3 requires a 15-point Unusual Background; Magery 4 can only be gained in play.**

3. One Style. A mage learns one style, and its spell list defines what he can be trained in. Multi-style mages are legendary figures, not starting player options.

II The Casting

Declare, commit, then roll — the dice are chosen blind.

4. Casting Levels (M0–M6). Every effect has a Casting Level, set by how far it pushes a thing from its natural behavior: **M1** helps a thing do what it naturally does · **M2** makes a thing act against its tendency · **M3** reshapes a thing within its kind, or imposes on a will · **M4** changes a thing's kind, or unmakes it · **M5** is the work of archmages · **M6** is legend, GM-only.

5. Signatures. A style's listed signature spells are cast **as if they were one Casting Level lower** (an intrinsically M4 effect casts as M3). One level maximum, fixed list per style, never applicable to M6. No other rule lowers a Casting Level.

6. Trained vs. Improvised. A spell you have points in is **trained**: you may spend MoS to mitigate Strain (total cost never below the Tithe). Any other casting is **improvised**: full cost, no mitigation. Improvising up to your Magery is legal — it is simply dangerous, and that is intentional.

7. Dice First. Choose how many magic dice you commit **before** making the skill roll. Total dice in one round never exceed Magery; charging and ceremony are the two exception roads, each with its own rules.

8. The Envelope. Total dice set base range and scope: **1 die** touch · **2 dice** ~10 yd · **3 dice** ~25 yd · **4 dice** ~100 yd; base scope one target or hex. Parameter dice buy one column each beyond the base: a range band, an additional target, area, or duration. Bolts take their range from dice released; surge dice add damage, never distance.

9. The Skill Roll. Roll 3d6 against your casting skill. Critical success = perfect control (the Tithe is still due). Success = MoS becomes a resource (Law 15). **Failure by exactly 1 = a flawed success:** the working holds, and the warp is its flaw. **Failure by 2 or more = true failure:** no effect, full cost, and the warp is the residue. **A 17 is always a failure, at any skill** — an ordinary true failure at effective skill 16+, a critical failure at 15 or less. An 18 is the worst warp on your table, plus backlash to HP.

III The Cost

Every casting pays, in this order: Tithe, Strain, Feedback.

10. Tithe. Every casting costs a minimum of 1 QP. No advantage, critical success, or circumstance removes it. Cantrips are the only free magic.

11. Strain. Each magic die showing a **4, 5, or 6** causes 1 QP damage per die, unless mitigated with MoS (trained spells only; total cost never drops below the Tithe).

12. Arcane Feedback. Magic dice showing **matching numbers** deal damage equal to the sum of the matched dice — to QP first for the Gifted (spilling into HP), directly to HP for the un-Gifted. Feedback over 6 is an explosion centered on the caster (B414): the caster takes the full sum; anyone at distance D takes feedback ÷ (3 × D), rounded down, ending where the division reaches 0.

13. Surges. Each 6 rolled offers one additional die; accept or decline each offer. A 6 cannot be mitigated — *no one controls a surge.*

14. Recovery. 1 QP returns per 10 minutes of actual rest — quiet and non-strenuous, parallel to FP recovery. No rest, no recovery. This is the baseline from which all exceptions flow: abilities, places, items, and Power Items that improve storage or recovery all exist — and all cost points.

15. Margin (MoS). MoS may be spent on: Strain mitigation (trained spells only) · Armor Divisor on an attack, 3 MoS per step (×2 / ×3 / ×5 / ×10) · Hardened on a force barrier, 3 MoS per level. Declare the split when the spell resolves.

IV Consequences and the World

Magic is loud, legible, and signed — and nothing stands alone for free.

16. Loudness. A casting announces itself by its highest die: 1–2 subtle · 3–4 plainly noticeable · 5–6 unmistakable. Subtle Casting is a −3 option to cast quietly. A trained observer can read a working's Casting Level with a Thaumatology roll.

17. Warps. Failed castings warp per the caster's style warp table. Warp character and severity vary by domain — Fire burns, Vitality sickens or withers, Passage strands — and every warp carries identifying traces of its caster.

18. Duration. Instant effects end on their own. A **sustained** effect occupies one of your magic dice and your attention. **Set** duration is for objects and places only — never on a living person; a buff on a person is sustained, or ceremony-anchored to a carried token. Any working that must persist with no caster attending it is built by ceremony, at ceremony prices.

19. Ceremony. Ceremonial casting sets dice instead of rolling them: 1 QP per die, no Strain, no Feedback, no Surges; failure fizzles, and only an 18 warps. Casting Level never exceeds the leader's Magery; Gifted helpers number at most one per level of the leader's Magery; the leader may set up to twice her Magery in dice. Lasting duration is purchased: ×5 one month · ×10 a year-and-a-day.

20. Countermagic. Three responses to hostile magic: **Resist** — the target's normal resistance roll; universal, no skill required. **Apply** — cast your own spell against the enemy working's purpose; normal cost and roll; opposed effects compare margins. **Unmake** — a Thaumatology Quick Contest against the working: +2 per Magery level you exceed its caster, −2 per level below, −2 if the working is outside your style's domains. You may spend QP before the roll: 2 QP per +1 to your Thaumatology roll.

C The Cantrip Laws

A cantrip is M0 magic — no roll, no cost, no dice. Everyone will try to abuse free magic; these six laws are the whole defense.

C1. Presence. A cantrip does only what an ordinary person could do this instant with a hand, a word, or a glance — including that method's limits and failure points. If the mundane version would need more time, more strength, a tool, or a contest, it is not a cantrip.

C2. Automatically Resisted. Any target that objects, any direct scrutiny, and any opposed craft or skill defeats a cantrip outright. A cantrip never wins a contest and never forces a roll on anyone.

C3. Harmless. No HP, FP, or QP loss, and no penalty to any roll, regardless of how it is described. (A specific spell may trump with a delineated −1 to one named roll — that exception is that spell's design, per Law 0.)

C4. Concentration. A cantrip lasts only while the caster concentrates on it. In combat, a cantrip is the Concentrate maneuver — step only.

C5. Free. No skill roll and no QP cost. The only roll ever present is a mundane skill roll the cantrip may be assisting.

C6. Range = Magery. A cantrip's range in hexes equals the caster's Magery. Magery 0 reaches only his own hex; your own body and mind are always in range. An aimed cantrip affects one target at a time, no matter the range; an awareness cantrip covers the whole range at once.

GM Cantrip Adjudication Guide

Readings of C1 and C2 — where players will probe the line.

Time. A cantrip compresses seconds of ordinary effort, and only for processes where extra time would add nothing further (dry is dry; adapted is adapted). If twice the time would accomplish twice as much, it does not compress at all: no instant reloading, searching, reading, travel, or first aid. Speeding up natural processes is M1 spell work.

Quantity. One hand's casual strength and no more: push a mug, pour a cup, turn a page, shed a candle's worth of light — never a lantern's worth, never a bucket, never anything a hand would strain at. When the work grows past a hand's easy effort, the Casting Level climbs.

Senses. A sensing cantrip reads only what already shows, at the level a perceptive expert would read it, and only from what already reaches the caster — never through barriers, never anything hidden, and never through concealment someone crafted (crafted concealment wins automatically under C2).

Bodies. A cantrip never restores HP, never stops or starts bleeding, and never treats injury, disease, or poison — the healing ladder begins at M1. Benign self-conditioning at trained-technique level is fair game: a diver's deep gulp that stretches breath-holding, settling a gassy stomach, easing a cramp.

+1 The Assist Rules

Magic on top of competence — never instead of it.

Cantrip assist. A trained, domain-appropriate cantrip assisting a mundane skill roll gives **+1** to that roll. The player must describe how the magic helps the work, within his domains; the GM adjudicates fit from the description.

Spell assist. An M1 spell assisting mundane work gives **up to +2** — a real casting with full cost and roll. **+2 is the ceiling:** M2 and above replace the craft with magical effects at their own Casting Level; they never grant larger skill bonuses. No assist of any kind ever applies to a casting skill roll. One magical assist per task, best bonus only — assists never stack.

E.G. Worked Examples — how a casting reads

Three castings a PC will make in their first session.

The journeyman's bolt (trained). Kestrel (Way skill 15, Magery 2) hurls a Force Bolt at a bandit eight yards off. **Declare & commit:** Force Bolt, 2 dice — the two-die envelope reaches ~10 yd (Law 8). **Skill roll:** she rolls an 11 — success by 4, so MoS 4 is her resource (Law 15). **Magic dice:** 5 and 3 — the bolt forms at 8 points of crushing damage. **Pay:** Tithe 1, plus Strain 1 for the die showing 5; the spell is trained, so she spends 1 MoS to mitigate the Strain — **1 QP total.** She could instead have spent 3 MoS on Armor Divisor ×2 and paid 2 QP. Next round she throws the readied bolt with a normal ranged attack.

The healer's mend, and a surge (trained). Maren of the Hedge lays hands on a wounded friend: Mend the Flesh, M1, one die committed. **Skill roll:** 9 against 16 — MoS 7. **Magic dice:** the die shows a **6** — the working surges, offering one more die (Law 13); she accepts, and it shows 4: a deep mend, and the patient wakes ravenous (M1 healing burns the body's own fuel). **Pay:** Tithe 1; the 4 is mitigated with MoS, but a 6 can never be mitigated — **2 QP total.** Declining the surge was the safe road; she gambled, and this time it paid.

When it goes wrong (improvised). Cornered in an alley, Maren improvises a two-die M2 working — vines gripping a cutpurse's ankles. It is not in her book: full cost, no mitigation (Law 6). **Skill roll:** she misses by exactly 1 — a **flawed success** (Law 9): the vines grip, and the warp is the flaw — her style table rolls *Loud*, and every dog in the lane starts howling on the pitch of her voice. **Magic dice:** 4 and 4 — **matched: 8 Arcane Feedback** (Law 12), and over 6 it detonates: Maren takes all 8 to QP, and everyone adjacent — including the cutpurse — takes 8 ÷ 3 = 2. **Pay:** Tithe 1 + Strain 2, nothing mitigable. The gamble worked and still cost her 11 QP and the neighborhood's attention. This is why trained spells exist, and why no one stands next to the wizard.

Under Development — not yet final

Law 13 — the surge-mitigation ban is in live playtest; the rule stands as written until the table says otherwise.

Law 19 — ceremony's sunrise tier (×2) and Magery duration-gates are under discussion and will be settled with the full ceremony rules.

The Laws of Magic v1.4 · Shattered Earth Powered by GURPS: The Age of Legends · specific trumps general — ask the card, then the GM.

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