

The header features a black background with white silhouettes of birds flying along the top and sides. In the center, the title 'Boil and Bubble' is written in a large, white, serif font. Below the title, there are silhouettes of two large cauldrons on the left and right, and several smaller bottles and flasks in the middle.

Boil and Bubble

Boil and Bubble: Weird Ritual Path Magic

by Christopher R. Rice

It's no secret that I like Ritual Path magic, I've talked about it before so I won't go into it again. If you are even remotely familiar with my blog (and I'll assume you are) you know that this is a subject near and dear to my heart – like *most* magic systems. So what do I mean *weird* Ritual Path magic? I mean . . . getting *weird*.

Adversarial Energy Accumulation

What if gathering energy were not an uncontested task? What if some force or being out there didn't like you stealing energy to do whatever ritual you want to do? Use the following rules: Every time a caster begins to accumulate energy for a spell, he must roll a Quick Contest of his gathering skill. In order to accumulate any energy he must *win*. The GM can randomly assign the skill of the caster's

opponent or create a system similar to how the mana rules function for standard *GURPS* magic. For example, No Mana would have a skill of 20 (or more!), Low Mana would have a skill of 15, Normal Mana 10, High Mana of 5, and *no* skill for Very High Mana! You could even change the skill used to gather energy: Merchant for haggling with spirits, Games for playing games with eldritch beings, Dancing for fascinating ghosts, or Intimidate for scaring spirits into doing what you want! If the GM feels that anything less than a Very Hard skill makes this too easy, he's free to create "Esoteric" versions of the skill. For example, "Esoteric Merchant" would be an IQ/VH skill and used to haggle with spirits. When using such rules, the GM is advised to reduce the time element from Ritual Adept, reduce its cost to 20 points.

Energy Accumulation as an Invention

Suppose that energy for rituals could only be gathered by special collectors or machines? Or perhaps one-off processes that took into account specific conditions. Maybe gathering energy can only be done during special events like eclipses, celestial alignments, etc. This would make magical energy an *extremely* precious resource and might be similar to Larry Niven's "The Magic Goes Away." To treat energy gathering as an invention use the following rules:

- Use an appropriate skill roll as decided by the GM for the concept and prototype rolls. For example, if magical energy is gained during celestial events only, then an appropriate skill might be Astronomy or even Physics (Astrophysics). Bugs during the Prototype phase instead decrease energy by -0.2 per bug instead of any of the normal effects at the GM's option.

- A invention's complexity determines how much energy is gathered (based on a multiple of the inventor's skill): Simple inventions gather energy equal to (concept skill x 7), average gathers energy equal to (skill x 30), complex gives (skill x 150), and amazing gives (skill x 700). This energy can take whatever form suits the campaign and the GM should feel free to adjust the amounts in any direction he desires. Ignore the penalties for TL unless magic *is* science in the campaign world and "magicology" is a legit form of science. Bonuses for existing models or methods are possible, but reduce the amount of energy gained. Divide the final amount of energy by the bonus gained from using a variant or copying an existing model.
- Cost for facilities is 1/100th the normal listed price. Use the listed times. Ignore the production phase unless every household has their own "mana collection engines." In such a setting spells that are dispelled, untriggered, etc. can be "reabsorbed" by a simple Lesser Control Magic ritual which garners energy equal to 80% of the spell.

Energy Accumulation Based on Other Attributes

GURPS Thaumatology has a great section on this (it starts on page 29); but let's see how it applies to Ritual Path magic. DX-based Path skills might make DX too important in a campaign as suddenly it aids magic, combat, etc. HT-based Path skills could be interesting and could involve channeling magical energy straight through your body instead of forming it into spell externally. Per-based Path skills might be a good way to go as you must first perceive magical energy before you can shape it into a spell. In such games, GMs may wish to allow Magery 0 to function as it does in the *Basic Set* (e.g., it lets you sense magical forces). Will-based Path skills could be all about the caster imposing his will over reality. A "Base 10" attribute (e.g., Path skills start at 7) and can be bought up from there might be interesting . . . but also expensive. Calculated bases get more interesting and builds that require multiple attributes could lead to casters who are more versatile than regular casters. A particular favorite of mine is the (total Striking ST + Per/3), which results in casters who can beat the living snot out of you because they're used to beating up spirits to do their bidding or release mana. Magic becomes very violent in such a world!

Picking Over the Bones

Personalizing your campaign's magic is never a bad thing – where it always seem to fall flat though is when GMs overthink or complicate it *too* much. There is an art to game design and one of the tenants of that art is fundamental (to all forms of writing really): keep it simple. Just keep it simple. Reduce your idea to its most base format and work your way up. For example, if you want to tie spirits and magic tightly together the best place to start is how they relate. Maybe spirits are composed of magical stuff and in order to cast spells you need to get a spirit's help. Going from there, you could logically assume that a spirit could be "harvested" to get more energy than it's normally willing to give. You could even make a whole game out of "spirit harvesters" whose sole occupation is finding a spirit, battling it, and then reducing it to its most component essence: magical energy. Regardless of what you do, keeping things simple is the only way to keep things moving along and to keep the GM sane.