# Ars Magica

## Fifth Edition

## DESIGN NOTES: CHARACTER CREATION

There were two main issues with character creation that had to be addressed in the revision. The first was Virtues and Flaws; what they should cost, and how they should be organized. The second was the mismatch between character generation and characters developed in play.

The solution to the first ended up as a fairly radical overhaul. I quickly realized that there was no way to accurately grade Virtues and Flaws on a six or seven point scale, especially given the varying importance of different Virtues in different sagas. Instead, I consolidated them into two groups, Major and Minor. This is a much easier distinction to make, although there are, of course, still borderline cases. However, with only one borderline instead of five or six, things are much easier. Further, most Major Virtues are Major whatever the saga style, and similarly most Minor Virtues are Minor. It also makes the arithmetic of character creation rather easier.

The other change concerned Flaws dealing with personality and story. These have always bothered me; story-producing flaws are a good thing to have, surely, and all characters should have a well-defined personality. However, if the storyguide tries to make these flaws into disadvantages, you end up with one character dominating the saga, or a character with flaws that never come into play. Neither of these are good.

Thus, I changed the way I was looking at those Flaws. Suppose that they were designed to give the storyguide ways to get characters involved in a story. Then, they'd be useful to storyguides as well as helping the player define the character. After a few rounds of clarification with the playtesters, I made it explicit that these Flaws were only *supposed* to come up once every ten sessions or so for a given character. Roughly speaking, one Story Flaw would come up per session, or per story, so the precise frequency depends on the number of characters. Thus, these Flaws don't really disadvantage the character at all; they just make the storyguide's job easier, as he knows how to get that character involved in a story.

Then I made them all Major Flaws, unless they had some attached advantage, in which case they were only Minor. This makes them a really good deal for player characters, and makes it very likely that all magi will have such a Flaw. (Normally, character are only allowed one, because more would lead to a single character being central in too many stories.) This gives the storyguide a useful hook by which to drag magi out of their sancta and into adventures; if you took the Flaw, you can't refuse to follow the adventure hook when it's dangled in front of you, because you have decided that your character will drop everything to deal with this issue.

As a result, ArM5 characters tend to have a very different mix of Virtues and Flaws from characters generated under Fourth Edition.

The second problem was much simpler in principle, but quite hard in practice. The results of character generation should be very close to the results of playing a character through every season of his life. Thus, the character generation rules should allow you to generate experienced magi, in a reasonable amount of time, and have them look more or less the same as magi advanced in play. Under ArM4 it was impossible to generate advanced magi using the character generation rules, and companions generated that way were significantly weaker than those created in play.

In ArM5, the character generation rules cover magi of any age, and magi and companions created that way seem to match those generated by going through all the seasons. It still takes a while to generate a magus over 100 years old, but it's much, much faster than it was under ArM4. And these rules define what elder magi will look like in all ArM5 supplements, so finally the game will have a consistent base power level.

In the next set of design notes, I'll talk about the heart of Ars Magica, it's magic system. The spell guidelines define what all the numbers in the magic system mean, so mistakes and problems here can have very wide-ranging consequences. So be sure to check back!

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