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Mecha Arcana

by Phil Reed

This issue of the *Modern Dispatch* brings together mecha and magic, two elements of the Modern rules set that blend together surprisingly well. The information contained within these pages assumes a campaign in which high-tech and arcane secrets operate side-by-side – the basic arcane setting for the Modern rules makes an excellent fit for the new rules described herein. In a pure mecha campaign, the GM could make use of this material to represent an extra-planar, or alien, invading force. After all, as the quote sort of goes, any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

To further expand your arcane options in futuristic campaigns, see Ronin Arts' *Future: Arcana*. Packed with two new classes and a host of spells, *Future: Arcana* is geared primarily toward starships (in fact, some of the spell concepts in this *Modern Dispatch* issue were derived from material I originally created for the *Future: Arcana* PDF). More unusual fun with mecha can be found in *Future: Mecha Companions*.

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About the Author

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Prestige Class: Mecha Mage

Rarely encountered, the Mecha Mage is an accomplished mecha pilot and experienced powerful arcane spellcaster that devotes his training to augmenting his mecha through the use of specialized spells. Respected by those that recognize his talents, the Mecha Mage is often selected for dangerous assignments that can only be successfully accomplished by one that relies as much upon magic as he does machines.

TABLE 1: MECHA MAGE

Class Level	Base Attack Bonus	Fortitude Save	Reflex Save	Will Save	Special	Defense Bonus	Reputation Bonus
1st	+0	+0	+2	+2	Total Spellcasting, Bonus Spells	+1	+2
2nd	+1	+0	+3	+3	Bonus Feat	+1	+2
3rd	+1	+1	+3	+3	Increased spells/day, Bonus Spells	+2	+2
4th	+2	+1	+4	+4	Luv My Mecha (+1)	+2	+3
5th	+2	+1	+4	+4	Bonus Feat, Increased spells/day, Bonus Spells	+3	+3

Most Mecha Mage's proceed from this prestige class back into either the Mecha Jockey advanced class or an advanced or prestige class that extends their spellcasting abilities. The fastest path into this prestige class is from the Mage and Mecha Jockey advanced classes, though other paths are possible.

Requirements

To qualify to become a Mecha Mage, a character must fulfill the following criteria.

Skills: Drive 10 ranks, Spellcraft 14 ranks, Knowledge (arcane lore) 14 ranks.

Feats: Advanced Mecha operation, Mecha Weapon Proficiency.

Special: Ability to cast arcane spells.

Class Information

The following information pertains to the Mecha Mage prestige class.

Hit Die

Mecha Mages gain 1d6 hit points per level. The character's Constitution modifier applies.

Action Points

The Mecha Mage gains a number of action points equal to 7 plus one-half their character level, rounded down, every time they advance a level in this class.

Class Skills

The Mecha Mage's class skills are as follows: Computer Use (Int), Concentration (Con), Drive (Dex), Investigate (Int), Knowledge (arcane lore, art, behavioral sciences, business, civics, current events, earth and life sciences, history, physical sciences, popular culture, streetwise, technology, theology and philosophy) (Int), Navigate (Int), Pilot (Dex), Profession (Wis), Read/Write Language (none), Repair (Int), Research (Int), Speak Language (none),

Spellcraft (Int), Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 7 + Intelligence modifier.

Class Features

The following features pertain to the Mecha Mage prestige class.

Total Spellcasting

Count all character caster levels when determining the Mecha Mage's casting level for arcane spells.

Bonus Spells

At 1st level, and again at 3rd and 5th level, the Mecha Mage gains a number of new spells equal to his Intelligence modifier. These spells are in addition to any others that the Mecha Mage may gain. These bonus spells must be selected from those that include the mecha descriptor (see New Spells, below).

Bonus Feat

At 2nd and 5th level the Mecha Jockey Mage gains a bonus feat. The bonus feat must be selected from the following list, and the Mecha Mage must meet all the prerequisites of the feat to select it. Advanced Firearms Proficiency, Advanced Mecha Operation, Burst Fire, Cleave, Combat Expertise, Dead Aim, Dodge, Double Tap, Far Shot, Force Stop, Gearhead, Great Cleave, Hair Trigger, Improved Bull Rush, Improved Disarm, Improved Sunder, Improved Trip, Mecha Crush, Mecha Fling, Mecha Operation, Mecha Sweep, Mecha Trample, Mecha Weapon Boost, Mobility, Personal Firearms Proficiency, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Shot on the Run, Skip Shot, Spring Attack, Strafe, Stun Mecha, Thruster Blast, Weapon Focus (mecha weapon only), Whirlwind Attack.

Increased Spells/Day

At 3rd level, the Mecha Mage increases the base number of arcane spells per day by one half (round down). This increase occurs before modifications for high intelligence or other alterations. At 5th level, the Mecha Mage again increases the number of arcane spells available per day, this time to a total of twice what he would normally have. As before, this increase happens prior to any modifications or alterations.

Luv My Mecha

Starting at 4th level, a Mecha Mage gains a +1 bonus on Drive, Pilot, and Repair checks when applied to a mecha he designates as familiar. The same bonus is applied to the Mecha Mage's attack rolls with the mecha's ranged weapons. To designate a mecha as familiar, the Mecha Mage must have operated it for at least one month. Minor changes and upgrades to the mecha don't affect familiarity, but if the Mecha Mage switches to a mecha with a different size, different superstructure, different flight system, or more than one new weapon, he must operate it for at least one month before he is familiar with it. A Mecha Mage can be familiar with only one mecha at a time.

If the Mecha Mage already possesses this class feature from a previous class, or gains it from a future class, this bonus stacks with the bonus gained from a different advanced or prestige class.

New Spells

The existence of magic in a futuristic campaign would, of course, lead to a variety of new spells to cope with new technology and situations. The spells presented in this section are all designed for use in campaigns in which magic and mecha interact.

Arcane Spells and Cybernetics

While cybernetics are designed to enhance the abilities of a character they have an adverse effect on spellcasters; each cybernetic attachment a character takes interferes with the character's spellcasting abilities, represented in game terms through arcane spell failure (see Arcane Spells and Armor in the basic rules for information on arcane spell failure). The type of components of the spell being cast has no bearing on arcane spell failure and cybernetics – all spells are negatively affected by cybernetic attachments.

A particular cybernetic attachment has an arcane spell failure percentage equal to one-quarter the attachment's Purchase DC + the PL of the attachment (round up).

Example: A Mecha Mage with an advanced prosthetic leg has an arcane spell failure percentage of 8 (Purchase DC of 22 + PL of 7/4 = 7.25).

A character with multiple cybernetic attachments and/or armor adds all of the percentages together to determine the total arcane spell failure percentage.

New Feat: Cyberarcane

You have melded your arcane abilities with your dependence on technology, decreasing the chance of failure when casting spells.

Benefit: When calculating the arcane spell failure percentage of any possessed cybernetic attachments you use the following formula: one-eighth the attachment's Purchase DC + the PL of the attachment (round up).

Example: A Mecha Mage with the cyberarcane feat and an advanced prosthetic leg has an arcane spell failure percentage of 3 (Purchase DC of 22 + PL of 7/10 = 2.9).

New Descriptor

Several of spells presented in this *Modern Dispatch* issue utilize a new descriptor – mecha. This new addition to the spell system is designed specifically to allow new spells that interact directly with mecha – both the Mecha Mage's mecha and those mecha he enters into combat with.

Saving Throw (Object)

Spells with the mecha descriptor that allow saving throws include the designation (Object). Such spells

may be resisted by any member of the mecha's crew though only one crew member may attempt to resist the effects of any one spell.

If more than one crewmember attempts to resist the same spell, the saving throw of crewmember with the highest Will bonus supercedes all other character's saving throws.

Spell Descriptions

The spells herein are presented in alphabetical order.

Animate Mecha

Transmutation [Mecha]

Level: Mage 5; **Components:** V, S, M; **Casting Time:** Attack action; **Range:** Touch; **Target:** One uninhabited mecha touched; **Duration:** 1 minute/level (D); **Saving Throw:** None; **Spell Resistance:** No.

This spell turns an uninhabited, otherwise functional into an automated robotic machine under the caster's control. The mecha gains limited, animal-like intelligence for the spell's duration during which time it will follow simple commands (such as following you, attacking specific targets, protecting an area against any that enter the designated space, and so on). If the mecha is given a command that the GM determines to be too complex the mecha freezes up and remains inactive for 3d6 rounds before it will again be ready to follow its "creators" commands.

You may not animate more than one mecha at a time.

Material Component: A small circuit board from a mecha's operations computer (purchase DC 5).

Disrupt Gyroscopic Stabilizers

Transmutation [Mecha]

Level: Mage 3; **Components:** V, S, M; **Casting Time:** Attack action; **Range:** Long (400 ft. +40 ft./level); **Target:** One mecha; **Duration:** 3 rounds +1 round/level; **Saving Throw:** Fortitude partial (object); **Spell Resistance:** Yes.

A brutal, dangerous spell, *disrupt gyroscopic stabilizers* targets a mecha's gyroscope in an attempt to lock the mecha in place. A mecha targeted by *disrupt gyroscopic stabilizers* is paralyzed for the spell's duration (a successful Fortitude save reduces the duration to half. The crew onboard the mecha are unaffected by this spell; only the mecha itself is

paralyzed by disrupt gyroscopic stabilizers.

Material Component: A small circuit board from a mecha's operations computer (purchase DC 5).

Disrupt Gyroscopic Stabilizers, Greater

Transmutation [Mecha]

Level: Mage 5; **Components:** V, S, M; **Casting Time:** Attack action; **Range:** Long (400 ft. +40 ft./level); **Target:** Two mecha, which may be no more than 100 ft. apart; **Duration:** 5 rounds +1 round/level; **Saving Throw:** Fortitude partial (object); **Spell Resistance:** Yes.

This spell functions like *disrupt gyroscopic stabilizers*, except that it has a slightly longer duration and affects two starships at once.

Mecha Shield

Abjuration [Force] [Mecha]

Level: Mage 2; **Components:** V, S; **Casting Time:** Attack action; **Range:** Personal; **Target:** Your mecha; **Duration:** 1 minute/level (D) ; **Saving Throw:** None; **Spell Resistance:** No.

An advanced form of *shield*, *mecha shield* creates an invisible, powerful shield of force energy that constantly moves around your mecha, protecting you completely against *magic missile* attacks and granting you a +4 bonus to Defense against all other attacks. *Mecha shield* presents no armor penalty or chance of arcane spell failure.

If you cast the standard *shield* spell while within your mecha the spell's defensive capabilities are decreased due to the mecha's size; the bonus to Defense is reduced to +2 and the spell provides no protection against *magic missile* attacks. A single mecha cannot be protected by both *mecha shield* and *shield* at the same time.

Mecha Stealth

Illusion [Mecha]

Level: Mage 3; **Components:** S; **Casting Time:** Attack action; **Range:** Long (400 ft. +40 ft./level); **Target:** One mecha; **Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 round/level; **Saving Throw:** Will negates (harmless) (object); **Spell Resistance:** Yes (harmless) (object)

The targeted mecha has total concealment for the duration of the spell. To attack a mecha under the effects of this spell, an attacker must guess in which square the mecha currently is (or determine its position based on where it attacked last), and even if the guess is accurate, there is a 50% chance that the attack misses.

This spell supercedes the effects of any stealth gear that may already be activated on the targeted mecha.

Mecha Surge

Transmutation [Mecha]

Level: Mage 3; **Components:** V, S; **Casting Time:** Move action; **Range:** Personal; **Target:** Your mecha; **Duration:** 10 rounds/level (D) ; **Saving Throw:** None; **Spell Resistance:** No.

Empowering your mecha with a burst of arcane energy, mecha surge temporarily enhancing your mecha's Strength – granting a +6 bonus for the spell's duration – and boosting its speed by 20 ft./round. Additionally, for as long as the spell persists, the mecha shimmers with a pale blue, arcane glow (treat as candlelight in a darkened environment).

New Mecha Devices

In addition to spells, there are a few pieces of mecha gear designed for use in campaigns that include arcane spells. GMs and players can use the new items that follow as written or modify them to suit their

specific campaign needs. Additionally, these new devices serve as a baseline guide for the creation of even more arcane-connected mecha devices.

Note: These items do not include a progress level designation – such information is not important since the inclusion of these items is allowed or disallowed solely on the GM's authority. For most of the items I have assumed that your campaign is set at PL 7, Gravity Age, since it has been my experience that PL 7 campaigns are more common than any other progress level.

Arcane Diagnostics

A series of arcane computers tied directly to the mecha's systems monitor the machine, constantly working to keep the mecha operating at its peak potential. The arcane diagnostics system repairs 2d10 points of damage every hour, during which time the mecha may not move or attack (if the mecha moves or engages in combat during that hour the system's repair ability drops to 1d6 points of damage each hour). The system repairs only the mecha's bonus hit points – the mecha operator and crew are unaffected by the repair systems of this device.

Equipment Slots: 0.

Activation: None.

Range: Personal.

Target: You.

Duration: Persistent.

Saving Throw: None.

Purchase DC: 35.

Restriction: Military (+3).

Arcane Subsystems

The mecha's electronics systems are replaced with a network of arcane systems. While the mecha's standard operating commands are unaffected, the entire machine is transformed into an arcane battery that boosts the power of any spellcaster crewmember

– any arcane spellcaster inside the mecha gains a +2 caster level bonus to the effects all of spells cast while within the mecha. Additionally, the arcane subsystems enrich the arcane connection of affected casters, granting arcane spellcasters a single bonus 0-level spell slot for as long as they remain seated within the mecha. This bonus spell slot may be gained only once each day, no matter how many times the spellcaster enters and exits the mecha.

Equipment Slots: 0.

Activation: None.

Range: Personal.

Target: You.

Duration: Persistent.

Saving Throw: None.

Purchase DC: 25.

Restriction: Military (+3).

Eldritch-Charged Laser Cannon

Based on the Fusion Age Typhoon 240 laser cannon (see the future SRD), the eldritch-charged laser cannon fires a burst of arcane energy in a tight, brilliant beam that tears through most mecha. The eldritch-charged laser cannon can be fired by any mecha crewmember, though arcane spellcasters may, as a free action, interlace their own arcane power with the weapon's blast – by sacrificing a prepared spell of any level, the weapon's damage is increased by a number of six-sided dice equal to the level of the spell sacrificed.

Purchase DC: 30.

Other statistics are identical to those of the Typhoon 240 Laser Cannon (see the future SRD).

Magebound Armored Shell

Connected directly to the presence of an arcane operator, the Magebound Armored Shell is a series of arcane energy layers embedded directly into the mecha's armor. When an arcane spellcaster sits in the

operator's seat of the mecha, and grasps the controls, the system engages, arcane energy locking the mecha's armored plates together in order to create a denser, more powerful outer skin.

When engaged, a mecha equipped with a Magebound Armored Shell gains 50 bonus hit points and equipment bonus to Defense is doubled. If the pilot leaves the mecha, or is rendered helpless in any way, the mecha automatically loses these bonuses – if this would reduce the mecha's current bonus hit points to less than 0 then the mecha is automatically destroyed.

Equipment Slots: 1.

Activation: None, see text.

Range: Personal.

Target: You.

Duration: See text.

Saving Throw: None.

Purchase DC: 40.

Restriction: Military (+3).

Mk. IV Spellflight Assist System

This arcane-powered mecha flight system, usable only when the mecha is piloted by an arcane spellcaster, grants a mecha a fly speed of 60 ft. (clumsy) once per day for a number of rounds equal to the pilot's caster level + Intelligence modifier. At the end of the flight, the pilot is exhausted. Advanced versions of this system provide the mecha with a flight time twice that of the standard system, though at a greater purchase cost.

Equipment Slots: 0.

Activation: Move action.

Range: Personal.

Target: You.

Duration: See text.

Saving Throw: None.

Purchase DC: 30.

Restriction: Military (+3).

Sample Mecha: Merlin

The *Merlin* assault mecha is a rarely seen *Scourge* variant (see the future SRD). In the right hands, a Merlin is a devastating, powerful machine capable of taking out larger and more powerful mecha designs. To increase the capabilities of a *Merlin* grab more mecha devices that require 0 equipment slots or install gear that add bonus equipment slots to the design.

A Merlin installed with the standard equipment package (see below) has a purchase DC of 50.

Size: Huge (-2 size).

Bonus Hit Points: 200.

Superstructure: Vanadium.

Hardness: 20.

Armor: Duralloy.

Bonus to Defense: +8.

Armor Penalty: -8.

Reach: 10 ft.

Strength Bonus: +16.

Dexterity Penalty: –.

Speed: 30 ft., fly 90 ft. (poor).

Base Purchase DC: 48.

Standard Equipment Package: Pilot's cockpit (torso and back), Class II sensor system (helmet), Enigma sensor suite (visor), eldritch-charged laser cannon (left arm and left hand), M-53 Firestar rocket launcher (right hand), 6-pack of M-53 Firestar rockets (right arm), jet-assist wings (shoulders), LX-10 antishock array (belt), jetpack (boots), comm. system (no slots), arcane diagnostics (no slots), arcane subsystems (no slots).

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