Puzzle 1

The clues below show words in which “paired” letters have been adjusted by equal and opposite amounts. For example, if the two paired letters are C and R, and the C changes to an A (decreases 2 letters), the R will change to a T (increases 2 letters).

The numbers in parentheses after the clue denote which letters are paired.

For each clue, each pairing has been adjusted by a unique number between 1 and the number of pairs. So for example, if a word has 4 pairings, one of them has been adjusted by 1 letter, one by 2 letters, one by 3 letters, and one by 4 letters.

Note that letters do not cycle. (That is, A does not connect to Z.)

All of the words are connected in theme to the mystic arts and fortune telling. To find the final answer, use the first letter of each word.

1. XQRXDNBWDO
   1. Connections: 1-6, 2-8, 3-10, 4-5, 7-9
2. UJDYHAYQOEX
   1. Connections: 1-11, 2-10, 3-9, 4-8, 5-7
3. BYMTFMOL
   1. Connections: 1-5, 2-8, 3-4, 6-7
4. LVLNKGRZ
   1. Connections: 1-2, 3-5, 4-6, 7-8
5. NUFWOCFFFEYHMK
   1. Connections: 1-7, 2-8, 3-9, 4-10, 5-11, 6-14, 12-13
6. FIBEDNY
   1. Connections: 1-3, 2-7, 4-5
7. AEXMODSNJL
   1. Connections: 1-6, 2-4, 3-10, 5-7, 8-9

Answers:

1. soothsayer
2. thaumaturgy
3. exorcism
4. prophesy
5. prestidigitate
6. enchant
7. divination

Final answer: Stepped