


# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/114 April '18

## MIND OVER MAGIC



### THE INCANTER'S GRIMOIRE

Christopher R. Rice

### GLASS MAGIC

David L. Pulver

### THE CARNIE

Sean Punch

### ARTIFACTS OF EVIL

Paul Stefko

# STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Sometimes the key to the universe is to unlock the power of your mind and unleash the magic. And sometimes magic can be found in forces your mortal mind can barely comprehend. In this issue of *Pyramid*, the intricacies of imagination meet all matters magical.

The magic system from *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* is great for its flexibility, but that versatility can sometimes slow down the game; fortunately, *The Incanter's Grimoire* can help on both accounts. Summoned by *Incantation Magic* co-author Christopher R. Rice, this treatise presents 16 new spells plus plenty of tips for designing your variations and new rituals.

When *Names Have Power*, you can control the very essence of an individual. Find out what defines a True Name, how to figure out these magical monikers, and who is susceptible to this form of magic. Add True Names to several flavors of magic across the *GURPS* library, from the skill-based *GURPS Magic* system to *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*.

When you're uncovering secrets of the universe, some truths are crystal clear . . . and then there's *Glass Magic and the Specularii*. Learn how a valued luxury in ancient times became the focus for a secret society of mages looking to harness powers of glass, mirrors, and spying in this month's Eidetic Memory from *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* author David L. Pulver. Discover the Body of Glass meta-trait, unleash glass elementals, and learn the secrets of the Glass college – including six new spells and glass variants of several others.

Will those arcane objects you found in the villain's lair help you, or are they *Artifacts of Evil*? Find out about seven strange and sinister new items, complete with *GURPS* stats and a related ritual defined using *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*. Get tips for identifying artifacts, acquiring them, and destroying them, including a new enchantment limitation.

So you want to adopt the life of *The Carnie*; are you out of your mind?! Maybe . . . The beloved wandering performer takes on disturbing aspects thanks to *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* creator Sean Punch. Harness the power of the titular profession with a new template and lots of customization notes, including unique perks, Talents, power-ups, and a power. You'll also get tips for making various types of carnies useful in your campaign.

The month's Random Thought Table wraps up the theme by looking at ways to add magic and mental-minded aspects to heroes without the players' knowledge, including a couple of new disadvantage variants. With this issue of *Pyramid*, the possibilities of magic are all in your mind . . . in the best way possible!

### ARTICLE COLORS

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

- Pale Blue*: In This Issue
- Brown*: In Every Issue
- Green*: Columnist
- Dark Blue*: **GURPS** Features
- Purple*: Systemless Features

#### COVER

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## MIND YOUR P's AND Q's (YOUR POSSIBILITIES AND QUINTESSENCES, THAT IS . . .)

Two of the most important aspects of defining a hero are *personality* and *abilities*. The two often go hand-in-hand. Swashbucklers often have a sense of derring-do, giving their personalities an airiness that helps them swing from chandeliers. Similarly, many magically minded sorts tend to keep their noses buried in books and have an air of erudition and sophistication about them.

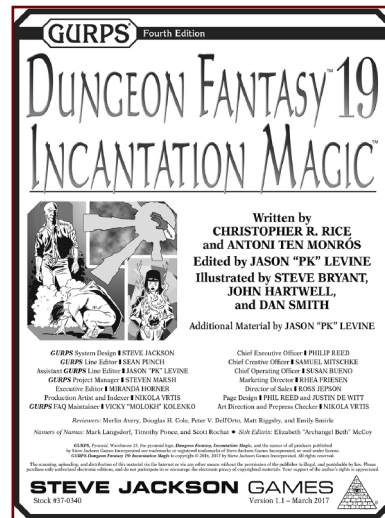
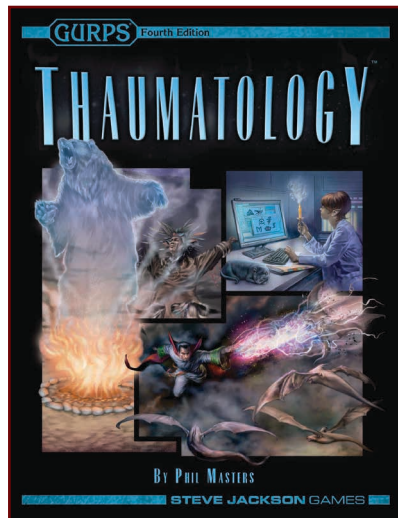
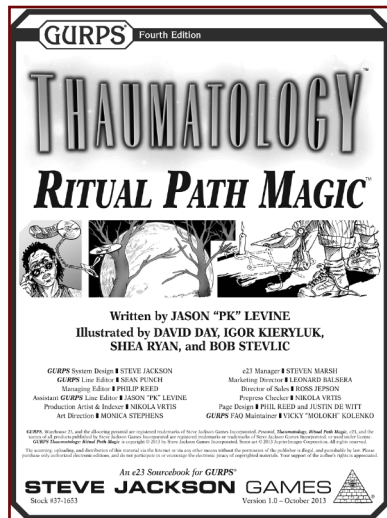
Of course, not all mindsets are defined by abilities, in games or in the real world. It's entirely possible to envision a "reluctant swashbuckler" – an otherwise dour hero who practices swashbuckling techniques because he's calculated they're effective. (And they *may* be scientifically effective in a world whose genre laws encourage such behavior!) Or a spell-slinger might be an otherwise happy-go-lucky slacker who happens to have an aptitude for magic, and realizes it's a path to a life of relative ease.

Still, it can be useful to have an assortment of abilities at your fingertips, since those are often effective tools to help come up with PC personalities. What kind of hero do you want to unleash the power of names (p. 00)? What's the mindset of someone who dabbles in secrets and glass (p. 00)? And what do you do with a carnie, exactly (p. 00)?!

New abilities can spur our imaginations, and new ways of thinking – about the world and heroes – can inspire our outlook on abilities. Hopefully the traits herein will add to your repertoire and help with *GURPS'* mandate of letting you make any hero you can think of . . . and maybe they'll spur you to dream up kinds of adventurers you *haven't* thought of before.

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Your comments help us improve our publication. How are you using this material in your campaign? What do you wish we'd write about? Let us know via private feedback at [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or join the public discussion online at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



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# THE INCANTER'S GRIMOIRE

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* is a freeform magic system that allows delvers to create spells in their own style (within reason) – but sometimes having a list of ready-to-use spells is what's needed to speed up play.

This article contains several new spells for incanters, as well as notes on edge cases when creating new spells, optional rules, and other crunchy goodies.

## REQUIRED INCANTATION GIFT LEVELS

The GM should note that not all of these spells are suitable for beginning incanters. This is *intentional!* This is meant as a catalog for both beginners and more experienced casters. If the GM *really* wants to have a spell whose effects exceed the caster's Incantation Gift (*Incantation Magic*, p. 10), the following caster perk may be taken.

### Potent Ritual

You've studied a particular ritual (see *How Specific?*, *Incantation Magic*, p. 21) so much that you can exceed the normal listed limits for a particular Path when using it. For that one spell, increase your Incantation Gift by the level of this perk for determining flat effects, bonuses, dice of damage, percentages, etc., and anything marked

with an asterisk (\*) in the Path descriptions (*Incantation Magic*, pp. 10-14). This essentially allows incanters with this perk to treat their Incantation Gift as a level (or more) higher for one specific ritual for all purposes.

You can have up to *three* levels of this perk per ritual. The GM may rule that you can only buy three levels of this perk *total*. Choose wisely!

*Example:* Hellfire Aura (*Incantation Magic*, p. 27) does 2d of burning damage and would thus require an Incantation Gift of 2 to cast. Someone with Incantation Gift 3 and Potent Ritual 1 (Hellfire Aura) could increase that damage to 4d, while someone with Incantation Gift 6 and Potent Ritual 3 could increase it to 9d!

## NEW SPELLS

The following new spells are useful to incanters and their delving parties.

### Burning Death

*Spell Effects:* Create Necromancy.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Damage, Direct Burning (Incendiary; Side Effect, Terrible Pain).

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Necromancy-6.

*Casting Time:* 10 minutes.

This spell causes any animate physical being to burst into flame from the *inside* if he fails a HT roll. This causes 1d-1 burning damage per second for the next 3d seconds. The damage *ignores* DR *and* requires the subject to make a HT roll, at -1 per two points of damage sustained, or suffer Terrible Pain (p. B428). For the purpose of determining whether the

target catches fire (p. B433), *triple* the effective damage; e.g., 4 points of damage sets fire like 12 points of burning damage.

After the initial damage roll, the victim can try to resist the original margin of success at HT. Victory means he takes no damage this second, but must still roll the next second.

The GM may also rule that this is a Create Elementalism spell instead or as well.

*Typical Casting:* Create Necromancy (6) + Damage, 7d Direct Burning (Incendiary, +10%; Side Effect, Terrible Pain, +110%) (53\*) + Range, 10 yards (4) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *Notes:* Adds "Based on HT," increasing the number of effects by one. 66 SP.

\* This damage is spread over 10 seconds (converted into dice of damage using the optional rule *Modifying Dice + Adds*, p. B269), and amounts to a special effect.

## Castling

*Spell Effects:* Create Protection.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Bestows a Bonus, Body Sense.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Protection-12.

*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

Teleports a friendly subject (who may be yourself!) out of the way of an attack; you must be within five yards of the subject. The range of the teleport is also five yards. If there are no safe spots within range, the spell automatically fails. You must immediately make a DX (or Body Sense+5) roll to act on your next turn. This spell is treated as a dodge, similar to Warp (p. B98). This ritual is cast as a *Blocking Spell (Incantation Magic*, p. 20) and includes the -10 penalty to skill. Note that this is similar to Blink (*GURPS Magic*, p. 148).

*Typical Casting:* Create Protection (6) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to Body Sense rolls (12) + Range, 5 yards (8\*) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 29 SP.

\* See *Look This Is Crazy, No Teleporting, but Shifting Maybe*, below, for details on the cost.

## Death Ray

*Spell Effects:* Control Necromancy ×2.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Altered Traits, Fragile (Super Unnatural) + Area of Effect + Damage, Toxic (All or Nothing; Cosmic, Affects non-living animate beings).

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Necromancy-19.

*Casting Time:* 10 minutes.

This spell allows you to instantly slay your foes! If they are weak enough, that is. The spell affects up to 1d living and/or animate, non-undead creatures of up to 10 hit points. The target area must be within 100 yards, and the radius of effect is up to five yards; you can choose a smaller area. Further, you may exclude up to four targets from the effects.

You may also focus your attacks on fewer enemies than you rolled, combining the injury inflicted in increments of 10 (e.g., you rolled a 5 and could thus affect five targets, but you want to kill a single HP 10 orc and two HP 20 dire wolves).

*Typical Casting:* Control Necromancy (5) + Control Necromancy (5) + Altered Traits, Fragile (Super Unnatural) (20) + Area of Effect, 5 yards, Excludes 4 subjects (52) + Damage, 20d Direct Toxic (All or Nothing, -10%; Cosmic, Affects non-living beings, +50%) (107) + Subject Weight, 1,000 lbs. (4). 193 SP.

## Dispel Illusion

*Spell Effects:* Destroy Elementalism + Destroy Mesmerism.

*Inherent Modifiers:* None.

*Skill Penalty:* The lower of Path of Elementalism-1 or Path of Mesmerism-1.

*Casting Time:* 10 minutes.

To immediately end an illusion, roll a Quick Contest of your Path skill vs. the targeted illusion's controlling attribute. In most cases, this will be IQ (for illusions cast by

sentient beings) or HT (for naturally occurring illusions). If you win, the illusion vanishes. This works on any sort of illusion, whether it's in the subject's mind or "physically" there.

*Typical Casting:* Destroy Elementalism (5) + Destroy Mesmerism (5). 10 SP.

## Grease

*Spell Effects:* Create Elementalism ×2.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Altered Traits, Total Klutz + Bestows a Penalty, DX rolls.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Elementalism-7.

*Casting Time:* 10 minutes.

This spell visibly applies a viscous layer of grease to a four-yard-radius area. When the spell is cast, subjects within the area may attempt to escape it with a Dodge roll. For the next minute, every remaining target who failed to resist acquires Total Klutz (p. B141), turning any failed DX or DX-based skill rolls into critical failures. In addition, anyone in the affected area takes -2 to all DX-based skills.

*Typical Casting:* Create Elementalism (6) + Create Elementalism (6) + Altered Traits, Total Klutz (3) + Area of Effect, 4 yards (40) + Bestows a Penalty, -2 to DX (10) + Duration, 1 minute (3) + Range, 20 yards (6) + Subject Weight, 1,000 lbs. (4). 78 SP.

## Enhanced Spells

The GM may allow some spells to be enhanced with unique effects or beneficial properties, but be slower to cast. To do this, first convert the beneficial properties to enhancements. Every full +20% increases the number of effects by one for the purposes of casting time, but does not increase the ritual's spell points in any way. For an example, see *Burning Death* (p. 4).

## Look This Is Crazy, No Teleporting, but Shifting Maybe

In *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, long-distance teleportation is not possible (except by very secret and costly methods available mostly to NPCs). What *is* possible is shifting yourself instantly from one place to another over very *short* distances. Thus, *Blink (GURPS Magic*, p. 148) is an allowed spell for wizards, but *Teleport (Magic*, p. 147) is not. The GM using *Incantation Magic* should keep such distinctions in mind when creating new spells. For spells that allow instantaneous movement, use Path of Arcanum (for general movement) or Path of Protection (for a defensive warp), and add four times the SP for Range to account for distance to the subject and distance to the target location. The GM may also decide that such arcane secrets require special training even to *try*. If that's the case, then he may charge a 1-point perk for knowledge of one such spell or a 5-point power-up if it applies to *all* such spells.

## SAVE OR DIE!

Some spells are simply not fair and force the subject to make a roll to resist the spell or perish. To create spells like this, use Altered Traits to add Fragile (Unnatural) (p. B137). This means that if the victim of the spell takes more than double his HP in a single hit, the roll to survive at negative HP is bypassed and that person *dies*.

If this is not lethal enough, the GM can allow a higher level of Fragile (Unnatural), which would be a -100-point disadvantage – if the victim falls to 0 HP or less, he gets *no* roll to survive. Thus, even 3d of damage might be enough to kill the average villager. To keep this from getting out of hand, the GM should require “All or Nothing” (-10%) on such a spell’s Damage modifier.

The GM should limit this modifier to spells from the Path of Necromancy or Path of Elementalism.

Another approach to save-or-die could afflict the target with “Instant Death” for +60 SP. If the target fails his roll to resist the spell, he just *dies*. Such spells might be Path of Mesmerism because they frighten the target to death!

Note that a large amount of damage *also* does the trick: 18d of damage is enough to kill anything with 10 HP.

## PREPARING MULTIPLE SIMILAR SPELLS

The GM may allow incanters to prepare the same spell multiple times (each one being an “instance” of the same spell) with a single roll. If so, use the following additional rules (unless otherwise stated, all other rules are in effect).

- A caster may only stack instances of a spell equal to the maximum number of magic slots he can have.
- He takes a penalty on his *attachment* roll equal to (number of instances / Incantation Gift).
- The “time to prepare” becomes equal to (base casting time of the ritual) + (the number of instances “stacked” × 0.8, in the same units as the casting time). Thus, if the base casting time is five minutes and the number of instances stacked is two, then the time to prepare is 6.6 minutes.

The GM may restrict the number of instances that can be stacked to the level of the caster’s Incantation Gift.

## Halt Death

*Spell Effects:* Destroy Necromancy.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Bestows a Bonus, Survival rolls against death.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Necromancy-2.

*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

This spell causes one subject (who must be within two yards of you) who just failed a HT roll vs. death to reroll with +5. If successful, he stabilizes for long enough for someone else to use a healing spell, first aid, etc.

*Typical Casting:* Destroy Necromancy (5) + Bestows a Bonus, +5 to Survival rolls against death (12) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 20 SP.

## Hideaway

*Spell Effects:* Create Arcanum.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Altered Traits, Payload.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Arcanum-4.

*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

The caster may take a small container (one that weighs 10 lbs. or less) and create a “pocket space” within it, which lasts for 24 hours. The maximum weight in pounds the space can hold is equal to (square of Path of Arcanum) / 2.5. Items that could not logically go through the mouth of the container cannot fit inside – but anything else is game!

If the spell ends while the hideaway still contains items that exceed the container’s natural capacity, the GM makes a roll against the caster’s Path of Arcanum skill, at -1 per 10% of the hideaway’s weight capacity currently occupied. Success means the items appear beside the caster, unaffected; failure means some of the items are lost! For every point by which the caster failed, 10% of randomly chosen objects disappear.

*Typical Casting:* Create Arcanum (6) + Altered Traits, Payload 20 (Based on IQ, +20%) (24) + Duration, 1 day (11) + Subject Weight, 10 lbs. (0). 41 SP.

## Ice Armor

*Spell Effects:* Create Elementalism.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Altered Traits, Burning Attack\* and Damage Resistance (Semi-Ablative).

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Elementalism-6.

*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

This spell shields the target in a layer of frigid ice that gives DR 7 (which also protects his gear, but is Semi-Ablative) and causes 1d burning damage (which cannot set fires) to anyone who is in close combat with the subject. If injured by this spell, the victim must make a HT roll (at -1 per 2 points of penetrating damage) or be paralyzed (p. B429) for (20 - HT) minutes. This spell lasts until DR is reduced to 0 or one hour has passed, whichever comes first.

*Typical Casting:* Create Elementalism (6) + Altered Traits, Burning Attack\* and Damage Resistance 7 (Force Field, +20%; Semi-Ablative, -20%) (52) + Duration, 1 hour (7) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 68 SP.

\* Built as Burning Attack 1d (Accessibility, Only while DR is active, -10%; Aura, +80%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; No Incendiary Effect, -10%; Side Effect, Paralysis, +200%) [17].

## Lighten Load

*Spell Effects:* Control Elementalism.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Bestows a Bonus, Reduction of weight.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Elementalism-5.

*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

This spell is usually cast on a container such as a backpack or trunk. The original weight of the container *and* its contents cannot be above 100 lbs. For the next day, the weight of the container and everything within is halved. Lighten Load can also be cast on a single piece of gear.

*Typical Casting:* Control Elementalism (5) + Bestows a Bonus, +50% reduction of weight (32\*) + Duration, 1 day (11) + Subject Weight, 100 lbs. (2). 50 SP.

\* Uses the rules for a single category of Bestows a Bonus, but multiplies the bonus by 5% to determine the reduction of weight.

## Lori's Tiny Hutch

*Spell Effects:* Create Protection + Strengthen Arcanum + Strengthen Transfiguration + Create Elementalism x2.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Area of Effect + Altered Traits, Chameleon, Damage Resistance (Force Field), and Silence + Altered Traits, Regeneration (Regular) and Fit (Cosmic, Includes FP spent supernaturally).

*Skill Penalty:* The lowest of Path of Arcanum-20, Path of Elementalism-20, Path of Protection-20, or Path of Transfiguration-20.

*Casting Time:* 3 hours.

This spell conjures a bubble that envelops a two-yard-radius area, allowing up to 10 subjects to shelter underneath. Moreover, the bubble generates breathable air and keeps a consistent climate, so it's always dry and at a reasonable temperature regardless of the conditions outside the bubble.

Those inside the bubble gain DR 10 from attacks from outside of it, recover an extra 1 HP per hour, and recover 1 FP per five minutes (including those used to fuel spells, lost supernaturally, etc.). Furthermore, the bubble grants its inhabitants +10 to Stealth rolls vs. Hearing or Vision; halve this bonus if the inhabitants are moving around inside. (The GM can assume that at any given time, searchers looking for the bubble must beat a margin equal to its inhabitants' worst Stealth-4.)

*Typical Casting:* Create Protection (6) + Strengthen Arcanum (3) + Strengthen Transfiguration (3) + Create Elementalism (6) + Create Elementalism (6) + Altered Traits, Chameleon 5, Damage Resistance 10 (Force Field), and Silence 5 (110) + Altered Traits, Regeneration (Regular) and Fit (Cosmic, Includes FP spent supernaturally, +100%) (35) + Area of Effect, 2 yards (20) + Duration, 1 day (11) + Subject Weight, 1,000 lbs. (4). 204 SP.

## Miasma

*Spell Effects:* Create Necromancy x2.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Area of Effect + Damage, Margin-Based Toxic + Bestows a Penalty, HT rolls.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Necromancy-12.

*Casting Time:* 10 minutes.

This spell has a range of up to 10 yards, filling a five-yard-radius area with deadly mist that severely damages those who inhale it. (Up to six subjects within the area may be excluded from the effects.) Victims can resist by rolling their HT against the caster's effective Path skill. Those who fail to

resist suffer one point of toxic damage for every point of the caster's margin of success. If the victim resists, he takes no damage this turn, but must reroll again next turn if he remains within the mist. See *Holding Your Breath* (p. B351).

Additionally, merely being within the mist gives -3 to HT rolls if a Will-based roll to resist is failed.

*Typical Casting:* Create Necromancy (6) + Create Necromancy (6) + Area of Effect, 5 yards, Excludes six targets (53) + Bestows a Penalty, -3 on all HT rolls (20) + Damage, Margin-Based Toxic (Cosmic, Active Erosion\*, +50%; Erosive†, +10%; Respiratory Agent, +50%) (22) + Duration, 1 hour (7) + Range, 10 yards (4) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *Notes:* Allowing the spell effects to be split and requiring two separate rolls is effectively a feature. 121 SP.

\* This means the *attack* tries to actively thwart victims from holding their breath! Every turn, roll a Quick Contest: the attack's controlling attribute (in this case, the effective Path skill) vs. the target's HT + Breath Holding (if any). If the target loses, he suffers the effects of the attack for one second; critical failure means he exhaled and can no longer hold his breath!

† Protective gear or effects (including spells) must win a Quick Contest of HT vs. the caster's effective skill (or the skill used to cast a spell). Loss means the protective gear breaks down, requiring a major repair (p. B484), its HT (or effective casting skill) is reduced by 1, *and* it lets this spell affect the target.

## MARGIN-BASED EFFECTS

Damage can be *margin-based* (instead of a flat amount of dice) as a feature, which costs 0 SP. Damage inflicted is then based on the margin of victory over the target's resistance. Every additional SP adds 1 point of damage to the final margin if the spell succeeds. You can change the amount of damage based on margin: if the target suffers 2 points of damage for every point by which you win, this costs +4 SP; if it's 3 points of damage for every point by which you win, this costs +8 SP; and so on.

Margin-based spells may be indirect or direct. This does not change the amount of damage dealt, but the caster may use the higher of his Path or Innate Attack skills to determine his margin for indirect spells!

Optionally, *effects* from a spell made by adding *Bestows a Bonus* or *Bestows a Penalty* (*Incantation Magic*, p. 15) may be based on the spell's margin of success. This is a feature for a single task or roll; costs 1 SP for a moderate task or roll; and costs 3 SP for a broad task or roll. For a single task or roll, this gives ±1 per two points of your margin; for a moderate task or roll, this gives ±1 per three points of your margin; and for broad tasks or rolls, this gives ±1 per five points of your margin. In all cases, the minimum modifier is ±1. For *Bestows a Bonus*, the subject may choose not to resist and roll against the better of his HT or Will *or* your effective Path skill roll to determine the effect. Both types of effects are still limited to the caster's Incantation Gift level!

## WHEN TO USE ALTERED TRAITS

Knowing when to use Altered Traits and when not to can be tricky. Here are a few guidelines to help.

- *Does the spell put the effect under the caster's control, or the subject's?* If the spell's effects would normally be in the caster's control, then Altered Traits isn't appropriate. To grant the *subject* control over the effects, Altered Traits can be used. For example, a caster can levitate ("make fly") a target with a Control Elementalism effect, but the *caster* determines where the subject is going. Adding Altered Traits (Flight) grants the *subject* control over his aerial course.

- *Does the spell significantly modify the subject's native abilities?* For example, an incanter turns a human into a cat using Transform Transfiguration, which lasts for the duration of the spell and is under the caster's control. Alternatively, the incanter could provide Altered Traits (Alternate Form) to allow the subject to turn into a cat when he chooses to.

- *Does the spell already do what you need it to do?* Some spells affect the target, but either the whole point of the spell is that it's *not under the subject's control* or the "traits" being added are an *implicit* part of the effect. For example, a caster would not need Altered Traits (Slave Mentality) or Altered Traits (Reprogrammable) to use a Control Mesmerism effect to enslave a target – the spell effect does that already!

- *Does the spell require that you use Altered Traits instead of a ritual modifier to make sense?* When a spell affects both its target *and* those who interact with its target, Altered Traits may be appropriate to express *how* that interaction works. For example, the spell might protect the target and damage others at the same time, but the damaging effect lasts only as long as the protection. See Ice Armor (p. 6) for an example of this.

## SENSE-BASED AREA OF EFFECT SPELLS

Creating a spell that works through the target's senses is possible, but this adds a flat +100 SP to the spell for the first sense and +30 SP per additional sense thereafter. Each target in the area rolls against the targeted sense; *succeeding* at this makes a target *more* likely to be affected! Note the margin of this roll, and add it to the resistance roll as a *penalty* if the roll was successful or a *bonus* if the roll failed.

For some senses, this can be *devastating*. The +10 to Vision rolls for spotting something in plain sight applies here if the caster is out in the open for all to view (and target)! Imagine a death spell in the form of a gourmet dessert charm that uses a Taste-based damaging attack on whoever eats it . . . That halfling triple chocolate cake is literally to die for. For *indirect* damage spells, simply add the Sense-Based enhancement (p. B109) to the Damage modifier and use the above rules.

At the GM's option, he might allow Sense-Based as a modifier for *any* spell if it makes sense. For example, a spell that blinds the subject might have "Vision-Based."

## (Terrain) Walker

*Spell Effects:* Strengthen Transfiguration.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Altered Traits, Terrain Adaption.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Transfiguration-2.

*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

This spell allows the subject to ignore the penalties for moving on difficult terrain. Each type of terrain is another spell. For instance, Snow Walker and Sand Walker are different spells.

*Typical Casting:* Strengthen Transfiguration (3) + Altered Traits, Terrain Adaptation (one type of terrain) (5) + Duration, 1 day (11) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 22 SP.

## Vampiric Swarm

*Spell Effects:* Transform Necromancy.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Damage, Indirect Corrosion (Cone; Reduced Range).

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Necromancy-4.

*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

The caster conjures a cone of spectral insects, emanating from his hands and extending to a maximum width of five yards and length of 20 yards (see *Area and Spreading Attacks*, p. B413). This cone does 4d corrosion damage and requires a roll against Innate Attack (Beam) to hit. Any damage inflicted by the swarm restores HP to the caster on a point-for-point basis.

*Typical Casting:* Transform Necromancy (8) + Damage, 4d Indirect Corrosion (Cone, 5 yards, +100%; Reduced Range,  $\times 1/5$ , -20%) (36). 44 SP.

## Voice of the Void

*Spell Effects:* Destroy Protection.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Area of Effect (Hearing-Based) + Damage, Direct Corrosion.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Protection-12.

*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

This spell temporarily breaks down the walls between the material plane and the realm outside of reality where Elder Things exist. *Animate* beings that can hear the caster speak must make a Hearing roll followed by a resistance roll. Apply the margin on the Hearing roll to the resistance roll as a *penalty* if the roll succeeded or as a *bonus* if the roll failed. Hearing the music of the Elder Things is dangerous!

*Everything* in the area that fails to resist will take 3d corrosion damage, which ignores DR.

*Typical Casting:* Destroy Protection (5) + Area of Effect, Hearing-Based (100) + Damage, Direct Corrosion 3d (16) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 124 SP.

## Wall of Force

*Spell Effects:* Create Arcanum + Strengthen Arcanum.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Altered Traits, Increased HP + Area of Effect + Damage, Direct Crushing (Low Signature; Wall, Rigid).



## YOU BUILD THE WALL YOU PAY FOR

“Wall of (X)” spells are popular in the genre fiction that *Dungeon Fantasy* cleaves to, but *Incantation Magic* is not explicit on how to build such spells. Use the following guidelines.

### Walls of Energy

The wall of fire or force is a classic spell for pointy-hat-wearing wizards. The easiest way to create a spell that damages those who try to pass through it is to use the rules for conjured weapons (*Incantation Magic*, p. 21), which describe how to add the Duration and Damage ritual modifiers in a single spell. Next, add the Wall enhancement (p. B109) that’s most appropriate for the type of wall you are conjuring. Its DR and HP can be increased by adding Altered Traits normally.

### Walls of Solid Matter

If the wall is made of a solid material (e.g., ice or stone), the only thing you need to know is how big the wall is and how much it weighs. HP is equal to  $8 \times$  (cube root of weight in lbs.), and DR is equal to Path skill / 4, regardless of what the actual substance is. This is an intentional simplification to ease game play!

For solid walls with a duration of one minute or *more*, you must *also* make a roll against the best of your Path

skill, Engineer (Civil), Prospecting, or Architecture. Failure means your wall begins to collapse, losing 10% of its max HP and DR per 10% of duration that passes.

*Examples:* A spell with a duration of one minute would lose 10% of its max HP and DR every six seconds. Meanwhile, if the spell lasts an hour, it loses HP and DR every six minutes. A spell that lasts a day loses HP and DR every 2.4 hours. (The GM may wish to round that to 2.5 hours, if such a long-lasting spell exists, for ease of bookkeeping.)

To increase the amount of DR or HP the wall has, use Bestows a Bonus (*Incantation Magic*, p. 15), with each +1 adding 10% to either HP or DR, up to double DR and HP. HT rolls for such walls always use your effective Path skill. To increase damage dealt to those who slam into it, use “Bestows a Bonus, Slam damage,” treating the modifier as a bonus to a single task or skill. Furthermore, you can add other types of damage (such as burning or impaling) to a wall by using an appropriate Create effect along with Bestows a Bonus – just as if enhancing a weapon.

### Shapeable

For a flat +6 SP to the Area of Effect cost, you can shape a wall when you first cast it. Otherwise, it appears as a solid block of appropriate dimensions.

*Skill Penalty:* Path of Arcanum-8.  
*Casting Time:* 10 minutes.

The caster conjures a transparent wall of pure “arcane force” that is nine yards long, three yards tall, and three yards wide; the wall may be placed up to 20 yards away. It does 2d of crushing damage to those who collide with it; otherwise, it does no damage. It has DR 6 and 12 HP. This wall lasts for one minute before dissipating.

*Typical Casting:* Create Arcanum (6) + Strengthen Arcanum (3) + Altered Traits, HP +11 (22) + Area of Effect, 3 yards (30) + Damage, Direct Crushing Attack 2d (Low Signature, +10%; Wall, Rigid, +30%) (12) + Duration, 1 minute (3) + Range, 20 yards (6). 82 SP.

### Wall of Ice

*Spell Effects:* Create Elementalism.  
*Inherent Modifiers:* Area of Effect.  
*Skill Penalty:* Path of Elementalism-6.  
*Casting Time:* 5 minutes.

The caster conjures a wall of translucent ice up to 20 yards away. At 12 yards long, two yards tall, and 9” thick – shaped as the caster wants at invocation – it weighs five tons. See *Walls of Solid Matter* (above) for DR, HP, and HT. This wall lasts for one minute before dissipating.

*Typical Casting:* Create Elementalism (6) + Area of Effect, 4 yards, Shapeable (see above) (46) + Duration, 1 minute (3) + Range, 20 yards (6) + Subject Weight, 5 tons (6). 67 SP.

## A FINAL WORD ON CREATING SPELLS

Despite the detailed framework players and the GM have access to, creating incantation magic spells is still more of an art than a science. Sometimes it takes repurposing the tools you already have to achieve the effect you want. See Lighten Load (pp. 6-7) for an example; that spell repurposes Bestows a Bonus from a flat numerical bonus into a percentage, but in a very specific way. This could be done for other things as well. For example, if the GM is worried that controlling the minds of others is too easy, he could require that the caster *also* adds the Summoned modifier (*Incantation Magic*, p. 16) to the spell. If you don’t add enough energy, then you can’t control high-point-value targets.

In the end, the best way to enhance a grimoire is to work with the GM and try out new spells in the game. If a spell doesn’t work, it’s going to become quickly apparent in play. To that end, the GM should squash munchkin-y attempts to game the system, while trying to be as even-handed as possible when a player comes up with a brilliant spell or solution. The occasional in-game adjustment of a spell may occur

*Sometimes you need to repurpose the tools you have.*

if the player and the GM realize they had an honest misunderstanding of the spell’s desired effects; rerolling to see if the new version of the spell succeeds might be required.

For more incantation magic Paths and power-ups, plus an incantation magic lens for bards, see **Pyramid #3/109: Thaumatology V**.

## ADAPTING SPELLS FROM *RITUAL PATH MAGIC*

For those who have access to *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*, the following spells are appropriate and use the same modifiers, but have different Paths. Page references are to that book, not this one.

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Incantation Paths</i>	<i>Total SP</i>	<i>Penalty</i>	<i>Casting Time</i>	<i>Page</i>
Alertness	Strengthen Mesmerism	19	-1	5 minutes	p. 39
Amplify Injury	Destroy Necromancy	26	-2	5 minutes	p. 39
Babble On	Sense Mesmerism + Strengthen Mesmerism	45	-4	10 minutes	p. 39
Bag of Bones	Control Necromancy + Create Necromancy	30	-3	10 minutes	p. 39
Body of Shadow	Transform Transfiguration + Transform Elementalism	75	-7	10 minutes	p. 39
Call Spirit	Control Necromancy	51	-5	5 minutes	p. 39
Chill	Control Elementalism	46	-4	5 minutes	p. 40
Conjure Credentials	Create Elementalism + Sense Mesmerism	19	-1	10 minutes	p. 40
Create Pocket Dimension*	Create Protection + Create Elementalism	73	-7	10 minutes	p. 40
Death Touch	Control Necromancy	16	-1	5 minutes	p. 41
Death Vision	Control Necromancy	10	-1	5 minutes	p. 41
Destruction	Create Elementalism	92	-9	5 minutes	p. 41
Detect Secret Doors	Sense Augury	102	-10	5 minutes	p. 41
Diamond Mind	Create Mesmerism + Sense Mesmerism	68	-6	10 minutes	p. 41
Dreamcatcher	Strengthen Transfiguration + Strengthen Mesmerism	72	-7	10 minutes	p. 41
Dull (Sense)†	Destroy Mesmerism	19	-1	5 minutes	p. 42
Duplicate Object	Create Elementalism + Sense Elementalism	21	-2	10 minutes	p. 42
False Memory*	Create Mesmerism	19	-1	5 minutes	p. 42
Feral Rage	Control Mesmerism + Strengthen Body	54	-5	10 minutes	p. 42
Fireball	Create Elementalism	6	0	5 minutes	p. 42
Ghost Shirt†	Control Elementalism	36	-3	5 minutes	p. 43
Gift of Gab	Strengthen Body + Strengthen Mind×2	35	-3	30 minutes	p. 43
Glamor Glamour	Strengthen Transfiguration + Transform Transfiguration	50	-5	10 minutes	p. 43
Hall of Records	Create Augury + Sense Augury	15	-1	10 minutes	p. 44
Halt	Destroy Elementalism	21	-2	5 minutes	p. 44
Haste†	Strengthen Transfiguration	33	-3	5 minutes	p. 44
Hinder†	Destroy Transfiguration×2	29	-2	10 minutes	p. 44
Hunger	Destroy Transfiguration	20	-2	5 minutes	p. 44
Hush	Destroy Elementalism	34	-3	5 minutes	p. 44
Implant Mind-Shard*	Create Mesmerism	24	-2	5 minutes	p. 45
Intercom	Sense Mesmerism	19	-1	5 minutes	p. 45
Itch	Control Transfiguration	19	-1	5 minutes	p. 45
Kiss of Silver†	Transform Elementalism	14	-1	5 minutes	p. 45
Legs of the Kangaroo	Strengthen Transfiguration + Strengthen Transfiguration×2	36	-3	30 minutes	p. 45
Life Preserver*	Control Elementalism	19	-1	5 minutes	p. 46
Light†	Create Elementalism	12	-1	5 minutes	p. 46
Live Off the Land*	Strengthen Mesmerism + Strengthen Transfiguration×2	35	-3	30 minutes	p. 46
Lockpick	Control Elementalism	5	0	5 minutes	p. 46
Mantle of Glory	Strengthen Demonology	68	-6	5 minutes	p. 46
Medicine Bag*	Strengthen Arcanum	28	-2	5 minutes	p. 46

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Incantation Paths</i>	<i>Total SP</i>	<i>Penalty</i>	<i>Casting Time</i>	<i>Page</i>
Necrosis	Control Necromancy	28	-2	5 minutes	p. 47
Nixie's Curse	Create Elementalism	30	-3	5 minutes	p. 47
Pentagram Trap*	Control Demonology + Sense Demonology	73	-7	10 minutes	p. 47
Petrify	Transform Transfiguration + Transform Elementalism	31	-3	10 minutes	p. 47
Project Voice†	Control Elementalism + Strengthen Elementalism	17	-1	10 minutes	p. 48
Rain of Fire	Create Elementalism	64	-6	5 minutes	p. 48
Remove Reflection†	Destroy Elementalism	18	-1	5 minutes	p. 48
Resist Cold†	Destroy Elementalism	32	-3	5 minutes	p. 48
Resist Magic†	Destroy Arcanum	20	-2	5 minutes	p. 48
Seek Person	Sense Augury	8	0	5 minutes	p. 48
Serpent's Grace	Strengthen Transfiguration + Strengthen Transfigurationx2	32	-3	30 minutes	p. 49
Show of Character	Sense Mesmerism + Transform Transfiguration	29	-2	10 minutes	p. 49
Slow†	Control Transfiguration	38	-3	5 minutes	p. 49
Sorcerous Mark*	Strengthen Arcanum	17	-1	5 minutes	p. 50
Suspend Gravity	Destroy Elementalism	117	-11	5 minutes	p. 50
Sylph Form	Transform Transfiguration + Transform Elementalism	65	-6	10 minutes	p. 50
Terrify	Control Mesmerism	11	-1	5 minutes	p. 50
Track Traveler	Sense Augury	4	0	5 minutes	p. 50
Transmogrification	Transform Transfiguration	28	-2	5 minutes	p. 50
True Form	Control Transfiguration	11	-1	5 minutes	p. 51
Truthteller	Control Mesmerism	22	-2	5 minutes	p. 51
Wallwalker†	Strengthen Transfiguration	31	-3	5 minutes	p. 51
Weaken Blood†	Destroy Necromancy	24	-2	5 minutes	p. 51

\* Duration is 1 day instead of listed duration.

† Duration is 12 minutes instead of listed duration.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice is a Master of the Dark Arts – okay, more like a Petty Dabbler of the Dark Arts. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's spinning words and whimsy into gold. Of course, if he's not writing about *GURPS*, he's blogging about it. Visit his site "Ravens N' Pennies" ([www.ravensnpennies.com](http://www.ravensnpennies.com)) for more *GURPS* goodies. He's the co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* and *Dungeon Fantasy Traps*.

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# NAMES HAVE POWER

BY RORY FANSLER

*Jorlson had struggled all day against the enemy magicians, but there were too many for him to counter. His fellow warriors greatly outnumbered, it was clear the battle would be lost before nightfall unless he could pull off a miracle. He made his way to the top of a hill overlooking the battle and started his ritual. Soon he smelled blood in the air, and the hairs on the back of his neck stood up. He recognized the signs for what they were and continued his chanting. With one last push of his will, he spoke the Name. With a flash of light and crash of sound, a mighty being appeared.*

*"How dare you summon me, seiðmann?"*

*"I apologize, my lord, but your people have need of you, for our enemy is strong and outnumbers us greatly," Jorlson replied.*

*"I am forbidden to act in mortal battles. Surely you know this?" the figure boomed.*

*"I do. However, no one can fault you if you were coerced by your True Name."*

*The figure laughed. With a fierce roar, he raised his hammer and charged into battle.*

True Names are a staple in history and fiction. This article explores how they can be used with various magic systems and settings. It is a supplemental concept to add flavor to your system of choice. It heavily references *GURPS Thaumatology*, other works under that banner, and *GURPS Fantasy*. In particular, *Thaumatology*, pp. 128-129 and 245, has some nice details on using True Names in a campaign. This article is for those who want to dial it up a notch!

## WHAT IS A TRUE NAME?

Everything in creation has a True Name, from the smallest pebble to the mightiest god. In myth and fantasy literature alike, an object's True Name is its ultimate description or a sort of cosmic anchor point that ties the named thing to reality. One can gain great power over an entity by learning this secret name.

True Names are also often part of an obscure magical language that was part of creation itself. Naturally, this language is a closely guarded secret, and few know the whole thing. For the purposes of this article, a True Name is not the name you are born with or called by those you know. True Names resonate with magic and the universe, and tell reality who and what you truly are. This gives True Names great power over individuals and things, because without them, those beings

and things would not exist. Alternatively, animist beliefs suggest that everything has a spirit and to learn the name of the spirit lets you control it.

## HOW TO FIND A TRUE NAME

True Names are closely guarded and someone may not even know their own, so how do you learn them?

### By Asking Someone

Revealing your True Name makes you vulnerable, so asking for or using one is generally a hostile act. Magical powers give a bonus of at least +4 to resist when trying to force someone to reveal his name. Trickery is often used to make the target slip up or convince him to reveal it. For example, in Egyptian mythology, Isis tricked Ra into giving her his True Name by poisoning him. When no one could heal him, she claimed she could *but* needed his name to do so. Numerous advantages and skills can be brought into play here.

### Skills

*Diplomacy*, *Fast-Talk*, *Intimidation*, and *Sex Appeal* all can be used to get someone to reveal their deepest secrets. However, any attempt should be subject to the +4 to resist. Some beings are immune to the attempt.

### Advantages

*Indomitable* (p. B60) makes the subject immune to social skills unless you have the appropriate empathy advantage. Spirits require *Spirit Empathy* (p. B88) for example.

*Magic Resistance* (p. B67) counters spells used to control, giving both a penalty to the caster's skill *and* a bonus to the subject's resistance.

*Mind Shield* (p. B70) gives a bonus to the subject's Will or IQ to resist and works against magic and psionics.

*Obscure* (p. B72) can make the person harder to locate and gives a penalty to abilities (such as divination) used to find (but not control) the subject's True Name.

*Resistant* (p. B80) is a cheap and effective way to protect oneself, though it's more specific than the above. In a setting that makes great use of True Names, the *Obscure True Name* (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 19) perk may be too powerful and should be bought instead as a "Rare" category of Resistant (Obscure Name) for +3 [1], +8 [2], or Immunity [5].

This counters any roll to find out a being's True Name. However, if a True Name is known, Resistant does not counter the effects of using it against that person. Note that Immunity should be reserved for things that are unknowable, such as Elder Things, lost gods, etc.

### Disadvantages

*Absent-Mindedness* (p. B122) makes the person more vulnerable to Fast-Talk, as it's hard to focus on trivial things, and the skill tends to bury the important among the trivial in order to get more information.

*Addiction* (p. B122) and related traits such as *Compulsive Behavior* (p. B128) can be used against the person by offering him what he wants. This is especially effective during withdrawal periods. Many spirits have addictions or similar traits. Djinn (among others) are noted for gambling, while others may be addicted to possessing people.

*Oblivious* (p. B146) and similar mental disadvantages have their normal effects. For example, someone with Oblivious is at -1 to resist Influence skills.

*Susceptible* (p. B158) (Group True Name) [-1] can represent a common or easily discovered name and gives +1 per level to discovery. This can be used for species where everyone shares the same True Name. This is common for animals and plants, but can also be used for sentient beings where everyone is essentially the same. This may also be used for racial True Names.

### Research

If you can't ask, then you're going to have to work for it. True Names represent an underlying pattern of the universe, so they can be puzzled out. If you're lucky, the name you are looking for may already be known and recorded somewhere.

A few magical texts list True Names for angels, demons, or spirits. However, they are rare and valuable, and one that you find may not have the Name you seek.

Summoning demons to learn True Names has its own risks. Of course, such beings are unlikely to know the name of anyone more powerful than themselves.

Unless a given True Name is a plot device, the *New Inventions* (pp. B473-474) rules work pretty well for deciding how difficult a name is to discover. The appropriate Hidden Lore (True Names, Spirits, etc.), Symbol Drawing, Thaumatology, or Theology skill becomes the invention skill.

The complexity represents how difficult it is to find the True Name. A basic guideline is that minor spirits and common animals are Simple to Average; major spirits, rare animals, simple forces, and most people are Complex; and deities and really obscure or protected individuals are Amazing. The name-researcher should get a modifier based on how appropriate the invention skill is for the subject. Complementary skills can assist. Also, some libraries and facilities are more likely to have certain Names than others, and thus give a bonus.

The Concept roll represents whether you are on the right track with your research.

The Prototype roll involves actually testing the Name, which can be very dangerous. Success

means you learned part of it. With a failure, you can try again at no penalty. A critical failure means you got your subject's (or something else's) attention but have the wrong name!

The time required at the prototype stage indicates how long it took you to discover the True Name. The prototype cost represents any research materials or lab facilities that you needed to obtain in order to learn the Name. The GM can use the maximum retail price associated with a given Name's complexity as the prototype cost. (Alternatively, the GM can fold the time and cost into an adventure!)

Minor bugs represent accents or other variations. Each such bug gives -1 (cumulative) to spells using the Name. Major bugs might double this penalty, or they might represent a wrong but similar Name, and trying to use it in a spell will give you no control but still let the being know that you tried. Skip the production step and costs.

*Example:* Jorlson needs to find the True Name of a local river spirit that has been drowning people. He has Symbol Drawing (Futhark) and Control, Magic, Sense, and Water as known symbols. The GM decides this provides enough of a foundation to begin research, and Water should be the invention skill used. The GM decides this task is of Average complexity since it concerns a local spirit that is not very powerful. Jorlson uses the symbol skills Magic and Sense as complimentary rolls. The Prototype roll takes 2d days. The roll is at -10 for Average, +4 for the complimentary skills, and +2 as a GM bonus for clues based on local activity. Jorlson's Control and Prototype rolls are at an effective -4 to skill. The research has a facility cost of \$10,000, since Jorlson already has most of the materials and a lab for researching Names, and the GM decides to use the base retail price associated with the complexity in determining costs. Each attempt costs another \$10,000. Jorlson is likely to lose money on this deal, as the village is not that wealthy. However, he will have another spirit's Name in his repertoire.

## TRUE NAMES AND MANUFACTURED ITEMS

Manufactured items tend *not* to have True Names, or at least not helpful ones, until they have been in use for a great length of time. Thus, objects that are unique and have been around a long time will develop a True Name. Anything that uses *Enchantment Through Deeds* (*GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 112-113) or the Named Possession (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 19) perk will have its own name. Some magic may also grant a True Name to an object.

From an animist point of view, manufacturing something involves altering and melding different objects (and their spirits) to make a new one. It takes time for the new spirit to evolve out of the old mix.

From a creationist point of view, manufactured items have been changed so the original names no longer apply. Depending on setting and situation, someone may still be able to affect them by controlling the major building material if it was not significantly altered.

## USING A TRUE NAME

True Names allow you to affect others more easily, especially magically. Someone knowing your True Name is something even gods have feared throughout literature so it's considered a powerful effect.

For magical settings where the power of a True Name is uncommon, treat this as Magic Susceptibility 4 (Only to those who use your True Name, -80%) [-2] (p. B143). The being might also have Divine Curse (Cannot harm anyone who invokes your True Name; see *Name in Pyramid #3/45*, pp. 4-5) [-5] or (Can be driven off by using your True Name; see *Name in Pyramid #3/45*, p. 23) [-5]; see p. B132. Reprogrammable (p. B150) is good for beings that *must* obey anyone who knows and uses their True Name. These disadvantages are fitting for all spirits and magically aware beings. In settings where True Names are ubiquitous, the GM may allow people to buy the disadvantages off with an Unusual Background (Protected Name) [5].

As a nonmagical though cinematic option, knowing someone's True Name is good for +4 to Intimidation. Since a True Name represent someone's essence, knowing it could give a bonus to Empathy, and to skills like Body Language and Detect Lies. True Names are a magical effect, but in a setting with psionic abilities, adding the modifier to Telepathy and related powers may be a setting switch.

## THE PRICE OF KNOWING A NAME

True Names are mostly a feature of magic, and the limitations on knowing the True Name of the subject and having the

right spells to take advantage of that makes pricing mostly a campaign-setting issue. Thus, pricing should reflect that you need another ability or skill to make use of True Names *and* that they are pretty specific.

True Names thus come in two power levels.

- *True Name (Entity) Perk*: This acts as a prerequisite for various spells or powers and can trigger the subject's Divine Curse, Magic Susceptibility, or Reprogrammable disadvantage, but it has no power on its own.

- *Words of Power*: This is a True Name spoken in the language of creation and has a power all its own; see *Thaumatology*, pp. 178-179.

## TRUE NAMES AND MAGIC

True Names can be added to a variety of magic systems. Here are a few ideas.

### Standard Magic System

With the standard *GURPS* magic system, True Names give bonuses to communicating with, controlling, and summoning spirits or any sentient being. Most Names should be a perk (see above), as summoning spells already address how powerful the being is. Magic Susceptibility gives a bonus to non-resisted spells as well, making any spell easier to cast on the subject. This is handy for offsetting range or other penalties.

### Identify True Name (VH)

Regular; Resisted by Will+10

When cast on a subject that fails to resist, this spell grants the caster the subject's True Name. Points must be spent to buy a perk to remember a True Name, but the perk allows its use with other spells. This is a Knowledge spell.

*Cost*: 2.

*Time to cast*: 1 minute.

*Prerequisites*: Aura or Mage Sight.

### Path/Book Magic

If the ritual calls on a specific being or would benefit from its aid, then a True Name grants +2 to effective skill. If the spell is *targeting* the named being, it gets +4 to effective skill. See Chapter 5 of *Thaumatology* for more details on Path/Book magic.

### Magic as Powers

If spells are bought as abilities, then requiring a True Name to access them should be a limitation. This can be subsumed into a power modifier like Magical (perhaps mages need to know the True Names of the targets of their spells rather than worry about mana levels). Alternatively, a new limitation can be added; see below for some examples. Spirits whose True Name is known to you could be bought as Allies with the Unwilling modifier and probably Summonable with Special Abilities.

## OTHER NAMES

Pseudonyms, nicknames, and public names are good enough for a ritual connection but grant no bonus to spells that use them. Legal names or citizen identifiers such as Social Security numbers grant +1. Baptism, coming-of-age names, and other ritual names are good for +2. Fully individual and unique names are +3. True Names are good for +4 and can trigger Susceptibility and other advantages and disadvantages. Gods are typically known by a pseudonym for a connection to their worshipers, while inner-circle priests may know a ritual name (+2) which makes it easier to get their attention. Ritual True Names can be given to religious followers and allow easier casting of spells – Magic Susceptibility 2 (Only those who use the Ritual True Name, -80%) [-1] – on them. This can be used to locate and heal also, so even good religions may do it. Furthermore, it ties the True Name to the religion, so the deity may notice when it's used. See *True Names (Fantasy*, p. 164) for some other ideas.

Common things share a group Name, but those treated as individuals get new Names. Natural landmarks such as lakes, mountains, or that oak tree with all the yellow ribbons on it over time get their own Name. Use *Enchantment Through Deeds (GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 112-113) as a rough guideline. Also, things can be ritually given a Name; this works on even minor things like a hearth fire.

## True Name Modifiers

*Named Attack*, +15%, for abilities that use True Names for better control. Suitable even for common spells like Air Jet or Shape Fire. Based on Reliable +4, +20% (Accessibility, Requires True Name of attack's composition, -20%) or Accurate +4, +20% (Accessibility, Requires True Name of attack's composition, -20%).

*Named Target*, +5%, for Malediction-type attacks where knowing the Name of the target helps. Based on Reliable +4, +20% (Accessibility, Requires True Name of target, -80%).

*Name Required*, -5%, for attacks where knowing the Name helps and not knowing a Name makes the power nearly impossible to use. Based on Reliable +4, +20% (Accessibility, Requires True Name of target, -80%); Hard to Use 3, -15% (Accessibility, Without a specific Name of target, -20%). See *Other Names* (p. 14) for levels of names; consider any name that gives +1 or greater to be a "specific Name."

## Symbol Magic

Symbol magic is the use of symbols that represent various aspects of the universe in such a manner as to exert your will upon that portion. This makes it very similar to Name magic; in fact, some symbol magic is said to use the language of creation. No Easy symbol skill has a corresponding True Name perk; only unique versions of things in this category would have a True Name. For Average or more difficult symbol skills, the magic user can gain a benefit from knowing the True Names of subgroups and individuals – and thus acquiring the True Name (Entity) perk (p. 14). Nonsapient races and common objects share a True Name; for example, the perk True Name (Wolf) would give the caster a bonus on all wolves.

Someone who has the True Name (Entity) perk for a specific being or item can use that symbol along with the related Noun skill to take advantage of the appropriate Magic Susceptibility, Divine Curse, or Reprogrammable disadvantage. Additionally, casting a spell on certain beings and objects may require both the True Name (Entity) perk and the appropriate symbol skills.

*Example:* Knowing the Archangel Gabriel's name would mean that you have the True Name (Archangel Gabriel) perk, but you would use the Sowilo (Spirit) symbol skill for a casting using Futhark runes.

Symbol magic also aids in researching Names (see p. 13). A Noun skill can be used as the invention skill for Names within its category.

See *Thaumatology*, pp. 168-179, for more details on symbol magic and its variations.

## Words of Power

Words of Power are the ultimate expression of True Names. As a system of magic, they're powerful but also risky – a bit like carrying around large bombs! For ideas about the Names of creatures and things, and what those Names can do, consider *True Names* (*Fantasy*, p. 164) and *Named Objects* (*Fantasy*, p. 26). *Enchantment Through Deeds* (*GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 112-113) offers an idea for naming gadgets. Spirits might all have Secret (True Name) as a feature, which becomes Reprogrammable when the True Name is spoken. This vision of True Names also fits well with abilities like Rapier Wit

(Words of Power, +100%) (see p. B79 and *GURPS Powers*, p. 70). See *Thaumatology*, pp. 178-179, for more details on Words of Power.

## Ritual Path Magic

In *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*, a True Name grants an energy discount of 10%, which is cumulative with *Traditional Trappings* (*Ritual Path Magic*, p. 19). If using decans, the True Name is worth an extra 5% per associated decan (see *Thaumatology*, pp. 248-252).

Another way to use this system is to add a Path of Names (see below), which can substitute for Energy, Matter, Mind, and Spirit when the caster knows the subject's True Name (and has the associated True Name perk, p. 14). Note that forces of nature such as air, fire, lightning, and water each have a True Name in this system, just as in symbol magic. This can make for a powerful ultimate Path. However, the requirement to know the True Name for everything should keep it in line with standard Paths. Note that the caster does *not* get the energy discount for the Name when relying on the Path of Names.

To summon beings using their True Names, figure the energy cost as if they were an Ally built with the Special Abilities, Summonable, and Unwilling modifiers and Constant availability. Use this *instead* of the cost for the Create and Control effects. This means the additional energy cost for a spirit Ally would be eight times its base cost in character points, making powerful spirits harder to summon and control. This is a bit more granular than the Lesser Create effect for a minor spirit and Greater Create effect for a major one suggested in the rules, but can provide more flavor and balance.

## Reveal True Name

*Spell Effects:* Greater Sense Body + Greater Sense Magic + Greater Sense Mind + Greater Sense Spirit.

*Inherent Modifiers:* None.

*Greater Effects:* 4 (x9).

This spell allows you to learn the subject's True Name. The subject resists at +4 with a Quick Contest of the better of his HT or Will, plus Magic Resistance. If the target fails to resist, you learn the True Name. If he resists but you successfully cast the spell, you still get a hint of the True Name and that may lead you to learn more. Treat this as a small bonus equal to (margin of success / 3) to research attempts (p. 13).

*Typical Casting:* Greater Sense Body (2) + Greater Sense Magic (2) + Greater Sense Mind (2) + Greater Sense Spirit (2). 72 energy (8x9).

## Path of Names (Ren)

IQ/VH

*Prerequisite:* Thaumatology.

This sample Path for the Ritual Path magic system is built around True Names.

This Path is very broad and encompasses effects from other Paths, but you must learn the True Name perk for each subject or force to use or control it. *Unique* beings and objects have their own specific True Names, which can be hard to learn.

*Strengthen*, *Restore*, *Control*, and *Destroy* have the normal effects on beings, objects, and forces that you know the True Name for.

*Sense Name:* Lesser Sense Name can figure out the name of a generic force or energy if the ritual is cast in its presence. It can also be used to communicate over short distances. Greater Sense Name is needed to learn unique True Names and is resisted at +4 plus any appropriate bonus (Magic Resistance, etc.) that may apply. Greater Sense Name can communicate over any distance or dimension.

*Create Name:* Lesser Create Name can summon individuals; energy cost equals their character-point cost if bought as Allies with a frequency of Constantly and the modifiers Special Abilities, Summonable, and Unwilling (8x the basic cost under *Ally's Power*). Greater Create Name is used as a coming of age or baptism rite and gives an individual a unique True Name, or perhaps just a ritual name, which provides the person or creature with Magic Susceptibility -2 (Only those who use the ritual name, -80%) [-1]. This can be cast on animals, which can both protect them by replacing the race name and make it easier for someone who knows the Name to cast spells on them.

*Transform Name:* Lesser Transform Name can create a temporary change, lasting no more than a day, to disguise the subject's nature. Greater Transform Name can have any duration or make an actual change to the Name and transform the subject, however temporarily. The True Name reasserts itself as soon as the duration expires.

## CHARACTER TRAITS

*Diviner of Names:* Gadgeteer (pp. B56-57) with "Accessibility, True Names only" may help with discovering True Names through research (p. 13). The value of the Accessibility limitation depends on how common True Names are, but -50% puts it into line with Specialized. A Quick Gadgeteer version may also be available.

*Onomancy:* Onomancy (see *Pyramid* #3/48: *Secret Magic*, p. 38) is an expression of the power of a True Name and an interesting idea where giving up your Name grants power. Note that using the Ultimate Stranger ability (below) counts as a reset.

*Transfiguration:* Knowing something's name can let you change into it, so Shapeshifting (p. B83) with "Accessibility, Requires True Name of target form" is a fitting ability. Patricia A. McKillip's *The Riddle-Master of Hed*, Ursula K. Le Guin's

*Earthsea* series, and the tales of Math and Taliesin from Celtic lore offer examples of such an ability.

*Speaker of Names:* Rapier Wit (p. B79) with the Words of Power (*GURPS Powers*, p. 70) modifier is a useful ability. As is, it works well for speaking a powerful Name. Alternatively, it can have an Accessibility limitation for only working on a target when you speak his True Name. Dialing it up a notch, you can add Affliction (p. B35) modifiers for various effects as suggested in *GURPS Fantasy*, p. 130.

*Ultimate Stranger:* Zeroed (p. B100) with Cosmic +50% can represent those who have the ability to magically hide their True Name and extend that to things like records with minimal effort. Essentially, even if you're found out, you can erase all records of your existence. If you acquire this ability, you should buy off your Divine Curse, Magic Susceptibility, and Reprogrammable disadvantages, as they no longer have an effect on you. Cosmic, +300% represents the ultimate shadow, moving through the world unnoticed and unrecorded. Even those who see you will eventually remember you only as a nameless face. You must work through temporary identities to maintain any sort of social connection longer than a day, unless you add Selective Effect, +20%. To protect others when you "memory wipe" the universe, buy Immunity, +50% per person or a combination of Area Effect, Force Field, and Immunity. To affect others with your ability (thereby "wiping" them too), add Cosmic, Affects Others, +50% and the Affects Others enhancement per person you can do this to. The GM may require characters so afflicted to purchase Zeroed (or simply give it to them).

*Warded Name:* Obscure (p. B72) can be bought as a bubble that counters Name-seeking magic, or extended to other divination.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rory Fansler (also known as "refplace") started roleplaying games with the original boxed set of *Dungeons and Dragons* and enjoys a variety of genres and making up worlds to play in. He bought into *GURPS* largely on the strength of the Steve Jackson name (he's also an old Metagaming fan) and never regretted it. He is a native Californian who resides in Oklahoma. He would like to give thanks to the *Pyramid* Write Club, but the first rule of Write Club is "we do not talk about Write Club."

The image shows the cover of the GURPS Fourth Edition book "Thaumatology". At the top, a blue banner contains the "GURPS" logo in a stylized font and "Fourth Edition" in a smaller font. Below this, the word "THAUMATOLOGY" is written in large, blue, 3D block letters. Underneath the title, the website "gurps.sjgames.com/thaumatology" is printed in a smaller blue font. To the right of the text is a collage of four images: a glowing blue bear-like creature, a person sitting at a desk with a computer, a character in a dark, hooded outfit, and a dragon-like creature. At the bottom of the cover, a blue banner contains the text "STEVE JACKSON GAMES" in white. Below the banner, the text "Available in print from Amazon, BN.com, and other retailers!" is written in red.



# EIDETIC MEMORY

## GLASS MAGIC AND THE SPECULARII

BY DAVID L. PULVER

Glass – whether true glass formed from silicates or naturally occurring volcanic glass (obsidian) – was a valued luxury in antiquity. Glass has many magical and fairytale associations: crystal balls, magical mirrors, glass slippers or stairs,

and so on. As a result, in a fantasy setting, there would be mages who specialize in glass magic!

This article describes a sub-college of Earth magic, Glass spells, and an associated style, the Specularii, created using *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles*.

## GLASS SPELLS

Glass is an amorphous material that has solidified from a molten state without crystallization. It includes ordinary silicate glass, certain plastic-based materials, and obsidian (produced by a fast cooling of magma). Glass is affected at no extra cost by Earth spells that work equally well on earth, stone, and metal. Where Earth spells can also affect metal at extra cost, the same generally applies to glass.

Glass magic may be considered a sub-college of Earth magic or promoted to full college status. A college of Glass magic might encompass spells from the Earth, Light and Darkness, and Making and Breaking colleges in *GURPS Magic*, as well as a few new spells. The table below lists those spells that can be considered Glass spells (and make up the Glass college, if it exists) and lists variations or alternate prerequisites when this is the case. The notes describe the extra cost, if any, to use Earth spells on glass.

Walk Through Earth is not part of the Glass college but can be used to walk through glass rather than earth at triple cost.

*Glass was a valued luxury in antiquity.*

Spell	Prerequisites	Notes
Body of Glass (VH)	Flesh to Glass	
Create Sand	Seek Earth	[1]
Crystal-Gazing	Glass Vision, History, and Mirror	
Earth to Air	Create Air and Shape Earth	[2]
Earth to Stone	Shape Earth	[3]
Essential Earth	Six Earth or Glass spells	[4]
Flesh to Glass	M1, Create Sand, and Earth to Stone	
Glass Missile	Create Sand	
Glass Vision	Shape Earth	
Glasswraith	M2 and Body of Glass	
Light	–	
Mirror	Colors	
Partial Vitrification (VH)	M2 and Flesh to Glass	[5]
Rain of Glass	M2 and Glass Missile	
Repair	Shape Earth	[6]
Sand Jet	Create Sand	
Seek Earth	–	
Shape Earth	Seek Earth	[7]
Sharpen	Repair	[6]
Stone to Earth	Earth to Stone or any 4 Earth or Glass spells	[7]
Transparency	Glass Vision and Stone to Earth	[8]

## Notes

[1] As Create Earth, but creates fine-quality sand rather than good, fertile earth.

[2] Triple energy cost to turn glass to air.

[3] Normal energy cost for stone or sand to glass; double cost for earth or clay to glass.

[4] Sand can be created at the same cost as earth. If Essential Earth or Sand is transformed to glass, it's three times as strong (DR and HP) and utterly flawless. In addition to being stronger, optics that are made from such glass get an extra level of Telescopic Vision, Acute Vision, or Microscopic Vision compared to similar, mundane versions of the same size, weight, and TL.

[5] Turns part of the subject to glass. Vitrified parts are Fragile (Brittle) and DR 2, Aside from prerequisites, this VH spell is identical to Partial Petrification (*GURPS Magic*, p. 52).

[6] If learned with the variant Glass college prerequisites, can only affect glass (including obsidian) items or weapons. This doesn't apply if the caster knows all the prerequisites (and their prerequisites, and so on) listed under Repair in *GURPS Magic*, p. 118.

[7] Sextuple energy cost to shape glass windows, turn glass to earth, etc. However, Stone to Earth merely requires triple cost to turn glass to sand.

[8] If learned with these Glass college prerequisites, Transparency can only affect earth, stone, sand, brick, glass, obsidian, or ceramics. This doesn't apply if the caster knows all the

prerequisites (and their prerequisites, and so on) listed under Transparency in *GURPS Magic*, p. 119.

## NEW GLASS SPELLS

In addition to the variant spells (Partial Vitrification, Create Sand) detailed in the table's footnotes above, these spells are available to glass mages.

### *Body of Glass (VH)*

**Regular; Resisted by HT**

Subject becomes an animated, transparent glass statue; he temporarily acquires the Body of Glass meta-trait (above). Clothes also become glass, but carried equipment does not.

*Duration:* 1 minute.

*Cost:* 9 to cast. 4 to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 5 seconds.

*Prerequisite:* Flesh to Glass.

### Item

Staff, wand, or jewelry. Only affects the wearer. *Energy cost to create:* 1,400.

### *Flesh to Glass*

**Regular; Resisted by HT**

"Vitrifies" a living subject (and all his gear), turning that person into glass. Must affect the entire subject, not just a part of it!

Stone to Flesh (*Magic*, p. 53) can reverse the effects of this spell, but that caster is at -4 unless he knows Flesh to Glass. Remove Curse (*Magic*, p. 126) and Suspend Curse (*Magic*, p. 125) are also effective.

*Duration:* Permanent until reversed by another spell or shattered.

*Cost:* 12 to cast.

*Time to cast:* 2 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 1, Create Sand, and Earth to Stone.

### Item

Staff or wand. Usable only by mages; the item must touch the subject. *Energy cost to create:* 1,200.

### *Glass Missile*

**Missile**

Create a shard of glass and fire it from one hand, injuring anything it hits. This spell has Acc 2, Range 40/80.

*Cost:* Any amount up to your Magery level per second, for 3 seconds. The missile does 1d+1(0.5) cutting damage per energy point.

*Time to cast:* 1 to 3 seconds.

*Prerequisite:* Create Sand.

### Item

Staff or wand – the missile is fired from the end of the item. Usable only by mages. *Energy cost to create:* 400.

## GLASS ELEMENTALS

Optionally, glass elementals may exist, with their own Summon, Create, and Control Elemental spells.

### *Small Glass Elemental*

40 points

*Attribute Modifiers:* IQ-4 [-80]; HT -1 [-10].

*Secondary Characteristic Modifiers:* HP-1 [-2]; Basic Speed-0.75 [-15]; SM -1.

*Advantages:* Chameleon 1 (Always On, -10%) [5]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; DR 2 [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Sealed [15]; Sharp Claws [5]; Slippery 1 [2]; Vacuum Support [5].

*Disadvantages:* Fragile (Brittle) [-15]; Vulnerability (Sonic or Vibratory Attacks x2) [-20].

## GLASS META-TRAIT

*Body of Glass:* Your body is made of animated glass! Chameleon 1 (Always On\*, -10%) [5]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; DR 1 [5]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Pressure Support 3 [15]; Sealed [15]; Slippery 1 [2]; Vacuum Support [5]; Fragile (Brittle) [-15]; Vulnerability (Sonic or Vibratory Attacks x2) [-20]. 107 points.

\* Although you don't blend in with objects, your transparent nature effectively gives you a level of Chameleon when you are not wearing clothing.

## Glass Vision

### Regular

Glass is always transparent to the subject, even if stained, warped, scratched, etc. Relying on this spell, however, prevents the subject from using an optical instrument that depends on lenses, such as eyeglasses, a telescope, or a microscope. This is also a Knowledge spell.

*Duration:* 30 seconds.

*Cost:* 1 per 10 yards of thickness to cast. Same cost to maintain.

*Prerequisite:* Shape Earth.

### Item

Any. *Energy cost to create:* 150.

## Glasswraith

### Regular; Resisted by HT

Renders the subject intangible to glass. Obsidian or glass blades pass through him, he cannot hold a glass goblet or potion bottle, and he can slip through glass windows or doors like a ghost (provided he avoids any framing).

*Duration:* 1 minute.

*Cost:* 5 to cast. 3 to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 2 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 2 and Body of Glass.

*Fortune is like  
glass: the brighter  
the glitter, the more  
easily broken.*

– Publilius Syrus

### Item

(a) Wand, staff, or jewelry. Usable only by mages. *Energy cost to create:* 1,000. (b) A glass or obsidian weapon may be enchanted so that it may be wielded by or against the subject of this spell. *Energy cost to create:* 200 per pound of weight (minimum 1 lb.).

## Rain of Glass

### Area

Shards of razor-sharp glass rain from the sky onto the area, causing 1d(0.5) cutting damage per second to all within it! Everyone under the Rain of Glass takes damage on their own turns; if less than an entire second is spent in the area, damage is halved (round down). See Rain of Stones (*Magic*, p. 53) and Rain of Ice Daggers (*Magic*, p. 192) for rules governing shields, cover, etc.

*Duration:* 1 minute.

*Base cost:* 1 to cast (minimum 2). Same cost to maintain. For double base cost, remove the armor divisor.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 2 and Glass Missile.

### Item

Staff. Usable only by mages. *Energy cost to create:* 800 energy and \$500 of obsidian.

# THE SPECULARII

The Specularii, or Catoptromancers, are a mysterious, mystical order of diviners, spies, and assassins. Their focus is the study of the magic of glass and mirrors. As mirrors focus light and show images, and glass is made from sand, they also learn certain Earth, Light, and Illusion spells.

Their legendary origins are associated with the ancient arts of glassblowing and mirror-making. A family of glassmakers of near-supernatural skill was retained to make a set of far-seeing magical mirrors for a great emperor, which were used for crystal-gazing to provide intelligence of activities in far-flung provinces. In order to keep this a state secret, the emperor's secret police initially planned to execute all the glassmakers involved in the task after they had completed it. However, the head glassmaker, who was also a mage, was testing the mirror and spied an intrigue involving the emperor's wife and the head of the imperial bodyguard. Privately informing the emperor of this treachery, the glassmaker and his apprentices were rewarded for their success and diligence; they were granted their lives in exchange for an oath of perpetual servitude as the keepers, protectors, and maintainers of the magic mirrors.

Over centuries of covert service, in addition to keeping the empire informed, they also improved their skills, delving deep into the mysteries of glass, light, and reflection. Members of the order became not merely scryers and crafters, but also trusted imperial agents, an elite brotherhood of spies and assassins who were the invisible "glass dagger" of the empire!

If the empire is no more, the order may have fragmented. Rival shards of the Specularii may now be mercenary magical spies for kings, nobles, guilds, or temples; research magic in secret; or try to revive the empire.

## Organization

The Specularii have four degrees of membership: Initiates, Praecursors, Eidolons, and Catoptromancers. As inner mysteries of guilds of glassblowers, lampworkers, and mirror-makers may involve magical rites with secret ties to this style, recruits might be found among journeymen with Magery and a desire for adventure or intrigue. Top ranks of the order form a council that sets policy, directs spy missions, and enchants items.

## MAGICAE SPECULUM

13 points

*Style Prerequisites:* IQ 12+ and Magery 1 (not One College Only).

The order's unique spells provide methods for using glass, crystal, and mirrors in various ways, both actual and metaphorical. Within the style, creating gates, crystal balls, or Soul Jars always involves using mirrors of glass or obsidian as the spell components. The Planar Summons and Summon Spirit spells also require that the creature emerge from either a glass window or a mirror that is adjacent to the caster.

The style's perks include a number of Shortcuts to Power. Those for Heat and Air Jet represent techniques learned for magical assistance when glassblowing. The Enchant, Create Gate, and Planar Summons shortcuts represent the style's familiarity with the creation of certain magical objects and the use of mirrors as portals reflecting an infinity of realities.

*Required Skills:* Thaumatology; any *one* of Metallurgy, Physics, or Professional Skill (Glassblower); any *one* of Intelligence Analysis, Photography, or Shadowing.

*Required Spells:* Colors; Detect Magic; Keen Vision; Light; Seek Earth; Seek Magic; Shape Earth; Simple Illusion; Ward.

*Perks:* Guild Rank; Limited Energy Reserve 1-5 (Specularii); Mighty Spell (Glass Missile *or* Sunbolt); Missile Spell Mastery (Glass Missile *or* Sunbolt); No Incantations (any spell on list); Psychic Guidance (Glass Missile *or* Sunbolt); Quick and Focused; Sanctum 1 or 2; Secret Mage; Secret Spells (Mirror Duplicate *or* Mirror Trap); Shortcut to Power (Air Jet, Create Gate, Crystal Ball, Enchant, Heat, Planar Summons, Soul Jar, *or* Summon Spirit).

*Secret Spells:* Mirror Duplicate; Mirror Trap.

### Optional Traits

*Attributes and Secondary Characteristics:* Improved IQ and Will.

*Advantages:* Administrative (or Military) Rank; Alternate Identity (Legal *or* Illegal); Claim to Hospitality (Order's safe houses); Contact Group (Order's spy network); Eidetic Memory *or* Photographic Memory; Languages (any)\*; improved Magery; Security Clearance.

*Disadvantages:* Callous; Curious; Duty (Specularii); Enemy (Rival magical security or intelligence agencies, illuminated groups, etc.); Paranoia; Sense of Duty (Own nation).

*Skills:* Acting; Area Knowledge; Chemistry; Cloak; Cryptography; Electronics Operation (Scientific); Hidden Lore (Conspiracies); Holdout; Interrogation; Knife or Shortsword; Observation; Occultism; Poisons; Stealth; Teaching; any required skills not already taken.

\* If the order is of ancient Roman lineage (see p. 21), Languages should include Latin.

## SPELL LIST

Members must know a minimum number of spells from their current rank before being admitted to the next rank. Use Glass magic variations (pp. 17-18) where applicable.

### Initiate

An Initiate must have Magery 1 and IQ 12+ to be accepted. Nine spells are considered basic. A new Specularii is required to learn all of them.

Colors	Light	Shape Earth
Detect Magic	Seek Earth	Simple Illusion
Keen Vision	Seek Magic	Ward

### Praecursor

An Initiate is promoted to Praecursor after learning all of the above spells. That entitles him to learn any of these spells.

Counterspell	Independence	Repair*
Create Sand	Initiative	Seeker
Earth to Stone	Mirror	Shape Light
Glass Vision	Reflect	

\* See pp. 17-18 for notes.

### Eidolon

A Praecursor is raised to the rank of Eidolon after learning at least 10 of the prior rank's spells. This gives him access to any of these spells.

Dispel Magic	Sand Jet
Divination (Crystal-Gazing)	Sharpen*
Earth Vision	Shield
Flesh to Glass	Small Vision
Glass Missile	Stone to Earth
Hawk Vision	Trace
History	Transparency*
Reflect Gaze (VH)	

\* See pp. 17-18 for notes.

### Catoptromancer

An Eidolon is promoted to Catoptromancer after learning at least 10 of the prior rank's spells, one of which must be Divination (Crystal-Gazing). That achievement entitles him to study any of these spells – though some Specularii learn Crystal Ball or Enchant earlier via the style's Shortcuts to Power. Full-fledged Catoptromancers often use Shortcut to Power perks to acquire Create Gate, Planar Summons, Soul Jar, or Summon Spirit as well.

Body of Glass (VH)	Mirror Trap (p. 21)
Control Glass Elemental	Mystic Mist
Create Glass Elemental	Partial Vitrification* (VH)
Crystal Ball	Rain of Glass
Death Vision	Remove Reflection
Enchant (VH)	Scryguard
Glasswraith	Summon Glass Elemental
Images of the Past	Sunbolt
Mirror Duplicate (VH) (p. 21)	

\* See pp. 17-18 for notes.

*Then looking in the mirror, he saw  
the presage of death or recovery, according  
as the face appeared fresh and healthy,  
or of a ghastly aspect.*

– Pausanias

## SECRET SPELLS

The Specularii have developed a number of secret spells which are taught to third-rank or higher members of the style. Teaching these spells to non-members will result in punishment, expulsion, or execution.

## Secret Spell: Mirror Duplicate (VH)

This is identical to Duplicate (*GURPS Magic*, p. 98) except the mage must cast the spell on the reflection of an object in a mirror, and then pulls the duplicate out of the mirror. The object is also mirror-imaged, so it is not quite an exact duplicate, but is otherwise fully functional. Prerequisites are changed to Magery 3+, Mirror, and Seeker.

## Secret Spell: Mirror Trap

**Regular; Resisted by HT**

The spell instantly traps the subject in a nearby mirror. The mirror must currently be reflecting the image of the subject. When calculating range penalties, use the greater of the distance to the subject or the mirror.

The subject is trapped with anything carried. While in the mirror, he can do nothing and is frozen in time until freed by breaking the mirror or the reverse of this spell.

The subject – reflection captured in whatever pose he had when trapped – will be visible to anyone who is looking into the mirror, usually as if he were behind them. However, if the viewer turns around, the subject is not there.

*Duration:* Permanent until broken or reversed.

*Cost:* 9 (but only 5 to reverse a mirror trap).

*Time to cast:* 2 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 2 and Mirror.

### Item

Mirror (worth at least \$1,000). Anyone touching their reflection in the mirror is instantly affected by the spell (they may resist normally). *Energy cost to create:* 1,200.

## SPECULARII IN A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Specularii are intended for a fantasy setting, but can be easily used in a historical-fantasy or modern-day campaign.

“The empire” in their history may be the Roman Empire. From the first century B.C. onward, Rome was an early center of glassmaking technology, and priests who employed crystal-gazing for divination were even known as specularii. If the order survives into medieval or modern times, they trace their ancestry to an order who manufactured magic mirrors for these priests, and developed Glass magic from these arts.

Mages often falsely claim their origins stretch back to antiquity. Perhaps the Specularii have a shorter lineage: a Mason-like secret society, albeit with real magic, nestled within a medieval or Renaissance-era guild of glass- or mirror-makers. Their arts were first used to protect and perfect their craft, but soon were pressed into service for industrial espionage against rival guilds and later other city-states. Aside from Rome, Florence (see *GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence*) and Venice are good settings!

To use the Specularii in a modern-day setting, just assume they're a survival (or re-creation) of a Roman or Renaissance-era organization. They could still have ties to espionage, or be merely occultists who rediscovered or inherited their magic.


## ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid science-fiction fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*. Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating *Transhuman Space*, co-authoring the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* anime RPG, and writing countless *GURPS* books, including the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and the *GURPS Spaceships* series.

**GURPS** Fourth Edition

# MAGIC

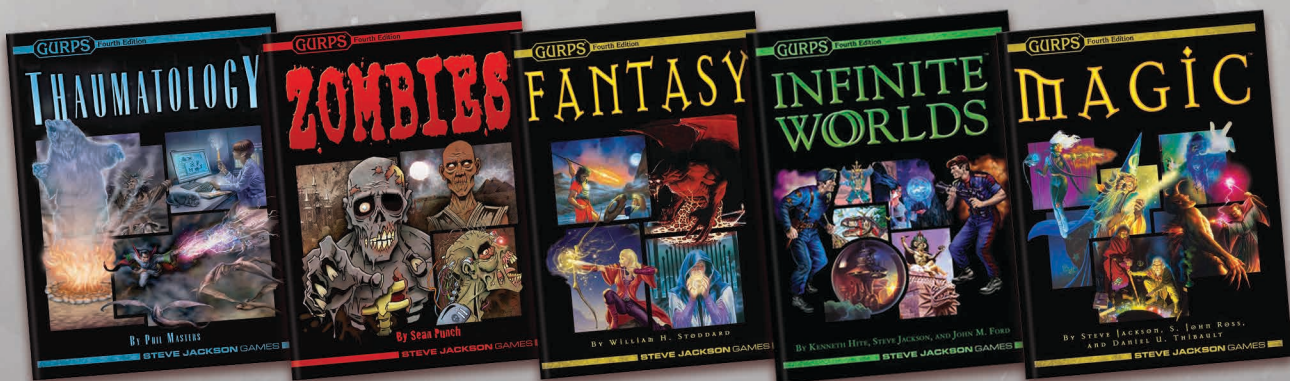
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# ARTIFACTS OF EVIL

BY PAUL STEFKO

**GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic** provides rules for creating enchanted items as advantages. This article presents a number of such artifacts for use by those of a villainous bent. Full statistics are included for the GM who likes to keep track of such things; it is also possible for PCs who defeat these villains to claim the items for themselves.

Each artifact is accompanied by a ritual (in the format presented in **Ritual Path Magic**) that produces a similar effect.

While the Ritual Path magic system does not allow for the creation of enchanted items using standard rituals, having the rituals spelled out like this offers at least a fictional basis for the villain to have created the enchanted item.

Dealing with the enchanted items you take from the villains you defeat is also discussed, whether you want to acquire the items for your own use or destroy them to protect the innocent.

## NEW ARTIFACTS

Unprotected artifacts (**Ritual Path Magic**, p. 33) grow weaker over the long term for individuals who use them without paying the character-point cost to attune to them; see **Looting** (**Ritual Path Magic**, p. 34). Unprotected items are unusable after the 10th day without attuning.

Protected items will not work at all for anyone other than the person attuned to them.

*Let everyone witness how  
many different cards fortune  
has up her sleeve when  
she wants to ruin a man.*

– Benvenuto Cellini

### CLOAK OF THE NIGHTDRINKER

3 points

This black, fur-lined cloak is surrounded by a faint metallic odor, like dried blood. It grants the wearer the ability to fly by grasping the sides of the cloak and holding his arms out like wings. The cloak can also render the wearer invisible with a Concentrate maneuver.

Anyone who is attuned to the Cloak of the Nightdrinker takes on a curse, however. The person no longer casts

reflections in mirrors or similar surfaces. He also develops a craving for blood and must make a self-control roll to avoid feeding on blood when it is available (at -2 if deliberately tempted or a large quantity of blood is within range of his senses). The curse remains even if the cloak is removed or stolen, until someone else attunes to it and the original character loses the points spent to attune to it.

*Unattuned:* Air Move takes a cumulative -1 per day after the first. After the first day, activating the invisibility effect requires an IQ roll, at a cumulative -1 for each day after the second. The unattuned wearer casts no reflection while wearing the cloak, and he craves blood, although he gets a cumulative +1 on self-control rolls for each day after the first.

*Statistics:* Flight (Cloak, Unprotected, -70%; Magical, -10%; Small Wings, -10%) [8] + Invisibility (Cloak, Unprotected, -70%; Magical, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [12] + Supernatural Features (No Reflection) [-10] + Uncontrollable Appetite (Blood) (15) [-7]. 3 points.

### Nightdrinker's Gift

*Spell Effects:* Greater Control Body + Greater Control Energy.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Altered Traits.

*Greater Effects:* 2 (x5).

The target of this ritual becomes invisible and gains Flight for one hour. He has no control over the invisibility but can direct the flight as he wishes.

*Typical Casting:* Greater Control Body (5) + Greater Control Energy (5) + Altered Traits, Flight (40) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). 280 energy (56x5).

## GRASPING PAW

320 points

This artifact appears to be a desiccated animal paw, distorted by age so its original species is unidentifiable. It is constantly clenching and unclenching, as if trying to grasp something it can never reach.

Once per day, the wielder of the Paw can visualize a small object, weighing no more than 5 lbs. and able to fit in one hand. After 10 seconds of concentration, the item appears, grasped in the Paw. (The GM can rule that particularly rare or unique items cannot be gained with the Paw; see *Snatcher*, p. B86, for guidelines. If the penalties for an item would reduce the wielder's IQ+2 to less than 3, it simply will not appear.)

*Unattuned:* For each day after the first, using the Paw imposes a cumulative -10 points of disadvantages on the user as some manner of curse. Suitable disadvantages include Delusions, Dependency, Destiny, Divine Curse, Frightens Animals, Lifebane, Magic Susceptibility, various Supernatural Features, Unluckiness, and Weirdness Magnet. These disadvantages remain as long as the granted item is in the wielder's possession. Moreover, the item itself becomes cursed, so the disadvantages pass to whomever receives it.

*Statistics:* *Snatcher* (Cosmic, No die roll required, +100%; Limited Use, 1/day, -40%; Magical, -10%; Permanent, +300%; Reliable 2, +10%; Wand, Unprotected, -60%) [320]. 320 points.

## Sudden Treasure

*Spell Effects:* Greater Create Matter.

*Inherent Modifiers:* None.

*Greater Effects:* 1 (x3).

This ritual creates a single object weighing up to 10 lbs. This object can be as complicated as the caster can properly visualize (see *Ritual Path Magic*, p. 16). The creation lasts for one day.

*Typical Casting:* Greater Create Matter (6) + Duration, 1 day (7). 39 energy (13x3).

## IDENTIFYING ARTIFACTS

It should not be immediately obvious what an enchanted item does, especially when you are taking it off the body of a fallen enemy. The adventurers may know some of the item's effects if the villain used his tools against them, but full understanding should take effort.

Those with Thaumatology can roll the first time they see an enchanted item and again the first time they handle it, while anyone with an appropriate Hidden Lore skill can roll at a penalty based on the age, obscurity, or complexity of the item. Casters can use a Greater Sense Magic effect to determine an item's function. Time spent in study (and a Research roll) may turn up legends about the item; their reliability is up to the GM, of course.

None of these methods should reveal "curses" nor the negative effects for using the item without attuning.

## HACKER'S AMULET

65 points

With this iridescent silver amulet (resembling a miniature compact disc), the user can instantly take control of any computer system with a touch. This requires a Concentrate maneuver and an IQ roll with a penalty equal to the system's Complexity. On a failure, the person is mentally stunned for 1d seconds and can never attempt to control that system again.

If the attempt succeeds, the user's mind occupies the computer system, and he can command it to do anything it is capable of doing, access any of its files, and so on. The person has no awareness of the outside world. He may return to his body at any time with no roll required.

*Statistics:* Possession (Amulet, Protected, -35%; Cybernetic Only, -50%; Full Memory Access, +10%; Magical, -10%; Telecontrol, +50%) [65]. 65 points.

## Possess Computer

*Spell Effects:* Greater Control Energy + Greater Sense Energy.

*Inherent Modifiers:* None.

*Greater Effects:* 2 (x5).

The caster possesses the target computer system as described above for up to one hour.

*Typical Casting:* Greater Control Energy (5) + Greater Sense Energy (2) + Duration, 1 hour (3). 50 energy (10x5).

## MAGNET OF BINDING

28 points

This circlet is actually a thin, wide horseshoe magnet of the classic black-with-red-tips variety. When the user activates it with a successful Attack maneuver, waves of "magnetic" force engulf the target, pinning him with ST 16. The user cannot layer this effect, and the binding force cannot be damaged by attacks. If the wielder activates the Magnet of Binding on a new target, any previous target is released.

*Unattuned:* The magnetic force decreases to ST 14 after the first day, ST 12 after the second day, ST 11 after the third day, ST 9 after the fourth day, ST 8 after the fifth day, ST 6 after the sixth day, ST 4 after the seventh day, ST 3 after the eighth day, and ST 1 after the ninth day.

*Statistics:* Binding 16 (Accessibility, Can only affect one target at a time, -40%; Circlet, Unprotected, -55%; Engulfing, +60%; Magical, -10%; One-Shot, -10%; Unbreakable, +40%) [28]. 28 points.

## Flesh Binding

*Spell Effects:* Greater Control Body.

*Inherent Modifiers:* None.

*Greater Effects:* 1 (x3).

This ritual immobilizes the target as if he were pinned with an effective ST equal to the caster's Path of Body skill. The effect lasts 10 minutes or until the target breaks free.



*Typical Casting:* Greater Control Body (5) + Duration, 10 minutes (1) + Subject Weight, 300 pounds (3). 27 energy (9x3).

## MINION RING

13 points

Sometimes a villain just can't be bothered to cart his goons around everywhere he goes. Save time and trouble with the Minion Ring.

This thin silver band is set with a one-carat diamond. In addition to being attuned to the wearer, the ring must also be bound to a subject. This requires a drop of the subject's blood be placed on the diamond, which absorbs the blood and turns a deep red. The subject must knowingly and freely give the blood, though he doesn't need to know what it is to be used for. A smart villain will require mandatory blood testing of all new employees.

Once a Minion Ring is bound to a subject, the user can activate the ring to immediately summon the subject. Take a Concentrate maneuver and roll 3d. On a 15 or less, the subject appears and can act in the normal turn sequence; on a 16 or higher, the subject does not appear and cannot be summoned again for one full day. The user can dismiss the subject at any time as a free action, as long as the subject is physically present.

*Statistics:* Ally (Bound minion; Built on 50%; 15 or less; Magical, -10%; Minion, +50%; Ring, Protected, -25%; Summonable, +100%) [13]. 13 points.

### Call Minion

*Spell Effects:* Greater Create Crossroads + Greater Control Body.

*Inherent Modifiers:* None.

*Greater Effects:* 2 (x5).

This ritual (typically cast as a charm) opens a portal from the caster's location to the location of a single individual within 100 miles and draws that person through it.

*Typical Casting:* Greater Create Crossroads (6) + Greater Control Body (5) + Lesser Control Magic (5) + Range, 100 miles (30) + Speed, 100 miles/second (30) + Subject Weight, 300 pounds (3). 395 energy (79x5).

## PARAMOUR BAND

39 points

This platinum ring feels comfortably warm, no matter the ambient temperature. The magic contained within allows the wearer to appear to someone else as whomever that person loves the most.

To activate the Paramour Band, the wearer takes a Concentrate maneuver and rolls a Quick Contest of his IQ (modified by standard range penalties) against the target's Will. If the user succeeds, that person learns the identity and physical appearance of whatever individual the target holds most dear. The wielder also creates an illusion around himself that disguises him as that individual. Anyone seeing the wearer (including the target) can make a Will-3 roll to see through this disguise. The illusion does not affect machines.

The illusion only changes the wearer's appearance. It does not alter the voice or any other sensory cues. The ring grants a +4 bonus to any Disguise rolls to impersonate the paramour.

*Statistics:* Elastic Skin (Glamour, Will-3, -15%; Link, +10%; Magical, -10%; Reduced Time 4, +80%; Ring, Protected, -25%) [28] + Mind Probe (Accessibility, Only to discover individual most dear to the subject, -80%; Link, +10%; Magical, -10%; Ranged, +40%; Ring, Protected, -25%; Sensory, +20%) [11]. 39 points.

### True Love's Face Stolen

*Spell Effects:* Greater Sense Mind + Lesser Control Mind + Lesser Strengthen Mind.

*Inherent Modifiers:* Bestows a Bonus.

*Greater Effects:* 1 (x3).

This ritual makes the caster appear to the subject as the person the target holds most dear (and grants +4 to any Disguise rolls to impersonate that individual). The illusion cannot be seen by anyone else. The effect lasts for 10 minutes.

*Typical Casting:* Greater Sense Mind (2) + Lesser Control Mind (5) + Lesser Strengthen Mind (3) + Bestows a Bonus, +4 to Disguise (8) + Duration, 10 minutes (1). 57 energy (19x3).

*Chieftain Beluga: Our prophecies speak of three golden artifacts that have been hidden throughout these islands. They are in the form of the ancient gods of the ocean: the Wise Turtle, Noble Sea Horse, and the Cranky Fish. Guybrush Threepwood: Cranky Fish? Chieftain Beluga: Err . . . the prophecies are very old. Some of the translations may be a bit off.*

– *Tales of Monkey Island: Chapter 2 – The Siege of Spinner Cay*

## SOULDRINKER BLADE

75 points (lesser); 89 points (greater)

A Souldrinker Blade is a fine-quality shortsword whose surface shimmers with flecks of light that resemble stars on a dark night. This subtle beauty belies the vile power of this weapon.

The blade deals swing+1 cutting or thrust+1 impaling damage. A successful attack also triggers the sword's magic. The wielder and the victim roll a Quick Contest of Will. If the sword's physical attack failed to penetrate DR, the victim gets a bonus to Will equal to his DR. If the attacker wins the Quick Contest, the victim's soul is severed from his body and absorbed into the blade. This is potentially lethal to the victim; treat as a heart attack (p. B429), ignoring any Injury Tolerance.

A Soul drinker Blade can store a soul for up to a day. This has no innate effect, but the soul can be manipulated with magic. If the subject survives the heart attack, the stored soul allows casting rituals on the subject as if he were present. The soul of a dead subject can be directly affected by Path of Undead rituals as if it were an unmanifested ghost.

If the blade drinks a soul while it is already storing another, the wielder can decide which one to keep. The other soul is returned to its owner's body (if alive) or released to whatever final destination awaits it. Anyone can cast the Soul Trap ritual (see below) to transfer the stored soul to another vessel.

A greater version of the blade allows the wielder to interrogate a trapped soul (whether captured in the blade or with a Soul Trap ritual). Roll a Quick Contest of Will with the soul's owner (as it was when it was alive, if dead); if the sword's wielder wins, he learn the answer to a single question, to the best of the soul's knowledge. If the user loses, he can try again at a cumulative -2 per attempt to ask the same question in the last hour. On a critical failure, he cannot question that soul for the next 24 hours.

*Unattuned:* Each day after the first, the wielder takes a cumulative -1 to the Quick Contest of Will.

*Statistics:* Affliction 1 (Will; Cosmic, Injury Tolerance does not protect from Heart Attack, +300%; Follow-Up, -20%; Heart Attack, +300%; Magical, -10%; Malediction 1, +100%;

Wand, Unprotected, -60%) [71] + Cutting Attack 1 point (Gadget, DR 2, SM -6, Can be stolen with a Quick Contest of ST, -60%; Melee Attack, Reach C, 1, ST-Based, +80%) [1\*] + Impaling Attack 1 point (Gadget, DR 2, SM -6, Can be stolen with a Quick Contest of ST, -60%; Melee Attack, Reach C, 1, ST-Based, +80%) [3] + Feature (Holds a single soul for up to one day) [0]. The "greater" blade adds Mind Probe (Accessibility, Trapped souls only, -50%; Based on Will, +20%; Magical, -10%; Sensory, +20%; Universal, +50%; Wand, Unprotected, -60%) [14]. 75 or 89 points.

\* Priced as an alternative attack.

## Soul Trap

*Spell Effects:* Greater Control Undead + Lesser Control Undead.

*Inherent Modifiers:* None.

*Greater Effects:* 1 (x3).

The ritual moves a severed mortal soul or ghost into a physical vessel and then creates a ward (**Ritual Path Magic**, pp. 24-25) within the vessel, trapping the soul inside for up to a year.

*Typical Casting:* Greater Control Undead (5) + Lesser Control Undead (5) + Duration, 1 year (22). 96 energy (32x3).

*The desire for imaginary benefits often involves the loss of present blessings.*

– Aesop

# DEALING WITH EVIL ARTIFACTS

When you put enchanted items into the hands of their enemies, it is inevitable that the PCs will gain possession of them. And an artifact needs to be particularly vile not to tempt the adventurers to use it themselves. **Ritual Path Magic** includes a good solution to this problem with the Protected enchantment limitations. If an artifact is protected, the PCs cannot use it without paying points for it. Even unprotected items fade in power unless the player makes the investment.

## ACQUIRING ARTIFACTS

When someone takes possession of an enchanted item, that person can either use it immediately (if the item is unprotected) or not. If the adventurer has enough unspent character points to pay for the item, he can attune it, gaining unlimited use of even a protected item. The GM also has the option of awarding the enchanted item directly (see *Traits Gained in Play*, p. B291).

The GM can permit someone to go into "point debt" in exchange for immediately attuning to an artifact. This allows

that person to pay off the cost of the item as he earns character points through adventuring.

Instead of just giving an item as a reward or assessing a point debt, the GM could offset some or all of the cost of an enchanted item with disadvantages. This can represent the classic "cursed item" of fantasy gaming, using traits like Cursed, Destiny, Divine Curse (Cannot remove item), or Unluckiness. An intelligent evil item can impose Phantom Voices, Delusions, or Nightmares on a user. Buying off such disadvantages may be equivalent to paying back a point debt, but this method produces a much more interesting story.

## DESTROYING ARTIFACTS

**Ritual Path Magic** gives DR and HP values for items made using the enchantment limitations. Without other modifiers, destroying an enchanted item is simply a matter of dealing damage to an inanimate object (see **Ritual Path Magic**, p. 33).

Countless stories, however, have revolved around the difficulty of destroying evil artifacts. The items themselves resist attempts to dispose of them; some simply cannot be destroyed without specific arcane methods or materials. If there's an item the protagonists don't want but can't just leave lying around, it's more fun making them work to get rid of it than just letting them hack it in two.

Indestructible enchanted items have a smaller enchantment limitation, and subsequently, cost more points to attune. In fact, much of the value of each enchantment limitation reflects the vulnerability of the item to damage. Removing this vulnerability leaves only the chance of the item being stolen, resulting in the following modifier values: Circlet or Tiara, -20% or -40%; Amulet, Cloak, Staff, or Wand, -15% or -30%; Ring, -10% or -20%

If an enchanted item is indestructible except to attacks from a particular source, against which the normal DR and HP specified with the enchantment limitation apply, the limitation can be modified according to the following table, based on the rarity of the source according to *Limited Defenses* on p. B46.

Rarity	Amulet	Circlet	Cloak	Ring	Staff	Wand
Very Common	-30%/-45%	-35%/-60%	-45%/-60%	-20%/-30%	-45%/-60%	-40%/-55%
Common	-25%/-40%	-35%/-60%	-40%/-55%	-20%/-30%	-35%/-50%	-35%/-50%
Occasional	-20%/-35%	-30%/-55%	-30%/-45%	-20%/-30%	-30%/-45%	-25%/-40%
Rare	-20%/-35%	-25%/-50%	-25%/-40%	-15%/-25%	-20%/-35%	-20%/-35%

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Stefko is attuned to nothing more sinister than his iPhone, which may be the spawn of dark forces, depending on your point of view. He lives in Pittsburgh with his wife

and their cat, who often helps them test the destructibility of cherished objects. In addition to his work in *Pyramid*, Paul has written for *The Unspeakable Oath* and Atomic Overmind Press. He would like to thank the *Pyramid* Write Club, but the first rule of Write Club is "we do not talk about Write Club."

## UNDER THE HOOD: MOSTLY INDESTRUCTIBLE

The enchantment limitations in *Ritual Path Magic* are worked examples of the Gadget limitations on p. B117, combining the appropriate Breakable values for the listed SM and DR with the Can Be Stolen value as described.

To derive the values in the table (see below) for enchanted items that are mostly indestructible, we separated the Breakable part of the limitation from Can Be Stolen, applied the modifier for *Limited Defenses* on p. B46 to the Breakable value, and then added the parts together again. The values in the table are rounded for easier math.

For each entry in the table below, the value before the slash is for a protected item, while the value after the slash is for an unprotected item.

*Example:* A protected wand that can only be damaged by magical metal has an enchantment limitation of -25%.

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# THE CARNIE

## BY SEAN PUNCH

*Austin Powers: Only two things scare me and one of them is nuclear war.*

*Basil Exposition: What's the other?*

*Austin Powers: Carnies. Circus folk. Nomads, you know. Smell like cabbage. Small hands.*

– *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*

The wandering minstrel is a sound historical archetype with which gamers are most familiar through pseudo-medieval fantasy. *Horror* figures prominently among the many sources such fantasy pilfers, however. Here, the traveling performer acquires a disturbing aspect, his heritage shrouded in mystery, his gods ancient ones named in hushed tones, his life an endless, immoral bacchanal. He is at best a drifter sans lord or duty . . . and at worst a sinister, even *evil* clown, terrifying to behold.

The *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* bard brings only some of these elements to the table. While he has a roguish outlook, this hardly distinguishes him from other delvers. His use of mind-magic might mark him as untrustworthy, except that fantasy spellcasters tend to be respected professionals. Customarily, he's socially connected, polite, and charming.

Which illustrates why *Dungeon Fantasy* needs the *carnie*. Where the bard deals in witty wordplay, soulful song, and courtly dance, the *carnie's* gaudy costumes, frenetic cavorting, and cunning tricks distract spectators from the work of pickpockets and the smell of animals, and entice youths to run away from home. His performance is that of the tawdry side-show or the *freak* show. His power is the Carnival of Madness (pp. 30-31) – not magic, but insanity so palpable that it warps minds and even reality.

Come, join the circus!

## CARNIE

250 points

You're a traveling performer – not a magic-using poet like the bard, but an entertainer talented at stunts and showmanship. In a world where monsters own the wilderness and orcs menace the roads, however, it takes a *special* kind of person to wander from town to town, juggling and clowning for a pittance. Your nomadic lifestyle not only provides a fine cover for treasure-seeking, but also conceals a secret deeper than mere indifference to property laws and traditional morality . . .

**Attributes:** ST 11 [10]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 14 [80]; HT 12 [20].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [-10]; Basic Move 6 [0].

**Advantages:** Madness 1 [5] and Penetrating Voice (The Laugh) [1]. • 40 points in Mad abilities (pp. 30-31), Madness 2-6 [5/level], advantages and perks from *The Freak Show* (p. 30), and/or a nonhuman racial template (*especially* one stranger than the usual run of dwarves, elves, gnomes, goblin-kin, and halflings). • A further 35 points chosen from among the previous traits or ST +1 to +3 [10/level], DX +1 [20], IQ +1 [20], HT +1 to +3 [10/level], Will +1 to +6 [5/level], Basic Speed +1.00 [20], Basic Move +1 to +3 [5/level], Alcohol Tolerance [1], Ambidexterity [5], Animal Empathy [5], Animal Friend 1-4 [5/level], Catfall [10], Charisma 1-4 [5/level], Daredevil [15], Enhanced Dodge 1 or 2 [15 or 30], Fit [5] or Very Fit [15], Flexibility [5] or Double-Jointed [15], Gizmos 1-3 [5/level], High Manual Dexterity 1-4 [5/level], High Pain Threshold [10], Lifting ST 1-3 [3/level], Luck [15] or Extraordinary Luck [30], Mind Shield [4/level], Musical Ability 1-4 [5/level], No Hangover [1], Perfect Balance [15], Serendipity [15/level], Signature Gear [Varies], Sinister Clown 1-3 (p. 29) [10/level], or Wild Talent 1 [20].

**Disadvantages:** Odious Personal Habit (a *freakish* one!) [-5]. • -35 points chosen from among ST -1 or -2 [-10 or -20], DX -1 [-20], IQ -1 [-20], HT -1 or -2 [-10 or -20], Appearance (Unattractive, Ugly, or Hideous) [-4, -8, or -16], Bowlegged [-1], Callous [-5], Chummy [-5] or Gregarious [-10], Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5], Compulsive Carousing [-5\*], Compulsive Lying [-15\*], Disturbing Voice [-10], Dwarfism [-15] or Gigantism† [0], Greed [-15\*], Hunchback [-10], Impulsiveness [-10\*], Jealousy [-10], Kleptomania [-15\*], Laziness [-10], Lecherousness [-15\*], Overconfidence [-5\*], Sense of Duty (Adventuring companions) [-5], Trickster [-15\*], Unnatural Features‡ [-1/level], Vow (Never refuse a dare) [-10], Wealth (Struggling, Poor, or Dead Broke) [-10, -15, or -25], Xenophilia [-10\*], a more severe Odious Personal Habit [-5 or -10], or *one* of Overweight [-1], Fat [-3], Very Fat [-5], or Skinny [-5].

**Primary Skills:** Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [2]-13; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-14; Panhandling (E) IQ+1 [2]-15; Performance (A) IQ [2]-14; and Psychology (any) (H) IQ-1 [2]-13.

*Insanity – a perfectly rational adjustment to an insane world.*

– R.D. Laing

**Secondary Skills:** Six of Crossbow, Forced Entry, Jumping, or Thrown Weapon (any), all (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Boxing, Climbing, Dancing, Filch, Riding (any), Sumo Wrestling, Throwing, or Wrestling (A) DX [2]-14; Escape or Sleight of Hand, both (H) DX-1 [2]-13; Acting, Animal Handling (any), Disguise, Fast-Talk, Propaganda, or Public Speaking, all (A) IQ [2]-14; Mimicry (any), Musical Instrument (any), Psychology (any other), or Ventriloquism, all (H) IQ-1 [2]-13; Carousing or Singing, both (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Lifting, Running, or Sex Appeal, all (A) HT [2]-12; Mental Strength (E) Will+1 [2]-15; Mind Block (A) Will [2]-14; or 2 points to raise one of those skills or a primary skill by a level.

**Background Skills:** Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-13 and Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-13. • Five of Brawling, Fast-Draw (any), or Knife, all (E) DX [1]-14; Axe/Mace, Cloak, Lasso, Shortsword, Staff, Two-Handed Axe/Mace, or Whip, all (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Pickpocket (H) DX-2 [1]-12; First Aid or Gesture, both (E) IQ [1]-14; Holdout, Merchant, Packing, Smuggling, or Teamster (any), all (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-14; Observation or Urban Survival, both (A) Per-1 [1]-13; 1 point to raise one of those skills by a level; or 1 point for another secondary skill at one level lower.

\* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† Reduce the point cost of ST and Lifting ST by the usual 10% and spend the points saved on additional freaky advantages. See p. B20 for other adjustments.

‡ Unnatural Features are often *required*; see *The Freak Show* (p. 30).

### Customization Notes

The carnie can be a flexible, even powerful delver, but his usefulness depends on his unusual abilities rather than his combat prowess (which this template deliberately pushes into the background). He should decide on a role and then select mundane advantages, freakish traits, and skills that offer synergies. One need only consider archetypal circus performers for inspiration:

**Acrobat:** The master of aerial stunts and gymnastics wants excellent Acrobatics and Climbing skills; advantage points in DX, Flexibility, and Perfect Balance to boost those; and several complementary capabilities, especially the Catfall, Daredevil, and Enhanced Dodge advantages, and Jumping and Running skills. Among the freaky stuff, Brachiator is by far the most valuable choice.

**Animal-Tamer:** Stack up Animal Empathy with Animal Friend, and then learn Animal Handling and the customary Whip skill for lions, tigers, and bears; Packing and Teamster to handle the troupe's (or adventuring party's) wagons; and perhaps Riding and Lasso for equestrian stunts. The most valuable freaky gift is Speak with Animals, but some tamers capitalize on physically resembling their bestial charges (Fur helps!).

**Clown:** The Sinister Clown advantage isn't just aptly named but also practical, as it raises skill at Acrobatics, Dancing, and Performance for foolery, as well as Intimidation, Psychology, and Stealth for jumping out of nowhere and scaring the hell out of people. Any freaky-looking trait is fitting, although successful

disturbing clowns possess truly unpleasant stuff like Slippery – or an Extra Mouth in a worrisome location.

**Escape Artist:** Good DX, Compact Frame (below), Flexibility (or Double-Jointed), and a high Escape skill form the core of this specialty. Freaky contortionists will find Slippery indispensable, and many exploit Amphibious and Doesn't Breathe (Gills) for *underwater* escapes. Skill at Forced Entry and Wrestling can help in confining situations where agility alone isn't enough.

**Ringmaster:** Not all carnies are outward freaks with physical specialties – many are barkers and *verbal* showmen. These want good IQ, Charisma, and skill at Acting, Fast-Talk, Propaganda, and Public Speaking. Those who double as comen find that the Filch and Sleight of Hand skills, boosted by High Manual Dexterity, are handy for shell games and similar cheats. Stage magicians prefer to confuse and misdirect via a swirling cape (Cloak) and a timely nageteppo (Holdout, Fast-Draw, and Throwing).

**Strongman:** This beefy figure should buy as much ST and Lifting ST as he can afford. Freakier add-ons are Cotton Stomach (below) and DR (Tough Skin) for taking punches, and the traditional Injury Tolerance (No Neck) – but good old Alcohol Tolerance and High Pain Threshold also fit. Training is obvious: unarmed skills, Forced Entry and Lifting for feats of strength, and better Intimidation. Finally, note that high ST, Gigantism, Long Arms, and Two-Handed Axe Mace enable big damage with a comically outsized (SM +2) maul.

## MUNDANE CARNIE ABILITIES

Carnies may buy two new perks and a new Talent.

### *New Perk: Compact Frame*

1 point

You get +1 to Escape roll for *Squeezing* (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 8). With 10 seconds' preparation, you can ball yourself up small enough to reduce effective SM by one, though you can't do anything but talk while doing so.

### *New Perk: Cotton Stomach*

1 point

Once per turn, you can defend against an *unarmed* attack (punch, kick, bite, etc.) aimed at your *torso* by bracing and stiffening your gut. Roll a standard parry using any unarmed combat skill. Success wards off the attack without expending a hand parry.

### *New Talent: Sinister Clown*

10 points/level

You get +1 per level to Acrobatics, Acting, Dancing, Intimidation, Mimicry, Performance, Psychology, Sleight of Hand, Stealth, and Ventriloquism. You also get +1 per level to audience reaction rolls when you perform using those skills.

*For me, insanity is super sanity. The normal is psychotic.  
Normal means lack of imagination, lack of creativity.*

*– Jean Dubuffet*

These are just suggestions! Many a carnie trades on being a pure freak with graphic advantages like Long Arms, *Extra Arms*, or even *Extra Head* . . . and the mere sight of a cat-girl or a gargoyle can impress rubes. Then there are the geeks (Universal Digestion), impressionists (Mimicry advantage or skill), knife-throwers (Thrown Weapon), trick shooters (Crossbow), accompanying minstrels (Musical Ability, plus Musical Instrument or Singing), etc. Most performers handle several jobs. Moreover, carnies are rarely far from the underworld (whence *Stealth* and *Streetwise*), and some do little *but* conduct scams while their associates perform – which can mean anything from being a sexy dancer who steals from spectators (*Dancing*, *Pickpocket*, and *Sex Appeal*) to using a circus as cover for illicit trade (better *Streetwise*, plus *Merchant* and *Smuggling*).

Mad abilities needn't have anything to do with these choices. Indeed, the unexpected ones often work best. *Dungeon-crawling* carnies must watch out for Unfazeable demons and undead, but can get considerable mileage out of cursing enemies with *Chaos*, foiling spellcasters with *Dementation* or *Derangement*, and analyzing monster weaknesses with *Know Madness*. Still, subtle social operators might prefer *Elastic Skin* and *Mimicry*.

While disadvantages don't necessarily have to *match* the chosen archetype and Mad gifts, neither should they be at odds with them; e.g., a dashing ringleader or a seductive dancer ought to avoid low *Appearance* or seriously nasty *Odius Personal Habits*, while a minstrel won't want *Disturbing*

*Voice*. On the other hand, it never hurts to turn one's problems into assets. For instance, a strongman can get cheap *ST* using *Gigantism*; the carnie's primary *Intimidation* skill can reap bonuses from *Callous* and bad *Appearance*; and a *Skinny* escape artist is better off than a *Fat* one (*Dungeons*, p. 18). Above all else, pick a few troubles that add color, whether that means *Bowlegged* for someone who does horse tricks, or *Impulsiveness* and low *Wealth* for the youngster who ran away to join the circus.

## CARNIVAL OF MADNESS

The carnie's power flows from controlled mental instability. It originates from *within* – like *Chi Mastery* (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*, pp. 21-22) and *Psionics* (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi*, pp. 4-15) – and not from *mana*, *sanctity*, or any similar external source. Its abilities require the *Mad* limitation, and all rolls required to use them enjoy a bonus equal to the user's *Madness*.

### Power Modifier: Mad

-10%

*Mad* abilities depend on the carnie's insanity. He must live with an irresistible *Odius Personal Habit* worth -5 points or worse. This penalizes others' reactions at all times *and* marks him as a carnie. Beings with the *Unfazeable* advantage are *immune* to the *Carnival of Madness* – they cannot be affected by its mind-warping attacks, aren't deceived by its *Elastic Skin* and *Mimicry*, can penetrate its *Indomitable* and *Unfazeable* to influence the user, and so on.

### Mad Abilities

*Chaos* [22]; *Dementation* [26]; *Derangement* [35]; *Elastic Skin* (PM, -10%) [18]; *Indomitable* (PM, -10%) [14]; *Know Madness* [17]; *Mimicry* (PM, -10%) [9]; *Rapier Wit* (PM, -10%) [5]; *Terrifying Gaze* [27]; *Unfazeable* (PM, -10%) [14]; and *Visions of Madness* [26].

*Chaos*: *Affliction* 1 (Will; Based on Will, +20%; Disadvantage, *Unluckiness*, +10%; *Malediction* 1, +100%; PM, -10%) [22]. *Notes*: Take a *Concentrate* maneuver to roll a *Quick Contest of Will* with your victim. You may add *Madness*, but are at -1 per yard of distance; he may add his *Mind Shield*, if any. If you win, he's *cursed* for minutes equal to your margin of victory. His next fortunate outcome – critical success, success against worse-than-even odds, or enemy critical failure that benefits him – is reversed to failure for him or success for his foe, and then the curse ends. 22 points.

## THE FREAK SHOW

Many circus folk boast remarkable inborn "talents." In fantasy, these can get downright *freakish*. The GM might allow almost any physical oddity – and some mental ones – but here's a list of recommendations to start off with:

*Amphibious*\* [10] (webbed extremities), *Brachiator*\* [5] (disproportionate ape arms), *Compact Frame* (p. 29) [1], *Cotton Stomach* (p. 29) [1], *DR 1 or 2 (Tough Skin, -40%)* [3 or 6], *Discriminatory Hearing*\* [15] (huge ears), *Doesn't Breathe* (*Gills*\*, -50%) [10], *Extra Arms*\* 1 or 2 [10 or 20], *Extra Head*\* 1 [15], *Extra Mouth*\* 1 or 2 [5 or 10], *Fur*\* [1], *Injury Tolerance (No Neck)*\* [5], *Lifting ST 4-10* [3/level], *Long Arms*\* (+1 SM) [10/arm], *Nictitating Membrane*\* 1-5 [1/level], *Peripheral Vision*\* [15] (abnormally wide-set eyes), *Slippery*\* 1-5 [2/level] (slimy), *Speak with Animals* [25], and *Universal Digestion* [5].

\* You *must* accompany this with a level of *Unnatural Features*! The reason appears in parenthesis, where not obvious.

*Dementation*: Affliction 1 (Will; Attribute Penalty, -5 to IQ, +50%; Based on Will, +20%; Malediction 1, +100%; PM, -10%) [26]. *Notes*: Roll as for Chaos. If you win, the effect is that the target has -5 to IQ (and Will and Per) for minutes equal to your margin of victory. 26 points.

*Derangement*: Neutralize (Derange, -20%; PM, -10%) [35]. *Notes*: This ability has four different versions: Derangement (Chi), affecting Chi Mastery and chi skills; Derangement (Divine), affecting Druidic Arts, Holy Might, and related spell-casting ability; Derangement (Magical), affecting wizardly spellcasting and Bard-Song; and Derangement (Psi), affecting Psionics. Take an Attack maneuver to *touch* your victim. If you hit, roll a Quick Contest of Will; you may add Madness, while he adds his Talent with the associated power (Chi Talent, Magery, Power Investiture, etc., as appropriate). If you win, you warp the target powers for minutes equal to your margin of victory. Your opponent may still activate the relevant advantages, skills, or spells, but the GM will roll randomly for target affected, direction moved, and so on . . . 35 points/power.

*Know Madness*: Detect (Madness; Analyzing, +100%; PM, -10%; Vision-Based, -20%) [17]. *Notes*: Take a Concentrate maneuver to attempt a Per roll on a person you can *see*, subject to the range modifiers on the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550). Success reveals whether your target has exploitable mental instabilities, as well as their broad nature; e.g., “some kind of Dread” or “a Phobia.” Then make an IQ roll; you may use Psychology, if higher. If *this* roll succeeds, you learn the exact disadvantage(s); e.g., “Dread of silver within 10 yards” or “Necrophobia (9).” 17 points.

*Terrifying Gaze*: Terror (Active, +0%; PM, -10%) [27]. *Notes*: Take a Concentrate maneuver to roll a Quick Contest of Will with a specific person within 10 yards, who must be able to *see* or *hear* you. You may use Intimidation or Performance, if higher. You add Madness, while he adds his Mind Shield, if any, and +1 for each time you’ve used this ability on him in the past 24 hours. If you win, roll 3d, add your margin of victory, and consult the Fright Check table (p. B360) to learn his fate. 27 points.

*Visions of Madness*: Affliction 1 (Will; Based on Will, +20%; Hallucinating, +50%; Malediction 1, +100%; PM, -10%) [26]. *Notes*: Roll as for Chaos. If you win, the effect is that your victim is crazy for minutes equal to your margin of victory. He must make a Will roll before each success roll he tries. If he succeeds, he’s distracted and at -2; if he fails, hallucinations block his sensory input and his penalty on *all* tasks grows to -5 for the effect’s duration. Either way, he must keep preceding success rolls with Will rolls, with critical failure meaning he counts as “unconscious” but stays standing. 26 points.

## Madness

5 points/level

Madness gives +1 per level to all rolls (most often against IQ, Will, or Per) to activate Mad abilities, analyze feedback from Know Madness, and so on. The usual upper limit is Madness 6, though the GM may wish to limit starting delvers to Madness 4.

## Mad Skills

Those with *any* points in Carnival of Madness can learn Mental Strength (p. B209) and Mind Block (p. B210). Madness *doesn't* add to these skills.

## CARNIE POWER-UPS

Carnies can spend earned points on everything in their template and in the Carnival of Madness power. They *can* grow more freakish with time, even sprouting an extra head or arm as their power corrupts their body (though they can’t buy racial templates) – but any required Unnatural Features come with this, and lower the carnie’s point total without reducing advantage cost. Other power-ups include:

- Any *one* of ST, DX, or IQ up to 25 *before* racial modifiers. Strongmen tend to be strong; acrobats and escape artists, dexterous; and conniving ringleaders, intelligent.
- Craftiness 1-4 (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 11: Power-Ups*, p. 35) [5/level].
- Heroic Lifts (*Power-Ups*, p. 19) [6/level], for strongmen who meet its prerequisites.
- Ridiculous Luck [60].\*
- Serendipity [15/level], with *no* upper limit.\*
- Sinister Clown up to 6 [10/level].
- Street-Smart 1-4 (*Power-Ups*, p. 35) [5/level].
- Wild Talent [20/level], with *no* upper limit.\*

\* Chaos favors the carnie. The GM may allow any other “meta-game” advantage that exists in the campaign, too.

*I think we all have the urge to be a clown, whether we know it or not.*

– Ernest Borgnine

## MAKING THE CARNIE USEFUL

The carnie is less an A-list, front-line adventurer than a challenge to the slightly loony roleplayer: “Can you take an oddball who has minimal combat skills – one whose special abilities amount to physiological oddities and a detrimental effect on others’ sanity – and *make it work* in a subgenre that’s traditionally about fighting, magic, and pillaging?”

To make this challenge fun, the GM ought to bear in mind that two of the carnie’s primary skills (Panhandling and Performance) shine only out of combat, while the others (Acrobatics, Intimidation, and Psychology) depend on the violence being more nuanced than endless attack and defense rolls. Construct scenarios so that *Scoring Extra Cash* (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 4), *Dungeon Parkour* (*Dungeons*, pp. 7-8), *Trickery* (*Dungeons*, p. 10), *Speed is Armor!* (*Dungeons*, p. 12), and *Taunt and Bluster* (*Dungeons*, p. 12) are valid solutions to problems.

Introduce situations that showcase the carnies' specialty, whether that means giving the animal-tamer an opportunity to try Animal Handling and Mimicry (*Dungeons*, p. 10), allowing the strongman exploit his Lifting ST advantage and Forced Entry and Lifting skills (*Dungeons*, p. 8), or having a wealthy backer be impressed by the clown's jester act or ringmaster's Propaganda skill. It's easiest to achieve these goals by setting part of an adventure or even the whole thing in town; see *Town Adventures* (*Dungeons*, p. 30).

It's equally important to ensure that the Carnival of Madness saves the day once in a while. While lots of monsters are Unfazeable, and hence immune, make sure that just as many aren't. Keep sight of the fact that Mad abilities that work as Quick Contests of Will affect spirits and similar insubstantial enemies, allowing a carnies to play a leading role in fights against entities that most weapons can't hurt. He might also use Dementation or Derangement to foil potent enemy casters, or Know Madness to discover the secret fears of an overpowering enemy. Mad abilities aren't magic, either, so when mana or sanctity runs out – or the baddies have Magic Resistance – the carnies may command the party's only working supernatural powers. It's worth including encounters that

specifically play up these angles, especially when combat is inevitable . . . there's nothing wrong with a carnies using *Acrobatic Guard* and *Tumbling* (*Dungeons*, p. 12) to move around the field of battle, staying out of reach and sowing confusion instead of striking blows.

Lastly, don't forget that carnies are consummate generalists. Who else is likely to be genuinely *good* at a bizarre combination of skills like Dancing and Teamster, or Escape and Psychology? It's no crime to manufacture the occasional situation where only an odd skill combo will do – especially if the carnies has Serendipity to justify it!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995. He has written or developed some 150 *GURPS* releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and contributed regularly to *Pyramid*. Lead creator of the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series, he designed the *Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game*, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango.

*So when you find yourself locked onto an unpleasant train of thought, heading for the places in your past where the screaming is unbearable, remember there's always madness. Madness is the emergency exit . . .*

*– The Joker, in Batman: The Killing Joke*



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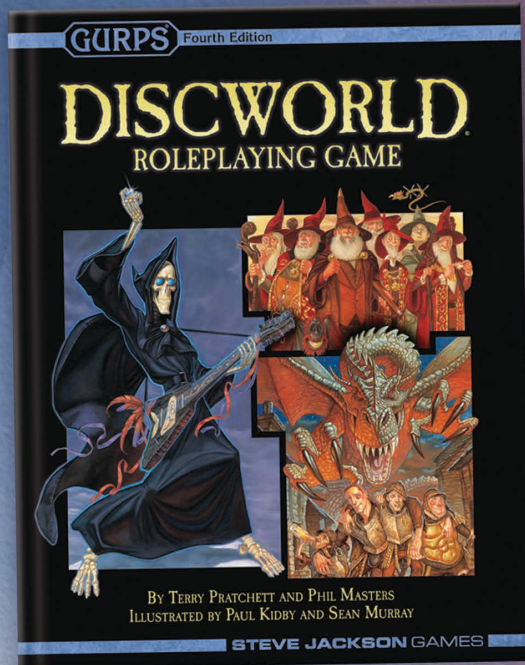
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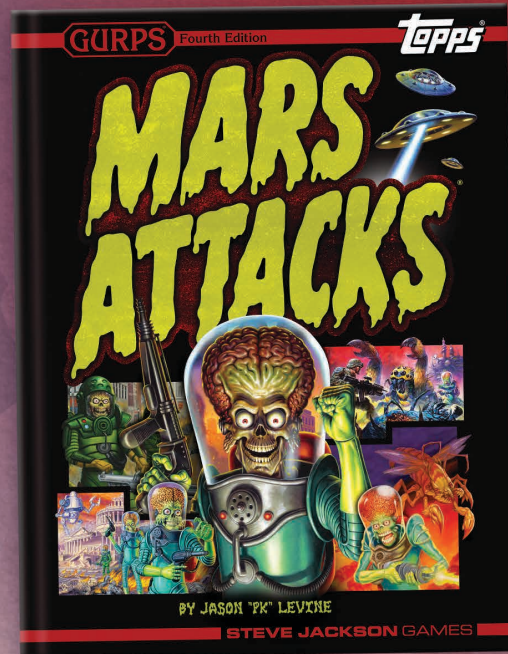


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# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE ZERO-SUM GAME

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

One of the greatest strengths of the *GURPS* system is the fact that it's point-based. While that method isn't perfect, it's certainly easier to make characters that are on a more-or-less equal footing by comparing point totals.

An interesting aspect of this is that – so long as the point totals stay the same – *GURPS* is relatively forgiving of adding options to characters. In other words, if the GM gives some or all the players a package of abilities, then it'll be pretty much balanced so long as it's a 0-point package.

This is the case even if it's a *secret* package. Thus, if a player hands you a 200-point hero and you add advantages worth 50 points and disadvantages worth -50 points (which the hero and player don't know about yet), then it's still a 200-point hero . . . albeit one that can get into a lot of trouble during a game.

Here, then, are some ideas for how to make this idea work in a larger whole.

*For almost a minute the two of us  
were locked in a battle of wills that had  
no possible winner, only a different order  
of losing.*

– Mira Grant, *Parasite*

## THE FRENEMY OF MY FRENEMY

One really simple option is to provide the player with a previously unknown – and perhaps secret – Patron (p. B72) whose point value exactly cancels that of an unknown Enemy (p. B135). Those numbers are fairly straightforward to balance.

As an additional wrinkle, in the same way the *Basic Set* reminds us that the same person can be both a Dependent and an Ally (p. B131), perhaps the *same* Patron is *also* an

Enemy! This may be best reserved for larger organizations, allowing for the heroes to (say) be caught in the machinations of a company's Shadow Ops at the same time they're being aided by another division therein. Or – if you're looking to be really bizarre – there's no reason it can't be the same *person*. An android with two conflicting personalities, a time traveler working against himself from a different point in his timeline, or a magical entity with an intrinsic dual nature are all examples of someone working as both a Patron and Enemy.

## A MIND WITH A HEART OF ITS OWN

Combining this zero-point possibility with strange powers, it's possible to give heroes new abilities that are offset by unknown disadvantages. *The Accidental Magus* (from *Pyramid* #3/48: *Secret Magic*) offers insight into building a campaign that revolves around magicians who are new to the craft, but you can take this further, by making them unaware they even have powers until they discover them.

If you're going to give a hero an ability that is just a few points – maybe to whet the players' appetites for larger magical mysteries – then a good possibility to offset that cost is Trademark (p. B159). The Simple version of this disadvantage is worth -5 points, which should be enough for a cheap skill or two, perhaps some unusual perks, etc.

Interestingly, there's nothing in the description of Trademark that indicates the person with that disadvantage *knowingly* leaves the Trademark; it certainly seems reasonable that a person could have it and not realize it. (Of course, this would be a jerk maneuver at the non-Simple levels of Trademark, where the GM could declare that the player is leaving "calling cards" that can be directly traced back to the PC without the player being aware of it.) But, to keep it more "official" and codified, it's best to offer a different version of Trademark:

*Unwitting:* You do something (which should be relatively common) that leaves a Trademark you're unaware of.

*People are supposed to fear the unknown, but ignorance is bliss when knowledge is so damn frightening.*

– Laurell K. Hamilton,  
*The Laughing Corpse*

Perhaps you have a magical ability that leaves the location with an aura of faint unease or causes something breakable to crack in a minor but distinctive way. Maybe you have a distinct way of milling about a scene that is obvious to everyone else but you. This is otherwise identical to a Simple Trademark; it takes next to no time – quite probably *no* additional time outside of using the ability – and it can't be traced. (The GM could theoretically allow Unwitting variations on Complex or Elaborate Trademarks, but it's a lot harder to justify how you have no idea you're doing something that takes 10 minutes.) -5 points.

## UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS

For those looking for a *really* secret-magic campaign hook, we present the following, which goes even further.

In this case, the heroes have more elaborate magical or unusual abilities that they are unfamiliar with (which they may discover in play). But they also have a secret – one that *they don't know* they don't know. In game terms, the heroes have the following version of Amnesia.

### Amnesia

see p. B123

*Memory Holes:* You have a form of Amnesia, but you don't know it! You have a full and "complete" memory of your life, including your name; you have absolutely no idea (at first) that things are not what they seem. However, your memories have been sculpted – and, as needed, your personality or backstory shaped – so that you *don't know* that you don't know something. Perhaps that monotonous job you had over the summer wasn't as boring as you thought, or maybe Something Interesting was interacting with you for two hours every evening, making you forget it when you woke up. Mechanically, this works similarly to Partial Amnesia, where the GM can assign up to an extra -30 points of disadvantages to you. However, the points for Memory Holes and the extra disadvantages go toward abilities that you also don't know you have. -10 points.

*Example:* While minding their own business, the heroes are shot at by strange gunmen! It turns out that at some point the PCs had killed an evil magician and stolen his secrets; the heroes had hoped to cover their tracks by casting a ritual that erased all evidence of their actions (including their memories), but the ritual backfired. On the plus side, the botched ritual also gave them new magical abilities (worth 30 points) . . . if only they can learn about them before their -20-point Enemy gets them first!

Memory Holes can be acquired during play; in fact, it's one way to breathe some fresh life into a campaign. The GM should just make sure to gauge player interest before inflicting this on their heroes. (If one of the players seems like he'd be reticent, then perhaps he can be pulled aside, and his character can be given a Secret equal to the value of the Memory Holes and additional disadvantages: "I know what's really going on, but I can't let my teammates know right now . . . for their own good, and mine.") One good way to see if this would be usable in game is to have the heroes discover the ritual (or whatever memory-wiping method is used) ahead of time, then ask them, "Under what circumstances, if any, would your heroes be willing to use this?" Take note of their answers and go to town . . .

Note that Enemies created as part of the -30-point disadvantage total for Amnesia do *not* gain the -5 points for being unknown; that's part of the points already bestowed by Amnesia.

## WHAT'S THE POINT?

This thought exercise raises a reasonable question: If all the heroes are going to have the same 0-point package dumped on them, what does the point cost matter? In other words, if the purpose of points is to ensure that heroes are relatively comparable to each other, can't you just give everyone whatever you feel like? If everyone suddenly has an extra 50-point package (instead of a 0-point one), the system still works, right?

The answer is . . . maybe? If the only purpose of points in a campaign is to compare heroes to *each other*, then you can probably get away with not being super-strict about points, so long as all players are on equal footing. For example, if everyone receives the one-time-use boon "Is Owed a Moderate Favor by a God," then it *probably* doesn't matter what the point value of that "ability" is; it'll all sort out in the wash.

But keeping the zero-sum principle in mind has other uses. First, it helps ensure (somewhat) that the GM can devise adversaries that are on a more-or-less equal footing . . . or, if unequal, you at least know what you're getting into. Secondly, a zero-sum plan lets the GM add character-tweaking options to PCs *beyond* having all the heroes get the same option. Maybe one hero has a "frenemy" (p. 34), another suffers from memory holes (above), etc. And not every PC needs to have some strange add-on they're not entirely sure about; some characters may be exactly what they seem . . . but, since the point totals work out, that won't diminish their effectiveness.

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for almost 20 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

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