



# Build a Better Wand in Seven Days

## Options for enchanters in *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by C. Lee Davis & Anna M. Short

*Legolin barged into the laboratory, nearly knocking a carelessly stacked pile of scrolls into an oil lamp in his haste. "Anthras! Have you heard? Kelen's been attacked! The city's under siege!" Anthras glanced up and noticed that his friend was already in his riding leathers. "It's the dragon riders, just as the prophecy said!"*

*"And you want to ride to the rescue." The irritation in Anthras' voice was evident. "Fine. You go ahead."*

*"You're not coming?" Anthras was no coward, Legolin knew from experience.*

*The wizard stopped for a breath and looked up at his friend. "I've been working on this staff for two and a half years, ever since we first heard about the prophecy of the dragon riders. I'll be done in another two months. Do you know why I'm not finished now? I'll tell you why. Because two years ago, you talked me into going to Kelen to try to prevent the prophecy. Not only did that not work, not only did it set me back two months on making a weapon that can kill dragons, but the good citizens of Kelen decided to burn me for a demon sorcerer. So, no, I'm not coming. I'm going to stay right here and finish this one enchantment, and if we're lucky, by the time they're done sacking Kelen, we'll have something that will work against them instead of just valiant optimism."*

*Legolin stood back, shocked by his friend's outburst. "Now go, shoo," Anthras added. "Don't get killed. But leave me to my work. I'll join you in two months."*

\* \* \*

Enchantment in the standard *GURPS* model can be highly problematic for a player character. Without access to a large circle of mages of equal or greater power, which GMs may be reluctant to allow, a mage will require years to enchant a magic item, and even then the result will most likely be at best equal to the abilities he already possesses. In order to do this, he must drop out of play for game years; if the campaign can't wait, his skill as an enchanter is meaningless. If Magery is rare in the campaign, the time required may destroy all logical incentive for even NPC mages to create magic items -- why spend years on a wand of fireballs when he's arguably better off just casting the spell himself?

*GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Fantasy* offer advice to GMs attempting to reduce the number of magic items in their campaigns, but none to those who want to enable player character enchantment without unbalancing the game. Just like an alchemist, an enchanter can be a distinct magical archetype and as playable in a fantasy setting as is a gadgeteer in a high-tech world.

## Assumptions in *GURPS*

*GURPS Magic* sets all costs of enchantment based on the assumption that an enchanter works 22 eight-hour days a month and has Average wealth. From that, it derives costs for items created using Slow & Sure and Quick & Dirty enchantment. *GURPS Magic* also assumes that would-be enchanters have access to circles of mages with Magery 2 and any spells to be enchanted at 15 or better, and that the enchanter himself has the applicable spells in the neighborhood of 20, so that he can lead the circle.

*GURPS* also assumes that it is often easier to teach a spell than to make an item. At most, it takes (400 hours × number of prerequisites) to learn any particular spell. With the standard restrictions on *GURPS* enchantment, the student not only ends up with access to the spell in less time, but learns all its prerequisites as well, and, unlike a magic item, his learning cannot be stolen. High mana worlds, where anyone can learn spells, elevate teaching over enchantment even further.

For example, Fireball (4 prerequisites) takes 200 man-days to learn (4×400/8), or 800 mage-days to enchant. The only reasons, under standard *GURPS* enchantment, to make a wand of fireballs are to exploit other enchantments, such as Speed or Power, or to use dedicated powerstones. Otherwise, it is simply faster and cheaper to teach the spell; the student gains the additional benefits of knowing Shape Fire, Create Fire, and Ignite Fire.

These assumptions do not fit many fantasy worlds. Mages may be wealthy and powerful, especially if Magery is rare. In such a setting, if the GM still wants magic items to be created for reasons other than to add Speed, Power, or dedicated Powerstones, he needs to make some changes to the material in *GURPS Magic*. These changes must address both the enchantment process and the wealth of enchanters, since the two are integrally related.

## Speeding Up Slow & Sure Enchantment

The *Basic Set* sets the rate of Slow & Sure enchantment at 1 point of energy per day. Tinkering with that rate has a dramatic effect on how quickly enchanters can work, and therefore on how playable they are as characters; it can also be used to promote the creation of particular types of items by changing the tradeoffs for low-energy vs. high-energy spells, multiple enchantments on one item vs. enchanting multiple items, and so forth.

Each option includes a suggested minimum Wealth level for enchanters, to keep the cost of magic items about the same as it is in the *GURPS Magic* system. Increasing the enchanter's income will also raise the price he can charge for items created using the Quick & Dirty method; the same amount of his time is simply more valuable.

### Fast Enchantment

**Hours required = energy**

A simple change is to allow Slow & Sure enchantment to enchant at a rate of one point of energy per hour, rather than per day. This makes enchantment much more competitive with teaching without introducing any additional, complicated calculations. Medium-sized projects may still take mage-years to complete, but lesser items will be achievable in a few weeks.

**Suggested Wealth:** Very Wealthy.

### High-Powered, Multi-

**Days required = the square root of**

## Function Items

## total energy required

If the setting suggests that enchanters create few items, but those items have a wide range of capabilities, this function will support it. The incremental cost of each additional enchantment grows lower as more are put on the same item.

Using this option strongly suggests making all skill rolls on Enchant skill instead of the lower of Enchant or spell skill (see "The Power of Enchantment," below), since otherwise figuring out what enchantment took how long can be complicated. If the GM prefers, though, he can allocate the resulting time in proportion to the energy required.

**Suggested Wealth:** Very Wealthy.

### High-Powered, Single-Function Items

**Days required = the square root of the  
energy required for each spell**

This calculation doesn't encourage multi-function items, but powerful items will not take so much more time than less powerful ones.

**Suggested Wealth:** Wealthy.

### Skilled Enchanters

**Energy per day = Enchant/10**

Master enchanters will be able to produce magic items much more quickly than their less-skilled counterparts. To enhance the effect, use Enchant<sup>2</sup> instead of just Enchant; someone with Enchant-15 will be barely half as fast as someone with Enchant-20. To enhance the effects of tools, mana levels, or other factors, use effective skill instead of raw skill. Be careful with combining this with "Power of Enchantment," below, or the Enchant spell may become too powerful.

**Suggested Wealth:** Comfortable, or Very Wealthy if using Enchant<sup>2</sup>.

## Alternative Enchantments

Tinkering with the rules for enchantment itself can produce a different set of trade-offs in character design that support certain archetypes or behaviors.

### Craft Enchantment

This alternative approach to enchantment requires that the enchanter also be a craftsman; a highly skilled artisan may not even need to be a very good mage. Any item to be enchanted *must* be made by the person who will enchant it. Weapons must be of *fine* quality (*very fine* quality for melee weapons at TL7+). Equipment must be of *good* quality. Other items must be of similar quality, of the sort usually retailing for 4× normal cost; this might give a -4 to the skill roll to make the item.

The enchanter gets a bonus to his skill roll to enchant the item equal to his margin of success in crafting it. He gets an additional +2 if he made the item from natural materials (mining and smelting

iron ore himself to make a sword, or cutting and carving his own timber for a staff); this requires a roll on the appropriate skill.

Using this system, Enchant should only have the prerequisite of Magery 2; the requirement of artificer skills replaces that of ten spells from different colleges, since each different type of item will require a different craft skill. An enchanter might specialize in one type, such as swords or jewelry, but that makes him less flexible than a standard *GURPS* enchanter or one with a broader range of skills. He will also likely need to invest more in his craft skills, since they will not benefit from Magery, yet he cannot afford to be less skilled as a craftsman than as a mage.

This system is an alternative for enchanters to "Mysteries of the Trade" in *GURPS Fantasy*, chapter 7. Using both in the same setting but for different groups would be a good way to contrast the dour but incredible tradecraft of the dwarves with the eldritch elegance of faerie workmanship.

If the "Enchanting Tools" rules are used, a different set of tools is required for each craft skill.

## Reliable Enchantment

The single skill roll for enchantment is a powerful disincentive to math-savvy players; one bad die roll could ruin game-years of work. As an alternative, the GM may treat enchantment as a long task (p. B346); setbacks become minor instead of catastrophic. Critical success no longer increases power for the item, however; it merely reduces the time required for the job. Workshops full of enchanters (if such exist) require Administration rather than enormous skill at spells to coordinate. Magic items will be about 5% cheaper, since the chance of total failure no longer exists. This is taken into account in "Enchanted Economics," below.

## The Power of Enchantment

If the GM feels that there's not enough reason to make magic items in the first place, he might want to allow the power of the item to be based on the *higher* of the enchanter's skill with the spell being enchanted or with Enchant. This will encourage enchanters to invest in Enchant rather than other in spells. It might be too powerful if combined with "Skilled Enchanters," above.

## Enchanting Tools

The GM may require special enchanting tools. These must be themselves enchanted, with an energy cost of 5,000. If they modify effective skill (as per p. B345), adjust the time required to make them by the same amount as the price. Depending on the setting, tools may be available for sale; see "Enchanted Economics," below, for prices. Working without them would be subject to the penalties for "no equipment." The origin of the first enchanting tools might be worth a line or two in a creation myth.

If tools for enchantment need not be magical, the suggested base price is one year's wages at average income for the TL.

## Other Factors

A more radical alternative is to drop the enchanting rules altogether and build magic items using the gadget limitations on p. B117. Most magic items will be Breakable, Can Be Stolen, and Unique. Generalizing the rules for study, the GM could allow enchanters to make such items by taking 200 hours per point the advantage would cost. Using this model, knowing the spell or even knowing Enchant can be made optional without sacrificing game balance.

If the GM wants to let factors other than sheer skill influence the power of the resulting item, he may want to use *effective* skill, and involve the magical lenses from *GURPS Fantasy*, chapter 7; the equipment modifiers from the *Basic Set*; or even the full Hermetic magic set from *GURPS Cabal*.

## Improving Items

For *GURPS Third Edition*, Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch suggested some measures that GMs might want to use to power up magic items in their campaigns; these work just as well in *Fourth Edition*:

1. Spells cast using magic items do not count as spells "on."
2. Spells cast using items are unaffected by Shock, although someone using an item is still susceptible to Distraction while concentrating on using an item.
3. Spells cast using items do not count against a mage's uses of a spell, when that matters (for example, Major and Minor Healing).

## Enchanted Economics

The bulk of the cost of magic items is in the enchanter's labor. Speeding up the process makes them less expensive, unless the enchanter simply demands more money for his labor.

The default assumption in *GURPS Magic* is that a wizard is about as well-off as the average blacksmith or tavern-keeper, and significantly poorer than a typical priest or armorer, never mind a knight. Wizards (or at least enchanters, who must be exceptionally talented) may demand significantly more for their labor if it is more scarce. Magic items may be literally worth a king's ransom, or be so rare as to be beyond price!

	<i>Slow &amp; Sure</i>			<i>Quick &amp; Dirty</i>		
<b>Wealth</b>	<b>Base</b>	<b>TL3</b>	<b>TL8</b>	<b>Base</b>	<b>TL3</b>	<b>TL8</b>
Average	×0.048	\$33	\$124	×0.010	\$7	\$27
Comfortable	×0.095	\$67	\$248	×0.021	\$14	\$54
Wealthy	×0.24	\$167	\$619	×0.052	\$36	\$134
Very Wealthy	×0.95	\$666	\$2,476	×0.21	\$145	\$537
Filthy Rich	×4.8	\$3,333	\$12,379	×1.0	\$723	\$2,686

Base values are cost per mage-day for Slow & Sure enchantment, and cost per energy point for Quick & Dirty. Multiply average monthly income at the TL by the base value to get the cost of enchantment per mage day or per energy point, assuming enchanters of a given wealth level. Reduce prices by 5% if using "Reliable Enchantment," above. For those who'd rather do the math, slow and sure is (average wealth × wealth multiplier × S), where S is 0.0476 for standard enchantment or

0.0455 for reliable enchantment; quick and dirty equals (average wealth × wealth multiplier × 0.0103).

Given the hectic lives of player character enchanters, the GM may find it easier to simply roleplay each commission. For some wizards, enchantment might simply be a lucrative sideline that pays the bills for repairs to the tower and research materials.

## Advantages

Finally, a few character creation options can help differentiate the dedicated enchanter from the generic wizard, and fit the use of enchantment better into the game.

### Magery

See p. B66

**Enchantment Only:** You may learn spells normally, but may not cast them; you can only enchant them into items. This differs from One-College Magery (Enchantment) in that you can learn spells in any college, even those with Magery prerequisites, if you have the appropriate level of Magery (Enchantment Only). -30%.

**No Enchantment:** You may not enchant items. -15%.

**No Slow & Sure Enchantment:** You may only enchant items using the quick and dirty method; this limits you to weaker items. -10%.

### Signature Gear

See p. B85

Using any of the optional slow & sure enchantment systems in this article, it is not possible to set a fixed ratio of character points to energy. Base the cost of a magic item on the typical enchanter's income and how long it would take to create.

\* \* \*

*Legolin barged into the laboratory, nearly knocking a carelessly stacked pile of scrolls into an oil lamp in his haste. "Anthras! Have you heard?"*

*"About Kelen? Yes." Legolin paused a moment to boggle; the wizard was wearing his travel robes, but a sword's baldric was thrown over one shoulder and a quiver over the other. As Legolin stood there, a kite shield was pressed into his hands, so Anthras could grab his staff with the hand that wasn't already holding a lance. To Legolin's elven mage senses, every item shone with enchantment. "Get that cloak. Where are the others? We're ready for this. This time, we've got weapons that can actually hurt dragons. Burn me, indeed. I'll show those Kelen fools the difference between a demon sorcerer and an enchanter!"*

---

Article publication date: November 11, 2005

---

Copyright © 2005 by [Steve Jackson Games](#). All rights reserved. Pyramid subscribers are permitted to read this article online, or download it and print out a single hardcopy for personal use. Copying this text to any other online system or BBS, or making more than one hardcopy, is *strictly prohibited*. So please don't. And if you encounter copies of this article elsewhere on the web, please report it to [webmaster@sjgames.com](mailto:webmaster@sjgames.com).