



Cutting Edge Magic in GURPS

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A staple of the cyberpunk genre is the continuous development of computing technology, an extension of "Moore's Law," making yesterday's technology obsolete and tomorrow's technology priceless and coveted.

In a setting where magic replaces or co-exists with cyberpunk technology, research and development into magic would proceed at a pace comparable to that of technology. Instead of magic spells and rituals being based on ancient, arcane knowledge lost to the majority of the world, magic would rapidly evolve. In such a "cutting edge magic" setting, experimentation is rampant and new techniques are continuously developed that improve on yesterday's methods of spellcasting. Likewise, counterspells and mystical defenses are constantly being updated to keep up with the spellcasting advances.

In *GURPS* terms, an up-to-date spell technique is at -5 to resist. Truly cutting edge techniques may extend this even further, up to -10 to resist, though that bonus depreciates rapidly (losing -2 of its resistance penalty per age period until at the level indicated in Table 1, below). An up-to-date general counter charm gives a +5 to resist any spell. Again, a cutting edge counter charm may give a further resistance bonus, up to +10, losing +2 of its bonus per age period until its advantage is lost.

Age of Technique	Spell Resistance Penalty	Counter Charm Resistance Bonus/Technique Thaumatology Bonus	Depreciated Value
Less than 1 day	-5	+5	100%
1 day to 1 week	-4	+4	50%
1 week to 1 month	-3	+3	25%
1 to 3 months	-2	+2	10%

3 months to 6 months	-1	+1	5%
More than 6 months	0	0	0%

A brand new spell technique typically costs \$1,000 plus \$1,000 per prerequisite that spell has, and takes about one hour of practice under a teacher who knows the technique (one hours with just written instructions) to acquaint oneself with the new technique.

Counter charm costs vary depending on the scope of the charm. A general charm costs \$20,000 when new, while one college charms typically go for \$1,000 new. A single spell charm costs \$100 + \$100 per prerequisite the spell has, but sometimes last a bit longer before being superceded. For a new single-spell charm, roll one die every day -- the charm only begins to depreciate on a roll of the charm's age in days or less. Even without a charm, if you know the spell you get a single-spell charm bonus as if you had a charm depreciated to the same age as spell. Resistance bonuses for charms or spell knowledge are not cumulative, use only the best one.

Undiscovered Techniques

A sorcerer who develops a new technique may keep it secret, attempting to preserve its utility. The technique will not begin to depreciate until it becomes general knowledge.

There is a chance another mage will discover the same technique independently. Roll 3d every day the secret is kept -- on a 17 or 18 the technique is discovered independently and made public, thus beginning its depreciation.

Someone may discover the secret through espionage. The likelihood of this is entirely dependant on how careful the developer was with his notes and researches; this kind of incident makes prime adventure fodder. Factors improving security may include encryption or destruction of notes and physical and magical security of the lab. Factors reducing security could include the intelligence analysis skill of the agency attempting the theft, and the number of people who had access to the lab during the development of the technique.

Finally, the technique may be discovered through observation. Anytime the new technique is used, it will be discovered automatically if observed by another mage. Even if no mages seem to be present, someone may be spying or lurking under cover (magical or not). Roll 3d6 every time the technique is used: on a 17 or 18 it is observed and begins to depreciate.

Developing New Techniques

To develop a new spellcasting technique, one requires a magical lab, current knowledge of the spell for which the technique is being developed, and the Thaumatology skill. Time required is 1d-5 days, +1 day for every prerequisite the spell has, with a minimum of 1 day. This assumes work continues for 8 hours a day.

Each day the researcher rolls against the spell, spending the appropriate amount of fatigue (or increasing his power tally if Umana is being used). A failed spell roll means that the research of that day is wasted; a critical success counts for 1d days research; a critical failure calls for a roll on the critical spell failure table, and counts for 1d-3 days research -- possibly setting the research back, but also possibly giving unusual incite.

After the research is complete, a roll on the thaumatology skill is made at -10. Modifiers for this roll are:

- *Spell has 3-5 prerequisites: -1*
- *Spell has 6-10 prerequisites: -2*
- *Spell has 11+ prerequisites: -3*
- *Age of most advanced technique for that spell known at time research is complete: +0-5, according to Table 1, and;*
- Add the number of character points in the spell (representing time spent studying that particular spell), up to +5.

Success by 5 or more indicates a valid new technique is developed. Success by less than 5, or failure, indicates a less advanced technique is invented, or an existing technique is duplicated -- the technique has a resistance penalty equal to the amount the roll was made by, and is considered to have already depreciated to that level. Critical success indicates that the technique is truly cutting edge, and qualifies for an extra bonus at the GM's discretion.

Creating Charms

Charms are small items, often jewelry, given a minor enchantment that aids in resisting spells. The easiest type of charm to create is the single-spell charm, which requires knowledge of the spell and a roll on the lower of the spell skill or symbol. It takes 10 minutes per prerequisite the spell has, with a minimum of 30 minutes. Material cost is \$25, but may be assumed to be trivial if a magical lab is available to work in. The newly created charm is effectively as old as the creator's spell technique in that spell.

One-college charms are created in a similar way, taking 2 hours to create and \$100 in materials, and requiring a roll against the lower of symbol drawing skill or skill in the appropriate college (calculated as per improvised magic rules). For one-college charms, the effective depreciated age is determined by the amount the roll succeeded by: 5 or more creating a +5 charm, just making the roll creating a charm that is not current enough to be of use (no bonus), as per table 1.

General charms are created alchemically, costing 1d x \$1,000 in materials, taking 1d hours to create, and requiring a roll at alchemy -5, with appropriate modifiers for quality of the alchemical lab. Again, level of success is guided by table 1, with success by 5 or more creating a general charm with a +5 resistance bonus.

Options for Cutting Edge Magic

If cutting edge magic is only researched in one area of your world, it would be appropriate to charge an unusual background cost for the use of cutting edge magic. Any mage who does not pay the cost would be assumed to have learned traditional magic, and would not be flexible enough to continuously update their techniques. They also would be unable to create charms, though they certainly would benefit from carrying charms other people created.

If cutting edge magic is practiced in multiple areas, but those areas have no means of instant communications between them, a technique developed in one area would not begin to depreciate in the other area until enough time has passed that the technique could have spread. This time should probably be the same as the usual travel time between areas.

The time scale in Table 1 can be adjusted to make techniques less time dependant. This would be especially appropriate in a world where wizards are rare, spread out, and work independently. If

techniques take longer to learn, or are harder to duplicate, it would also make them less time dependant.

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