

# GURPS®

Fourth Edition

# THAUMATOLOGY™

# SORCERY



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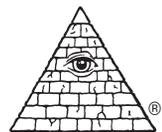
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## ABOUT GURPS

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# INTRODUCTION

In many settings, magical power demands painstaking training. Gray-haired wizards debate whether magic is art or science, but all concur that study and practice are essential to its mastery. And most **GURPS** magic systems agree with them: spellcasting is based on skills, and as you improve these, your invocations become more potent.

But other worlds call for a take on magic wherein academic training is downplayed, even nonexistent. Such supernatural might originates within the spellcaster. It's *inherent* and offers terrifying power once mastered . . . the power of sorcery!

**GURPS Thaumatology: Sorcery** introduces a new system that models magic as a *power* and spells as mystical advantages the sorcerer can draw upon instinctively, easily, and repeatedly. Nearly all sorcerous spells – however powerful – can be cast in a mere second with but a single Fatigue Point. They're limited by character-point costs alone, not by skill levels, prerequisites, or escalating casting times and energy costs; thus, their strength scales directly with campaign power level. This makes **Sorcery** a perfect fit to any background featuring magic that lets dabblers light candles from afar and create mild zephyrs while archmages hurl 100d fireballs and generate tsunamis with a thought.

A sorcerer might have a smaller bag of tricks than his **GURPS Magic** counterpart, but he wields them as an extension of himself. If nothing in his grimoire fits the situation, he can *improvise* – and though such impromptu magic is weak, the right cantrip sometimes makes all the difference! Creating new spells is easy, too: pick the right advantages, add suitable modifiers, and trust the simple guidelines herein to keep things straightforward, versatile, and *balanced*.

With **Sorcery**, all of **GURPS** is your potential grimoire and the only limit is your ambition. Unlock the power within yourself and never look back.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

This is a standalone supplement which requires only the **GURPS Basic Set**. However, those looking to expand their

grimoires will find **GURPS Magic** inspirational for its colleges and spells; **GURPS Thaumatology** useful for its advice on magic as powers; and **GURPS Powers** and the **GURPS Power-Ups** series invaluable for their expanded rules, traits, and modifiers.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY

An early version of this system appeared in the article “The Power of Sorcery,” from *Pyramid* #3/63: *Infinite Worlds II*; it has been significantly overhauled and expanded for this supplement. The spells in Chapter 2 are unique creations but were inspired by their counterparts in **GURPS Magic**. Some of the rules for enchanted items were adapted from **GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic**, but are used in a very different context here.

### *Under the Hood*

“Under the Hood” boxes sprinkled throughout the text show details and designer’s notes regarding important or complex rules. They exist *only* for hardcore rules hackers who want to revamp sorcery or port its ideas to their own custom systems. If that doesn’t describe you, *just skip these boxes* – you don’t need to know or understand anything in them to use sorcery in your game!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason “PK” Levine may not be able to conjure fireballs, but he *can* make a handkerchief disappear right in front of your eyes . . . if you aren’t paying too close attention. Fortunately, his lack of sorcerous power did not prevent him from being hired as the Assistant **GURPS** Line Editor, where he wrote **GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic** before deciding that inventing one magic system wasn’t enough and building this one. He lives just outside of Chattanooga with his lovely wife and cats.

*I think magic is a force . . . some of us can touch a little piece of it, some more than others, and we can use that little bit to do something to influence the physical world. What we can do depends entirely on what little bit of the Power we can personally reach.*

*– Larry Correia, **Hard Magic***

*Example:* Ada, with Sorcerous Empowerment 1 [20], can improvise any spell with a full cost of 1 point – no more. She could improvise the basic version of Ignite Fire (p. 16) but not the improved version. Bob has Sorcerous Empowerment 19 (Limited Colleges, Fire, -40%) [120], and thus could improvise any Fire spell from Ignite Fire (either version) up through Shape Fire 1 (p. 16).

Otherwise, casting an improvised spell works just like casting a normal one: two Concentrate maneuvers, or just one if it was the last spell you cast. In other words, improvising a spell is no more difficult than switching between two known spells.

## Hardcore Improvisation

A sorcerer who needs to exceed the bounds of his normal improvisational ability may attempt to push his limits, improvising a spell based on the *cost* of his Sorcerous Empowerment rather than its level. Using the example above, Ada could try to improvise a spell with a full cost of up to 20 points, while Bob could aim for one costing up to 120 points!

This requires no additional time; it still takes just two Concentrate maneuvers to improvise a new spell. After the first Concentrate maneuver, pay 3 FP and roll against Will + Talent; you may substitute Will-based Thaumatology for Will, if better.

*Modifiers:* -4 if the full cost of the spell is no more than 25% of the cost of your Sorcerous Empowerment; -6 if no more than 50%; -8 if no more than 75%; and -10 if higher (up to 100%). +1 for every additional FP you spend above and beyond the 3 FP required – but this can only offset the penalty for spell cost, not provide a net bonus.

If this roll *succeeds*, you improvise the new spell *for a single casting*. On a critical success, you also recover all FP spent on the improvisation attempt and get +1 on any rolls to cast or use the spell. You must still cast the new spell – pay 1 FP, make any casting roll necessary, and so on. (If your improvisation roll succeeds but your *casting* roll fails, you have to start over from scratch – sorry!) If the spell has an indefinite duration, you may maintain it normally (see p. 8). After casting the spell, you are considered to have *no* spell currently improvised; if you want to recast it, you must start the hardcore improvisation over.

If your improvisation roll *fails*, the FP and second of concentration are wasted, but you can try again next turn at no penalty. On a critical failure, however, your sorcery shuts down for the next 1d *minutes*; you've overexerted yourself and now must pay the price! (If you have **GURPS Powers**, feel free to use the more complex *Crippled Abilities* on p. 156 instead of this simple rule.)

*Example:* Ada needs to cast Light 1 (p. 19) now – but she doesn't know it and has only Sorcerous Empowerment 1 [20]. She must therefore use hardcore improvisation. Ada has Will 13 and Sorcery Talent 4, and Light's 11-point cost is over 50% but under 75% of the cost of her Sorcerous Empowerment. She takes a Concentrate maneuver, decides to spend a total of 8 FP, rolls against 13 (Will) + 4 (Talent) - 8 (up to 75%) + 5 (extra FP) = 14, and succeeds! On her next turn, she takes the second Concentrate maneuver to actually cast the spell, and succeeds. After all this, if she wants to cast Light again, she'll have to start from scratch; it is not considered "the last spell she cast" as a normally improvised spell would have been.

## ALTERNATIVE RITUALS

As a rule, sorcery spells cost 1 FP to cast. This keeps just enough resource management in sorcery to prevent its spells from turning into superpowers. As an optional rule, the GM may instead give sorcerers more flexibility by requiring them to meet any *two* of the following three requirements when casting a spell:

1. Pay 1 FP upon casting the spell.
2. Perform obvious physical gestures, requiring some torso and leg movement and exaggerated arm movement, for the duration of the casting. The sorcerer can meet this requirement if he is sitting (unbound) or if his legs are chained, but not if his legs are clamped in place, he is tied to a chair, or his arms are restrained in any way.
3. Speak an obvious ritual chant, at normal conversation levels, for the duration of the casting. The sorcerer cannot be gagged and this makes Stealth (to be silent) impossible.

These requirements may be shifted on the fly. A sorcerer could cast the same Ignite Fire spell using gestures and chanting (to save FP) when helping a friend, then with FP and gestures (to be quiet) when later sneaking into a castle, and then again with FP and chanting (no movement) after the guards catch him and tie him up. One major benefit is that sorcerers can ignore FP costs when they don't mind being flashy, but as a downside, they lose the ability to cast spells if fully restrained and gagged.

The gestures and/or chanting make it clear to anyone with *any* awareness of how magic works that the sorcerer is casting a spell. Someone with actual magical training (even if only theoretical, such as Occultism or Thaumatology) may roll vs. an applicable skill (or IQ) as a free action to estimate what the spell will do. This roll is at -4 if the sorcerer is only gesturing or only chanting, or at no penalty if he's doing both.

If this rule is in play when a high-fatigue spell (p. 17) is cast, replace 1 FP of that cost with the requirements above.

*Example:* The GM has invented a powerful spell that costs 5 FP, but alternative rituals are in play. Thus, the spell's actual cost becomes "4 FP plus two ritual requirements." A sorcerer could pay 5 FP and gesture, pay 5 FP and chant, or pay 4 FP and gesture *and* chant.

## Improvisational Limits

The GM is perfectly within rights to restrict sorcery to an approved grimoire for the campaign, declaring that only *these* spells can be learned or improvised. If he does allow sorcerers to improvise completely new spells, each such improvisation must make sense as a new, general spell for the setting.

In addition, every zombie must immediately roll against HT+DR; this is an unopposed roll, not a Quick Contest. If that roll fails, that zombie *immediately* flees from the caster and will not approach him again for the next 15 hours.

*Statistics:* Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Zombies only, -50%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Disadvantage, Dread, +30%; Extended Duration, 300x, +100%; Fixed Duration, +0%; Link, +10%; No Signature, +20%; Sorcery, -15%; Variable, Area, +5%) [25] + Crushing Attack 1d (Accessibility, Zombies only, -50%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Cosmic, Irresistible attack, +300%; Link, +10%; Magical, -10%; No Signature, +20%; Variable, Area, +5%) [22]. Additional levels add Area Effect (+50%) to Affliction [+5\*] and Crushing Attack [+2.5\*].

\* Calculate the total cost and then round *down* (because the total cost before rounding is 46.25). Level 2 costs 54 points, level 3 costs 62 points, level 4 costs 69 points, level 5 costs 77 points, and so on.

## PLANT SPELLS

### *Blight*

*Keywords:* Area (Leveled), Resisted (HT, special).  
*Full Cost:* 44 points for level 1 + 5 points/additional level.  
*Casting Roll:* Will.  
*Range:* Unlimited.  
*Duration:* Permanent.

Plants in the area grow more slowly and weakly: Crops produce half the usual yield, vegetation grows half as tall, and any mundane HT rolls made by the plants are at -2. This spell affects only inanimate plants; mobile or sentient ones are immune.

This spell is resisted by the plant with the single best HT+SM value in the area. (If a plant's HT is unknown, assume HT 12.) If it resists, the spell fails and no plants are affected; otherwise, all of the plants are.

Blight is permanent until countered (e.g., by Dispel Magic, p. 21), but it targets the *plants*, not the area. Once the plants die or are harvested, the soil is fine for growing new plants. (Plants designed to stick around for years, such as trees, continue to suffer.)

*Statistics:* Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Sessile plants only, -30%; All or Nothing, p. 17, -10%; Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Disadvantages, Slow Healing 1 and Very Unfit, Variants, +20%; Extended Duration, Permanent, +150%; Fixed Duration, +0%; Malediction 2, +150%; No Signature, +20%; Sorcery, -15%; Variable, Area, +5%) [44]. Additional levels add Area Effect (+50%) [+5].

### *Body of Wood*

*Keywords:* Buff.  
*Full Cost:* 98 points.  
*Casting Roll:* None. Use Innate Attack (Gaze) to aim.  
*Range:* 100 yards.  
*Duration:* 30 minutes.

The subject gains the Body of Wood meta-trait; see the footnote below for details. Clothing and gear weighing no more than his BL change with him. He cannot shift back on

his own; he must wait for the spell to expire or be dispelled. (This does not change if the sorcerer is the subject.)

*Statistics:* Affliction 1 (HT; Advantage, Body of Wood, +840%; Extended Duration, 10x, +40%; Fixed Duration, +0%; Increased 1/2D, 10x, +15%; Sorcery, -15%) [98]. *Notes:* "Body of Wood" is Alternate Form (Body of Wood\*; Can Carry Objects, No Encumbrance, +10%; Magical, -10%) [84]. If turned into a "usually on" magical item (pp. 27-28), the wearer can shift at will but it takes 10 seconds to do so.

\* A meta-trait from p. 165 of *GURPS Magic*: Basic Speed-1 [-20]; Blunt Claws [3]; DR 2 (Semi-Ablative, -20%) [8]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous) [40]; Lifting ST 5 [15]; Numb [-20]; and Affected by Plant Spells [0]. 76 points.

## Mana

All spells require mana. In no-mana areas, spells simply cease to work. In low-mana areas, all casting rolls are at -5, while spells with no casting roll halve all effects: damage, range, weight, etc. (The GM may have to interpret what "half effect" means for certain spells.) Normal-mana areas use these rules as written. In high-mana areas, halve all casting times, rounding up. In very-high-mana areas, halve all casting times and the sorcerer immediately recovers any FP spent on a spell or to boost an improvisation attempt (pp. 6-8)

## PROTECTION AND WARNING SPELLS

### *Magelock*

*Keywords:* None.  
*Full Cost:* 25 points for level 1 + 15 points/additional level.  
*Casting Roll:* None.  
*Range:* Touch.  
*Duration:* Five hours.

The sorcerer must touch a portal – here defined as a door, window, or similar entrance that can be opened and closed. This spell locks the portal, even if it had no lock, and physically prevents it from opening. Attempts to pick the lock fail, as the lock itself is essentially "frozen" in place.

Intruders must break the door down to enter. However, every level of Magelock *past the first* gives +5 DR to the portal (including its lock, hinges, and so on). This DR only hinders attempts to force the door; it does not provide cover DR to those behind it, nor does it help if enemies use area effects or explosions to blow up the portal as a whole!

*Statistics:* Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Only portals, -50%; Extended Duration, 100x, +80%; Fixed Duration, +0%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; No Signature, +20%; Nuisance Effect, Can be overcome by Lockmaster, -5%; Paralysis, Variant, +150%; Sorcery, -15%) [25]. Additional levels add "Advantage, DR 5 limited to breakdown attempts" (+150%) [+15].

# MAGICAL ECONOMICS

Wherever enchanted items are made, there will be customers willing to pay for the privilege of owning them. The following rules assume that enchanters are about as common as other highly qualified professionals in the game world. If they are significantly more common, treat it as an Average job (0.5× the wage values given below); if almost unheard of, as a Wealthy job (2.5× the wage values).

*If you want to live to a ripe old age, buy a [magical] weapon and as much armor as you can wear and still run from trouble. Buy a spell or two. And practice your skills. Don't practice on citizens. We call that foul murder, and we don't like it.*

– Arrille,  
in *Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*

## ENCHANTING JOBS

Enchanting is usually a Comfortable job (pp. B516-517). Rather than having the player work out the details for each enchantment, make a success roll for each shift, etc., just boil it down to a monthly job roll against IQ + Talent. Thaumatology at IQ+1 or better gives +1 to this roll, as it helps the enchanter maximize magical synergies and minimize waste. Assume that the vast majority of the enchanter's work "in the background" like this will be enchanting and selling minor (1-4 EP) items, which means no character points need be sacrificed.

The value of "enchanter's assistant" as a job depends on the assistant's qualifications. With no sorcery, it's usually a Struggling job. Being a sorcerer raises that to Average. And a sorcerous assistant who knows Enchant and several useful spells could be an enchanter himself; he'd be a partner rather than an employee, worth Comfortable wages.

## BUYING MAGIC ITEMS

The cost of a magic item is the sum of two things:

- The mundane cost of the item itself (*Inherent Value Table*, p. 30), and
- The cost of the enchanter's labor (below).

Assume that a typical enchanter will have IQ + Talent of 15 and expect Comfortable wages. He may have assistants to speed things up, but if so, he has to pay them for their time; having them increases his productivity greatly, but the economic difference *per item* is a wash.

Thus, every 25 enchanter-days will produce 5 EP on average – which means each EP requires 5 enchanter-days. Since there are 22 workdays in a typical month, each EP is worth (Comfortable monthly pay) × (5/22). Or, as a table:

TL	Wages per EP	TL	Wages per EP
0	\$285	7	\$955
1	\$295	8	\$1,180
2	\$305	9	\$1,635
3	\$320	10	\$2,545
4	\$365	11	\$3,680
5	\$500	12	\$4,820
6	\$725		

Simply multiply the enchantment's total EP by the wage value from the table above and then add the underlying item's inherent value. The total is the price to create that enchanted item. If magic-item shops or dealers exist, this is the price they will pay for it; they will usually sell it to the public for *twice* this value, though buyers can attempt to haggle (see *Commercial Transactions*, p. B562). Second-hand, damaged, or buggy items may cost less, while enchantments for rare or dangerous spells may cost more.

*Example:* Bob can cast only Fire spells – but having learned the hard way how important Healing magic can be, he's tracked down a magic-item dealer. The dealer offers him an Amulet of Minor Healing which requires Sorcerous Empowerment to use. (Fortunately for Bob, it doesn't require full prerequisites, because his Fire-limited sorcery would not cut it.) The spell has a full cost of 32 points and the amulet has a multiplier of 0.45, for 15 EP. At TL3, that requires a \$70 amulet. The enchanter's wages add \$320 × 15 = \$4,800. The amulet thus cost the dealer \$4,870, so he's willing to sell it to Bob for \$9,740.



# APPENDIX

# SAMPLE

# SORCERER

Bryce the Bold is a typical sorcerer, built for a TL3 **GURPS Banestorm** campaign but adaptable enough to drop into almost any fantasy game. She is heavily focused on magic, but has enough mundane skills to still be useful if her group encounters a no-mana area.

Her Innate Attack skills are usually at +3 from her Talent, but as this is technically a conditional bonus, it has not been added below.

Bryce has paid full price for Complex Illusion, her most expensive spell. This allows her to focus on *two* spells at once. She usually uses this to keep a Complex Illusion active while doing something else, though it's also useful if she's using Locksmith for fine work and needs to cast another spell without interrupting it. See *Simultaneous Spells* (p. 8) for more.

Bryce's first spell was Ignite Fire (Improved), but she deprecated it (see p. 25) upon raising her Sorcerous Empowerment to 4. She still casts it (frequently!) but now as an improvised spell.

*Yes, I am a sorcerer – and this magic is in my bones, not cribbed off of “Magic for Dummies.” And I can keep casting the same friggin’ spell at you until you roll over and die.*

*You can have your finely-crafted watch – give me the sledgehammer to the face any day.*

– Xykon, in **Order of the Stick: Start of Darkness**

## BRYCE THE BOLD

250 points

While being raised in a small peasant village, Bryce always displayed an aptitude for magic. She had an uncanny way with animals from the time she was a small child, and gradually began figuring out other magic on her own. After a teenage Bryce accidentally burned down her neighbor's barn, her parents sent her to the nearby town to apprentice with a hedge witch.

Now a young lass of 21, Bryce has finished her apprenticeship and is determined to lead a life of adventure – in part

because she's heard that's the quickest way to earn coin, and she wants to set her parents up for a comfortable retired life. She has joined up with a group of fellow travelers with plans to head to the city upon the next sunrise. A place that big is bound to have opportunities for a group of earnest heroes!

**ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 12 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9; Parry 11 (Staff).  
5'4"; 145 lbs.

### Social Background

*TL:* 3 [0].

*CF:* Christian [0].

*Languages:* English (Native) [0].

### Advantages

Luck [15]; Sorcerous Empowerment 4 [50]; Sorcery Talent 3 [30].

*Spells:* Air Jet 4 [5]; Animal Control [2]; Cancel Spells [2]; Complex Illusion 1 [42\*]; Icy Weapon [4]; Locksmith [2]; Minor Healing [7]; Sense Life (Basic) [6]; Tanglefoot [8].

### Disadvantages

Absent-Mindedness [-15]; Impulsiveness (12) [-10]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Reputation -2 (“Rube”; People of means; Always) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Family and Friends) [-5]; Unluckiness [-10].

*Quirks:* Avoids spending money; Broad-Minded; Incurable flirt; Sweet tooth. [-4]

### Skills

Climbing (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Innate Attack (Beam) (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Innate Attack (Gaze) (E) DX [0]-11†; Lockpicking (A) IQ [2]-13; Meditation (H) Will-2 [1]-11; Naturalist (A) IQ-1 [2]-12; Occultism (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Pharmacy (Herbal) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-13; Sling (H) DX-1 [2]-10; Staff (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Stealth (A) DX [2]-11; Survival (Plains) (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Veterinary (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Weather Sense (A) IQ-1 [1]-12.

\* Paid full cost rather than 1/5.

† Default from Innate Attack (Beam).

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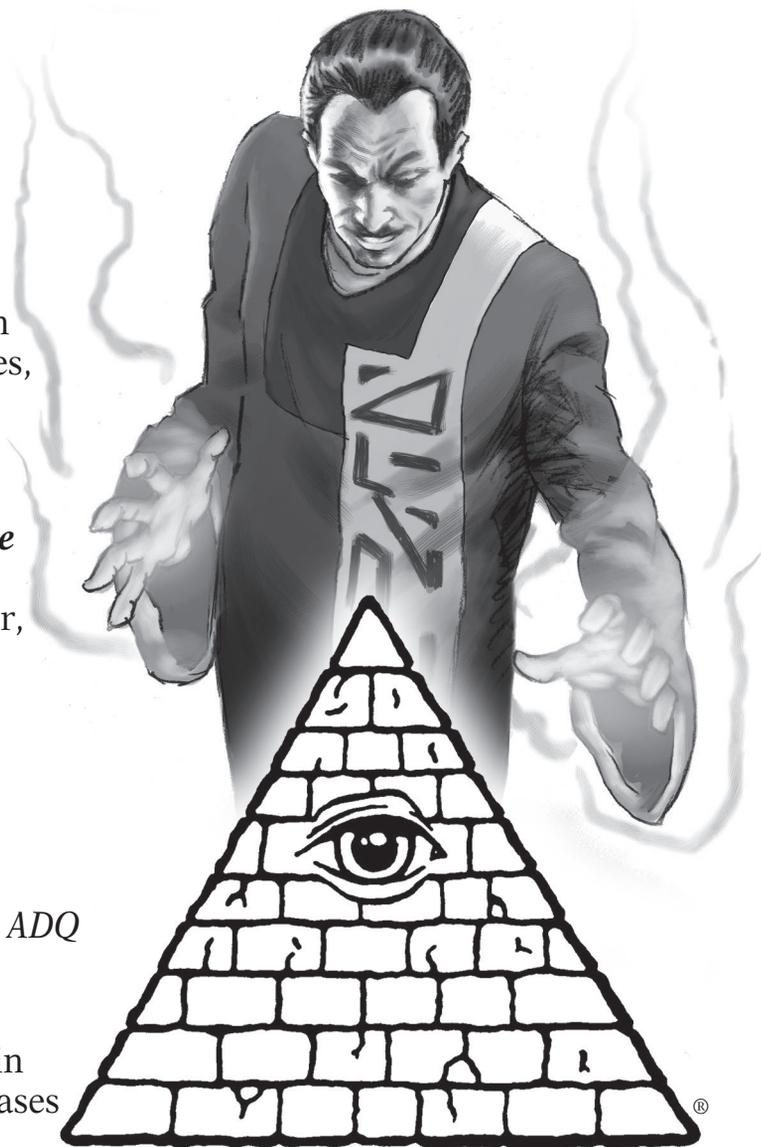
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