

**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# THAUMATOLOGY™

## Urban Magics™



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*An e23 Sourcebook for GURPS®*

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

Stock #37-0130

Version 1.0 – November 2009



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# INTRODUCTION

Fantasy is about worlds in which magic is real. Many accounts of those worlds depict them as rural places. The common people live in villages, the nobles in castles, and when either of them go on quests, they travel through wildernesses. Any cities they encounter are likely to be in ruins, inhabited only by ferocious beasts or angry ghosts.

Despite a seeming dearth of urban settings, numerous living cities exist: L. Frank Baum's Emerald City, J. R. R. Tolkien's Minas Tirith, Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar, Terry Pratchett's Ankh-Morpork, China Miéville's New Crobuzon, and many others. These places can be just as magical as any other location in their worlds. In some instances, they're more so: With larger

populations and wealthier economies, they can support more mages and more magical objects. Special magical arts and distinctive supernatural creatures may be found only in cities. The practice of mystical arts may make the cities themselves magical. Cities in the real world have urban legends; in fantasy worlds, such legends may be true.

If you want to include cities in your fantasy campaign – whether as starting points, places to visit, or the setting of the entire campaign – *GURPS Thaumatology: Urban Magics* will help you. This supplement is a collection of ideas for you to use. Most of them include new (optional) rules. GMs can rely on these if they'll help the campaign, and ignore them if they don't.

Most of this material focuses on the cities of traditional, low-tech fantasy worlds. However, many ideas here can work in a modern-fantasy setting. In fact, some are specifically designed for such a campaign or based on modern supernatural beliefs, such as electronic voice phenomena and hell money.

## About GURPS

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*Errata.* Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

## PUBLICATION HISTORY

*GURPS Thaumatology: Urban Magics* is a set of footnotes to *GURPS Fantasy*, particularly to its discussions of local settings in fantasy worlds. Nearly all of the content of *Urban Magics* is new. The treatment of ley lines is partly borrowed from, and partly inspired by, the material in *GURPS Places of Mystery*. *The Mechanical Equivalent of Magic* is inspired by *GURPS Technomancer*.

This book also relies on options from *GURPS Magic*, *GURPS Thaumatology*, and *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles*.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# URBAN SHAMAN

125 points

Urban shamans speak to the city, and it speaks back. They are not necessarily mages, nor do they speak to spirits, other than the spirit of the city itself. Instead, they communicate with the city in part (buildings, pigeons) or in totality, and gain its protection. Many of this template's abilities are bought as spirit powers; see *GURPS Powers* and *GURPS Thaumatology* for more information on spirit-based powers.

**Attributes:** ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 12 [20].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 13 [10]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

**Advantages:** Street Smarts 2 (p. 17) [20]. • A further 15 points chosen from among Ally (Spirits) [Varies], Animal Empathy (Only city animals, -30%; Spirit Power, -25%) [3], Auto-trance [1], Blessed (Spirit Power, -25%) [8], Chameleon 2 or 4 (Only in cities, -30%; Spirit Power, -25%) [5 or 9], Channeling (Spirit of the city only, -40%; Spirit Power, -25%) [4]; Contacts (Spirits, p. 16) [Varies], Danger Sense (Only in cities, -30%; Spirit Power, -25%) [7], Fearlessness [2/level], Night Vision [1/level], Oracle (Only in and only dealing with cities, -40%; Spirit Power, -25%) [6], Psychometry (Only in and only dealing with cities, -40%; Spirit Power, -25%) [7], Racial Memory (Passive; Deceased residents of home city, not genetic ancestors; Spirit Power, -25%) [12], Reputation (Among spirits) [Varies]; Resistant to Pollution (+3; Spirit Power, -25%) or (+8; Spirit Power, -25%) [4 or 6], Signature Gear (Ritual or enchanted items) [Varies], Silence 2 or 4 (Only in cities, -30%; Spirit Power, -25%) [5 or 9], Speak With Animals (Only city animals, -30%; Spirit Power, -25%) [12], Temperature Tolerance 4 (Only in cities, -30%; Spirit Power, -25%) [2], True Faith [15], or Unfazeable [15].

**Disadvantages:** -20 points in disadvantages, one of which *must* be Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism or other, but *not* Monasticism!) [-5, -10, or -15], and the rest chosen from among Addiction (Hallucinogen or other) [Varies], Berserk

[-10\*], Compulsive Vowing [-5\*], Flashbacks (Possibly of "racial" memories) [-5, -10, or -20], Intolerance (Non-city people, or people from outside *your* city or neighborhood) [-5 or -10], Neurological Disorder [Varies], No Sense of Humor [-10], Odious Personal Habits [-5 to -15], Phantom Voices [-5 to -15], Phobia (Wilderness) [-10\*], Selfless [-5\*], Sense of Duty (City residents) [-10], Status [-5/level], Trademark [Varies], Trickster [-15\*], Vow [-5 to -15], or Wealth (Struggling or Poor) [-10 or -15].

**Primary Skills:** Area Knowledge (City) (E) IQ+4 [4]-15†; Occultism (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Streetwise (A) IQ+3 [4]-14†; and Urban Survival (A) Per+3 [4]-16†.

**Secondary Skills:** Five of Area Knowledge (Spirit World) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Current Affairs/TL (City) (E) IQ+3 [2]-14†; Architecture, Fast-Talk, Hidden Lore (Urban Secrets), Professional Skill (Urban Planning), or Teaching, all (A) IQ [2]-11; Shadowing (A) IQ+2 [2]-13†; Expert Skill (Expert Skill (Urban Studies, p. 17) or Hypnotism, both (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; or Autohypnosis (H) Will-1 [2]-12.

**Background Skills:** Four of Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Body Language (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Detect Lies (H) Per-2 [1]-11; Exorcism (H) Will-2 [1]-11; Law (City) (H) IQ [1]-11†; Meditation (H) Will-2 [1]-11; Merchant (A) IQ+1 [1]-12†; Mind Block (A) Will-1 [1]-12; or Scrounging (E) Per+2 [1]-15†.

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

† Includes +2 from Street Smarts (p. 17).

## Customization Notes

A less capable urban shaman would have a lower level of Street Smarts or possibly none at all. His IQ wouldn't drop, but his DX and HT might be lower. He also should have no more than one spirit-granted advantage.

A more advanced urban shaman could have a long list of such advantages, and at higher levels. He might even have Modular Abilities based on being able to talk the spirit of the city into doing him favors. Look at increased social advantages as well; a highly developed shaman ought to be able to make his spiritual insights pay off in the mortal world.

# ADVANTAGES

In campaigns set in cities, a few advantages could have new variants.

## Contacts

see p. B44-45

In an urban-magic campaign, some new types of Contacts may come into play.

**Academic:** Professors, lecturers, graduate students, librarians, and high-school teachers can be sources of knowledge. It's often convenient to have them provide Research, but a specialist may instead be skilled in one science or scholarly discipline. In a fantasy campaign, this can be Occultism or Thaumatology! A high school teacher or graduate student has effective skill 12. An untenured college instructor or librarian has skill 15. A full professor or research librarian has skill 18. A world-famous scholar has skill 21.

**Fashion and Decorative Arts:** This person can provide consultation on questions of style, create clothing or accessories, or perform personal grooming. A hairdresser or seamstress who can work quickly and on short notice has effective skill 12. A skilled craftsman or stylist has effective skill 15. A designer who's known for original creations, and has skilled craftsmen *working* for him, has effective skill 18. A designer whose clientele is made up of aristocrats, millionaires, or people at the cutting edge of fashion has effective skill 21.

**Magical:** A magical Contact is someone who knows how to cast a particular spell; the effective skill for such a Contact is his effective level with the spell. A magical Contact always counts as having supernatural talents! Naturally, such a Contact will know more than one spell. The spell for which he's taken as a Contact will be normally an unusual one that he happens to have learned. For an enchanted item dealer (pp. 11-12), Contacts will often be enchanters; their effective

# LEY LINE SPELLS

*GURPS Fantasy* (p. 45) and *GURPS Thaumatology* (p. 53) discuss ley lines: invisible lines of higher-than-normal mana connecting high mana or very high mana areas, and forming boundaries between regions of differently aspected mana.

Ley lines have an Intensity rating, which determines how much of an effect they have on their surroundings. For naturally occurring ley lines, Intensity ranges from 1 to 6 (select an appropriate number or roll 1d to determine). Most ley lines link sites of high mana; sites of very high mana may be connected by *megalines*, which have much stronger effects and are more dangerous to interact with (see *Ley Tap*, p. 20).

Ley lines are naturally aspected to movement; see *Ley Lines and Travel* (pp. 37-38). This may include teleportation, at the GM's option; see *Teleportation* (pp. 37-38) and *Interdimensional Portals* (pp. 38-39). Most ley lines are about the width of a path or road, from 18" for the smallest to over 12' for the largest.

Given the usefulness of ley lines, magical civilizations may not be satisfied with the existing ones; they may want to create new ones. Two approaches to this are possible; the GM may choose one or allow both.

First, a spell for this purpose may be available (see *Ley Line Creation*, p. 21). Second, new ley lines can be created with the methods of sacred architecture (pp. 21-23), reshaping the land to generate natural paths for the flow of mana. Use the standard methods, except that the builder rolls against Symbol Drawing (Sacred Architecture) and Engineer (Civil). The new ley line must link two sites of high or very high mana, either natural or deliberately created with sacred architecture. Difficulty increases with distance; apply the long-distance modifiers (p. B241) based on the length of the ley line to the Symbol Drawing roll.

The Ley Lines college may be considered either a new independent college, or a subcollege of the Meta-Spells college, as the GM prefers. It includes the following spells. At the GM's discretion, these spells may be assigned to existing colleges, in addition to or instead of the Ley Lines college.

## Seek Ley Line

### Information

Tells the caster the direction and approximate distance to the nearest ley line – specifically, to the nearest point on that line. Use the long-distance modifiers. The caster may exclude already known ley lines before casting the spell.

If cast within close range of a ley line, the spell reveals the line's Intensity (see above) and the aspect, if any, of the mana to either side of it. Use a distance modifier of -1 per yard from the ley line.

May also be treated as a Knowledge spell.

*Cost:* 3.

*Time to cast:* 10 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Magery 1.

### Item

A sliver of lodestone, suspended to turn freely or embedded in a forked stick. *Energy cost to create:* 150.

## Ley Speech

### Information

Enables the subject, while on a ley line, to use it for communication at a distance. Despite its name, Ley Speech works for any sound the subject makes, with his own body or with whatever equipment he is carrying. The caster specifies the person who is to hear the sounds; that person is treated as a secondary subject. If both subjects are on the ley line, use the long-distance modifier (p. B241) for the distance between them. If not, the spell automatically fails.

When the spell is cast, the secondary subject's ability to hear the primary subject requires a Hearing roll; in place of the standard range modifiers for Hearing (p. B358), use the long-distance modifiers. Apply a modifier of +1 or -1 for each step the sound being transmitted is above or below normal conversation on the Hearing Distance Table (p. B358). Simpler sounds can be resolved at greater range; any rhythmic sound such as drumbeats or Morse code gives +5 to Hearing rolls, shouted single words give +2, conversation is unmodified, and musical performance or whispers give -5.

For two-way conversation, the spell must be cast a second time, with the primary and secondary subjects interchanged. The same or a different mage can do this.

May also be treated as a Sound spell.

*Duration:* Duration of message, as spoken by caster.

*Cost:* 1 per minute of message duration.

*Time to cast:* 10 seconds.

*Prerequisites:* Seek Ley Line and Voices.

### Item

(a) Jewelry or musical instrument – or, at higher TLs, a radio or mobile telephone. *Energy cost to create:* 150. (b) Matching floor material, floor covers, or seats. When activated from either end, sounds at both locations are audible as if from the same relative distance. *Energy cost to create:* 500 for the pair.

## Ley Running

### Regular

If the subject is running along a ley line, this spell lets him regain FP equal to the ley line's Intensity each minute – but only to counter fatigue due to the exertion of running. On an Intensity 1 ley line, paced running can be sustained as long as the spell holds out. On an Intensity 4 ley line, sprinting can be sustained as long as the spell holds out. A sprinter gains partial benefit from an Intensity 1-3 line, but over time, he'll accumulate fatigue from failed HT rolls in excess of the Intensity.

May also be treated as a Body Control or Movement spell.

*Duration:* 10 minutes.

*Cost:* 2 to cast. 1 to maintain.

*Time to cast:* 1 minute.

*Prerequisites:* Seek Ley Line and Haste.

### Item

Jewelry or footwear. *Energy cost to create:* 900.

## Item

A cylinder resembling a Tibetan prayer wheel (or any other radially symmetrical object) attached to any kind of motor, engine, or millwork. Able to handle  $50 \text{ kW} \times$  the Power of the enchantment. Provides 1 energy/minute per 6 kW; however, the first 1 energy/minute goes to maintain the device's magical function. Anyone can activate it, but if the user can't cast a spell to which its energy can be directed, the energy is wasted. *Energy cost to create:* 1 per 100 pounds of the device and its power source (round up); the minimum cost is 250.

## MANA TRANSMISSION

If Minor Draw Power (pp. 26-27) is available, as a spell or enchanted device, then electrical power lines can be used to supply extra mana conveniently where it's needed. Casting Lend Power (*GURPS Magic*, p. 180) on the generators in the power plant lets mana go in at one end of the power line and

come out at the other. However, some magical cities may want to send the mana directly, either because they don't know about electricity, or because they don't want the mana to become aspected to electricity or technology in the process.

Ley lines (see p. 19) can be used for this purpose. Any ley line naturally conducts an amount of magical energy equal to its Intensity, which can be used to power spells with Ley Tap (p. 20). If the spell Lend Power is available, magical energy obtained with Ley Tap can power an electrical or mechanical device; each level of Intensity is equivalent to six kilowatts.

Energy can be fed into a ley line, either from living spellcasters or from engines through Draw Power and Ley Supply (p. 20). Energy that goes in at one location can be tapped at another location. Each point of energy raises the Intensity of the ley line by 1 between the source and the Ley Tap. If this raises a ley line's Intensity to 60, it turns into a megaline with Intensity 1 (that is, 1 energy/second); using its energy without Ley Buffer (p. 20) becomes much less safe!

## Ex Machina

In some settings, energy can spontaneously convert itself into magic. This requires a certain threshold level of energy flow; low-tech machines can't reach this amount, but as technology advances, machinery could become a source of magical accidents. In such a world, magic might actually be safer and more reliable than technology based on the physical sciences.

Any inanimate mechanism that generates 0.1 kWh per second, or 360 kilowatts, might occasionally flash over into a mana source (producing 1 energy point per second). When inventors begin experimenting with such systems, roll the operator's skill in Mechanic or Electronics Operation once per second after starting up the machine. Treat any critical failure as a *magical* critical failure. Since there is no actual intent to cast a spell, the GM may randomly choose any spell for which sufficient power is available as the starting point for the effects of the critical failure.

The same reasoning could apply to single intense discharges of energy. For example, the detonation of three ounces of TNT releases 360 kW of energy, equivalent to 1 energy point. For other explosives, divide the required weight by the REF of the explosive (see p. B415). For example, it takes  $(3 \text{ ounces})/0.4 = 7.5$  ounces of TL4 black powder (just under half a pound) to generate 1 energy point. On a critical failure, any large gunpowder weapon will cause a magical catastrophe! Gunpowder in such a world might really be "the devil's powder" – only desperate rulers resort to gunpowder artillery. This is one way to explain a ban on gunpowder in a fantasy setting.

In an animistic world, these magical effects may not be purely accidental: Spirits may cast Draw Power and feed on the resulting mana. Initially, they might be rare and dependent on high-energy natural events such as lightning bolts, but human technology might enable them to multiply – until human engineers gave up on high-powered machinery.

# CITIES AND MANA LEVELS

The usual assumption in *GURPS* is that the presence of cities doesn't affect the local mana level or aspect, any more than it affects the climate. Cities may be built in sites with relatively high or low mana (see *Location*, pp. 48-50), but the mana level doesn't change as a result. In some fantasy settings, though, cities may actively influence the local mana level.

How likely this is depends partly on the scale on which mana varies. If the mana level is the same over a continent, cities (other than world-cities; see p. 48) aren't likely to affect it. If a morning's walk can take a hiker through half a dozen changes of mana level or aspect, then a village, or even a single large house, might affect how the local mana flows.

Commonly, fantasy worlds assume something in between these extremes. Typically, each country has its own mana level and perhaps aspect, just as it has its own climate. (In terms of the categories used for Area Knowledge – see p. B177 – "country" means barony, county, duchy, or small nation; a large nation, or a continent, can easily have different mana levels in different regions.) If mana varies on this scale, then the smallest settlement that's likely to influence it is a metropolis, with 100,000 or more inhabitants (see *Scale*, pp. 47-48). Although this may still be smaller than a small country, it may hold a large share of a country's inhabitants, buildings, and energy flow, and influence peoples' lives in the rest of the country and even neighboring countries; its magical impact can plausibly be out of proportion to its size.

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*And the sign said, "The words of the prophets  
 Are written on the subway walls  
 And tenement halls  
 And whispered in the sounds of silence."*

*– Simon and Garfunkel,  
 "The Sounds of Silence"*

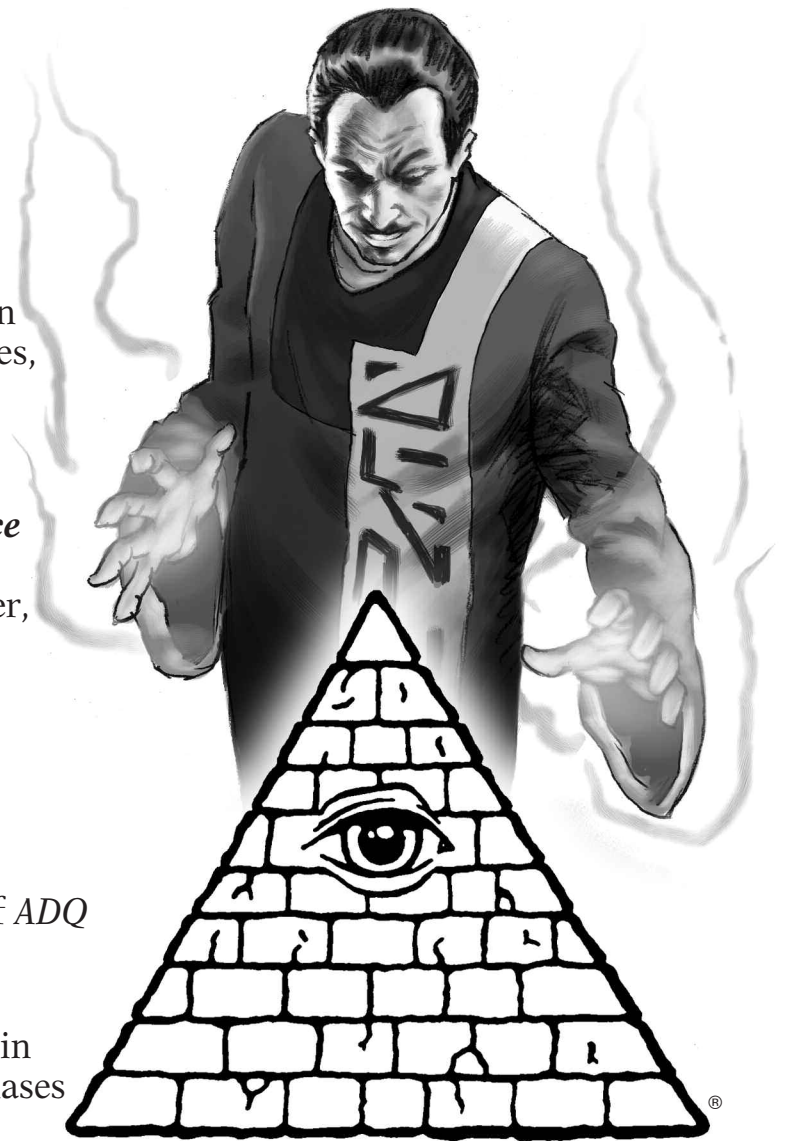


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