GURPS
Fourth Edition

THAUMATOLOGY™

RITUAL PATH MAGIC™

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An e23 Sourcebook for GURPS®

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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.

INTRODUCTION

Cole Jenkins squatted, his cheap flashlight barely revealing the remaining flecks of dried blood. This must have been where Nate's head struck when he hit the ground, tearing his scalp. The cops and doctors agreed that it was a heart attack. Blood tests showed no foul play. But Cole knew of several ways to give a man a "heart attack" that no mundane test would see through. This was worth pursuing. It had to be.

Thoughts of the past ran through his head. Cole pushed them aside. Sitting cross-legged, he pulled a few items out of his coat pocket: a piece of tortoiseshell he'd carved into a small cube, a dried mandrake root, a bundle of sage, and a golden chalice. Placing the root and sage in the chalice, he set them aflame, then picked the chalice up with his left hand. Holding the tortoiseshell in his right, he began the gestures and incantations that would reveal the truth. This place was not tainted – good. The mystical energy began to build within the pattern he traced.

*About a minute later, Cole felt the universe begin to give way – it was almost ready to accede to his demands. Drawing upon his inner strength, Cole focused his gathered energy and **pushed.** Sometimes reality pushed back . . . but not this time. The air around him sang him a story of spells and rituals. He saw the malign, olive-colored energy of the death spell – the invocation that had killed his childhood friend. It stretched far across the city; someone had taken the trouble to do this from a distance. What had that idiot gotten himself mixed up with? Who had done this?*

*Cole didn't have the answers, but he would. He quietly gathered his accouterments, stood up, and walked out into the chill night air. "I **will** avenge you, Nate," he whispered to himself. "That's a promise."*

In some settings, magic can accomplish almost *anything,* with no fixed spell lists and no hard limits. **GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic** introduces a new magic system in this vein, allowing spellcasters to accomplish nearly any feat they can think of . . . assuming they have enough time, enough effort, and enough *energy.*

In Ritual Path magic, every spell is an agreement between the spellcaster and the GM. Casters can combine various spell effects and modifiers for an *infinite* number of results. Powerful spells often require self-sacrifice or other forms of outside aid. Even a dabbler can work a ritual, though it may take hours where a trained adept could achieve the same effect in *seconds!*

This system is designed to feel like "real" magic, mixing real-world traditions and beliefs with concepts used in popular books, movies, and television shows. With a solid grounding in flavor, balance, and flexibility, **Ritual Path Magic** is ready to add some arcane options to your game, whether you're running sword-and-sorcery fantasy, modern action, or futuristic space exploration. So step inside the pentagram, crack open your copy, and find out just what your Thaumatology skill is really good for . . .

PUBLICATION HISTORY

The Ritual Path magic system first appeared (in a more basic, condensed form) in **GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions.** Some of the additional detail in this work first appeared in **GURPS Monster Hunters 2: The Mission, GURPS Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy,** and **GURPS Monster Hunters 4: Sidekicks.** The rules for alchemical elixirs first appeared as "Bottled Magic" (by Christopher R. Rice) in *Pyramid #3:43: Thaumatology III,* though they have been slightly altered and expanded here.

Going back further, however, Ritual Path magic was inspired by several magical systems found in **GURPS Thaumatology.** The concept of adepts and gathering ambient energy was drawn from Energy-Accumulating Path/Book magic (**Thaumatology,** pp. 121-137), the combination of effect and Path is similar to verb-noun magic (**Thaumatology,** pp. 184-187), the division of Paths and the way effects are tiered by power level resembles Realm magic (**Thaumatology,** pp. 188-192), and so on. Ritual Path magic is its own unique system, but it owes much to that which came before it.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

This is a standalone magic system; only the **GURPS Basic Set** is required to use it. However, some of the advanced options, particularly *The Sephiroth and Decans* (pp. 35-37), also require **GURPS Thaumatology.** As this work was derived from the concepts in **Thaumatology,** readers looking to expand this system will find that book useful in other ways as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason "PK" Levine is no stranger to the mystical world. As a Reverend in the Church of the Subgenius, he has healed appliances, cast demons out of a possessed van, and cursed a desktop computer (that totally deserved it). As the Assistant **GURPS** Line Editor, he has learned unique spell effects such as Strengthen Text Clarity and Create Crunch. Someday he may try casting a ritual on a living subject. He practices his arcane craft in northwestern Georgia, assisted by his beautiful wife and a handful of (mostly furry) acolytes.

Path of Crossroads (Tiphareth)

IQ/VH

Prerequisite: Thaumatology.

Crossroads are the connections between locations, times, and planes of existence. The specifics vary by campaign, but most settings have some form of gates (or similar weak points), creatures, or people with the ability to move between places, between times, and/or between dimensions. Lesser Crossroads effects can only target *existing* gates or weak points in reality; Greater Crossroads effects can actively create them, or target creatures or people. Unless the GM rules otherwise, neither allows true teleportation – at most, a ritual can link two places with a temporary spatial gate, which anyone may then pass through.

Gates take a full second to form and are very noticeable. Conjuring a gate beneath a foe is an option, but unless he's prevented from moving or the gate is *huge,* he's likely just to step away from it.

By default, a gate can be used by anyone, in either direction; use Control Crossroads to restrict this. If the caster creates a portal in mid-air, he can decide if it's "one-sided" (you have to approach it from a single direction to use it) or not. Any other aspects of gates (e.g., what happens if you try to create a spatial gate into the middle of a mountain) are a GM call; the answers may vary from campaign to campaign. Casters can make a Thaumatology roll to know the answer before invoking a ritual.

Note that Crossroads includes *mundane* connections between locations as well – that is, normal (or secret!) doors, windows, and so on.

Sense Crossroads: Lesser Sense Crossroads can reveal a nearby gate, identify where it goes, or use it to find or communicate with someone on the other side. Greater Sense Crossroads can locate someone (or something) with an innate ability to cross over, identify details about that ability, or find or communicate with someone through time or across dimensions.

Strengthen Crossroads: Lesser Strengthen Crossroads can stabilize a fluctuating gate, cause a temporal weak point to reach further back (or forward) in time, or make it easier for travelers to use the crossroads. Greater Strengthen Crossroads can enhance someone's innate ability to cross over (e.g., giving him a bonus or allowing him to take additional people), help a being remain in our time/plane if its ability to do so is weak, or *force* such a being to remain here instead of returning home.

Restore Crossroads: Lesser Restore Crossroads can reopen a closed gate. In many settings, a time- or dimension-crossing being leaves behind a residual weak point after returning home, which allows a Lesser effect to summon the being back; if not, a Greater effect is needed. The GM may also rule that Greater Restore Crossroads is required to reopen a gate or weak point which has been closed for so long that it's effectively inert. It can also restore someone's innate ability to cross over if something else took it away.

Control Crossroads: Lesser Control Crossroads can alter the use of a gate – restricting it so it's only useful during certain times, to certain people, etc. – or physically move a weak point to a new location. Greater Control Crossroads can overrule a person's (or creature's) innate ability, allowing the caster to determine how it works and where/when it takes him, or target an area as a whole to make it easier or harder for others to form gates that link there.

Destroy Crossroads: Lesser Destroy Crossroads can close a gate, oppose a spell which allows something to cross over, or banish a being relying on such a spell (or an open gate) to temporarily remain here. Greater Destroy Crossroads can banish *any* being here from another place, time, or dimension, even if it's using its own innate abilities to cross over indefinitely; it can also cause a partial destruction (e.g., turning a spatial-and-temporal gate into a spatial-only one or removing someone's ability to travel to one particular plane).

Create Crossroads: Lesser Create Crossroads is very limited; at most, it can make an existing weak point visible and easily controlled. Greater Create Crossroads allows the caster to form a spatial, temporal, *or* dimensional gate; if he wants a gate that can combines two or three options, he'll need multiple Greater Create Crossroads effects.

Transform Crossroads: Lesser Transform Crossroads can change the endpoint(s) of an existing gate without changing the type of gate it is; e.g., it can shift a gate to Hell to point to the astral plane, but could not turn it into a temporal gate. Greater Transform Crossroads *can* alter the fundamental nature of a gate, as well as rearrange a person or being's crossroads-related traits.

Weather-Working

Weather-altering spells will usually bestow a broad-ranging bonus or penalty (p. 17); e.g., a rain spell that gives -2 on any roll which would logically be affected by the downpour. Because weather is a nebulous, chaotic system, use Greater Chance effects for this. Casters weak in Path of Chance can instead take a more direct approach, using Path of Energy (to affect things like wind speed or electrical activity) and Path of Matter (to summon rain, hail, etc.). Such rituals require area of effect (p. 17) but not subject weight (p. 18); don't worry about how much a square mile of hail weighs!

Path of Energy (Geburah)

IQ/VH

Prerequisite: Thaumatology.

Energy includes fire, electricity, kinetic energy, light, sound, and more. It is a versatile Path, offering many potential effects, but its domain ends where others begin; e.g., disrupting electrical impulses to a subject's legs requires Path of Body, not Path of Energy. Lesser Energy effects can affect normal forms of the energy in simple, natural, likely ways; it allows the caster to do things with the energy that it would already be "inclined" to do. Greater Energy effects can affect weird forms of the energy or cause it to do complex, unnatural things.

Sense Energy: Lesser Sense Energy can detect electrical current, analyze the spectrum of a fire (e.g., to identify its fuel), locate the nearest source of light, or clarify a garbled sound. Greater Sense Energy can use energy *as* a sense (e.g., "seeing" via reflections of your own voice, like sonar), separate an audio recording into every one of its component sounds, or track a particular electron as it passes through an appliance.

● *Critical Failure:* The spell fails horribly – use the guidelines under *Gathering Ambient Energy* (pp. 20-21). As an *optional* rule, the GM may invoke the "Threefold Law" if the spell was one intended to cause harm to another living being: *Triple* the energy that goes into the botch instead of doubling it (minimum 30 energy)!

● *Failure:* The energy doesn't flow properly. The caster must continue to concentrate for seconds equal to the margin of failure, after which he can try again at no penalty.

● *Success:* If the spell is not targeting a living subject, or if the subject is an aware *and* willing participant, it works. Use the margin of success to determine general effectiveness and precision. Otherwise, every potential subject who is *not* a willing participant resists with a Quick Contest using the better of his HT or Will, plus any Magic Resistance. The spell must *win* to affect each subject; if necessary, it uses its margin of victory to determine general effectiveness and precision. (Unaware subjects instinctively attempt to resist *any* spell, even a helpful one!)

● *Critical Success:* As for success, plus the caster's mana reserve is instantly refilled (if low). There is no other special effect. Subjects *do* get a resistance roll.

For spells to learn information (not including invasive spells, like mind reading), the *GM* rolls instead of the caster. If such a spell fails by 5 or more or critically fails, he lies *instead* of the normal failure effects.

If the subject is currently under the effect of existing spells, check to see if *Stacking Spells* (p. 15) is an issue *after* making sure the new spell is cast successfully. If this new spell conflicts with one of the existing ones, whichever cost *less* energy fizzles, and the other spell takes or retains full effect.

AFTER CASTING

Once cast, the spell will last for whatever duration the caster chose. A caster may cancel all the effects of his own ritual before they expire. This takes one second and does not require a roll, but he must be free to move and speak. He has no other connection with the ritual (unless that was added as an effect); he doesn't know how subjects react unless he can see them, he doesn't instinctively know when it will end, etc.

The original caster may come back to extend the spell's duration. At *any* time before the spell ends, he may work a new ritual, using the same Path skill. The caster must be within range (the original range) of the subject or area; this cannot be done from a greater distance. The energy cost is equal to that required for the additional duration (p. 18) he wishes to add. No other modifiers (including the Greater effects multiplier) apply. If this inexpensive ritual is successful, the extra duration is added to the *end* of the spell. An extension ritual cannot lengthen a spell by more than its original duration; e.g., if a caster invoked a ritual with a one-week duration, and later wanted to extend that ritual by a month, he'd have to do it one week at a time (as four separate, 9-energy extension rituals). This does not violate *Stacking Spells* (p. 15), as it's considered an extension of the same spell.

Sample Castings

Thomas and Sabrina demonstrate how to alter reality using Ritual Path magic.

Adept

Thomas is a witch with Magery 5 (and thus a mana reserve of 15), Ritual Adept, Thaumatology-19, Path of Spirit-17, and Path of Undead-15. He wants to give his seven-yard-radius home a ward (pp. 24-25) against any spirit beings or undead coming in for the next week. This is a Lesser Control Spirit *and* Lesser Control Undead effect, for a base 10 energy, modified by +6 (area) and +9 (duration) for a total of 25 energy. There are no Greater effects. He'll be using Path of Undead, as it's the lower of the two relevant Path skills.

He takes five seconds and rolls against Path of Undead, succeeding by 6, for 6 energy. Another five seconds and he succeeds by 4, for 10 total energy. Another five seconds and he fails; he has 11 total energy, but there'll be a quirk – the GM decides that the field will also resist the first spell *he* casts across it. He then takes *one* second to tap into his mana reserve, withdrawing 14 energy, bringing him to a total of 25. He rolls against Path of Undead to complete the ritual and succeeds. Any spirits trying to enter his home must overcome his skill of 17 and any undead must overcome a 15, but for every threat that *does* get through, *both* skills drop by 1 for the purpose of the ward.

If Thomas wants to renew this every week, he can return home (any time before it expires) and work a new ritual, using Path of Undead to add up to another 9 energy to extend the duration by one week. If he wanted to renew it for a month, he'd have to do it a week at a time, since the original spell was only good for a week. This does not replenish any "damage" to the ward, though – for that, he must recast it.

Non-Adept

Sabrina has Magery 0 and Thaumatology-21. All of her Path skills are defaulted from Thaumatology, and thus limited to 12. She is in a sewer looking for a magical artifact and casts a spell to see if it's anywhere within 200 yards. This is a Greater Sense Magic effect, for 2 base energy. The only modifier is range, but that's +0, as information spells take long-distance modifiers. The final cost is 6 energy, due to the one Greater effect.

As the sewer is unprepared space and Sabrina is not an adept (*Non-Adepts and Magic,* pp. 19-20), she first takes 1d minutes and a Thaumatology roll to bring her consecrated space penalty to only -1 for this ritual. She holds an ancient parchment describing the artifact to avoid a connection penalty. After five minutes, she rolls against an effective Path of Magic skill of 11 – succeeding by 3 gets her 3 energy. Afraid to try again, she takes one minute to sacrifice 6 FP and 2 HP, for the remaining 3 energy needed. Because it's an information spell, the GM secretly rolls against her skill of 11, but fails by 5! He lies and says that the artifact is down the south tunnel . . .

DECANIC TRAPPINGS

The word "decan" originally comes from the Greek word *dekanos,* meaning "ruler of ten." Each decan governs a 10° segment of the zodiacal arc; thus, all 36 of them collectively hold power over the entire (360°) astrological compass. Casters who realize this can tap into the energy of these decans when invoking a ritual. If these rules are used, they replace the simpler ones under *Traditional Trappings* (p. 19).

The sephirah of each Path has four associated decans, as detailed in **Thaumatology** (pp. 248-252). By invoking the correspondences (*places* and *materials*) associated with a decan, a caster can draw upon its energy for his spell. This process becomes even more efficient when invoking correspondences from two, three, or even all *four* decans! The decans being appeased *must* correspond to the Path skill being used for the spell; see *Choose the Skill* (pp. 19-20).

Each of the correspondences below gives a certain number of *decan points* (DP). At the end, these will be used to determine the final energy discount for the spell. Every spell starts with 0 DP.

Place: If the spell is being cast in a place favorable to the decan, add 5 DP. If the place is an unequivocal *archetype* of the decan's nature, the GM may increase this, to a maximum of 10 DP. You may get only one place bonus per decan – and it's hard to get this from more than one decan at a time!

Materials: Using materials appropriate to the decan adds DP, as per the *Decanic Materials Table* (below). Expensive materials (worth more than half a month's income) are more effective than inexpensive ones, and materials that will be consumed by the ritual pack more punch than reusable ones. (Of course, the reusable ones are much more convenient!) You may acquire multiple material bonuses for the same decan, but they give diminishing returns; use the "First" column for the largest-DP one, the "Second" column for the next-largest, and so on.

Add up the DP accumulated for all four decans and determine the energy discount based on total DP:

0 to 20 DP: The DP *are* the percentage discount. For example, 10 DP becomes -10%.

21 to 60 DP: Subtract 20 from the DP, halve the result (round up), and then add 20. That is the percentage discount. For example, 30 DP becomes -25%.

61 or more DP: Subtract 60 from the DP, quarter the result (round up), and then add 40. That is the percentage discount. For example, 80 DP becomes -45%.

The GM is entitled to adjust the final discount by up to ±5% based on how cool, appropriate, and evocative the ritual was (as described by the player).

Example: Cole needs to cast a powerful Path of Mind spell to search the memories of an entire neighborhood – that's a *lot* of energy. He decides to call upon the associated decans: Harpax, Methiax, Naôth, and Ruax. First, he chooses his casting place carefully, keeping it close to the neighborhood to minimize his range modifier. He finds an artists' studio on the campus of a university. Using the information in **Thaumatology,** the GM agrees to let it count as a place for Methiax *and* Naôth: 10 DP!

That night, Cole breaks in with a bulky load of offerings. For Harpax, he wears his expensive green jade necklace (5 DP) and burns amanita mushrooms (2 DP). For Methiax, he couldn't find anything, but he sets off the reusable flashbulbs in the studio (2 DP) and puts a fractal screensaver on the computer (1 DP). For Naôth, he carefully unpacks a rare Les Paul guitar a friend lent him (5 DP, but the GM makes it 6 DP when he succeeds at a default Musical Instrument roll to play it) and burns bay leaves (2 DP). Finally, for Ruax, he breaks out his prize: an expensive, highly illegal bouquet of opium poppies (10 DP) that he stole. He scatters them into a spiral pattern (1 DP) before burning them.

Cole's total is 39 DP. To find his discount, he subtracts 20 (19), halves the result (10), then adds 20 (30). His spell's energy cost is reduced by 30% – a tremendous savings!

Smart casters will carry expensive, reusable items that correspond to their favorite Paths. For example, Cole carries that jade necklace around with him, because he knows how handy it is for his Path of Mind spells.

> *To the hill sigh for the dead*
> *In that dreadful view survey lies*
> *my crown of Kether*
> *I arise to Tiphereth heading for*
> *the pagan sadness*
> *Pagan sadness that frees me of*
> *the Malkuthian chains*
>
> *– Malkuth, "My Last*
> *Touching Battlefield"*

Zodiacal Trappings

Every decan is tied to a particular combination of zodiacal house and planet. Thus, if the caster cannot find enough genuine decanic correspondences, he may substitute zodiacal ones (**Thaumatology,** p. 247). However, this requires twice as much effort, because each *pairing* of house correspondence and planet correspondence counts as a single decanic correspondence. If they fall into two categories (e.g., one is consumable and one is reusable), average the DP value, rounding down.

Decanic Materials Table

Materials	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth
Expensive and Consumable	10 DP	5 DP	2 DP	1 DP	–
Expensive and Reusable	5 DP	2 DP	1 DP	–	–
Inexpensive and Consumable	5 DP	2 DP	1 DP	–	–
Inexpensive and Reusable	2 DP	1 DP	–	–	–

Implant Mind-Shard

Spell Effects: Greater Create Mind.
Inherent Modifiers: Altered Traits, Split Personality with custom disadvantage package.
Greater Effects: 1 (×3).

This ritual creates an imperfect replica of the caster's mind within another person. It resides within the subject for the next *year,* fighting for control of his mind and body. In times of stress, the subject must make a self-control roll (12 or less) to avoid switching personalities.

The implanted personality is represented by a -20-point package of the most defining mental disadvantages of the caster; the GM can choose these or make the selection *random.* When the subject assumes the implanted personality, the -20-point package *replaces* -20 points of his *own* disadvantages.

Example: James is a goodly knight who's been cursed with this ritual by the evil Garret. The GM strips Garret's key disadvantages down to a -20-point package: Gluttony (9) [-7], Odious Personal Habit (Manic Laughter) [-5], Proud [-1], and Sadism (15) [-7]. When James' personality swings over to Garret's shard, these *replace* James' natural Code of Honor (Chivalry) [-15] and Guilt Complex [-5].

For an interesting twist, the GM can allow the *physical* disadvantages of the caster to carry over psychosomatically; e.g., a limb that no longer works because the subject's mind is convinced that it's useless.

Typical Casting: Greater Create Mind (6) + Altered Traits, Split Personality and -20-point disadvantage package (7) + Duration, 1 year (22). *105 energy (35×3).*

Intercom

Spell Effects: Lesser Sense Mind.
Inherent Modifiers: None.
Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell allows the subject to mentally communicate with the caster as long as both stay within 100 yards of each other. The effect lasts for one hour.

Typical Casting: Lesser Sense Mind (2) + Duration, 1 hour (3) + Range, 100 yards (10). *15 energy (15×1).*

Itch

Spell Effects: Lesser Control Body.
Inherent Modifiers: Affliction, Itching.
Greater Effects: 0 (×1).

This spell causes the subject (who must be within 10 yards) to develop a fierce and irritating itch. This causes the subject to suffer a -2 to DX for the next 10 minutes or until he takes one full second to scratch the itch. He can do nothing else while scratching. (Itching is a +10% Affliction enhancement found in *GURPS Power-Ups 4: Enhancements.*)

Typical Casting: Lesser Control Body (5) + Affliction, Itching (2) + Duration, 10 minutes (1) + Range, 10 yards (4) + Subject Weight, 300 lbs. (3). *15 energy (15×1).*

Kiss of Silver

Spell Effects: Greater Transform Matter
Inherent Modifiers: None.
Greater Effects: 1 (×3).

This spell temporarily transforms a weapon (weighing up to 10 lbs.) into another substance. This is often used to play on a supernatural foe's vulnerability; e.g., by turning a sword into silver. Despite the name, though, it can alter the composition of a weapon in *any* manner – a knife could become obsidian, orichalcum, or even diamond. (For exotic materials, the GM may require a Geology or Metallurgy roll to get the composition just right.) It cannot turn weapons into pure energy – though a similar ritual that added Greater Transform Energy would allow this! The spell lasts 10 minutes.

Typical Casting: Greater Transform Matter (8) + Duration, 10 minutes (1) + Subject Weight, 10 lbs. (0). *27 energy (9×3).*

Legs of the Kangaroo

Spell Effects: Greater Strengthen Body + Lesser Strengthen Body ×2.
Inherent Modifiers: Altered Trait, Basic Move + Altered Trait, Super Jump + Bestows a Bonus, Jumping.
Greater Effects: 1 (×3).

The subject of this spell can make prodigious running leaps! He has +1 to Move for all purposes, and his jumping distances are doubled – *after* factoring in the Move bonus.

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Given these books – and sometimes, somebody to translate them for you – you could learn almost everything important that I know in about a year. To make something of the material, of course, you'd have to have the talent, since magic is also an art.

– James Blish, **Black Easter**