

GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

MAGICAL STYLES[™]

HORROR MAGIC[™]



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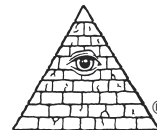
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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2	Secret Spell: Greater Summons (VH)	7
Required Books	2	Secret Spell: Sacrifice (VH)	7
About the Author	2	THE DARK PATH	8
A TRIPLE THREAT	3	Spell List	8
Why Limit Myself?	3	Secret Spell: Invest (VH)	9
About GURPS	3	<i>Design Notes: The Dark Path</i>	9
Style Guide	4	Secret Spell: Order from Chaos (VH)	10
Who Uses This Stuff?	4	FORGOTTEN WISDOM	10
<i>Power, Corruption, and Lies</i>	4	Spell List	11
CULT SECRETS	5	Secret Materials: Alchemical Potions	12
Spell List	5	Secret Spells: Hedge Magic	13
<i>Design Notes: Cult Secrets</i>	6	<i>Design Notes: Forgotten Wisdom</i>	13
		INDEX	14

*Now is the time. This is the hour. Ours is the magic. Ours is the power.
Now is the time. This is the hour. Ours is the magic. Ours is the power.*

– The Craft

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, **GURPS Magic** looks to be designed for fantasy – the flamboyant kind that boasts fireballs and flight spells. Its reliable “ritual *x* creates effect *y*” mechanics can feel like a poor fit to genres where magic is customarily unpredictable, even risky, while many values of *y* are too flashy for games where magic is supposed to be subtle or secret. These difficulties send many GMs to alternative systems, notably those found in **GURPS Thaumatology** and its supplements (like **Ritual Path Magic** and **Sorcery**).

Yet the **Magic** rules have the advantage of being *straight-forward*: No user-specified effects that encourage those playing spellcasters to become rules lawyers and challenge the GM, as in **Ritual Path** magic. No ability-building mini-game filled with the math of enhancements and limitations, as for **sorcery**. Spells as skills surely have idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies, but they’re simple and come ready to use.

Often, all it *really* takes to adapt **Magic** to a “secret magic” game is to eliminate spells that seem too fast, reliable, or flashy for the setting, and to frame those that remain within a structure that feels less like lightning-tossing fantasy. **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles** provides tools capable of doing that.

GURPS Magical Styles: Horror Magic offers three worked examples for campaigns where magic is kept under wraps because most people wouldn’t accept it or its wielders. Even if not truly *evil*, the magic is *unnerving* and its users secretive. While these styles suit **GURPS Horror**, they should also work

in **GURPS Thaumatology: Urban Magics** games – and conceivably in **GURPS Monster Hunters**, as alternative magic systems The Enemy can use to surprise champions.

REQUIRED BOOKS

GURPS Magical Styles: Horror Magic draws on **GURPS Magic** for its spells and **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles** for countless concepts and perks; advanced practitioners of **Forgotten Wisdom** will want **GURPS Magic: The Least of Spells**, too. Despite its title, it *doesn’t* require **GURPS Horror** (or any other world- or genre-book).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to hundreds of **GURPS** releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to *Pyramid* magazine. From 2008, he has served as lead creator of the **GURPS Action** and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** series; work on the latter led to his design of the **Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game**, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with *son amour*, Geneviève.

STYLE GUIDE

The following information appears for each style:

Style Name: Descriptive but *generic*; consider changing this to suit your campaign.

Style Cost: The cost to buy Magical School Familiarity and put 1 point in each required spell and skill.

Style Prerequisites: Non-spell prerequisites for the style's required spells and skills.

Keywords: Words that describe the magic or its users, to help the GM decide when and where to use it.

Description: Deeper insights into the style and how to use it in the campaign.

Required Skills and Spells: Skills and spells that must be bought at the 1-point level to gain access to the style's advanced teachings.

Perks: Magic Perks available to stylists with Magical School Familiarity and all required skills and spells. Practitioners may buy one such perk per 10 points in the style's spells, plus another from whatever list the GM deems "general" per 20 points in spells.

Secret Spells: Spells available to stylists who've bought the style's required elements and relevant Secret Spell perks.

Optional Traits: Advantages, disadvantages, skills, etc. that are *likely* but not required for stylists.

Spell List: The style's spells for the purposes of Magical School Familiarity, Magic Perks, etc. All but secret spells can be learned in play simply by paying points. All three styles use alternative prerequisites that replace standard ones. Spells that work differently from standard versions get footnotes.

Secrets: A *secret material* is a special substance the stylist can prepare if they have the associated Secret Material perk. A *secret spell* is available only to full-fledged stylists who have the relevant Secret Spell perk and the correct prerequisites.

Design Notes: A box on the game-mechanical thinking behind the style.

Who Uses This Stuff?

To help the GM match philosophies and capabilities to NPCs – and to give players a better idea of what they're getting into, if the GM permits these styles to PCs as the only way to learn magic or as a way to circumvent restrictive social oversight – here's a quick summary:

Cult Secrets (pp. 5-7) is for wizards who cooperate in large ritual workings. They may do so in the name of a demon or even a true god, or they might be faithless power-seekers who find strength in numbers – but to outsiders, they're *cultists*. This is the stuff of robed figures who exchange secret signs under cover of night. There's almost always a megalomaniac in charge (often



the person who dug up the grimoire!), but this individual may be less "archmage" than group leader, their power more social than magical.

The Dark Path (pp. 8-10) is aimed at individuals who've stumbled upon the Wrong Books and decided that magic is a risk worth taking. It's filled with shortcuts that appear to have been placed there deliberately by forces that *want* users to get in over their heads as quickly as possible. It would be easy to assume that this is a devil (or *The Devil*), but that isn't the only option. Perhaps the art's mortal masters benefit from the errors of those who've gone too far, too fast.

Forgotten Wisdom (pp. 10-13) isn't as cultish or dangerous as the other two styles. It might even have been "white magic" at some point, but now it's viewed as superstitious and ignorant at best, an affront to faith at worst. It's the kind of thing you'd run into at a "charms and potions" shop in the rundown part of town, or in the hands of the crazy cat lady who lives in the haunted house. While more social than the Dark Path – it involves customers and perhaps apprentices – its covens rarely reach Cult Secrets size.

Power, Corruption, and Lies

Gamers with large *GURPS* collections might ask why *Horror Magic* doesn't automatically impose downsides like *Power Corrupts* (*GURPS Horror*, pp. 146-148), *Black Magic* (*GURPS Magic*, p. 156), and *Spiritual Distortion* (*GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 93-94). The answer is that its styles are meant to cover not only evil, soul-selling sorcerers, but also wizards in settings where magic's shady reputation is chiefly *social*. Which isn't to say that such practices can't evoke fear or disgust because they damn their adherents or turn them into psychopaths! The GM who wants such outcomes can declare that these styles use one of the systems cited above – or possibly several of them. For instance, maybe each brings down a different "punishment," or perhaps *Forgotten Wisdom* (pp. 10-13) is exempt because its devotees have full-fledged Magery and great potential to do good. The matter is left *optional* because it's entirely possible for magic to be horrific not for what it does to its users, but for what its users do with it.

Bless Plants	Current	Tide
Blight	Dry Spring	Warm
Clouds	Rain	Waves
Cool	Snow	Wind
Create Spring	Storm	

Grandmaster (Cult Rank 4)

Grandmaster spells either produce grossly unnatural effects in the world (Earthquake and Volcano – and Restore Mana, in settings where mana might be depleted), or deal in blessing, cursing, and uncursing people. These are considered risks, liable to create new enemies. All call for *any seven* Master spells *and* Magery 3 (Ceremonial Magery).

Bless	Lesser Geas (VH)	Restore Mana (VH)
Curse	Remove Curse	Volcano
Earthquake		

Apex (Cult Rank 5)

If Apices exist, they command magic the likes of which would never go unremarked without extraordinary planning: people suddenly change their values, the dead return, life springs from nothing, landscapes shift, and swirling passages appear between locations – or worlds. These require *all seven* Grandmaster spells.

Alter Terrain (VH)	Mass Zombie (VH)
Create Gate (VH)*	Move Terrain (VH)
Great Geas (VH)	Resurrection (VH)
Golem (VH)†	

* Learned this way, Teleport, Timeport, and Plane Shift aren't needed, but gates can only be between places and planes of existence – never *times*.

† Enchant isn't required; roll vs. Golem. Enchantment is ceremonial already – don't further increase casting time. Used for flesh golems (“new life”) and the traditional clay golem, unless the GM rules otherwise.

Secret Spell: Greater Summons (VH)

Special

Summons something far beyond mere animals, spirits, or even demons – most often a manifestation of an archdevil or god. Forget about control! When the spell is cast, make a reaction roll, ignoring *all* modifiers except that for whatever the GM decides *this specific entity wants right now*, which can be up to +5 for something dangerous or +10 for near-impossible stuff like sacrificing the sitting head of state to the Demon Lord of Strife. It's up to the GM whether the caster(s) know what this need is.

On a “Good” or worse reaction (15 or less), the being destroys the caster(s) outright in whatever way suits its nature: demon lords rip out souls, fire gods produce hundreds of dice of Essential Fire, creator gods *unmake*. The same happens on any critical failure.

A result of “Very Good” (16-18) means the entity appears briefly and departs without doing harm – though it might mention what it *really* wants for next time.

A roll of “Excellent” (19+) results in the being granting one wish on a par with Great Wish (*Magic*, p. 62), which must be in keeping with that entity's role and disposition.

This spell is relatively easy to learn and quick to cast (50 minutes using ceremonial magic), but *profoundly* draining – usually requiring the whole cult and several external energy sources – and *incredibly* risky.

Cost: 1,000.

Time to cast: 5 minutes.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 (Ceremonial Magery), five Journeyman spells, *and* Secret Spell (Greater Summons).



Secret Spell: Sacrifice (VH)

Special

Makes the life force released by the sacrifice of a living being available to energize another spell. Cast Sacrifice first, at the moment the caster(s) kill the victim; the slaughter is part of the ritual, and must involve a melee attack or similar “hands on” method. The second spell has to begin immediately after this, without delay, and Sacrifice counts as a spell “on” during its casting.

The extra energy available for the second spell equals the subject's IQ multiplied by the *lower* of HT or HP (so small animals with IQ 1-4 and HP 1-2 are rarely worth it).

Cost: None.

Time to cast: 1 hour.

Prerequisites: Magery 3 (Ceremonial Magery), seven Master spells, *and* Secret Spell (Sacrifice).

INDEX

Alchemical potions, 12-13.
Campaigns, *using in*, 2-4.
Ceremonial Magery limitation, 5.
Charms, *style using*, 10-13.
Cult Secrets style, 5-7; *design notes*, 6; *overview*, 4, 5.
Dark Path style, 8-10; *design notes*, 9; *overview*, 4, 8.
Design notes, 6, 9, 13.
Folk traditions, *style based on*, 10-13.
Forgotten Wisdom style, 10-13; *design notes*, 13; *overview*, 4.
Greater Summons spell, 7.
Grimoires, *style using*, 8-10.
GURPS, 4; *Dungeon Fantasy*, 3, 8; *Horror*, 2, 4; *Magic*, 2-5, 7, 12; *Magic: The Least of Spells*, 2, 13; *Magical Styles: Dungeon Magic*, 3; *Monster Hunters*, 2; *Power-Ups 3: Talents*, 11; *Thaumatology*, 2, 4-6, 8, 9, 11; *Thaumatology: Magical Styles*, 2, 9; *Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*, 2; *Thaumatology: Sorcery*, 2; *Thaumatology: Urban Magics*, 2.

Hedge Magic version, 13.
Hedge Magician perk, 13.
Herb Lore skill, *potions and*, 12-13.
Invest spell, 9-10.
Magic, *as secret*, 3.
Magery advantage, *Ceremonial*, 5; *Radically Unstable*, 8, 9; *special requirements*, 5, 8.
Magic Perk, *new*, 13.
Naturalist skill, *style requiring*, 10-13.
Order from Chaos spell, 10.
Perks, *new*, 12, 13.
Player characters, *reason for styles*, 3; *usage recommendations*, 4; *see also specific styles*.

Potions, 12-13.
Radically Unstable Magery limitation, 8, 9; *spell to gain*, 9-10.
Sacrifice spell, 7.
Secret Materials perk, 12-13.
Secret spells, 7, 9-10, 13.
Secret Spells perk, 13.
Spells, *Radically Unstable Magery level*, 9; *secret*, 7, 9-10, 13; *see also specific styles*.
Spirits, *style contacting*, 10-13.
Styles, *automatic downsides*, 4; *based on cult magic*, 5-7; *based on folk traditions*, 10-13; *based on magical texts*, 8-10; *overview*, 4; *reading stats*, 4.

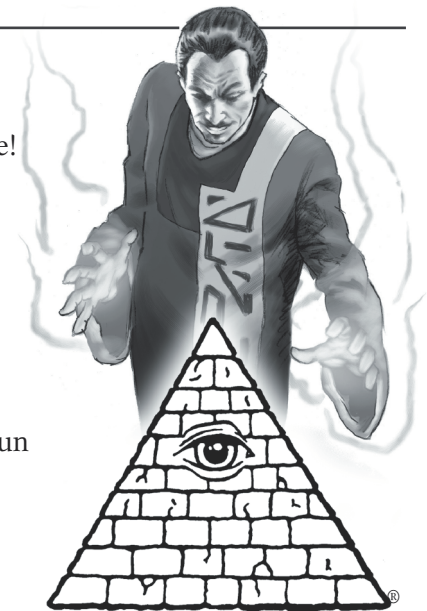
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*– Stephen King, On Writing:
A Memoir of the Craft*

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