

GURPS®

Fourth Edition

THAUMATOLOGY™

Alchemical Baroque™



Written by **PHIL MASTERS**

Edited by **JASON "PK" LEVINE** and **NIKOLA VRTIS**

Illustrated by **GREG HYLAND**

Cartography by **ALLYN BOWKER**

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*Fairy: . . . I do wander every
where,
Swifter than the moon's sphere;
And I serve the Fairy Queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green.*
– William Shakespeare,
*A Midsummer
Night's Dream*

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Page Design ■ PHIL REED and
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Art Director ■ WILL SCHOONOVER
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Prepress Checker ■ WILL SCHOONOVER

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VICKY "MOLOKH" KOLENKO

Playtesters: Fred Brackin, Scott Harris, Leonardo de Moraes Holschuh, and Emile Smirle

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a fairy-tale world of muskets, ghosts, and strange magics. **GURPS Thaumatology: Alchemical Baroque** describes a fantasy setting with a difference. It avoids the medieval technology and orcs-and-elves stereotypes of most fantasy games in favor of something a little more technologically advanced and yet driven by a sense of wonder. It's *alchemical* because the magic of the setting has a formal, quasi-scientific flavor, and *Baroque* because stories set here

should have a sense of style drawing from history's Baroque period – a fever dream of the world as of the early 18th century.

In addition to the **GURPS Basic Set**, GMs looking to run games in this setting will usually need **GURPS Magic** for its *Alchemy* rules (pp. 210-222 of that book), and **GURPS Thaumatology**, primarily for Path/Book magic (see pp. 121-165 of that volume). It's possible to run quite a lot of **Alchemical Baroque** games without those systems coming into play, but they do define significant parts of the world. Some rules reference **GURPS Powers**, but most games should be able to get by without that supplement.

*When evil stalks upon the land
I'll nyther hold nor stay me hand
But fight to win a better day
Over the hills and far away!*

*So fall in lads behind the drum
With colors blazing like the sun
Along the road to come-what-may
Over the hills and far away!*

– John Tams/traditional,
“Over the Hills
and Far Away”

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Alchemical Baroque originally formed one chapter of **GURPS All-Star Jam 2004**, where it was presented in **GURPS Third Edition** terms. This treatment has been updated for *Fourth Edition* and slightly expanded in the process. Aside from the details of characters and technology, the magic has been brought into line with **GURPS Thaumatology**.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Masters is the author-compiler of **GURPS Thaumatology** and admits responsibility for a certain amount of other **GURPS** stuff, such as **GURPS Dragons** and parts of **GURPS Banestorm** and **GURPS Powers**. He's also worked on other roleplaying lines and products, including material for Atlas Games' *Ars Magica* product line and a chapter in *Dreaming Cities* from Guardians of Order. He lives close to where two ancient roads cross and where a king once built a hunting lodge.

About 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.

ALCHEMY AND HERB LORE

Alchemy and Herb Lore use the rules in *GURPS Magic* (pp. 210-222), including use of Herb Lore as an alternative elixir-making skill (albeit without the ability to analyze potions or magical items), with some special conditions and variations: Treat this setting as normal mana for Alchemy and Herb Lore purposes. Use the elixir costs listed for “common magic” campaigns. Ignore the mythological names for elixirs – Known Lands mythology is not that of the real world.

Alchemy and herbalism operate at TL4; no one has yet integrated enough advanced philosophical concepts or techniques into these fields to raise them further. Likewise, Alchemy skill gives no default to Chemistry.

Herb Lore may never differ by more than two levels from the character's Ritual Magic (Witchcraft) skill. In addition, it cannot exceed the character's Pharmacy (Herbal) skill (so it effectively has that other skill as a prerequisite). *Alchemy* cannot differ by more than two levels from Ritual Magic (Esoteric Philosophy), and it cannot exceed the *average* of the character's Chemistry, Philosophy (Neoclassical), and Physics skills. (It's perfectly possible for one or even two of those skills to be zero, but that will reduce the average severely!) Note that these rules usually mean that alchemists and potion-makers must have the Magery (Path/Book) advantage, as Ritual Magic skill is no use without it. It might *just* be possible to have such a character who has learned Ritual Magic skill as a theoretical system, to support his alchemical studies, but who can never get any actual rituals to work.

Prices for potions made with Herb Lore use the rules on p. 104 of *GURPS Thaumatology*; reduce materials costs for elixirs by 50%, to a maximum reduction of \$100. Reduce final prices by the same, or by slightly more at the GM's option to represent general ease of production. Likewise, again as per *Thaumatology*, a Herb Lore home laboratory costs just \$500 to equip, although better labs have costs as for Alchemy. Likewise, per *Thaumatology*, alchemical formularies are no use to characters manufacturing elixirs using Herb Lore. The Herb Lore equivalent – *herbals* – are rare and can't offset the penalties for working without a formulary. Characters who use Herb Lore mostly learn formulas from each other, rather than from books; indeed, some witches are illiterate. A PC advancing in Herb Lore skill and wanting to learn new formulas will usually have to seek out an NPC teacher.

Formularies are sold openly, but good ones are scarce and expensive, despite the existence of the printing press; *herbals*

are just as openly available and uncommon, being the work of eccentric scholars or even rarer herbalists with enough literary and technical skill to create them. The problem is that no standard alchemical or herbalist notation exists, and many of the best alchemists seem to be crazy, or at least eccentric and willfully obscure. Hence, there are a lot of poor formularies around, and *all* herbals are strange at best.

*My husband is a proud man,
who's delighted to be associated with
every brick and every tree of his
property at every moment of his
waking life – and no doubt in his
dreams as well . . .*

– Mrs. Herbert, *The Draughtsman's Contract*

Only a few booksellers know how to identify the good volumes – and they sell at a premium. The typical base cost for either type of book is \$200 per formula, and the GM can be downright whimsical about availability, especially for herbals. Cheaper books exist, but for each -10% reduction in price (to a maximum of -70%), apply a -1 to any attempt to make an elixir using formulas from the book. An alchemist or herbalist may add such formulas to his personal list when advancing in Alchemy skill, but he takes the penalty whenever making that elixir until he can find and study a better text. However, there are no secret formulas and no central “Alchemist's Guild”; any formula *might* show up in a formulary or herbal somewhere, although the chance of finding reliable formulas for some of the unusual and more powerful elixirs may be slim.

Some university libraries hold formularies, but access tends to be limited to members of the institution in good standing or to high-Status visitors vouched for by a member. (“Donations to library funds” can help.) Herbals will only appear in slightly eccentric collections; most university libraries are far too intellectually snobbish to hold them. Also, libraries only permit *study* of books, not removal – certainly not removal for use during elixir creation in chemical-filled, dangerous laboratories!

Other Optional Alchemy Rules

GURPS Thaumatology includes additional optional rules for alchemy (pp. 100-107). However, GMs should be cautious about using some of these in *Alchemical Baroque* games. Options such as alchemical *Quick Gadgeteering* (p. 103) or *Alchemical Gizmos* (p. 104) may make practioners more aggressive and combat-oriented, whereas *Alchemical Baroque* magic-wielders are supposed to be scholarly lab rats. Certainly, alchemist gadgeteering can explain who invents new potions, but such inventions should be rare.

Nonetheless, some of the other rules in *Thaumatology* may be very appropriate. The rules for *Alchemical Inventions* (p. 103) can certainly be used in games where alchemists are conducting innovative research, including the creation of *Binary Elixirs* (p. 106), while GMs can apply whatever rules they wish in cases of *Ad Hoc Mixing* (p. 106). Also, alchemy is definitely related to medicine; the rules for *Alchemical Cures* (pp. 106-107) can apply. Lastly, the new TL4 *Elixir Delivery Methods* (p. 107) in that book – smoking and pills – can certainly fit with the style of this setting.

Sapient Cats

Known Lands domestic cats appear much like those in the real world, but *some* of them are rather different. This is not actually supernatural, in local terms; these aren't spirits, fairy beings, or possessed creatures, just an unusual natural species – although this setting can stretch the definition of “natural.” Smarter cats often associate with witches, leading to talk of “familiars,” but in fact this is simply a way for them to get interesting conversations from people who don't mind talking to nonhuman beings, in exchange for use of their exceptional senses.

Typical cats in the Known Lands are, in fact, very much like those of the real world, apart from being maybe a little more intelligent and slightly longer-lived on the average. Many, perhaps most, also possess a certain innate sense for supernatural phenomena. Some are *far* more intelligent or otherwise exceptional. To reflect this, truly exceptional “sapient cats” may be treated as characters, with the following racial template.

Sapient cats behave much like ordinary cats in most ways, although they may be slightly lazier and more cautious. They don't have a full-scale culture of their own, preferring to attach themselves to human society; when two of them meet, they tend to interact with ironic looks and sarcastic body language. They regard territorial marking and suchlike ordinary cat behavior as the height of vulgarity.

Cats can make interesting Allies or PCs. Although many are selfish, even solipsistic, they aren't usually actively evil. Even so, a truly villainous cat can be dangerous, ruthless, and sadistic.

Known-Lands Sapient Cat

-33 points

Attributes Modifiers: ST -6 [-60]; DX +4 (No Fine Manipulators, -40%) [48]; IQ -4 [-80]

Secondary Characteristics Modifiers: SM -3; Will +5 [25]; Per +6 [30].

Advantages: Acute Hearing 2 [4]; Acute Taste and Smell 2 [4]; Catfall [10]; Claws (Sharp) [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Discriminatory Hearing [15]; Enhanced Move 1/2 (Ground) [10]; Flexibility [5]; Medium [10]; Night Vision 5 [5]; Perfect Balance [15]; Teeth (Sharp) [1]; Ultrahearing [5]; Vibration Sense [10].

Perks: Fur [1].

Disadvantages: Cannot Speak [-15]; Dead Broke [-25]; Quadruped [-35]; Short Lifespan 2 [-20]; Sleepy (1/2 the time) [-8]; Social Stigma (Valuable Property) [-10]; Stubbornness [-5]; Quirk (Dislikes Getting Soaked) [-1].

Racial Skills: Acrobatics (H) DX [2]-14*; Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-16; Stealth (A) DX [2]-14.

* Includes +1 for Perfect Balance.

Some cat characters buy their IQ up significantly or have fortune-related advantages such as Luck or Serendipity. A few buy off Cannot Speak, sometimes replacing it with Disturbing Voice, and some can eliminate at least one level of Short Lifespan. Some have up to eight levels of Extra Life.

Advantages

Appearance (Very Beautiful) [16]; Intangible Fairy [252]; Status 5* [20]; Walk on Air [20]; Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30].

Disadvantages

Callous [-5]; Dread (Devout prayers, holy ground, the sound of church bells, humans with True Faith, etc.; 6 yards; Common) [-30]; Jealousy [-10]; Selfish (12) [-5].

Quirks: Distractible. [-1]

Skills

Connoisseur (Poetry) (A) IQ+2 [8]-12; Dancing (A) DX [2]-13; Erotic Art (A) DX [2]-13; Garrote (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Interrogation (A) IQ [2]-10; Intimidation (A) Will+2 [8]-12; Knife (E) DX [1]-13; Naturalist (Earthlike) (H) IQ-1 [2]-9; Riding (Horse) (A) DX [2]-13; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ+2 [4]-12; Sex Appeal (A) HT+6 [2]-18†; Singing (E) HT [1]-12; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-12.

* Includes +1 from Wealth.

†Includes +6 from Appearance.

OGRES

63 points

Ogres are technically fairies, but they've burned out their spirit powers taking a large physical form, reducing their

minds to a parody of intelligence in the process. Hence, they don't have the fairy meta-trait; treat them as a normal material race. They could even be used as PCs, although they're invariably stupid and dull, and wouldn't usually be very interesting to play. They do represent an example of a permanently manifested fairy type, as well as making good opponents for adventurers.

These stats represents a typical ogre.

ST 20 (Size, -10%) [90]; **DX** 9 [-20]; **IQ** 7 [-60]; **HT** 13 [30]
Damage 2d-1/3d+2; BL 80 lbs.; HP 20 [0]; Will 8 [5]; Per 7 [0];
FP 13 [0].

Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 9; Parry 9 (Axe/Mace).
8'; 450 lbs.; SM +1).

Social Background

TL: 4 [0].

CF: Known Lands (Native) [0].

Languages: Local human language (Native/Illiterate) [-3].

Advantages

Acute Hearing 5 [10]; Acute Taste and Smell 7 [14]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Damage Resistance 4 (Tough Skin, -40%) [12]; Discriminatory Smell [15]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Medium [10].

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The elfin maidens were already dancing on the elf hill, and they danced in shawls woven from moonshine and mist, which look very pretty to those who like such things. The large hall within the elf hill was splendidly decorated; the floor had been washed with moonshine, and the walls had been rubbed with magic ointment, so that they glowed like tulip-leaves in the light.

– Hans Christian Andersen, “The Elf Hill”

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