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Inexpensive Magic Items for *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

Sure, enchanted items are neat, but they're *expensive*. You can get a wand that hurls explosive fireballs or a sword that can penetrate plate armor as though it weren't there. However, that wand costs \$40,000 (including the cost of a rather gaudy ruby), and the armor-ignoring sword costs over \$800,000! Even lesser enchantments cost thousands. With most enchantments starting at twice the standard starting wealth of the sort of TL3 setting where most fantasy campaigns take place, what's a poor character to do?

As it turns out, the cheapest enchantments cost between \$1 and \$60. Only a handful of enchantments are that cheap, about 50 spells in all, and some of them aren't suitable for magical items. Tangle Growth, for example, permanently entangles an area, which is no good for the thrifty adventurer on the go. Others may not be suitable for most fantasy campaigns (say, Seek Radiation or Seek Plastic before TL6), or next to useless if they are (for example, Mature and Preserve Fuel). Still, there's a handful of enchantments which may be both useful and affordable. This article will deal with enchanted items available for \$1,000 or less and how to use them.

Adjustable Clothing

This \$50 enchantment may not seem particularly useful for most adventurers, but depending on how strict the GM is, it might save a fortune in clothing for some lycanthropes and other shape-changers.

Alarm

As an enchantment, Alarm costs \$60 per casting. How it might be used depends on how the spell works in the campaign. The GM may rule that the alarm goes off at the same local time every day (say, every morning at the local 6:00 AM). If that's the case, a batch of alarm objects can be used for timekeeping that doesn't require a sundial or astronomy skill. Someone standing a two-hour watch knows that he can wake up the next guy and go to sleep himself when the next alarm object goes off, rather than having to guess when two hours have passed or keep an eye on the stars to figure it out. A military organization might *love* that.

Where The Money Goes

We'll take as given the economic assumptions spelled out in *GURPS Magic*: Enchantments cost \$1 per point of energy up to 60 points, then \$33 per point for enchantments which take more energy than that. There's a large gap between enchantments which cost up to \$60 and those which start at \$2,013. Of course, much depends on assumptions. A lack of ready assistants for enchanting drives the \$33 threshold down, while a higher average skill for enchanters could push it up. If, for example, master enchanters had an average skill of 24, the maximum energy for cheap enchantments would rise

However, if the alarm goes off at the same absolute time (that is, not correcting for time zones), it becomes an aid to navigation as well. For example, consider an alarm that goes off at noon. If a character with a little skill in astronomy checks the height of the sun when the alarm goes off, he'll be able to figure out how far east or west he is of where the alarm was set based on the difference between its current height and its maximum height, a feat not possible in mundane navigation until the beginning of TL 5.

Armor Enchantments

Slightly enhanced armor is well within the reach of the frugal adventurer. +1 to DR from Fortify is available for \$50 for a full suit of armor, but anything higher than that is out of reach, and Deflect for full suits of armor is unavailable in the price range. However, since there are discounts for casting most armor enchantments on individual pieces, it's possible to build up a well-enchanted suit of armor from parts. The chart below shows the cost of affordable armor enchantments by piece (*not* including the cost of the armor itself).

| Part | <i>Fortify</i> | | | <i>Deflect</i> | | |
|--------------|----------------|-------|-------|----------------|------|------|
| | DR +1 | DR +2 | DR +3 | DB 1 | DB 2 | DB 3 |
| <i>Full</i> | \$50 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| <i>Torso</i> | \$25 | NA | NA | \$50 | NA | NA |
| <i>Groin</i> | \$5 | \$20 | \$80 | \$10 | \$50 | NA |
| <i>Neck</i> | \$2 | \$5 | \$20 | \$3 | \$13 | \$50 |
| <i>Arms</i> | \$8 | \$30 | NA | \$15 | \$75 | NA |
| <i>Legs</i> | \$15 | \$60 | NA | \$30 | NA | NA |
| <i>Hands</i> | \$3 | \$10 | \$40 | \$5 | \$25 | NA |
| <i>Feet</i> | \$4 | \$15 | \$60 | \$8 | \$38 | NA |
| <i>Head</i> | \$5 | \$20 | \$80 | \$10 | \$50 | NA |
| <i>Skull</i> | \$3 | \$10 | \$40 | \$5 | \$25 | NA |
| <i>Face</i> | \$3 | \$10 | \$40 | \$5 | \$25 | NA |

The Lighten enchantment is also affordable for individual pieces. This chart shows the cost for enchanting individual pieces of armor for each level of weight reduction:

| Part | -25% | -50% |
|--------------|------|------|
| <i>Torso</i> | \$50 | NA |
| <i>Groin</i> | \$10 | \$20 |
| <i>Neck</i> | \$3 | \$5 |
| <i>Arms</i> | \$15 | \$30 |
| <i>Legs</i> | \$30 | \$60 |
| <i>Hands</i> | \$5 | \$10 |
| <i>Feet</i> | \$8 | \$15 |
| <i>Head</i> | \$10 | \$20 |
| <i>Skull</i> | \$5 | \$10 |
| <i>Face</i> | \$5 | \$10 |

to 100, making a vast number of other enchantments readily available. Different pay for magicians would likewise lead to different prices. Even under the circumstances assumed in *GURPS Magic*, there'd be some fuzziness around the 60 energy point, with a number of lesser enchanters not quite able to use five assistants and a handful of highly skilled enchanters able to use more. However, since the 60 energy break point is what's in the book, it's the most likely point of departure for most fantasy campaigns.

Beneficial Charms

Several inexpensive protective charms are available within the price range: Amulet, Bless, and Talisman. Prices for such charms in our price range are listed in this table:

| Spell | Cost |
|--------------------|------|
| <i>Amulet +1</i> | \$50 |
| <i>Bless +1</i> | \$10 |
| <i>Bless +2</i> | \$20 |
| <i>Bless +3</i> | \$30 |
| <i>Talisman +1</i> | \$15 |
| <i>Talisman +2</i> | \$45 |

The main drawback for these inexpensive enchantments is that they provide a limited number of uses. Amulet and Talisman are also extremely specific. However, if adventurers research their opposition well, they can pick out a few appropriate amulets and talismans to give them short-term but vital protection against their enemy's most powerful abilities.

Cook

An enchantment allowing a cooking pot to cook one meal a day costs \$30, and an enchantment cooking two meals costs \$60. This is, of course, a luxury rather than vital gear, but it can be very convenient for frugal adventurers. It can save some money on long journeys, letting them cook fresh food purchased along the way rather than having to carry quantities of preserved food, and might give a small bonus to Survival rolls, since the cooking process will likely kill mundane bacteria and parasites in wild foods.

Curses

There are two "curses" available in this price range: Curse (\$10 per point of penalty up to -3), and the version of the Itch enchantment which causes the bearer of an item to itch uncontrollably (\$50). Stealthy characters might drop these into the pockets of enemies, although they'll fall victim to their ill effects while carrying them, so they'd best make the attempt under ideal conditions.

Darkness

Darkness (\$12 per square foot up to 5 square feet) and Blackout (\$15 per square foot up to 4 square feet) could be cast on long strips of rug, which could be unrolled to create a six-foot-tall barrier of blackness. They wouldn't be particularly useful in a combat situation, but they could be used to conceal small encampments at night. A group of adventurers could surround their position with Darkness or Blackout rugs. Within the perimeter of the rugs, they could cook on fires, light candles for reading, and so on, and remain essentially invisible to people outside (from a distance, anyway; the darkness doesn't stop sound).

Impression Blocker

This enchantment is available for containers holding up to three pounds at a cost of \$20 per pound. Characters limited to this level of expense might not ever carry something important enough that it

matters whether or not it's associated with them, but small-time smugglers might want to be sure illegal goods can't be tracked back to them.

Inscribe

For \$30, characters can buy a pen or brush which leaves a mark on any solid surface without needing ink or paint. This could be useful for leaving navigation marks in underground labyrinths, outlining secret doors, and so on. Charcoal is infinitely cheaper, but an Inscribe-enchanted object could leave marks in a bright color, more visible in dim chambers and on dark backgrounds.

Knot

A one-yard length of rope may be permanently enchanted with the Knot spell at a cost of \$60 (longer pieces of rope, unfortunately, cross the 60 energy threshold). It's not enough to produce a secure means of tying a climbing rope, but that should be just enough to tie someone's arms or legs, making it somewhat harder to escape from. It may also be used to more securely tie animals to a hitching post if there's a chance that they'll be stolen or try to run away themselves.

Missile Enchantments

Both Accuracy and Puissance are at a considerable discount if cast on individual arrows. It's a very high premium (\$25 for each), and any more than a +1 to hit and damage takes it the cost well out of the discount price range, but a few special arrows might give an archer the edge he needs for a really important shot.

Odor

The Odor enchantment, available for \$40, is cheap enough to be a popular consumer item. Socially oriented characters might carry one or two as a low-cost alternative to perfume. However, there's a potential adventuring use as well. If a character can find an enchanter who can become familiar with his own personal scent (which may require a non-human enchanter or one with spells enhancing his sense of smell), he could get an Odor-enchanted item which could be used to deceive anyone attempting to track him using scent.

Pentagram

At a cost of \$1 per square foot, it's possible to create a pentagram just under six feet on a side for \$60. A reasonably large pentagram could be installed on any budding magician's floor.

Preserve Food

This enchantment, \$20 per pound up to three pounds of food protected, may be of little use in most circumstances, but can pad out the amount of fresh food a character can carry in harsh environments. It may be particularly useful used with the Cook enchantment.

Purify Air

An enchantment allowing the user to cast Purify Air costs \$50. Poisonous gasses are rare at low TLs, but it would be very useful for clearing out smoke and could be of some use in underground chambers where the air is stale.

Seek Spells

A number of Seek spells are available for reasonable prices, listed in the chart below:

| Spell | Cost |
|-------------------|------|
| <i>Seek Air</i> | \$60 |
| <i>Seek Earth</i> | \$50 |
| <i>Seek Fire</i> | \$50 |
| <i>Seek Fuel</i> | \$60 |
| <i>Seek Plant</i> | \$50 |
| <i>Seek Power</i> | \$60 |
| <i>Seek Water</i> | \$40 |

The important caveat here is that an item enchanted with Seek Earth can only find one type of earth, which is set at creation and requires a one-ounce sample. It can, therefore, be a useful tool for prospecting, but requires some forethought and perhaps significant additional cost. Depending on the price of gold, a Seek Earth tool is likely to require an additional \$60 to \$120 for the one-ounce sample. Although a Seek Earth tool could be set to search for silver, copper, or other metals, metals other than gold are rarely found in a native state. A prospector would be wiser to get one set to find far more plentiful ores instead of pure metals. Seek Water would be very useful for characters traveling through wilderness, perhaps giving a bonus to Survival skill in dry environments.

Skull Spirit

For the character hoping to do a little damage, this may be the most cost-effective enchantment available, at a mere \$40. Skull spirits are both frightening and very difficult to kill, making them excellent for diversions and harassing attacks. Still, like many other cheap enchantments, this is another one-shot spell; the enchanted skull crumbles into dust and can't be reused. It may also be illegal to cast the spell and carry around a dangerously enchanted skull in most civilized regions.

Smoke

The Smoke enchantment, available for \$50, is another good bet. A Smoke-enchanted item lets anyone (including mighty warriors, who may have plenty of fatigue to burn) put up an eye-stinging smokescreen to cover their retreat. It will, of course, be particularly useful indoors, with no wind to blow the smoke away. On the other hand, since Purify Air is a relatively cheap enchantment as well, smoke clouds may end up being dispelled quickly.

Sound Spells

Temporary Enchantment

It's not particularly cost-effective in the long run, but using temporary rather than regular enchantment can bring the price of a few castings of a powerful spell well within reach of the frugal adventurer. This table lists the maximum original energy for a spell which can be brought in the 60 energy range depending on the number of uses for the enchanted object:

| Castings | Energy |
|----------|--------|
| 1 | 400 |
| 2 | 200 |
| 3 | 133 |

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
| Objects can be enchanted to make sounds constantly with Sound (\$ | 4 | 100 |
| 50) or Voices (\$20 per word up to three words). Unfortunately, the | 5 | 80 |
| Link enchantment, which could be used to turn the sounds on and | 6 | 66 |

off, costs far to much to use here, so adventurers using these enchantments will have to live with enchanted objects that won't shut up. However, they might be muffled by wrapping them up in the middle of any other baggage the adventurers may be carrying. They might be used as a distraction or deception. For example, an object might be enchanted with the sound of marching feet, making it sound like an out-of-sight opponent has a far larger force with him than he really does, or the sound of snoring, so that a character can slip off of his bed and sneak around at night without people listening at the door being any wiser.

Stench

The Stench enchantment, \$60, produces effects similar to Smoke but even more potentially harmful. Adventurers might use Smoke if there's reason to make the cloud appear natural (or at least mundane) , or Stench if they don't mind their enemies knowing that they've got at least a bit of magical ability. Again, cheap Purify Air enchantments may render this far less useful.

Stored Spells and Energy

These enchantments probably give you the most bang for your buck. Six enchantments involve charging up a small, valuable stone with mystical power for later use: Powerstone, Single College Powerstone, Manastone, Spellstone, Spell Arrow, and Blank Spell Arrow. Spellstones and Spell Arrows in particular give adventurers access to magical abilities they might not otherwise have.

There are a number of drawbacks to these items, though. Again, most are single-use. Manastones can be recharged, but only when you've got access to a moderately skilled enchanter. The second and more important factor is that the enchantments may not be expensive, but the necessary materials are. Small enchantments may be cast on tiny and relatively inexpensive stones, but the cost of the stone increases with the square of the cost, putting items with the these enchantments out of the price range of the average starting character at about seven points of energy. The chart below shows the costs for powerstones and other spell and energy-storing items which cost up to \$1000.

| Power | Powerstone | Manastone | Single College Powerstone | Spellstone | Spell Arrow |
|-------|------------|-----------|---------------------------|------------|-------------|
| 1 | 70 | 55 | 62 | 70 | 80 |
| 2 | 165 | 135 | 149 | 165 | 185 |
| 3 | 280 | 235 | 256 | 280 | |
| 4 | 425 | 365 | 393 | | |
| 5 | 595 | 520 | 555 | | |
| 6 | 790 | 700 | 742 | | |
| 7 | 1000 | 895 | 944 | | |

Teleport Shield

A small rug or bit of wood or tile no larger than a square foot can be enchanted with Teleport Shield for \$50. By itself, that's hardly any protection at all. However, a series of Teleport Shield tiles might be used to pave a larger area in which no one can teleport for a reasonable price.

Touch

An item with the Touch enchantment, \$50, might be used by someone not entirely confident with his Stealth skill. For example, he might come close to a sentry, use the Touch object to "tap" him on one shoulder, then quickly come up from the opposite side.

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