GURPS® Fourth Edition

FANTASY

PORTAL REALMS™

Written by
WILLIAM H. STODDARD

Edited by SEAN PUNCH

Illustrated by
ZACH HOWARD,
SHEA RYAN, and DAN SMITH

Additional Material by
ROGER BURTON WEST

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

CONTENTS

The bear went over the mountain,
   The bear went over the mountain,
   The bear went over the mountain,
   To see what he could see.
    – Traditional song

INTRODUCTION

Alice climbing into a mirror . . . Randolph Carter finding the silver key to the gate of dreams . . . Howard Shea transporting himself to the world of the Eddas . . .

These characters, and others like them, found their way out of the everyday world into realms of fantasy and adventure. Such journeys are the subject of *portal fantasy*.

In portal fantasy, people from our world are transported into a magical realm where things are different. They may be there permanently, or return eventually to Earth; in either case, their experiences change them, making them more capable and also revealing supernatural forces to them.

GURPS Fantasy: Portal Realms is your guide to this kind of fantasy: to creating worlds, helping players create characters, and running adventures.

Similar stories have appeared in other genres. John Carter's journeys to Barsoom in *A Princess of Mars* and its sequels, Martin Padway's time travel to the late Roman Empire in *Lest Darkness Fall*, and Calvin Morrison's transportation to the Aryan-Transpacific Timeline in *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen* are science fiction, with no hint of magic, but the settings of their heroes' adventures are otherwise a lot like portal realms. Much of the material in this supplement could be used for such a science-fictional campaign – just leave out the magical parts.

> *"And may I ask,*
> *O Lucy Daughter of Eve,"*
> *said Mr. Tumnus, "how you*
> *have come into Narnia?"*
> *"Narnia? What's that?"*
> *said Lucy.*
>
> *– C.S. Lewis,*
> ***The Lion, the Witch***
> ***and the Wardrobe***

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of ***GURPS Fantasy: Portal Realms.*** The concept of a portal realm is briefly discussed in ***GURPS Fantasy*** – and Yrth, presented in ***GURPS Banestorm,*** is a type of portal realm.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William H. Stoddard is a professional copy editor, specializing in scientific and scholarly publications. He and his wife live in Riverside, California, with their cat, Macavity, and more than 100 shelf-feet of books. He has been a roleplaying gamer since 1975, and has been writing for ***GURPS*** since 2000, when he wrote ***GURPS Steampunk.***

ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of ***GURPS*** players. We can be reached by email: **info@sjgames.com**. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. ***GURPS*** continues to grow – see what's new at **gurps.sjgames.com**.

Warehouse 23. Our online store offers ***GURPS*** print items, plus PDFs of our books, supplements, adventures, play aids, and support . . . including exclusive material available only on Warehouse 23! Just head over to **warehouse23.com**.

Pyramid (**pyramid.sjgames.com**). Our monthly PDF magazine includes new rules and articles for ***GURPS***. It features systemless locations, adventures, and much more. Look for each themed issue from Warehouse 23!

Internet. To discuss ***GURPS*** with our staff and your fellow gamers, visit our forums at **forums.sjgames.com**. You can also join us at **facebook.com/sjgames** or **twitter.com/sjgames**. Share your campaign teaser in 140 characters or fewer with #GURPShook on Twitter. Or explore that hashtag for ideas to add to your own game! The ***GURPS Fantasy: Portal Realms*** web page can be found at **gurps.sjgames.com/portalrealms**.

Gamer and Store Finder (**gamerfinder.sjgames.com**): Connect with other people and places playing our games. Add yourself to our database so they can find you as well!

Bibliographies. Bibliographies are a great resource for finding more of what you love! We've added them to many ***GURPS*** book web pages with links to help you find the next perfect element for your game.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Errata pages for ***GURPS*** releases are available at **sjgames.com/errata/gurps**.

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.

CHAPTER ONE
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Whether in stories, dramas, or games, fantasists need to obtain *willing suspension of disbelief:* to imagine beings and events outside the order of nature, and get other people to play along. Impossible events are the strength of fantasy, appealing to the sense of wonder. They're also its weakness! Their very conflict with the players' knowledge of the real world means it takes extra work to account for their presence in the campaign setting.

One way to resolve this conflict is to set the "real world" aside and create a separate world, such as Tolkien's Middle-Earth, Le Guin's Earthsea, or Martin's Westeros and Essos – one that has its own rules that allow supernatural events. But neither the different rules nor the world as a whole will be familiar to the players, making it harder for them to get their bearings. A different strategy is to say that the real world *does* contain magic, but it's rare, or physically concealed, or veiled by illusion – the approach of much urban fantasy. The challenge here is to explain *why* the magic remains hidden: why the adventurers can't make it public, or why other people didn't do so decades or centuries before.

Portal fantasy combines some of the advantages of both approaches. Its starting point is the real world, often in the present day – a setting that's familiar to the players. However, at some point the characters find themselves in an entirely different, unfamiliar world, one where fantastic things happen.

This makes suspension of disbelief easier, because the supernatural is just one part of the overall strangeness; and because the travelers aren't native to the portal realm, which is just as new to them as to the players, it's easier for players to create characters and identify with them. There's usually only one portal into the new world, which can be treated as a rare magical object or place that could plausibly have been kept hidden.

Two other tropes provide alternatives to portal fantasy for fitting magic into present-day or recent Earth:

Wainscots are magical or otherwise fantastic societies existing parallel to the mundane world. The name comes from stories about tiny people hiding behind the paneling of houses, as in Mary Norton's *The Borrowers*. As a metaphor, it includes other physically separate spaces such as the London Below of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere,* and even alternative societies concealed by secrecy, such as the wizarding world of the Harry Potter novels. A wainscot realm is accessible from many places on Earth, and frequent trips between it and Earth may be possible for those who know its secret.

Enclaves are locations where magic has leaked through from another world, forming a fantastic domain on Earth. Their magic isn't concealed, and how the mundane world reacts to them is a big focus of stories such as John M. Ford's *The Last Hot Time,* S. Andrew Swann's *Dragons of the Cuyahoga,* and Terri Windling's shared-world Borderland series.

PERILOUS REALMS

Portal realms are natural settings for several types of stories.

EXPLORING THE WORLD

The simplest possible storyline is the *travelogue,* where the heroes wander about an unfamiliar setting seeing the sites, meeting the inhabitants, and coping with obstacles and threats. This was a big part of the appeal of such classic works as Baum's Oz novels and Burroughs' Barsoom novels (technically *planetary romance:* a form of science fiction, but one whose appeal is much like that of fantasy). Exploration as a theme requires an inventive GM. In this kind of story, the *sense of wonder* is embodied in a series of specific *wonders.*

Returnees

It's possible to treat a visit to a portal realm as the backstory of an adventurer on Earth. His travels might have allowed him to learn magic or esoteric martial arts, or even given him superhuman powers. He may have come back with some mysterious gadget that Earth's technology can't duplicate. This would usually count as an Unusual Background. Perhaps only one person in the world has it, or maybe it's a family heritage, monastic tradition, or shamanic initiation that's been passed down through time.

Self-Discovery

Other portal fantasies highlight the *characters* more than the *setting*. The focus is on how a visit to a different world changes the visitors, both through encountering its wonders and through learning to cope with the journey. Such themes are especially common in stories about children or adolescents, providing an outward and visible symbol for the struggles of growing up. But older characters may also be transformed by such journeys, in the style of Coleridge's ancient mariner. The encounter with an alternate reality becomes a rite of passage.

Saving the World

If a portal realm can change strangers who visit it, they may change it in return. Portal fantasies often show travelers who visit new worlds caught up in desperate struggles, and becoming participants, even key figures, in those struggles. Such stories might involve self-discovery as well: What the travelers learn about themselves may be that they have unguessed talents as mages, or warriors, or spiritual figures, which are just what the newly encountered world needs – a recurring theme in Lewis' Narnia series, for example. But heroes with fully developed abilities might also discover that those abilities can save the day. In some stories, visitors to portal realms are called there by a Destiny as its saviors. In any case, the theme and the central conflict play a big part in such tales.

Thresholds

If a portal works in both directions, it can allow repeated or even frequent journeys. The story can become one of contact between two different worlds, with the protagonists as vectors of their interchange. They may act as explorers, missionaries, traders, or invaders, or in more specialized roles such as tour guides or diplomats. This kind of portal fantasy can take on an organizational focus, with the portal becoming a specialized asset of a family, corporation, or bureaucracy (Charles Stross explored this idea in his Merchant Princes novels, though as science fiction more than fantasy). Characters' personal encounters with the strange and terrifying can interweave with their careers and social positions, in the style of military stories about "seeing the elephant." Threshold stories may turn a portal into an enclave (p. 4).

Larger Conflicts

The battles of portal fantasy needn't be confined to a single portal realm. Heroes of portal fantasy may learn that their particular struggles are only part of vast multi-universal wars. *Three Hearts and Three Lions* hints that World War II and the clash of Law and Chaos in its portal realm are the same struggle in two different guises. With the Christian underpinnings of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* its conflict seems to extend to every cosmos ever created.

There's not much point to working out this kind of vast conflict if it isn't going to come on stage! In some campaigns, it can be mostly background: Allusions to "part of a larger struggle" can help motivate the heroes (see *Disadvantages,* pp. 16-17), or the PCs can get occasional help from a secretive organizational Patron (p. 15). A more foregrounded conflict can include overt help, or enemies from further realms (see *Many Doors,* p. 6). Heroes of portal fantasy may even transcend the limits of one portal realm and wage war in many different realities, on the lines of Zelazny's struggle between Amber and Chaos.

Journeys Long and Short

How long do you plan to stay? Like any journey, a visit to a portal realm can be temporary or permanent. Different durations result in different types of stories and campaigns.

The portal's controllability makes a big difference here. Can you decide you're going to go over, spend time training and gearing up, and transfer at a time of your choosing? Or do you "softly and silently vanish away," in the middle of a journey, off the street, or even from your own bed? (See *Wealth and Possessions,* pp. 22-24, for some particularly important implications.)

Exile

Some trips to portal realms are one-way: The traveler goes and doesn't come back. Such permanent departures occur at or near the start of fantasy series such as Andre Norton's Witch World stories. The heroes of these tales are exiles who will never go home; they have to build new lives in their portal realms.

Passage through a one-way portal can be compared to death – as Shakespeare called it, "The undiscovered country from whose bourn/No traveler returns." Other comparisons could include irreversible coma, dementia, or insanity. Deliberate one-way journeys are for the rootless or the desperate; victims of unintentional ones are likely to grieve for their lost lives and loved ones.

In a campaign about exiles, the reference society (pp. 13-14) will necessarily be one of the societies of the portal realm.

Long Stays

Other portal fantasies have their main characters go to a portal realm and come back. Such visits are often prolonged, and may profoundly change the visitors. Experiences like these might be compared to a period of unconsciousness or insanity followed by recovery; more often, they're like a journey far from home, such as going away to college or military service, or on a pilgrimage.

Fantasy novels may provide a framing narrative, in a style going back to Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," where the story begins and ends with the traveler talking with someone from his native land.

Other literary examples of this style of portal fantasy include Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz;* Lewis' Narnia Chronicles, especially *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* where the four Pevensies stay in Narnia long enough to grow up before returning to England and childhood; Anderson's *Three Hearts and Three Lions;* Donaldson's two series of Thomas Covenant novels; Allston's pulp-inspired *Doc Sidhe;* and Dellamonica's *Child of a Hidden Sea.* Long stays in portal realms are the subject of anime series such as *Those Who Hunt Elves* and *The Vision of Escaflowne,* and of the film *Spirited Away.*

Time spent in a portal realm doesn't have to be equal to time passed on Earth. A traveler might experience a single day or night on the other side, and return to find that weeks, years, or centuries have passed. Or it may go the other way, with the traveler returning days or moments after leaving, despite living through many years. In some versions, the traveler is instantly aged or de-aged according to the time passed on Earth: Irish legend has Ossian coming back from the Land of Youth, stepping onto the ground, and instantly aging 300 years; the Pevensies mature to adulthood on their first visit to Narnia, but revert to childhood back on Earth.

Sometimes a story that starts out in this mode eventually turns into one of exile (p. 5). This eventually happens midway through the original Oz series, in *The Emerald City of Oz,* when Dorothy Gale goes to Oz to stay, taking her uncle and aunt with her.

In this case, too, the reference society is usually one of those in the portal realm.

BRIEF VISITS

Not all visits to portal realms last that long! Carroll's Alice spends only the length of a dream in Wonderland or Looking-Glass Land, and the film *The Wizard of Oz* makes Dorothy's time in Oz a dream as well. The more recent film *Labyrinth* involves an actual quest, but one that lasts a mere 13 hours. Harold Shea's visits to worlds of literary fantasy in *The Compleat Enchanter* typically last just a few days.

As these examples suggest, brief visits to portal realms are likely to be repeatable. A single visit can represent a life-changing experience, akin to a Native American vision quest (see *Self-Discovery,* p. 5); someone who makes many such journeys can be a *liminal* figure (from Latin *limen,* "threshold") such as a shaman. Such an individual might become a Patron (pp. B72-74) for first-time travelers – though, given the eccentricities of many shamans, very likely one with the Minimal Intervention limitation!

In a campaign about a brief visit or series of visits, it generally works best to have the visitors' native society (in the examples above, the one they hail from on Earth) be the reference society.

MANY DOORS

If there's *one* doorway to *one* realm, there might be many of each. At least three variants of this appear in fiction and mythology:

● Earth has portals in different places that lead to different realms.
● Earth has a portal that leads to a higher-level realm filled with portals to many realms.
● A portal from Earth leads to a realm that can also be reached from a third realm (which may lead to conflicts with invaders from that realm; see *Larger Conflicts,* p. 5).

METHODS OF TRAVEL

The word "portal" suggests a door or gate. Portal realms aren't necessarily reached by literal doorways, however. Any fantastic realm that is separated from the mundane world and has its own laws, and that can be reached in one way or a small number of ways, can be a setting for portal fantasy.

Access to a portal realm isn't usually an *advantage* in portal fantasy: The portal is a feature of the setting rather than a trait of a character. But the portal's effects are similar to those of Jumper (pp. B64-65 and ***GURPS Powers,*** pp. 57-58). Moreover, there are different *kinds* of portals, and their peculiar features can often be compared with those resulting from Jumper's enhancements and limitations.

GATES

The most basic form for a portal amounts to a doorway – or the Platonic ideal of a doorway: A two-dimensional surface, one side of which faces our world and the other side, a different world. Its size is finite but large enough for at least one person to pass through at a time. It may be larger; each portal can be given a Size Modifier (p. B19). In terms of advantages, this is like Jumper with the Tunnel enhancement (p. B64).

This arrangement creates some puzzles: What does the portal look like when seen edge-on? (Maybe it *can't* be seen that way.) What happens if you walk into it from the back? (It's simplest if you end up in the same world but facing the opposite direction.) Players may get distracted by exploring the paradoxes that result – or finding ways to exploit them! A portal embedded in a wall or other solid surface is less likely to suggest such questions and is a common image in portal fantasy, whose authors have other themes in mind.

Some independently existing portals are open all the time, allowing a constant flow of air, water, objects, or creatures between two worlds. But it's more common for them to open when someone performs a ritual or says the correct phrase, or when the right person comes along. The "permanence" in this case is the gate's continuing existence rather than its constant operation.

TUNNELS

Some connections between worlds are "tunnels" in a more literal sense: elongated volumes of space, with one end opening on Earth and the other on the portal realm. Travelers spend some time in neither one world nor the other.

In some campaigns, this is simply a preferred way of visualizing the transition: Not as instantaneous, but as taking a finite amount of time. In others, the tunnel might be an actual realm with its own peculiarities. The journey may be challenging or disorienting, with some of the qualities of a rite of passage, including a first phase of separation from the familiar world, a middle period of transition, and a final stage of coming into a new world. Such *liminal experiences* can plausibly give rise to Fright Checks. Rolls against Body Sense (p. B181), to avoid physical disorientation on arrival at the other end, are also a possibility.

TRANSITIONS

Not all shifts between worlds involve an overt portal. In some stories, the travelers simply vanish from Earth and appear in another world – or, from their viewpoint, Earth fades from around them and the other world appears. This may happen in an instant, or Earth may fade out and the other world fade in.

This can still be the result of encountering some sort of entity or force that continues to exist over time. But it can also be the effect of a spell or power. The "portal" itself is called into existence at the start of the transition and vanishes at the end. Its creator may continue to exist, but that doesn't mean the travelers can communicate with that person or induce that individual to send them back.

Such an effect may also come about spontaneously, through a chance release of magical energy. Or it could be the result of an error in casting a spell.

GOING OFF COURSE

Transitions can also take place over a span of time. The travelers leave a known location, get lost, wander about, and eventually arrive in a place they've never heard of, where things are different. In **GURPS Banestorm,** for example, new arrivals on Yrth sometimes get there after such a journey. As with tunnels, the trip is often a liminal experience that demands Fright Checks; physical disorientation is less likely, as the journey's start and end are usually gradual.

In older literary works, travelers such as Odysseus, Gulliver, and Coleridge's ancient mariner get lost at sea and have fantastic adventures in exotic lands – places off the edge of the map. In the modern world, where the entire planet has been mapped, such voyages might be explained as experiences in portal realms. The travelers lose their way and wander in parts fantastic . . . but eventually find their way back with unbelievable stories to tell.

MIRRORS

Mirrors and other reflective surfaces (e.g., bodies of water) can give the impression of looking into another world. Fiction and legends sometimes treat such things as genuine portals.

In terms of Jumper, this is akin to the Special Portal limitation (**GURPS Powers,** p. 58). Robert Heinlein's "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag" offers an extreme version of this, where *all* mirrors can act as gateways into a different world – which is closer to wainscot fantasy than to portal fantasy. An effect that works with only one specific mirror better fits the "portal" concept.

Mirror portals obviously work only some of the time. One way to envision this is in physical terms: the viewer must find just the right angle of view. This can go with the fantasy that the mirror world beyond what the mirror shows is entirely different from the observer's world, as in Alice's speculations about Looking-Glass House in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There.* Perhaps a clever viewer could catch a glimpse of the true mirror realm, or go through the mirror and see it all – or perhaps mirror beings could come into the observer's world (one possible origin for doppelgangers). Another physical option, with reflecting pools, is to suppose that the surface has to be perfectly still and ripple-free – which can also be a way of portraying clairvoyance, as in H. Rider Haggard's *She* or J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings.*

WAY STATIONS

If travel between realms isn't a single step but a journey, it may take long enough to require stopping for rest. Some stories envision inns or caravanserais that accommodate travelers, such as the Old Phoenix in Poul Anderson's *A Midsummer Tempest,* or the four "free houses" in Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman.* Commonly, travelers stumble into such a refuge after getting hopelessly lost, and perhaps caught up in darkness or bad weather; an overnight stay can let them recover from Fright Checks and fatigue.

Way stations need not be reachable from only two realms; often they're connected to many worlds, and they may move about. They can be meeting places for people from different worlds. Such encounters rarely form part of the action, but can give rise to a "shore leave" episodes, or pass on a vital hint to some mystery.

Some people may become regular visitors to a way station, but in most campaigns it's better if the heroes have a single mysterious visit – otherwise, they may be tempted to turn it into a base of operations, creating an entirely different sort of campaign! On the other hand, the travelers might become permanent residents, having all their encounters and adventures there, in effect turning the way station itself into a portal realm of sorts.

DREAMS AND TRANCES

Clarity of vision can also be taken psychologically, as a process of calming and focusing the mind, in which a reflecting surface is used to help induce a trance state (+2 to trance rolls; see **GURPS Low-Tech Companion 1: Philosophers and Kings,** p. 16). This could go with visiting other worlds in mind only (as in the Projection limitation for Jumper; see **GURPS Powers,** p. 58) – but it could also lead to physical translation.

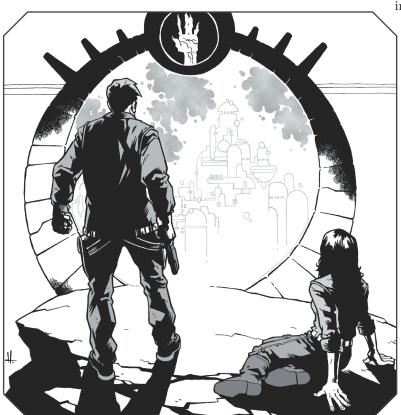A powerful enchanted mirror or magical pool might ensure a trance state suited to entering another world.

Other ways of inducing trances can also lead to arrival in a portal realm; so can dreaming, especially lucid dreaming (see *Dreaming,* p. B188). Travelers may physically vanish from Earth, or their unconscious bodies may remain and need to be cared for. And visitors may appear in the portal realm in their own bodies, or possess inhabitants of the realm, or appear in it as disembodied spirits – though this last variant is challenging to turn into an interesting campaign!

In some versions of this approach, the portal realm may not be entirely independent of the traveler. The condition of body or mind may change the land, or be changed by it (see *Blessed,* p. 14). Stephen R. Donaldson, for example, explored this premise in his Thomas Covenant novels.

MOTIVES

Whatever form it takes, a portal isn't enough to ensure the heroes visit a portal realm. You have to get them to pass through it! Certainly, reckless people might dive through without hesitation – especially if they have disadvantages like Curious, Impulsiveness, or Overconfidence. But others, with a greater sense of self-preservation or stronger emotional ties, would back away. What motivates adventurers to take the leap into the unknown?

is instead on how they adapt to their new environment. Do they set out to make lives for themselves there, or do they strive to go home, like Dorothy in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz?*

PUSH

Some people leave their native world because they *want* to. They may be fleeing from enemies, like Simon Tregarth in *Witch World,* or they might desire to explore a new realm, like Harold Shea in *The Compleat Enchanter.* Whether Earth has become intolerable and the new world is less bad, or whether they long for something more than their mundane lives, their own need is what gets them there. In some cases, they may simply choose to take their chances on a leap into the unknown; in others, their desire or desperation may attune them to a specific world.

In either case, the new world confronts the travelers with hardships of its own. If they were driven by fear, it gives them things to fear; if they were seeking something better, it has its own problems and flaws. Without this, there wouldn't be a story or a campaign! Once the heroes get to "happily ever after," the story is over. It's the GM's job to give the protagonists new and different things to be unhappy about. To satisfy the players, though, the portal realm needs to grant them more freedom to do something about their unhappiness.

A variation on this plot is the rescue story, whose hero is seeking a loved one stolen away into a magical realm. The legend of Tam Lin tells of a woman trying to save her lover from the fair folk; the film *Labyrinth* has a girl seeking the baby brother stolen by the Goblin King. Such stories almost always end in a return home, commonly after a brief visit (p. 6).

CHANCE

Some journeys to other worlds happen by accident: The traveler stumbles across a portal, gets caught up by natural or supernatural forces, or is singled out as a victim by a prankish spirit or god. In *GURPS Banestorm,* for example, new arrivals on Yrth are brought there by a spell cast centuries in the past, which seemingly chooses its subjects at random. There's no *purpose* for these particular people making the journey – neither their own nor someone else's. The focus of the campaign

PULL

In other cases, the want – or the need – is that of the portal realm: Fallen into peril, it draws people to it who can save it. This often means the travelers have a Destiny (pp. 14-15). This works particularly well with "saving the world" as a campaign theme (p. 5). It can be invoked when the visitors are children or adolescents, as in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,* where Narnia needs "sons of Adam and daughters of Eve" to be rightly ruled.

Or the need may be that of a particular society, organization, family, or individual on the other side, who seeks out assistance from the exotic realm of Earth. In this case, the protagonists are less likely to have a Destiny, but they might have special talents that make their help useful, such as Hitomi Kanzaki's psychic powers in *The Vision of Escaflowne* or Rudy Solis' magical gifts in *The Time of the Dark*. Often these are mystical or psychic capabilities that couldn't fully develop on Earth (leading to a "self-discovery" theme; see p. 5), but they may be mundane abilities the portal realm lacks.

Some portal fantasy offers a variation on this: The main character is not wholly of earthly ancestry, but is a child or descendant of the portal realm, as in *Child of a Hidden Sea* or *Nine Princes in Amber* (though Corwin's fully recovered abilities take him beyond the usual limits of portal fantasy). The protagonist is often a lost orphan, an amnesiac, or deliberately kept in ignorance by protective parents or guardians. This kind of story combines the pull of an otherworldly heritage with the push of a desire to know one's past.

REALMS AND CAMPAIGNS

Settings for portal fantasy are limited only by your imagination. Here are three examples, which you can use either as starting points for campaigns or as inspiration for inventing your own portal realms.

> *For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.*
> *– 1 Chronicles 29:15*

THE BARRENS

The Barrens is designed for a single prolonged visit. The protagonists' time there will test them, serving as a rite of passage that gives them new self-awareness. Conditions are difficult, with few sources of help, but not mortally perilous, or not immediately so; the challenge is rather the need for self-reliance.

The Realm

The Barrens is a thinly inhabited world. Most of its land has sparse vegetation; terrains with denser cover – jungle, swampland, and woodlands – occur in small patches. The soil's fertility is low, except in river basins and some volcanic regions. Settled areas are scattered and generally small; a large share of the population is nomadic foragers, fishers, hunters, and herders. There are several humanoid races adapted to different environments and behaving in different ways.

However, there's evidence that this has not always been true. Ruins dot the landscape, from single collapsing houses, temples, or watchtowers to entire cities, variously empty, squatted in, or haunted. An abandoned hoard, or one taken from a defeated foe, may contain ancient magical creations. Native inhabitants tell stories of the remote past when kings and wizards walked the earth.

There's no longer any grand overarching threat to the whole world; its magical resources have faded to a level that can't support such ambitions. But there are still conflicts on a smaller scale: bandit raids, vendettas, and even minor wars of conquest, relying partly on low-tech weapons and partly on ritual magic. The magical arts of the Barrens are best represented by Path/Book magic (*GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 121-165): Paths for the arts still remembered from the ancients, Books for compilations of obscure rituals by eccentric sorcerers. The "Path of the People" (*Thaumatology*, p. 154) offers many ordinary folk a measure of magical self-protection. Another option – for players prepared to take a more improvisational approach to the mystic arts – is to use *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic.*

The Outsiders

Travelers to the Barrens are at an age of transition, typically somewhere between their early teens and early twenties. Whatever their age, their previous experience was limited in some way – by childhood, restrictive marriages, adult responsibilities, or even confinement in a prison or mental hospital. Their journey to the Barrens is a product of *chance* (p. 8): Vast numbers of people are in similar positions, but these few are the ones who find the way to an unknown world.

The protagonists should not have amazing gifts or skills at the outset. They can plausibly be a little above average, but they shouldn't be career adventurers; 50 points is a reasonable starting level. Disadvantages or quirks that would encourage them to go exploring are a good idea. Intraparty conflict is appropriate for this kind of campaign, but it shouldn't become murderous or cruel; the main characters likely have Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) and perhaps some level of Honesty (see *Disadvantages*, pp. 16-17). Any disadvantages the GM mandates don't count against the campaign limit (p. B11).

If the adventure begins really suddenly, the travelers will have only what's in their backpacks, purses, or pockets (see *Possessions? What Possessions?*, p. 23). However, delayed departures are common in portal fantasy, allowing time to put together basic supplies and pack them conveniently. Unless the travelers are actually *on* a camping trip, though, they won't have complete camping gear or easy access to it. Let them take things they could plausibly have in their homes or dorm rooms.

Arrival

Arrival in the Barrens involves travel through an overt portal such as a door, a gate, or a narrow passage in a cave. Suddenly the explorers are in a different world. The experience isn't terrifying, but it has a dreamlike quality, requiring a roll vs. Dreaming or Will-6 to keep track of the path (though the first visitor of a party may find the way back and then bring the others through).

On the other side, the visitors come under observation by a member of a race of small scavengers. Once they let their guard down, the observer will sneak in and pick up or snatch one of their possessions – perhaps something useful, possibly something merely bright and shiny. The pursuit of the thief provides another opportunity for the travelers to get lost! Once they realize they aren't getting back immediately, they need to find a place to make camp; they can attempt Survival rolls to find shelter, water, food, or fuel.

As they continue to explore, they'll come on a traveled pathway, and further along it, an inn, where they can barter some of their possessions for food and shelter, and begin to learn the local language. During their stay, they'll also discover some of the varied races that inhabit the Barrens. This is a good time to give them hints about remnants of ancient lost magic.

Source Material

The GM seeking inspiration for portal fantasy may find it in literature, film, or television. For tips on adapting these works to your campaign, see **GURPS Adaptations.**

Books

Allston, Aaron. *Doc Sidhe.* Pastiche of Doc Savage, set in a portal realm inhabited by the fair folk.

Anderson, Poul. *Three Hearts and Three Lions.* An American caught up in a battle of World War II stumbles into the realm of Charlemagne as portrayed in French legend.

Baum, L. Frank. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.* First of a series of American fairy tales. Oz is a physical place, not a dream world. It isn't actually in an alternate reality, but Baum's writing is the source of many tropes of portal fantasy.

Boyett, Steven R. *The Architect of Sleep.* A spelunker takes a wrong turn and emerges in a world of sapient raccoons. The fantasy elements are minimal; in many ways this is nearer to science fiction, despite the low-tech setting.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There.* Another original source for the portal realm trope, though Alice's journeys turn out to be dreams.

Chant, Joy. *Red Moon and Black Mountain.* Novel from the post-Tolkien fantasy upsurge of the 1970s, in which three children take part in the battles of a magical world.

de Camp, L. Sprague and Pratt, Fletcher. *The Complete Compleat Enchanter.* Harold Shea, the hero, creates his own portals with the aid of symbolic logic – but where he goes is humorously unpredictable.

Dellamonica, A.M. *Child of a Hidden Sea.* First of a series in which a young woman from Earth travels to a magical realm of scattered islands – and discovers her heritage there.

Donaldson, Stephen R. *Lord Foul's Bane.* First of a trilogy (followed by a second trilogy and further novels) that treats a portal realm in psychological terms.

Hambly, Barbara. *The Time of the Dark.* First of a trilogy in which a young man and woman from Earth are called into a world being overwhelmed by supernatural monsters.

Lewis, C.S. *The Chronicles of Narnia.* Series of novels in which successive groups of British children travel to the magical world of Narnia, witnessing events from its creation to its apocalyptic end.

McGuire, Seanan. *Every Heart a Doorway.* Children who have lived in portal realms and come back attend a boarding school designed to meet their unusual needs.

Norton, Andre. *Witch World.* An earthman fleeing false charges is granted passage to a world of magic – and becomes a key figure in resisting invasion from a third world.

O'Donohoe, Nick. *The Magic and the Healing.* A group of student veterinarians get taken on journeys to a fantasy realm where they learn to treat magical creatures.

Smith, Sherwood. *Sasharia En Garde.* A young woman from Earth, the daughter of a king in a magical world, is carried back to her father's realm, now ruled by a usurper.

Zelazny, Roger. *Nine Princes in Amber.* First of a series about a family of interworld travelers, in which the exiled Prince Corwin regains his memory and rediscovers his heritage.

Films

Labyrinth (Jim Henson). A young child is kidnapped by the ruler of a magical realm, and his older sister goes on a quest to get him back.

Spirited Away (Hayao Miyazaki). Anime classic in which a young girl enters the spirit world and struggles to find a way home for herself and her parents.

Wizard of Oz, The (Victor Fleming). Best-known film version, and the source of the "Oz is a dream" interpretation.

Television Shows

Those Who Hunt Elves (Kazuyoshi Katayama). Anime series about three young adults transported to a fantasy world and trying to find their way home by capturing elves who carry magical markings.

Twelve Kingdoms, The (Tsuneo Kobayashi). An adolescent girl from Japan is carried into a fantasy world and discovers herself to be the heir to one of its kingdoms.

Vision of Escaflowne, The (Kazuki Akane). Anime series in which an adolescent girl from Earth becomes involved in another world's wars, fought with spells and giant robots.

Variant Arrival

A campaign in the Barrens can also begin with a single traveler from Earth. In this case, the other PCs will be natives of the Barrens. They may be in need of help, which the visitor can offer, or they might all meet at the inn and decide to travel together.

GERONTOMACHIA

Gerontomachia is the destination of a one-way journey, a realm of permanent exile. Conditions there are harsh and often perilous – but the émigrés must cope with them, lacking the option of return. And they have their own part to play in its conflicts, if they choose to.

The Realm

Gerontomachia is a world of ancient, powerful supernatural forces. Some of its human inhabitants have learned to shape and direct these forces, and the most powerful of them have created pockets of stability where civilizations can emerge. But from time to time, the ancient powers break through the surface of the natural world. Now those breakthroughs are becoming more frequent, and natural catastrophes, monsters, and mad wizards are overwhelming the peace of the realm, destroying its cities and turning the survivors into refugees. The remaining human communities are caught up in a desperate war and groping toward an uncertain alliance.

Gerontomachia is home to three distinct forms of extraordinary abilities. Mortal practitioners normally tap their own vital energy through mystic disciplines. Innately supernatural beings, and a few very potent humans, can wield the raw energy of creation. In between these two are ritualists, whose mediumistic arts let them petition for transcendental aid. All of these capabilities can be represented in terms of "magic as powers." Suitable modifiers are, respectively, Chi, Cosmic, and Spirit. **GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers** offers examples of the first, and the cosmic abilities of **GURPS Powers: The Weird** of the second.

The Outsiders

The journey to Gerontomachia is a result of *push* rather than *pull* (see pp. 8-9): the adventurers are refugees from their native world. The most straightforward option is for them to be soldiers on the losing side in a war; for example, they might be Jacobites after the Glorious Revolution, southerners after the American Civil War, Whites after the Russian Revolution, or troops of a nation destroyed in some future conflict. Other groups with combat skills – such as police, criminal gangs, or the crew of a small military vehicle – could play a similar role. Whatever the background, their peril should be sufficient to make flight into the utterly unknown seem a lesser evil.

The protagonists can start out with technologically advanced equipment – but no way to resupply! A vehicle will likely be out of fuel in days; ammo and personal gear may last weeks, if husbanded, but not forever. And the threats they face are hard targets, not to be wiped out with a few rounds of ammunition. In the long run, their organizational skills and unit cohesion will be more valuable. At the GM's option, some adventurers may turn out to have a talent for Gerontomachia's mystical arts – a character with serious training in a martial art might follow this path, for example. (On the other hand, a chronic screw-up or a noncombatant may turn out to have unexpected gifts.)

Gerontomachia's chaos has created a lot of refugees from destroyed cities and empires; the heroes might not be identified as visitors from another world, especially if they make an effort to fit in. How much to reveal about themselves, and to how many people, can be an important decision for the campaign.

Arrival

Arrival in Gerontomachia is the result of going off course. In desperate retreat from an overwhelming military defeat, the protagonists (and any Allies or Dependents) get lost and stray down an unknown path. Eventually they discover that they don't know where they are, and their navigational aids don't work: charts don't match the landmarks or coastlines, and GPS systems get no signals. At this point they should have to make Fright Checks, if they haven't before.

While searching for a place to ask questions, the exiles encounter a battle. On one side are human beings like themselves, though using pre-gunpowder technology. On the other are a pair of huge monsters, resembling the Cyclopes of Greek myth, standing 40' tall and strong in proportion, and wielding potent ranged attacks – a gaze that hurls lightning and a roar that creates a massive shock wave. Standing between the two are human thaumaturges with some command of their own over the elements, but not on the scale of their foes. Will the refugees enter the fray?

> *"That would be no good," said the wizard, "not without a mighty Warrior, even a Hero. I tried to find one; but warriors are busy fighting one another in distant lands, and in this neighbourhood heroes are scarce, or simply not to be found . . . That is why I settled on burglary . . ."*
>
> – J.R.R. Tolkien, **The Hobbit**

SEIHOU

Seihou is a setting inspired by anime and by the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West* (also known as *Monkey*, after its most vivid character). It's designed for repeated short visits. Most journeys there will help the visitors take a step toward enlightenment, so there will be gaps between trips while they discover new spiritual challenges in their lives.

One plausible basis for a continuing storyline is to have the travelers meet a pilgrim: a monk or sage on a quest of some kind. If they travel with him and offer their help, they can learn useful lessons and perhaps even become his disciples. Aiding in his quest may even be their Destiny.

PORTAL REALMS AS TIMELINES

The settings of portal fantasy aren't necessarily "alternate worlds" in the science-fiction sense of locations on a dimension of time that runs sideways rather than forward and backward. A portal realm is often reached by a leap of faith that transcends measurement. Still, including one in an Infinite Worlds campaign – as a weird or myth parallel (pp. B527-528) – is an option. A portal realm might also be reached through a critical failure on Electronics Operation (Parachronic), in which case *getting back* may be a problem!

● In some cases, it's "simply" a question of figuring out the parachronic coordinates that brought the adventurers to the portal realm, and then setting up a reverse journey. After accomplishing that, the travelers can return home – and the world will likely end up on the Closed list, due to the presence of magic.

● It might be difficult to get the parachronic conveyor to work. Perhaps it was damaged by the anomalous transition, and the resources for repair are hard to come by – especially if the operator is using Electronics Repair (Parachronic) at default. Or maybe the presence of magic makes technology unreliable (e.g., -5 to all skills above a certain TL).

● It may be completely impossible to get back by technological means! The portal realm could be a quantum sargasso (p. B546) – or perhaps a world where electronics or advanced technology in general don't work. In that case, the campaign turns into something close to standard portal fantasy.

The Realm

Despite its being named for the legendary Western Paradise, a sojourn in Seihou does not guarantee enlightenment in a single lifetime, nor is the realm free of sin (attachment) or suffering. However, it's a benign land whose physical dangers and moral evils are smaller than those of Earth, as in light fantasy, children's fantasy, and some anime. It can serve as the setting for a travelogue that encounters new creatures, races, and customs at every turn. Death is possible, but many threats are of captivity, mind control, or bodily transformation – and can be reversed without permanent harm.

Seihou is also a highly magical land; in *GURPS* terms, it has high mana, allowing anyone to attempt to cast spells. The standard magic system (pp. B234-253 and *GURPS Magic*) is suited to a campaign set there. Knowledge of one or two spells is common, and even animals are likely to have instinctive magical abilities. Most animals have IQ 6-8 and are able to speak, though many species are Bestial. A few, such as foxes and ravens, are more intelligent than that, and may be able to learn magic through study.

The Outsiders

Seihou is designed for a *pull* campaign (pp. 8-9): those who visit it are brought there by their karma. Treat this as a Destiny (p. B48). It may bring them back repeatedly over the course of their lives; a campaign might have installments set several years apart, starting with travelers in their teens and progressing from there.

As part of their karma, the travelers are bound to one another. They might have traces of memory of each other, which can be treated as Racial Memory (Passive) (p. B78). They may also possess Reawakened (p. B80), and the GM may grant them suitable skills that aren't available – or aren't commonly known – on Earth. At the GM's discretion, a visitor might have Wild Talent with Retention (p. B99) to represent sudden recollection of skills from past lives. A mutual Sense of Duty (p. B153) is possible but not mandatory: two individuals or subgroups could be linked by conflict in past lives, which they were brought together to work off. A pair of voyagers may share a Special Rapport (p. B88), indicating a particularly close karmic bond.

Arrival

A number of Japanese adolescents (age 14-15, and in their last year of compulsory schooling) are in Kyoto, whether as natives or as visitors. They all notice a mysterious, archaic-looking building that passersby seem to be ignoring; when they approach it, they see one another, and some of them have a sense of recognition, though they're strangers. Exploring the building (which is open and seemingly unoccupied), they discover a pool inside, with a bright reflective surface – one in which their images are surrounded by huge trees. Looking around, they find that the city's buildings and streets are nowhere to be seen.

Their initial encounter is with a fox who starts following them. This is a sapient animal, and an unusually clever one, with DX 13, IQ 9, and Per 13; he also knows a few magic spells. He may play tricks on the visitors, or sneak in to steal food or an attractive possession. Depending on how they react, he may find them entertaining and stay around to see what else they'll do. If cornered, though, he'll speak to them – in fluent Japanese – bargaining for his freedom.

A journey of a thousand li starts under one's feet.

*– **Tao Te Ching,** Chapter 64*

TRAVELERS

Mighty-thewed warriors, cunning rogues, mysterious spell-casters – everyone knows what fantasy adventurers are like. But heroes of portal fantasy are often none of these! Their most important quality is that they aren't native to the magical lands they visit. Even if the visitors are skilled in combat or crime, the portal realm's inhabitants probably go about these activities in ways that are unfamiliar to them.

THE REFERENCE SOCIETY

Some character traits reflect, not a person's inherent qualities, but how that individual stands in a particular society. For example, an American in 1900 with TL6 technological skills has neither High TL nor Low TL. In the world of Greek legend at TL1, though, someone with exactly the same skills would count as having High TL 5. Traits such as High TL and Low TL define how an adventurer's access to skills and equipment compares to what's normal where that character's adventures take place.

The heroes of portal fantasies move between societies in which their character traits would not be defined the same way. But it isn't convenient to have multiple character sheets with different point totals. Instead, the GM should pick one society as the campaign's *reference society,* and define character traits according to how that society sees them. This ought to be the same society for all the PCs, so that the same entries on character sheets mean the same thing for everyone. It would be awkward if a medieval knight had Low TL 5 (relative to visitors from the 2010s) while his friend the computer programmer had High TL 5 (relative to the local medieval village)!

For a campaign of permanent exile to a portal realm, or one about a prolonged stay, pick one of the societies of the portal realm as the reference society. This often works for a campaign about a series of shorter visits, too. But if a significant part of the action takes place in the adventurers' home, and especially if people from the portal realm can pay return visits there, it may work better to treat the home society as the reference society.

Yet it can be a challenge to figure out how a college student from, say, present-day Boston or Tokyo would look to people from a different and unfamiliar world. And providing the information needed to do so may spoil the surprise of encountering the new world, and take away the sense of discovery that's a payoff of the campaign.

There are two handy tricks for getting around this: *zero-point features* and *meta-traits*.

ZERO-POINT FEATURES

Some traits depend on how people in your native society see you, or on what they know about you. If you visit an entirely different society that has no knowledge of those socially defined categories, you won't have the associated traits there! Yet they may still be part of your life story, and thus worth noting. To do this, write them on your character sheet as usual, but with cost [0].

Traits that sometimes or always work this way in portal fantasy include:

Claim to Hospitality: In most campaigns, the social group is left behind.

Clerical Investment: Unless the same religion exists in the portal realm, this won't mean anything to its inhabitants. It might matter to other travelers, though; see *Rank.*

Contacts, Enemies, and *Patrons:* These inhabit a specific world and aren't likely to appear in a new one (though a *powerful* Enemy or Patron might). This doesn't apply to Allies or Dependents, who can perfectly well come along through a portal – and often should!

Cultural Adaptability and *Cultural Familiarity:* These usually don't apply to the cultures of a strange world. At the GM's discretion, Xeno-Adaptability *might* allow an experienced interworld traveler to avoid cultural unfamiliarity penalties in both (or all) of a campaign's realms.

Debt and *Independent Income:* In a new world, you can neither pay nor collect an old world's debts.

Duty: Nearly all such obligations are left behind when you pass through a portal.

Fashion Sense: If your ability comes from deep familiarity with your native culture's styles in clothing and grooming, you'll lose it in a new society; treat it as a feature. If it's innate genius that works in whatever culture you visit, it remains an advantage.

Favor: If someone in your original world "owes you one," you'll be unable to collect until you get back.

Intolerance: If your prejudice is directed at a group that doesn't exist in the portal realm, you no longer have anyone to dislike – unless a member of that group came with you!

Legal Enforcement Powers and *Legal Immunity:* These both cease to exist in the new world.

Rank: This is defined within a particular organization. If a significant part of that group comes with you *and* is cohesive enough to keep functioning, Rank may still be meaningful.

(Gamers with **GURPS Social Engineering** might want to use its rules for repricing Rank, if most of the organization that grants it is left behind.) Rank in a small or less cohesive group is a feature.

Reputation: All your established Reputations are forgotten in the new world.

Secret: In many cases this won't matter on the other side of the portal.

Security Clearance: Classified information gets left behind.

Social Regard: Usually, whatever special social category you belong to is unknown in the portal realm.

Social Stigma: Many stigmas cease to apply when you enter a new world. Criminal Record, Disowned, Minority Group, Subjugated, and Valuable Property don't carry over, and Excommunicated, Ignorant, Minor, Second-Class Citizen, or Uneducated may not. (Excommunicated *might* transfer if both realms have the same gods, if the gods are real and can make their feelings known to their worshippers.)

Status: In most campaigns, this is lost in a new world, in the same way as Reputation, making it a feature. However, the GM may rule that your air of confidence, your pride in your possessions, and the attitudes of your companions make your Status visible in your new world; if so, treat it as an advantage or disadvantage as usual.

Tenure: Your job may be waiting for you when you return, but you don't have it in the portal realm!

Wealth: Assets you leave behind on Earth have no significance in your new world. Assets you take with you are subject to special rules; see *Wealth and Possessions* (pp. 22-24).

Zeroed: Whatever the authorities of present-day Earth know about you is irrelevant once you're through the portal. The same reasoning applies to Alternate Identity and Secret Identity.

Rules change in the Reaches.
– Ursula Le Guin,
A Wizard of Earthsea

META-TRAITS

Anyone from Earth who enters a portal realm may have certain traits there simply by virtue of coming from Earth. These can be combined into a meta-trait. Players needn't know what specific traits such a meta-trait includes when they build their characters. The GM can take its point value into account when deciding how many points to allow for character creation.

The following traits are likely choices for a "person from Earth" meta-trait. For an example, see *Transmundane* (p. 18).

Charisma: It's common for travelers from Earth, even if they were quite ordinary there, to become leaders or otherwise influential in portal realms. One way to represent this is to allow them a level of Charisma. This may be simply a narrative convention, or it might be a personal aura acquired during the journey between worlds. Returnees from portal realms, such as Thomas the Rhymer or Coleridge's ancient mariner, may have the same quality on Earth (see p. 20).

High TL: Portal realms in fantasy are nearly always less advanced than Earth. Grant one level of High TL per tech level of difference.

Mundane Background: This disadvantage is a central trope of portal fantasy! Nearly everyone on Earth has it, but it isn't worth any points . . . on Earth. In a realm of magic or the supernatural, it's worth the full -10 points.

Oblivious: In a campaign that assumes substantially different cultures, failure to understand others' motivations is a natural result of those differences.

Zeroed: If the portal realm's magical arts include divination, visitors from other worlds may not be subject to it. The advantage is worth the full 10 points in a magical society where soothsayers are common and commonly consulted; if true prophets and seers are hardly ever met, treat it as a perk.

TRAITS

Certain advantages, disadvantages, and skills merit further discussion when creating characters for portal-realm campaigns.

ADVANTAGES

Several advantages are especially applicable to characters in portal fantasy, sometimes as variants of the usual versions.

Blessed

An additional form of Blessed may apply to some travelers to portal realms, particularly those who are brought there because the realm needs them (*Pull*, pp. 8-9):

The King's Two Bodies: Similar to Special Rapport (p. B88), but with a country. You are aware of the condition of the land you rule, regardless of distance and without a dice roll. Anything that injures the land injures you, and vice versa. This works by analogy and metaphor: if the king is crippled, the army can't fight; if the queen is barren, the crops will fail. Magic or holy ritual that heals you can heal the land. You are not specifically aware of any individuals within the land. *10 points.*

Destiny

A suitable Destiny is one way to account for characters getting to a portal realm (*Pull*, pp. 8-9). This is generally at the Minor Advantage level ("you are fated to play a small part in a larger story"), but an individual traveler may have a higher level. Indeed, one visitor may have Destiny at *any* level, even in a campaign where the party as a whole does not.

Some portal fantasies have a variant of this advantage.

Destiny (Heritage)

You have a special background by virtue of your descent; for example, you were born in a portal realm and exiled to Earth in early childhood, or your ancestors fled to Earth and concealed their origins. There may be hints of your true identity in obscure records, family legends, or mysterious artifacts, but not enough to tell you the truth . . . not until you enter the portal realm! If these hints come from your own memories, take Racial Memory (p. 16) as well. If you have the potential for special abilities, that's a secret advantage (below).

Gizmos

"Little gadgets from Earth" is a possible theme for an adventurer in a portal realm. This is only suited to cinematic campaigns! Travelers in realistic campaigns must deal with supplies running out, and lost or damaged equipment not being replaceable.

No Mundane Background

10 points

Most Earth people who visit portal realms have Mundane Background (p. B144), and that's included in the standard meta-trait (see *Transmundane*, p. 18). If for some reason you don't have this disadvantage, list its absence as a separate advantage.

Patrons

One way to get to a portal realm is to be sent or called there by a god or other powerful entity. This can be defined as a Patron, typically with Minimal Intervention, Secret, and Special Abilities. Being summoned or brought by a native inhabitant, such as a mage, is also possible. The ability to do this counts as Special Abilities, but the summoner is usually less powerful otherwise – whence the need for help!

Acquiring a native inhabitant's help, instruction, and protection in play is also possible. This normally requires a "Very Good" or "Excellent" reaction after at least a month together – and a "Bad" or worse reaction gives -5 to future rolls. For detailed rules, see *Building Trust* (**GURPS Social Engineering,** pp. 40-41) and *Finding a Master* (**Social Engineering,** p. 41). The GM may choose to award the Patron without charging earned character points, if the relationship has been roleplayed appropriately.

Perks

Two perks are especially appropriate for portal fantasy.

Advanced Learning

You've managed to acquire one particular "book-learned" skill despite having Social Stigma (Uneducated). If you later buy off the Social Stigma, this perk loses its value. In compensation, reduce the cost to remove the Social Stigma by one point per Advanced Learning perk, to a maximum of four points saved. Five perks automatically buy off the disadvantage.

This perk comes from **GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School,** and especially suits child characters (pp. 18-19) – particularly prodigies in such fields as Hobby (Chess), Mathematics, Musical Composition, or Tactics.

Weapon Adaptation

You've adapted the moves used with one group of weapons to another class of weapons. This lets you wield the weapons covered by one weapon skill using a different skill and its techniques, with all the benefits and drawbacks of that skill. Each adaptation is a separate perk; e.g., Weapon Adaptation (Shortsword to Smallsword) lets you use the Smallsword skill to fight when equipped with a Shortsword weapon – complete with fencing parries, superior retreats, and encumbrance penalties.

This perk, from **GURPS Martial Arts,** is useful in campaigns that follow common portal-fantasy tropes about combat; see *Combat Experience* (pp. 29-30). While intended for melee weapons, visitors to portal realms may apply it to missile weapons if the style of use is comparable; e.g., Weapon Adaptation (Crossbow to Guns) permits using a pistol crossbow with Guns (Pistol).

Secret Advantages

A portal realm is an excellent place to discover a secret advantage (p. B33), especially if the campaign theme includes self-discovery (p. 5). This fits easily into a "push" campaign (p. 8), with a character's unfulfilled potentialities being a source of chronic frustration. However, it can also work in a "pull" campaign (pp. 8-9), where the adventurers are sought out for gifts they didn't know they had – or even a "chance" campaign (p. 8), where the point is that they might never have known what they were capable of.

Possession

This advantage is normally under your control, allowing you to choose your host and move from host to host. But if you travel to a portal realm mentally (*Dreams and Trances*, pp. 7-8), you might not have that much choice! You may be drawn to one specific host (in a way analogous to Special Rapport; see p. 16) and be unable to change hosts. If you leave that body, or are cast out (see *Exorcism*, p. 18), you return to your own body in your world of origin. This version of Possession is a zero-point feature.

When you change bodies in this way, your host's racial template replaces your own. You retain your skills and mental attributes, but acquire your host's physical attributes. If you're going to remain in that host for the campaign's duration, the GM may allow you to choose those attributes and require you to pay for them out of your character-point budget; in that case, your original physical attributes and racial template are zero-point features!

If you repeatedly travel to the new world, the GM should draw up a template for each host you occupy. This isn't an excuse for the GM to give you a damaged or defective body! A fair guideline is for the GM to spend as many points on physical attributes and appearance as you spent on those traits for your original body.

In all cases, you won't take any physical possessions with you – not even clothing. The GM may simply decide what your new body owns.

Racial Memory

see pp. B78-79

The Passive form of this advantage can represent fragmentary knowledge of a portal realm, from childhood memories or ancestral lore, to accompany *Destiny (Heritage)* (p. 15).

Reawakened

see p. B80

If you're a returnee (pp. 4, 20), you may come back to Earth long after you left (see *Brief Visits*, p. 6). The time before you entered the portal realm might be effectively a "past life," even though you didn't actually *die*. If it was long enough ago, you may have skills for which teachers are no longer available.

Resistant

see pp. B80-81

People from present-day Earth could be Resistant to Propaganda (usually at the +3 level) due to having been exposed to it since infancy; this is an "Occasional" effect. A broader version would be Resistant to Influence Skills, which count as "Common" – Immunity to Influence Skills [15] is the same as Indomitable (p. B60).

Special Rapport

see p. B88

A traveler to a portal realm may discover this kind of unique bond with a native of the realm. This can provide an explanation for how the visitor got there in the first place – a variant of *Pull* (pp. 8-9).

Unusual Background

see p. B96

In some cases, a visitor to a portal realm has capabilities that aren't available to its natives. These can be represented as an Unusual Background. That might mean being able to take advantages or skills that are unknown in the portal realm, if the GM thinks they'll give the visitor a significant edge there – though the usual examples (spells, cinematic skills, supernatural advantages, etc.) won't apply to visitors from Earth. But it can also represent a special benefit that isn't easily described using existing traits; see *Trader* (pp. 21-22) for an example.

In a sense, *all* visitors to portal realms have "unusual backgrounds": they come from other worlds! But this isn't worth points if it doesn't grant tangible benefits, or if existing advantages already cover the benefits it gives. For example, access to equipment and skills more advanced than those of the portal realm is represented by High TL (see p. 14) – though taking High TL *could* require an Unusual Background in a world where technological skills are as rare as Magery is on Earth.

Wild Talent

see pp. B99-100

This advantage can grant the use of skills native to the portal realm but uncommon or unheard of on Earth – spells, for instance, making it one way for a mage-to-be (p. 20) to discover a talent for magic! The Retention enhancement (+25%) lets the user learn some of those skills permanently. If Wild Talent works *only* for portal-realm skills unknown on Earth, add Focused (-20%).

DISADVANTAGES

The following disadvantages are particularly likely to afflict characters in portal fantasy.

Amnesia

see p. B123

Partial Amnesia can come into a portal-fantasy campaign in two characteristic ways:

● Exiled natives of a portal realm may have forgotten their true origins through immersion in Earthly life. This suits those who left as adults; those exiled as small children, or the descendants of exiles, should instead have Racial Memory (p. 16). Return to the portal realm might lead to the restoration of memory. In a "push" campaign (p. 8), the first stirrings of memory could motivate an exile to seek out a portal.

● Earthly adventurers returned from a portal realm may have a veil of forgetfulness drawn over their sojourn there. This can help explain why the existence of portals and portal realms isn't generally known.

Curious

see p. B129

Some level of this disadvantage can help explain why people would *knowingly* go into the mysterious land beyond a portal.

But I cannot help my strangeness. All my family are strange, for we are all always – strangers. We are inconvenient nuisances, but it is not our fault. We fall between two worlds, and neither can fit us in.
– Joy Chant, **Red Moon and Black Mountain**

Delusions

see p. B130

Finding oneself in a portal realm sometimes gives rise to the Delusion that its people and events aren't real ("derealization," in psychological language). This can be anything from a Minor Delusion, if it simply produces odd behavior, to a Severe one, if it results in suicidal risk-taking or horrendous crimes against inhabitants of the portal realm (as in Stephen Donaldson's *Lord Foul's Bane*).

Destiny

see pp. B131-132

This works much like the advantageous form (pp. 14-15).

Honesty

see pp. B138-139

Part of the appeal of portal realms as settings is greater freedom of action – which often means "less law and order"! For example, shortly after her arrival, Dorothy Gale is told that Kansas is a civilized country, but Oz is not. Such differences create opportunities for this disadvantage to come into play.

Pacifism

see p. B148

In many campaigns, it's quite plausible for visitors from Earth to have the Reluctant Killer version of this disadvantage. Combat in fantasy settings tends to be up close and personal. Realistically, many people who stray into such worlds won't be accustomed to this; it would be particularly likely for children to feel this way, and perhaps disturbing for them not to. On the other hand, some portal fantasies disregard this issue, and the GM could choose to do so as well.

Phobias

see pp. B148-150

A portal realm provides opportunities to experience such conditions as Hoplophobia, Manaphobia, or Teratophobia – or in some cases, to acquire them! A sufferer from Xenophobia could be in constant and perhaps crippling terror there, and might never enter a portal realm voluntarily. In contrast, Technophobia is reduced to a -5-point disadvantage in low-tech portal realms.

Secret

see pp. B152-153

Being a visitor from another world could certainly attract unwelcome attention – and possibly worse! Many travelers will want to keep it secret.

Social Stigma

see pp. B155-156

For most people, Social Stigma (Uneducated) is worth -5 points and gives -1 to reactions. It's normal for children to lack education – but they also have Social Stigma (Minor), worth -5 points and giving -2 to reactions when trying to deal with others as an adult. They get no extra penalty for lack of education, which is *expected;* in their case, Social Stigma (Uneducated) is worth 0 points. A child may take up to four levels of the Advanced Learning perk (p. 15), or can gain full access to "book-learned" skills as an Unusual Background worth 5 points, but will still have the legal disabilities of a minor. (The GM may opt to disregard this for child PCs, especially in a cinematic campaign.)

Ordinarily, a child who reaches adult years but hasn't been educated trades Social Stigma (Minor) for Social Stigma (Uneducated), at no cost difference. One who gains a normal adult education loses Social Stigma (Minor) *and* the Unusual Background (it's not *unusual* for adults), again at no net difference in cost.

Weirdness Magnet

see p. B161

If portals to other worlds exist, anyone with this disadvantage is almost guaranteed to stumble over them!

Xenophilia

see p. B162

Being a xenophile doesn't necessarily compel you to enter a portal realm – but it can make the experience of being there fascinating. Conversely, if you're visibly different from the native inhabitants, any of them with Xenophilia will take a friendly (perhaps *too* friendly!) interest in you . . .

> *I met a traveler from an antique land.*
> — *Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"*

SKILLS

A number of skills are really useful for heroes of portal fantasy! Others have specialties that apply to portal realms – including skills that specialize by planet type, terrain, culture, or the like. And still others work *differently.*

Administration

see p. B174

Anyone who has attended college, performed military service, or worked for a large corporation or a government agency has experience in dealing with bureaucracies. Most portal realms seem to be run far less bureaucratically! It's plausible to allow people from Earth to have a modest level of Administration skill just from getting through everyday life.

Cartography

see p. B183

A roll against Cartography allows you to draw a map of unfamiliar terrain, which you can subsequently use as a resource for finding your way (see *The Lay of the Land,* pp. 25-26).

Connoisseur

Some additional specialties can be useful in a portal-fantasy campaign – particularly for traders. Examples are Arms and Armor, Clothing, Cuisine, Horses, Jewelry, and Rare Books (*not* the same as Literature). A villainous NPC may specialize in Slaves (for beautiful or talented slaves, not common servants or field hands).

Skill defaults, at the usual -3, are: Armoury (Body Armor, Melee Weapons, or Missile Weapons) for Arms and Armor; Sewing for Clothing; Cooking for Cuisine; Animal Handling (Equines) for Horses; Jeweler for Jewelry; Artist (Calligraphy, Graphic Design, or Illumination) or Leatherworking for Rare Books; and Artist (Body Art or Sculpting) or Teaching for Slaves.

Current Affairs

In many fantasy settings, news travels slowly. Except for the Regional specialty for a city, the penalty for being out of touch is -1 per *week* instead of per day – but knowledge obtained from a successful roll is much less current. The standard news media are local gossip and visits from traveling bards; letters from informed people in faraway places are the equivalent of subscribing to a news service.

Dreaming

If portal realms are reached through dreams (*Dreams and Trances,* pp. 7-8), a traveler who has visited such a realm may be able to return by making a Dreaming roll.

Exorcism

Travelers who arrive in portal realms in disembodied form, and either remain that way or possess local inhabitants, can be forced to leave using this skill. In this case, the ritual's effectiveness depends not on the culture of the *traveler,* but on that of the god, spirit, or other power that granted the visitor the ability to enter the portal realm. At the GM's discretion, Exorcism might also work on travelers who assume bodily form on appearing in a portal realm.

Hidden Lore

You can specialize in a particular portal realm whose existence isn't generally known. This includes knowledge of settlements and other important sites, and their general locations; rulers and powerful entities; and the major ways in which the laws of nature are different.

Law

A new specialty is useful in some portal realms, especially for a savior (p. 21):

Comparative: Similarly to Theology (Comparative), this is knowledge of the similarities and differences between legal systems. Use this specialty, in particular, to devise a legal code or write a constitution for a people, polity, or society that lacks one, or that has a badly flawed one that needs major reforms. The Law of any region and field routinely studied by scholars in your game world defaults to this specialty at -5.

TEMPLATES

Several character types turn up repeatedly in portal fantasy. These aren't occupations in the normal sense – visiting portal realms is usually too far from normal experience to become a job, career, or social role! Rather, they're specific ways in which a character can fit into a portal realm.

Represent your occupation before you entered the portal realm by adding further skills or other traits. To pay for these, the GM should allow some extra character points over and above the point cost of the campaign's usual template, and/or permit taking more disadvantages than the template includes. The use of templates isn't mandatory. An ordinary college student, office worker, or mechanic without special adventuring skills can be built with knowledge, occupational, and recreational skills that reflect life before becoming an interworld castaway.

I wanted the feeling of romance and the sense of wonder I had known as a kid.
– Robert Heinlein,
Glory Road

Most of the templates in this section include a meta-trait based on typical assumptions of present-day portal fantasy.

Transmundane

20 points

Advantages: Charisma 1 [5]; High TL 5* [25].
Disadvantages: Mundane Background [-10].

> * A typical level based on the difference between Earth's current TL8 and the TL3 of many fantasy worlds. Adjust this to fit the campaign premise.

CHILD

0 points

You never completely stopped believing in magic, and it turns out you were right! You've crossed into a new world where legends and fairy tales are real, and sometimes frightening. But it also gives you more freedom and more responsibility than children have on Earth, forcing you and your companions to grow.

Your adventures may have a goal such as rescuing a younger sibling, or preventing a parent from dying (as in C.S. Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew* or Edward Eager's *Knight's Castle*). This can count as a Higher Purpose.

On this template, Native Language (Accented) isn't literally an accent, but reflects a smaller vocabulary, simpler sentence structure, and difficult in reading and pronouncing some words. Math-Shy is unfamiliarity with advanced arithmetic: -1 to Mathematics and related skills. Children in fantasy realms commonly have as much freedom of action as adults, so they lack Social Stigma (Minor) and instead have Social Stigma (Uneducated), which makes most book-learned skills unavailable – though Advanced Learning (p. 15) can partially compensate for this. No Mundane Background (p. 15) cancels out the Mundane Background included in Transmundane – children are not closed off to the possibility of magic!

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 9 [-20]; IQ 9 [-20]; HT 11 [10].
Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9 [0]; Will 11 [10]; Per 9 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].
Advantages: No Mundane Background [10] *and* Transmundane [20]. ● 20 points chosen from among ST +1 [10], HT +1 [10], Per +1 [5], Basic Move +1 [5], Advanced Learning 1-4 [1/level], Animal Empathy [5], Appearance (Attractive *or* Handsome/Beautiful) [4 or 12], Daredevil [15], Fit [5], Gizmos [5/gizmo], Higher Purpose [5], Magery 0 [5], True Faith [15], Voice [10], or additional Charisma [5/level].
Disadvantages: Math-Shy [-1]; Native Language (Accented) [-2]; Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5]; *and* Social Stigma (Uneducated) [-5]. ● -10 points chosen from among Bad Sight [-10], Gluttony [-5*], Impulsiveness [-10*], Oblivious [-5], Overconfidence [-5*], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], Short Attention Span [-10*], Shyness (Mild *or* Severe) [-5 or -10], Stubbornness [-5], Truthfulness [-5*], or Xenophilia [-10*].
Skills: *Three* of Brawling, Hobby Skill (DX-based), Liquid Projector (Squirt Gun), or Sewing, all (E) DX [1]-9; Boating (Sailboat *or* Unpowered), Climbing, Dancing, Riding (Horse), Sports (any), Stealth, Throwing, or Wrestling, all (A) DX-1 [1]-8; Sleight of Hand (H) DX-2 [1]-7; First Aid, Games (any), Gardening, Hobby Skill (IQ-based), or Housekeeping, all (E) IQ [1]-9; Animal Handling (any), Astronomy (Observational), Fast-Talk, or Navigation (Land *or* Sea), all (A) IQ-1 [1]-8; Leadership or Public Speaking, both (A) IQ [1]-9†; Artist (Drawing *or* Painting), Mimicry (Animal Sounds *or* Bird Calls), Musical Instrument (any), or Naturalist, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-7; Singing or Swimming, both (E) HT [1]-11; Hiking or Running, both (A) HT-1 [1]-10; Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1]-10; or Fishing or Scrounging, both (E) Per [1]-9.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Includes +1 from Charisma (in Transmundane).

Customization Notes

This template is designed for a boy or girl at the edge of adolescence, perhaps age 12. For younger or older children, adjust attributes down or up (see p. B20). *Much* younger children may have Innumerate [-5] instead of Math-Shy, and know only the spoken form of their native language.

EXPLORER

100 points

You have skills that let you make your way in a strange land. Exploring can be a profession, but you may also have gained these skills while traveling for other reasons – from personal curiosity to a holy pilgrimage.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 11 [10].
Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].
Advantages: Transmundane [20]. ● 15 points chosen from among Per +1 to +3 [5/level], Absolute Direction [5], Danger Sense [15], Fearlessness [2/level], Fit [5] *or* Very Fit [15], Gizmos [5/gizmo], Hard to Kill [2/level], Language Talent [10], or Sensitive [5] *or* Empathy [15].
Disadvantages: -10 points chosen from among Callous [-5], Code of Honor (Gentleman's *or* Soldier's) [-10], Curious [-5*], Honesty [-10*], Loner [-5*], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10], Sense of Duty (Fellow explorers) [-5], Social Stigma (Minority Group) [-10], Stubbornness [-5], or Xenophilia [-10*].
Primary Skills: Gesture (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Observation (A) Per+1 [4]-12; *and* Survival (any land terrain) (A) Per+2 [8]-13.
Secondary Skills: Navigation (Land *or* Sea) (A) IQ [2]-11. ● *One* of Anthropology, Diplomacy, Geography (Physical *or* Political), Linguistics, Mathematics (Surveying), Naturalist, Psychology, Sociology, or Surgery (Field-Expedient), all (H) IQ [4]-11; or Body Language (A) Per+1 [4]-12.
Background Skills: First Aid (E) IQ [1]-11 *and* Leadership (A) IQ [1]-11†. ● *Either* Cartography *or* Writing, both (A) IQ-1 [1]-10. ● *One* of Boating (Sailboat *or* Unpowered), Riding (any), or Stealth, all (A) DX-1 [1]-10; or Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-10. ● *One* of Leatherworking or Sewing, both (E) DX [1]-11; or Carpentry or Masonry, both (E) IQ [1]-11.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Includes +1 from Charisma (in Transmundane).

Mage-to-Be

90 points

At the start of the campaign, you're unaware of your magical capabilities – life on Earth hasn't given them a chance to manifest themselves. You must buy off the Mundane Background included in Transmundane before actually learning magic (see *Learning Magic,* pp. 30-32). However, your awakening magical talent may subject you to Absent-Mindedness, Nightmares, Weirdness Magnet, or Xenophilia, which you can buy off once you start casting spells or performing rituals.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.00 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Magery 0 [5] *and* Transmundane [20]. ● 30 points chosen from among IQ +1 [20], Eidetic Memory [5] *or* Photographic Memory [10], Language Talent [10], Magery 1+ [10/level], Single-Minded [5], Visualization [10], or Wild Talent 1 [20].

Disadvantages: -15 points chosen from among Absent-Mindedness [-15], Clueless [-10], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Nightmares [-5*], Oblivious [-5], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], Weirdness Magnet [-15], Workaholic [-5], or Xenophilia [-10*].

Primary and Secondary Skills: Research (A) IQ+1 [4]-13. ● *One* of Anthropology, Archaeology, Computer Programming, Mathematics (Pure), Philosophy (any), or Theology (any), all (H) IQ [4]-12.

Background Skills: *One* of Sleight of Hand (H) DX-1 [2]-9; Occultism or Poetry, both (A) IQ [2]-12; Fortune-Telling (A) IQ+1 [2]-13†; Artist (any), Cryptography, or Religious Ritual (any), all (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Dreaming or Meditation, both (H) Will-1 [2]-11; or Esoteric Medicine (H) Per-1 [2]-11.

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

† Includes +1 from Charisma (in Transmundane).

Customization Notes

This template assumes the use of standard (mana-based) ***GURPS Magic,*** for which Magery 0 is usually a prerequisite. It also works for other varieties of magic that require or greatly benefit from Magery (Ritual Path magic, some other forms of flexible magic, many versions of Path/Book magic). If spells can be cast without Magery (e.g., in a high-mana setting), the mandatory Magery 0 can be replaced with another 5 points of optional advantages.

In a "magic as powers" setting (p. 32, and see also ***GURPS Thaumatology***), remove both Magery 0 *and* further levels of Magery from the template, and add another 5 points of optional advantages. These advantages can include a suitable power Talent, such as Chinese Elemental Talent (***GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers***) or Sorcery Talent (***GURPS Thaumatology: Sorcery***).

In a high-powered campaign, a mage-to-be may have more expensive advantages: Gadgeteer (perhaps specialized to spells or rituals), multiple levels of Magery, one or more versions of Path/Book Adept, or Ritual Adept (for Ritual Path magic). To allow purchase of such impressive traits, raise the template cost by 50 points. Such a character could act as a magical equivalent of a savior (p. 21).

Returnee

0 points

If it's possible to travel to a portal realm, it may be possible to come back. Returnees are likely to have abilities gained during their sojourns. These could be entirely mundane, similar to those a traveler or explorer might acquire by living in another country. If time passes differently in the portal realm (see *Brief Visits,* p. 6), it may affect skill options: an adult who entered a portal realm long ago and returned in the recent past might have skills now rare or entirely lost (see *Reawakened,* p. 16); a child who lived through years in a portal realm may have skills children rarely learn. Being a returnee could also explain how a character learned magic or cinematic martial-arts skills, or gained superhuman powers.

Time in a portal realm can be simply backstory, explaining the origins of an adventurer who now has other concerns. But some returnees acquire a mission, like Coleridge's ancient mariner, compelled to travel about teaching the necessity of love for all living creatures.

Because the possible effects are so varied, being a returnee is treated as a lens that can be applied to many different character types.

Advantages: Charisma 1 [5]. ● 15 points chosen from among Fit [5], Higher Purpose [5], Reawakened [10], Unusual Background [Varies], Zeroed [10], or additional Charisma [5/level].

Disadvantages: Delusion (Minor) [-5] *or* Secret (Serious Embarrassment) [-5]. ● -15 points chosen from among Low TL [-5/level], Nightmares [-5*], Obsession (Return to portal realm) [-10*], Vow [-5 to -15], Weirdness Magnet [-15], or increasing Secret to (Utter Rejection *or* Imprisonment or Exile) [-5 or -15].

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

Customization Notes

Higher Purpose should reflect a personal mission based on experience in the portal realm. Unusual Background is appropriate if a returnee has abilities that are otherwise unavailable; it's worth 5 points if it grants a child access to adult skills that would normally be off limits (see *Social Stigma,* p. 17) or 10 points if it's equivalent to Reawakened (p. 16). Higher-value Unusual Backgrounds for supers and similar characters should usually be bought separately from this lens, along with the associated exotic or supernatural traits.

Outcast

100 points

You left Earth because you *had* to: powerful enemies were closing in on you, and flight to an unknown world was less daunting than what they intended if they caught you.

You have a variety of skills suited to hiding, fleeing, acquiring resources, and protecting yourself inconspicuously.

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

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Transmundane [20]. ● *One* of Per +3 [15], Danger Sense [15], or Empathy [15]. ● A further 15 points chosen from among the previous traits or Absolute Direction [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness [2/level], Fit [5] *or* Very Fit [15], Flexibility [5], Hard to Subdue [2/level], Language Talent [10], or Resistant to Influence Skills (+3 *or* +8) [5 or 7] *or* Indomitable [15].

Disadvantages: -15 points chosen from among Bloodlust [-10*], Charitable [-15*], Chronic Pain (Old Wound) [Varies], Code of Honor (Pirate's, Gentleman's, *or* Soldier's) [-5 or -10], Flashbacks [Varies], Nightmares [-5*], One Eye [-15], or Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents *or* Self-Defense Only) [-10 or -15].

Primary Skills: Holdout (A) IQ+1 [4]-12 *and* Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-12. ● *One* of Brawling, Garrote, Guns (Pistol), Knife, Liquid Projector (Sprayer), or Thrown Weapon (Knife, Shuriken, *or* Stick), all (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Shortsword or Throwing, both (A) DX+1 [4]-12; or Blowpipe or Sling, both (H) DX [4]-11.

Secondary Skills: Acting (A) IQ [2]-11; Observation (A) Per [2]-11; *and* Scrounging (E) Per [1]-11. ● *Either* Hiking *or* Running, both (A) HT [2]-10. ● *One* of Fast-Talk, Soldier, or Streetwise, all (A) IQ [2]-11; Diplomacy, Forgery, Intelligence Analysis, or Psychology, all (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; or Urban Survival (A) Per [2]-11. ● Another 2 points in one additional combat skill from those above, or in one of Fast-Draw (Knife, Pistol, *or* Sword) (DX/E), Wrestling (DX/A), or Judo or Karate (DX/H).

Background Skills: *Two* of Escape (H) DX-2 [1]-9; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-11; Administration, Disguise, Merchant, Research, or Traps, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Expert Skill (Conspiracy Theory, Military Science, *or* Political Science) (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; or Body Language or Survival (any), both (A) Per-1 [1]-10.

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

SAVIOR

175 points

Your journey brought you to a world in peril, which you chose to help. More than just an adventurer, you're a *leader*, able to bring people together in a time of struggle. To those you lead, it seems that you were sent to them by some higher power.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Destiny (Minor Advantage) [5] *and* Transmundane [20]. ● *One* of ST +2 [20], DX +1 [20], IQ +1 [20], Will +4 [20], or 20 points in a suitable Talent. ● A further 25 points chosen from among Blessed (The King's Two Bodies) [10], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness [2/level],

Higher Purpose [5], Language Talent [10], Patron [Varies], Reawakened [10], Resistant to Influence Skills (+3 *or* +8) [5 or 7] *or* Indomitable [15], Sensitive [5] *or* Empathy [15], True Faith [15], Voice [10], Weapon Master (One specific weapon) [20] , or additional Charisma [5/level] or a greater Destiny [5 or 10].

Disadvantages: *One* of Charitable (12) [-15], Fanaticism [-15], or Sense of Duty (Humanity) [-15]. ● -15 points chosen from among Chronic Pain (Old Wound) [Varies], Code of Honor (Professional, Gentleman's, *or* Soldier's) [-5 or -10], Compulsive Generosity [-5*], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents *or* Self-Defense Only) [-10 or -15], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], or Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Diplomacy (H) IQ+1 [8]-13 *and* Leadership (A) IQ+2 [4]-14†. ● *Two* of Administration, Politics, Propaganda, or Teaching, all (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; or Law (Comparative), Religious Ritual (any), Shiphandling (Ship), or Strategy (any), all (H) IQ [4]-12.

Secondary Skills: Public Speaking (A) IQ [1]-12†. ● *Two* of Economics, Expert Skill (Military Science *or* Political Science), Finance, Intelligence Analysis, Mathematics (Surveying), Philosophy (any), Psychology, Tactics, or Theology (any), all (H) IQ [4]-12; or Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-12.

Background Skills: Savoir-Faire (High Society *or* Military) (E) IQ [1]-12. ● *Five* of Riding (any) (A) DX-1 [1]-11; First Aid, Masonry, or Seamanship, all (E) IQ [1]-12; Navigation (Sea) or Soldier, both (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Carousing (E) HT [1]-12; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-11; or 1 point in a weapon skill.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Includes +1 from Charisma (in Transmundane).

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.
– Matthew 13:45-46

TRADER

125 points

You have access to a portal that lets you make repeated journeys between Earth and a portal realm, and you exploit this to carry goods back and forth to earn a profit. You've done this often enough that you're knowledgeable about the portal realm: you know the geography, the culture, and a language of one of its societies, and you fully accept the supernatural as real. Your ventures have earned you a measure of wealth, and you display enough of it to be treated with respect. You've invested 80% of your money in merchandise (see *Interworld Trade,* pp. 32-33).

The Unusual Background this template offers represents the ability to buy goods that are readily available on Earth but unavailable in the portal realm – except through *you* (see *Shopping List,* p. 33). This doesn't represent higher-TL merchandise (that's covered by the High TL advantage, p. 14), but liquor, chocolate, spices, exotic flowers or pets, fine cloth, toys, and other luxuries. The advantage depends on your having a monopoly; once other traders start competing with you, your profits fall to normal levels, so your trade route can be treated as a Secret.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 12 [20].
Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].
Advantages: Business Acumen 1 [10]; Cultural Familiarity (one society of portal realm) [1]; Language (one language of portal realm; Accented) [4]; No Mundane Background [10]; Status 1* [0]; Transmundane [20]; *and* Wealth (Wealthy) [20]. ● 15 points chosen from among Absolute Direction [5], Business Acumen 2 [10], Claim to Hospitality (Portal-realm trade partners) [5], Fashion Sense [5], Gizmos [5/gizmo], Language Talent [10], Reputation (Pay your debts) [Varies], Resistant to Influence Skills (+3 *or* +8) [5 or 7], Unusual Background (Exotic Goods) [5], Voice [10], or additional Status [5/level] or Wealth (Very Wealthy) [10].
Disadvantages: -15 points chosen from among Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Disciplines of Faith (Ritualism) [-5], Gluttony [-5†], Greed [-15†], Honesty [-10†], Miserliness [-10†], Obsession [-5† or -10†], Overconfidence [-5†], Pacifism (any except Total Nonviolence) [Varies], Post-Combat Shakes [-5†], Secret (Trade Route) [-5], Selfish [-5†], Sense of Duty (Employees) [-5], or Workaholic [-5].
Primary Skills: Administration (A) IQ+1 [2]-12‡ *and* Merchant (A) IQ+2 [4]-13‡.
Secondary Skills: Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]-11 *and* Finance (H) IQ [2]-11‡. ● *Either* Freight Handling *or* Packing, both (A) IQ [2]-11. ● *One* of Riding (any) (A) DX [2]-10; Connoisseur (category of merchandise), Fast-Talk, Holdout, Navigation (Land *or* Sea), or Smuggling, all (A) IQ [2]-11; Leadership or Public Speaking, both (A) IQ+1 [2]-12¶; Propaganda (A) IQ+1 [2]-12‡; Law (Commercial) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; or Body Language (A) Per [2]-11.
Background Skills: Accounting (H) IQ-1 [1]-10‡ *and* Area Knowledge (trading area) (E) IQ [1]-11. ● *Two* of Current Affairs (Business), First Aid, or Savoir-Faire (High Society *or* Servant), all (E) IQ [1]-11; Cartography, Heraldry (Makers' Marks), Speed-Reading, Teaching, Weather Sense, or Writing, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Psychology (H) IQ-2 [1]-9; Economics (H) IQ-1 [1]-10‡; or Carousing (E) HT [1]-12.

* Includes +1 from Wealth.
† Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
‡ Includes +1 from Business Acumen.
¶ Includes +1 from Charisma (in Transmundane).

And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly,
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.

– T.S. Eliot, "Journey of the Magi"

WEALTH AND POSSESSIONS

Portal fantasy has some special conditions that make accounting for possessions less than straightforward:

● Earth and the portal realm probably have different TLs, where any particular amount of starting wealth (p. B26) has different point costs.
● Earth's money isn't legal tender in the starting realm.
● Travelers normally can't take all their assets with them; if the portal realm is the reference society, anything left on Earth is a zero-point feature.
● Some possessions may be of a higher TL than the portal realm's; their cost is doubled for each level of difference (p. B27).
● In most campaigns, players won't know about the portal realm ahead of time; they lack the information to choose a wealth level (p. B25) in the reference society and buy equipment with the resulting money.

There are two options for resolving this: A quick, approximate method that focuses on Wealth, and a detailed method that focuses on possessions.

WEALTH-BASED METHOD

This approach makes several simplifying assumptions:

● The assets travelers carry are worth up to half the value of their movable possessions (p. B26).
● The weight of movable possessions isn't accounted for in detail.

● No TL multiplier applies to high-tech equipment – both because not all equipment is high-tech and because high-tech equipment is no longer useful when ammunition, fuel, or batteries run out.

Each traveler starts with a given wealth level on Earth. This has *no character point cost*. Most visitors take 10% of their starting wealth with them; rootless adventurers take 50%. In the portal realm, no traveler has a settled lifestyle – the movable possessions they bring along become their new starting wealth. Since all of this wealth is movable, it's compared with 100% of starting wealth for the new TL. If the amount falls between two wealth levels, use the point cost for the next-*higher* level.

It's convenient to create a table of point costs for wealth levels on Earth, based on the TL difference. The following table – for travelers from TL8 Earth to a TL3 world – is an example:

Wealth Level on Earth	Starting Wealth		Point Cost	
	Settled	*Wanderers*	*Settled*	*Wanderers*
Dead Broke	$0	$0	-25	-25
Poor	$400	$2,000	-10	10
Struggling	$1,000	$5,000	0	20
Average	$2,000	$10,000	10	30
Comfortable	$4,000	$20,000	20	30
Wealthy	$10,000	$50,000	30	50

Treat wealth levels higher than Wealthy on Earth as Wealthy – there's a limit to how much a traveler can carry! If you were Filthy Rich on Earth, you just leave a bigger share of your assets behind.

Travelers can spend their movable funds on possessions and equipment that will go with them – see the next section for guidelines. It isn't necessarily to account for the weight in detail, but the GM may rule out excessively heavy items such as refrigerators and mainframe computers. Unspent funds have *no value* in a portal realm (though paper money makes good kindling!).

POSSESSIONS-BASED METHOD

For greater accuracy at the cost of increased complexity, focus on actual possessions. Perform the following steps for each character:

● Define a wealth level and starting wealth on Earth.
● Spend the appropriate amount (20% or 100%) of starting wealth on movable possessions.
● Choose which of these to take, and add up weights until they reach a preferred maximum load (not more than 10×BL in any case).

POSSESSIONS? WHAT POSSESSIONS?

The *Wealth-Based Method* (pp. 22-23) and *Possessions-Based Method* (below) both assume that the travelers have some advance notice of the journey, and a chance to plan. But that isn't always true! The heroes of some tales are swept off to enchanted kingdoms without warning, carrying only what they happen to have with them. This can be played for harsh realism, as interworld castaways struggle to survive in an unfamiliar realm, or optimistically, with the new world's inhabitants ready to help their strange visitors.

It's possible to define such a lack of resources as a combination of two traits:

● You have a variant form of Dead Broke (p. B25). As with the standard version, you have no job, no source of income, and no money, and own only the clothes you're wearing. These clothes can be whatever was appropriate to your Status in your original world; they don't have to be cheaply made, ill-fitting, or falling apart. You can also carry minor personal items: matches or a lighter, a knife or multi-tool, makeup, a few snacks, or the like. If you routinely carry something more substantial, such as a pistol or laptop, you can pay its cost *in the portal realm* (taking TL multipliers into account; see below) with *Trading Points for Money* (p. B26) – but you can't have actual money.

● You have the ability to buy off this disadvantage after becoming familiar with the portal realm. This is Not Dead Broke treated as a potential advantage (p. B33) worth 13 points. When you've paid the remaining 12 points, your wealth level is Average; raising it higher than that has the normal point cost.

● Use the guidelines in the subsections that follow to determine values for these possessions in the portal realm.
● Find the wealth level that's sufficient to pay for all the possessions at the portal realm's TL, determine its point cost, and use this in designing the character.
● If the resulting point cost is too high, go back and adjust the choice of possessions – and perhaps the initial wealth level on Earth – until you're satisfied with the result.

Clothing

The cost of starting clothing doesn't come out of starting wealth, so it doesn't count toward the wearer's wealth level in the portal realm. However, its weight counts as part of the encumbrance carried into that realm. See *Clothing*, p. B266.

The cost of items of apparel bought separately from basic clothing for a fixed price – notably, rugged garments such as cloaks, trench coats, and boots – *does* come out of starting wealth, and counts toward the owner's wealth level in the portal realm. Don't apply a multiplier for TL difference, however.

Actual armor – and specialized protective gear such as camouflage clothing and gas masks – also comes out of starting wealth. It *is* subject to a multiplier for TL difference. The GM can require a plausible background for its owners, whether as combat troops, firefighters, or reenactors. In some cases, a minor Unusual Background, worth perhaps 5 points, may be appropriate.

Muscle-Powered Weapons

Most kinds of muscle-powered weapons fall in the TL0-3 range; cost multipliers for higher TLs are uncommon, and disregarding them outright won't create many problems.

If the GM chooses to account for TL differences, note that fencing weapons such as sabers and smallswords are TL4.

However, any weapon with a steel blade from a TL7+ world (including Earth, in most portal fantasy) is considered to be of fine quality; see p. B274. This doesn't raise its cost on Earth, but multiplies it in the portal realm: ×4 for fencing- or sword-class weapons, ×3 for spears or arrows, or ×10 for cutting weapons such as axes.

Weapons incorporating advanced technology – e.g., compound bows (**GURPS High-Tech,** p. 201) and chainsaws – *do* receive multipliers for higher TL.

Firearms

Always take differences in TL into account with firearms – even a matchlock musket (TL4) is more advanced than most portal realms allow. For example, a 5.56mm assault carbine (p. B279), which costs $900 on Earth, is worth $28,800 in a TL3 portal realm; carrying such a weapon would qualify its owner as Filthy Rich.

A firearm that's out of ammunition is little more than an expensive club. Travelers may carry extra ammo, but this adds to their wealth. For example, the 31-round full load for that assault carbine weighs 1 lb. and so costs $20 at TL8 – but that becomes $640 at TL3, making each round worth over $20. Strict fire discipline is recommended!

Electronics

Electronic devices are always subject to cost multipliers for TL differences; e.g., a TL8 handheld radio (**GURPS High-Tech,** p. 38) is worth $8,000 in a TL3 portal realm. Battery-powered devices remain useful only while their batteries last; for example, the three XS batteries in that TL8 handheld radio weigh 0.3 lb., provide power for 10 hours of use, and are worth $16 each. Travelers may have spare batteries, or carry hand-cranked generators or solar-powered rechargers, if they had time to plan ahead.

Many functions of electronic devices depend on having a source of signals. A radio can talk with other radios, and a Computer Operation roll can set up a local network of portable computers, tablets, or smartphones. But GPS is useless in a world without satellites, and there are no cellular networks and no Internet.

Medical Supplies

Medical and surgical equipment undergoes huge advances at higher TLs; cost multipliers for TL definitely apply. Medical skills use drugs and other consumables such as bandages, sutures, and syringes. Doctors at TL8 also rely on a variety of gear that needs batteries, starting with digital watches and thermometers.

For detailed rules on consumables, see Chapter 7 of **GURPS High-Tech.** For a simpler treatment, assume that any portable medical kit contains enough supplies for five patients. When they're used up, the practitioner's medical skills function as TL5 for the purposes of *Medical Care* (pp. B424-425); this assumes the use of improvised substitutes such as boiled cloth (for bandages) and herbal extracts. A first aid kit can be used *once* to treat a patient without depleting the supplies in a medical kit.

Precious Metals

Paper money is just a curiosity in portal realms, but people in most worlds will accept gold and silver. Travelers who have time to prepare may convert their unspent funds into precious metals. At recent commodity prices, a pound of silver costs *roughly* $200, and a pound of gold *around* $15,000. In a realistic TL3 setting, a pound of silver is worth $1,000, and a pound of gold $20,000 (see p. B264) – but the GM can change these values. If a world has vast hoards of precious metal, a pound of silver could be worth $12 and a pound of gold $240.

Even travelers without coins might have some gold and silver jewelry. **GURPS Low-Tech** provides detailed rules for deciding how much this is worth. It's also possible to disregard workmanship and judge value purely by weight.

COOL ADVANCED WEAPONS

This variation on *Cool Ethnic Weapon* (**GURPS Low-Tech Companion 2: Weapons and Warriors,** p. 16) suits some portal fiction:

Cool Advanced Weapon: The weapon you brought from Earth is simply *better* than one of that type from the portal realm: +1 to hit, +1 damage, +1 HT, and double HP relative to its usual statistics. This is commonly applied, for example, to fencing weapons.

TRANSPORT

Most belongings count as a load the traveler must carry; if they're too heavy, they have to be left behind. But some possessions have a carrying capacity of their own: they can transport visitors *and* their equipment. This carrying capacity replaces the traveler's, making it possible to bring along heavier objects – though the *riders'* weight may take up part of that capacity, if accounting for the weight of possessions in detail.

If a source of transport will work indefinitely in the portal realm, count its value toward starting wealth in the *Wealth-Based Method* (pp. 22-23), or count it as a movable possession in the *Possessions-Based Method* (p. 23). This applies to muscle-powered vehicles; to sailing craft; and to powered vehicles, *if* their power supply can be restored with local resources (say, using a still, solar recharger, or hand-cranked generator) and, in the case of land vehicles, *if* they can operate in the wilderness or on local roads. For powered vehicles, cost multipliers for TL apply in the possessions-based method. Riding or pack animals also fall under these rules, and don't take cost multipliers for TL.

A vehicle that won't keep working in the portal realm can still carry equipment and supplies through the portal. Its price comes out of the traveler's wealth in the native realm, but it doesn't count toward wealth in the portal realm. The GM may allow voyagers to make Scrounging rolls to salvage useful parts or materials from such a vehicle. If they choose to stay with it after it stops working, it can provide an improvised shelter from the elements: +1 to Survival.

CHAPTER THREE

DANGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Once you get the adventurers to the portal realm, they'll need to learn to cope with it. A variety of challenges may confront them: the hazards of the natural environment, exotic or hostile inhabitants, or magic and the supernatural. They may also master new skills or discover new sources of wealth.

WILDERNESS

Most portal realms have smaller, less dense populations than Earth. Visitors will often spend much of their time in wilderness areas. Unsettled lands are natural places for adventures.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

A portal realm is an unfamiliar landscape: At the start of a portal-fantasy campaign, *nothing* in the realm is home ground to the heroes. An important part of the campaign is simply learning where things are. At the outset, travelers have to find their way around an unknown environment by making Navigation rolls – typically Navigation (Land), as they won't usually have boats, and ships or aircraft are even less likely.

Navigation is the skill of locating oneself in relation to an extended area, wider than the visible horizon. It relies on some sort of abstract coordinates, not just on immediate sensory cues. There are three different ways of doing this, dependent on technology:

Landmark recognition relies on prominent features of the landscape and connects them together in a narrative. It's used at TL0-2.

Dead reckoning (from *deduced reckoning*) keeps track of speeds and directions to describe a previously traveled course. It comes into use at TL3.

Celestial navigation uses precision instruments to identify an exact location. The first steps toward it are taken at TL3, with the measurement of latitude, but it doesn't mature till TL5, with the measurement of longitude.

Which of these is possible depends on equipment:

● *Unaided sensory perception* allows only landmark recognition and gives -3 to Navigation.

And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side.
– John Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci"

● Navigation *by the stars* makes dead reckoning possible, if the portal realm has the same stars as Earth. It gives -1 to Navigation (-2 if the pole star isn't visible, or if there isn't one).

● A *compass* is basic equipment for dead reckoning. An improvised compass, such as a floating magnetized needle, gives no penalty to Navigation; a needle on a pivot gives +1. This assumes the portal realm has a magnetic field – one with a consistent orientation, without weird anomalies (which a fantasy world might easily have!).

● *Navigational instruments* – including a sextant for measuring the height of the sun above the horizon and a chronometer for identifying the time when it's directly overhead – allow determination of exact latitude and longitude by celestial navigation, giving +3 to Navigation. This assumes the day is still 24 hours long. A character with Absolute Direction gets the same bonus.

● *GPS equipment* doesn't work. There are no satellites sending directional signals!

● In a fantasy world, *supernatural* options may exist. Spells might provide benefits similar to technology: pointing in a particular direction (substituting for a compass); fixing an exact position (substituting for navigational instruments); or even pointing toward a desired goal of a particular kind (making a Navigation roll unnecessary). Traits such as Blessed or Oracle may do so as well – at a minimum, they might provide enough signs for navigation by landmark recognition.

The major task Navigation is used for is planning a course from a starting point to a destination. Navigators who don't know their current location, *or* who don't know the location of a desirable destination, are at -4 to effective skill (reduce this to -2 if there's a road, river, or coastline to follow). The newly arrived in a portal realm lack *both* sorts of knowledge; only one -4 applies in that case. On land, they may also face penalties for terrain type, from no penalty for open plains with good visibility to -4 for dense forest or branched, twisting gullies.

Under these conditions, if they make a successful Navigation roll, they figure out which way to go to reach someplace desirable, such as a settlement or a source of water. Critical success takes them to a really good destination. Failure leaves them not knowing which way to turn; if they set out anyway, see *Good and Bad Places* (below). If they choose not to go anywhere, they can make Survival rolls to find local resources. Critical failure means they run into significant danger: hostile wildlife, or robbers, or simply a natural hazard like a swamp.

GOOD AND BAD PLACES

If travelers strike out at random, the GM may opt to roll 3d to determine how favorable or unfavorable a place they end up in:

3-4 – Immediate threats to life and limb: treacherous weather, hazardous terrain, monsters or dangerous animals, hostile inhabitants, or magical curses. *Requires* Survival rolls, combat, or rolls to resist magic.

5-8 – Barren, uninhabited terrain. Unfavorable weather likely (see *The Elements,* below). Survival rolls to forage and find shelter are at -2.

9-12 – If uninhabited, allows unmodified Survival rolls; if inhabited, allows unmodified reaction rolls to deal with inhabitants.

13-16 – If uninhabited, Survival rolls are at +2; if inhabited, inhabitants' reaction rolls are at +2.

17-18 – Very favorable place: a highly fertile wild area (Survival rolls at +5), a welcoming community (+4 to reaction rolls), or the domain of a benevolent magical being.

If they do travel, they'll begin to learn the locations of things, systematically or casually.

Mathematics (Surveying) *or its defaults* can be used to ascertain precise locations of geographic features in relation to each other. The roll is at +2 with modern (TL5+) surveying equipment; unmodified with earlier equipment (TL2-4), which may be obtainable in a low-tech portal realm; or at -2 with improvised poles, plumb bobs, and the like. Pacing off distances without equipment gives -5.

This information is necessary for drawing an accurate map, which requires a roll vs. Cartography *or its defaults*. (Cartography defaults to Mathematics (Surveying)-2, and Mathematics (Surveying) to Cartography-3 – and *both* skills default to Navigation-4.) Modern mapping software gives +2 to Cartography; a flat drawing board, compass, straightedge, and protractor are basic equipment; a pad of graph paper is *improvised* equipment, giving -2. The resulting map is sufficient for dead reckoning. Creating it takes time; see *Player-Made Maps* (p. B491).

Travel at normal marching speed gives enough information for landmark recognition by the travelers' leader (whoever is deciding which way to go) or by any other traveler who's consciously paying attention. If the information is recorded in a sketch map (roll vs. Artist (Drawing), Cartography, or Navigation (Land) to produce one), or compiled into a mnemonic verse (roll vs. Poetry), this reduces the Navigation skill penalty from -3 to -2; so does Eidetic Memory, and Photographic Memory reduces it to -1.

Either sort of knowledge allows lost travelers to try to identify their current position, relative to their starting point or another known point, with a Navigation roll (at -3 for landmark recognition). If they've done so – and if they also have a known destination – the -4 to Navigation doesn't apply.

THE ELEMENTS

Portal fantasy often involves long journeys through unsettled country – meaning spending time out of doors. Weather can have a big impact on such travel. Each terrain type (see *Survival,* pp. B223-224) has different typical weather, which creates different problems.

Cold: The archetypal problem of Arctic terrain. It's also common in Mountain terrain, and Desert terrain can get bitterly cold after sundown. The primary effect of cold is FP loss (see *Cold,* p. B430). It can also produce snow or ice that limits mobility (see *Weather,* p. B351). Dropping temperatures can generate fog that limits visibility: -1 to -9 to Vision and ranged attack rolls, depending on density. Conversely, on clear days, glare off snow or ice can require a HT roll to avoid snow blindness, which gives -4 to Vision while exposure continues and for minutes equal to margin of failure afterward; if exposure is prolonged, make a HT roll as for crippling injury (pp. B422-423) to avoid lasting impairment.

Heat: An archetypal problem of Desert and Jungle terrain, and sometimes also an issue in tropical Plains or Swampland. As with cold, its primary effect is FP loss (see *Heat,* p. B434). In *humid* heat, as in Jungle or Swampland, rolls to resist FP loss are at an extra -2. In dry *or* humid heat, heavy sweating can lead to dehydration (p. B426).

Drought: Another archetypal problem of Desert terrain. The main risk is cumulative fatigue from dehydration (p. B426) and inability to recover if water runs out (p. B427). *Seasonal* drought can produce large amounts of dry grass or leaves, especially in Plains or Woodlands, creating a risk of fires (pp. B433-434). Island/Beach terrain can also face travelers with lack of drinkable water, though not with exceptional fire hazard.

Wetness: An issue in Jungle and Swampland terrain, and may arise in other terrains (but rarely in Desert) during periods of heavy rain. A world whose land surface consists almost entirely of island chains (and a lot of Island/Beach terrain) may well have heavy rain and wet climates. The main problem wetness creates is reduced mobility (see *Terrain* and *Weather,* p. B351), either permanent (Jungle and Swampland are Very Bad terrain) or temporary during rainfall. *Heavy* rain limits visibility as fog (-1 to -9), and heavy clouds give -1 to Vision during storms. Seasonal rainfall, especially in Desert or Plains where rain is less common, can produce floods that present a risk of drowning (pp. B354-355, B436-437).

Altitude: Creates problems of low atmospheric pressure (pp. B429-430) in Mountain terrain. Fantasy worlds may have deep enough underground realms for *high* pressure to be an issue; treat the atmosphere as "dense" starting at one mile, "very dense" starting at 2.2 miles.

CREATURES AND MONSTERS

The plants and animals of portal realms are often part of their strangeness. Familiar Earthly species may have special qualities there. There might also be species that don't exist on Earth; these may even have capabilities that are physically impossible for Earthly species, such as the flight of griffins or rocs. (These might be explicitly magical, as discussed in *Magic and the World,* below.) Such beings may be unique monsters, existing as relics of the past, begotten by gods, or created by magical arts. However fantastic they are, living beings can usually be described using abbreviated creature statistics, as discussed on pp. B455-461.

In some portal realms, living beings may have *emblematic traits:* special qualities that mythology or folklore attributes to them. In plants, these often take the form of healing benefits or other forms of magic; the Herb Lore skill grants knowledge of these properties. In animals, they're likely to be mental or moral: elephants might truly have Eidetic Memory, or ants (praised for hard work in the Bible) could have Workaholic or Higher Purpose. Knowledge of these qualities may fall under Naturalist or some variety of Hidden Lore.

In some portal realms, animals can talk. This may be limited to particular species (such as the eagles, ravens, and wargs of Middle-Earth) or extraordinary specimens of many species (as with the talking beasts of Narnia, which exist alongside non-talking ones); it may even be *all* animals. Such beasts have IQ 6 or higher – but their behavior can be defined as Bestial (p. B124) if they're still creatures of the wild, and they may have Social Stigma (Monster) (p. B155) if they're large and aggressive. On the other hand, animals may exhibit various forms of "civilized" behavior, making laws or even living in cities. If they do, Influence skills will usually work on them without the need for Animal Empathy. Each species or group of related species might have different customs, however, imposing penalties for lack of Cultural Familiarity on most people who deal with them. Familiarity with the cultures of *all* animals in a portal realm would count as Xeno-Adaptability (p. B46).

MAGIC AND THE WORLD

In many portal realms, magic isn't just something a few highly trained people do – it's a power that pervades the world. Its effects can often be seen in things that exist apart from humans and have little to do with them.

> ## City Stats
>
> In most worlds, visitors will eventually encounter a settlement: an isolated farmstead or inn, a metropolis, or anything in between. To describe such a location, use the system of statistics in **GURPS City Stats,** which focuses on the impression a settlement makes on travelers as a whole – its size, situation, appearance, wealth, and defenses, for example. Despite the name, "city stats" can describe a village or an isolated estate as readily as a town or a city.

Animals, plants, and even minerals in realms of fantasy may have magical effects and uses; see *Material Magic* (**GURPS Thaumatology,** pp. 95-120) for a discussion of these. Animals, in particular, may have overtly magical powers, such as the legendary panther's ability to lure people with its perfumed breath. Represent these either as advantages with the Magical power modifier or as instinctive knowledge of spells. In worlds where beasts can speak (see *Creatures and Monsters,* above), some of them – particularly species famed as tricksters, such as foxes in Japanese legend – may be able to *learn* magic.

Fantasy realms also have inhabitants whose entire being is magical or supernatural, such as spirits (see *Spirit,* p. B263, for one possibility). It's common for spirits to be tied to specific places: mountains, trees, bodies of water, etc. The presence of such spirits can help give the realm as a whole a sense of personality. Advantages that make it possible to deal with these beings – Channeling, Medium, and Spirit Empathy in particular – are a plausible form for unsuspected magical talents. In some worlds, magic as such might involve calling on the powers of spirits, and Magery may be another form of awareness of the spirit world. Hidden Lore (Spirits) is an important skill in spirit-filled realms!

It's also possible for a fantasy realm to experience direct manifestations of magical power, in the same way that a non-magical world might experience extreme weather or geological events through the overflow of physical energy. Certain places – or certain times of the day or year – may be especially subject to such outbreaks of magic. Perhaps midnight, or All Hallows' Eve, really *is* a time when spirits walk a portal realm, or when people who don't protect themselves risk being magically transformed. Such a magical outbreak might even be responsible for the appearance of mysterious travelers from another world!

LAWS AND CUSTOMS

Portal realms aren't just lands and wildlife. They're also home to humans and often other sapient inhabitants. And sapient beings have societies and cultures, which people from elsewhere must deal with.

LANGUAGES

Some portal fantasy hand-waves the whole issue of language. The people of Oz and Narnia speak English, exactly like their visitors. This is especially common in children's fantasy, but the Thomas Covenant novels, for example, make the same assumption about the Land. Many anime series have portal realms where everyone speaks Japanese. Campaigns set in portal realms can make the same assumption.

For a variant on this, the portal realm could use a different dialect of the Earth language, with a distinctive accent and vocabulary, and even different sentence structure (e.g., "It likes me not" rather than "I don't like it").

The GM can roleplay this as much or as little as desired – but mechanically, it can be represented by treating the language of visitors from Earth as, for instance, English (Accented) or Japanese (Accented), with the consequent minor skill modifiers.

If the portal realm has a different language, it may have magical teaching devices that let the newcomers learn it. This is a way to speed up the story; the GM can simply decree that it's happened and award earmarked character points to pay for it. The transition from Earth to the portal realm might even imprint the new language on the visitors' minds, as in the journeys of Harold Shea in *The Compleat Enchanter*.

Lacking any of these shortcuts, travelers will find themselves learning a new language by immersion. This is equivalent to four hours a day of training (p. B25), or one character point in the new language per 50 days, plus whatever extra time is spent in study. See ***GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School*** for detailed rules. In the meantime, the visitors will be making Gesture rolls, perhaps at the IQ-4 default. In most campaigns, a session or two of Gesture rolls is enough to make the point. It's perfectly fair to fast-forward a campaign a few weeks, to the stage where everyone has Broken comprehension of the new language.

CULTURES

Travelers will *also* have to deal with cultural differences. Living in a different culture grants four hours a day toward a new Cultural Familiarity by immersion, at the same time as learning the new language – by the time the new arrivals have Broken speech, they'll be familiar with the culture and no longer have penalties there. But in those first 50 days, Cultural Familiarity modifiers will apply! In a really exotic fantasy world, Cultural Familiarity might cost *two* points and take twice as long to buy off, even if the inhabitants are human.

An IQ 10 traveler using Gesture at the default of IQ-4, and with a Cultural Familiarity penalty of -3, has an effective skill of 3 – just barely enough to attempt to communicate at all! The outcome will be either a rare critical success (roll of 3 or 4) or a failure, often a critical failure. The GM may want to disregard Cultural Familiarity penalties, or allow generous bonuses for straightforward ideas such as "I'm thirsty" or "We come in peace."

Cultural Familiarity grants the ability to use a variety of skills with no penalty. Many of these – including all Influence skills – have to do with face-to-face social interaction. Most people who lack Cultural Familiarity will have better luck relying on straight reaction rolls, which aren't subject to Cultural Familiarity modifiers. Bear in mind that people of the portal realm probably won't be familiar with Earth cultures, either, and will have the same skill penalties! In particular, their Teaching skill will be at -3, which among other things reduces the number of people they can teach at once (as discussed on pp. 17-18 of ***GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School***). If Cultural Familiarity is gained in parallel with Broken speech in a new language, skill penalties for its lack will rarely come into play – but if the new arrivals are conveniently granted knowledge of a local language, they'll come up a lot.

One of the skills affected by Cultural Familiarity is Connoisseur. Among its other uses, Connoisseur is used to judge what style of art, music, or literature will appeal to an audience. After a failed roll (or if no roll is attempted), a successful roll to create or perform a work of art requires a reaction roll; an unfavorable reaction indicates the work was technically skilled but didn't speak to the audience. This can be important to newcomers who try to become bards, craftsmen, dancers, or storytellers.

A function of the Anthropology skill is figuring out the behavior and customs of people in newly encountered cultures. Roll vs. Anthropology to avoid penalties for lack of Cultural Familiarity. Each success waives the penalty for the *next* skill roll. Critical success grants fuller insight: the next time the player has an unspent character point, it can be used to buy Cultural Familiarity immediately. Critical failure indicates serious misunderstanding: the next culture-dependent skill roll is an automatic failure! If it's an Influence roll, this means automatically losing the Quick Contest.

LICIT AND ILLICIT MAGIC

Any society where magic is commonly practiced is likely to have laws about it. Some forms of magic might be freely permitted to everyone; others, only to licensed wizards. Yet others may be illegal for everyone. These distinctions can be defined in terms of Control Ratings and Legality Classes (pp. B506-507).

Control Ratings are generally similar to those for non-magical societies, ranging from anarchy (CR0) to total control (CR6). However, a society may have a higher – or, rarely, lower – CR for magic than for other activities.

Legality Classes often have the same rationale as for technological equipment, but special considerations may apply. If magic can inflict injury in a way difficult to trace, it might be allowed only to licensed practitioners, or banned entirely. And if there are supernatural beings, magic that threatens them, offends them, or usurps their prerogatives may be restricted or proscribed. For example, medieval law viewed knowing the future as a manifestation of divine omniscience and forbade divination spells that attempted to grant foreknowledge. Typical categories might be as follows:

LC0 – Spells with large-area destructive effects; spells that kill or cripple secretly; spells that threaten or challenge the gods; spells that call on supernatural enemies of the gods.

LC1 – Spells that inflict *any* harm secretly; spells of disguise or deception; spells that offend the gods.

LC2 – Mind-control spells (if they actually take away free will); divination that reveals secrets; spells that openly inflict severe injury or life-threatening afflictions.

LC3 – Spells that openly inflict lesser injury or incapacitating afflictions; spells that influence the emotions; spells that grant blessings *if* they risk side effects (e.g., weather-control spells).

LC4 – Healing and protective spells; divination that doesn't reveal secrets.

LAWS AND RELIGIONS

Any culture has depths beyond those reached by Cultural Familiarity. These are represented by skills that require specialization based on culture, including Law, Religious Ritual, and Theology. Such skills provide guidance in what a particular culture and society expect of their members in terms of formal rules that go beyond face-to-face interaction. Law and Theology also have Comparative specialties (see *Law,* p. 18, and p. B226), which examine broad patterns of belief in different cultures.

If you lack Cultural Familiarity with a society, you have -3 to Law (Comparative) and Theology (Comparative) for answering questions about its beliefs. After you gain it (see *Cultures,* p. 28), this penalty goes away. You can also avoid the penalty for one specific question by making a successful Anthropology roll first. Sociology can substitute in cultures that have formally organized court systems or priesthoods

(it doesn't apply, for example, to shamanistic belief systems, whose practitioners may not *have* Theology skill).

For Law (but *not* Theology), specialized knowledge of a particular field, such as contract law or criminal law, allows a roll at -4 for the same field in a different region, assuming that field exists (a nomadic society won't have real-estate law, for example) – but only in Earth cultures. In unfamiliar cultures, you don't roll at -4; rather, *you can't attempt the roll at all.* (The GM may make an exception in a portal-realm culture that's akin to an Earth culture, such as the human cultures of Yrth in *GURPS Banestorm.*) Cultural Familiarity or skill rolls that substitute for it make such attempts possible.

Law skill can be used directly in trials, or to predict the likely outcome of a trial. Either Law or Theology can be used as a complementary skill to Administration in dealing with a suitable large organization.

> *Come with me if you want to live.*
>
> *– The T-800, in* **Terminator 2: Judgment Day**

COMBAT EXPERIENCE

People who pass through a portal don't necessarily have any experience of battle or danger. But they usually find themselves in adventurous situations. Portal fantasy has a number of common tropes about combat readiness:

- Children who enter a portal realm can fight deadly enemies or go into battle and win.
- Adults whose lives on Earth were peaceful turn out to have a natural talent for combat.
- Students of a combat sport such as fencing or judo can go up against foes with actual combat experience, and defeat them.
- Martial skills learned on Earth are *better* than those of the portal realm; for example, fencing skills can defeat armored foes such as Roman legionaries or medieval knights.
- A soldier or gang member from Earth, trained in firearms, has no trouble adapting to dart guns, bows, or swords.

To sum up, portal fantasy isn't usually a harshly realistic genre (as discussed in **GURPS Martial Arts**). To capture its particular flavor, some special rules are worth considering:

Combat Sport Is Combat: An adventurer who has learned a Combat Sport skill can use it at no penalty in life-or-death fights. In a cinematic game, actors with Stage Combat *might* gain a similar benefit. To avoid over-the-top fighting skills (unless that's the point of the campaign!), allow players to default *one* Easy combat skill to Stage Combat+1, one Average skill to Stage Combat, or one Hard skill to Stage Combat-1 – or *two* combat skills to one level lower. (Be sure to tell them about this limit; they might not want the default for the first fighting skill they need to use.)

Montages: A group of adventurers in a portal realm, especially one in a *pull* campaign (pp. 8-9), may get lessons from an extraordinary source: a legendary teacher similar to the centaur Chiron, or the supernatural power that summoned them there. **GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School**

offers detailed rules for *teaching,* but in an average portal-fantasy campaign, it isn't necessary to roll for this; just assume the teacher's success. This grants one character point in a single skill, or perhaps one point in each of two or three skills, with seven days of study. Normally, the quickly learned skill fades after the first battle – but the GM can allow students with unspent character points to buy skills permanently by making a Will or Meditation roll for each skill.

Secret Advantage: Consider giving some Earth people Combat Reflexes as a secret advantage (p. 15). The new arrival may never have been in an actual fight – but faced with one, the hero defends unusually well and never freezes.

Weapon Adaptation: Each traveler gets one *free* Weapon Adaptation perk (p. 15); e.g., Shortsword to Smallsword or Crossbow to Guns (Rifle).

Weapon Superiority: One of the traveler's Earth weapons, such as a smallsword or saber, gets the bonuses in *Cool Advanced Weapons* (p. 24).

In a realistic campaign, the visitors ought to be kept out of combat, or faced with easily defeated foes, until they've had time to study combat skills (see *Monthly Training Rolls,* p. 30). Or they should come from backgrounds on Earth that gave them such skills, and be able to bring along their accustomed weapons.

Combatants who aren't trained in a fighting skill can use the Telegraphic Attack option (**GURPS Martial Arts,** p. 113), carefully lining up their attack in a way that reveals their intentions: +4 to the attack roll, but also +2 to the target's defense roll. The attack bonus can't be combined with bonuses from Evaluate (which untrained fighters don't usually know how to do), and the enhanced skill doesn't affect the chances of a critical hit. Telegraphic Attack can be combined with All-Out Attack (Determined), which gives *another* +4 to the attack roll (and which *does* affect the odds of a critical hit), but sacrifices all active defenses until the attacker's next turn.

An untrained fighter may rely on All-Out Defense (usually Increased Defense (Dodge), as Parry is unlikely to be very good!) until a critical failure leaves the foe open, or until the hero – or player – gets tired of waiting.

Monthly Training Rolls

Just because visitors to portal realms lack combat skills doesn't mean they can't *learn* them; see *Improvement Through Study* (pp. B292-294). But players may prefer an approach with simplified bookkeeping: monthly study rolls. Instead of tracking hours of training day by day, roll vs. Will once per month to determine how much each character has learned.

Modifiers: +1 for Attentive, or +3 for Single-Minded; +1 for each hour of Less Sleep, or +8 for Doesn't Sleep; -5 for Laziness.

The basic monthly study rate is 150 hours; add or subtract 10% (15 hours) per point of success or failure. Critical success indicates a breakthrough that grants 400 hours of learning for that month, if that would be better. This assumes working with a teacher; studying from texts grants half as many hours.

On a critical failure, the student overworks and collapses, gaining *no* hours that month and suffering 3d fatigue, with negative FP causing injury as usual (p. B426). Recovering these lost FP requires *days* of rest, at 3 FP/day.

Example: Armed with a spear, Kathryn is standing between her younger sister and a huge wolf. Being faster than she is, the wolf acts first, with an All-Out Attack calculated to slam her to the ground. Kathryn's dodge barely avoids the leap – and now the wolf is unable to defend! On her turn, Kathryn makes a Telegraphic All-Out Attack (Determined) against the wolf's vitals. With DX 11, her default Spear skill is 6; but at +4 for Telegraphic Attack, +4 for All-Out Attack (Determined), and -3 for the vitals, she'll hit on 11 or less. She rolls a 9 and her spear passes between the wolf's ribs.

Anyone who's new to combat is likely to find it a shock. Usually this means a Fright Check (pp. B360-361) when the fighting starts, and another on first seeing someone killed or severely wounded. This may make the frightened person useless in combat! A combatant with Combat Reflexes as a secret advantage gets +2 to Will – but in addition, the hero *won't* be incapacitated by fear. Instead, treat the adventurer as having Post-Combat Shakes (p. B150) after the first fight is over. This is a good way for a new arrival to discover a hidden talent!

Learning Magic

People from Earth who travel to magical worlds may discover that they have an unsuspected talent for magic, and even become powerful mages. This trope goes back at least to Baum's later Oz books, where the Wizard becomes a permanent resident of Oz and Glinda the Good teaches him real magic.

Most people from Earth who travel to a portal realm have Mundane Background (p. 14), often as part of the Transmundane meta-trait (p. 18). This prevents their learning any form of magic, even if they have Magery! However, they can buy it off with character points earned in supernatural encounters, in effect gaining the trait No Mundane Background (p. 15). The GM may also award earmarked points for this purpose, crediting the adventurers with hours per day of learning at rates that depend on the setting and adventures:

Magic is rare or subtle (there are only a few mages in a nation – either small or large – *or* magic lacks obvious effects): Four hours/day; 500 days to gain No Mundane Background.

Magic is common (every town, or perhaps every village, has a mage or two): Eight hours/day; 250 days to gain No Mundane Background.

Magic is constantly present (ordinary people use magic in their daily activities, or encounter it in their daily lives): 16 hours/day; 125 days to gain No Mundane Background.

Adventurer actively looks for the supernatural (also applies if the adventurer is trying to *disprove* the existence of magic!): 16 hours/day; 125 days to gain No Mundane Background.

Once an Earthling has thoroughly internalized the existence of magic, it's possible to begin studying it. How that works depends on how magic functions in the portal realm! Here are suggested approaches for roleplaying the learning process in various magic systems.

Mana-Based Magic

The standard magic of the **GURPS Basic Set** and **GURPS Magic** is learned spell by spell, with each spell counting as a different skill. Study of a spell starts by memorizing it – essentially, gaining *familiarity* (p. B169) with it. This takes two days of regular practice, or one day of intense effort, with a Will roll. At this point, the spell can be cast at IQ + Magery - 6 if IQ/Hard, or IQ + Magery - 7 if IQ/Very Hard; in effect, the student gains default use of the spell. An overconfident student, or one faced with an emergency, may attempt a default casting; success makes it possible to spend one character point to buy the spell. Other students can practice under supervision, with favorable conditions that grant +4 to +6 to skill, until they have accumulated 200 hours of study.

In some worlds, this can be combined with Symbol Drawing as an aid to casting. The student takes one extra second to call up a suitable mental image, or to trace it in the air with gestures. Success at Symbol Drawing grants half the margin of success (rounded down) as a bonus to the roll to cast the spell. It isn't possible to gain bonuses to *spells* by taking extra time (p. B346), but Symbol Drawing (e.g., on a wax tablet, with a stylus) *can* benefit from such bonuses. On the other hand, Magery bonuses apply only to the spell itself, not to Symbol Drawing.

PATH/BOOK MAGIC

Path/Book magic (see **GURPS Thaumatology**) doesn't *necessarily* require Magery, though the GM may make an exception in a particular game world. What prevents people on Earth from using magic may be either that our natural laws are resistant to it, or that we haven't learned the appropriate methods.

In general, anyone who visits a portal realm where Path/Book magic works has some chance to learn it. The first step is usually finding a teacher and studying the Ritual Magic skill, which is a prerequisite for the various Paths and Books. A student who has one point in Ritual Magic gains the use of *all* available Paths at Ritual Magic-6; this in turn grants the use of each Path's rituals, which default to it as techniques. In practice, learners will want to limit their efforts to techniques with small or no penalties! A caster can improve the odds by taking extra time, working in long-established ritual spaces, or using material or symbolic components (all discussed in **GURPS Thaumatology**).

Character points earned on adventures that involve successful castings can be spent on higher skill in Ritual Magic, a particular Path (which may not exceed Ritual Magic), or a specific ritual (which may not exceed its Path). Unless the GM decrees otherwise, they cannot be spent to raise skill in a Book. Further study can also improve Ritual Magic, a Path, or a ritual, and is the *only* way to acquire knowledge of a Book.

A person from Earth who has skill in Religious Ritual can attempt a default roll against Ritual Magic at Religious Ritual-6 *if* the portal realm has the same religion or a similar variant, and *if* the form of ritual magic is based on it. This grants *no* default to any Path or Book, or any ritual included in one. However, a default roll is still useful for such purposes as preparing a ritual space or offering a sacrifice.

INVENTED MAGIC

Some portal fantasies portray a different approach to learning magic: Instead of being trained by a practitioner native to the realm, the traveler observes that magic works, determines its principles, and uses the knowledge to devise original spells. In the *Compleat Enchanter* stories, for example, Harold Shea uses symbolic logic to come up with spells suited to various worlds. More recent fiction often suggests that computer programmers are naturally suited to becoming mages.

Don't allow this in a campaign where magic is supposed to be mysterious and otherworldly!

Inventing Spells in Mana-Based Magic

Creating new spells can be represented with a variant of the rules for new inventions (pp. B473-477). The governing skill is Thaumatology, which defaults to Anthropology-4, Mathematics (Pure)-5, or Computer Programming-6 in a setting that works this way. A successful invention roll allows buying actual Thaumatology skill; after this, either Mathematics (Pure) or Computer Programming can be used as a complementary skill.

The GM may allow the Gadgeteer advantage to apply to creating new spells, or allow a mage-to-be (p. 20) to purchase this trait with Specialized, Magical, -50%. This could represent the special benefits of applying formal logic or anthropological insight to spell creation. Such a mage can perform analysis to reverse-engineer another mage's spell, or modification to alter it – which includes creating a counterspell. See *Gadgeteering During Adventures* (p. B477).

Spell creation has a baseline penalty of -6, *unless the inventor is a Gadgeteer*. Added penalties apply for many spells: -2 per prerequisite spell, halved to -1 for a Gadgeteer. Only the Concept roll needs to be made; the equivalent of the Prototype roll is the roll to actually *cast* the spell, and the consequences of critical failure in casting take the place of the risk of bugs. The effective skill level for this roll is IQ + Magery, with the same penalties as for the Concept roll. A caster with an unspent character point can attempt to learn the newly invented spell, in the same fashion as for Wild Talent (pp. B99-100) with Retention.

Inventing Rituals in Path/Book Magic

In Path/Book magic, you create *rituals,* which are considered techniques rather than skills. For Path magic, roll vs. Path skill, at a baseline penalty of -6 *unless the inventor is a Gadgeteer*. There's an added penalty equal to *double* the penalty for the ritual's Path default in the Effect Shaping approach (use this for both the Effect Shaping and Energy Accumulating models); if the inventor is a Gadgeteer, don't double the added penalty. The GM assigns this penalty based on a comparison of the ritual's effects with those of other rituals of the same Path. Once the ritual is created, you can always cast it at the default penalty; if you have two unspent character points, you're free to invest them in the new ritual.

It's possible to create a ritual for a Path you haven't studied, or even one that hasn't been invented yet, at an added -6 for the Path skill's default to Ritual Magic. If you do so, you can cast the ritual *once* at IQ (or at IQ + Magery, if Magery gives bonuses to rituals). You *must* invest a point in the Path skill if you wish to use the ritual again; this is done in the same fashion as for Wild Talent (p. B99-100) with Retention.

If the attempt succeeds, you can always cast the ritual at the default penalty; if you have two more unspent character points, you're free to invest them in the new ritual. Once you've created and begun to learn a new Path, you can add rituals to it by the standard process.

Book magic works somewhat differently, as the logic of a Book is less obvious and more personal. If you invent a new ritual, it's treated as belong to a Book that hasn't been invented yet (you're creating it by inventing the ritual!). You roll against Ritual Magic at a baseline penalty of -6, or at no penalty if you're a Gadgeteer. To make the ritual usable, you *must* invest a point in the new Book skill, in the same fashion as for a new Path skill; otherwise, the underlying concept isn't solidified enough to be of any benefit. *If the GM approves,* you may add further new rituals to the same Book, once you've created them – but you never get to base the invention roll on the Book skill. To add a new ritual to a Book, make the same roll as for Wild Talent with Retention, but you don't need to invest an additional point in the Book skill. With either the first or a subsequent ritual, you're free to invest two unspent character points in it after making the roll to add it to the Book.

> *In some mythic settings, supernatural forces regularly walk the earth.*
>
> *– GURPS Powers*

Ritual Path Magic

As an alternative to using the invention rules, a campaign can use a magic system where the creation of new spells or effects is built in. *GURPS Thaumatology* offers several options: symbol magic, verb-noun syntactic magic, and Realm-based syntactic magic. The most fully developed verb-noun variant has its own supplement: *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic.*

In a realm where Ritual Path magic works, anyone – including visitors from a world without magic – can *attempt* to learn and use it. This requires buying No Mundane Background (or losing it through exposure to magic; see p. 30), and then spending one point on Thaumatology to acquire it at IQ-3; travelers from a nonmagical world won't have had a chance to learn it before arriving. Path skills default to Thaumatology-6.

After learning Thaumatology, the new spellcaster will probably want to spend points on one or more Path skills, which can be used to improvise magical effects. Path skills can't be raised above Thaumatology, so learning Thaumatology at higher levels always comes before learning Path skills at those levels.

Path skills *also* can't be raised above (12 + Magery level). A practitioner without at least Magery 0 makes *all* Path rolls at -5, which limits *effective* skill to 7. A mage-to-be (p. 20) or any other transmundane with Magery 0 is exempt from this penalty. It isn't common in portal fantasy for transmundanes to acquire Magery 0 *after* arrival – it's much more common for a new arrival to discover an unsuspected gift for magic that was always there.

At the GM's option, a mage-to-be, or perhaps a child (pp. 18-19), may have the advantage Ritual Adept [40] (*GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic,* p. 6), which makes Ritual Path magic much easier and more effective. To enhance the role of transmundanes, this advantage might *only* be available to them, letting them emerge as truly extraordinarily powerful mages. It would be fair to charge an extra 10 points for an Unusual Background in such a case.

Magic as Powers

In a "magic as powers" system, the ability to learn magic depends not on Magery, but on Talent for a particular power. If you have at least one level of Talent for a power, you can acquire new abilities of that power by study. Someone with *no* abilities can have a level of Talent as a "placeholder" for the potential to gain them, much as Magery indicates the potential for learning spells in mana-based magic. At the GM's option, each 200 hours of study might earn one point toward the cost of the studied ability, or the student may put points earned through adventuring toward a designated ability, with no set time requirement – or both. Each level of Talent reduces the study-time requirement by 10%, to a minimum of 60% (120 hours) for Talent 4. Talent doesn't alter an ability's point cost.

If you have an ability but no Talent, you can't gain new abilities except through repetition of whatever accident, enchantment, or miracle gave you the first one. However, you can spend study time or earned points on acquiring the Talent, which will open the door to a wider range of abilities. Study time for a Talent does *not* benefit from whatever Talent you already have!

Supplements that provide worked systems of magic as powers include *GURPS Powers: Divine Favor, GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers,* and *GURPS Thaumatology: Sorcery.*

Interworld Trade

If a portal can be used in two directions, and repeatedly, it creates opportunities for trade. On a small scale, trade can help travelers pay their way in a portal realm; on a larger scale, it can become an industry. Economic activity isn't a major theme in novels or films – but it's likely to occur to *gamers,* and a portal-fantasy campaign may have to address it.

What governs trade is *comparative advantage:* If conditions on one side of a portal are unusually favorable for producing

a particular good, the society there can specialize in providing that good. For example, advances in metallurgy make fine weapons inexpensive in high-TL worlds, and modern Earth could export them. Other goods may be inexpensive in worlds where magic works, and portal realms could export them – for example, Plant spells or ritual invocation of spirits might allow high yields of wine or spices.

To conduct trade, a merchant needs:

1. *Merchandise* or *exchangeable goods.*
2. *Transportation.*
3. *Supplies* for the trip's duration (for both the merchant and any employees).

The second and third can be regarded as adventuring gear (p. B26), but it's reasonable to treat merchandise as coming out of the 80% of starting wealth that goes into fixed assets. The merchant carries this along on journeys but isn't free to consume or expend it – not if the plan is to continue being a merchant! Transportation must be able to carry the weight of merchandise and supplies, and sometimes that of the merchant and any employees (see *Transport,* p. 24), making cargoes with a high value per pound – such as precious metals, germs, spices, drugs, perfumes, works of art, and luxury goods of all kinds – most desirable.

Earth and a portal realm aren't likely to have the same money, if the portal realm has money at all. In dealing with a TL1-4 realm, trade will involve taking Earth goods through the portal, selling them for the portal realm's money, and using that money to buy goods for export – and then reversing the process on Earth. "Money" in portal realms often means some physical commodity, typically precious metal, exchanged by weight at TL1 or coined at TL2-4 (see *Precious Metals,* p. 24). In most portal-fantasy campaigns, it's convenient just to give portal realm prices in "$," while making it clear that this is some currency of the portal realm that has nothing to do with Earth dollars; in a trade campaign that alternates between settings, keeping portal-realm accounts in "ounces of silver" or "denarii" *might* achieve a sense of cultural distance.

Most TL0 societies won't actually have money. Trade involves barter; e.g., so many bottles of brandy for so many strings of pearls.

For basic rules for trade, see pp. B559-562, especially the passages about commercial transactions. **GURPS Social Engineering** expands on these, especially for trade in previously unfamiliar goods. **GURPS Low-Tech Companion 3: Daily Life and Economics** offers advice on running a mercantile enterprise, and on currency.

You can't take it with you.
– Traditional saying

SHOPPING LIST

Interworld traders looking for suitable goods to ship to portal realms have a number of options. Many of these are also worth considering as valuables that one-way travelers might just happen to be carrying with them.

Alcohol: Distilled liquors appeared as commercial products at late TL3 or early TL4; some portal realms won't have them, even if they have beer, wine, cider, or mead. Bringing them in may create a number of medical and legal problems.

Books: Guides to using technology *just a little* more advanced than the local TL might find a ready market.

Cloth: Modern dyes have brighter colors and are slower to fade than low-tech ones.

Cosmetics and Perfumes: Substances that add to beauty or sex appeal are always in demand; if they're rare and high-priced, they may have extra appeal as signals of wealth. Present-day Earth has both natural products from all over the world and a variety of synthetic ones.

Drugs: Never mind the illegal drugs – well into TL5, medicine was often ineffective or toxic, and sometimes both! Consider the demand for aspirin (an effective treatment for headache), antibiotics (among other things, a cure for sexually transmitted diseases), or oral contraceptives.

Spices: Historically these were the basis of many trade routes, some covering thousands of miles. Ancient Roman records have pepper trading for one-eighth of its weight in silver, and medieval European prices could be even higher.

Steel: Good-quality steel becomes available at much lower cost at TL5. Weapons have an obvious appeal, but think of less dramatic products such as sewing needles. Stainless steel's rust-resistant brightness could get objects made from it treated as presentation quality (×5 cost or more).

Sugar: Refined sugar is an intense experience for people who've never tasted it. When first imported into Europe, it was treated like a spice – and priced like one. Continuing trade could result in some inhabitants of the portal realm acquiring an Addiction.

ORGANIZATIONS

Traders frequently have to deal with organizations rather than individuals. The stats used to describe these are defined in **GURPS Boardroom and Curia.**

Type is most often Commercial – whether as trading partners, providers of services, or sources of funding. However, a trader might turn to a Government organization for enforcement of contracts or property rights, or even an Aid organization when a venture fails.

In typical TL1-4 portal realms, organizations tend to be small, usually with 5-20 members; one with 100 members would be unusually large. Those worth trading with commonly have a *Wealth* of Comfortable or better.

A typical *Reaction-Time Modifier* is +2, based on technological limitations.

A trader who wants to set up a firm may have the benefit of comparatively high Wealth (see *Wealth and Possessions,* pp. 22-24). If the organization has High TL as a trait, it can gain the benefits of functioning at TL7-8, particularly better reaction time (modifier 0 rather than +2); this is easiest to achieve with the aid of high-tech equipment, but administrative methods such as double-entry bookkeeping and organized filing systems can make a difference by themselves.

INDEX

Through the blue-tiled walls of the market stalls
There's a hidden door she leads you to.
– Al Stewart, "The Year of the Cat"