PYRAMID

ALTERNATE GURPS III

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and Antoni Ten Monrós

NATURAL WEAPONS
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EVERYMAN TASKS
by William H. Stoddard

BY DEFAULT
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by Hans-Christian Vortisch

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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COVER ART
John Zeleznik

Pyramid is the home for great new **GURPS** options, but sometimes we pull out all the stops to take the system to new and interesting places. These issues we call "Alternate **GURPS.**" Buckle up; you're in for an amazing ride!

Are you looking for a new take on character creation – one that accommodates power-gamers and varied heroes with oddball flaws? The Grand Master of **GURPS,** Sean Punch, gives you *Buckets of Points* to work with, and walks you through how to design perfect character-creation budgets and post-adventure rewards.

Don't go it alone; save the day with *Team Up!* These two new advantages, four new skills, eight perks, and plenty of **GURPS** rules tips let you replicate action-fiction group dynamics, turning your collection of adventurers into a highly effective outfit.

GURPS Tactical Shooting expert Hans-Christian Vortisch turns his sites on the Guns skill, using his know-how to deliver *Alternate Guns Specialties and Techniques*. With this simplified system of three specialties, six familiarity penalties, and two techniques, shootists can more accurately reflect real-world experiences.

When you want your campaign to rely heavily on interpersonal interactions, consider character creation with *Social Points*. In this month's Eidetic Memory, **GURPS Basic Set** co-designer David L. Pulver explains how he did it and the interesting side effects – including increased interest in Secret Advantages!

Not everything natural is healthy! *Natural Weapons* offers a new **GURPS** advantage for making heroes and monsters with innate weaponry. In addition to game mechanics and special modifiers for the titular trait, you'll get 11 sample abilities.

Sometimes it's useful to have an idea of things that anyone can do. William H. Stoddard, author of **GURPS Fantasy,** describes dozens of *Everyman Tasks,* divided by attribute default and offering modified **GURPS** skills for each one.

When you want your campaign to focus more on skills than on attributes, you should consider changing how things are done *By Default.* **GURPS Technical Grappling** author Douglas Cole reveals the benefits and pitfalls of altering how skills default to attributes.

Make your skills even more useful with *A Full Complement!* Sean Punch winds down the issue with a **GURPS** discussion of complementary skills, which rewards teamwork and promotes obscure skills.

This month's *Random Thought Table* turns the "average" into some extraordinary, while *Odds and Ends* wraps up with tiny bits we couldn't fit elsewhere, including a new option for **GURPS Powers: Divine Favor** from its author, Jason "PK" Levine.

Whether your game has shooters, talkers, clawers, loners, or comrades, this issue has alternatives for you!

FROM THE EDITOR

SAY, YOU KNOW WHAT'S AWESOME?

As I write this, *The Lego Movie* is still performing strongly in the theaters. One of the things that struck me about it is how *genuine* it seemed to me. It was a movie that doesn't feel like it could have existed (say) 20 years ago; even a film that flirted with a genuine appreciation of the non-mainstream – such as 1992's *Wayne's World* – wrapped much of its view on life in an ironic detached "not!" mentality.
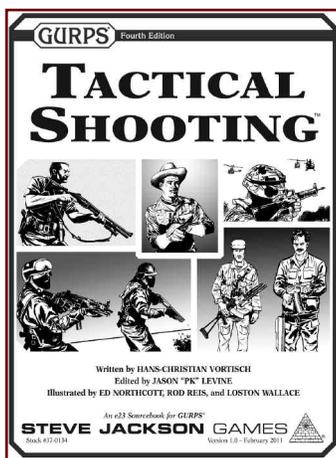
I came away from *The Lego Movie* realizing that society's ability to be unapologetically optimistic and unironically enthusiastic might be at a level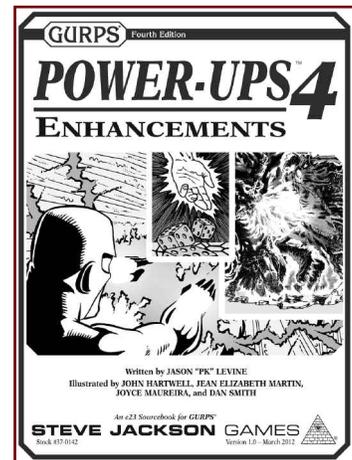 unknown since the late 1950s and early 1960s, when running around pretending to be a jet pilot was a normal childhood activity, and educational films on the value of community were meant to be watched without snarky quips from *Mystery Science Theater 3000/RiffTrax*-style commentators. (I note that my choice of this era of enthusiasm may well be a reflection of American/Baby Boomer-childhood history; I'm honestly not sure what the mindset was in other parts of the world at that time.)

What does all this have to do with *GURPS?* (This is one of our "Alternate *GURPS*"-themed issues, after all . . .) Well, as I was sitting in the theater watching *The Lego Movie,* I realized I recognized the spirit I was witnessing.

It's common on the *GURPS* forums, when countless new ideas spring into life each month for how to use this Generic Universal Role-Playing System: "Looking to convert some near-forgotten RPG or TV show into a more active system? *Awesome!* An economics-based simulationist game set in medieval Europe? *Awesome!* A low-level look at the support teams that keep giant combining robots operative during wartime conditions? *Awesome!!*" And I hope some of that spirit is in every issue of *Pyramid,* but especially the "Alternate *GURPS*" issues. May this issue supply a new batch of toys and tools to play with, letting you take your gaming to new and awesome areas.
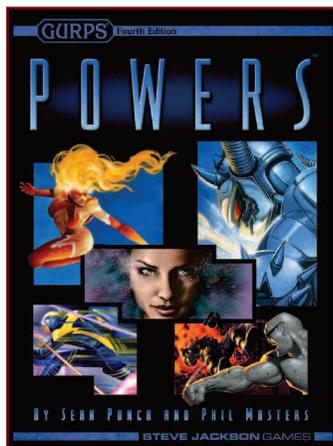
WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

You know what else is awesome? When you tell us how we're doing! Did some of these tools get used immediately in your game? Or did some come broken or otherwise fall to the bottom of the toy box? Let us know privately at **pyramid@sjgames.com**, or join the madcap gaming modders at **forums.sjgames.com**.

BUCKETS OF POINTS

BY SEAN PUNCH

A strength of point-build systems such as **GURPS** is that they enable players to bring all manner of interesting character concepts to life. A downside is that "power-gamers" can use strategic spending to generate unbalanced monstrosities. Although some players bridge these categories, that's rare. Differences between these outlooks are liable to tear apart a gaming group, and few GMs enjoy the balancing act of sparring with gamers who want to "win" while entertaining those whose vision of fun accepts dramatic flaws and failures.

The first step in coming to grips with this problem is to examine its roots. One source of trouble is character abilities the GM has difficulty controlling. Another is capabilities that are underpriced, in general or for a specific campaign. Unfortunately, the surest way to address these issues is to examine each trait and decide whether to permit it as written, allow it at a different point cost (e.g., by tacking on an Unusual Background), or ban it outright – a laborious process! And as prohibited options might be essential to perfectly good character concepts, the GM must *also* hear player appeals, adding to the workload.

A final source of difficulty is mathematical optimization: obtaining the largest ability scores for the smallest investment of points. Every **GURPS** player is familiar with this. Why spend 20 points to raise five IQ/A skills from IQ+1 to IQ+2 when +1 IQ costs the same amount . . . even if your character concept *is* "expert at these specific skills," not "all-around genius"? Why take a 10-point level of Talent with a collection of HT-based skills when +1 HT costs 10 points? And so on. Fortunately, *this* weakness is easier to remedy!

DIFFERENT KINDS OF POINTS

The root of the optimization problem is favorable "exchange rates" between character points spent on different types of traits. In particular, points put toward attributes tend to give more bang than those invested in skills, but similar situations exist for skills vis-à-vis techniques, standard skills vs. wildcard skills, and so on. A solution is to render such comparisons irrelevant by giving each category of capabilities its own point budget. To make this separation explicit, rename the points earmarked for each "bucket": Attribute Points, Advantage Points, Skill Points, etc.

Basic Categories

The simplest division is threefold:

1. *Attributes.* Basic attributes (ST, DX, IQ, and HT) and secondary characteristics (HP, Will, Per, FP, Basic Speed, and Basic Move). The GM may judge other traits similar enough to these to include them here, notably Striking Strength (pp. B88-89) and Lifting Strength (pp. B65-66) as proxies for damage and Basic Lift, respectively; Energy Reserve (*GURPS Powers,* p. 119) as variant FP; and water and air Move (p. B18). This is a complication, however, and strictly optional.

2. *Advantages.* Everything described in Chapter 2 of the **GURPS Basic Set** – including perks (pp. B100-101) – that isn't called out as part of the previous category, plus all positive traits under *Age and Beauty* (pp. B20-22), *Social Background* (pp. B22-25), *Wealth and Influence* (pp. B25-30), *Friends and Foes* (p. B31), and *Identities* (p. B31).

3. *Skills.* Everything in Chapter 4 of the **Basic Set** – including wildcard skills (p. B175) and techniques (pp. B229-233) – as well as "special" skills such as magic spells, the psi skills from **GURPS Psionic Powers,** and the Imbuement Skills in **GURPS Power-Ups 1: Imbuements.** The GM might move "skill-like" advantages from the previous category to this one; Cultural Familiarities (p. B23) and Languages (pp. B23-25) are especially fitting. This is another optional complication.

> *A man never discloses his own character so clearly as when he describes another's.*
> *– Jean Paul Richter*

Advanced Categories

Matters needn't be so simple! The campaign's needs may suggest subdivisions of the previous categories.

Attributes

These rarely need divvying up, but the GM who wants to keep players from tinkering with IQ, Will, and Per – or with HT, FP, and Basic Speed – might break out *Secondary Characteristics* with a separate budget . . . or *no* budget.

Advantages

There are lots of possibilities here! Perhaps the most important separation is between mundane advantages and *Special Abilities,* the latter including the campaign's permitted exotic and supernatural traits, and probably cinematic gifts (Gadgeteer, Gizmos, Rapier Wit, Trained by a Master, Weapon Master, etc.). Some genres and backgrounds benefit from finer divisions; e.g., *Biological Modifications* and/or *Cybernetics* in worlds where almost everybody has those, *Psionics* in a campaign about psis, and *Super-Powers* in a **GURPS Supers** game.

Mundane advantages can be split up, too. For instance, the GM might separate *Social Pull* from innate gifts and assign this area its own budget to be spent on Allies, Claim to Hospitality, Clerical Investment, Contacts, Independent Income, Legal Enforcement Powers, Legal Immunity, Patrons, Rank, Reputation, Security Clearance, Social Regard, Status, Tenure, and Wealth. This would tie the heroes into the game world while setting an upper limit on their starting importance.

And if the GM prefers a perk allowance different from the schemes in supplements such as **GURPS Martial Arts** and **GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles** – say, "five perks" to mirror the customary five quirks – then *Perks* could become its own category.

The same trait type might appear in several categories with different origins. Plenty of advantages could result from cybernetics *or* super-powers. Allies could be social traits *or* – with Summonable – purely supernatural. Perks could be super-powers if exotic, social abilities if they represents licenses or favors, *or* straight-up mundane advantages.

Skills

If superhuman gifts are allowed, it's handy to subdivide not only advantages but also skills. A conservative high-fantasy campaign might benefit from a *Spells* category, while a "kitchen sink" approach like that of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** would do better with a broader *Special Skills* bin for Enthrallment skills (pp. B191-192), cinematic martial-arts skills (e.g., Breaking Blow and Power Blow), spells, and so on.

Wildcard Skills is another good division. This removes the struggle between boosting these costly skills or spending the same points on a few of the included standard skills at higher levels. In a campaign where not every PC has wildcards, it would be reasonable to fold these into *Special Skills.*

Techniques is a logical category, too, if such traits are central to the campaign. For instance, a **Martial Arts** game might require every PC to master a martial-arts style and spend a number of points on its techniques. This removes the "economic" motivation to raise a skill instead of a bunch of associated techniques.

Themes

The GM is welcome to get creative! Every category suggested so far tacitly assumes that like is kept with like; e.g., Special Ability Points buy advantages, usually unrealistic ones. However, the GM who doesn't mind keeping track of the details might opt to base categories on *themes* instead of *trait types,* so that every PC has capabilities befitting the campaign. For instance, that **Martial Arts** game might feature Martial Arts Points valid for Trained by a Master, Weapon Master, Style Perks, combat skills, cinematic martial-arts skills, and fighting techniques. Similarly, Psionics Points could buy not just **Powers**-style abilities, but also psionic Talents, and the psi skills and psi techniques in **Psionic Powers.**

BUDGETS

The GM's next task is to assign each category a budget. This is completely arbitrary, but a few principles are worth bearing in mind.

If aiming for a campaign about believable people thrust into adventures due to their training and/or social importance – not because they're super-talented, much less super-*powered* – keep Attribute Points and Advantage Points modest, but offer generous Skill Points. "Modest" and "generous" are relative; special-ops soldiers are better than horror victims in all respects, but their skills are still what matters. Allotments of Perk Points and Social Points *separate* from Advantage Points often fit. Don't worry about powers, spells, wildcard skills, etc.; these don't exist for anyone.

In larger-than-life campaigns, budgets for attributes and mundane advantages needn't be so modest. Other details depend on *why* the PCs are heroically capable. As previously suggested, it makes sense to allocate points for martial-arts styles in a **Martial Arts** game – and there might be a Special Ability Points allowance earmarked for gifts such as Extra Attack and Trained by a Master. In a pulp campaign, the GM could instead budget Shtick Points for wildcard skills that define each hero's role, and give out Special Ability Points intended for advantages such as Gadgeteer for inventors, highly limited Mind Reading for mysterious swamis, and perhaps Extra Life. And in a **Supers** game, a large parcel of Special Ability Points is essential and the GM may allow these to buy almost anything.

Overall power level is more flexible when using categories. It's only sensible to keep track of the sum of all budgets; e.g., in a 200-point campaign with Attribute, Advantage, and Skill Points, start by distributing 200 points among the three bins.

Notation

There is no overall point *budget* in this approach, but there's still a point *total*. Everything costs what it always does, so it's sensible to speak of the campaign as if its power level were the sum of all budgets and its disadvantage limit were the sum of the caps in each category. For instance, a GM might describe a game with 70 Attribute Points, 30 Advantage Points, and 50 Skill Points as a "150-point campaign" – and if PCs can pick up to 50% of Attribute and Advantage Points in negative-cost traits, it would be reasonable to talk of a -50-point disadvantage limit, too.

On the other hand, it's imperative to spell out each budget for the players. To save space in notes, give any percentage disadvantage limit in parenthesis after the budget. Mention quirks (p. 7) and required traits (p. 8) at the end, separate from budgets. For instance, to describe the above scheme to players – and note that everyone has five quirks – it would be clear enough to write "Attributes 70 (50%), Advantages 30 (50%), Skills 50, Quirks 5."

However, there's considerable room for give and take, as assigning modest budgets to the traits behind the worst abuses admits more generosity in other areas. For instance, the GM may initially want to kick off a **GURPS Tactical Shooting** campaign about well-trained-but-plausible commandos at 250 points . . . yet 400 points might work fine as 150 Attribute Points, 50 Advantage Points, and 200 Skill Points, because that isn't the 400-point free-for-all that a **GURPS Gun Fu** game would be.

The takeaway message is that the GM should strive to give each PC a suitable place in the story by *requiring* minimum expenditures in essential areas, but cap the maximum points per bin at a level that prevents unbalanced or poorly rounded heroes. In general, since attributes and advantages are the most abused categories, this is where to be most conservative. It's harder to go wrong with Skill Points.

> ## Disadvantage Points?
>
> In theory, instead of defining disadvantage limits as percentages in specific categories (see *Limits*), the GM might assign characters a Disadvantage Points budget alongside their allocations for attributes, advantages, etc. These points would give *nothing* back – they would just be another part of being a PC. This would mirror the recommended handling of quirks (see *Quirks*).
>
> In practice, this gets messy. Some negative-cost traits are subpar attributes, others are social problems, and yet others are genuine physical, mental, exotic, or superhuman disadvantages. Depending on what's selected, the effects could be horribly unequal – particularly if the GM implements *The Exchange*. A workaround would be to define separate categories of negative points, but that would get complex and force PCs to have problems in areas that don't suit them. Thus, a budget-based approach isn't recommended.

DISADVANTAGES

A wrinkle introduced by binning traits is "What kind of points do disadvantages give back?" The obvious answer is that disadvantageous traits in each category return points *in that specific category;* e.g., selling off attribute levels garners Attribute Points to use for *other* attributes, and as advantages and disadvantages are "opposites," disadvantages grant more Advantage Points. If a category is finely divided, it's important to maintain conceptual separation: social disadvantages give Social Points, not general Advantage Points or Special Ability Points; supernatural disadvantages give Special Ability Points but never Social Points; and so on. As there's no real equivalent to "negative" skills or techniques, there's no need to worry about this topic for Skill Points, Technique Points, or anything similar.

Limits

In this system, *Disadvantage Limit* (p. B11) applies on a category-by-category basis. For instance, the GM could allow up to 50% of Attribute Points in scores with negative costs, returning points for other attributes; 40% of Advantage Points in disadvantages, netting additional advantages; and no other drawbacks. It's best to ensure that the total permitted tradeoff doesn't exceed a comfortable disadvantage limit; e.g., if the GM wouldn't want to keep track of more than -50 points of

problems in a standard 250-point game, then in a campaign with 150 Attribute Points, 50 Advantage Points, and 50 Skill Points, it would be reasonable to set, say, a 20% limit on Attribute Points (for up to -30 points) and a 40% limit on Advantage Points (another -20 points), or for that matter to go with 10% (-15 points) and 70% (-35 points).

As with the regular disadvantage limit, such restrictions are optional. In the previous example, the GM might be willing to let players shift points freely from one attribute to another (no limit!), yet restrict disadvantages to 100% of Advantage Points (-50 points). In that case, the only permitted disadvantages would come from Chapter 3 of the **Basic Set** and the negative traits on pp. B18-31.

The fact that Skill Points have no negative equivalent reduces the abuse potential. For instance, in a 150-point campaign with 70 Attribute Points, 30 Advantage Points, and 50 Skill Points, the GM might go as high as 50%, as that's still -35 points in attributes and a mere -15 points of true disadvantages, not the excessive -75 points that would result from applying that percentage in a standard 150-point campaign!

Quirks

Quirks are a special case. The GM *might* lump them into the disadvantage percentage for some category, but as quirks can be completely off-the-wall and defy categorization, that would straitjacket character design and suck a lot of fun out of it. A better idea is to declare that everybody must specify five quirks that don't yield extra points. They're a lot like *Required Traits* (p. 8).

If that seems stingy, the GM can add 5 Advantage Points to the original budget – or perhaps tack on 5 Perk Points.

THE EXCHANGE

The assumption up to this point is that each bucket of points is firewalled from every other – that players *can't* shuffle points between categories. This doesn't have to be the case! It may be that some or all points *can* move around but don't have the same buying power everywhere. This let the GM tailor the "exchange rates" hinted at earlier.

Mobility

First, the GM must decide what can be exchanged. A free-for-all is *an* option, but it's hardly the only one and really only a *good* option if the campaign features relatively few bins (no more than three or four). Some ideas to mix and match:

No Trading: Some categories are completely hermetic; no points can flow in or out. Players must spend a fixed allotment of points in that area – no exceptions. This is only recommended if the expenditure is an essential campaign premise, as is often the case for *Themes* (p. 5). An example would be a **Psionic Powers** game in which a non-psionic hero would have no part to play, and which starts with the PCs acquiring different psi abilities from a "scientific" plot device (drug, genetic engineering, etc.) that imparts a predictable number of Psionics Points. This amounts to *Required Traits* (p. 8) with a degree of choice.

Unidirectional Trade: Other budgets allow trades out but not in, or vice versa. If only outgoing trades are allowed, then it's possible lack such traits but not to be extra-gifted; e.g., the GM of a **Supers** game might cap Power Points but permit super-skilled "norms" to sacrifice them for incredible mundane abilities, while a campaign about inexperienced child prodigies may forbid extra Skill Points but allow players to give up a few for more Attribute or Advantage Points. If only incoming trades are permitted, then the category can grow but never diminish; e.g., in a game about highly trained commandos, it might be fine to increase Skill Points, but not to reduce them.

Trade Alliances: Some categories are sorted into groups, and exchanges are allowed *within* these collections but not *between* them; e.g., the GM might allow Skill and Technique Points to move in either direction, and also permit two-way trades between Attribute and Advantage Points, but forbid other deals. This is a good model for, say, martial-artists who have Perk and Technique Points in their styles – letting them juggle a few such points around makes it easier to accommodate fighting arts that place different relative emphases on these things without creating a situation where everyone sells it all to buy high DX.

Exchange Rates

The precise conversion rates are completely up to the GM. Below are two suggested approaches.

Ratios: If exchange is possible between only a small number of categories – whether because the campaign uses just the basic three (Attribute, Advantage, and Skill Points) or because all permitted trades occur within groups of two or three trait types – it's practical to establish ratios that makes optimization less appealing. If Attribute, Advantage, and Skill Points trade at 2:3:4, then giving up 60 points of attributes gains 90 points of advantages or 120 points of skills, sacrificing 60 points of advantages gives 40 points of attributes or 80 points of skills, and exchanging 60 points of skills grants 45 points of advantages or 30 points of attributes. In that example, it's half as effective to strip points off skills for higher attributes, and 50% *more* attractive to purchase Talents instead of attributes. Always specify *one* ratio with terms for every kind of tradable points, even if some trades are unidirectional. That way, there won't be loopholes (e.g., if Attribute and Skill Points trade at 1:2, Advantage and Skill Points trade at 2:3, and Attribute and Advantage Points trade at 1:2, an Attribute Point buys two Skill Points directly but *three* if it's converted to an Advantage Point first – a major flaw!).

Dilution: There might instead be an across-the-board reduction whenever points are moved out of their home category into any other category allowed; points are multiplied by 3/4, 2/3, 1/2, or worse when traded. This is tricky to manage if players are allowed to keep moving points around. It's best saved for situations where players create characters in front of the GM and the GM is willing to make deals: "I need another 5 Advantage Points for Combat Reflexes." "You have 12 unspent Skill Points and we're using a 50% dilution, so I'll let you trade 10 of those for 5 Advantage Points."

Even Trades

Not all trades need involve *Exchange Rates* (above). A 1:1 trade might still be unidirectional (see *Mobility,* pp. 6-7) and/or subject to *Bounds* (below). For instance, the GM of a **Martial Arts** campaign might permit players to exchange each Skill Point for a Technique Point, permit no trades in the opposite direction, and set a lower bound on Skill Points or an upper bound on Technique Points.

Bounds

The GM can also set upper and lower bounds on each bin to sharpen campaign focus. Perhaps everybody starts with 50 Skill Points and may go as low as 40 Skill Points or as high as 100 Skill Points. However exchanges work, only 10 Skill Points can be shuffled off to another category, but incoming trades can add up to 50 Skill Points.

Benefits of the Exchange

All of this requires extra thinking, but it has several "natural" benefits:

● *It keeps everything at its standard cost.* While it's possible to get similar results by re-pricing (e.g., instead of saying that Attribute Points trade 1:2 for Skill Points, the GM could double attribute costs or halve skill costs), this makes it tricky to use other rules that depend on absolute point costs. And re-pricing can't emulate *Even Trades* (above).

● *It can get rid of Unusual Backgrounds.* If the GM wants, there can be categories of traits that have exchange rates but *no* budgets. Adjusting how unfavorable a rate is to incoming trades lets the GM increase the *effective* cost of those capabilities in proportion to their worth rather than by a flat amount. This is handy for situations such as **GURPS Horror** campaigns where occult abilities exist but are exceedingly rare, and where players who want them for their PCs must be willing to make sacrifices. It's also a way to curb fussing around with secondary characteristics: assign them no budget and make playing with them a costly privilege.

At every single moment of one's life, one is what one is going to be no less than what one has been.

– Oscar Wilde

● *It puts a price on opting out without forbidding it.* This is in a sense the converse of the previous point: The GM can allow players to opt out of something that's important to the campaign, but require them to pay for the privilege by making it inefficient to trade off points in the associated traits. This makes "special snowflakes" who don't suit the genre or story less attractive than PCs consistent with the campaign's premises.

> ## Required Traits
>
> When binning points into different categories, traits that every PC *must* have fall outside the framework. They have point values but don't affect the budgets, bounds, disadvantage limits, etc. of any category, and cannot be exchanged. They just *are.* This means specific, fixed traits such a required Patron and Duty for a group of secret agents; if there's a choice, give it a budget instead.

AWARDS

When separating points into different buckets, the GM rewards good roleplaying and successful adventures with specific kinds of points rather than generic character points. This makes awards far more interesting!

Each award could consist of a mixture. Perhaps a game session typically brings in 1 Attribute Point plus 2 Skill Points, or maybe each adventure normally earns 4 Attribute Points, 1 Advantage Point, and 5 Skill Points. The GM need not stick to the campaign's original proportions; it's quite reasonable to be generous with Advantage Points (and their subcategories) at character creation but to focus on "learnable" abilities in play.

Awards might instead alternate, to much the same effect. The GM could give out 2 Skill Points, 2 Skill Points, and 1 Attribute Point for the first three sessions, and then repeat the cycle.

More radically, sessions, adventures, and large arcs of several adventures could each bring different rewards. Ordinary game sessions might earn Skill Points; the heroes exercise their skills and get better at using them. Completing adventures or story arcs may be the only way to obtain more Attribute and Advantage Points.

Certain awards could match the details of specific scenarios. Events that see the PCs make friends may garner Social Points, if these are separate from Advantage Points. Favors done for organizations or entities that can offer ultra-tech or magical services might earn rare-but-precious Bio-Mod Points, Cybernetics Points, Special Ability Points, and so on.

Schemes like these allow the GM to control the rates at which specific kinds of traits improve. In all cases, if starting points are tradable between categories, then it's only fair to allow this with earned points, subject to *Exchange Rates* (p. 7).

Learning

In a campaign that uses rules such as *Improvement Through Study* (pp. B292-294) and *Time Use Sheets* (p. B499), hours put toward a specific trait earn whatever kind of points that capability costs. The division of points into bins affords a straightforward way to define what's learnable, and at what rates. For instance, the GM might declare that only Attribute Points and Skill Points can be earned during downtime, and that Skill Points allow the full range of study options but Attribute Points always use the quarter-speed rates of *Learning on the Job* (p. B293).

Impulse Buys

If the campaign allows *Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347) or the expansion of those rules in ***GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys,*** the GM needs to decide what varieties of unspent points can be used this way.

One option is to restrict such expenditures to a specific category. This gives the GM a tool with which to control how often those rules are invoked. Picking a variety of points that's scarce during character creation, or difficult or impossible to trade for or earn, will make these kinds of uses rare – few players will burn Advantage Points if they start with just 20, can't trade Skill Points for more, and earn only one per multi-session adventure. Selecting a kind that's more readily available, typically Skill Points, will encourage such spending.

A different possibility is to associate particular kinds of unspent points with specific rules. In a campaign that uses Social Points for Allies, Status, Wealth, etc., it may be that only these can purchase *Favors in Play* (***Impulse Buys,*** pp. 8-9). Supernatural options like *Divine Intervention* (***Impulse Buys,*** p. 9), *Points for Energy* (***Impulse Buys,*** pp. 12-13), and *Changing the World* (***Impulse Buys,*** pp. 13-15) might consume Special Ability Points and nothing else. The GM can tune the relative frequency of such invocations by associating purchases intended to be rare with hard-to-get points and those meant to be commonplace with points that flow like water.

Yet another option is to fuel each use with points associated with the trait that stands to benefit. *Buying Success* (p. B347) might call for Attribute Points when it affects an attribute roll, Advantage Points when it influences the roll to activate an advantage, Skill Points when it alters the outcome of a skill roll, and so on. In borderline cases, the GM's word is final. This is probably the most dramatically satisfying approach.

Whatever method the GM chooses, if starting points can be traded between categories when buying permanent abilities, then unspent points can be moved around to purchase temporary benefits, but they're still subject to *Exchange Rates* (p. 7).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every **GURPS** product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of **GURPS** *Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the **GURPS Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created **GURPS Powers** (with Phil Masters), **GURPS Martial Arts** (with Peter Dell'Orto), **GURPS Zombies,** and the **GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy,** and **GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . among other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie.

TEAM UP!

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE
AND ANTONI TEN MONRÓS

Fiction is filled with action-packed scenes where a leader brings his team together to do things that would be otherwise impossible for any one of them to do by themselves. This could be something as mundane as distracting a target while your buddy attacks him from a vulnerable angle or as fantastic as combining your electricity-controlling powers with your partner's weather abilities to create a mobile lightning storm. These optional rules make heavy use of *GURPS Powers* and *GURPS Social Engineering*, but neither supplement is required to use them.

WORKING TOGETHER

Whether you are part of a realistic military squad or a cinematic group of troubleshooters, being able to work together is a crucial (and often underused) part of game play in any role-playing game. Although covered to some degree by *Coordinated Attacks* in **Powers** (pp. 165-166), there's room for more detail to enhance a team-focused campaign. While buying a technique does make sense in certain campaigns, it can be limiting – you need to specialize by combat skill *and* a particular group. Thus, the following new advantage might be a better fit.

Coordinated Action

12 points for level 1, plus 9 points for each additional level*

Prerequisites: Sense of Duty (Teammates) *and* one of Battle Drills (**GURPS Tactical Shooting,** p. 37), Drills (p. 10), *or* Teamwork (p. 10).

You're a member of a group that trains together so often that synchronization of action is second nature to you. You must specialize by a particular group of people or team. Levels higher than two are cinematic.

To use this advantage, everyone in the squad must take a Ready maneuver to "form up." After that, the entire group acts at the same point in the combat sequence as its *slowest* member. On the team's collective turn, each member may choose his actions freely, *and* may do one of the following.

● *Synchronize:* If two or more characters are using the same skill (e.g., Stealth or Climbing), they may help other team members by simply being nearby and offering minor assistance. First, start with the *highest* skill level among the adventurers and then add a *bonus* equal to (number of teammates that have at least one point in the skill) - (number of teammates who do not have the skill) + (the *lowest* level of Coordinated Action among the characters). This bonus applies to all members of the team that are relying on the skill. If using *Complementary Skills* (**Social Engineering,** p. 21), the GM should allow those who are assisting their teammates to gain a bonus to *any* skill roll used to complement another, equal to their level in this advantage.

● *Overwhelm:* When attacking a single target, each team member beyond the first who hits inflicts a cumulative -2 to active defenses (or half this penalty on resistance rolls) against all attacks. This penalty may never be larger than *twice* the minimum level of Coordinated Action. Halve this penalty (dropping fractions) if the target has Enhanced Time Sense. For example, if three soldiers with Coordinated Action 2 attack, they can cause at most -2 to active defenses or -1 to resistance rolls – or -1 to defenses and no resistance penalty if the target has Enhanced Time Sense.

● *Pulling Together:* If combining ST for an ST roll or to cause damage to an object (e.g., with small battering ram), use the *highest* ST plus the *lowest* level of this advantage *plus* 1/5 the total of the other ST scores (round up). If working together to lift a weight, add together everyone's Basic Lift and increase the final amount by 5% of the *lowest* level of this advantage. The GM may extend this advantage to similar tasks. For instance, digging a hole or building a wall could easily benefit from such cooperation; use the above guidelines for physically intensive tasks that require no skill or reduce the time required for a Long Task by 5% per level of this advantage.

● *Wound:* Team members can all attempt to attack the same hit location, "adding" their attacks. This doesn't actually increase the amount of injury a highly armored target takes, but it does increase the secondary effects of damage (e.g., blunt trauma, knockback, setting things on fire, DR lost to corrosive attacks, and so on). Apply the target's DR *separately* to each attack for determining injury – but add conjoint attacks that *don't* penetrate DR when assessing other effects. After working out the final HP of injury inflicted by each attack – taking into account DR, damage type, hit location, etc. – add the injuries together and treat them as a *single* wound for shock, knockdown, stunning, crippling, and anything else that depends on wound size. This lets harassers with relatively weak attacks inflict major

New Perks

The following perks may be helpful when using these new rules. Those marked with a * are cinematic traits and may not suit all games, those with a † require specialization by group, and those with a ‡ come in levels.

Aura of Authority‡
Prerequisite: Natural Leader.

You've got a way of projecting yourself to your followers. Increase your Charisma by one per level of this perk for the purposes of determining how many people you can affect with your Guidance skills (pp. 11-13). The GM should set a hard cap on levels for this perk; up to five suits most campaigns. It may be acquired as a learnable advantage after the game has begun (p. B294).

Distant Linking‡
You no longer need physical contact to link up with others (*Powers,* pp. 170-1710), as long as they're close enough. You can link up with companions who are adjacent to you, even if you're unable to touch them, as long as you can either see or hear them. Optionally, this might be a leveled perk, with further levels increasing the range by one yard per level. This incurs the usual -2 for linking up distantly. Those with ranged communication powers do not need this perk.

Drills (Task)†
Prerequisite: Teamwork.

You've drilled at a particular task or skill with your team so much that any use of *Complementary Skills* (*Social Engineering,* p. 21; see also pp. 9 and 32-33) garners an additional +1 to the bonus. This doesn't negate the skill penalty brought on by a failed roll, but critical failures are treated as failures. This perk cannot be taken for tasks that could not benefit from it.

Esprit de Corps†‡
Prerequisites: Teamwork and Sense of Duty (Teammates).

Your brothers-in-arms are your dearest friends and compatriots. You get +1 on rolls to resist Brainwashing, Interrogation, and supernatural mind control in any situation where failure to resist would lead to betrayal of your comrades. This perk may be leveled at the GM's option, giving a further +1 per level (up to +3).

Harmonious Action*†
Prerequisites: Coordination Action 2+, Esprit de Corps, Teamwork, *and* either Battle Drills *or* Drills.

You've practiced so much with your teammates, you no longer need to spend a Ready action to form up; this becomes a free action. This perk also functions with similar traits that require coordination among multiple members (e.g., the Teamwork or Battle Drills perks). You must specialize by a particular group.

Karma Pool†‡
Prerequisites: Teamwork and Sense of Duty (Teammates).

Members of your karma pool, who must also possess this perk, can contribute unspent character points into a collective fund that all members of the pool can draw from. A karma pool cannot hold more points than (the number of its members) × (the lowest level of this trait possessed by a member). Any member of the team can veto the use of points by spendthrift players. This is a meta-game trait, like Luck or Serendipity. This perk is leveled, and you must specialize by a particular group.

Natural Linker†
Unless you're trying to perform a Quick Linking (p. 15), you do not need to roll when *Combining Powers* (*Powers,* p. 170). If using the Quick Linking rules, you gain +5 to link up. This perk first appeared in *GURPS Psionic Powers* (p. 19), as *Gestalt Familiarity.* You must specialize by power source or a particular group.

Teamwork makes the dream work . . .
– John C. Maxwell

Teamwork†
You've practiced fighting in a team. To use Teamwork, everyone in the squad must take a Ready maneuver to "form up." After that, the entire group acts at the same point in the combat sequence as its *slowest* member. On the team's collective turn, each member may choose his actions freely. The sole requirement is that after everyone in the original formation has taken his turn, they're all still adjacent to one another (in adjoining hexes). If anyone gets separated, the team must form up again – with or without the straggler.

A fighter who's formed-up may:

● Brace a teammate in *front* of him and within a yard, adding 1/5 (round down) of his ST or HP, as applicable, to his ally's score when his friend resists a slam (p.B371), executes a shove (p. B372), or suffers knockback (p. B378). This is a free action.
● Feint and transfer the benefits to another teammate who can reach the same foe.
● Ignore the -2 to attack enemies in close combat with teammates (p. B392).
● Sacrifice a parry or a block to defend a teammate *behind* him from a long weapon or missile that passes within a yard (through his hex).

You must specialize in working with a particular small group (e.g., an adventuring party). Only those with the *same* specialty can form up and enjoy these benefits. This perk originally appeared *GURPS Martial Arts* (p. 52).

wounds on opponents with high DR . . . or blow apart a foe with Supernatural Durability. All active characters must have Coordinated Action at a level equal to the number of participating characters. For example, if two characters are using flamethrowers to attack an zombie, they could concentrate their onslaught on the zombie's head. Although this might not do a lot of damage immediately, it would be *additive* to determine if the zombie's head catches fire (see *Making Things Burn*, p. B433)!

* Those with Enhanced Time Sense (p. B52) reduce these costs to 9 points for the first level and 6 points per level thereafter.

CAPTAIN, MY CAPTAIN!

The difference between a good team and a great one has always been, and will always be, the *leader*. This person is the linchpin upon which the team rests.

NEW ADVANTAGE

A good leader can make a team more than the sum of its parts; he knows how to get the most out of each of his people. The following new advantage emulates this.

> *Leadership is action,*
> *not position.*
> *– Donald H. McGannon*

Natural Leader

5 points

Prerequisite: Charisma 2+, Leadership 12+, *and* either Sense of Duty (Teammates) *or* an appropriate Code of Honor.

You have an innate ability to lead others. Once per round, as a *free action*, you may make a Leadership roll to snap others out of mental stun caused by surprise, Fright Checks, etc. Your roll is at -1 per ally stunned beyond the first, and you cannot affect anyone farther away than your HT in yards (add +3 for Penetrating Voice and +2 for Voice).

Success on this roll gives your allies an immediate Will roll to recover from mental stun (at +1 if you have Penetrating Voice or Voice). If they recover, they do so fast enough to shed the defense penalties for being stunned and can act normally.

This trait also enables the use of the special Guidance skills (see pp. 11-13).

Special Enhancements

Inspiring: In addition to negating mental stun, you can also give +1 to all combat-related Fright Checks, morale checks, and self-control rolls for disadvantages that would result in loss of "battle efficiency" (e.g., Berserk, Cowardice, or – if you wish to take prisoners – Bloodlust); critical success gives a +2! This bonus persists until your next turn. The GM may allow those with Charisma 3+ to increase the bonus to (Charisma - 1), or (Charisma + 1) on critical successes. +50% or +100% if your Charisma increases the bonus.

Powerful Voice: Add +1 to your HT for the purposes of determining your radius of effect. This is incompatible with the Frail Voice limitation. The GM sets the maximum level. Two levels are appropriate for realistic games, while cinematic games can support levels up to 10! +20%/level.

Tactical Influence: This enhancement requires that you take a Concentrate maneuver to shout out commands to your allies, who must be within hearing range, and cannot number more than your Charisma *squared*. The player declares a specific action for each of his allies to be affected by this ability, who must follow that course of action *exactly*. The player then makes a Leadership roll; for every 3 points by which he succeeds, all allies he directed gain +1 to their die rolls that round. If an ally cannot take his prescribed course of action or chooses not to do so, the bonus for all other allies is reduced by one. This *can* result in a penalty to rolls, so a poorly executed plan can be disastrous! +750%.

Special Limitation

Frail Voice: You use only *half* your HT for determining your affected radius, and never add a bonus. Vocal-related traits also never add a bonus. This is incompatible with the Powerful Voice enhancement. -25%.

NEW SKILLS

The following new Guidance skills are similar to the Enthrallment skills from the **Basic Set** (p. B191), and represent the cinematic abilities demonstrated by heroic captains of the guard, born leaders, and so on.

Guidance

IQ/Hard

Default: None.
Prerequisites: Charisma 2+, Natural Leader, *and* Leadership 14+.

Kings and other leaders of men can often drive those under their command to perform feats that they otherwise could not. Though the GM could just treat this as high levels of the Leadership skill, he may instead use the following four Guidance skills (see pp. 10-13). Depending on the setting, these skills might be magical, psionic, or sheer cinematic talent. Each has a time requirement, FP cost, duration, and requires *two* skill rolls to use. You may never learn these skills at a skill level higher than your Leadership skill. The effects take place immediately unless noted otherwise.

To use Guidance, roll your Leadership. Critical success gives +1 to a subsequent Guidance roll. Failure gives a penalty equal to the margin of failure. Critical failure means the Guidance fails, and a natural 18 insults those you were trying to lead!

After the required time has passed for the skill, roll against your chosen Guidance skill (resisted by Will if your men have reason to dislike you or have a Poor or worse reaction to you). If you succeed, you affect your target(s). If you fail, there is no effect. If you critically fail, the people become hostile!

Multiple Guidance attempts can be used on the same group, but require separate rolls and are at a cumulative -3 per skill beyond the first.

Group Size: You may not affect a group of people larger than your Charisma level *squared*.

Modifiers: All four Guidance skills are at -3 for Low Empathy (p. B142). +1 if you successfully use Public Speaking to give a speech (+2 on a critical success).

Instigation

IQ/Hard

Default: None.

You can instill a fervor and belief in your cause to all your allies, giving them a bonus to resist any attempt to sway them from attacking, whether this is from supernatural mind control or Intimidate skill rolls. This skill also gives a bonus to your team's Morale Checks (p. B561). The total bonus granted equals *half* the margin of success (round down; minimum +1).

Time: 1 minute.
Fatigue Cost: 2 FP, whether successful or not.
Duration: One hour; if used in combat, until the end of the battle.

Motivation

IQ/Hard

Default: None.
Prerequisite: Instigation 12+.

You can motivate your allies to perform better. This gives all those affected +1 to their rolls (+2 if a critical success is rolled) for the next hour (or rest of the battle they are in). If you succeed by 5 or more (or critically succeed), affected followers also are immune to the negative effects of having less than 1/3 of their FP (see p. B426).

Time: 10 minutes.
Fatigue Cost: 4 FP, whether successful or not.

Duration: One hour; if used in combat, until the end of the battle.

Swift Action

IQ/Hard

Default: None.
Prerequisite: Motivation 12+.

You can inspire urgency in your teammates; this does one of the following (choose before rolling).

● Your followers' Basic Move improves by 1/10 your margin of success (round final Move down; minimum +1).

● Your associates' Basic Speed increases by +0.25 for every five points of success, or fraction thereof.

● One companion of your choice gains an additional Move maneuver per turn. This may be done a maximum number of times per combat equal to one-*fifth* your margin of success (minimum of one). Optionally, you don't have to pick a specific person; you can use it on *any* compatriot of your choice during the battle by taking a Concentrate maneuver. You must pick one or the other before you roll for this skill.

● The group's overland movement rates increase by 1% per point by which you succeed on your roll, with a minimum of an increase of 5%. This stacks with bonuses to movement from other sources (e.g., the increase gained from making a Hiking skill roll).

Time: 30 minutes.
Fatigue Cost: 6 FP, whether successful or not.
Duration: Until the end of the battle or march.

Unwavering Fortitude

IQ/Hard

Default: None.
Prerequisite: Swift Action 12+.

You can infuse an unflinching resolve in your compatriots. This allows them to fight or act longer, even when they should be reeling from their injuries, lack of sleep or food, etc.

Battle, Glory, and Honor!

These new rules can be used with *GURPS Mass Combat,* with the following changes in traits. (The GM may allow other effects as befitting the trait, character, and situation).

● *Instigation* (above): This allows the character to temporarily bestow either the Impetuous or Fanatic feature on a particular element for one battle. If used on a unit that already has this feature, it negates the downsides of the trait for that battle only.

● *Motivation* (above): Temporarily increases the Troop Quality of an element by one class. This has no effect on Elite units.

● *Natural Leader* (p. 11): Allows a Rally Strategy to be used "instantly" – for every two points of margin of success, the motivator can automatically end confusion for one element. If the person has the Powerful Voice or Tactical Influence enhancement, this becomes one element per point of

their margin of success! If he has both, this becomes two elements per point! If the user has the Frail Voice limitation, this becomes one element per three points of margin of success. Additionally, once per battle, Tactical Influence can be used to give the person's side's commander (which can be himself) a bonus to his Strategy rolls.

● *Swift Action* (above): Temporarily increases the Mobility class of an element: Foot becomes Mounted, Mounted becomes Mechanized, Slow Air becomes Fast Air. Optionally, it could allow a non-Recon unit to temporarily gain the Recon class.

● *Unwavering Fortitude* (above): This skill can be used before a battle on a particular unit. For every point by which the leader succeeds, he can replace up to 5% of that unit's losses. See *Force Replacement* (***Mass Combat,*** p. 14) for more details. This can also be used to increase the speeds listed under *Forces In Motion* (***Mass Combat,*** p. 27).

When calculating the *Effects of Injury* (p. B380) or *Lost Fatigue Points* (p. B426), use 1/4 for both of those values, instead of 1/3. This has no effect on what occurs when you have 0 or less HP or FP left. If you critically succeed, then all affected allies *ignore* the effects of lost HP or FP until they reach 0 of either of those values. This has no effect on how fast either of those traits are recovered.

Time: 30 minutes.
Fatigue Cost: 8 FP, whether successful or not.
Duration: One hour, or if used in combat, until the end of the battle.

COMBINED POWERS, REVISITED

While cinematic teamwork and leadership can be considered (quasi-)realistic, combining powers is an obvious supernatural stunt common in video games, comics, and fiction. For example, mages pool their power to create world-shattering spells or telepaths "merge" their minds to boost their abilities. Characters wanting to combine their powers must first link up, as described in **Powers** (pp. 170-171).

The possibilities of combined powers are endless, but some stunts are staples across genres, and are presented here as worked examples.

USING ABILITIES AT DEFAULT

Characters often combine their abilities to achieve goals they couldn't accomplish alone; perhaps one has skill, and the other(s) have raw power, or perhaps *all* of the linked participants are improvising. The most straightforward option is to allow anyone to try to *improvise* a suitable ability, using the *Using Abilities at Default* (**Powers**, p. 173) rules. That character must make any necessary rolls (and pay any FP costs for improvising the ability) for this after joining the gestalt, but before he can contribute to it. This takes no extra time.

Example: Marie and Jill are two tekes who possess TK Crush 10 and TK Grab 5 respectively. They need to throw a TK Bullet, but neither possesses the ability. After linking up, they try to improvise TK Bullet. Maria now has TK Bullet 10, while Jill now has TK Bullet 7. Combined, they have TK Bullet 14.

USING COMPLEMENTARY POWERS

A common trope with companions who possess "opposite" powers (especially those with elemental abilities) is to combine them to create something better than its components. This allows it to affect targets who are resistant or immune to one of the effects, but not the other.

To do this, apply *Using Abilities at Default* (**Powers**, p. 173) combined with the rules for *Combining Powers* (**Powers**, pp. 170-172). For this stunt, unlike normal uses of *Combining Powers*, it is better if the participants have different, complementary powers (though they still need to have the same source). All participants contribute an ability. Add up the point costs of the contributed abilities in the following order; no single ability counts more than once. Round down all values.

● The most costly ability is counted at full cost.
● Those with the same ability from a different power (e.g., a Burning Attack) or a similar ability (e.g., Innate Attack) use half its point total.
● Finally, use 1/4 the point total of other abilities that are dissimilar, but would make sense to combine.

This total represents the combined potential, and is used with the *Using Abilities at Default* rules to improvise a new ability that represents the combined powers of the participants, and that transcends the limitations on each of the powers involved. This costs 3 FP per different power involved, shared among the participants.

Example: The Elemental Quartet is a team of supers representing the classic Western elements. They are facing an alien being from beyond reality that seems immune to their elemental attacks. Desperate, they combine their powers to unleash an Etherblast, representing a mythical fifth element. They contribute a Fireball [50], a Lightning Blast [60], a Stone Spike [50] and a Wave of Cold [50]. Their combined potential is 60 points for the Lightning Blast, plus 75 points for the rest of the abilities, for a total of 135 points. They decide they need a Corrosion attack, with Cosmic, Irresistible Attack, and after some quick math, the GM tells them they can manifest an attack that deals 4d+2 corrosion and ignores defenses, worth 134 points normally. It will require a Will-8 roll by the team leader (for an ability that costs more than 75% of the original ability), and will cost the team 12 FP that they can split as they want.

It might be possible to combine multiple instances of the same power from different sources, if the GM thinks that the sources complement each other. As usual, the GM's word is final.

Take the children and yourself,
And hide out in the cellar,
By now the fighting will be close at hand,
Don't believe the church and state,
And everything they tell you,
Believe in me, I'm with the high command.

–Mike and the Mechanics,
"Silent Running"

ABILITIES REQUIRING MULTIPLE CHARACTERS

Some adventurers have abilities they use often that require two or more companions working *together* to unlock. Unlike the options described above, these abilities are permanent; they just cannot be used without the other character(s). Total up the ability's cost, divide by the number of people needed to use it, and round the final cost up.

The ability now requires that everyone in the group remain within linking range, but needs no extra rolls. It is used by any of the teammates, but it counts as the next action for *all* participants; after using it, the others must take a Do Nothing maneuver with their next action. The GM who doesn't mind added complexity can create abilities that require less than a full group. To do so, split the ability cost between the number of required participants, and have everyone on the team pay this cost.

Example: If five members of the Awesome Seven are required to use the Awesome Blast, an Innate Attack that costs 100 points, then each member must pay 20 points, and any five acting together can use this power. If they had needed a full team, they would have each paid 15 points.

POWERING UP TEAMMATES

Teamwork and Leadership are relatively straightforward. Combining powers requires math, but is easy enough if taken one step at a time. It's much more complicated to combine powers when effectiveness depends upon points spent on abilities, yet fiction and video games are filled with characters whose abilities let them empower the attacks of their allies.

There are two options to represent this tactic. First, the detailed approach – build explicit abilities to "buff" one's allies. Second, the quick-and-dirty approach, for improving your friends' attacks when the flow of combat is more important than point-accounting.

THE DETAILED APPROACH

It is possible to make dedicated abilities designed to boost the powers of others.

The most direct way is to use Affliction (p. B35) with the Malediction modifier (p. B106), making use of the *Beneficial Afflictions* rules (see *Powers*, p. 40). The meta-modifiers *Aura of Power* and *Beneficial Song* (*GURPS Power-Ups 4: Enhancements*, pp. 4-6) build on this to provide a simple way to easily and rapidly "bless" multiple allies. For those who want the best of both worlds, use either Selectivity or *Alternative Enhancements* (*Power-Ups 4*, p. 13). For those who can "tune" their abilities to different modes, use *Variable Enhancements* (*Power-Ups 4*, p. 5)

An alternative to Affliction is taking a trait with Affects Others (*Powers*, pp. 107-108). Unlike Affliction, this *requires* you to have the trait yourself; with GM permission, you may be able to add the variant Affects Others Only (that doesn't let *you* use the trait), worth +0% for the first level and +50% per additional level. Combining it with Selectivity would allow you to use the trait yourself, or give it to an ally, but not both at once.

Once the mechanisms to provide traits to others are clear, the big question is what to grant. Increased attributes are the easiest way to improve general performance: increased ST will make your allies hit harder; increased DX will let them do so more often, with greater precision, and will also improve their defenses; increased HT will let them fight longer and the extra FP will let them perform more impressive feats (see *Extra Effort in Combat,* p. B357). Individual advantages also work well, letting allies perform feats that would be otherwise impossible. Sometimes afflicting disadvantages can be considered useful; do this by adding the Controllable Disadvantage perk.

Imparting knowledge is harder. There's no way to directly grant skills to others, as skills cannot take Affects Others, nor can they be granted with an Affliction. The simplest way is to use Modular Abilities, suitably limited, and add Affects Others. *Power-Ups 4* (pp. 9-11) offers some additional tips for modifying "no cost" traits.

Finally, the Imbue advantage lets you modify your own non-advantage based attacks by adding enhancements, changing the damage type or even making attacks produce non-attack effects. There are multiple ways to transfer the benefits of Imbue to your allies. The Imbue Other enhancement (*Pyramid #3/36: Dungeon Fantasy*, p. 24) lets you use any of your Imbuement Skills on one of your compatriots, while Imbuement Transference (*Pyramid #3/60: Dungeon Fantasy III*, p. 30) lets you do so on a skill-by-skill basis. Granting Imbue and the associated Imbuement Skills is the only way to share these abilities with others while giving them control over it.

THE QUICK-AND-DIRTY APPROACH

This method has much in common with *Using Abilities at Default* (**Powers**, p. 173) in that it doesn't cost points, but only produces momentary effects. Unlike *Using Abilities at Default,* it doesn't require building a "virtual ability."

First, the character who wants to enhance his ally takes a Ready or Concentrate maneuver (depending upon the power and source, as dictated by the GM), selects an ability, and explains what he wants to do with it and how it relates to what he wants to do.

Second, the GM decides if it's a *bad* match, a *poor* match, a *good* match, a *excellent* match, or a *perfect* match. If it's a bad match, the action is impossible, and the person wasted a turn while he tried to make the ability function in a way completely against its nature. Otherwise, multiply the cost of the original ability by 25% on a poor match, by 50% on a good match, by 75% on an excellent match, and by 100% on a perfect match. Divide this number by 10, rounding down, to obtain the number of Power Points this generates.

Third, during a companion's turn, the character can declare he's boosting one of his ally's attacks, declare the exact uses of his Power Points, and roll HT (for Ready Maneuvers) or Will (for Concentrate Maneuvers), at -8 plus a penalty for the range between the helper and the target (use normal range penalties; see p. B550). Each Power Point can be spent to do one of the following.

- Grant +1 to one of the target's rolls, trading power for skill.
- Change the damage type of the attack, either by one step, or between the types in the same step in the following list: Small Piercing; Burning, Crushing, Piercing or Toxic; Cutting or Large Piercing; Impaling or Huge Piercing; Fatigue or Corrosion.
- Give the target +2 ST for that attack only.
- Add a follow-up of 1d of damage, from a type of damage associated with the boosters' power.
- Add +2 damage to the attack.
- Give the attack +20% worth of enhancements.

Multiple Power Points can be used for the same effect as long as it makes sense. For example, 4 Power Points could be spent to give 80% worth of enhancements to the attack; turn Small Piercing damage into Fatigue damage; or add +8 to the attack's effective ST.

Quick Linking

Sometimes you don't have the time to create a stable gestalt. Sometimes all you need is a single burst of combined power at the right instant. To do so, all participants need to be in the position to link up and willing to take a Concentrate maneuver, continuing to Concentrate until everyone has joined. On the turn of the last linker, everyone rolls IQ as usual, with an extra -4 and an extra 2 FP cost that must be paid by each team member individually. Success lets them link up and *instantly* make a single use of their powers. Any rolls with the combined ability are at an extra -4, and the gestalt breaks up immediately after the effects of the ability resolve.

Those with Coordinated Action (pp. 9, 11) add their level to the initial roll, and the minimum level shared of Coordinated Action acts as a bonus to any further rolls to use the combined ability, but only for that use.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christopher R. Rice (from the Portsmouth, Virginia) and Antoni Ten Monrós (from the sunny Mediterranean coasts of Spain) have been practicing Coordinated Action and Distant Linking for years, and finally managed to get enough points to improve both of them. They would like to thank Beth "the Sith Editrix" McCoy for chasing them around with whips made of commas and pain, and Christopher's gaming group (especially L.A., his muse and co-GM) for playtesting it. They'd also like to thank Pyramid Write Club, but the first rule of Write Club is "We do not talk about Write Club."

ALTERNATE GUNS SPECIALTIES AND TECHNIQUES

BY HANS-CHRISTIAN VORTISCH

Your proficiency with the MP5, especially in burst or fully-automatic firing modes, is greatly dependent on your ability to master the necessary skills described below . . . The vertical and horizontal rotation of the shooter's body causes the muzzle of the weapon to move upward and outward away from the initial point of aim . . . It is impossible to prevent this rearward push that starts this rotation, regardless of how large or strong the firer may be . . . This rearward push can only be countered through the use of the proper techniques . . .

– Jim Schatz, **Heckler & Koch MP5 Submachine Gun Family Operator's Manual** *(1993)*

According to *Guns* (pp. B198-199), there are nine specialties of that skill: Grenade Launcher (GL), Gyroc, Light Anti-Armor Weapon (LAW), Light Machine Gun (LMG), Musket, Pistol, Rifle, Shotgun, and Submachine Gun (SMG).

The *raison d'être* for some of these is pure historical inertia, both in the sense of widespread but inaccurate weapon nomenclature in the real world, and precedence set forth in earlier editions of **GURPS.** However, many specialties are questionable for both realistic and in-game reasons. Others look fine on first sight but display serious problems once applied to some real-life gun types.

The following optional suggestions simplify these specialties to only *three:* Light Anti-Armor Weapon (LAW), Long Arm, and Pistol. Two new techniques are introduced to deal with special applications like full-automatic fire.

REVISITING THE SKILLS

In order to reduce the number of weapon skills, it helps to compare the various existing specialties.

Guns (Rifle) vs. Guns (Shotgun)

Some authorities suggest exclusive use of rifled slugs [in shotguns] and eschew buckshot completely. I disagree: if you do that, you no longer have a shotgun, but rather a rifle.

– Gabriel Suarez, **The Tactical Shotgun** *(1996)*

What is the difference between Guns (Rifle) and Guns (Shotgun)? The **GURPS Basic Set** explains that shotguns have smoothbore barrels and rifles have rifled barrels. Although this is correct, that's still hard to justify as a game-mechanical difference – not to speak of the fact that there *are* shotguns with rifled barrels, such as the H&H Fosbery Gun (**GURPS High-Tech: Pulp Guns 1,** p. 22) or the Remington Model 870 Deer Gun (**GURPS High-Tech,** p. 105).

The actual difference, both in the real world and in the game, lies entirely in the ammunition. In **GURPS,** the advantage that a multiple-projectile shotgun shell provides for hitting a target is a function of the *Rapid Fire* rules (pp. B373, 409), whereas the accuracy and range advantages of the rifle are covered by weapon stats like Acc and Range. And what happens if a shotgun fires a single projectile like a slug? For all effects and purposes, this gives rifle-like performance (**High-Tech,** p. 166).

All this is compelling evidence that there is, in fact, no difference between Guns (Rifle) and Guns (Shotgun). It makes sense to combine both into Guns (Long Arm).

Guns (Rifle) vs. Guns (SMG)

In this position the [submachine gun] is used exactly as you would use a shot-gun. As the gun is brought into the shoulder the body is pressed forward towards the target.

– Eric Sykes, "SOE Syllabus: Machine Carbine Course" (1944)

Similarly, what is the difference between Guns (Rifle) and Guns (SMG)? The former covers all rifled long arms, including those that fire full-automatic, except those that fire pistol-caliber ammunition, which are covered by the latter skill. This is a less-than-satisfying differentiation, considering that there are many rifles that fire pistol-caliber ammunition, like the Steyr AUG with 9mm conversion kit (**High-Tech,** p. 118) or the Winchester Model 1873 (**High-Tech,** p. 110).

There are also assault carbines (short rifles) that have exactly the same ergonomics, handling, and appearance as SMGs, like the H&K HK53A3 (**High-Tech,** p. 116), which looks like the H&K MP5A3 (**High-Tech,** p. 123). Then there are SMGs that are basically selective-fire rifles in a pistol-caliber, such as the Colt SMG R0635 (**High-Tech,** p. 119), which shares most parts with the Colt CAR-15 series of carbines (**High-Tech,** p. 119). And what about semiautomatic versions of submachine guns, like the H&K MP5SFA3?

The confusion is even in evidence in the real world, where many militaries call assault rifles like the Haenel MP44/StG44 (**High-Tech,** p. 115) or the Kalashnikov (**High-Tech,** p. 114) "submachine guns," as do manufacturers with certain assault carbines, like the Colt XM177E1 (**High-Tech,** p. 119) or the H&K HK53A3 – although all of these fire rifle cartridges and therefore can't be submachine guns according to the accepted technical definition, which *does* hinge on the use of pistol-caliber ammunition!

The difference lies, again, in the ammunition used. This is expressed by weapon stats like Dmg, Acc, and Range, but has no measurable impact on handling and firing.

In light of all of this, it makes sense not to differentiate between Guns (Rifle) and Guns (SMG), and both can be folded into Guns (Long Arm). The handling difference experienced when firing a full-automatic weapon can then be covered by the Burst-Fire technique (p. 19).

Guns (Rifle) vs. Guns (LMG)

At one point, Sergeant Macdonald took up a Lewis gun which had lost its team, got out of the trench and went forward with it, firing from his shoulder. He then got his gun into position and continued to fire it until he was badly wounded.

– Malcolm Kincaid-Smith,
The 25th Division in
France and Flanders *(1918)*

What is the difference between Guns (Rifle) and Guns (LMG)? Both specialties apply to long arms firing full-automatic. **Basic Set** asserts that the difference lies in the fact that the LMG is fired from the hip or bipod and thus conversely, that the rifle is *not* fired from the hip or bipod, but (always) from the shoulder.

However, any LMG can be fired by a sufficiently strong gunner from the shoulder, and any full-automatic rifle can be fitted with a bipod – in fact, many come with one as standard, such as the IMI Galil ARM (**High-Tech,** p. 117). Of course any rifle can be fired from the hip, as well. All this is controlled by the minimum ST of the gun.

Not even the admittedly unusual belt-feed can be cited as the divisive difference between the full-automatic rifle and the LMG – there are numerous effective LMG designs that use magazines identical or similar to those employed in rifles, such as the Enfield Bren (**High-Tech,** p. 133), FN MINIMI (**High-Tech,** pp. 136-137), or H&K HK21A1 (**High-Tech,** p. 136). There are even LMGs that are little more than heavy-barreled assault rifles, like the Enfield L86A1 (**High-Tech,** p. 118), Molot RPK (**High-Tech,** p. 114), or Steyr AUG with heavy barrel (**High-Tech,** p. 118).

Hybrids like the BAR (**High-Tech,** pp. 112-113) and Rheinmetall FG42 (**High-Tech,** p. 115), which straddle the line between rifle and LMG in weight, size, application, and performance, further muddle the waters.

In short, there is no meaningful game difference between Guns (Rifle) and Guns (LMG), and it makes sense for LMGs to be covered by Guns (Long Arm) as well.

Guns (Musket) vs. Guns (Rifle) vs. Guns (Shotgun)

The **Basic Set** defines the difference between a musket and a rifle as the difference of having a smoothbore and a rifled barrel, and the difference between a musket and a shotgun as firing a single (solid) projectile and multiple projectiles.

While all of this is correct at face value, there is no handling difference between, for example, a flintlock smoothbore musket like the Charleville Fusil Mle 1777 (**High-Tech,** pp. 107-108) and a flintlock rifle-musket like the Baker Rifle Pattern 1800 (**High-Tech,** p. 108). They are loaded and fired in exactly the same way. There is a performance difference, but this is expressed in the game by weapons stats such as Dmg, Acc, and Range.

Similarly, any smoothbore musket can fire multiple projectiles – and historically, they often did, both in the shape of ordinary buckshot and especially as buck-and-ball (**High-Tech,** p. 173). Following the logic set forth in the **Basic Set,** this means the musket should then require Guns (Shotgun). However, the lack of differences between Guns (Rifle) and Guns (Shotgun) has already been established (p. 16).

In light of the above, Guns (Musket) can also be folded into Guns (Long Arm).

Converting Gunmen

Those who'd like to convert their existing firearms experts to ones using these new options should first determine how many points they have in all of their Guns specialties. Then they can buy appropriate levels of the three new, broader Guns specialities (see p. 18). Leftover points can be used to purchase the two new techniques that cover special-use cases (see p. 19) or perks or techniques from **GURPS Tactical Shooting** and similar supplements.

Guns (Pistol) vs. Guns (Rifle)

Being able to shoot with [shot]gun or rifle does not necessarily enable a man to hit even a large object with a pistol. It is very important that anyone who is armed with the shorter weapon should learn how to handle it, and not trust to his skill with other firearms as an excuse for not studying the peculiarities of the one-handed "shooting-iron."

– Walter Winans,
The Art of Revolver Shooting *(1901)*

The **Basic Set** does not spell out the difference between a pistol and a rifle, but perhaps the handling characteristics are so obviously different that this is not required. Where handguns have short sightlines and are fired with one or at best both hands (**GURPS Tactical Shooting,** pp. 11-12), long arms have the advantages of long sightlines and much more stable shooting stances, with the gun braced against the torso – either the shoulder or the hip (**Tactical Shooting,** pp. 12-13). Where handguns can be quickly brought to bear in all sorts of situations, long arms are often slower to bring up or swing around.

All this means that there is a notable difference between the use of stockless handguns and stocked long arms – arguing for Guns (Pistol) and Guns (Long Arm).

Guns (Pistol) vs. Guns (Shotgun)

Why should a shotgun that has been sawed off to handgun-size (**High-Tech,** p. 106) still use Guns (Shotgun)? The advantage of its spreading shotload is modeled by the *Rapid Fire* rules. On the other hand, why does a pistol firing a shot cartridge (**High-Tech,** p. 173) not require Guns (Shotgun)?

In either case, the cartridge should not define the skill required. Rather, the size and especially the handling of the gun dictates it.

Guns (Pistol) vs. Guns (SMG)

According to the **Basic Set,** machine pistols require Guns (SMG). This seems right for a stocked Beretta Mod 93R (**High-Tech,** p. 100), H&K VP70 (**High-Tech,** p. 100), Mauser C96 M1932 *Schnellfeuerpistole* (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns 1,** p. 14), or Molot APS (**Tactical Shooting,** p. 55). However, a stockless Beretta Mod 1951R (**Tactical Shooting,** p. 56), Glock 18 (**High-Tech,** p. 101), or Lebman machine pistol (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns 1,** p. 18), or any of the above-mentioned machine pistols with the stock detached is held and fired like a semiautomatic pistol – and obviously requires Guns (Pistol) if firing single shots! This is the only instance in which changing the fire mode requires a separate skill. This makes no sense either realistically or game-mechanically.

Therefore, machine pistols mesh logically to Guns (Pistol), and don't need a separate Guns (SMG) skill, unless fitted with a shoulder stock. The latter converts them into full-automatic carbines – and carbines already require Guns (Rifle), and thus can be folded into Guns (Long Arm). The Burst-Fire technique (p. 19) is useful to model the differences in use between an ordinary pistol and a machine pistol.

Guns (Grenade Launcher)

According to the **Basic Set,** Guns (GL) covers any large-bore, low-powered small arm that fires a bursting projectile, including underbarrel grenade launchers, flare pistols, and tanglers.

This ignores the fundamental handling differences between handguns and long arms, and also fails to cover a variety of edge cases. For example, why does a grenade launcher firing a multiple-projectile load (**High-Tech,** p. 143) not use Guns (Shotgun)? Why does the Guns skill treat weapons firing bullets or bursting projectiles differently, but the Gunner skill does not? After all, Gunner (Machine Gun) covers both ordinary heavy machine guns firing bullets, autocannon firing explosive shells, and grenade machine guns firing grenades (p. B198).

After all this, it's easy to justify getting rid of Guns (GL), replacing it instead with Guns (Pistol) and Guns (Long Arm). The Payload Warhead technique (p. 19) is useful to account for differences in warheads used.

Guns (Gyroc)

Guns (Gyroc) covers all small arms firing rocket-propelled ammunition that are not LAWs, regardless of stock or size (p. B199) – meaning there is no handling or firing difference between a gyroc pistol or gyroc carbine. This makes sense if all rockets fired by gyrocs are guided and self-steering, and the gyroc weapons are just launch platforms; however, many gyroc warheads are unguided (**GURPS Ultra-Tech,** p. 144). In turn, a gyroc weapon still needs to be aimed and fired like any other gun, and that means the differences between handgun and long arm (with their different supports and sightlines) can still affect the projectile. A specialty isn't necessary just to cover the kind of warhead fired, as their effects are covered by other rules – including those on homing projectiles (**Ultra-Tech,** p. 146).

This means that the Guns-specialty simplification can continue, replacing Guns (Gyroc) with Guns (Pistol) and Guns (Long Arm). Use the Payload Warhead technique (p. 19) to account for differences in warheads.

Guns (LAW) vs. Gunner (Rockets)

The techniques, procedures, and marksmanship skills that enable a Soldier to engage a target with a rifle are also applied for shoulder-launched munitions. The four fundamentals of marksmanship – steady position, aiming, breath control, and trigger squeeze – are just as important when firing shoulder-launched munitions.

– U.S. Army Headquarters,
TM 3-23.25 Shoulder-Launched Munitions (2010)

Should Guns (LAW) even be a specialty of Guns? Why not make these "heavy weapons" a specialty of Gunner? The reason is simple – Gunner exclusively covers mounted direct-fire weapons (p. B198). LAWs are aimed and fired manually, and supported from the shoulder like an oversized rifle. Therefore, it makes sense to have them remain as a separate specialty under Guns. However, they are distinct enough from ordinary long arms to not fold them into Guns (Long Arm).

ALTERNATE GUNS SPECIALTIES

As an alternate rule, use the following specialties. This will not only improve realism, but also reduce the point-drain of the skill, both for realistic shooters proficient with numerous gun types, and for cinematic gunslingers capable of firing any gun they pick up.

Light Anti-Armor Weapon (LAW)

All forms of shoulder-fired rocket launchers and recoilless rifles.

Long Arm

All kinds of long arms – guns fired either one- or two-handed and with the help of a shoulder stock. This includes muzzle-loading muskets; muzzle-loading rifles; breech-loading single-shot or double-barreled rifles; bolt-, lever-, or pump-action rifles; semiautomatic rifles; assault rifles; single- or double-barreled shotguns; bolt-, lever-, or pump-action shotguns; semiautomatic shotguns; full-automatic shotguns; submachine guns; belt- or magazine-fed handheld light machine guns; grenade launchers; and gyroc carbines or support weapons. It also applies for any handgun, including a revolver, semiautomatic pistol, or machine pistol, that is fitted with a shoulder stock. All guns capable of full-automatic fire are best used with the Burst-Fire technique (p. 19) in that fire mode.

Pistol

All kinds of handguns – guns fired either one- or two-handed, but *without* the support of a shoulder stock. This includes muzzle-loading pistols, derringers, revolvers, semiautomatic pistols, stockless sawn-off shotguns ("shot pistols"), flare pistols, and gyroc pistols, as well as machine pistols without stock. The last are best used with the Burst-Fire technique in that fire mode.

Defaults and Familiarity

All three specialties default at -4 to each other. Use the following familiarity penalties:

-1 for a substantial *caliber* difference (handgun cartridge, rifle cartridge, shotgun cartridge, heavy machine gun cartridge, any Magnum cartridge vs. an ordinary one, etc.). This penalty especially applies whenever there's a damage difference of 1d or more.

-1 for *ignition* (flintlock, caplock, self-contained cartridge, etc.).

-1 for *action* or operating mechanism (automatic, pump-action, lever-action, etc.). For this purpose, there's no difference between semiautomatic and full-automatic.

-1 for *grip* or handling (normal stock vs. bullpup, pistol vs. revolver, etc.).

-1 for *sights* (iron sights, scope, reflex sight, etc.).

-1 for *feed* (internal magazine, detachable magazine, revolver cylinder, muzzle-loading, belt-feed, etc.). This doesn't apply if someone else has loaded the gun for you!

All familiarity penalties disappear after you have had eight hours of practice with it (p. B169). An easy way to avoid familiarity penalties is the Cross-Trained perk (**Tactical Shooting,** p. 38).

Per p. B168, each TL difference gives a further -1, but the GM may ignore this generic rule for Guns. In the real world, the differences between firearms of different TLs are fluid and often very minor. Rigid adherence to the TL penalties will often lead to unrealistic results; see the discussion about tech levels in **GURPS SEALs in Vietnam** (p. 16). The penalties listed above more than cover any real differences.

Examples: Going from a .38 Special S&W Model 10 revolver (**High-Tech,** p. 95) to a .357 Magnum S&W Model 19 revolver (**High-Tech,** p. 96) is a *caliber* difference. Going from a Remington Model 870 pump-action shotgun (**High-Tech,** pp. 105-106) to a Remington Model 1100 semiautomatic shotgun (**Tactical Shooting,** p. 60) is an *action* difference. Going from a Colt M16A1 assault rifle (**High-Tech,** p. 117) to a Steyr AUG assault rifle (**High-Tech,** p. 118) is a *grip* difference. Going from a Colt XM177E1 assault carbine with iron sights (**High-Tech,** p. 119) to a Colt M4A1 assault carbine with collimating sight (**High-Tech,** p. 119) is a *sights* difference. Going from a FN M249 light machine gun with magazine to a FN M249 light machine gun with belt (**High-Tech,** pp. 135-136) is a *feed* difference.

Going from a S&W Model 10 revolver to a Luger P08 pistol (**High-Tech,** p. 98) is an *action* and a *grip* difference, but their calibers (.38 Special and 9×19mm Parabellum) are close enough (Dmg 2d pi vs. Dmg 2d+2 pi) to avoid the *caliber* penalty. Going from an ArmaLite AR-7 semiautomatic rifle (**High-Tech,** pp. 115-116) to a scoped Barrett Model 82A1 semiautomatic rifle (**High-Tech,** p. 118) is a *caliber* and a *sights* difference. Going from a Greener Far-Killer double shotgun (**High-Tech: Pulp Guns 1,** p. 22) to a Daewoo USAS-12 semiautomatic shotgun (**High-Tech,** p. 107) is an *action, grip,* and *feed* difference. Going from an M4A1 assault carbine with collimating sight to a Kentucky rifle (**High-Tech,** p. 107) is a *caliber, ignition, action, grip, sights,* and *feed* difference.

NEW TECHNIQUES

In some combat situations, the use of automatic or burst fire can improve survivability and enhance mission accomplishment . . . Fully automatic fire is rarely effective and can lead to unnecessary noncombatant casualties or fratricide. Not only is fully automatic fire inaccurate and difficult to control, but it also rapidly empties ammunition magazines.

– U.S. Army Headquarters,
***FM 3-22.9 Rifle Marksmanship** (2008)*

Use the following techniques with the reduced list of alternate Guns specialties, because they allow realistic differentiation between skill applications of civilians like hunters, target shooters, or patrol cops, and of military personnel or SWAT officers.

Burst-Fire

Average

Default: Guns-2.
Prerequisites: Guns; cannot exceed Guns.

This technique enables you to buy off the -2 to Guns when firing full-automatic, regardless of burst length. Burst-fire is relatively easy to master, but lack of training results in poor performance. This also covers issues like avoiding overheating.

Payload Warhead

Average

Default: Guns-2.
Prerequisites: Guns; cannot exceed Guns.

This technique enables you to buy off the -2 to Guns when firing payload warheads from shotguns, flare pistols, grenade launchers, gyrocs, etc., that perform differently than ordinary single or multiple projectiles, such as HE, illumination, smoke, tangler, tear gas, thermobaric, etc. The technique accounts for minimum and maximum distances, fuse lengths, estimating flight for different warhead weights, etc.

Long Arms Without Stocks

As the primary difference between Guns (Pistol) and Guns (Long Arm) is the use of a shoulder stock, the question arises what happens if a long arm is fired without stock – folded, retracted, or removed entirely. In many gun laws, this converts it into a "pistol" – but this is a legal definition having to do with issues of concealability, not with how the gun handles. Generally, shooting without stock won't require use of a different specialty, but it *does* come with serious penalties (**Tactical Shooting,** p. 12).

The only exception is when a long arm is reduced so drastically in size that it not only lacks a stock, but has actually *become* a handgun. See *Shortening a Long Arm* (**Tactical Shooting,** pp. 69-70).

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Special thanks to the Hellions.

Eidetic Memory

Social Points

by David L. Pulver

One of my favorite **GURPS** campaigns was a space opera inspired by works like the E.E. Doc Smith's *Lensmen* series and H. Beam Piper's *Space Viking*. It was an action-oriented game featuring black-ops missions, exploration of deadly alien ruins, and plentiful close-quarter battles and psionic duels. In common with its genre, it also included a great deal of social and economic mobility for the player characters. In the course of a few dozen adventures, the party acquired and lost several starships and several million dollars worth of equipment. They also rapidly acquired allies and power.

This started out when the adventurers performed some particularly dangerous smuggling operations, and quickly acquired 20 million credits in profits, upgraded their starship, and turned privateer. Two of the PCs then solved a plot threatening the empire, joined its elite spy agency, and were appointed to command a 10,000-ton starship on a voyage of exploration into contested alien space. The first officer liberated a planet from a plague of space vampires and found himself anointed planetary dictator. Another adventurer rescued an exiled princess from a lost generation ship, married her, acquired several allies from among her relatives, and become pretender to the imperial throne. He sold a precursor artifact – a revolutionary antimatter power plant – that he'd found to a megacorporation for $100 million, and used the funds to effectively buy his own planet to serve as a base of operations for himself and his paramour. With the help of the other PCs, he then assembled a battle fleet and a mercenary army and conquered the imperial capital, becoming emperor. All this took place in about a year and a half of play . . .

Due to this very rapid pace of development, I made extensive use of the *Traits Gained in Play* (p. B291) rule. In particular, I did not charge any character points for getting traits such as Rank, Reputation, or Status that were earned during play, nor for any Allies or Contacts secured as a result of a character's own actions. (The same applied to acquired social disadvantages like Dependents or Enemies, of course).

However, the decision to do this – which was made known to the players – coupled by the high-power, action-oriented nature of the campaign (with lots of deadly personal combat!) had a significant impact on the decisions players took during character creation. This was seen in particular when the players created new characters to replace those who were killed or were temporarily out of action, imprisoned, or otherwise busy. (I allowed each of the five players to have two active PCs to ensure everyone could participate each session.) Most players felt they would much rather spend their valuable points on things that wouldn't improve "for free" during adventures. Why blow points on Wealth when you could except to earn a few million credits in a couple of successful adventures? Why acquire Allies when the GM was going to let you make fast friends and keep them?

However, that didn't stop some of my players from wanting to create adventurers who started out a bit richer or with some existing social perks, like a knighthood. Nevertheless, they did feel that they were being disadvantaged over the long term if they spent 30-40 beginning points on these advantages rather than on the traits that would keep them alive, like higher attributes, combat, merchant, and leadership skills, or psi powers. I considered reducing the cost of various social traits, but that didn't deal with the underlying issue, and would have been a lot of work.

Social Points

The problem was that, in my game, social advantages could be gained (or lost) easily enough that this affected their perceived value. The solution I chose was a variant of the "Bucket of Points" rule discussed in general terms in Sean Punch's *Buckets of Points* (see pp. 4-8). This approach is designed to let the GM improve play balance or influence the tone of a game by creating separate "bins" of character points for different categories of traits.

In this case, I took a limited approach, by segregating what *Buckets of Points* refers to as the "social pull" advantages into their own category. After some experimentation, this variant was used for all new protagonists that entered the campaign.

I initially used a "heroic" starting point total of 200 points for characters, of which 15% of that – 30 points – were Social Points; that left them with 170 "normal" character points that could be spent on anything else (attributes, skills, or other advantages). The Social Points were a separate bucket of character points that could *only* be spent on social advantages (p. B32).

Likewise, ordinary points could not be spent on social advantages. The table below summarized the traits covered by Social Points.

Administrative Rank	Patron
Allies*	Police Rank
Alternate Identity	Potential Advantages
Claim to Hospitality	Reputation
Clerical Investment	Rank
Contact Groups	Religious Rank
Contacts	Security Clearance
Legal Enforcement Powers	Signature Gear
Legal Immunity	Status
Merchant Rank	Tenure
Military Rank	Trading Points for Money
Independent Income	Zeroed

* This does not apply to Allies who are Summonable.

Although Cultural Familiarity and Pitiable are both marked as a Social advantages (on pp. B297 and B298), I omitted them from this category in my game, classing them instead as mental (Cultural Familiarity) or physical (Pitiable) advantages.

SOCIAL DISADVANTAGES

Social disadvantages followed the same rule that is recommended in *Buckets of Points*: Social disadvantages could only give back Social Points. I initially assigned a 50% disadvantage limit for social disadvantages. Since I was offering 30 Social Points that meant -15 points of social disadvantages. In practice, that proved stingy, and it was quickly changed to a 100% of Social Points, for up to -30 points of social disadvantages. This gave PCs who wanted to start with higher levels of Wealth and/or Status (for example) the option to do so by loading up on countervailing social disadvantages like Enemies, Secrets, Reputations, and Duties. This had the nice side effect of feeling both realistic and balanced – socially influential or wealthy adventurers ended up with disadvantages that logically circumscribed that particular aspect of their power.

Debt	Reputation	Social Stigma
Dependents	Secret	Status
Duty	Secret Identity	Wealth
Enemies		

THE FARM-BOY PROBLEM

The Social Point rules followed the "No Trading" assumption detailed in *Bucket of Points:* All Social Points were firewalled from ordinary points.

That was fine, except that while most players were happy to spend their Social Points, a few of them came up with character concepts that involved beginning as poor farm boys, runaway slaves, or the like – folks with few social advantages, or even just disadvantages. That left the issue of what to do with excess Social Points?

One option would have been an Exchange Rate as discussed in *Bucket of Points,* with a high ratio so that, say, 10 Social Points might trade for one character point. However, I didn't want to go there. Instead, I suggested to players that the best way to burn unwanted Social Points that fit the space opera genre was Secret Advantage (p. B33). When a Secret

Advantage was bought with Social Points, that meant the character would possess a social advantage (worth twice that many points) I could reveal at a later date.

So, for example, the runaway slave/street thief PC turned out to be a lost heir with secret levels of Patrons and Status (he'd been captured by star wolf raiders while a baby and sold into slavery in the outer rim). Another player just said, "come up with something cool!" and left *all* his Social Points, including 30 points from social disadvantages, unspent! With a full 60 points to blow, I ended up with a combined Secret Advantage (Alternate Identity, Patron, Police Rank, Signature Gear, and Security Clearance). A seeming chance encounter turned personal when a player character – a hard-bitten space pirate – came upon a murder scene, and the dying victim claimed to recognize him, calling him by a different name and begging him to help finish a mission. He didn't know her – but her words led him to a hidden cache of gear and identity papers, and eventually to a revelation that his past as a mercenary and pirate were a lie, and he was really an elite mind-wiped deep cover agent of the space patrol.

Not everyone needed something so melodramatic, of course. Secret Advantage (Wealth) was an easy option for a mundane inheritance, and Secret Advantage (Allies) provided "relatives you didn't know you had and/or old comrades you had thought were dead." More fun then straight Wealth was Secret Advantage (Signature Gear), which allowed me to "gift" one character with another inheritance-from-a-distant-relative: an old starship that held many secrets of its own.

> *Still, he considered himself fortunate. While his unpredictable talents had often placed him in trouble, they had also helped extricate him from it.*
> *– Alan Dean Foster,*
> *Flinx in Flux*

LUCK POINTS

The Secret Advantage route didn't work for every adventurer, and I didn't want to *absolutely* require spending Social Points if it didn't fit their story. However, I still feared allowing players to give back Social Points for ordinary points would create the same economic problem the rule was trying to avoid in the first place!

Ironically, the solution to this came while contemplating another player-psychology problem. I had implemented *Optional Rule: Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347) to keep protagonists alive in stressful situations.

Loki Jesus Mao (200 points)

L.J. is 23, with black skin, amber eyes, and a slight build. He grew up in the slums that clung like fungi to the arcology towers on Celephais, a world on the galactic fringe. His mother, Ali, was a homeless runaway who died when he was born. By local custom, he was named after old Terran deities. At age 12, he escaped a state orphanage to join a street gang. His wits and talent for burglary hastened his rise in the underworld; by age 20, he was dubbed "the Black Cat of Celephais." When the PCs arrived seeking a way into the fortified vault of local billionaire and artifact collector Inigo Stern, L.J. was their man. Afterward, with Celephais too hot for him, L.J. joined their crew.

This is L.J. at that point – built on 200 points, including 30 Social Points. Months later, as the PCs burglarized the offices of Poniard Industries (a megacorp they suspected of developing an illegal nova bomb), his Secret Advantage activated. Company files revealed his mom was really Alice Poniard, lost megacorporate heir, who'd fled years ago to escape a coup by her usurping aunt Alexandra. L.J. learned he had considerable Status and Wealth – and powerful Enemies.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 11 [4]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 6 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.
5'6"; 125 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 10 [0].
CF: Galactic [0].
Languages: Galactic Standard (Native) [0].

Advantages

Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Comfortable [10]*; Gizmos [5]; Intuition [15]; Luck Points 13 [13]*; Reputation +4 (Master thief; In underworld) [7]*; Secret Advantage [20]*.

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5]; Enemy (Interstellar Police; Hunter; 6 or less) [-15]*; Greed (12) [-15]; Lecherousness (12) [-15]; Skinny [-5]; Status -1 [-5]*; Xenophilia (12) [-10].

Quirks: Careful; Code of Honor (Always finish a job and never betray a client); Loves to cook; Nosy; Proud. [-5]

Skills

Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [2]-12; Acting (A) IQ [2]-13; Architecture (A) IQ [2]-13; Beam Weapons (Pistol) (E) DX [4]-14; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Cartography (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Climbing (A) DX-1 [2]-13; Cooking (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Computer Operation/TL10 (E) IQ [1]-13; Computer Programming/TL10 (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Connoisseur (Visual Arts) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Disguise/TL10 (A) IQ [2]-13; Driving/TL10 (Groundcar) (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Electronics Operation/TL10 (Security) (A) IQ+7 [24]-20; Fast-Draw (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-12; First Aid (E) IQ-1 [1]-12; Forced Entry (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Forgery (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Garrote (E) DX [1]-12; Gesture (E) DX [1]-12; Holdout (A) IQ [1]-13; Jumping (A) DX [1]-13; Knife (E) DX [1]-12; Lockpicking (A) IQ [2]-13; Pickpocket (H) DX-1 [2]-12; Piloting (Flight Pack) (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Research/TL10 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Scrounging (A) Per-1 [1]-12; Shadowing (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Stealth (A) DX+2 [8]-15; Swimming (E) HT [1]-10; Traps (A) IQ+1 [4]-14.

* Purchased with Social Points.

This rule allowed players to spend bonus character points (p. B498) to buy or improve successes on die rolls and affect plot points. Such player-direction was, in theory, extremely useful for the sort of high-powered, action-heavy cinematic space opera game I was running. The trouble was my players *hated* using this rule because they never wanted to sacrifice hard-earned bonus points unless faced with absolutely certain death, and even then grumbled about doing so! From their perspective, earned character points were for advancement, and that was it!

I eventually realized that this was the same mentality that had led to the decision to use Social Points in the first place: An unwillingness of my players to spend points on transitory outcomes rather than solid improvement. This provided a natural sink for unspent Social Points. I ruled that unspent *starting* Social Points could be used as bonus character points for influencing success rolls. Players quickly referred to these as "Luck Points." I further decided to award all characters one extra "Luck Point" after each adventure session (two if they engaged in heroic or entertaining play). This also ensured that, like other social advantages, they could be freely acquired during play.

My players rarely spent more than 5-10 Social Points on Luck Points, but for game balance I ruled no more than five Luck Points could be expended in a single game session. This was about the same as the number of bonus character points PCs tended to have unspent, ensuring Luck Point play could influence but not dominate the game.

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid SF fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released **Basic Dungeons & Dragons.** Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating **Transhuman Space,** co-authoring the **Big Eyes, Small Mouth** anime RPG, and writing countless **GURPS** books, including the **GURPS Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition,* **GURPS Ultra-Tech,** and the **GURPS Spaceships** series.

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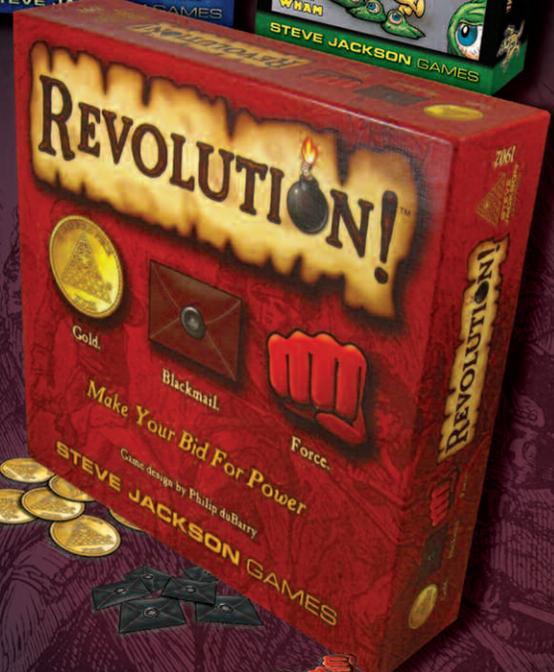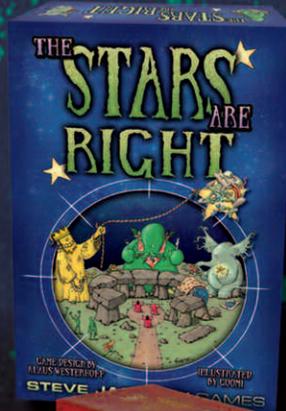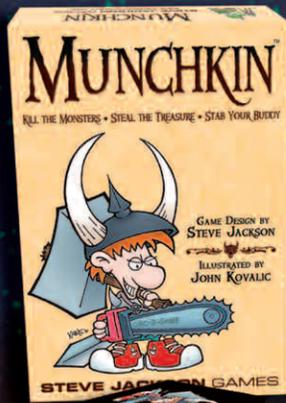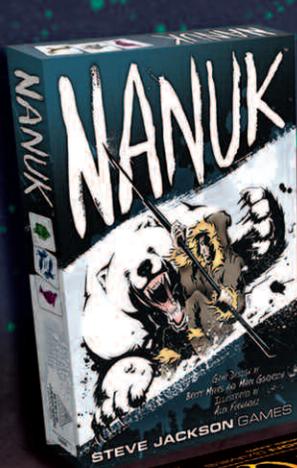
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NATURAL WEAPONS

BY ÍTALO G. GONÇALVES

Advantages like Claws, Teeth, and Striker allow the creation of heroes and monsters with a variety of natural weaponry. The new optional Natural Weapon advantage offers even more possibilities. Inspired by the Innate Attack advantage (pp. B61-62) and the ST-Based enhancement (**GURPS Power-Ups 4: Enhancements,** pp. 20-21) the new advantage allows the construction of a wide variety of built-in weapons, both physical and esoteric, with greater detail. The advantage's game mechanics also provide details and options for how an innate weapon can interact with normal weapons.

> *Logan: Why don't you open these bracelets and we'll see who's made of what?*
>
> *Viper: The claws. Now we can begin.*
>
> – ***The Wolverine***

Natural Weapon

Variable

You possess one or more body parts that can function as weapons. By default, all limbs of the same kind are modified (for example, a set of claws in each hand, or hooves on all of your feet), and you can only use your natural weapon when striking with a limb of that kind.

You deal thrust damage with your weapon, at reach C. Use DX or Brawling to attack and parry in combat. For parrying purposes, your weapon has an effective weight equal to your ST/10. Your opponents can't disarm you, but they can strike your weapon; it has the same DR as the body part to which it is attached. It also has HP according to a homogeneous material with its weight (see p. B557). If broken, the weapon recovers its HP at the same rate as your body.

Although your weapon is part of your body, it does not have to be biological in nature. The special modifiers below allow the creation of weapons such as breath attacks, chi, magical, or psychic abilities, mechanical parts, etc. Cost is 3 points for *small piercing;* 4 points for *toxic;* 5 points for *burning,* *crushing,* or *piercing;* 6 points for *large piercing;* 7 points for *cutting;* 8 points for *huge piercing* or *impaling;* and 10 points for *corrosion* or *fatigue.* See *Innate Attack* (pp. B61-62) for details on each damage type. You cannot apply general modifiers that don't suit muscle-powered attacks, such as Malediction, Resistible, or Sense-Based.

Special Enhancements

Destructive Parry: Your weapon always does damage to your opponent's weapon on a successful parry, or when it is parried. +40%.

Disarming: Your weapon has a shape that favors disarming, giving you +2 on disarming attempts. +20%.

Extra Damage Type: You can deal more than one type of damage with your natural weapon. Choose an alternate damage type with a cost equal to or less than the base cost of the main damage type. Any enhancements you buy only apply to damage types for which they are valid. For example, if your attack deals Fatigue and Toxic damage, the Dehydration enhancement will only work when you choose to use Fatigue. +20%.

Extra Reach: Your weapon has a greater reach. Cost is +20% per hex if you can only attack at maximum reach, +50% per hex if you can attack at any reach, or +30% per hex if you can attack at any reach but need a Ready maneuver to change reach. Changing reach from C to 1 is free. If your weapon is very long, consider adding Hidden (below) or Switchable (**Power-Ups 4,** p. 17) to be able to pass through doors, drive a car, etc.

Flexible: Your weapon is flexible like a whip and can be used to entangle enemies and weapons. +30%, or +60% if your weapon also imposes parrying penalties like a flail.

Good Defense: Your weapon has a shape that favors its use for defense, giving you +1 or +2 to parry. +30% or +60%.

Heavy: Your weapon is bigger or denser than normal, being more difficult to break and sweep aside in combat. Effective weight is increased by 10% per level, up to 100%. +10% per level.

Hidden: Your natural weapon is concealed within your body. It can be drawn or retracted as a free action, and may appear only when you attack and parry, if you wish. If your weapon is grabbed, stuck into something, locked by another weapon, etc., you may not retract it again until you break free. +20%.

Increased Damage: Your weapon is harder or sharper than usual and capable of inflicting more damage. +30% per +1 to damage, up to +5. You may consider each +2 as *+1 per die,* if that would be better. To do more damage, buy Striking ST.

Intangible: Your natural weapon is diffuse or made of energy, and thus cannot be damaged or grappled. You must also take Cannot Parry (p. 25). +50%.

Projected: This must be combined with Ranged (below). Your ranged natural weapon can bypass barriers to strike your foe. Decide whether you use Brawling or Innate Attack to hit. +50%.

Ranged: Your natural weapon works like a muscle-powered ranged weapon, with Acc 3, Range ×0.5/×1, RoF 1, Shots N/A, Bulk -2 (-6 if Two-Handed, below), and Recoil 1. Use Innate Attack skill to hit your target (or Brawling, if you have Projected, above). You can still use it in melee. This alleviates the restrictions on attack enhancements, but each one must be approved by the GM. Ammo never runs out by default, but modifiers like Limited Use and Takes Recharge can change this; if so, they only apply to ranged use, never melee use. +100%.

Resilient: Your natural weapon is hard to break. For +10%, your weapon is considered to be of fine quality for parrying purposes and has twice DR; +20% makes it very fine and multiplies DR by 5; +40% makes it utterly unbreakable. Note that even an unbreakable weapon may be swept aside by a heavier one, and if an enemy severs the body part it is attached to, you lose it for good!

Swing-Capable: You can deal swing damage with your weapon. Remember that a swing/impaling weapon can get stuck (p. B405). If you have Extra Damage Type (p. 24), this only applies to *one* type by default; each additional type that can swing adds +10%. +20% to deal only swing damage or +30% if you can switch between thrust and swing.

Special Limitations

Cannot Parry: Your natural weapon is too short, frail, or somehow useless to parry. Incompatible with Destructive Parry, Fragile, Good Defense, Heavy, Light, Poor Defense, Resilient, and Unbalanced. -40%.

Fragile: Your natural weapon breaks easily. Halve its DR, and consider it as cheap for parrying purposes. -20%.

Light: Your weapon is smaller or less dense then normal, being easier to break and sweep aside in combat. Reduce effective weight by 10% per level, to a maximum of eight levels. -5% per level.

Poor Defense: Your weapon is too short, thin, or somehow difficult to defend with. You parry with it at -2. Incompatible with Cannot Parry and Unbalanced. -20%.

Reduced Damage: You can't inflict much damage with your weapon. -30% for -1 damage per die, or -60% for -2 per die.

Single: Instead of one weapon per limb, you only have *one* natural weapon. Choose a limb when you buy the ability (for example, right hand). -20%.

Two-Handed: You need two hands to attack with your natural weapon. You may attack with only one at -2, but the weapon will become unready. If you have Ranged, you can't attack one-handed at all. To take this, you must also take Single. -30%.

Unbalanced: Your weapon has a bad weight distribution, so you can't parry in the same turn you attack with it, and vice versa. Incompatible with Cannot Parry and Poor Defense. -30%.

Sample Abilities

Below are some examples of natural weapons.

Bone Stakes: Natural Weapon (Impaling; Armor Divisor (2), +50%; Fragile, -20%; Increased Damage, +2, +60%; Increased Range, ×2, +10%; Ranged, +100%; Takes Recharge, 15 seconds, -20%) [23]. *Notes:* You grow sharp stakes from your arms. You can use them in melee or shoot them from a distance. If you shoot, each one takes 15 seconds to grow again. *23 points.*

Special Cases

There are a few special considerations concerning the Natural Weapon advantage.

Natural Weapons and Strikers

The Natural Weapon advantage intrudes a little into the niche of the Striker advantage, so it becomes necessary to clarify the differences between them. The main difference is that the Striker is an additional body part separate from the other limbs, while a Natural Weapon is not. Thus, any damage to a Striker is taken off of the body's HP (and it is susceptible to bleeding, crippling, etc.). However, the Striker allows you to attack while your hands are occupied (grappling, holding something, etc.). In contrast, a broken Natural Weapon isn't any worse than a broken nail or tooth, but you must use your hand, mouth, etc. in order to attack with it.

In other words, games using both advantages should treat tails, tentacles and such as Strikers and claws, teeth, horns, quills, etc. as Natural Weapons. In order to add more detail, the GM may allow the modifiers Disarming, Extra Damage Type, Flexible, Good Defense, Poor Defense, Swing-Capable, and Unbalanced to be applied to Strikers as well.

Natural Weapons and Skills

The default skill to use with a Striker or a Natural Weapon is Brawling (or Innate Attack, if you took the Ranged enhancement). If the GM agrees, you may rely on Karate to inflict further damage using natural melee weapons with reach C (per **GURPS Martial Arts,** p. 57). For other variations, the GM may allow you to take the Weapon Adaptation perk (see **GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks,** p. 8) to benefit from a different skill or from such traits as the Weapon Master advantage. In either case, your weapon must be appropriately modified to use with the new skill – for example, to use Smallsword skill and gain the benefits of a fencing weapon, your natural weapon can't have a reach longer than one yard, and you should take a few levels of the Light limitation. This means no Karate bonuses for axes and swords!

Natural or Innate?

Some Natural Weapons may resemble Innate Attacks with the ST-Based enhancement. Although it is possible to make certain powers using either advantage, the version built with Natural Weapon will usually be more balanced in terms of cost-benefit. As stated in **Power-Ups 4,** ST-Based should be handled with care by the GM, so Natural Weapon will usually be a better option in low-powered games.

Chi Blast: Natural Weapon (Crushing; Cannot Parry, -40%; Hidden, +20%; Increased Damage, +2 per die, +120%; Intangible, +50%; Power Modifier, Chi, -10%; Ranged, +100%; Single, -20%; Two-Handed, -30%) [15]. *Notes:* An energy blast created with your chi. You have to use both hands to focus your inner energy. The ability is completely invisible until the moment when you attack. *15 points.*

Decaying Touch: Natural Weapon (Corrosion; Cannot Parry, -40%; Hidden, +20%; Intangible, +50%; No Signature, +20%) [15]. *Notes:* Touching a target causes it to crumble to dust! *15 points.*

Dragon's Breath: Natural Weapon (Burning; Cannot Parry, -40%; Cone, 5 yards, +100%; Hidden, +20%; Intangible, +50%; Limited Use, 3/day, -20%; Ranged, +100%; Single, -20%; Swing-Capable, +20%) [16]. *Notes:* The cone of fire is five yards wide with range equal to your ST. *16 points.*

Freezing Strike: Natural Weapon (Fatigue; Cannot Parry, -40%; Extra Damage Type, Burning, +20%; Freezing, +20%; No Incendiary Effect, -10%; Side Effect, Paralysis, +200%; Switchable (*Power-Ups 4,* p. 17), +10%) [30]. *Notes:* You turn your fists into ice to freeze your enemies slowly (dealing fatigue damage) or quickly, like liquid hydrogen (burning damage), with the possibility of paralyzing them with the cold. You can't parry with the *ability,* but you can still parry normally with your hands! *30 points.*

Hammer Hands: Natural Weapon (Crushing; Accessibility, breaking the weapon cripples the hand, -20%; Extra Reach, C, 1, +50%; Heavy 10, +100%; Increased Damage, +2 per die, +120%; Swing-Capable, +20%; Switchable (*Power-Ups 4,* p. 17), +10%; Temporary Disadvantage, No Fine Manipulators, -30%; Unbalanced, -30%) [16]. *Notes:* You turn your hands into powerful hammers to smash your foes. *16 points.*

Lightning Whip: Natural Weapon (Burning; Destructive Parry, +40%; Disarming, +20%; Extra Reach, 1-4, Ready maneuver necessary, +90%; Flexible, +30%; Light 4, -20%; Poor Defense, -20%; Single, -20%; Surge, Arcing (*Power-Ups 4,* p. 21), +100%; Swing-Capable, +20%; Switchable (*Power-Ups 4,* p. 17), +10%; Unbalanced, -30%) [16]. *Notes:* This whip made of lightning takes one Ready maneuver to appear in your hand, and another whenever you want to change reach.

The Weapon Adaptation perk allows you to crack the whip and deliver painful blows (see p. B406). *16 points.*

Minotaur's Horns: Natural Weapon (Impaling; Cannot Parry, -40%; Increased Damage, +1 per die, +60%; Link, +10%; Single, -20%) [9], bought *twice. Notes:* You may gore with both horns as a single attack; if you hit, figure damage for each horn separately. They have the same DR as your skull (DR 2 by default). If you lose one horn, you may still attack with the other. *18 points.*

Psychic Dagger: Natural Weapon (Fatigue; Affects Insubstantial, +20%; Cannot Parry, -40%; Intangible, +50%; Mental Resistance Only (*Power-Ups 4,* p. 19), +250%; Power Modifier, Telepathy, -10%; Single, -20%; Switchable (*Power-Ups 4,* p. 17), +10%) [36]. *Notes:* This dagger made of psychic energy allows you to strike directly into your foes' nervous system. *36 points.*

Telekinetic Push: Natural Weapon (Crushing; Cannot Parry, -40%; Cone, 5 yards, +100%; Double Knockback, +20%; Hidden, +20%; Intangible, +50%; No Blunt Trauma, -20%; No Wounding, -50%; Power Modifier, Psychokinesis, -10%; Projected, +50%; Ranged, +100%; Swing-Capable, +20%) [17]. *Notes:* If you are using *GURPS Psionic Powers,* damage and range can be based on the psionic skill (instead of ST) as a special effect. *17 points.*

Ultra-Sharp Claws: Natural Weapon (Impaling; Armor Divisor (10), +200%; Disarming, +20%; Extra Damage Type, Cutting, +20%; Increased Damage, +2 per die, +120%; Resilient, Unbreakable, +40%; Swing-Capable, Cutting, +20%; Switchable (*Power-Ups 4,* p. 17), +10%) [44]. *Notes:* This set of claws can cut through anything. Damage is sw cut or thr imp. *44 points.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EVERYMAN TASKS

BY WILLIAM H. STODDARD

GURPS allows success rolls against both skills and attributes. Skills apply to tasks that require specific training; people without that training either default to an attribute or a related skill at a substantial penalty, or can't even attempt the task. What tasks a skill covers are spelled in the rules. Attribute rolls apply to tasks that anyone can attempt without specialized training – but those tasks aren't defined in the same detail.

Skills often have modifiers: penalties (which lower the number you have to roll below) for hard tasks, or bonuses (which raise it) for easy ones. Those modifiers can apply to a *default roll* against a skill! If the bonus for an easy or mundane task is high enough, a person without specialized training can attempt the task with an *unmodified* attribute roll. This provides a way to identify many activities that can be done with a simple attribute roll. Such *everyman tasks* are within the reach of any adult in a given culture (except one who has the Incompetence quirk).

These same bonuses apply to those who *are* trained in a skill, of course. Having that level of skill lets them do routine tasks with minimal risk of failure; if they have a high enough modified skill, they may suffer critical failure only on a natural 18. (The GM may simply let the skill roll go in such cases.) For some skills, they may be able to do simple tasks with exceptional skill. They also can perform routine tasks under nonroutine stress – in the dark, or with improvised equipment, or while distracted, for example – and still have a decent chance of success.

Having a Talent for a group of skills also benefits their default use, and therefore, it benefits routine undertakings.

The following activities cover a select number of the numerous *GURPS* skills, and are a sample of everyman tasks, emphasizing those that are likely to come up in an adventure and those that really should *not* be limited to those with special training. For convenience, they're grouped under the attribute to which each skill defaults.

DEXTERITY

Climbing: Climb an ordinary tree (see p. B349). Modified skill: Climbing+5.

Cycling: Ride a bicycle at moderate speeds, without significant hazards, without falling off. Modified skill: Bicycling+4.

Driving: Drive a car on small town streets with light traffic. Modified skill: Driving+5.

Grab and Run: Snatch a small object out of a display, off a table, etc., with no attempt at concealment, but followed (usually) by immediate flight. Snatch an object from another person's hands with a Quick Contest of DX. Modified skills: Filch+5, Pickpocket+5.

Hunt and Peck: Typing with two fingers, while looking at the keyboard, at two-thirds the speed for regular Typing skill. If you *have* Typing skill, you won't use this method! Modified skills: Administration+1, Computer Operation+1, Professional Skill (Journalist)+1, Research+1, Typing+4, Writing+1.

Lobbing: Throw an object into a general area (targeting a single specified hex). If you miss, use the scatter rules (p. B414). For a small, relatively smooth object, you can gain a skill bonus – Throwing+3. Similar mechanics can be used for dropping an object into a general area, with a modified skill of Dropping+3.

Mending: Perform simple sewing tasks such as reattaching a button to a shirt. Modified skills: Leatherworking+4, Sewing+4.

Move Unobtrusively: Move through a room or outdoor area without calling undue attention to yourself. This won't actually prevent anyone looking at you from seeing you! However, you won't specifically attract attention by making a display of yourself or making noise. At the GM's option, some reaction bonuses may *penalize* this roll. Modified skill: Stealth+5.

Sex: Use *basic* sexual techniques that are commonplace in your culture. Modified skill: Erotic Art+5.

Social Dancing: Perform whatever kind of dancing is common among ordinary people in your culture, social class, and age group well enough to fit in. This isn't enough to perform a dance on stage or impress a partner. Modified skill: Dancing+5.

Write or Print: Produce a clearly readable document (failure gives a scrawl; critical failure means near illegibility). Base writing speed is 4,000 words per day. Modified skill: DX-based Artist (Calligraphy)+6.

INTELLIGENCE

Advertising: Advertise a single job opening, a single object for sale, personal services, or something similar, using simple means such as classified ads, fliers, or handing out business cards. Commonly used as part of a search roll. Modified skill: Propaganda+5.

Arithmetic: Use pencil and paper to do *complex* problems (adding up columns of numbers, long division, fractions) in place notation. Modified skills: Accounting+6, Mathematics (Applied or Statistics)+6.

Computer Use: Turn on an unfamiliar computer, log in, enter data, interact with standard programs (e-mail, Web browsers, music players, etc.). Works with graphic user interface systems; earlier interfaces are more difficult! Modified skill: Computer Operation+4.

Concealment: Set up prefabricated camouflage over a location or object. Modified skills: Camouflage+4, Soldier.

Cultivating a Persona: At a social event, or on an ongoing basis month by month, maintain a public identity that is an improved version of your real self, with stylizations, exaggerations, or editing out of flaws; this requires a Quick Contest of IQ vs. the highest IQ of the group affected. Winning gives +1 to reaction or Influence rolls; losing gives -1. Modified skills: Acting+5; Performance+3, or other skills in specific contexts, including Leadership+3, Politics+3, Psychology (Applied)+3, Religious Ritual+3, and Teaching+3.

Deception: Tell a single, simple lie; used to resist Detect Lies in a Quick Contest. Modified skill: Acting+5.

Dogma: Know the basic creed or doctrines of your philosophy, political ideology, or religion, if it has one. You can repeat them from memory, but not give a systematic explanation of them. Modified skills: Philosophy+6, Theology+6.

Driving: As defined under *Dexterity* (p. 27).

Familiar Places: Recognize landmarks and locations in your "home base" area (see p. B176) when you are actually there. This doesn't include recalling their locations or geographic relationships when you're somewhere else! Modified skill: Area Knowledge+4.

Follow Orders: Figure out what your unit leader or petty officer is telling you to do and attempt to do it. This won't make you skilled at the task, but will help you avoid being singled out for punishment or sarcasm. Modified skills: Crewman+4, Soldier+4.

Going Through Channels: Submit a routine request to an organization for help or information that falls within the organization's purpose or function. Modified skills: Administration+5, Law+5, Politics+5.

Handyman: Perform minor repairs or maintenance: Change a fuse, check loose cables, patch a small drywall hole, etc. Modified skills: Electrician+5, Electronics Repair+5, Mechanic+5, etc.

Improvise Tools: Find natural objects that can be used as simple tools, as is or with minor reshaping, or turn available tools to unintended uses. Any such improvised tool imposes the usual penalties (*Equipment Modifiers,* p. B345). Modified skills: Machinist+5, Scrounging, Survival.

Loading Small Vehicles: Arrange a full load of personal baggage, groceries, small gear, etc. in the storage compartment of a car, boat, or other personal vehicle. Don't bother to roll if you're not under time pressure! A failed roll means that you can't get everything to fit, and either have to leave some things behind or delay your departure; a critical failure means you left something behind without knowing it. Modified skill: Freight Handling+5. Similar rolls can apply to packing *your own* personal mount, with a modified skill of Packing+5.

Lore or *General Knowledge:* Know facts that are common knowledge in your community or culture, whether in the form of simple mnemonic rhymes ("Thirty days hath September"), proverbs and maxims ("Possession is nine points of the law"), or elementary education. Modified skills: Expert Skill (Bardic Lore)+6; Naturalist+6; most academic or knowledge-based skills or Expert Skills at +6 – but not Hidden Lore or any skill without an IQ-based default!

Manners: Get along as a guest in a subculture with specialized standards, without giving offense, but without appearing or trying to appear to be a member of the in-group – just a respectful visitor. Subject to Cultural Familiarity modifiers. Modified skills: Savoir-Faire+4.

Paperwork: Fill out a credit, job, license application, purchase order, or other standard form without making mistakes or asking for help. Modified skills: Administration+5; Merchant+5 for commercial transactions.

Read: Puzzle out a scrawled or hastily written document (see *Write or Print,* p. 27). Modified skill: Professional Skill (Scribe) or a suitable document-related skill (History, Intelligence Analysis, Literature, Research) at +5.

Respond to Questions: Give clear answers in an interview, in a conversation, or as a witness in court. The overall direction of the conversation is provided by the questioner; success means the answers are on topic, clearly phrased, and audible. Benefits from Voice. Modified skill: Public Speaking+5.

Rhyming: Make up doggerel, taunting rhymes, and so on. Your compositions won't have any artistic value, but they'll rhyme and scan (more or less) and be catchy enough for easy recall: IQ rolls to remember them have a bonus equal to half your margin of success, rounded up. Modified skill: Poetry+5.

> *Anticipate the difficult*
> *by managing the easy.*
> *– Lao Tzu*

Shutterbug: Capture images on a camera or cell phone. The images will not have artistic merit (the GM *may* allow this on a critical success!) but will include the important information at the scene: a recognizable face, an animal species' identifying characteristics, the arrangement of objects, and so on. Modified skill: Electronics Operation (Media)+5, Photography+5.

Sketch Maps: Do a quick sketch of a building, travel route, landscape, etc., showing general directions and important details, but not precise scale or details. A successful roll will produce a good enough map to get another person to a destination; a failure will be confusing; a critical failure will lead the user to the wrong place. Modified skill: Cartography+5.

Tutor: Give instruction to one or two students; for larger groups, look up the number in the *Linear Measurement* column of the *Speed/Range Table* (p. B550), rounding up, and apply the corresponding modifier from the *Speed/Range* column. Roll vs. the lesser of your modified IQ and the skill you are trying to teach. Modified skill: Teaching+5.

HEALTH

Avoid Contagion: Resist getting ill in a disease-ridden environment; the modifiers on p. B443 apply. Modified skill: HT-based Hazardous Materials (Biological)+5.

Famine Foods: Eat substances with poor digestibility, limited nutrition, and/or mild toxicity without distress, as found either in the wild (ground tree bark, weeds. insects) or in a besieged or disaster-struck city (leather objects, trapped rats).

A failed roll leaves you nauseated (p. B428); a critically failed roll inflicts 2d-4 toxic injury. Famine foods are only suitable to stretch out a normal diet; depending entirely on famine foods counts as missing one meal per day (1 FP lost per day, restored only by rest and full meals). Modified skill: HT-based Survival+5 or HT-based Urban Survival+5.

Group Singing: Join in singing a simple song as part of a group, such as a hymn or marching song, or join in the chorus to a folk song. Benefits from Voice. Modified skills: Singing+4; HT-based Soldier for marching songs.

Wading: Move through water that is at least up to your hips, but not over your head. Roll when you first enter the water, and again every five minutes, with modifiers as for Swimming (p. B354). A failed roll requires an actual Swimming roll, and counts as entering the water *unintentionally*. Modified skill: Swimming+4.

PERCEPTION

Detect Spoiled Food: Notice the first signs that food is no longer fit to eat – moldy spots, a smell of decay, etc. Modified skill: Per-based Housekeeping+4.

Find Mislaid Item: Look through your own living space, or retrace your immediate past steps, to locate an item of your own property that you have lost track of. Modified skill: Search+5.

Judge Weather: Notice immediately oncoming weather, such as a change in the wind or the start of rain or snow, just as it starts or a few minutes ahead – early enough to be able to make basic preparations (change clothes, stow gear, get under cover, adjust sails). This is *no use* for predicting weather further ahead than an hour or two. Modified skill: Per-based Meteorology+5.

Notice Illness or Injury: Spot that someone is ill, injured, or drugged or poisoned, if there are external signs. An actual Diagnosis roll is often needed to figure out the cause of an impaired condition. If the condition produces incapacitation, or involves bleeding, or produces crippling injury, no roll is needed to spot it! Modified skill: Per-based Diagnosis+6.

Notice Lifeform: See or hear an animal amid natural vegetation or against a natural background; see a distinctive plant, such as one bearing fruit, or smell its odor. To recognize the species of a common lifeform, use *Lore or General Knowledge* (p. 28). Modified skills: Per-based Naturalist+5, Survival+5. If the lifeform is actively hiding or sneaking, Per can be used in a Quick Contest against its Stealth, but the skill bonus does not apply!

WILL

Dream Recall: You can recall the major events of a dream; on a critical success, you have detailed memory of the dream. The roll is unmodified if you make it right after waking up; -2 for up to an hour's delay; -6 the same day; -10 any time after that. Modified skill: Dreaming+6.

Peace of Mind: Resist the urge to fidget, chain-smoke, etc., under stressful conditions by calming yourself. Modified skill: Meditation+6.

Poker Face: Avoid showing a visible reaction to information you receive. Used to resist Body Language or Detect Lies in a Quick Contest. Modified skill: Will-based Acting+5.

Waking Up: If you are having a bad dream, you can wake yourself up from it. This does not let you avoid the bad effects of Nightmares; you may cut the nightmare short, but you are still short of sleep and perhaps shaken. Modified skill: Dreaming+6.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William H. Stoddard is a professional copy editor, specializing in scientific and scholarly books in fields ranging from aerospace technology to archaeology. Fortunately, he likes reading nonfiction; his research library is threatening to take over his apartment, and he regularly visits the nearest university library for supplemental reading. His other pleasures include cooking, reading science fiction and alternate history, and running and playing in roleplaying games; he has been doing the latter since 1975, when he first encountered *Dungeons & Dragons.* His previous work for Steve Jackson Games includes writing the award-winning *GURPS Social Engineering,* the latest editions of *GURPS Supers* and *GURPS Low-Tech,* and *Pyramid* articles on such subjects as formal dances and sexual situations in roleplaying games. He lives in San Diego with his cohabitant Carol, two cats, two computers, and far too many books!

By Default

by Douglas Cole

One of the nice parts of **GURPS** game mechanics is the ability to do many things "by default." Your basic coordination (DX), ability to resolutely process and act on information (IQ, Per, Will), and power and fitness (ST and HT) enable you to execute nearly any task, given a calm environment and enough time.

Those last two considerations are important, because for average folks (stats in the 9-11 range), defaults are based on your controlling attribute at -4 (for Easy skills) to -6 (Hard skills). You'll be rolling against anywhere from 3 to 7 in stressful conditions (always less than 15% chance of success), necessitating taking extra time or searching for ways to gain bonuses to the roll.

This turns around at high attribute levels. Spend enough points for DX or IQ 18 (160 points!), and you're defaulting to a professional level of skill even on Hard skills, under stress. Among some gamers, this has led to a strong belief (sometimes referred to as "stat normalization") that high attribute levels should be curtailed in all but the most cinematic games.

Finally, the difference between the broadest Talents [15/level] and raising *all* of your physical or mental skills via DX or IQ [20/level] just isn't that large. The temptation to pump up your attributes is pretty high.

For an alternate take on attributes, check out "When We Were Very Small" in **Pyramid #3/34: Alternate GURPS.**

Half-Stat Defaulting

Changing how skills default doesn't alter the fairly satisfying results at average attribute levels, but tamps down the power of very high attributes – and gives a boost at lower levels, making reduced scores a bit more palatable.

Instead of the usual default attribute values for Easy, Average, and Hard skills, convert these defaults to half-stat by changing the basis for all defaults to Attribute/2 (round fractions down) plus a modifier. The modifier equals the normal default penalty (expressed as a negative number) plus 5.

Examples: Thaumatology has a default of IQ-7, and (-7 + 5) equals -2, so the half-stat default is Attribute/2-2. For Bicycling, with a default of DX-4, because (-4 + 5) equals 1, it would instead default to Attribute/2+1. Throwing, with its default of DX-3, would now default to Attribute/2+2, since (-3 + 5) equals 2.

This alteration has no impact at all on human-average attribute levels of 10. Most Average skills default to Attribute-5 using

the rules in the **Basic Set,** and Attribute/2 with this tweak – both produce a default of 5. At high attributes, the change is significant. An Average skill defaults to only 9 given IQ 18, instead of 13. Where the IQ 18 person could get and hold a job in almost any field based on his IQ alone using the rules in the Basic Set, using the half-stat system, about the only way he can get that same job is to have some amount of training in it.

This change unifies the cost of skills as well; consult the *Half-Stat Skill Cost Table* (below) for new values. If the skill has no default, then for skill-cost purposes only, the "default" value equals Attribute/2 (round fractions down) plus a modifier: +1 for Easy skills, 0 for Average skills, and -1 for Hard and Very Hard skills. The GM may adjust this based on skill rarity. For example, Lasso is a common Hard skill with no **Basic Set** default. It would have a skill-cost default of (Attribute/2)-1.

Half-Stat Skill Cost Table

	Difficulty of Skill	
Final Skill Level	**Easy, Average, and Hard**	**Very Hard**
Default+3	–	1
Default+4	1	2
Default+5	2	4
Default+6	4	8
Default+7	8	12
Default+8	12	16
Default+9	16	20
Default+10	20	24
Extra +1	+4	+4

Impact of Half-Stat Defaulting

While the transformation of the defaulting rules is easy to do, the implications of the changes are large enough that the value of basic character building blocks are altered.

Attributes

The most obvious change is in the benefit of attributes! Half-stat defaulting effectively doubles the cost of a +1 to all derived skills. Prior to the change, you could effectively get a boost to all skills covered by IQ or DX at 20 points per +1, the rounding of half-stat defaulting increases this to 40 points for DX and IQ, and 20 points for HT and ST. Given the sheer value of such a large improvement, this might be considered "fair," but no matter what, it's a huge change. Players will also likely avoid starting at odd-numbered attribute levels or even improving attributes, due to attribute defaults rounding down.

If the GM wishes to see more attribute improvement, he should consider increasing the frequency of raw attribute rolls by adding more challenge that rely on skills that the protagonists do *not* have. Do this enough, and the value of high (and odd-numbered) attributes will be preserved.

Skills

Two important side-effects occur when using the half-stat system as the basis for a default: Skills become more desirable, and the concept of relative skill level changes.

Points in Skills

In the **Basic Set**, it's always cheaper to focus on skill over attribute until you're interested in five or more skills, at which point it's better to focus on attributes. With half-stat defaulting, that balance point shifts to 10 or more skills.

Example: An acceptable heroic level in a melee combat skill such as Broadsword is 16, which is enough to give a decent Parry and for the occasional Deceptive Attack to the torso, with a decent chance of attacking the vitals (-3) or neck (-5) if the adventurer elects Committed or All-Out Attack (Determined). With a warrior-like DX 12, getting to 16 (or Attribute+4) in Broadsword costs 40 points in the attribute and 16 points in the skill, for a total of 56 points. Using the half-stat system to get the same stats, you must spend a total of 60 points: 40 points for DX 12 (which gives a default value of only 6) and 20 points for a 16 in Broadsword (which is bought at Default+10). Similarly, if you want DX 14 and a Broadsword of 16 in the half-stat system, you would need to spend 96 points, or 80 points for the attribute (which gives a default value of only 6) and 16 points for the skill (which is bought at Default+9), compared to 88 points under the **Basic Set** rules.

Because it is much more expensive to push a set of skills into the cinematic territory of 18+, the half-stat system may not be as appealing to such genres as **GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy,** and **GURPS Monster Hunters.** The knight template (**GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers,** pp. 8-9) offers weapon skills in the range of 19 and 20; using the standard 250-point template, all DX-based skills will drop by 2 points due to increases in skill cost.

Relative Skill Level and Attribute Basis

Many concepts in **GURPS** use the relative skill level (p. B171) as a figure of merit. Wrestling, Karate, and Weapon Master (among others) give bonuses when reaching a minimum value. Likewise, when shifting the attribute basis of a skill (such as an IQ-based Guns roll), you use the relative skill level.

Shifting the attribute basis for a skill using half-stat defaulting works as normal. If you purchased a skill at Default+8, that +8 will move to any attribute just fine – just recalculate the default value of the new controlling attribute. (Don't forget to round down; moving from DX 12 to IQ 11 as the basis of a skill will result in a -1 to that skill.)

When looking at bonuses that apply when skills reach certain thresholds – such as the damage bonus for Weapon Master, or the boost to ST given by Wrestling – the new default values often mean that players spend more points to receive fewer benefits. To keep point expenditures in line with the spirit of the **Basic Set,** figure a proxy for comparative value as follows: Take the number of points spent in the skill and divide by 4. Modify that number based on the skill difficulty: +1 for an Easy skill, no change for Average, -1 for Hard, and -2 for Very Hard. Finally, drop fractions. Use *that* number as a proxy to determine when you get bonuses triggered by relative skill level.

Example: You have DX 13 and Karate-12. Karate is a hard skill with no listed default, so you bought it from a base of 5 (half of DX 13, minus 1 for the Hard skill) and spent 8 points to know it at Default+7. Technically, your relative skill is DX-1, which would mean no damage bonus. But to be fair, we instead use the formula above: 8 points divided by 4, minus 1 (because it's a Hard skill) equals 1, so you have a *proxy* relative skill of DX+1 and you *do* get a bonus.

This method keeps "relative skill" bonuses consistent (for the *points* spent) across the two methods, which is fair for things meant to represent benefits earned due to extensive training.

Talents

Large Talents are probably the big winner using Half-Stat defaults. The 10- and 15-point Talents especially become an excellent way to boost a group of relevant skills that are germane to your character, and take more levels before the cost compares unfavorably to just increasing your base attribute.

One outcome of the shift to half-stat defaulting is that the GM may wish to allow a certain number of levels in weapon-related Talents to offset what would otherwise be a drop in overall effectiveness of characters in certain genres.

PUTTING IT IN PRACTICE

The entire point of this change is to decrease the value of high base attributes when it comes to influencing skills, making attributes less dominant in character creation. This opens up a broader range of attribute scores, since even with DX or IQ 20, your default for Average skills is only 10; you've spent 200 points to be *meh* at all skills, while Joe Average with DX and IQ of 10 can best you in any individual skill with only 4 points spent per skill. Of course, those same 4 points (Default+6) with an attribute of 20 jump you quickly to skill 16, which is credible, if not astoundingly heroic.

Due to the far-reaching nature of it, changing to the half-stat system would be devastating applied mid-campaign, as it would likely result in an overall decrease in character competency. The switch would likely *increase* niche protection for genres that require it, since you'll only see high scores in areas in which you overlap Talents with skill points, even in campaigns with large character point totals. In fact, using this concept would likely encourage starting point values for characters to go up by about 50-75 points, to compensate for a broad loss in competency by allowing a commensurate skill boost in niche-specific areas. Thus, this system is probably *not* a good idea for campaigns in which broad, overlapping competencies are required for success: It would be difficult to imagine the point cost of James Bond or Batman using this rules tweak!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Douglas Cole is a sometimes writer and oft-times blogger, where he tries to spread the **GURPS**pel at Gaming Ballistic (*gamingballistic.blogspot.com*). His gripping release, **GURPS Martial Arts: Technical Grappling,** is finally out: Go buy it. Douglas lives with his wife and daughter in Minnesota, where many are cold, but few are frozen.

A FULL COMPLEMENT

by Sean Punch

Players of **GURPS Action** and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** already know all about *complementary skills*. If you're unfamiliar with the concept – or want a refresher – see *Complementary Skills* (p. 33). This rule definitely would have appeared in the **GURPS Basic Set** had we thought of it in 2004! It has no serious drawbacks, yet offers two nice benefits:

● It makes obscure skills worth the points by allowing them to boost more obviously useful ones.
● It rewards teamwork.

The GM who likes this rule might want to explore a few other options. Except where directly contradictory (e.g., *Multiple Complementary Skills* and *Average Complementary Skill* almost never make sense together), these can be mixed and matched freely.

Multiple Complementary Skills

The GM may let a master skill benefit from *several* complementary skills. This makes the most sense when there's a sizeable penalty to offset (-5 or worse), or for a long task (p. B346) involving most or all of the PCs in a major team effort. If the GM allows a net bonus, he should set an upper limit; the +4 that assistants can provide when inventing (p. B474) is a fair cap, but if the description of the master skill in the **Basic Set** notes a larger bonus, use that instead.

A few examples:

● Computer Hacking might receive bonuses from Computer Programming (for writing optimized intrusion software), Expert Skill (Computer Security) (for identifying security holes), Research (for poring over tech manuals), Scrounging (for Dumpster diving), and social skills such as Fast-Talk (to learn passwords via social engineering).
● Intelligence Analysis attempts to learn secrets often have huge penalties, offset by complementary bonuses from Interrogation (for interviewing prisoners), Observation (for direct surveillance), Photography (for imagery), Research (for checking public records), etc.
● Interrogation gets a flat +6 for torture, but the GM may opt to allow Knife, Surgery, Wrestling, and almost any other skill capable of unpleasantness to give a bonus, up to a total of +6.
● Propaganda campaigns could benefit from Electronics Operation (Media) or Forgery (for doctored media or records), Public Speaking (for giving speeches), and Writing (for writing speeches and articles).

Average Complementary Skill

Some tasks involve so many people that only consistent group competence is likely to affect success meaningfully. Roll once against *average* skill to determine the modifier in such cases. Some examples:

● Cannon or catapult crew rolling against average Artillery, Gunner, or Soldier to give the gunner an Artillery or Gunner bonus.
● Salesmen rolling against average Merchant skill to give a business owner a Finance bonus.
● Troops rolling against average Soldier skill to give their commander a Tactics bonus.
● Vehicle crew rolling against average Crewman skill to give the captain a Shiphandling bonus.

Extra-Complementary Skills

When the person attempting the complementary skill roll is taking a big risk by doing so, or the complementary skill's description in the **Basic Set** specifies a larger bonus than +1, the GM may opt to increase the size of the modifiers.

Double the Fun: In most cases, it's best simply to double the modifier: +4 for critical success, +2 for success, -2 for failure, or -4 for critical failure. This lines up with the +2 for a success at Administration or Carousing, for instance, and replaces the flat +3 for a distraction to complement a Filch, Pickpocket, or Sleight of Hand attempt (e.g., using Sex Appeal). At the GM's option, when a master skill fails due to a doubled penalty from an assistant's botched skill roll, the target's ire is as likely to be directed at the assistant as at the main actor!

Know No Limit: In rare cases where the GM feels the complementary skill should be *really* effective, he can use the entire margin of success (minimum +1) or failure as the modifier. This is fairest when the master skill has a large penalty (-5 or worse) owing to lack of knowledge or preparation that the complementary skill could reasonably provide in full. The GM may wish to cap the bonus at the size of the penalty (no *net* bonus), at the +2 that critical success at a standard complementary skill roll would grant, or at the +4 possible in a "double the fun" situation. In all cases, failure may be catastrophic for both parties if an assistant is involved.

Complementary Contests

The GM may require a complementary skill to win a Quick Contest with someone in order to provide a bonus.

Complementary Skills

The GM may rule that a *complementary skill* could logically assist the *master skill* required by some undertaking, potentially yielding a bonus. The GM decides whether the individual performing the task must attempt both skill rolls, needs an assistant with the complementary skill, or may choose either option. Usually, the two rolls must involve different skills; however, if the GM feels that many hands would make light work, an assistant may help using the same skill.

To use a complementary skill, roll against it *before* trying the master skill roll. Only personal modifiers (from afflictions, disadvantages, fatigue, injury, etc.) influence the complementary skill roll – never external ones. The result gives a modifier to the master skill, cumulative with other modifiers such as equipment bonuses:

+2 for critical success
+1 for success
-1 for failure
-2 for critical failure

The character attempting the master skill roll *must* use this modifier – he can't opt out. If you don't trust your skills or assistant, don't request a complementary skill roll!

It isn't legal to "chain" complementary skill bonuses. That is, a complementary skill cannot boost a master skill that serves to complement some third skill.

Examples

● Acting, Intimidation, or Psychology by a partner to complement Interrogation (good cop, bad cop).

● Administration to complement Diplomacy or Savoir-Faire vs. bureaucrats.

● Architecture to complement rolls to defeat a building's security (e.g., Traps) – or to complement Explosives (Demolition) to blow up the building!

● Area Knowledge or Navigation to complement vehicle-operation skills on long trips.

● Carousing to complement other social skills by buying drinks.

● Carousing, Connoisseur, Dancing, or Gambling to complement Sex Appeal – at least if your name is Bond.

● Chemistry (for industrial chemicals), Naturalist (for venom), or Pharmacy (for drugs) to complement Diagnosis to recognize poisoning, Physician to treat it, or Poisons to engage in it.

● Intimidation to complement Streetwise – or vice versa – when dealing with gangs.

● Musical Instrument to complement Singing (musical accompaniment).

● Observation by an ally watching enemies' positions to complement Guns (Rifle) when sniping – or, if you have radios, to complement your Stealth.

● Savoir-Faire (Mafia, Military, Police, etc.) to complement Acting attempts to impersonate a member of a social group.

● Sex Appeal by someone in plain sight to complement an ally's Stealth via distraction.

● Surgery by a coroner to complement Diagnosis to determine cause of death (exploratory surgery).

● Urban Survival to complement Stealth in built-up areas.

For instance, the GM may rule that for Sex Appeal to count as a distraction and benefit an ally's Filch, Pickpocket, or Stealth roll, it must beat the Will of the individual being distracted. In cases such as these, read the outcomes as follows:

+2 for victory by 5+
+1 for victory by 0-4
-1 for loss by 1-4
-2 for loss by 5+

Where the GM would use *Extra-Complementary Skills* (above), double the modifiers in "double the fun" situations, or use the full margin of victory or loss if the task knows no limit. As always, negative outcomes are as likely to be bad for the assistant as for the person attempting the master skill roll! A good example of this appears in the **Basic Set,** where Sleight of Hand grants from +1 to +5 to Gambling when cheating, but the party using Sleight of Hand must meet the victim's Gambling or Vision in a Quick Contest. In that case, using the full margin would be fair.

Complementary Bonuses to Other Rolls

The GM might even want to let complementary skill rolls affect master rolls that aren't skill rolls:

Appearance Rolls: The roll to call upon an Ally, Contact, or Patron could conceivably get a small boost from a suitable skill roll; e.g., an Administration roll to deal with a Patron organization, a Propaganda roll to signal a conspiratorial Ally via a subtle clues in the newspaper, or a Streetwise roll to put the word on the street for a criminal Contact. To keep this from cheapening the value of higher frequency of appearance – which costs a lot of points – the GM should probably limit the bonus to +1 even on a critical success or *only* on a critical success. To balance this, limit the penalty to -1.

Damage Rolls: Out of combat, knowing where and how to apply force can sometimes be very useful. A complementary skill roll might give a bonus to damage in cases where it's something like Physiology to assist dissecting someone or Machinist to take a torch to a vault door. It's fairest to limit this to +1 *per two dice* (minimum +1) on a success or +1 *per die* (minimum +2) on a critical success. Read failure and critical failure as giving corresponding penalties.

Reaction Rolls: Several skills in the **Basic Set** give a circumstantial reaction bonus on a success, including Administration, Carousing, and Politics. As the usual bonus is +2, the GM may wish to treat all such attempts as "double the fun" situations. However, a very borderline case (like using a Hobby Skill to impress someone who happens to share the hobby) might give only the standard modifiers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As the **GURPS** Line Editor, Sean Punch has contributed greatly to the game line, including *Buckets of Points* (pp. 4-8), which includes a detailed bio.

Random Thought Table

This One Goes to 11

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

During a long-running campaign I was part of (we took turns swapping GM duties), one beloved anecdote went something like this between a player and me as the GM:

"I try to do [something impossible]."
"You fail."
"Wait; don't I even get a roll?"
"Oh, right." I roll the dice; as they're in midair, before the dice hit the table, I look at the player and say, "You fail."

The very first section of the first chapter of **GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns** (p. B343) deals with the question: "When should the dice be rolled?" Most RPGs take a fairly liberal view of dice-rolling. In fact, some games – such as **Torg** and other open-ended "exploding dice" systems – encourage rolling even when it seems impossible because you *just might* roll three dozen 20s in a row.

Because this is an *Alternate GURPS* issue, where we throw crazy ideas at the wall and see what sticks, so let's do something different and go the other way as a bit of a thought exercise.

Is it time to see if you succeeded or failed?
You got an 11. Always. No rolling.
(And, lo, we've just invented **GURPS Diceless** . . .)

The System

To be specific about how this system works: We're pretending that we're rolling three Platonically Ideal dice, getting a 3.5 on each one, which we're rounding up to 11 for simplicity's sake.

Of course, if the players know they're always rolling 11 (modified by situation-relevant advantages and disadvantages), they can adjust their actions to make sure they succeed, generating whatever modifiers they can to get the desired result. Good! That's part of the point. In fact, it's fairly cinematic: It's nigh-unknown for the good guys to get to a climactic scene, throw all their resources at the ultimate problem, and then fail. Are we to believe that we're always watching movies where the heroes rolled above average (or even critical successes) right when they need them most? Maybe they knew ahead of time what needed to be done to win . . .

The Devil's in the Details

In a lot of games, the dice are a storytelling element. A critical success might elicit a response such as "you say just the right quip to the doorman and breeze on past security," while a failure might provoke a development like "he doesn't believe your story, and wants to borrow your credentials to run them through his computer." The result of the dice inspire the GM to take the story in an unexpected way.

However, if we assume a roll of 11 in all cases, it should be up to the *players* to come up with why the modifiers they're attempting to apply are cool and interesting. For example, taking extra time (p. B346) is likely to be popular in this system; rather than letting a player say, "I take eight hours to research the Lovecraftian horror instead of an hour," he should be encouraged to explain how he manages to get that modifier: "I bring in coffee and donuts for the library staff, and explain how I'm planning on spending all day researching a little something." Or perhaps, "I stay hidden in the shadows of the library and come out at night, conducting my research by flashlight."

Regardless, players are urged to pile on whatever modifiers they can imagine to reach their desired goal, as long as they can justify them with in-story descriptions. In a lot of ways, they're not fighting the dice anymore . . . they're fighting the GM's deviousness.

A Perfect 10?

Since we were rounding our Platonic Ideal dice, it's entirely possible to tweak this thought experiment so that you're rolling 10 on average (instead of 11). It doesn't change the basics of the system, but it obviously makes success more likely. Depending on the tasks they face, players may have less reason to imaginatively describe how to get their rolls to something that'll mean they succeed.

KNOWN UNKNOWNS

Even if you know with absolute certainty what every dice roll is going to be, it's still not an absolute cakewalk for the heroes. In particular, the players still do not have access to any information – including modifiers – that they wouldn't have had access to before. This means the heroes can't buy all their skills to 11 and call it a day, confident they'll get the results they want in all situations. If they *don't know* how difficult the vault is to open, then they can't be certain to take the exact amount of time or effort required to make sure they succeed. (See p. B344 for basic but important insight into this.) In a lot of ways, with this system, the players will be swapping the uncertainty of the dice with the uncertainty of their own knowledge. Even so, it should still provide a significant edge to heroes . . . which the GM can be offset by including more known unknowns, and by having challenges be ever greater (since the GM can be certain the adventure won't be derailed by one unfortunate die roll).

What About Damage (and Other Good Things in Life)?

We're dealing with Platonically Ideal dice here, so calculate damage as being 3.5 per die, then apply modifiers as usual, rounding up the damage total if needed. Other uses of dice as randomizers might need to rely on actual rolls; it doesn't make a lot of sense that all failed targeting rolls overshoot the target (or veer to its right side). Still, it's interesting to think about a world where (say) all reaction rolls are guaranteed to start at 11 . . .

TWEAKS

The core of this alternate system is simple enough to be tweeted, which makes it perfect to modify to your heart's content.

Perhaps the best and most obvious tweak is to use the options for buying successes, to allow for more variability. (See p. B347 for the basics, and ***GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys*** – especially *Buying Successes,* pp. 4-7 – for many more options.) In fact, the GM might establish a pool of points specifically to modify die results; see *Separate Rewards* from p. 17 of ***Impulse Buys*** for more insight on that idea.

As a possibility – which might be available even if other methods of modifying die rolls are impermissible by the GM – a player might be able to spend a character point to force a die roll (as per standard ***GURPS*** rules). In fact, the GM might permit players to spend a point to force *anyone* in the scene into a die roll, unlike the standard rules from ***Impulse Buys,*** which don't allow for much mucking with opponents' rolls. (This shouldn't be as disruptive as the normal use of points, since it's just forcing the opposition from having a die roll with a guaranteed "average" of 11 to a die roll with a mathematical average of 11.)

The GM might limit the "always 11" system to specific situations, such as only those times *outside* of combat, or to speed up certain scenes. Alternatively, the GM might permit the use of this system as the group decides, functioning somewhat similarly to the "take 10" and "take 20" rules from the ***d20 System*** (which state you can, in some situations, proceed as if you got a 10 or 20 on the 20-sided skill-check die role).

VARIANTS

A lot of the flavor from ***GURPS*** comes from the possibility of critical successes or critical failures. As a minor tweak, roll the dice in all situations where you normally would; if the result is a critical success or critical failure, then the roll is as shown on the dice. If it's not, then the result is an 11, regardless of the total shown on the dice. The GM might restrict using this only for situations where critical successes or critical failures are of preternatural importance, such as determining whether a ritual backfires on its caster.

Alternatively, the "always 11" system might be a 0-point feature for certain creatures. This would enable the GM to create robotic or alien races that are thoroughly competent, but lack the "spark" of humanity that allows them to triumph through the vagaries of chance.

Regardless of how you use these rules, they'll definitely result in a ***GURPS*** game that's above average (on a roll?).

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

In This Dimension, Everyone Is Above Average . . .

One good way to try out the "always 11" option is to set up a world where these rules are in force. This is easy in a setting such as ***GURPS Infinite Worlds,*** where you can just explain away the rule difference as being a fundamental change in that alternate world.

Alternatively, campaigns such as ***GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*** provide lots of hand-wavable reasons for the laws of time and space to break temporarily. Hopefully, the heroes will put everything right at the end of the adventure (unless, of course, the players and GM decide that they're okay with the effects of the Median Crystal never being undone upon the land).

Regardless, the GM should probably use some kind of plot bullshidium to keep tangible rewards from spilling out from this alternate world or dimensional change, in case the players realize their heroes can crank out six powerstones a day if they're guaranteed consistent 11s.

ODDS AND ENDS

DIVINE FAVOR FOR THE MASSES

by Jason "PK" Levine

GURPS Powers: Divine Favor assumes a prerequisite of 15 points in Divine Favor before being able to summon the might of a deity. This minimum buy-in prevents the faithful from just "throwing a few points" into being a paragon; it requires a serious investment. But what if we changed that?

Divine Favor Level	Cost
0	0
1	1
2	5
3	10

The GM must set the minimum level of Divine Favor, using the table above. For example, if he allows Divine Favor 2+, the minimal buy-in becomes 5 points (plus the usual -10 points in religious disadvantages). Allowing Divine Favor 1, 2, or 3 means there's still *some* division between "layperson" and "paragon"; allowing Divine Favor 0 gives *any* faithful believer a chance of summoning miracles. Under casual circumstances, there's no way such a person could draw upon a miracle . . . but in times of crisis, he might be able to catch his god's attention, if he has been sufficiently devout and righteous.

Despite the difficulty of actually *using* it, allowing Divine Favor 0 will have a profound effect on the campaign world, as anyone willing to take (and abide by!) a -10-point holy code has at least the potential to summon a miracle from the heavens when necessary.

With this change, Final Rest's learned prerequisite changes to Divine Favor 2 and Holy Touch's learned prerequisite becomes Divine Favor 3.

Example: Patrick has Vow (Never refuse a request for help) [-15] as part of his religious beliefs. He has no other "holy traits," but because the GM allows Divine Favor 0, Patrick's Vow automatically grants it – though he rarely attempts to use it. One day, his friend becomes deathly ill, so he takes her to a church and prays for several hours. His target number is 0 (Divine Favor) + 2 (two hours of prayer) + 1 (high sanctity); the GM must roll a 3 for Patrick's god to consider his request.

Midrange Mud Man

Divine Favor is appropriate for a wide range of campaigns, regardless of whether the GM allows lower levels. *GURPS Monster Hunters* even offers rules for making Divine Favor available to crusaders. Most champions would especially appreciate having a golem fighting alongside them! *Feat of Clay* (*Divine Favor,* p. 14) includes statistics for a 200-point golem – perfect for junior hunters – while the following version can be used in *any* 400-point game:

ST 30; **DX** 14; **IQ** 10; **HT** 15.
Will 12; **Per** 13; **Speed** 7.00; **Dodge** 11; **Move** 7.
SM 0; 300 lbs.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; DR 12; Extra Attack 1.
Skills: Brawling-16; Forced Entry-16; Intimidation-11; Lifting-14; Observation-12; Stealth-15.

Design Notes: By Default

by Douglas Cole

I played a campaign based on the concept of "half-stat defaulting" found in *By Default* (pp. 30-31) for a while back in the days of *GURPS Third Edition*. The primary observation was the niche-protection outcome mentioned in *Putting It in Practice* (p. 31). It was more difficult to get sky-high skill levels in many areas as opposed to only one, which I considered desirable for that game.

Reports that say that something hasn't happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns; that is to say, there are things that we now know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns – there are things we do not know we don't know.

– United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld

About *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by email: **info@sjgames.com**. Resources include:

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.