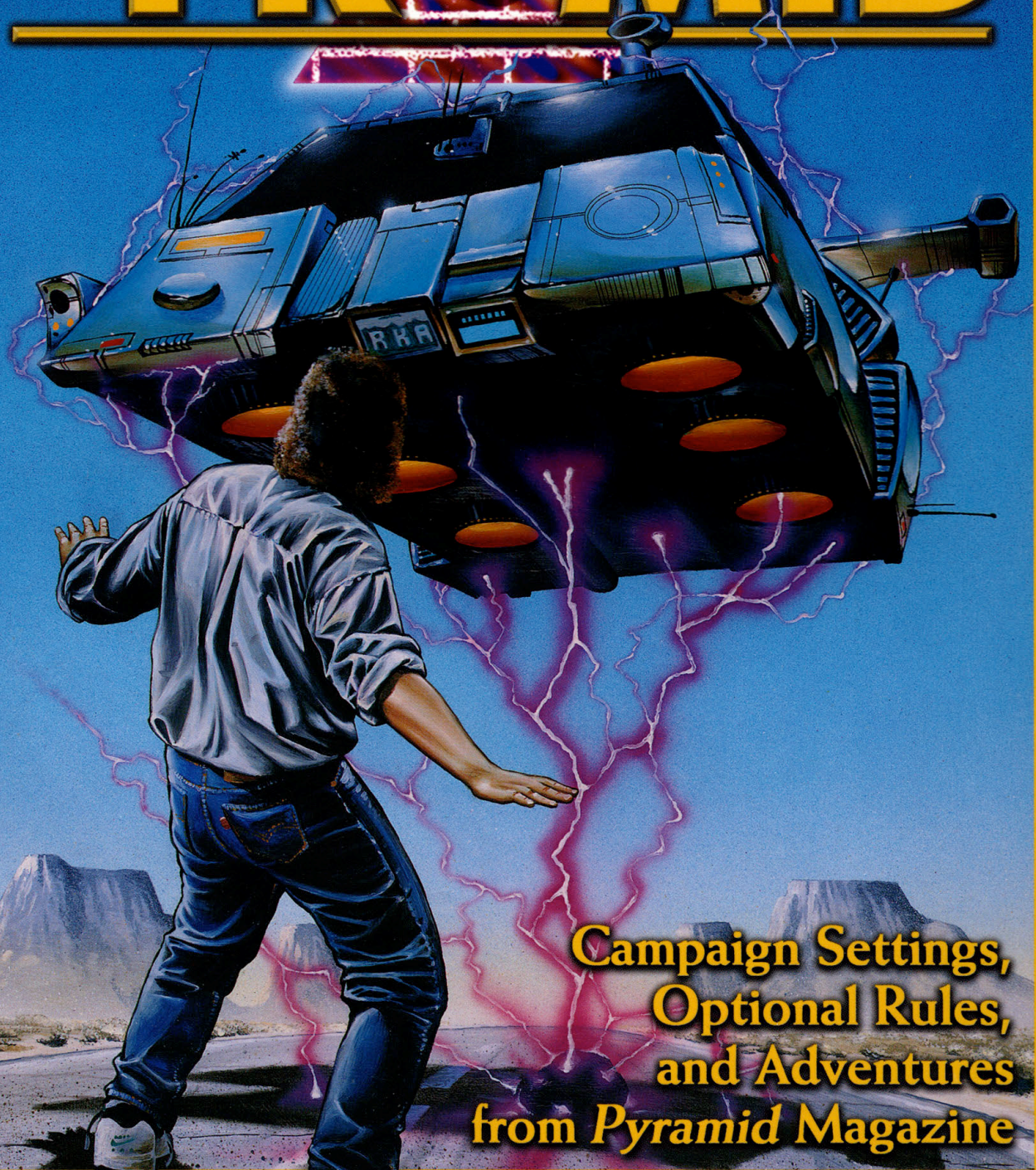


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Volume 1

PYRAMID[™]



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GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised and *Compendium I: Character Creation* are required to use this book in a *GURPS* campaign. *GURPS Best of Pyramid* can be used as a sourcebook for any roleplaying system.

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BEST OF

Volume 1

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Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources now available include:

Pyramid (www.sjgames.com/pyramid). Our online magazine includes new rules and articles for *GURPS*. It also covers the hobby's top games – *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Shadowrun*, and many more – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *In Nomine*, *INWO*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre*, and more. And *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online, to see (and comment on) new books before they're released.

New supplements and adventures. *GURPS* continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. A current catalog is available for an SASE. Or check out our Web site (below).

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are always available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE with your request. Or download them from the Web – see below.

Q&A. We do our best to answer any game question accompanied by an SASE.

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Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for an online catalog, errata, updates, and hundreds of pages of information. We also have conferences on CompuServe and AOL. *GURPS* has its own Usenet group, too: rec.games.frp.gurps.

GURPSnet. Much of the online discussion of *GURPS* happens on this e-mail list. To join, send mail to majordomo@io.com with "subscribe GURPSnet-L" in the body, or point your World Wide Web browser to gurpsnet.sjgames.com/.

The *GURPS Best of Pyramid* page is at www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/pyramid1.

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INTRODUCTION

Approximately five thousand years ago the first pyramids were built in Egypt. Working tirelessly under the hot Egyptian sun, tens of thousands of skilled laborers constructed these amazing monuments to time.

"Whew! Thank goodness *that's* done," a worker would say as he finished polishing the last piece of limestone before slumping to the ground in exhausted satisfaction. "Excellent!" the pharaoh would exclaim. "Now you must construct . . . *another* pyramid!"

Fast forward to June, 1993.

Working tirelessly under the hot Austin, Texas sun, a handful of skilled laborers constructed the first issue of *Pyramid Magazine*, an amazing bimonthly monument to the fun of gaming.

"Whew! Thank goodness *that's* done," a worker would say as he finished typesetting the last article before slumping to the floor in exhausted satisfaction.

"Excellent!" Steve would exclaim. "How's issue two looking?"

Pyramid has always been dedicated to "The Best in Gaming." We believe that and strive to meet this lofty ideal; from the beginning we've endeavored *not* to be a house organ. But *GURPS* has always held a special place in our hearts, too . . . and not just because of the solid gold ingots the Hidden Masters provide for furthering *their* goals. So when we had the opportunity to publish some of the best *GURPS* material from the paper days of *Pyramid* into a somewhat more "permanent" form, we thought it was a good idea. Because, paradoxically, *Pyramid* publishes material that is both too odd to include in most books, yet is too good, useful, and *fun* to remain in an ephemeral form.

Pyramid is a wonderful opportunity for us to publish material that otherwise can't quite justify a full rulebook. Sure, there's interest in, say, *GURPS Horror*,

but there *probably* isn't as much interest in *GURPS Really Cheesy Fun Horror of Ineffectual Evil*. We also get to publish support for games that won't get another book anytime soon, like *Goblins*, *Atomic Horror*, or *Warehouse 23*. And, in staying true to *GURPS'* generic roots, we are able to run a lot of articles that would be useful to many different campaigns, like "Willful Weapons" and "Low-Tech Economies."

As the current editor of *Pyramid*, I have the pleasurable job of sifting through all the really good articles I receive in order to pick out the best ones. When I'm trying to decide what goes into the magazine, I'm generally drawn to those that trigger some sort of "Wow!" reaction in me.

Each of the articles reprinted in this book satisfies that condition, and then some:

Pulp-era heroes trapped in the Cretaceous era against a futuristic fascist foe.

Magical tattoos that transform into animal companions.

An alternate timeline where Richard Nixon is responsible for colonizing Mars.

And so on. For me, part of the fun of a publication (and a compilation, like this book) is the wonder of juxtaposition. When you're reading pieces by different writers about a variety of subjects, you can't *help* but crisscross ideas in your mind. What if a sinister weapon waited amid the evil of Trespasser's Isle, coaxing those who drew too near to take it, hold it, kill? How would the Knights Templar react to a large metal winged wagon that inexplicably flew under its own power, yet could contract to the size of a rock? What's the story behind Nixon's tattoo? And, of course, being *GURPS*, it's trivial to cross games and boundaries to answer those questions.

We've divided this book into three sections: Settings, Optional Rules, and Adventures. The bounds are somewhat

nebulous; some of the adventures and rules contain a fair amount of setting, the settings and adventures contain some rules, etc. But it's useful to have designations, if for no other reason than to keep from reading the entire book in one sitting. When appropriate, we've updated articles to new edition rules and references. We deny the inclusion of any additional subliminal material.

If you like this book (as we hope you do), we already have plans for additional volumes; you'll get to see the articles that lost the coin toss to be included in this book. And, of course, fans of the paper and electronic version of *Pyramid* are encouraged to pick up *Murphy's Rules* and both *Suppressed Transmission* volumes.

In 1998, after 30 bimonthly issues, *Pyramid* joined the 21st Century and became exclusively an Internet publication.

Instead of producing an issue every two months, we were able to release quality material every *week* . . . at a substantially reduced cost. We produce approximately 60,000 words a month (more in months with five Fridays), and provide message boards, chat rooms, and playtest material to our readers at no additional cost. And I get the ego trip of having a weekly column, *Random Thought Table*. We have more subscribers now than we ever did in our paper days, and we're able to release material (like news and reviews) faster than a dead trees edition ever could. And, of course, we deliver *lots* of new and different *GURPS* material.

Every week we labor to bring the Best in Gaming to our readers. And every Thursday before midnight Austin time, we finish the magazine, breathing a sigh of relief as another new issue is launched into the void of cyberspace. "Thank goodness *that's* done," we exclaim to each other in the chat room

"Excellent!" Steve exclaims. "So . . . What's coming up next week?"

MORE TIMELINES

GURPS TIME TRAVEL

BY THOMAS CRON

The best part of gaming the alternate worlds campaign of *GURPS Time Travel* is inventing alternate timelines for the campaign. History is so stuffed with turning points that gamers can play the game for decades and never use the same world twice. What's more, if a Game Master wants to use an "if" of history again, he can simply generate a different alternate history. This practice has worked in print; witness the numerous victorious-Nazis stories that have come out in the last 50 years, no two alike. Each person's idea of the results of an altered event is unique, like a fingerprint. This makes the game all the more fascinating.

The following timelines were discovered by Infinity Unlimited explorers and researchers in the year 2016.

Technate

This world is definitely one to keep an eye on. On this Quantum 5 timeline, Imperial Germany had better tactics and communications in 1914-16, winning World War I and stamping its rule on all of Europe and Africa. The Czar managed to keep Russia out of the war and put down the Bolsheviks in 1917. The second major change was the greater success of the Technocrat movement of the 1920s. The Technocrats advocated government by scientists according to scientific principles, and managed to overthrow the U.S. government in 1926, setting up a new nation, the American Technate.

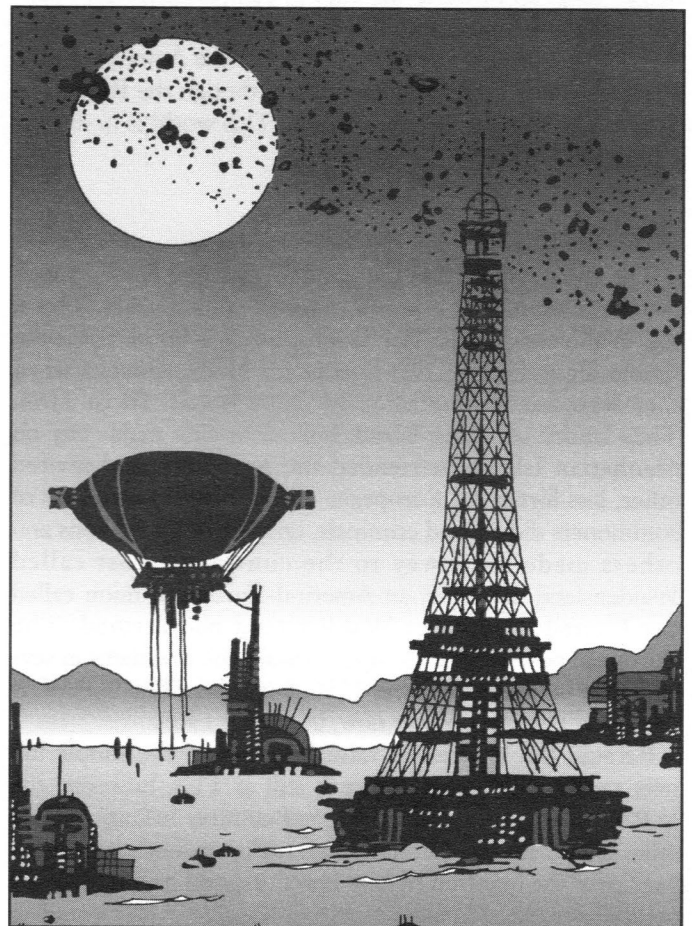
The Technocrats set about developing their technology, and the Kaiser of Germany soon followed suit. By 1935, jet aircraft were being tested in the Technate; the first controlled nuclear reaction was achieved in Baltimore in 1940; the first computer was built in 1943 and all American homes boasted one by 1960. The laser was invented in Los Angeles in 1948. The joint Technate-German lunar mission of 1966 established colonies on the moon. The other nations simply copied the technology of the Technate and Germany, with little innovation of their own; one exception was Japan's achievement of a magnetic-levitation train system in the late 1960s.

Surprisingly, this timeline is relatively peaceful. After the Russian Imperial family fell from power in 1927, a conservative Menshevik government took over, establishing arepub-

lic that is still struggling to feed its people. China remains a collection of warring states, those parts of it not run by Japan. Most nations are content to follow the lead of the Technate and Germany, and since these two powers are allies, they've seen no need to develop nuclear weapons. (There are nuclear-powered cars and airplanes, however!)

The problem is, either power could be tempted to try conquest if it discovers the existence of alternate timelines. Infinity scientists estimate that the Technate or Germany or both could build their own conveyor within a year, if they came by one of ours.

This timeline is in its year 1991, and is at Tech Level 10.



Low-Tech Economies

Silk and Spices: The Historical/Fantasy Merchant Campaign

To get away from hack-and-slash in fantasy campaigns, many gamers are turning to economic development, building modest fiefs or engaging in trade. It's not a bad choice. After all, the life of a merchant and his companions combines travel to exotic lands to match the grandest heroic campaign with the subtlest social and political machinations imaginable. However, few games provide much direction for day-to-day transactions so important to carrying on trade. This article is intended to remedy some of that lack, describing low-tech economies and merchant negotiations in useful game terms.



The Ancient Economy for Gamers

One of the most important details in merchant campaigns is how the economy works. The problem with the economies implied by many fantasy games is that they look like modern, consumer-oriented capitalist economies. There are convenient shops where characters can slap a stack of coins down on the counter and walk out with whatever they were after at a stable, listed price. This is convenient, but unrealistic. Ancient economies bear little

resemblance to the modern economy, and neither should economies of low-tech fantasy societies.

Making a living as a merchant in a low-tech setting is remarkably difficult. The merchant must raise capital in a setting where capital is very hard to accumulate, travel to lands only slightly understood, and transport expensive goods at enormous personal risk to sell on a fundamentally unstable market. Each difficulty is an opportunity for adventure, however. Is a merchant's favorite commodity being taxed? Perhaps he can talk his ruler into eliminating the tax or, better yet, exempting him while taxing his competitors. Is a competitor getting better prices at the same source? It's time to find out who (or what) he knows. There are several points to keep in mind about a low-tech economy:

- Money is scarce. Literally. Taxes are regularly levied in grain and livestock, and even employees of a powerful lord or wealthy merchant are paid with room and board, jugs of wine, or new clothing, in addition to a small cash stipend. Characters should expect to trade goods at least in part for other goods and only gradually convert them to money. If a merchant absolutely must sell immediately for money, he will have to accept a lower price.

- Prices are unstable. Peasant farmers, the basis of any low-tech economy, perch on a narrow margin between surplus and starvation. A small variation in the weather can cause huge variations in food prices. The price of grain one year is often twice as much (for a bad year) or half as much (for a good year) as the year before. Variations in food prices in turn effect the cost of labor and, ultimately, the prices of everything. "Average" prices were actually relatively stable, with an annual inflation rate of 1% or less for most of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Goods were rarely available at that average price, however; rather they varied wildly in a broad but stable range.

- Travel is difficult. Roads are bad, navigation is primitive, and most people distrust strangers. In many places, foreigners have few or no legal rights and, without guards or native allies, can be robbed or murdered with impunity. Information is hard to come by and unreliable when it can be found. What news there is arrives in the form of traveler's tales and occasional letters circulating among scholars and the upper classes. News from one city may reach a neighbor fairly quickly, but news from a more remote area is likely to be inaccurate, out of date, or entirely fictional.

- The price of doing business is high. Many large transactions are taxed. The tax is typically small (on the order of modern sales taxes), but even a small tax will eat into an already small profit margin. Merchants might be required to belong to a guild and buy the right to trade and travel freely, which means that an individual merchant must buy his way in and pay regular fees. Apart from taxes, moving

PRINCE FROG

A Fantasy Adventure by Scott Tengelin

Introduction

The far-off principality of Glimpuddle has been recently troubled by the mage Therigon. With his bravest companions to accompany him, Prince Richard went in search of the wizard to stop him. There was a great battle, but in the end, Therigon won. Richard's companions were imprisoned with a horrible curse, changing their forms forever.

This is a story of a frog prince with a twist; the frog is in his natural form, while his subjects have been changed to humanoid statues. This adventure is for four to six characters, 100 to 125 points each. A wide variety of character types is recommended.

The Meeting

The characters encounter Prince Richard, a two-foot tall frog in chainmail, brooding by the side of the road. If the party talks to him, read the following:

"I am Prince Richard. My friends and I have journeyed from our principality to confront our most hated foe, only to lose the battle. My people have been imprisoned with a curse most foul, but I was allowed to escape to live with the burden of the curse for the rest of my days.

"Please, help me and my people! Our enemy is a mage whose strength I cannot combat alone. His treasure is great, of course, and you may keep all that you find, if only you help me break the spell. And you would have the gratitude of the people of Glimpuddle forever."

Notice that Richard said he was to live with the *burden* of the curse, not the curse itself. For the adventure to have the greatest impact, avoid letting the players know the nature of the people of Glimpuddle; let them think that Prince Richard is the classic prince turned into a frog. If asked, he will only call it a "curse most foul," and "a great burden for me to bear." If the party asks for the specifics of the curse, he will tell them that his people have

been turned into stone. Richard is not trying to hide anything from the characters; he is simply too preoccupied to consider the obvious. And of course it is only obvious to Richard that his people are humanoid frogs.

The Journey There

The forest seems to grow stranger as you travel along the path. Richard takes you down trails that you probably never could have found had you not had him as a guide. The mushrooms along the path stand as high as your waist, and the trees and flowers seem to watch you as you pass.

Gradually, the mushrooms and flowers become more sparse, and the trees seem to scowl at you and reach across the path with long, clawed branches. Clouds gather overhead, darkening the trail.

The party's journey to Therigon's lair can be as difficult or as easy as you wish. This forest is highly magical, and any encounters should reflect the sylvan setting.

The Lair of Therigon

When the party arrives, read the following:

The forest clears to reveal a fence of sharpened logs, surrounding three wooden buildings. Eight pens line the largest building, each containing a lean, hungry wolf. The buildings seem to be guarded by five statues, all in various battle poses. "My people! My people! Oh, how Therigon will pay for this!" Prince Richard exclaims.

The fence has a large set of wooden double doors, braced from the inside. A combined ST of 28 is required to force the doors open. When the party enters, read the following:

The double doors to the farthest building fly open, and there stands a man in dark robes, with a thin black beard. "Richard!" he says, "I see you have brought new decorations for my home!" "Therigon!" Richard replies, "Raise your curse, and I will see you are spared! If you do not, you will die today!" With that, Therigon raises his hands, and the eight pens



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