GURPS®

COMPENDIUM II

COMBAT AND CAMPAIGNS

A Digest of Advanced Rules for Combat and Injury, Hazards and Threats, Campaign Design and Equipment. A Rules Expansion for the Basic Set, Third Edition.

COMPILED BY SEAN PUNCH

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

THE BEST OF ALL WORLDS!

Compendium II is 192 pages of the best articles and the most-requested new expanded/optional rules for *GURPS*! We've chosen the most useful GM resources from over 14,000 pages of *GURPS* material (much of it no longer in print) and added new material written by experienced *GURPS* gurus. *Compendium II* is a must-have for Game Masters (no more digging through a stack of books to find the optional rule you want) and a valuable aid for any *GURPS* player.

• **CAMPAIGNING** – Game mastering and campaign design, cinematic games, other dimensions, campaign power level and designing believable societies.

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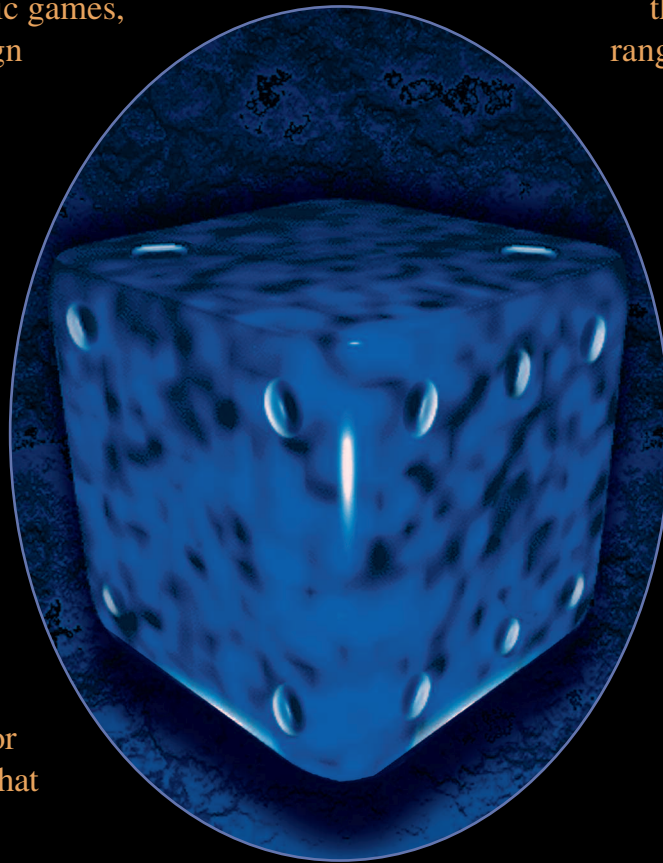
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• **MASS COMBAT** – Yes, the much-requested Mass Combat System is back in print, in an up-to-date, all-inclusive format that includes new, optional rules.

This book is designed for use with *GURPS Compendium I* and *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition,* and includes rules that appear in the appendix of *Basic Set, Third Edition Revised.*

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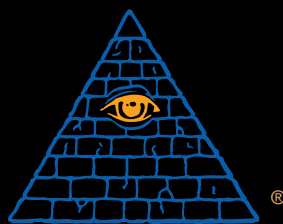
STEVE JACKSON GAMES

GURPS

COMPENDIUM II

CAMPAIGNS AND COMBAT

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**This book could not exist without the combined efforts of all those credited previously
in other *GURPS* books, as well as the authors of numerous *Pyramid* and *Roleplayer* articles,
virtually all of whom have – knowingly or otherwise – contributed to this book.
The list is too long to include here, but you know who you are.**

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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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INTRODUCTION

About GURPS

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. Our bimonthly magazine includes new rules and articles for *GURPS,* as well as information on our other lines: *Car Wars, Toon, Ogre Miniatures* and more. It also covers top releases from other companies – *Traveller, Call of Cthulhu, Shadowrun* and many more.

New supplements and adventures. We're always working on new material, and we'll be happy to let you know what's available. A current catalog is available for an SASE.

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.

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

Gamer input. We value your comments. We will consider them, not only for new products, but also when we update this book on later printings!

Illuminati Online. For those who have home computers, Illuminati Online supports SJ Games with discussion areas for many games, including *GURPS*. Here's where we do a lot of our playtesting! It's up 24 hours per day at 512-448-8950, at up to 28.8K baud (28.8 users should dial directly to 512-448-8988) – or telnet to io.com. Give us a call! Visit us on the World Wide Web at http://www.io.com/ sjgames/. We also have conferences on Compuserve, GEnie and America Online.

The GURPSnet. Most of the online discussion of *GURPS* takes place on an electronic mailing list. To join, send a message to Majordomo@io.com with "subscribe GURPSnet-L" in the body, or point your Web browser to http://www.io.com/ ~epopt/gurpsnet.html.

Page References

See *Compendium I,* p. 181, for a full list of abbreviations for all *GURPS* titles. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised;* e.g., p. B144 refers to page 144 of the *Basic Set.* Those beginning with CI refer to *Compendium I.*

GURPS Compendium II: Combat and Campaigns is our second *compendium.* It is a companion volume to *Compendium I: Character Creation,* and the two together are intended, in turn, as companions to the *Basic Set.* The three books combined encompass most of the rules of any consequence ever published for *GURPS.*

For those of you who missed the introduction to *GURPS Compendium I* (why don't you have it yet?), it was originally our intention to publish a single book to cover all the advanced and optional rules that had appeared since 1986. However, over 14,000 pages of *GURPS* supplements and magazine articles – and some of our more vocal friends in the gaming world – forced us to reconsider. When we did, we realized that we needed two volumes. With the publication of this book, though, our long-standing promise to publish *GURPS Compendium* has *finally* been realized!

This book is a collection of rules and guidelines for equipment, combat, the hazards of adventuring and the challenges of campaign design. Just as in *Compendium I,* we have included material from *GURPS* supplements and *Pyramid* and *Roleplayer* articles, as well as a selection of popular "house rules" and a few essays and clarifications by various *GURPS* illuminati. The main purpose of this book is to serve as an "official" third volume to the *Basic Set, Third Edition Revised* (*Compendium I* was the second volume). Things that appear in the two *compendia* will no longer be reprinted in worldbooks.

Unlike the first volume, *Compendium II does* include some genre-specific or world-specific material, including things such as the *Space Opera Combat System,* and rules and weapons for 16th- and 17th-century swashbuckling. The reason for this is twofold. First and foremost, people asked us for it. Second, a lot of this material was out of print (such as material from *GURPS Japan* and *Swashbucklers,* as well as back issues of *Roleplayer),* so this book gave us an opportunity to present some useful material that is no longer available in any other form. We hope you like it and find it useful!

Please note that many things in this book have been edited or altered from their original form: for clarity and brevity, to combine multiple sets of rules into a single rule that covers everything, or to correct errata. However, every effort has been made to retain the original intention and feel of the rules. In the case of discrepancies between this book and any earlier ruling, this book takes precedence.

– Sean M. Punch, July 1996

About the Compiler

Sean Punch is the Line Editor and overall system "guru" for *GURPS.* Aside from editing, his job occasionally includes developing *GURPS* products. His past endeavours in this regard include co-authoring *GURPS Fantasy Folk, Second Edition* and developing a new edition of *GURPS Martial Arts.* He hopes to one day write a few *GURPS* books of his own, but first he needs to find the time.

Sean does *not* live in Austin, but "telecommutes" to SJ Games by Internet. Those who also use the Net may know him better as "Dr. Kromm." Before becoming an editor, he was a particle physicist, but he's better now. His present interests include tigers, military technology and being a cinemaphile. He has also been a fanatical gamer since 1979.

Sean and his wife, Bonnie (who is a nanny, and a gamer as well), presently live in Montréal, Canada with four cats and one parrot.

BRAIN (3-4)
Modifier: -7
Miss By 1 Hits: TORSO
Multipliers: Bullet (×4), Crush (×4), Cut (×4), Imp (×4)
Blow-Through: –
Special Effects: Skull provides DR 2. Critical hits use *Critical Head Blow Table*. Any blow that does exactly 0 (or more) damage requires a HT roll to avoid *knockout*. Victim *stunned* on hits over HT/3. Victim *knocked out* automatically on hits over HT/2.

EYES (–)
Modifier: -9 (-10 through helm's eyeslits – only with missile or thrusting attacks)
Miss By 1 Hits: HEAD
Multipliers (except on BRAIN hit): Bullet (x1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×2)
Blow-Through (except on BRAIN hit): Bullet (HT×3), Energy (HT×6), Imp (HT×3)
Special Effects: Critical hits use *Critical Head Blow Table*. More than 2 hits of damage blinds the eye. An impaling or missile hit (if the missile is less than 1 inch across) gives and automatic BRAIN hit; skull's DR does not protect.

HEAD or FACE (5)
Modifier: -5
Miss By 1 Hits: TORSO
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (x2)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT×3), Energy (HT×6), Imp (HT×3)
Special Effects: No DR from helmets without full-face protection. Critical hits use *Critical Head Blow Table*. Any blow that does exactly 0 (or more) damage requires a HT roll to avoid *knockout*.

NOSE (–)
Modifier: -6
Miss By 1 Hits: HEAD
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×2)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT×3), Energy (HT×6), Imp (HT×3)
Special Effects: No DR from helmets without full-face protection. Critical hits use *Critical Head Blow Table*. Any blow that does exactly 0 (or more) damage requires a HT roll to avoid *knockout*. Roll against HT-1 (at +5 for High Pain Threshold or at -1 per point of damage for Low Pain Threshold) or be *stunned*.

JAW (–)
Modifier: -6
Miss By 1 Hits: HEAD
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×2)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT×3), Energy (HT×6), Imp (HT×3)
Special Effects: No DR from helmets without full-face protection. Critical hits use *Critical Head Blow Table*. Any thrust/crushing blow that does exactly 0 (or more) damage requires a HT roll to avoid *knockout*. Roll against HT-2 or HT minus damage (whichever is *lower*) or be *stunned*.

NECK (–)
Modifier: -5
Miss By 1 Hits: TORSO
Multipliers: Bullet (×2), Crush (×1.5), Cut (×2), Imp (×2)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT×3), Energy (HT×6), Imp (HT×3)
Special Effects: Use the PD and DR of the TORSO (unless a heavy helm is worn, in which case its PD and DR should be used instead). Victim is *stunned* on damage over HT/3. Any crushing blow that does over HT/3 damage requires a HT roll to avoid a crushed throat; if the throat is crushed, the victim must make a HT roll every turn, taking 1 hit of damage if he fails, until he dies or receives medical attention. Any cutting blow that does over HT damage requires a HT roll to avoid decapitation (i.e., *instant death*).

VEINS and ARTERIES (–) (Cutting attacks only.)
Modifier: -4 (radial or femoral artery, in the arm and leg respectively), -7 (jugular vein or carotid artery, in the neck)
Miss By 1 Hits: ARM (radial), LEG (femoral) or NECK (jugular or carotid)
Multipliers: Cut (×2) for radial or femoral artery; Cut (×3) for jugular vein or carotid artery
Blow-Through: Cut (HT×3)
Special Effects: Surrounding bone gives +1 PD. On a critical hit, the artery or vein is torn open. This automatically inflicts 1 hit per 2 turns (radial or femoral artery) or per turn (jugular vein or carotid artery), until the victim dies or receives medical attention.

TORSO (9-11)
Modifier: 0
Miss By 1 Hits: –
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×2)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT), Energy (HT×2), Imp (HT)
Special Effects: –

NEAR (WEAPON) ARM (8)
Modifier: -2
Miss By 1 Hits: –
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×1)
Blow-Through: Any (HT/2)
Special Effects: Damage over HT/2 cripples arm; this *stuns* the target. Excess damage is lost.

FAR (SHIELD) ARM (6)
Modifier: -2 (-4 if a shield is carried)
Miss By 1 Hits: –
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×1)
Blow-Through: Any (HT/2)
Special Effects: Damage over HT/2 cripples arm; this *stuns* the target. Excess damage is lost.

HAND (7) (Roll for left or right.)
Modifier: -4
Miss By 1 Hits: –
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×1)
Blow-Through: Any (HT/3)
Special Effects: Damage over HT/3 cripples hand; this *stuns* the target, and anything in that hand is dropped. Excess damage is lost.

SHIELD HAND (–) (Only if a shield is carried; otherwise, see HAND.)
Modifier: -8
Miss By 1 Hits: –
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×1)
Blow-Through: Any (HT/3)
Special Effects: Damage over HT/3 cripples hand; this *stuns* the target. Excess damage is lost.

VITAL ORGANS (17-18) (Missile and thrusting attacks only.)
Modifier: -3
Miss By 1 Hits: TORSO
Multipliers: Bullet (×3), Crush (×1), Cut (×1), Imp (×3)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT×3), Energy (HT×6), Imp (HT×3)
Special Effects: Any crushing blow that does exactly 0 (or more) damage requires a HT roll to avoid *knockout*. Impaling or bullet attacks have a 1 in 6 chance of hitting the HEART instead.

HEART (–) (Missile and thrusting attacks only.)
Modifier: -4
Miss By 1 Hits: TORSO
Multipliers: Bullet (×3), Crush (×1), Cut (×1), Imp (×3)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT×3), Energy (HT×6), Imp (HT×3)
Special Effects: On any bullet or impaling hit that does damage equal to or greater than HT×3, an additional HT roll is required to avoid *instant death*.

KIDNEYS (–) (Only from behind. Missile and thrusting attacks only.)
Modifier: -4
Miss By 1 Hits: TORSO
Multipliers: Bullet (×3), Crush (×1.5), Cut (×1), Imp (×3)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT×3), Energy (HT×6), Imp (HT×3)
Special Effects: Any crushing blow that does exactly 0 (or more) damage requires a HT roll to avoid *knockout*.

GROIN (–) (Missile and thrusting attacks only.)
Modifier: -3
Miss By 1 Hits (roll 1d): TORSO (1-2), NEAR LEG (3-4) or FAR LEG (5-6)
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×2)
Blow-Through: Bullet (HT), Energy (HT×2), Imp (HT)
Special Effects (human males only): Use the PD and DR of the armor on area 11 (lower torso). On a hit, make a HT roll at -1 for every point of damage or be *stunned*. Make a second (unmodified) HT roll to avoid *knockout*. High Pain Threshold gives +5 to these rolls; Low Pain Threshold *doubles* the penalties.

FAR LEG (12)
Modifier: -2
Miss By 1 Hits: –
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×1)
Blow-Through: Any (HT/2)
Special Effects: Damage over HT/2 cripples leg; this *stuns* the target, and a two-legged target falls down. Excess damage is lost.

NEAR LEG (13-14)
Modifier: -2
Miss By 1 Hits: –
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×1)
Blow-Through: Any (HT/2)
Special Effects: Damage over HT/2 cripples leg; this *stuns* the target, and a two-legged target falls down. Excess damage is lost.

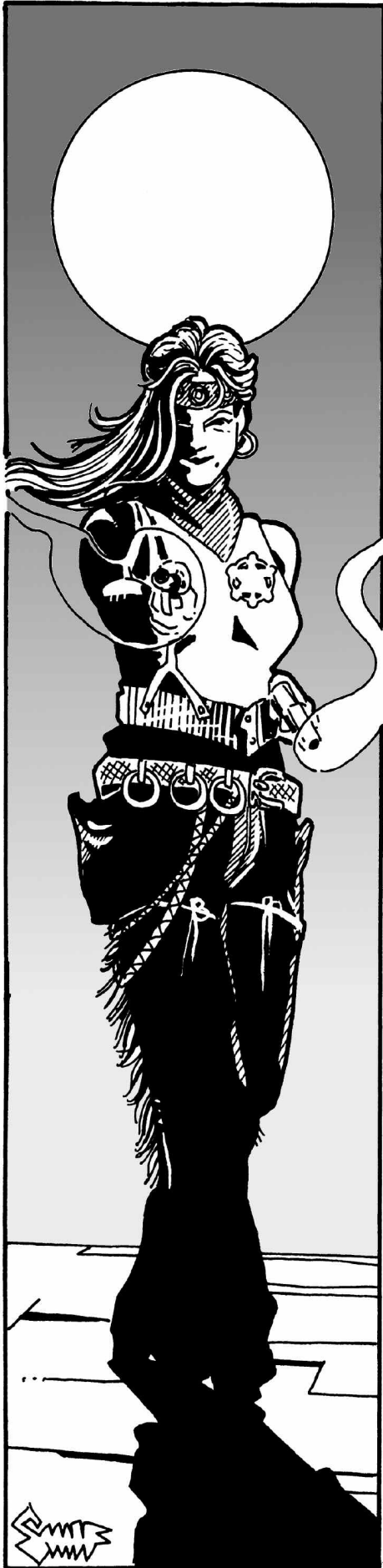## FOOT (15-16) (Roll for left or right.)
Modifier: -4
Miss By 1 Hits: –
Multipliers: Bullet (×1), Crush (×1), Cut (×1.5), Imp (×1)
Blow-Through: Any (HT/3)
Special Effects: Damage over HT/3 cripples foot; this *stuns* the target, and a two-legged target falls down. Excess damage is lost.

SHOOTOUTS

Realistically, gunfights involve a lot of waiting as opponents try to out-guess and out-maneuver one another. The gunfight at the O.K. Corral lasted about 30 seconds, with adversaries close enough to forego aiming. More typical gunfights take from 15 to 20 minutes – up to 1,200 turns.

GMs should encourage "opportunity" actions (see sidebars, pp. B118-119) and should not skimp on Long Actions. Skipping over a number of turns while fighters continue what they're doing can greatly speed shootouts.

Players should familiarize themselves with the Ranged Weapons section of the Advanced Combat rules (pp. B114-121). The following tables are vital: Size and Speed/Range Table, p. B201; Ranged Attack Modifiers, p. B201; Firearm Critical Miss Table, p. B202; Parts of the Body, p. B203. The Advanced Combat rules allow a variety of special actions, such as Pop-Up Attacks (p. B116) and Opportunity Fire (p. B118). They also detail adverse combat conditions: Hit Penalties (p. B98) and Cover and Concealment modifiers (p. B118) essential for classic Western shootouts. The use of miniatures for Advanced Combat is highly recommended.

Order of Events in Shootouts

Characters may act in order of descending Move scores, or play may move clockwise around the table (see *Turn Sequence,* p. B95). If the GM has no pre-set turn sequence for the NPCs, he may move one after each player, until all have acted.

Maneuvers

The maneuvers commonly used during classic shootouts include Aim, Long Action (reloading weapons, etc.), Move and Attack with a ranged weapon. Close Combat is also possible.

The confusion in a shootout renders the split-second timing of the Fast-Draw skill less important than for showdowns. In a gunfight with multiple opponents, the Fast-Draw skill works normally, allowing the shootist to ready a weapon in essentially no time. Turn sequence is calculated normally, rather than by a Quick Contest of the Fast-Draw skill, and injuries take effect at the beginning of the next turn.

Gunfire

Apply the following modifiers to any attempt to shoot:

Adverse Combat Conditions: See the sidebar on p. B98.

Aiming: Aiming for at least 1 turn eliminates the Snap Shot and recoil penalties and brings the weapon's Accuracy bonus into play. See p. B116.

Attacker's Situation: Firing from above or below the target, or while moving, modifies effective skill. Firing through an occupied hex may result in hitting the wrong target. Pop-Up Attacks and Opportunity Fire also bear special penalties. See pp. B116-118.

Cover and Concealment: Use the list on p. B118 to determine cover modifiers. For situations especially appropriate to Western shootouts, see below.

Recoil Penalties: Any subsequent shot fired without waiting at least 1 turn has a recoil penalty. These penalties increase with each shot, until the gun remains unfired for one turn.

Snap Shot Penalties: If the character fires without aiming, compare the adjusted skill (including all other modifiers) to the weapon's SS number. If the shooter's adjusted skill is less than the weapon's SS number, the "to hit" roll is at an additional -4.

Target Size: Man-sized targets have no size modifier. Horses head- or tail-on have no modifier; a side view gives +1 to hit. Use the *Linear Measurement* and *Size* columns of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B201) for larger or smaller targets.

Target Speed and Range: Consult the *Size and Speed/Range Table* to determine modifiers based on the target's speed and range. Remember the weapon's 1/2D and Max range stats as well (see p. B115).

Cover and Concealment

Horses as Cover: Hiding behind a horse's shoulder leaves only the head exposed. The hindquarters expose head and shoulders. Any other part of the horse exposes the legs. Firing around the horse counts as a Pop-Up Attack.

Roll on the NPC Reaction Table (p. B205) to determine the horse's reaction to this treatment. The character may attempt an Animal Handling roll if no other action is taken. Success adds +1 to the horse's reaction; critical success adds +2. Critical failure spooks the horse. Very Good or Excellent indicates the horse stays where it is, or moves at the character's instruction. On a reaction of Bad, the horse tries to leave. On a reaction of Very Bad, the horse panics.

Using a moving horse as cover requires either an Equestrian Acrobatics roll, or both an Animal Handling and DX roll. Failure results in loss of cover. Critical failure results in an accident.

Smoke: Black powder makes plenty of white smoke. With each shot, the GM may assess a cumulative -1 penalty to the next shot, due to impaired vision – until wind, time or the gunman's movement disperses the smoke. Reduce the penalty by 1 for each turn without gunfire. Fighters may time their movements to take advantage of the "smoke screen."

Dust: Thundering hooves and flying bullets kick up a lot of dust – sometimes enough to allow a hard-pressed gang to escape. GMs may apply negative modifiers (-1 to -9) to vision based on the dust in the air.

Tricks

Players will come up with all sorts of dirty tricks, from the old "Watch out behind you!" to a hat in the face. The GM decides what, if any, effects a trick has. Keep in mind that tricks can backfire against experienced gunmen. See sidebar, p. B123.

Aiming at Muzzle Flashes: This is a special situation for Opportunity Fire. The gunman waits until he sees the muzzle flash of an opponent's gun, then fires at that spot. Penalties are as for Opportunity Fire (remember Speed and Range modifiers, as well), with an additional -5 to -9 to skill. Aiming at specific body parts is not allowed.

Armor: Gunfighters may try concealed armor made from scratch (like Clint Eastwood in *A Fistful of Dollars*). The GM must assign the PD and DR, but he shouldn't reveal them to the players until the armor is tested.

Attack from Above: Ambush from above is a good surprise tactic. See p. B124.

Shooting Through Walls and Floors: Penalties are as for *Shooting Blind* (see sidebar, p. B115). Any solid object between the gun and the target provides some measure of DR. Refer to the table on p. B125 for DRs of wooden slabs and brick or stone walls. See also the sidebar on p. 54.

Surprise Attacks and Initiative: When the PCs surprise a group of adversaries, or vice versa, the surprised party may not be able to react immediately. See pp. B122-123.

Multiple Combatants

It is possible to let all the PCs roll simultaneously, if desired, and combine the NPCs' rolls into one. In this case, it is assumed that all NPCs have equal skills. The GM simply rolls once for *all* NPCs, and announces how well the roll was made. This is the result for *each* of the PC's opponents – the players then simultaneously roll and the results are applied as above.

If the GM is rolling once for multiple NPCs, very high and very low results should be thrown out. Such rolls might indeed occur for some of the foes, but it is highly unlikely that ten fighters at once would all score critical hits or failures! In general, treat any roll below 7 as a 7, and any roll above 16 as a 16 when rolling for numerous characters. If a character is facing two or more fighters, he has two choices:

A) He can All-Out Defend. In this case, he rolls as above, but does no damage. His roll is compared to each of the enemies' rolls, and he only takes damage from those that beat him.

B) He can attack one foe, and do his best to defend against them all. Only one roll is made for such a hero: read the roll as usual against the chosen foe. Read the same roll against two-thirds skill (round down) for each additional fighter – he cannot inflict damage on them if he wins, however.

Critical Hits and Misses

For simplicity, treat a critical miss as a dropped weapon. Treat a critical hit as maximum damage.

Unarmed Fighters

If an unarmed fighter is facing an armed foe, he can roll versus a martial art skill or DX to attempt to grapple in close combat. He does no damage if he wins, but his opponent must take a turn to break free.

An unarmed person can also pick up a weapon. He rolls versus DX, and takes damage if he loses the Contest. He gets the weapon in 1 round whether he takes damage or not.

Otherwise, an unarmed fighter can simply retreat: roll a Quick Contest of DX versus the armed fighter's Weapon skill. Take damage if you lose, successfully evade if you win.

CINEMATIC ROLEPLAYING

*By Sean Barrett, author of **GURPS Lensman***

Cinematic campaigns are those in which the "rightness" of the story outweighs its realism. While cinematic games are frequently high-powered games and vice versa, they are *not* the same thing! The PCs in a special forces unit are likely to have high point totals, but the campaign may well be grim, realistic and even nihilistic. On the other hand, many of Robin Hood's Merry Men could be designed with less than 100 points and still participate in a cinematic campaign.

In essence, "cinematic" is a *style,* not a point level. ***GURPS*** provides rules like multiple attacks (p. 72), skills like Science! (p. CI158) and supplements like ***Swashbucklers, Cliffhangers*** and ***Lensman*** to help the GM create campaigns where the PCs are able – and expected – to take on ten swordsmen each (*à la The Three Musketeers*), an entire muay thai school (in the spirit of Bruce Lee) or a platoon of border guards (Bond – James Bond) and triumph. However, simply using additional advantages, skills and rules will *not* create epic heroes and action.

The purpose of a cinematic game is to create a story in the legendary style of adventure that inspires "pulp" writers like Alexandre Dumas and H. Rider Haggard. Epic stories cannot be bogged down by mere realism; they've got more important things to do! Cyrano de Bergerac defeated dozens of professional swordsmen simultaneously not because his skill was realistic or even believable, but because his panache allowed nothing less. Space opera craft whoosh or roar in the silence of space just because fast things whoosh and powerful engines roar. In a cinematic game, *rightness* always overrules mere *correctness.*

The Cinematic Formula

Nearly all genres have stylistic conventions that are only ever violated *deliberately,* for reasons that advance the story. The players in a cinematic campaign expect the same formula to hold in the game. When it doesn't, it can only be because the plot requires an exception . . . and then the convention doesn't merely bend – it reverses itself. For instance, swashbucklers routinely escape from taverns by swinging on chandeliers. Usually, this is as reliable a mode of transportation as a carriage. However, if the plot calls for one of the swashbucklers to be captured, he will not merely miss his catch: he will crash down, stunned, at the feet of the Captain of the Guard!

The cinematic rules in ***GURPS*** reflect the all-or-nothing nature of these conventions. For instance, multiple attacks and cinematic defenses will allow for the easy disposal of run-of-the-mill NPCs, but more serious opponents either have higher levels of the same skills, or else are cunning enough to not get caught in situations where those skills can be used against them. The GM can control the ease with which the heroes overcome obstacles by first allowing their exceptional abilities to dominate all routine encounters, and then confronting them with extraordinary encounters.

Cinematic Playing Style

The nature of a cinematic game provides the relationship between the GM and the players. If the GM feels that the players are too powerful, he may become vengeful – hammering them with uniformly overpowering opponents, which eliminates any possibility of an epic tone. If the players feel that they cannot rely on their abilities – if every chandelier dumps them – they will quit trying what doesn't work . . . and so much for dashing action!

Dice

Players quickly gain an intuitive understanding of odds. If their abilities are totally controlled by the dice, they will quickly learn how to optimize their chances of success, and let Game Theory decide their actions instead of dash and style. On the other hand, a completely deterministic game can be perceived as hopeless, with the players totally at the mercy of the GM's whims. The GM and the players must agree in advance how much effect the dice will have on the action.

An epic style of play relies less upon dice than other styles, and the GM must be prepared to overrule the dice on any roll. This is because while some random factor *is* necessary – the protagonists are not infallible, nor is the plot predestined – dice can be just as tyrannical as a heavy-handed GM, and players are apt to revolt if a random number decides that a brave adventurer has suddenly died from a urinary tract infection!

Details

Over-concern with details can also cripple a cinematic campaign. The only details important in an epic story are those that *directly* affect the outcome. At every point, the GM must determine whether the details will advance or hinder the story. If the heroes must cross the Burning Wastes to get to the Dark Tower, they will find enough water along the way. It wouldn't be much of a story if they didn't. Will it advance the story to play out their searches? This is where GM experience and preparation is essential, so that the right details can be brought up and the wrong ones ignored, while still allowing the players to enjoy a maximum of free will.

Trust

The players and the GM must trust one another to be true to the spirit of the story. A player must have confidence that if he tries to swing from the chandelier, the GM will not sneer at him and announce that he has broken his back – and must now play a quadriplegic – because his hands slipped off the grease and wax caked onto it. He may fall, but he should not be punished for trying. Nor should the GM bog down play by requiring rolls against "Leap from Balcony" and "Swing on Chandelier" skills, modified by the dimness of the tavern and the number of glasses of *vin ordinaire* the character had. If the game is to include the glorious action that is common in stories, then such action must be likely to succeed and not tediously complex to game out.

Similarly, the GM must trust that the players won't take inappropriate advantage of the conventions, such as the "inevitability" of the outcome. Yes, they will make it across the Burning Wastes – but that doesn't mean that they don't need proper preparations. A player who remarks, "Don't worry about water at all. After all, we're heroes; we're sure to find some," is probably playing in the wrong campaign. After all, the *character* doesn't know that he's the Favorite of Destiny!

The players must do their part, providing dialog and attitudes in keeping with the style of the campaign. If the arch-villain is going to take the trouble to pause in his escape and explain his grand plan to the captured and soon-to-be-elaborately-killed heroes, the least they can do is tell him that he won't get away with it! Some of this roleplay can be enforced by the environment – unchivalrous individuals will suffer tremendous handicaps in a world where a well-timed snap of "You, sir, are no gentleman!" can do critical damage to one's social status – but it's more fun when it isn't forced.

Cinematic Campaigns

A cinematic world is *fair,* but it is not necessarily honorable or good, and it is certainly not *nice.* Evil dreams and goals – the Count of Monte Cristo's vengeance, for example – can be obtained as reliably as good ones. If certain standards are met and prices paid, then certain rewards will be gained; if standards are not upheld, punishment will be exacted. Above all, actions have *appropriate* results: the manner of a villain's death befits his depravity.

Plots

A cinematic world is also *ordered.* Events have reasons. These are sometimes too deep to be immediately understood, but very few things happen arbitrarily, and nothing significant ever happens at random. However, plots are not necessarily linear or predestined. Reversals of fortune occur, and even if the final goal is set, the manner by which it is reached is not.

Characters

Not every character can attain epic stature, but the most memorable ones do. Epic characters have been singled out; they are fated for Great Things. They may not know this; they may not *want* this; but they don't have much of a choice! This can be represented by the formal *Destiny* mechanic (see p. CI35), but it can also simply be a part of the characters' personalities. They are driven by their needs or desires. Their control over their fate is determined by the price they are willing to pay to attain their dreams. A simple hope or wish has no more force in an epic story than in any other, and a character with no more motivation than that will be swept along by events, unable to affect them at all. Conversely, a burning desire is unstoppable.

However, obsession is a roleplaying challenge, as it can lead to a simplistic character. It's easy to conceive of someone devoting his entire life to the single dream of avenging his father – obviously, he will be interested in little but honing his martial skills and seeking his enemy – but an effort must be made to round the character out. This can be as simple as adding the quirk that when he first meets a stranger, he describes the day of reckoning, down to the actual dialog that will occur when he finds his father's murderer.

A clear character conception is necessary to integrate all the *mechanics* on the character sheet, both to create a personality and to reinforce the inevitability of the goal. A driven character also requires extra attention to integrate into a party, so that his unwillingness to be distracted from his obsession doesn't interfere with intentions of the other adventurers.

Combat

Violence is the most common arena – though hardly the only one – in which epic action takes place. *GURPS* provides the cinematic offensive and defensive skills to make it likely, but not certain, that the PCs will overcome the bulk of their foes. Using skills (instead of absolute abilities) retains the chance of failure, so that even against everyday foes, the adventurers will not always win. Of course, even if fortune favors their opponents, they are never slaughtered out-of-hand. (Their nemesis has far more cruel plans for them than that!) Thus, even an ignominious defeat in combat is only a plot twist that provides another opportunity for the adventurers to prove their mettle.

Death and Destiny

Some heroes are so durable that no one, not even their creators, can kill them off: Sherlock Holmes, Blackie DuQuesne, Conan. They have adventure after adventure, never aging, never changing. Some just travel off into the sunset. Many characters, however, do actually die "on stage." More so than any other genre convention, heroic deaths must be handled correctly, satisfyingly and according to formula. Above all, an epic death cannot be trivial, though the means may be: Cyrano is killed by a log dropped on him, Don Quixote dies of fever.

In a cinematic campaign, any PC who dies, dies gloriously, bravely saving his comrades' lives or taking an impressive honor-guard of foes with him. Fate (in the person of the GM) will always be generous to a hero in his dying moments; even if no horde of opponents or other imminent danger was planned, such will appear nonetheless, solely for the purpose of providing the dying hero with opportunity for greater glory. There is no need for stinginess: the PC won't be around to be a problem later, and the GM has an infinite supply of disposable obstacles.

A character with a dream, moreover, will always see at least the beginning of the fulfilment of that dream before dying. The degree of completion is proportional to the degree of obsession. A mono-maniacal individual who is close to attaining his goal is unstoppable!

The trust between player and GM is essential in this sequence. Once it is clear that the character is playing out his final act, the GM should feel free to hurl obstacle after obstacle at him, and let them be overcome. This convention can create memorable scenes, as the foes quail before the iron determination of the heroes, but it must not be abused. A dying character's invincibility must be used only for direct progress toward the goal: if Inigo Montoya had stopped introducing himself and advancing on six-fingered Rugen, he would surely have dropped dead from his wounds in an instant!

Yoicks! And Away!

A cinematic game requires that the players and the GM all understand and agree on the style, and then cooperate to achieve it. The cinematic rules of *GURPS* will assist them, but such campaigns are more difficult than mundane ones, because an epic story is apt to transcend the rules. The challenge is well worth the undertaking though; when done well, cinematic games can be the most satisfying, because the stories they tell simply feel *right.*
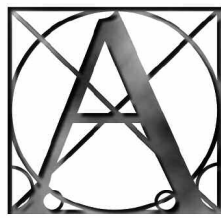
APPENDICES

A few short (but useful) points that did not fit anywhere else.

APPENDIX 1 – RULES OF N

There are several "magic numbers" in **GURPS** that appear as limits on skill levels or attribute rolls. Since a GM must always keep these rules in mind, here they all are in one place:

The Rule of 12 – Racial Advantages

If evolution or the creator provides a certain advantage, then that advantage generally works. Consequently, *racial* advantages that require an attribute roll will often work more efficiently than the attribute suggests, as follows:

*For advantages that require an attribute roll, members of a race with an average of less than 12 in that attribute will roll at 12 or the individual's actual attribute, whichever is **higher.** For races with an average attribute of 12 or more, always use the individual's actual attribute, even if that is **less** than 12!*

The Rule of 14 – Fright Checks and Resisting Disadvantages

When a character is called upon the make a Fright Check, or to make a roll against HT, IQ or Will to resist the effects of one of his disadvantages, the following rule applies:

*After all modifications, the roll is limited to a maximum of 13; a roll of **14 or more** is always a failure.*

Note that this does *not* affect IQ or Will rolls made to resist distraction when taking an Aim or Concentrate maneuver, IQ rolls made to "shake off" mental stun, resistance rolls (even those rolled against Will), or HT rolls to stay conscious at 0 or fewer hit points.

The Rule of 16 – Resistance Rolls

When a character is using a paranormal ability (such as a psi skill, super power, magic spell or cinematic martial arts skill) that is *resisted,* the following rule applies:

If the subject is a living being, the attacker's effective skill cannot exceed the higher of 16 or the subject's actual resistance, thus eliminating "automatic victory."

The Rule of 20 – Super Attributes

When a character with very high attribute calculates his skill defaults, the following limitation applies:

Skill defaults to attributes of 20 or more are calculated as if the attribute were at 20; everything else is ignored.

Note that this does *not* apply to defaults calculated from other skills; learning a skill at a very high level will always help you with other, related skills.

APPENDIX 2 – METRIC CONVERSIONS

All **GURPS** books use the old imperial units of measurement, rather than metric, because most of our readers are Americans who use the old system. But not all! Every year, more and more people in the rest of the world start **GURPS** campaigns. And outside the U.S., people think in metric.

Our authorized French, Spanish, Portuguese, etc., translations use metric units. But many people want the English versions. And we can't afford to do two editions of everything. So . . . here's a conversion table.

Note that there are two conversion columns. The first column is an approximation, easy to do in your head, and plenty good enough for gaming. The second column is the *real* metric equivalent, just in case you ever need to be exact.

Imperial	Game Metric	Real Metric
1 foot (ft.)	30 cm	30.48 cm
1 yard (yd.)	1 meter	0.914 meters
1 mile (mi.)	1.5 km	1.609 km
1 inch (in.)	2.5 cm	2.54 cm
1 pound (lb.)	1/2 kg	0.454 kg
1 ton	1 metric ton	0.907 metric tons
1 gallon (gal.)	4 liters	3.785 liters
1 quart (qt.)	1 liter	0.946 liters
1 ounce (oz.)	30 grams	28.349 grams
1 cubic inch (ci)	16 cu. cm	16.387 cu. cm
1 cubic yard (cy)	0.75 cubic m	0.765 cubic m

Temperature: When dealing with changes in temperature, one Fahrenheit degree is 5/9 the size of a degree Celsius. So a change of 45° F is equal to a change of 25° C. To convert actual thermometer readings, subtract 32 from the Fahrenheit temperature and multiply the result by 5/9. So 95° F is 5/9 of (95-32), or 5/9 of 63, or 35° C.

APPENDIX 3 – SIZE OF AREA AFFECTED

Sometimes, it is useful to know the number of hexes in an area of a certain radius (r). The formula is 3r(r-1)+1. Size of the areas up to radius 10:

Radius 1: area 1   Radius 6: area 91
Radius 2: area 7   Radius 7: area 127
Radius 3: area 19   Radius 8: area 169
Radius 4: area 37   Radius 9: area 217
Radius 5: area 61   Radius 10: area 271

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