

GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

POWER-UPS[™] 9

ALTERNATE ATTRIBUTES[™]



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ABOUT GURPS

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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.

INTRODUCTION

As the introduction to the *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* boasts, *GURPS* is *one* set of rules comprehensive enough to let you use *any* background and have the resulting campaigns be compatible. That's vital for cross-world or cross-genre gaming. But even if you aren't doing those things, a generic, universal system offers savings in terms of the money needed to buy new games and the time required to learn them.

All of that assumes you intend to explore *many* settings and genres, though, whether in one or several campaigns. Some gamers stick to a few backgrounds or genres – maybe just one. For them, it's more important that the game system be a good fit to the milieu they've chosen and the stories they plan to tell.

Sometimes, *GURPS* delivers here, too. Although its core rules focus on things likely to be of importance in *most* campaigns – and omit many matters essential only to *some* campaigns – it offers an extensive library of add-ons to

choose from. Rules for a setting or genre's definitive abilities, tasks, and situations might be in a supplement rather than in the *Basic Set*, but then again, even an RPG designed around a specific world might span several books.

Other times, *GURPS* falls short because the fundamental building blocks of the rules don't quite work. Maybe rolling under a target number on 3d6 doesn't deliver the desired experience as well as, say, rolling high, counting successes, using funky dice, or drawing cards would. Perhaps *randomness itself* is the problem, and bidding- or narrative-based resolution would be better. Fine-grained character points might not fit as well as chunky "levels." Even the GM-player division could be undesirable!

It's *hard* to solve such problems, but many puzzles fall between a glib "Get *GURPS Asparagus* for all your vegetable-centered needs!" and a rueful "*GURPS* can't hack axe-throwing-based task resolution." Solving *these* involves buying a supplement and doing some work. For instance, *GURPS*

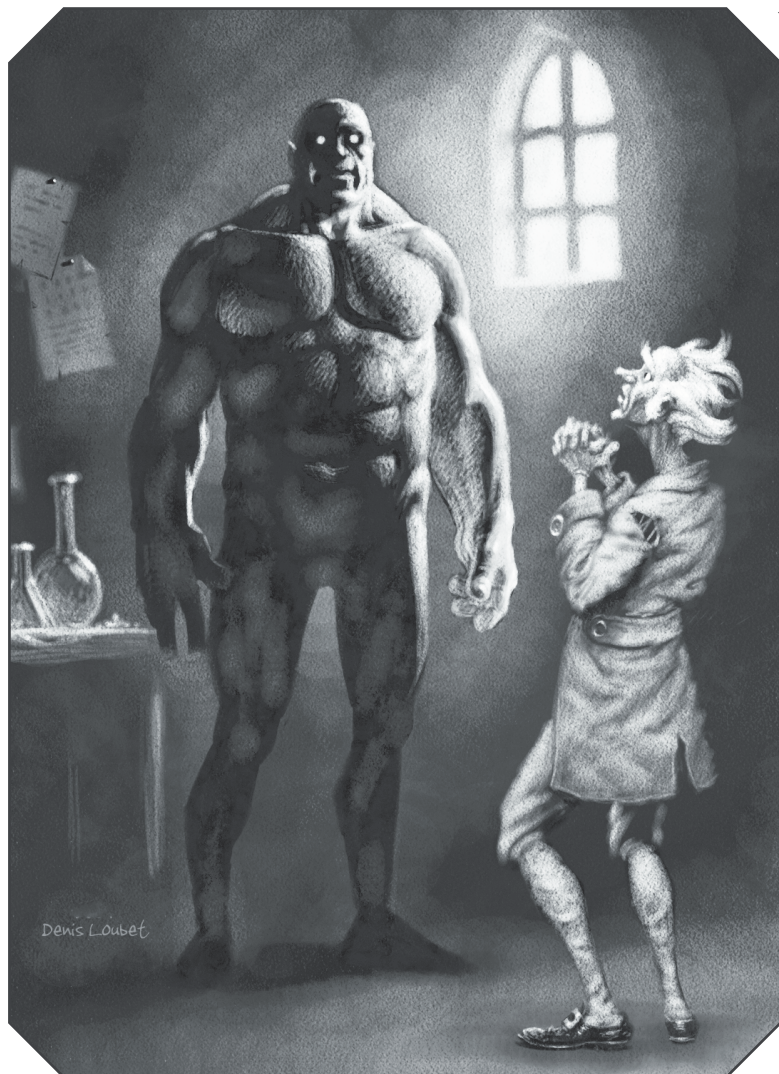
Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys introduces special points that players can earn, spend, bid, and wager to alter the narrative, and suggests replacing perpetually increasing PC power with story-based "horizontal development" – but these concepts usually need to be built into the campaign.

GURPS Power-Ups 9: Alternate Attributes offers another such tool. It recognizes that a campaign is a playground for characters, that characters are built from traits, and that the most fundamental traits in *GURPS* are *attributes*. It takes the stance that if you can tailor lists of advantages, disadvantages, skills, etc. to a campaign – declaring some mandatory, placing limits or conditions on others, prohibiting a few, and inventing new ones – why not do the same with attributes?

Alternate Attributes rethinks *GURPS* character creation at a basic level. Its methods entail considerable work. But it aims to make that effort quicker and cheaper than buying and learning an entirely new game!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to some 150 *GURPS* releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to *Pyramid* magazine. From 2008, he has served as the lead creator of the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series, which led to his design of the *Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game*, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango (and occasionally tending bar). He lives in Montréal, Québec with *son amour*, Geneviève.



CHAPTER ONE

PLAYING WITH POINTS

Sometimes, the standard rules for ST, DX, IQ, HT, and the secondary characteristics figured from those attributes don't suit a campaign not because they offer a bad way to divvy up basic abilities, but because they make those scores too expensive or too cheap – in either absolute or relative terms – for the genre, setting, or realism level, or perhaps the GM's tastes. Fortunately, that's easy to fix: Change the price of the offending traits! The GM can do so by fiat, but here's some systematic advice.

Price is what you pay.

Value is what you get.

– Warren Buffett

CHEAPER BASIC ATTRIBUTES

The GM might reduce the point cost of ST or HT to less than 10 points/level, or that of DX or IQ to less than 20 points/level. Most gamers like the math best if 10 becomes 5, or if 20 becomes 15, 10, or even 5, but that's "just" aesthetics. (Still, aesthetics can be an important motivation – see *Aesthetic Pricing*, p. 15.)

But why do this at all?

Cheaper ST

Strength provides muscle-powered damage, carrying capacity (Basic Lift), and Hit Points. In high-tech games, especially, all of those things may be less important.

At TL5, firearms start to outperform muscles. This becomes particularly striking at TL7+: While high ST *does* let one use bigger guns, a ST 8-9 shooter can manage most assault rifles (5d damage), an average ST 10 human can handle heavier rifles (6d to 8d damage), and ST 11+ mostly just means reloading less often because it makes machine guns practical as personal weapons. At TL9+, deadly ultra-tech weapons, notably *beam* weapons, require very little ST indeed. And at all of these TLs, bipods, tripods, vehicle mounts, etc. can further reduce ST's relevance.

Also at those TLs, body armor weighs so little per point of DR that near-immunity to low damage – such as that of

muscle-powered weapons – isn't encumbering. Indeed, *all* equipment tends to grow lighter as technology advances. The renders carrying capacity progressively less important as TL increases, especially in backgrounds where PCs have powered exoskeletons, battlesuits, or good old cars to help lug gear around.

As for Hit Points, high-TL weapons inflict *so much* damage that personal HP scores smaller than those of large vehicles are irrelevant. Staying upright and alive is mostly a function of HT rolls.

Thus, in high-TL campaigns with plentiful gear, the GM may want to reduce the cost of ST to match its decline in importance. Although 5 points per level is simplest, it's also workable to use a scheme that depends on *campaign* TL (not *individual* TL!), like this:

TL	0-4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Cost/Level	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2

Reducing ST cost makes it imperative to do the same for HP (*Cheaper Hit Points*, p. 7) and to adjust the costs of several advantages (*Attribute Costs and Advantages*, p. 11).

The mere presence of high-TL gear isn't enough to justify cheaper ST, though! Those tools must be available to PCs *and* decisive in adventuring situations – especially *combat* situations. In a CR5-6 dystopia where all the interesting equipment is controlled, or a campaign in which cinematic rules empower the martial arts to rival guns (as in **GURPS Action 3: Furious Fists**), ST retains its value. Also remember to consider the setting's sustainable TL; a post-apocalyptic world ruined by death rays and robots might have treasures hidden in the ashes, but the "real" TL for most people, most of the time is low – and again, ST remains precious. In some such cases, the GM might even consider *More Expensive ST* (p. 10).

It isn't always a question of tech, either. If the campaign is an unusual one with PCs who take few or no *personal*, *physical* risks – be they as exotic as spirits in the æther or as mundane as brainy officials controlling armies and empires without ever showing up in person – ST isn't going to matter. If the GM chooses not to eliminate ST (see *Doing Away with Attributes*, pp. 37-40), it should cost very little, as it amounts to insurance against rare dangers. It's probably about as important as Courtesy Rank (p. B29) – a way to add color more than capability – and worth perhaps 1 point/level.

Finally, ST might be made cheaper by fiat in **Supers** campaigns, where Innate Attack, Telekinesis (p. 11), and so on make muscles feel overpriced.

Then there's the question of which points are based on HT, follow the guidelines in *Fatigue Points Reformulated* (p. 18), and use *Independent Fatigue Points* (pp. 22-23). It isn't a bad idea to use $FP = HT$ for true FP. Heroic Reserves may do the same, begin equal to ST or $(ST + HT)/2$ so mighty warriors can pull off mighty feats, or start at 10. Energy Reserves might start from 10, but it's also possible to make the base value equal to IQ, Will, or a new attribute split off from these, like Faith or Magery. Different ERs can use different formulas; Chi Points may start equal to HT, Magic Points equal to the Magery attribute, Psi Points equal to Will, and so on.

Pricing is a question of utility. Mundane FP depleted by physical tribulations should follow the guidelines in *Cheaper Fatigue Points*, going as low as 1 point/level if players can't spend them and the GM mostly plans to ignore them – but in a gritty special-ops or post-apocalypse campaign with aggressive FP tracking, 3 points/level is fair even if FP are good *only* for this. Other kinds of points are best kept at 3

points/level, as they're resources, and anyone looking to raise them is planning to exploit them.

As for limits, the standard $\pm 30\%$ from baseline suits regular FP. The GM should limit other varieties of points in accordance with how much power the PCs are supposed to wield; see *Setting Limits* (p. 22). Remember that these are *instead of* rather than *as well as* FP, and can't go negative, so if the GM would allow ER 20 in a campaign where FP were useful for such things, it's fair to allow 30, 40, or more in one where they aren't.

Finally, while *Dividing Up Hit Points* (p. 30) proposes rules for interactions between different kinds of HP, similar measures *probably* aren't necessary when splitting up FP. The entire motivation for dividing up FP is that FP represent many things that shouldn't influence one another! An exception is for an *After the End*-style short-term/long-term split; see those rules for how *that* works.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Sometimes, the “problem” with an attribute isn't its rules but what it's called. Changing its name – and perhaps nothing else! – can make it better match the campaign's “feel.”

Names are important when *Dividing Up Existing Scores* (pp. 28-33), too. It's often advantageous to pick synonyms – or *near-synonyms* – for the original attribute's name. This reminds everyone that the attributes are related, while the terms' connotations and nuances (and the fact they're different words!) differentiate them. The biggest challenge can be coming up with *evocative* names for all the new scores, which also arises when *Splitting Up the Universe* (pp. 33-36).

Some suggestions, presented alphabetically and without judgment:

Strength: Brawn, Might, Muscle, Physical Power, Physical Strength, Physique, Power.

Dexterity: Adroitness, Agility, Balance, Coordination, Deftness, Flexibility, Hand-Eye Coordination, Manual Dexterity, Motor Ability, Nimbleness, Poise, Precision, Reflexes.

Intelligence: Astuteness, Brainpower, Brains, Cleverness, Cognition, Craftiness, Creativity, Cunning, Education, Imagination, Ingenuity, Innovation, Inspiration, Intellect, Intuition, Judgment, Knowledge, Logic, Memory, Mind, Reason, Recall, Resourcefulness, Shrewdness, Smarts, Understanding, Wisdom, Wits.

Health: Athleticism, Condition, Constitution, Durability, Endurance, Fitness, Fortitude, Grit, Hardiness, Physical Resistance, Resilience, Resistance, Robustness, Stamina, Sturdiness, Toughness, Vigor, Vitality.

Hit Points: Body Points, Damage Points, Injury Points, Life Points, Shock Points, Stun Points, Trauma Points, Vitality Points, Wound Points.

Will: Backbone, Bravery, Courage, Determination, Drive, Ego, Guts, Mental Resistance, Mental Strength, Mettle, Nerve, Pluck, Psyche, Resistance, Resolve, Sanity,

Self-Control, Self-Discipline, Spirit, Stability, Tenacity, Willpower, Wits.

Perception: Acuity, Alertness, Attention, Attentiveness, Awareness, Canniness, Caution, Insight, Perspicacity, Sensitivity, Vigilance, Watchfulness.

Fatigue Points: Endurance Points, Energy Points, Stamina Points.

Basic Speed: Alacrity, Celerity, Dodge, Quickness, Reactions, Reflexes, Sequence, Speed.

Basic Move: Foot Move, Ground Move, Pace, Running Move, Swiftiness.

Many terms suit several attributes; e.g., this list reuses Reflexes, Resistance, and Wits, and sticks “Points” after things used elsewhere. So if you want to use Athleticism for ST and Physique for HT, go for it! The words offered for IQ, Will, and Per are *especially* interchangeable.

Two further categories become important when new or spinoff attributes fall outside the largely mental and physical realms of standard *GURPS* ones:

Interpersonal Attributes: Control social skills and may grant reaction modifiers. Options include Character, Charisma, Charm, Empathy, Fascination, Magnetism, Personality, and Presence. Many suggestions for IQ, Will, and Per work, too: Canniness, Cunning, Drive, Ego, Resolve, Sensitivity, etc.

Mystical Attributes: The power Talent or modifier associated with the exotic or supernatural advantages, cinematic skills, or spells the attribute controls often suggests a name: Chi, Magery (or just Magic), Spirit, etc. Some sound nicer with a name change, like Faith or Holiness (instead of Divine or Power Investiture). For a general “weird stuff” attribute, the suggestions for IQ, Will, and Per again offer ideas, notably Awareness, Intuition, Psyche, Sensitivity, and Spirit. Also, Power always works. To name an associated resource (like FP), stick “Points” after the attribute name: Chi Points, Faith Points, Magic Points, Psi Points, Spirit Points, etc.

Coordination

Specifically *hand-eye* coordination, meaning using the hands to aim ranged weapons, operate vehicle controls, respond to danger, and otherwise react rapidly and precisely to external input. This *could* encompass reflexes – here we assume so, but the GM is free to divide further.

Possible Skills (27): Beam Weapons, Blowpipe, Boating, Bolas, Bow, Crossbow, Driving, Dropping, Fast-Draw, Fire Eating, Gunner, Guns, Innate Attack, Lance, Lasso, Liquid Projector, Parry Missile Weapons, Piloting, Shield, Sling, Spear Thrower, Submarine, Teamster, Throwing, Throwing Art, Thrown Weapon, Zen Archery.

Craftiness

A faculty for deception – the term “criminal intelligence” gets used – is sometimes distinguished from *Social Intelligence* (p. 43), and may encompass things the standard rules don’t deem IQ-based.

Possible Skills (18): Acting, Brainwashing, Camouflage, Counterfeiting, Disguise, Fast-Talk, Forgery, Holdout, Mimicry, Propaganda, Shadowing, Smuggling, Stealth, Strategy, Streetwise, Tactics, Traps, Ventriloquism.

Creativity

The ability to dream things up and present them to the world, typically identified with artistic potential. It’s anyone’s guess whether such imagination is related to the spark of *technical* invention and *scientific* innovation; here we assume it isn’t.

Possible Skills (17): Architecture, Artist, Dancing, Group Performance, Jeweler, Leatherworking, Makeup, Musical

Composition, Musical Influence, Musical Instrument, Performance, Photography, Poetry, Public Speaking, Sewing, Singing, Writing.

Fine Motor Ability

Small-scale manipulation with the fingers or similar extremities, important for fine work and feats of legerdemain.

Possible Skills (13): Fast-Draw, Filch, Holdout, Jeweler, Knot-Tying, Leatherworking, Lockpicking, Pickpocket, Sewing, Sleight of Hand, Surgery, Symbol Drawing, Typing.

Flexibility

Suppleness is important to many skills but the be-all, end-all for few, and has less to do with precise control than the other facets of what’s normally considered DX.

Possible Skills (5): Climbing, Erotic Art, Escape, some Sports, Wrestling.

Intrapersonal Intelligence

Knowledge of oneself. The associated skills are generally Will-based in the standard rules – but not always!

Possible Skills (9): Autohypnosis, Body Control, Body Sense, Breath Control, Dreaming, Meditation, Mental Strength, Mind Block, Philosophy.

Knowledge

Every skill involves *some* knowledge, but here we mean knowing about culture, the humanities, and collective human wisdom – anything academics pursue that wouldn’t better be judged *Logic* (below). The GM might want to make this different from memory, but it’s often hard to separate the two.

REASSIGNING ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Many advantages require attribute rolls to use; IQ rolls are most common, but there are HT rolls for Metabolism Control, Will rolls for Neutralize, Per rolls for sensory abilities, and so on. Similarly, disadvantages sometimes allow rolls against attributes to avoid their effects: DX for Klutz, HT for Combat Paralysis, Will and Per for Absent-Mindedness, etc. For lists of such traits, see *Attribute Rolls* (pp. 37-38).

When swapping around attributes, it’s important to account for these things. This is a matter of ensuring that any advantage or disadvantage that depends on a deleted, renamed, or divided-up attribute isn’t left dangling – it’s assigned to an attribute that replaced or was split off from the score that formerly controlled it, or one the GM deems a good fit. Be warned that this creates work, if not as much as *Reassigning Skills* (pp. 41-44).

An alternative for GMs who prefer to devote energy to other things is to apply *Self-Control for Mental Disadvantages* (pp. B120-121) to disadvantages that use attribute rolls, and to adapt it to advantages as well. As usual, a target number of 12 – whether to avoid a disadvantage or exploit an advantage – is the baseline. Adjust this for any built-in modifiers; e.g., the Per-5 and Will-5

rolls for Absent-Mindedness are against $12 - 5 = 7$, while the Will+3 roll to ignore pain that High Pain Threshold allows is against $12 + 3 = 15$. There’s no need for adjusted rolls to use 6, 9, 12, or 15 as for self-control, but the GM might prefer that because those “steps” are familiar. If so, the GM can always go high, low, or nearest (so 9, 6, or 6 for Absent-Mindedness), perhaps favoring the PCs in higher-powered games but not in lower-powered ones.

Contributions of such rolls to the point values of attributes are fairly treated as negligible. For one thing, while a decent-sized skill list is almost universal, not everyone has advantages or disadvantages that depend on attributes under the standard rules. For another, these traits are nowhere near as numerous as skills. Thus, changing the rolls such traits use doesn’t affect attribute prices.

That said, rethinking *common* attribute dependencies can make under- or overvalued attributes seem fairer at a given price. For instance, if a new Psyche attribute governs mainly cinematic martial-arts skills and magic, it’s in danger of becoming a “dump stat” for characters without those abilities. Making it the roll to use Channeling, Danger Sense, Empathy, Intuition, True Faith, Visualization, and similar advantages might keep players honest.

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Names and attributes must be accommodated to the essence of things, and not the essence to the names, since things come first and names afterwards.

– Galileo Galilei

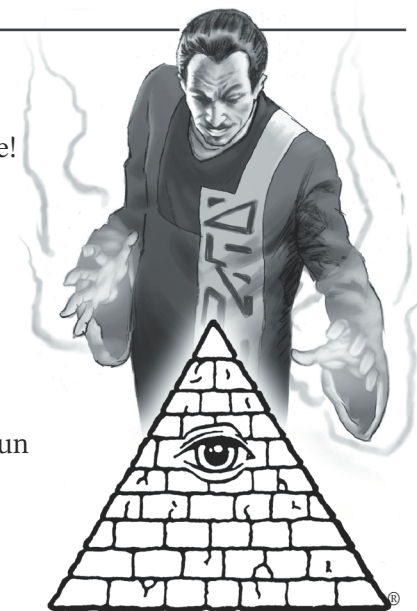
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