

**GURPS**

Fourth Edition

# **ACTION 2**

# **EXPLOITS™**



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**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION . . . . 3</b>	Physical Searches . . . . 11	Live Capture . . . . . 24	Cracking Skulls . . . . . 36
About the Author . . . . . 3	Audio Surveillance . . . . 12	<b>DESTRUCTION . . . . . 24</b>	Flashy Fighting . . . . . 37
<i>About GURPS</i> . . . . . 3	Visual Surveillance . . . . 12	Arson . . . . . 24	Sneaky Fighting . . . . . 37
<b>1. CHALLENGES, NOT HEADACHES . . . . 4</b>	Bugs, Beacons, and Wires . . . . . 12	Blowing Stuff Up . . . . 24	Extra Effort Rules . . . . 37
<b>BASIC ABSTRACT</b>	<i>High-Tech Challenges</i> . . 13	Sabotage . . . . . 25	Cinematic
<b>DIFFICULTY . . . . . 4</b>	Intercepts . . . . . 14	Setting Traps . . . . . 25	Combat Rules . . . . . 38
How BAD Is It? . . . . . 4	Dumpster-Diving . . . . 14	<b>DECEPTION . . . . . 26</b>	Banter . . . . . 39
From BAD to Worse . . . . 4	Files and Records . . . . 14	Cleaning . . . . . 26	Using Your Head . . . . 39
BAD Guys . . . . . 5	<b>SOCIAL ENGINEERING . . 15</b>	Cover-Ups . . . . . 26	Standoffs . . . . . 39
BAD Ideas . . . . . 5	Contacts and Contact Groups . . . . 15	Fake ID . . . . . 26	Special Combat
<b>COMPLEMENTARY SKILLS . . . . . 5</b>	Word on the Street . . . . 15	Falsifying Records . . . . 26	Situations . . . . . 39
<b>TEAMWORK! . . . . . 5</b>	Manipulation . . . . . 15	Fooling Polygraphs . . . . 27	
Got You Covered . . . . . 5	Interviews . . . . . 16	Impersonation . . . . . 27	<b>5. WHEN THINGS GO WRONG . . 40</b>
Pulling Your Weight . . . . 5	Making Them Talk . . . . 16	Psy-Ops . . . . . 27	<b>MEDIC! . . . . . 40</b>
<b>2. THE BASICS . . . . 6</b>	<i>Fitting In</i> . . . . . 16	<b>GETTING AWAY . . . . . 27</b>	Outbreak! . . . . . 40
<b>GETTING THE BALL ROLLING . . . . . 6</b>	<b>PLANNING . . . . . 17</b>	<b>PROVIDING SECURITY . . . 27</b>	Overdose, Poisoning, and Venom . . . . . 41
The Job . . . . . 6	The Big Picture . . . . . 17	Watches . . . . . 28	<b>REPAIRS . . . . . 41</b>
Assembling Kit . . . . . 6	Permission to Act . . . . 17	Bodyguard Duty . . . . . 28	<i>It's Better to Be Lucky</i> . . 41
Targets and Locations . . . . . 7	The Mission Plan . . . . 17	Bomb Disposal . . . . . 28	<b>CAPTURED! . . . . . 42</b>
Travel . . . . . 7	The Training Sequence 17	WMD . . . . . 29	Escaping Restraints . . . 42
<i>Bullets, Beans, and Batteries</i> . . . . . 7	<i>How to Game Fact-Finding</i> . . . . . 17	Checkpoint Security . . . . 29	Escaping Prisons . . . . 42
<b>SQUAD SOP . . . . . 8</b>	<b>GETTING IN . . . . . 18</b>	Electronic Security . . . . 29	
Communications . . . . . 8	Surveillance and Patrols . . . . . 18	Security Tools . . . . . 30	<b>4. ULTRA-VIOLENCE . . . . . 31</b>
Formations . . . . . 9	Insertion . . . . . 18	<b>5. FIGHT OR FLIGHT . . . . . 31</b>	<b>6. DIRECTING THE ACTION . . . . . 43</b>
Light . . . . . 9	Climbing . . . . . 18	<b>CHASES . . . . . 31</b>	<b>CAMPAIGN TYPES . . . . . 43</b>
Subtlety . . . . . 9	Parkour . . . . . 19	Quarry and Pursuer . . . . 31	<b>ASSISTANCE ROLLS</b>
<i>The Cell Phone Problem</i> . . . . . 9	<i>Falls</i> . . . . . 19	Rounds . . . . . 31	<b>IN ACTION . . . . . 44</b>
Staying Alert . . . . . 10	Fences . . . . . 20	Range Band Table . . . . 31	<i>Ten Rules to Use Sparingly</i> . . . . . 44
<i>Go-To Skills</i> . . . . . 10	Locks . . . . . 20	Chase Sequence . . . . . 32	<b>DUTY IN ACTION . . . . . 45</b>
<b>3. TRICKS OF THE TRADE . . . 11</b>	Doors . . . . . 20	Chase Maneuvers . . . . . 32	<b>ENEMIES . . . . . 45</b>
<b>GATHERING INTELLIGENCE . . . . 11</b>	Glass . . . . . 21	Passenger Actions . . . . 33	Mooks . . . . . 45
	Security Systems . . . . 21	Chase Rolls . . . . . 34	Henchmen . . . . . 46
	Barrier BAD-ness . . . . 21	Multi-Party Chases . . . . 34	Bosses . . . . . 46
	Traps . . . . . 22	Attacks . . . . . 35	Other Enemies . . . . . 46
	<i>Safecracking</i> . . . . . 22	Defenses . . . . . 35	<b>AFTER ACTION . . . . . 46</b>
	<b>GRABBING THE GOODS 23</b>	Damage . . . . . 35	<i>Making Everybody Useful</i> . . . . . 47
	Finding the MacGuffin . . . . . 23	Wipeouts . . . . . 35	<b>INDEX . . . . . 48</b>
	Grand Theft Auto . . . . 23	<b>COMBAT . . . . . 36</b>	
	Lifts and Pulls . . . . . 23	Shooting Made Easy . . . . . 36	

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# INTRODUCTION

An action movie is first and foremost a showcase for the heroes' astonishing abilities. There might be calm before the storm, emotional interludes, and slice-of-life moments, but we're holding our breath for the stunts and pyrotechnics – for the *exploits*. Without high-speed car chases, fights of all descriptions, and races against the clock to disarm bombs, hack computers, crack safes, and so on, action movies would seem stupid. Often they *are* stupid, but excitement forgives a lot!

Consequently, *GURPS Action 2: Exploits* cuts to the thrills and ignores inconvenient realities. It's a collection of simple rules for resolving classic action situations without worrying much about minor details like human nature . . . or physics. If it's possible on the silver screen – and especially on the *blue* screen – that's good enough.

Players should be aware that the exploits described here are tailored to heroes created using *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*. While *Exploits* is by no means worthless on its own, it often invokes assumptions and concepts from *Heroes*. Think of it as a sequel! Since a major goal of *Exploits* is to show how to use the PCs' abilities, the important skills, advantages, and even *disadvantages* for each situation appear in **boldface**.

For the GM, *Exploits* is a guide to setting up action scenes to challenge the heroes. Its rules aren't the "official" *GURPS* take on anything except over-the-top action. Feel free to use them in a serious police procedural or a wilderness-of-mirrors spy campaign – but unless your cops can fire two guns while leaping through the air, and your spies can save the world and be back in time for tea, you might find these rules extreme.

## 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. During the *GURPS Third Edition* era, he compiled both *GURPS Compendium* volumes, developed *GURPS Lite*, wrote *GURPS Wizards* and *GURPS Undead*, and edited or revised over 20 other titles. With David Pulver, he produced the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*, in 2004. His latest creations include *GURPS Powers* (with Phil Masters), *GURPS Martial Arts* (with Peter Dell'Orto), and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1-4*. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec, with his wife, Bonnie. They have two cats, Banshee and Zephyra, and a noisy parrot, Circe.

*Every search for a hero must  
begin with something which  
every hero requires – a villain.*

– Dr. Nekhorvich,  
*Mission: Impossible II*

## 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 e-mail: [info@sjgames.com](mailto: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.



## BAD GUYS

The PCs will often meet their opponents in Quick Contests. Every +1 to their rivals' skill is +1 to the bad guys' margin of success – which has the same effect as giving the heroes -1, just like incrementing BAD by -1. Thus, when the squad faces henchmen (*not* mere mooks) directly, the GM may wish to increase the NPCs' skill *instead of* applying BAD to the heroes' skill.

At the GM's option, henchmen without character sheets have an *effective* skill of 10 + absolute value of BAD: 11 at -1, 12 at -2, and so on. As with all BAD things, this is abstract. Actual

skill, equipment quality, extra time, and anything else that might matter is all rolled into one handy number.

## BAD IDEAS

The GM *shouldn't* use BAD in combat (pp. 36-39) or chases (pp. 31-35). The goal of BAD is to abstract things like enemy planning, security systems, and social connections – not battlefield or road conditions, never mind the PCs' tactical options. It's fine to use BAD to rate a henchman's skills in one of these situations, however.

# COMPLEMENTARY SKILLS

In action stories, there's no such thing as too much talent. Whenever it makes sense, the GM may allow one skill to aid another. The assisting skill is the *complementary skill* while the skill actually needed for the task is the *master skill*.

To encourage teamwork, the person using the complementary skill *doesn't* have to be the one using the master skill, unless splitting up these rolls would make no sense, even in an action story. For instance, an infiltrator using Stealth to sneak through a door might benefit from a face man using Fast-Talk to distract guards. In that example, Fast-Talk would be complementary to Stealth.

To use a complementary skill, simply roll against it. The result gives a modifier to the master skill: +2 for critical

success, +1 for success, -1 for failure, or -2 for critical failure. This modifier is cumulative with others, such as equipment bonuses and BAD.

Unless explicitly noted, though, the complementary skill roll *isn't* subject to BAD. Its purpose is to empower the heroes to offset the bad guys' numbers and teamwork – which BAD abstracts – using their own. Thus, applying BAD twice would rarely be fair!

Many specific tasks in *Exploits* name complementary skills. Players are encouraged to suggest others. If the GM agrees, a master skill might sometimes be able to benefit from *several* complementary skills! A skill can never serve as complementary skill and master skill at the same time, however.

# TEAMWORK!

These next two rules apply to group efforts, when the entire team gets only a single success roll or other attempt at an action.

## GOT YOU COVERED

In a situation where everyone must look out for himself but some heroes lack a vital skill, skilled PCs can sometimes cover for unskilled ones. When making a single roll for the entire team, start with the group's best skill level, add a bonus equal to the number of people who *know* the skill (no defaults!), and subtract a penalty equal to group size. Most uses of **Soldier** work this way, making it possible for a military squad to "carry" a few civilians.

## PULLING YOUR WEIGHT

For things like **Forced Entry**, the GM must first decide how many sets of hands can contribute; e.g., two heroes could probably operate a small ram, while four could carry a stretcher. If combining ST for a ST roll or to cause damage (e.g., with that ram), use the *highest* ST plus 1/5 the total of the other ST scores (round up).



If working together to lift a weight, add together everybody's Basic Lift.

# DECEPTION

Obscuring the truth about a deed, an object, or a person might be preparation for a job (often alongside *Social Engineering*, pp. 15-17), the whole point of an operation, or an aspect of the cleanup after clandestine criminal, espionage, or military activity.

## CLEANING

The most important kind of deception on an actual operation is cleaning up behind the squad. These tasks are the cleaner's department.

*Disposing of Corpses:* Corpses can be burned using **Arson** (p. 24); carried off-site and surreptitiously buried or tossed in the river with a **Stealth** roll; dissolved in acid (perhaps conveniently available due to **Serendipity**) with a **Chemistry** roll; fed to pigs or dogs, if you have access to them, with a suitable **Animal Handling** roll; handed over to criminal **Contacts**; or stashed using **Camouflage** outdoors or **Smuggling** indoors. Failure means that something linking corpse and killer remains. Critical failure means being caught in the act!

*I Don't Do Windows:* **Housekeeping**, of all skills, is most valuable. It covers getting stains out, picking up clutter, and removing smudges – like bloodstains, spent cartridges, and fingerprints! If the squad is undetected, these are free actions; the cleaner works as the group moves. If they did something noisy, though, they'll have to use **Stealth** to hide if anybody comes to check out the scene while they're cleaning it – and if there was any bloodshed, industrial cleanser is *required*. Afterward, rivals who try *Physical Searches* (pp. 11-12) must *win* a Quick Contest vs. the cleaner's **Housekeeping** to find useful clues.

*Planting False Evidence:* To leave a *false* clue requires suitable materials (cartridges, blood, whatever) and the **Forensics** skill. When rivals use *Physical Searches* (pp. 11-12) to seek clues, the Forensics roll to analyze evidence becomes a Quick Contest. The other party must *win* or be deceived. See *Lifts and Pulls* (p. 23) to learn how to leave evidence on people or in plain sight.

## COVER-UPS

"Clandestine" doesn't always mean "subtle." When 23 suspected terrorists turn up dead or the Mona Lisa goes missing, it's hard to keep it secret for long. But a cover-up can divert suspicion.

Orchestrating a cover-up requires extensive media access – usually via an Assistance Roll – and a **Propaganda** roll. Apply BAD to reflect counter-propaganda; this is nearly always -10 against a sovereign state or a national agency. **Electronics Operation (Media)** (for doctored media), **Public Speaking** (for speeches), and **Writing** (for speechwriting and written articles) are all complementary. This is collectively a long action that takes days or *weeks*, as suits the plot.

If those doing the cover-up or their agents are trying to convince the world that they didn't commit the clandestine act of which they're accused, success casts enough doubt that enemy fact-finding efforts are at -2, or -4 on a critical success. Failure has no effect. Critical failure spills the beans; PCs will face Rank loss or termination.

Those working for *victims* of high-profile skullduggery can also spin what they know, where they're looking, whom they suspect, etc. Success or critical success here erases -2 or -4, respectively, of the BAD that investigators face on the case, as the opposition won't be as wary. Failure has no effect. Critical failure gives the investigators an *extra* -4!

## FAKE ID

False identity is incredibly useful to infiltrators and social engineers. It eliminates the need to use **Fast-Talk**, **Stealth**, and so on to sneak into secure areas. Just show your pass and walk in!

There are *two* steps to establishing a false identity. Both are subject to the BAD one would face trying to infiltrate the locale or organization involved. The GM always rolls secretly. Any failure means the identity token won't pass, which may get you detained temporarily. Any critical failure means it will provoke arrest, attack, or another serious response.

*Faking Tokens:* Creating fake cards or badges requires a counterfeiting/forgery kit *and* a computer – although when faking old or low-security tokens, or altering purloined ones, the contents of a typical office desk will do, albeit at -5 to skill. These tasks call for a **Forgery** roll. Certain tokens *can't* be faked without special materials, which must be procured through an Assistance Roll, social engineering, or burglary.

*Validating Tokens:* To ensure that the token corresponds to a real person on the right lists, databases, etc., use *Falsifying Records* (below) for physical records and *Hacking* (p. 13) for digital ones.

## FALSIFYING RECORDS

Fake records are useful whenever the opposition is relying on reports, tapes, and so forth instead of direct observation. The GM rolls secretly for these tasks. Success yields a convincing sham. Failure means the attempt is obvious. Critical failure also gives the opposition a clue about the forger!

These tasks *aren't* subject to BAD. That modifier does affect any social engineering or theft needed to gain access to the records or sneak in with fakes, though. Somebody *will* have to do this – doctored surveillance tapes aren't useful unless they're where the real ones should be.

*Electrons:* Doctoring electronic media calls for a digital recorder, a computer, and an **Electronics Operation (Media)** roll. Success can *completely* fool anyone relying solely on surveillance systems, or produce "disturbing evidence" that lets the skill roll count as complementary to a social engineering attempt.

*Paper:* Altering documents requires a counterfeiting/forgery kit, a computer, and a **Forgery** roll – or a **Counterfeiting** roll, for bonds, stocks, etc. In some cases the roll is against the *lower* of the above skill or another: **Accounting** for ledgers, **Administration** for other complex forms, or **Law (Police)** for crime-scene reports. Possible benefits of success include membership in an organization, drawing police suspicion, and *averting* police suspicion.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# ULTRA-VIOLENCE

So far, we've presented many ways to handle indirect and unopposed violence done by heroes to bad guys or vice versa: smashing doors, blowing things up, etc. However, violent contests are the soul of action cinema. Every previous rule sets the scene for this, offering opportunities to bring on the throbbing soundtrack and bone-crunching sound effects. This sort of violence takes two main forms: *chases* and *combat*.

## FIGHT OR FLIGHT

When heroes and bad guys meet on bad terms, what happens next depends on who wants to do what:

- If both parties wish to back down or flee, there's no encounter: Wimps . . .

- If one party wants to get away, ask the other if they wish to pursue. If so, there's a chase. If not, there's no chase – but there might be combat if the party that isn't leaving the scene chooses to shoot at their fleeing rivals!

- If neither party wants to leave, direct interaction occurs: combat, interrogation, robbery, etc.

Chases and combat aren't exclusive! The chase rules support combat during a chase, and the GM is free to end a chase if both sides decide to stop running and start shooting. Similarly, if somebody bolts from a fight, the GM can switch over to the chase rules.

## CHASES

A chase occurs when heroes and bad guys meet and one side wants to leave – to fetch help, not get killed, whatever. On level ground without cover, assume that the faster party flees or overtakes the slower one. The system that follows is for footraces across rooftops, car chases in dense traffic, etc., where speed *doesn't* guarantee victory. This should be *most* chases in an *Action* campaign!

Remember: BAD never modifies rolls made in chases, although it can determine NPC skill; see *BAD Ideas* (p. 5).

## QUARRY AND PURSUER

These rules assume two parties (but see *Multi-Party Chases*, p. 34). The person or vehicle trying to flee is the *quarry*. The one chasing is the *pursuer*.

## ROUNDS

Chases take place in abstract *rounds*. A round is "time enough for both sides to try something cool." It has no specific duration – because in action cinema, camera effects and editing bend time. Use these guidelines to measure "chase time" against outside time:

- Each round allows an ally or an enemy who *isn't* involved in the chase to perform one task that takes at most a minute. For instance, a crew could lead guards on a three-round chase while their infiltrator (1) picks a lock, (2) negotiates laser beams, and (3) finds a hidden safe. He couldn't *crack* a safe – that takes an hour! This allows more to happen during an action scene than the second-by-second combat rules in the *Basic Set* permit.

## Range Band Table

Distance, too, is abstract in a chase. It uses five *range bands*:

Range Band	Starting Range*	Range Penalty*	Description*
Close	0-5 yards	0 to -2	Can touch rival, at least some of the time.
Short	6-20 yards	-3 to -6	Can talk to enemy, or toss things at him.
Medium	21-100 yards	-7 to -10	Can only shout at rival; need a gun to attack him.
Long	101-500 yards	-11 to -14	Opponent is out of earshot, at scoped rifle range.
Extreme	501+ yards	-15 or worse	Rival difficult or impossible to see <i>or</i> shoot.

\* Use distances in yards, range penalties, and descriptions only to settle the chase's *starting* range band; e.g., if spotted doing computer monitoring at 100 yards, the chase begins at Medium range. If the exact range is unknown, use the text description to assign starting range based on what initiated the chase; e.g., pickpocketing requires a touch, so chasing a pickpocket starts at Close range.

# INDEX

- Accumulated Complementary Total (ACT), 17.  
Acquiring gear, 6-7; *Assistance Roll*, 45.  
Acrobatic, *evade*, 37; *guard*, 37; *stand*, 37.  
Adventures, *directing the action*, 43-47; *plot steps*, 11; *starting*, 6-8.  
Aerial surveillance Assistance Roll, 44.  
After-action activities, 46-47.  
Alarms, triggering, 28.  
Ammo, keeping track of, 7.  
Area electronic surveillance, 29.  
Arson, 24.  
Artillery, 25, *Assistance Roll*, 45.  
Assassins in campaigns, 47.  
Assembling kit, 6-7; *Assistance Roll*, 45.  
Assistance Rolls (AR), 44-45.  
Athletics in combat, 37.  
Attack maneuver, 32.  
Attacks during chases, 35.  
Audio, *bugs*, 13; *surveillance*, 12.  
BAD, *see Basic Abstract Difficulty*.  
BAD guys, 5.  
Bailout Assistance Roll, 44-45.  
Balancing on something narrow, 19.  
Banter, 39.  
Bar DR and HP, 21.  
Barrier BAD-ness, 21.  
Bashing doors, 20.  
Basic Abstract Difficulty (BAD), 4-5.  
Batteries, keeping track of, 7.  
Beacons, 9, 13.  
Binding a target, 24.  
Biometric locks, 20.  
Black market, 6.  
Blasting doors, 21.  
Bleeding, 40.  
Blending in, 27.  
Boats, using to get in, 18.  
Bodyguard duty, 28.  
Bomb disposal, 28.  
Bomb tricks, 28.  
Bonds, escaping from, 42.  
Booby traps, 23.  
Boost to reach high area, 19.  
Bosses (enemy), 46.  
Brainwashing, 17.  
Breaking into vehicles, 23.  
Bribery, 15; *Assistance Roll*, 45.  
Briefings about the job, 6.  
Brotherhood in Blue campaigns, 43.  
Bugs, *concealing*, 12; *planting*, 12; *types*, 13.  
Buildings, explosives and, 25.  
Bulletproof Nudity combat rule, 38.  
Buying lucky breaks, 41.  
Buying success, 41.  
Cameras, 12, 18, 30; *digital*, 13.  
Camouflaged positions, 28.  
Campaign types, 43-44.  
Cannon Fodder combat rule, 38.  
Caper campaigns, 43.  
Captured, what happens when, 42.  
Cash Assistance Roll, 45.  
Cell phones, *as beacons*, 9, 13; *monitoring*, 14; *problems*, 8, 9.  
Chase Rolls, 34  
Chases, 31-35; *maneuvers*, 32; *sequence*, 32.  
Checkpoint security, 29.  
Cinematic combat rules, 38.  
Cinematic Explosions combat rule, 38.  
Cinematic Knockback combat rule, 38.  
Cleaners in campaigns, 26, 47.  
Cleaning behind the squad, 26.  
Cleanup of WMD, 29.  
Clients, finding, 6.  
Climbing, 18-20.  
Code-cracking, 13.  
Collateral damage during chases, 35.  
Combat, 36-39; *during chases*, 35; *while mobile*, 39.  
Commandos, *campaigns*, 43; *tactics*, 28.  
Commercial travel, 8.  
Communications, 8-9, *disasters*, 8, *failure*, 9, *silent*, 10.  
Complementary skills, 5.  
Computers, *bugs*, 13, *hacking*, 13, 30, *monitoring*, 14; *sabotage*, 25; *security*, 30.  
Contact mikes, 12.  
Concealed carry, 10, 37.  
Concealing traps, 25.  
Contact poisons, 23.  
Contacts and Contact Groups, 15.  
Container DR and HP, 22.  
Control Rating rules, using, 44.  
Conventional mikes, 13.  
Corpses, 11; *disposing of*, 26.  
Cost of living rules, using, 44.  
Counter-countermeasures, electronic, 30.  
Countersniper system, 30.  
Countersurveillance, 30.  
Cover-ups, 26; *Assistance Roll*, 45.  
Crippling injury rules, using, 44.  
CT scanners, 30.  
Cuffs, 42.  
Cutting power, 22, 25.  
Damage during chases, 35.  
Deception, 26-28.  
Deductions from physical evidence, 12.  
Defenses during chases, 35.  
Defusing, *see Disarming*.  
Demolition Men in campaigns, 47.  
Destruction, 24-25.  
Detecting, *security sensors*, 22; *WMD*, 29; *see also Finding, Searches*.  
Digging for job information, 6.  
Diplomacy to gain information, 15.  
Disappearing during combat, 37.  
Disarming, *bombs*, 28; *security sensors*, 22; *WMD*, 29.  
Disease outbreak, 40.  
Disembark/Embark maneuver, 32, 35.  
Divers, getting in, 18.  
Diving into openings, 19.  
Dogs, *as bomb detectors*, 29; *as guards*, 18, 46.  
Do Nothing maneuver options, 39.  
Doors, 20-21; *attached hardware DR and HP*, 21; *DR and HP*, 21.  
Drawing aggression, 39.  
Ducking into cover/shadows, 37.  
Dumb Mooks combat rule, 38.  
Dumpster-diving, 14.  
Duty disadvantage, 45.  
Economic rules, using, 44.  
Electric fences, 20.  
Electromagnetic car stoppers, 30.  
Electronic locks, 20.  
Electronic media, falsifying, 26.  
Electronic security, 29-30.  
Embark maneuver, 32, 35.  
Emergency Action maneuver, 32.  
Encouragement during combat, 39.  
Encryption, 14.  
Endoscopes, 12.  
Enemies, 45-46.  
Escape, *from a chase*, 34; *from prisons*, 42; *from restraints*, 42.  
Evidence collection, 12.  
Exotic restraints, 42.  
Explosives, 24-25; *as traps*, 25.  
Exposure to WMD, 29.  
Extra effort in combat, 37-38.  
Face Men in campaigns, 47.  
Facilities Assistance Roll, 45.  
Fact-finding roleplaying, 17.  
Fake identification, 26; *Assistance Roll*, 45.  
Falls, 19.  
False evidence, 26.  
Falsifying records, 26.  
Fast Reloads combat rule, 38.  
Fast-talk to gain information, 15.  
Fatigue rules, using, 44.  
Fences (security), *climbing*, 20; *types*, 20.  
Feverish defense, 38.  
File searches, 14; *Assistance Roll*, 45.  
Finding, *bombs*, 28; *clients*, 6; *electronic surveillance*, 30; *the MacGuffin*, 23; *opportunities/jobs*, 6; *see also Searches*.  
Fire support Assistance Roll, 45.  
First aid, 40.  
Fitting in social settings, 16.  
Flares as traps, 25.  
Flashy fighting, 37.  
Flesh Wounds combat rule, 38.  
Flex cuffs, 42.  
Flipping a weapon to hand, 39.  
Fooling polygraphs, 27.  
Force maneuver, 32, 35.  
Forced Entry skill and teamwork, 5.  
Foring doors, 21.  
Forensic accounting, 14.  
Formations, 9.  
Fragile gear, 8.  
Fright Check rules, using, 44.  
Gadgeteering to make gear, 7.  
Gate DR and HP, 21.  
Gear, *acquiring*, 6-7; *Assistance Roll*, 45; *fragile*, 8; *repurposing*, 13; *searches of*, 8, 29; *security*, 30.  
Getting away, 27.  
Getting in, 18-23.  
Glass, 21.  
Gliders, using to get in, 18.  
Go-to skills, 10.  
Grabbing the goods, 23-24.  
Grand theft auto, 23.  
Grenades as traps, 25.  
Grille DR and HP, 21.  
Guard animals, 18, 46.  
Guards, *bodyguards*, 28; *checkpoint security*, 29; *patrols*, 18; *tricking to escape*, 42; *see also Security*.  
Gun Control Law combat rule, 38.  
Gunfire and security sensors, 22.  
Guns as melee weapons, 36.  
Gunslinger advantage, 33, 35-39.  
**GURPS**, 3, 4; **Action**, 4, 47; **Action 1: Heroes**, 3, 7, 13, 16, 24, 36, 39, 41, 43, 44, 46, 47; **Basic Set**, 4, 31, 33, 36, 41; **High-Tech**, 38; **Martial Arts**, 38.  
Hackers in campaigns, 47.  
Hacking, 13, 30.  
Hands bound behind back, 42.  
Hardware deductions, 12.  
Henchmen, 46.  
Heroic charge, 38.  
Hide maneuver, 32.  
Hiding, *in a crowd*, 10; *items*, 12; *items in a car*, 10; *weapons*, 10, 37.  
High-tech challenges, 13.  
Home-cooked explosives, 24.  
Hotwiring vehicles, 23.  
Housekeeping skill, 26.  
Hydrophones, 30.  
Identify verification, 29.  
Illumination, 9.  
Impersonation, 27.



- Improvement through study rules, using, 44.
- Incendiaries as traps, 25.
- Infiltrators in campaigns, 47.
- Infinite Ammunition combat rule, 38.
- Injury during chases, 35.
- Insertion, 18.
- Inspection of gear, 8, 29.
- Intelligence gathering, 11-14; *Assistance Roll*, 45; *roleplaying*, 17; *see also Finding, Searches, Social Engineering*.
- Intercepts, 14.
- Interrogations, 16-17.
- Interviews, 16.
- Investigators in campaigns, 47.
- Jobs, finding, 6.
- Jumping, 19.
- Keeping track of expendables, 7.
- Keyboard bugs, 13.
- Lab forensics, 12.
- Laser beams, 22.
- Laser mikes, 12.
- Leading the target, 36.
- Legality rules, using, 44.
- Lifting items, 23.
- Lights (illumination), 9; *stats for common*, 9.
- Listening, 12.
- Live capture, 24.
- Location of job, 7.
- Locks, 20, 22.
- Luck advantage, 41.
- Lucky breaks, buying, 41.
- MacGyver repairs, 42.
- Magic rules, using, 44.
- Making an impression, 15.
- Making everybody useful, 47.
- Manipulation, 15.
- Mechanical locks, 20.
- Medevac Assistance Roll, 45.
- Medical assistance, 40-42; *Assistance Roll*, 45.
- Medics in campaigns, 47.
- Melee combat, 36-37.
- Mercenaries campaigns, 43.
- Metal detectors, 30.
- Microphones, 12, 13, 30.
- Millimeter-wave cameras, 30.
- Mines, 23.
- Mission plan, 17.
- Mobile phones, *see Cell Phones*.
- Mobility Escape maneuver, 32.
- Mobility Pursuit maneuver, 33.
- Monitoring, 14.
- Mook Marksmanship combat rule, 38.
- Mooks, 45-46; *leaders*, 46.
- Mortal wounds, medical assistance and, 40.
- Motion detectors, 22.
- Motivations for heroes, 6.
- Move and Attack maneuver, 33, 35.
- Move maneuver, 33.
- Multi-party chases, 34.
- Multi-tasking in combat, 38.
- Near miss extra effort, 38.
- New cinematic combat rules, 38.
- Obvious clues, 14.
- Opportunities, finding, 6.
- Ordering a client to cover, 28.
- Orders as motivation, 6.
- Other planes of existence rules, using, 44.
- Overdose, medical aid for, 41.
- Paper media, falsifying, 26.
- Parachutes, using to get in, 18.
- Parkour, 19-20.
- Passenger actions in vehicle chases, 33.
- Pat-downs, 29.
- Patrols, 18.
- Permission from superiors, 17.
- Photography, 12.
- Physical searches, 11-12; *Assistance Roll*, 45.
- Pinhead mikes, 12.
- Plague outbreak, 40.
- Planning, 17.
- Player guidance of success, 41.
- Playing dead, 37.
- Plot steps, 11.
- Poisoning, medical aid for, 41.
- Polygraphs, 16, 27, 30.
- Power, *cutting*, 22, 25; *restoring*, 40.
- Protective gear against WMD, 29.
- Providing security, 27-30.
- Proximity sensors, 22.
- Prying open doors, 21.
- Psionic rules, using, 44.
- Psy-ops, 27.
- Public speaking to gain information, 15.
- Pulling items, 23.
- Pursuers in a chase, 31.
- Quarry in a chase, 31.
- Quick searches, 14.
- Radio direction finders, 30.
- Radio intercept, 14.
- Ram maneuver, 33, 35.
- Range band table for chases, 31.
- Rapid reload, 38.
- Rappelling, 19.
- Razor wire, 20.
- Rearming security sensors, 22.
- Records searches, 14; *Assistance Roll*, 45.
- Regular Contests rules, using, 44.
- Reloads, keeping track of, 7.
- Remote-controlled weapons, 23.
- Repairs, 41-42.
- Replacement gear Assistance Roll, 45.
- Repurposing gadgets, 13.
- Requisitions for gear, 7.
- Researching files and records, 14.
- Restoring power, 40.
- Resuscitation, 40.
- Reverse maneuver, 33, 35.
- Robots, stats, 46.
- Rounds in chases, 31.
- Running climb, 19.
- Running, turning at end of, 20.
- Sabotage, 25.
- Safecracking, 22.
- Savoir-faire to gain information, 15.
- Scrounging for gear, 7.
- Searches, *files and records*, 14, 45; *gear*, 8, 29; *physical*, 11-12, 45; *gear*, 8, 29; *see also Finding, Intelligence Gathering*.
- Second wind in combat, 38.
- Security, *cameras*, 18; *electronic*, 29-30; *locks*, 20, 22; *systems*, 21-22; *tools*, 30; *see also Surveillance*.
- Security sensors, *detecting*, 22; *disarming*, 22; *rearming*, 22; *types*, 22.
- Seismic detectors, 22.
- Sensors, *see Security Sensors*.
- Serendipity advantage, 41.
- Serendipity as motivation, 6.
- Setting traps, 25.
- Severing doors, 21.
- Sex appeal to gain information, 15.
- Shakedown, 16.
- Shaking it off in combat, 38.
- Shielded rooms, 30.
- Shooters in campaigns, 47.
- Shooting made easy, 36.
- Shooting two guns, 36.
- Shotguns, *shooting*, 36.
- Shoving, *people into stuff*, 37; *stuff into people*, 37.
- Simplified range, 36.
- Simplified rapid fire, 36.
- Skidding, 19.
- Skills in boldface, 3.
- Skills, key action, 10.
- Sliding, 19.
- Smart fences, 20.
- Smashing people against walls, 37.
- Smuggling, 27.
- Sneaking out, 27.
- Sneaky fighting, 37.
- Sniping, 37.
- Social engineering, 15.
- SOP, *of group*, 8-10; *rule*, 8.
- Special combat situations, 39.
- Spike mikes, 12.
- Spinning at end of run, 20.
- Spotting during combat, 39.
- Spotting trouble, 28.
- Spy vs. Spy campaigns, 43.
- Squeezing through openings, 20.
- Standard operating procedure, *see SOP*.
- Standoffs, 39.
- Static in communications, 8.
- Static maneuvers, 34-35.
- Staying alert, 10.
- Stealth, 9.
- Stethoscopes, 12.
- Stop maneuver, 33.
- Straitjacket, 42.
- Strength, using to escape, 42.
- Stunt Escape maneuver, 34.
- Stunt maneuver, 33.
- Subdual of target, 24.
- Subtlety, 9-10.
- Super Silencers combat rule, 38.
- Surveillance, 12, 29, 30, 44; *countersurveillance*, 30; *of secure areas*, 18; *see also Cameras, Microphones, Security*.
- Sweeping for electronic surveillance, 30.
- Swinging, 19.
- Switcharoo, 23.
- Switches in security systems, 22.
- Tackling a client, 28.
- Tactical analysis during combat, 39.
- Tactical combat rules, using, 44.
- Tactical communication networks, 8.
- Tactical radar, 30.
- Tailing, 10.
- Tamping charges, 25.
- Target of job, 7.
- Task Force campaigns, 43.
- Teamwork, 5.
- Tech level rules, using, 44.
- Technical means Assistance Roll, 45.
- Ten rules to use sparingly, 44.
- Threats, 24.
- Three-way chases, 34.
- Time Use Sheets rules, using, 44.
- Tossing lines, 19.
- Tracking beacon, 13.
- Trails left by others, 12.
- Training sequence, 17.
- Transportation, *see Travel to Locations*.
- Traps, 22-23, 25.
- Travel to locations, 7-8; *Assistance Roll*, 45; *commercial*, 8; *NPC controls*, 8; *on foot*, 8; *PC controls*, 8.
- Traversing something narrow, 19.
- Tricking guards to escape, 42.
- Triggering alarms, 28.
- Tripwire weapons, 23.
- Troubleshooters campaigns, 44.
- Truth serum, 16.
- Tumbling, 37.
- TV Action Violence combat rule, 38.
- Unarmed Etiquette combat rule, 38.
- Underwater shooting, 39.
- Uttering threats in combat, 39.
- Validating false identification, 26.
- Vehicles, *breaking into*, 23; *hiding items in*, 10; *hotwiring*, 23; *stealing*, 23; *see also Chases, Travel to Locations*.
- Venom, medical aid for, 41.
- Video bugs, 13.
- Vigilante Justice campaigns, 44.
- Violence, forms of, 31.
- Visual surveillance, 12; *see also Cameras*.
- War Against Terror campaigns, 44.
- Watch, keeping, 28.
- Watching, 12.
- Weapons of Mass Destruction, 29.
- Wheel Men in campaigns, 47.
- When things go wrong, 40.
- Wipeouts, 35.
- Wire Rats in campaigns, 47.
- Wiretaps, 14.
- Wiring a metallic object, 25.
- WMD, 29.
- Word on the street, 15.
- Wrongs as motivation, 6.
- X-ray machines, 30.



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