

# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>

Issue 3/44 June '12

## ALTERNATE GURPS II

### THE LAST GASP

by Douglas H. Cole

TACTICAL MASS COMBAT

by David L. Pulver

COLORLESS GREEN IDEAS

SLEEP FURIOUSLY

by Roger Burton West

FROM SKILLS TO ADVANTAGES

by Sean Punch

SURVIVABLE GUNS

by David L. Pulver

ABSTRACT WEALTH

by Jason Brick

# STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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# CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR .....	3
THE LAST GASP.....	4
<i>by Douglas H. Cole</i>	
FROM SKILLS TO ADVANTAGES .....	14
<i>by Sean Punch</i>	
COLORLESS GREEN IDEAS	
SLEEP FURIOUSLY.....	18
<i>by Roger Burton West</i>	
EIDETIC MEMORY:	
TACTICAL MASS COMBAT.....	24
<i>by David L. Pulver</i>	
ABSTRACT WEALTH .....	30
<i>by Jason Brick</i>	
RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE:	
A NICHE TO SCRATCH.....	33
<i>by Steven Marsh, Pyramid Editor</i>	
ODDS AND ENDS .....	35
<i>featuring Murphy's Rules</i>	
APPENDIX Z: SURVIVABLE GUNS.....	36
<i>by David L. Pulver</i>	
ABOUT GURPS.....	38



## Article Colors

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

*Pale Blue:* In This Issue

*Brown:* In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)

*Dark Blue:* **GURPS** Features

*Purple:* Systemless Features

COVER ART  
*Keith Parkinson*

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*Greg Hyland*

# IN THIS ISSUE

For anyone who's ever wanted to turn his gas-powered car into an electric, install Linux on a toaster, or turn something cool into something *cooler*, this issue is dedicated to your experimental spirit. This month, *Pyramid* is devoted to "alternate **GURPS**" – optional new tweaks, systems, and expansions to take your game to brave new lands.

Many fight scenes have an ebb and flow to them that makes them exciting. Bring those waves of excitement to your game as you fight to *The Last Gasp*. New options for fatigue make it riskier to reach your limits, and a new system lets you track exactly how hard you're pushing yourself each second.

Discover how you can add limited cinematic feats to your realistic campaign by going *From Skills to Advantages*. Sean Punch, the **GURPS** Line Editor, describes the process and offers 16 examples, plus tips for converting spells.

When communication is essential to your campaign, you need to find out why *Colorless Green Ideas Sleep Furiously*. Get an alternate skill-based system for using and learning languages, including a table that shows the relationships between over 160 of modern Earth's most commonly used languages.

Turn **GURPS Mass Combat** into a war game with *Tactical Mass Combat*, by that popular supplement's author, David L. Pulver. This month's *Eidetic Memory* offers rules and tables to get the battle started with two players – then skip to *Odds and Ends* for suggestions on adding more participants!

If you prefer to save your bookkeeping savvy for tax time but still want a way to track your **GURPS** cash, you'll want to learn how to *Abstract Wealth*. With one roll on your new Wealth attribute, this issue might pay for itself! (Figuratively . . .)

Is a firearm *really* two to three times more effective at killing with a chest wound than a sword or axe to the same area? If you have your doubts – or you know some heroes who'd prefer that answer be "no" – check out *Appendix Z*, where David Pulver, co-author of the **Basic Set**, offers a suggestion for *Survivable Guns*. It even includes a table of sample weapons that work this tweak!

This issue's *Random Thought Table* lays down a new perk to ensure everyone in the party gets a day in the sun, while *Murphy's Rules* mixes terrestrial pharmacology and alien physiology for *big* laughs!

You've got the cutting edge of experimental **GURPS** innovation. Be sure to wear your lab coat and *have fun!*

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## FROM THE EDITOR

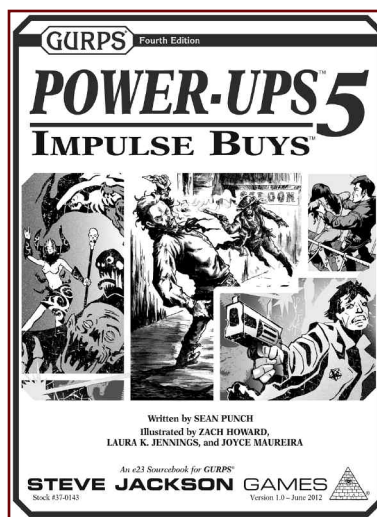
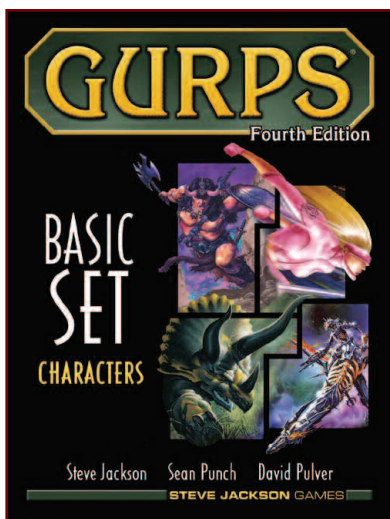
Each new game is an opportunity to reinvent the world . . . sometimes more literally than others. It's like a blank slate – what bits from column A will you be using? What do you want from column B? Fortunately, for those who like their options – and that's most of us – *GURPS* is happy to help.

This month, *Pyramid* offers some awesome possibilities to *really* shake things up. The revised possibilities of Fatigue and the introduction of Action Points (pp. 4-13) lets you make each encounter a tense race to see how gets tired first . . . and become truly terrified of robots and zombies again. New language rules (pp. 18-23) let you add dynamic depth to your communicative capabilities. The expanded *GURPS Mass Combat* options (pp. 24-29) allow you to go from the abstract to the concretely tactical. Revised purchasing possibilities (pp. 30-32) make it quick and *fun* to fling around cash. And there's more; we're not even going to mention one iota of the radical character-creation options (pp. 14-17) penned by Sean Punch. (Whoops . . .)

The right radical rules option can be just what you need to spark something spectacular in a new setting . . . or add pizzazz to a pre-existing campaign. This is a big toy box full of brand new goodies; play with them, smash them together, and have fun!

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Did you know that the first *Alternate GURPS* issue (*Pyramid* #3/34, for those of you keeping track) was suggested by someone on the Steve Jackson Games forums? Or that many other issue topics and article ideas have come directly from you, the reader? (Well, maybe not you, *specifically* . . . we're talking the abstract "you," here.) We read your mail! Feel free to send us private feedback and insight to [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or join public the discussion online at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com). The only way we can get you what you want is if you ask for it!



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## Long Recovery and the Rule of Awesome

Having FP recover more slowly potentially violates the *Wendler-Dell'Orto Rule of Awesome: Anything that enhances the potential for something to be Awesome is good. If what you're doing isn't Awesome, stop doing it and do something else.*

Making FP recover more slowly *can* be awesome, though. Being down a few levels of skill or strength because you've been on the run from Bad Guys, and succeeding anyway? Awesome. Having to make the dramatic choice between sleep/recovery and beating your rival to the Holy Grail Grenade? Also awesome. Making massive FP

expenditures for spell casting or extra effort a bit more strategic due to higher cost in recovery time? That can definitely enhance storytelling, and therefore be awesome.

Still, fair warning: This concept makes FP more valuable in games where they're used a lot, and requires more bookkeeping. This will need to be balanced against the potential dramatic impact of having to manage resources. The GM will need to make such expenditures have high Awesomeness potential. Adventurers built around massive and continuous expenditure of FP for extra effort in combat will need much more recovery time after each battle.

# SHORT-TERM FATIGUE

All-out, anaerobic thrash action will leave nearly anyone breathless. Fights often have an ebb and flow to them that does not arise naturally from the *GURPS* rules – there's nothing to prevent, or even discourage, a Move or an Attack every second. This section offers some options to encourage conditioning to matter, to provide for lulls and flurries in a battle to present themselves organically, and for full-throttle action to result in quick exhaustion, but equally quick recovery if you can shepherd your resources and take sufficient short breaks.

## ACTION POINTS

Mimicking these situations invites a system representing short-term energy reserves. The reserves are depleted – and replenished – on the *GURPS* time scale of *seconds*. Here, this store of short-term energy is called *Action Points (AP)*.

Everyone starts with AP equal to his *HT* – not FP. Action Points are expended every time you do something physical: move, attack, defend, lift something heavy (including drawing a bow), etc.

### *Extra Action Points*

**2 points/level**

Action Points can be bought up (but not down), limited to 150% of the character's *HT* in realistic games. Cinematic games could increase those limits, and superheroes have no limits, though a bottomless bag of AP might not be the best way to achieve your goal.

### *Hitting Bottom*

Action Points represent a store of short-term energy, and may never be reduced below zero. When you reach 0 AP, you're too drained to do anything that *costs* AP – you must opt for zero-cost events (pp. 10-11), or use recovery events (p. 11) to gain them back. You *may* burn either a Fatigue Point or a Destiny/Wildcard point (see *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*, p. 31, or *GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys*, p. 5) for a *Second Wind* (p. 12), recovering AP equal to 50% of *HT* (round up).

*Example:* A fighter with *HT* 13 would start with 13 AP. If during the course of a combat, he dropped to 0 AP, he would not be able to do anything that costs AP. He could Evaluate, take *one* step per turn (best saved for a retreat!), All-Out Defend (p. 10), or perform any other recovery or zero-cost event. He may elect to burn a FP or (if the game has them) a bonus point to regain 7 AP.

A cinematic adventurer may start with a large number of AP, allowing a very intense initial burst of exertion – perhaps enough to win a fight. This flurry of activity, if matched point for point by a less-conditioned rival, could force his unfortunate rival to spend FP in order to do anything but mount a limited defense. This becomes a fight strategy based on exhaustion, especially if using *Gradual Impairment Due to Fatigue* (pp. 4-5).

### *Mighty Warriors and Action Points*

Another option borrows and modifies the concept of bonus points. Each 12 points in relevant skills or advantages gives an extra AP per *flurry*. A flurry begins when you start spending AP, and ends when you have completely recovered back to your starting AP total.

You may only spend these AP on an appropriate action during that time. If you had Broadsword at DX+4 [16], during each flurry, your skill would give one extra AP while performing an action using a broadsword, such as an attack or parry. Karate at DX+5 [24] would give an extra 2 AP per flurry, where your extensive training allows you to perform actions that others cannot. Advantages such as Weapon Master (All Bladed Weapons) [40] (p. B99) would grant 3 AP to actions performed with blades, while if you *also* had Trained By a Master [30] (p. B93) and Shortsword at DX+4 [16], you would have spent 86 points on things benefitting Shortsword, providing a flurry pool of 7 AP.

## STRENUOUS EVENTS

Most combat actions will cause a reduction in AP. The topics below give guidance for the cost of typical events.



## Force Commander

Each side has one commander. He must accompany an element.

*Starting Command Points (CP):* Divide the commander's (Leadership + Strategy) skill by four, dropping fractions. This is his CP pool to spend on various command tasks. At TL5-, the commander can only affect an element if within 10 hexes of it. At TL6+ he needn't be, but if not, the CP cost triples (at TL6) or doubles (at TL7+).

*CP in Combat:* Before dice are rolled for any particular attack, a commander may announce he is spending a CP to add a +1 modifier (if his side is attacking) or -1 (if his side is defending) to the roll. No further modifier may be applied to a single combat roll, but multiple combats may be influenced. Obviously, if both commanders spend CP, modifiers cancel out.

*Rally:* A commander may spend CP to get a demoralized element on his side to attack or move adjacent a foe, or move in a way that is not closer to his own map edge.

*CP and Movement:* During the Movement phase, a commander may spend a CP to let a given element take its move twice (in that phase only). No single element can do this more than once a turn, but several may be affected.

### Regaining CP

Once spent, CP is not regained unless the commander takes time to *plan*. To plan, he may not have used CP this turn and his element may not have attacked or moved (if Foot or Mounted). In the Pin Recovery phase, make a Strategy roll. Success regains 1 CP; success by 5+ or critical success regains 2 CP. If he is currently with a C3I element, add its TL/2 to his skill.

*C3I Superiority:* If one side has at least twice the TS of the other's C3I element (or the enemy has none) it regains an extra CP each turn.

### Other Rules

If a commander's element is eliminated, a new commander can be appointed. He starts with CP 0. He may recover CP by planning as described previously, up to his normal maximum. (Assume Strategy and Leadership 1d+8 if statistics are unavailable.)

The GM may allow a force to be broken into multiple smaller forces each with their own commanders, which operate independently but are allied. If so, divide the starting CP by the total number of allied commanders to reflect disunity of command!

### General PC Rules

Any PCs or major NPCs on the battlefield – including but not limited to the force commander – must be assigned to specific elements. They may switch elements if both begin the Movement phase in the same hex.

*Non-Hero Elements:* If a PC (including the overall commander) is leading a non-Hero element, multiply its TS by his (sum of Tactics + Leadership)/20, and let the player roll any dice when it is attacking. If eliminated, assume PCs in it take 6d-6 HP of injury.

*Hero Elements:* The element's TS represents the character(s) involved. If it is eliminated, characters in it are assumed reduced to -2d HP and unconscious.

At any time the GM can opt to "pause" the war-game action and switch to regular **GURPS** rules; remember that each "tactical combat" turn is about 300 seconds.

# WINNING AND LOSING

A force loses if all elements are eliminated or retreat off the battlefield. The GM may also rule a demoralized force (see below) has lost, or set other conditions for victory, such as capturing a particular Built-Up area or advancing a certain number of elements off a particular map edge.

*Demoralization:* The first side in the battle with over half its elements eliminated *and* losing more elements than the enemy is demoralized. All elements not Elite, Fanatic, Hero, or accompanied by PCs cannot attack or move adjacent to an enemy element; if their side has a home map edge, any movement must bring them closer to that edge or off it.

## AFTER THE BATTLE

Elements that were eliminated or obliterated are lost. Elements that fled off the map can be retrieved to fight again. When looting the battlefield, use 1/5 of the value of eliminated

elements. If one side is wiped out (100% casualties), so is its logistic force.

## ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

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

*Example:* A TL10 computer programmer with a Wealth of 12 has a Threshold Value of \$700. Items costing between \$701 and \$1,399 give -1 to his Wealth roll. Those costing \$1,400 to \$2,799 are at -2. From \$2,800 to \$5,599, purchases are at -3.

A *critical success* gets the item, and imposes -1 on Wealth rolls (cumulative with all other penalties to Wealth) for a number of months equal to the penalty on the attempt. It does not actually reduce your Wealth score – your Threshold Value does not change.

A *success* is treated as a critical success, except the -1 *does* reduce your Wealth score (and thus your Threshold Value).

A *failure* doesn't buy the item. Try again in a month. If the penalty on Wealth was -3 or lower, the attempt inflicts -1 on Wealth rolls for one month.

A *critical failure* doesn't buy the item, but inflicts the same penalties as a critical success.

### *Quirks and Perks*

A +1/-1 modifier to certain kinds of purchases makes for good color and characterization. Somebody with a background in one industry will know the best dealers and values, for +1 to Wealth for that kind of item. A car maven might have -1 for automotive purchases, reflecting a tendency to go for the high-ticket roadsters rather than affordable, reliable transportation.

## **WEALTH IN PLAY**

Buying stuff using abstract wealth can speed play and let groups focus on the aspects of the game they find most interesting. Some special situations call for detailed treatment to avoid bogging down play, or unscrupulous players taking advantage of "loopholes" in the system.

### *Living Below Your Means*

These rules assume the person is living a typical lifestyle for his level of income. Anybody can choose to live below that lifestyle for as long as he likes, rolling all Wealth attempts and making trivial purchases as though his Wealth score was lower.

For each month of living like this, an adventurer gains a one-time +1 to a single purchase attempt for every point of Wealth he lived below his "natural" score. A Wealth 11 spy living at Wealth 8 would get a total of +3 per month.

Players can choose to spread that bonus over multiple rolls, or save for a large bonus on a single important purchase. Like many people in real life, they can also use this bonus to mitigate the penalties from earlier expensive purchases.

If someone has Status, Rank, or Reputation, living below a certain level may reduce or eliminate those benefits until the person returns to living the lifestyle to which he has led others to believe he is accustomed.

### *Windfalls*

Campaigns where loot and other cash infusions are a regular part of the game don't mesh well with these rules. Getting,

splitting, and spending the booty is a reward of the adventure, and abstracting wealth tends to devalue that.

If a game has occasional cash rewards, it's easiest to let the group spend that cash on specific purchases. Just make certain the cash infusions are significant enough to let them buy something normally beyond the reach of their Wealth.

### *Pooling Resources*

Party members will inevitably want to combine their assets to afford larger purchases. Handle this by subdividing the total cost of an item and having individuals make a Wealth roll for their part of the total bill. Let the group split the shares among themselves as they see fit. When pooling resources, it's never possible for a purchase to qualify as trivial. Even a share that would normally qualify as such would instead be treated as cheap.

### *Time Frame*

Abstracting how much an item costs doesn't mean it appears instantly in a shopper's hand. The GM should assign a reasonable time frame for any given purchase. It only takes half an hour to pick up a nail gun at a big-box hardware store, but even paying cash for a car takes the better part of a day. Buying a house or business can take weeks and even months.

### *GM Discretion*

Like other abstract rules, this variant relies on GM judgment to make it work. A GM is well within his rights to rule that a certain purchase is trivial, impossible, or otherwise handled differently than the system suggests. The GM should also feel free to assign ad-hoc bonuses and penalties to reflect an item's availability, limited access to character wealth, market forces and other factors. A trillionaire alone in a firefight has no more options than a street urchin in the same situation.

Always keep in mind that these rules are intended to streamline accounting in the game, not to sidestep a problem or challenge. An adventure designed around resource management should never get bypassed by a simple Wealth roll. Be sure to build resource challenges fully aware of how much cash the party can bring to the table!

### *Other Resources*

It's easy to apply this idea to nonfinancial resources, creating similar systems to manage someone's influence, social status, or pull within an organization. In a complexly social campaign, each adventurer might have a different score to represent his Status with a dozen or more factions.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jason Brick is a freelance writer whose 30-year gaming habit has included all four versions of *GURPS* and countless other systems. His work can be found in print and dead tree magazines worldwide. In his spare time, he enjoys travel, martial arts, and time with his family. Read more at his blog, [brickcommajason.com](http://brickcommajason.com).

## ABOUT *GURPS*

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*Errata.* Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases are available on our website – see above.

*GURPS* rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book.

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