


PYRAMID[®]



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ALTERNATE GURPS IV



POINTLESS MONSTER HUNTING
by Christopher R. Rice

KNOWING YOUR OWN STRENGTH
by Sean Punch

PLAYING WITH HEALTH
by David L. Pulver

SCHRÖDINGER'S BACKPACK
by Douglas H. Cole

POSSESSIONS UNDER CONTROL
by Timothy Ponce

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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IN THIS ISSUE

Get ready to push the envelope of your **GURPS** campaigns again, with the latest from our leading-edge laboratory. This issue has rules, options, and possibilities that can take your games in bold new directions!

When you want to get to The Mission right away, dispense with the standard character-creation system and go *Pointless Monster Hunting*. Long-time *Pyramid* contributor Christopher R. Rice brings you a divergent character-creation system for **GURPS Monster Hunters** that *doesn't* use character points, making it as simple as choosing options off a menu – quickly and easily! And we won't even mention the tips for designing new options . . .

Sometimes coming up with an exciting campaign premise is just a matter of *Knowing Your Own Strength*. **GURPS** Line Editor Sean Punch takes a look at redefining **GURPS** Strength logarithmically. Learn how to get rid of three-digit ST scores, how to keep house cats in line, and how to assign scores when you want a threat that's 10 times as strong as an average guy!

When we're done tweaking Strength, why not try *Playing With Health*? **GURPS Basic Set** co-author David L. Pulver devotes this month's Eidetic Memory column to showing how HT can be made more *active* in a campaign, with a look at why to link it to Perception, how to define Speed-based skills, and more.

Not all games need to track all gear down to the last granola bar. For such campaigns, it'll speed things up to reach into *Schrödinger's Backpack*. This option from **GURPS Martial Arts: Technical Grappling** author Douglas H. Cole lets you rummage around for anything in your equipment pack . . . and it just *might* be there!

Do bad guys keep taking over your mind and soul? Then it's time to get your *Possessions Under Control!* This option recasts the **Technical Grappling** system to let you wrest control away from some demonic or alien possessor. Use the included techniques to get a better grip on sinister situations.

This issue also features a Random Thought Table that'll shake your **GURPS** game down to its very *bones*, plus some Odds and Ends we couldn't fit anywhere else. Whether you're trying to make your games faster, easier, or more flavorfully rich, this issue has something in its pack. With this *Pyramid*, you'll explore the alternatives like never before!

ARTICLE COLORS

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

- Pale Blue:* In This Issue
- Brown:* In Every Issue (humor, editorial, etc.)
- Green:* Columnist
- Dark Blue:* **GURPS** Features
- Purple:* Systemless Features

COVER AND INTERIOR ART

Brandon Moore

All things are possible until they are proved impossible – and even the impossible may only be so, as of now.

– Pearl S. Buck

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FROM THE EDITOR

GURPS Is All CAPITAL!

I suspect that most gamers start a tabletop game with a certain amount of “mental capital” to invest in the game. In other words, if a GM can only carve out 10 hours from his schedule before running a Mutant Bunny Cyberpunk Horror game, then he’s going to need to prioritize those hours to make sure he understands the game system, the world, the characters, and so on. So if it takes seven hours to understand the rules and two hours to get the world together, that doesn’t leave a lot of time to make sure Cottontail Bloodchip is a compatible character concept with Hoppy Goretech.

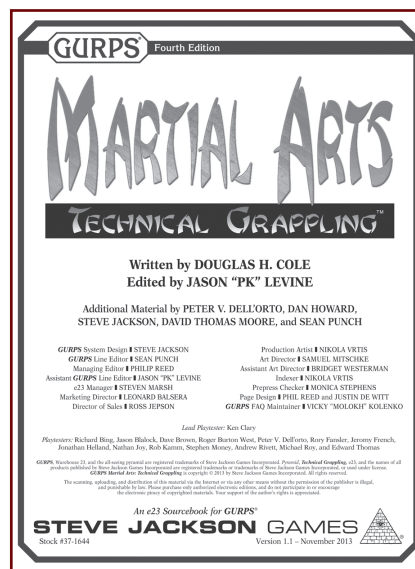
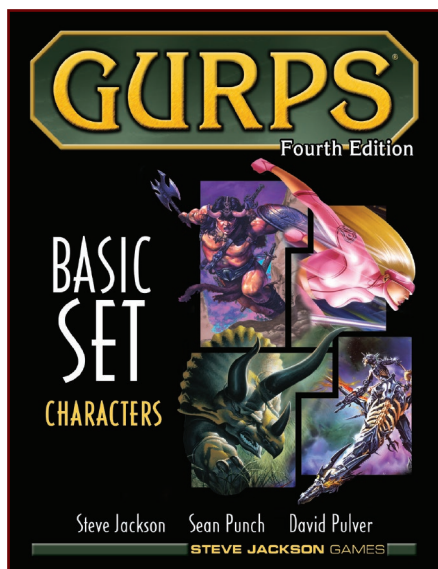
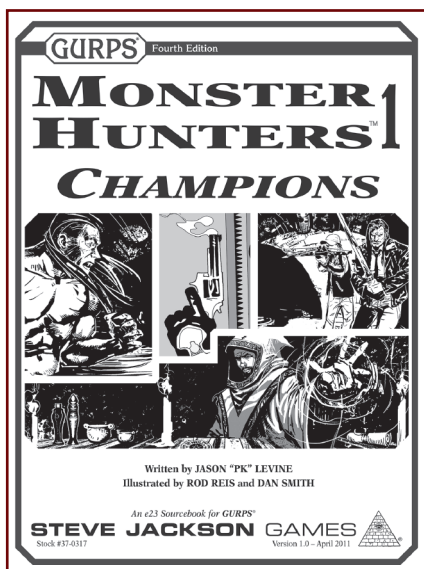
In fact, one of the elements that originally inspired the creation of **GURPS** was the notion of a unified system. Once you know **GURPS**, you don’t need to spend much time in subsequent campaigns (re-)learning the rules, even if you want to switch genres, tones, or focuses.

However, many gamers also have a certain *minimum* threshold for “mental capital” they want to invest in a game.

If you’re going to start something new and you’ve got a few hours, *why not* poke at the rules and see what new niftiness you can come up with? That’s where other enticing **GURPS** supplements and issues of *Pyramid* come in handy – especially the *Alternate GURPS* issues. If you’ve got a few hours of mental capital you’re looking to invest in the rules, and you already love **GURPS**, hopefully something herein will spark some new excitement for your next game! Just make sure you leave enough time for your bunnies . . .

WRITE NOW, RIGHT NOW

How well spent was your bunny money on this month’s *Pyramid*? Did something leap off the page and into your game immediately? Or is it getting added to your mental hopper for future evaluation? Let us know privately what you dig via email pyramid@sjgames.com, or adjust your computer’s rabbit ears and join the burrow at forums.sjgames.com.



Additional Material: Douglas H. Cole, Phil Masters, and Sean Punch

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For instance, "IQ +1" means just +1 to IQ – not to Will or Per – while an Aptitude that improves IQ as in the **Basic Set** would explicitly indicate "IQ +1, Will +1, and Per +1." No math is necessary outside of adding the visible modifiers to the archetype baseline.

- Techniques with a "1" have no fixed skill base and work with any Wildcard (pp. 11-14) that makes sense.

- Some Aptitudes affect the Destiny Point Limit (see p. 15), or DPL.

Aptitudes with levels provide tiers of benefits and "stack" with themselves. The number of levels a beginning character can have is limited, but the GM determines the highest level allowed after play has begun.

Some Aptitudes (and some levels of Aptitudes) have other ones as prerequisites, which are notated in boldfaced brackets – e.g., **[Mysticism]**. Lastly, some Primary and Power Aptitudes have an additional number notated beside them – e.g., **[4]**. This means that the Aptitude costs that many slots (per level, if leveled).

Primary Aptitudes

These Aptitudes use *three or more* slots apiece.

Adept **[Ritualist]** **[4]**. You use the adept times when casting spells. See **Champions**, p. 25.

Consecrated Aura 1-5 **[3]**. Each level gives you, and any caster within two yards of you, +1 to energy-gathering rolls. This stacks with being in a place of power (**Champions**, p. 36), but bonuses can never exceed +5.

Grace of Heaven/Hell **[Inhuman]** **[3]**. You are no longer burned when touching holy artifacts, being on holy ground, or when splashed with holy water. This can be because the forces of Heaven no longer consider you a foe or you're so far up the food chain in Hell that you ignore most holy attacks.

Resurgent **[3]**. Extra Life (p. B55) and +1 DPL.

Seventh Son **[5]**. You're the seventh child of a seventh child. Because of the circumstances of your birth, you get +3 DPL, you have +2 on all reaction rolls, *and* both Serendipitous (p. 6) and Fortunate (p. 6) have no level caps for you. You also have an uncanny sense when it comes to supernatural beings and phenomena; treat this as Detect (p. B47) with the Vague limitation. This Aptitude can also be repurposed as a general "Chosen One" if the GM likes.

Secondary Aptitudes

These Aptitudes take up *two* slots apiece.

Coordinated 1-3. Each level gives DX +1 and Per +1.

Connected (Group). You must specialize by group (see p. B44). Such contacts are Somewhat Reliable, appear on a 12 or less, and have a skill of 12 (for supernatural capabilities) or 15 (for those without).

Daring. Daredevil (p. B47) and +1 DPL.

Deductive Mastery **[Learned 2 and Photographic Memory, or Sage Archetype and Photographic Memory]**. Use the rules for Psychometry (p. B78), except that you read days as hours, and years as days. Your ability is not a psychic power, but instead due to a very observant nature, and can be used on people as well as places or things. Make an IQ roll normally,

but you must be able to see, hear, and smell your subject. If you can only do two of the three, you roll at -2 if you can only use one, you roll at -4; if you can't use any of your senses, you cannot use this ability.

Dual-Weapon Mastery. Gives Ambidexterity (p. B39) and Dual-Weapon Attack! (p. B230).

Ears like a Bat. Acute Hearing 1 (p. B35), Discriminatory Hearing (p. B49), and Parabolic Hearing 1 (p. B72). This can be taken as an **[Enhanced]** Aptitude, in which case a second level is allowed and gives both Parabolic Hearing 2 *and* four more levels of Acute Hearing.

Energetic. HT +1 and FP +5.

Enhanced. This trait serves as an Unusual Background, allowing access to Bioenhancement Aptitudes (p. 7), certain other Aptitudes, and the Bioenhancement! Wild-card (p. 12).

Evasion 1-2. Each level gives Basic Speed +1.00 and Basic Move +1. *Evasion 3* is allowed with **[Enhanced]**.

Fearless. Will +1 and Unfazeable (p. B95).

Heroic Archer. See **GURPS Martial Arts** (p. 45). All rolls use Archery!

Intuitive. Intuition (p. B63) and +1 DPL.

OTHER ARCHETYPES

The GM may wish to introduce other archetypes into his campaign or perhaps create a "sidekick" version of each. The four presented types use these guidelines:

1. Each is built with 130 points.
2. Minimum ST and IQ are 10 – physically weak or incompetent champions don't last long!
3. Minimum DX is 11 and minimum Basic Speed is 6.00, to avoid complete combat incompetence.
4. Minimum HT is 11 and HP is 14, to prevent easy character death.
5. Minimum Will and Per are both 11, to enable the character to spot and survive supernatural threats.

Only the first rule is immutable. The GM is free to disregard the others.

Linguist 1-3. You have Accented comprehension of *any* language that you may have plausibly studied in the past; **[Language Talent]** raises this to Native. The exceptions are inhuman tongues (**Champions**, p. 24) and any other language the GM feels you couldn't have possibly learned. You may simultaneously use a number of languages equal to your level in this Aptitude; e.g., with Linguist 1 you can understand any *one* language at a time, but with Linguist 2 you could translate between any *two* languages.

Lucky 1-2. Lucky 1 gives Luck (p. B66) and +1 DPL. Lucky 2 doubles the benefits: Extraordinary Luck and +2 DPL.

Mana Reserve 1-7 **[Ritualist]**. Each level gives you a 7-point mana reserve.

Mystic. An Unusual Background granting access to Mysticism Aptitudes (pp. 7-8) and certain other Aptitudes. Decide if this counts as Clerical Investment (p. B43); if so, you acquire Spiritual (p. 10) or Religious (p. 10) on top of your other Foibles.

Strength and Machines

When a machine requires a minimum user ST, look up the BL associated with that ST on the *Basic Lift and Encumbrance Table* (p. B17), find the smallest ST needed to match that BL on the *Revised Strength Table*, and use that as the new requirement. For ST 1-20, that converts as follows:

Old ST	New ST	Old ST	New ST
1-3	1	12	12
4	2	13	13
5	4	14	13
6	6	15	14
7	7	16	15
8	8	17	15
9	9	18	16
10	10	19	16
11	11	20	16

Thus, most common melee weapons, which fall in the ST 6-13 range, are unaffected. Those who prefer an equation can use this one, which won't give *quite* the same cutoffs because it doesn't compare two rounded-off values:

New ST = [20 × log(Old ST)] - 10, rounded nearest, minimum ST 1

Vehicles, on the other hand, are best converted as though they were animals. Convert empty weight in tons (LWt. minus Load) to pounds, apply *Assigning ST* (p. 19), and add +6 for being in the category of Unliving beings and machines. With minor rounding, this gives:

ST = [10 × log(weight in tons/3)] + 36, rounded nearest

For instance, the van on p. B464, with LWt. 3.5 and Load 1, ends up with ST 35.

WEIGHT-BASED HIT POINTS

If HP remain equal to ST on the compressed ST range while damage is based on ST in more-or-less the same way as before, huge things will demolish each other much too easily. The simplest fix for this is to keep HP based purely on weight, per the *Object Hit Points Table* (p. B558). This offers the major benefit of not requiring an overhaul of the entire damage system! Thus:

HP = 2 × (cube root of weight in lbs.) if living

HP = 4 × (cube root of weight in lbs.) if Unliving or a machine

HP = 8 × (cube root of weight in lbs.) if Homogenous or Diffuse

For living beings, round down or up as desired to reflect variations in build. Thus, a 90-lb. child with ST 8 has 8-9 HP for 0 or 2 points, a 150-lb. man with ST 10 has 10-11 HP for 0 or 2 points, and a 250-lb. man with ST 12 has 12-13 HP for 0 or 2 points. A male gorilla weighing 400 lbs. has 14-15 HP, a male grizzly that weighs 700 lbs. has 17-18 HP, and an elephant that weighs 12,000 lbs. has 45-46 HP, relative to the ST 18, 21, and 33, respectively, in *Assigning ST* (p. 19).

For inanimate objects use empty weight and round up. The 2.5-ton van on p. B464 still has 68 HP, despite having only ST 35.

PRICING REVISED STRENGTH

When using the *Revised Strength Table*, ST still costs 10 points/level. The No Fine Manipulators and Size modifiers on p. B15 are no longer necessary. The first corrects for an inability to use melee weapons that enjoy swing damage, which isn't the problem it was – it amounts to -2 to damage, not the loss of *dice* of damage. If that seems unfair, give out an extra -2 points for the No (Fine) Manipulators disadvantage!

The second limitation adjusts for the fact that massive creatures need to buy a lot of ST that gives them relatively little. That isn't much of an issue when using *Assigning ST* (p. 19). For instance, the 12,000-lb. elephant on p. B460 needs ST 33 [230] and gets BL 4,000 and thrust 6d+1 in the bargain, instead of paying for ST 45 (Size, -30%) [245] and getting BL 405 and thrust 5d.

It's probably fairest to re-price some parts of ST, though:

Hit Points: Cost is unchanged at ±2 points per level above or below ST, but the Size limitation no longer applies. That 12,000-lb. elephant with ST 33 and 45 HP would also buy +12 HP for 24 points, making its final ST and HP cost 230 + 24 = 254 points.

Striking Strength: With every four levels of ST giving +1d to ST-based damage, each level of ST for damage only is *about* the same as 1/4 of a die of Crushing Attack (Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%) [3.5/level]. While advantages and weapons can improve damage type, Reach, and so on, those have their own costs in points or cash. It seems fair to use the cost given by basic arithmetic (0.875 points per die) and round up to 1 point/level to account for the rest. Again, ignore the No Fine Manipulators and Size limitations.

Lifting Strength: By subtraction, this ends up at 7 points/level – and again, the Size limitation isn't applicable. This cost is *much* higher than the 3 points/level in the **Basic Set**, but arguably, with BL improving as $10^{(ST/10)}$ rather than as ST^2 , no cost is too high; e.g., for a ST 10 character, Lifting ST 5, 10, and 20 formerly multiplied BL by 2.3, 4, and 9, but now they multiply it by 3.2, 10, and 100, and it goes up from there! See *Strength Rolls* (p. 19) for another reason why Lifting ST costs so much.

Strength rates the capacity to inflict and absorb physical punishment and to do work.

Caps

The GM will want to assign a racial maximum ST to each living species. These rules assume that's ST 16 for humans. For other creatures, use the top of the range found in *Assigning ST* (p. 19), typically by looking at the weight of the most massive *non-obese* specimens of the species – usually large males, for mammals. This is the “hard” limit, and requires Unusual Background (Peak ST) [10]. The “soft” limit is one level below this, or ST 15 for humans. One level means a lot in this system: the hard limit allows lifting a respectable 25% more than the soft one at *all* ST levels!

A more nuanced treatment could phase in the Unusual Background earlier, perhaps at 5 points for the soft limit and another 5 points (total 10 points) for the hard one.

Spending Mental Control Points

Someone who has accumulated MCP over another can spend them in a number of ways. (All point expenditures must be declared before rolling dice, but they are not lost until after the roll.)

- You may spend MCP to reduce your foe's ability to win possession-related Contests such as the ones for Enervation (p. 32), Feint (p. 33), Inquisition (p. 33), etc. Spending MCP can reduce a Will-based or Trained Will roll, but never below the Will score itself. Your opponent is at -1 for every 1 MCP spent.

- You must spend MCP when attempting to inflict mental afflictions using techniques; see *Techniques* (pp. 32-33).

- You may spend MCP when attacking an opponent's possession. If your attack is successful, add the MCP spent to your MCP roll to dislodge that possessor, see Possession, below.

- You may spend MCP to reduce your foe's skills beyond any passive penalties to DX, IQ, Perception, and Will. Each MCP spent lowers one skill by 1 for a single use.

Contagion, Sympathy, and the Power of Names

Some would-be possessors may try to exploit magical laws, such as the *Law of Contagion* or *Law of Sympathy* (see *GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 243-245). Others use the power of *Names* (*Thaumatology*, p. 245) to affect their subjects. Possessors use Contagion and Sympathy to offset range penalties to their possession attack rolls, while incorporating Names affects Possession Point rolls.

TECHNICAL POSSESSION

All possession attempts involve a series of mental attacks during which the combatants vie for dominance. Anyone using a form of possession with particular requirements – e.g., skin-to-skin contact, physically entering a host, spiritually merging with the host's body, etc. – must maintain these conditions throughout the entire possession process or immediately fail.

The Attack Sequence

Possession attacks are handled like any other attack with a few notable differences.

- A possessor attacks using the highest of his Trained Will or a new technique called Possession (p. 33). If he hits, he rolls for MCP inflicted.

- A host may use a *possession defense* against an attack; this is similar to a Block or Parry. He rolls against (defense skill + Mind Shield)/2+3, where "defense skill" is the best of Trained Will, Exorcism, Meditation (but at -2), Mental Strength, or the Possession technique (p. 33). A host taken by total surprise (p. B393) suffers -4 to possession defenses, rather than not being allowed to make one. On a success, his opponent inflicts no MCP.

Possession

Possessing a host requires that you reduce his Will to zero. This is usually accomplished by accumulating (subject's

Will)×2 MCP. Afflictions, magical spells, and physical pain also can reduce Will.

The host is not helpless throughout the process, however. He can attack, accumulate MCP, and spend it to break his possessor's grip! The possessor makes possession defenses normally. If a possessor's maintained MCP ever falls below zero, his possession attempt immediately ends, and he is mentally stunned for 1d seconds.

The possessor may choose to end a *successful* possession at any time as a free action, after which his host is mentally stunned for 1d seconds. This means that in the few seconds after you leave, your host will be extremely vulnerable to possession attempts!

The Cost of Possession

Independent of any FP costs for using Possession or casting spells, the struggle for mental dominance is *tiring*. Any possession attempt that lasts more than 10 seconds costs 1 FP plus an additional 1 FP per minute thereafter, just as if fighting a physical battle. Other actions that deplete FP, like extra effort or spell casting, have their usual costs.

Additionally, possession attacks and defenses are *distracting* and require focus. While engaged in a possession, both possessor and host must decide whether the mental struggle or their physical activity takes priority. Whichever they choose is unpenalized, but *all* lower priority tasks – including skill rolls, defense rolls, sense rolls, etc. – take -4.

SPECIAL SCENARIOS

The basic rules cover most attempts to possess a target, but sometimes situations are more complicated.

Multiple Possessors

Sometimes multiple entities get involved in a possession. This includes situations where two or more entities fight for control of a host, two or more entities gang up on a host, or where one or more entities help a host fight off one or more possessors. While this can be confusing and require a fair amount of bookkeeping, the rules for handling such scenes are simple.

Each entity involved – including the host – attacks, defends, and rolls for MCP normally. Possessing entities inflict their MCP against the host. Entities attempting to wrest control from another being attack that "possession" attempt. Make the attack roll normally, but rather than inflicting MCP against the host, subtract rolled MCP from those the possessor is maintaining.

Any entity whose maintained MCP falls below zero is exorcised and may attempt to repossess a host or otherwise engage in the possession once his stun wears off. New entrants to the mental melee initiate possession attempts normally.

The penalties to the host's abilities resulting from MCP are cumulative.

ABOUT *GURPS*

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