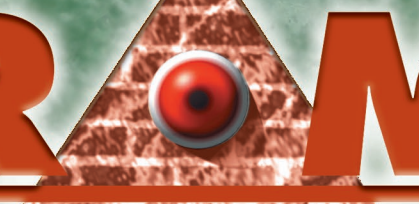
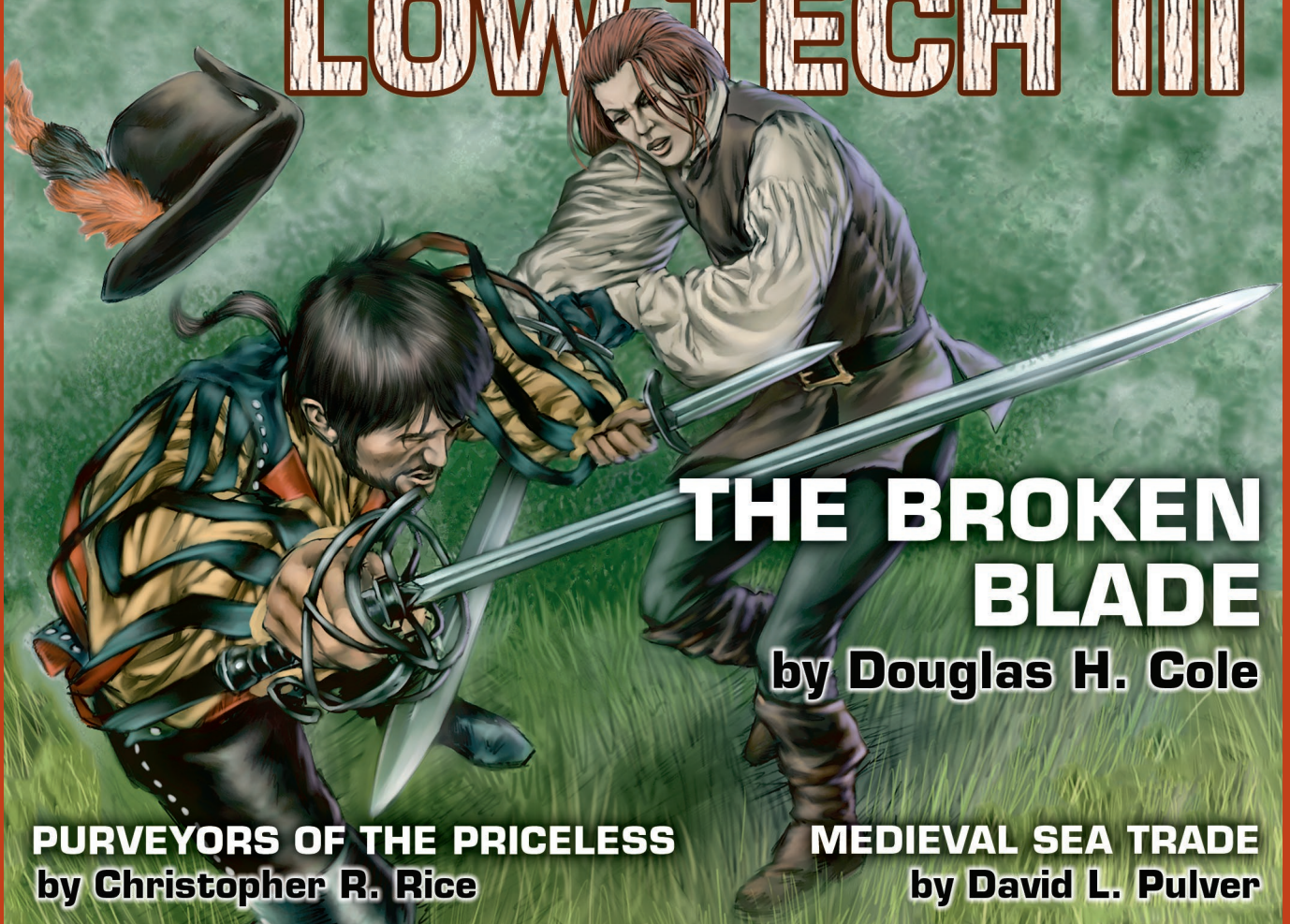


# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/87 January '16

## LOW TECH III



### THE BROKEN BLADE

by Douglas H. Cole

**PURVEYORS OF THE PRICELESS**  
by Christopher R. Rice

**MEDIEVAL SEA TRADE**  
by David L. Pulver

**KNOWLEDGE IS POWER**  
by Matt Riggsby

**THE MUSIC MAKER**  
by Jon Black

**TEN MINUTES IN OCTOBER**  
by Steven Marsh

**TEMPERED PUNKS**  
by Graeme Davis

## STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Everything old is new again! With this issue of *Pyramid*, we're taking another look at bygone days, with the latest in low-tech innovations. Spice up the past with new rules, insights, possibilities, and more.

Perhaps the greatest danger in melee combat comes from *The Broken Blade*. These rules from Douglas H. Cole – author of *GURPS Martial Arts: Technical Grappling* – add the excitement and danger of weapon breakage to your *GURPS* campaign . . . and teach you how to make your armaments battle-worthy again!

Getting the best price for goods is always helpful for *Purveyors of the Priceless*. These optional subsystems for *GURPS* – from prolific *Pyramid* penman Christopher R. Rice – let you barter and trade like a pro. You can even use these rules to make commerce your full-time in-game profession.

Set sail with more things to sell, by taking up the *Medieval Sea Trade*. In this issue's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver adapts his trading rules from *GURPS Spaceships 2: Traders and Liners* to more retro realms, allowing lucrative low-tech dealings. Buy cargo, transport passengers, and put into ports around the world, living the life of a free-trading crew.

When it comes to accessing the inner realms of bureaucracy, *Knowledge Is Power*. *GURPS Hot Spots: Constantinople, 527-1204 A.D.* author Matt Riggsby helps you enter the halls of power of Imperial China, with a guide to the education, examination, and implementation of that empire's awe-inspiring administration, plus insight into how to apply its machinations of other great civilizations.

When it comes to legendary low-tech musical instruments, one name is perhaps most associated throughout history as *The Music Maker* – Antonio Stradivari, also known as “Stradivarius.” Author Jon Black takes you on a tour of the life and legacy of this legendary craftsman, including *GURPS* stats for the master himself, information about his amazing violins, and adventure seeds for all genres.

In a “punk”-style campaign, heroes are encouraged to push the envelope. But sometimes it's necessary to strive for *Tempered Punks*. Graeme Davis – co-author of *GURPS Crusades* – offers some systemless campaign ideas for how to keep innovators from being *too* innovative in a low-tech campaign.

This month's Random Thought Table gives you permission to break reality, while Short Bursts provides another glimpse into the new *Car Wars* universe from *Pyramid* Editor Steven Marsh that shows what happens when tech goes wrong (including stunning new artwork from Brandon Moore). Whether fighting, trading, or innovating, this issue of *Pyramid* is sure to be the *tech* of the town!

## 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

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## GET IT IN GEAR!

Arguably, all aspects of human studies ultimately boil down to tech. At a fundamental level, tool-usage is what sets us apart from most animals (we're keeping an eye on you, New Caledonian crows). And advanced technology – the ability to evolve ever-more-complex innovations – definitely sets us apart from any other critters out there. (Take *that*, crab-eating macaques!)

Thus it's no surprise that even something as thoroughly documented as pre-Industrial Revolution-era technology continues to provide fertile ground for new gaming innovation. New ways of looking at the past always crop up, whether it's an analysis of tech that's been part of all low-tech games from the beginning (pp. 4-8), an in-depth exploration of a little-focused social construct (pp. 22-27), or new rules for tying in existing bits into a larger satisfying subsystem (pp. 15-21). As we argued last month (*Organization Rules!* on p. 32 of *Pyramid* #3/86: *Organizations*), the existence of new systems or insight allows for expanded creativity when designing new challenges for heroes.

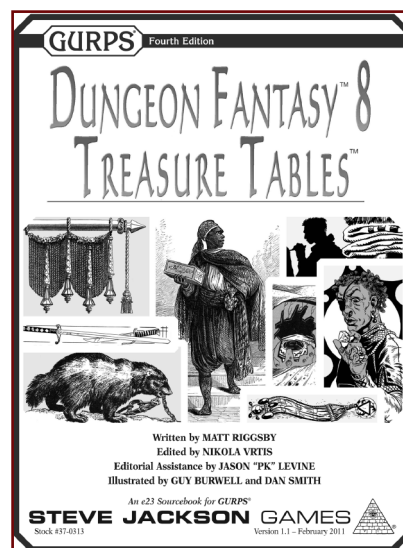
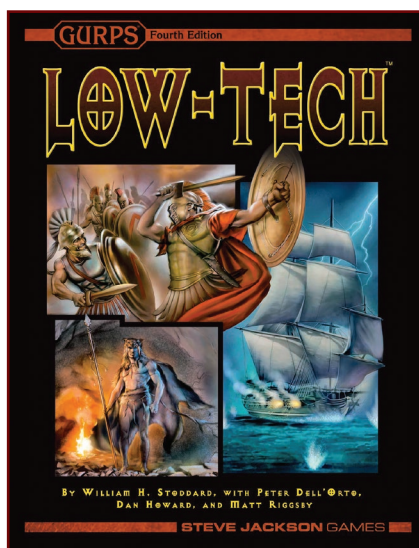
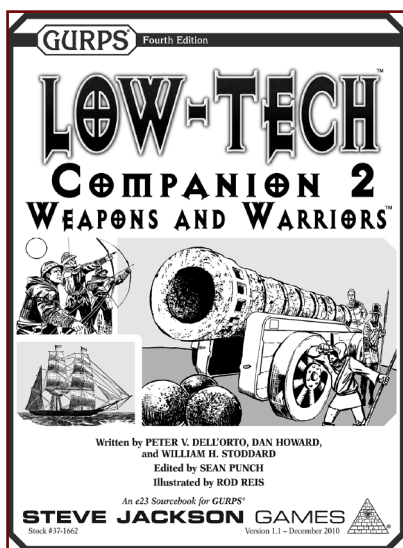
So whether you're exposing adventurers to the vagaries of an uncaring bureaucracy, opening up trade possibilities for mercantile-minded explorers, or giving the heroes a chance to acquire one of the great historical treasures that has stood the test of time (pp. 28-32), it's always worthwhile to explore new and different areas of past eras.

May this issue prove to be a passport to new and exciting vistas of gaming goodness!

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of gaming goodness, was this trip to Ye Olden Times time well spent? Or was something not your cup of tea (even if it *was* imported at great expense and risk by some plucky merchants)?

We always love to hear your thoughts, and modern technology means you barely need to pick up a quill! Send your mischievous musings privately to [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or visit our public pub of peerless peers at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



*Additional Material:* Phil Masters, Matt Riggsby, William H. Stoddard, and Jonathan Woodward

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## Weapon Breakage Checks

A breakage check is a roll against the weapon's HT+2 that occurs on parrying any blow that exceeds the defense breakage threshold (p. 5), or delivering a blow that exceeds the attack breakage threshold (p. 5). Every full multiple of the *failure increment* (p. 5) by which a blow exceeds a breakage threshold gives -1 to this roll.

If the roll fails, your weapon suffers damage in the form of lost HT equal to the margin of failure (minimum 1). The blade *also* breaks outright if the HT of the weapon is reduced below 3, a breakage check is failed by 5 or more, or if a breakage check is critically failed (regardless of the margin of failure).

*Example:* The knight with his small knife must defend against someone swinging a broadsword at him; the knife's defense breakage threshold is only 5. His attacker swings for 2d+2 and rolls 9 points of basic damage, exceeding the threshold by 4 points. The small knife, with its ST 5 rating, has a failure increment of 1, so the breakage check is rolled at a net HT-2. A heavier weapon such as a shortsword (defense breakage threshold of 8, and failure increment of 2) would roll at its full HT+2.

The loss of HT might represent notching of the blade or haft, or any other damage and deformation to the weapon. Such damage may be repaired if it is not too severe (see *Repairing Damaged Weapons*, pp. 7-8).

## Striking Hard Surfaces

If striking purposefully at something with hard DR such as armor or an object (but not when striking at a foe's weapon, or while parrying), the GM may decide that the weapon suffers additional HT penalties to breakage checks.

Flesh and bone without inherent DR incur no penalty, nor do tough hide and cloth armor. Wood or hard organic armors (such as scales or plates) and tough hide give penalties: -1 for DR 1-4, and -2 for DR 5 and higher. Hard armor materials like bronze, iron, and steel (as well as high-tech stuff such as boron carbide or other ceramics) take a penalty equal to their DR/2, rounded up, with a maximum of -5.

## Making Skill Count

More skillful combatants can attempt to reduce the risk to their weapons when delivering or receiving hard blows. Treat such skillful deflection as a combat option. Each -2 to a hit roll, or -1 to a Parry, increases the corresponding breakage threshold by one for that attack or defense. It effectively allows fighters to use their skill to slide blows from their weapons instead of meeting them head-on, at the risk of being too clever and missing completely.

## Weakening the Weapon

For playability, only consider the DR of a weapon for breakage when it is the deliberate target of a foe's attack. If such an attack lands (e.g., a successful hit roll or a failed parry), subtract the weapon's DR from the rolled damage, and the weapon then suffers -1 to HT for every multiple of the weapon's failure increment, rounding down. Do not reduce HP! That would represent having pieces of the weapon knocked off, instead the increased fragility of the weapon is represented by HT loss.

## Dangerously Fragile Weapons

Any weapon whose HT is reduced to 6 or less has its breakage thresholds and DR halved (minimum 1 for threshold; a weapon *can* have DR 0). Additionally, if the weapon normally has a higher attack threshold than its defensive threshold, treat them both the same, equal to the lower value.

## THE DULL BLADE

Beating on foes, especially encased in armor, tends to do bad things to a weapon's cutting edge. If someone abuses a weapon in this way, roll vs. the weapon's HT-2; on a failure, the weapon dulls. If the weapon is striking a hard surface, apply the following additional penalties to the HT check:

- Wood, internal DR due to bony structures (such as the skull's DR 2), and hard organic armors (such as animal scales or bony plates), and tough hide give a penalty: -1 to HT for each 2 points of DR, to a maximum of -5.

## WEAPON ROBUSTNESS QUICK REFERENCE

In all formulae, if a weapon has several usage modes, each with a different ST rating, use the *highest*.

*Defense Breakage Threshold:* weapon's ST rating

*Attack Breakage Threshold:*  $1.5 \times$  weapon's ST rating, rounded down

*Defense Safety Limit (in dice):* (weapon's ST rating) / 6; retain adds

*Attack Safety Limit (in dice):*  $(1.5 \times$  weapon's ST rating) / 6; retain adds

*Failure Increment:* (weapon's ST rating) / 5, round normally (e.g., ST 3 has an increment of 1)

*HT:* Cheap weapon has HT 10 or less; good quality has HT 12; fine quality has HT 14; very fine has HT 16.

*DR:* Usually DR 4 for hafted weapons, and DR 6 for all-metal ones.

*Edge HT:* (weapon's HT) - 2

*Breakage Check:* current HT + 2

## STRIKING BONE AND MEAT

"Hard organic armor" (see *Striking Hard Surfaces*, above, and *The Dull Blade*, below) includes bone structures such as the thigh bone (femur), the long bone in the upper arm (humerus), the pelvis, spine, and the skull. All would have DR 2 when it comes to cleaving them with weapons, yielding -1 to breakage checks and -2 for dulling. Other strong bones, such as those of the shins and forearms and the shoulder blades, are in this category as well.

Larger creatures with strong structural bones should scale this DR: Use the creature's HP/5 as a good baseline. Giant birds will be less; supernaturally tough creatures should be more.

## NEW PERKS

The following perks can prove useful to merchant princes and traders alike.

### Caravan Master

*Prerequisites:* Leadership 12+, Area Knowledge 16+, Riding or Teamster 16+, and Navigation (Land) 16+.

You are a master at leading caravans or other group of people, beasts, or vehicles. As long as at least one of your relevant skills (except Leadership) remains at 16 or more, you reduce any penalties due to terrain, weather, or lack of roads by 5% × (lowest skill - 15). For example, if you had Area Knowledge, Riding, and Navigation (Land) at 19, you could ignore up to 15% of penalties for *Hiking* (p. B351).

### Disbursed Time‡

This leveled perk allows someone with a job to spend one workday less on his occupation while still getting paid the same amount. Typical workdays a month at TL4 or lower is 25 days (higher TLs are often just five days a week, resulting in 22 workdays a month). Optionally, each level reduces total time by 5% instead. The GM sets the upper limit, but people should spend at least one day a week to get administrative paperwork in order, purchase new supplies, and so on.

### Eye for Wares†

Pick an Armoury or Connoisseur specialty (pp. B178, B185), or Jeweler (p. B202). You may use your Merchant skill to precisely identify the market value of items covered by your chosen specialty.

### Manipulative Salesman

You may use *any* Influence skill as a complimentary roll while attempting to peddle wares.

### Natural Fence‡

You have a knack for finding somebody interested in finding your wares. Each level (maximum of four levels) of this perk gives +1 to any roll to locate someone willing to barter or buy for what you are selling.

### Occupational Proficiency†‡

This leveled perk (maximum of four levels) gives +1 per level to *all* rolls associated with performing a specific job (p. B516). This includes specific skill rolls for figuring out monthly competence, rolls to determine negative effects on a critical failure, and so on. It only adds to job rolls and never helps with actual adventuring tasks! You must specialize by particular job. For example, if Robert the Clockmaker had both Machinist and Mechanic (Clockwork)-12 and two levels of Occupational Proficiency (Clockmaker), he'd roll against 14 every month for his job. For all other rolls, his skills would be at their normal levels.

### Traveled Roads

Experience allows you to optimize getting goods from point A to point B. After you have made a trip at least once, you may ignore -1 in penalties due to distance while trading per 4 points you have in Merchant (round down).

### Unfettered by Corruption

Through charm, knowledge, or being a charlatan yourself, this perk lets you ignore -1 in penalties due to corruption while trading per 4 points you have in either Merchant *or* Streetwise (round down).

## BEING YOUR OWN BOSS

As *Low-Tech Companion 3* notes, merchants must spend 80% of their starting money on materials and goods relevant to their business. This can be gear useful for the merchant's business. For example, a blacksmith could claim 80% of his starting money is tied up in his smith's kit (*Low-Tech*, p. 30) – those tools are important to his trade! If he's the head of a group venture or must answer to a group of stake- or stockholders, this is better represented with Merchant Rank (p. B29 and p. 11) or an appropriate Patron (p. B72 and below).

### Self-Made Men

From the dabbler to the self-styled merchant-prince, it can be difficult to decide exactly what sort of traits are needed. Is he a simple facilitator of goods or is he actually haggling with other merchants? Useful skills include Area Knowledge, Connoisseur, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Finance, Freight Handling or Packing, Merchant, and Savoir-Faire.

### Patron

see p. B72

Patron can be used to represent someone who has various "back channels" within his own business or corporation. This allows him to reallocate resources quickly enough to use his business in immediately useful ways. A classic example of this is Bruce Wayne in *Batman Begins*, where Wayne purloins various advanced technologies to help him become Batman. Optionally, those with *GURPS Boardrooms and Curia* could create their business as an organization, to determine its cost as a Patron.

Because Patron is a per-session advantage, this may not be appropriate to some campaigns. At the GM's option, a Patron can be called on once per *game* week, instead of once per *game session* (this is essentially adds Game Time to Patron; see *GURPS Power-Ups 4: Enhancements*, p. 14, for further details).

### New Special Limitations

*Equipment Only:* As per the enhancement on p. B73, except that this is the *only* thing your Patron does for you. It can't pull strings, get you out of prison, etc.

## Negotiations

The traders may opt to negotiate, using Merchant skill to lower the asking price, engaging in a Contest with the would-be seller according to the rules on p. B209; a typical opposing Merchant skill is 1d+10. A victory will *lower* the price by 10%, while a defeat *raises* it by 10%. For groups desiring more options for bargaining, see pp. B560-562 and **GURPS Social Engineering**. The GM may choose to play out the meeting with the seller.

*Exception:* If goods are illegal, roll against the lower of Merchant or Streetwise skill when negotiating prices (two characters on the team can roll separately and take the worst of these two rolls).

*The merchants can try to locate goods at the same time as trying to find buyers for goods already in the hold.*

## Actual Price Table

Roll	Actual Price	Monetary Metals*
3 or less	30%	80%
4	40%	85%
5	50%	90%
6	60%	90%
7	70%	95%
8	80%	95%
9	90%	100%
10	100%	100%
11	100%	100%
12	110%	105%
13	120%	105%
14	130%	110%
15	140%	110%
16	150%	115%
17	160%	120%
18	170%	120%
19+	180%	125%

\* Use this column for silver and gold commodities, which tend not to vary in price as much as that of other trade goods.

## SELLING CARGO

Beginning the first full day after arrival at a new port, a merchant crew may search for buyers for any speculative cargoes their ship is carrying. Each attempt to find a buyer for any one lot takes a day (but may be modified using *Time Spent*, p. B346; it is never instantaneous). It's made using the best skills from among the merchant team who are searching.

Attempts to find a buyer use the same skills and modifiers as *Buying Cargo* (pp. 16-19). If the goods are illegal, roll to see whether they're considered unlawful *here*; if so, use Streetwise, with a penalty of the city's CR, to find a buyer.

On a success, a buyer is found. On a critical failure, the crew runs into difficulties with local law or customs as described in *Focused Cargo Searches* (p. 18).

If an attempt fails, repeated attempts can usually be made by taking another day, at no penalty. If the ship has more than one lot of speculative cargo in its holds, the crew may opt to split its team so that some are searching simultaneously for buyers for each of them while others are searching for a lot of goods to purchase.

## Determine Selling Price

Once a potential buyer has been found for a given lot of goods, the sale price must be determined. Use the same process detailed under *Determine Purchase Price* (pp. 18-19).

Based on the port where the goods are being sold, add 2 if the goods are desired imports, subtract 2 if the goods are notable exports. Add 1 in times of piracy, war, etc.

As with buying goods, a Contest of Merchant skill can be used to improve the sale price. A victory *raises* the price by 10%, while a defeat *lowers* it by 10%.

The sale price offered by a potential buyer doesn't have to be accepted, but refusal to sell means no other buyer can be sought for these goods for an entire *week*.

The crew is responsible for unloading the goods, clearing them through inbound customs, and paying (or evading) any customs duties owed on them.

# FREIGHT AND PASSENGERS

In addition to or instead of carrying speculative cargo, ships may arrange to transport freight ("other people's cargo") or paying passengers.

To do this, the ship's captain must advertise where his vessel will go next, usually arranging for the destination to be posted in a public place or announced in local taverns. After the destination is posted, the GM should determine what the basic rates for freight shipments and passenger tickets are.

## BASIC SHIPPING AND PASSENGER RATES

Basic freight rates are calculated per ton of freight per unit of distance. These rates are based on the assumption that the

typical vessel is a 60' cog with a crew of 10 (and room for eight passengers). A suggested shipping rate for freight is about \$7 per hundred miles. A suggested passenger rate is about \$10 per hundred miles. Due to increased risk, double this in a war zone, pirate-infested area, etc.

## LOOKING FOR FREIGHT OR PASSENGERS

Medieval ships usually transported their owner's cargoes rather than serving as freighters. However, it's possible for a ship owner to seek out a merchant who wants a shipment transported somewhere and doesn't have a ship available.

## 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.

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