

PYRAMID[®]

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SPACESHIPS III

**SO YOU WANT TO
BUILD A SPACESHIP**
by Roger Burton West
and Timothy Ponce

HAZARD RATES
by David L. Pulver

BLACKBEARD STATION
by Ted Brock

BATTLE FOR THE EARTH
by Michele Armellini

STRANGE OBJECTS IN DISREPAIR
by J. Edward Tremlett

REMATCH
by Matt Riggsby

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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CONTENTS

IN THIS ISSUE

FROM THE EDITOR 3

SO YOU WANT TO BUILD A SPACESHIP 4
by Roger Burton West and Timothy Ponce

BATTLE FOR THE EARTH 11
by Michele Armellini

BLACKBEARD STATION 18
by Ted Brock

EIDETIC MEMORY: HAZARD RATES 21
by David L. Pulver

STRANGE OBJECTS IN DISREPAIR 26
by J. Edward Tremlett

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE:
YOU GOTTA GET A GIMMICK 33
by Steven Marsh, Pyramid Editor

SHORT BURSTS: REMATCH 35
by Matt Riggsby

ABOUT GURPS 36

When it comes to off-world science fiction, spaceships make things happen! And in an infinite universe, there's always room for more awesome spacecraft and ideas for how to use them. Fortunately, we at the *Pyramid* shipyard have you covered, with the latest models fresh off the space lot.

So You Want to Build a Spaceship with the possibilities of the **GURPS Spaceships** line. Great! But with eight volumes in that series, it can be daunting to decide which options are best for your campaign. Get inspired by four different types of science-fiction themes and adventure expectations, then learn what ship engine, power plant, and weapon options best fit the theme and expectations. And stay out of sight with IR masking, a new **Spaceships** system!

In a fast attack from space, aliens wiped out Earth's major cities and installations. Now it's time for humans to strike back in a *Battle for the Earth*. Michele Armellini – author of **GURPS WWII: Grim Legions** – uses **GURPS Mass Combat** to describe human and alien force elements, providing the modifiers needed to play out their final confrontation. Drop it into a myriad of science-fiction campaigns with the included tips!

When outlaws need a place to relax, refuel, and resell, they visit *Blackbeard Station*. This former mining asteroid hides in a distant system with the help of some special equipment. It includes both **GURPS City Stats** and **Spaceships** information for the gargantuan pirate haven, plus details on its history, politics, and key leaders.

When you expect a spaceship crew to actively seek out less-than-legal cargo, you'll need to pay them *Hazard Rates*. In this month's *Eidetic Memory*, David L. Pulver – author of the **Spaceships** series – offers tips (along with a new cargo table) for gaming the pursuit of "special" freight, plus ideas for interesting passengers and official mail routes.

When you're among the stars, it's quite possible you'll come across *Strange Objects in Disrepair*. Each of the three derelict alien vessels included herein has a story and a challenge, perfect for heroes of any game system to unravel and figure out.

This issue docks into port with a Random Thought Table that ponders how to prevent all extraplanetary vessels from looking the same and a Short Bursts vignette from the **Car Wars** universe that reveals how folks can keep a grudge even after they're dead. If the stars are your destination, this issue of *Pyramid* is your passport!

ARTICLE COLORS

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features

Purple: Systemless Features

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INTERIOR ART

Brandon Moore

Starbuck: Why can't we use the starboard launch tube?

Chief Tyrol: It's a gift shop now.

– *Battlestar Galactica, "Miniseries, Part 1"*

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FROM THE EDITOR

FULFILLING A BOLD MISSION

GURPS celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, and a few times lately, I've had occasion to reflect on where **GURPS** has been and where it might go. One of the joys of a well-defined, heavily supported game system is that there's more breathing room to take some time and reflect on what it all *means*. In the early days of a game, a lot of time and effort is taken up by making sure you're covering the basics: "Do we have extensive hand-to-hand combat rules? Because we need those."

As time progresses, we can start branching out to things that are still important, but not as day-one vital: "What about a system for mass combat? How would *that* work?"

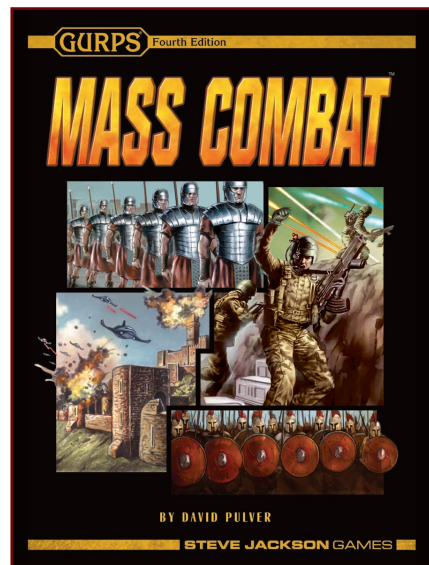
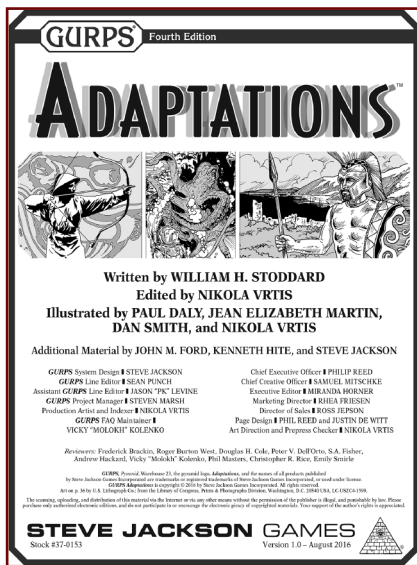
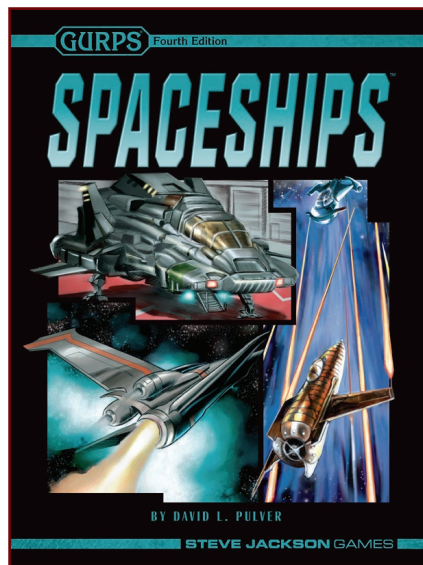
Eventually, as the must-haves and wouldn't-it-be-nice elements are filled, we can start making sure that everything is working as well as it can, to achieve the desired result. As I type this, we've recently released **GURPS Adaptations**, a guide to adapting beloved fictional settings to **GURPS**, including insight into how to create specialty gear, stat up heroes, and get the *feel* of the setting just right with the myriad of

options that are out there. This issue offers a similar look at **GURPS Spaceships** (pp. 4-9), with suggestions for how to select from the possibilities of that series to devise a campaign that fits your vision.

The magazine also supplies a number of elements that are designed to be dropped into as many campaigns as possible, whether it's dealing with an alien mothership (pp. 11-17), taking on not-quite-legal cargo (pp. 21-25) or exploring derelict spacecraft (pp. 26-31). With the foundations of spaceships covered so thoroughly by the rest of the **GURPS** line, we have more room to explore strange new realms. And isn't that the point of spaceships?

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

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Crew members are generally good at what they do, but skill levels of 12-13 are often considered adequate.

A BALANCE OF TERROR

Secure all active scanners. Passive systems only . . . Quiet! There's a destroyer hunting us . . . We're in an intense radiation belt. Gamma rays are clouding their screens. If they can't see or hear, they won't find us.

– Commander Paul Gerald, in *Wing Commander*

Science fiction depicts space warfare in a dizzyingly wide variety of modes, but few inspire suspense like the life-and-death struggle between two captains hunting each other. Perhaps the most famous example of this genre is the battle between Captain Kirk and the commander of a Romulan Bird of Prey, but it crops up in *Babylon 5*, the *Star Wars Expanded Universe*, and a variety of written fiction. As a whole, this sort of story emulates the feel of submarine warfare in which one or both ships know the other is out there somewhere but for lack of sufficiently reliable or sensitive detection equipment, must hunt each other, much like in *The Enemy Below* (1957) or *The Hunt for Red October* (1990). Of course, the underlying assumption of stealth in space is wholly unrealistic and incongruent with hard science fiction, but why should we let that stand in the way of fun?

This genre seeks to cultivate suspense via the cat-and-mouse game of finding and killing one's enemy before they get a chance to reciprocate the favor. As such, combat must be deadly, and there must be a source of tension – namely, the hunt. Weapons must pose a viable threat – e.g., crippling or destroying a target within a few shots – but they shouldn't threaten death on the first hit because that isn't fun. Also, the detection rules need modification because, as written, they make spotting targets regardless of where they are trivial, and the categorical inclusion of cloaking devices runs contrary to the idea of degrees of stealth present in the likes of *The Hunt for Red October* (1990). A better alternative is changing the stealth option (*Spaceships*, p. 30) as described below, and including IR masking (see below).

Stealth remains an option, but in order to maintain a steady pace between sensors and stealth, the latter grants a penalty to all detection rolls equal to 10+TL. All ships that actively hunt stealth vessels should also include a tactical or multimode sensor array, and dedicated sensor picket ships should use an oversized sensor array (see *Bigger Systems*, *Spaceships* 7, p. 5) to eke out an additional +1 to their detection rolls.

A typical engagement involves one or both ships running on auxiliary power using their passive sensors to try to locate the other. This boils down to a series of Detect rolls. Once an enemy is spotted, the attacking vessel maneuvers into range – assuming it isn't already – powers up, and fires its main weapons. This first shot, if it hits, should give the attacker enough of an advantage to finish off his target. Ships that use a fuel cell to maintain some energy don't need to fully power up, but are at an additional +1 to detection if they are above auxiliary power. Their gunners may fire on any ship within range as they are detected. Once a ship fires, it reveals its location to all ships executing a sensor detection task (*Spaceships*, p. 52) that turn.

Some ships may decide to forgo stealth and scan their surroundings with active sensors (see *Spaceships*, p. 46). This automatically detects anything without the stealth hull feature within range on a successful skill roll. Ships with a stealth hull of the same or higher TL as the scanning sensor array impose a penalty equal to 3 + 2 per TL above the sensor. (This replaces the rule for passive sensors given above.) For example, a TL11 stealth hull imposes -5 on a TL10 sensor array. Remember, however, that using active sensors lets anyone within *twice* the sensors' range to detect the scanning ship!

In particularly cinematic "Balance of Terror" games, a common trope involves hiding in nebulas or other environmental impediments to vision or sensors. Model this using *Nebulas*, *Ion Storms*, and *Gas Clouds* (*Spaceships* 4, p. 35). For even *more* unrealistic . . . ahem . . . cinematic games, consider having the crew make complementary Stealth rolls to avoid being *heard* by other ships. In this case, success gives a penalty to the hunter's sensor rolls and a failure gives a bonus!

At all TLs, warships should have DR approximately equivalent to two *unhardened* armor systems of the current TL per hull section – fine-tuned up or down with smaller systems (*Spaceships* 7, p. 4). They likely have a conventional power plant and reaction drive for use when not engaged in stealth maneuvers. These are usually powered down for stealth operations so the ship can operate on auxiliary power or off of a backup fuel cell. When an enemy is detected, the ship either powers up and shoots at the target, or uses the fuel cell to fire weapons. While it may be unintuitive, missiles and potentially guns inflict far too much damage to make good torpedoes; no sense in arbitrarily killing the PCs because of one bad dice roll after all! Instead, use energy weapons as described below so that PCs' ships can survive about three shots before being destroyed. This gives them a chance to retaliate or escape after getting hit, while still making direct hits frightfully dangerous.

IR MASKING [ANY]

An advanced coolant system that reduces the IR signature of any spaceship in which it is installed. Each system gives -4 to Detect rolls made to spot the vessel via passive sensors. No more than two systems can be installed. The penalty only applies if the IR masking is of the same TL as or higher than the array searching for it.

SM	+4	+5	+6	+7	+8	+9	+10	+11	+12	+13	+14	+15
Workspaces	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	10	30	100	300
Cost (\$)	150K	500K	1.5M	5M	15M	50M	150M	500M	1.5B	5B	15B	50B

Repair Skill: Electronics Repair (EW).

THE ALIEN MILITARY FORCE ROSTER

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Total TS</i>	<i>Classes</i>	<i>Mobility</i>	<i>Features</i>
1 Mothership (Flying Battleship)	180,000	Air, Nav	FA	All-Weather, Night, Sealed
12 HQ Network (Command Post)	(24,000)	C3I	0	All-Weather, Night, Sealed
16 Combat Robots (MBTs)	96,000	Arm, Cv, F	Mech	Night, Sealed
7 Scavenger Robots (Combat Engineers)	4,480	Eng	Foot	Night, Sealed
6 MP Contra-Gravity Light Drones (Sky Troopers)	1,440	F, Rec	SA	All-Weather, Night, Sealed
3 Local Command (Command Post)	(6,000)	C3I	0	Night, Sealed
3 Command Vehicles (Flying APCs)	6,000	Air, Arm, Cv, F, T1	SA	All-Weather, Night, Sealed
<i>Air TS</i>	<i>186,000</i>			
<i>Armor TS</i>	<i>102,000</i>			
<i>C3I TS</i>	<i>30,000</i>			
<i>Cavalry TS</i>	<i>102,000</i>			
<i>Engineering TS</i>	<i>4,480</i>			
<i>Fire TS</i>	<i>103,440</i>			
<i>Recon TS</i>	<i>1,440</i>			
<i>Force TS</i>	<i>290,920</i>			

THE BATTLE

The Terrans are outnumbered and outgunned. They forfeit the air part of the engagement and are outclassed as to C3I. But their reconnaissance is superior, and they are the only ones with artillery (albeit barely enough to count).

The Alien General

The basic value to calculate the aliens' chances to swat the Terrans away is their commander's Strategy skill. Since the players can come up with their own character designs to fill in the shoes of the Terran officers, and give them any Strategy skill level they want, the GM can customize the scenario by deciding how clever the enemy will be.

It is suggested that the aliens, not being that used to ground battles, will not have more than Strategy-14.

The Terran force is a hodgepodge of diverse units.

Basic Strategy Modifiers

The Basic Strategy Modifier for the Terran force is +3 (for the Special Class Superiority in Artillery).

The Basic Strategy Modifier for the alien force is +12 (+6 for the Relative Troop Strength, +3 for Air Superiority, and +3 for C3I Superiority).

The Reconnaissance Contest

The Terrans have a total modifier of +5 to their roll (see *GURPS Mass Combat*, p. 29); summing up: +1 because the

locals (what remains of them) are friendly, +1 because some of the troops have the proper Terrain feature, and +3 for their Recon Superiority.

The aliens are patrolling the area normally. They have a total modifier of +2; summing up: -1 because the locals are hostile and +3 for their Air Superiority. For the purpose of their roll, the aliens' effective skill is 14.

The modified Terrain Rating is 2 (3 for a Built-Up Area which both sides begin the battle from, -1 for the bad weather).

Hopefully, the heroes will have high Strategy and Intelligence Analysis, and they will at least win initiative or possibly surprise the enemy!

Important Options

The players should be made aware of the following options. The GM may require Strategy or Leadership rolls, and bestow information according to their success. Or he could listen to the players' tactical ideas and see whether something they come up with goes along with any of the following.

Or he could use a mouthpiece – the general, or an experienced junior officer – to provide hints.

First thing, the Terrans have a huge disadvantage, as shown by the Basic Strategy Modifiers. Their best chance is to take the aliens by surprise.

Even then, however, they are heavily outnumbered, and it would make sense for them to choose – if they can – an *encounter battle* (see *Mass Combat*, p. 32). That reduces their Artillery Superiority bonus to +2, but it also reduces to +2 both the Air and C3I Superiority bonus of the invaders, thus reducing their overall modifier to +8.

EIDETIC MEMORY HAZARD RATES

BY DAVID L. PULVER

Early in my *GURPS Space* campaign, the party acquired a tramp freighter – which I think they named the *Hungry Iguana* – and decided to try their hand as merchant adventurers. However, only one of them had a mercantile background, being the scion of an interstellar-trading family. Brought together by professional connections and a shared desire to leave the provincial capital a few steps ahead of various enemies, the group included an unemployed interstellar geologist, a retired space marine commando, an ecologist turned leftist revolutionary, and a psychic. They eked out a living with a mix of freelance black ops, interstellar salvage, tomb raiding . . . and free trading.

Due to their lack of experience and capital, their initial mercantile ventures proved unfruitful. After a few less than lucrative runs shipping electronic parts or grain for little profit, they turned up their noses whenever the speculative cargo table indicated a consignment of vegetables or farm machinery in favor of gauss rifles, drugs, or military robots. Now that the adventurers were actually seeking out illegal cargoes, it didn't make much sense to roll on the standard tables. So, I ended up creating a special one along with rules for this type of work. A *GURPS Spaceships 2: Traders, Liners, and Transports* version is presented here.

And the *Hungry Iguana*? Their smuggling spree ended when a gun-running charter led them to a terrorist plot to use stolen nuclear missiles to blow up a passenger liner carrying a diplomatic conference and thus start an interstellar war. Their better nature prevailed, they stopped the plot, and ended up on the government payroll as black ops.

The motto: take the hazard rates . . . if you know when to stop while you're ahead.

BLACK-MARKET CARGOS

Not all space merchants are law-abiding space truckers! Some are smugglers who work for criminal organizations . . . and others actively go into business for themselves, specializing in illicit speculative trading. The trading system in *Spaceships 2* allows a merchant to occasionally discover an illegal cargo shipment, but what if they're specifically looking for shady goods like blaster rifles, stolen air-cars, or illegal

drugs? As an alternative for the free-spirited (or black-hearted), the following *Low-Legality Cargo Table* (p. 22) is provided.

When deliberately hunting illicit cargoes, rely on the usual rules from Chapter 3 of *Spaceships 2* but add an extra penalty equal to the local Control Rating. (If looking for focused cargo, add that to the normal modifiers.) Moreover, if any roll fails by 5+, it means a potential encounter with either rival criminal gangs or law enforcement. This could range from an attempted robbery, arrest, or sting to a demand to be cut in for a piece of the action.

Using the Table

Roll two dice, one at a time. If this world is TL5 or less, halve the *first* die roll, rounding up. After any halving, apply the following modifiers:

On the first die, -1 if the world is Non-Industrial; +1 if Industrial.

On the second die, -1 if the world is Non-Agricultural, +1 if Agricultural.

Treat results that are less than 1 as 1, and those greater than 6 as 6. Read the two modified numbers consecutively as a two-digit number from 11 to 66, and consult the "Commodity" column on the *Low-Legality Cargo Table* to find out what sort of lot was discovered.

Next, determine the lot size in tons. The "Lot (tons)" column shows the die roll to figure the actual lot size (in tons).

Abbreviations in the "Price Modifiers" column are per *Trade Classifications, Spaceships 2*, p. 36. See *Speculative Trade, Spaceships 2*, pp. 35-39, for more details on determining the purchase and selling prices.

Special conditions are as per *Spaceships 2*, p. 39, except that *every* cargo on the table may be low-legality; roll 3d against the number in parentheses to see if the condition applies; if no number is listed, the cargo always low-legality. The GM should roll 1d against the CR of any given port the merchant plans to visit to see if the goods are illegal there or not.

As usual, attempts to sell illegal goods require getting them past customs, and have -2 when looking for a buyer but add +4 to the selling price.

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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, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

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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