

PYRAMID[®]

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SETBACKS

MAD AS BONES
by Christopher R. Rice

MONSTERS' MINIONS
by Michele Armellini

SPACESHIP MALFUNCTIONS
by David L. Pulver

**DESIGNER'S NOTES:
THE SILK ROAD**
by Matt Riggsby

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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IN THIS ISSUE

Adventurers are only as cool as the obstacles they overcome. In an effort to give heroes the opportunity to be more heroic, we present this issue devoted to setbacks, snags, and complications.

Maintaining stability in the face of adversity is a challenge for even the most seasoned of investigators; can you keep from going *Mad as Bones*? Christopher R. Rice – co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* – presents a complete optional *GURPS* system that allows for tracking and influencing the stability of heroes in challenging situations. Now heroes can struggle – and hopefully prevail – against fear, isolation, mental fatigue, and other ephemeral afflictions with more variety than ever.

Long story short, the heroes have poked something they shouldn't have, and now they need to face the *Monsters' Minions*. Michele Armellini – author of *GURPS Locations: St. George's Cathedral* – presents 16 threats that would be well-suited for a *GURPS Monster Hunters* campaign, or any modern-day *GURPS* campaign where the heroes fight against the forces of evil. Now you can have stats at a moment's notice – and a little background – for a pugilist, collaborator, or an old family servant . . . and a dozen other denizens of darkness!

In space, only your crewmates can hear you say “uh-oh” as you hurriedly deal with *Spaceship Malfunctions*. *GURPS Spaceships* author David L. Pulver presents options for having things go wrong with the various *Spaceships* components of a vessel, and how to fix them. For those looking to save a few bucks at the shipyard, it also includes options for reducing the price of a ship if it has problems. From radiation leaks to jammed turrets to software bugs, now traveling the void between the stars just got a *lot* more interesting . . .

Historically speaking, getting from here to there has always involved setbacks and complications, as showcased in *Designer's Notes: The Silk Road*. Matt Riggsby – author of *GURPS Hot Spots: The Silk Road* – looks at some recent discoveries in this historical connection of East and West, plus describes a handful of supernatural beasts that would make a great threat for those undergoing the expedition.

This issue also includes a Random Thought Table that looks at how to add setbacks that the players will appreciate. Whether in the past, present, or future – or struggling with your own mental fortitude – this issue of *Pyramid* is sure to have something to give heroes new ways to prove their mettle!

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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FROM THE EDITOR

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

When we first started the third volume of *Pyramid* magazine over eight years ago now, one of the possibilities I insisted we squeak in was “miscellaneous”-themed issues. After all, I reasoned, I’d hate for good articles to fall by the wayside just because I couldn’t find a theme to tie them to.

To date, we haven’t had one of those miscellaneous issues. To be fair, we’ve had some motlier issues than others, but I like to think that we’ve done a good job of tying together contents with a unifying theme.

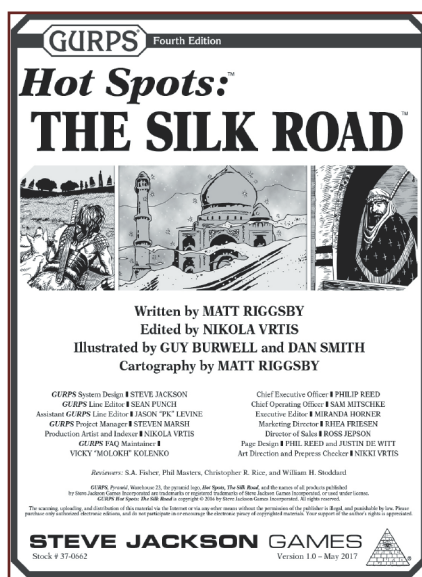
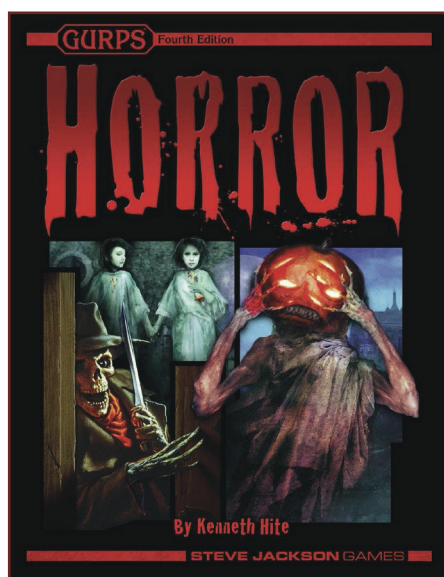
For a while, this issue looked like it might be the exception to the miscellaneous rule. But when I took another look at the articles I had that I wanted to find a home for – and when I asked David Pulver and Christopher R. Rice about their thoughts for articles for this issue – I realized that I *could* do an issue revolving around a broad theme of things going wrong.

This issue also focuses on some elements that I try to do for *Pyramid*: having at least one article that will ideally be of use to most groups, keeping you abreast of something new and cool among *GURPS*, and providing you with something that you didn’t know you wanted until you saw it.

So hopefully you find an issue that includes spaceships, the Silk Road, madness, and minions as awesome as I do just thinking about it.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Regardless of how you felt about this issue, we want to hear about it! Let us know if this issue is as cool as we envisioned, or if it’s a “setback” to the quality you usually associate with *Pyramid*. You can write privately at pyramid@sjgames.com, or set your thoughts down *back* at the public space of forums.sjgames.com.



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Preparation: +1 if you have previous personal experience with this kind of threat; +1 per exposure to this *particular* threat in 24 hours; +1 to +3 (depending on the quality of the report) if you learned the details of this particular situation before you witnessed it.

Fueling Supernatural Powers and Defending Against Attacks

Abilities may require SP in place of FP or LSP in place of HP. Some attacks can inflict SP loss; see *Innate Attack*, pp. 8-9, and *Terror*, p. 9, for examples.

Casting the Yellow King's Gaze Costs How Much?!

A simple switch to any magical system relying on FP might be to substitute casting costs for SP. This allows you to use familiar systems while completely changing the flavor of the magic. For powers-based systems you can do the same; simply use the rules for Costs Fatigue (p. B111). Additionally, in powers-based systems, any roll to improvise powers, use extra effort, etc. require SP loss, not FP loss.

Mental Disturbance

Whenever you suffer a severe mental disturbance (e.g., you fail a self-control roll for a mental disadvantage), you immediately lose 1 SP per *three* points of your margin of failure (critical failure turns this into LSP gain); round for the worse. Since players are encouraged to waive self-control rolls when appropriate, resisting mental disadvantages during such a situation reduces SP.

If the event does not normally call for a roll, make a Will roll, including the modifiers from *Ways to Become Unstable* (see p. 5); as always, a 14 or higher fails. Suffer one-third your margin of failure as SP loss (minimum 1, even on a success); critical failure turns this into LSP instead. Extremely stressful events (e.g., such as the loss of a loved one) *double* (or *triple*) that loss.

You may always choose to give in to a disadvantage when it comes up; if you do this, you suffer the normal effects of the disadvantage and do not roll self-control. This allows you to *regain* SP instead of losing it. Giving into your habits and inner nature help you regain control of yourself! Make a Will roll instead and *add* one-third of your margin of success to your SP total (minimum of +1 SP); critical success also lets you recover an equal amount of LSP, while critical failure means you suffer the effects of the disadvantage and lose SP normally.

Shell-Shock

Any battle that involves real danger, regardless of length (though not simple sparring), causes stress. At the end of the battle, you lose at least 1 SP, modified as follows:

- You were injured: +1 SP.
- You received a major wound or were reduced to 0 HP: +1 SP.

- Intense or lasting fighting: +1 SP.
- Battle included horrific deaths or mutilations: +1 SP (*doubled if the event involved someone you know*).
- You made no attack or defense rolls during the fight: -1 SP (*minimum 0*).

At the GM's option, SP lost from combat stress can only be regained by no longer being in a combat zone, or is treated as negative SP for the purposes of how it is shed. Actually going into negative SP from combat stress is liable to cause any number of issues, including *Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (**Horror**, p. 144).

Social Isolation

Extended solitary confinement is stressful. The average person in such a situation must roll once per day to avoid losing 1 SP; those with Chummy roll once every 12 hours, and those with Gregarious roll every six hours. Those with Loner do not need to roll. This roll is at a bonus (up to +4) with suitable distractions available, or a penalty (up to -10) if the environment is particularly boring. Optionally, Dreaming or Meditation may substitute for Will and suffer no penalty for lack of distractions.

Sustained Mental Exertion

Doing the same thing for extended periods, especially if boring and/or repetitive, induces stress. Any situation which requires absolute focus for a number of hours equal to (Will + 2) causes the loss of 1 SP: computer programming, research, Concept rolls for new inventions, long-distance travel (if driving or walking), studying, and other similar situations (in particular, anything that gets a bonus from Attentive or Single-Minded). Add an additional SP for each of the following applicable situations:

- If the skill being used is Hard or Very Hard.
- You are rolling against penalties of -10 or more.
- You are working hastily (penalties of -5 or more for *Time Spent*, p. B346).
- You are engaged in Intensive Training (p. B293).
- You are using a typically non-combat skill in combat or other hazardous situation.

The GM may allow a Will roll to reduce this penalty by 1 SP plus an extra SP per three points of margin of success. Single-Minded and Attentive give their bonus to this roll. Those with Obsession for a task they are working on receive +3 to this roll.

If the GM is using *Improvement Through Study* (p. B292), apply -1 per point of SP below 12 when engaged in *Intensive Training* (p. B293); Grounded and Very Grounded (p. 8) offset this penalty.

I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity.

– Edgar Allan Poe

If a tank containing antimatter fuel is leaking, fixing the leak may be hazardous, exposing the repair crew to 1d × 100 rads of gamma radiation every half hour they are working; a critical failure may also result in an explosion (see *Major Damage From Malfunctions*, p. 23).

Habitat Malfunction

Habitat systems consist of multiple individual cabins or rooms. Because each habitat system may have various options, no table can cover every possibility. Instead, the GM should simply pick one of the rooms or cabins and then roll 2d to see what might go wrong. Reroll anything inappropriate. If a habitat consists *only* of steerage cargo, instead consider rolling on the *Cargo Hold Malfunction* table (pp. 21-22).

2. *Furniture Malfunction*. This may be a swivel chair or desk lamp ceasing to work, or a closet door jamming, or lights failing in a particular cabin, or failure of a minor appliance, such as a coffee maker. Likely to produce loud complaints from passengers!

3. *Laundry Malfunction*. A failure in the habitat's washer or dryer systems (or some other high-tech clothing fabricator) may prevent proper cleaning of clothing, stain or shrink an entire set of uniforms, etc.

4. *Plumbing Malfunction*. This can range from backed up or overflowing toilets in one or more cabins to a shower with a messed up control dial (resulting in freezing or scalding water). Plumbing malfunctions could also impair laundry or food preparation operations.

5. *Software Bug*. See p. 21.

6. *Wastewater Recycling Malfunction*. This system reprocesses liquid and solid wastes for water. Failure results in a reduction of supply to stored water (this is 24 man-hours per rated occupant of the habitat) until fixed.

7. *Specialized Room Malfunction*. If the habitat contains specialized rooms other than simple cabins or cargo, something about them fails. If the ship has artificial gravity or spin gravity, a specialized room malfunction may instead

have a 1-in-6 chance of resulting in the gravity system ceasing to function. See *Specialized Room Problems* (below) for some ideas.

8. *Lighting or Intercom Malfunction*. Requires answering the question: How many spacers does it take to change a light bulb? One or more habitats or rooms is plunged into darkness or has communications cut off from the rest of the ship.

9. *Galley Malfunction*. Habitats with cabins (or cells) include kitchens with associated appliances (ovens, coffee makers, fridges, etc.). A malfunction in the galley appliances (often from human error) results in the total or partial interruption of food preparation until it can be fixed. At the GM's discretion, a galley malfunction could cause food poisoning (e.g., due to spoiled, contaminated or undercooked food).

10. *Climate Control Malfunction*. Temperature will either rise or fall (GM's discretion) by 3°F per minute until malfunction is repaired. It may be a problem with the entire habitat (roll of 1-3 on 1d) or a single cabin or room (roll of 4-6).

11-12. *Air Purification Failure*. This is a life support failure in the habitat system as a whole, rather than in an individual cabin. Failure in a major subsystem (such as carbon monoxide scrubbing) gradually turns the air toxic, triggering automatic release of short-term emergency oxygen systems and/or warnings to suit up. The end result is that emergency bottled-oxygen masks must be used. Air supply duration reduced to one man-hour per seat.

Hangar Bay Malfunction

Roll 1d for the type of malfunction.

1-2. *Hangar Bay Doors*. The hangar doors are jammed shut. Until repaired, entry or exit is impossible (at least without blasting one's way out).

3-4. *Refueling Lines*. Smaller craft may not be refueled from inside the hangar bay.

5. *Air Pump Malfunction*. The hangar bay cannot be pressurized if opened in vacuum.

6. *Software Bug*. See p. 21.

SPECIALIZED ROOM PROBLEMS

The options are too many to randomly determine, but they could include:

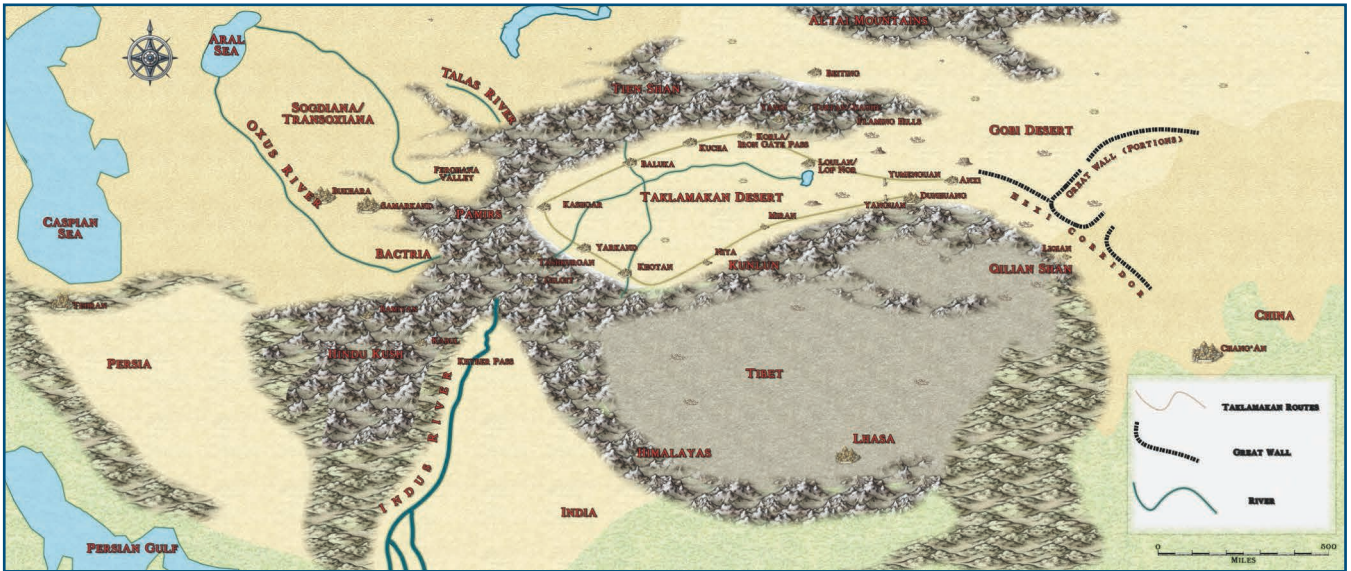
- Cell or cage's surveillance camera ceases to work or one or more cell locks open.
- Briefing room's A/V system fails (perhaps in the middle of a presentation).
- Establishment's automated credit or cash machine may be down, increasing the workload when serving customers.
- Hibernation chambers that malfunction will typically have some form of safety systems that sound an alarm. A successful Physician roll may be needed to safely remove the occupants of a failing hibernation chamber, with failure or inattention resulting in significant tissue damage (6d injury) from an unsupervised revival.
- Office terminal (or other piece of office equipment) ceases to work.

• Lab ceases to function, or, more, dangerously, a containment system holding a dangerous item that is being studied fails, risking contamination of the ship.

• Minifacs may suffer malfunctions identical to those of factories.

• Sickbay malfunctions are most likely to be in diagnostic systems such as medical scanners, eliminating the ability to use them for Diagnosis skill rolls, or in automated systems. Redundant safety systems in automeds generally mean they will simply stop working, but at the GM's option could inflict harm or inject the wrong drugs.

• Teleport projector malfunctions could either produce all manner of hideous effects of the sort found in old B-movies and sci-fi dramas, or simply stop working. A simple alternative is that the malfunction means they can send but not retrieve, or vice versa.



MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA, OVERVIEW

See *GURPS Hot Spots: Silk Roads* for descriptions of locations.

BESTIARY

The Silk Road tries to address real history, gesturing vaguely in the direction of supernatural belief mostly as a social phenomenon. When it comes to actual games, though, many GMs want something with a little more magic. For those purposes, here are a few magical creatures one might have encountered on the Silk Road, as imagined by those who actually traveled it, as well as one possibly real beast.

HEAVENLY HORSES

The famous “heavenly horses” which led China to open the Silk Road in the first place aren’t a particular breed, of course. They’re a general description of the kinds of horses available to the Chinese through Central Asian horse breeders. The cavalry horse (p. B459) and the heavy warhorse (p. B460) are both plausibly within the range of what could be sold as heavenly horses, but the “real” version of a heavenly horse below provides another reasonable example. However, the traits attributed to them by awestruck poets and generals suggest *truly* heavenly horses, semi-magical creatures with miraculous origins.

Heavenly Horse (Real)

Heavenly horses are a bit over average height for a horse, about 16 hands, but not huge like a draft horse. Ideally, in addition to “sweating blood” (possibly a symptom of skin parasites), they have a relatively small head, long neck, short legs, and a thickly muscled body.

ST: 23	HP: 23	Speed: 5.25
DX: 9	Will: 10	Move: 8
IQ: 3	Per: 10	Weight: 1,600 lbs.
HT: 12	FP: 12	SM: +1 (3 hexes)
Dodge: 9	Parry: N/A	DR: 0

Bite (12): 2d-2 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (10): 2d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Domestic Animal; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 16); Hooves; Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Weak Bite.

Skills: Brawling-12; Mount-13.

Cost: \$5,000.

Notes: If sweating blood is in fact a consequence of a skin infestation, HT may be 11 (reducing Speed to 5.00 but not changing Move).

Heavenly Horse (Mythic)

The heavenly horses of legend are the offspring of dragons. They are tireless, and they seem to fly. Such animals are priceless.

ST: 23	HP: 23	Speed: 5.25
DX: 9	Will: 10	Move: 9
IQ: 3	Per: 10	Weight: 1,600 lbs.
HT: 12	FP: N/A	SM: +1 (3 hexes)
Dodge: 9	Parry: N/A	DR: 0

Bite (12): 2d-2 crushing. Reach C.
Kick (10): 2d+1 crushing. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Domestic Animal; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 18); Hooves; Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Walk on Air; Weak Bite.

Skills: Brawling-12; Mount-14; Running-12.

Notes: Mythic heavenly horses may sweat blood as they exert themselves, but they never tire. They neither have nor spend Fatigue.

ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of **GURPS** players. We can be reached by email: info@sjgames.com. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

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Or explore that hashtag for ideas to add to your own game! The *Pyramid* web page is pyramid.sjgames.com.

Gamer and Store Finder (gamerfinder.sjgames.com): Connect with other people and places playing our games. Add yourself to our database so they can find you as well!

Bibliographies. Bibliographies are a great resource for finding more of what you love! We've added them to many **GURPS** book web pages with links to help you find the next perfect element for your game.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Errata pages for **GURPS** releases are available at sjgames.com/errata/gurps.

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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