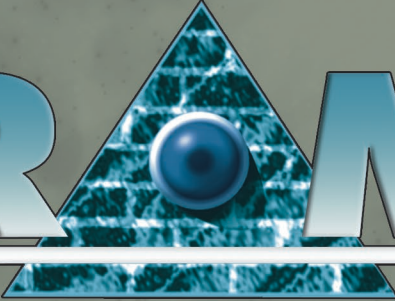


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/111 January '18

COMBAT II



THE WITCHED GUN

S.A. Fisher & Christopher R. Rice

ASTRODUEL!

David L. Pulver

THE WRESTLER

Sean Punch

CREEPY CHARLY

J. Edward Tremlett

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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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
- Orange:* Special Features
- Purple:* Systemless Features

COVER AND INTERIOR ART

Aaron Panagos

Sometimes fighting isn't just *an* option for solving problems; it's the *only* option! This issue looks at some new possibilities for what roleplaying games were originally designed for: *Combat!*

When shootists need an edge beyond mere mechanical means, they're sometimes tempted to pick up *The Witched Gun*. This feature – from *GURPS High-Tech* co-author S.A. Fisher and *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* co-author Christopher R. Rice – looks at the history of firearms as mystical and mythical armaments, and includes a number of new *magical GURPS* options to augment their potential and power from across the gamut of gunpowder weaponry.

If you're looking to come to grips with problems in a cavernous crypt, consider tapping the powers of *The Wrestler*. *Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game* author Sean Punch delivers this challenging new profession for that boxed set (with notes for how to use it with *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*). You'll discover new skills plus a ready-to-use hero.

Sometimes the road to adventure isn't a road at all, but space "highways" filled with enemies to *Astroduel!* This month's Eidetic Memory installment from *GURPS Spaceships* author David L. Pulver takes the flavor of *Car Wars* and translates it to space, with a campaign history, setting assumptions, factions, and *Spaceships* craft to make interstellar combat up close and personal.

Humans aren't the only ones who fight for their lives; sometimes our friends with four legs, wings, or tails unleash *Animal Combat Styles*. This collection of techniques for *GURPS Martial Arts* and *GURPS Technical Grappling* gives the edge to combative critters.

If you're looking for armaments that are beyond the cutting edge, sometimes your best bet is to track down *Creepy Charly*. A one-man justification for the Early Adopter perk, this odd fellow's history and personality are presented just enough to bring him out of the shadows . . . albeit briefly and begrudgingly.

This issue also includes a Random Thought Table that looks at how you can modify some basic assumptions of adversaries to present countless dangerous and exciting variations for heroes to face.

Whether you're crawling through dungeons, patrolling the space lanes, or trying to get an improbable firearm to face an impossible enemy, this issue of *Pyramid* is sure to have something to make the heroes' hostilities more harrowing. Adventure awaits!

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FROM THE EDITOR

I SENSE A THEME

When I was growing up, there was a science-focused educational program in the United States called *3-2-1 Contact*. I was never as much of a fan as I wanted to be, although it had a great recurring segment called “The Bloodhound Gang” that featured junior detectives in various science-based mysteries.

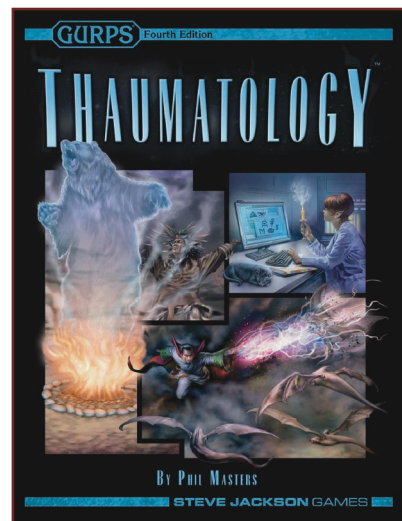
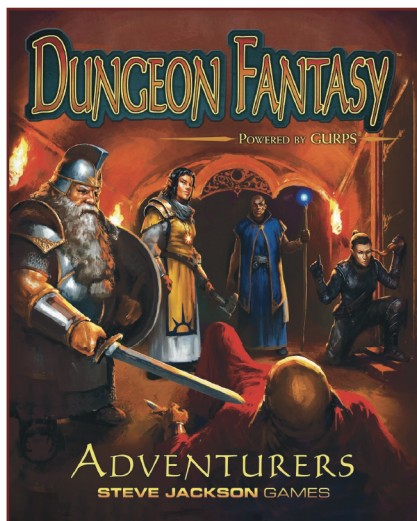
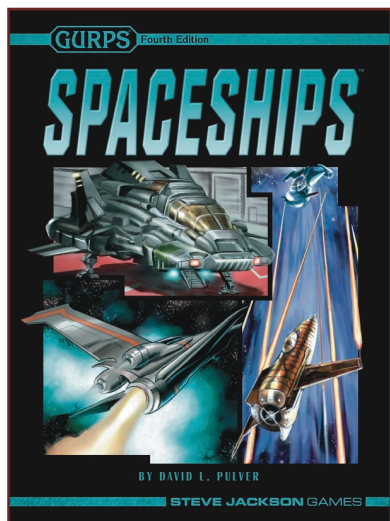
My enjoyment of the show coincided quite strongly with my fledgling interest in roleplaying games, unsurprisingly – as a child of the early 1980s – focused on a certain classic dungeon-crawling roleplaying game. Now, these two interests converged because my young mind felt the need to convert the awesome *3-2-1 Contact* theme song to reflect my newfound interest in slaying monsters, changing the lyrics in my mind: “3-2-1! Combat is the secret / is the moment when everything happens. Combat is the answer / is the reason that everything happens . . .” If you haven’t heard the original theme song, I heartily recommend looking for it on YouTube; the trivial one-word filk substitution will make itself obvious. (And if your brain is otherwise uninfected with earworms, I also recommend the theme song for “The Bloodhound Gang.”)

All of this is preamble to the realization that – as amusing as eight-year-old me no doubt found my theme-song revision – there was a certain truth. Combat *is* the moment when everything happens in many roleplaying games, and it behooves us gathered around the gaming table to try to make combat as cool and interesting as possible.

That’s where this issue of *Pyramid* comes in handy. It includes articles of interest to shootists, dungeon crawlers, spacefarers, and more. Exhibiting martial prowess is such an integral part of so many games because it’s so darn fun, and hopefully this issue will spark something new with your old fighting spirit. Let’s make combat!

WRITE HERE! WRITE NOW!

So did this issue punch above its class, or did it give up the fight? Your a-*sword*-ed comments help us improve our publication. How are you using this material in your campaign? What do you wish we’d write about? Let us know via private feedback at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the public discussion online at forums.sjgames.com.



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Gun magic was perhaps strongest in American folklore, where the gun was an essential element of survival on the frontier, enhanced by gun magic of Swiss and German immigrants and even some American Indian beliefs.

Magical guns make excellent fodder for any campaign in which guns play a part, modern or historical, fantasy or realistic. They are especially suitable sources for Quirks, Delusions, Obsessions. They even give an in-game justification for the Weapon Bond perk. In certain types of fantasy or horror settings, these may even have actual game effects.

Folk magic, and particularly gun magic as described below, uses the common tropes associated with magical laws as described in many Western sources. Folk magic draws upon the laws of sympathy and similarity (see *GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 14) and especially the uses of traditional materials and zodiacal, planetary, or decanic correspondences (see Appendix A of *GURPS Thaumatology*). In any of the magical rules described below, the GM may allow these to provide bonuses to virtually any magic roll where the weapon can somehow be incorporated, up to +1 per category in the right circumstances. For instance, a gun decorated with death motifs (+1) in silver (+1) would provide a +2 to spell-casting rolls where death, silver, etc would resonate. Likewise, any of these features might count toward *Traditional Trappings*, *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*, p. 19.

Each section below is broken up into two parts: the real-world myths and boxed text detailing how to describe those myths using *GURPS*.

Death

Shooters have long associated the magical theory of contamination with their guns or bullets, believing that guns were more deadly when something connected with death was

New Skill: Expert Skill (Folklore)

When the setting involves a myriad of superstitions and folk beliefs, it make sense to create a new Expert Skill just for understanding folklore. While Occultism is a practical skill, Expert Skill (Folklore) is purely factual (like any other Expert Skill). It can allow the user to answer questions about superstitions, local beliefs, religious practices, and folk tales. It also stands in for Area Knowledge, Geography, Occultism, and Theology for that purpose. In some campaigns, this skill may permit either a generous default to Occultism (-2 to -3) or may replace it entirely. Ask the GM before you take either skill in his campaign.

incorporated into or used in them. A bullet that had killed a person, once recovered for reuse, was considered especially powerful, particularly against witches or supernatural creatures. Likewise, shot taken from a game animal was sure to kill again. Digging up a coffin, taking a nail from it, and driving the nail into a rifle's stock "guaranteed" the gun would kill any target. Storing bullets in a human skull made them deadlier. This effect might be enhanced by the skull of an enemy, or a murderer – or if the bullets resided in the skull from one full moon to the next.

Bullets were reputed to be more destructive if dipped in or sprinkled with human ashes or blood, or when rubbed with the blood or fat of a predatory animal or a corpse. Old-fashioned muzzle-loader rifled bullets could use this fat as lubrication; Haitian rebels in the 18th century reportedly greased their sunsights with human brains to make the bullet hit its mark. Of course, some claimed simply keeping bullets in their pocket during a funeral was sufficient to guarantee it would kill its target.

POWER OF DEATH

Using the death of another being to create more death makes symbolic sense in most mystical traditions. In general, the GM can allow a death-related ritual to provide a *one-time* bonus to damage by requiring a roll against the better of Occultism or IQ-based Guns skill at -4. This roll takes a *further* -2 to per point of additional damage dealt and requires 1d × 10 minutes to locate appropriate ingredients or perform necessary actions (*Extra Time*, p. B346, applies). No more than one such ritual preparation can affect a given weapon or ammunition. *You* can, however, ritually prepare ammunition and a weapon separately.

In addition to whatever is required to enchant an item in the preferred magic system, permanent effects add a cost factor depending on the bonus. For guns, +1 damage is worth +10 CF, +2 damage is worth +15 CF, +3 damage is +20 CF, +4 damage (or +1d) is worth +30 CF, and so on, following the "Linear Measurement" column of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* on p. B550. For ammunition, +1 damage is worth +2 CF, +2 damage is worth +3 CF, +3 damage is +5 CF, +4 damage (or +1d) is worth +7 CF, and so on. The GM decides on the limit for the damage

bonus, but setting it at half (or full) TL, equal to a special talent (such as Magery, Occultist, or Power Investiture), or to (total points in skill)/4 are all valid approaches.

Optionally, such effects might not do additional damage, but rather ensure that a well-placed shot is deadly. This can be done in several ways. The bonus could instead reduce hit location penalties to the vitals, eye, or skull. In this case, use *half* of the penalty or CF given for an equivalent damage bonus (round up). For example, a roll against Occultism at -4 (not -8) to ritually prepare a bullet could give the shooter +4 to hit, but *only* to negate the hit location penalties for targeting the eye of a target.

The bonus could instead represent an increase in the odds of making a critical hit. In such cases, *double* the penalty or cost for a damage bonus for each bonus to the critical-hit threshold. It's up to the GM if this can increase the critical-hit threshold beyond 6. Finally, the bonus could be a modifier when rolling on critical hit (or similar) tables; use the same penalty as for damage (above). If a critical hit is rolled, the shooter can include the bonus to his roll as either a penalty or a bonus – his choice.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see *Dungeon Fantasy Adventurers*, p. 55.

† Those who vow to fight unarmed can replace the melee skill with a sixth choice from the last list.

Customization Notes

The biggest decision is how to spend advantage points. Stronger is better, so extra ST or Lifting ST is a safe bet. While wrestlers tend to be muscle-bound and ungifted in the Basic Speed department, higher Basic Move to shoot in for the grapple is valuable – as is Enhanced Dodge for avoiding attacks you *can't* parry. It's also good to be tough enough to withstand vicious escape attempts (HT, HP, Fit, Hard to Kill, Hard to Subdue, or High Pain Threshold) and bounce back from them (Rapid Healing or Recovery). Sorcery and fear can stop you just as readily, so consider Will, Fearlessness, or Magic Resistance.

Disadvantage choices speak mostly to motivation: Are you a prizefighter, wrestling your way out of poverty (Greed and low Wealth)? An honorable warrior with something to prove (Obsession and Vows)? Or a thug defined mostly by Bad Temper, Bloodlust, Bully, Callous, etc.?

Skills allow wrestlers to diversify considerably. Most require a weapon, but there's little point in picking an expensive one when you boast ST 15+; Axe/Mace, Broadsword, Shortsword, Smallsword, Staff, and Tonfa all go with various clubs and sticks. You may prefer an inexpensive knife (Main-Gauche or Knife), something that lets you disarm foes before grabbing them (Jitte/Sai or Whip), or the flair of nunchaku (Flail). Then decide whether your background is gladiatorial (Lifting is likely, plus Acrobatics and Sumo Wrestling for show), the streets (Carousing, Forced Entry, Intimidation, Stealth, and Streetwise), being an adventurer from the outset (Climbing, Fast-Draw, Hiking, Parry Missile Weapons, and Thrown Weapon), or some other path.

Consider using four of the five points from quirks for another level of Wrestling, as that translates directly into more ST when grappling. Of course, additional advantages are nice, and it's fine to pool these points to get, say, ST +5. Trading points for money is another option: It might not seem necessary, but high ST and Lifting ST let you carry a *lot* of gear, and Wrestling (unlike Judo) is unimpeded by encumbrance.

SPECIAL WRESTLER TRAITS

The wrestler can raise ST to 25 instead of 20; *starts* with three levels of Enhanced Parry (which boosts *all* unarmed parries) and three apiece of the barbarian's Lifting ST and Tough Skin advantages (*Dungeon Fantasy Adventurers*, p. 16); and can buy an impressive three levels of Enhanced Dodge and an unprecedented *six* of Lifting ST. The wrestler also begins with the martial artist's Immovable Stance and Push skills, and can learn Parry Missile Weapons.

One special advantage is reserved for wrestlers alone – and all three special skills need notes.

Wrestling Master

10 points

When you grapple or parry using Judo or Wrestling, your arms and hands count as weapons: Enemies don't get free attacks if they parry you; likewise, if you fail a parry using those skills, your assailant can't opt to attack your arms instead. *Deliberate* attacks targeting your arms or hands can still injure them normally, but you get +3 to HT rolls for crippling (and to resist Wither Limb spells!). You enjoy the same benefits with the Push skill, but *not* when striking for damage.

Your ST bonus in a grapple, break free, strangle, take-down, or pin isn't limited to +2 if you know Wrestling at DX+2 (*Wrestling, Adventurers*, p. 93). It's +3 at DX+3, +4 at DX+4, and so on, with no upper limit!

Finally, you may learn the martial artist's Immovable Stance, Parry Missile Weapons, and Push skills without needing Trained by a Master, and buy up to *six* levels of Lifting ST.

Being a Drag

The wrestler's shtick is grappling strong, mobile enemies to keep them from escaping. Bear in mind that while you cannot prevent a rival with more than twice your ST from taking off with you hanging on (*Dungeon Fantasy Exploits*, p. 41), your Lifting ST and Wrestling bonuses count here; e.g., a wrestler with ST 15, Lifting ST 3, Wrestling Master, and Wrestling at DX+6 has effective ST 24 and can prevent a ST 48 foe from leaving by walking, slithering, flying, or any other means besides teleporting or becoming vapor or spirit. Opponents with ST between yours and twice yours can break free quickly but must waste a turn doing so – and you can re-grapple them *next* turn. To defeat rivals who can teleport or transform, see *Immovable Stance* (below).

Wrestler Skills

Thanks to Wrestling Master, a wrestler can learn three special skills.

Immovable Stance

see *Adventurers*, p. 32

Anchoring yourself isn't just useful against knockback and falls. If a rival you've grappled or pinned tries to escape by teleporting or changing form, you can anchor *them*, too! They must *win* a Quick Contest of their special ability (where unspecified, use the higher of IQ or Will, plus Magery or Power Investiture if magic is involved) vs. your Immovable Stance or their power fails and they remain in place, in their current form.

Parry Missile Weapons

see *Adventurers*, p. 33

Tough Skin 3 suffices to allow wrestlers to parry missiles barehanded.

Push

see *Adventurers*, p. 33

Wrestling Master lets this skill count as an *armed* attack – if your attempt is parried, there's no special risk to your hand.

Subspace is inherently inimical to ordinary matter, causing it to disintegrate into elementary particles. However, subspace has multiple levels (or frequencies). If two star gates are built and set to the exact same frequency, a one-dimensional “hyperstring” median stretches between them. The cosmic vibrations of the hyperstring open a stabilized path through hyperspace. This path, the starway, is initially no wider than the entry gate, but quickly expands to a maximum diameter of just over 100 miles. Within the starway, the matter-disrupting effects of subspace are neutralized, permitting material objects to safely traverse the distance. Should a vessel drift beyond the starway, its destruction is assured.

King William's Star Knights

In the early years after the Disconnect, colonial governments were often displaced by warlords, pirates, or soldiers. One such boss, William Lee of Zachary Station, adopted the title King William of Zachary and promoted his best pilots into an order of “star knights,” granting the most favored among them conquered or derelict systems to hold as fiefs in his name. William encouraged them to adopt a chivalric code of honor, patrolling the space lanes and dueling with pirates and raiders. Competition between star knights is fostered with an annual astrodueling arena tournament held around Zachary’s moon. Mercenaries and duelists from outside the realm are also encouraged to attend, with prizes and rewards (including knighthood and service to the crown) offered.

ABCs of Starway Travel

Main worlds in Alliance space are orbited by one to three gates, depending on how important they were when the Solar Union was building gates. To use a star gate, a spacecraft leaves parking orbit or a space-station hangar bay, and maneuvers through the portal into the starway. Once through, the pilot hits full thrust on the spacecraft’s nuclear engines, spending delta-V. A minute or so of acceleration will reach a cruising velocity, usually 0.3 to 0.6 miles per second.

The spacecraft then drifts at this velocity down the starway. Engines are activated only when course corrections are needed or in combat. The average starway is 900 miles long for every parsec or fraction separating the two connected gates. Usually, this is one to six parsecs (effectively 900 to 5,400 miles). Flight time in seconds is thus the starway’s length in miles divided by the chosen cruise velocity in miles per second. In other words, for every 0.1 mps of speed, traveling a thousand miles takes 10,000 seconds.

When the starship’s sensors indicate the starway is narrowing toward an exit, the spacecraft’s pilot uses its control system’s attitude thrusters or gyros to orient on the star-gate mouth (the “funnel”) and emerge. The gate automatically corrects for planetary- and stellar-relative motion, and the starship comes out of the gate in the destination system in normal space, often into an orbit a few hundred miles over a planet.

Some emergent vessels cut their velocity (taking a minute to decelerate) and maneuver to rendezvous with the nearest

space station. Others continue on, orientating on the next gate (if there is one). However, even if just passing through, it’s courteous to identify yourself and spend a few minutes chatting with the local station traffic control, sharing any news or gossip by radio.

When approaching a station or planet, incoming spacecraft ask permission to dock or land and determine if there are any fees (often \$10 per ton for a hangar dock, \$1 per ton for external docking). If a visitor has freight, damage, prisoners, or medical emergencies, an alerted friendly station may have stevedores, paramedics, repair crews, or security staff on standby. After attending to any urgent business, most crew who are up for it then head to the station’s lounge, bar, or other establishments to relax for a few hours. If they’re staying longer, they rent a hotel room.

Pirates or others attacking the local station will make threats, launch ordnance, and maneuver to attack the station, or any nearby craft. The station will usually defend itself with any onboard weapons or launch its own spacecraft. For someone who is a space trucker, astroduelist, or the like, it’s basic courtesy (and good sense) to join the defense.

STARWAY ENCOUNTERS

There is a chance per hour of encountering something on the starways. A good way to determine this is to add up the starport classes on either end of the starway and roll that number or less on 2d. (See *Star-System Categories*, p. 17, for details on specifying starport classes.) For instance, if the starway is between class II and III ports, an encounter will occur on a 5 or less per hour. Pick an encounter from the list below, or roll 1d to determine one randomly.

1d Common Encounters

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Patrol |
| 2 | Space Trucker |
| 3 | Convoy |
| 4 | Commuter, Taxi, or Courier |
| 5 | Astrodueler |
| 6 | Other (roll 1d on the table below) |

1d Other Encounter

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 1-2 | Pirates |
| 3 | Space Bus or Tanker |
| 4 | News Craft |
| 5 | Battle or Duel |
| 6 | Floater (person or wreckage; roll again, starting with the common-encounters table above, for origin; reroll 5-6 on second table) |

Patrol: One or two astroguard craft, vigilantes, or colonial rangers, either on general patrol or a specific mission. Decide whether they’re within their jurisdiction; if so, they may be on the lookout for pirates. Some patrol vessels attempt to enforce local ordinances such as speed limits, weapon laws, etc. within a few parsecs of their system; often a fine (really a bribe of a few thousand dollars) is what they’re really after.

ABOUT *GURPS*

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