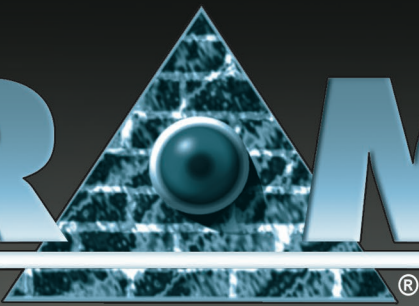


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/120 October '18

ALTERNATE GURPS V



OPUS LONGA, PUGNA BREVIS

Sean Punch

THE FIFTH ATTRIBUTE

Christopher R. Rice

CONDITIONAL INJURY

Douglas Cole

DESCRIBING VEHICLES

David L. Pulver

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Infinite possibilities wrapped around an easy-to-understand core, **GURPS** is a perfect system for tinkerers, like a cosmic roleplaying-game craft shop or home-improvement store. Sometimes you want to really experiment with what's possible. This issue is devoted to alternate **GURPS** – new ideas that push the envelope of what the system is and does.

When combat overlaps with long specialist tasks, there's always the danger of folks losing interest . . . but you can keep the excitement high for everyone with *Opus Longa, Pugna Brevis*. Sean Punch – mastermind of the **GURPS Action** series – shows you how to repurpose haste and chase rules to make sure everyone always has something to do. He also provides guidelines for using combat-style resolutions to deal with every situation, regardless of whether it involves fighting.

In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of the **GURPS Spaceships** series – provides a step-by-step process for *Describing Vehicles*. This feature provides all the information you need to assign **GURPS** stats to real-world vehicles, using the Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird as an example and including several tables loaded with samples.

When you want you a little more fine-tuning for your hero with extraordinary abilities – and you don't mind messing with a foundational element – consider adding *The Fifth Attribute*. Christopher R. Rice – co-author of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic** – reveals the nature of Quintessence and how it can be used to measure a person's control over supernatural energies. You'll also get tips for combining it with any of several systems for magic and the paranormal.

The venerable Hit Points system is great for tracking abstract harm with numerical precision, but sometimes you want to shake things up with *Conditional Injury*. Douglas Cole – author of **GURPS Martial Arts: Technical Grappling** – demonstrates an effects-based system for tracking wounds. Learn about the new Robustness Threshold trait, how to determine damage and the effects of injury, and how to recover from wounds. You'll also get a few new ways to make this system even more interesting.

Finally, this month's Random Thought Table looks at how to shake up the concept of progress, replacing (or augmenting) the standard skill-progression system with a system of fluctuating skills. If you've ever wondered why a pulp hero can be a martial-arts master one month and barely above-average the next, this idea might be for you.

Whether you want to shake things up, unleash new magic, or give your campaign a new set of wheels, this issue has something to jumpstart your imagination.

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

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FROM THE EDITOR

SHELF CARE

A number of years ago, I decided to make a bookshelf for myself in our house. I found a plan online, which seemed relatively forgiving in terms of measurement, tools required, and skill level. Since I lacked all of those things and more, it seemed like a good fit.

That initial bookshelf used a power drill, hacksaw, and wood sawed by the hardware store we bought the lumber from. We managed to transport everything home in a small sedan. True to its word, the plans were sound, and I cobbled it together quickly and easily enough. There were many things I did wrong with it – uneven holes, strange slopes, unpainted wood, jerry-rigged parts – but it still stands today in the bedroom, functioning as a 5'-wide floor-to-ceiling custom bookshelf for my graphic-novel collection.

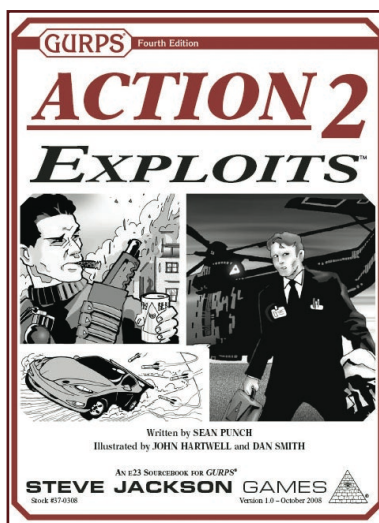
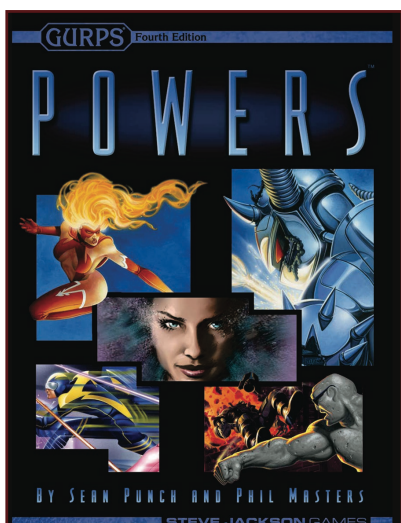
I took the skill I acquired from that process to make another bookshelf of the same design, this one in the entry hallway. I painted for the first time, and discovered many fascinating and incorrect ways to apply paint to wood. But the holes were straighter, the cuts more precise, and the whole thing came together well, looking like a built-in part of the house.

A year or so ago, I used what I learned to make a wall-sized “entertainment center” for my son’s redesigned bedroom. I used a drill press acquired in the intervening years to make perfect holes, and applied my hard-earned painting expertise. I rejiggered the plans to fit his television and video-game systems perfectly, added lots of storage options, and painted it jet black to match his new loft. It made his bedroom truly special.

I’m reminded of this process as I think about *GURPS*, and how fascinating it is to build something new and wonderful, based on pieces you already know, and experimenting with new and exciting bits. Each issue of *Pyramid* tries to provide some of those new bits for your own games, waiting to be put to good use. This month’s *Pyramid*, especially, is devoted to those doing strange and daring things to their games, all in pursuit of something amazing. I hope it finds a good home on your shelves . . . however you may design them.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

How does *Pyramid* fit into your game-improvement plans? Don’t be *shelf-ish*; let us know! Write privately to pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the do-it-yourself community at forums.sjgames.com.



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OPUS LONGA, PUGNA BREVIS

BY SEAN PUNCH

In *GURPS*, heroes normally deal with rivals through either Contests (pp. B348-349) or series of discrete attack rolls, defense rolls, and rolls for effect (such as damage). By contrast, they most often handle inanimate dangers, puzzles, and obstacles by making a single, unanswered skill roll: disarm the bomb or trap, figure out the controls, open the lock, repair the gadget, etc. Making an *opponent* difficult involves giving that adversary higher attributes, skills, and active defenses, leading to longer and (with any luck) more dramatic encounters. Engineering a tougher *situation* mostly amounts to penalizing PCs' skill rolls.

Usually that's fine! Adventure games are traditionally about *teams*, with each member tackling specific kinds of tasks: the burglar disarms, the cleric or doc heals, the detective or scout investigates, the face talks, the whiz kid casts spells or does lab work, and so on. Speedy skill rolls let experts do their part without turning the session into a "mini-game" that's fun for one but boring for the others.

Combat is special because it directly engages and endangers *everyone* – not just the warriors – so it customarily enjoys extra time and detail. But what happens when combat or similar action (such as a chase) overlaps a specialist task? If the task requires a single-digit number of Concentrate or Ready maneuvers and/or a skill roll (e.g., casting a spell to unlock a door or heal a friend, exploiting a social skill to mislead the enemy, making a Tactics roll for the team, or completing one of the long actions listed on p. B383), it fits well enough into combat pacing to require no special treatment. If it takes longer – well, now it's the *expert* who's bored.

GURPS offers a couple of rules to address that: *Time Spent* (p. B346) and *Rounds* (*GURPS Action 2: Exploits*, pp. 31-32). Read on to learn how to repurpose those, and for a whole new option: *Life Is a Battlefield* (pp. 6-8).

HASTE

If a task is one for which working faster makes sense and involves a success roll, the heroes can voluntarily take penalties to *force* it into combat time; see p. B346. The feats players most often want to rush take minutes to an hour. Examples:

- One minute to attempt Escape (p. B192) or Lockpicking (p. B206), tie up a helpless foe (p. B401), or bandage (p. B424) or resuscitate (p. B425) an ally.
- *At least* one minute to cut a fence (*GURPS Action 2: Exploits*, p. 20).

- One minute to set a fantasy trap with the Traps skill (*GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 12), or 10-30 minutes to set a realistic trap using Survival (p. B223).

- For quick gadgeteers, 1d minutes to figure out strange technology, and then 1d×10 minutes to modify it (p. B477).

- Five minutes to defuse a cinematic bomb (*Exploits*, p. 28).

- Up to 30 minutes to render First Aid (p. B424).

- Half an hour for minor repairs (p. B484).

- An hour to fix a weapon with a mechanical or electrical malfunction (p. B407).

For a one-minute task, reducing time by 90% *might* suffice; after six turns, roll at -9. Longer actions – and possibly even one-minute feats, in desperate situations – take too long for that, and require the GM's permission to try instant use at -10.

If the task requires equipment – bolt cutters, first-aid kit, lockpicks, toolkit, etc. – *it still does*, unless the player wants to eat *Equipment Modifiers* (p. B345) on top of haste penalties. As well, the gear's user must be in reach of the person or thing being worked on (in the same hex or an adjacent hex, on a battle map). This can necessitate Ready maneuvers to dig out tools (see *Not-So-Long Actions*, p. 5) and Move maneuvers to get into place – and that's fine, because it gives the expert something to do!

Twist: That "Forever" Seemed to Last an Instant

Instant feats can overcorrect the problem, leading to too much happening in too little time, and to players trying to abuse such deeds as free actions (pp. B363-364). To curb this, the GM may rule that for anything that takes one minute or longer, "instant" is relative and actually one second: a Concentrate maneuver for IQ-, Will-, or Per-based tasks, a Ready maneuver for ST-, DX-, or HT-based ones.

If permitting haste for tasks that take hours, plural – e.g., realistic computer hacking and safecracking – bump "instant" up to one second *per hour*. Optionally, allow players to reduce even this incredibly short time, to a minimum of one second, at an extra -1 per second shaved off. For instance, if hacking The Computer takes an eight-hour workday, "instant" takes eight seconds and a Computer Hacking roll at -10; when The Computer is shooting death rays, you might try to do this in one second, at -17!

EIDETIC MEMORY

DESCRIBING VEHICLES

BY DAVID L. PULVER

These guidelines are intended to help assign a modern or historical vehicle's basic statistics based on real-world information that is easily available in published books and online sources. They provide the information needed to *describe*, rather than design, the vehicle. The focus of this article is on the statistics of real-world vehicles, such as cars and airplanes. It doesn't spend much time discussing spacecraft, as *GURPS Spaceships* provides plenty of guidelines for those.

Example: For a black-ops/monster-hunter game, we want to stat up the Lockheed SR-71 Blackbird strategic reconnaissance aircraft, a supersonic spy plane famous as the world's fastest airplane, and also used in variant form by a popular mutant superhero team. Theoretically retired from CIA/USAF use shortly after the end of the Cold War, we assume a few examples were secretly transferred off the books for chasing UFOs and similar missions.

BASIC VEHICLE STATISTICS

A vehicle stat block, such as those found in the *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS High-Tech*, looks like the *Air Vehicle* table below. These rules describe how each of the headings and numbers were derived from readily available sources.

Example: For sources, we'll use the first ones that come up in an online search (in this case, Wikipedia).

AIR, GROUND, SPACE, UNDERWATER, OR WATER VEHICLE?

The first thing to decide is how the vehicle moves. In vehicle stat blocks, the movement type is usually fairly obvious, but it can be indicated by a heading such as "Air Vehicles."

There are five basic movement types:

Air: The vehicle flies in an atmosphere, like an airplane or helicopter.

Ground: The vehicle moves on the ground, like a car or wagon.

Space: The vehicle flies in vacuum, like a spaceship.

Underwater: The vehicle can move while submerged, like a submarine.

Water: The vehicle floats on the surface of water (or some other liquid), like a boat.

Some vehicles can operate in multiple environments. You need only specify the performance statistics for the primary environments the vehicle will operate in. For example, you do not need to list ground performance for aircraft that move on land only when they are taxiing on a runway.

Air Vehicle

For additional game details about this craft, see *Notes and Descriptions*, p. 19. Terms and notation are as defined in *Vehicle Statistics* (pp. B462-463).

TL	Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Stall	Loc.
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PILOTING/TL (HIGH-PERFORMANCE Airplane)

7	SR-71 Blackbird	163	-1/3	11f	5/1,075	76	2	+7	2PS	5	3,300	\$204M	86	gW3Wi
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THE FIFTH ATTRIBUTE

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

GURPS has four basic attributes (Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, and Health), each representing a physical or mental aspect of a given character. Other games have a statistic measuring supernatural or paranormal power, which doesn't precisely map to any one **GURPS** attribute. There are numerous examples: Palladium's *Rifts* roleplaying game has "PPE" (Potential Psychic Energy), *Shadowrun* has "Essence," *Big Eyes/Small Mouth* has "Soul," and so on. **GURPS** lacks such an attribute, but one could easily be added. Including a separate trait to measure paranormal resources allows creation of an even greater range of characters, so you can

design, for example, a physically weak and mentally average hero who can tap into incredible internal power. It works best in campaigns where protagonists can expect to be attacked regularly by mages, demons, or other beings with abilities for controlling minds or inflicting psychic damage.

This article adds the *Quintessence* attribute and provides guidance in applying it to select existing **GURPS** systems for supernatural abilities. (This version of Quintessence is distinct from those mentioned in other **GURPS** supplements, such as *GURPS Alphabet Arcane* and *GURPS Powers: The Weird*.)

THE QUINTESSENCE OF POWER

This system introduces a new attribute and a new secondary characteristic. The first measures the raw paranormal power the character possesses, and is called *Quintessence*, or *QN*. The second measures the person's ability to use supernatural powers, and is called *Quintessence Points* or *QP*. *Quintessence Points* also represent how on guard the character is against supernatural forces. At low *QP*, natural barriers degrade, just as the person would grow tired and less physically capable with lost *FP*. While everyone with supernatural powers benefits from above-average *Quintessence*, those who practice magic tend to learn how to store ambient paranormal energy within themselves, providing an in-game excuse to purchase more *Quintessence* or *Quintessence Points*.

For the purposes of this article, it's assumed that *Quintessence* is the power underlying superhuman and paranormal abilities, and is entirely decoupled from intelligence or physical strength. Where a power would normally use *Fatigue Points* (in **GURPS**, that's most of them), it now taps the person's pool of *Quintessence Points* – but "fatigue of the soul" can be just as debilitating as fatigue of the body! If you're running low on *QP*, you are less resistant to non-mundane attacks, much as a fighter finds it harder to lift their shield when they're tired. Lose too many *QP*, and you risk unconsciousness or death.

Quintessence (QN)

±10 points/level

Quintessence measures a combination of supernatural capability, raw mystical power, and

innate talent with paranormal abilities. It also represents your resistance to those abilities. A *Quintessence* of 10 is *free*, and is considered the human average. Higher-than-average scores represent mystical training, honing chi, highly developed "internal mana," and so on. Lower scores represent spiritual degradation, improperly aligned chakras, refracted internal mana, etc.

Even without training, *Quintessence* is an *attribute*, just like *Dexterity* or *Strength*. It gives the following two benefits to *everyone*.

- *Quintessence Points*: *QN* determines base *Quintessence Points* (p. 22).

- *Supernatural Resistance*: When resisting a supernatural ability, *Quintessence* is used in place of any other attribute, skill, etc. Alternatively, the GM can decide that a higher or lower *Quintessence* instead affects the standard roll. If so, someone with a *Quintessence* of 10 or greater adds +1 to their roll per three full points that *Quintessence* is above 10. Conversely, if the person has a *Quintessence* of 9 or less, when resisting supernatural abilities, they either roll against

Quintessence or suffer -1 per two full points that *Quintessence* is below 9.

Those without much exposure to the supernatural will probably not have extremely high or low *Quintessence*!

*Quintessence is
a new way to express
paranormal power.*

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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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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