

PYRAMID[®]

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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 Wicked 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.

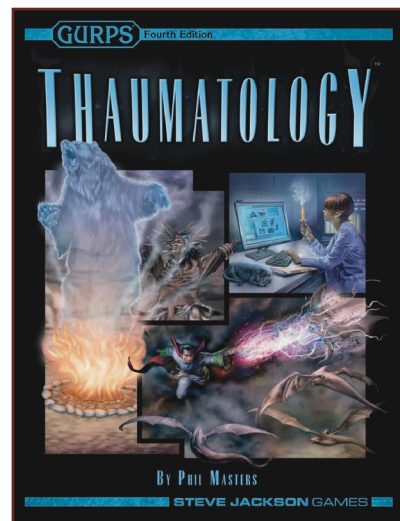
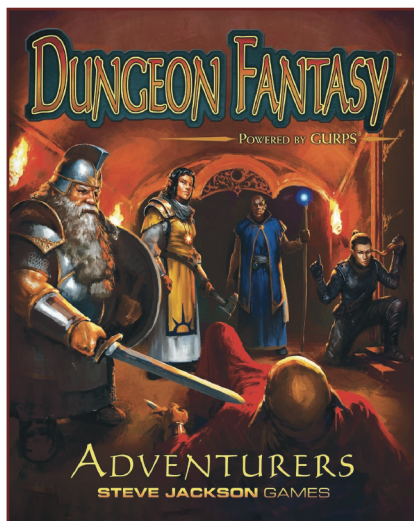
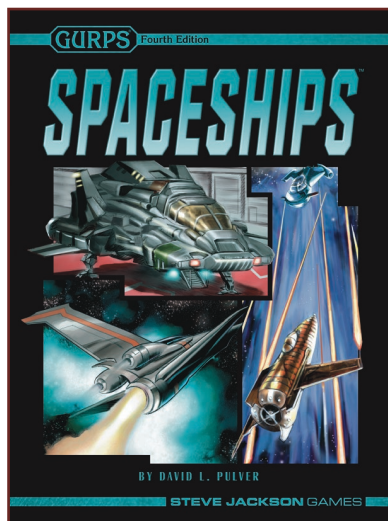
My enjoyment of the show coincided quite strongly with my fledgling interest in roleplaying games, unsurprisingly – as a child of the early 1980s – focused on a certain classic dungeon-crawling roleplaying game. Now, these two interests converged because my young mind felt the need to convert the awesome *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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THE WITCHED GUN

BY S.A. FISHER AND CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

Susan Keys huddled in the back of the Chinook helicopter with her cameraman, the stench of blood, sweat, and jet fuel strong in her nostrils, a body bag dumped on the floor at her feet.

The battlefield today had been a dusty valley in the Hindu Kush not far from Kabul. Yesterday, she'd been down in the Helmand provinces, near Zabol. Every day for a war reporter was another ambush, another skirmish, another journal entry, another story.

She looked at the passengers her chopper to Kabul had been diverted to pickup. They had never spoken, these four bearded men across from her. They just clambered aboard with the body bag. The group was trying to sleep, sweating, stripped down to their t-shirts, their body armor and gear piled at their feet. They wore a mix of traditional Afghan garb and U.S. athletic clothing – jamas, pakool, Oakley glasses, Adidas boots, Under Armour t-shirts, and the like. Each wore a necklace from which dangled dog tags, rosaries, crosses, amulets, and so forth. She spotted a few Afghan tarwi charms alongside Catholic saints medals. Two of the men had a single bullet on a leather cord around each of their necks.

In their laps they cradled their rifles. These were not the usual slick black modern weapons of American GIs – these looked older, pre-modern, fetishistic. The guns had been painted in a mottled desert color scheme at some point, but it had worn off in places. A white, spray-painted skull adorned each stock, along with black tiger stripes and Arabic script. The rifle muzzles ended with sharp, serrated teeth. One man carried the same weapon, but with a grenade launcher attached, a white saber-toothed tiger painted so that the huge bore of the weapon was the tiger's open mouth. The slings were of woven paracord, with dog tags, crosses, and more saints medals woven into them.

One of the men opened his eyes and looked at her.

She looked back, swallowed, and said, "What have you been doing?"

He responded without expression, "Working."

With our modern, rational, materialistic worldview, we typically treat guns and bullets as antiseptic science or technological toys. However, the gun is also a symbol of power, and like any other such symbols, it has produced superstitions, myths, and old wives' tales. In many campaigns, such stories are likely to be just that – stories. But if the supernatural and occult are real in a game, why not make those stories real as well? By introducing protagonists to these magical beliefs about guns, it is possible to imbue the weapons with mysticism, even in a present-day or futuristic setting.

This article gives real-world accounts of the myths and magic surrounding firearms and firearm paraphernalia. It also provides game-mechanical "crunch," allowing the GM to create a more detailed occult campaign featuring the magic of guns. It does not prescribe any particular magic system; rather, it offers suggestions on how things may be replicated for various types of magic.

FOLK VIEWS ON FIREARMS

The Chinese made the first gun in the 12th century, and ever since it has been an object of fear and fascination. John Milton in *Paradise Lost* reckoned that the gun came from Satan and his rebellious angels. In Renaissance Europe, some believed that rifles were more accurate because their spinning bullets made it impossible for demons to sit on them. The great medieval alchemist Albertus Magnus, it was said, invented both the pistol and the cannon. Cotton Mather insisted that the Rev. George Burroughs – the only minister executed for witchcraft in colonial America – could lift a gigantic fowling piece by "putting the forefinger of his right hand into the muzzle . . . and hold it out at arms-end," sure proof of his contract with the devil. American Indians recognized the gun as a powerful medicine and adorned them just as they did their hatchets, clubs, and spears. Today, guns are used in Palo Mayombe rituals by Central American drug cartels, with the intent to rely on these "spirit guns" against their enemy's souls.

Defining exactly what magic is, and is not, in comparison to folklore, religious ritual, and superstition is well beyond the scope of this short article. The material presented here uses all these terms interchangeably.

FOLK MAGIC AND THE GUN

The gun and its projectiles and accouterments – from Russia and Eastern Europe to Scandinavia and Central Europe, all the way to Africa and North America – have always been associated with magical qualities. Over time, the gun has accumulated a large body of folklore and magic, most of which was originally ascribed to rings, jewelry, bows, arrows, swords, armor, and so forth, but became linked to guns as its place of importance in material culture ascended.

Of course, gun magic varied from country to country, with a richer mystical tradition in those countries with a stronger hunting culture and more permissive gun ownership.

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 gunsights 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.

Words

A scrap of paper with some obscure words written on it was often slipped under the butt plate of a rifle stock or kept in the patch box of a Kentucky rifle. This was said to give the gun more accuracy or destructive power – or perhaps protect against a hex being placed on the gun (see below). In the 19th century, it was rumored that all St. Louis-built Hawkins rifles had this protection. Exactly *what* the message read has not yet been discovered. According to the witch-hunter's bible, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, simply carrying a bit of paper with scripture written on it (such as John 1:14, "The Word became Flesh" or Luke 4:40 "Jesus passed through their midst") was enough to short-circuit a hex.

In America, German immigrants equipped their rifles with a *powwow*, a talisman, written in Latin. One such phrase translated as "No one looks deeply into himself, but does see the pack on the back of the one who walks before."

During the 17th century, one phrase believed to protect against gunfire was +ZADA+ZADASH+ ZADATHAM+ABIRA+ (the crosses are especially important for Christians). The phrase, some claimed, must be written on "virgin paper."

Some riflemen during the American Revolution inscribed their rifles with patriotic slogans such as "Liberty or Death" with the belief that this was a powerful talisman.

Symbols

When American Indians first acquired their guns through the fur trade, the flintlock had a serpent motif on the lock. Most native purchasers insisted that all other guns have this serpent, considering the creature to be a symbol of power. Many long rifles of Pennsylvania and Kentucky were marked with a horse head, a crooked heart, or an X-mark placed under the barrel. The eight-pointed "hunter's" star was another common symbol, supposedly linked to the Star of Bethlehem and thus to Christ. Silver bullets were, it was said, sometimes inscribed with a cross or the letters J.M.J. (Jesus, Mary, and Joseph).

Many other symbols have been used on guns, including dragons, angels, eagles, and dogs. Aztec iconography, such as human skulls, has been found alongside angels and cherubs on Spanish-made guns in the New World because the guns were re-worked in the Spanish-held city of Vera Cruz by Mesoamerican natives trained in gunsmithing.

POWER OF WORDS

Words and ritual phrases have long guarded against magic, demons, and other supernatural forces. The GM can allow a roll against Occultism, IQ-based Guns roll at -4, or Theology (as appropriate) and 1d hours worth of work mixing appropriate inks, inscribing, etc. The first time that the protected firearm malfunctions, jams, or requires an HT roll, the wielder can instead make *three* rolls and take the best roll, as if the gun has a temporary version of Luck. If the phrase only protects against supernatural attempts to destroy, misalign, or otherwise affect the firearm, it instead gains a resistance roll equal to *half* the margin rolled on the skill used to enable the protection. Regardless of what happens, the magic user misses whatever he was aiming at.

For effects that increase the deadliness of the weapon, use the rules for *Death* (p. 5) instead. For phrases that grant the *user* protection, either allow temporary Luck (as above) against the first critical hit affecting the user, or give the user "DR (Force Field; Limited, Bullets only)"

equal to *half* the margin rolled on the skill that enabled protection. Optionally, the GM may rule that this effect mimics the Bless spell (*GURPS Magic*, p. 129) instead. In such cases, every three points of the ritualist's margin grants a level of blessing (e.g., a margin of six grants a 2-point blessing).

In addition to whatever is required to enchant an item in the preferred magic system, permanent effects add a cost factor of +9 CF (for protection against malfunctions, jams, or HT rolls) or +0.5 CF *per* +1 to rolls (to resist supernatural tampering). Permanent damage-resistance effects add a cost factor depending on the bonus: +1 DR is worth +3 CF, +2 DR is worth +7 CF, +3 DR is +15 CF, +4 DR is worth +30 CF, so on, moving up the "Linear Measurement" column of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) two steps at a time. The GM sets the cap for damage bonus, but half (or full) TL, a special talent (such as Magery, Occultist, or Power Investiture), or (total points in skill)/4 are all valid approaches.

POWER OF SYMBOLS

Firearms bearing symbols are like any other totemistic or ritualistic item: they give the wielder a measure of power. The effects of such items vary depending on what sort of supernatural powers exist in a given campaign setting. Two examples include:

- *Holy Symbol*: The firearm has been inscribed with religious images and consecrated to a particular faith tradition. It can be used with *True Faith* (p. B94). It can harm creatures who possess certain traits (e.g., Vulnerability or Weakness) normally. This adds +4 CF.

- *Mystical Symbol*: The firearm has been embellished with magical images and imbued with mystical power.

The actual effects depend on the magic system used, but in general, any firearm with a bulk of -4 or less counts as a "wand," while a bulk of -5 or more counts as a "staff" (thus allowing the user to ignore -1 or -2 worth of range penalties for spells cast "through" them). Additionally, firearms use all the normal rules for a staff (*GURPS Magic*, p. 13), meaning the mage can cast touch spells *through* his gun by touching the target with the gun (or its bayonet). Optionally, if the gun can deliver spells by *range*, then the firearm gains a linked attack – hitting with the bullet, even if it doesn't penetrate DR, means the spell *also* affects the target! This adds +1 to CF (if it can deliver spells via touch) or +29 CF (if it can deliver spells via range).

Other adornments, such as the crescent moon and star associated with Islam, can be found on guns made in the Middle East. Afghan *tarwis*, folk charms created as protection against *jinn* and sickness, can be found on Afghan National Army rifles, a practice that has been appropriated by U.S. and allied special operators. Modern drug traffickers in Mexico adorn their handguns with Roman Catholic religious iconography, including the crucifix, the Virgin Mary, and Santa Muerte, a folk saint of the dead.

Sometimes these symbols were simply drawn on a scrap of paper and placed in the rifle's patch box or placed between the barrel and stock.

Materials

To protect the gun from being hexed, Pennsylvania gun-makers frequently placed needles between the barrel of a long rifle and the wooden stock – perhaps a dim folk connection to the idea that “cold iron” protected from the fae. A crumb of communion wafer or a few grains of salt placed in the patch box were also used – all common elements long established as good for fighting witchcraft in Europe. In fact, some may have considered the striped burly maple stocks of the long rifle as a component of magical import when it came to the accuracy of the rifle itself, just as yew was considered the preferred wood for the English longbow.

Silver has long been thought of as ideal magic-bullet material; one shooting contest in 1547 in Mainz, Germany featured silver bullets engraved with religious symbols. A great many guns in Europe and America have had silver embellishments, including chasing, repousse, and engraving, often in hunting or martial themes, and potentially creating a sympathetic magical effect as well. Not all such decoration counts as styling (*GURPS High-Tech*, p. 10), though the elaborately decorated guns of the Mexican Drug cartel often include diamonds, rubies, gold, and silver, which certainly would be attractive to other gang members, drug dealers, and gun collectors – and possibly to certain Afro-Caribbean spirits.

American Indians believed the gun was a powerful religious object in its own right. Mandan sachems ritually purified guns with tobacco smoke and salt. Apache medicine men attached a bead of turquoise to a gun to make it accurate. Warriors commonly decorated their firearms with feathers and animal totems (usually hides, teeth, or claws), and sometimes brass trade tacks. The brass tacks were said to represent a scalp taken from an enemy, thus producing a death association (p. 5) with the rifle.

Materials also feature in folklore as protection against bullets. Many people carried with them a bullet that was extracted from their body as luck charm. Likewise, it once was a common practice to treat the bullet, once removed, with various concoctions aimed at producing a sympathetic response in the patient. Some strategies included washing the bullet in wine, vinegar, or a special salve or oil. Casting the bullet into another shape (such as a religious symbol) was also a useful strategy for curing the wound itself.

During WWII, Japanese soldiers often wore a strip of cloth which had 1,000 stitches woven into it – each stitch put there by a different person. The soldier's mother might stand on a street corner and beseech passersby to make a stitch for her

son. This cloth was worn into combat as protection against harm, wrapped around the warrior's head or torso.

Today, U.S. Marine Corps scout-snipers are given upon graduation from their sniper course a “hog's tooth,” a single bullet which they wear around their neck at all times. The hog's tooth is not only a symbol of the scout-snipers profession, but like the 1,000-stitch belt, it is supposed to provide protection.

POWER OF MATERIALS

There are extensive lists of material correspondences in *GURPS Thaumatology*. For example, decanic correspondences appropriate to firearms include Agchoniôn (noise), Anatreth (bullets), Arôtosael (gunpowder), Charchnoumis (hunter's weapons), Eneuth (sulfur), Marderô (gunpowder), Ouare (gears, clockwork), Phoubêl (x-shapes), etc. Those using Ritual Path magic may treat some weapons as reusable, possibly expensive decanic trappings (*GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*, p. 36).

The costs of adding materials to a weapon depends entirely on the materials themselves. Such costs can be found in numerous *GURPS* books, including the *Low-Tech* series. The *effect* of adding such embellishments may mimic just about any listed in this article. For example, if a material adds to its user's mystical or holy power, use the rules under symbols (p. 8). Optionally, the GM could grant a bonus equal to the total CF of the weapon / 3, rounded up, to rolls to cast spells while holding onto the firearm.

Rituals

It was once a common belief that rubbing a new gun three times on your left leg would bring good luck. Another superstition suggested that if one boiled a gunflint in rue and vervain, the weapon using that piece would never miss. A new moon on Sunday was an auspicious time for casting bullets. One common ritual was to draw a picture or a mark on a tree which resembled the hunter's game, and then shoot it; this guaranteed a successful hunt.

Ozark hill folk believed that by urinating or pouring blood down the barrel of a gun, or by holding a gun in a stream so water flowed down the barrel, it would be protected from witchcraft or make it so that it would never miss. Some Mexican police in recent years have turned to animal sacrifice during a full moon in order to protect themselves against the magic bullets of the *narcosatanicos*.

If a witch could rub a hand on a gun, it would never hit again. In some tales, the gun was hexed by any woman's touch, or just by the word of a witch. If a person inadvertently kicked a rifle on the ground, he would die of a gunshot wound. Likewise, it was considered bad luck to place a rifle on a bed.

The Cherokee believed that a gun fired at the sacred wolf had to be disassembled, filled with burned sticks, and placed in a brook overnight. Blackfeet Indians claimed that any gun that had been fired at a wolf or coyote would never shoot straight again.

POWER OF RITUALS

Guns used with Ritual Path magic spells may feature as reusable, possibly expensive decanic trappings (*GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*, p. 36).

Firearms that are cursed or hexed should use the usual rules for a campaign's magic system. As a variation not tied to a specific system, the executor can make a Will-based roll against Occultism at -2, an appropriate Guns skill at -4, Symbol Drawing at -1, or Ritual Magic. This takes 1d minutes, after which the ritualist must briefly touch the weapon or otherwise make some contact. One-third the margin of success then gives a penalty to all rolls to use the weapon for one day per point of success. The GM may decide that this subtracts from the weapon's Malfunction number instead. Blessing a weapon uses the same rules, but bestows a bonus instead.

Shooting at specific targets or in specific ways may result in the gunner blessing or cursing himself. In most cases, a roll versus Occultism is required to perform this kind of "folk blessing" correctly, with the bonus equal to the margin of success (minimum of +1). The GM may decide that such modifiers are restricted to certain tasks (e.g., hunting) or shooting against a specific target (e.g., the witch who hexed your musket). A curse in the form of penalties to future rolls to use the gun may come from shooting at particular targets (e.g., fae-protected animals) or in certain places (e.g., consecrated ground).

Freeshooters (and similar tales) would bestow either Gunslinger (p. B58) or multiple weapon-specific skill levels (both with the Pact modifier, p. B113) on those who made such a Faustian bargain. The GM may also use the Guided Weapon imbue from *GURPS Power-Ups 1: Imbuements*, p. 8. Alternatively, he could use the rules from *GURPS Power-Ups 4: Enhancements*, p. 11, to modify one specific firearm, usually with the Guided (p. B106) or Homing (p. B106) enhancements.

POWER OF NAMES

Like rituals, names can have any sort of effect on a weapon, though the GM should restrict them to effects befitting the title. For example, a weapon called "Go-and-Seekum" might get the bonus to skill bestowed by a death effect (p. 5), but only for hunting game, not for shooting people. The GM may wish to use the Named Possession perk (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 19) to simulate such ritualistically named items. Using a bullet with a target's name might grant a bonus depending on how close the name is to the target's real name (see *Names*, *GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 245). For example, if you wrote your target's full name on the bullet, then it would grant +2 on rolls to hit and damage them. Optionally, those using Ritual Path magic could rely on the following spell.

Bullet With Your Name On It

Spell Effects: Lesser Strengthen Matter + Lesser Sense Spirit.

Inherent Modifiers: Damage, External Crushing (Side Effect, Instant Death).

Greater Effects: 0 (x1).

This spell is cast as an ammunition charm (*Ritual Path Magic*, p. 27). the bullet must bear the name of a specific target. Against that one target, the bullet does an additional 3d of crushing damage and requires the subject roll HT at -1 per 2 points of penetrating damage or die (just as if he suffered a mortal wound).

Typical Casting: Lesser Strengthen Matter (3) + Lesser Sense Spirit (2) + Damage, 3d External Crushing (Side Effect, Instant Death, +350%) (70). 75 energy (75 x 1).

According to German folklore, a *freischtuz* (freeshooter) was someone who sold his soul to the devil to gain an unerring rifle. In some versions of the story, the shooter was given a number of bullets that would never miss. One way to gain this boon involved firing from your rifle a bullet cast on a cross-road on Christmas.

Various rituals in folklore use guns to help one to become a witch. For example, one only had to fire a silver bullet at the moon "and mutter two or three obscene old sayin's," or to repeat the Lord's Prayer backward "and fire seven silver bullets at the moon." Another version had the person shoot at the sun just as it appeared in the morning for nine mornings in a row, after which a drop of blood would appear on the gun barrel, "and the Devil appeared and you sold your soul."

Names

Traditionally, the act of naming an object caused it to acquire a life or spirit of its own. Many gun owners have named their guns at least in part because they considered them lucky (or unlucky, in some cases). In Scotland, one particular legendary gun was simply known as "the black gun of misfortune" for its role in an infamous murder. Legendary Texas Ranger Frank Hamer called his favorite Colt revolver "Old Lucky." Mountain men sometimes named their rifles in hopes of gaining hunting prowess: "Go-and-Seekum" or "Knock-him-stiff." James Fenimore Cooper called his hero's rifle "Killdeer." Buffalo Bill dubbed his rifle "Lucretia Borgia," after Victor Hugo's femme fatal. U.S. Marines were for many years ordered to name their rifle after their girlfriend. Davey Crockett styled three different rifles after his sister Betsy. American troops in World War I called one 155mm artillery piece "Betsy the Sniper" in honor of the gun's accuracy. It is not uncommon to find a gun's name etched, engraved, or in modern times, simply spray-painted on the weapon.

A silver bullet is believed to be more effective if inscribed with the target's name or (less commonly) the shooter's name. According to Malay legend, Magat Terawis carried four bullets inscribed with (in part) "wherever his bullets fall he will become chief." He fired a bullet at a chief, Tan Saban, who was merely scratched by the shot.

However, upon picking up the inscribed bullet, the victim read the inscription and died, leaving Magat as chief. Military units have, since at least World War I, painted or inscribed sayings onto artillery shells and bombs, including, of course, the names of their targets.

Gunpowder

While bullets and guns were often seen as important talismans, gunpowder with its stink, flash, and smoke was not ignored. As early as the 15th century, soldiers have swallowed a small amount of gunpowder before battle as a charm to protect them from gunfire. Santeria practitioners sometimes use gunpowder in their ceremonies to awaken the spirits.

Gunpowder purportedly had healing properties, too. American Indians used it for snake bites. A pinch of gunpowder mixed with warm water or sour milk was regarded as a sure cure for disease or infection and administered to women for labor pains. Other women used it as an abortifacient. Soldiers in the 15th century, and long after, used gunpowder mixed in wine to prevent infection or blood poisoning. An itch, boil, or sore could be healed with a paste made of gunpowder and wood ashes mixed with sweet cream. Gunpowder placed in the cavity of an aching tooth would deaden the pain.

Sounds

In some American Indian cultures, the gun represented thunder and lightning. It was used in various dances, such as the Green Corn Ceremony (celebrated by the Cherokee, Seminole, Yuchi, and Iroquois tribes).

A witch, it was said, could fire a gun and anyone within earshot would find that their gun would instantly malfunction. The only way to reverse the “witch gun” spell was to draw a picture of the suspected witch on a tree, and then shoot it (sometimes this required a silver bullet). This would lift the spell and injure or perhaps kill the witch.

For rule suggestions to mimic this, see p. 10.

Totems

A gun totem is a weapon that looks like a gun. In Zimbabwe and central Africa, the traditional weapon for killing an evil spirit or witch is the *kaliloze* gun, or night gun. A human thighbone served as the barrel and was fitted to a piece of wood so that it looked like a miniature musket. Typically, the local witch doctor prepared the gun with a shot of sorghum and millet and gave it to the wronged person; that person then approached the sleeping witch and touched off the gun with a match, thereby breaking the witch's spell.

American Indians from the early 17th century sometimes used a gunstock club. This was a wooden club carved in the shape of musket, sometimes with a metal, flint, or horn spike added where the lock would be. The intent was to capture the power of the gun simply by using its shape. Sitting Bull

POWER OF GUNPOWDER

Gunpowder superstitions that bestow protective bonuses use the rules under *Power of Words* (p. 6), while those that heal might grant a bonus of +1 or +2 to Esoteric Medicine rolls. The GM may also use the rules for material and symbolic components (*GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 128) for those using Path/Book Magic. Those using *GURPS Magic* might find this spell useful.

Essential Gunpowder

Regular

Transforms regular gunpowder into the perfected essence of gunpowder. Essential Gunpowder does not spoil, get wet, or ever go bad. This improves the Malfunction number by 3 when using ammo that contains Essential Gunpowder. If used in the manufacture of match-grade or extra powerful ammunition, it doubles the normal benefits and drawbacks. This can also be incorporated into explosive powders, but not something like C4 or detonating cord. For explosive powders enhanced with Essential Gunpowder, only double the REF.

Duration: Permanent.

Cost: 3 per pound of material; if casting this on ammunition, use the weight per shot (WPS).

Time to cast: 30 seconds.

Prerequisites: Essential Air, Essential Earth, and Essential Fire.

Item

Wand, staff, or jewelry. Usable only by mages. *Energy cost to create:* 800.

POWER OF TOTEMS

Like names, totems can have any sort of effect on a weapon though the GM should restrict them to effects befitting their use. For example, weapons made of human bone might use the rules for death (p. 5) or materials (p. 7). Firearms that have been repurposed into a club, for instance, might count as one step higher quality thanks to its previous usage.

turned over a gunstock club when he surrendered to U.S. Army General Nelson Miles.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

There several sources for folk magic about guns that may be useful for GMs and players. The primary references for Pennsylvania powwow doctors and their ilk were the Bible, *Malleus Maleficarum*, and *The Long Lost Friend* (by John George Hohman). In particular, Hohman's book includes many sayings for “charming” guns.

Eliason, Eric A. and Tad Tuleja. *Warrior Ways: Explorations in Modern Military Folklore* (University of Colorado Press, 2012). An extensive detailing of folk magic beliefs popular in modern military units worldwide.

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POWER OF SOUNDS

For folk magic that relies on sound to curse a specific victim's firearm, use the rules under *Power of Rituals* (p. 8). If this applies to everyone who can hear the weapon go off, the GM can require the one doing the cursing to spend either 15 FP (a hefty sum!) or 2d+1 *hours* ritually preparing the firearm (which must then be used immediately) and spend 6 FP. The GM can then make Hearing rolls (p. B358) for all of those who could be affected to see if they heard the shot.

To reverse such a curse per the generally accepted method (see *Sounds*, p. 6)), those affected can roll Occultism at -2, Symbol Drawing at -1, or Ritual Magic. Artist (Drawing) provides a complimentary skill bonus to this roll, *but* this requires that they know who cursed them. Success means the curse is lifted. Success by 5 or more (or critical success) means the witch must immediately succeed a HT roll, with at -1 per 2 points per margin of success by the curse lifter, or suffer injury equal to HT roll's margin of failure!

For those using *GURPS Thaumatology: Sorcery*, the following spell simulates the firearm hex described above.

Firearm Hex

Keywords: Obvious, Resisted (Special).

Full Cost: 81 points.

Casting Roll: Will.

Range: Special.

Duration: Permanent.

You can fire a gun, and anyone who hears the shot (*Hearing*, p. B358) must then roll a Quick Contest of your Will + Sorcery Talent vs. the *lower* of their Will or HT or the HT of their firearm. Failure means the firearm takes a -10 to its Malfunction rolls until the hex is reversed. This attack ignores DR, but instead allows those with Protected Hearing to gain a bonus to their rolls.

Statistics: Affliction 1 (HT; Accessibility, Firearms Only, -40%; Area Effect, Hearing Range*, +400%; Based on lowest of Will, HT, or firearm's HT, +60%; Emanation, -20%; Extended Duration, Permanent until Reversed, +150%; Hearing-Based, -20%; Male-diction 1, +100%; Malfunction† -10, +100%; Nuisance Effect, Must fire a shot from a firearm, -10%; Sorcery, -15%) [81]. **Note:** Add "Terminal Condition: Shooting portrait of witch" (-20%) if desired, reducing full cost by 2 points.

* Roughly equivalent to Area Effect 8, fair for most rifles, but exchanging surety of targeting for potentially greater range depending on weapon and subjects' Hearing.

† You can modify the Malfunction statistic of a piece of gear. This costs +10% to increase or decrease the value, or *double* that if you can decide to increase or decrease it each time you use the affliction.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christopher R. Rice is very superstitious and often reads the writing on the wall. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's spinning words and whimsy into gold. Of course, if he's not writing about *GURPS*, he's blogging about it. Visit his site "Ravens N' Pennies" (www.ravenspennies.com) for more *GURPS* goodies. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group (the Headhunters); Beth "Archangel" McCoy, the "Sith Editrix" for being most excellent sounding boards. He's the co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* and *Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game: Traps*.

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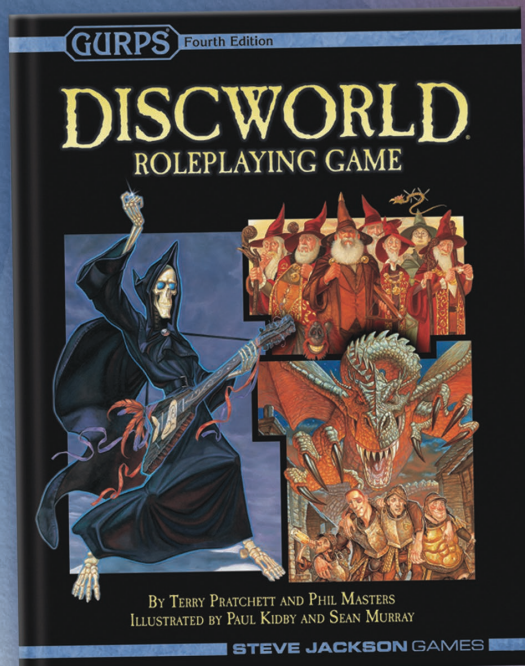
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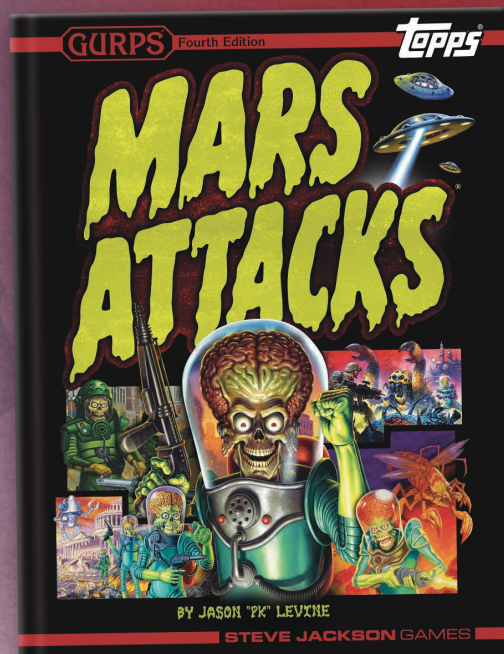
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THE WRESTLER

BY SEAN PUNCH

Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game heroes slay monsters. Yet some foes can easily flee to a safe distance. Others are difficult to defeat owing to DR or other protection. And thanks to personal codes (druids and elves defend plants and animals, Charitable delvers want to help enemies, and so on), the circumstances of your quest (e.g., the person you're rescuing is possessed by The Devil), or the demands of *Interrogations* (*Dungeon Fantasy Exploits*, p. 10), there are opponents you must restrain, even capture.

Entangling weapons (bolas, lariats, nets, etc.) can work but aren't hard to cut or burn. Nonlethal spells – like Rooted Feet, Sleep, and Total Paralysis – are ineffective on foes with Magic

Resistance or high attributes. Paralytic slime and sleep potions face the same resistance problem and are costly ("Great, we just wasted *another* \$500.").

Grappling the target is crude but effective – *if* the grappler is sufficiently strong and skilled. Most heroes aren't, but the wrestler specializes at this and still hits hard enough to contribute to slaying. This professional template is trickier to play than the ones in *Dungeon Fantasy Adventurers*, and requires a thorough understanding of *Unarmed Combat* (*Exploits*, pp. 38-41) – especially *Grappling* and *Grappling Moves*. Think of it as a challenge for the veteran player!

WRESTLER

You're a warrior who wrestles opponents into submission. Some you pin, others you strangle, and the rest you restrain for allies to deal with. Even the mighty barbarian and agile martial artist can't beat you at this game! As a professional warrior, you're aware this isn't a winning strategy against *every* foe (jellies, fire elementals, large dragons . . .) – but your strength makes even the cheapest weapon deadly in your hands.

Attributes: ST 15 [50]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 13 [30].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d+1/2d+1; BL 65 lbs.; HP 15 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [-15]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Enhanced Parry 3 (Unarmed) [15]; Lifting ST 3 [9]; Tough Skin 3 [9]; *and* Wrestling Master [10]. • Another 45 points distributed among:

ST +1 to +4 [10/level]	Fit [5] or Very Fit [15]
DX +1 or +2 [20/level]	Hard to Kill [2/level]
HT +1 to +4 [10/level]	Hard to Subdue [2/level]
HP +1 to +5 [2/level]	High Pain Threshold [10]
Will +1 to +9 [5/level]	Lifting ST 4-6 [3/level]
Basic Move +1 to +3 [5/level]	Luck [15] or
Combat Reflexes [15]	Extraordinary Luck [30]
Enhanced Dodge 1-3 [15/level]	Magic Resistance [2/level]
Fearlessness [2/level] or	Rapid or Very Rapid
Unfazeable [15]	Healing [5 or 15]
	Recovery [10]
	Trademark Move [1/move]

Disadvantages: -15 points chosen from among these traits:

Greed [-15*]
Obsession (Wrestle and defeat some specific type of monster) [-5*]

Vow (Never refuse a challenge to combat) [-10] or (Always fight unarmed) [-15]

Wealth (Struggling, Poor, or Dead Broke) [-10, -15, or -25]

• A further -20 points chosen from among the previous traits or:

Appearance (Unattractive or Ugly) [-4 or -8]	Gluttony [-5*]
Bad Temper [-10*]	Odious Personal Habit (Unrefined manners) [-5]
Bloodlust [-10*]	Overconfidence [-5*]
Bully [-10*]	Sense of Duty (Adventuring Companions) [-5]
Callous [-5]	Stubbornness [-5*]
Compulsive Carousing [-5*]	

Skills: Brawling-16 [4]; Immovable Stance-14 [4]; Judo-14 [4]; Push-14 [4]; *and* Wrestling-20 [24]. • One of these backup melee skills†:

Axe/Mace-14 [2]	Shortsword-14 [2]
Broadsword-14 [2]	Smallsword-14 [2]
Flail-13 [2]	Staff-14 [2]
Jitte/Sai-14 [2]	Tonfa-14 [2]
Knife-15 [2]	Whip-14 [2]
Main-Gauche-14 [2]	

• Five of these skills†:

Acrobatics-13 [2]	Intimidation-10 [2]
Carousing-14 [2]	Knot-Tying-15 [2]
Climbing-14 [2]	Lifting-13 [2]
Fast-Draw (any)-15 [2]	Parry Missile Weapons-13 [2]
First Aid-11 [2]	Stealth-14 [2]
Forced Entry-15 [2]	Streetwise-10 [2]
Gesture-11 [2]	Sumo Wrestling-14 [2]
Hiking-13 [2]	Thrown Weapon (any)-15 [2]

* 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.

MAKING WRESTLERS USEFUL

Spotlight the wrestler by including opponents vulnerable to grappling; if *every* enemy is harmful to touch, Diffuse (cloud, slime, swarm, etc.), insubstantial (like a spirit), or too strong to restrain, the player will feel cheated. Out of combat, offer problems best solved with feats of strength. Gear other delvers avoid owing to its weight makes excellent loot – as does anything that enhances ST!

WRESTLERS IN GURPS

This 250-point template is intended for the *DFRPG* but works just fine in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, though a few traits require clarification:

Stubbornness: Gains a self-control roll in the *DFRPG*. Replace “[5*]” with “[5].”

Tough Skin: Damage Resistance (Tough Skin, -40%), renamed.

Trademark Move: Perk suggested on p. 27 of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*.

MAMIE Q

246-point Human Wrestler

Mamie is a sinewy mass of scars. She sees her broken teeth, crooked nose, etc. as badges of honor. People who poke fun can apologize or get beaten up – or arm-wrestle her to earn the right (losing costs silver and means being beaten up). Running away is ill-advised: those pillar-like legs have incredible explosive strength, and she’ll beat you up when she inevitably catches you.

Her combat tactics are simple: Chuck a boomerang or two, close with a slam (using Brawling at 16 to hit for 1d+4 crushing at Move 9), and then grapple with effective ST 27 (usually hoping to strangle). She’ll use her quarterstaff to whack foes who are too dangerous to grapple.

When defending, she’ll often use her Judo parry to set up a throw, dumping one foe on the ground before occupying another with a grapple.

ST 15 [50]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 13 [30].

Damage 1d+1/2d+1; BL 88 lbs.; HP 15 [0]; Will 12 [10]; Per 10 [0]; FP 13 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00 [-15]; Basic Move 9 [15]; Move 9.

Dodge 9; Parry 16* (Wrestling), 14* (Brawling), 13* (Judo), 12 (Staff); Block N/A.

Mamie Q in GURPS

To interpret Mamie’s abilities, see above. Her gear is from the *DFRPG*. If using the *Basic Set*, her armor becomes scale on the torso, arms, and legs, plus pot-helm, gauntlets, and sollerets (pp. B283-284). That’s \$1,230, 84 lbs.; she spends \$1,470 less but carries 12 lbs. more (Light encumbrance: Dodge 8, Move 7). Ignore the coin denominations but keep their \$ value.

Wrestling Master: Effectively bundles a collection of perks from *GURPS Martial Arts* – Iron Arms, Power Grappling, Special Exercises (Lifting ST 6), Unusual Training (Immovable Stance), Unusual Training (Parry Missile Weapons), and Unusual Training (Push) – with a copy of Striker (Crushing; Accessibility, Not for damaging strikes, -40%; Limb, Arm, -20%) [2] for each arm. The GM may prefer to go with the sub-components, particularly if different costs are desired for any part. Wrestling Master cannot be combined with these things, as that would be double-dipping.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995. He has written or developed some 150 *GURPS* releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and contributed regularly to *Pyramid*. Lead creator of the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series, he designed the *Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game*, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango.

Advantages

Enhanced Parry 3 (Unarmed) [15]	Lifting ST 6 [18]
Hard to Subdue 1 [2]	Tough Skin 3 [9]
High Pain Threshold [10]	Wrestling Master [10]

Disadvantages and Quirks

Appearance (Ugly) [-8]	Greed (12) [-15]
Gluttony (9) [-7]	Stubbornness (12) [-5]

Arm-wrestles for fun and profit. [-1]

Follows excessive “fad diets” (currently the Elven Diet). [-1]

Loves to charge into combat with a slam. [-1]

Proud of her battle-scarred appearance. [-1]

Won’t *willingly* release foes who can still fight back! [-1]

Skills

Acrobatics-13 [2]	Intimidation-12 [2]	Stealth-14 [2]
Brawling-16 [4]	Judo-14 [4]	Thrown Weapon
Carousing-14 [2]	Push-14 [4]	(Stick)-15 [2]
Immovable	Staff-14 [2]	Wrestling-20 [24]
Stance-14 [4]		

* Includes +3 for Enhanced Parry.

Equipment

\$3,000, 87.62 lbs. (No encumbrance)

Boomerangs x2. 2d+1 cr, Acc 2, Range 90/150, Shots T(1), Bulk -2. \$40, 2 lbs.

Canteen, Full. 1 quart water. \$10, 3 lbs.

Clothing. \$0, 2 lbs.

Coins. 6 silver, 5 copper. \$125, 0.22 lb.

Elven Rations, 18 meals. \$90, 3 lbs.

Personal Basics. \$5, 1 lb.

Pouches x2. Hold personal basics, rations. \$20, 0.4 lb.

Quarterstaff. 2d+3 cr (reach 1, 2) or 1d+3 cr (reach 1, 2). \$10, 4 lbs.

Segmented Plate Armor, Suit. DR 4 (total DR 7). \$2,700, 72 lbs.

EIDETIC MEMORY

ASTRODUEL!

BY DAVID L. PULVER

This combat-heavy campaign setting for *GURPS Space* is aptly described as “*Cars Wars* in space.” It borrows tropes from a setting in which every car is heavily armed and road rage is settled with a hail of machine gun and rocket fire – and adapts them to *GURPS Spaceships*. Thus, in the world of *Astroduel*, all spacecraft are small (10 to 100 tons mass) and thus relatively affordable. They often have one- or two-person crews. Interstellar travel between star systems takes about as long as driving down the highway between two adjacent towns. Further events result in a breakdown of social order, creating an anarchic environment in which these small starships are routinely heavily armed and engage in ship-to-ship duels, in tournaments or on the starway.

To get extra use of the *Astroduel* setting, the GM may also want to have *GURPS Spaceships 3: Warships and Space Pirates* (for tactical combat) and *GURPS Spaceships 4: Fighters, Carriers, and Mecha* (for expanded small ship rules and SM +4 craft). Any number of *Cars Wars* or *GURPS Autoduel* supplements can also be mined for inspiration. To run a star-trucking campaign, *GURPS Spaceships 2: Traders and Liners* may prove helpful.

ALLIANCE SPACE: A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

How did things break down?

75 Years Ago: Most humans live in a unified multi-world state, the Solar Union, centered on Terra and the new star colonies of Alpha Centauri and Tau Ceti. The invention of a faster-than-light interstellar star-gate system known as the starway dramatically cuts travel time, permitting inexpensive colonization once an initial star gate is laboriously established. However, gates are expensive to build and time consuming to install (requiring a multi-decade slower-than-light journey) and mass-limited to small starships: no craft over 100 tons mass can enter a star gate.

35 Years Ago: The Solar Union has now colonized hundreds of planets linked by the starway. Habitable “garden” worlds prove rare, but terraforming is progressing on many marginal

planets. Mass production of “space truck” starships is ongoing, as well as smaller commuter and courier vessels.

25 Years Ago: The Solar Union’s economy is tightly integrated through the starway gates. Star gates now connect many mining and agricultural planets, feeding and supplying the populous Sol, Alpha Centauri, and Tau Ceti core systems. Fleets of space truckers carry goods, parts, and commodities from central core worlds like Earth or Mars to and from extrasolar planets. Planetary businesses rely on the starway for “just in time” interstellar deliveries; private spacecraft are regularly used for interstellar commuting. The booming economy spurs investment and innovation, including a revolutionary development in neurotech and biotech. This is braintaping (p. 18), the transfer of a dying or elderly patient’s mind to a healthy but blank-minded clone body.

20 Years ago: The first commercial braintape clinics open. Treatments cost several million dollars, but eternal life is now available . . . for the rich. The perceived gap between rich and poor becomes a chasm.

18 Years Ago: Protests grow against the wealthy elite of “immortals,” with attacks on cloning centers and megacorporate offices. Most violence is centered on the core worlds. In the interstellar colonies, the main issue is not immortality but space-worker rights; this leads to the founding of a space trucker’s union, the Star Hauler’s Association.

16 Years Ago: Anarchist hactivists reveal that biotech corporations had been concealing a breakthrough neural scanning technology that vastly reduces the cost of braintaping, one kept secret by deep state bureaucrats and executives who feared widespread immortality for the masses would corrode the socio-economic system.

15 Years Ago: An extremist radical group known as “The Life Brigade” mounts coordinated terrorist strikes that destroy key Sol System, Tau Ceti, and Alpha Centauri star gates, cutting these core worlds out of the starway. The starway outside of these central hub worlds remains intact, but reconnecting the core worlds will take decades of slow sub-light travel. With core worlds of the Solar Union trapped on the other side of dead star-gate links, the interstellar economy begins collapsing.

14 Years Ago: Last year's event has been dubbed "The Disconnect." Due to the formerly integrated economy, many colonial planets and stations lack the agricultural or industrial capacity to support themselves. There are food riots, starvation, life-support failures, and uprisings across colonial space. Some systems use the starway to perform piratical raids on neighbors. Others establish "fortress worlds" and stockpile supplies and weapons.

13 Years Ago: Swarms of space pirates plunder planets and stations, seeking parts, fuel, or slaves. Most take care not to destroy the star gates and risk cutting themselves off. Bosses and local gangs now rule many systems outside the major colonies and fortress worlds. Clone tanks used for making clones for the wealthy elite are repurposed to growing food. In a few places, where biotechnicians were strung up by anarchist radicals, knowledge to reprogram the vats is lost, but vats continue to produce blank-mind clones of former elites . . . who are used as food. Elsewhere, the elites keep control using clone soldiers and the carrot of everlasting life.

12 Years Ago: Several major colonial fortress worlds, out-world corporations, local tyrants, and Starhaulers' Association representatives hammer out an agreement for a new interim caretaker interstellar government, the Colonial Alliance. It is to last until Earth can be reconnected. However, many marginal worlds are abandoned or controlled by local bosses or pirate gangs.

11 Years Ago: Several alliance worlds have now resumed large-scale production of fuel and vital industry, including commercial "space truck" star-craft components.

10 Years Ago: The interstellar economy starts to stabilize, although medical and food rationing and black markets continue in many star systems. A savage pirate raid destroys the New Texas space habitat; hundreds are killed or carried off by the raiders. The Alliance establishes an organized patrol force, the Colonial Rangers, but it is badly underfunded.

Nine Years Ago: News from Earth (sent by radio) reaches the outer colonies. Thanks to widespread social disorder and economic recession on Earth, it's estimated it will be at least another decade before they reconnect the gate network. Some colonials despair; others now prefer the freedom of the new order, happy not to have the Solar Union's national-corporate overlords breathing down their necks. To help pacify restive colonial populations and avoid further social breakdown, many Alliance worlds enact welfare systems and subsidized mass entertainment, a tried-and-true "bread and circuses" policy.

Eight Years Ago: The Alliance government of the New Zion asteroid belt decriminalizes manslaughter among participants in holovid sports. Other worlds follow its lead as violent sports grow in popularity. The most successful are battlesuit gladiators, combat grav ball, bug hunts, and anything-goes star racing with nuclear-engine space trucks.

Seven Years Ago: "Mad Chad" Jackson wins the New Zion space derby by mounting a Solar Union patrol-surplus laser cannon in his space truck, scoring a ratings bonanza for his sponsors. The sport of "astrodueling" is born.

Six Years ago: Political disputes between major Alliance worlds and independent local bosses continue to reduce its tax revenues. Xenarthra Astroduel Arena opens in the L5 Lagrange Point formally occupied by the New Texas space habitat. Space piracy remains a problem.

Five Years Ago: Founding of the Colonial Astroduel Association (CADA).

Four Years Ago: Astrodueling becomes the most popular holovid sport, moving ahead of combat gravball, live coverage of pirate raids, and televised bug hunts. A large after-market in improvised and military-surplus space weaponry develops, both for starway self-defense and astroduels. Thanks to CADA efforts, most Alliance systems legalize civilian starship weaponry of a very loosely defined "defensive" nature (that is, anything not nuclear). Dueling beyond planetary orbits is now legal in 14 star systems and tolerated in most others.

Three Years Ago: At Midgard Station, a band of pirates are unlucky enough to stage a raid during the regional astroduel tournament. An ad-hoc coalition of Midgard Militia astroguard, local astroduelists, and space truckers destroy the pirates. Replays of the "Battle of Midgard" is carried on holovid networks across most of the Alliance.

*It's a rough world . . . and
"Drive Offensively" is its motto.*

– Car Wars

Two Years Ago: With more armed star craft filling the space lanes and a continued lack of enforcement patrols, informal starway duels increase in number. A variety of weaponry becomes available as "standard options" on all new-build Alliance civilian starcraft. In the Enoch system, astroduelists form the vigilante group StarBlade to patrol neighboring starway lanes in nearby systems to stop raids by space pirates. They are the first of many "citizen space militia" groups to grow out of dueling culture.

One Year Ago: The Colonial Rangers admit their inability to deal with duelist-armed spacecraft operating in the star lanes. Many Alliance member systems are unwilling to strengthen them, fearing a well-armed central government will help the bigger worlds to crack down on the periphery's hard-earned independence. Most space trucks are now heavily armed, often traveling in convoys, with smaller mercenary vehicles as escorts.

Today: Pirate attacks are down, thanks to the weaponry of private citizen spacecraft. Astrodueling is now legal throughout most of the Alliance. Terran star-gate replacement continues to fall behind schedule and the "reconnect" is still "10 years from now." But Alliance Space has morphed into something very different than what it once was . . .

Colonial Alliance Space

Alliance space consists of several dozen star systems all connected by a web of star gates. Total population is still low (several tens of millions). There are a few major systems with populations of 100,000 to several million, and lots of tiny mining or terraformer colonies, derelict stations, or minimal "truck stop" outposts.

Alliance space is mostly TL8 or TL9. Star gates and some corporate facilities and cloning clinics are TL10. A few regressed systems are TL7 or less. Most worlds are CR 0 to CR 2, with the exception of a few controlled by repressive cults or dictators (CR 3-4).

To map a section of Alliance space simply, take a blank sheet of paper, scatter several dots to represent systems, and connect each dot by one or more lines (the starways). Make a notation of 1 to 6 (roll 1d to determine randomly) besides each line to indicate the real-space distance in parsecs.

See *Star-System Categories* (below) for more suggestions on designing star systems.

THE ASTRODUEL UNIVERSE

Just about any sort of world may be found in Alliance Space. The GM is free to add aliens, weird societies, or exotic planets. The GM should use **GURPS Space** to detail star systems and worlds, although since astroduel action is usually confined to space and around star stations, you can skip on a lot of details.

Star-System Categories

Most colonies are under a century old, and few have better than a Class III starport. See *Spaceports*, **GURPS Space**, p. 97, for information on features of various classes of ports. For the purpose of a simple astrodueling campaign, the star systems in Alliance Space often fall into one of a few categories.

Major Colony. This is a habitable planet with either a large space habitat or “garden planet” conditions. It is typically home to large colony (100,000 to a million people) who maintain a vibrant mixed agricultural and industrial economy. The population is divided between a space station and the surface, with one or more cities and multiple towns or villages. There are usually three or more star gates. A major astrodueling arena is located around a nearby moon or other convenient location. A major colony’s spaceport is Class III or IV.

Marginal World: This is a roughly Earth-sized terrestrial planet (gravity 0.8 to 1.2G) whose climate, atmosphere, or other conditions weren’t quite right for large scale habitation, at least not without a lot of work, but nevertheless justified installing a star gate for future development. Most of these places have thin or very thin atmospheres; cold or overly hot conditions; bleak, wind-swept, or dusty terrain; and rudimentary life forms such as slime molds and algae-covered seas. Some of them have breathable air (but visitors often need a filter mask or respirator). There is a 50% chance that a rudimentary spaceport on the surface with a small corporate or scientific outpost was situated before the Disconnect to study the planet and consider terraforming it. Today, the outpost may be abandoned, or used by pirates or cultists, as a prison labor camp, etc. A marginal world’s spaceport is Class I or II, depending on how frequent the traffic is.

Subsistence Colony: This is a marginal world (see above) that was developed before the Disconnect. It has one or more crowded domed habitats, bases, or underground complexes supporting a theoretical population of several hundred to several thousand, usually centered around a large fission or fusion reactor, atmosphere plants, and mines. There’s one or more “truck stop” stations in orbit, and a rocket shuttle service between orbit and a surface spaceport. This was likely originally a “terraforming” colony intended to create a new habitable world, but after the Disconnect, the focus became survival. The colony is now somewhat self-sufficient in agricultural and/or mineral production, and often exports a small

surplus to other stations, while importing higher-tech goods and luxury items. A subsistence colony’s spaceport is usually Class III, with the occasional Class II.

Way Station: A star gate plus a “truck stop” station, in very low orbit over an asteroid, dwarf planet or gas-giant moon mined for ice and other volatiles to provide fuel, air, and water. Usually the world has no or trace atmosphere and minimal gravity (0.1G or less), making it easy to land or takeoff without much delta-V expenditure. It’s dependent on imported food and supplies, and eager for news. Inhabitants range from a couple of people to a few hundred, many working as miners in the truck-stop station. Kids from way stations are notoriously eager to be recruited by duelists. They often dedicate much of their time to working as mechanics or practicing gunnery and piloting in simulators. Some way stations were conquered and enslaved by pirates or would-be warlords; those that weren’t often have a few local duelists who provide a tiny astroguard militia. A way station is typically Class III, but sometimes Class I or II.

Dead Station: This is a way station that was wiped out by pirates, plague, or other disaster, or went bust and was abandoned. There may be enough life support and supplies left for a few lonely eccentrics, desperate survivors, or mad cannibals. Some dead stations are Class I, but a few have been stripped of useful resources. Stripped stations count as Class 0 and at best serve as a place to dock a ship to make whatever repairs the crew can with what they have in their ship.

Ruined Colony. This is a subsistence colony that fell into ruin due to starvation, riot, life-support failure, pirate attack, or plague. It probably has been stripped and looted. However, there could be hidden survivors or items worth salvaging. Ruins are sometimes used as pirate bases. Treat this as a Class 0 port, as with a dead station (above); if the crew is lucky, the colony is Class 1 in terms of spare parts and landing or docking facilities, but has no technicians.

Many plots center on the technical details of running or commanding a starship.

– **GURPS Space**

Local Government

To quickly determine the local government, roll 1d (add +1 if a major world, and subtract 2 if a marginal world or ruined colony), and consult this table. Dead stations have no government worth noting. For overviews of each type of government, see pp. B509-510. When given a second choice, roll 1d: on 1-3, it’s the first option; on 4-6, it’s the second option.

1d	Government
1-	Anarchy or tribal (often a pirate haven or multiple factions). Usually CR 0.
2	Dictatorship (“bossdom”) that is an oligarchy or subjugated. Usually CR 3+.
3	Feudal or theocracy. Usually CR 4+.
4	Alliance member: technocracy or corporate state. Usually CR 1-2.
5+	Alliance member: Representative democracy. Usually CR 1-2.

Organizations

These are some possible patrons, enemies, or employers.

Colonial Alliance: The loose and poorly funded interstellar government of the colonies. Squabbling representatives from numerous colonies meet regularly.

Colonial Astroduel Association (CADA): Sets rules and organizes tournaments and corporate prize sponsorship deals. Promotes a chivalric code of honor among astroduelists. Lobbies the Alliance governments for unrestricted astrodueling and heavy-weapons sales, low taxes on personal spacecraft, and cheap braintape insurance.

Colonial Rangers: This small and underfunded paramilitary space patrol is the closest thing to an armed force that the Alliance has. The space marshals handle everything from pirate raids to exterminating alien bug infestations.

Loki Atomics: Major manufacturer of spaceships and heavy weapons.

Transolarian Industries: Fuel, mining, and food producer.

StarCross: Medical and biotech company; provider of braintaping technologies (below).

Alliance News Network and Star News: Rival holovid news agencies.

Star Hauler's Association: The main independent space trucker's transport union, mostly comprised of mom-and-pop operations and independently owned truckers.

Alliance Express: The "big trucking corporation," which is a rival to the Star Haulers' Association. Known for their dirty tricks.

Loki, Enoch, Xenarthra, Midgard: Major worlds in the Alliance.

Astroguards: Local-system defense militias that patrol orbital space and nearby starways. Many have only one or two spacecraft; some have squadron-sized operations.

Braintaping

Clinics exist on major Alliance worlds (and at a few corporate labs). They provide superscience TL11 non-destructive uploading and downloading to cloned bodies using TL10⁺ clinical mind-transference equipment (see *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, pp. 220-221). Replacement bodies are quickly grown using forced-growth cloning (*GURPS Bio-Tech*, p. 21). Computers cannot run mind emulations that aren't downloaded into a living body. It costs \$25,000 for an initial non-invasive mind scan for "death insurance"; that is, the Extra Life (Copy) advantage, with the mind-emulation data held at a major StarCross facility. After that, there's an extra \$9,000 for each clone that is force-grown to provide a new body for a download and an additional \$25,000 fee for each download into a clone or other body. The Alliance makes it illegal to deliberately create multiple copies of the same person.

Astroduel Tournaments

The tournament "arena" consists of the orbital space around a small moon or asteroid a few hundred thousand miles away from the planet (far enough that stray shots won't

get in the way nonparticipating traffic). A common location is the stable L4 or L5 points between a planet and its moon. An array of radar transponder beacons and holovid cameras drones are placed to mark a spherical zone: the "astroduel arena." A typical arena is about 2d × 100 miles across. It's possible to put an arena in empty space, but most have a planet, moon, or planetoid in the center, and often there is scattered wreckage, space junk, ring ice, or small asteroids, often deliberately towed in! Use the rules for debris fields in *Spaceships 4*, pp. 35-36.

Most arenas are located in major systems, where the expense of decent prize money is justified by having an audience of several hundred thousand real-time viewers, each willing to cough up \$50 to \$100 for a live pay-to-view experience, with additional revenues generated through copious advertising and betting on the duel's outcome. Footage is also recorded by the news networks and sent off by courier to astroduel fans in other star systems (who receive it hours or days later).

"Last ship standing" or "team vs. team" battles are most popular, but "one on one" duels (sometimes over a matter of honor) are also common. Ships can surrender if they're crippled or without functional weapons. Fleeing or accidentally drifting out of the arena counts as a loss. Entry fees are often paid by sponsors in exchange for displaying exclusive advertising on the vessel.

Usually the winner's prize is something around 25% to 100% of the combined dollar value of all vehicles competing. Tournament prizes are paid out by sponsors (often munitions companies, spacecraft manufacturers, and fuel companies), advertising before the event at the local station and during the broadcast, and exclusive pay-to-view concession rights to either Star News or Alliance News Network.

Special prizes are often offered by sponsors, e.g., a certain value in spacecraft parts or weapons, several month's supply of fuels or missiles, deed to a derelict station, etc. Prizes go to the vehicle owner who is responsible for arranging compensation of the pilot, gunner, etc. Corporate-sponsored and even government-sponsored teams exist; these usually give the vehicle crew about 25% of the winnings and cover all expenses for repairs, ammunition, and (usually) medical care. In team combat, the winnings are divided between team members. Some arenas give the survivor the right to salvage either 50% or 100% of his kills.

Some arenas ban gambling, usually due to local vice laws, which results in local criminal elements taking it over. CADA blacklists pilots caught taking payoffs to fix duels.

Staging Combat

The suggested encounter distance and turn length for this setting is Close scale with one-minute turns. Astroduel craft use reaction engines which burn plenty of fuel. Managing this is critical to combat strategy. A team can be mission-killed if the craft runs out of fuel and can't maneuver anymore, leaving them drifting helplessly in space . . . If this happens on the starway, the crew isn't doomed: traffic is busy enough and the starways narrow enough that a crippled or bingo vessel or even a "floater" in a vacc suit can expect a couple of encounters before they run out of life support. Spacecraft and suits have automatic radio transponders (unless deliberately deactivated), making them easy to locate.

CHARACTERS AND CAMPAIGNS

Suggested starting point total for protagonists is 100 to 150 points. There are several particularly suitable concepts for an astroduel campaign.

Astroduelists: The adventurers are pilots in the astro-dueling circuit, traveling from system to system to compete in arena events. Between tournaments, they may be involved with jealous rivals or criminal elements attempting to fix matches, or hire on as mercenaries to escort convoys, stomp pirates, or protect expeditions that are trying to perform recolonizing or salvage missions.

Mercs or Vigilantes: The protagonists are part of an interstellar mercenary, vigilante, or astroguard militia organization. They may be opposed to astrodueling and piracy, and are trying to clean up the space ways. Or they might be seeking vengeance against a particular foe that has wronged them, such as a ruthless megacorporation seeking to exploit small colonial stations. Or they may be roving “guardian angels” who seek out wrongs to right and help the oppressed.

Pirates: The reverse of the above: the adventurers are the space-going equivalent of Vikings or biker gangs, or chivalrous Robin Hood rogues who steal from the rich (such as corporate space-trucker convoys or oppressive colonies run by slavers, cultists, or dictators) and redistribute the wealth to themselves and the poor. Maybe they even have a greater goal in mind, like founding a pirate kingdom.

Space Truckers: The group owns one or more space trucks, space taxis, or courier vessels, and maybe some astrodueling vessels as escorts. They carry freight, passengers, or high priority cargo (e.g., drugs to treat medical emergencies). They get into conflicts with rival trucking firms, pirates, union-busting goons, or predatory militias.

Other options include news crews, ambulances, interstellar bus drivers, missionaries, salvage crews, etc. Feel free to combine concepts, e.g., a former pirate who has gone straight and is now a space trucker (or vice versa). The main thing to remember is that, ideally, in an *Astroduel* campaign, every player character should pilot their own spacecraft.

Typical Skills

As for skills, everyone should have Pilot (High Performance Spacecraft), Gunner (Beams), possibly Artillery

(Guided Missiles), and Vacc Suit. Skills useful for repairing the vessel include Armoury (Heavy Weapons and Vehicular Armor), Electronics Operation (Sensors), Mechanic (High Performance Spacecraft), or Electronics Repair (any). For adventures outside of the spacecraft, Beam Weapons, Freefall, Freight Handling, Guns, First Aid, and perhaps Carousing and Gambling are helpful.

Reputation (Astroduel)

Protagonists will often have a Reputation as an astro-duelist, although it's usually more fun if starting characters have to earn it rather than beginning with it. Due to the mass media penetration of astrodueling, this should be seen as affecting a large group on a 10 or less (for 1/4 cost). The GM should let duelists earn extra bonus character points toward Reputation whenever they duel in the public eye or under holovid news cameras. A typical value might be +1 point per spacecraft kill scored in a tournament or in a starway duel, with an extra +1 after you make ace (five or more kills) or double ace (10+ kills). If the victim has a Reputation, add the target's own Reputation (e.g., 3 for a kill vs. Reputation +2). Thanks to sponsorship, a duelist may be granted an extra 5% in any arena cash prizes for every Reputation +1 (Astroduelist) he possesses.

Getting a Ship

Decent interstellar spacecraft (SM +4 to +6) are \$300,000 to \$1,500,000. TL9 starting wealth is \$30,000, so Very Wealthy gives you \$600,000 (at TL9) to play with, which is usually adequate. Protagonists should be allowed to put all of their wealth into spacecraft and consumables (fuel, ammo, etc.). Alternatively, the GM may let PCs start out working for a patron organization that provides some or all of the group with one or more spacecraft they can operate but don't own. If spacecraft need extra crew members (such as additional gunners or mechanics), taking them as Allies, Dependents, hired NPCs, or second PCs is a better option; that way everyone can fly his own ship, and no one will be bored and out of the loop during space-combat scenes. (You *can* play with some players serving as gunners or the like, but that's not as interesting as letting everyone make piloting decisions.)

That doesn't mean deliverance is assured, however. The GM may wish to use a rescue to set up another adventure (found by pirates, aided by someone who's in only slightly better shape, encountering a “wrecker” who charges an exorbitant fee for a tow, etc.).

THE STARWAY

In this universe, interstellar travel involves “subspace,” which is a smaller dimension than normal space. This

makes it possible to enter subspace, take a shortcut through it, and emerge again in normal space. The conversion factor between subspace and normal space is just over 200 billion to one. As a result, one parsec (3.26 light years) in normal space is equivalent to 900 miles in subspace.

To enter or exit subspace requires a portal into subspace, also known as a star gate. At present, star gates cannot transit objects significantly more massive than about 100 tons (a SM +6 spacecraft); anything larger creates an instability that damages the gate.

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.

Space Truckers: A single space truck carrying freight along a route between populated systems. Usually chatty, courteous, and fierce in self-defense, some truckers seek out duels with rival competing trucking firms. A small number of truckers are actually something else; roll 2d: on 2, they're pirates, on 3-11, they're legit; and on 12, they're really patrol ships.

Convoy: Two or more space trucks escorted by a couple of astrodueling or patrol vehicles, often on a long-range run carrying valuable cargo through a dangerous area. It may be a corporate, private, or government convoy. Astroduelists can often earn \$10,000/parsec plus their fuel expenses if they agree to sign on as convoy escorts.

Commuter, Taxi, or Courier: Commuters are privately owned starcraft traveling for personal reasons: business, tourism, wanderlust, science, etc. Couriers are fast commuter vessels carrying messages or small packages. Taxis are commuter craft for rent.

Astrodueler: 1d astrodueling vessels. They may be on their way to a tournament, or looking for starway duels for honor and salvage rights. There's a 1-in-6 chance they're being shadowed by a Star News or Alliance News Network craft, which will record the carnage.

Pirates: 1d pirate spacecraft. Because pirates steal other people's spacecraft, the vessels could be anything from dueling craft to space trucks; often they're a mix of craft. The villains may be looking for trouble, or returning (laden with booty and/or suffering battle damage) following a raid or interception. Pirates near civilized systems are often disguised as astroduelists or truckers and "casing" the area or meeting contacts to sell loot.

Space Bus or Tanker: A 100-ton "star liner" carrying dozens of passengers. Usually migrant workers or colonists, they may instead be a platoon of colonial rangers, refugees, school kids off to camp, a touring a rock band, or vacationing pensioners. There is a 50% chance it is escorted by one to three mercenary astroduelists who provide added security.

News Craft: The most exciting stories and bloodiest violence are often on the starways, and reporters maintain high-speed craft to record it. Star News and its rival Alliance News Network own pay-for-view and cable franchises; many astroduelists are much more likely to start trouble if a news ship is going to witness the action (possibly boosting their reputation).

Battle or Duel: An ongoing space action. Either roll two encounters from the *Common Encounters* table (p. 20, with a roll of 6 automatically being "pirates") have them go at each other, or assume it's autoduelists or pirates. There's a 2 in 6 chance a news craft is nearby.

Encounter Positions

Most spacecraft travel at a "cruising" velocity, usually at 30% to 40% of their maximum delta-V reserve, but sometimes a vessel may be drifting very slowly (e.g., stopped for repairs or pick up a casualty, wrecked, etc.).

Roll 1d to find out where the ship or ships are in relation to your vessel:

- On a 1-3, the encounter is ahead of you. Roll 1d to find its traveling direction and speed. On 1, it is stationary. On 2-4, it is approaching. On 5-6, it is ahead of you and receding, but at an equal or higher speed to you.

- On a 4-6, it is behind you. It must have entered the starway afterward, so it will be closing.

SPACECRAFT DESIGN

Construction facilities for large spacecraft do not exist in the Alliance Space, and vessels are TL9. All are built with SM +4 to SM +6 (10 to 100 tons) hulls, which also are the maximum size that can traverse a star gate. Most starship hulls are unstreamlined. Often, specialized shuttles or boosted rockets are used to land or takeoff from planets.

High-thrust engines – typically nuclear thermal rockets – are most commonly used to traverse the starways. These also have enough thrust to lift off from low-gravity moons. A few craft use chemical rockets or antimatter thermal rockets, but these are uncommon (except in surface-to-orbit shuttles on major worlds). Low-thrust engines like mass drivers or ion drives, or fusion rockets, are too vulnerable to attack for ships to considering incorporating them, while space sails do not work at all within the starway.

Most starships carry three to five tanks of fuel. Using hydrogen as reaction mass, that's enough for a couple of miles per second of delta-V, sufficient to cross the stars in a few hours and have a reserve for combat. Multi-stage vessels are sometimes employed for surface-to-orbit travel on worlds with significant gravity, but they are rare as starcraft, except for a few high-speed couriers or interceptors. Abandoning stages is costly, so these aren't in common use.

As interstellar travel takes hours rather than days, spacecraft usually omit habitats, occupants in control rooms, or passenger seating.

Almost all starships are armed; Alliance space remains infested with pirates and would-be astroduelists. In fact, it's nearly impossible to get starship loans or insurance otherwise. The dangerous nature of Alliance Space means armor and weaponry are common, with lasers and missile launchers favored. Short-duration power plants (fuel cells, MHD turbines) are commonly used to power weapons, though some ships have fission reactors.

Subspace Radiation (The Bleed)

A leakage of subspace into the starway interferes with sensors and communications. This creates a sensor horizon of about 500 miles that acts as an absolute limit on both sensor, communication, and weapon ranges.

Subspace Portal (TL^)

Star gates generate portals leading to subspace. These are similar to jump gates, but more limited, working as described on pp. 19-20. Star gates can only be constructed in space in a microgravity environment; they're usually placed in orbit.

To create a traversable starway, the settings must be coupled, or harmonized, with another star gate. This is set when both gates in a pair are built. Since the only means of faster-than-light travel is via star gates, creating a star gate link between uninhabited systems requires sublight travel, taking decades at significant expense.

A subspace portal can transit any vessel of up to SM +6. Larger vessels cannot pass through without several damaging the portal and the ship.

The "Range" in the table below is the maximum distance in parsecs that can link two subspace gates.

SM	+9	+10	+11	+12	+13	+14	+15
Range	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Workspaces	0	1	3	10	30	100	300
Cost (\$)	150M	500M	1.5B	5B	15B	50B	150B

Once, I was a cop. A road warrior searching for a righteous cause.

– Max Rockatansky,
Mad Max: Fury Road

STANDARD SPACECRAFT DESIGNS

These are examples of mass-produced starships in the astroduel era. The GM and players are encouraged to design their own vessels, or use ones described in *GURPS Spaceships* supplements that conform to the restrictions listed under *Spacecraft Design* (p. 21).

PALADIN (TL9)

This is a typical astrodueling ship designed with heavy armor and a mixed laser and missile armament. It uses a SM +4 (10 ton) unstreamlined hull 10 yards long. Built for arena action, it has a modest fuel fraction but high acceleration. It seats two crew (pilot in the control room, gunner in the major battery's turret), with no provision for passengers or cargo.

Front Hull	System
[1-4]	Metallic Laminate Armor (total dDR 8).
[5!]	Major Battery (fixed 3 MJ Laser).
[6]	Defensive ECM.

Front Hull	System
[core]	Control Room (C3 computers, comm/sensor 2, one control station).

Central Hull	System
[1-2]	Metallic Laminate Armor (dDR 4).
[3]	Fuel Tank (0.5 tons hydrogen).
[4]	Fuel Tank (0.5 tons hydrogen).
[5]	Fuel Tank (0.5 tons hydrogen).
[6!]	Major Battery (turret with 300KJ rapid fire laser).

Rear Hull	System
[1-2]	Metallic Laminate Armor (total dDR 4).
[3]	Major Battery (16 cm missile launcher).
[4]	Nuclear Thermal Rocket Engine (0.5G).
[5]	Nuclear Thermal Rocket Engine (0.5G).
[6]	Nuclear Thermal Rocket Engine (0.5G).
[core]	MHD Turbine (two Power Points for two hours).

Normal crew is a pilot and gunner.

TL	Spacecraft	dST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost
9	Paladin	15	0/4	12	1.5G/1.35 mps	10	0.2	+4	2SV	8/4/4	–	\$549,000

Piloting/TL9 High-Performance Spacecraft

Top air speed is 300 mph.

STARHOPPER (TL9)

The *Starhopper* is a luxury star craft for commuting or fast courier delivery service between frontier star systems. It is not a purpose-designed dueling vehicle, but is capable of holding its own against casual opponents thanks to a rapid-pulse laser turret and triple missile launchers. It has a SM +5 (30 ton) unstreamlined hull that is 15 yards long. It seats two crew (pilot and gunner) and four passengers, and has a small cargo hold. With its delta-V of 2.25 mps, its usual flight profile is to use 0.75 mps accelerating, 0.75 mps decelerating, and save the remaining 0.75 mps as a reserve in case of danger or combat.

Front Hull	System
[1-3]	Light Alloy Armor (total dDR 6).
[4]	Medium battery (three fixed 16cm missile launchers).
[5]	Passenger Seating (two seats).
[6]	Passenger Seating (two seats).
[core]	Control Room (C4 computers, comm/sensor 3, one control station).

Central Hull	System
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (total dDR 4).
[2]	Cargo Hold (1.5 tons).
[3]	Fuel Tank (1.5 tons hydrogen).
[4]	Fuel Tank (1.5 tons hydrogen).
[5]	Fuel Tank (1.5 tons hydrogen).

<i>Central Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[6!]	Major Battery (one turret with 1 MJ rapid fire laser).
<i>Rear Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1-2]	Light Alloy Armor (total dDR 4).
[3]	Fuel Tank (1.5 tons hydrogen).

<i>Rear Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[4]	Fuel Tank (1.5 tons hydrogen).
[5]	Nuclear Thermal Rocket Engine (0.5G).
[6]	Nuclear Thermal Rocket Engine (0.5G).
[core]	Fuel Cell (one Power Point for 12 hours).
Normal crew is a pilot and optional gunner.	

<i>TL</i>	<i>Spacecraft</i>	<i>dST/HP</i>	<i>Hnd/SR</i>	<i>HT</i>	<i>Move</i>	<i>LWt.</i>	<i>Load</i>	<i>SM</i>	<i>Occ</i>	<i>dDR</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Cost</i>
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Piloting/TL9 High-Performance Spacecraft

9	<i>Starhopper</i>	20	0/4	12	1G/2.25 mps	30	2.1	+5	2+4SV	6/4/4	–	\$855K
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Top air speed is 250 mph.

TEKTITE STARHAULER (TL9)

The *Tektite* is a mainstay of interstellar cargo transport between solar systems in the Colonial Alliance. It is designed around a standard space-truck chassis: a SM +6 (100 ton) unstreamlined hull that is 20 yards long. A single nuclear thermal engine means it's not very agile, but its decent fuel capacity provides both an adequate starway velocity and a sufficient reverse for defensive combat maneuvers where necessary. It seats two crew (pilot and gunner) in the control room, and has a large cargo hold with a total of 25 tons capacity. It is armed for self-defense with two turrets and a missile system.

<i>Front Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1-2]	Light Alloy Armor (total dDR 6).
[3-5]	Cargo Hold (total 15 tons).
[6!]	Major Battery (turret with 30 MJ laser).
[core]	Control Room (C5 computers, comm/sensor 4, two control stations).

<i>Central Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Light Alloy Armor (dDR 3).
[2-3]	Cargo Hold (total 10 tons).
[4]	Fuel Tank (5 tons hydrogen).
[5]	Fuel Tank (5 tons hydrogen).
[6!]	Medium Battery (two turrets with 10 MJ lasers and one fixed 20 cm missile launcher).
[core]	MHD Turbine (two Power Points for two hours).
<i>Rear Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1-2]	Light Alloy Armor (total dDR 6).
[3]	Fuel Tank (5 tons hydrogen).
[4]	Fuel Tank (5 tons hydrogen).
[5]	Fuel Tank (5 tons hydrogen).
[6]	Nuclear Thermal Rocket Engine (0.5G).

Normal crew is a pilot, co-pilot, and up to three gunners, some of whom probably double as mechanics and loaders.

<i>TL</i>	<i>Spacecraft</i>	<i>dST/HP</i>	<i>Hnd/SR</i>	<i>HT</i>	<i>Move</i>	<i>LWt.</i>	<i>Load</i>	<i>SM</i>	<i>Occ</i>	<i>dDR</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Cost</i>
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Piloting/TL9 High-Performance Spacecraft

9	<i>Tektite Starhauler</i>	30	-1/4	12	0.5G/2.25 mps	100	25.5	+6	5SV	6/3/6	–	\$2.4M
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“TRUCK STOP” STAR GATE (TL10)

Gate stations are pre-Disconnect relics held together despite a severe shortage of TL10 spare parts (which were mainly manufactured in the Sol system). They are often referred to as “truck stops” due to their role in servicing and facilitating interstellar transport. The most common design is a SM +10 (10,000 ton) ring-shaped station spun to generate artificial gravity, with the subspace gate located in a hub module in the center of the ring. However, some designs are built instead into rock or icy asteroids.

In addition to the gateway, the central hub of the ring is surrounded by a fusion reactor, hangar facilities for ships that will dock rather than pass through the gate, and tanks for refueling other vessels. The rotating rings contain promenades with facilities for visiting spacers and residences: motel rooms, bars, souvenir shops, barber shops,

coffee or tea shops, restaurants, cargo warehouses, garage facilities, shooting ranges, general stores, entertainment facilities (casinos, strip clubs, swimming pools, brothels, and holovid theaters are often popular). Most truck stops have anywhere from 30 to 100 permanent residents and usually twice as many visiting transients.

There are usually offices for representatives from whom ever owns the truck stop (planetary government, a corporation, wealthy citizen, or Colonial Alliance), local security or police offices or barracks (depending on the station's ownership), offices from major transport and space-worker firms, a religious institution (church, mosque, temple, etc.; sometimes multiple faiths sharing facilities), a Colonial Alliance post office, a interstellar news company office, and, sometimes, a lonely military recruiting office for the Colonial Rangers.

Before the Disconnect, truck stops were not armed, but most have been retro-fitted with various weapon turrets, albeit equipped with TL9 rather than TL10 weaponry.

<i>Front Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Metallic Laminate (dDR 20).
[2]	Fuel Tank (400 tons hydrogen, 100 tons water).
[3]	Habitat (30 luxury cabins).*
[4]	Open Space (quarter-acre park).*
[5]	Cargo Hold (500 tons cargo).
[6]	Cargo Hold (500 tons cargo).
[core]	Control Room (C9 computers, comm/sensor 9, only four control stations).*

<i>Central Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Metallic Laminate (dDR 20).
[2!]	Subspace Gate (2 parsec link, 100-ton shift).*
[3]	Hangar Bay (300 tons capacity).*
[4]	Hangar Bay (300 tons capacity).*
[5]	Hangar Bay (300 tons capacity).*

<i>Central Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[6!]	Secondary Battery (10 turrets with 30 MJ rapid fire lasers).*
[core]	Fission Reactor (one Power Point).*
<i>Rear Hull</i>	<i>System</i>
[1]	Metallic Laminate Armor (total dDR 20).
[2]	Habitat (briefing room, 10-bed sickbay clinic, two luxury cabins, 13 cabins, three cells, nine establishments, two minifacs, nine offices).*
[3]	Cargo Hold (500 tons cargo).
[4]	Cargo Hold (500 tons cargo).
[5]	Fuel Tank (500 tons hydrogen).
[6!]	Factory (fabricator, \$500K/hr.).*

* One workspace each.

Normal crew are four command crew, 10 gunners (also doubling as security staff), and 10 mechanics.

<i>TL</i>	<i>Spacecraft</i>	<i>dST/HP</i>	<i>Hnd/SR</i>	<i>HT</i>	<i>Move</i>	<i>LWt.</i>	<i>Load</i>	<i>SM</i>	<i>Occ</i>	<i>dDR</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Cost*</i>
10 [^]	Truck Stop	150	–	14	0	10,000	2,910.2	+10	102ASV	20	–	\$1,117,200,000

MISSILE AMMUNITION

Most military grade ordnance was fired off during the violent first few years of the Disconnect. While ordnance factories have resumed production, the average missile is overpowered for a SM +4 to +6 target. Cheaper models are common: so-called dueling missiles are less capable than military “warshots” with less efficient rocket motors and smaller final stages. Treat dueling missiles as TL8 missiles.

Nuclear and antimatter warheads aren’t available for guns or missiles.

Dueling Missile Statistics

<i>Missile Size</i>	<i>Tons</i>	<i>Cost*</i>	<i>LC</i>	<i>SM</i>	<i>Damage†</i>
16cm missile	1/10	\$20,000	2	-1	6d×2
20cm missile	1/5	\$40,000	2	-1	3d×5
24cm missile	1/2	\$100,000	2	0	3d×7
28cm missile	1	\$200,000	2	0	6d×4

* For dueling missiles; ×5 cost for TL9+ “warshots” with standard performance.

† Includes halving of effective size; multiply this by relative velocity.

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid science-fiction fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released *Basic Dungeons & Dragons*. Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating *Transhuman Space*, co-authoring the *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* anime RPG, and writing countless *GURPS* books, including the *GURPS*

Basic Set, *Fourth Edition*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and the *GURPS Spaceships* series.



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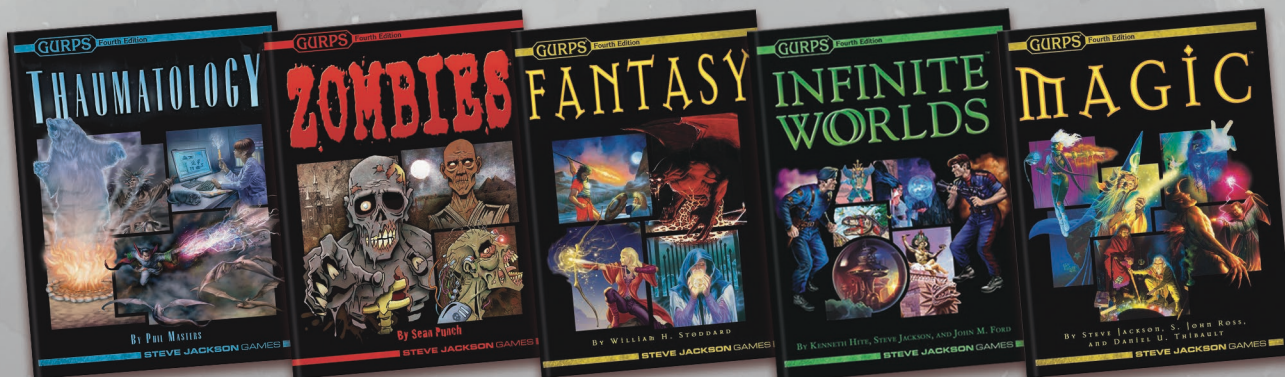
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ANIMAL COMBAT STYLES

BY RORY FANSLER

Many animals are known for certain signature moves they use in combat. This article discusses general tactics and some of those special moves, including some new techniques. *Animals in Combat* (p. B461) is a good start for reading about the subject, and *Close Combat and Body Morphology* (**GURPS Martial Arts**, pp. 114-117) is also recommended. Additional material can be found in **GURPS Martial Arts**, **GURPS Martial Arts: Technical Grappling**, *Fight While in Flight* from Pyramid #3/14: *Martial Arts*, and *Team Up!* from Pyramid #3/65 *Alternate GURPS III* (for cinematic pack abilities).

Since **Technical Grappling** allows Wrestling (Sweep) at -4 default, it is used here without the Skill Adaptation perk. This article also includes several perks from **GURPS Power Ups 2: Perks**, though none are essential to the styles.

Referenced Combat Options

All Out Attack (Determined and Double) (see p. B365), Committed Attack, Defensive Attack, and Telegraphic Attack (**GURPS Martial Arts**, pp. 99-100, 113) see common use among predators, and several techniques are designed to capitalize on the move.

Aerobatic Recovery and Wing Buffet are from *Fight While in Flight* in Pyramid #3/14. Choke or Strangle is from **Technical Grappling**, p. 36. Rake is from **GURPS Martial Arts: Yrth Fighting Styles**, p. 28.

Combat Option Notes

Using Sweep or Trip on aerial or swimming targets does not cause them to fall but makes them lose control instead. Regaining control requires an Aerobatics, Aquabatics, Flight, or Swimming roll. This is penalized on the first turn by the margin of failure in the first contest!

Observation, Survival or straight Per is used to spot predators and prey, while Tracking can follow them.

AMBUSH PREDATORS

These animals find a good spot such as a path or water source to lie in wait for the prey to come to them. The initial strike is usually Attack from Above or a Springing Attack with Telegraphic Attack. If the prey does not come close enough or fails to be surprised, a chase may ensue, which is less than ideal. When using a Choke Hold after pinning the prey, cats usually apply damage, while snakes try to reduce FP.

This efficient style best suits solitary hunters who have the patience to wait, and good locations to choose. Many of the great cats (such as jaguars and tigers) use this method, as well as constrictor snakes.

Ambush Predator

6 points

Skills: Brawling; Jumping; Stealth; Survival; Wrestling.

Techniques: Acrobatic Stand (Jumping); Attack from Above (Brawling); Breakfall; Choke or Strangle; Choke Hold; Combination (Brawling Bite/Neck + Brawling Kick/Torso); Deadly Pounce (p. 28); Ground Fighting; Head Lock (Teeth); Jump Kick; Neck Snap (Teeth); Rake; Springing Attack; Targeted Attack (Brawling Bite/Neck).

Perks: Clinch; Ground Guard; Focused Fury; Limited Camouflage (preferred terrain); Patience of Job; Penetrating Voice; Perfume; Skill Adaptation (Acrobatic Stand and Breakfall default to Jumping); Technique Mastery (Springing Attack).

Optional Traits

Skill: Climbing.

Perk: Rapid Retraction 3 (Bite) (snakes only).

BIRDS OF PREY

Most birds are scavengers and eat insects, high-energy plants (flower nectar and berries), or tiny animals such as worms that cannot readily get away. They rely on locating such things before others and quickly snapping up their find or carrying it away to avoid another bird taking it away from them. Other larger birds such as seagulls or eagles add fish to their diet, while some such as crows eat the leftovers of other animal kills.

The birds this style fits are true hunters and go after other birds or small animals. The challenge here is to make a quick and effective strike so the prey cannot get away or fight back. Most birds rely on flying high to help with surprise attacks, but some learn to use the sun and watch their shadows, using Stealth. A bird will often dive (up to +10 Air Move, and up to double its top speed) to make an attack. This helps it surprise prey, but a hit at that speed is likely to hurt itself as well, especially if the prey is on the ground! Full Braking (p. 28) is an important technique that lets the bird get closer before having to slow down.

Slams are ill-advised against ground targets but can be effective on aerial ones. Eye-Rake is included for the rare times that birds attack humans, because birds often go for the head or face. However, this would be an unusual technique to improve.

Optional Rule: If the relative difference between attacker and defenders Move is 7 or more, the attack is at -1 to hit, but +1 damage (based on *Calvary Weapons*, p. B397).

Bird of Prey

5 points

Primary Skills: Aerobatics; Brawling; Flight; Survival.

Techniques: Aerobic Recovery; Attack from Above; Breakfall; Crafty Dodge (p. 28); Dancing Death (p. 28); Eye-Rake; Evade; Feint (Aerobatics); Full Braking (p. 28); Hide in Sun (p. 29); In and Out (p. 29); Sweep; Swooping Attack (p. 29); TA (Brawling Slam/Wing)*; Trip; Wing Buffet.

Perks: Aerobic Feints; Aerobic Kicks; Eye For Distance; Focused Fury; Penetrating Voice; Rapid Retraction 3 (Bite); Rapid Retraction 3 (Claws); Sure-Footed (Windy).

* Defaults to Brawling -2; cannot exceed Brawling -1.

Optional Traits

Racial Feature: Born Biter.

Skills: Kiai; Stealth.

MOUNTS

Animals used as mounts may be trained for combat and if so become great assets to their riders. If Mount exceeds Riding skill, use the average of the two skills (round up) whenever a Riding roll is needed. Otherwise, simply having Mount grants +1 to Riding. Well-trained (especially sentient) mounts may also allow travel without using the Riding skill, removing the -3 penalty for no hands.

Hero's Steed

3 points

Primary Skills: Mount; Running.

Techniques: Axe Kick; Back Kick (Brawling); Evade; Stamp Kick.

Cinematic Skills: Flying Leap; Immovable Stance; Light Walk.

Perks: Skill Adaptation (Back Kick defaults to Brawling).

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Enhanced Move (Ground); Lifting ST.

Skills: Jumping.

PACK PREDATORS

Some animals rely on strength in numbers to make the kill. This is an effective strategy when the prey is large enough a single kill can feed many, or when the prey is

highly mobile and may easily escape a single hunter. Wolves and lions fit into this category. They will try to get in close and surround their prey before it notices them and then chase it down and kill it.

Some prey live in large groups (such as herd animals), and the hunters need to separate the target from the rest. They typically choose a young or wounded animal. Ideally they kill it while it is running, but sometimes the prey chooses to stand and fight. In such cases, the pack goes for defensive attacks with the goal of wearing the prey down (rather than try for a single-strike kill). This is important as pack members that are wounded in a fight might not contribute to later kills.

Pack Predator

7 Points

Primary Skills: Brawling; Running; Stealth; Survival; Tracking; Wrestling.

Techniques: Counterattack; Crafty Dodge (p. 28); Feint (Brawling); In and Out (p. 29); Sweep (Wrestling); Targeted Attack (Brawling Bite/Legs).

Perks: Fearsome Stare; Ground Guard; Pack Tactics; Penetrating Voice; Rapid Retraction 1 (Bite); Teamwork (Pack).

Optional Traits

Racial Feature: Born Biter.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes.

Skills: Intimidation; Leadership; Tactics.

AQUATIC HUNTERS

Aquatic hunters rely on many of the predator strategies and tactics described here; simply replace Running with Swimming. However those that stalk have a few more key differences, mostly due to the 3D environment and not being able to use gravity to help them.

Watery Death

4 points

Primary Skills: Brawling; Survival; Swimming.

Techniques: Death From Below (p. 28); Head Lock (Teeth); Neck Snap (Teeth); Rushing Death (p. 29).

Optional Traits

Racial Feature: Born Biter (particularly such toothy fish as piranhas and swordfish).

PREY ANIMALS

The majority of animals are herbivores and only fight for group dominance or when attacked. These creatures rely on being alert at all times to avoid becoming food. When running away, they typically rely on All-Out Defense (Increased Dodge) for +2 to dodge and 1/2 move. Once they think they are out of reach (or possibly if they panic), they move at full speed until they feel safe.

Prey Animal

3 points

Primary Skills: Brawling; Survival.

Techniques: Skirt Death From Above (p. 29); Skirt Death From Below (p. 29).

RUSHING OR STALKING PREDATORS

Single hunters are often better off ambushing prey, but some terrain offers few suitable spots, or they simply lack the patience to wait for the food to come to them. These predators need to easily find suitable prey and take it down quickly. The typical method is to get as close as possible and strike by surprise, or at least before the prey can react.

Rush Predator

6 points

Primary Skills: Brawling; Running; Stealth; Survival; Wrestling.

Techniques: Acrobatic Stand (Wrestling) Combination (Brawling Bite/Neck + Brawling Kick/Torso); Deadly Pounce (below); Ground Fighting; Head Lock (Teeth); Neck Snap (Teeth); Rake; Rushing Death (p. 29); Sweep (Wrestling).

Perks: Focused Fury; Limited Camouflage (preferred terrain); Skill Adaptation (Acrobatic Stand defaults to Wrestling).

*A tiger doesn't lose sleep
over the opinion of sheep.
– Shahir Zag*

NEW TECHNIQUES

Crafty Dodge

Hard

Default: Dodge-2; cannot exceed Dodge.

By dodging with this defensive technique you set up your foe to be more easily attacked on the following turn. You dodge at -2 but if successful get +2 to hit on your next attack against that foe.

Dancing Death

Hard

Default: Aerobatics-7.

Prerequisite: Aerobatics and Brawling; can't exceed lower of Aerobatics or Brawling.

This is a very showy and fancy aerobic attack that takes advantage of high maneuverability to throw the target off

guard. This is a special option for Move and Attack; use the rules below *instead* of the normal ones. You must first make a Aerobatics or Flight roll at -2. This is a claw strike, -2 to dodge, and -2 damage or -1 damage per die, whichever is *worse*. After the attack, your next dodge is automatically an Aerobatic Dodge (p. B375), made at +2, but you cannot retreat.

This technique assumes the birds claws are foot manipulators. Apply an extra -2 if they are just legs.

Death From Below

Average

Defaults: DX-2 or Brawling-2; can't exceed DX or Brawling.

Prerequisite: Amphibious or Swimming.

This is an attack from below and typically made against prey swimming on the surface. Targets are often surprised, but if they do spot the attacker, they are at -2 to defend. This can be combined with any Attack or Move and Attack maneuver and techniques such as Rushing Death (p. 29).

Deadly Pounce

Average

Defaults: Brawling, Jumping, or Wrestling.

Prerequisites: Brawling, Jumping, and Wrestling and requires four legs; can't exceed prerequisite skill+2.

This is an All-Out Attack (Double) that combines a Pounce (p. B372) followed by a grapple attempt. It allows up to a half move forward with an extra yard of reach and +4 to hit for a slam, followed by a bite to grapple. Roll DX, Acrobatics, or Jumping to stay on your feet afterward.

Full Braking

Average

Default: Flight.

Prerequisite: Flight; see below for maximum technique level.

You have mastered braking at high speeds! This buys off the penalty to slow down, which is -1 per two full yards/second beyond your Air Move from Flight, before Enhanced Move (Air) that you attempt to slow down by (p. B395). This cannot counter more than penalties up to Basic Air Move × 2, as beyond that, you lose control automatically.

Example: The large falcon (p. B457) has a Basic Air Move of 12, so it is limited to +6, which would let it slow down by 24 yards/second.

Hide in Sun

Average

Defaults: prerequisite skill.

Prerequisites: Shadowing or Stealth; can't exceed prerequisite skill+4.

You are practiced at keeping the sun at your back when following someone. This makes it unlikely they even look in your direction and hard to see you if they do. This technique can only be used on one known target or a small group traveling close together. Others are at +2 to see you.

In and Out

Average

Defaults: prerequisite skill.

Prerequisite: Boxing, Brawling, or Karate; can't exceed prerequisite skill.

This is a quick strike followed by an equally quick step back, designed to wear out an opponent rather than make an outright kill. Due to the lowered defenses, it is best used when attacking from where the foe can't easily strike back (to the rear or side). It is a Committed Attack (Determined) with two steps for in and out. The attacker has -2 to defense and can neither parry nor retreat.

Rushing Death

Hard

Defaults: prerequisite skill-3.

Prerequisites: Jumping and four or more legs, or Flying or Swimming; can't exceed prerequisite skill.

This is a fast charge ending in a bite, claw strike (foot manipulators), or kick at an additional -2 (which cannot be bought off). This is not a slam; it is a special option for Move and Attack (p. B365), and uses the rules below *instead* of the normal ones for that maneuver. You must first make a running broad jump (see p. B352) or a Move and Attack using Flight or Swimming. If successful, then at the end of your move, roll against this technique to hit. Your foe dodges at -2, and you inflict your usual damage at +2 or +1 per die, whichever is *better*. Afterward, you cannot retreat, and your active defenses are at -4. These effects last until your next turn. You must succeed at a DX, Acrobatics, or Jumping roll at -2 to stay on your feet if you jumped. Flying or swimming attackers require a control roll at -2. This is a risky technique best used against weak foes.

Skirt Death From Above

Hard

Default: Dodge-2.

Prerequisites: Acrobatics or Jumping and Running; can't exceed Dodge.

You are always expecting an attack from above and are adept at avoiding them. This does not help if you are surprised, but it does counter the normal penalty to Dodge.

Note: Skirt Death From Below is a similar technique for avoiding Death From Below. For aquatic creatures, it requires either Jumping or Aquabatics, plus Swimming instead of Running. Some flying animals might use either one with Aerobatics instead of Jumping and Flight instead of Running.

Swooping Attack

Average

Defaults: DX+3, Brawling+3, or Wrestling+3.

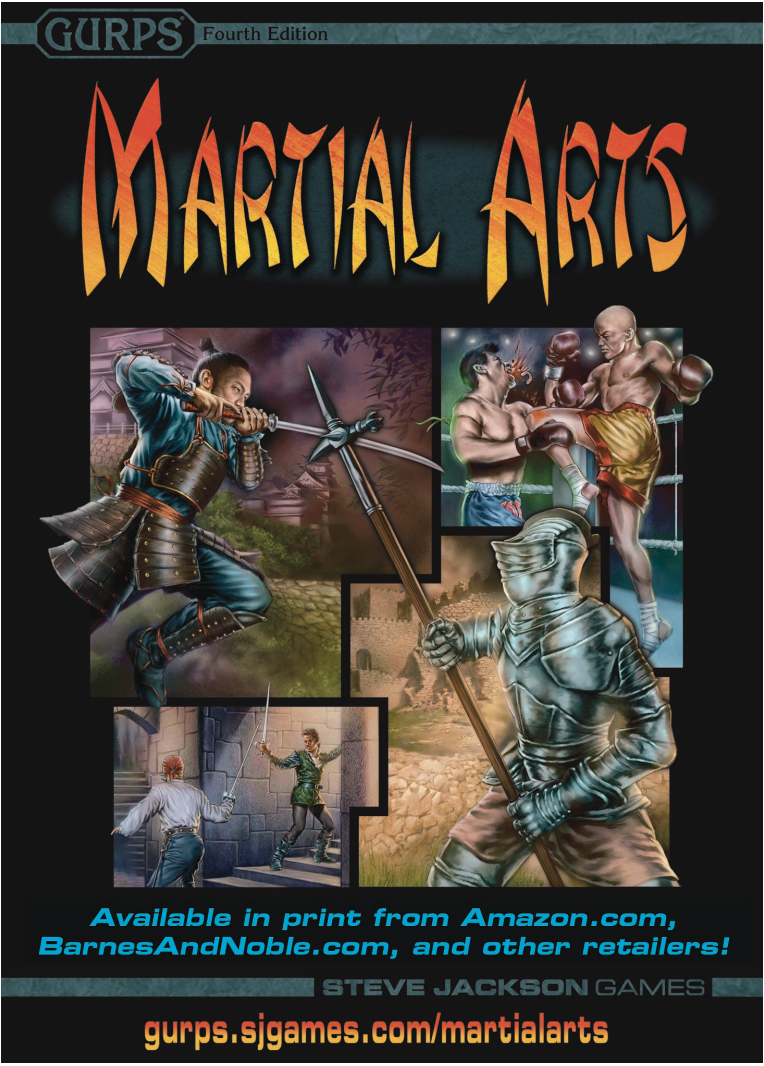
Prerequisites: Flight; cannot be bought up.

You can grab or strike at small game on the ground. You come in at a low graceful dive, so do not get the benefit of attacking from above.

The technique is based on Committed Attack and allows two steps, with the attack made in the middle or at the end. To attempt to carry the target off, you have to successfully grapple and then succeed in a Quick Contest of your HT (with Wrestling bonus) against the highest of your opponent's DX, ST, or best grappling skill. Divide the subject's weight by your Basic Lift (round normally) and add 3; apply this as a penalty to your roll. (This is a simplified variant of *Pickup*, **Technical Grappling**, p. 24). A typical bird can grab and fly with up to Light encumbrance. The attacker has -2 to defense and can neither parry nor retreat.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rory Fansler (also known as "refplace") started roleplaying games with the original boxed set of **Dungeons and Dragons** and enjoys a variety of genres and making up worlds to play in. He bought into **GURPS** largely on the strength of the Steve Jackson name (he's also an old Metagaming fan) and never regretted it. He is a native Californian who resides in Oklahoma.



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CREEPY CHARLY

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Los Angeles, June 2, 2009, 6:36 p.m.

"So, you were telling me you needed something for going through a labyrinth?" Charly said, not even grunting as he slung and dropped a heavy, reinforced case onto the motel room's creaky bed.

"A laby-what?" Stone asked, taking a step back as another wave of his hardware supplier's unique B.O. wafted his direction. "If you mean the floor plan's one blind, short turn after another . . ."

"Exactly," Charly interrupted, opening the locked case with the flourish of a key. "So, I got you something to help with those turns and their guards."

Inside was a weird and blocky thing that looked like a combination between a gunstock and a handheld video camera. The thick muzzle seemed to be hinged, and there was a well-protected lens-flashlight combination right under the barrel. The sight was a small screen atop the stock. A side-panel, once flipped out, showed a crisp, clear picture of what was in front of the gun.

"This is a nice little weapon," Charly announced, picking it up, turning away from Stone, and aiming it at the wall across from them. "Israeli-invented, American-backed. If you're dealing with close combat in urban areas, well, check this out."

He pressed a button on the side of the stock. The weird barrel/sight/light slowly turned to the right, eventually achieving a 60-degree angle.

"Shoots around corners, thanks to this sturdy, motorized hinge in the stock. Gives you a digital picture of what's around that corner through the main sight, with this nice optional side panel so others can see what you're seeing."

"Okay, these I've heard of," Stone said, looking at all the add-ons in the case. "And last I heard, these things were just a fancy rig for a Glock. What we're up against, I need total stopping power on well-trained people in body armor."

Charly looked back at him and smiled, thankfully closed-lipped, as he handed Stone the weapon for inspection. "I know. That's why I got you an advanced model. This shoots M-16 rounds and comes with a built-in, removable silencer. Normally useless on that kind of firepower, but since you're going to be doing it one quiet bullet at a time . . ."

Stone smiled, hefting the weapon and liking it. "I'll take two."

"Fifteen grand each," Charly said, smiling. "I'll throw in three full magazines per gun, on the house. That and I need a favor when you're done with this job. Big one, this time . . ."

Stone just nodded, knowing the favor would probably be as hairy as the one the time before. But given how important this job was, he figured it was worth it for this kind of firepower.

If only he had known what Charly would want, he'd have dropped the gun and run.

Any good, bent dealer can get you a regular gun on the quiet. Any decent fixer or military-surplus merchant can get

you something a little more lethal. If you need something heavier than that, there's more than a few private collectors who'll get the job done.

But if you need to get your hands on special weapons – the kind no one's even *seen* yet – you need to talk to Creepy Charly.

Something of a legend in underground specialist weapons circles since the late 1970s, Charly's got the best goods anywhere. In fact, some of the hardware he can deliver on is so ahead of the curve that it's almost spooky. If you tell him exactly what you need, or what you're up against, he can deliver just about anything, given enough time.

But there will be a high price to pay – one that may go well beyond money.

Having Creepy Charly as someone's Contact makes for a colorful justification for the Early Adopter perk (*GURPS Gun-Fu*, p. 18) or for Signature Gear, but he could also create some interesting complications within the campaign. With that in mind, this article presents what is known about Charly, what he's offering, and how he operates. It also gives some ideas on what he could *really* be, and the interesting problems that may create.

THEY SAID HE WAS CRUDE

Old-timers in the business say that Charly showed up out of nowhere, back in the late 1970s. He quickly made a name for himself with well-armed crooks, police with questionable ethics, and the professional mercenary circuit as the man to see for cool weapons. He also got a quick reputation for being really bad luck, sooner or later, but, in this kind of life, no one really thinks about later until it finally arrives.

He used to hang out exclusively in the American Southwest, especially Southern California and Northwestern Mexico. In the years since, he's expanded his roaming to the entirety of North America. He even made it out to Hawaii once, if the stories are true, though no one really wants to talk about what went down.

Charly looks and acts like a man who knows he has nothing to prove. A mildly portly gent of indeterminate age, he dresses in three-piece suits – usually tan or brown – with an incongruous, usually tropical or floral shirt/tie combination underneath. His fat face is wreathed by shoulder-length, slightly curly hair that seems greasy, and he wears large, brown-tinted, plastic-rimmed sunglasses. He smells of aniseed and bad aftershave, and his teeth are a rotten, brown picket fence in his mouth.

They say he drives a bone-white 1979 Lincoln Continental Mark V. It's usually parked nearby when he does business with someone. For some reason, it doesn't photograph very well, and no one can ever remember the license plate number. No one has actually seen him behind the wheel.

Asking around about Charly in the arms-dealer set tends to get one sullen looks at best, and forceful urgings to “shut your mouth” at worst. Those who know he’s not a myth have heard enough bad stories to know that a client who’s looking for him too loudly might as well be courting death. Those who persist might find death, too, but careful questions may glean weird stories: rumors about an unusual church down in the Yucatan, or a secret government operation gone rogue in San Francisco.

They might even tell you how no one has seen him outside of a motel room – *ever*.

THEY KNEW ALL THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Charly works by word of mouth, or at least that’s what *he* says when he makes initial contact with a potential customer.

There will be a call, out of the blue, and he’ll say he got the number from a friend of a friend. He won’t say who, of course – he respects people’s privacy – but he’s heard that the customer needs something special for an upcoming job, and he’s willing to talk. He’ll suggest a lonely motel or sleazy hotel nearby, for noon the next day, and give a room number (usually ending in 3).

Of course, this could be a trap. If the customer doesn’t make the date, then he never hears from Charly again, even if he desperately needs him. If he goes there, though, he’ll find Charly sitting in a chair in the room, amusedly re-reading a really old paperback copy of *The Stand*. Charly will snap the book shut, stand up, extend a hand and say, “As a flame to the wick of a lamp.”

After that handshake, it’s down to business. The creepy fellow will make his sales pitch, explaining that sometimes the only difference between a successful job and a botched one is having the right tool for the occasion. He will claim to be an expert at getting the right tool, and show off a specially fitted briefcase filled with state-of-the-art handguns (none loaded, of course) as well as photographs and technical specs for a few other, much larger items that just won’t fit inside a case.

“But these, my friend, are toys,” he will say, closing the case. “Nice, in their own way, but just a step behind the curve. Any thug with enough money and the right ears to bend could get one of these, and I’m sure their procurer will be told it’s the latest thing, and they have to have it.

“But me? I’m going to get you something that hasn’t even shown up on their radar yet. Something dealers haven’t heard of, or thought was years away. I will get you a weapon that will make your name, or at least get you through your next job alive.

“Surely that’s worth your time and money?”

If the customer says yes (and why wouldn’t he?), then all’s well. He’s given a number to reach Charly at, and the promise that, for a “reasonable fee” and the occasional favor, he can get the customer a truly amazing item for everyday, personal use. He’s also happy to come up with firepower solutions for specific jobs, provided he’s told all the information – sparing no detail – and promises to keep that information in the strictest confidence, “Just like a priest.”

He’ll smile when he says that. It will not be a comfort to any sane onlooker.

A NASTY REPUTATION AS A CRUEL DUDE

Working with Charly has been compared to having a high-tech gun nut for a fairy godmother. He’s thoughtful and inventive, and quite willing to go out on a limb for his “best customers.” But you don’t *ever* want to make him angry.

He’s good by his word. He has immediate access to up-to-date weaponry and ammunition – everything from one-shot hidden handguns to massive machine guns – and, with a little time, can deliver on cutting-edge tech. If the PCs don’t try to be overly sneaky or evasive, and they tell him what they’re doing, what obstacles they think they’ll need to overcome, and what parts of their plan they’ve figured out, he can present the group with numerous firepower solutions. He *won’t* plan their ops for them, though; if their scheme stinks, he’ll just sell them the best and most expensive gear he can get, figuring he may never get a chance to sell to them again.

In return for his excellent services, Charly wants money – lots of money. He charges double the market price for the latest things, but can guarantee that they’re as clean as the driven snow, and quite untraceable. As for the advanced items, he makes the same guarantee, and charges anywhere from three to five times the going rate for a mass-produced top-of-the-line item (use **GURPS Bio-Tech**, **GURPS High-Tech**, and **GURPS Ultra-Tech** for pricing ideas).

Charly also requires the occasional favor – maybe one every other job, depending on how much he cuts them a deal on the price. What he wants them to do is usually in keeping with what the PCs can offer him, and is usually of questionable legality at best.

Protagonists involved in law enforcement might be asked to look the other way while something heinous goes down, sneak something out of an evidence locker, or see to it that a certain gun-runner is “shot while fleeing.” Criminals might be asked to steal something of interest – usually from someone powerful or well-connected – or take interesting packages from place to place *without* looking in them. Mercenaries might get to do a free job for one of his many strange and brutal “friends” in another part of the world, or else terminally inconvenience an unfriendly competitor.

If the PCs refuse to do a favor for Charly, complain too loudly when he drops the ball, or actually get *rude* with him, he will stop helping the group. He will not deign to answer the next few calls, and then, when he finally does pick back up, he’ll refuse to help them unless they do him a really “special” favor.

I Think I’m Gonna Crash

As a Contact, Creepy Charly costs 12 points. His effective skill in Armoury (Small Arms) is 18, his Frequency is Quite Often, and he’s usually reliable. If the PCs fail to get hold of him, he explains that he was busy helping someone else. If he can’t get them really good weapons – or they prove to be prone to misfiring – he will just say “the river dried up on me” and smile.

Such favors are invariably ones the whole team might not come back alive from, and that may be the last they ever hear from him anyway.

EVERYTHING ALL THE TIME

As written, Creepy Charly is an unnerving enigma with no ready solution. It may be enough for the group to know that he can score them some great weapons, at least at first. But after he's had them jump through some dangerous, possibly career-destroying hoops on his behalf, they might just get a little curious about this bad-dressing, walking billboard for dental hygiene they've signed up with.

Here are some ideas of who he really is, along with possible consequences for knowing him. Any one of these could be the seed for an entire story, or could just remain background noise that never reaches a proper crescendo.

Former Government Spook

Back in the 1970s, Charles Forester was an up-and-coming agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, chasing down gun-runners in Southern California. Then a massive, international bust at a weird church in southern Mexico went spectacularly bad, and he took all the blame for others' mistakes.

He wasn't exactly fired, but he was assigned the mother of all desk jobs. They put him to work looking after the evidence the other agents brought in to the San Diego office, as well as the weapons lock-ups.

Eventually, he came to realize that he was sitting on a gold mine. Not only did he have the key to the best stuff taken from the streets, but he also had the direct pipeline on all the experimental stuff they wanted the bureau to try out. All that plus all the information he'd need on those best-suited to pay for it was right at his fingertips.

He carefully began to create a web of electronic backdoors, secret files, well-paid (and cruelly blackmailed) accomplices, and the like. By the time he retired, in the 1990s, he had the whole of the California bureau under his thumb. Now he's so well-connected he can walk right into the headquarters in D.C. like he owned the place.

It's like no one can see him, somehow.

Complications

The ATF *knows* something is wrong, but they can't quite put their finger on how it's happening. All they can do is follow the symptoms, and that's the PCs. If they ever get nailed by law enforcement, or made to account for their cool toys, the ATF might find out and recognize the "clean" guns as something they may have lost. After that, they will begin following the protagonists, hoping to catch them in something within their jurisdiction, at which point, Charly may let them go or use them to bait a trap for his former co-workers.

Current Government Spook

Back in the 1970s, Charles Franklin was an up-and-coming agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, chasing down gun-runners in California. Then one bust went spectacularly bad, at a weird compound in the Bay Area, and he took all the blame for others' mistakes. However, rather

than putting him out on the street, the bureau decided to make lemonade out of the lemon, and made him their undercover man.

Armed with a series of conflicting rumors about his origins, "Charly" became the ATF's best sting operator. He would hook up with people looking to buy hardware, arrange a sale, and then stand back and smile his nasty grin when the Feds kicked down the door. Then, while they sweated under the lights and spilled, he'd take what they had to offer and go on to the next bust, and the next.

Charly still does it for the ATF; it's just that he's decided that he doesn't have to do it all the time. He plans to retire someplace nice and tropical – preferably with no extradition treaties – and has been using his skills and position to build a comfortable fund on the side. Worthy persons (such as the PCs) are afforded chances to get truly remarkable and expensive wares, use them to for their own (and sometimes Charly's) benefit, and get a bonus stay-out-of-the-bureau's-sight card. All others get fed to his day job so it looks like he's actually doing something on the government's dime.

Complications

So long as the PCs pay their bills, do what they're told, and don't get too uppity, they should be fine. But the moment Charly decides they are more trouble than they're worth – or gets the notion *they're* investigating *him* – he will gladly arrange for them to be arrested, nailed for any number of things they may or may not have done, and tossed into prison for an extended stay. Even if they escape the sting, they'll be wanted felons, which will make doing their gun fu a little more difficult from here on out.

Undercover Arms Tester

Every major product has blind testers, out in the field. They get the unsuspecting to use their wares, and then keep tabs on how well they actually work in the field – far away from labs, safety regulations, and planned experiments. Then they take back the data in order to improve the final product.

They do the same thing with weapons. They sell them on the black market to interested parties likely to use them several times, and then hang back and watch what happens. If the users live through the experience, the testers call that a win. If not, there's always someone else willing to pay the company to test its guns.

Carlos Figueroa is the best freelance weapons-test facilitator currently working in North America. He is paid very well by a number of arms manufacturers to "borrow" their advanced prototypes, take them into the field, and watch how they work in real time. He gets all the information from his clients so he can position himself at an optimum viewing angle – even breaking into the places they plan to hit, just so he can find a way to watch. He also keeps the money he makes off of the sale, just to pad his already-considerable retirement fund, and has his clients perform favors to help conceal his real identity.

Complications

Other than frequent misfires, dealing with this version of Charly brings the chance of being caught up in a massive corporate trap. The weapons manufacturers won't dare touch Charly, but they'll gladly mess with the people he sells the product to, in the hopes of stymieing their rivals' R&D.

This means they may be attacked by corporate thugs, at any moment, for no discernible reason.

In addition, there's a chance that the protagonists might realize they're being watched by Charly, or his many helpers and assistants. If they do, and he realizes this, he'll drop all contact and have one of his other clients do him the "favor" of putting them in the ground. He can't have the subjects realizing they're in a maze after all.

Cunning Time Meddler

They say Charly's ahead of the curve, but they have no idea how far that really is.

Gunsmith, criminal historian, and fixer extraordinaire, Xarles Fyeaulx³ escaped from the dreaded Prison Noire of Grande Paris in the year 2836. Sentenced to 10 consecutive lifetimes of zero growth and development— a fate worse than death for an imaginative rogue like himself— he not only managed to escape, but stole a timesuit (itself stolen from an unfortunate, near-anencephalic traveler from the year 3482628) and ported himself to the 1970s.

There, in an era he had a particular fondness for, Xarles slipped into the shoes of some poor fellow who was killed in a little interne-cine misunderstanding, down in Xtul. Since then, he's been using his massive foreknowledge of guns to turn a tidy profit. He uses his timesuit to go forward in time to find the next best thing, steals a working, off-the-shelf copy right from the manufacturers, and then sells it to his clients. Then he takes the money, goes back in time exactly one year, and lives it up— coming back to the present only when he needs more money.

Complications

Charly knows a lot about what's going to happen— except about what's going to happen to him— and has a pathological fear of being imprisoned. He uses his clients as tools to avoid capture, and will gladly sacrifice them all to stay free and alive. A sure sign that things are about to go bad for the PCs is when he cuts them loose.

Moreover, every so often, Charly gets the feeling that he's being watched. He suspects the beings from the year that poor temporal visitor came from are trying to find him (and his suit). When he get that itchy feeling, he puts together a "care package" for someone, which consists of an exact, working copy of his

own mind. Then he has one of his clients drive that package out of town, just after Charly goes back in time a few years, knowing full well that the visitors will take the package— and whoever's got it— back to the future with them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid*, has been the editor of *The Wraith Project*, and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's the author of the fictional blog *SPYGOD's Tales* (spygod-ales.blogspot.com) and writes for Op-Ed News. He currently lives in Lansing, Michigan, with two cats and a mountain of Lego bricks.

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RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

FRESHEN UP YOUR FIGHTS

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Welcome, would-be deity! You want to challenge those pesky heroes who are trying to kill those who are trying to kill them? Congratulations! You've come to the right place.

This time, I want to look at how to make combat encounters more interesting by shaking up some assumptions of adversaries. Before we begin, I'm assuming a basic tenet that you're not necessarily trying to design foes that are exact matches for the heroes (see *The Basics*, below). If you do want to make directly "fair" encounters, you will need to carefully consider the implications when following this advice, but it should still be inspiring.

With that idea in mind, let's explore some new random thoughts we've tossed out on the table. (See what I did there?)

THE OUT-OF-WHACK ADVERSARY

One option to make a combat-worthy enemy more interesting is to wildly augment some basic physical aspect of the foe.

- *An incredible combat power.* Maybe the foe has a laser blast that does tremendously more damage than normal. Or maybe an orc has super-human strength (and commensurate damage). Or a vessel has nukes, mines, or something else that

gives a bigger-than-normal boom for the buck. The point is, such an adversary can probably do a whole bunch of damage (or even kill outright) if the heroes let their guard down.

- *Remarkable defenses.* Whether it's a force field, thick plating, or really tough skin, the enemy can simply ignore a lot of damage flung at it. This means that unless the heroes can blast their way through the defenses – or find a weakness they can exploit – the good guys aren't going to do much of anything.

- *Unending endurance.* Maybe the bad guy doesn't have any particularly noteworthy defenses, but it has a *lot* of Hit Points to just suck up damage for a longer-than-expected period than the heroes can dole it out (or the opponent can regenerate so fast that it makes a difference in combat). Or maybe it has so many Fatigue Points – or is otherwise tireless – that it can outlast the heroes' attempts to stay one step ahead of it. (One of the things that makes zombies such an effective villain is that they can do their zombie thing 24 hours a day . . . whereas their non-zombie targets still need to sleep a number of hours each night.)

- *Incredible agility.* An orc that's otherwise the same but has a DX of 25 is a *very* different encounter than its standard counterpart. Even a Dodge or Block that's amped up to incredible levels is going to prove a surprise to the heroes.

THE BASICS

This column relies on a point that I've made in the past that I'm going to gloss over quickly. Namely, that you're under no obligation to provide challenges that are directly appropriate to the heroes' abilities.

This runs contrary to what many of us encountered in many of our first roleplaying games, where fledgling heroes face simple foes – goblins, bandits, Stormtroopers, etc. – that the PCs are expected to prevail over. But – barring specific scenarios set up to challenge certain power levels of adventurers – there's no reason for that to be the case; in fact, it's quite likely that's *not* true! (Look around

your own group of friends, family, and associates, and it's all but certain you wouldn't be built on the same number of points if you were stat'd in *GURPS* terms.)

Realizing this, a whole world of possibilities opens up. Mighty dragons can mingle among orcs, wimpy rent-a-cops can guard important installations, and indestructible robots can protect the Galactic Chamber.

If you spring this on an unsuspecting group that's otherwise handled encounters in previous adventures, you might want to break the lesson gently with an enemy that's more defensive than deadly (see above).

Of course, it's also possible for combat abilities to be out of whack the *other* way. For example, think of how you could alter the encounter with a giant dragon using the reverse of the above suggestions. Maybe it lacks its fearsome fire breath, or only has two Hit Points, or has no protective armor whatsoever.

MATTERS OF THE MIND

The classic high-powered *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* adventure *Dragon Mountain* has as its primary adversaries kobolds, one of the weakest enemies in the game. But the enemies aren't particularly augmented or made more dangerous; rather, they're simply played as if they were truly intelligent beings, using their environment and tactics as vital aspects of their danger. (Oh, and it also has a dragon, which shouldn't come as much surprise in an adventure named as it is.)

Playing up an adversary's intelligence as fully as possible is one of the most revelatory maneuvers possible. Completely detailing how to play foes intelligently could well take up a full book on its own, but here are some quick ideas to keep in mind.

- **Bad guys don't want to die** any more than the heroes do. If they find themselves on the receiving end of potentially lethal damage, they'll almost certainly try to escape, summon help, or otherwise do everything in their power to keep from dying (or, barring that, make sure their death is meaningful and/or avenged as much as possible).

- **Foes almost certainly know the terrain** better than the heroes, and will use it to their advantage. This includes traps, evasion opportunities, and hit-and-run possibilities. For a good example of this in action, check out how the Ewoks from *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* use their superior knowledge of their home to win the day.

- **Bad guys are at least as knowledgeable** in their abilities as the heroes are in theirs, and they're almost certainly as observant. In particular, if something isn't working, they'll likely stop doing it and try something else . . . up to and including running away.

When thinking about adversaries' intelligence, there are two broad considerations: *tactics* (the nuts-and-bolts of getting through a specific combat situation as effectively as possible) and *strategy* (which entails the larger aspects of what they're hoping to accomplish with their overarching mission or their lives in general).

*Pew pew! Lasers! Just like
the real thing, right?*

*– Unity's Platform Bot card,
Sentinels of
the Multiverse*

Thus, a group of orcs might have tactics that entail hiding in ambush positions, targeting spellcasters, and calling for help at the first moment one of their group dies. Their strategy might entail guarding the entranceway, ensuring that the summoner in the caves ahead is aware of any goings on, and – if need be – sacrifice their lives to make certain the summoner can bring support from the aether.

Again, by varying the level of intelligence – higher or lower – you can escalate or neutralize the danger of an encounter, providing more variation.

NEW PLAN, NEW PLAN . . .

One of the most important elements in varying fundamental aspects of encounters is that it opens up the possibilities of what it means to be a hero. If all enemies are designed to be thwacked until they remain motionless, then it places an incredible emphasis on abilities that cause or deflect damage.

However, when not all enemies are designed to be killed or killable, the heroes have to use other traits – along with their own cleverness – to get through the encounter. Examples include:

- **Stealth abilities.** Maybe an encounter can be bypassed entirely?
- **Knowledge skills.** Perhaps an area includes environmental aspects that can be exploited to provide an edge?
- **Powers of perception.** If enemies are otherwise impervious, maybe it falls to a clever hero to find a weakness or exploit a characteristic to provide an edge.
- **Diplomatic and social skills.** Talking with the enemy might offer a clue to a weakness or let the heroes trick their way through the situation. And, if all else fails, maybe the encounter can be bribed or persuaded to leave the PCs alone?

THE UPSHOT

Starting with the underlying assumption that not every encounter will be resolvable via combat by the heroes, the question then becomes *how* those encounters can differ from the expectations of the good guys. By altering fundamental aspects of potential opponents, the GM can provide a world of encounters, even with a limited number of adversaries. A humble hovering drone can have countless variations, ranging from the drone with a missile, to a drone with a force field, to a drone immune to corporeal damage, to a drone that's hyper-intelligent and omnisciently aware of the heroes' movements and weaknesses. With a few simple techniques, the familiar whirl of a drone's blades can spell not tedium, but a myriad of possibilities that will keep the heroes guessing. The danger is endless, and combat is now!

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

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