GURPS® Fourth Edition

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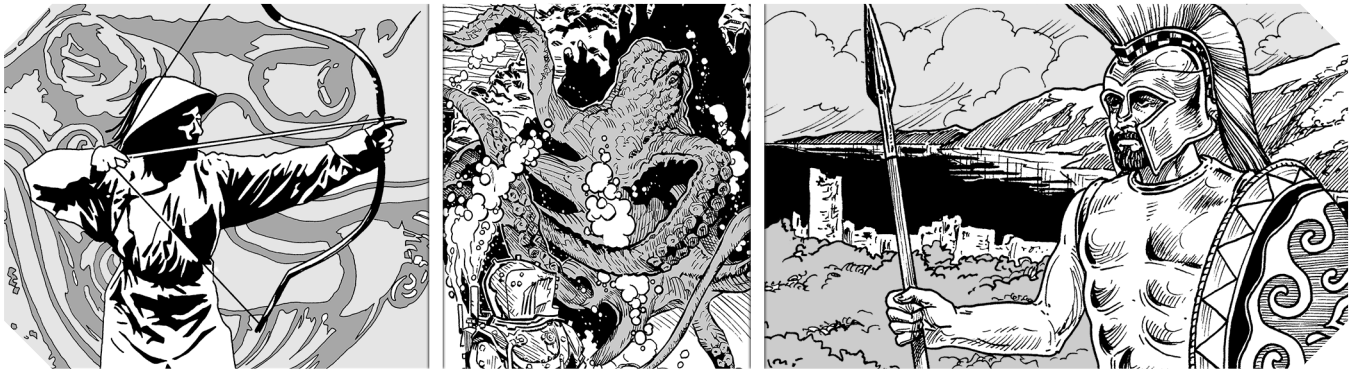

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> *. . . a probable impossibility is to be preferred to a thing improbable and yet possible.*
>
> *– Aristotle,* ***Poetics***

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Introduction

One of the big attractions of roleplaying games is exploring the worlds of our favorite books or movies. The Cthulhu Mythos, *The Lord of the Rings, Star Trek,* and many other published works have licensed game rules – sometimes multiple sets. But maybe you'd rather use ***GURPS*** than another system. Or maybe you like a fictional world no one has thought of making into a game, or one whose author or publisher won't license it. One of the major uses of ***GURPS*** is running campaigns in such worlds. And one of the big topics for ***GURPS*** questions is how to do it right!

GURPS writers have addressed this topic in the ***Basic Set*** (especially pp. B486-522) and in supplements, especially genre-focused supplements such as ***GURPS Fantasy, GURPS Horror, GURPS Space,*** and ***GURPS Zombies.*** This material is helpful and is highly recommended. But many questions about adapting fictional sources are broader than a single genre. It's time for a systematic, full-length discussion – ***GURPS Adaptations.***

In gaming, "adaptation" doesn't mean quite the same thing as in literary, graphic, or cinematic media. Rather than a retelling of the original story, *new stories* emerge from campaigns: sequels, prequels, alternative versions, or more radical transformations (see *Reinventions,* p. 7). This supplement's focus is on translating the original setting and characters, but if you want to reenvision a favorite work, you'll find suggestions on how to do so.

When you're planning a campaign based on a work of fiction or drama, ***GURPS Adaptations*** is your "how to" guide. Pick your favorite novel, graphic novel, movie, television series, or other inspiration – and get started!

Recommended Books

The only books that are required for use with ***GURPS Adaptations*** are the ***GURPS Basic Set.*** For adaptations of works in specific genres, the GM may find appropriate sourcebooks useful, such as ***GURPS Fantasy, GURPS Horror, GURPS Mysteries, GURPS Psionic Campaigns, GURPS Space,*** or ***GURPS Supers.*** Any book with game mechanics can be useful for the right source material – ***GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*** and ***GURPS Power-Ups 6: Quirks*** in particular are good with almost any source.

> *Of all fictions, the marvelous journey is the one formula that is never exhausted.*
> *– Northrop Frye,* ***Anatomy of Criticism***

About the Author

William H. Stoddard and his wife life in San Diego, California, with two cats and more books than they have time to count. He has been running ***GURPS*** campaigns for over 20 years, starting with ***GURPS Uplift.*** He has run many campaigns based on fictional or dramatic sources, about half of them using his own adaptations of the source material.

About *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of ***GURPS*** players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: **info@sjgames.com.** Resources include:

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Bibliographies. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all ***GURPS*** releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

Based on . . .

To illustrate its concepts and methods, ***GURPS Adaptations*** offers examples of working with published sources. Necessarily, these are older books that are in the public domain. However, all of them are still read, all have been adapted into other media, and all have been sources of inspiration for later works that imitate or transform them. Each title is followed by a short form that will be used to refer to it later in this supplement.

When we met in Dr. Seward's study two hours after dinner, which had been at six o'clock, we unconsciously formed a sort of board or committee.
– Bram Stoker, ***Dracula***

The Odyssey [Odysseia] (Odys.)

An epic poem by Homer, thought to have been composed before 700 B.C. It tells how a Greek hero came back from Troy, after spending 10 years lost at sea, and finally reclaimed his wife and his kingdom from a crowd of ambitious suitors. The first part provides a model for quest stories, particularly tales set at sea; it could also be read as science fiction, with each island (like a recently discovered planet in *Star Trek*) holding a new monster or exotic culture. The second part is a story of seeking revenge through covert methods.

Recommended version: The Odyssey, translated by Robert Fagles (Penguin Classics, 1999).

Adaptation: The Odyssey (television miniseries, 1997), written and directed by Andrei Konchalovsky.

Works inspired: Nostoi, an ancient Greek epic, now lost, about other heroes coming home from Troy; *The True History,* by Lucian of Samosata (second century A.D.), a satire of Homer, the oldest surviving story of space travel; *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel,* by Nikos Kazantzakis (1938), an epic poem about Odysseus's departure from his homeland and his later adventures; *Homer's Daughter,* by Robert Graves (1955), a witty novel about a Sicilian princess who writes the *Odyssey,* puts herself into it as a character, and passes it off as Homer's work; "Tales of Brave Ulysses" (1967), a hard-rock song by Eric Clapton and Martin Sharp; *Island in the Sea of Time* and its sequels (1998, 1999, 2000), a series of novels by S.M. Stirling where modern Americans displaced in time encounter an ancient Greek warrior named Odikweos; *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), a film by Joel Coen about three escaped convicts in rural Mississippi in 1937.

Water Margin [Shui Hu Zhuan] (WM)

A classic Chinese novel attributed to Shi Nai'an (1296-1372) that tells the story of the 108 Stars of Destiny, a band of outlaws struggling against corrupt officials. It's loosely based on folktales of the historical outlaw Song Jiang (active around 1121, in the Song Dynasty). It's one of the oldest known sources of the martial-arts tropes of *wuxia* films and recent novelists such as Jin Yong. It could also be a model for a supers campaign, as many of its heroes have super-human abilities.

Recommended version: The Marshes of Mount Liang, translated by John Dent-Young and Alex Dent-Young (Chinese University Press, 1994-2002). There are many Chinese and Japanese adaptations.

Works inspired: Golden Lotus (*Jin Ping Mei*), by Lanling Xiaoxiao Sheng (1610), an erotic novel that takes off from an incident in *Water Margin; Suikoden,* created by Yoshitaka Murayama (1995-2008), a series of martial-arts-themed video games. Many film and television versions have been created in Hong Kong and Japan. In a larger sense, the entire genres of *wuxia* and *chambara* films take off from it!

Pride and Prejudice (P&P)

A novel of manners by Jane Austen, first published 1813, which has become a classic British love story for its portrayal of initial conflict turning into romantic attraction. It's a model for lively roleplaying with relatively little "adventure," but a good deal of comedy – though one of its subplots involves investigation, after the heroine's younger sister elopes with a soldier who has no intention of marrying her, and has to be tracked down.

Adaptations: Pride and Prejudice (1940), a film by Robert Z. Leonard with a screenplay co-authored by Aldous Huxley; *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), a BBC television series by Simon Langton; *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), a film by Joe Wright.

Works inspired: Bride and Prejudice (2004), a film by Gurinder Chadha set in modern India and Britain, with many Bollywood influences – and amazingly faithful to the original; *Lost in Austen* (2008), a four-part British television series by Dan Zeff, in which a 21st-century young woman changes places with the heroine of *Pride and Prejudice,* derails the plot, and takes desperate measures to salvage the original happy ending; "Pride and Prometheus," by John Kessel (2008), a science-fiction story where one of the heroine's younger sisters meets both Victor Frankenstein and his creature; *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies,* by Seth Grahame-Smith (2009), a mash-up of Austen's story with zombie horror; *Death Comes to Pemberley,* by P.D. James (2011), a mystery novel in which Elizabeth and Darcy investigate a murder of which her younger sister's husband is accused.

Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea [Vingt mille lieues sous les mers] (20KL)

A novel by Jules Verne, first published 1870, the best known of his *voyages extraordinaires* ("amazing journeys"), which were major sources of science fiction. It starts out as a story of scientific investigation of a mysterious sea monster, focused on three adventurers with varied talents. The "monster" turns out to be a submarine, a classic "marvelous invention," and becomes the continuing stage for a vehicle-based story of exploration – one deliberately modeled on the nautical adventures of Odysseus.

Recommended version: 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, translated by Walter James Miller and Frederick Paul Walter (Naval Institute Press, 1993) with annotations.

Adaptation: 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (1954), a film directed by Richard Fleischer that has become one of the major sources for steampunk.

Works inspired: Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water (1990-1991), a 39-episode anime series directed by Hideaki Anno, in which two children join forces with Captain Nemo to struggle against a hidden conspiracy; *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen,* by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill (2003), a graphic novel in which Captain Nemo belongs to a secret British team of proto-supers.

Dracula (Drac.)

A Gothic novel by Bram Stoker, first published 1897, which gave the vampire mythos its standard form in 20th-century literature and film. Similarly to *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,* it brings together a small group with varied backgrounds to investigate and combat a mysterious threat. It's notable for its heroes' reliance on innovative science, from blood transfusions to hypnotism. They also engage in unofficial covert ops, from housebreaking in London to guerrilla warfare in the Balkans.

Adaptations: Dracula (1931), a film directed by Tod Browning, with Bela Lugosi as Dracula; *Horror of Dracula* (1958), directed by Terence Fisher, the first film with Christopher Lee as Dracula; *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), a film directed by Francis Ford Coppola, with Gary Oldman as Dracula, emphasizing the vampire's historical background.

Works inspired: Nosferatu (1922), a German silent film directed by F.W. Murnau that made its vampire, Count Orlok, a figure of death and corruption with no romantic aspects; *Tomb of Dracula,* a Marvel Comics series mainly scripted by Marv Wolfman (1972-1979); *Anno Dracula,* by Kim Newman (1992), an alternate history in which Count Dracula becomes the ruler of the United Kingdom; *Hellsing* (1997-2008), a manga series by Kouta Hirano in which a reformed Dracula is an ally of the Van Helsing family; "Buffy vs. Dracula" (2000), an episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that brings Count Dracula to Sunnydale; *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (see *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* above), where the team leader is Mina Harker, one of Dracula's foes; *The Dracula Dossier Director's Handbook* and the accompanying *Dracula Unredacted* (2015), a campaign framework by Kenneth Hite and Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan, based on the premise that Stoker's novel is a cover story for a secret history.

Multiple Sources and Mashups

What if you want to combine two or more source works in a single campaign – a *crossover* or *mashup?* This is common in fan fiction, but not limited to it; Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* brought together multiple characters from Victorian fiction (see *Based on . . . ,* pp. 4-5). Far earlier, the tale of the Argonauts brought together 100 heroes of Greek legends, including Atalanta, Castor and Pollux, Heracles, Laertes (Odysseus' father), Orpheus, and Theseus – the total cast was as big as that of *Water Margin!* For a sustained campaign, as opposed to a one-shot or guest appearance, look for common elements that match up closely.

An extreme case of mashups is the "kitchen sink" campaign, which takes material from any source in an entire genre. This approach goes back to the very start of roleplaying games! The original *Dungeons and Dragons* books took elements from *The Lord of the Rings;* sword and sorcery by authors such as Howard and Moorcock; more recent fantasy by Anderson, Leiber, and Vance; and other sources ranging from classical mythology to "creature feature" movies.

*Example (Drac./P&P): W*hat if Dracula had shown up in England decades earlier, and picked one of the Bennet sisters as his prey – and George Wickham as his Renfield?

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (WWOz)

A children's fantasy novel by L. Frank Baum, first published 1900, which became the leading American fairy tale. The basic plot is a quest, with the same goal as the *Odyssey:* to return home. Much of the story is a travelogue fantasy where the heroes pass through strange locations and encounter peculiar creatures. It's an early example of a story set in an invented world.

Adaptations: The Wizard of Oz (1939), a film directed by Victor Fleming, notable for its gimmick of changing from black and white for scenes set in Kansas to color for scenes set in Oz; *The Wiz,* a Broadway musical by William F. Brown and Charlie Smalls (1975) that reinterprets the story in terms of African-American culture, later adapted into a film (1978) directed by Sidney Lumet.

Works inspired: 13 sequels by Baum, from *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1904) to *Glinda of Oz* (1914, after his death), which further explore Oz and other magical realms (plus many more sequels by Ruth Plumly Thompson and others); "Tin Man" (1974), a pop song by America; Robert A. Heinlein's science fiction novel *The Number of the Beast* (1986), in which interuniversal travel allows a visit to Oz; *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West,* by Gregory Maguire (1996), an "alternate universe" prequel; *Tin Man* (2007), a television miniseries by Nick Willing that reinterprets Oz in science-fictional terms.

Chapter One
High Concept

Movie scriptwriters talk about *high concept,* a quick summary of what a movie is about and what's going to bring in an audience. That summary is also a mission statement for the writers, a starting point for their creative work.

When planning a roleplaying game, you need the same things – a statement of what kind of campaign you plan to run, and what you're going to promise your players (see *The Players,* pp. 12-13). For a game based on a source, thinking about that source in terms of high concept can help identify the key elements your campaign needs to capture.

For the story-title abbreviations used in the examples, see *Based on . . . ,* pp. 4-5.

Glossary

agency: The ability of characters to make things happen in an imagined world; also, the ability of players to affect the course of events in a game.

alternate universe: A retelling of an existing story with a key event happening differently.

atmosphere: Features of the physical environment that help to create a mood.

attribute: (1) In ***GURPS,*** one of a character's four basic traits. (2) In painting, a distinctive possession or object by which a specific person such as a saint can be recognized.

austerity: The degree to which characters' actions have consequences, either physical or legal.

fan fiction: Stories about characters or settings from works of fiction or drama, not written by the original creator or as authorized continuations; now primarily published online.

indirect exposition: The portrayal of an imagined setting through the implications of a story's events, especially minor events.

MacGuffin: An object whose only role in a story is to be pursued or fought over, and whose specific qualities are irrelevant. Also McGuffin or maguffin.

mimetic fiction: Stories focusing on common life experiences in familial and organizational settings, and without fantastic elements. Also called *literary realism* or *realistic fiction.*

mundane: A setting, character, or story without weird or fantastic elements.

pathetic fallacy: The practice of having natural conditions change to reflect a character's emotions or the emotional implications of a storyline.

protagonist: The main character of a narrative or drama; the character who makes the key decisions and whose fate the story focuses on.

recognition: A key discovery or insight that changes a protagonist's understanding of the dramatic situation and leads to a climactic confrontation.

sandbox: A style of roleplaying that emphasizes exploring a world without a continuing or developing plot.

thaumatocracy: A society governed by people with magical powers or skills. For other common types of governments, see pp. B509-510.

theme: A recurring idea expressed in different ways in a narrative or drama.

trope: A typical element in some form of narrative or drama.

unreliable narrator: A viewpoint character who repeatedly misunderstands events and situations.

verisimilitude: The ability of an imaginative work to give a convincing impression of reality.

Starting Point

You and your players are going to create *new* stories that grow out of your source. Several different strategies exist for coming up with ideas for such stories.

Prequels and Sequels

One of the oldest strategies goes back to storytellers in marketplaces: asking *What happened next?* Many stories have room for a sequel. The original author may face continuing demand for sequels to a popular work; Baum tried to end the Oz series with *The Emerald City of Oz,* as Conan Doyle did the Sherlock Holmes stories with "The Final Problem" – and both failed!

A sequel could begin the very day after the end of the original work, asking literally, "what happened next?"

Other sequels start, in effect, "the next time something interesting happened." Or a sequel could begin a generation or more later, telling about descendants of the original heroes.

Recent works have developed the idea of a *prequel,* a work that tells about the younger life of a hero, his ancestors, or the earlier history of a setting. Prequels need to end up someplace consistent with the start of the original work – which can be tricky for the GM, who has several co-authors with their own ideas!

Example (Odys.): During the original story, Odysseus' son Telemachus comes to manhood – and gains the favor of his father's patron Athena. He and a group of companions could be sent on a quest of their own, as the subject of a campaign.

Filling the Gaps

Many sources have stories with time gaps, or multiple stories separated in time, like the Oz series as a whole. It's possible to fit adventures into the gaps, as "untold tales" about the original heroes. If the source defines a detailed timeline, each untold adventure may need to be assigned to a specific point on it, before some events and after others. If time sequence is vague, it may be enough to say, "This is an untold story."

Displacements

Another way to tell narratives that don't conflict with the source is to focus on different main characters: minor characters from the source who get promoted to stars of their own stories, or original characters made up for the campaign.

A campaign can be set in a location that exists in the source material, but is only briefly visited in the original story, or even simply mentioned. Any such place could have its own cast of characters.

Another option is to stay in the main location, but promote minor characters to leading roles. These can be either named individual characters, or characters who simply belong to groups.

Example (WM): With 108 main heroes, *Water Margin* can't tell all their stories in detail. A campaign could focus on the exploits of less fully described heroes. These could be fitted into gaps in time, especially in the first half of the novel, before the heroes come to terms with the imperial authorities.

Alternate Universes

Alternate histories take off from the real world, choosing some one key event, making it turn out differently, and tracing the consequences. (For many examples based on the history and myths of our world, see the ***GURPS Infinite Worlds*** series.) The same method can be applied to key events in fictional settings. Any of this supplement's source works could have ended some other way. Fan-fiction writers, who do this a lot, talk about "alternate universes."

The key to creating an alternate universe is finding a point in the story, or in the previous events it implies, where things could have taken a contrasting path – but still created a situation with the potential for exciting experiences. It's also possible to change situations more radically, creating a disastrous outcome to the original story – one where the heroes need to take up different strategies, or where different heroes need to step forward.

Example (Drac.): Dracula doesn't return in time to save Jonathan Harker from the three vampiric women in his castle. Lacking access to the legal records of his property acquisitions, Lucy Westenra's avengers are delayed in taking action against him, letting him establish himself as a master of England's underworld. This leads to a mystery campaign in which the original characters may appear as player characters or as Contacts with valuable information.

Retelling the Original Story

All of the suggested starting points are for new stories based on the source – telling a different story in the same world, or moving the story to a different world and seeing what happens. But what about playing out *the original story* in the same setting? A novel can be adapted into a movie, a television series, or a graphic novel; why can't any of these be adapted into a campaign?

There are real difficulties in doing this; in fact, they've been the subject of more than one humorous story. Novelists have joked for a long time about characters with minds of their own, who won't do what the plot requires, but *player characters* really do have minds of their own – because each has a different creator. The GM can try to manipulate the players into staying on track, but that takes away the freedom that's one of the big pleasures of roleplaying.

Of course, many adaptations *do* change the original story, sometimes drastically; the film version of Oz is a dream, not a real place, for example. If everyone is willing to accept the game as a new story *based on* the source, a campaign may work.

If the *players* really want to re-create the original story, optional rules for letting them shape the narrative can help; see, for example, *Buying Success* and *Player Guidance* (p. B347) and the expanded discussions in ***GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys.*** The rules for Destiny Points in ***Impulse Buys*** can help pay for this, with the original story defining destinies for its characters. For example, if Odysseus misses Polyphemus' eye, he can buy a success and live to reach Ithaca, instead of getting torn apart.

Reinventions

Instead of creating a new story in the original setting, it's possible to do the reverse: move to an entirely different setting while preserving the essential situation (as *West Side Story* did with *Romeo and Juliet*). Roleplaying campaigns often transform realism into fantasy, but the opposite strategy is also workable (see *Premise,* pp. 8-9). Likewise, consider changing to a different type of fantastic element – fairy tales to horror, or historical fantasy to science fiction.

Another style of reinvention is *parody,* imitation of a source with changes that make it funny or absurd. The key to such reworking is often *incongruity,* a mismatch between the borrowed material and the newly introduced characters or setting. (Though incongruity doesn't always produce parody: *The Hobbit* starts out with a clash between the respectable Bilbo Baggins and the Viking-like dwarves, but Tolkien makes their adventures a serious and exciting story – and by the end, neither is ridiculous to the other.)

If a proposed campaign reinvents its source, the players needed to know this before they agree to participate! Players who were anticipating heroic Chinese outlawry, for example, may not accept a remote galactic empire as a setting, however similar the themes and incidents.

Example (20KL): Instead of a professor of oceanography, his valet, and a harpooner, the *Nautilus* picks up a band of British schoolchildren (and their dog!).

Example (WM): In a future Galactic Empire, an official's injudicious instructions to a computer lead to the creation of 108 enhanced posthumans, who band together as heroic space pirates.

Premise

Every story is founded on a *premise,* something the audience has to assume for its events to be possible. For example, the premise of *Water Margin* is that 108 spirits are born in human form and grow up to be heroic outlaws. This is the basis for their amazing fighting skills, for the superhuman powers many of them show, and for the affinity that draws them together.

Further stories in the same fictional world share its original premise, but they may have subsidiary premises, new assumptions they take off from. Usually these have less wide-ranging implications than the original story – they extend or modify its premise rather than adopting an entirely new premise, as when Baum's *The Marvelous Land of Oz* introduced Princess Ozma as Oz's long-lost rightful ruler. A game based on a fictional source usually needs this kind of subsidiary premise. Choosing a suitable premise helps to define the campaign's starting point.

One Impossible Thing

H.G. Wells described his science-fiction stories as making one impossible assumption and working out what it implied. This is what ***GURPS Space,*** pp. 29-30, calls the "one miracle" approach to science fiction. In this book's terms, that "one miracle" is the *premise* of a fantastic story.

There's nothing wrong with a story, or a campaign, having more than one miracle. But it's a good idea to be cautious about adding an entirely new fantastic premise. The players were probably attracted by the premise of the original source, and want to explore it. A different premise may not appeal to them; and in any case, it's not what the campaign promised them, and it takes time and attention away from the original premise.

Philosophers talk of *Occam's razor,* the principle that the simplest explanation that actually works is the best. Storytellers and campaign designers can think in terms of *Wells' razor:* The fewer and simpler premises a story has, the more easily the audience will accept it.

Mundane Premises

Some premises don't change the nature of the fictional world. Rather, they add detail to it. *Pride and Prejudice,* for example, starts out with five sisters of divergent personalities and abilities, whose modest fortunes make it both difficult and necessary for them to find husbands. No one's view of the world would be transformed by believing in this situation; it's of interest because it creates the possibility of drama or comedy.

Stories of this type are often called "realistic" – but ***GURPS*** contrasts *realistic* with *cinematic* (pp. B488-489), which isn't the same distinction. For clarity, this supplement calls them *mundane* (as in Mundane Background, p. B144).

Campaigns based on a mundane premise usually suggest mundane subsidiary premises – for example, about the career developments, later lives, or children of the protagonists. But it's not impossible to shift to a fantastic key.

Example (P&P): Lydia Wickham has not been welcome at Pemberley. But she arrives without warning and appeals to her sister, Elizabeth Darcy, for help: Her husband George is being pressured about his latest gambling debts, not to repay them, but to connive at some serious crime. Lydia is afraid he'll get caught; Elizabeth can see the danger of his being blackmailed into worse crimes. Can she and her husband thwart the scheme – and should they save Wickham, once again, in the process?

Example (P&P): Georgiana Darcy has more than musical gifts; for several years, she has been hearing the voices of ghosts. On a visit to her aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, she realizes that her cousin Anne has fallen under supernatural influence. Can her brother and his new wife help her uncover the mystery?

Fantastic Premises

Campaigns set in fantastic worlds are founded on fantastic premises – that is, on assumptions that the world is different from what most people believe in some important way. The *Odyssey* assumes that its hero has the favor of the goddess Athena, and more broadly that the Greek pantheon is real. *Dracula, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, Water Margin,* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* make other fantastic assumptions.

The subsidiary premise for a campaign based on one of these works can be either fantastic or mundane. A further development of the original fantastic premise can inspire a new campaign. Alternatively, a campaign can explore the *mundane* implications of the original fantastic premise.

Example (Drac.): Less than a year after their final encounter with Count Dracula, Jonathan and Mina Harker had twin children – a son, Quincy, and a daughter, Lucy. Now in their teens, both have developed unusual qualities that set them apart from other people – and have started wondering why. Are they adopted? Under a family curse? Bastards of some noble family? Their investigations open the door to family secrets perhaps better left hidden.

Example (Drac.): Lord Godalming's adventures in the Balkans while avenging his fiancée's death confirmed his interest in foreign affairs. As a member of the House of Lords, he became involved in foreign intelligence. After two decades, he's the head of the Balkan section, dealing with bureaucratic infighting, the plots of Serbian nationalists, and hints of more sinister forces that he would rather have forgotten.

If you buy the premise, you buy the bit.
– Robert A. Heinlein, ***Expanded Universe***

Genre

The difference between fantastic and mundane premises is part of *genre*. The word "genre" means "kind." A genre in literature or film is a group of works that are seen as similar and that appeal to similar audiences. Many roleplaying games are inspired by a specific genre; ***GURPS,*** as a universal game, has sourcebooks for various genres, such as ***GURPS Fantasy, GURPS Horror, GURPS Mysteries, GURPS Space, GURPS Supers,*** and ***GURPS Zombies.***

Why Genre Matters

Talking about genre may be interesting to theorists and critics. But what does it do for the GM and players?

To the GM

Fictional works typical of a campaign's genre give you a model for your own work. If you know that fairy stories classically have the participants interacting with anthropomorphic animals and supernatural and inscrutable magical beings, you can set up your fairy-tale campaign to include these elements. Or you can intentionally go against that, and instead of the happily nonlinear whimsy found in children's stories, you might play to the brutal morality tales of the original fairy stories – working against the usual expectations of the genre, as a way of surprising your players.

One of the GM's roles is to define the reward structure of the campaign. Primarily, this means awarding bonus points (pp. B498-499) – so characters who perform genre-appropriate actions could earn an extra point for that session, whereas those who violate genre would forgo it. Some genres also provide special ways to *spend* points, such as the training montages of martial-arts stories (see ***GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School***). In a campaign where character points or destiny points can be spent on successes (see *Retelling the Original Story,* p. 7), the GM can restrict this to actions that fit the genre.

To the Players

For the players, genre is a basis for predicting what they're going to like. If you've read or watched dozens of horror stories, or romances, you can reasonably anticipate that you'll enjoy another one. The GM who says that a campaign is in a particular genre is promising you that particular sort of experience.

Because roleplaying games are a social activity, the attitudes of the other players can also affect your own pleasure. If the other players have signed up for a game in a particular genre, you can reasonably hope they'll share your enjoyment of it. And since they'll help create the story, you're better off if they make the kinds of choices that you like, which the genre helps identify. Conversely, genre defines what other players are entitled to expect of *you* – actions and characters that fit the assumptions of the genre.

What Defines a Genre

Each genre has its own characteristic types of content and ways of telling stories.

Conventions

The *conventions* of a genre are its particular ways of telling a story, and the things that storytellers assume in order to relate the tale. It's a convention of epic poetry, for example, that characters speak in verse – and that no one sees anything strange in *everyone* speaking in verse. Long impromptu speeches with perfect scansion don't need special explanations; they're just a device for telling the story.

Another type of conventions takes the form of *limits* on what can happen in a story. For example, classic four-color supers don't kill criminals – not because they're incapable of it, but because deadly force was considered unsuitable for the readers.

Tropes

Tropes originally referred mainly to ways of using *language* in telling a story, such as similes ("he was as brave as a lion") or metaphors ("she was a lioness"). In discussing stories, they now often refer to typical *story elements*: robots or spaceships in science fiction, assassins or encrypted messages in thrillers, or aristocratic people with mysterious pasts in romance. (The website *TV Tropes* provides many examples.) Much of Chapters 2-4 in this supplement is about identifying story elements and defining them in game terms.

Common Genres

A number of genres appear frequently in roleplaying games.

Action/adventure is about carrying out tasks that involve physical danger, typically in mundane settings. Some versions of the swashbuckling genre can be included.

Alternate history (or *uchronia*) involves stories, usually but not always mundane, set in worlds where historic events happened differently. A common convention is to trace the change to a specific *point of divergence*.

Fantasy is inspired by myths, legends, or fairy tales, and generally includes magic or the supernatural; a campaign based on the *Odyssey* would usually be fantasy. Fantasy often is set in invented countries or worlds where magic is pervasive, as in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

Hardboiled fiction and *noir films* entail some forms of mystery, but aren't limited to it; they also include crime drama, stories of political corruption, and "mean streets" urban fiction, in a grimmer and more cynical analog of mimetic fiction. The scenes of official corruption and abuse in *Water Margin* are often in this spirit.

Horror portrays people, creatures, or places that inspire fear, which its characters have to endure and overcome. Horror often has science fiction or fantasy premises, but they don't define it – it can be better if the source of the threat is mysterious or incomprehensible. *Dracula* is an example of horror.

Humor (or *comedy*) can be a mood in almost any genre (*Mood,* p. 11), but it can also be a genre in its own right. Characteristic of pure humor is avoidance of grave consequences – because neither life nor fortune is at risk, or because the heroes are saved by coincidence, or because they're immune to lasting harm (as with the cartoon figures of ***Toon***). Humor often takes off from unlikely or impossible situations, which the audience accepts not because of some elaborate rationale but *because they're funny*. There are strong elements of humor in *Pride and Prejudice,* notably in Lizzie's confrontations with Darcy and with Lady Charlotte.

Martial arts (such as *chambara* or *wuxia*) was originally a Chinese genre; it's basically action/adventure, but with borderline fantastic elements based on Buddhist or Taoist beliefs. This is most familiar in film, but *Water Margin,* a novel, contains almost every element of the genre.

Mimetic fiction (also called *realistic fiction*) is about relationships and social conflicts, often familial, organizational, or political; fantastic elements are excluded, and action/adventure is often kept in the background. *Pride and Prejudice* has strong elements of mimetic fiction.

Mystery starts out with a murder or other crime, and focuses on a detective who has to identify the criminal, whether by brilliant deduction, systematic investigation, or stubbornness and physical toughness. *Dracula* has some elements of mystery.

Romance is about love and courtship, and most often about couples who are attracted to each other, but can't or won't get together, often because of differences of social background. In roleplaying games, it's more often a subplot than the main story. *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the major sources for romance, though it's often comedic and even ironic.

Science fiction takes off from a speculative scientific or technological idea to describe an invention, creature, or alien world that its characters encounter. Current science fiction mostly relies on *indirect exposition* – portraying a future society through characters who take its differences for granted. Science fiction often takes place in outer space. *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* is a prototype for science fiction, set beneath the seas rather than in space; much of the *Odyssey* can be read as an ancient analogue of science fiction, based on the science of navigation.

Slipstream and related genres such as *bizarro* and *new weird* introduce fantastic or horrific elements into mundane genres – without attempting elaborate worldbuilding, unlike fantasy or science fiction. The goal is more to deconstruct the usual vision of the world than to offer a different one.

Superheroic fiction features people with superhuman powers or extraordinary skills, engaged in ongoing struggles of (usually) clearly defined good and evil. It has a whole series of standard tropes, including dual identities, code names, and colorful costumes.

Thrillers are stories that emphasize tension and suspense, often focused on maintaining a deception while pursuing a goal. Stories about espionage, especially realistic treatments of it, are a classic example; crime, private vengeance, and psychological dramas are other common themes. Physical action may be involved, but it's not the most important element. The swashbuckling genre is a precursor; its Spanish name, *capa y espada,* is the source of "cloak and dagger." The events after Odysseus' return to Ithaca are a classic thriller plot.

Mood

Different stories aim at producing different emotional effects. Classic literary theory opposed *tragedy*, which produced pity and terror, to *comedy*, which provoked laughter. (There's an old saying that a tragedy ends where the hero is dead, and a comedy when he's married.) The overall emotional quality of a work is its *mood* or *atmosphere*.

Horror, as a genre, is primarily defined by mood: terror, horror, or shock. But other genres have typical moods as well: excitement in action/adventure, supers, thrillers, and *wuxia;* amusement or hilarity in comedy; romantic attraction in romance; "sense of wonder" in fantasy, science fiction, and supers.

Mood takes on extra importance in roleplaying games, because the players are co-creators of the story. If the campaign inspires the right mood, the players will tend to come up with actions for their characters that fit the genre and situation. Players who aren't prepared to enter into the appropriate mood can wreck almost any campaign. The GM can help a campaign along by encouraging a suitable mood, through such methods as pacing, scene setting, dialogue, and perceived rewards and risks.

Example (WWOz): Baum intentionally toned down the horror and cruelty of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and the stories of Charles Perrault; for example, when the Wicked Witch of the West takes Dorothy prisoner, she doesn't fatten her up for eating, but makes her do chores! Baum wrote that his story "aspires to being a modernized fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out."

Theme

Theme is the key to developing a campaign. It's what brings all of the preceding aspects of the source material together. But it's also one of the more elusive ideas in literary criticism. Theme is *what a story is about,* but in a very specific way.

The Central Idea

What is the *Odyssey* about? "It's about a man named Odysseus" – but Odysseus is a *character.* Aristotle wrote that it was a mistake to write a *Heracleid* that told the whole story of Heracles's life, from Zeus' affair with Alcmene, his mother, to his death and ascension to Olympus, because one character could be involved in many different stories in his life. "It's about how Odysseus sets out to come home from Troy; visits some islands along the way; is captured on one by the Cyclops Polyphemus, blinds him, and escapes, provoking Polyphemus to call on his father Poseidon, who curses Odysseus to wander at sea for 10 more years" – and at this point we've only covered half of the epic! A summary of the *plot* isn't the same as the *theme;* most importantly, it doesn't explain why all those incidents belong in the same story.

In the fourth word of the *Odyssey,* Homer calls Odysseus *polytropos,* a word with several meanings: passively, "much-turned, much-traveled"; actively, "shifty, versatile"; abstractly, "changeful, complicated." All of these apply to Odysseus, "the man of twists and turns" (in Fagles' phrasing). The story and all its incidents illustrate *polytropia* in various ways, as he's carried into new places, gets into trouble, and uses his cunning mind and many skills to get out – the same traits that help him when he returns to Ithaca and finds his house occupied by Penelope's suitors. This is the *theme* of the *Odyssey,* the underlying idea all its episodes relate to.

The other sources also have themes:

- Characters in *Water Margin* are constantly saying, "Within the four seas all men are brothers," and the story is about a specific idea of brotherhood: the brotherhood of outlaws who settle differences by open fighting, as contrasted to the corruption of officials.
- *Pride and Prejudice* is about the moral element in choosing a husband or wife, and the contrasting moral qualities shown by its various characters in making this choice.

A Theme Is Not a Thesis

"Theme" is sometimes thought of as a statement or assertion that a work makes; for example, "Within the four seas all men are brothers," in *Water Margin.* Many stories do make such a statement. They may even have a *moral,* a lesson to be learned from them, as in Aesop's fables.

But not all stories make statements! There's a name for those that do – *roman à these,* "thesis novel" – but this is a specific type of tale; there are other types. *Pride and Prejudice* begins with a famous explicit statement, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" – but the story is an ironic commentary on that statement, not an argument for it. And in any case, the thesis or moral isn't the main thing that readers or viewers are looking for. Audiences look for exciting incidents, ingenious plots, emotional involvement with characters, psychological insight, imaginative worldbuilding, or all of these – and writers who have a message need to "instruct by pleasing." This is even truer for roleplaying games, whose players are there for fun, not to be taught lessons.

A thesis or moral is a *statement;* a theme is a *topic*. A story can explore a topic from many different angles, and make many different statements about it; the same is true for a campaign.

● *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* is about the sea itself and about human relationships to it – in particular, Captain Nemo's self-chosen exile and outlawry at sea.

● *Dracula* is about redemption: of Jonathan Harker from captivity in Transylvania, of Renfield from his worship of Dracula, of Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker from vampiric infection, and in the end of Dracula himself from his own undeath.

● *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* contrasts civilization with wildness and magic. The Good Witch of the North asks Dorothy, "Is Kansas a civilized country?" and tells her that Oz, not being civilized, has witches and wizards – though the wizard turns out to be a civilized man using his technological skills to *pretend* to wizardry.

And story, thank God, after
a certain point becomes irreducible,
mysterious, impervious to analysis.
– Stephen King,
Danse Macabre

From Idea to Action

Fiction and drama aren't about ideas for their own sake (see *A Theme Is Not a Thesis,* p. 11). They're about ideas embodied in actions and in the characters who engage in those actions. The incidents of a story need to reflect its key ideas.

This is vital in a roleplaying campaign. Theme is a *principle of selection*. The GM needs the campaign to focus on some particular type of actions. The player characters need to be people who would pursue actions of that sort, and the situations need to give them motives and resources to do so. A campaign about supers isn't likely to send its heroes to slaughter monsters in a dungeon; a dungeon-fantasy campaign won't require its adventurers to put on flashy costumes and battle the Assassins' Guild. Or, if either of these happens, it needs careful effort to have it make sense in a campaign that's about something else.

The GM has a spectrum of possibilities for dealing with theme. At one end is pure *theme setting* – declaring at the outset that the campaign will be about a specific goal or a specific type of activity, and that the protagonists must have suitable abilities and motives. At the other is pure *theme seeking* – giving the players a town, a world, or a galactic empire; asking them to agree on what brings their characters together; and trying out different situations to see what captures their interest. Most campaigns will develop in the middle ground between these two options.

Inventing a New Theme

Many campaigns expand the original theme of the source further. But this isn't required! There are ways of asking new questions about a source: focusing on a specific aspect of its theme, taking up a related or more general theme, or looking at a place or situation that was only briefly mentioned and making it the main focus.

Example (20KL): Verne hints that Captain Nemo is an exiled prince, embittered by his native country's incorporation into a colonial empire. What if he went from exile to active war on the land powers, seeking liberation for European colonies or vengeance for his own wrongs? An explicitly politically themed campaign could have either British or American naval officers, oceanographers, and engineers fighting to keep the seas open, or younger allies of Nemo seeking an end to imperialism.

Variations

A theme works best if it's expressed in a variety of situations – in game terms, the campaign isn't the same scenario over and over! It's a good idea, when starting to develop a campaign, to note possible scenario concepts that relate to its theme. This can be a resource when you have to come up with situations for play sessions. It can also be a good way to test a possible theme before you commit to it – if you can't come up with a list of possible stories, your theme may not be rich enough to support a campaign.

Example (Odys.): Odysseus' cleverness is tested first in his voyages to many islands and seacoasts, in which he encounters monsters such as Scylla and Charybdis, sorcerers such as Circe, and exotic human cultures such as the lotus eaters; and then by his return home to reclaim his house from his wife's suitors. And Penelope is shown as clever in her own right, in putting off the suitors' demand that she choose a husband.

The Players

One of the oldest maxims for writers and orators is to start by considering the audience: their needs, their interests, and their attitudes. *Players* are more than an audience – they're co-creators who shape the story that emerges from the game, rather than its passive spectators. But that makes it all the more vital to ask what they need and want from a campaign. All the other things this chapter discusses are for the sake of attracting and holding players. If you have no players, you aren't a GM!

The players also need to hold *each other's* interest. Part of being a good player is portraying someone in a way that brings that character to life for the other players. Another part is showing appreciation for good performance – not least by paying attention to it. One of the vital roles of the GM is to encourage players to entertain each other, but players shouldn't wait to be encouraged!

Interest

The most basic need, in any campaign, is the players' interest. A game requires people to want to play – and to keep on wanting to play. All the different aspects of high concept are things you can offer players to gain their initial interest. The remaining chapters of this supplement, especially Chapter 5, discuss ways of keeping it.

Familiarity

In running a campaign with a source, it's a big help to have players familiar with the source! Knowledgeable players easily fall into the spirit of the original. Players who understand the original only from GM handouts and verbal explanations are very likely to change it into something different, often unknowingly.

Familiarity includes knowledge of settings, characters, and technology and artifacts, as discussed in Chapters 2-4. But what's even more important is knowing the *style* of the original – what kinds of things people do, how they talk, and what kind of mood the story conveys (*Mood,* p. 11). Players who know this can make up new elements that fit the source, just as the original creator did, and can help out each other's sense of what's fitting.

What if you have players who *don't* know the fictional world – but are interested and curious enough to try a campaign set in it? Ideally, you'd like them to read the book, or watch the movie or a season of the television show. But making big demands on their time, before they get to play, may kill the campaign before it starts. If there's a film or television version (original or adapted) that can be watched in a couple of hours, as part of a setup session, that may work better than a reading list; for one thing, the group participation may keep them interested. It can also be helpful to hand out a few pages of key facts about the source – especially those that can be used to help design characters!

Adaptations of Roleplaying Games

Published roleplaying games aren't fiction or drama; they're toolkits and sourcebooks for creating improvised fiction or drama. The game doesn't impose a specific plot – or, usually, a specific theme. Converting a game to a different rules system means adapting the source material – in this supplement's terms, the *places*, *people*, and *things*.

Obviously, these are going to have game statistics in the original game. But it's best not to try to translate those statistics directly into ***GURPS*** (or any other new rules system). Most rules systems have fussy technical points that don't go over easily into other systems! The other game may use the same name for a different concept, or vice versa – for example, it may say "Subterfuge" instead of "Acting" for the ability to maintain a false identity.

Focus on the "story" aspects of the source material, and find ways to express them in ***GURPS*** terms. In particular, try to preserve *relative ranks;* the stronger opponent, or the weapon with longer range, shouldn't become inferior just from a change of rules, even if the exact value is different. This is much the same process as working with source material from novels or movies, and much of this supplement's advice applies to it.

Trust

The real payoff of all these concerns is player trust. In running a campaign, making up new material is unavoidable. If the players object to that material, finding it incongruous, their involvement is damaged, even if every bit of it has a precedent in the original. It's even worse if the players don't say anything, but just silently disengage. A GM who's built up credit for knowing the source, and caring about it, is better off than one who can justify every detail – and regularly has to!

You can do several things if you want that sort of credit.

- You have to actually know the source, and care about it. You can't fake this by reading online summaries or quick cramming. Base your campaign on a work that you personally love.
- When you make a substantial change, plan for and let the players know before they decide to play.
- When you get something wrong – and getting *something* wrong is almost inevitable – admit the mistake if the players call you on it. With any luck, they'll accept that the universe is a little different, so that the campaign can go on. (This also applies to players getting something wrong. It's a game, not a final examination. If a player interprets something from the source differently than you would, it's better to find a way to make this work than to force them into your own interpretation.)

Again, players also need *each other's* trust. This doesn't mean the *characters* have to cooperate. Players may well act out scenes of opposition and conflict – but cooperate in making those scenes as dramatic as possible!

> *Here I am noble; I am boyar; the common people know me, and I am master. But a stranger in a strange land, he is no one; men know him not – and to know not is to care not for. I am content if I am like the rest.*
>
> *– Bram Stoker,* ***Dracula***

Chapter Two
Places

The first step in designing a campaign is often *place:* the creation of a *setting* for the campaign's events. This chapter starts out by looking at places; the next two chapters discuss *people* and *things*.

Describing the World

A *place* can be an entire world or even a universe – a large realm with its own natural laws. Both Odysseus and Captain Nemo are seafarers, but Odysseus's world is one of angry gods, their monstrous offspring, and cunning sorcerers; Captain Nemo's is the scientifically knowable world of oceanography. The two offer very different possible encounters.

A world is also a place that can be traveled through – possibly as long as 20,000 leagues or 10 years. All this supplement's source works include journeys; even *Pride and Prejudice* has Lydia Bennet eloping to London, and Fitzwilliam Darcy helping fetch her back! Consulting a map of the larger area (or drawing one, for an invented world without a map) can help define possible journeys and destinations. The action will take place in specific *locations* (pp. 20-23), but those locations exist within the larger world.

The Source Material

Unless told otherwise, the players will expect the game world to be consistent with the setting as the author envisioned it. It's possible to change a setting deliberately from the original version! But this is much likelier to turn out well if you *know* the original version and depart from it only intentionally.

The Original Work

Naturally, the most important source is the fictional work itself. The reliability of other sources can be judged by how consistent they are with this.

One set of questions to be answered focuses on the spatial layout of the world.

- What's the *scale* of the story; that is, how big a realm do the characters move in? See *Scale* (p. 23) and *Travel* (p. 24).
- Does the setting have *spatial coordinates?* Many stories are set in the real world and can rely on latitude and longitude, as shown on maps (or, in outer-space campaigns, on astronomical coordinates). Some invented settings have them, too.
- Is there a *central place?* Even if the source isn't specific about directions, it may define locations as close to or remote from an important site.
- Works without a central place can still have an *itinerary,* a set of locations visited and sometimes of travel times. Going through a work and compiling a list of locations can provide a starting point for making sense of its spatial layout.
- Some works have *double settings* – often a wild place (pp. 22-23) and a more civilized one. These may be virtually two separate worlds, each of which has to be mapped out in its own right.

Beyond physical layout, what is the essential nature of the setting? Does the will of a god or a pantheon of gods shape it? Does it allow one or many forms of magic? Do some of its human inhabitants have access to advanced technology or superhuman powers? Are some of its inhabitants aliens, monsters, or talking animals?

If its natural laws are the same as ours, how dissimilar are its history and geography? Did some key historical event turn out differently? Is its entire map different, or does it have an extra continent or island, country or city, or simply a few extra houses and families? How variant are its technology, its economics, and its laws and customs?

Example (WWOz): Oz has definite directions – Dorothy's first encounter is with the Wicked Witch of the *East* – and a central place, the Emerald City. Dorothy's quest defines an itinerary. The scale isn't precisely defined, but Oz seems to be a small nation: its principal city has just over 50,000 people (*The Emerald City,* p. 21), and it takes Dorothy only six days to travel there from the Munchkin country. The country as a whole is a wild place as contrasted to civilized Kansas, and one where magical things happen regularly. Oz is an imaginary place not to be found on real maps.

Continuations and Adaptations

A well-known, popular work may acquire continuations, by its original author or new creators. L. Frank Baum wrote a total of *14* Oz books, which add dozens of new places and groups within Oz, as well as several neighboring magical realms, and give more details of its history and customs – not always consistent! The eighth book, *Tik-Tok of Oz,* provides two maps, one of Oz alone and one including other countries. Material from sequels of this kind is often consistent with the main source. Sequels by other authors may not be; how well they fit is a judgment call.

Another source of optional material is adaptations into other media. Many classic works of literature have been made into cinematic or graphic works, for example – more or less faithfully. (More recently, successful films or television shows may have novelizations.) As new interpretations of the source material, these can be disregarded if they conflict with the original; however, they may help bring the setting to life, especially if they portray it visually. Or the adaptation may be the starting point – a campaign might be based on *The Wizard of Oz* (the movie) rather than *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (the book).

Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are books and other material *about* a work, usually by people other than the creator. For stories set in an invented world, it may be possible to find atlases or guides that describe the world in detail. Stories set in the real world may have setting guides – or, for older, more legendary works such as the *Odyssey,* speculative works that attempt to identify the real world setting. Many classic works have annotated editions, which combine the work itself and the research in one book. You have to use your own judgment as to how far to trust such material – but good secondary works can fill in details that would require a lot of data gathering, or organize the information in a more systematic form.

Another kind of secondary source is a *roleplaying game* based on the source material. Even if you aren't planning to use the specific game system – you're probably going to use ***GURPS,*** if you're reading this supplement! – any game developer has to put in a lot of work organizing the information in a source and figuring out its implications.

Further Research

If your source is set in the real world, you aren't limited to what the author tells you about the environs. Factual information can be found on almost any real-world setting, in books or online. When Bram Stoker writes that Dracula rented a house in London, for example, it's fair to use historical and geographical information about London in developing your Dracula-based campaign. Of course, if the source contradicts the real-world information, you're free to assume that the author has set the story in a *slightly* different world. Alternatively, you can say that the author got things wrong, or if there's a narrator, that he was lying to protect himself or others, or was deceiving himself about the real situation (the *unreliable narrator* trope).

History

When did the story's events happen? Many works set in the real world take place in the author's own time. Others are set in the past and can be dated by historical events or figures. However, events of the remote past, such as the Trojan War, may have uncertain dates, and it may even be doubtful if they actually happened; if you use historical sources, you'll have to decide which date to rely on.

After establishing the date, look over a historical timeline and find out what was going on in the world, or the part of it where the source is set. It may be worth reading historical books: a history of the country or of a major event in it (such as the Napoleonic Wars); a history of daily life, to get details of the setting right; and possibly a specialized history – for example, of war, exploration, or business and commerce. If other fictional works are available for the period, they can help gain a sense of how people lived and talked.

Geography and Astronomy

Where a story happened is as important as *when*. For a source set in the present, online maps are a good starting place; a map and a short article on the country will provide basic information – Wikipedia articles are normally reliable for this. Historical fiction or drama, or classics created in the past, takes more work! A good historical atlas can be a starting point. For detailed information, it may be worth investing in a reproduction of an older map.

In campaigns based on ancient epics and legends, actual places may be debatable. Most scholars agree about the location of Troy, but the islands Odysseus visited on his way home – if they actually existed! – are still being guessed at. In running a campaign inspired by such a source, you can pick a theory that makes sense to you, or leave locations vague, as Homer did.

Science-fiction-styled campaigns may be set on planets orbiting other stars. Some authors put their planets and solar systems in remote parts of the galaxy, or in galaxies far, far away. Others place them relatively close to Earth, making it possible to consult star charts and catalogs. Older science fiction was often set in our own solar system – but the past 50 years have brought enough discoveries about the other planets to make the classic works no longer plausible; if your setting is the traditional "ancient dying Mars," you may need to rely on earlier writers such as Percival Lowell or Garrett Serviss (see *The Retro Solar System,* p. 17). Recent discoveries of extrasolar planets are doing the same to modern science fiction, as we learn which stars actually have planets and what other planetary systems are like.

Technology

Technology can be included in history (or archaeology). But it's worth considering on its own, because it makes a big difference to what your campaign's heroes are capable of.

Histories of technology can tell you when various devices were invented. Books and online sources are available for topics of special interest, such as vehicles or weapons; many of these are particularly handy for gamers as well! Reproductions of old catalogs can help identify available gear in TL5-7 settings (and give an idea of the price level). For earlier historic or prehistoric periods, archaeological books and museum exhibits may provide illustrations and even some statistics. More general histories of technology can help you understand how technology shaped past societies. This information will often be more specific than ***GURPS*** TLs – but if the campaign's not about technological change, using gear from the same TL may be accurate enough.

Science

If you're starting from a work of science fiction, you may want to read about the scientific ideas that went into it. It's useful to know what conditions are really like beneath the sea or on other planets; for that, look for a good popularization.

You may also want to know what scientists *believed* about the world when the story was written. Maybe, in the world of your campaign, those beliefs are true.

For a quick look into a source's scientific assumptions, online articles often provide enough information. But if you prefer go into depth, you may want to read about the history of scientific ideas. You may learn about related scientific concepts that you can incorporate into your campaign. It also may be possible to track down the historic works that inspired the authors of the source. For example, Verne says that one of Captain Nemo's books is Matthew Fontaine Maury's *The Physical Geography of the Sea,* which was a historically important work in oceanography, and an influence on Verne's ideas about it.

Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.

– Dorothy, in ***The Wizard of Oz***

Legends

The other big source of fantastic elements in a world is myths, legends, and fairy tales. Various of the sources this supplement discusses draw on Greek mythology, Chinese stories about Taoist sages and martial-arts masters, Balkan legends of vampires, and classic fairy tales – though all of their authors gave the material their own spin!

Guides are available to the supernatural and mystical beliefs of many different cultures. It's worthwhile reading collections of actual legends or tales, to get the flavor of a culture's storytelling and to spot things to borrow. Of course, you'll have to decide how much of this legendry is *real* in your campaign.

Inventing New Material

If a source is set in an invented world, you can't rely on real-world research to learn more about the setting. But no one author can imagine a world in as much detail as the real world! You have room to make up parts of the setting that the source doesn't describe. On a smaller scale, you can do this for stories set in the real world.

Players can contribute to this process. When they create characters, invite them to come up with backgrounds – the place they were born, the school or workplace that trained them, the place they live now – and add those to the fictional world. You may need to guide them, or veto unsuitable choices, but if possible, running with their ideas is best – it will add to the world and encourage them to buy into it.

Filling In

Any setting from a city up to a galaxy is too big to map out or describe in detail. The source will leave gaps between described locations, which you can fill in. You also have the option of portraying an established location within a world in more detail.

Example (Odys.): A key turning point in Odysseus' journey is his being shipwrecked off the coast of Scheria; coming ashore, he is befriended by Princess Nausicaa, whose father gives him passage home to Ithaca. The people of Scheria, the Phaeacians, are technologically advanced, with self-steering ships that travel as fast as a falcon flies. A campaign based in Scheria could map out the palace and the surrounding city in much more detail than Homer provided.

Building Out

The other direction to take is outward from what the source material portrays. If the setting is the real world, read about other regions or countries and figure out how they interact. If it's a created world, decide what's in the blank areas on the map, or what's over its edge.

Transforming

In both the preceding options, the established setting is left unchanged. But you aren't required to do that! There are several different ways to create a new setting from the source material: You can set a story in the past or future of a legendary or created world, when things were inevitably different. You can change a key event in a setting's history and figure out how the world would be different – an alternative history or an alternative fictional timeline. You can translate the entire story to a different milieu, giving its key elements appropriate new forms. You can even use *the exact same setting,* but with key characters and events having a different meaning.

Variants on all of these strategies have been used in the inspired works listed in *Based On . . .* (pp. 4-5).

Example (P&P): A campaign could be designed around the problems of a Roman *paterfamilias* with five daughters to find husbands for; Roman *equites* ("knights") are roughly comparable in social position to English gentry.

Environments

Once you have all this information, you have to translate it into game terms. ***GURPS*** offers a wide range of tools for describing an imagined world, particularly in the ***Basic Set*** (pp. B505-522) and in ***GURPS Space.***

Planets

If your source is science fiction, it may be set on another planet or on multiple other planets. ***GURPS Space*** (pp. 73-98, 100-133) provides detailed rules for designing a planet, starting with basics like the size and age of the star and the planet's orbital radius. But to fit a description to your source material, you'll have to work backward for some of them. For an Earthlike world (in ***GURPS Space*** terms, an Ocean or Garden world), use the following.

Stellar characteristics: If the star is one that really exists, you can look up its mass, radius, temperature, luminosity, and age online. If not, you'll very likely be told its color – a red sun or a blue-white one in the sky helps set the scene.

The Retro Solar System

The rules in ***GURPS Space*** are based on recent observations of other solar systems, and on current theories of planetary formation. But a lot of classic science fiction derives from older astronomical theories – for example, the *tidal theory* of James Jeans, which had a near collision with another star pulling matter out of the sun that later condensed into planets, with those farther from the sun becoming solid earlier. Percival Lowell's ancient, dying Mars inspired science fiction from Wells' *The War of the Worlds* and Burroughs' *A Princess of Mars* to Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet* and Heinlein's *Red Planet*. Both Mars and Venus were long expected to be much more like Earth than they are. Similarly, some classic science fiction put habitable planets around stars with familiar names like Rigel or Vega, without worrying about stellar lifespans.

To fit this older astronomy, some adjustments can be made to the standard design process in ***GURPS Space.***

Placing first planets (Step 21, pp. 107-108): In creating a solar system, either change eccentric and epistellar gas giants to conventional gas giants, or assume that all solar systems have gas giants.

World types (Step 25, pp. 113-114): Classify Small worlds with blackbody temperature 191-390K as Garden or Ocean, and hotter ones as Chthonian. Classify Standard and Large worlds with blackbody temperature 241-440K as Garden or Ocean, and hotter ones as Chthonian. In deciding if a planet is Garden or Ocean, roll 3d and make it a Garden world on a 9 or more, without regard for stellar age or mass. There are no Greenhouse worlds.

Atmosphere (Step 3, pp. 81-82): Tiny worlds are still airless, as are Chthonian and Hadean worlds. Atmospheric pressure **P** for other Small, Standard, and Large worlds isn't affected by planetary size; however, it depends on planetary age: 0.5 × **S** for old planets, **S** for intermediate ones such as Earth, and 2 × **S** for young ones, adjusted up or down by up to 50%. Calculate **M** as **P** / **S** for any planetary size.

Hydrographics (Step 4, p. 114): Assign Small Ocean and Garden worlds a liquid coverage of 1d+2 × 10%. If a world is old (like Mars), divide its hydrographic coverage by 2 if Large, by 5 if Standard, or by 10 if Small.

Climate (Step 5, pp. 83-84): Cloud-covered worlds such as Venus still have absorption factor **A** of 0.77, regardless of hydrographics. The greenhouse factor **G** is 0.16 for any Ocean or Garden world.

Geologic Activity (Step 31, pp. 119-121): The GM has the option of disregarding tectonic activity, which was not part of the older view of the solar system. Mountain building varies with planetary age: Young worlds have young, high mountains; old ones have old, weathered ranges or continental shields.

Example: Mars

Orbital radius: 1.52 AU.
Blackbody temperature: 225K.
Surface gravity: 0.376G.
Planetary diameter: 0.53 (4,213 miles).
Atmospheric pressure: 0.34 (Very Thin).
Atmospheric composition: Oxygen/nitrogen, high oxygen (treat as Thin).
Hydrographic percentage: 4%.
Surface temperature: 245K (Very Cold; -18°F).

As an ancient, dying planet, Mars has low atmospheric pressure, and its seas have long since dried up. Its atmospheric oxygen is artificially elevated by ancient chemical-engineering facilities, and scant water at the poles is distributed in summer by its famed canals. The few mountain ranges are eroded down to modest highlands.

Each color goes with a particular spectral type: red with M, orange with K, yellow with G, white with F, blue-white with A, and blue with B and O – but blue stars are rare and short-lived and not likely to have planets with advanced life. Subgiants, giants, and supergiants are also short-lived; it's best to assume a main sequence star. Choose a suitable stellar mass on the *Stellar Evolution Table* (***GURPS Space,*** p. 103), assign an appropriate age, and determine the star's other characteristics, especially its luminosity, **L**.

Orbital radius: Find the square root of the star's luminosity; this is the orbital radius in AU for an Earthlike planet. Apply a multiplier between 0.75 and 1.33 to obtain the orbital radius **R** for a hotter or colder climate. For later reference, calculate the blackbody temperature in kelvins as:

B = 278 × (fourth root of **L**) / (square root of **R**).

Planetary diameter: If the planet's surface gravity isn't stated, assign a surface gravity **S** as a multiple of Earth's, between 0.5 and 1.5G. The planetary diameter **D** as a multiple of Earth's can be from **S** / 0.8 for a low-density planet to **S** / 1.2 for a high-density one; multiply by 7,930 miles to get the diameter in miles. Adjust this for planetary temperature by multiplying by square root of (**B** / 278); hotter planets need higher gravity to retain an Earthlike atmosphere.

Atmospheric pressure: Calculate **B** / (**S** × **D**). If this is 241 to 1,080, the planet is Standard; if 121 to 240, it's Large. Atmospheric pressure **P** is equal to **S** for a typical Standard planet, or to 5 × **S** for a typical Large planet; this can be reduced or increased up to 50% for a comparatively thin or dense atmosphere.

Surface temperature: The planet's surface temperature can be estimated from blackbody temperature **B,** absorption factor **A,** and atmospheric mass **M;** see the *World Climate Table* (***GURPS Space,*** p. 83). The value of **A** can be found from hydrographic coverage: 0.95 for 20% or less, 0.92 for 21% to 50%, 0.88 for 51% to 90%, and 0.84 for 91% or more (see *Terrains,* p. 18). The value of **M** is **P** / **S** for a standard planet, or 0.2 × **P** / **S** for a large planet. For any Ocean or Garden world, surface temperature **T** in kelvins can be calculated (assuming a greenhouse factor of 0.16) as:

T = **A** × (1 + 0.16 × **M**) × **B.**

Terrains

The definition of Survival (pp. B223-224) lists both land and water terrain types, but most campaigns take place mainly on land. Different environments have different typical vegetation and present residents and travelers with different challenges. In science fiction, a planet's main terrain (perhaps its *only* terrain, in cinematic science fiction!) determines its hydrographic percentage (see *Planets,* pp. 16-17): Desert goes with 0-20%, Plains with 21-50%, Jungle or Woodland with 51-90%, and Island/Beach or Swampland with 91-100%. (Arctic planets are distinguished by large orbital radius and low temperature rather than hydrographics.)

GURPS recognizes eight standard land terrain types. It can be worth defining new types if the relevant Survival skills would require facing different challenges, such as the radiation and mutated wildlife of a science-fictional Radioactive Wasteland (see the ***GURPS After the End*** series), or the sparse life, darkness, and occasional toxic atmospheres of Underground settings (see ***GURPS Underground Adventures***).

Arctic settings are described as cold, with bitterly harsh winters, though they aren't normally frozen year-round. On Earth, days are extremely long in summer (ranging up to "midnight sun") and extremely short in winter. Vegetation is low and sparse, with few or no trees.

Desert terrain is also barren, but it's hot and dry, at least in summer and by day; it can be bitterly cold at night. Vegetation is drought-adapted, either dry and spiny, or with thick leaves or body that retain water (as with cacti and succulents) – and some deserts have little or no vegetation. Descriptions emphasize the sparseness of life and the long distance between water sources. See for example the deserts that surround Oz.

Island/Beach settings are most easily identified by being reached from the sea, or close to it. For example, most of the *Odyssey* is set on various islands, and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* features several island visits. Islands are likely to have unusual plants and animals, and in stories, they may have monsters, magical features, or societies with strange customs.

Jungle settings are tree-covered, often so densely that the sky is hidden. Their climates are tropical, and for at least part of the year, they have heavy rainfall. They provide cover for a lot of wildlife, often dangerous. If the story features heat, humidity, and strange noises and smells, it's probably a jungle. None of the source works actually has this type of climate, but the forest the Cowardly Lion is invited to rule in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,* with its many tigers and other wild beasts, otherwise fits the archetype well.

Mountain settings emphasize height and the need to climb; they can occur in the midst of most other types of terrain. The lower levels usually match the surrounding climate, but the levels get colder with altitude, and the peaks are often similar to Arctic terrain – they may even have glaciers (see *Destructive Environments,* p. 23). If they have human inhabitants, their communities are often fortified, because their height makes them easy to defend; both the outlaw settlement in *Water Margin* and Dracula's castle are set in mountainous terrain.

Plains on present-day Earth are usually flat and often somewhat dry, but not barren like deserts. They get enough rain to be covered with vegetation, but have few trees. Most of their plant life is grasses that spring up quickly in the rainy season, and die back in the dry one. Look for descriptions of vast open fields and herds of grazing animals. Militarily, they're at the opposite pole from mountains, having few defensible sites, but ready mobility; cavalry often dominate their military. Kansas is a plains area, as are parts of Oz, including the poppy fields where Dorothy, Toto, and the Cowardly Lion are nearly trapped.

Swampland has interspersed land and water, but without rapidly flowing streams or exposure to ocean waves. *Water Margin* offers an example – the marshes that surround the outlaw base on Mount Liang. (Arctic terrain often becomes swampy in summer, because the surface snow melts, but the soil a few feet down stays frozen and can't absorb the water.) Swamps appear in stories mostly as obstacles, with bad footing, quicksand, biting insects, and other hazards. Crossing them by boat is safer, but finding a way through meandering channels can take a long time.

Woodlands are the other tree-covered terrain. They come in several varieties: Mediterranean scrub forest, with dry summers and rainy winters; deciduous forest, with trees that grow from spring to autumn and shed their leaves in winter; and boreal forest, with evergreen trees that tolerate heavy snow (mountains also have evergreen belts just below their barren peaks). Look for scenes of people walking under trees, such as the woodlands surrounding Pemberley (p. 22) in *Pride and Prejudice,* or the forest where Dorothy meets the Tin Woodman and the Cowardly Lion in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.*

> *The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist.*
>
> *– Karl Marx,* ***The Poverty of Philosophy***

Technologies

Stories set in the real world can be assigned the TL of the era and country where they were written, or that of their setting, for historical fiction. This is also largely true for historical fantasy, as magic doesn't usually count as part of TL. For science fiction or alternate history, there are several ways to assign a TL (see also *Tech Level and Variant Technology,* p. 44).

- If the general patterns are similar, but one or two technologies are missing, delayed, or advanced, go by the typical TL, and by the kind of society it permits. Don't focus on a single signature technology such as bronze or steam engines; look at the overall pattern.
- If the society reached an advanced stage without the characteristic inventions of that age – for example, a steampunk world with analytical engines rather than electronic computers – use a divergent TL, such as TL(5+2) rather than TL7.
- If the society took a radically different path from the beginning, such as the classic science-fiction idea of a civilization based on biotechnology and bioscience, define it as TL(0+1), TL(0+2), etc.
- If a key invention is superscience, add a ^ to the TL.

● If the entire technology is impossible to define by analogies to Earth's history, call it TL^ without assigning numbers.

By these guidelines, the *Odyssey* is TL1, but the brutal Cyclopes are TL0, and the Phaeacians, with their incredibly fast, self-steering ships, are TL1^. *Water Margin* is TL3. *Pride and Prejudice* is TL5, as is *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,* though Captain Nemo's inventions are TL(5+1). *Dracula* is TL6, and so is Kansas in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz;* Oz itself is probably TL4, letting the young O.Z. Diggs establish himself as a wizard with technological tricks.

Populations

The standard ***GURPS*** rules (pp. B517-518) provide search modifiers based on the population of villages, towns, or cities (*Cities and Communities,* pp. 20-21). But for describing a world, it's useful to think in terms of *population density,* or how many inhabitants there are per square mile, averaged over a large area. Population density can be used to define search modifiers over a diffuse or decentralized area.

Few sources give actual populations and areas for their worlds, and still fewer give densities. With historical settings, it's often possible to look up censuses or population estimates (*History,* p. 15). If not, or in fictional settings, densities can be estimated from the general description of the area, which can be compared with Earth's average density in various eras; with different countries on present-day Earth, from Mongolia (the sparsest) to Monaco (the densest); or with various types of present-day landscapes. See the *Population Density Table* (below) for suggested values.

Cultures

Characters in ***GURPS*** are natives of a particular culture, though they may be familiar with others; their adventures may include encounters with people who have other customs. Societies have worldviews and ways of life that reflect the influence of particular cultures. ***GURPS*** defines these broadly, so that they cover large areas of the world. The list of historical and current cultures presented in ***GURPS Infinite Worlds*** includes 23 areas: Andean, Bactrian, Celtic, Chinese, Egyptian, Hellenic, Hittite, Indic, Indus Valley, Iranic, Islamic, Japanese, Malay, Meso-American, Mesopotamian, Minoan, Mississippian, Norse, Orthodox, Roman, Steppe, West African, and Western. A present-day setting would have Chinese, Indic, Islamic (Near Eastern and North African), Japanese, Malay, Orthodox, West African, and Western – though the Bantu cultures have spread from West Africa as far as South Africa and could be called "Sub-Saharan." This list is confined to societies that developed such features as agriculture, cities, literacy, or trade networks; tribal societies such as the Inuit or the Polynesians have their own cultures – if they haven't been overwhelmed by colonialism. Most narratives that take place in the real world can be assigned to one of these. The *Odyssey* is set in Hellenic culture, *Water Margin* in Chinese, and the other source works in Western – though Count Dracula's native land is close to Islamic and Orthodox societies and has been influenced by them.

Invented societies in classic literary works often share the cultures of their creators: the people of Oz speak English and have customs understandable to an American girl, making them Western, however exotic the details. Recent genre fantasy and science fiction is often set in invented worlds with their own distinctive customs and features, such as the various cultures of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoom or J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-Earth (other than the essentially English culture of the Shire).

In describing invented worlds, don't assume that every race or every language matches a different culture. What ***GURPS*** calls a "culture" goes with a Cultural Familiarity that negates penalties to many skill rolls (see p. B23 for a list). People who would logically face those penalties belong to a different culture. If the source mostly ignores cultural differences, it can be assumed that everyone has the same culture, even if realistically they wouldn't; if it emphasizes them, start looking for those who find other characters confusing.

How many cultures should a world have? The cinematic advantage Cultural Adaptability costs 10 points; it's not worth taking unless there are more than 10 cultures. But few source works have, or need, as many as that – a modern-day globe-trotting campaign can cover nearly every nation with eight. Unless social diversity is part of a story's theme, a handful of cultures should be sufficient, and many sources need only one.

As discussed in ***GURPS Social Engineering,*** each campaign has a *reference society.* This is usually the location where the story mainly happens. However, if adventurers travel through many different societies, it's convenient to treat their native place as the reference society. Each reference society has a culture and a language, which should be identified. It also has specific forms of Status, Rank, and/or Wealth; Social Regard and Social Stigma; and various other social traits (*Social Backgrounds,* pp. 31-32). These don't necessarily apply to travelers from other societies. Their own social traits may carry over unmodified in the society they're visiting; they may be recognized as socially "high" or "low," but not to a specific degree; or their original social position may mean nothing.

Population Density Table

Density	*Search Modifier*	*Planetary Era*	*Country*	*Landscape*
<0.64	-4	Preagricultural	–	Barren
0.64-6.4	-3	Late Neolithic	Mongolia	Wilderness
6.5-64	-2	Ancient/medieval	Saudi Arabia	Slash and burn
65-319	-1	Current Earth	United States	Ranchland
320-639	0	Hyperurban future	China	Farmland
640-3,199	+1	–	Netherlands	Suburban
3,200-6,399	+2	–	Vatican City	U.S. cities
6,400-32,000	+3	–	Singapore	European cities
>32,000	+4	–	Monaco	Asian cities

War and Politics

A basic question about the political background of a source is how big its typical units (*polities*) are. This varies with TL: TL0 worlds tend to be tribal, with chieftains and "big men" in wealthy areas, but no states. TL1-3 worlds have city-states, consisting of single cities (see *Cities and Communities,* below) and their hinterlands; powerful city-states may become imperial capitals, like Babylon, Rome, or Baghdad. TL4-9 worlds have nation-states, which contain cities as municipalities. Future worlds at TL10+ are often envisioned as planetary empires, federations, or republics, possibly belonging to multiplanet polities.

The next step is to identify society and government types (pp. B509-510; see *Cities and Communities* for a few secondary categories). For example, Odysseus' native island, Ithaca, is a dictatorship; the Chinese Empire in *Water Margin* is a dictatorship/meritocracy (civil service examinations are a major source of class mobility); England in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Dracula* is nominally a dictatorship with feudal aspects, but functionally a representative democracy; Oz has no unified government, but the Emerald City is a dictatorship/thaumatocracy. Society/government types can be identified from history for stories set in the real world. Stories with invented settings usually give some information on political organization – but don't rely on the official label; the real power may lie elsewhere!

Ordinary citizens' encounters with government largely reflect the Control Rating (pp. B506-507); this may be modified by the Corruption rating (defined in ***GURPS City Stats***). Scenes involving law enforcement are primary evidence on this; characters' assumptions about their rights and duties are indirect evidence. For example, Ithaca is CR3 with Corruption -2 before Odysseus comes home (but had Corruption 0 under Odysseus' rule); the Chinese Empire is CR5 with Corruption -4. England in Elizabeth Bennet's time is CR3 with Corruption -2, but by Mina Harker's has become CR2 with Corruption 0. The high seas in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* are CR1 with Corruption 0. The Emerald City is CR3 with Corruption 0.

GURPS City Stats gives a formula for computing a city's Military Resources. In an empire, this can be applied to the capital city; in a national or planetary state, a similar calculation can be based on the total population. In a war story, use ***GURPS Mass Combat*** to define combat elements, and use the Military Resources statistic to decide how many of them are in service. In some tales, individual heroes or their adversaries may control combat elements.

Supernatural Forces

Many sources in fantastic genres include supernatural forces and abilities – of the five works with fantastic elements this supplement examines, only *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* lacks any form of the supernatural. These forces may be humanly controllable through magical arts (see *Magic and Its Variants,* p. 34). But the world may also contain supernatural powers that transcend human command.

Since these aren't part of the natural world, their behavior isn't constrained by natural laws. Their forms, abilities, or manifestations can't be equated with those of entities that are part of nature. Often they're beyond human understanding and control.

Supernatural forces aren't necessarily all of the same kind. There may be several sorts of mysterious powers. There may even be powers that are mysterious to the other powers.

To gain a sense of how such powers behave, and what can be expected of them, rely on the *narrative,* on the stories that are told about them, and on your sense of what kinds of stories fit them. The supernatural can take several forms in a narrative:

- It can be a *person* such as Athena or Poseidon – but usually one without a full character sheet, like some Patrons and Enemies.
- It can be a trait bestowed by a supernatural power, such as Blessed, Destiny, Divine Curse, or Weirdness Magnet; or an ability to manifest aspects of the supernatural, such as Channeling, Medium, or Oracle. Either of these can be represented as a suitable advantage or disadvantage.
- It can be a location where supernatural manifestations are more likely, such as a place of very high mana (p. B235) or sanctity (discussed in ***GURPS Fantasy***).
- It can be a single event, favorable or unfavorable, that someone experiences: a dream, a vision, a haunting, a miracle, or the like. Such events are often sent as signs of something that's about to happen or that a character needs to do.
- It can be a physical object with supernatural properties, either inherent (as with the herb moly in the *Odyssey* that protects against magic) or granted to it (such as the consecrated host that repels vampires in *Dracula;* see *Transcendents,* p. 41). Such objects often can be built as gadgets (pp. B116-117), usually with a power modifier reflecting their source, such as Divine or Magical (see ***GURPS Powers***).

Locations

Rather than an entire world, a place can be a *location* within a world. Locations are settings for specific encounters or scenes, or stages in a journey. The islands Odysseus visits and the houses where Elizabeth Bennet is a guest are locations. Each is included in a larger world and subject to its natural laws.

Cities and Communities

Much of the action in many campaigns will take place in settled sites, from isolated farms up to huge metropolises.

The bigger cities actually contain multiple smaller locations, sometimes in vast numbers. It makes sense, though, to treat them as single places if they can be traveled across in an hour or so, using transportation available at their TL, or if they can be the site of a battle or siege.

To describe a city from a story in game mechanical terms, use the system in ***GURPS City Stats.*** Most of its statistics are specifically intended to define features of a community that affect games set in it, from its appearance to the severity of its law enforcement. For an example of city stats, see *The Emerald City.*

A historical city's population can be researched; a fictional one's may be stated, or can be estimated from information on populations of real cities at a comparable TL. At TL1-4, a population of 50,000-99,999 would be a major city; the capitals of many kingdoms are in this size range. A few cities are larger, and at any one time, the *entire world* may have one or two cities with a million inhabitants. At TL5, populations increase, and many more people move to cities. By TL8, there are several hundred cities with a million or more, and 30 "megacities" with over 10 million. Science fiction portrays even more urbanized worlds, up to planet-covering cities with a trillion inhabitants!

Appearance and Defense Bonus can be judged from a city's description. For government type, Control Rating, Corruption, and Military Resources, the experiences of people who visit it or live in it are a guide.

Settlements can be classed as *city-states* (politically independent, with control of the nearby countryside); *colonies* (founded by people from another city or country and partly under its control); *free cities* (included in a larger political unit, but with partial Legal Immunity inside its own boundaries); *municipalities* (included in a large political unit, and subject to its laws, but self-governing); or *subjugated* (conquered cities and other settlements without self-government or legal rights). This will usually be clear from the source.

For purposes of Area Knowledge rolls, most communities can be defined as either a Village, Town, or City; very small settlements, or smaller areas within a community, can be defined as a Neighborhood.

The Emerald City

Population: 57,318 (Search +2)

Physical and Magical Environment

Terrain: Plains
Appearance: Beautiful (+3) **Hygiene:** 0
Normal Mana (No Enchantment)

Culture and Economy

Language: English **Literacy:** Native
TL: 4
Wealth: Wealthy (×5) **Status:** -1 to 6

Political Environment

Government: Dictatorship, Thaumatocracy, City-State
CR: 3 (Corruption 0)
Military Resources: $1.1M **Defense Bonus:** +8

Notes

These statistics represent the Emerald City under the Wizard's rule. Though it's classed as a thaumatocracy, the Wizard has no actual magical abilities, relying on trickery to keep his subjects happy and his enemies at a distance. For example, the city's appearance is only Beautiful, but having its inhabitants wear green spectacles makes it seem Very Beautiful (+4). The Wizard maintains a small army, but puts most of his revenues into entertainments and public works, including sanitation; if his reputation as a mighty sorcerer fails him, he counts on the city's high walls to deter attack. Treat it as having Reputation +3 (Protected by a mighty sorcerer; Land of Oz; All the time).

Later, under Ozma's rule, the city becomes genuinely magical and even wealthier and more beautiful – in fact, a virtual utopia.

Buildings

Smaller than settlements (usually) are buildings: artificial structures where people live and work. High-TL science-fiction settings may have arcologies, single edifices equivalent to a town or even a city. Rooms inside buildings provide settings for many scenes. In some campaigns, a structure can become something like another character, based on its appearance and atmosphere. In some worlds, a building may have spirits – guardians such as *lares* and *penates,* brownies who sneak in at night to help with housework, or ghosts of people who died in it.

A residential construction should be suited to the Status of its inhabitants. Works of fiction will often give some idea of how people of high and low Status live.

The GM can use some general rules for depicting structures. Such descriptions can be used in drawing floor plans of important places. (For *underground* construction, see ***GURPS Underground Adventures,*** pp. 13-14.)

Size

Building areas depend on the size of the building, using the following guidelines.

Floor Area (square feet)	***Examples***
10	Outhouse, shed, shrine, tent
50	Hut, pavilion
200	Cottage, market stall, office
1,000	Apartment, small house, tower keep
5,000	Commercial space, large house, meeting area, small industrial structure, square castle, warehouse
20,000	Enclosed commercial space (mall), fortified site, large industrial structure, lodgings, mansion, school
100,000	Hospital, huge industrial structure
Over 100,000	Major commercial structure

Possible heights of buildings depend on TL. Before the powered elevator (late TL5), heights over five stories were rare, because of the requirement for climbing stairs. Before steel-framed buildings (TL6), buildings taller than 10 stories were unsafe (-1 HT per two added stories or fraction thereof). For heights, use the following guidelines.

Stories	*Example*
1	One-story
2	Two-story
5	Multistory
10	Ancient high-rise
20	Modern high-rise
50	Skyscraper
100	Burj Khalifa, Empire State Building, Shanghai World Financial Center

Vehicles as Locations

A vehicle that's large enough for several people to live in can provide a mobile base for a campaign. A larger vehicle than that, with multiple interior spaces, is functionally equivalent to a building. A huge vehicle such as an aircraft carrier or a starship can be compared to a skyscraper or other huge building. Scenes can be set in multiple locations within the body of the vehicle, or (rarely) on its exterior surfaces, or in places it visits, such as seaports or planets.

Example: The *Nautilus* is 70 meters long (230') and displaces 1,500 cubic meters when submerged (52,900 cubic feet). Given its elongated shape (nearly a 10:1 ratio), it can be estimated as having SM +10. The interior of the *Nautilus* has a volume comparable to a high-rise.

Statistics

Building statistics can be estimated according to *HP and DR of Structures* (pp. B558-559). Use the figures for ratios of weight to square footage there for buildings with a single floor. For two or more floors, divide the total square footage by the number of floors; estimate the weight of the ground floor, and add one-third of this weight for each upper level with the same area.

In addition, a building can be defined as having traits that reflect its design.

Quality is suitability for a particular function or activity, giving bonuses or penalties to the relevant skill. These can be defined in terms of various physical features. For a residence, bonuses or penalties to Housekeeping can be explained by good layout or insulation; for a medical office, bonuses or penalties to Surgery could be explained by good lighting. Most buildings rank as basic equipment for their intended function (*Equipment Modifiers,* p. B345) and as improvised equipment for other functions (-2 to skill). Badly maintained or cheaply made buildings count as improvised equipment for any function. Exceptional buildings may be considered as good or fine equipment (+1 or +2 to skill).

Attractiveness is the appearance of a building, including its location and landscaping; it grants the same modifiers as for a character. (Beautiful, Very Beautiful, or Transcendent buildings should be treated as Impressive.) The effect is similar to that of styling for gear (see ***GURPS Low-Tech,*** p. 14).

Example: Pemberley

Pemberley is Fitzwilliam Darcy's home in *Pride and Prejudice*. It's a mansion on a substantial estate, in a natural setting amid light woodlands. It stands three stories tall, with dimensions of 160' × 125', giving each floor an area of 20,000 square feet. Its construction is of stone; thus, the ground floor has a weight of 3,000 tons, increased to 5,000 by the upper floors. This means it has DR 6, 1,700 HP, and HT 13, reflecting its excellent construction and good repair. The structure is Attractive (+1 to reactions) and architecturally of good quality. This affects several skills: overall layout provides +1 to Housekeeping for cleaning, a well-laid-out kitchen gives +1 to Cooking for preparing elaborate dishes, good acoustics in the ballroom furnish +1 to Musical Instrument and Singing, and good lighting and sight lines in picture galleries offer +1 to Connoisseur (Visual Arts).

This description is based on Chatsworth House, often suggested as the original inspiration for Pemberley, and Lyme Park, where the Pemberley scenes in the 1995 production of *Pride and Prejudice* were filmed. Both of these are extremely large buildings, but Pemberley is given a smaller floor area, because Austen doesn't describe it as extraordinarily large. However, she has Elizabeth admire its appearance, and reflect that had she accepted Darcy's proposal, she might have been its mistress, which supports making it Attractive – but probably not Beautiful, as it seems not to be widely famed. Given Darcy's wealth, it seems plausible to treat it as the equivalent of good-quality equipment for various household functions.

Wild Places

In many fictional sources, cities and other settlements are contrasted with wild places where adventures are likely and self-reliance is necessary. Commonly, these are terrains such as deserts, jungles, mountains, or woodlands with few inhabitants (see *Terrains,* p. 18). The sea itself is often an ultimate wild place; in science fiction, space may be another. But countries with human inhabitants may be "wild." *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* contrasts the land of Oz with the "civilized country" of Kansas, and Dracula's native Transylvania is opposed to modern England – to which Dracula tries to bring his archaic, predatory habits.

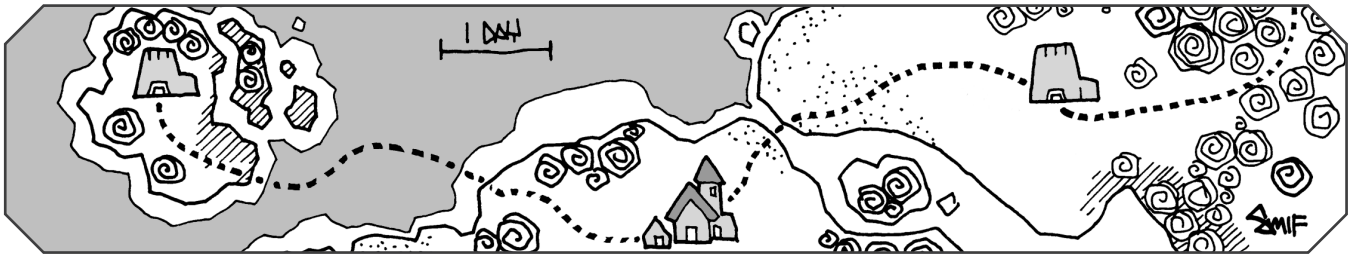
Wild places commonly require Survival rolls suited to their particular terrain; see ***GURPS Low-Tech Companion 3: Daily Life and Economics,*** pp. 4-8, for rules for foraging, and ***GURPS Low-Tech,*** p. 35, for fire-starting methods. (***GURPS After the End 2: The New World, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 16: Wilderness Adventures,*** and *Pyramid #3/90: After the End* offer additional suggestions for surviving in wild places.) Usually, there are no roads; travel requires hiking (p. B351), riding (pp. B459-460), or suitable vehicles, as well as Navigation rolls to avoid getting lost. Travelers can encounter dangerous animals, from giant octopuses to tiger/bear hybrids (see *Kalidahs,* p. 44). Dangerous flora is also possible, whether gigantic and predatory, or simply equipped with thorns or poisonous secretions.

In "wild" human countries – or at sea or in space – they may encounter people who live outside the law.

Destructive Environments

Some environments are more extreme than wildernesses, with conditions that will quickly kill an unprotected human being. Surviving them requires protective gear – or, in some cases, specially designed vehicles. See *Equipment Modifiers* (p. B345) for going to such places without specialized gear! The glaciated regions of the Arctic or Antarctic, mountain peaks with very thin air (less than 0.5 atmospheres, found above 20,000'), and extremely hot underground locations such as deep mines are examples. Underwater, the vacuum of outer space, and planets with atmospheric composition, pressure, or temperature radically different from Earth's also count. (See *Hazards,* pp. B428-437, for game effects of such environments.) In a fantasy or horror story, magically lethal environments may exist, such as the Deadly Desert that separates Oz from the rest of the world.

Temporary hazards are also possible: natural disasters such as floods, forest fires, or volcanic eruptions; humanly created conditions such as toxic gases or intense radiation; or in fantasy worlds, outbreaks of wild magic or plagues of monsters or demons. High-tech battlefields are another example, one deliberately created to inflict harm on an enemy.



Setting and Drama

Worlds and locations can be fun to create for their own sake; many people spend happy hours drawing maps of imaginary cities, countries, or worlds. But in a roleplaying game, they're eventually going to be put to work in enabling adventures and dramatic situations.

Parameters

Campaign worlds usually exist in larger universes – but most of the universe doesn't come into the action of the campaign. The *world* is the part of the universe that affects the protagonists, and that they can affect. How big a world does the campaign have?

Scale

Scale is how big the campaign world is. That is, how much of the world do you have to know about, to account for the things the PCs might act on or be affected by? What are they likely to have in their mental map of their surroundings?

The world of a modern-day campaign can be as large as the entire Earth. Any location the PCs go has a latitude and longitude. They can learn about places and people on every continent, and perhaps come to the attention of or communicate with those the group encounters. In a science-fictional future, the entire solar system or even planets of many different stars may form part of the "world." In comparison, the *Odyssey* takes it for granted that everyone speaks Greek, and *Water Margin* that everyone (even the Tartar invaders) speaks Chinese, without getting into detail on regional dialects or languages; their "worlds" are single countries, plus imaginary realms surrounding them. And it's possible to run a campaign in an even smaller space – a single building or underground complex, for example.

In terms of the area classes for Area Knowledge (p. B177), a dungeon is effectively a neighborhood. A single-country world is the size of a small or large nation. A science-fictional campaign may be set in an interplanetary state or even a galaxy.

Focus

Focus is how much of the campaign world features in important events. Does the narrative range widely, or do nearly all the scenes take place in a handful of locations? Most of this supplement's source works involve long journeys and have scenes in many places. *Pride and Prejudice,* however, takes place in three English counties – Derbyshire, Hertfordshire, and Kent (though events in two others are described in letters) – most of it in five large houses. The *Odyssey* changes focus radically, the first half ranging all over the Mediterranean, but the second narrowing to the island of Ithaca and then to Odysseus' house, after he returns there.

A campaign with a tight focus can easily be made dramatically intense. The heroes are in one place and confronted with one situation (see *Settings for Conflict,* p. 26), whose resolution is crucial to their fates; they have to achieve it with their own abilities and the resources they have at hand. Such intensity isn't as easy with a broad focus, where after each encounter the heroes can go somewhere else. The payoff there is panorama: a wide-ranging view of the setting.

Consider, for example, the difference between a siege and a guerrilla campaign. In either, the geography, populations, and military resources of two entire countries shape the situation. However, a guerrilla campaign can range all over one of those countries, whereas a siege brings two sets of forces together in one fixed location. The two call for different emphases in worldbuilding: short notes on as many locations as possible vs. as much information as possible on just one or two locations.

Functions of Environments

The setting of a campaign serves a variety of functions.

Scenery

Aristotle lists *spectacle* as an element of drama. Roleplaying games have a limited ability to present actual images of their settings. But striking scenes can be *described* – landscapes, cityscapes, and weather, for example. This can create a sense of a larger space where the events of the game take place – that is, it can add to the sense of scale (p. 23).

Scenery also can create a sense of *atmosphere* (see *Mood,* p. 11). As the word suggests, this is often done with weather: dense clouds for drama, sunlight for understanding or happiness, rain for sorrow, fog for mystery, and so on. Likewise, different terrains (p. 18) have their own sorts of weather that can help define the mood of a campaign.

The Pathetic Fallacy

In romantic literature, the natural environment often changes to reflect a character's emotions. If he's angry, the winds howl and blow things around; if he's disappointed in love, rain falls like tears. Literary critics call this the *pathetic fallacy* (from the Greek word *pathos,* meaning something that appeals to the emotions). It can easily be overdone – but poets did it because it was effective! In a game session, where there usually isn't a single central character, natural events can reflect the emotional nuances of a *storyline,* such as dark clouds when a battle against a dangerous foe is impending.

Travel

Campaigns often include journeys, whether as short as from Hertfordshire to Derbyshire, or as long as the *Nautilus'* 20,000 leagues. If the setting is the real world, placing locations on a map will make it possible to determine distances between them. Travel routes can be identified, as can the hazards of taking different routes. If the setting is an invented world, a map can be sketched from whatever descriptions of it are given, and hazards and obstacles can be placed on it.

Challenge and Conflict

A campaign world can be a source of challenges, when the protagonists struggle against it (see *Conflicting Actions,* pp. 47-48, for major types of struggles). Character vs. nature is the obvious example. But character vs. society can pit a small group of heroes against the world; and in a fantasy or supernatural horror campaign, so can character vs. fate. What's crucial is to identify what it is about the world that the adventurers want to change – or are forced to try to change by a desperate situation.

A world's "natural laws" also determine what means someone can use to pursue a conflict. In a world that has magic, mystical countermeasures may be available, such as the wondrous herb moly that protects Odysseus against Circe's enchantments, or the kiss of the Good Witch of the North that deters the Winged Monkeys from harming Dorothy.

Knowability

A world is a place that can be *known*. Some world-knowledge is essential to any story or drama; without the ability to anticipate likely consequences of their characters' actions, players can't have *agency* (p. 46). Understanding at this level isn't a matter of special skills. It's partly represented by rolls vs. IQ, which represents the general knowledge that adults have. Much of it, though, shouldn't even require IQ rolls; it's the job of the GM to convey a sense of what the world is like, through *exposition* scenes that familiarize the players with the setting (see *Indirect Exposition,* p. 25) – and Common Sense is available for players who have trouble picking this up.

In some genres, investigation is the focus of the story, and skills related to it will see a lot of use: scientific skills such as Biology, Geology, Meteorology (all affected by planet type; see p. B180 and ***GURPS Space***), and Astronomy in science fiction; social science skills such as Anthropology for tribal societies and folk customs, or Sociology for complex organizations; Criminology and Forensics for mysteries; Intelligence Analysis for thrillers and some war stories. In an exotic world, some challenges may require rolls against Weird Science. The GM can plan for how various sorts of knowledge can be *useful* in solving problems, so that rolls against knowledge-granting skills have a payoff. Ideally, the audience – the players – should see such applications for themselves, rather than being led to them.

A more intense version of this focus is the story that leads up to a *recognition* (see *Revelatory Campaigns,* p. 51): the discovery of something that changes the players' whole understanding of the campaign and the world – or shows them something incomprehensible.

Example (WWOz): Interplanetary courier pilot Dorothy Arashi is caught in a spacewarp and comes to a landing on the Earthlike planet Ozu, ruled by a psionically gifted aristocracy. Learning to understand the new world requires rolls against Sociology (to comprehend the social and political system) and Psychology (to interpret the peculiar mental states some inhabitants enter into) – skills that, unfortunately, she has at their IQ-6 defaults!

Demonstration of Premises

Some worlds are created specifically to explore "what if" ideas. Rather than just taking the premise (see pp. 8-9) as the springboard for a campaign, they build an entire world on it, exploring all of its implications. Alternate history is a classic expression of this impulse; speculation also inspires stories set in imagined societies with different moral assumptions, perhaps on distant planets, and even stories that assume different laws of nature.

Working things out in this way is often a private extra pleasure for the GM; it's easy to go beyond anything the players will need to know. But some player groups will get involved in the fictional world, trying to figure out how their characters fit into it, and asking "What happens if I do *this?*" Players of this sort can become co-creators of game settings, or co-explorers of borrowed worlds, by forcing the GM to consider unanticipated questions. (See *Inventing New Material,* p. 16, for more on this.)

Commentary and Parody

Some fictional worlds comment on other fictional worlds, or on the real world, especially in stories from countries without freedom of expression. A story set in a remote land, on another planet, or in an imaginary world can make political points without exposing the author to censorship or arrest. A campaign based on a fictional source can use its setting to comment on the real world. Or it can remark on the source itself: resolving its inconsistencies, suggesting that something else was really going on, questioning its premises, or showing how they lead to absurdities.

Example (WM): Readers of *Water Margin* over the ages could enjoy its heroes' many confrontations with corrupt officials, without suggesting that their own officials suffered from any lack of integrity.

Sandboxes

Some campaigns don't focus on a plot, situation, or mission, or on character interaction, but on the world. The characters take on definition, and discover goals to pursue, in the course of exploring the world. These are commonly called *sandbox* campaigns.

The world for a sandbox campaign needs to be as fully developed as possible. It can't be a bare stage dominated by the PCs; nor can the GM do a complete job on the specific locations for a planned quest or conflict, and leave the rest vague. An effective sandbox campaign needs many different directions to travel and goals to seek.

It's not easy to run a sandbox campaign in a world taken from a fictional source; most sources develop only the parts of the world that directly support their plotlines. Sandbox campaigns usually require inventing new material (see p. 16). Sources whose settings are places in the real world, on the other hand, have nearly unlimited information available to support sandbox campaigns.

Functions of Locations

The specific locations where scenes occur have additional purposes.

Milestones

In classic quest stories, locations are markers of how far the hero has traveled, and stopping places along the way. If this is their primary function, they don't need elaborate descriptions; the hero will encounter them as single points, rather than exploring them as complex regions. The system in ***GURPS City Stats*** is designed to provide this level of information. (Quest stories may also put their heroes in trivial locations on side trips to perform secondary tasks, or because they've lost their way.)

Example (WWOz): Dorothy's journey to the Emerald City takes her through a series of locations and encounters: a forest where she meets the Tin Woodman and the Cowardly Lion; two ditches they have to cross, at the second of which they're attacked by monsters called Kalidahs (p. 44); a river they cross on a raft; and a field of poppies that put several of them to sleep.

Bases

A journey needs a starting point as well as a goal. Most adventurers have a *base,* a place to keep their larger equipment, their mounts or vehicles, and their facilities for caring for these. They may also live there, especially if hostile territory surrounds it. If a base is in a city, the city itself can serve as a kind of larger base, giving access to a variety of equipment and services.

In a quest campaign, the base is merely a starting point. It may even be eliminated, leaving the hero with only what he can carry. In other cases, the hero can go on repeated short journeys and come back for rest and resupply.

Indirect Exposition

Science fiction partly grew out of utopian fiction, one of whose conventions was the hero's guided tour of the utopian society, with lectures on how it worked – which actually made some sense in a setting based on conscious adherence to a moral ideal. Early science fiction moved these visions from "nowhere" to the "nowhen" of the future. In the late 1930s, John W. Campbell began insisting that writers for *Astounding Science Fiction* use a different technique, now called "indirect exposition": showing people in future societies with different customs that they *took for granted.* The older methods largely went out of style in fantastic fiction, acquiring labels like "idiot lecture" and "infodump."

Players in roleplaying games can be asked to read short descriptions of a setting before they create their characters; they're co-creators of the campaign, and the campaign notes amount to the "series bible." But once play begins, indirect exposition is normally more plausible – most people don't go around giving long explanations of how things work – and more dramatically effective, as it allows the protagonists to take action rather than turning them into a passive audience. The trick is to figure out things that it makes sense for NPCs to do *because* the world is a certain way, have them do those things, and leave the players to figure out *why* those actions make sense. Nonetheless, if players come out and ask how things work, or what their characters would know, they aren't likely to object to a short infodump. Don't carry indirect exposition so far that it makes roleplaying impossible!

What if your *source* uses indirect exposition? This makes coming up with a description of the setting more work. The author doesn't walk you through the setting, noting the points of interest. To find out about it, watch the events the narrative shows, and ask what has to be true for them to happen. In a campaign, those assumptions become the premises.

Adventurers on a long journey may establish a forward base, close to their real goal. Or a large vehicle can serve as a mobile base (see *Vehicles as Locations,* p. 22), as the *Nautilus* does for Captain Nemo (in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*).

Personal Domains

Some locations – especially residences – are not simply utilitarian; they carry the stamp of their owner's personality. This kind of description can help bring an NPC to life – especially an important one such as a Patron or Enemy. To come up with something suitable, look at the occupant's Status; his particular interests, as evidenced by his skills; and personality traits that affect how he spends money or cares for his possessions. For an example, see Captain Nemo's cabins in the *Nautilus* (*Furnishings,* p. 42).

> *Mind shall not falter nor mood waver,*
> *though doom shall come and dark conquer.*
> *– J.R.R. Tolkien,* ***The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son***

Settings for Conflict

One of the crucial functions of locations in roleplaying games is as settings for conflict (see *Conflicting Actions,* pp. 47-48).

Arenas

Conflict often means *physical* fights or other tests of physical abilities, such as athletic contests. An *arena* is a location where combat takes place. This can be a specially designed space for an athletic contest, or any location where a serious fight breaks out, from a barroom to a battlefield.

In playing out a fight, it's important to take account of all the different ways its location and time affect the outcome. A list of such modifiers appears on pp. B547-549 for one-on-one conflicts; movement point costs (p. B387) are also relevant. For full-scale battles, see ***GURPS Mass Combat. How to Be a GURPS GM,*** pp. 29-30, offers other insights into how environment affects combat.

Example (Odys.): Odysseus carefully sets up the space for his battle with the suitors. The banquet hall is a long room, big enough to hold archery contests. Odysseus seats himself at one end, with his bow and a quiver of arrows, far enough away so the suitors can't close with him too quickly. He arranges to have the other doors barred, so no one can get behind him. Then he sends his allies to fetch spears and shields before he runs out of arrows. When the suitors acquire spears of their own, the doorway he stands in provides him with partial shelter against their throws.

Crucibles

Conflict in a game can be mental as well as physical; an intellectual challenge such as a debate or riddle contest, a social one such as an attempt to influence a group of people against a rival, or a raw emotional one such as a quarrel between friends or lovers can all be dramatic. Such conflicts can arise anywhere, but they're most intense in a situation where neither person involved is free to just walk out – a courtroom scene, a debate over policy or strategy, a group therapy session, an interrogation, or simply a clash between two people who are emotionally involved with each other, as in Darcy's first proposal to Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*.

GURPS Social Engineering contains rules for competing Influence rolls and for speaking to crowds, including the effects of acoustics.

Tests

The location itself may be what the hero has to overcome. A physical place can present adventurers with a variety of different challenges.

Hazards

Some locations are dangerous in themselves; they introduce cliffs to be scaled or rivers to be forded or swum. This requires rolls vs. skills such as Climbing (p. B349), Jumping (p. B352), or Swimming (pp. B354-355) – or vs. Perception or an appropriate Survival specialty to spot hazards such as crevasses or quicksand. Buildings (pp. 21-22) and cities (pp. 20-21) may offer similar challenges, especially those that are designed to repel or trap intruders. Odysseus swimming for the shore of Scheria after Poseidon destroys his raft, and Jonathan Harker's perilous climb down the outer wall of Dracula's castle, are examples of how such perils can fit into a larger story.

Ordeals

A location may be a cause of pain, fear, or exhaustion, through either physical or mental stress. Many natural environments can inflict fatigue (p. B426), starvation or dehydration (p. B426), difficulty breathing (pp. B436-437), or environmental stress (*Terrains,* p. 18). Exposure to danger can also require Fright Checks (pp. B360-361). These experiences call for tests of HT or Will.

Puzzles

Some locations raise questions that need answers (see *Revelatory Campaigns,* p. 51). A classic example is exploring ancient ruins, seeking a concealed passage or the location of a lost treasure, typically with rolls vs. Architecture. Searching for clues at a crime scene calls for Criminology, and analyzing them relies on Forensics. A Naturalist roll could interpret the habits of an unknown animal. Any such inquiry calls for rolls against some knowledge-based skill.

To make these scenes work, figure out, first, what's really going on; second, how it's being concealed; and third, what clues are available to the hidden truth. A scene can fail *either* if the visible events come across as simply arbitrary, *or* if the hidden truth is too quickly or fully revealed, taking away the mystery. Maintaining the right level of suspense is something of a tightrope for the GM.

Places of mystery are a major element in fantastic campaigns. They're often supernatural, but they may be manifestations of superhuman intelligences or alien creatures. But mundane campaigns can have secretive facilities where unexplained things happen, run (for example) by an intelligence agency, a criminal conspiracy, or a wealthy and powerful person.

Chapter Three
People

Once you've defined the setting, you have the background for a story or a campaign. But the foreground is mostly occupied by *people* – the *characters*. To tell new stories in a fictional world, you need a clear picture of the established characters, and you need to be able to create new characters. Character traits provide a language for expressing a character concept.

Consider the roles that people play in the source works.

Roles

The characters in the source material play a variety of *roles,* from its heroes to unnamed minor characters who speak a couple of lines and vanish. Identifying these roles can help you judge how much detail to go into in translating them into game terms, from a full character sheet to no more than a name and a line or two of statistics. You can also use them as models for creating new characters who play comparable roles (*Specifications for Original Characters,* pp. 38-39).

Major Characters

The major characters in a work are the ones the story is about – the *protagonists*. The reader or viewer identifies with them, much as players identify with their characters. The outcome of the story is seen in terms of its impact on them (see *Consequences of Actions,* p. 49). They perform key actions and make key decisions that bring the outcome about. The events are often shown from their point of view. In all these ways, they're similar to PCs, and many campaigns will turn them into PCs or model new PCs on them.

For practical reasons, tabletop roleplaying games usually share the "protagonist" role among several characters – but within limits: games with only one or two PCs, or with 10 or more, are unusual. Works of fiction and drama are more variable. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* has one protagonist, Dorothy Gale, and the *Odyssey* and *Pride and Prejudice* each have two. In contrast, all 108 Stars of Destiny could be counted as protagonists in *Water Margin.* Don't assume that every story is about a small band of adventurers!

Too many main characters aren't much of a problem for setting up a campaign, whether the players re-create characters from the source or make up new ones. A smaller group could habitually work together for many reasons – as the larger group's leaders, as a specialized force, or because of friendship or common background. When the campaign needs an expanded cast, new people can be brought in as additional protagonists, or supporting characters can be moved into the spotlight. The original protagonists can either become "first among equals" or be moved into the background, with the focus on their allies. In a campaign set far away, or in the past or future (see *Starting Point,* pp. 6-8), those original protagonists may never appear.

Guest Stars

Rather than appearing in his own story, or his own setting, a fictional character can put in an appearance in an entirely different one. He may be the central NPC in a scenario, as a Patron or Enemy; he can equally well be a minor encounter, as a source of aid or a bit of color. If the players are familiar with a fictional character, they may enjoy having him introduced under a different name and figuring out for themselves who he is.

Example (WWOz): In a post-Civil War steampunk campaign, a party of adventurers encounters a traveling circus, one of whose attractions is a balloonist named O.Z. Diggs.

Supporting Characters

Supporting characters appear in a story because of their relationships to the main characters. They have names and personalities, but they're portrayed in less depth. They don't usually make key decisions, though there are exceptions, especially for adversaries; if they make decisions, whatever internal debate they go through isn't the focus of the narrative. Most supporting characters can be defined, in ***GURPS*** terms, as Allies, Dependents, Enemies, or Patrons. In some cases, a source's supporting characters can be promoted to PCs (see *Major Characters,* above).

Many sources have characters who show in one scene or chapter and never again – but who still have names, personalities, and motives. Their roles usually can be compared with those of Allies, Dependents, Enemies, or Patrons.

Some of them can be included in character creation as Favors, but the GM can also just bring them onto the scene as needed or convenient.

Patrons

To identify Patrons, look for characters who are more powerful than the protagonists and provide them with substantial help, but don't take the same risks or go along on their adventures (see *Allies,* below). A relationship with a Patron may impose a Duty: "I give you this magic sword; use it to kill dragons."

Example (WM): The Emperor becomes a Patron of the 108 Stars of Destiny. As such, he has Special Abilities (extensive social or political power); however, powerful ministers who resent and oppose them hinder the heroes' access to him, which can be represented as a variant of Minimal Intervention. Their relationship with him imposes a Duty of fighting rebels against imperial authority.

Enemies

Different sorts of characters can be identified as different sorts of Enemies. The characters it's most natural to class as Enemies are Hunters: those who intend to kill the hero or inflict lasting harm on him.

Rivals are characters who seek to get the better of the heroes, but not to inflict lasting harm. Those who limit the heroes' freedom of action can also be treated as rivals.

Watchers monitor the heroes' actions, but without attacking or restraining them. Note that it's possible for the same character to be a Patron (see above) and a Watcher.

Example (20KL): Captain Nemo has no wish to harm Professor Arronax; he admires the professor's work and comes to value his friendship. But he keeps Arronax and his companions prisoner on board the *Nautilus.* This level of opposition to their desires makes him effectively a Rival.

Example (P&P): Lady Catherine de Bourgh has provided Elizabeth Bennet's cousin, the Reverend William Collins, with a position as a clergyman, but she also feels free to come into his house and criticize his domestic arrangements. She can be treated as both a Patron and a Watcher.

Allies

Allies, like Patrons, are sources of help to the main characters – but they don't stay behind when the heroes go on journeys or face difficulties or enemies; they're right there beside them. There's not always a clear line between main characters and Allies. It's mainly a question of who gets the spotlight. Allies tend to be less powerful, or to have narrower abilities, so they don't become the heroes of the story. Allies' personalities are less fully developed, and they mostly interact with the primary heroes, rather than with each other or other secondary characters.

An Ally cannot also be a Patron, but he might be a Rival or perhaps a Watcher. Even a Hunter can become a temporary Ally in an emergency!

Example (Odys.): Odysseus' son Telemachus is the viewpoint character in the first three books of the *Odyssey,* and he plays a leading role in Odysseus' confrontation with Penelope's suitors; he can plausibly be considered a second main character. Eumaeus the swineherd and Philoteus the cowherd also fight at Odysseus' side, but neither talks much with anyone but Odysseus himself, and they readily follow his orders, which makes them more like Allies.

Dependents

Dependents also go along on the heroes' journeys and are with them in perilous situations. However, they *need* help rather than *offer* it. One-time dependents are sometimes called "supplicants": characters whose role is to ask for or need aid. It's possible for the same person to be both an Ally and a Dependent at different times, but anyone powerful enough to be a Patron can't also be a Dependent.

Example (WWOz): In Dorothy's travels in Oz, her dog Toto is always with her. He seems to be a pure Dependent; he doesn't give her help or protection, whereas she's ready to stand up to the Cowardly Lion to keep him safe.

Mongo only pawn in game of life.
– Mongo, in ***Blazing Saddles***

Extras

Many sources have people who play even less significant roles and don't need complete descriptions. This applies to characters who are named only as members of groups, to single characters who are left unnamed, and sometimes to named characters who have only a single scene.

Characters of this sort can be portrayed in several ways. A single, full game write-up could be created to use with all the members of a group, based on their average traits. A character who's going to be engaged in combat can be provided with *only* combat-relevant attributes and skills. An informant can be defined as a Contact or simply have a single skill or other key trait listed. Or the GM can just improvise such minor characters when they appear. In a campaign, some extras can be promoted to supporting or even major characters.

Example (P&P): When Elizabeth Bennet's aunt and uncle take her to Pemberley, Darcy's estate, Mrs. Reynolds, his housekeeper, shows the house to them. More important, she praises Darcy's good character – and is never on the scene again. If she had to perform a task, the relevant skill would usually be Housekeeping, or perhaps Administration to supervise the household staff. (In a "belowstairs" campaign set at Pemberley, focused on the servants, she could become a major character or even a powerful Patron!)

Example (Drac.): R.M. Renfield, a patient at Dr. Seward's lunatic asylum, is a source of information about Dracula; he could be treated as a Contact with Hidden Lore (Vampires). This isn't the result of study, but of his delusions opening him to Dracula's influence – apparently partly by supernatural means, as he seems to feel that influence even before actually facing the vampire. He doesn't so much answer the heroes' questions as give things away in his ravings. Between his madness and his near worship of Dracula, he's Unreliable, probably with effective skill 10.

Organizations

Another option is to treat minor characters as members of organizations. Individual members of the organization's personnel will interact with the major characters, but they won't have character sheets at all – their capabilities and priorities are those of the organization. ***GURPS Boardroom and Curia*** can be used to write up organizational statistics. Tech level, number of members, organizational wealth, and other traits usually can be judged from the source. For combat forces, the definitions of elements in ***GURPS Mass Combat*** can be relied on instead.

Example (20KL): The *Nautilus* (pp. 42-43) has a crew of 20 with combat skills-12, Diving Suit-18, Mechanic (Submarine)-15, and Submariner-21, plus High TL +1 and Zeroed. As an organization, they're Filthy Rich (not Multimillionaire, despite Captain Nemo's huge fortune, because they don't use cash to acquire resources), giving a startup cost of $48 million (not including the value of the *Nautilus!*). They're worth 15 points as a Patron (with Special Abilities) and -20 points as Enemies. Organizational Types (***Boardroom and Curia,*** pp. 11-13) include Aid (to revolutionary groups), Fraternal, Research, Secret, and Voluntary. Loyalty is Very Good.

Defining Major Characters

When you've identified the major characters, you'll want to think about how to describe them in ***GURPS*** terms. This doesn't have to mean doing full character sheets; unless they're going to play an active role in the campaign, they don't need complete ***GURPS*** statistics. But working out a description can help you decide what sort of protagonists your campaign will have.

For any trait with multiple levels – attributes, skills, and many advantages and disadvantages – a good approach is to identify the major character who's at the high end; give his traits suitable values; and then fit other characters in between his values and average values. Major characters rarely have below-average traits, unless they're there to make a specific dramatic point.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts. . . .

– William Shakespeare, ***As You Like It***

Attributes and Talents

Attributes and secondary characteristics should be approached differently in epic or cinematic campaigns and in realistic campaigns (see *Modes,* p. 49). In a cinematic campaign, attributes (and Will and Per) can go as high as 20, and perhaps a point or two higher for a truly extraordinary hero. For real-world-style campaigns, an attribute of 17 would give most Average skills a default of 12, or "good enough to get a job" (see *Choosing Your Skill Levels,* p. B172); hardly any realistic human beings are so broadly competent. A good range in campaigns with realistic sources is 9-14. See p. 9 of ***GURPS Template Toolkit 1: Characters*** for detailed guidelines for both realistic and cinematic sources.

Exceptionally gifted people in realistic campaigns have narrower ranges of high ability – precisely the sort of thing that Talents are designed to represent (pp. B89-91 and ***GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents***). Characters in cinematic campaigns may have *both* Talent and high attributes – as can larger-than-life characters in realistic ones.

Examples: Georgiana Darcy (*P&P*) has Musical Ability. Ned Land (*20KL*) has Seafarer – note that it includes Thrown Weapon (Harpoon)! Odysseus (*Odys.*) has Smooth Operator (see p. 37). Oz the Great and Terrible (*WWOz*) has Clown – odd though the name sounds, the skill list is a close fit to the tricks he uses!

Strength

Strength is something of a special case. It doesn't affect skills, and it can be used in performing physical feats such as lifting heavy objects. It can have a value higher than 20. High ST scores can sometimes be estimated from stated multiples of human strength, comparisons with animals ("as strong as a horse"), or descriptions of physical feats. For people without superhuman attributes, ***GURPS Template Toolkit 1: Characters*** suggests a range from 8 to 18 for ST.

It's also possible to have limited aspects of high strength. A racial template can include Arm ST, Lifting ST, or Striking ST; the perk Special Training can allow a human character to acquire one of them. The cinematic skill Power Blow lets a martial artist double or even triple his ST by concentrating. The perk Strongbow allows a skilled archer to draw a heavier bow than his ST would normally permit.

Examples: Ned Land (*20KL*) is a skilled harpooner and is described as exceptionally large and strong; he could have ST 12-13. Odysseus (*Odys.*) uses a bow other Greek warriors can't even string; he has ST 15, with +2 from the Strongbow perk and his Bow skill. Wu Song ("Pilgrim," *WM*) at one point in the story lifts a stone weighing 400-500 catties (533-677 lbs.), throws it above his head, and catches it; ST 20 would give him BL 80 lbs., which would let him lift 640 lbs. and throw it 1.6 yards (see p. B355). Professor Van Helsing (*Drac.*) says that Dracula is as strong as 20 men; since an average man's BL is 20 lbs., Dracula's would be 400 lbs., which would give him ST 45 – but van Helsing may be overestimating, as there's a scene where Renfield, a normal human, physically restrains Dracula briefly.

Skills

Major characters usually get the chance to demonstrate multiple proficiencies. Some have a huge range of expertise. Others may have one or two main skills that largely define them. A close reading or watching of the source can identify the tasks its protagonists accomplish, and provide a basis for judging their approximate skill. It's also necessary, though, to think about competencies that aren't explicitly described, but that are essential to support those that are, or make sense given a character's background.

As a rough guideline, someone who does an activity as a hobby is likely to have skill 10, give or take a point; for example, Lizzie Bennet (*P&P*) has Musical Instrument (Large Keyboard)-11, because she plays the pianoforte but doesn't practice assiduously (see p. 35). A skill that *defines* an occupation or role can generally be set at 12, or 14 for high-risk activities. Professor Arronax's valet Conseil (*20KL*) has Savoir-Faire (Servant)-12; Ned Land (also *20KL*), a harpooner – a dangerous trade – has Thrown Harpoon-14. Highly regarded experts can be set at skill 16 or higher; for example, Abraham van Helsing (*Drac.*) is an expert medical practitioner, with Diagnosis-16 and Physician-16. History's greatest experts in a field, or cinematic geniuses, can be given ratings of 20+; for example, Captain Nemo (*20KL*) qualifies for Engineer (Electrical)-21 for the high-powered batteries and other electrical apparatus on board the *Nautilus*. Again, see ***GURPS Template Toolkit 1: Characters,*** pp. 12-13, for more detailed guidelines.

A high skill level can be achieved several ways! One practitioner may simply have a large number of points in the one skill; this makes him a narrowly focused professional or gives him an innate high aptitude for that one endeavor (like a chess prodigy). Another may have one or more levels of Talent; this gives him broader competence in a range of related areas such as musical, social, or technological skills. Still another may have a high attribute – making him equally gifted at IQ-based skills in abstract knowledge, social interaction, and tool use, or at DX-based skills in body movement, combat, and vehicle handling. Which is the best fit doesn't depend on ability in a single skill, but on a character's spectrum of skills.

Martial arts knowledge was esoteric knowledge and was preserved as such. The skills and knowledge involved were both part of a tradition . . .

– Peter Lorge, ***Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century***

Combat Skills

In most campaigns, participants repeatedly face the test of combat. If the fighting abilities on the character sheet don't match what the person does in the source material, the mismatch will show up at dramatic moments, and it's likely to have serious consequences.

GURPS Mass Combat classifies troops into four broad levels of capability: Inferior (minimal training and little or no combat experience), Average (actual combat experience), Good (prolonged combat experience or highly realistic training), or Elite (picked troops with exceptional abilities). People with realistic abilities usually can be assigned to one of these levels. Numerical equivalents could be 9-11 in the best combat skill for Inferior fighters, 11-13 for Average, 13-15 for Good, and 15-17 for Elite. (The effective skill, taking equipment and organizational support into account, can be higher; ***GURPS Boardroom and Curia*** recommends Contact skill levels of 12, 15, 18, and 21.) Similar judgments can be made about duelists, brawlers, and other less formal combatants.

Epic or cinematic adventurers often are comparable to Elite forces, or even better. It's often possible to find descriptions of their notable feats and work out how good they have to be to bring them off. Supporting characters, such as companions and adversaries, can be scaled down from the main characters: With skill two levels lower, an adversary will probably lose but presents a respectable challenge; skill four levels lower gives very little chance, and a foe with skill six levels lower will win only by sheer luck.

Characters based on source material generally don't need to have techniques. Even so, an explicitly described combat move or other feat may match up with a technique, which should then be included in the write-up. It's both good character design and good storytelling to limit characters to a handful of techniques, usually to one for each major skill, which can act as a signature move.

What skills should a combatant have? For armed combat, look through weapon tables for the nearest equivalent to a character's weapon of choice, and take the skill it falls under. Unarmed combat is more of a judgment call.

Striking: If the hero uses only his fists, give him Boxing, especially if he favors evasive footwork and defensive attacks. Brawling goes with crude ferocity, including biting, eye-gouging, and slams, and with the use of blackjacks or brass knuckles. Exotic hand strikes and fancy kicks such as back kicks and jump kicks are the mark of Karate. Characters who rarely fight probably lack all these skills and rely on DX.

Grappling: Fighters who throw their opponents, particularly after deflecting their attacks, are using Judo. Those who slam or shove them, in combination with grappling them, are using Sumo Wrestling. Wrestling relies on basic grapples, but applies them in takedowns and pins (p. B370); it's also commonly combined with the use of melee weapons, which is rare for the other two skills. Again, characters who rarely grapple with anyone probably rely on DX.

Example (Odys.): After returning from his voyages, Odysseus visits his house, disguised as a beggar – but he's threatened with a beating by Iros, a younger man who regards the house as his territory. The two men end up fighting for the entertainment of Penelope's suitors. One of the options Odysseus considers is killing Iros with one punch!

Odysseus is a strong man (p. 37), but not the equal of Heracles or even Ajax; his basic thrust damage can't be high enough to kill. Power Blow could double his effective ST, but he'd have to raise his skill extraordinarily high to count on using it without prolonged concentration – and he never raises his strength in that way in other scenes (for example, in his wrestling with Ajax in the *Iliad*). However, there's a third option: damage from a blow to the skull is ×*4*, which could be enough to kill.

The attack penalty for the skull is -7; Boxing-18 would let Odysseus hit on an 11 or less, which could be raised as high as 14 or less with Evaluate (which he might be doing while he decides how to attack!). With ST 15, he inflicts 1d crushing damage with a punch, raised to 1d+2 by his Boxing skill; spending 1 FP on a mighty blow (p. B357) increases this to 1d+4, or 5-10. The skull reduces this to 3-8, which is quadrupled to 12-32; assuming Iros has 10 HP, he'll have to roll vs. HT to survive an average blow.

Social Backgrounds

The starting point for someone's social background is to identify his native society (and its culture and language). This may be the *reference society* (see p. 29) of the story, or a different one. Odysseus is a native of Greece; Song Jiang and his companions, of the Chinese Empire; and Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy, of the United Kingdom. In contrast, Dorothy Gale is an outsider in Oz, and her social position in Kansas means nothing there; the same is true for Dracula in the United Kingdom – though not for the American Quincey Morris or the Dutch Abraham van Helsing; both are treated with respect suited to their (modest) Status.

Status

Status is generally the easiest thing to identify about people in stories. In an industrialized society, or in a town or city in any society, ordinary people are usually Status -1 to 1; in a preindustrial society where farmers are bound to the land by law or custom, they're Status -2 to 0. Any society may have people with higher Status gained by Rank, Wealth, or public office. In an aristocratic society, some people may be born to high Status, as gentry (Status 2-3), nobility (Status 4-6), or rulers (Status 6-8).

Example (Drac.): Dracula claims the title of count. This is an intermediate level of nobility, higher than baron but lower than duke, making him probably Status 5.

Wealth

Wealth often isn't spelled out in sources. If not, assume the level of Wealth that can support a character's Status or its cost of living. For example, Dracula's Status 5 goes with Multimillionaire 1; Odysseus' Status 6 (see p. 37) with Multimillionaire 2.

Mimetic fiction may give actual numerical amounts. It's not usually easy to translate these into ***GURPS*** $ – for some well-documented eras it may be possible to track down estimates of cost of living or purchasing power, but this can demand serious library research. But what *can* be done is to look at ratios between different amounts, and choose wealth levels that have comparable ratios.

Martial-Arts Styles

Some sources describe their characters using forms of combat that involve multiple skills, or even being trained or training others. For example, in *Water Margin,* Wang Jin, an instructor in the Chinese army driven into exile by the corrupt official Gao Qiu, teaches Shi Jin ("Nine Tattooed Dragons"), one of the 108 Stars of Destiny, the full range of combat skills used by the army (see below). Such source-material passages can be the basis for a martial-arts style.

A style should include the skills required to use any named weapons – though identifying which weapons are actually meant can take some research! Unarmed-combat skills can be chosen based on the kinds of moves that are described; include Acrobatics, Riding, or other skills if adherents are shown using them. To choose techniques, look first for narrative about signature moves; if any technique would be especially useful in the described style of combat, consider including it. Decide whether the style is realistic or cinematic, and if cinematic, add suitable skills and techniques. To complete the style, choose perks that fit its skills and weapons, and think about suitable optional traits.

Chinese Imperial Military Combat

14 points

Water Margin lists 18 weapons that a martial-arts instructor in the Chinese Imperial army is required to know how to use. The specific list varies based on version and translation; a typical list consists of bolas, bow, broadsword, buckler, crossbow, flail, guisarme (identified in ***GURPS Low-Tech*** as a *dueling bill*), ge (use stats for a *halberd,* but it has no point at the end and does no thrust damage), hammer (this appears to be a melon head hammer, a form of *round mace* often used in pairs, rather than a European warhammer), hatchet, lance, mace, pike, quarterstaff, rake, trident, two-handed sword, and ji (identified in ***GURPS Martial Arts*** as a type of *halberd*). Several included skills cover more than one weapon: Axe/Mace covers mace and hatchet; Polearm encompasses ge, rake, and ji; Spear includes pike and trident; Staff is for the quarterstaff and can be used with the pike.

Skills: Axe/Mace; Bolas; Bow; Broadsword; Crossbow; Lance; Polearm; Riding (Horse); Shield (Buckler); Spear; Staff; Two-Handed Flail; Two-Handed Sword.

Techniques: Cavalry Training; Feint; Hands-Free Riding; Hook; Retain Weapon; Sweep.

Cinematic Skills: Kiai; Power Blow.

Cinematic Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack; Dual-Weapon Defense.

Perks: Exotic Weapon Training (Trident); Form Mastery (Spear); Off-Hand Weapon Training; Quick-Sheathe; Strongbow.

Optional Traits

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Fit or Very Fit.

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Soldier's); Duty; Obsession (Perfect my martial art).

Skills: Brawling; Expert Skill (Hoplology); Fast-Draw (Arrow, Sword, Two-Handed Sword); Savoir-Faire (Military); Teaching.

In doing this, be careful not to mix up monthly or annual incomes; the total investments that produce those incomes (in the form of Independent Income); and starting wealth, which represents a different, often smaller amount of disposable funds and personal possessions.

Example (P&P): The Bennets have 5,000 pounds of invested funds, which will be divided among their five daughters when Mr. Bennet dies, bringing each daughter 50 pounds a year; this implies a 5% rate of return (which was fairly typical for the era). Mr. Darcy, however, has 10,000 pounds *a year;* assuming the same 5% rate, his investments would be worth around 200,000 pounds.

During Mr. Bennet's lifetime, he has the right to live at the Longbourn estate; this raises his family's standard of living. We might guess that it doubles their worth, giving them 500 pounds a year, or 1/20 of Mr. Darcy's income. This would fit their being Wealthy (and Status 2) and Mr. Darcy's being Filthy Rich (and Status 4).

In ***GURPS*** terms, then, Darcy has starting wealth of $500,000. Monthly pay for his Wealth level would be $80,000 to $160,000; Independent Income 20 would give him $100,000 a month, or $1,200,000 a year. In ***GURPS*** terms, one pound is $120, and his total fortune is $24,000,000, far more than his starting wealth – but he isn't going to turn it into cash (see *Independent Income,* p. B26).

Rank

Rank can be based on the size of a command, following the guidelines in ***GURPS Social Engineering:*** 5 at Rank 1, 20 at Rank 2, 100 at Rank 3, and ×100 for each three added levels. The rules for variant costs of Rank in ***GURPS Social Engineering*** may be useful in describing nonstandard organizations.

Example (WM): The outlaws of Mount Liang have hierarchical titles and a chain of command, typical resources, and special assets (cinematic skills and chi powers), but have neither dominance or uniqueness, nor legitimacy, so their Outlaw Rank is worth 3 points/level. After gaining an imperial pardon and being sent against the Tartars, they have Military Rank worth 6 points/level. The novel gives them a fighting force of some 100,000 men, a suitable command for Rank 8, giving Song Jiang Outlaw Rank 8 for 24 points and then Military Rank 8 for 48 points.

Other Traits

Other social traits, such as Social Regard and Social Stigma, can be assigned following their definitions in the ***Basic Set*** and clarifications in ***GURPS Social Engineering.***

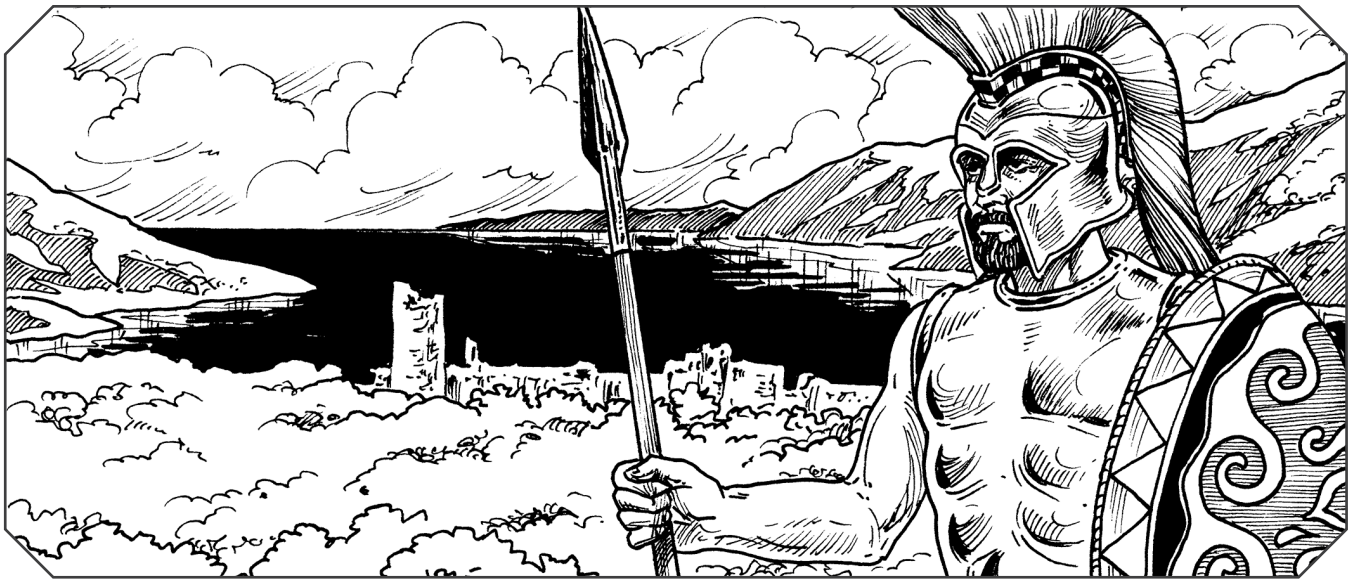
Examples: Witches and wizards in Oz seem to have Social Regard (Feared) – the Wizard is "Oz, the Great and Terrible" (*WWOz*). During their time as heroic outlaws, the 108 Stars of Destiny have Social Stigma (Criminal Record) (*WM*). Dracula has both Social Regard (Feared) and Social Stigma (Monster) in his native land (*Drac.*).

Visible Qualities

Social interaction is also affected by outward appearance – and this usually can be judged from a source. Visual media present images of their characters; writers typically give descriptions to draw readers into a story. If the author doesn't explicitly describe a character's appearance, it often can be judged by other people's reactions.

Realistically, most people range from Attractive to Unattractive – but in stage plays, films, television shows, comics, and animation, a kind of *improved realism* prevails in which the range is from Attractive to Average. Following this lead in defining characters in ***GURPS*** terms isn't likely to offend the players' sense of realism. Outright cinematic campaigns often have heroes who are Handsome or Beautiful, and ordinary people who are Attractive. Nonetheless, a realistic campaign based on a movie might give Average or even Unattractive looks to characters played by quite appealing actors when that seems suitable based on how others react.

Authors are less likely to describe the quality of a character's voice. Both Voice and Disturbing Voice are extreme traits, with larger point values and providing bigger bonuses or penalties, akin to Ugly or Handsome. It's best to give characters these traits only if a source makes a point of how their voices sound.



Example (Odys.): Odysseus' journey back to Ithaca is delayed by a year as the lover of Circe and then by seven years on Ogygia, the island of Calypso – two goddesses to whom most mortal men would have no appeal. It would be reasonable to make him Handsome.

Miles is likely to attempt to take over any situation in which he is involved . . . (If he doesn't at least try to sort everything out himself, then he's not being played right.)

– Vorkosigan Saga Supplement and Roleplaying Game

Motivation and Personality

The essence of a character is his psychology – both his outward behavior, as others perceive it, and his drives and intentions, as he experiences and expresses them. Internal mental traits fall into two main groups: active and reactive.

Active traits express a person's agency (see p. 46) through moral choices, and especially through standards that he lives by. In ***GURPS*** terms, these can be represented by *self-imposed mental disadvantages* (p. B121).

Examples: Most of the 108 Stars of Destiny (*WM*), belonging to the "fraternity of the lakes and rivers," have Code of Honor (Pirate's), though some of them have Code of Honor (Soldier's), and their leader, Song Jiang, clearly has Code of Honor (Confucian). Captain Nemo (*20KL*) has Fanaticism; he also has taken a Vow never to set foot on land (for game purposes, this is Minor, comparable to vegetarianism). Dorothy's adventures (*WWOz*) could be taken as a model of Honesty – even though Oz is "not a civilized country," she behaves as if she were in Kansas, asking openly for help and helping others when she can.

Reactive traits, tendencies to feel certain emotions or perform certain actions without choosing them, are mainly represented by traits with *self-control rolls* (pp. B120-121). (Honesty is a special case; it has a self-control roll, but it's *also* self-imposed.) Bear in mind that these are extreme traits! Resisting on a 15 or less fits a normal person with a definite susceptibility to some form of behavior: he can restrain himself if giving in to his impulses would be against his interests or conflict with his self-imposed mental disadvantages, but he'll always *notice* the temptation, and if it's strong (a risk of death for Cowardice, or a Handsome/Beautiful person of suitable sex for Lecherousness), he's likely to give in. Resistance on a 12 or less, or worse, indicates definite impulse control problems! For many people, quirk-level versions (see *Perks and Quirks,* below) are more suitable.

Example (WM): Li Kui ("Iron Ox") repeatedly pleads to go along on secret missions, vowing to be discreet, but eventually, he picks a fight and makes a spectacle of himself. This could be portrayed as Bad Temper (9).

Various other disadvantages without self-control numbers represent internal mental traits as well. Again, any full-blown version (as opposed to a quirk) is an extreme trait.

Example (Drac.): Renfield's belief that he can gain immortality by eating other living beings is a Severe Delusion. It gets him locked up in an asylum, and others react to him with fear or pity because of it.

Finally, some traits show up mainly in outward behavior: Bestial, Clueless, Laziness, No Sense of Humor, Odious Personal Habit, Stubbornness, and Workaholic. Judge these by described behavior, rather than verbal statements or internal mental processes. (Bully could be listed here, but it also has a self-control roll.)

Examples: Renfield's eating flies and spiders could be counted as an Odious Personal Habit *in addition to* his Delusion. Ned Land's unwillingness to give up seeking escape from the *Nautilus* (*20KL*) could plausibly be taken as a display of Stubbornness.

Perks and Quirks

Minor character traits can be represented as perks (pp. B100-101) and quirks (pp. B162-165). Despite their low point value, these are invaluable in capturing what's distinctive about a fictional character! In action/adventure genres – particularly martial arts and swashbuckling – Style Familiarity perks may be common, and it can be useful to work out the details of the associated styles (see *Martial-Arts Styles,* p. 31).

Examples: Wu Song (*WM*) has the perk Drunken Fighting. Darcy (*P&P*) is almost the archetype of the quirk Proud. Dracula (*Drac.*) has the perk Good with Wolves.

GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks and ***GURPS Power-Ups 6: Quirks*** define a large number of perks and quirks, many customizable to fit a particular character. But the GM should feel free to create new ones to fit minor peculiarities of published characters. For example, the Tin Woodman (p. 36) has the following minor exotic quirk.

Affected by Rust: A quirk-level variant of Fragile – if you get wet, your body surfaces oxidize. At the end of any day spent exposed to moisture, roll against HT+4, or against HT under extreme conditions such as torrential rain. On a failure, your joints stiffen (giving -2 to DX and -1 to Basic Speed) until they are oiled and moved back and forth. On a critical failure, or if your joints are currently stiffened and you fail *again*, you are paralyzed (p. B429) until oiled! If part of you is splashed or soaked, make an additional roll vs. HT to avoid localized effects on that body part.

Esoteric Arts

Characters in some of the fantastic genres can learn to do things that aren't possible in the real world. Finding the right way to represent these abilities in ***GURPS*** can be a challenge! Realistic skills can achieve specific results in specific ways, which are subject to reality testing, but magic, for example, has been envisioned in many different ways. Making ***GURPS*** rules fit something that a particular storyteller has invented demands ingenuity.

Cinematic Skills

What ***GURPS*** calls *cinematic skills* are actually low-end supernatural abilities – but they aren't called "magic." The best-known examples are the chi-based feats of martial-arts legends and films, which have advantages such as Trained by a Master as a prerequisite – meaning that the student is enlightened enough to transcend normal human limits. ***GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers*** discusses applying chi to several non-combat-oriented skills.

The skills of Enthrallment and Musical Influence aren't classified as cinematic, but they definitely aren't realistic, and they have advantages as prerequisites. They can represent the ability to influence hearers' minds with which legends of many cultures credit bards.

Weird science is another essentially cinematic ability: science as practiced in movies, pulp novels, and comic books (see ***GURPS Powers: The Weird***). The Weird Science skill allows coming up with radical new inventions, possibly including superscience inventions such as Captain Nemo's various electrical devices.

Example (WM): Shi Qian ("The Flea") is amazingly good at bypassing obstacles with acrobatic movement, and might be given Flying Leap, Light Walk, or Lizard Climb.

Magic and Its Variants

The ability to use magic is common in myths, legends, and older fiction and in fantasy stories inspired by them; the *Odyssey, Water Margin,* and *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* all have characters with magical abilities. The question is which of the various approaches in ***GURPS*** best represents a source's version of magic. Any fictional version of magic is going to require customization of ***GURPS*** magic, but the closer the initial fit, the less work will be necessary.

The starting point for this process is identifying the way that magic functions in the narrative of the source. (Bear in mind that a source may have multiple forms of magic – or even a large number of specific magical capabilities that aren't systematized.)

Some mages interact with *personified* magical forces: gods, spirits, demons, and the like. They may be able to call such beings to take on visible form, often through summoning spells (as in the Necromantic college in mana-based magic) or spirit rituals (in Path and Book magic – see ***GURPS Thaumatology,*** pp. 159-162). They might perceive beings that are invisibly present, using Medium or a suitable Detect; or they could have the ability to enter the spirit world, perhaps using a spirit ritual. They may even have lastingly present familiars as Allies. Whatever magic they work involves bargaining with the powers that grant it, often with the aid of Spirit Empathy to allow the use of Influence skills.

Some mages work through *procedures,* often called "spells" or "rituals." Older sources often envision elaborate, time-consuming procedures, similar to Path and Book magic; more recent works, such as the Harry Potter novels, and including many stories inspired by fantasy gaming, have spells that can be cast in seconds, like mana-based magic. Sources don't necessarily go into detail about how their procedures are worked out, but some suggest fixed routines that have to be memorized or looked up (Book magic and mana-based magic are good fits to these, as well as ***GURPS Thaumatology: Sorcery***). Other sources treat magic as a tool that can be applied to many different tasks (a good fit to symbol magic – see ***GURPS Thaumatology,*** pp. 168-177; see ***GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*** for another take on rituals).

Many mages work with *magical objects or substances*. For example, magic in the *Odyssey* often involves herbs and potions – not only Circe's use of a potion to change men into swine, but also Helen's use of herbs (learned in Egypt) to make Telemachus forget his grief for Odysseus. Such arts could be described in ***GURPS*** as Herb Lore or Alchemy. For more options for either bringing out the hidden powers of natural things, or imbuing them with new powers, see the discussion of material magic in ***GURPS Thaumatology,*** pp. 95-120; *Alchemical Elixirs* in ***GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic;*** "The Material Difference" in *Pyramid #3/66: The Laws of Magic;* or "Dungeon Brewmasters" in *Pyramid #3/82: Magical Creations.*

Mages may follow *magical or spiritual disciplines* that release hidden abilities of their adherents, or grant them new ones from external sources (see *Special Abilities and Power Modifiers,* below). ***GURPS Thaumatology,*** pp. 196-214, offers guidance on "magic as powers"; ***GURPS Powers: Divine Favor, GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers,*** and ***GURPS Thaumatology: Sorcery*** are detailed worked examples that may suit specific campaigns. Abilities gained in this way often have an additional power modifier from a requirement for Disciplines of Faith or a suitable Vow (see ***GURPS Powers,*** pp. 22-23).

> *The Flea was someone accustomed to flying over walls and floating on rooftops; leaping barriers and crossing city defenses was nothing to him.*
>
> *– Shi Nai'an,* ***Water Margin***

Special Abilities and Power Modifiers

Not just "magic as powers," but many other forms of special powers appear in various sources. Examples include the abilities of the Greek gods (*Odys.*), of many of the 108 Stars of Destiny (*WM*), and of Dracula and his brides (*Drac.*). These capabilities transcend normal human abilities and have special rules, given at length in ***GURPS Powers.***

The abilities that make up a power share a *power modifier* (***GURPS Powers,*** pp. 20-29), which expresses their source and typically includes various factors that can limit their users in ways not inherent in the underlying advantages. For example, the Psionic modifier (-10%) reflects the existence of anti-psi advantages (Neutralize and Static) and of technological devices that can block or shut down psi (discussed in ***GURPS Psi-Tech***). *Modifiers can always be altered to fit a source!* For example, in some settings, anti-psi technology may be impossible; in others, developing and maintaining psionic abilities may require regular meditative exercises equivalent to Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism).

The big question about special abilities in most sources is their magnitude. On one hand, how do they compare with normal human capabilities? On the other, how do they compare with *each other?* ***GURPS Supers*** rates combat abilities as I-scale (equivalent to a big animal), D-scale (equivalent to a tank), C-scale (equivalent to a battleship), or M-scale (even more potent); similar ratings can be used for abilities in sources – though before the twentieth century, hardly any fictional beings exceeded I-scale. Relative power levels are trickier, especially with supers. Supers tend to become more powerful over time, they're more powerful as protagonists than as guest stars, and (lately) they may have different power levels in comics vs. in films and television. Usually, it's possible to identify the highest level of any given ability in a setting; below that, who ranks whom is a judgment call – and the GM needs to be ready to make it.

Psionic abilities (described on pp. B254-257 and in multiple supplements) have been added to various classic science fiction, superhero adventures, and anime (and discussed in ***GURPS Psionic Powers***). The concept of "psi" wasn't defined till the 1940s, but it derives from earlier research on psychic abilities and hypnotism, as seen for example in *Dracula*.

Racial Traits

Some sources include beings that aren't human and have abilities human beings don't have – or lack abilities that human beings do have! Portraying such characters requires creating *racial templates* that define their *racial traits* (pp. B450-454). Despite the word "racial," such templates aren't limited to biological species; they can be created for classes of supernatural entities or for models of constructed beings. Optionally, they can be defined for certain kinds of nonsapient entities, such as animals (in place of creature statistics; see *Life Forms,* p. 44) or vehicles (pp. 42-43). Racial templates could be provided for such beings as Cyclopes in the *Odyssey* or the Winged Monkeys in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.*

A racial template is a laborsaving device. It's efficient to work out traits shared by a whole group of characters and use that as a baseline, and it saves space on character sheets to write "Winged Monkey" and a point value rather than "Extra Arm," "Flight (Winged)," "Odious Personal Habit (Prankster)," and so on. But even with those who are the only member of their race to appear in a story, such as the Cowardly Lion in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* – or who are one of a kind, such as the Scarecrow – it can be useful to distinguish inherent traits of their "kind" from individually acquired traits. This information helps someone who wants to play a similar character or when the GM would like to add more such beings later in the campaign. Note that, if someone is magically transformed (as Odysseus' men were turned into pigs by Circe), he gains a new racial template, but he keeps his original acquired individual traits, even if he can't use them in his new form.

Racial templates are different from powers! A power is the ability to *do* something; it has a power modifier, which usually includes ways of shutting it down. For example, a fire power would grant the ability to create, control, or use fire in various ways; if it had the Magical power modifier, then anti-magic powers or spells, or entering a no-mana zone, could temporarily shut off that ability. In contrast, a racial template defines you as *being* something, and has no power modifier. Being a dragon isn't a power; it's what a dragon *is* – if an anti-power could shut it down it would make dragons suddenly vanish. A dragon might have a talent for wielding fire, or for flying, but it can't have a talent for "being a dragon." A dragon's fiery breath could be a magical power, which an anti-magic spell could shut off, but it could also be an inherent part of the draconic nature.

Examples

The following characters from various source works illustrate many of this chapter's recommendations.

Elizabeth Bennet ("Lizzie")

75 points

Lizzie Bennet is the second of five sisters, and very much her father's daughter. She shares his love of reading, which has helped her express herself clearly and at times forcefully. She's physically active, thinking nothing of a three-mile walk, and has an eye for landscape. Like most of her sisters, she's attractive, but not beautiful, though she has striking, perceptive eyes. As an unmarried daughter, she lives with her parents, sharing in their lifestyle; she has $500 (20% of her starting wealth) available for personal possessions and expenses.

ST 9 [-10]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.
5'6"; 110 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 5 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Attractive [4]; Fit [5]; Resistant to Influence Skills (+3) [5]; Status 2 [5]*; Wealthy [20].

Perks: Classic Features (Fine eyes); Friend (Charlotte Lucas). [2]

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Gentlewoman's) [-10]; Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5]; Sense of Duty (Family) [-5]; Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5].

Quirks: Close to her father; Determined; Quick to judge. [-3]

Skills

Area Knowledge (Meryton) (E) IQ [1]-12; Artist (Calligraphy) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Connoisseur (Landscape) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Dancing (A) DX+1 [4]-11; Games (Whist) (E) IQ [1]-12; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-10; Literature (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Musical Instrument (Large Keyboard) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Naturalist (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Public Speaking (Informal Debate) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Riding (Horse) (A) DX-1 [1]-9; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Sewing (E) DX [1]-10; Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

* Includes +1 from Wealthy.

Nick Chopper, the Tin Woodman

300 points

Nick Chopper was the son of a woodcutter in the Munchkin country, who inherited his father's trade, and he worked to save money to marry a Munchkin servant girl. The girl's employer connived with the Wicked Witch of the East to put a curse on his axe, which successively cut off his limbs and then his head, and finally cut his body in two. A friendly tinsmith replaced each part with a metal prosthetic. These were highly durable but subject to rusting when wet. Dorothy Gale found him rusted into immobility in the woods and helped him by fetching and using his oil-can. Believing that having no heart made him unable to love, the Tin Woodman (as he was now called) decided to join Dorothy's trip to see the Wizard of Oz, hoping to acquire a replacement heart.

This represents Nick Chopper just after Dorothy finds him. At this point, he has little wealth, living in a hut with few possessions other than his axe and his oil-can.

ST 13 [30]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 14 [40].
Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13 [0]; Will 12 [10]; Per 10 [0]; FP N/A .
Basic Speed 6.50 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.
5'11"; 190 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 4 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Damage Resistance 6 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%) [18]; Doesn't Breathe [20]; Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Immunity to Pain [30]; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous, No Blood) [45]; Signature Gear (Good-quality felling axe) [1]; Unfazeable [15]; Unkillable 1 [50]; Unusual Background (Has Gadgeteer friend) [15].

Perks: Equipment Bond (Felling axe); Striking Surface; Weapon Bond (Felling axe). [3]

Disadvantages

Delusion (Believes himself incapable of feeling) [-5]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Numb [-20]; Pacifism (Self-Defense Only) [-15]; Status -1 [-5]; Struggling [-10]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Vow (Avoid harm to sentient creatures) [-10].

Quirks: Affected by Rust (p. 33); Disadvantage Embellishment (Pacifism, Moved to tears if he causes harm); Distinctive Features (Made of tin); Responsive; Sexless. [-5]

Features and Taboo Traits: Neither has nor spends FP.

Skills

Area Knowledge (Munchkin Country) (E) IQ [1]-10; Artist (Woodworking) (H) IQ-2 [1]-8; Carpentry (E) IQ+1 [2]-11; Mechanic/TL4 (Carts & Wagons) (A) IQ [2]-10; Professional Skill (Forester) (A) IQ+4 [16]-14; Survival (Woodlands) (A) Per [2]-10; Two-Handed Axe/Mace (A) DX+1 [4]-13.

Hu Sanniang ("Steelbright")

370 points

Hu Sanniang is one of the spirits who were reborn as the 108 Stars of Destiny. Her preferred fighting style uses two swords nearly as long as she is, from which she gets her nickname – in full translation, "Ten Feet of Blue." She started out as a foe of Mount Liang, during a clash between the outlaws and the Zhu family, one of whose sons was betrothed to her; the lecherous Wang Ying ("Shorty") accepted her challenge to a duel, and she defeated him and took him prisoner. After several more fights, she pursued Song Jiang, who led her into an ambush and made her a prisoner. Her fiancé died in further combat, so Song Jiang gave her to Wang Ying as a wife and made her an officer in his cavalry. She played both roles honorably for the rest of her life.

Hu's swords are often described as "sabers"; this is a common Western label for the dao. However, the dao in ***GURPS Martial Arts*** is classed as a broadsword, making it much shorter than 5'. Treating them as oversized weapons with SM +1 (***GURPS Low-Tech Companion 2: Weapons and Warriors,*** pp. 20-21) gives them ×1.3 reach; if they start out at 46", near the upper limit for broadswords (p. B208), this gets them to exactly 5'. This is comparable to a bastard sword, so they can be given reach 1, 2. Their other stats then are damage sw+3 cut/thr+1 imp; parry 0U; cost $1,575; weight 11.25 lbs., rounded to 11 lbs.; and required ST 16.5, rounded to 17. Two levels of the Huge Weapons (ST) perk let her wield them with ST 15, which becomes her ST, despite her small stature (a classic *wuxia* trope!).

ST 15 [50]; **DX** 15 [100]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d+1/2d+1; BL 45 lbs.; HP 15 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 6.50 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10*.
5'4"; 120 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Chinese [0].
Languages: Chinese (Native) [0].

Advantages

Charisma 1 [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Daredevil [15]; Destiny (Death in the service of the Emperor) [10]; Reawakened [10]; Resistant to Influence Skills (+3) [5]; Signature Gear (Pair of fine dao) [26]; Status 3 [10]†; Very Fit [15]; Very Wealthy [30]; Weapon Master (Sword) [20].

Perks: Flourish; Huge Weapons (SM); Huge Weapons 2 (ST); Off-Hand Training (Broadsword); Weapon Bond (Dao); Weapon Bond (Dao). [7]

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Confucian) [-10]; Impulsiveness (12) [-10]; Sense of Duty (108 Stars of Destiny) [-5]; Social Stigma (Second-Class Citizen) [-5]; Vow (Marriage to Wang Ying) [-5].

Quirks: Admiration (Song Jiang); Pacifism (Prefers to capture foes rather than kill them); Proud. [-3]

Skills

Artist (Calligraphy) IQ [4]-11; Broadsword (A) DX+2 [8]-17; Expert Skill (Military Science) (H) IQ-1 [2]-10; Fast-Draw (Sword) (E) DX+1 [1]-16*; Judo (H) DX-2 [1]-13; Jumping (E) DX [1]-15; Lasso (A) DX [2]-15; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [2]-12‡; Parry Missile Weapons (H) DX+1 [8]-16; Poetry (A) IQ [2]-11; Riding (Horse) (A) DX+1 [4]-16; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-11; Tactics (H) IQ-1 [2]-10.

Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack (Broadsword) (H) Broadsword [5]-17; Hands-Free Riding (H) Riding (Horse) [4]-16; Quick Mount (A) Riding (Horse) [3]-16.

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.
† Includes +1 from Very Wealthy.
‡ Includes +1 from Charisma 1.

> *O brave new world, that hath such people in it!*
>
> *– William Shakespeare,* ***The Tempest***

Odysseus

675 points

Odysseus is the king of Ithaca, a remote Greek island, and is a skilled and exceptionally strong warrior; in an archery contest, no other man can even string his favorite bow. More important, though, is his quick mind, which enables him to deal with almost any task that comes his way, from building a boat to begging for a meal. Above all, he's a master of deceits and stratagems; even Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, finds him impressive and has long been his Patron.

Odysseus has Multimillionaire 2, with starting wealth of $5,000,000, and he invested one-fifth of that in his Trojan venture, mostly on a fleet of a dozen light galleys (see below) – but lost it all to Poseidon's anger on his return voyage. At the start of the *Odyssey,* he's a prisoner on a remote island, ruled by the goddess Calypso, who hopes to persuade him to marry her and accept the gift of immortality.

Unlike standard light galleys, Odysseus' ships had no Transport capability. In its place, they had weapons and shields for their crews, who could disembark and fight as Medium Infantry. Normally he would have had to pay the cost of raising 50-60 elements of land forces, but these were sons of wealthy households on Ithaca, coming along out of loyalty and the hope of loot, and are treated as levies, with no cost to raise them.

ST 15 [50]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 16 [120]; **HT** 14 [40].
Damage 1d+1/2d+1; BL 45 lbs.; HP 15 [0]; Will 16 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 14 [0].
Basic Speed 7.00 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 11*.
6'2"; 225 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 1 [0].
CF: Hellenic [0].
Languages: Classical Greek (Native/None) [-3].

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; Fit [5]; Handsome [12]; Hard to Kill 1 [2]; Heroic Archer [20]; Multimillionaire 2 [100]; Patron (Athena; Highly Accessible, +50%; Minimal Intervention, -50%; Special Abilities, +100%; 12 or less) [120]; Smooth Operator 1 [15]; Social Chameleon [5]; Status 6 [15]†.

Perks: Naval Training; Strongbow; Style Familiarity (Heroic Spear Fighting); Weapon Bond (Composite Bow). [4]

Disadvantages

Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Curious (12) [-5]; Weirdness Magnet [-15].

Quirks: Compulsive Lying (Conceals his true identity at first meeting); Easily Influenced (Desirous); Obsession (Returning to Ithaca); Proud. [-4]

Skills

Acting (A) IQ+2 [4]-18‡; Artist (Woodworking) (H) IQ-2 [1]-14; Boating (Sailboat) (A) DX [2]-14; Bow (A) DX+4 [16]-18; Boxing (A) DX+4 [16]-18; Carousing (E) HT+2 [1]-15‡; Connoisseur (Literature) (A) IQ-1 [1]-15; Dancing (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ [2]-16‡; Disguise (A) IQ-1 [1]-15; Farming (A) IQ-1 [1]-15; Fast-Draw (Arrow) (E) DX+2 [2]-16*; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [2]-17‡; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [2]-17‡; Navigation (Sea) (A) IQ-1 [1]-15; Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-15; Psychology (H) IQ [4]-16; Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [2]-17‡; Religious Ritual (Greek polytheistic) (H) IQ-2 [1]-14; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ+2 [2]-18‡; Seamanship (E) IQ [1]-16; Shield (E) DX+2 [4]-16; Shiphandling (H) IQ [4]-16; Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Spear (A) DX [2]-14; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Strategy (H) IQ [4]-16; Survival (Island/Beach) (A) Per-1 [1]-15; Survival (Woodlands) (A) Per-1 [1]-15; Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Tactics (H) IQ-1 [2]-15; Thrown Weapon (Spear) (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Thrown Weapon Sport (Disc) (E) DX [1]-14; Wrestling (A) DX+5 [20]-19.

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.
† Includes +3 from Multimillionaire 2.
‡ Includes +1 from Smooth Operator 1.

Specifications for Original Characters

What if the original characters aren't going to be the protagonists of the campaign? (See *Starting Point,* pp. 6-8.) The newly created characters will need to fit the source material and the setting. Part of setting up a gaming adaptation of a work is providing the players with guidelines for creating suitable characters. Doing ***GURPS*** treatments of established characters (as discussed in the preceding section) provides a basis for those guidelines.

Writers don't start out by drawing up character sheets for their heroes.

Point Value

To start with, how many character points should the PCs have? Pick out a group of people from the published work whose roles in the overall story are roughly comparable, and draw up character sheets for them, giving them whatever traits make sense. Then add up the point costs. For example, write up the five younger heroes from *Dracula;* the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion from *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz;* – or, for a lower-powered campaign, the Guardian of the Gates, the Soldier with the Green Whiskers, and the girl who waits on Dorothy in the Wizard's palace (named Jellia Jamb in later books). The range of point scores should suggest a baseline, which can be adjusted up or down to suit the premise of the campaign (see pp. 8-9).

What if the characters you select have wildly different point values? After all, writers don't start out by drawing up character sheets for their heroes! There are three basic options:

- List the characters by point value, from lowest to higher, and pick one of the characters in the middle as your baseline, adjusted up or down to a convenient round number.
- Take one of the higher-point characters as a baseline, and give the less powerful characters traits that reflect narrative advantages, to explain how they can keep up with their more powerful companions: Daredevil, Destiny, Hard to Kill, Higher Purpose, Luck, Pitiable, or Serendipity.

Excluded Options for Characters

One of the important things to do in planning a campaign is to decide what traits protagonists are *not* allowed to have. Limits may be either hard (absolute) or soft (subject to exceptions if there's a really good narrative justification).

- Attributes should have an upper limit for unmodified human beings; see *Attributes and Talents* (p. 29). For realistic nonhuman creatures, ST limits should be proportional to the longest dimension for a creature's SM (see p. B19).
- Upper and lower limits may be set on social traits such as Status and Wealth. In realistic campaigns, characters who spend time together should usually fall into a narrow range of Status.
- Mental disadvantages that make effective cooperation and trust impossible, or that make it impossible to function in a society, may be disallowed.
- Cinematic skills and advantages that give access to them, such as Trained by a Master, may be unavailable.
- Special abilities such as magic or psionics may be prohibited.
- Exotic and supernatural advantages and disadvantages should be unobtainable in a mundane campaign. In a fantastic campaign, specific advantages and disadvantages may be banned if they don't fit the premise.

Unusual Background

Some traits don't fit at all in the setting of a story (see *Excluded Options for Characters,* above). But other traits, though *unlikely,* aren't impossible. To include them, while keeping them rare, the GM can require an Unusual Background.

Unusual Background typically reflects, not an active ability, but a passive state. For example, the active ability to create new devices in the course of play could be represented as Gadgeteer, but simply owning such a device – as an earlier invention, an inheritance, a gift, or a purchase – would be Unusual Background (see p. B477).

On one hand, the point cost of Unusual Background represents the rarity of a particular trait in a setting, following the general assumption that traits that cost more are less common. On the other, it reflects the advantage gained from having traits that most people can't have and probably aren't prepared to deal with – and may not even believe in.

The point cost of Unusual Background typically ranges from 5 points for a modestly unusual trait, such as access to cutting-edge technology (p. B345), to 50 points for extremely rare traits, such as being a demigod or belonging to the world's only super-team.

• Forget the whole issue of point value. Instead, ask players to propose character concepts, and let them build any character whose concept fits the source material and the campaign, and who meets the other guidelines.

Required Traits

Player characters may be *required* to have certain traits: high enough attributes to survive their adventures; wealth enough to fund them; training in certain mandatory skills; or possession of a disadvantage such as Code of Honor, Pacifism, or Sense of Duty. If people in the source material all have certain traits, that argues for requiring those traits for newly created player characters.

Example (WM): The 108 Stars of Destiny are masters of the martial arts; all of them should have at least one of Heroic Archer, Trained by a Master, or Weapon Master. (In fact there are scenes of characters training other characters – see *Expanding the Original Cast.*) Their origin as spirits can be represented by making them all Reawakened.

Example (WWOz): The Wizard's help to Dorothy's companions takes the form of tricking them into believing in themselves. They all have Delusions about their own lack of wisdom, love, and courage. Helping Dorothy isn't so easy for him, because her problem isn't a Delusion (she really is a long way from Kansas!).

Division of Labor

In many campaigns, it's desirable for participants to have *niches,* types of activity that they do really well and that other people can't take over from them. This idea is something of a formula in genre-based series such as ***GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*** and ***GURPS Monster Hunters.*** Fictional sources don't usually adhere so strictly to a formula, but groups of characters often play distinct roles. The real point of niches is their ability to contribute in different ways to the pursuit of a goal; an examination of the source can suggest what those ways are.

Not all stories have to have niches. Characters with much the same general abilities can be distinguished by background or personality. In this kind of campaign, it's important to provide a little "downtime" where characters' personalities can emerge.

Example (Drac.): Professor van Helsing contributes scholarly and arcane knowledge; John Seward, medical skills; Arthur Godalming, wealth and social influence; Quincey Morris is a man of action; and Jonathan Harker provides legal knowledge. Mina Harker not only has a telepathic link with Dracula but is the real leader of the group – things start going wrong when she's excluded from the men's discussions and only begin going right when she takes charge.

Templates

It can be useful to draw up templates for character creation. If belonging to a nonhuman race is an option, a *racial template* is definitely needed (*Racial Traits,* p. 35). If a source portrays a society with definite roles, *occupational templates* can ensure that characters fit their roles (see ***GURPS Template Toolkit 1: Characters*** for guidance in depth).

Campaigns set in more differentiated societies, such as Europe and North America in the 19th century, have far more occupations. But it's possible to group them into broader types, each represented by a template. Some such list can be a worthwhile project for a GM whose players need help with finding their way through character creation. The templates can also offer built in niche protection, if that's wanted.

Example (Odys.): The *Odyssey* portrays nobles (both men and women), bards, sorceresses (see *Magic and Its Variants,* p. 34), domestic servants, and herdsmen. These and perhaps a few other occupational roles could cover the likely character types in a campaign based on Greek heroic tales.

Expanding the Original Cast

A campaign can have a mixed cast – some or all of the heroes of the source work, plus some newly introduced heroes. This is a natural development in a "what happened next" campaign (*Prequels and Sequels,* pp. 6-7). It can also be the basis for an alternate universe campaign (p. 7) where some additional people have joined the team – though care has to be taken that the added people don't put the original heroes in the shade! In either case, the question is how to make the new people fit into a group that was created without them.

The obvious option is to find a useful role that no one in the original group is playing. In *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,* for example, we have Professor Arronax, the scientist; Conseil, his servant, with his trick of having memorized the classifications of all marine animals; and Ned Land, the man of action – but no ship's engineer to figure out the *Nautilus*' design.

Another possibility is to have a new character in the same niche as an existing one, if it's a niche where multiple occupants can be useful. The old and new characters may be rivals, friendly or otherwise. They may also be the best of friends, like the Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger (introduced in *Ozma of Oz,* Baum's third Oz novel).

A new character can be a romantic interest for an existing one. This happens near the end of *Water Margin,* when Zhang Qing ("Hotshot") dreams of teaching a young woman the art of throwing stones with infallible accuracy – and then meets the actual lady, Qiu Qiongying ("Jade Arrowtip"), who leaves a rebel army to fight beside him and later marry him.

This illustrates another possibility: having a former adversary turn into an ally, out of sympathy or necessity. Suppose, for example, that Elizabeth Bennet's sister Lydia, a few years after her marriage to George Wickham, discovered that he was involved in some dishonest scheme and had gotten in over his head, and turned to her older sisters and their husbands for help (as discussed under *Mundane Premises,* p. 8)?

Chapter Four
Things

Literary critics don't have a standard name for inanimate objects, though they often play an important role in narrative and drama. The mighty bow of Odysseus that lesser men can't string or draw, the *Nautilus* that Captain Nemo commands, and the silver shoes (changed to ruby slippers in the movie) that Dorothy Gale takes from the body of the Wicked Witch of the East are vital story elements. Such *things* are more recognized in theater and film (as *props*) and in art criticism (where they're called *attributes*). They've been vital to roleplaying games from the beginning. ***GURPS*** calls many of them *equipment* (pp. B264-289) or *technology and artifacts* (pp. B462-485).

Narrative Function

One important way to classify artifacts is by *narrative function,* the role they play in a storyline or scenario.

Gear

Gear is what characters use to perform tasks. In most sources, people have the supplies and equipment they need to use their skills. Character design can include purchasing gear suited to the listed skills, or belonging to an organization that can provide what's needed (see ***GURPS Boardroom and Curia***). Performing a task with improvised equipment can display unusual skill; good- or fine-quality or technologically innovative equipment can indicate access to unusual resources. In either case, *equipment modifiers* (p. B345) should apply. The logic also can be turned around: A fictional character who owns a piece of equipment will normally have the skill for using it. A catalog of available gear can be based on what the source describes, and more generally on the setting's TL (see *Technologies,* pp. 18-19).

Missing or unavailable equipment can give rise to dramatic situations. Heroes may need to improvise gear from available resources, scrounge for cheap gear, or persuade other people to give them what they need. Both Odysseus (*Odys.*) and Dorothy Gale (*WWOz*) have to deal with such issues.

Example (Odys.): Odysseus owns a composite bow, made partly of horn and sinew. He has ST 15 – but his Strongbow perk and Bow-18 skill let him draw a bow with ST 17, and he's wealthy enough to pay $3,600 (4× list price) for a fine bow. This gives him 1/2D 384, Max 480, and Damage 1d+5 imp, with other statistics unchanged. He doesn't actually carry his bow with him on his voyages, but when he gets back to Ithaca, it's there waiting for him.

Evidence

In an investigative scenario or campaign, objects and information can be *evidence* of some secret or mystery. The source may describe particular types of clues, which make certain skills important both for spotting essential details (often with a Per-based skill) and for making sense of them (often with an IQ-based skill). The GM can pick other objects to use in roles similar to ones found in the source work.

The major characters may use their own investigative skills, turn to an Ally or Contact for help, or even undertake a search for someone with suitable expertise (discussed in ***GURPS Social Engineering***) to get information. For example, John Seward calls in his old teacher Abraham Van Helsing to diagnose Lucy Westenra's mysterious anemia (*Drac.*).

Evidence in a scenario can be planned out in advance – but it's not a good idea to make the whole story depend on finding and understanding one clue; what if the investigators can't make sense of it, or can't find it in the first place? A successful roll against any investigative skill should give some kind of hint at what's going on, if there's any sensible way for it to do so – even if the GM didn't plan for the use of that particular skill. Understanding how the game world works (see *Describing the World,* pp. 14-16) can help in coming up with suitable clues.

Personalizers

The heroes of stories often have distinctive, recognizable possessions, like the pictorial *attributes* of saints that symbolize their martyrdoms. Such objects may be perfectly standard gear in the setting; for example, many of the 108 Stars of Destiny (*WM*) have favorite weapons, and Quincey Morris (*Drac.*) carries a Bowie knife (written up on pp. 197 and 200 of ***GURPS High-Tech*** as a "survival knife"). Or they can be high quality, like Odysseus' bow (see *Gear,* above) or Hu Sanniang's 5' swords (see p. 36). ***GURPS*** defines such *personalizers* as Signature Gear. Their owners may also have Weapon Bond or Equipment Bond as a perk (see ***GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks***).

Especially in fantastic stories, the heroes or their enemies may have the ability to *create* one-of-a-kind gear by methods such as invention, gadgeteering, or enchanting (see *Fantastic Items,* p. 45). Anything of this sort is a personalizer.

Example (WWOz): Nick Chopper, the Tin Woodman, is never seen without his axe (p. 36). Since he's a woodcutter, this is best described as a felling axe (***GURPS High-Tech,*** p. 24). This costs $100; since Oz is TL4, one point of Signature Gear is worth $1,000, more than enough to pay $500 for a good-quality axe that gives +1 to Carpentry and Professional Skill (Forester). Consider it improvised equipment for Artist (Woodworking). Chopper wields it two-handed, so in combat, it can be treated as a lighter great axe, inflicting sw+2 cutting damage.

Valuables

Other objects are important as embodiments of wealth – gems, gold and silver coins, banknotes, or marketable goods in general. Such things may be described in detail (see *Decorated Equipment,* pp. 37-38, and *Jewelry,* pp. 38-39, in ***GURPS Low-Tech***), but often they're generic heaps of precious metal or bundles of dollar bills. Their only *required* statistic is a value in ***GURPS*** $.

In a realistic story, valuables are a *medium of exchange;* they're used to buy or rent useful objects or hire employees. In a cinematic one, such practical issues are often swept aside. Valuables serve more as a *store of value* – in fact, as *treasure,* like the gold, silver, and silk that appear repeatedly in *Water Margin.*

Transcendents

Finally, some objects embody extraordinary powers or higher realms. Their primary narrative function is to convey a sense of awe or amazement – or, sometimes, of terror. Secondarily, they may play a role in the storyline, as omens, threats, or the goals of quests, for example. They may even be usable by the heroes, as sources of special powers, or as protection against them, as Odysseus uses the magical herb moly given to him by Hermes (*Odys.*).

It's hard for an object to continue inspiring wonder, though, if the PCs rely on it all the time to solve problems. Limiting an object's use can protect its transcendence. Maybe it's only available once, or a few times; maybe it can be made active but not fully controlled; maybe its use is stressful, perilous, or even corrupting.

Example (Drac.): Consecrated communion wafers are distributed daily in the Mass, but their effects on vampires in *Dracula* are visible manifestations of divine power. When Van Helsing first uses them, he emphasizes having obtained special permission – this amounts to having a Contact with supernatural talents. (By the end of the novel, though, he's keeping vampires off by drawing circles with powdered wafers. Authors aren't immune to turning rare wonders into convenient machinery!)

MacGuffins

Alfred Hitchcock popularized the word *MacGuffin* (sometimes *McGuffin* or *maguffin*) for objects whose *only* role in a story is to be pursued or fought over – such as the Maltese Falcon in the movie by that title. What the object actually is and does is unimportant. The heroes can't make use of it, or sell it and send the proceeds; in the end, it will be taken away from them.

Physical Form

In game-mechanical terms, equipment serves various functions and takes forms suited to these functions.

Clothing and Armor

Unless they've washed up naked after a shipwreck, like Odysseus on the shore of Scheria, a story's characters will be wearing something. A film, television show, or graphic novel will provide visual images. A novel or epic often describes garments and grooming; if the descriptions are incomplete, a history of costume can provide illustrations. The price of garments can be estimated from the wearer's Status (*Clothing,* p. B266).

Armor and protective gear, as described in the source, frequently can be matched up with equipment in ***GURPS Low-Tech, GURPS High-Tech,*** or ***GURPS Ultra-Tech.*** If the source describes it as having superior qualities, give it higher DR, lighter weight, or other advantages. If specific dimensions, weights, or capabilities are mentioned, match the weight and appearance as closely as possible.

Example (20KL): The diving suits in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* are essentially TL5 closed-dress rigs (***GURPS High-Tech,*** p. 73), but with the external compressor and air hose removed: 175 lbs., $2,500. In their place is a large tank (***GURPS High-Tech,*** p. 74) of advanced TL(5+1) design that holds air for 10 hours: 35 lbs., $600. (This is better than realistic TL8 air tanks.) Armor added to the chest allows full duration unaffected by local pressure; this can be treated as medium bronze segmented plate (***GURPS Low-Tech,*** p. 111) giving +4 DR: 18 lbs., $2,700. The total suit has DR 6 for hit locations 3-5, 9-10, and 17-18; provides air for 10 hours, assuming mild exertion (pp. B351-352); and confers Immunity to Eye and Nose Irritants, No Sense of Smell/Taste, and Tunnel Vision. Total: $5,800, 228 lbs.

Personal Gear

The simplest way to identify personal gear is from descriptions of characters carrying or using it. This applies particularly to weapons. Some research may be needed to identify the obscure ones – such as the guisarme and the voulge in the list of military weapons in *Water Margin.*

A character sheet typically lists things the source's author didn't bother to write about, or the director to show – but that may become relevant in dealing with typical challenges. Anyone who travels can be expected to have *personal basics,* and likely a share of *group basics* (see p. B288).

In many settings, all major characters can be assumed to have a standard load of basic gear (*Presupposed Items,* p. 45). People in a TL5-8 campaign can be given *personal accessories* (***GURPS High-Tech,*** pp. 31-32); similar lists can be worked out for lower and higher TLs. Characters can be assumed to have equipment for maintaining their primary gear – a whetstone for bladed tools or weapons, or a gun-cleaning kit for firearms, for example. Anyone with a skill can be expected to have tools, reference materials, supplies, and other things needed to practice it – in compact form to carry around, or in more elaborate form for use in a workplace (*Other Machines,* p. 43).

Furnishings

Furnishings usually aren't acquired as separate items; they're treated as part of the standard of living for a given TL, culture, and Status. Their normal effect is to provide evidence of Status. In some cases, furnishings may count as good- or fine-quality equipment for a particular skill; for example, a wealthy person might have a superior kitchen stove or electronic sound system. The GM may need to give suggestions for how people of different classes live in a particular setting.

Similar judgments can be made about the furnishings of a business or other organization, following guidelines in ***GURPS Boardroom and Curia,*** p. 5. Schools or other instructional organizations can provide facilities for learning; see ***GURPS Social Engineering: Back to School,*** pp. 28-29.

Wanderers who aren't required to assign 80% of starting wealth to furnishings and other fixed assets (p. B26) must include any furnishings they own in their list of personal gear – and account for their weight and cost! This doesn't apply to wanderers who have large vehicles as their residences (*Vehicles as Locations,* p. 22). They can have furnishings suited to their Wealth and Status, whose specific weight and cost need not be accounted for – though usually they'll be compact.

Example (20KL): Captain Nemo has a museum of oceanographic specimens, a library of 12,000 books in many languages (perhaps 1,000 shelf feet, a fine library giving +2 to Research; see ***GURPS Low-Tech Companion 1: Philosophers and Kings,*** pp. 33-34), some 30 paintings by artists from Raphael to Delacroix, a number of sculptures, and a pipe organ, but all fitted into about 1,000 square feet. To make room, his personal cabin is small and almost monastic.

Vehicles

Vehicles are some of the most significant artifacts in stories. They provide a means of making journeys (*Travel,* p. 24). They can transport other possessions. Large ones can be lived in, and even act as mobile settings (*Vehicles as Locations,* p. 22). The cost of a vehicle, and its styling and furnishings, can make it evidence of the owner's Status. If he invented it, it can give proof of his genius.

Vehicles in realistic stories, and some vehicles in fantastic stories, can often be compared to vehicles included in the ***Basic Set*** (pp. B464-465) or various supplements. If there isn't a close enough match, it may be possible to find information on real-world vehicles that can be used in working out ***GURPS*** statistics. For purely imaginary vehicles, especially fantastic ones, the GM will need to make up statistics – unless the author has done so.

Example: The Nautilus

To illustrate how statistics can be worked out for a vehicle, here is the *Nautilus.* (Terms and notation are as defined in *Vehicle Statistics,* pp. B462-463.)

TL: The *Nautilus* was built around 1860 (TL5), but uses more advanced technology than really existed then: TL(5+1).

ST/HP: Captain Nemo tells Professor Arronax that the *Nautilus* weighs 1,356.48 tonnes, which is approximately 2,991,000 lbs. or 1,496 tons. As a powered vehicle, it counts as Unliving, giving it ST/HP 576.

Hnd/SR: The *Nautilus* is comparable in size to a TL6 tramp steamer (p. B464) and can be given the same statistics: -3/6.

HT: Most machines have HT 10, but the *Nautilus* was expensively built to high standards, and operates under conditions where failure could be catastrophic: HT 12.

Structures

Structures are normally treated as *locations.* Habitable dwellings, in particular, can usually be defined as buildings (pp. 21-22). (For *underground* construction, see ***GURPS Underground Adventures,*** pp. 13-14.) Some structures are potentially movable and gain their integrity entirely from internal construction, though they may have a point of attachment; aerostats (hollow structures held aloft by lighter-than-air gases), large rafts, mobile homes, and orbital stations are examples. These can be described as vehicles, with some modifications (see pp. B462-463):

- Not being able to move under their own power, they have ST 0, and usually Taboo Trait (Fixed ST). If writing them up as characters, give them Injury Tolerance (Homogenous) and base their Payload on HP rather than ST (a +0% modifier).
- Since they don't move, they have no Hnd. However, they're usually large enough to have a high SR: a mobile home could have SR 4 (similar to a bus); a small aerostat, SR 3 (similar to a blimp); and a small space station SR 5 (similar to a star freighter).
- Give them Acceleration (Move) of 0, and Top Speed of 0 (no Enhanced Move).
- Range doesn't apply, since they don't move under their own power.
- An aerostat by definition has Stall 0.

See ***GURPS Spaceships 6: Mining and Industrial Spacecraft*** and "Alternate Spaceships" in *Pyramid #3/34: Alternate* ***GURPS*** for tips on using the ***GURPS Spaceships*** rules to design detailed game stats for structures.

The Nautilus

SUBMARINE/TL (LARGE SUB)

TL	*Vehicle*	*ST/HP*	*Hnd/SR*	*HT*	*Move*	*LWt*	*Load*	*SM*	*Occ.*	*DR*	*Range*	*Cost*	*Loc.*	*Draft*	*Notes*
5+1	*Nautilus*	576	-3/6	12	0.08/25	1,654	33	+10	23	224	24,850	$120M	4gs	21'	[1]

Notes

[1] Cost is estimated with ***GURPS Mass Combat*** rules. See Notes, below, for details on weapons.

Move: The highest speed mentioned for the *Nautilus* is 50 mph, which equates to Move 25. Its Acceleration isn't defined, but can be estimated. A tramp steamer (p. B464), with Top Speed 6, has acceleration 0.01, or 1/600 of its Top Speed, implying that it can reach Top Speed in 10 minutes (600 seconds); the *Nautilus,* at an equivalent TL, seems to function as a high-performance vehicle, so its Acceleration can be set at 1/300 of Top Speed, or 0.0833, rounded to 0.08, which lets it reach Top Speed in just over five minutes. A more typical speed is 32 mph (Move 16), a normal cruising speed (p. B463). At this speed, its turning radius is 16/0.08 = 200 yards, about 2.6× its length (pp. B394-395).

Loaded Weight (LWt.): 2,990,000 lbs. is 1,495 tons. This increases to 1,654 tons when fully submerged; the difference comes from filled water tanks in the outer hull.

Load: The *Nautilus* isn't designed as a cargo vessel. Its carrying capacity might be estimated at 33 tons (the Basic Lift for its ST, equivalent to Payload 10).

SM: At 70 meters long (77 yards), the *Nautilus* has SM +10. It's a fast, narrow craft, so this isn't increased for box shape.

Occ.: The largest number of crewmen seen at once is 20; the biography of Captain Nemo included in *The Mysterious Island* refers to "some twenty of his closest friends." There is space for at least three passengers.

DR: According to Captain Nemo, the inner hull is five centimeters thick (2"), and made of steel, which gives it DR 112 (see p. B558). The thickness of the outer hull isn't specified, but the weight budget is more than enough to allow it to be equally thick, for total DR 224.

Range: The "20,000 leagues" or 49,700 miles of the title is completed with only one stop to replace the submarine's batteries, roughly midway through the voyage. This can be taken as an estimate of its range.

Cost: The cost of the *Nautilus* is never specified (but see below).

Locations (Loc.): The design includes a very small superstructure and four windows for observation: 4gs. As a powered vehicle, the *Nautilus* also has vital areas.

Draft: The diameter of the *Nautilus* is eight meters (8.75 yards). It has 90% of its volume underwater when its tanks are empty; given its cylindrical cross-section, perhaps 20% of its diameter is above water, giving it draft 21'.

Notes: The *Nautilus* carries no conventional weapons, but is equipped with a ram. At cruising speed (32 mph or Move 16), it inflicts (576 × 16) / 100 = 92.16d of crushing damage, rounded down to 92d; the ram makes this 92d+92 damage to its target. Collision damage to the *Nautilus* itself is at -1 per die.

As a combat element (see ***GURPS Mass Combat***), the *Nautilus* can be represented as a very fine TL6 submarine – actually TL(5+1) – of class Nav, T1 with TS 8,000 and sea mobility. Its cost to raise is $60,000,000, doubled to $120,000,000 for one level of High TL.

Use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without.
– American folk saying

Objects as Characters

There are times when it makes sense to define an inanimate object by giving it a character sheet. This is a standard option for vehicles (see *Personalizers,* pp. 40-41).

In some fictional worlds, inanimate objects really *are* characters, in a sense that goes beyond game mechanics: They are sapient, have personalities, are capable of agency (see p. 46), or all three. In fantasy, this could apply to magically animated beings (including spontaneously animated ones such as the Scarecrow in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*) or certain enchanted objects (see ***GURPS Thaumatology,*** pp. 116-120); in science fiction, typical examples are computers, AIs, and robots (see ***GURPS Ultra-Tech,*** pp. 27-35, for general rules). Such beings should be defined much like human characters; however, they typically are Unliving (fantasy entities such as golems may be Homogenous), and in science fiction, they often have Digital Mind.

Other Machines

Machines are comparable partly to furnishings and partly to vehicles. They have a complex internal structure (making them Unliving rather than Homogenous) and an intended function. They aren't normally designed for long-term occupancy, though they may have a seat for an operator. Their functions are too widely variable to be defined by any simple system of rules, but ***GURPS Low-Tech, GURPS High-Tech, GURPS Ultra-Tech,*** and ***GURPS Low-Tech Companion 3: Daily Life and Economics*** offer examples.

Heavy weapons, whose operation calls for Artillery or Gunner rolls, can be classified as machines, from TL1 battering rams and TL2 ballistae to TL7 HEAT rounds and guided missiles (or the science-fictional weapons in ***GURPS Ultra-Tech***). If such weapons turn up in a source, they usually can be approximated by one of the heavy weapons in the various tech supplements.

Life Forms

Animals, and even plants, can sometimes be written up as characters; this is appropriate for animals that can speak, like the Cowardly Lion, and for loyal companions that are treated as Allies or Dependents. But nonsapient life forms typically are given partial statistics. The ***Basic Set*** provides guidelines and multiple examples (pp. B455-461). This also applies to most nonsapient monsters.

Example: Kalidahs

As the heroes travel to the Emerald City, two Kalidahs attack Dorothy and her companions. These are huge, fierce beasts, larger than the Cowardly Lion, who is "as big as a small horse." Since horses have SM +1, they are given SM +2, with length four yards, ST 22, and weight 1,300 lbs. Their other attributes average those of grizzly bears and tigers; however, their Will is raised and their Per lowered from those of a tiger. They appear to be true animals, without sapience. They are universally feared and hence are classified as "monsters."

Kalidah

Kalidahs are Oz's most dangerous predators. They have heads like those of tigers and bodies like those of bears. They often go upright, especially to attack with the large, sharp claws on their front feet; when doing so, they are limited to Move 5.

ST: 22	**HP:** 22	**Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12	**Will:** 12	**Move:** 9
IQ: 4	**Per:** 10	**Weight:** 1,300 lbs.
HT: 12	**FP:** 12	**SM:** +2
Dodge: 10	**Parry:** 12	**DR:** 2

Bite (16): 2d+1 cutting. Reach C, 1.
Talons (16): 2d+1 cutting or impaling. Reach C, 1.

Traits: Bad Temper (12); Combat Reflexes; Night Vision 2; No Fine Manipulators; Semi-Upright; Sharp Teeth; Social Stigma (Monster); Talons; Temperature Tolerance 2; Wild Animal.
Skills: Brawling-16; Survival (Woodlands)-12.

It was not likely that a private individual could have such a marvel of mechanical engineering at his command. Where and when could he have built it? How could he have kept its construction a secret?
– Jules Verne, ***20,000 Leagues Under the Sea***

Availability

In running a campaign, there are two big questions about objects: Which ones exist in the setting, and how can PCs gain access to them?

Tech Level and Variant Technology

Availability of technology is what ***GURPS*** tech levels are based on. What defines a TL isn't laboratory demonstrations, the experiments of mad scientists, or prototype designs, but devices that have been brought into production. In market economies, most of the technology that defines a TL can be purchased for money – though it may be so expensive that only a national government can afford it!

Once a setting's TL has been defined (*Technologies,* pp. 18-19), it's usually fair to assume that devices at that TL are available, whether or not the source discusses them. This can be modified to fit a variant TL.

Some sources bring together characters from different TLs. Giving some people High TL (if the setting is a less advanced country) or Low TL (if it's the most advanced country in the world) can represent this kind of gap. Low-TL people may be able to *use* High-TL equipment – if you can fire a crossbow, you can figure out a rifle or a laser – but they'll have trouble maintaining it, repairing it, obtaining supplies to use with it, and understanding its implications.

Skills such as Engineer, Computer Programming, and Bioengineering can be used to design and build more advanced equipment, and a gadgeteer can achieve heroic feats along these lines (pp. B473-477). An inventor can get past some of the usual tech-level restrictions on gear.

Example (Drac.): Much of the struggle against Dracula turns on the use of TL6 technology and organization as a weapon. Dracula has *access* to the technology, but doesn't fully understand it. For example, he travels back to Transylvania by sailing ship, but his foes go by train and intercept him!

Legality

Certain types of material objects may be technically possible but unavailable for legal reasons. This will depend on the society's Control Rating (CR), as discussed under *War and Politics* (p. 20). For weapons and some other gear and equipment, this is defined in terms of Legality Class (p. B507). In fact, what weapons are legally permitted in a setting is one of the main indications of its CR. Of course, outlaws won't pay any attention to such limitations!

Possessions can be restricted for reasons other than their use in combat or intrigue. Many societies have *sumptuary laws,* which either prohibit owning, wearing, or consuming certain things (for example, Prohibition in the United States) or permit them only to certain social classes (for example, ancient Irish laws that defined how many different colors people of different ranks in society could wear). This reflects the culture of a setting (*Cultures,* p. 19).

Wealth

The ability to acquire gear is usually constrained by *cost*. This may be simply a matter of checking the price to buy the equipment (pp. B264-289 and ***GURPS Low-Tech, GURPS High-Tech,*** and ***GURPS Ultra-Tech***). But inventing new equipment also has costs: the inventor must pay for the facilities for his work, and for each prototype that he tests (p. B474).

In creating a character, this limit is usually applied the other way around. First decide what equipment the character needs, and then determine how much Wealth it will take to buy that equipment, or to invent it, and give the person that much Wealth.

> *Artifacts are those odds and ends that look as though they could do a lot more than lie around looking interesting.*
>
> *– Alec Worley,* ***Empires of the Imagination***

Presupposed Items

In some campaigns, it makes sense for the heroes to have possessions and equipment they weren't required to pay for. The crew of a large vessel, for example, commonly aren't co-owners and don't have to pay its cost. Soldiers may have equipment issued by the army they serve in. The same is true in many mundane, nonadventuring jobs: doctors in a hospital or forensic scientists in a police department get supplies and equipment by requisitioning them, not by paying for them out of pocket.

In general, it's appropriate for anyone who has a Duty to be provided with the equipment needed to perform it – though this can vary with the cultural background.

Organizationally Provided Items

Another way to get possessions without paying for them is to make a special request to a sponsoring organization. ***GURPS Social Engineering: Pulling Rank*** provides detailed rules for making such requests. ***GURPS Boardroom and Curia,*** p. 16 discusses typical sorts of aid obtainable from organizations of various types.

Fantastic Items

Some items simply can't be purchased in a given setting; they have to be acquired from extraordinary sources. Most of these appear in the fantastic genres, and it's convenient to call them *fantastic items* generically. However, they could also be "best equipment possible at your TL" (p. B345), which might be provided by a government or comparably powerful organization. Conversely, in a society where magic is commonly practiced (*Supernatural Forces,* p. 20), making enchanted objects may be a recognized career, and it may be possible to commission magical gear or even buy it from a dealer – in which case such gear is restricted by money and legality in the usual ways.

What fantastic equipment is available can be determined directly or indirectly. *Directly* acquired equipment is paid for with character points, based on the advantages it grants. That fact that it's *equipment* is represented by giving it gadget limitations (pp. B116-117). The GM may want to consider giving it a *power modifier* as well (see p. B254 or ***GURPS Powers***), such as Divine for sacred relics, Magical for mystical objects (in a world where such objects are rare and can't normally be purchased), or Superscience for unique creations of gadgeteers (pp. B475-477; see ***GURPS Powers,*** p. 107, for a definition of Superscience). The power modifier represents the *narrative justification* for the object's availability. Other modifiers may be applied to define the object's abilities more accurately. If such equipment is *rare,* its possessors may be required to have an Unusual Background (see p. 38).

Having a fantastic item grant a one-time benefit can lower its point cost; someone who is designated as the owner of such an item pays 1/5 the normal cost per use. The GM can simply disregard the point costs of items acquired through adventures, as the benefits they grant are only temporary (discussed under *Transcendents,* p. 41).

A common way to gain fantastic items *indirectly* is to have them granted by a Patron (pp. B72-74; p. 28). This will usually be at least an ultra-powerful individual such as a manifestation of a god; it may be a true god. The ability to offer fantastic gear is *Special Abilities* at the +100% level; if the equipment is provided on a continuing basis, rather than for a single task, mission, or quest, that's *Equipment* at the +100% level. If the PC has a Duty to the Patron, the provision of equipment for the performance of that Duty does not require a special modifier.

Example (WWOz): After Dorothy melts the Wicked Witch of the West, she acquires her magical golden cap, which has the power to summon the Winged Monkeys. Two of them can carry Dorothy (and Toto!), who probably weigh about 60 lbs. The Cowardly Lion is "as big as a small horse," perhaps 800 lbs. (similar to a pony – p. B460), which suggests that about 27 Winged Monkeys would be needed to carry him; adding a few more for the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman, the total band might be close to 50. They count as Allies with the Minion and Summonable enhancements, and always appear when summoned. Each of the three uses of the golden cap would be worth one-fifth the resulting point cost – if Dorothy had to pay it.

Chapter Five
Action

The topics of the last three chapters – places, people, and things – are the *nouns* of a story or a campaign. But grammar needs *verbs* as well as nouns: words that describe actions. To create a campaign, its places and things, and especially its people, need to be put into action.

Agency

Agency is the ability to make things happen. Agency is important to roleplaying games in two ways. First, *players* want to have agency – to make choices that affect the outcome of a scene, session, or campaign. They don't want to just sit there while the GM tells them a story. Second, players normally want their *characters* to have agency – to be people (or aliens or creatures or robots!) whose actions make a difference. Even in a horror game where the world is doomed and people are going mad or losing their humanity, the player characters struggle to fight off madness and despair and to save the world for another day.

Conflict is necessary to fiction and drama – and to roleplaying games!

Outward Action

The obvious form of action, and the one many games focus on, is *external action,* doing things that bring about a change in the world – or prevent one. ("The world" includes other people.)

The ability to perform external actions is represented on a character sheet by physical attributes, Per, and many skills. The things characters have to act on are other characters, technology and artifacts, and settings. The results of these actions include arrival at various places; victory or defeat in struggles with other characters; objects found or created; and wealth, relationships, and social positions. In other words, nearly all the things that define a lot of characters relate to outward action.

Inward Action

Internal action is subtler. It involves performing tasks that change the doer – gaining him insight or knowledge, or shaping his own character. This can be purely private and solitary. But relationships can change the people involved in them; emotional involvement with another person can be a form of internal action.

The ability to perform internal actions is represented by Will, IQ, and some skills. These can be used to learn, seek understanding, live by a commitment, or struggle against a psychological weakness – or to resist doing any of these things! The results of making these choices include skills and many mental advantages and disadvantages, particularly self-imposed disadvantages and changes in the self-control number for behavioral disadvantages. Inward action is about making one's self a certain kind of person.

Physical training is a borderline case. It changes the attributes (ST, HT, and sometimes DX) and the skills of the person undergoing it, which could be considered "internal." But those traits are used mainly to act on the external world. And effective training often involves doing things similar to outward action: running to gain HT and become Fit, sparring to learn fighting skills, or using tools to practice craft skills, for example.

Action and the World

People act not only *on* things in a world (themselves among them) but *within* a world. What kind of world it is determines the nature of those actions, in several ways.

Possible Actions

What is it *possible* to do? This is a question about the world, and especially about its natural laws; it's an important part of the campaign's premise (pp. 8-9). In a mundane campaign, it depends on the available technology, on the skills that it's possible to learn, and on the organizations and resources that can support an enterprise. Fantastic worlds add one or more "miracles": advanced or superscientific technologies, magic, cinematic skills, or superhuman powers.

To turn a source into a campaign setting, start by identifying things that it shows to be definitely possible – especially activities that are springboards for plots or may provide premises for new stories (*Premise,* pp. 8-9).

Just as important, identify things that *shouldn't* be possible: actions that have been shown to be impossible, that would clash with the genre (for example, spell casting in hard science fiction), or whose possibility would give characters shortcuts around the complications of the original story; see also *Excluded Options for Characters,* p. 38.

Appropriate Actions

The actions in a story have to be *appropriate* to its narrative conventions; each fictional setting operates in a way consistent with those conventions. *Wuxia* heroes can hardly walk down the street without meeting someone skilled in martial arts and getting into a contest of skill (as in early chapters of *Water Margin*). Four-color supers have similar battles between colorfully costumed heroes and villains, who wield amazing powers but somehow never actually kill anyone. Such typical situations are features of the campaign's genre (pp. 9-10).

Even mimetic fiction has genre conventions (p. 9). These may seem like "just the way things are," but that's because present-day audiences take these particular customs for granted.

In designing a campaign world, keep the genre expectations in mind. Either make traits and events that clash with them impossible, or make them difficult to achieve – for example, by requiring an Unusual Background (see p. 38).

Thematic Actions

Thematic actions are activities a campaign focuses on (*From Idea to Action,* p. 12). In designing a campaign, identify its key activities by how much time the source spends on them. The players will expect that their characters can do those sorts of things. For example, *Water Margin* has constant scenes of armed or unarmed duels; *Pride and Prejudice* keeps coming back to social position, manners, and courtship. Find rules that give expanded detail and a wider range of options for them than the ***Basic Set*** provides; ***GURPS Martial Arts*** and ***GURPS Social Engineering*** are particularly useful.

Motivated Actions

The campaign setting also provides *reasons* to act. These can be external rewards and threats; for example, the story of *Water Margin* is set in motion by the corrupt Gao Qiu's rise to imperial favor. But they can also be internal motives that fit the cultural background; for example, in *Pride and Prejudice,* the initial conflict is a result of Darcy's pride, and its later resolution, of his sense of what his honor as a gentleman demands.

In designing a campaign, think about the culture of its characters – both what it recognizes as credible rewards and threats, and what codes of conduct it encourages, represented as Code of Honor, Disciplines of Faith, Fanaticism, Sense of Duty, Vows, and similar traits. Internal motives are especially suited to a campaign that emphasizes inward action (p. 46).

Codes of conduct can be customized to reflect a fictional setting. Odysseus, for example, lives by an ancient Greek concept of honor that makes a guest's person sacred (the Cyclops demonstrates his savagery by violating this custom). Such requirements can often be treated as variants within existing versions of a disadvantage, but it's perfectly legitimate, and sometimes necessary, to define a new version with a new name. Code of Honor (Xia) from ***GURPS Martial Arts*** and Disciplines of Faith (Contemplation) from ***GURPS Thaumatology: Chinese Elemental Powers,*** for example, were created for their sourcebooks; these could fit some of the heroes of *Water Margin.*

Conflicting Actions

Conflict is necessary to fiction and drama – and to roleplaying games! We want the heroes to succeed (but see *Horror and Tragedy,* p. 48), but if there's no doubt of their success, there's no tension and little involvement. ***GURPS*** represents immediate uncertainty of success with success rolls, with Regular and Quick Contests, and often with combat scenes. But it's more effective if these grow out of a long-term conflict and form part of a continuing struggle. There are several options for such a central conflict.

Character vs. Fate/God

A struggle against a supernatural force. This may take the form of trying to overcome a curse or taint, such as vampirism. Struggles to evade a prophecy also belong here. A *character vs. monster* story belongs here if an offended god sent the monster. *Example:* the *Odyssey.*

In designing a campaign world, look at the supernatural versions of Enemy, and at supernaturally themed disadvantages that such a being might inflict: Destiny, Divine Curse, Phantom Voices, Unluckiness, Unnatural Features, or even Weirdness Magnet.

Conflict with gods doesn't usually take the form of combat; the odds are hopelessly against any mortal who attempts it. A hero might defeat a monster or a divine servitor such as the angel that wrestles with Jacob in Genesis 32:22-32. A tragic hero may inspire awe by contending against an impossibly superior foe.

Horror and Tragedy

We like our heroes to succeed – but there are genres and modes where they don't. Tragic heroes suffer terribly and often die; characters in horror, if they survive, often lose bodily integrity, sanity, or friends and loved ones, and gain haunting memories.

What makes this sort of story *enjoyable?* Part of the pleasure is sheer intensity of feeling; the audience empathizes with the characters' suffering or fear, but at the same time has it framed within a narrative or drama, so that it moves but doesn't overwhelm them. Part of it is also that there *is* an element of success. The tragic hero is destroyed, not by random accidents or external enemies, but by his own choices, particularly his insistence on preserving his own character. The hero of a horror story struggles to endure and continue to act even in the face of terror. These genres are to inward action what action/adventure and thrillers are to outward action.

Dracula is one of the classics of horror. Captain Nemo, the *adversary* in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,* is a nearly perfect tragic hero, with his brilliance, self-imposed exile, and desperate loneliness.

Character vs. Character

A struggle between two characters or groups of characters: this is the most common form of action/adventure story, but also includes capers, mysteries, and romances. It can include *character vs. machine* or *character vs. monster* if the machine or monster is sapient. *Examples: Pride and Prejudice; 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea; Dracula;* the climactic struggle in the *Odyssey.*

In designing a campaign world, treat such conflicts as involving an Enemy or a series of short-term adversaries. These can be Watchers or Rivals rather than Hunters. This type of conflict often turns into physical combat; see *Combat Skills* (pp. 30-31) for guidelines on skill levels for opponents.

Character vs. Nature

A struggle against the impersonal forces of the natural world. This is another classic form of action/adventure story. The type of conflicting action includes castaways striving to survive, disaster and post-apocalyptic stories, and hunting stories. *Character vs. monster* belongs here if the monster is nonsapient. *Examples:* Incidents in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the *Odyssey;* much of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

In designing a campaign world, focus on environmental hazards (*Wild Places,* pp. 22-23; *Destructive Environments,* p. 23); dangerous events such as storms, floods, or fires; and predatory or aggressive life forms, including outright monsters (*Life Forms,* p. 44). Dealing with dangerous living creatures can often involve physical combat.

Character vs. Self

A mainly internal conflict, where people try to overcome their own weaknesses or choose between two possible selves. This is important in ***GURPS,*** in the form both of self-imposed "virtuous" disadvantages (p. B121) and of disadvantages with self-control rolls (pp. B120-B121). If it's going to be brought into the foreground, players should be asked to portray the struggle – for example, by revealing actions or by characters debating with themselves. The GM can encourage this by awarding character points for well-played scenes. *Examples:* In *Pride and Prejudice,* when Darcy confesses his love for Elizabeth. In *Dracula,* after Mina has been infected with vampirism.

Character vs. self is the least likely form of conflict to give rise to physical combat. However, a protagonist may need to struggle against himself to find the will to fight – or to hold back from excessive violence. A close emotional relationship with a foe can also make inner conflict a hindrance in a fight; for example, the foe's margin of victory in an Influence roll can act as a penalty to an attack roll.

Character vs. Society

A variant on *character vs. character,* in which the protagonists struggle not against individual opponents, but against organizations or an entire culture. Some versions assume a good society whose values have been corrupted; others reject even these fundamental values. "Victims of society" stories about prisoners, fugitives, subjugated or exploited people, or inhabitants of dystopia fit here. Can have very large casts of characters; can include *character vs. machine* if the machine is under human control. *Example: Water Margin*.

In designing a game world, look at the social background (*Cultures,* p. 19; *War and Politics,* p. 20). Organizations that act on behalf of the society or its rulers can be described using ***GURPS Boardroom and Curia.*** The central characters can be given Enemy (normally organizational rather than individual), Secret, or Social Stigma of some appropriate form.

In realistic campaigns, character vs. society doesn't usually take the form of physical combat; numbers and organization favor society too heavily. Winning out against society depends partly on personal integrity, and partly on influence and organizational skills (see ***GURPS Social Engineering***). Cinematic campaigns can give small bands of heroes the ability to win fights against vastly superior numbers, through amazing skill or heroic endurance.

Consequences of Actions

When the dice come out, it's the fact that actions have *consequences* that makes the roll dramatic. When players pick up the dice, they're saying that their characters care enough about the possible good consequences to be willing to risk the possible bad consequences. Combat is the prototype for this, which is why it's so central to most campaigns – but it's not the only example. Characters can take physical or emotional risks in many ways. Ideally, every roll of the dice should carry some real risk with it.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.
– William Ernest Henley, "Invictus"

On one hand, the source material's "natural laws" define what these consequences are, and what risks the heroes are taking. On the other, the consequences of in-game actions can include departures from the source material: they can supply takeoff points for new storylines, permanently change or even kill major characters, or even transform the entire setting (for example, in a revelatory campaign; see p. 51). It's best for the GM to think through these possible outcomes ahead of time!

Modes

Mode is the way a campaign *presents* its content. This is a separate question from what the content *is*. In terms of content, the mundane contrasts with the fantastic (*Premises,* pp. 8-9); in terms of mode, the *realistic* contrasts with the *cinematic*.

Mode is one of the features of a source that make a big impression on its audience. Players who enjoyed a cinematic book or movie will expect to play their characters in a cinematic style, and to have the game world and play style let this work; being held back by realistic details will spoil their fun. Players who *enjoy* figuring out those details will feel cheated if handwaving works as well as careful preparation. Although it's possible to switch modes, players need to know about it before the campaign starts. So identifying a source's mode is vital.

Cinematic Modes

What ***GURPS*** calls "cinematic," earlier ages might have called *epic* or *theatrical*. Epics have large-scale narratives that carry the reader along, a focus on individual heroes, and broad characterization with straightforward motives. Theater provides visual spectacle and striking dialogue. Cinema adds visual storytelling devices such as montage, panorama, and crosscutting, and a sense of movement.

Cinematic works can be recognized in a number of ways. Their characters tend to be archetypes or stereotypes, with straightforward motives and without psychological complexity (though they can have inner conflicts); major characters are driven by ideals or passions. Dialogue is passionate, eloquent, or witty; characters whose players aren't so eloquent may get lots of rolls vs. Public Speaking or Influence skills! Battles are decided by outcomes of heroes fighting one on one; crowds of lesser foes are only temporary obstacles. The drive of the narrative to reach a climax carries the story along, usually to an unambiguous defeat or victory. Game rules such as wildcard skills, cinematic mechanics, and in particular *spending points to buy success* (p. B347) help to attain this.

The *Odyssey* is largely cinematic, with a larger-than-life hero undergoing a series of adventures – and, even more important, with the goddess Athena providing advice and help with minor obstacles, so that the story isn't slowed down. *Water Margin* is even more so, with even the largest battles being fought as one-on-one duels of opposing leaders. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is mainly cinematic, though the Wizard's reliance on technology and fast-talk is a touch of realism.

Realistic Modes

Realism in ***GURPS*** is largely a matter of *verisimilitude,* a flow of events that gives a convincing impression of reality. This approach became common with the emergence of *novels* as a literary form. An important part of realism is *austerity,* the degree to which actions have consequences in the campaign world and the difficulty of avoiding those consequences. The standard ***GURPS*** rules provide moderate realism; it's possible to go further to *gritty realism,* using rules that emphasize obstacles and consequences.

Realistic characters are shown as human, complex, and flawed; their motives reflect their social relationships or emotional conflicts. Dialogue tends to be down to earth, without elaborate speeches. Good tactics in a fight can take advantage of the combat environment, but battles may come down to numbers and endurance; the GM should consider adopting rules for things like bleeding or damage to weapons. Rather than slowing down the story, practical details and planning are a big part of what the story is about.

Pride and Prejudice is at the realistic end of the spectrum; its most theatrical touch is the articulate dialogue of its main characters. *Dracula* has a strong element of realism in its heroes' use of scientific inquiry, business organization, and technology; Dracula himself is the most cinematic figure in the novel – which doesn't work to his advantage! *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* is on the borderline: Nemo himself is a larger-than-life figure, but the novel's heroes are not; and while Verne gives Nemo's inventions verisimilitude with exact engineering measurements, their capabilities are not extrapolated from real technology, but dictated by the needs of the story – in effect, they're a cinematic rendering of the *idea* of realism.

Narratives

Roleplaying games are played by narrating the characters' actions and delivering their dialogue. Every game naturally creates an ongoing story. But there are different ways to organize a story. Campaigns with sources will often follow the same narrative form as their source – but they don't have to; switching narrative form can help create a fresh starting place in a familiar setting (see *Premise,* pp. 8-9).

The Unities

French playwrights in the 17th century talked about the *unities of place, time,* and *action,* appealing to the authority of Aristotle. In fact, Aristotle was only concerned with unity of action; he briefly mentioned unity of time as a rule some dramatists followed, and said nothing about unity of place.

Unity of place meant that a story or drama had a single location (see pp. 20-23). This can be good in some stories, giving a tighter focus – for example, country-house mysteries or haunted-house stories – but it isn't necessary for a long story, or a series of episodes. Many roleplaying games observe a variant of unity of place in *keeping the party together* – but splitting up the group can create dramatic tension. However, this should be done cautiously, as keeping track of parallel series of events and keeping players interested when their characters are offstage can be challenging.

Unity of time meant that a story should all take place in a single day. Any number of effective stories break that rule! In a less restrictive variant, a story can be required to take place in a single continuous span of time, with backstory being brought in by having its events remembered or narrated, as Odysseus tells the story of his disastrous voyage home while a guest of the Phaeacian royal family. Jumping forward in time between sessions is the game analog of unity of time.

Unity of action involves having a connected series of events. They should all reflect the same theme (*From Idea to Action,* p. 12) and be part of the same central conflict (*Conflicting Actions,* pp. 47-48). Each action's success or failure should affect a larger struggle. Scenes unrelated to this will come across as distractions and are best kept short – and when the outcome is decided, the story is over; you'll need to come up with a new one, even if it stars the same people.

Episodic Campaigns

Some sources, and some campaigns, are divided into self-contained episodes. This was common for television shows and comic books of the 1950s and 1960s. Before that, it was found in *picaresque novels* (from Spanish *picaro,* "rogue"), which followed an adventurer through a series of unconnected exploits.

An episodic campaign needs a new situation, challenge, or adversary every session or two. Enemies usually won't reappear after their defeat, though exceptions can be made for those who leave a big impression. World-building concerns take a back seat: It might be improbable that there are that many criminal masterminds, monsters, or superpowered villains in the setting, but somehow, they'll keep turning up. The player characters become more capable as they earn character points, but they won't have long-term projects. Fundamentally, everything in this sort of campaign should remain the same.

Story-Arc Campaigns

Many recent television series have adopted *story arcs,* often lasting a season; similar arcs appear in comic books. In an arc, each episode has its own short-term plot, but it also contributes to an ongoing story that builds up to a larger resolution. In series about heroic adventurers, an arc often has a "Big Bad" whose schemes develop in the background of some episodes, and who create subordinate threats in others, but who isn't defeated till the very end.

The focus of a story-arc campaign is a primary villain to be defeated, or a big problem to be solved. The heroes often start out not clearly knowing what they're up against. As the campaign continues, they get more evidence, face more problems, and acquire more resources. At the same time, they have to resolve a series of smaller problems, some tied to the major issue and others not. They *can* pursue long-term goals – so long as their projects pay off at the end of the arc; after that, they typically go back to their starting point, though often much more capable.

Example (Odys.): The *Odyssey* breaks into two story arcs. The better known tells of Odysseus' voyage home from Troy; the opposition he faces in this is the curse of Poseidon. After he gets home, a new story arc begins, in which he has to take control of his palace back from his wife Penelope's suitors.

Developmental Campaigns

Novels and single films often have a continuing development of the plot and characters from chapter to chapter, without episodes or story arcs. The external situation changes because of the main characters' actions; meanwhile, their knowledge of it grows. In many stories, they themselves are changed by involvement in it – often by growing, as Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy grow in *Pride and Prejudice.* However, tragedy can show originally great people brought low by their own actions, as with Captain Nemo is *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea.*

A developmental campaign won't bring the action to a stop at the end of sessions or episodes; the narrative flow continues from meet-up to meet-up. It can be useful to end sessions at moments of high dramatic tension.

This type of structure is best for campaigns with internal action (p. 46). If external adversaries appear, they're likely to be continuing figures, rather than a series of short-term foes; the personal relationship between protagonists and antagonists may be an important focus. Campaigns may also be about exploring a country or a world, carrying out a large-scale project, or working to preserve or change something.

Revelatory Campaigns

Some novels and films lead up to a climactic scene where the central characters learn something of deep significance. In classical drama, this was called *recognition*: a critical discovery or insight, such as learning one's own or another person's true identity. This is akin to the end of a mystery, where the detective reveals the identity of the murderer – but to the detective, this is his job or his vocation, and he'll go on in the next story to investigate another crime, not much changed from what he was. Recognition in tragedy changes (and often destroys) the hero's whole life or self-image. In horror, recognition of a monster, or insight into Things Man Was Not Meant To Know, may drive the protagonist mad. But recognition can also occur in adventure stories, where it confronts the hero with a crucial choice, and even in comedies, where it brings about the happy ending.

This kind of campaign needs an ultimate secret for the player characters to uncover. Discovery of the secret brings the campaign to a natural endpoint, by removing its goal or making individual people unable to act, as in the loss of sanity in cosmic horror (see ***GURPS Horror,*** pp. 142-146). Or it can change the genre of the campaign to one that takes the revelation as a *premise,* as in post-apocalyptic campaigns. It's best to make the players aware of the prospect of either sort of outcome; it can come as a total surprise to their *characters,* but players who don't expect to be surprised may be unhappy.

Example (WWOz): The Wonderful Wizard of Oz has a revelatory ending, when Dorothy learns that the silver shoes that she took from the body of the Wicked Witch of the East had always had the power to return her to Kansas – just as her three friends had always had intelligence, love, and courage. After that, Dorothy is back home in Kansas and her adventure is over.

Preparing the Payoff

The classic description of plot divides it into *exposition* (the introduction of the central characters and of the problem), *complication* (a series of efforts to solve the problem that leave it unsolved and in fact increase the tension), *climax* (the point of highest tension, at which the problem is resolved), and *denouement* (the interval after the climax where the effects on the characters and setting become evident). Roleplaying games often have a similar sequence (but see *Slice-of-Life Campaigns,* below). However, depending on narrative structure, the main climaxes may come at the ends of single sessions, story arcs, or entire campaigns.

Most readers or viewers – or players – invest emotion in a story: they care what happens to its characters. The climax brings this involvement to its greatest intensity, in a sequence of actions where both sides in the central conflict are at their fullest strength. The denouement shows the point of rest that follows. In a complex plot, this includes accounting for minor characters and subsidiary conflicts, so that the loose ends are tied up. Together these are the *payoff* of the story. After they're over, the audience should have no residual feelings of "what about *this?*"

A ***GURPS*** campaign has the advantage that players generally care about their characters, right from the first scene. But the GM can't know in advance what those characters will care about, or how they'll get to the big confrontation or test. A campaign has several co-authors with ideas of their own! The GM needs to define the central conflict and the person or situation that acts as the opposition; plant hints that lead the protagonists to it; and suggest motives for going into the arena.

Some elements are worth remembering in setting up a climactic scene:

- All of the player characters have to be present and involved. Nothing is more disappointing to a player than having to sit and watch while others in the group have the big dramatic confrontation.
- If possible, a positive outcome should depend on everyone using more than one ability or making more than one choice.
- Despite the dramatic significance of dice (*Consequences of Actions,* p. 49), the outcome of the climactic struggle shouldn't depend on a single throw of the dice.
- If someone performs an intentionally self-sacrificial action, and dies or is irreversibly harmed, don't undercut it dramatically by undoing the consequences.

Slice-of-Life Campaigns

Some genres and forms have stories that neither end in a climax, nor are divided into episodes with smaller climaxes. Examples include television soap operas and "slice of life" comics. This is an option for roleplaying games as well.

Slice-of-life campaigns still need to provide the same satisfactions as other campaigns. They just do it in a series of small payoffs, rather than one big payoff. Dramatic confrontations may involve one character or part of the total cast. Revelatory scenes can give significant information without changing everything. Problems can be solved, and jobs completed, while others are still being worked on. This kind of ongoing story often has less intensity, but it gives the pleasure of getting to know a cast of characters, in a gaming style that puts characterization above action.

Slice-of-life storylines can work well in sandbox campaigns (p. 25). Discovering new features of a richly detailed world can provide the small payoffs that slice-of-life campaigns rely on.

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The fighting Homer describes – duels between chieftains who ride up to the battle line in chariots, dismount, and exchange speeches, sometimes quite long ones, before engaging man-to-man with spear and shield – is clearly a creation of the epic muse rather than a representation of actual battle conditions.

– Robert Fagles, Introduction to the ***Iliad***

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Oh, I can't think about this now! I'll go crazy if I do! I'll think about it tomorrow . . . After all . . . tomorrow is another day!

– Scarlett O'Hara, in ***Gone with the Wind***

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