

GURPS

Fourth Edition

POWER-UPS™

WILDCARD SKILLS™



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INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest strengths of *GURPS* is also one of its weaknesses: *all those skills*. The skill selection is broad enough that the game lives up to its claim to let you play any character you want. The catch? It's *so* broad that it can be difficult to figure out who that character is!

Hidden within this complexity is a related puzzle: How to decide which skill applies to a task. When the PCs encounter a security system, do they use Electronics Operation, Electronics Repair, or Traps? What's the best skill for an autopsy – Diagnosis, Forensics, or Surgery? And does this even matter for larger-than-life heroes? Sometimes you want to *get on with the game*, shouting, "Of course the world-class cat burglar can neutralize the alarm!" or "Dr. Quincy has years of experience with this!", and then rolling the dice.

Fortunately, *GURPS* includes a solution to these difficulties in the form of *wildcard skills*. And since the *GURPS Basic Set* limits its discussion of this topic to a 400-word box, there's lots of room to explore the concept. Which brings us to the goal of *GURPS Power-Ups 7: Wildcard Skills*, which is to offer new tricks for wildcards, elaborate on old ones, and catalog all such skills published to date.

Get ready to get wild!

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of *GURPS Power-Ups 7: Wildcard Skills*. It includes all the wildcard skills published in the *GURPS Basic Set* and its supplements up to November 2013, notably those found in *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*, *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*, *GURPS Social Engineering*, and *GURPS Supers*. Rules and advice for using these traits fill about 75% of this work, and are largely original content – though *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) hails from *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions* and was developed in *GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every *GURPS* product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of *GURPS Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created *GURPS Powers* (with Phil

Masters), *GURPS Martial Arts* (with Peter Dell'Orto), *GURPS Zombies*, and the *GURPS Action*, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, and *GURPS Power-Ups* series . . . among many other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango. He and his wife, Bonnie, live in Montréal with their cat, Zephyra.

About GURPS

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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.

Depend on it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones.

– Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*

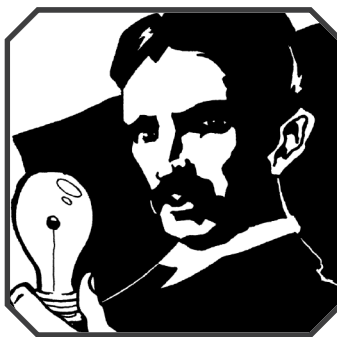
CHAPTER ONE

DEFINING WILDCARDS

The *GURPS Basic Set* describes more than 200 *standard* skills, many of which are subdivided into specialties. To these, add special-purpose examples from supplements; e.g., the 800+ spells of *GURPS Magic*. This diversity is a positive thing in realistic campaigns! An *entire world* needs a plethora of activities, studies, and professions to feel plausible. Even gaming that privileges story over realism benefits from such detail, because the greater the number of skill permutations, the stronger the protection of the protagonists' dramatic niches.

Still, that doesn't suit every possible game . . . or gamer! In particular:

- In cinematic campaigns, the heroes are defined more by dramatic roles than by plausible qualifications or arbitrary game-mechanical classifications. Every moment spent worrying about what skills to learn or use increases the odds of the rules derailing the story.
- Even in realistic campaigns, dramatic-minded gamers rarely find staggering skill diversity compatible with fun. They prefer streamlined simplicity.



• In either kind of campaign, new *GURPS* players might find that “plethora” means “headache” and that “diversity” is a codeword for “crippling decision paralysis.”

• Regardless of campaign type or player preference, a group that's short on gaming time might want to hasten the processes of creating characters and figuring out what skills to use.

For these situations, the *Basic Set* offers an alternative treatment of skills: *wildcard skills* (p. B175). Often called simply “wildcards,” and recognizable by the exclamation point at the end of the skill name (e.g., “Sword!”), each of these special skills reflects knowledge of every facet of a broad-yet-coherent area. In brief:

Wildcard skills include and replace all specific skills within their area.

How they accomplish this is the focus of the remainder of this supplement!

ANATOMY OF A WILDCARD SKILL

Like standard skills, wildcard skills cost character points and interact with attributes. They differ in several important ways, however.

POINT COST

Wildcard skills have *triple* the point cost of Very Hard skills shown on the *Skill Cost Table* (p. B170). For ease of reference, use the *Wildcard Cost Table* (below) instead.

SCOPE

As noted already, a wildcard skill includes and replaces all specific skills within its area. At the most basic level, this means it takes the place of an entire list of ordinary skills.

Which skills is a big topic, more important to GMs (and writers!) than to players; see *What to Include* (pp. 6-10). Players mostly need to know the following:

- *Standard skills the wildcard replaces fully.* If a wildcard encompasses a given skill without qualification, it can replace that skill for *all* uses of *all* specialties. This includes finding defaults. Assume this case unless the wildcard's write-up specifies otherwise!
- *Specialties the wildcard replaces fully.* If a wildcard is described as taking in only certain specialties of a skill, it can replace that skill for all uses of *those specialties only*. Specialties outside the wildcard must be bought separately or used at default. Skills that require specialization and permit defaults between specialties default normally to the wildcard.

Wildcard Cost Table

Skill Level	Attribute-3	Attribute-2	Attribute-1	Attribute+0	Attribute+1	Extra +1
Point Cost	3	6	12	24	36	+12

- *Skills the wildcard replaces conditionally.* The typical wildcard specifies some skills that it replaces only under thematically appropriate circumstances: when influencing a particular class of people, performing specific tasks, wielding certain weapons, working with a subset of items, etc. If the conditions aren't met, the wildcard doesn't apply – use a skill (wildcard or standard) that *does* apply, or resort to a default. When standard Skill A defaults to standard Skill B, it doesn't default to a wildcard that includes Skill B only conditionally, though the GM may allow a default roll in a situation where this specific use of Skill A satisfies the conditions unambiguously.

Defaults are the trickiest concept mentioned so far. See *Defaults to Wildcards* (below) for a detailed explanation.

CONTROLLING ATTRIBUTE

The **Basic Set** states that wildcard skills covering mainly intellectual pursuits are IQ-based, while those pertaining chiefly to physical actions are DX-based. This leads to two meta-game problems:

1. Wildcards reflect dramatic themes, and not every such theme revolves around the use of specific attributes. A wildcard might encompass DX-, IQ-, HT-, Will-, and Per-based tasks, or even entire skills, because they all suit its “high concept.”
2. Wildcards are questionable deals if the skills they benefit are mostly or exclusively based on a single attribute. For instance, why pay 12 points per level beyond attribute-1 for a wildcard that covers IQ-based skills when IQ [20/level] minus the price of Will [5/level] and Per [5/level] costs a mere 10 points/level? *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15) provides some relief, but wildcards work best when they span tasks dependent on many attributes.

Thus, it's best to think of wildcards in terms of *Relative Skill Level* (p. B171); e.g., 3 points buy attribute-3 (so record *that* rather than “IQ-3” or “DX-3”), while 36 points give attribute+1 (instead of “IQ+1” or “DX+1”). This more clearly shows that the purchase grants broad-based competence. It also accelerates play when using *Bonuses From Relative Skill Level* (below), *Finding the Target* (pp. 24-25), and options such as *Boosted Attribute Defaults* (p. 6) and *Other Bonuses* (pp. 13-15).

Still, rules for matters other than tasks occasionally differentiate on the basis of which of DX, IQ, HT, Will, or Per *controls* a skill. For instance, the teaching and learning aids in **GURPS Ultra-Tech** work differently for IQ-, DX-, and HT-based skills. Similarly, the *Zombie* spell in **GURPS Magic** preserves DX-based skills but not IQ-based ones. There are many other examples. Consequently, it's sometimes necessary to associate a specific attribute with a wildcard – if only nominally.

For these purposes, use the attribute that controls the largest number of standard skills the wildcard covers; e.g., a wildcard encompassing eight DX-based skills and seven IQ-based ones is DX-based. In the event of a tie, let high concept decide . . . a wildcard that covers DX-based Gunner, Piloting, etc. and IQ-based Electronics Operation, Mechanic, and similar technical skills in equal numbers might be DX-based if it's for ace pilots, IQ-based if it's for geeky technicians.

DEFAULTS

Wildcard skills have *no* default. To use one and exploit *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15), you must spend at least 3 points on it – it doesn't exist below attribute-3 level. On the other hand, all of the standard skills *within* wildcards retain their usual defaults; the mere existence of a wildcard covering, say, Acrobatics and Broadsword doesn't prevent people who lack it from rolling against DX-6 and DX-5, respectively, for those skills.

Things get more complicated in the other direction, though.

Defaults to Wildcards

When Skill A defaults to Skill B, it *might* default to a wildcard that encompasses Skill B. Use the following rules:

- *Standard skill the wildcard replaces fully.* When a wildcard includes a skill without qualification, it counts as that skill when working out defaults to it; e.g., a wildcard that covers fully general Acrobatics but not Body Sense allows a Body Sense default at wildcard-3, because Body Sense defaults to Acrobatics-3.

- *Specialty the wildcard replaces fully.* As above, but only for defaults to the included specialty; e.g., if a wildcard covers Engineer (Civil), then other forms of Engineer default to wildcard-4 because Engineer specialties mutually default at -4 . . . but if the GM rules that Engineer (Parachronic) doesn't default to other Engineer specialties, the wildcard won't help.

- *Skill the wildcard replaces conditionally.* Generally, this *doesn't* allow defaults. The GM may make exceptions in situations where the conditions are met unequivocally; e.g., a wildcard that counts as Acrobatics *only while fighting with a sword* wouldn't normally give a Body Sense default, but it would be reasonable to permit a wildcard-3 roll should the swordsman be teleported during a swordfight. See *Conditional-to-General Defaults* (p. 6) for a related optional rule.

Bonuses From Relative Skill Level

The rules sometimes assess bonuses on the basis of relative skill level. The most common examples are damage bonuses (from Boxing, Brawling, Karate, Throwing Art, and Weapon Master) and ST bonuses (from Forced Entry, Sumo Wrestling, Throwing, Throwing Art, and Wrestling). Where a wildcard includes standard skills that grant such benefits, use its relative skill level to determine these; e.g., a cinematic martial-artist who buys attribute+2 level with a wildcard covering “all unarmed combat skills” enjoys bonuses commensurate with DX+2 level in those skills. Identical logic applies to *any* rule that judges characters on relative rather than absolute skill level. Specific wildcards may offer generous exceptions, as described in *Other Bonuses* (pp. 13-15).

Improving Standard Skills From Wildcards

If the GM hasn't replaced all standard skills with wildcards (*Ditching Standard Skills*, pp. 22-23), then individual standard skills – even those included in wildcards – can be bought at their usual point cost. In that case, it's fairest for these to be cheaper for people who've bought high levels of related wildcards, as follows.

- *Improving a standard skill the wildcard replaces fully.* Your level with the standard skill equals your level with the wildcard, based on the standard skill's normal controlling attribute. If such a level would cost at least a point, you can improve it by paying the usual point-cost difference to raise the standard skill. *Example:* A wildcard you have at attribute+3 level includes Chemistry (IQ/Hard). This gives you Chemistry at IQ+3, which would cost 16 points on its own. Chemistry at IQ+4 would cost 20 points. Thus, you could increase Chemistry by a level for 4 points, which is less than the 12 points to increment your wildcard by a level – a good deal if all you want is better Chemistry.

- *Improving a standard skill that defaults to one the wildcard replaces fully but does not include.* Apply the default penalty between the standard skills and then follow the rules above. *Example:* Suppose that wildcard known at attribute+3 includes Chemistry but not Explosives (Fireworks) (IQ/Average). Fortunately, Explosives (Fireworks) defaults to Chemistry-3. Chemistry at IQ+3 gives you that Explosives specialty at IQ+0. That would normally cost 2 points, while IQ+1 would be 4 points, so you could increase Explosives by a level for 2 points, which is *much* cheaper than raising the wildcard.

- *Improving the general form of a conditional standard skill.* In a campaign that uses *Conditional-to-General Defaults* (below), the fully general version of a skill the wildcard includes in conditional form can be improved from default. This works like the previous case, except the default penalty is always -2 and the improved general skill level replaces the wildcard level for special-purpose use only if higher. *Example:* Attribute+0 level in a wildcard that acts as Acrobatics (DX/Hard) only in swordfights gives attribute-2 with general Acrobatics. Thus, the swordsman knows Acrobatics at DX-2. Since that normally costs 1 point on its own, while DX-1 costs 2 points, improving Acrobatics by a level for all other purposes costs the warrior 1 point. He still uses DX+0 in swordfights, though!

These three possibilities are mutually exclusive. First, if more than one of them would apply, for whatever reason, always use the *cheapest*. Second, that latter two don't "stack" to enable a conditional skill to act as its general case in order to reduce the point cost to improve a *different* skill that defaults to it (e.g., conditional Acrobatics doesn't count as general Acrobatics at wildcard-2 and thus allow Body Sense to default to Acrobatics-3, or wildcard-5), because that would violate *Double Defaults* (p. B173).

Optional Rule: Conditional-to-General Defaults

Conceptually, the conditional standard skills included in wildcards are almost indistinguishable from optional specialties (pp. B169-170). The GM may declare that they're the same thing, and allow the general case to default to the specific one at the usual -2. Thus, a wildcard that conditionally replaces a skill can stand in for that skill under less thematically appropriate circumstances, but at -2. As always, if the hero boasts another, higher default – to an attribute or another skill (standard or wildcard) – use that instead.

Though this option weakens high concept somewhat, it more than makes up for that by facilitating suspension of disbelief. It's implausible that someone with experience using a skill one way would enjoy *no benefit at all* when trying to use it another way! On the other hand, this approach *does* give heroes even greater cinematic competence.

In a borderline-realistic campaign that employs wildcards less as amazing abilities than as simplifications, the GM might prefer something more modest:

Steeper Defaults: If the GM finds -2 too generous, he can make the penalty -3 or worse. At -4, such defaults will be comparable to those typically seen between *required* specialties. At -5 and below, attribute defaults will often be better.

Boosted Attribute Defaults: More radically and less generously, the GM might just add the wildcard's relative skill level to the attribute default, where beneficial. For instance, if a wildcard functions as Acrobatics in a swordfight, having it at attribute+5 gives +5 to the DX-6 default for general Acrobatics; the swordsman can try Acrobatics at DX-1 outside of combat.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

From the GM or writer's perspective, *designing* wildcard skills can be challenging. It's certainly a task best broken down into parts. Before embarking on this process for the first time, glance ahead to *Wildcards in the Campaign* (pp. 21-23).

WHICH SKILLS?

The Golden Rule of wildcard-skill design is easy to grasp:

A good wildcard should encompass all of the standard skills essential to its high concept.

Concocting a wildcard applicable to a range of interesting tasks associated with a well-defined facet of the action is the

apex goal – above game balance, realism, and everything else but *fun* – and two principles are essential to achieving it:

1. The high concept is linked to what someone *interesting* (like a PC!) does to move the plot forward.

2. All of the standard skills included and/or the tasks they accomplish are *related* in some fashion. An effective way to ensure this is to start with a "rules object" that both shares the wildcard's high concept and involves a skill list – excellent examples being character templates, job prerequisites, martial-arts styles, and Talents – and have the wildcard encompass the same group of skills.

In most cases, this means following one of the patterns below. These categories often overlap, however – and that’s fine. For instance, for the purpose of defining Cleric!, what matters most is that the cleric’s player has *one* skill to worry about instead of a huge list; contrasting “divinely inspired holy man” as an archetypal role, “religious concerns” as a broad subject matter, and “priest” as a profession, though an interesting mental exercise, is of secondary importance.

Epitome or Role

The strongest wildcards are associated with someone’s place in the story. This might be a timeless archetype emergent from mythology or folklore (“mother figure,” “wise man,” “trickster,” etc.), or a part common in popular fiction, like “hard-boiled PI,” “mad scientist,” or “swashbuckler.” Some such roles resemble occupations or social positions (below), but don’t be fooled – what’s important for this kind of wildcard is that it provides an individual with the competence to do everything that’s expected from him or her *as a character*, which may well deviate from the skill set of any plausible job. The included skills are those needed to meet plot exigencies, based on the designer’s knowledge of upcoming adventures. *Ultimate Template Wildcards* (p. 18) is especially appropriate in this case.

Broad Subject Matter

Almost as strong are wildcards that encompass all actions pertaining to interesting subjects. Examples vary by genre but often include detective work, finances, inventing, medicine, nature, personal mobility, social influence, theft, and vehicles. Such skills are convenient in campaigns in which the heroes are so much larger than life that each fills *several* niches, some of which overlap; e.g., every PC in a space-opera campaign might know the wildcard that covers starship operations, and then the ship’s captain adds one for leadership and tactics, the chief surgeon adds a medical wildcard, and so forth. If an activity would suit a Talent (pp. B89-91), then it could work as this kind of a wildcard.

Special Ability

Another option is to shine the spotlight on wildcard skills’ less-than-realistic nature, transforming them from merely cinematic to outright exotic or supernatural. The skills they include might be mundane, but linking them into a unit and making extensive use of *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15) can yield gifts no more plausible or less amazing than Flight or Mind Control. Such wildcards resemble those for broad subject matter (above). What makes them impressive is that they’re reserved for people who qualify for “special abilities” – usually PCs. The gifted are differentiated by their gifts, and wildcards enjoy a seat at the table with spells, powers, cinematic martial-arts skills, ultra-tech implants, and so on. This structure is often tied to Unusual Backgrounds or built into a template set.

Occupation or Social Position

In a larger-than-life campaign, even ordinary jobs (the sort on pp. B516-518), socio-economic groups (castes, social classes, etc.), callings and vocations (like the “cleric” and “wizard” of dungeon fantasy), and so on may give rise to wildcard skills. If the game will focus on high adventure instead of on daily life and job rolls – or if it will emphasize the *extraordinary* feats of

people in these walks of life, rather than their workaday skill sets – then assign each occupation or position a wildcard encompassing its “job skills” or the skills that would appear on its character template (see *Template Wildcards*, pp. 17-19). The details of this list matter only while defining the wildcard; the player has just *one* trait to write down on the character sheet. Save this for situations where complexity warrants it; it’s overkill for a job with one or two prerequisites!

Other Training

Countless other realistic pursuits – from academic subjects through martial arts to the operation of ultra-tech vehicles – are defined by multiple skills. If the GM is tempted to include such structured knowledge in a cinematic campaign where the component skills won’t matter *that* much, it would be reasonable to adopt the treatment recommended for broad subject matter (above). This helps protect exciting areas of knowledge from getting smeared across the character sheet and losing their identity. For instance, to keep kung fu *cool*, the GM might use wildcards to simplify the lengthy styles in *GURPS Martial Arts* (which can consist of a jumble like Acrobatics, Breath Control, Judo, Jumping, Karate, Meditation, Philosophy, half a dozen Melee Weapon skills, and a raft of techniques), as described in *Style Wildcards* (pp. 15-16).

Culture or Race

Rarely, everybody with a given ethnic, biological, or other origin can perform certain feats of skill. Such stereotyping is widespread in tales that put drama ahead of realism, especially pulp stories – consider the “Red Indians” in classic Western yarns, every one of whom knows Axe/Mace, Bow, Camouflage, Riding, Tracking, etc. Wildcards offer a concise alternative to complex templates in such cases. Follow the guidelines given for occupations or positions (above), but include the skills that would appear on a *racial* or *cultural* template instead of an occupational one. Alternatively, adopt the simplification in *Ultimate NPC Wildcards* (p. 18).

HOW GENERAL?

It’s rare for every skill appropriate to a cinematic role, profession, culture, or similar concept to be *equally* fitting. Age of Sail swashbucklers customarily know all there is to know about swords, but use Acrobatics mostly to swing from rigging and dodge attacks. Space Patrol captains have no difficulty justifying Shiphandling (Starship) and Strategy (Space), but their Tactics skill is meant for space combat, too – not for urban warfare and clearing buildings. And so on. Fortunately, wildcard skills can handle such variations in depth.

Fully General Skills

If every aspect of a standard skill suits the wildcard, then include it without comment. In play, someone with the wildcard truly knows that skill for *all* purposes. Find his level by adding the wildcard’s relative skill level to the appropriate controlling attribute; e.g., a hero with DX 14 and attribute+1 in a wildcard that includes Acrobatics and Jumping functions exactly like someone who bought Acrobatics-15 and Jumping-15 individually. Wildcards should consist *mostly* of unrestricted skills, or they’ll be less attractive than standard skills.

Specialties

Required Specialties (p. B169): When a wildcard includes standard skills that require specialization, it should stick to specialties that match its high concept. This might mean one or a small number of specialties, like Guns (Pistol) for a wildcard aimed at Old West card sharps; all but a few specialties, like Guns (all but Gyroc and Musket) for modern-day commandos; or *every* specialty, like Guns (all) for masters of gun fu. Each *included* specialty functions like any other fully general skill; it's "conditional" only in the sense that specialties cover particular subject matter, and faces no restrictions within its area. As required specialties mutually default in most cases, including any of them allows the user to try some or all of the others at a penalty; see *Defaults to Wildcards* (p. 5).

Optional Specialties (pp. B169-170): Conditional skills (below) completely supplant these. See *Conditional-to-General Defaults* (p. 6) for an optional rule formalizing this equivalence.

Conditional Skills

If a standard skill makes sense only when used in a manner befitting the wildcard's high concept, and that skill doesn't have required specialties that align with the concept, the wildcard can and probably should include a rider restricting the skill's applicability. Common examples include:

- *Only rolls in suitable game-world circumstances.* Many a wildcard is limited by the environment in which it works. One for starship captains will qualify several of its skills with "in space" or "in space combat," while one for sneaky ninja (or vampires!) may well restrict some activities to "after dark." Two common qualifiers for wildcards intended for heroic PCs are "only in combat" and "only when fighting with (weapon type)."

- *Only rolls in suitable dramatic circumstances.* Wildcards are inherently cinematic, so it's fitting for them to discriminate on dramatic grounds; e.g., "can stand in for any medical skill to save the life of a dying friend" or "counts as Leadership when Destiny is on the line." The operative concept is that a *story* concern – not something objective, like target audience, time of day, or weapon type – determines applicability.

- *Only rolls for certain standard tasks.* The rules for many skills describe several distinct applications. A wildcard might cover only a subset of these: "Acting only for impersonation," "Fast-Talk and Intimidation when attempting specious intimidation," "any Melee Weapon skill for the express purpose of making a parry," etc.

- *Only rolls involving particular attributes.* An important refinement of the previous case is the wildcard that works only for DX-, IQ-, HT-, Will-, or Per-based rolls against some skill. This needn't coincide with the wildcard's nominal controlling attribute; e.g., a wildcard for commandos might be mostly DX-based and about fighting, yet add "Per-based Traps rolls" for spotting mines and tripwires.

- *Only rolls to interact with specific types of people.* A skill for dealing with people might discriminate on the grounds of age, nationality, profession, race, sex, or almost anything else: "functions as Fast-Talk when interacting with politicians," "can replace Diagnosis and Physiology when examining the undead," and so on.

- *Only rolls to work with specific kinds of equipment.* Use this to narrow a skill to a specific subset of applicable gear: "Escape to get out of handcuffs" for a wildcard for cops, "Fast-Draw (Long Arm) to ready rifles" for one befitting snipers, "Broadsword to wield a club" for one covering blunt weapons, and so on. Specialties for technical skills that require them, and weapon tables for combat skills, can be inspirational.

This list isn't exhaustive. The GM can get as weird as he likes! What matters is that all such limits are *clear* to the players and ultimately reducible to "Only when using the skill in a manner consistent with the high concept."

When such conditions aren't met, the wildcard doesn't apply. See *Scope* (pp. 4-5) and *Defaults* (pp. 5-6) for important ramifications. The GM who dislikes sharp discontinuities can either include only fully general skills or permit *Conditional-to-General Defaults* (p. 6).

Finally, a warning: A wildcard that consists *exclusively* of conditional skills merits reexamination. It's often better to represent such a high concept using not a skill but a Higher Purpose (p. B59) that aids all tasks consistent with a goal.

As part of the Elite Special Forces Unit of the Federated Army, you are an expert in the use of all weapons and spacecraft needed for this mission.

*– General Munro,
in The Fifth Element*

Techniques

In a way, the technique is the ultimate in conditional skills, in that it specifies a skill use and permits heroes to spend points to become better at *that one task* without aiding everything else the skill covers. This suggests an interesting way to make wildcards more attractive for the points: Have them encompass not just skills, but also certain techniques that default to those skills, all at full wildcard level. For instance, a martial-arts wildcard that includes Karate might also work as Back Kick, Elbow Strike, Jump Kick, Kicking, Knee Strike, and Sweeping Kick – and someone who knows that wildcard at attribute+2 level can use Karate *and all those techniques* at DX+2. This lets him do much of what Karate normally allows without worrying about fussy default penalties.

However, it isn't a good idea to throw in techniques that buy off situational combat penalties – e.g., Ground Fighting – unless they're an unusually apt fit to the wildcard's high concept. Dealing with being knocked down, on bad footing, in the dark, etc. is an important part of the drama! Fancy "secret techniques" with massive default penalties should likewise be learned separately rather than included.

Techniques included in wildcards cannot exceed their usual limits relative to the parent skill. For instance, the Ear Clap technique in *GURPS Martial Arts* is capped at Karate-1, so someone with a wildcard that gives Karate and Ear Clap would use the latter at wildcard-1, *not* wildcard+0.

For more on how wildcard skills interact with techniques, see *Counting Techniques* (p. 10), *Techniques for Wildcards* (p. 12), *Techniques in Style Wildcards* (p. 15), and *Wildcard Techniques* (p. 20).

HOW MANY?

The short answer to “How many standard skills should a wildcard skill include?” is “However many you need to cover the high concept properly.” Wildcards cost the same regardless of the number of skills they encompass or what conditions apply, and whether or not they come with techniques, supernatural skills, or *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15).

It’s important to recognize the economics of character design, though. Most skills are of Average difficulty, meaning that 1 point buys attribute-1 level while 2 points purchase attribute+0. Comparable competence at a wildcard costs 12 and 24 points, respectively. At entry level, then, wildcards are “competitive” only if they include 12 or more skills. Given that wildcards serve many of the same purposes as Talents, it’s worth noting that this is consistent with what *GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents* calls “smooth Talent cost.”

At the high end, consider that the broadest Talents cost 15 points per +1 to arbitrarily many skills. There’s no strict upper limit to skill count, but as *Power-Ups 3* warns, a Talent that benefits more than 17 skills may be too broad. Scaling this bound to the 12 points/level at which wildcards plateau gives a soft cap of around 14 skills.

The upshot of all this is a useful generality:

The rough target range for wildcard breadth is 12 to 14 standard skills.

There are many possible exceptions to this guideline, though. A general exploration of these follows – and *Interesting Cases* (pp. 15-20) discusses some special categories. The GM who prefers to fly by the seat of his pants is invited to *ignore* all that . . . if the goal of using wildcards is to simplify character design and accelerate game play, a good start is to avoid bean-counting!

Skill Difficulty

The above analysis assumes that wildcards include mostly Average skills. This isn’t always true. At the one-point level:

Easy skills are at attribute+0. A wildcard at attribute+0 costs 24 points. Thus, it takes 24 Easy skills to be competitive, making each equivalent to 12/24 or *half* of an Average skill.

Hard skills are at attribute-2. A wildcard at attribute-2 costs 6 points. Thus, it takes six Hard skills to be competitive, making each equivalent to 12/6 or *two* Average skills.

Very Hard skills are at attribute-3. A wildcard at attribute-3 costs 3 points. Thus, it takes three Very Hard skills to be competitive, making each equivalent to 12/3 or *four* Average skills.

Consequently, if the GM wants to do detailed math to keep wildcards competitive, it wouldn’t be completely illogical to count Easy skills as half a skill apiece, Average skills as one,

Hard skills as two, and Very Hard skills as four, and then add up these numbers when aiming for 12 to 14 skills.

Conditional Skill Count

Conditional skills aren’t as valuable as general ones. As has been explained already, they’re effectively optional specialties, which are a step easier (see pp. B169-170). Use *Skill Difficulty* (above) and treat them as a step less difficult when trying to hit the target; e.g., general Acrobatics is Hard and counts as two skills, but Acrobatics *only useful in a swordfight* is Average and counts as just one. It’s simplest not to count conditional Easy skills at all, but the GM can call them 1/4 of a skill apiece if the math seems important.

Skill Overlap

Wildcards that include many ways to do the same thing, or sets of skills that could be bought cheaply via defaults, aren’t as good a deal as ones that offer a selection of largely independent skills. It’s fairest to give such wildcards more breadth to compensate.

The most common case is the wildcard that includes a “master skill” and several skills that default to it. Merchant is a classic example, with six skills that default to it – at IQ+4 and above, it’s cheaper to raise Merchant and improve these other skills from default than to pay for attribute+4 in a wildcard that includes them all! Many clusters of Melee Weapon skills have this property, too; Shortsword is the target of six defaults as well. In such cases, count the *master* skill at face value and the rest as Easy; e.g., Administration, Merchant, and Propaganda (all IQ/A), and Accounting, Economics, Finance, and Market Analysis (all IQ/H), would count as one Average skill (Merchant) and six Easy ones, equivalent to four Average skills instead of 11.

In a larger-than-life campaign, dramatic overlap or the desire to get on with the game can produce similar redundancy. For instance, the choice of which scientific skill a pulp scientist “should” use is largely academic – indeed, the GM might be foggy on when to use Chemistry and when to use Physics – while Cryptography challenges tend to blend into Computer Hacking tasks for cinematic hackers. If the GM plans to run the game that way, he’s free to treat *any* set of skills as if they defaulted among themselves. Count the hardest skill at face value and the rest as Easy; e.g., one Average, 10 Hard, and two Very Hard sciences would count as one Very Hard skill and 12 Easy ones, equivalent to 10 Average skills instead of 29.

Skills that require specialization – such as Driving, Electronics Operation, Engineer, Guns, and Piloting – are a special case. Talents treat any number of specialties of such a skill as *one* skill. To be competitive with Talents, it’s a good idea for wildcards to do the same. Count a skill *once*, at its usual difficulty, no matter how many of its specialties the wildcard includes.

Here, too, unrelated skills can end up in the same situation as related ones. Notably, there’s no default between Boxing, Brawling, and Karate – or Judo, Sumo Wrestling, and Wrestling – yet within each of these sets, the overlap is so great that there’s little added value to knowing more than one of the skills. Treat these as *effective* specialties of the same skill, using the difficulty of the *hardest* skill in the cluster; e.g., Karate (DX/H) is equivalent to two Average skills, but a wildcard that includes it could count as Boxing and/or Brawling as well, if the GM felt that was warranted.

Counting Techniques

Techniques default to master skills that the wildcard (presumably!) covers, so they're *always* subject to a version of *Skill Overlap* (p. 9). Therefore, if the GM considers skill counts vital for balancing wildcards, it's only fair to treat each technique as an Easy skill. For instance, adding Karate (DX/H) and six techniques to a wildcard skill is equivalent to including five Average skills.

Given that techniques can be improved for a mere point per level, some gamers view them as "Very Easy" skills. Thus, it might seem fairer to count each as just 1/4 of a skill, like a conditional Easy skill (*Conditional Skill Count*, p. 9). However, as techniques work at *full* wildcard skill level even when they have extreme default penalties such as skill-10, it's more balanced not to do this.

Contrasting Multi-Skill Traits

Wildcard skills aren't the only traits that link groups of standard skills. The GM contemplating allowing them needs to be familiar with how they differ from the other possibilities.

Wildcard Skills vs. Talents

Talents (pp. B89-91) and wildcard skills share the goal of using a single trait to improve several skills at once. However, a Talent is meant to be a plausible inborn aptitude for objectively related skills, whereas a wildcard is learned and doesn't concern itself unduly with realism – it's about *dramatic* ability and skill interrelationships.

These two mechanics are intended as alternatives. If a wildcard and a Talent exist to cover the same skills, and the GM permits a character to have both, the Talent doesn't improve skills covered by or defaulted to the wildcard. Obviously, this means Talents shouldn't include wildcards – that would be superfluous at best, unbalanced at worst. The GM might want to offer *only* one or the other for specific groups of skills, or in the campaign in general.

Wildcard Skills vs. Expert Skills

Expert Skills (pp. B193-194) and wildcard skills both specify lists of skills they can replace. However, an Expert Skill can only answer factual questions about a narrow theme, whereas a wildcard enables all tasks – including *practical* ones – relevant to a broad "high concept" (though a few conditions might apply). As well, an Expert Skill never allows technique use, while a wildcard does. And an Expert Skill doesn't get *Additional Benefits* (below). This is why Expert Skills are so much cheaper; compare, say, IQ+0 for 4 points to attribute+0 for 24 points.

These two categories of skills *aren't* strictly alternatives. In principle, someone could have both. In practice, a wildcard automatically includes and stands in for any overlapping Expert Skill, so a character with the wildcard skill would only list the Expert Skill separately if he had raised it past default (*Improving Standard Skills From Wildcards*, pp. 5-6) to be better at answering factual questions. And to state the obvious: Expert Skills cannot stand in for wildcards!

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

Wildcard skills are simple, cinematic, and fun, but not without their problems. The big one is that – point-for-point – heroes built with them end up with lower skill levels than those who focus on a few of the standard skills they include. For instance, the 36 points needed to purchase Sword! (p. 36) at attribute+1 is *nine times* the 4 points for a DX/Average sword skill at DX+1. With 36 points, a character could have that ordinary sword skill at DX+9, enjoy an eight-skill-level edge in a fight, and boast several *other* weapon skills at respectable defaults (e.g., Shortsword at DX+9 gives Broadsword at DX+7; Jitte/Sai, Knife, and Tonfa at DX+6; and Saber and Smallsword at DX+5).

As well, while it's best to view wildcards in terms of relative skill levels and not give them strict controlling attributes (see *Controlling Attribute*, p. 5), it often makes sense for wildcards to spotlight skills controlled by just one of DX, IQ, HT, Will, or Per. This, too, is unattractive: DX without its Basic Speed component costs 15 points/level, IQ sans Will and Per costs 10 points/level, Will and Per cost 5 points/level apiece, and selling off FP and Basic Speed can give HT for a mere 2 points/level, all of which makes paying 3, 6, or 12 points to improve a wildcard based on one of these scores a rotten deal.

Though DX might look like an exception, that's only true for a character without other DX-based skills. Even with a disadvantage limit to prevent players selling back piles of secondary characteristics, it's difficult to see what wildcards offer. And regardless, when heroes can have several wildcards, *full* DX and IQ are a better deal – why raise two DX- or IQ-dependent wildcards past attribute-1 level, for 24 points total, when full-on DX or IQ costs a mere 20 points?

This is why it's important to design wildcards that offer more than one-dimensional competence, and that spread their skills across multiple attributes. Even then, however, gamers (particularly "power-gamers") will gravitate toward whatever gives the highest levels in *key* abilities – usually DX, IQ, and combat skills – for the fewest points. For wildcards to stay in the running, they need some extra oomph.

What follows are ways to make wildcards more competitive by empowering them to bend, even break the rules. They're completely optional; the GM decides which ones to use. "Everything except what the GM explicitly forbids" is recommended. All of these suggestions together aren't half as troublesome as standard skills cranked up to extreme levels like attribute+9!

WILDCARD FAMILIARITY

A goal of wildcard skills is to remove the need to worry about finicky subdivisions of knowledge within a field. It would be consistent with this aim to exempt wildcard-users from *Familiarity* (p. B169) – which epitomizes, even glorifies such complications – and all similar rules. Doing so means that heroes with wildcards are fully acquainted with all of the equipment, personalities, procedures, situations, and so on relevant to the included standard skills, and never suffer any penalty attributed purely to novelty, obscurity, or unfamiliarity. The list includes but isn't limited to:

- The -3 for unfamiliarity with a *culture* (p. B23). Wildcards confer the benefits of Cultural Adaptability (p. B46) with all included skills.

- All penalties for *different models of gear* (p. B169), such as those described under Armoury, Artillery, Boating, Bow, Computer Operation, Driving, Electronics Operation, Electronics Repair, Forward Observer, Gunner, Guns, Liquid Projector, Mechanic, Photography, Piloting, Scuba, Shiphandling, and Submarine.

- The -2 to Artist (p. B179) for an unfamiliar medium, -5 to Dancing (p. B187) for an unfamiliar dance, -4 to Stage Combat (p. B222) for an unfamiliar weapon, -5 to Writing (p. B228) for an unfamiliar subject, and all similar penalties for *artistic experience*.

- *Physiology Modifiers* (p. B181), the -2 to -4 to Gardening (p. B197) for unfamiliar crops, the -2 to Veterinary (p. B228) for an unfamiliar animal type, and any other penalty for not knowing a *species*.

- Penalties to Computer Hacking, Computer Operation, and Computer Programming (all p. B184) for *unfamiliar software*, including programs and programming languages.

- The -1 to -10 that Computer Hacking (p. B184) and Electronics Operation (p. B189) assess for *obsolete knowledge* (“away from the field for a long time”), and the similar -1 per day that Current Affairs (p. B186) imposes for time away from news media.

- Penalties for *new regions*, like the -2 to -4 to Gardening (p. B197), -2 to Merchant (p. B209), -1 to -10 under Navigation (p. B211), -1 or worse for Prospecting (p. B216), and -3 to Streetwise (p. B223). However, if knowledge of time or place is a skill's entire point – as with Area Knowledge – the modifiers in *Geographical and Temporal Scope* (p. B176) apply except when offset by *Other Bonuses* (pp. 13-15).

- The -2 to Shiphandling (p. B220) for an unfamiliar crew, to Teamster (p. B225) for unfamiliar animals, and to any other skill for not knowing the *specific beings* involved.

- Any penalty for a weapon being “exotic,” like the trident, *qian kun ri yue dao*, and three-part staff in *GURPS Martial Arts*, and the penalties that book assesses when using or facing a melee weapon for the first time. This obviates the need for Exotic Weapon Training perks.

These waivers are cumulative – there's no limit to the penalty erased. For instance, when using Dancing for a new dance (-5) from a foreign culture (-3) with a new troupe (-2), a

wildcard lets the dancer ignore the entire -10. Likewise, a wildcard that acts as Physician can wipe out -2 for unfamiliar medical gear *and* -6 for alien physiology simultaneously.

A warning: Such penalties are often overlooked! The GM must remember to enforce them on characters who *aren't* using wildcards for this benefit to be meaningful.

WILDCARD TECH LEVEL

The /TL designator on technological skills is another example of a fussy subdivision. Generally, heroes with wildcard skills can ignore *Tech-Level Modifiers* (p. B168) for all TLs at or below the campaign TL (or *their* TL, if that differs owing to High or Low TL). For instance, in a modern-day campaign, a shootist with a wildcard that encompasses Guns could use primitive TL3 gones, TL4 flintlocks, TL5 caplocks, the TL6-7 weapons of the World Wars, and the TL7-8 firearms we know today – all without TL penalties. Exactly as with *Wildcard Familiarity* (above), this rule depends on the GM enforcing penalties when standard skills are used; e.g., if TL8 gunmen without wildcards have -2 to shoot and -3 to repair TL6 weaponry, firearms-related wildcards become more attractive.

Wildcard Ultra-Tech

If the campaign includes limited or secret “future-tech” or superscience, the GM may decide that since a wildcard is intrinsically cinematic, it includes comprehension of that, too. This can range from knowledge of a few bits of “bleeding edge” tech (effectively a built-in version of the Cutting-Edge Training perk described in *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*) on up to the functional equivalent of High TL (p. B23). If nothing else, heroes should be able to function at full wildcard level when a mad inventor hands them some completely new device relevant to their skills!

If a wildcard exists specifically *for* mad inventors, and acts as a cinematic skill to accompany Gadgeteer, it ought to waive the first -5 for working at a TL above that of the campaign; see p. B475.

And if the campaign includes *weird* tech that penalizes ordinary folks, cross this rule with *Wildcard Familiarity* (above) to wipe out that penalty for wildcard-users. Wildcards are cinematic, so it's only fair that they're ideally suited to cinematic equipment – be that TL(5+3) “steampunk” gear, TL3^ magitech, or wonders too strange for a numerical TL.

EXTRA-BROAD PERKS AND TECHNIQUES

Two classes of traits that enhance skill use often require specialization by skill: *perks* (pp. B100-101) and *techniques* (pp. B229-233). Unless the GM rules otherwise, wildcard skills are legitimate specialties for these abilities. The player buys the perk or technique once – at the usual cost, *not* at triple cost like the associated wildcard – and it works with every applicable standard skill the wildcard covers. As this can save a lot of points, it makes wildcards more attractive to characters who would have many such traits, notably martial artists.



Perks for Wildcards

Skill-specific perks bought for wildcards benefit all included skills that would reasonably benefit from them. For example, if a ninja with a wildcard that encompasses many Melee Weapon skills has the Off-Hand Weapon Training perk for his wildcard, he takes no off-hand penalties with *any* of the relevant weapon skills, while if he has Quick-Swap for it, he can swap *any* two weapons it covers. Likewise, a ship's surgeon with the Efficient perk for her medical wildcard can ignore -2 for haste whether she's using her skill to work sensors with Electronics Operation (Medical), treat injuries using First Aid, formulate a cure that requires Pharmacy, or extract alien parasites via Surgery.

The GM needs to make sure that nobody takes perks that don't matter. For instance, the Cross-Trained and Exotic Weapon Training perks are meaningless when using *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11), while Cutting-Edge Training is redundant with *Wildcard Ultra-Tech* (p. 11). Perks that float tasks between skills included in the wildcard are similarly pointless; this affects Acrobatic Feints, Acrobatic Kicks, Pistol-Fist, Skill Adaptation, Unarmed Parry, Weapon Adaptation, and so on. See *Implicit Perks* (below) for a related topic.

Conversely, it's important not to overdo it. Attribute Substitution is potent – the GM should be certain that he wants players floating *every* use of their wildcards to their characters' highest scores before permitting it. (Mind you, that option would definitely make wildcards attractive!) Extra Option perks that switch on powerful skill-related rules for wildcards can also get out of control. And while Shticks for wildcards aren't overpowered, it's *less fun* if there's no difference between, say, Fearsome Stare and Sexy Pose.

And a few perks can swing either way. Hyper-Specialization is a great example. It's almost worthless to have an obscure specialty that applies to only a single constituent of a broad wildcard . . . but if the player concocts a specialty that applies to most or all of the included standard skills, the "rare" +5 could become common and overpowered.

To learn more about the perks named here, see **GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks**.

Implicit Perks

As *Perks for Wildcards* (above) explains, wildcards sometimes "include" perks by dint of how such skills work. The GM is welcome to add others to sweeten the pot; e.g., a weapon wildcard could bestow the effects of several combat-related perks, much as it might cover techniques. Always spell these out for the players!

Techniques for Wildcards

If a technique that would logically apply to a wildcard isn't already included in the skill (*Techniques*, pp. 8-9), the player can default it to the wildcard at the usual penalty, and then improve it to its normal limit at the regular point cost. After that, it works with any of the wildcard's standard skills for which it makes sense. For instance, if our ninja spends 5 points to buy Dual Weapon Attack (p. B230) at wildcard+0, his attacks with *any* two weapons his wildcard covers are at no penalty.

The cost of a technique is the same no matter how many standard skills benefit from it. Work by Touch (p. B233) might cover only Explosives, Lockpicking, and Traps, even if the

wildcard includes a dozen other skills. Lifesaving defaults to Swimming alone, so while any wildcard that covers Swimming allows it, it gains nothing from being based on a wildcard. In either case, there's no discount for being less broad than the Dual-Weapon Attack example.

The decision as to whether a wildcard should include a technique or allow the player to buy it is left to the GM. This might depend solely on how "universal" the technique is among people who possess that wildcard in the game world. However, as it's less-than-appealing to have to pay for extra techniques when they apply to only a small subset of the wildcard's standard skills, narrow examples are good bets for inclusion. Conversely, extremely broad techniques that work with everything can get a little overpowering, so asking players to opt in and pay for them is fair – they're *still* very good deals, after all!

For much more on techniques – including numerous examples and a design system – see **GURPS Martial Arts**.

HYPER-COMPETENCY

Wildcards become much more competitive with standard skills when those who have them can sometimes *dictate* outcomes. A higher skill level isn't as important when you enjoy the ability to guarantee the occasional success – or even critical success!

The justification used in the **GURPS Monster Hunters** series – where this option first appeared – is that a wildcard-user is like a whole team of experts in one body. Where the *average* person might use one standard skill, or at best a few in succession, the wildcard-user can bring an entire set of skills to bear with a single success roll. The higher the skill level, the more synergies emerge.

GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys builds on this idea but takes a somewhat more story-oriented outlook: Wildcard skills are abilities for larger-than-life campaigns, and since cinematic heroes tend to enjoy both an unrealistic breadth of competence *and* the favor of the plot, why not use an existing tool – wildcards – to represent both?

If either rationalization suits the campaign, read on . . .

Wildcard Points

The core mechanic of hyper-competency is that every full 12 character points spent on a wildcard skill bestow one Wildcard Point (WP) for that skill; the *Wildcard Benefits Table* (p. 14) shows this progression alongside some other possible effects of wildcards. The player can spend WP as character points on the options under *Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347) *if the outcome hinges directly on that wildcard*. Unlike character points, WP are fully refreshed at the beginning of each game session! Another difference is that they don't accumulate if unused. For instance, 24 character points in a wildcard give 2 WP to spend on uses of that wildcard each session – and whether you spend 2, 1, or 0 WP *this* session, you'll have 2 WP *next* session.

As WP are associated with specific wildcards and are regularly spent and refreshed, it's helpful to represent them with glass beads, jellybeans, poker chips, or something else color-coded to the skills that grant them.

Being Hyper-Competent

Players can spend WP on several kinds of “meta-game” outcomes, and may chip in character points – or, where appropriate, Destiny Points, Impulse Points, or Serendipity Points from *Impulse Buys* – to meet some or all of the associated costs.

Buying Success (p. B347): This is the main use of WP. They can only be spent when rolling against the wildcard that granted them, unless the GM rules otherwise. To make wildcards competitive with standard skills, the GM may permit WP to purchase critical successes in combat!

Flesh Wounds (p. B417): If a hero is wounded while using a wildcard, he can spend its WP on this rule. For instance, a swashbuckler who critically fails a parry with his wildcard, and who cannot afford the 2 or 3 WP to invoke the previous rule to turn his defense into a regular failure or a success, could still pay 1 WP after the blow strikes to ensure that it’s just a flesh wound.

Player Guidance (p. B347): Spending WP this way is allowed if the proposed result is tied directly to the use of the skill; e.g., when rolling against a wildcard to find clues, success and 2 WP (or critical success and 1 WP) might let the player declare that a specific kind of evidence is present.

Other Options for Wildcard Points

The GM with access to *Impulse Buys* may permit players spend to WP on *any* option described there, as long as the wildcard granting the WP is used for a skill roll pivotal to the outcome, or could at least explain the results. For instance:

- *Buying Effect* with the results of wildcard use.
- *Miraculous Recoveries*, if *Flesh Wounds* would apply but be inadequate.
- *Opt-In Options* related to skills the wildcard covers.
- *Perking Things Up*, if the wildcard or a skill it encompasses is associated with specific perks.
- *Upgrading Margins* with the wildcard (this makes wildcards more competitive with high standard skill levels in Contests).

Not all options suit every wildcard! Some wildcards suggest additional possibilities:

- *Bullet Time* with combat-oriented wildcards.
- *Divine Intervention* with wildcards for clerics.
- *Favors in Play* with social wildcards.
- *Points for Energy* with wildcards that work magic.
- *Trading Points for Money* with financially oriented wildcards.

The GM should *not* allow uses that permanently increase the character’s point value, however. In particular, character-point wagers are always inappropriate for WP.

Variations on Hyper-Competency

If the GM feels that this rule still doesn’t make wildcard skills tempting enough, he’s welcome to alter the parameters. Some suggestions:

Accelerated Wildcard Points: For a boost that makes entry-level wildcard purchases appealing without drastically changing the way the game plays at higher skill levels, set WP equal to (relative skill level)+4. The effects appear in the “Accelerated WP” column of the *Wildcard Benefits Table* (p. 14).

Even Larger Pools: Multiplying the suggested 1 WP per 12 character points by two or more will *dramatically* increase wildcard skills’ competitiveness with standard skills. At 1 WP per 6 character points, the effect is similar to everybody who knows wildcards having Luck or Serendipity with Aspected. Going to 1 WP per 3 character points makes even novice wildcard-users capable of impressive feats, and WP spending is liable to replace dice-rolling as the primary determiner of fate.

Common Pool: To give players an incentive to consider multiple wildcard skills – and to insure against costly abilities sitting unused – have WP from all sources fill a single pool that can be spent on any use of wildcards. For example, a hero who has two wildcards at attribute+0 and one at attribute+1 has 7 WP to spend on outcomes related to *any* of the three skills. This is a simple way to make wildcards more attractive without drastically changing the campaign’s feel. It also reduces bookkeeping!

Universal Pool: The GM might even generalize the common pool so that WP can be spent in *any* situation, not just circumstances related to wildcards. For instance, that hero with 7 WP could buy success with any old skill, invoke *Flesh Wounds* against any injury, and so on. To keep wildcards relevant in their own right, it’s advisable that more options be available when they are used than when they aren’t.

OTHER BONUSES

Improving a wildcard to a high level might grant bonuses in areas other than success rolls for the skill, in accordance with this general guideline:

At the GM’s option, a positive relative skill level with a wildcard skill doubles as a bonus to activities directly related to that skill.

Just as a wildcard can replace any skill the GM agrees fits its high concept, its bonus can assist any appropriate statistic or roll. Whatever the bonus, it’s always free – it never costs Wildcard Points (p. 12) to invoke. This flexibility has limits, though.

First, a wildcard bonus can never “stack” with itself. For instance, it might work as a damage bonus *or* a ST bonus with a melee weapon, but never as both at once.

Second, the GM – not the player – decides when a bonus applies. If full relative skill level seems too generous under the circumstances, he’s free to halve it and round up. The *Wildcard Bonus Table* (p. 14) summarizes the regular and halved schemes. The GM who feels that these progressions are stingy is welcome to be more liberal, perhaps reading the “WP” or even “Accelerated WP” column of the table as the bonus!

Sample Bonuses

Below are many suggestions for how to apply the wildcard bonus, including some situations where it’s advisable to halve the modifier. Players are encouraged to propose these and other benefits – this list *isn’t* exhaustive. Just remember that the GM has the final say.

(Gamers familiar with *GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents* will see a strong resemblance between these examples and the list of “alternative benefits” recommended for Talents. That’s intentional – wildcards and Talents cover similar ground. Remember the crucial difference, though: A wildcard doesn’t have a single, fixed bonus. Cinematic flexibility is the whole point.)

Wildcard Benefits Table

This table summarizes the effects of several optional rules described in *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15).

Points: Character points spent on the wildcard skill.

Skill Roll: Roll to use the wildcard as a skill based on any given attribute.

WP: Wildcard Points granted when using basic *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13). For extra-generous benefits with *Other Bonuses* (pp. 13-15), read the number as a bonus.

Accelerated WP: Wildcard Points granted when using the eponymous option under *Variations on Hyper-Competency* (p. 13). Again, this can be interpreted as a bonus.

Wildcard Bonus: Typical bonus when using *Other Bonuses*.

Half Bonus: Conservative bonus for potent instances of *Other Bonuses*.

Points	Skill Roll	WP	Accelerated WP	Wildcard Bonus	Half Bonus
3	Attribute-3	0	1	0	0
6	Attribute-2	0	2	0	0
12	Attribute-1	1	3	0	0
24	Attribute+0	2	4	0	0
36	Attribute+1	3	5	+1	+1
48	Attribute+2	4	6	+2	+1
60	Attribute+3	5	7	+3	+2
72	Attribute+4	6	8	+4	+2
+12	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1/2 (round up)

- A bonus to rolls related to the wildcard's high concept and to which *no* skill applies. For instance, a wildcard for inventors might help rolls on the *Enigmatic Device Table* (pp. B478-479), and any wildcard could aid IQ rolls for learning, memorization, or recall of its subject matter. This benefit extends to Will rolls for extra effort with the wildcard, and to HT rolls to avoid FP losses to any athletic feats it enables, if it doesn't encompass a standard skill that can serve in this capacity. The bonus might even work for rolls that explicitly disallow skills, when the wildcard seems especially relevant; e.g., ST rolls to break free of bonds that don't allow an Escape roll, for a wildcard built around freedom of movement. For rolls of fewer than three dice, like the 1d for initiative under *Partial Surprise* (p. B393) or for weapon breakage under *Parrying Heavy Weapons* (p. B376), *halve* the bonus.

- A bonus to rolls to use conceptually related advantages. A wildcard for healers may add its bonus to the IQ roll to use the Healing advantage, while one for combat veterans might benefit the Per roll for Danger Sense.

- A bonus to DX, IQ, HT, Will, or Per rolls to *resist* skills covered by the wildcard (e.g., a social wildcard that includes many Influence skills could fairly benefit Will rolls against those skills) or diametrically opposed to it (thus, a wildcard for detectives might grant its bonus to penetrate deceptions involving Acting and Fast-Talk, and to defeat concealment skills like Holdout and Stealth). It would be logical to extend this benefit to rolls to resist malign influences studied by the skill: HT rolls against poisons for a wildcard that covers them, resistance against supernatural attacks for a wildcard pertaining to the occult, and so on. *Halve* such a "defensive" bonus if it affects Block, Dodge, or Parry rolls.

- A bonus to DX, IQ, HT, Will, or Per rolls to avoid bad effects encountered in the course of using the wildcard. A nautical wildcard might benefit DX and HT rolls for rocking decks, seasickness, and similar shipboard hazards, while one for ranged combat could aid Will rolls to keep Aim with relevant

weapons. This may encompass rolls to recover from failures and critical failures with the wildcard; e.g., a wildcard that covers unarmed combat might benefit DX rolls to avoid falling down after missing with a kick, while any physical wildcard may lend its bonus to HT rolls required for critically failed attempts at extra effort. Again, *halve* such a bonus if it modifies active defense rolls.

- A bonus to reaction rolls made by or Influence rolls (p. B359) attempted on people who witness the user's impressively broad skill. This usually means "after a successful wildcard skill roll," which must generally benefit the target (repair his equipment, cure his wounds, fight off his enemies, etc.). However, an artistic wildcard might affect the attitude of audience members who merely watch a performance. It would be reasonable to *halve* the bonus if it benefits reactions from all suitable individuals, all the time (e.g., animals for a beast-taming wildcard, or spirits for a shamanic one), unless that group is tiny or rare.

- An offset against penalties for circumstances relevant to the skill, particularly those under *Equipment Modifiers* (p. B345) and *Geographical and Temporal Scope* (p. B176). If *Familiarity* (p. B169) and *Tech-Level Modifiers* (p. B168) aren't ignored completely thanks to *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11), add those to the list.

- An Accuracy bonus when aiming relevant ranged weapons. The GM may want to restrict this to heroes with Gunslinger or Heroic Archer. Except in highly cinematic campaigns, this modifier is best *halved*.

- A ST bonus when wielding relevant muscle-powered weapons (modify the *mount's* ST when the wildcard encompasses the Lance skill or allows Riding rolls to run people down). The GM may restrict this to heroes with Weapon Master. For skills that *already* give an effective ST bonus, like Brawling and Forced Entry, use this bonus instead of the usual one but leave it open-ended. This is a great way to make wildcards more attractive, though it can radically alter the face of combat.

- A bonus to damage when using the wildcard to deploy poisons, traps, etc. that don't depend on the user's ST. A similar bonus might apply to the first strike made after using a stealthy or tactical wildcard to set up an assassination attempt or an ambush. A further possibility is a damage bonus against foes studied by the wildcard; e.g., a Demonologist! skill might grant bonus damage against demons.

- A comparable bonus to HP *restored*, if the wildcard concerns healing, not harming.

- A bonus to *somebody else's* roll, when the wildcard directly aids others. The classic example is a bonus to HT rolls to recover from crippling, disease, or injury treated using a medical wildcard. A wildcard intended for a leader might give a bonus to his side's rolls to hear or understand him, or to their Fright Checks. *Halve* the bonus if it adds to others' rolls to act rather than to passive rolls like those in the examples – but when the wildcard is used for a complementary skill roll, this is cumulative with the usual bonus!

INTERESTING CASES

Several common classes of wildcard skills merit additional thought. If seeking specific examples for inspiration, Chapter 3 presents a long list!

STYLE WILDCARDS

Many *GURPS* supplements offer structured “fighting styles.” The *GURPS Martial Arts* series covers systems for unarmed combat and muscle-powered weapons; *GURPS Gun Fu* and *GURPS Tactical Shooting* address firearms training; and other volumes (e.g., *Transhuman Space: Martial Arts 2100*) contain combat arts suited to particular settings. Each style consists of a list of required skills; inventories of techniques, cinematic skills, and perks that, though not mandatory, are still deemed to be standard teachings; and menus of truly optional traits of every kind. To “know” a style, a warrior must buy a special perk – Style Familiarity – and spend at least one point on each of the required skills.

Obviously, that's a lot to keep track of! This makes simplifying styles an ideal job for wildcard skills. As a bonus, the cinematic nature of wildcards is a great fit to campaigns filled with raging combat action – particularly action involving implausible martial-arts skills such as Kiai and Power Blow.

Skills for Style Wildcards

A wildcard for a style – generically Style!, though actual examples will have names like Jujutsu! and Future Kill! – can include several distinct sets of skills:

Required Skills: Without exception, the wildcard should include *all* skills expected of someone who “knows” the style.

Optional Skills: If the style is light on techniques (below) and required skills, the GM might have the wildcard incorporate whatever *optional* skills he believes would contribute meaningfully to feel or function. When in doubt, reread the style description.

Cinematic Skills: The wildcard should also include all these. As they require a pricey enabling advantage such as Gunslinger, Trained by a Master, or Weapon Master, don't count them when doing detailed math (see *How Many?*, pp. 9-10). The high cost of the prerequisite trait *and* a wildcard makes it unlikely that the results will be underpriced.

Techniques in Style Wildcards

Whatever else it includes, a style wildcard should always remove the need to learn the style's individual techniques.

The warrior may make an *unpenalized* skill roll (often but not necessarily DX-based) for any of his style's techniques – realistic or cinematic, core or optional. Techniques that aren't part of the style but that default to standard skills that the wildcard covers default to Style! at the usual penalties; see *Techniques for Wildcards* (p. 12).

As techniques that default to full skill don't benefit from this arrangement, the GM may want to use the following option:

A Style! user can roll against the maximum level allowed for any technique his style offers. If a technique has no maximum, use skill+3.

Though this is presented as the norm in *GURPS Gun Fu* and *GURPS Martial Arts*, handle with care. It can lead to unbalanced results, such as the 3 points for Shaolin Kung Fu! at attribute-3 granting Arm Lock (Judo), Arm Lock (Staff), Disarming (Staff), Feint (Karate), and Feint (Staff) all at DX+0 when those same points would buy Staff at only DX-1 and Judo and Karate at a mere DX-2. It may be fairer to phase in this benefit more gradually: attribute-3 gives full skill (DX-3), attribute-2 gives skill+1 (DX-1), attribute-1 gives skill+2 (DX+1), and only attribute+0 gives skill+3 (DX+3) – all still capped at the technique's usual maximum.

Finally, remember that cinematic techniques – unlike cinematic skills – don't require Trained by a Master or Weapon Master to use. Style! skills include these for all users.

Additional Benefits for Style Wildcards

Style wildcards implement *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) in two different ways. First, even attribute-3 level in a Style! grants the equivalent of the associated Style Familiarity perk, eliminating the -3 for dealing with co-stylists from other cultures and -1 in active defense penalties from the style's feints and Deceptive Attacks. Second, it bestows full familiarity with every weapon the style covers, comparable to the Cross-Trained perk. Don't buy either perk separately.

Style! skills always permit *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12), too. The stylist may purchase his style's Style Perks for a point apiece regardless of points spent on the wildcard – and for those that require specialization by skill, Style! is a legitimate specialty and the perk benefits all applicable standard skills the wildcard encompasses. The GM might even *build* in truly iconic Style Perks; see *Implicit Perks* (p. 12). Similar thinking applies to techniques: When improving a non-style technique, it can be learned for Style! and works with all included standard skills for which it makes sense.

Hyper-Competency (pp. 12-13) isn't required – though if considering it for the campaign, style wildcards should be first in line. Wildcard Points from a Style! skill are applicable to anything combat-related, particularly Flesh Wounds while fighting and buying effect in the form of bonus damage. Bullet Time fits, too, but is so cinematic that the GM may wish to reserve it for heroes with Weapon Master or Trained by a Master.

As for *Other Bonuses* (pp. 13-15), the most fitting benefits are things like improved DX rolls to avoid falls after kicking – and possibly shifts away from the worst results on the *Critical Miss Table* (p. B556). Bonuses to resistance rolls against cinematic martial-arts skills (like Kiai and Pressure Points) might represent the fighter's strong *chi*. And ST bonuses with muscle-powered attacks are exceptionally appropriate, if the GM allows them at all.

SUPERNATURAL WILDCARDS

Wildcards are unrealistic to begin with, so it's no great stretch to have them function as spells or similar "skills of power." The GM might bundle any collection of related *skill-based* superhuman gifts into a wildcard. Doing so affords several benefits:

Better stories. In non-RPG fiction, wielders of such capabilities are more likely to possess broad, flexible gifts than to have discrete skills. This makes wildcards a perfect match! By imposing fewer limits on what's possible, wildcards reduce the odds of the rules interfering with creative roleplaying and storytelling.

Simplified character sheets. Many categories of supernatural skills are extensive in a way that mundane skill sets are not, leading to "busy," confusing character designs. This is *especially* true of magic spells. A small number of wildcards can work wonders here – literally and figuratively.

Unified power levels. Individual supernatural skills encourage players to create one-trick ponies. It's more balanced – and truer to most source material – for heroes with special abilities to possess a definitive level of broad proficiency. Wildcards accomplish this naturally.

There are potential pitfalls, too. Notably, because each supernatural skill grants a new superhuman ability, lumping many together can blur character concepts and upset game balance. The general guidelines for wildcards need adjustment to allow for these factors.

In all cases below, remember that the wildcards in question bestow *superhuman* abilities. Any Unusual Background the GM requires for cinematic skills, Imbuement Skills, spells, etc. should apply equally to wildcard versions of such things.

Wildcard Magic

As *GURPS Magic* suggests, spellcasting might be treated as a wildcard skill. There are two main possibilities:

Magic! A single wildcard covers *all* magic-use – though there might be Wizardry! for mana-based magic, Theurgy! for the sanctity-based kind, and so on. A magician can roll against skill to cast any spell he wants, at a penalty equal to the spell's prerequisite count (see *GURPS Magic*, pp. 223-237, or *GURPS Thaumatology*, pp. 261-267). This has the huge advantage of being extremely simple. However, turning all but the most basic spells into penalized uses of a costly skill makes low-points wizards almost useless . . . while lumping magic into a single skill elevates high-points wizards to gods. This option also stamps

out the distinctions between magic-users – everybody's abilities are equally broad (or narrow). It's best saved for campaigns that feature an enormous diversity of superhuman capabilities (such as *GURPS Supers*), where there may be but one spellcaster in the PC party or even the entire game world.

College! Each college – or roughly 35 spells, if sorting spells on some other basis – is a separate wildcard skill. This allows a greater variety of magic-users. As well, removing the threat of godlike universalists means there's less need to use prerequisite counts as a control mechanism; the GM might let casters attempt any spell within the college at *full* skill, relying on casting time, energy cost, and Magery level (see below) for balance. If that seems over-generous, the GM may use prerequisite count divided by two, three (as suggested in *GURPS Thaumatology*), or more, rounding as he sees fit. Just like Magic!, College! skills may differentiate by power source; e.g., Fire Wizardry! needs mana while Fire Theurgy! requires sanctity (and suits disciples of the Fire God).

The GM can mix these approaches, too. Clerics might learn Theurgy! for access to all spells on a modest list – and perhaps demonologists acquire Demonology!, shamans buy Shamanism!, and so on for similar selections – while mana-based wizards study a host of individual College! skills. In that case, what's important is that each skill covers roughly the same number of spells (or at least a comparable range of *useful* spells).

Magery *doesn't* add to these wildcard skills – no player will pay 12 points to improve one wildcard by a level if it costs a mere 10 points to increase all magic-related skills by a level, unless wildcards are rotten with *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15). Spells ought to retain their Magery prerequisites, however; e.g., a caster needs Magery 2 to cast Rain of Fire, or Magery 3 to try Create Servant, regardless of his wildcard level. As well, Magery plays its usual role in setting the maximum output of Missile spells and magic covered by *Magery and Effect* (p. B237). All this applies equally to other spellcasting Talents, such as Power Investiture.

Magical wildcards have leave to cover a huge number of skills because spells overlap a great deal; see *Skill Overlap* (p. 9). (This also explains why Magery boosts far more spells than ordinary Talents do skills.) Nevertheless, a college of magic – or *all* magic – is big swath of powerful knowledge, so such wildcards should include few *other* skills, all of which might be conditional. "Thaumatology when dealing with this kind of magic" might be everything, though a wildcard can always stand in for Artist (Illusion), Body Sense, Innate Attack, etc., if required by a spell it covers.

Wildcard Cinematic Skills

The cinematic skills that Trained by a Master and Weapon Master enable need not be exclusive to *Style Wildcards* (pp. 15-16). Perhaps not all users of these feats are martial-artists; some might be other highly disciplined individuals, like yogis. Or maybe Style! skills cover strictly realistic standard skills, and cinematic warriors learn a separate Chi! skill that *replaces* Trained by a Master or Weapon Master as the enabler for those feats.

Whatever the case, wildcards covering cinematic skills require a solid high concept linking the individual parts, much as College! skills tie together related spells. Forceful Chi and Inner Balance – a pair of Talents from *GURPS Martial Arts* – cover two of the broadest themes commonly encountered. They encompass 14 skills apiece, suggesting these wildcards:

Forceful Chi! Breaking Blow, Erotic Art, Flying Leap, Hypnotic Hands, Hypnotism, Invisibility Art, Kiai, Power Blow, Precognitive Parry, Pressure Points, Pressure Secrets, Push, Throwing Art, and Zen Archery.

Inner Balance! Autohypnosis, Blind Fighting, Body Control, Body Language, Body Sense, Breath Control, Dreaming, Immovable Stance, Light Walk, Lizard Climb, Meditation, Mental Strength, Mind Block, and Sensitivity.

Notice that both incorporate a mixture of cinematic and more-or-less realistic skills. Unlike *Magic!* and *College!* skills, these aren't so broad that they cannot fairly include other capabilities. The same goes for wildcards that cover unrealistic skills unrelated to chi or martial arts; e.g., one that functions as Enthralment skills and Musical Influence might also serve as most of the skills listed for *Smooth Operator* and *Musical Ability* (p. B91).

Wildcard Imbuement Skills

GURPS Power-Ups 1: Imbuements offers a wildcard possibility for its special skills: A wildcard version of any Imbuement Skill costs *triple* but works with every applicable combat skill – and possibly with skills for noncombat equipment. For instance, someone with *Burning Strike!* can turn any weapon to flame, be it a staff, a sword, an arrow from a bow, or a bullet from a gun.

With so many Imbuement Skills, this can mean a lot of wildcards. In a high-powered campaign where there are many different kinds of superhuman abilities – the sort of environment where *Magic!* is more fitting than *College!*, for instance – the GM may instead allow wildcards that replace every Imbuement Skill applicable to a given combat skill. For example, *Imbue Pistol!* would work as all Imbuement Skills that suit weapons used with Guns (Pistol). This is a *very* potent capability, so the GM might want to make the associated weapon wildcard (pp. 19-20) a separate skill and perhaps even a prerequisite; e.g., *Imbue Pistol!* requires a separate Gun! skill.

In either case, the user still needs an appropriate level of the Imbue advantage. For instance, *Burning Strike* requires Imbue 2, so only someone with Imbue 2+ could learn *Burning Strike!* or use *Imbue Pistol!* as *Burning Strike* (Pistol).

Additional Benefits for Supernatural Wildcards

Wildcard Familiarity (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) are unlikely to matter for supernatural wildcards, since such skills seldom cover the operation of gear. The same usually goes for *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12) – supernatural skills rarely support such traits – but there are notable exceptions. In particular, the techniques for adjustable spells in *GURPS Thaumatology*, and the perks normally specialized by spell in *GURPS Thaumatology: Magical Styles*, can be extremely powerful when they apply to many spells at once; the GM may want to forbid the likes of extra-broad Far-Casting and Huge Subjects perks, and techniques that add Cosmic to dozens of spells.

Hyper-Competency (pp. 12-13) demands careful thought, too. The GM might prefer not to allow wizards casting spells, warriors using *Breaking Blow* against armor, etc. to buy their way out of their abilities' special critical failure results. Trading

Wildcard Points for energy can get out of hand, too – especially for wizards. On the other hand, if these expenditures are allowed, few players will complain about getting their points' worth! One interesting option is to assume that supernatural wildcards have a stronger influence on Fate than the usual kind, and let associated WP constitute a “universal pool” (see *Variations on Hyper-Competency*, p. 13) that can affect just about any outcome *but* one related to the wildcard.

Other Bonuses (pp. 13-15) works well for these skills. For instance, wildcard bonuses might add to Per rolls to detect associated effects, resistance rolls against the self-same abilities, damage or healing with such capabilities, and reaction or Influence rolls where supernatural entities are concerned (so the *Demonology!* skill makes it easier to bargain with demons). The GM could assign different benefits to each supernatural wildcard, fine-tuned to the skill's focus. Perhaps wildcard Imbuement Skills add a bonus to basic weapon damage whenever they're used, while *Magic!* aids a mage's rolls to sense magic items and mana levels, and to resist spells.

Psionic Wildcards

Supernatural Wildcards (pp. 16-17) is silent on the skills in **GURPS Psionic Powers** because psi abilities are advantages, and psi skills merely make them work better; because people who want to be good with many psi skills can buy cheap Talents; and because the value of a wildcard would fluctuate from “nil” for one ability, through “minimal” for a narrow power like Teleportation, to “genuinely useful” for a telepath. Still, the GM is free to replace Talents with psi wildcards (e.g., *Telepathy!*) that include all of the power's skills and techniques; function as Expert Skill (Psionics), Hidden Lore (Psis), and mundane skills required to notice psi use, where that particular power is involved; and stand in for *Body Sense*, *Brainwashing*, *Dreaming*, *Exorcism*, *Hypnotism*, *Mental Strength*, *Mind Block*, and *Psychology* when used with or against that power. There might even be a *Psionics!* skill that does this for *all* psionic powers – though that's advisable only if the campaign has many special abilities, each with a similarly sweeping wildcard.

TEMPLATE WILDCARDS

Character templates, especially those describing high-powered roles, can be complex mazes of interdependent lists and choices. Wildcard skills offer a way to turn them back into the “quick-start” tools they were meant to be. The path is relatively straightforward – a template already has a high concept that's easily adapted to a wildcard!

Simplifying Templates

To simplify an existing template, begin by bundling its primary and secondary skill lists into a wildcard skill. If the template makes a Talent mandatory – say, *Green Thumb* for a druid or *Business Acumen* for a merchant – then add in all of the skills *that* covers, too. These steps will usually do the job, but if the included skills are too few in number (less than a dozen) or overlap excessively (e.g., a lengthy collection of Guns skills for a com-mando), then add background skills to flesh out the wildcard.

Ultimate Template Wildcards

If the GM wants, template wildcards (p. 17-20) needn't name *any* standard skills. Instead, each wildcard enables a character built using the associated template to perform every skilled task definitive of whatever the template represents: culture, dramatic niche, occupation, etc. The wildcard includes all skills conceivably tied to the template, subject to an overarching condition: "Only when playing my role." Thus, such a wildcard covers a role's *tasks* more than its skills.

When a character is playing his part in the campaign, *every* skilled activity involves a roll against the most suitable attribute modified by his relative skill level with his template wildcard. When he isn't, he's stuck using standard skills. In borderline cases, the GM's word is final – though it's more fun to put it to a vote!

For this to work out, the gaming group has to agree on a set of roles, and then every player must buy a wildcard associated with such a role. Everybody needs to be a good sport, too. If the group contains power-gamers who strive to stake a claim to every possible task – or players who can't agree to an equitable division of labor between characters with similar skills – this approach is doomed.

Ultimate NPC Wildcards

Most rules for wildcard skills tacitly assume that it's PCs who use them. This needn't be so. An NPC might have a wildcard that amounts to "The skill of everything the plot

calls for me to know or be good at." This is an extension of ultimate template wildcards to characters for whom brief stats blocks or scrawled notes take the place of templates.

This device makes it straightforward to grade NPCs as anything from "fodder" with attribute-3 level to "experts" with impressive competence. When the GM isn't tracking NPC point value, it simplifies many impromptu encounters to "Pick a level and get on with the adventure!"

Friendly/Neutral NPCs: Experts have Sage!, servants know Flunky!, kindly strangers use Samaritan!, and so on. The GM might spend the points of Allies, Dependents, and Patrons on such skills.

Contacts (pp. B44-45): These are trickier than Allies because they're defined by a skill level, not a point total. Wildcards are so broad that Contacts who have them cost triple – just as wildcards do relative to Very Hard skills. A "Contact!" can provide any sort of help that has a plausible relationship to his area of expertise.

Hostile NPCs: Foes boast wildcards like Guard!, Mugger!, Orc!, and Thug! – and Enemies might spend points on skills like this. These mostly cover standard skills for violence and deception.

Monsters: Even nonsapient enemies can play. Rather than worry about all the skills a tigress might have, give her Tiger! at, say, attribute+2 so she can climb, fight, and stalk at DX+2, swim at HT+2, track at Per+2, and so on.

Occasionally, a template covers a group of *related* professions or requires numerous choices from lists. If its divisions seem needlessly tedious, just assume that the wildcard is for cinematic polymaths and includes *everything*. If the distinctions are meaningful, or if lumping all the skills together would result in excessive breadth, it's better to come up with several wildcards – one per strong subtype – and reduce the necessary decisions to one: "Which wildcard do I pick?"

After that, remove the incorporated skills and associated Talents from the template. Replace them with the wildcard or choice of wildcards just worked out. Spend the points assigned to the deleted traits on as much of the wildcard(s) as they'll buy. Add leftovers to discretionary pools for advantages, background skills, and special abilities.

Template-specific wildcards don't replace the relevant templates' standard skills in the campaign in general. They're for people for whom *all* of the constituent skills are vital – that is, for heroes built using the associated templates. Characters designed freeform or based on unrelated templates buy individual skills normally. A simple-but-effective way to make this clear is to name template wildcards after the matching templates (or vice versa).

Not every template needs a wildcard! Some templates may involve too few skills for this to be worthwhile. Templates meant for ordinary NPCs instead of or as well as PCs – or for people who aren't supposed to wield special abilities in campaigns where wildcards represent such (see *Special Ability*, p. 7) – may omit cinematic components by design. It might even be

that the *only* templates with wildcards are those without other exceptional abilities such as powers and magic spells.

For a more radical simplification of templates with wildcards, see *Ultimate Template Wildcards* (above).

Wildcards as Template Building Blocks

Another alternative is for the campaign to feature a broad wildcard skill set spanning all the tasks the GM believes are likely to really matter, and to define character templates through *combinations* of these. If templates already exist, a practical method is to dump *all* of their skills together and then divvy up the combined list among a modest number of wildcards (about twice the number of templates works) whose high concepts match key activities. Then for each template, identify one to three standard skill sets that most overlap wildcards, and reassign their point allotment to the associated wildcards. Make sure that a few points remain to buy important standard skills that fall between the cracks.

For instance, a high-fantasy campaign might specify just three key combat wildcards (Archery!, Light Weapons!, and Heavy Weapons!), plus several noncombat wildcards (Outdoorsman!, Rogue!, Social!, etc.). The charismatic bard then receives Social! and a little Rogue!, leaving combat to standard weapon skills; the cunning thief gets Rogue! and a touch of Light Weapons!; the pure fighter pours everything into Heavy Weapons!; the hardy barbarian splits points between Heavy Weapons! and Outdoorsman!; and the equally wilderness-loving ranger enjoys Archery! and Outdoorsman!, relying on standard skills in a melee.

As this simple example illustrates, the wildcards go with tasks rather than specific templates. For a complete worked example, see *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*.

Additional Benefits for Template Wildcards

For the first class of wildcard skills – those corresponding to templates – anything in *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15) might fit, but the starring role goes to *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13). This gives players a potent tool for playing their characters' roles with style. The GM may want to consider invoking this rule for all wildcards in the campaign, but using the "accelerated" schedule for Wildcard Points for template-specific skills and/or allowing heroes to spend their WP on a wider range of options when performing their templates' core functions.

For the second category of wildcards – building blocks – extra benefits are especially important. Heroes will often have more than one wildcard, and this costly collection will seem inefficient if it brings nothing special to the table. Here, too, anything works but *Hyper-Competency* works best. A particularly effective tool is to allow all the wildcards that define a template to use the "common pool" option (p. 13) and thus empower each other in play.

In either case, don't skimp on *Other Bonuses* (pp. 13-15). The best options focus less on the wildcards' constituent skills than on beefing up the templates the wildcards serve to define. Bonuses to rolls to use template-specific advantages are especially effective. The same goes for bonuses that *replace* the most attractive benefits of expensive advantages; e.g., spending points on a wildcard that gives bonus Accuracy, instead of on Gunslinger or Heroic Archer – or on one that grants a ST bonus, instead of on Weapon Master – can yield impressive results. Tricks like restricting bonus poison and trap damage to assassins and thieves, bonus healing to medics, and initiative bonuses to fighters can also bolster each template's niche. And bonuses to allies' rolls can help to explain why a *team* boasts adventurers built on a wide range of templates.

WEAPON WILDCARDS

Among the wildcard skills most interesting to adventurers are those concerned with *weapons*. Many of these group weapons on the basis of fighting styles or wielders (assassins, commandos, knights, ninja, etc.); see *Style Wildcards* (pp. 15-16) and *Template Wildcards* (pp. 17-19), respectively. But some are all about the weapons, and weapon skills overlap – a lot. Point-for-point, wildcards covering them leave warriors rolling against lower numbers than opponents with standard skills. Thus, careful design is crucial.

Core Weapon Skills

Most fighters stick to a few weapons. This and defaults between weapon skills largely erase concerns about excessive breadth or niche invasion. Be generous – let the wildcard cover a wide range of related hardware! For instance:

- Wildcards for *blunt weapons* should include Flail, Staff, and Tonfa; conditional Axe/Mace and Two-Handed Axe/Mace for maces and unbalanced clubs; and conditional Broadsword, Shortsword, Smallsword, and Two-Handed Sword for balanced clubs.

- Wildcards for *firearms* might cover most or all Beam Weapons, Guns, and Liquid Projector specialties in the setting, plus suitable Gunner and Artillery specialties for man-portable weapons. Add Crossbow, too, unless it truly doesn't fit.

- Wildcards for *swords* ought to encompass Broadsword, Jitte/Sai, Knife, Main-Gauche, Rapier, Saber, Shortsword, Smallsword, and Two-Handed Sword. If the setting features suitable superscience, include Force Sword.

One-note wildcards – e.g., Pistolero! or Rapier! – *can* work, but demand more of everything described in the sections below.

Accompanying Combat Skills

Weapon skills are rarely used on their own. Make sure the wildcard turns the user into a well-rounded warrior. Valuable accompaniments are:

- Fast-Draw specialties related to the weapons and their ammunition.
- Blocking skills – Cloak and Shield – for melee fighters.
- Thrown Weapon specialties for melee weapons designed to be hurled.
- Parry Missile Weapons, if the wildcard includes balanced melee weapons.

Conditional Skills for Creative Weapon Use

Cinematic fighters often use weapons in unpredictable ways! Add *conditional* skills for unorthodox weapon usage, such as:

- Forced Entry for turning weapons on inanimate objects.
- Garrote, if the wildcard covers flexible weapons used with Flail, Kusari, or Whip. Archers might get "Garrote for use with bowstrings."
- Knot-Tying, if the wildcard covers something like Lasso or Whip.
- Melee skills for close-in work with ranged weapons; e.g., a firearms wildcard might note "Axe/Mace, Brawling, Staff, or Two-Handed Axe/Mace to butt-stroke, pistol-whip, or club with a gun, plus Spear for bayonets."
- Throwing or Throwing Art for chucking whatever the skill covers; e.g., "Throwing to toss grenades and empty guns at enemies, or spare weapons and ammo to allies" for a firearms wildcard, or "Throwing Art when hurling arrows" for an archery wildcard.
- Unarmed skills for use with melee weapons, such as "Brawling to pummel in close combat" and "Judo to execute throws after achieving an armed grapple."

Other Skills for Weapon Wildcards

All but the least-flashy weapon wildcards count as Acrobatics and Jumping when a roll against one of those skills is needed while wielding a suitable weapon. Add "Stealth to get into position for a sneak attack," if the wildcard focuses on small, concealable weapons.

Good weapon wildcards also enable several IQ-, Will-, and Per-based rolls, such as:

- Armoury to maintain and repair the weapons.
- Connoisseur and/or Merchant to recognize and evaluate the weapons.

To the Skills . . . and Beyond!

Readers may feel inspired to apply the theory behind wildcard skills – collecting many related, narrow traits into a single encompassing one – to things other than skills, whether to facilitate cinematic play or simplify the game. Below are a few ideas.

Wildcard Techniques

Techniques are essentially narrow, inexpensive skills based on other skills. It stands to reason that if a wildcard skill can replace many standard skills, floating between attributes as needed, then a wildcard *technique* might replace several standard techniques, moving from skill to skill as required.

If the GM wants, any technique that requires specialization and allows at least three specialties can be bought as a wildcard technique for triple the point cost of the desired relative level. It works with any skill to which it defaults. Associated perks (Technique Mastery, Unique Technique, etc.) need only be bought once. The Technique Adaptation perk becomes superfluous. No other rules (e.g., maximum level) change.

Example: Feint (p. B231) is a Hard technique that defaults to full skill for any unarmed combat or Melee Weapon skill. Spending 2, 3, 4, or 5 points buys it at skill+1, skill+2, skill+3, or skill+4 (the maximum), respectively. Feint! costs 6, 9, 12, or 15 points, and grants +1 to +4 to feint with any combat skill capable of it. The Technique Mastery (Feint!) perk costs its usual 1 point, and allows +5 for 18 points or +6 for 21 points.

Wildcard Advantages

Wildcard Contacts: As *Ultimate NPC Wildcards* (p. 18) notes, a Contact! who provides a wildcard skill costs triple. This is like buying a wildcard skill by proxy.

Wildcard Languages: Triple the cost of a language (pp. B23-25) for ability in a whole family of related languages (Afro-Asiatic!), every language used in a large geographical area (Southeast Asia!) or country (Russia!), or all tongues common among a large social group (Trader!). The GM may allow Language Talent to work normally and offer massive savings; it might even be a prerequisite for wildcard languages. For details, see *Pyramid* #3/54: *Social Engineering*.

Wildcard Powers: Quadruple the cost of any advantage-based ability, after all modifiers. This can then stand in for any *other* ability that costs no more than its basic (non-quadrupled) cost, *if* the player and GM can agree on a way it could serve the desired purpose. For other considerations, see *GURPS Supers*.

Even Wilder!

To go beyond this, follow the rough guidelines implied by the examples above and elsewhere in this supplement:

1. Anything skill-like (skills, skills-by-proxy, techniques, languages, etc.) uses triple point cost. Innate traits (most advantages) use quadruple cost.
2. The point-cost multiplier applies to the generalized trait but not to enabling or enhancing ones; e.g., languages but not Language Talent, spells but not Magery.
3. Maximum effect is set by points in the base trait *before* the multiplier.

- Intimidation when brandishing the weapons.
- Tactics when rolling to deploy the weapons optimally.

Techniques and Cinematic Skills for Weapon Wildcards

Lengthy lists of techniques and cinematic skills are better suited to *Style Wildcards* (pp. 15-16). Still, include anything that's iconic in fictional source material, notably:

- Armed Grapple technique (*GURPS Martial Arts*, p. 67) for a wildcard intended for melee weapons, Entangle technique (*Martial Arts*, p. 71) for one built around the kusari or whip, or Hook technique (*Martial Arts*, p. 74) for one focused on polearms. This lets the hero snag foes at full skill when using the weapons to grapple rather than strike.
- Sweep technique (*Martial Arts*, p. 81) for a wildcard concerned with long weapons, as using these to trip people is *very* common in fiction. There's something to be said for including Pole-Vault Kick (*Martial Arts*, p. 87) as well.
- Throwing Art skill, if the wildcard covers thrown weapons. Such a wildcard should be able to throw *anything*.
- Zen Archery skill for a wildcard used with bows. For slings, crossbows, etc., it's fair to go with "Works like Zen Archery when using these weapons."

Additional Benefits for Weapon Wildcards

Extras are essential to keep weapon wildcards competitive with standard weapon skills. The most basic package is *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) with all weapon types covered by the skill and known in the campaign world, and the option to exploit *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12). Consider using *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) here even if not allowing it for other wildcards – battle pits standard and wildcard skills against one another, and no other single benefit gives wildcard-users the fighting chance this one does.

Other Bonuses (pp. 13-15) is a big topic. A good low-key option is a wildcard bonus to rolls to avert mishap, particularly DX rolls to avoid falling down and Will rolls to retain Aim, when fighting with the included weapons; this might even shift rolls on the *Critical Miss Table* (p. B556) or *Firearm Malfunction Table* (p. B407) away from the worst results. Applying half the bonus to the 1d rolled for weapon breakage (p. B376) is also nice. To really beef up wildcards, have the bonus augment ST for muscle-powered weapons, apply to Acc for ranged ones (halving it outside of highly cinematic games), and/or shift rolls on the *Critical Hit Table*.

CHAPTER TWO

USING

WILDCARDS

Defining wildcard skills – the subject of Chapter 1 – is certainly the most involved step, but understanding

their role in campaign set-up and game play also merits careful consideration.

WILDCARDS IN THE CAMPAIGN

The decision to use – or not use! – wildcard skills is the GM's, to be made at the start of the campaign. Though *What to Include* (pp. 6-10) appears earlier in this work to help explain wildcards, its lessons are best applied *after* contemplating the following points.

WHEN *NOT* TO USE WILDCARD SKILLS

Wildcard skills can be fun, but before using them, it's important to know when *not* to use them. Sweeping skill diversity, though complex, is sometimes appropriate!

For one thing, having many individual skills is realistic. Think of the countless jobs and hobbies out there, and the myriad lessons and experiences these entail. While it's unquestionably *simpler* to stuff all human endeavor into a few pigeonholes, the results will feel unrealistic. In a campaign about believable people in plausible situations, bite the bullet and use standard skills – wildcards are a bad fit to high-realism gaming.

Wildcards don't always suit larger-than-life games, either. Cinematic campaigns often involve teams of PCs (if only ragtag ones!), with each player's fun rooted in "spotlight moments" where only *his* character's abilities will do. When wildcards can cover sharply distinct areas of knowledge, one per character, they enhance this experience – but that relies on the heroes being very different. Many stories are about parties of adventurers in the same line of work: buddy cops, three Musketeers, thieves from the same guild, and so on. For these, fine skill distinctions are key characterization elements, and wildcards may be too clumsy a tool for the job.

Finally, even if realism isn't an issue *and* the heroes differ so much that each can have his own wildcard, it's important to make the players happy. Reducing the size of the skill list is a godsend when it speeds character creation for gamers who are new to the system or strapped for time. But if the group consists mainly of **GURPS** veterans who prefer to tweak, wildcards actually add complexity. The players will

seek different skill levels in various key areas, and end up using rules like *Improving Standard Skills From Wildcards* (pp. 5-6) to concoct character sheets more complicated than ones that feature only standard skills . . . so why not use standard skills in the first place?

DECIDING HOW WILDCARDS WORK

The GM who feels that the campaign's realism level – and players – would support a "hand-waving" treatment of skills and tasks has several important follow-up decisions to make.

How Many Wildcards in the Campaign?

Highly variable! If templates define the campaign's major roles, each might feature a wildcard, while taking the "building blocks" approach results in roughly twice as many skills; see *Template Wildcards* (pp. 17-19). If the players are designing characters freeform to fit dramatic niches, the GM might work with them to develop one wildcard per PC – and interesting categories of NPCs could likewise get one apiece. *Interesting Cases* (pp. 15-20) leads to a wildcard for each fighting style, Imbuement Skill, magical college, psi power, weapon, etc., and these may well coexist with wildcards for niches or templates. What's imperative is to avoid overlap between wildcards likely to be bought together, and to ensure that especially broad wildcards have prerequisites: Imbue, Magery, Trained by a Master, Unusual Background, etc.

How Many Per Character?

Restrictions on wildcards per PC aren't essential, and some categories (e.g., College! skills, p. 16) are *meant* to allow several at once. Still, it's wise to set limits on wildcards associated with roles or templates, so that each hero has a clear niche. The expense of wildcards tends to drive players away from long lists, but why risk it?

A human being should be able to change a diaper, plan an invasion, butcher a hog, conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, comfort the dying, take orders, give orders, cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, pitch manure, program a computer, cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently, die gallantly. Specialization is for insects.

– Robert A. Heinlein, *Time Enough for Love*

Is an Unusual Background Required?

Unless the GM rules otherwise, all that's needed to buy wildcards is an appropriate background story. However, if they're special abilities in a campaign with "haves" and "have-nots" – whether by virtue of being wildcards at all (see *Special Ability*, p. 7) or because they're truly superhuman in the sense of *Supernatural Wildcards* (pp. 16-17) – there may be a prerequisite Unusual Background, conceivably one restricted to PCs and high-profile NPCs. The GM sets its point cost, which should be modest unless wildcards offer potent *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15) or remarkable powers. Something between a perk per wildcard and a flat 5 points feels right.

Which Optional Rules?

This supplement is chock-full of optional rules. The GM must decide which ones are in effect. In particular, review *Conditional-to-General Defaults* (p. 6); everything under *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15); the special options in *Interesting Cases* (pp. 15-20), like higher technique levels for style wildcards, and whether wizards use Magic! or College! skills; *Ultimate Template Wildcards* (p. 18); *Wildcard Techniques* (p. 20); *Yet More Optional Rules!* (pp. 25-26); and *Wild Criticals* (p. 26).

Can NPCs Have Wildcards?

If wildcards are cinematic abilities for heroes – that is, the PCs – the answer is "no." However, the GM is welcome to put arch-villains, important NPC allies, etc. on an equal footing. Some categories of wildcards might be *reserved* for NPCs; see *Ultimate NPC Wildcards* (p. 18). And usually, wildcards that are special abilities comparable to spells and powers are available to whoever who can afford them and any prerequisites.

Wildcards don't have to work the same way for PCs and NPCs, though. Those that exist only to simplify stats by reducing entire skill lists to, say, Tiger! or Orc! might offer fewer benefits than ones that represent special abilities or cinematic competence. This most often takes the form of less-generous optional rules. For NPCs built on points, a double-standard that makes wildcards less potent should reduce or erase any Unusual Background for such skills.

DITCHING STANDARD SKILLS

The most radical option is to declare that *only* wildcard skills exist – that no PC can buy standard skills or improve them from defaults to wildcards. This simplifies character creation immensely. Just as important, it eliminates the competition between standard and wildcard skills. Applying *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15) aggressively enough might even wipe out the rivalry between *attributes* and wildcards; indeed, if most of those options are "switched on," gauging how wildcards compare to other traits grows so subjective that dumping standard skills is worth considering for that reason alone.

Doing this will affect many of the GM's answers to the questions in *Deciding How Wildcards Work* (pp. 21-22):

How many wildcards in the campaign and per character? Making wildcards the only skills lets the GM set an important campaign-wide limit on character complexity. "One per template" or "one per niche" is unlikely to be satisfactory; that gives disappointingly one-dimensional characters. But it would be reasonable to group 200+ individual skills into, say, 15 to 20 completely independent wildcards that cover the major tasks important to the genre and setting, and then to expect or even *require* each PC to pick four or five of these. If combat is to be a major theme, weapon wildcards can raise the number of wildcards and player choices . . . or the GM might ordain that each hero has to select a different martial-arts style and buy its style wildcard, over and above everything else. If wildcards correspond to magical colleges, those would likewise constitute an extra list, not part of the basic one.

Is an Unusual Background required? Probably not, if everybody *has* to use wildcards – the extra trait is just a nuisance when the PCs are all on an equal footing. However, if some wildcards are more capable than others, the option to select them can fairly depend on suitable Unusual Backgrounds.

Which optional rules? This becomes *crucial*, as now the rules controlling wildcards supplant large swaths of standard **GURPS**. For instance, if *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) applies at all times, many fussy modifiers disappear, greatly simplifying game play. If the campaign will be "all wildcards, all the time," intricate options for wildcards become more attractive, because they replace skill complexity rather than compound it.

If nothing else, the GM might want to use *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13), *Compensating for Difficulty* (p. 25), and *Using Wildcards Together* (pp. 25-26) to offset the higher failure rate that accompanies somewhat lower overall skill levels.

Can NPCs have wildcards? If wildcards are truly the only skills, this is a given. But in cinematic campaigns that pit shining heroes against faceless hordes, it's more fitting to declare that NPCs are still stuck with standard skills. If so, it's important to keep their skill levels modest, and there are

but two sorts of NPCs: worthies who boast wildcards at levels at or near the heroes', and supporting cast with standard skills at the same *relative* skill levels or below. For instance, if the typical PC has DX 14 and combat-related wildcards at attribute+2, for skill 16, then NPCs should have at most 16 in their standard combat skills; the GM should avoid "logic" that has NPCs spending the same 48 points on combat skills so that even DX 10 cannon fodder are running around with skill 22!

WILDCARD SKILL ROLLS

Success rolls for wildcard skills work identically to rolls against standard skills: they use the same rules for success and failure (and *critical* success and failure), margins, and so on. However, the fact that a wildcard can replace *several* standard skills – whatever attributes normally control them – affords the GM greater flexibility.

SELECTING THE SKILL

The typical wildcard skill replaces a specific set of standard skills. When a rule or an adventure calls for a particular skill, any wildcard that encompasses that skill can stand in for it. Add the wildcard's relative skill level to the appropriate attribute (see *Finding the Target*, pp. 24-25) and get rolling!

Off-Label Use

Don't let the canonical skill list tie your hands, though. A wildcard skill isn't merely shorthand for a collection of standard skills – it embodies an *idea*. Any action directly related to its "high concept" is a legitimate use, even if it isn't explicitly mentioned. If a task governed by a skill not listed for the wildcard is clearly in keeping with its concept, then it's fairest for the GM to allow the wildcard to work. It's much easier to be flexible about this than to spell out every last skill that *might* fit, subject to complicated conditions. A major goal of wildcards is to get away from big lists, after all!

We Don't Need No Stinkin' Skills! Don't feel obliged even to specify a skill. If a task fits, pick a suitable attribute and allow a roll. This is how *Ultimate Template Wildcards* (p. 18) works, and it's a perfectly reasonable way to handle *any* wildcard – at least when nobody feels like scouring the **Basic Set** for the skill that "officially" applies.

Some Restrictions May Apply

Things aren't *always* free and easy, though.

Conditions, Conditions: As *Conditional Skills* (p. 8) explains, applicability can be more than a matter of the right standard skill appearing on a list – some wildcards attach conditions to certain skills. If these stipulations aren't met, no skill roll is allowed. Here, too, don't let canonical lists tie your hands. The GM is free to rule that a task is so far outside a wildcard's high concept that the conditions on *some* of its skills apply to others that normally lack them. For instance, a wildcard for snipers might include fully general Guns (Rifle) and many skills qualified with "for rifles" – but

if an unscoped rifle has its barrel and stock sawed off to convert it into a hand-cannon, the GM would be within his rights to rule that it's functionally a pistol, not a rifle, and fired using Guns (Pistol), or wildcard-2.

Decisions, Decisions: Sometimes it's essential to pick a skill. If a task allows a roll against any of several skills, *and* modifiers or outcomes applicable to those skills differ, *and* the wildcard can stand in for more than one of those skills, the player must specify which skill he's using his wildcard as before rolling the dice. "All of them!" is a valid answer only if the campaign uses *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) – in that case, if the player spends even a single Wildcard Point from the wildcard, for whatever reason, he enjoys the *most favorable* modifiers and outcomes from among its skills.

Negotiations

Everything under *Selecting the Skill* (above) and *Finding the Target* (pp. 24-25) is up to the GM. A player who feels that a wildcard should apply to a task has the right to ask permission to use it. If the GM agrees, then it's settled – work out the target number and roll them bones! If the GM *doesn't* agree, there are options besides outright forbidding the attempt:

A Matter of Degree: Not all justifiable uses of a wildcard are *equally* justifiable. The GM may allow a wildcard to work but apply a penalty from -1 to -10 based on how far he feels the player's proposed use deviates from the high concept.

Not Quite What You Wanted: The GM might permit the attempt but shift the roll to another controlling attribute – perhaps one that's less favorable. This can be combined with the previous option; e.g., if the player asks to use Gun! as First Aid by firing off a magazine and then using the hot barrel to cauterize a wound, the GM could allow it at -5 . . . *and* rebase the roll from Mr. Hot Shot's high DX to his mediocre IQ, since First Aid is IQ-based.

Law of the Instrument: If using *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13), the GM may let the player spend two Wildcard Points *from the wildcard he wants to exploit* to invoke *Player Guidance* (p. B347) *before* dice are rolled. This alters the situation to one where the wildcard genuinely applies, eliminating any penalty for deviating from the high concept. The GM might further allow this to change the attribute base; e.g., so that a hero with good IQ and so-so DX can capitalize on his expertise to turn a feat of pure agility into a matter of wits.

FINDING THE TARGET

Wildcard skill levels are recorded in relative terms (see *Controlling Attribute*, p. 5): attribute-3, attribute+2, or whatever. This makes it clear that the actual target number can vary depending on circumstances. As with the question of “What skill?”, the matter of “What attribute?” is up to the GM, and admits some subtleties.

Using Wildcards With Attributes

As explained in *Using Skills With Other Attributes* (p. B172), *any* skill might call for a roll involving any of DX, IQ, HT, Will, or Per (or even ST, though that should be rare). This remains true for wildcard skills. To make wildcard levels competitive with attribute and secondary characteristic improvements, the GM must strive to ensure that they get a workout in this regard.

The nominal attribute base for a wildcard roll is the controlling attribute of whatever standard skill the wildcard is replacing. If an adventure or a rule calls for another score, then use that trait with the wildcard instead.

Where things get interesting is when a wildcard represents vague competence rather than a specific skill (*We Don't Need No Stinkin' Skills!*, p. 23). In that case – and in any situation, really – it's the GM's job to assign the attribute base that matches the essence of the task. This is usually obvious, but when inspiration is in short supply, these word menus may help:

DX: Accuracy, balance, coordination, flexibility, grace, and precision. Athletics related to these things. *Physical* agility, artfulness, speed, and versatility. Matters of combat, fine craftsmanship, and vehicle handling.

IQ: Creativity, education, inventiveness, knowledge, memory, organization, reason, wisdom, and wit. *Mental* agility,

artfulness, speed, and versatility. Matters of art, business, magic, math, medicine, science, social interaction, and technology.

HT: Endurance, exertion, stamina, and vitality. Athletics related to these things. *Physical* fitness, focus, resilience, and resistance. Control over the body.

Will: Dominance, presence, sanity, spirit, and wits. *Mental* fitness, focus, resilience, and resistance. Control over the mind.

Per: Alertness, attentiveness, awareness, caution, sensitivity, vigilance, and wakefulness. Matters of information-gathering and observation.

*My name is Sherlock Holmes.
It is my business to know what
other people do not know.*

– Arthur Conan Doyle,
*The Adventure of
the Blue Carbuncle*

Using Wildcards Without Attributes

Like standard skill rolls, wildcard rolls can be moved to a flat base, usually 10. This suits wildcards well, as their applications span many attributes and the GM might desire an overall value to use in situations where no one score dominates. It's particularly appropriate for wildcards that represent an overarching supernatural capacity associated with standard skills based on a mixture of controlling attributes, especially when heroes and their rivals go head-to-head.

Bonuses From Other Traits

Unlike standard skills, wildcards never enjoy permanent, full-time bonuses to *base skill level* from other traits. Instead, *effective skill level* gets modifiers pertinent to specific tasks. Examining this case by case:

Basic Attributes and Secondary Characteristics: These add to wildcards in the sense that wildcard rolls are against one of these scores plus relative skill level, unless the GM invokes *Using Wildcards Without Attributes* (above). As *Controlling Attribute* (p. 5) notes, it's best to think in terms of relative skill level . . . and as with standard skills, higher attributes and secondary characteristics don't raise relative level.

Talents: Talents – including Magery, Power Investiture, and other advantages that improve magic spells rather than mundane skills – never benefit wildcards. See *Wildcard Skills vs. Talents* (p. 10).

Talent-Like Advantages: Some advantages are Talents in all but name; e.g., Charisma and Voice are effectively

Talents for large groups of social skills. Treat these as Talents and ignore them where wildcards are concerned. It's fairest to allow players to decide whether to buy wildcards or to stick with standard skills and advantages that boost them; to make wildcards competitive, the GM can restore reaction bonuses and the like via *Other Bonuses* (pp. 13-15). However, if an advantage other than a Talent exists primarily or exclusively to enhance just one or two skills (Absolute Direction, Brachiator, Chameleon, Elastic Skin, and Silence are all like this), the GM might permit its bonus as a task modifier when using a wildcard as one of those skills.

Advantages Benefiting Tasks: Advantages that assist particular kinds of tasks rather than lists of skills add their bonuses to effective skill level for those tasks – not to base skill level – for both standard and wildcard skills. Examples are Arm DX, Higher Purpose, Single-Minded, Versatile, and Visualization.

Example: Forceful Chi! (p. 17) encompasses skills based on DX, IQ, HT, and Will, while Inner Balance! spans DX, HT, Will, and Per. The GM wants to have people with these skills match pure chi against pure chi, with no one attribute dominant. A solution would be to roll a Quick Contest in which each party adds relative skill level to 10.

In the most extreme case, the GM might rule that all uses of certain supernatural gifts work this way. In effect, (10 + relative skill level) becomes a new “attribute” possessed only by people who know the wildcard (remember, wildcards have no default), allowing those lucky few to use cinematic skills, cast spells, or whatever at that level.

Finally, the GM can use this trick to compensate for the lower skill levels that result from the expense of wildcards, basing rolls on 11, 12, or more instead of on 10.

Using Wildcards for Figured Scores

In any formula based on absolute skill level, replace “skill” with “attribute + relative skill level.” The attribute is the one that usually controls the standard skill in the formula. Perhaps most important, Block and Parry with a wildcard are:

$$3 + [(DX + \text{relative skill level})/2]$$

This extends beyond success rolls. For instance, Speed-Reading (p. B222) multiplies reading speed by $1 + (\text{skill}/10)$, so wildcards that include Speed-Reading multiply reading speed by $1 + [(IQ + \text{relative skill level})/10]$. Likewise, nets (p. B276) use $\text{skill}/5$ in their range formula, which becomes $(DX + \text{relative skill level})/5$ for wildcards that cover Net. For a related concept, see *Bonuses From Relative Skill Level* (p. 5).

YET MORE OPTIONAL RULES!

Much of Chapter 1 – particularly *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15) and asides such as *Conditional-to-General Defaults* (p. 6) – is devoted to options that matter as much in play as during character design. Here are some additional possibilities, tied even less to defining specific wildcard skills than to how such abilities behave on adventures.

Average is Average: In a less-cinematic campaign where the GM regards wildcards as simplifications that mostly cover hordes of Average skills, Easy skills might still be used at +1 . . . but Hard ones get -1 and Very Hard ones suffer -2.

For fairness, the GM should use one scheme campaign-wide.

COMPENSATING FOR DIFFICULTY

An oddity of wildcards is that they’re balanced around mostly Average skills (*How Many?*, pp. 9-10) and priced at greater-than-Very Hard prices, yet may include skills of all difficulties. Among other things, this can lead to situations where masters of entire fields are bad at simple tasks. Optionally, the GM can pick a “standard difficulty” for wildcard tasks and apply modifiers to rolls that correspond to tasks executed with easier or harder skills. Possibilities include:

Easy is Easy: The recommended treatment for cinematic campaigns is to assume that wildcards are so costly that only bonuses would be fair, and then to further suppose that because most skills are Average, this amounts to giving bonuses to wildcards when they replace Easy skills. Uses of Easy skills are thus at +1.

Easy is Trivial: In a *highly* cinematic campaign, the GM may raise the previous bonus to +2 for Easy skills and +1 for Average ones – or even give +1 per step easier than Very Hard: +3 for Easy, +2 for Average, and +1 for Hard. This makes wildcards a much better deal, and is most balanced when using wildcards *only* (*Ditching Standard Skills*, pp. 22-23).



USING WILDCARDS TOGETHER

Much of this work (e.g., *How Many Wildcards in the Campaign?*, p. 21) counsels the GM to avoid overlap between wildcards that are liable to appear on the same character sheet. One way to make overlap less of a concern – and even turn it into a selling point! – is to permit wildcards that cover similar ground to reinforce one another. *Variations on Hyper-Competency* (p. 13) offers two options that rely on a finite resource (Wildcard Points): the “common pool” and “universal pool.” Below are possibilities for the GM who desires bonuses with unlimited uses.

Complementary Skills

The most modest method is to use the notion of *complementary skills*, introduced in the *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy* series. When this rule is in effect, if the GM agrees that a “master skill” would benefit from the application of a (different!) “complementary skill,” he can allow a roll against the complementary skill to help out. This gives a modifier to the ensuing master skill roll: +2 for critical success, +1 for success, -1 for failure, or -2 for critical failure.

Wild Criticals

In a cinematic game where wildcards compete with standard skills, increasing their critical success range can make them attractive *and* foster a larger-than-life mood. Instead of critical success on 3-4, rising to 3-5 at effective skill 15 and 3-6 at effective skill 16+, use one of these schemes:

Open-Ended Criticals: For wildcards, the standard progression doesn't stop! Success by 10+ is always a critical success: 3-7 at effective skill 17, 3-8 at skill 18, and so on.

Slow Open-Ended Criticals: Every two levels of effective wildcard skill past 16 adds one to the range: 3-6 at effective skill 16-17, 3-7 at skill 18-19, 3-8 at skill 20-21, and so on.

Relatively Critical: Wildcards start with a critical success range of 3-4 and add the "Half Bonus" from the *Wildcard Benefits Table* (p. 14); e.g., attribute+5 gives +3, making the range 3-7. Over-the-top campaigns might use the full bonus! Either way, the roll must succeed to be a critical success. Such a scheme makes high *relative* skill level worthwhile.

Players love frequent critical successes, but it's recommended that the GM set a maximum, whatever rule is used; 9 or even 8 is still generous.

This mechanic is intended to promote teamwork, and normally assumes that different PCs are using the complementary and master skills. However, wildcards effectively turn an individual into a team! *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) addresses this effect when a single wildcard's individual skills aid one another. Permitting complementary skill rolls enables *different* wildcards to assist each other in a less-flashy way that doesn't cost Wildcard Points.

Complementary skill rolls are a nice fit to wildcards because such traits are so broad – there's almost *always* a way to justify a connection between two of them, if the player's imagination is good enough! The mechanic is easy to use, too, and unlikely to throw the game out of balance; the bonus it gives is small (+1 or +2) and not risk-free (the -1 or -2). The downside is that the GM *will* face a steady stream of player requests leading to additional dice rolls and associated judgment calls. As well, the results might seem *too* understated for a highly cinematic campaign, though that's easily fixed:

Rescaled Complementary Bonuses: To make high wildcard levels count, if the bonus from the "Half Bonus" column of the *Wildcard Benefits Table* (p. 14) exceeds +1, use that as the benefit the wildcard grants on a successful complementary skill roll. Critical success gives +1 relative to that. For instance, for someone with attribute+3 and a "half bonus" of +2, the range of effects becomes -2, -1, +2, and +3. The GM who wants *really*

over-the-top action might use the full "Wildcard Bonus" column!

Automatic Bonuses

Another possibility is to use the essential concept of complementary skills without the associated skill rolls. If the player can convince the GM that one wildcard should benefit another, then it does. For its effects, refer to the "Half Bonus" column of the *Wildcard Benefits Table* (p. 14).

This option has the upside of being somewhat faster to use; there are judgment calls but no additional dice rolls. And though it *does* guarantee only bonuses – possibly large ones, at extreme wildcard levels – a major investment is needed to see any benefit at all. Thus, it's probably balanced and might even be somewhat austere. To work around this stinginess, the GM can use this next optional rule:

Complementary and Automatic Bonuses: If the GM desires larger bonuses and the gaming group likes rolling dice, *add* automatic bonuses to the standard complementary ones (-2, -1, +1, and +2). The range of effects for that hero with attribute+3 level and a "half bonus" of +2 would then become 0, +1, +3, and +4!

It's All About the Points

A different way to let multiple wildcards "stack" without extra dice rolls is to add the points invested in them whenever they cover the same standard skill for the purpose of a task. Look up total points on the *Wildcard Cost Table* (p. 4) or *Wildcard Benefits Table* (p. 14) to figure effective skill level. For instance, if Commando! and Gun! cover Guns (Rifle), then a sniper with 36 points in each of them has only attribute+1 for most tasks but effectively 72 points in shooting rifles, and therefore shoots at attribute+4.

When assessing *Other Bonuses* (pp. 13-15), use only the *highest* bonus from among the relevant wildcards. Never sum bonuses or calculate them from total points. In the example, the bonus would be +1 for attribute+1 – *not* +2 for two wildcards at that level, much less +4 for one at attribute+4!

The GM might use this method in the same campaign as *Complementary Skills* (pp. 25-26) or *Automatic Bonuses* (above). Perhaps points add when two or more wildcards encompass *exactly the same* standard skill for a specific task, while complementary and automatic bonuses apply when they don't. It's up to the GM whether to allow hybrid cases, like permitting multiple skills to sum points for a complementary skill roll to aid a master skill roll that *also* involves total points . . . but as that would get annoying in actual play, an either/or approach is recommended.

If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.

– Mohandas Gandhi

CHAPTER THREE

EXAMPLES

Many wildcard skills have appeared in *GURPS* supplements to date. What follows is a compilation of these. Wildcards created for specific genre treatments (*GURPS Action*, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, *GURPS Monster Hunters*, etc.) or campaign settings (e.g., *Transhuman Space*) have been edited to be more generic. Each entry notes its source(s) for gamers who want to understand it in its original context.

The top goal of this collection is to furnish inspiration. These examples collectively illustrate most of the concepts in Chapters 1 and 2, and therefore aren't uniformly broad, cinematic, or generic; thus, using them all in the same game isn't recommended. Instead, pick those that fit *your* campaign – either “as is” or with adjustments – and approach the rest as a source of insight when designing wildcards to fill any gaps. This inventory is canonical and exhaustive only in the sense that it includes every wildcard published so far . . . there's boundless room for innovation!

The wildcard skills are sorted alphabetically. For each, the name is followed by the attribute most often used for rolls against it – which, as *Controlling Attribute* (p. 5) explains, isn't a hard-and-fast association. Then comes the following information:

Skills: Standard skills the wildcard encompasses, including conditional skills and skill-like benefits.

Suggested Benefits: Possibilities from *Additional Benefits* (pp. 10-15) that would fit especially well even if the campaign doesn't otherwise use those options.

Source(s): The *GURPS* supplement(s) the wildcard comes from. The title(s) alone should hint at especially appropriate and inappropriate genres and TLs.

Notes: Any further comments, comparisons, and suggestions.

Art!

IQ

Skills: Architecture, Artist, Camouflage, Carpentry, Cartography, Connoisseur (for all Artist specialties), Current Affairs (High Culture), Engineer (Civil), Jeweler, Makeup, and Smith (Lead and Tin). Also replaces Counterfeiting to fabricate fakes but not to spot anti-counterfeiting measures; Forgery to create artistic replicas but not false documents; and Propaganda to place subtle-but-pervasive messages in artworks. Can further act as Mathematics (Applied) when the previous skills require it, though not in general. Make a DX-based roll for any “craftsman” Professional Skill that the GM feels has a significant artistic component.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for artistic experience, and to avoid obsolete knowledge with Current Affairs; bonuses to reaction rolls toward works created using Art! (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *Pyramid #2* (March 7, 2008).

Notes: The original version – called Artist!, but renamed here to avoid confusion with the standard Artist skill – was intended for European Renaissance games. In that context, it can substitute for Physiology; artists were expected to understand the workings of the human body, and would visit dissections and medical schools to educate themselves. At TL5+, add Photography instead. In magical settings, Art! might replace Symbol Drawing in applications that depend more on rendering symbols properly than on grasping their use and meaning.

Assassin!

DX

Skills: Fast-Draw (Knife and Pistol), Garrote, Knife, and Stealth. Doesn't stand in for ranged-weapon skills in general, but for aimed or surprise shots *out of combat*, the user can roll against the higher of this skill or his combat skill with *any* ranged weapon. Make an IQ-based roll for Acting, Camouflage, Disguise, Holdout, Poisons, Shadowing, or Smuggling, or a Per-based roll for Tracking.

Suggested Benefits: Bonuses to rolls for poison damage and/or to spot rival assassins (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard.

Barbarian!

IQ

Skills: Camouflage, Disguise (Animals), Mimicry (Animal Sounds and Bird Calls), Naturalist, Navigation (Land), and Weather Sense. Make a HT-based roll for Hiking, Running, or Swimming, or a Per-based roll for Fishing, Survival (any), or Tracking.

Suggested Benefits: Bonus to resist natural hardships (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Hunter! (p. 31).

Bard!

IQ

Skills: Acting, Current Affairs (any), Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Heraldry, Musical Instrument (any), Performance, Poetry, Propaganda, and Public Speaking. Make a HT-based roll for Carousing or Singing, or a Per-based roll for Detect Lies.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for artistic experience and culture; bonuses to reaction or Influence rolls after successfully using the wildcard to perform (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard.

Blade!

DX

Skills: Axe/Mace, Broadsword, Knife, Polearm, Rapier, Saber, Shortsword, Smallsword, Spear, Two-Handed Axe/Mace, Two-Handed Sword, or any other skill when wielding an edged melee weapon that does cutting, impaling, or piercing damage – but *not* for crushing or ranged attacks. Also roll against Blade! for any *physical* action in which such a weapon is instrumental; e.g., Acrobatics to dodge during a swordfight or to exploit a longsword as a vaulting lever, Climbing to use knives as improvised pitons, or Forced Entry to hack through a lock or a door. Further replaces any roll required to grab, ready, or retain a bladed weapon, including all relevant Fast-Draw specialties, Dropping or Throwing to toss a bladed weapon to a friend, and DX rolls to catch one. Make an IQ-based roll for Holdout to conceal a blade, and for skills like Armoury, Connoisseur, Current Affairs, Merchant, and Streetwise when it comes to buying, pricing, recognizing, repairing, or selling bladed weapons; a Will-based roll for Intimidation when wielding such a weapon; or a Per-based roll for Observation or Search to find one (even an improvised one).

Suggested Benefits: *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12); ST bonus when wielding relevant weapons (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15), if the GM wants to go *really* over the top!

Source: **GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions.**

Notes: Originally a template building block (pp. 18-19). Compare Katana! (p. 32) and Sword! (p. 36).

Boat!

DX

Skills: Boating (all specialties), and make an IQ-based roll for Shiphandling (Ship or Submarine). Allows rolls to operate *any* weapons system installed in a water vehicle, and for attack maneuvers with the vehicle itself.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) for water vehicles; bonus to avoid the effects of motion sickness (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Supers.**

Notes: As originally presented, this is a somewhat limited skill. The GM might add Knot-Tying, Meteorology, Navigation (Sea), Seamanship, and Submariner – plus Electronics Operation (any) for vehicular systems, Freight Handling for cargos, and Mechanic for repairs, where water vehicles are involved. Compare Wheel Man! (p. 37).

Bow!

DX

Skills: Blowpipe, Bow, Crossbow, Sling, Spear Thrower, and Thrown Weapon (Dart), as well as all related Fast-Draw skills. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons. Use Bow! in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Climbing for crossing or swinging from bow-launched climbing lines, and when shooting while dangling from high places.

Suggested Benefits: Bonuses to Accuracy, to ST, and/or to Will to retain Aim with relevant weapons (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Supers.**

Businessman!

IQ

Skills: Accounting, Administration, Current Affairs (Business), Economics, Finance, Gambling, Law (Contract and Corporate), Market Analysis, and Merchant, as well as Diplomacy for business negotiations and Propaganda for commercial advertising.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to allow the exchange of Wildcard Points for a little extra cash each game session; bonuses to reaction or Influence rolls after using the wildcard to close a deal (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Supers.**

Notes: Compare Money! (p. 34).

Cleaner!

IQ

Skills: Camouflage, Freight Handling, Holdout, Housekeeping, and Smuggling – and also Animal Handling, Chemistry, Electronics Operation, Explosives, Forgery, and Hazardous Materials whenever the objective is to doctor evidence, dispose of it, or create fake records legitimizing it. Make a Per-based roll for Search or Tracking, or a DX-based roll for Stealth.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to use player guidance to have the evidence disappear; bonus to spot the concealment efforts of rivals (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Action 1: Heroes.**

Notes: Originally a template wildcard.

Cleric!

IQ

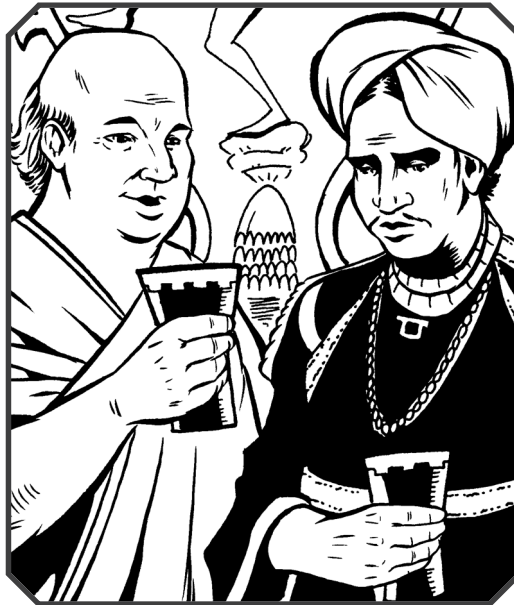
Skills: Any Philosophy, Religious Ritual, or Theology skill for the priest's faith, plus Diagnosis, First Aid, Hidden Lore (Demons, Spirits, Undead, etc.), Occultism, Public Speaking, Surgery, and Teaching. Make a Will-based roll for Exorcism

or Meditation, or a Per-based roll for Esoteric Medicine (Holy).

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for divine intervention; bonuses to reactions from holy entities and/or to HP restored using this wildcard (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers** and **GURPS Supers.**

Notes: The *Dungeon Fantasy* version is a template wildcard for the classic fantasy healer-priest. The *Supers* variant is more generic, replacing medical skills (Diagnosis, Esoteric Medicine, First Aid, and Surgery) and knowledge of the occult (Hidden Lore and Occultism) with Group Performance (Conducting) and Law (Canon), and leaving Philosophy and Teaching implicit.



The resulting wildcard is so narrow that the GM may want to beef it up by letting it function as *any* social skill – Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Leadership, Politics, Propaganda, Savoir-Faire, Teaching, etc. – when interacting with church officials, the faithful, or theologians. Compare Lore! (p. 32).

Computers!

IQ

Skills: Computer Hacking, Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Cryptography, Electronics Repair (Computers), Expert Skill (Computer Security), and Mathematics (Computer Science and Cryptology). Gives familiarity with all programming languages that don't require an Unusual Background. Can also be used to make Influence rolls against alien space probes, giant robots with logical puzzles, and similar entities.

Suggested Benefits: Already gives *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for software. If alien space probes and giant robots exist, *Wildcard Ultra-Tech* (p. 11) and a bonus to reactions from such entities (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15) would also fit.

Source: *GURPS Supers*.

Notes: Compare Hacker! (p. 31).

Courtier!

IQ

Skills: Current Affairs (Headline News, High Culture, People, and Politics, as well as Sports for upper-class pastimes), Heraldry, Poetry, Politics, Public Speaking, and Savoir-Faire (High Society, obviously, plus Dojo if any martial arts are considered important at court); Area Knowledge for the immediate environs of major palaces; and Games for the rules of combat tournaments and particularly fashionable games the GM deems relevant to courtiers. Make a DX-based roll for Dancing or any Sports skill that's especially popular at court; a HT-based roll for Carousing or Singing; or a Per-based roll to attempt Observation within the bounds of a familiar court.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) to avoid obsolete knowledge with Current Affairs; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to exchange Wildcard Points for Favors in play or extra cash, originating from deals made at court; bonuses to reaction rolls from the ruling class and fellow courtiers (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *Pyramid* #2 (March 7, 2008).

Notes: Originally intended for European Renaissance games. In other settings, adjust the skill list to reflect the artistic accomplishments deemed fitting for courtiers.

Demolition Man!

IQ

Skills: Engineer (Combat), Explosives (any), and Traps; Architecture and Mechanic when planting bombs in buildings and vehicles, respectively; Armoury (any), Artillery (any), and Expert Skill (Military Science) when dealing with *explosive* weapons; Chemistry to manufacture explosives; and Smuggling to hide bombs. Make a Per-based roll for Search to *find* a hidden bomb. Make a DX-based roll to attack with Guns (Grenade Launcher or LAW), or to chuck hand grenades with Throwing.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) with explosives; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to avert explosive critical failures; bonus explosive damage (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15), perhaps adding the "half bonus" to 6d in big blasts expressed as $6d \times n$, so that attribute+3 turns $6d \times 20$ into $(6d+2) \times 20$ for a satisfying +40 instead of an insignificant +3.

Source: *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard.

Detective!

IQ

Skills: Criminology, Detect Lies, Electronics Operation (Security and Surveillance), Forensics, Interrogation, Law, Observation, Research, Savoir-Faire (Police), Search, Shadowing, Streetwise, etc.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to use player guidance to find clues; bonuses to IQ rolls for the Empathy and Intuition advantages (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*.

Notes: *Monster Hunters* interprets "etc." liberally to generate a template building block (pp. 18-19) suited to 400-point gaming. This version can temporarily replace *any* skill for the specific purpose of finding evidence: Administration to finagle records; Biology, Chemistry, Housekeeping, and Physics to deduce what *really* happened from evidence; Body Language to keep tabs on people; and Savoir-Faire to coax (or trick) information from others. It can also serve as Intelligence Analysis to help put it all together. And it gives the Empathy and Intuition benefits suggested above. Compare Investigator! (p. 32).

Drive!

DX

Skills: Bicycling and Driving (all specialties). Permits an IQ-based roll for Teamster. Allows rolls to operate *any* weapons system installed in a land vehicle, and for attack maneuvers with the vehicle itself.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) for land vehicles; bonus to avoid the effects of motion sickness (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Supers*.

Notes: In its original form, this wildcard is somewhat sparing. The GM might include Navigation (Land), as well as Electronics Operation (any) for vehicular systems, Freight Handling for cargos, Mechanic for repairs, and Shadowing to follow another vehicle, where land transportation is involved. Compare Wheel Man! (p. 37).

Druid!

IQ

Skills: Druidic specialties of Religious Ritual and Theology, as well as Animal Handling (any), Disguise (Animals), Herb Lore, Hidden Lore (any *natural* lore), Naturalist, Pharmacy (Herbal), Veterinary, and Weather Sense. Make a Per-based roll for Esoteric Medicine (Druidic) or any kind of Survival.

Suggested Benefits: Bonuses to reactions from nature spirits, to resistance against natural hardships, and/or to HP restored using this wildcard (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard.

Encyclopedist!

Skills: Area Knowledge (any), Current Affairs (any), all Expert Skills, Games (only for knowledge of the rules), all IQ-based Hobby Skills, and Research. Allows the user to answer any purely factual question, but not necessarily to *understand* those facts. Never enables practical tasks of any kind, and doesn't encompass Hidden Lore.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) with the above skills; bonus to any IQ roll required for learning, recall, etc. (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Supers*.

Explorer!

Skills: Fishing, Survival (any), and Tracking, as well as Observation in wilderness environments. Make an IQ-based roll for any use of Anthropology, Camouflage, Cartography, Geography, Gesture, Meteorology, Naturalist, Navigation, or Traps that relates to wilderness or unexplored areas.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for new regions, and for culture in "first contact" situations; bonus to resist natural hardships (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Supers*.

Notes: This wildcard is somewhat austere, and might borrow elements of Barbarian! (p. 27), Hunter! (p. 31), or Scout! (p. 35) in a more action-oriented game.

Face Man!

Skills: Acting, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Gambling, Leadership, Merchant, Propaganda, Public Speaking, and Savoir-Faire – and Administration and Psychology for the purpose of social manipulation. Make a DX-based roll for Dancing, a HT-based roll for Carousing or Sex Appeal, a Will-based roll for Intimidation, or a Per-based roll for Body Language or Detect Lies.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for culture; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for Favors in play; bonuses to reaction or Influence rolls after using the wildcard to make a first impression (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Negotiator! (p. 34) and Talker! (p. 36).

Fake!

Skills: Acting, Disguise, Fast-Talk, Forgery, Fortune-Telling, Mimicry (Speech), Savoir-Faire, and Streetwise. Also replaces Leadership for group efforts to deceive or manipulate others. At the GM's discretion, any skill that has an attribute or secondary characteristic default *and* that isn't restricted by prerequisite skills can default to Fake! at the same penalty, where beneficial. This default cannot exceed the relevant attribute -1 for Easy skills, -2 for Average, -3 for Hard, or -4 for Very Hard; that is, Fake! cannot be as good as actually spending a character point to learn a skill.

Suggested Benefits: The ability to replace attributes when calculating defaults already amounts to an application of *Sample Bonuses* (pp. 13-15). Both *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11)

for culture and a bonus to penetrate deceptions by rival fakes would also fit.

IQ

Sources: *GURPS Social Engineering* and *GURPS Supers*.

Notes: Compare Talker! (p. 36).

*I know very little about acting.
I'm just an incredibly gifted faker.*

– Robert Downey Jr.

Fist!

Skills: Boxing, Brawling, Judo, Karate, Parry Missile Weapons, Sumo Wrestling, and Wrestling, as well as "traditional martial-arts weapons" skills such as Staff and Tonfa. Use this in place of Acrobatics and Jumping in combat, and make an IQ-based roll for Savoir-Faire (Dojo) in social situations. Those with Trained by a Master may add esoteric and cinematic skills for unarmed combat to the list. Fist! at DX gives +1 *per die* to damage with strikes (including bites and other natural attacks, and blows using fist loads), slams, and shoves, and +1 to ST for all grappling purposes; at DX+1, this rises to +2 *per die* to damage and +2 to ST for grappling. Fist! enjoys a +3 retreat bonus when parrying, yet isn't penalized for encumbrance or for parrying kicks or weapons.

Suggested Benefits: *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12); damage and ST bonuses generalized past +2 (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: *GURPS Supers* and *Pyramid #3/31: Monster Hunters*.

Notes: *Pyramid #3/31* expands Fist! into a template building block (pp. 18-19) suitable for 400-point gaming. It exchanges "traditional martial-arts weapons" for weapons wielded with unarmed skills, but then adds *many* more skills: Body Language and Observation to realize that someone is about to throw a sucker punch; Climbing in combat; Detect Lies to see through empty threats made by fist-waving foes; Fast-Talk to engage in specious intimidation (p. B202); Forced Entry for smashing inanimate objects with bare hands; Intimidation (specious or not) when menacing others with barehanded pain; and Tactics for unarmed fighting. Compare Martial Artist! (p. 33).

Gun!

Skills: All Beam Weapons, Gunner, Guns, and Liquid Projector specialties, and all associated Fast-Draw specialties (Ammo, Long Arm, and Pistol). Make an IQ-based roll for any use of Armoury (Heavy Weapons or Small Arms).

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) for guns; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for Bullet Time; bonuses to Accuracy and/or to Will to retain Aim with relevant weapons (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: *GURPS Basic Set*, *GURPS Gun Fu*, and *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*.

Notes: **Monster Hunters** expands Gun! into a template building block (pp. 18-19) suited to 400-point gaming. It allows Acrobatics, Dancing, Jumping, and so on to move in a gunfight; Brawling when pistol-whipping; Connoisseur, Current Affairs, Merchant, and Streetwise when it comes to buying, pricing, recognizing, or selling guns; Crossbow for gun-like weapons; Dropping and Throwing to toss an empty gun at a foe or a loaded weapon to a friend (or DX to *catch* one); Holdout to conceal a gun; Interrogation, Intimidation, or Streetwise when negotiating at gunpoint; Observation or Search to spot a hidden weapon; Spear with an attached bayonet; and technical skills such as Electronics Operation, Explosives, and Mechanic specifically for stunts like using a perfectly placed shot to bypass an electronic keypad, set off or disarm a bomb, or disable a brake line. It also permits a DX-based roll to retain guns against disarms, Pick-pocket attempts, etc. Compare Shooter! (pp. 35-36).

Hacker!

IQ

Skills: Computer Hacking, Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Cryptography, Electronics Repair (Computers), and Expert Skill (Computer Security). Can also stand in for Accounting, Cartography, Forgery, Research, or Speed-Reading when creating, seeking, reading, or altering digital files via computer – but *not* when working with printed or written records.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for software; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to allow Favors in play in the form of friendly insiders with passwords, and to trade Wildcard Points for money at hacked ATMs.

Source: **GURPS Action 1: Heroes.**

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Computers! (p. 29).

History!

IQ

Skills: All specialties of Anthropology, Archaeology, History, and Paleontology; the historical versions of Area Knowledge, Current Affairs, Geography, Heraldry, and Sociology; and the “academic” and historical elements of the various artistic skills (“Why, this is a lost Leonardo masterpiece, Billy!”). Also removes Cultural Familiarity penalties for all historical eras, and halves them for parallel histories.

Suggested Benefits: Already offers *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for culture, and this could be extended to *Geographical and Temporal Scope* (p. B176).

Source: **GURPS Infinite Worlds.**

Notes: Compare Scholar! (p. 35).

Holy Warrior!

IQ

Skills: Leadership, Religious Ritual, Strategy, Tactics, and Theology. Also covers all Hidden Lore, Physiology, and Psychology specialties pertaining to evil monsters. Make a Will-based roll for Exorcism, Intimidation, or Meditation.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for divine intervention; bonuses to reactions from holy entities and/or to damage to unholy ones (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers.**

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Lore! (p. 32).

Horseman!

DX

Skills: Riding (Horse) and skills for cavalry weapons appropriate to the setting, always including Lance. Replaces Acrobatics when mounting, dismounting, or engaging in “trick riding.” Make IQ-based rolls for Animal Handling (Equines), Packing, and Teamster – and for Veterinary when dealing with equines. A user with Animal Empathy or the Good with Horses perk can also make an IQ-based roll for Diplomacy or a Will-based roll for Intimidation against equines.

Suggested Benefits: Bonuses to ST when wielding cavalry weapons, and to *mount's* DX and HT rolls for hazards (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *Pyramid* #3/53: *Action.*

Notes: In a cinematic campaign with many broad wildcards, it would be reasonable to include techniques that **GURPS Martial Arts** ascribes to mounted styles, or simply to allow users riding and fighting at the same time to do both at full Horseman! level.

Hunter!

IQ

Skills: Animal Handling, Camouflage, Falconry, Mimicry (Animal Sounds and Bird Calls), Naturalist, Navigation (Land), and Traps. Make a DX-based roll for Riding, or for Stealth in wilderness conditions; a HT-based roll for Hiking; or a Per-based roll for Fishing, Survival, or Tracking, or to attempt Observation in the wilderness.

Suggested Benefits: Bonus to resist natural hardships (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15) – and possibly a “half bonus” to active defenses against savage beasts, hunting accidents, etc.

Source: *Pyramid* #2 (March 7, 2008).

Notes: In times and places where upper-class hunters use chariots, Teamster might replace Riding. Compare Barbarian! (p. 27), Explorer! (p. 30), and Scout! (p. 35).

*Useful against savage beasts
... and hunting accidents!*

Infiltrator!

DX

Skills: Acrobatics, Climbing, Escape, Filch, Forced Entry, Jumping, and Stealth – and Knot-Tying and Throwing for climbing lines and grapnels. Make an IQ-based roll for Camouflage, Electronics Operation (Security), or Lockpicking, or to exploit Architecture or Cartography to plan a robbery. Make Per-based rolls to use Traps to detect security devices, and IQ-based rolls to disarm them – but never to *set* traps.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for player guidance to find doors left unlocked and keys left unattended; bonus to rolls to spot rival sneaks (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Action 1: Heroes.**

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Thief! (p. 37).

Inventor!

IQ

Skills: All specialties of Bioengineering and Engineer. Also acts as a Mathematics prerequisite for any other skill. Can replace *any* skill roll required for inventing (p. B473) or gadgeteering (p. B475)! This includes Concept, Prototype, analysis, and modification rolls – everything except the roll for a gadgeteer to *find* parts (which is usually covered by Scrounging, but sometimes requires a more specialized skill).

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Ultra-Tech* (p. 11) with all relevant gadgetry; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to use player guidance to find needed parts; bonus to rolls on the *Enigmatic Device Table* (see *Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions* and *GURPS Supers*.

Notes: *Monster Hunters* uses this skill as a template building block (pp. 18-19). *Supers* spells out that “any skill roll required for inventing or gadgeteering” includes Armoury, Computer Programming, Electrician, Electronics Repair, Explosives, Machinist, Mechanic, Metallurgy, Smith, and Traps; any Expert Skills relevant to recognizing or identifying technological devices; and the technological applications of Weird Science. Compare Mechanism! (p. 33), which is better for settings that have yet to reach mature TL5.

Investigator!

IQ

Skills: Criminology, Electronics Operation (Surveillance), Forensics, Intelligence Analysis, Interrogation, Photography, Research, and Shadowing; Accounting and Speed-Reading when the objective is to spot irregularities in records; and Computer Operation when accessing DMV records, fingerprint libraries, Interpol databases, etc. Make a Per-based roll for Body Language, Detect Lies, Lip Reading, Observation, Search, or Tracking.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to use player guidance to find clues; bonuses to IQ rolls for the Empathy and Intuition advantages (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Action 1: Heroes*.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Detective! (p. 29).

Katana!

DX

Skills: Both one-handed (Broadsword) and two-handed (Two-Handed Sword) use of the katana. May substitute for Breaking Blow, Fast-Draw, Intimidation, Power Blow, and Throwing when using that weapon.

Suggested Benefits: *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12); bonuses to ST when wielding a katana – and to the *katana's* rolls to avoid breakage, because it's just that cool (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality*.

Notes: A weapon wildcard (pp. 19-20) originally intended for the “legendary katana,” a TL3⁺ exaggeration of the historical sword. The GM might add any skill taught by any version of Kenjutsu (see *GURPS Martial Arts*) – including Armoury, Blind Fighting, Flying Leap, Immovable Stance, Kiai, Mental

Strength, Precognitive Parry, Savoir-Faire, and Tactics – *for the katana only*. Compare Blade! (p. 28) and Sword! (p. 36).

Knight!

DX

Skills: “Heavy” Melee Weapon skills (Axe/Mace, Broadsword, Flail, Polearm, Spear, Two-Handed Sword, etc.) and Shield – plus Lance and Riding (Horse), for mounted combat. Make an IQ-based roll for Leadership, Strategy, or Tactics, or when an Armoury or Connoisseur roll is called for to recognize or maintain arms or armor.

Suggested Benefits: Bonuses to ST when wielding “heavy” melee weapons and/or to the Fright Checks of troops led using this wildcard (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. For a “knight” in the mounted-combat sense, use Horseman! (p. 31).

Lore!

IQ

Skills: Exorcism (at the usual -4 without holy advantages), Occultism, Research, and all monster-related specialties of Hidden Lore. Also counts as Area Knowledge, Current Affairs, and History for researching local monsters; as Biology, Diagnosis, Expert Skill (Psionics), Physics (Paraphysics), Psychology, Thaumatology, Theology, and Veterinary for the specific purposes of identifying or discovering information about monsters or other supernatural foes; as Criminology, Intelligence Analysis, Observation, Psychology, and Tactics when attempting to outwit such an enemy, divine its motivation, or predict its actions; and as Forensics and Search to comb through a former lair or the scene of a monster attack. Roll against the *better* of IQ or Lore! when using Empathy to recognize monsters disguised as humans, or Intuition to *guess* where monsters are or what they're doing. Lore! doesn't bestow supernatural abilities, but counts as the above skills where they're prerequisites for such things.

Suggested Benefits: Already offers bonuses to use Empathy and Intuition (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15). *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) removing culture and physiology penalties for monsters would also fit.

Source: *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*.

Notes: Originally a template building block (pp. 18-19). Compare Cleric! (pp. 28-29), Holy Warrior! (p. 31), Magic! (below), Occult! (p. 34), and Wizard! (p. 37).

Magic!

IQ

Prerequisite: Magery.

Skills: Allows the user to cast *any spell he wants* at a penalty equal to the spell's prerequisite count; see *Wildcard Magic* (p. 16) for important details.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to allow the exchange of Wildcard Points for energy, if the GM wants a high-powered campaign; bonuses to damage and healing with spells (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15), for something less extreme.

Sources: *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Supers*.

Notes: *Supers* also lets Magic! work as Hazardous Materials (Magical), Occultism, and Thaumatology. Compare Lore! (above), Occult! (p. 34), and Wizard! (p. 37).

Map!

IQ

Skills: An encyclopedic knowledge of where places are. This excludes unmapped dungeons or buildings, hidden fortresses, etc.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for new regions; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to use player guidance to find the right path; bonuses to rolls to avoid getting lost, and to resist supernatural disorientation (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies.**

Notes: The original wildcard names no standard skills, leaving Map! to work like an ultimate template wildcard (p. 18) for someone whose role is knowing where things are. It could replace Architecture or Urban Survival to guess what's around the corner in a building or on city streets, respectively; all Area Knowledge and Geography specialties for specifics about any region not restricted by Hidden Lore or an Unusual Background; and Cartography and Current Affairs (Travel).

*It is not down on any
map; true places never are.*

– Herman Melville,
**Moby-Dick;
or, The Whale**

Martial Artist!

DX

Skills: Judo, Karate, and any Melee Weapon or Thrown Weapon skill used with “exotic” weapons: Axe/Mace for *kama*, Flail for *nunchaku*, Jitte/Sai, Kusari, Smallsword for *jo*, Staff for *bo*, Thrown Weapon (Shuriken), and Tonfa. Also covers related Fast-Draw skills, and any use of Acrobatics, Climbing, Jumping, or Stealth in combat. Make a Will-based roll for Meditation.

Suggested Benefits: *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12); ST bonus when fighting barehanded or with relevant weapons (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers.**

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Fist! (p. 30).

Mechanism!

IQ

Skills: Carpentry, Current Affairs (Science & Technology), Lockpicking, Machinist, Metallurgy, and Traps; all Armoury, Artillery, Engineer, Explosives, Liquid Projector, Mechanic, and Smith specialties known in the game world; and any use of Mathematics (Applied) relevant to work with the previous skills. In a campaign where Weird Science exists, add its technological applications to the list.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) with all relevant gadgetry; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to use player guidance to find needed parts.

Source: Pyramid #2 (March 7, 2008).

Notes: Intended for games set at or below early TL5. Compare Inventor! (p. 32), which better suits mature TL5 and above.

Medic!

IQ

Skills: Diagnosis, Expert Skill (Epidemiology), Hazardous Materials (Biological), Pharmacy, Physician, Poisons, Psychology, and Surgery – and also Chemistry when dealing with drugs, Forensics when conducting an autopsy, and Naturalist to know what toxin or venom is afflicting someone.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for physiology; bonuses to HT rolls to avoid joining the infected, to HP restored by healing, to reaction rolls from people cured, and/or to *patients'* HT rolls to recover (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: **GURPS Action 1: Heroes** and **GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions.**

Notes: **Monster Hunters** expands Medic! into a template building block (pp. 18-19) suited to 400-point gaming. It makes First Aid and Veterinary explicit rather than leaving them implicit; extends scientific knowledge to Bioengineering, Biology (Biochemistry), Current Affairs (Science & Technology), Physiology, and Research; broadens technical skills to Electronics Operation (Medical and Scientific), as well as Computer Operation for medical systems; and adds “alternative medicine” in the form of Esoteric Medicine, Herb Lore, and Hypnotism. It also folds in a social angle in the form of Administration and Diplomacy when dealing with medical records and personnel, Law as applied to medical cases, and Influence rolls to request aid from medical professionals. Finally, it spells out that *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) is in effect, removing penalties for low TL. Compare Medicine! (below).

Medicine!

IQ

Skills: All specialties of Biology, Diagnosis, Electronics Operation (Medical), Expert Skill (Epidemiology), First Aid, Hypnotism, Pharmacy, Physician, Physiology, Poisons, Psychology, Surgery, and Veterinary. It may also include Bioengineering and/or Esoteric Medicine, at the GM's option.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for physiology; bonuses to HT rolls to avoid joining the infected, to HP restored by healing, to reaction rolls from people cured, and/or to *patients'* HT rolls to recover (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: **GURPS Bio-Tech**, **GURPS Reign of Steel: Will to Live**, and **GURPS Supers.**

Notes: Compare Medic! (above).

Memetics!

IQ

Skills: Brainwashing, Diplomacy, Expert Skill (Memetics), Fast-Talk, Interrogation, Leadership, Merchant, Politics, Propaganda, Psychology (all specialties), Sociology, and Teaching.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for Favors in play, to enlist someone well-disposed due to memetic manipulation; bonuses to reaction or Influence rolls after using the wildcard to instill a meme, and/or to rolls to *resist* such manipulation (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **Transhuman Space: Changing Times.**

Notes: Compare Psychologist! (pp. 34-35).

Money!

IQ

Skills: Administration, Fast-Talk, Finance, Merchant, and other appropriate skills used to obtain wealth and broker deals.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to allow the exchange of Wildcard Points for a little extra cash each game session; bonuses to reaction or Influence rolls after using the wildcard to close a deal (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Creatures of the Night, Volume 1*.

Notes: “Other appropriate skills” would logically include those listed for the Business Acumen Talent but not mentioned above: Accounting, Economics, Gambling, Market Analysis, and Propaganda. Money! should allow Panhandling in a pinch, too. Compare Businessman! (p. 28).

Move!

DX

Skills: Acrobatics, Aerobatics, Aquabatics, Body Sense, Climbing, Free Fall, Jumping, and Stealth. Works as Escape to move through narrow openings – and, at the GM’s discretion, as some forms of Dancing and Erotic Art. Make a HT-based roll for Flight, Hiking, Jumping, Running, Skating, Skiing, or Swimming. Any such HT-based roll results in +20% to the day’s travel in whatever mode of movement it covers. Move! can also take the place of any unarmed combat skill if performing some sort of fancy movement while attacking; Move! at DX+2 or better grants +1 *per die* to damage with such attacks.

Suggested Benefits: Bonus to ST rolls to break free from enemies or restraints – and possibly a generalized version of the damage bonus (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Supers*.

Negotiator!

IQ

Skills: Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Interrogation, Merchant, Politics, Public Speaking, Savoir-Faire, and Streetwise. Make a HT-based roll for Carousing or Sex Appeal; make a Per-based roll for Detect Lies.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for culture; bonuses to reaction or Influence rolls after using the wildcard to close a deal (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Social Engineering*.

Notes: Compare Face Man! (p. 30) and Talker! (p. 36).

Occult!

IQ

Skills: Occultism, all Fortune-Telling and Hidden Lore specialties, and Expert Skills such as Cryptozoology, Demonology, Pneumatology, Ufology, and Vampirology. Also covers occult, supernatural, or weird aspects of Anthropology, Archaeology, Area Knowledge, Criminology, Current Affairs, History, Literature, Psychology, and Research. In some campaigns, it may *further* encompass Alchemy, Dreaming, Exorcism, Herb Lore, Ritual Magic, Symbol Drawing, Thaumatology, and/or Weird Science, along with the creepier sort of Religious Ritual.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) removing penalties for obscurity, or a bonus that does this gradually

(*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15); *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to trade Wildcard Points for energy to fuel ill-advised, poorly understood rituals.

Source: *GURPS Horror*.

Notes: Originally called “The Occult!”. Compare Lore! (p. 32), Magic! (p. 32), and Wizard! (p. 37).

Perform!

IQ

Skills: Current Affairs (High Culture and Popular Culture), Electronics Operation (Media), Fire Eating, Fortune-Telling, Group Performance, Makeup, Mimicry, Musical Instrument (any), Performance, Public Speaking, and Ventriloquism. Make a DX-based roll for Dancing, Sleight of Hand, or Stage Combat; make a HT-based roll for Singing.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for artistic experience and culture; bonuses to reaction or Influence rolls after using Perform! to put on a successful show (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Supers*.

Pilot!

DX

Skills: Piloting (all specialties), and make an IQ-based roll for Shiphandling (Airship, Spaceship, or Starship). Allows rolls to operate *any* weapons system installed in an air or space vehicle, and for attack maneuvers with the vehicle itself.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) for air and space vehicles; bonuses to avoid the effects of acceleration, motion sickness, and space sickness (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Supers*.

Notes: This is a minimalist wildcard as written. The GM might add Airshipman, Free Fall, Meteorology, Navigation (Air, Hyperspace, and Space), Parachuting, Spacer, and Vacc Suit – plus Electronics Operation (any) for vehicular systems, Freight Handling for cargos, and Mechanic for repairs, where air or space vehicles are involved – as befits the setting. Compare Wheel Man! (p. 37).

Pirate!

DX

Skills: Acrobatics, Boating, Brawling, Climbing, Gunner (Cannon), Guns (Pistol), Intimidation, Jumping, Knife, Knot-Tying, Seamanship, Shiphandling, and Shortsword.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) for all suitable ships and gunpowder weapons; bonus to avoid the effects of motion sickness (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: *GURPS Supporting Cast: Age of Sail Pirate Crew*.

Notes: This could easily be broadened into an ultimate template wildcard (p. 18) for pirates!

Psychologist!

IQ

Skills: Brainwashing, Criminology, Hypnotism, Interrogation, Propaganda, and Psychology. Make a Per-based roll for Body Language or Detect Lies; make a Will-based roll for Mind Block.

Suggested Benefits: Bonuses to all rolls to resist madness or mental manipulation, to the reactions of people cured, and/or to *patients'* rolls to combat mental illness (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: **GURPS Social Engineering** and **GURPS Supers**.

Notes: Might veer into cinematic skills such as Enthralment and Mental Strength in some settings. Compare Memetics! (p. 33).

Scholar!

IQ

Skills: Anthropology, Archaeology, Cartography, Economics, Geography, Heraldry, History, Literature, Occultism, Philosophy, Public Speaking, Sociology, Teaching, and Theology. Can also be used for Research in any humanities or social-sciences field, and as Writing for scholarly works and popularizations (but not fiction or poetry).

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for artistic experience, culture, and/or new regions.

Source: **GURPS Supers**.

Notes: Compare History! (p. 31).

Science!

IQ

Skills: Astronomy, Bioengineering, Biology, Chemistry, Engineer, Geology, Mathematics, Metallurgy, Meteorology, Naturalist, Paleontology, Physics, Psychology, etc.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Ultra-Tech* (p. 11) with all sciences.

Sources: **GURPS Basic Set** and **GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions**.

Notes: The **Monster Hunters** version – being a template building block (pp. 18-19) for 400-point campaigns – mentions that “etc.” includes Anthropology, Physiology, and Sociology, and in effect turns Science! into an ultimate template wildcard (p. 18) by permitting it to work for *any* skill roll to offer a “scientific opinion.”

Scout!

IQ

Skills: Camouflage, Cartography, and Navigation (Land); Shadowing, but only when outdoors; and Gesture and Mimicry (Bird Calls) for signaling allies. Make a DX-based roll for Stealth, a HT-based roll for Hiking, or a Per-based roll for Observation, Survival (any), Tracking, or any use of Traps to *spot* traps.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for new regions; bonuses to resist natural hardships and/or to spot rival scouts (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers**.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Hunter! (p. 31).

Security!

Per

Skills: Body Language, Detect Lies, Observation, and Search. Make an IQ-based roll for Electronics Operation (Security and Surveillance), Expert Skill (Computer Security), Shadowing, or Tactics; Architecture to analyze security-related features of

buildings; or Law in the context of a guard's duties. Make a Will-based roll for Intimidation, or a DX-based roll for Knot-Tying or Stealth. Security! further allows DX-based rolls for *one* unarmed combat skill for restraining intruders and *one* weapon skill usual for guards in the setting, which might be the player's choice or the GM's campaign-wide decision.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for locations and security gear; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to allow Bullet Time for the specific purpose of protecting the client; bonus to reaction rolls from those protected (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Supers**.



Servant!

IQ

Skills: Administration, Computer Operation, Connoisseur (Wine), Cooking, Current Affairs (any specialty appropriate to the campaign's scope), First Aid, Freight Handling, Gardening, Heraldry, Housekeeping, Makeup, Professional Skill (Curator), Savoir-Faire (Servant), Teaching, and Teamster – all as befits setting TL – as well as Accounting for household finances, Disguise to play the role of one's employer, and any Hobby shared with that person. Also includes *one* Influence skill in addition to Savoir-Faire (Servant); Diplomacy is typical, but other skills such as Fast-Talk, Intimidation, or Sex Appeal are possible, with a plausible rationale. Make a DX-based roll for Driving or Sewing.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) for culture; bonus to reaction rolls from employers and/or those served (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Supers**.

Shooter!

DX

Skills: All Crossbow, Gunner, Guns, and Liquid Projector skills, plus associated Fast-Draw specialties (Ammo, Arrow, Long Arm, and Pistol). Covers any use of Acrobatics, Jumping, or Stealth to move around in a gunfight. Counts as Brawling when slugging someone with a pistol. Works as Forced Entry when shooting locks and doors. Stands in for Throwing when hurling a hand grenade or an empty handgun at enemies (or a loaded weapon to an ally!). Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury to get a gun working again.

Suggested Benefits: Wildcard Familiarity (p. 11) and Wildcard Tech Level (p. 11) for guns; *Hyper-Competency* pp. 12-13) for Bullet Time; bonuses to Accuracy and/or to Will to retain Aim with relevant weapons (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: **GURPS Action 1: Heroes** and **GURPS Gun Fu**.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Gun! (pp. 30-31).

Spy!

IQ

Skills: Any skill roll that would, in the GM's opinion, fall under the typical activities of a spy. This does *not* include combat skills. Spy! can generally replace Acting, Current Affairs (Geopolitics), Disguise, Fast-Talk, Holdout, Interrogation, and Shadowing. Make a DX-based roll for Escape, Pickpocket, Sleight of Hand, or Stealth, or a Per-based roll for Detect Lies, Observation, Search, or Tracking. The GM may allow other skills, and even take suggestions . . . but if the players get *too* creative, remember that Spy! covers activities directly related to the business of intelligence-gathering, not every exploit of cinematic secret agents (so no Carousing, Gambling, or Sex Appeal).

Suggested Benefits: Wildcard Familiarity (p. 11) with any gear needed to complete the mission; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for any use that helps the spy survive against all odds, in true Bond fashion; bonuses to resist seduction or torture, and/or to detect rival spies (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Lair of the Fat Man**.

Notes: This amounts to an ultimate template wildcard (p. 18).

In my business, you prepare for the unexpected.

– James Bond, in License to Kill

Stick!

DX

Skills: Axe/Mace, Broadsword, Flail, Shortsword, Smallsword, Staff, Thrown Weapon (Stick), Two-Handed Axe/Mace, Two-Handed Flail, and Two-Handed Sword for *crushing* weapons only. Use this in place of Acrobatics and Jumping in combat situations. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons. Users can wield two one-handed sticks at full skill without off-hand penalties.

Suggested Benefits: Already includes *Implicit Perks* (p. 12). *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12) and a bonus to ST when using a blunt weapon (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15) would also fit.

Source: **GURPS Supers**.

Notes: The GM may wish to give this wildcard depth comparable to Blade! (p. 28) in a high-powered campaign.

Swashbuckler!

DX

Skills: Fast-Draw, Melee Weapon, and Thrown Weapon skills for *one-handed blades* – Broadsword, Fast-Draw (Knife and Sword), Knife, Main-Gauche, Rapier, Saber, Shortsword, Smallsword, and Thrown Weapon (Knife). Also covers Boxing,

Brawling, Cloak, Shield, and Wrestling, and any use of Acrobatics, Climbing, Jumping, or Stealth in combat.

Suggested Benefits: *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12); bonus to ST when using a one-handed blade (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers**.

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Sword! (below).

Sword!

DX

Skills: Broadsword, Force Sword, Jitte/Sai, Knife, Main-Gauche, Rapier, Saber, Shortsword, Smallsword, and Two-Handed Sword, as well as related Fast-Draw skills. Use in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Jumping for physical stunts while fighting.

Suggested Benefits: *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12); bonus to ST when using a sword (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Basic Set**.

Notes: Compare Blade! (p. 28), Katana! (p. 32), and Swashbuckler! (above).

Talker!

IQ

Skills: Acting, Leadership, Propaganda, Public Speaking, Teaching, and *all* Influence skills (p. B359): Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Intimidation (with a Will-based roll), Savoir-Faire, Sex Appeal (with a HT-based roll), and Streetwise. Also acts as Administration, Carousing (with a HT-based roll), Fortune-Telling, and Politics when used in a social manner; Interrogation for casual conversations (not torture); Merchant for haggling (not estimating value); and any other skill required to persuade others through speech (e.g., if an NPC judge will respond only to Law, Talker! can replace Law to get a good reaction but not for a courtroom defense).

Suggested Benefits: Wildcard Familiarity (p. 11) for culture; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for Favours in play; bonuses to reaction or Influence rolls after using the wildcard to make a first impression (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions**.

Notes: Originally a template building block (pp. 18-19). Compare Face Man! (p. 30), Fake! (p. 30), and Negotiator! (p. 34).

Ten-Hut!

IQ

Skills: Any skill to use or repair military gear appropriate to the setting, plus any skill to repair (*not* use) military weapons, notably Armoury (Body Armor, Heavy Weapons, and Small Arms), Electronics Operation (Comm, EW, and Sensors), Electronics Repair (ditto), Engineer (Combat), Explosives (any), First Aid, Mechanic (for military vehicles), Parachuting (make a DX-based roll), and Scuba. Fully replaces Camouflage, Forward Observer, Gesture, Hiking and Running (with HT-based rolls), and Stealth (with a DX-based roll) in the field, and stands in for Intelligence Analysis, Strategy, and Tactics for combat involving multiple fighters on a side.

On a military base, works as Acting to fit in and convince others that you belong there, Area Knowledge to answer questions like “Where’s the mess hall?”, and Architecture to know how buildings are laid out. And functions as Interrogation, Leadership, Propaganda, and Savoir-Faire (Military) when dealing with military personnel, and as *all* social skills when interacting with a member of the military *as* a member of the military (whether this is true or just an act), discussing military business.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) for almost everything relevant to military activities; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for Favours in play on military bases; bonuses to reactions from military types (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions.**

Notes: Originally a template building block (pp. 18-19).

Thief!

DX

Skills: Climbing, Escape, Filch, Forced Entry, Pickpocket, Sleight of Hand, and Stealth. Make an IQ-based roll for Holdout, Lockpicking, Shadowing, Smuggling, Streetwise, or Traps, or for Gesture to signal allies. Make a Per-based roll for Search or Urban Survival.

Suggested Benefits: *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) for player guidance to find doors left unlocked and keys left unattended; bonuses to damage rolls for traps and/or to rolls to spot rival thieves (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Sources: **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers** and **GURPS Supers.**

Notes: The **Dungeon Fantasy** version is a broad template wildcard for high-powered fantasy. The **Supers** variant is narrower, omitting Gesture, Holdout, Search, Sleight of Hand, Smuggling, and Urban Survival, yet adding only Electronics Operation (Security) and Merchant (to sell stolen goods). Allowing *all* of these skills wouldn’t be unbalanced. Compare Infiltrator! (p. 31).

Throw!

DX

Skills: Bolas, Spear Thrower, and Throwing; *thrown* uses of Cloak, Lasso, and Net; all Thrown Weapon skills; and all related Fast-Draw skills. Make IQ-based rolls for Armoury pertaining to these weapons, and for Games skills such as darts. Lets you throw *any* object you can lift, as with Throwing Art, without requiring Trained by a Master or Weapon Master as a prerequisite. Having one of those advantages is still a prerequisite for gaining the damage bonuses of Throwing Art, though. Use this in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Climbing for actions that benefit from throwing, such as climbing a tossed grappling line.

Suggested Benefits: Bonuses to Accuracy, to ST, and/or to Will to retain Aim with relevant weapons (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Supers.**

Wheel Man!

DX

Skills: Boating, Driving, Piloting, and Submarine specialties for vehicles small enough for one person to operate; any

Gunner skill needed to fire built-in weapons on such rides; and Parachuting to bail out. Make an IQ-based roll for Artillery (any) or Electronics Operation (any) for vehicular systems, Freight Handling to pack a vehicle, Mechanic to make repairs, Navigation to plot a course, or Shadowing to follow someone in a vehicle.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Tech Level* (p. 11) for all relevant vehicles; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to use player guidance to find a handy vehicle waiting; bonus to avoid the effects of acceleration, motion sickness, etc. (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Action 1: Heroes.**

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. Compare Boat! (p. 28), Drive! (p. 29), and Pilot! (p. 34).

Whip!

DX

Skills: Flail, Force Whip, Kusari, Lasso, Monowire Whip, Two-Handed Flail, Whip, and *melee* uses of Cloak and Net. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons. Use it in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Climbing to climb up or swing from a whip; Garrote or Knot-Tying when choking or binding a foe with a flexible weapon; and suitable specialties of Erotic Art.

Suggested Benefits: *Extra-Broad Perks and Techniques* (pp. 11-12); bonuses to ST when using or trying to break free from a flexible weapon (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Supers.**

Notes: The GM may wish to give this wildcard depth comparable to Blade! (p. 28) in a high-powered campaign.

Wire Rat!

IQ

Skills: Electrician and all Electronics Operation and Electronics Repair specialties, plus any use of Camouflage, Holdout, Smuggling, or Traps to hide an electronic device such as an alarm, beacon, or bug. Make a Per-based roll for Search or Traps when the objective is to *find* such a gizmo, and for any use of Scrounging to locate parts.

Suggested Benefits: *Wildcard Familiarity* (p. 11) and *Wildcard Ultra-Tech* (p. 11) with all relevant gadgetry; *Hyper-Competency* (pp. 12-13) to use player guidance to find needed parts.

Source: **GURPS Action 1: Heroes.**

Notes: Originally a template wildcard.

Wizard!

IQ

Skills: Alchemy, Hazardous Materials (Magical), Hidden Lore (any *magical* specialty), Occultism, Research, Speed-Reading, Teaching, Thaumatology, and Writing. Make a DX-based roll for Body Sense or Innate Attack when spellcasting, or a Will-based roll for Meditation.

Suggested Benefits: Bonus to *resist* enemy magic, thanks to understanding it so well (*Sample Bonuses*, pp. 13-15).

Source: **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers.**

Notes: Originally a template wildcard. This covers all of a fantasy wizard’s trade *except* magic – it doesn’t allow spellcasting. Compare Lore! (p. 32), Magic! (p. 32), and Occult! (p. 34).

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He speaks a dozen languages, knows every local custom; he'll blend in, disappear, you'll never see him again.

– *Indiana Jones, in
Indiana Jones
and the
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