

GURPS[®]
FOR
DUMMIES[®]

**by Adam Griffith, Bjoern-Erik Hartsfvang,
and Stuart J. Stuple**



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About the Author

Adam Griffith has been role playing for 28 years and using the **GURPS** system almost exclusively in the last 10. When not gaming, Adam works as a research scientist in a lab specializing in cystic fibrosis. He lives in Bothell, Washington, with his lovely wife, two cats, and his newly adopted son.

Bjoern-Erik Hartsfvang got his start in role playing in 1980 and GMed his first campaign in 1982. He was introduced to **GURPS** in 1987 and began GMing in it in 1988. Over the years, his biggest gripe has been that he has spent so much time GMing that he hasn't gotten to play as much as he would like, but now that he's "time-sharing" the GMing with Adam and Stuart, he's now getting to play about 66% of the time. YEAH!!! When he's not gaming, Bjoern is a professional astrologer, freelance writer, and educator, and volunteers for waaaay too many charitable organizations. Bjoern lives in Redmond, Washington, with a dog, a cat, and a soul-mate.

Stuart J. Stuple got involved with gaming when Bjoern and he first were getting to know each other over 15 years ago. He has a master's degree in psychology and thinks **GURPS** does a better job of describing human beings in terms of their infinite variety of skills and personality than any textbook or theory. Over the years, he's come to appreciate the various forms of campaigns (dungeon crawls, puzzle campaigns, heroic adventures) and to love them all. Playing is like being in a book in which you get to play a character you've crafted and contribute to the plot line; GMing is like crafting that over-all story arc and making sure the plot advances. These days he spends most of his time living and working in the software industry as a program manager in Redmond, Washington.

Dedication

To our gaming group — Bobbi (Ysabet/Teddy/Siobhan), Erynn (Allira/Janoz/Sussharn), Herb (Rafe/Lady Stephanie/Rei), Katrina (Jessenia/Kieran/Miranda), and Michael (Felicity/First Daughter/Frederick Mercury) and numerous others over the years — thanks for letting us try out our ideas and for all of the many adventures. We thank you. (Do you realize we are each someone else's brother, sister, or wife throughout those worlds [Avonlea/Lanka/Castle F]?)

—Adam (Iff/Erica and Eryka/GM), Bjoern (GM/Anduril/Sheriff Dr. Erasmus), and Stuart (Harmonie/GM/Myryk).

Adam Griffith: To Ruth, who put up with me sitting at the computer for hours on end muttering to myself. And to my cats Buster and Spooky, who made writing ever so much more challenging by talking to me and walking on the keyboard while I was trying to work.

Bjoern-Erik Hartsfvang: To Jacqueline Aranté for giving me the confidence to write despite the knives in the chest. And thanks to Marcus Evenstar for introducing me to **GURPS** in the first place.

Stuart J. Stuple: To Mary B. and Melody for giving me the opportunity to write again — and even better, to write about something a lot more fun than software.

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Introduction

So, you want to be a wizard, do you, punk?

Or would you rather be a tough cop on the mean streets of San Francisco? How about an Amazon princess, a stalwart warrior, or a crafty thief? Are you interested in a career as a Cosmic Ranger, fighting lawlessness in the Outer Asteroid Colonies? Are you intrigued by the idea of being a private detective in a world where the shadow of Lovecraftian horror lurks in the spaces *between* the corners? This is just the smallest sampling of the types of characters you can play in **GURPS**, the *Generic Universal RolePlaying System* by Steve Jackson Games.

Role playing games have been on the market in one form or another for over 30 years, and gamers have many different systems to choose from. As avid gamers with over 50 years of experience under our collective belts, we've believed for years that **GURPS** is undisputedly the *best* role playing game system in existence. With the recent release of the fourth edition, **GURPS** has become even better, more sophisticated, and more adaptable to whatever game milieu you feel drawn toward.

About This Book

We love **GURPS**; it is the *only* role playing game that any of us has played in — or been the Game Master for — over the ten years that we have been gaming together. In writing *GURPS For Dummies*, we brought our collective experience as players and as Game Masters (GMs) to bear to give you as comprehensive a view of **GURPS** as we could. Each of the three of us has a fundamentally different role playing style — both as players and as GMs — and by collaborating on this book, we're able to provide you with three very different viewpoints about **GURPS** and the ways we've found to make the most of the system. However, everything that we've included in this book is information that all three of us have agreed upon, so you won't be stuck in the middle of any mundane arguments about the minutiae of **GURPS** rules.

We also wrote *GURPS For Dummies* to be a resource that any **GURPS** aficionado will find interesting and can benefit from reading. Whether you're

brand new to role playing or are as tenured as we are, you're going to find information here that challenges your assumptions about **GURPS** and gets your creative juices flowing. We hope that this book gives you insights into how to be a stronger player and a more valuable member of your party. If you are a GM, you can find information that may help you create campaigns that are more richly textured for the players and more consistent, more enjoyable, and more memorable for everyone.

We didn't write *GURPS For Dummies* to explain the rules of **GURPS** to you; there's another book on the market that does that much better than we ever could. It's called *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Our approach to *GURPS For Dummies* is to provide you with advice about the choices that **GURPS** demands gamers make — from the rawest newbie to the hoariest GM — from character creation to playing in an adventure to moving into GMing.

Why You Need This Book

In our oh-so-humble opinions, **GURPS** is more sophisticated, more versatile, and capable of more depth than any other role playing game in existence. What other gaming system gives you the ability to play a Cro-Magnon cave-person in one campaign, an ultra-sophisticated space traveler in another campaign, and the most feared wizard on two coasts in yet a third campaign — all using the same fundamental set of rules?

However, along with being so wonderful, **GURPS** can be a bit daunting. It demands that its players *actually think* during the adventure, rather than only consult the results of a series of dice rolls. And each character is a truly unique creation that requires the creating player to make numerous strategic decisions, not only during character creation, but also as play progresses.

GURPS introduced the concept of role playing as *shared storytelling* between the Game Master and the players. **GURPS** is designed with the concept that, if the GM is running an ongoing campaign, each adventure and each scenario should fit into the overall *plot* of that campaign and be more than merely a loosely connected series of “dungeon crawls” with no purpose other than the personal enrichment of the player characters. This makes gaming not only more emotionally satisfying and enriching, but more challenging for everyone involved.

Finally, with the release of the much-anticipated *GURPS, Fourth Edition*, much of what was once familiar and commonplace has undergone substantial and dramatic changes. To write this book, the three of us spent literally *months* combing through the new rules to get a handle on what has changed, what has remained the same, and how it all affects the way the game is played. Few people — and especially few overworked and harassed Game Masters — have the luxury to spend this kind of time in order to *unlearn* and *relearn* **GURPS** in its new manifestation. But that's okay; we did it for you, and throughout this book we've noted key changes in the system.

We were well aware of all these issues when we wrote *GURPS For Dummies* and integrated our opinions about the rule changes throughout the text. For example, the official material from Steve Jackson Games describes the specifics of each advantage and disadvantage, but nowhere does it provide you with an analysis of the relative impact of taking a specific advantage or disadvantage as compared to others. You can find that information in this book.

We'd like you to think of *GURPS For Dummies* as a companion to *GURPS Basic Set* — as a resource that not only helps walk you through some nuts-and-bolts activities, like creating your player character, but also gives you a contextual framework for integrating all the different aspects of your character into a coherent whole. This means that you can get a handle on the personalities and abilities of your player characters (and nonplayer characters [NPCs] in the case of GMs) much earlier and be able to play at a much higher level than you would otherwise.

How to Use This Book

How should you use this book? Any way you want. You are more than welcome to read it from cover to cover, but each chapter was written to stand alone and be read independently of any of the others. How you can best use this book depends on what you need at a particular moment.

How This Book Is Organized

GURPS For Dummies is organized into six specific parts. Each of the first five parts focuses on one general topic of gaming in **GURPS**, with the individual chapters of that part focusing on specific components of that topic. The sixth part, The Part of Tens, appears in every *For Dummies* book, and *GURPS For Dummies* continues the tradition.

Part 1: Getting Started with GURPS

Unless the GM just hands him a completed character sheet, everyone who plays **GURPS** gets his introduction to the system by creating his first player character (PC). It is an excellent way of becoming acquainted with the system, learning the underlying logic, and figuring out how to create a distinct personality for each PC. This part addresses the parts of character creation that are common to *every* character, regardless of milieu, specifically focusing on character role (Chapter 2), attributes (Chapter 3), advantages (Chapter 4), disadvantages (Chapter 5), and skills (Chapter 6).

Part II: Enhancing Your Character

One of the neat things about *GURPS* is the variety of ways that you can *enhance* a character. This refers to giving a character one or more specialized abilities — most of which fall outside the scope of what ordinary mortal humans can accomplish. Part II addresses the different ways that characters can be enhanced during the character-creation process, with each category (magic, powers, technology, and race) of enhancement being addressed in a separate chapter.

Part III: Playing with Your Character

Playing a character in *GURPS* is one thing; playing a character *well* can be something entirely different. Like most other parts of life, running a *GURPS* player character is not as simple as it looks, and all players should learn some specific skills to improve their ability to run their characters. In this part, we address three specific issues: engaging in combat, keeping adequate records, and role playing a character's personality. We find that players who can master these three skills quickly become superior players.

Part IV: Running Your Own Adventure

Eventually, most gamers want to try their hand at being the Game Master and running an adventure — if not an entire campaign. Some of these people — after only a single experience — run off screaming into the night, vowing never to GM again. This is a shame, and we wrote Part IV to try and help new (and not-so-new) GMs manage all the complexities of GMing in *GURPS* without strain or stress. This includes topics like creating a simple adventure, reviewing the players' characters to make sure they're suitable for your adventure, and even creating an electronic spreadsheet to manage the flow of information in your campaign.

Part V: Building Your Own World

Some GMs are satisfied just running simple adventures, others are quite happy to buy a campaign module that provides them with all the information necessary to run a campaign. Then there are those people who insist on setting up a campaign and adventure scenarios within a game world of their own creation. Yes, these people need help, but not the kind you are probably thinking. Creating a game world doesn't have to consume your every waking hour. In this part, we walk you through a series of decisions that any world-designer has to make — eventually. If you are playing in a campaign but not GMing, you may want to get permission from your GM before reading anything in this part.

Part VI: The Part of Tens

The five chapters in this part each list and describe our votes for the ten (or thereabouts) “best” choices in a particular category. For example, Chapter 24 is “Ten Disadvantages That Aren’t Too Painful,” and Chapter 22 is “Ten Rules for Spending Points.”

Icons Used in This Book

Whenever a particular paragraph says something that we want you to pay close attention to, it has one of the following icons in the margin so it can be quickly located:



We use the Tip to point out a really cool technique or process that is either much quicker, much easier, or gives a much better result than the “normal” way of doing it.



Sometimes we include information about a topic that we think GMs in particular ought to pay very close attention to.



We use this icon to emphasize a rule that has substantially or dramatically changed since the third edition of *GURPS*.



This icon indicates that you can find more information about what we’re discussing in *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*.



Remember these important nuggets, and you’ll be a better player or GM.



The bomb tells you that something tricky is afoot. If you aren’t careful with the information we give you, it could blow up in your face.

Where to Go from Here

In order to play **GURPS**, you need much more than just our humble volume; you also need the actual rule books published by Steve Jackson Games. If you don't have it already, at the very least you need to get *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*. GMs really ought to have it, but we also recommend that players get the second basic-set volume, *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*, as well. If the campaign has magic, then the GM and the players of mage characters need *GURPS Magic*; if other paranormal abilities are desired, these are addressed in *GURPS Powers* (not yet released as of December 1, 2005). *GURPS Martial Arts* is expected sometime in 2006. Please be sure to get the books for fourth-edition **GURPS**, rather than the out-dated third-edition volumes of the same name.

In addition, Steve Jackson Games has already released a number of worldbooks and genre books for the fourth edition. Currently, *GURPS Infinite Worlds*, *Banestorm*, and *Fantasy* are available. More are forthcoming, perhaps even by the time this book finds its way into your hands. If you're a GM and you don't want to go to all the work of creating your own universe, a worldbook is a vital resource. Even if you are creating your own reality, worldbooks are very reasonable investments; nothing is stopping you from lifting whatever you like out of a worldbook and inserting it into your own cosmology.

Steve Jackson Games runs a Web site that is a warehouse of online resources for GMs and players, including character templates, reference materials, and GM resources. We recommend you check it out; go to e23.sjgames.com.

Part I

Getting Started with GURPS

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



“Oh, hi. We’re still role-playing downstairs,
I was just questing a toilet...”



In this part . . .

We do exactly as the title says; we get you started. Chapter 1 gives you an overview of role playing and introduces you to **GURPS**. Most of this material is pretty standard regardless of which gaming system you use, but some of the material in this chapter specifically addresses the strength of the generic qualities of **GURPS**.

We don't believe in beating around the bush — in Chapter 2 we get you thinking about what sort of character you want to play in a **GURPS** campaign so that, in Chapter 3, we can help you determine your character's attributes (the scores used to determine a character's physical and mental capabilities). In Chapter 4, we discuss the different advantages (innate abilities, like an aptitude for math or the ability to work magic).

GURPS uses disadvantages (physical, mental, or social weaknesses or flaws that your character might possess) to give you more character points (which are what you use to purchase attributes, advantages, and skills) to work with, but disadvantages also are the fundamental components of your character's unique personality, and Chapter 5 gets you working on determining the disadvantages you want to incorporate into your character.

Finally, in Chapter 6, we guide you through the process of determining what specific skills your character possesses; for example, if you envision playing a cat burglar, you really ought to have the skills of Stealth, Lockpicking, Traps, and Streetwise — and quite a few more — unless you want to play either an incompetent cat burglar or a cat burglar in jail.

Chapter 1

Introducing *GURPS*— The Generic Universal RolePlaying System

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering the various parts of a role playing system
 - ▶ Assembling what you need before setting off on a *GURPS* adventure
 - ▶ Getting an overview of the game mechanics
-

Role playing games (RPGs) are all about playing a fictional character who moves through a fictional world. When you play a character in an RPG, you take on the role of that character, just like an actor in a play. But unlike the actor, you have no script to follow; you and your fellow players have free will that lets you influence the events of the story as they unfold.

But what do you do within the game world? Well, you can have a lot of fun enjoying the company of your friends and having the chance to step into the shoes of someone else whose life is dramatically different from your own. And you can also create entire campaigns and worlds for others to enjoy, but we get back to that in the last parts of the book.

Your character may explore a dungeon, puzzle out a mystery, or thwart the plans of an evil Mastermind. It all depends on the intents of the person who created the world and how you (in the role of your character) respond to the various events.

Who Is Involved

At a minimum, a gaming group consists of at least two people — the person managing (and in some cases, creating) the framework of the adventure and the person experiencing the adventure. But most gaming groups consist of four to eight people. Our regular group has fluctuated over the years, but there are usually about eight of us. Certainly, larger groups are possible, but coordinating that many people can be quite a challenge.

The Game Master (GM)

To have an adventure, you need a setting for the adventure. You also need someone to craft the story line — creating puzzles, hiding treasures, and providing challenges. And you need someone to manage the action, resolve any conflicts, and decide what is required to overcome each challenge. The person who provides the setting and fulfills all these roles is called the *Game Master*, or GM.

The GM provides the plot outline, the framework for all the action that will occur. This may be as simple as creating a map of a building to be explored, or as complex as creating an entire world with various cultures. In many ways, the fictional world belongs to the GM, who invites the players to come into that world and explore.

The player characters (PCs)

Most people begin their experiences with **GURPS** by creating and playing a character in an adventure. It is the action of these *player characters* (PCs) that determines the course of events that unfold within the GM's framework. With the exception of the GM, everyone in a group creates one or more characters for the adventure. These characters band together to form a group known as "the party."

New players often prefer that the GM provide very clear and precise guidelines about how their characters should be created. In fact, they sometimes want the GM to provide them with a completed, playable character, or they prefer to customize one of the character templates provided in the various **GURPS** books or by the GM. Other people truly enjoy the character-creation process as much as the actual adventure and may constantly be designing new characters for possible adventures or just for their own amusement.

Players create their characters by building a list of the psychological, social, and physical characteristics that define the individual. In *GURPS*, these are expressed as attributes (such as IQ), advantages, and disadvantages. Then the player gives each character a set of skills that defines what the character is good at. The remaining chapters in Part I guide you through the process of character creation.

Within gaming circles, people commonly refer to their characters in the first person — “I managed to crawl across the pit of snakes and grab the magical staff.” For many, the enjoyment of the game is more in role playing the character than in the action of the adventure. For reasons mysterious to us, we and other gamers frequently talk about *running* our characters rather than *playing* them. RPGs are filled with jargon of this sort, but we try to avoid it whenever possible in this book.

Nonplayer characters (NPCs)

Many GMs provide other characters for the player characters to interact with. Referred to as *nonplayer characters* (NPCs), these characters do not have free will but instead are all managed by the GM and exist to help enrich and guide the story line. NPCs can help the party, provide information, provide texture, or be the very opponents that the characters must defeat. Creating and managing the NPCs is the responsibility of the GM.

When and Where: The Game World Defines the Game

In the real world, you need to schedule a time for your gaming group to get together and find a place to meet. But the when and where of the fictional world form the setting of the adventure created by the GM and inhabited by the players’ characters. With *GURPS*, you can create any of the following types of worlds (as well as many more):

- ✓ Futuristic or imaginary worlds
- ✓ Historical settings or alternate histories
- ✓ Sword and sorcery
- ✓ High fantasy
- ✓ Contemporary worlds

Which: The new fourth edition

GURPS For Dummies is written for the fourth-edition rules of **GURPS** as presented in *GURPS Basic Set* and the various other fourth-edition titles. The information provided is useful for players and GMs using the third edition, but we recommend you consider upgrading to the new version. The rules have been streamlined,

particularly around character creation and combat, and the entire system has been retooled to fit together a bit more seamlessly. To make the transition, we strongly recommend you download *GURPS Update*, available at <http://e23.sjgames.com>.

The same basic set of rules is used for each of these adventures; what differs is the setting in terms of social environment, laws of the physical universe, technological advancement, or any combination of these elements. Understanding the setting of the adventure is necessary for you to understand how to create your character and how your character would respond to the various situations. For instance, the responses of someone raised in a version of Victorian England in which magic is a daily occurrence would differ dramatically from those of someone of contemporary, realistic London.

What You Need

All you really need to play **GURPS** are some completed character sheets, three six-sided dice, and a GM with an adventure. Some paper and a pencil to take notes, a few comfy chairs, and a table to hold maps are all nice additions, too. Oh, and don't forget the food and drink. Gaming sessions frequently last for many hours, often late into the night.

In most cases, however, the gaming starts with character creation, so you'll need access to some basic references for understanding the options available to you. The best resource is a combination of this book and *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, which is available at most gaming stores. *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* provides detailed descriptions of all of the advantages, disadvantages, and skills that your character might have as well as the basic rules that the player needs to know. The book you hold in your hands supplements *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* and provides guidance in selecting from the various options and for getting the most out of your gaming experience.



When you are first starting out, you may want to begin by downloading *GURPS Lite*, a free guide available from Steve Jackson's online store, e23, at <http://e23.sjgames.com>, rather than purchasing the complete *Basic Set*. *GURPS Lite* provides abbreviated lists of advantages, disadvantages, and skills with brief descriptions of each along with a good overview of the most important rules.

Most gaming groups also use mapping grids (with a hexagonal pattern) and character figures to track the position of everyone during the action (particularly during combat). More and more, we find ourselves using our computers to manage our character sheets, to keep track of important facts, and basically to replace pencil and paper.

How the Game Is Played

GURPS can be played almost as a board game. You have a map that diagrams the areas that you are exploring, and you make dice rolls to determine the outcome of each of your actions. But for us, *GURPS* is more about shared storytelling, an experience in which we each play a role in creating a fictional story line.

The game starts with the GM describing the game world so that you can begin your character creation. That description includes not only a general idea of the type of society and the physical characteristics of the world but also includes rules about how your character can be created. The most notable of these is the point value of the campaign — the total number of points that you can spend to create your character. The limitation of the point value is what makes character creation interesting. You can't have every advantage and every skill available; instead, you have to fit together those that let you create the character you want. The GM may also provide other guidelines. For example, some advantages or disadvantages may not be available or may be required for your particular campaign.

After everyone has their characters defined, the GM begins by describing the initial scene. Many times, this involves a situation that allows the various characters to meet for the first time. Some sort of problem is presented to the characters. It may be an attack, a job offer, or tantalizing clues of a mystery. Whatever the mechanism, the GM begins to lead the characters into the story line.

Of course, how the characters respond is up to the players. And that's where things start to get interesting. The GM can only provide a framework and attempt to lure the characters into it. The players determine which clues they'll follow or what approach they'll take to any given problem. For example, the GM may decide to attack the party, but the players decide whether to run away, defend themselves, or take yet another route.

Interactions with other PCs are done by talking among the players. In general, most conversation is done in the first person, so rather than saying, "My mage asks your soldier to hand him the map," you're likely to say, in the role of your mage, "Hey, soldier boy, hand me the map."

Interactions with NPCs are done by talking with the GM. The GM may respond by providing you a description of what happens or just the facts and information, or the interaction may also be in the first person. This depends in part on the GM's style and in part on how important the NPC is to the plotline.

The success of actions in which the outcome involves a large degree of chance, such as whether a character is able to dodge an attack or open a lock, is determined by dice roll. Each character has a different set of skills, and so in each situation, different players may be required to respond. Your character sheet records your base skills in those things you know; the GM may adjust that skill based on circumstances (for instance, picking a lock in a noisy, darkened bar). A successful roll is one in which the total of the three dice is *less than or equal to* the character's adjusted skill. That means that you successfully performed the task. A failed roll means that you failed at the task.



Unlike many other role playing games, a successful **GURPS** dice roll is *lower* than a target number. Many other games require high rolls. Other games also frequently require specialized dice, but **GURPS** is played with ordinary six-sided dice — the ones used for many board games.

As your characters experience the adventure, you as the player gain knowledge and insight about the fictional world. You then direct your character toward the goals that the GM has set before you. As the adventure progresses, you'll likely find yourself deepening your understanding of your character and getting a clearer picture of the GM's world, much as an actor begins to live his role as he rehearses it over time. This opportunity to grow as a character (and as a player) is what sets **GURPS** apart from other role playing games and is what makes **GURPS** such fun to play.

Chapter 2

Determining Your Role

In This Chapter

- ▶ Figuring out the type of character you want to be
 - ▶ Defining your character's personality
 - ▶ Using a character template
 - ▶ Being practical in your character choices
-

Have you ever dreamed about being a wealthy socialite with crime-fighting powers, a powerful mage, a brilliant scientist, or a secret agent with a shady past? With **GURPS**, any of these roles can be yours; you just have to decide which you want to be. And what's great is that you don't need years of training, working out at the gym, or exposure to radiation. All you need is to come up with an outline of who you want to be.

GURPS is about role playing. Just like an actor on stage, a good role player sets aside parts of his own personality and takes on those of the character. A good character has a life of his own. In fact, it's not uncommon for players to talk about their characters as though they have their own emotions and agendas. This chapter focuses on how to go about deciding what type of character to play, which sets the direction for all of the other choices you need to make during character creation. The rest of the chapters in this part walk you through the process of creating your character.

Identifying the Character Framework

More than just describing what you can and can't do, your character defines what you will and won't do while playing him. If you decide that your character is curious and impulsive, then you, as your character, need to go ahead and push the strange button — even when, as a *player*, you suspect the GM has a bomb attached to it. And if you decide that your character is all strength and no brains, then you have to bite your tongue even when you know the answer to a puzzle.

The framework for character construction

In human development, the mechanics of how you became the person you are today is a combination of your genetics and the experiences to which you were exposed. In **GURPS** character development, the process is a bit simpler. You have a set of points (determined by your Game Master, or GM) that you can spend to buy attributes (Chapter 3), advantages and perks (Chapter 4), and skills (Chapter 6), and you can get more points by taking disadvantages and quirks for your character (Chapter 5). The entire universe is available to you (well, except as limited by the number of points you have and any restrictions imposed by the GM), so you must have a focus — a framework around which you intend to build your character.

Defining the game world

The first step in crafting your character is making sure you understand the limits of the campaign you will be playing in. And the very first thing you need to know is what types of abilities are permitted there. Can your character be from a more advanced technological society or perhaps from the future? What about being a magic user? Are the types of available advantages limited? The GM must answer all of these questions for you. From there, you can then decide which, if any, of those special abilities or roles appeal to you.

Considering the available points

The next thing to consider is how many points the GM has made available to you. Although the same general framework can be used to create both a 250-point character and a 100-point character, the two need to be approached very differently. A 100-point character should be conceived as an action hero — just a little bit larger than life. A character built on 250 points likely has abilities that most people can't hope to obtain.

One thing to know right now — no matter how many points you get, you never have enough. And it's not the number of points that makes a character interesting and fun but how you spend them; one of our campaigns started with 50-point characters, and we had a great time taking on the local street gangs as our enemies until we worked our way up to bigger and badder foes.

Determining the party purpose

Each type of adventure can require a different set of characters. Exploring an abandoned dungeon is likely to require mostly combat and thief skills, whereas solving a mystery in Victorian England requires social skills as well as problem solving. The GM should give you enough information about what to expect so that you know the type of characters needed but never so much direction that you feel that your creativity is being limited. A key aspect of this information is the campaign setting — the party that's appropriate for medieval fantasy probably won't do so well in a space adventure (though don't be surprised if a good GM switches the environment on you during the campaign).

A good starting point for the process of selecting party members is determining what, if any, specialists are required. For instance, in many futuristic campaigns, you may need a character devoted to computer operations or piloting. In some cultural settings, you might need someone of a higher social class to “front” for the party in order to gain entrance to reputable society. And in a campaign in which religions play an important role, having a priest or two may be critical. It’s also a good idea to pay attention to healing and to consider whether you need any characters devoted to support roles, focusing on things such as languages, the Merchant skill, and knowledge about the regions where you expect the action to occur (Area Knowledge).

From that point, you can then decide how many in the party need to be combat-focused and how many need to be focused on exploration or puzzle solving. When it comes to choosing combat-focused team members, try to balance your party as much as possible. Keep in mind which of your team members specialize in offensive versus defensive modes of combat and which types of attack they employ.

The framework for role playing

The other component to consider as you begin outlining your character is how you like to run (role play) your characters and how much of your own personality needs to fit into the characters. One of our rules is that every character played by Stuart has to have the Fast-Talk skill — the ability to come up with convincing stories on the spur of the moment. That’s just too much a part of Stuart’s personality for him to set aside.

In most campaigns, it’s usually more fun to take skills and advantages that you actually understand. For example, if you’re playing in a futuristic campaign, leave the computer hacking to someone who knows how computers work. Of course, this is not an absolute rule. After all, what you can achieve is actually determined by dice rolls — you don’t actually have to know how to go out and hack into the Pentagon computer network just because your character is going to. But knowing something about the skill helps you know what’s possible and hence what to even attempt.

You also need to know a little bit about your own personality. Part of the fun is challenging yourself with the role that you take on. Many gamers try playing characters of the opposite gender or with personalities dramatically different from their own. But as you play, you’ll find that certain traits don’t work well for you. Stuart absolutely cannot play Easy to Read (a disadvantage where what you are thinking is easy to deduce just by looking at your face) to save his life — that Fast-Talk part of his brain is too deeply ingrained.

Determining Competencies and Personality

When you know something about the general environment for your campaign and the number of points available, and you've thought a bit about how your personality influences what sort of character you'll play, it's time to think about who your character is going to be and how he or she fits in with the other characters in the party. In some campaigns, the GM may guide you to some good choices — “the party needs a healer, at least two combat monsters, and a computer hacker” or “worry about brains, not brawn, for this adventure.” Checking in with the other players about what they are considering can also be very helpful, particularly to avoid too much overlap in the party.

Creating a useful character

A number of standard party roles are worth considering for your own character. Do you want to be the smart one? The strong one? The con artist? Think about the cast of any good book or television adventure show and you'll begin to see how each of these roles can be represented. In fact, one way to develop a character is to identify a fictional character and use him or her as a guideline for the types of skills and personality to give your own character.

In deciding your functional role, think about what sorts of things you want your character to be able to do. Some things to consider:

- ✔ **How do you feel about combat?** Is your character the one with the most powerful weapon or the one who prefers sneak attacks? Or does he hide in the corner and hope that the rest of the party can handle the problem?
- ✔ **What about social interactions?** Do you want your character to be the one who talks her way out of tough situations? Or do you want your character to be the one who gets the party into tough situations with his loud mouth?
- ✔ **How sneaky do you want your character to be?** Does your character know how to find secret passages and disarm traps? Can your character follow someone through the forest or down a busy street?
- ✔ **Do you want to be the brains?** Does your character have the skills to research arcane knowledge or solve puzzles? Does he collect information the way others collect gold and jewels? Can she outwit the opponents without breaking a sweat?
- ✔ **If the campaign permits them, does your character have any special abilities, such as magic, psionics, or super-powers?**

- ✔ **Do you want your character to have specialized technical knowledge?** Is he more a scientist or an artist?
- ✔ **What about support skills?** When someone yells “Medic!” is your character the one to respond? Does your character know how to negotiate, speak 17 different languages, or pilot every vessel the party is likely to encounter?

The answers to these questions help you get a sense of the type of character you’re going to create. Deciding on role is independent of any special abilities allowed by the GM. A combat-focused character can be normal, magical, or superheroic and can be placed in a medieval, contemporary, or futuristic setting.

Generalist versus specialist

A *generalist* is a character who can do a variety of things around a particular focus, whereas a *specialist* has one skill or advantage that most of the rest of his abilities support.

Thieves can be generalists by having a collection of skills like figuring out which houses or businesses to target, disposing of acquired items, defending themselves in a fight, and a wide range of general thief and spy skills, such as Stealth, Shadowing, and Scrounging. Looking at the functional role, this character certainly serves as the sneaky role but can also function in social situations, solve puzzles, and perhaps even have specialized technical knowledge.

On the other hand, you can design a thief to be a very specific second-story artist. All of the skills and advantages revolve around being able to get in and get back out of the upper floors of a building undetected. Details like figuring out which houses have valuables, fencing the loot, and dealing with other underworld contacts are left to other party members or a trusted contact.

An even more generalist approach is the character who brings together several different roles. A character who is an upper-class bard by day and a dark assassin by night with hidden magical talents pushes the envelope of the idea of a generalist (but, boy, is she a fun character to play!).

Party balance

The need for party balance stems from the limited number of points available for creating each character. No single character can have all the abilities that the party needs. Combat, for example, is subdivided into close combat, melee combat, and long-range combat (see Chapter 11). Each of these requires a different set of attributes, advantages, skills, and equipment — all of which cost points. So no single character is able to be expert at all of these types of combat.

In a larger party, each character has more room to be a specialist. Certain roles (such as combat and healer) almost always need to be covered by someone (or several someones). You must think about how your character fits into the larger party when you first begin creating the framework. If the GM permits it, talking with other players can help you understand what the party needs in terms of roles. Or think about what type of generalist character would do well and build from there.

Creating a character that's fun to play

Having a useful character is important, but enjoying what you're doing is the whole point of gaming. We believe that two things contribute to an enjoyable character:

- ✔ **A level of competency that allows you to contribute to the party.**
- ✔ **A personality that draws you in to seeing yourself as the character.**

For some people, a fun character is easy to play, straightforward in actions and thoughts, and focused on a relatively narrow goal. For others, *fun* means *complexity*. The personality of the character has depth and can force the player to act in ways contrary to her own nature. The character may have multiple agendas or a wide range of abilities that require extensive bookkeeping to manage.

One thing to consider is how much you want to stretch your role-playing abilities. Do you want to play a character who's totally different from the personality you normally have? If you're outgoing, try playing a shy introvert. Or if you tend to be cautious, let your character be a risk-taker. On the other hand, you may be more comfortable playing a character who is similar to you but who has enhanced abilities. Either works well in an adventure, and it's up to you to decide which is the most fun.

Think about creating a character with some inherent contradictions — the thief who is absolutely honest, the spy who is clumsy, or the warrior who can't stand the sight of blood. These sorts of contradictions make for interesting role playing opportunities and can be a lot of laughs.

Another good option is to take a character from fiction that you enjoy, such as Indiana Jones, Superman, or Sherlock Holmes. You can even adjust their personalities to better suit your own ends. One interesting variant is to make them a bit more archetypical — exaggerate the characteristics that define them as a character type, such as Holmes's perceptual and deductive abilities (and perhaps even his addictions).

One thing to keep in mind is making sure that your character will have things to do during the adventure. You want to consider both what he'll be doing during combat as well as at other times. Having a skill or group of skills that is unique within the party ensures that you'll have something to contribute.

Keeping secrets from other players

As you get to know other people in real life, you slowly find out things about them. Very few of us have a complete description of our personality pinned to our T-shirts. The same can be true of your character. Slowly revealing aspects of your personality through role playing leads to a far more interesting campaign than just letting other players read your character sheet. Secrets can include advantages, perks, quirks, or skills, and should almost always include disadvantages that wouldn't be apparent the first time someone meets you (but more on those in the following chapters).

On the other hand, you need to tell the GM everything. The more the GM understands how you view your character, the better he can adapt the adventure to your interests and goals (or, more precisely, your *character's* interests and goals). Your character sheet (discussed in Chapter 13) should contain notes about all aspects of your character. It may be necessary to elaborate on the details; for instance, if your character is an expert in art history, it helps if the GM has an idea of how to find out more about the topic.

Outlining Your Character

After finding out what's permitted in the campaign and giving some thought to what sort of role you'd like to play, you can begin outlining your character. Start by writing down the available points, the abilities that are allowed that interest you (if any), and, keeping the party purpose in mind, a prioritized list of the functional areas that you are interested in. This should result in a very brief descriptive overview of a character, such as any of the following:

- ✔ **The Investigator:** A 100-point individual in a contemporary setting in which the occult plays a big role. Primarily an investigator but with a research bent. Able to fight reasonably well. Good problem-solving with practical day-to-day survival skills but not a survivalist or scientist.
- ✔ **The Mage:** A 200-point mage in a medieval fantasy setting with a combat focus along with the social skills to get into "proper" culture. Not sneaky or problem-solving-oriented.
- ✔ **The Superhero:** A 500-point character with abilities far beyond what "normal" humans can do but which do not come from magic. Some sort of focus on the power around a particular theme.

This initial character concept anchors the rest of your decisions. Although you shouldn't let yourself feel locked into what you first put down, this initial concept allows you to narrow the wide range of advantages and disadvantages available down to those that are most appropriate for your character. And it also guides you as you begin to list the skills that you want.

Deciding on a focus

Most characters have a *focus* — an attitude, a particular advantage, a set of skills, or a power that defines the core aspects of that character. The focus is part of the character concept, but whereas the initial concept describes the goal, the focus describes how you get to that goal.

An investigator can be focused on scholarly research, can have a naturally inquisitive nature, or can have empathy that helps her see into the motivations of those she meets. A combat-focused character might be extraordinarily strong, be particularly talented with a single weapon, or be a martial artist. A mage, for example, might specialize in elemental spells or be focused on spells that involve objects or are related to a particular religion.

Using a character template

Character templates provide another way of finding a starting point for developing your character. A character template brings together a set of attributes, advantages, and skills to define a role and then adds disadvantages to produce a more complete starting point. Some character templates are specific to a setting (such as a mage), but many can be easily adapted to apply to a variety of worlds (such as an investigator). Some GMs may also provide templates specific to the campaign as possible starting points. The advantages and disadvantages in a character template generally count toward any campaign limitations (most notably the typical limitations on total points gained from disadvantages, discussed in Chapter 5).

Don't be afraid to customize a template (but check with the GM before you do, especially if it is a template that the GM provided). The purpose of a template is to give you a starting point, not to limit your creativity. Don't worry too much about the point value of the template. You may find that you need to adjust the template to be more appropriate for the particular campaign. Usually,

templates are relatively low-cost (in points) and allow you to add advantages or perks as well as additional skills. However, in some cases, you may need to reduce a template's point value; the best place to look for saving points is by either adding disadvantages or eliminating advantages.

You can even mix templates if the two roles are complementary (a warrior-priest for instance, or even a priestly thief), although this is best left to more-experienced players. Keep in mind that the more roles you combine into a single character, the more complex that character will be to play.

Racial templates are a very special kind of starting point. They provide a framework for a character that is not a normal human. Most notably, this means that the character may start with significantly different attributes or with traits that are unavailable to mere humans. Racial templates are often more expensive, but typically, the disadvantages listed do not count toward any campaign limits. You can find more information about playing nonhumans or non-standard humans in Chapter 10.

A focus can also be something that makes the character particularly newsworthy or fun to play. A generalist character who knows only things that he saw on television has a focus that's a little out of the ordinary but definitely helps define how the character will come together.

Another thing to consider in deciding on a focus is how you will develop that character over time. As you campaign, your character will have opportunities to learn new skills or develop the skills he already possesses. A good focus is one in which you start out above-average and have a goal of being extraordinary. A good real-world example is someone studying martial arts whose long-term goal is to become a master of the art.

If you don't have a focus when you first start drafting your character, don't worry. It's fine to begin filling in attributes, advantages, and disadvantages first to get a better sense of the type of character you are creating. And some characters may have more than one focus — in that case, make sure that you are comfortable with such a complex character. And, to be honest, sometimes it is hard to decide on a character's focus until after you start playing.

Fitting your character into the party

One of the things that you should do very early on with any character is make sure that he can survive and contribute within the campaign. Think about the various situations that you may encounter and what your character will do in each. Although being the world's best pickpocket might be fun, if the campaign primarily happens in a dungeon, it's unlikely you'll be very involved unless you have other skills to bring into play.

What are you going to do in a fight?

Not everyone in the party needs to be a front-line combatant ready to take on numerous opponents. But in almost every type of campaign, there will be some battles. And you need to think about what you're going to be doing during those conflicts. If your character has to run and hide when a fight breaks out, then you as a player are going to be bored. And being bored is rarely good. At the initial character creation, you just want to have some idea of what your character is likely to do during combat; you'll fill in the details with skills and equipment later.

At the very least, your character should have some basic close-combat skills. The gaming world is a dangerous place, and you need to be able to defend yourself. You also should have something that you can do during a melee combat. **GURPS** provides options for all types of characters and

doesn't require that you have a high strength to be effective. There are various thrown weapons or sneak attacks, such as poison, that depend more on dexterity than strength to do damage. Chapter 11 provides details about how combat works and suggestions about selecting weapons and combat skills.

If you don't want to be a frontline warrior, consider skills or abilities that let you provide a distraction, offer a way of protecting other party members, or provide healing. Another option is to consider taking some sort of unusual weapon, such as a knife or staff, that keeps you involved even if it doesn't do a great deal of damage.

Campaign skills

Be sure to identify what types of things you believe your character will contribute to the party goal. Consider making a list of the skills that you think will be unique to your character and sound out the other players to find out whether there is overlap with what you are intending. Also think about the overall setting and try to identify types of skills that you will need in order to fit into society, or just ask the GM. Knowing that most of your time will be spent out in the forest calls for a different approach to character design than you'd take for a campaign set in the city.

Depending on other party members

Just as important as knowing what your character is all about is knowing what you're counting on others to provide. You shouldn't try to design a character that can do everything by herself. Having weak areas frees up points to spend in improving other areas. And needing to depend on each other is part of what brings a party together and makes for an enjoyable experience for all of the players.

Filling in character details

At some point in creating your character, you need to decide what your character looks like and all the other details that define him. As you create your character concept, you may develop a sense of some of these aspects, whereas other aspects may remain vague until you have filled in more of the character details. For now, it's enough to get a general sense and wait to fill in the specifics.

Physical appearance

The first physical question to answer is gender. Is the character male or female? Many players base this decision on their own gender, either always playing the same gender as their own or always playing the opposite. Others make the decision based on the role.

Another approach is to think of larger-than-life examples and decide which is more interesting to you. For instance, there's quite a bit of difference between Xena the Warrior Princess and Conan the Barbarian, even though both of them are primarily combat-focused.

Attributes (discussed in Chapter 3) may also contribute to how you envision your character. Or conversely, how you envision your character may determine what sort of attributes you consider. If you see the character as small and slight, then you probably aren't going to make her extraordinarily strong. You want to be able to specify the character's height and weight as well as provide a general description of his build.

Sample characters: Concepts

Stuart's "Normal" Character

The new campaign allows only 100-point characters, so I won't be able to afford any outstanding characteristics. The world includes the supernatural (vampires and werewolves have been specifically mentioned as real for this setting). The setting is modern, so I can go up to TL8 in equipment. Given all of that, a human occult investigator who is smart, knowledgeable, and fast sounds good. Knowing the GM, I'm counting on more confrontations than investigation, so combat will probably be central. I like the tough female private eye in literature, so I think I'll make this character female. She'll have many sources of information as well as a lot of skills in various areas (though nothing too "bookish").

Bjoern's Mage Character

Our gaming group is getting ready to start a new campaign, and we just received our "briefing" from the GM. This campaign is going to be a standard swords-and-sorcery campaign with all spells from *GURPS Magic* available, a maximum Magical Aptitude level of 3, the standard nonhuman races (elves, dwarves, halflings, and orcs), TL3, and \$1,000 starting wealth. This is going to be a strongly combat-oriented campaign, and

the GM has advised us that it would be diplomatically advantageous to have some nonhumans in the party. We need to create 200-point characters with up to -100 points in disadvantages and -5 points in quirks. After consulting with the other players, I've decided to play a nonhuman mage.

Adam's Supers Character

The GM decides to start a new campaign, based loosely on the works of H.P. Lovecraft. Beneath the apparently placid surface of society, evil lurks just out of sight, waiting to devour an unsuspecting populace. The campaign calls for TL6 characters built on 350 points, with a -40 point limit on disadvantages. Powers are allowed, but they must be derived from the supernatural or from gadgeteering devices (rather than, say, from accidents involving radiation or mutations). The GM advises that the party should have several useful fighters and someone with healing power (this last accompanied by unsettling laughter) and should also contain characters with good investigative skills. I decide I'd like to run one of the more combat-oriented characters, although I'm inclined to throw in a few abilities that are useful out of combat.

Names and titles

Coming up with a good name for your character can be quite a challenge. A good resource is one of the many baby-naming sites on the Internet. At these sites, you can limit suggested names to a specific culture and often find out the meaning of the names to help you decide. You can also make up names that just sound good — a particularly common practice for fantasy characters. You may also want to consider giving your character a nickname (although, frequently, the other players will take care of that for you).

Titles can be a bit trickier. If you want to give your character a title that conveys status, such as Doctor or Count, you need to check with the GM about what is required. Is it a real title? If so, your Doctor may have to have a specific skill level in her specialty, and your Count may need advantages that represent his wealth and social standing. If it's not real, you may need to take skills such as Fast-Talk to justify how you've convinced others that you really are the long lost ruler of a small island nation.

Chapter 3

Laying the Attribute Foundation

In This Chapter

- ▶ Determining the attributes your character needs
 - ▶ Calculating the levels of your basic attributes (IQ, DX, ST, and HT)
 - ▶ Figuring out secondary characteristics
 - ▶ Establishing your character's social role
-

Atttributes define the basic capabilities of your character and are the basis for any skills that you acquire. One of the first things you need to do when creating a character is adjust the character's attributes to reflect the areas in which you want your character to excel. It may also be useful to reduce the attributes in areas that don't matter to the character's success. Deciding on your character's attributes is a good starting point in the character-creation process, but you will probably need to come back and adjust your attribute expenditures after you've purchased advantages and skills. For more information about this process, see Chapter 6.

Using the information presented in this chapter as a guide, adjust your starting attributes. In general, consider dividing the total points available equally among attributes, advantages, and skills; the total points available is the point total allowed by the GM plus the disadvantages that you take. This means roughly half the points permitted should go toward attributes. We consider that, however, a general guideline. We frequently reduce that for a mage and increase it for a character who relies on physical abilities for combat. Include in the cost of your attributes any points spent to modify your Basic Speed or Basic Move.

Selecting the Right Attributes for Your Role

The four basic attributes in *GURPS* are Strength (ST), Dexterity (DX), Intelligence (IQ), and Health (HT). Most skills are based either on IQ or on DX, which is reflected in the fact that these attributes are worth 20 points per level. ST and HT are worth 10 points per level.

Normal humans start with all of their attributes set to a value of 10, described as *average*. If you want your character to be particularly strong in any area, you want to raise the attribute values to a minimum of 13, described as *exceptional*. If a character is to have a focus that is based on an attribute (as opposed to one based on a collection of advantages or a specific set of skills), then you may want to raise the attribute to 15 or more, described as *amazing*.

We do not recommend reducing any attribute to less than 8, which is described as *below average*, unless you do not intend to use that attribute at all during play. Even if you don't plan to use the attribute, keep in mind that if you ever need to roll against an attribute of 8, your chance of success is only 26 percent.

Being the party smarty-pants — IQ

IQ is particularly important to any character focused on intellectual skills or knowledge. If you want to run a character who is able to analyze information, recite critical facts, and overcome mental challenges, you need to invest in IQ. Some examples of characters that require an investment in IQ are as follows:

- ✓ A character intended for espionage. A high IQ provides a good foundation in necessary skills, such as Shadowing and Disguise.
- ✓ A character in a futuristic campaign in which physical tasks and interactions are less important.
- ✓ A character focused primarily on social interaction (because most social skills are based on IQ).
- ✓ Any magic user. All spells are based on IQ.

The Perception secondary characteristic

IQ comes into play any time you are trying to notice something. Observing things is actually controlled with the secondary attribute Perception (Per), which starts out equal to IQ and can be adjusted from IQ at a cost of 5 points per level. Any roll to notice something is made directly against your Per value unless a specific skill can be brought into play. In general, those skills are in turn based specifically on Per and include

- ✓ **Body Language**
- ✓ **Detect Lies**
- ✓ **Lip Reading**
- ✓ **Search**
- ✓ **Tracking**

Raising Per specifically, rather than raising IQ, results in a character who is “street-smart” (in tune with her environment) rather than “book-smart.” Any advantage or disadvantage that involves your senses interacts with Perception.

The Will secondary characteristic

Will is another secondary characteristic that starts out equal to IQ; it can be adjusted at a cost of 5 points per level. In any campaign that involves the supernatural or magic, Will can play a very important role because it is used to resist mind reading and any form of mind control (specifically with the Mind Block skill). It is also the basis for the Exorcism skill.

Will is the base attribute for a number of skills that can be used to influence other characters in the campaign, such as

- ✓ **Captivate**
- ✓ **Intimidation**
- ✓ **Persuade**
- ✓ **Suggest**

Will is also used for skills that represent a form of mental discipline, including Autohypnosis, Dreaming, Meditation, and Power Blow.

Characters intended primarily for combat can afford to reduce their IQs. However, playing a character with an IQ of 8 or less is a lot of work because you have to restrain yourself, as a real live human, from solving problems that your character would not have a hope of understanding.



Note that in futuristic campaigns, high-tech vehicle and equipment skills are based on IQ rather than DX to reflect the importance of understanding and manipulating the equipment rather than using your reflexes.

Being a twinkle toes — DX

DX is the core attribute for most physical skills (although a few are based on HT instead). DX, along with HT, determines how quickly your character can move and how well you can dodge. With most weapons, DX is the factor that primarily determines how likely you are to hit a target. See Chapter 11 for advice on selecting weapons and calculating the necessary statistics for your character’s attacks and defenses.

Your Basic Speed is a calculated value that is used to determine how quickly you react to a situation, your Basic Move, and your Dodge. Basic Speed is calculated by adding DX and HT and dividing by 4. From the results of the

calculation, you derive your Basic Move — the number of yards your character can move in one second — by dropping any fraction.

Here's an example. If your DX is 12 and your HT is 10, your Basic Speed is $(12 + 10) \div 4$, or 5.5. Dropping the fraction gives you your Basic Move value; in this case, it's 5.

In order to get the best Move, we recommend raising your Speed to a whole number whenever possible (either by adjusting DX and HT or by buying the necessary .25 increments at 5 points each). You can also buy increases in Move at 5 points per yard per second, but we feel that this is not generally the best investment of your points because covering long distances quickly will only rarely be critical.

In a high-tech campaign, you can frequently use technology to overcome a reduced DX. Magic users also have a variety of ways to increase a low DX, including spells that can provide a temporary boost to their attributes. You can also create a combat-oriented character that has a low DX — just invest heavily in the weapon skill to make sure you can hit and increase your ST to make sure you do enough damage when you do — and then let your enemies come to you.

Note that many advantages and disadvantages can also modify how your DX and skills interact, including those that improve or limit movement and those that improve or limit your abilities to perform fine motor tasks. If your GM permits it, you can raise the DX of a single arm or of both arms by using the Arm DX advantage (12 or 16 per level). All DX-based skills using that arm benefit from such an investment.

Being the fitness nut — HT

One of HT's most important roles is its contribution to calculating your Basic Speed and hence your Basic Move. It is also important for resisting poisons, radiation, disease, and some types of spells. Such threats are most common in high-tech or magical campaigns. HT also comes into play after you have taken damage — it is the attribute that determines whether you remain conscious, and perhaps even alive, when severely injured.

But even with all of that, in many campaigns, HT is the attribute that you are most likely to lower for your typical character. The thing to keep in mind, however, is that HT represents your chance of remaining alive after taking significant damage. Lower it too much and you won't survive a typical battle.

Characters who have abilities that require fatigue points (FP) to activate or maintain, such as a mage, benefit from a higher HT because fatigue points are based on HT. However, you can buy individual FP at 3 points each so if points are particularly tight, you can lower HT and buy Fatigue back. Investing in FP is wise for anyone with abilities that rely upon FP, but otherwise it isn't too vital.

The skills that are based on HT include any activity in which athleticism or endurance plays a key role, such as

- ✓ Carousing
- ✓ Hiking
- ✓ Sex Appeal
- ✓ Singing
- ✓ Swimming

Being the POWERHOUSE — ST

ST describes how much damage you can take, how hard you hit, and how much you can carry. You can also use ST to get an idea of the general build of your character by using the table on page 18 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, although the ranges provided are quite large.



Strength is very important because it equates to how much damage you can take, represented as Hit Points (HP). HP can be adjusted with 2 points per level, but you'll rarely want to lower it. For any attack that uses the force of your hand or arm, ST directly relates to the amount of damage that you can inflict.

Encumbrance refers to how much weight you are carrying. The greater your Encumbrance, the slower you move. Most characters function at Light Encumbrance, which is twice your Basic Lift. *Basic Lift* equals the square of your ST divided by 5 ($ST \times ST \div 5$).

The GM may permit you to buy Striking ST for 5 points per level to increase your ST only for attacking, or Lifting ST for 3 points per level to increase your ST only for the purpose of figuring Basic Lift. For one-handed feats of strength, it is more effective to purchase Arm ST at 3 points per level; this affects both striking and lifting. To improve both arms, Arm ST costs 5 points per level.

Understanding Social Standing

A *GURPS* adventure involves your character interacting with a variety of other characters, many of whom are managed by the GM rather than by another player. A number of your character's characteristics determine how these NPCs (nonplayer characters) respond to you, including the following:

- ✓ Appearance
- ✓ Status and Wealth
- ✓ Reputation

Appearance

The general appearance of your character is largely a matter of personal preference. You can use the ST table on page 18 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* to get a suggestion about build, but things like eye color, hair color, age, and basic physical features (including handedness) are left to your imagination.

However, how NPCs evaluate your attractiveness is a characteristic represented by an advantage or disadvantage. With no investment in appearance level, other people will find your character average-looking. But you can change your appearance level as described on page 21 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*. To a great extent, how important appearance is depends on the style of the GM, specifically, if and when he considers it in determining NPC reactions.

Status and Wealth

The functional role your character plays in society is, for the most part, up to you. The way in which society accepts or rejects your character in that role is, however, determined by your Status. You can believe yourself to be the prince of the local land, but unless you have invested in the Status necessary for that role, society in general is not going to accept you. Variations on the relationship between societal role and societal status are possible, as in the unrecognized prince or the dethroned prince — the title may be real but it conveys no status (and hence you do not have to purchase Status as an advantage). In most campaigns, Status plays a very important role in how NPCs respond, most particularly those who control access to important parts of the societal structure.

Although they are often intertwined in modern society, do not confuse Status and Wealth within *GURPS*. Wealth is a very practical characteristic that translates directly to how much cash you start the campaign with and how much money you earn on a monthly basis (assuming you are working or have an independent income). Note, however, that maintaining Status frequently requires Wealth (though it need not be personal wealth). Different technology levels have different starting Wealth; for a general guide, see page 27 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, but check with your GM for specifics.

Both Status and Wealth can be varied so that they are above-average (an advantage) or below-average (a disadvantage). Status varies with a fixed 5 points per level, and the various levels are described on page 265 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* (along with a recommended cost of living for each).

Reputation

Appearance, Status, and a variety of other disadvantages and advantages (both your character's and those of the characters with whom he interacts) contribute to the reaction of NPCs. All of those modifiers help determine the general class of people to which your character belongs (wealthy nobility, poverty-stricken thief, and so on). Modifiers related to the way your character as an individual is known to the public are represented by Reputation. Reputation consists of several factors, including how many people are likely to know of your character by name, how likely they are to recognize her, and how her reputation is likely to influence their responses.

Reputations can improve the likelihood that those who recognize your character will react favorably (an advantage), or a reputation can work against your character (a disadvantage). Minor reputations (1/–1) are fun additions to your character's background and personality. More significant reputations (10/–10 or more) must form a core part of your character's identity in most campaigns.

Reputations are a bit of a wildcard in terms of how useful they are during a campaign. The GM may choose to incorporate them frequently, or they may not be a significant factor. Having Patrons, Allies, or Contacts is a more dependable way of ensuring help, and having an Enemy guarantees someone out there is reacting negatively to you. (See Chapter 4 for a discussion of Patrons, Allies, and Contacts; see Chapter 5 to find out about Enemies.)

Sample characters: Attributes

Stuart's "Normal" Character

For an occult investigator, the most important attribute is, without a doubt, IQ. I envision the character as tough but not necessarily a particularly wonderful fighter (so no need for high DX). Her weapons are likely to be a gun and judo, so I'm not worried about increasing ST, either. I could raise her HT to account for her toughness, but I think that's more a personality characteristic for her rather than a physical trait, so I think I'll go with normal values for HT as well. That means I'm comfortable investing enough points in IQ to raise it to 13. That gives her a basic speed of 5, which is a little slow but probably the best I can afford.

Bjoern's Mage Character

My first step is actually determining my character's race, which I discuss in Chapter 10. I decide on a halfling character, which has a racial template cost of 20 points and has the base attributes of ST -5, DX +1, HT +2, and Will +2. I'll use this as the foundation to create my character's attributes.

The most important attribute for a mage is IQ; after that, it's HT for the fatigue points. However, a high Will also helps keep a mage from succumbing to mentally-focused magical attacks, so a halfling has a leg up on other races in that regard. An IQ of 14 is good for a mage character; with Magery III, it gives a base skill level of 15 for hard spells and meets the prerequisites of all but the Great Wish spell. I'm happy with an HT of 12, but I'd like a little higher DX, so I go with a 12. Having only 5 hit points (based on the

racial Strength of 5) is of concern, though, and I'll have to see what I can do to raise that amount; the rulebook says (and the GM confirms) that a PC can have a number of hit points only equal to 30 percent more than the ST score. I'll start with an ST of 8 with +2 HP to give this character 10 hit points. At this time, this character has the following attributes: IQ 14, Will 16, Per 14, DX 12, HT 12, Fat 12, ST 8, HP 10. This gives him a Basic Speed of 6, which is pretty darn good for a mage.

Adam's Supers Character

What level of attributes you assign your character is often determined by the role you intend her to play in the campaign. I intend my character to be a fighter, and the most important attributes for fighters are ST, because ST determines both hit points and how much damage you deal out with hand-to-hand weapons, and DX, which is what combat skills are based upon.

Because I intend to have my character fight with supernatural powers, which generally do damage that isn't based on ST, DX is a more vital statistic for me. For starters, I gave my character a DX of 14, and I might raise it later if I have points left over after buying powers.

350 points is a pretty high point total for a campaign, and I should be able to afford pretty good attributes all around. I expect this campaign to put all of my attributes to the test, so for now I assign levels of 12 to HT, IQ, and ST. I buy her Basic Speed up to 7, which will be a great help in fighting.

Chapter 4

Taking Advantages

In This Chapter

- ▶ Deciding how much to spend on advantages
 - ▶ Figuring out which advantages to purchase
 - ▶ Improving your combat abilities
 - ▶ Getting the most out of your environment
 - ▶ Improving the usefulness of your attributes
 - ▶ Understanding social advantages
-

Many heroes are defined by a single characteristic — X-ray vision, perfect balance, the ability to see onto the astral plane, and so on — that sets them above others. Most of these abilities are defined within *GURPS* as *advantages*.

An advantage is a trait that your character possesses that is part of her nature, as opposed to a skill that she has learned. You have to remember to tell the GM when you want to use an advantage, particularly if the advantage is likely to modify the dice roll you are about to make or the actions of another character. Just because you have the ability to tell when someone is lying doesn't mean you are necessarily paying attention and checking whether what someone says is the truth.

Powers are groups of advantages that can include attacks, defenses, and many other abilities, and represent special traits like psionics and super-powers. Chapter 8 provides guidelines for creating and managing powers for a campaign.



The information presented here is useful for deciding which advantages to consider. To help you compare advantages, the point value is included in parentheses following the first mention in the paragraph where the advantage is explained. Before adding an advantage to your character sheet, make sure to read the complete description in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*. To find a specific advantage, use the Advantages section of the Traits List on page 297 of that book.

Spending Points for Advantages

Advantages cost points and are generally bought at character creation. Boosting a character's abilities is generally done with a combination of increased attributes (discussed in Chapter 3) and advantages. For many players, advantages represent the largest investment of points in the character.

Determining what you can afford

In deciding how many points you should invest in advantages, one of the first things to consider is how much you want your character to have innate abilities versus skills. Advantages can provide your character with information, can enable him to do things that would otherwise be impossible, and can make many activities easier, whereas skills determine how well he performs specific tasks. In general, acquiring skills during a campaign is much easier than acquiring advantages, if only because skills are generally less expensive.

In a campaign with a total character value of 150 points or less, we recommend one of two core strategies:

- ✔ If you want one particularly costly advantage to define your character, then that advantage should be your highest priority item. You then select advantages that complement that core advantage.
- ✔ Focus on the 1- to 15-point advantages to create more of a generalist. List out those advantages that you would like to have if budget were no constraint. After you've created that master list, identify what each advantage will provide your character. Then prioritize the list relative to your character concept — give those skills that help your character's functional role a higher priority than those that just seem generally useful. From there, just select as many high-priority advantages as you can afford.

As a starting budget, consider spending as much as half of the available points on advantages. If the campaign has a high character value (the number of points available for character creation), you can combine the two methods and will likely spend a higher percentage of the available points on advantages, attributes, or both. As you invest points in other areas, you may need to adjust the percentage given to advantages.



Advanced players can reduce the cost of many advantages by placing limitations on their use. A very common limitation is that of an activation roll, which makes the advantage behave more like a skill in that you must roll before using it. For more information about the types of limitations, see Chapter 8.

Deferring a purchase

Even in heroic fiction, characters rarely develop new abilities without some major event in their lives (such as exposure to radiation or falling into toxic chemicals). Whether your character has the potential to gain advantages during play is something to discuss with the GM. If you have specific advantages in mind, be specific in talking about what would be required.

Gaining advantages during play can be an integral part of a campaign. Some advantages, such as Combat Reflexes, are just naturally suited for living an adventurer's life. After all, if a bunch of strangers kept attacking you, you'd be more likely to pay closer attention to your environment and be a little quicker on the draw yourself (that is, develop the advantages of Combat Reflexes).

After discussing it with your GM, you may also decide to start with a single advantage that you will develop into a set of related advantages. You might not be able to afford being able to see in total darkness, but you might be able to invest in improved **Night Vision (1 point per level up to 9)** in order to provide a foundation for acquiring the full **Dark Vision (25)** advantage during play. From improved **Night Vision**, you might also have the chance to acquire other related abilities, such as Telescopic Vision or 360° Vision. Such planning provides a framework to explain the new powers and gives the GM a heads-up for his own planning.

Perks and minor advantages

Perks are one-point advantages that add interest to your character and may provide a very specialized ability. If you have a friend who can name the details of every movie ever made, then you have a friend with a perk (knows movie trivia). Perks are close cousins to *quirks* (discussed in the next chapter). Whereas advantages and disadvantages must come from an approved list, you are free to create your own perks and quirks.

Many advantages that cost 5 points are used as much to provide “flavor” to your character as for their practical value. Use 5-point advantages and perks to add richness to your character, but only after you've made sure you have the necessary abilities to survive your adventure. In general, we suggest noting these down in a separate area of your character sheet as you work on creating your character. You can then come back to that list later to decide which ones you want to keep.

Improving Your Survival Chances

A number of advantages are particularly related to combat. If your character's primary function is being a front-line warrior, then investing in combat-related advantages is a good idea. For most other types of characters, other advantages are a better investment of points; the combat needs of such characters can be best met with wise investments in skills and equipment.

Intended to help with role playing are those skills that supplement the player's own thinking and perception. One of the most notable of these is **Common Sense (10)**. If a player tends to be impulsive and to leap before looking, then providing the character with Common Sense may be the answer. When a character has this advantage, a burden is placed on the GM to help guide the player into making reasonable decisions. If you never seem to guess right, consider **Intuition (15)**, which helps your character make more accurate guesses when faced with a series of choices.

Combat options

Improving your character's defenses, making it easier to draw his weapon, and making it more difficult to surprise or frighten him are all benefits of the **Combat Reflexes (15)** advantage. Combat Reflexes is a wise investment for any warrior, but particularly if that warrior will be leading your party into battle (in which case, everyone in your party benefits by being able to react a bit faster). If your character is designed for combat and you have more points to invest in advantages, we recommend you consider these other choices:

- ✔ **Danger Sense (15)**: The ability to anticipate an attack or other dangerous situation.
- ✔ **Enhanced Defenses (Variable)**: Various improvements to one's ability to defend oneself from an attack.
- ✔ **High Pain Threshold (10)**: Reduces one's reaction to damage, which thereby improves one's ability to counterattack.
- ✔ **Fearlessness (2 per level)**: Useful for reducing the effects of being stunned or otherwise disabled in response to a frightening experience.
- ✔ **Unfazeable (15)**: Eliminates the effects of a frightening experience.

One advantage to consider, depending upon your character's fighting style, is **Ambidexterity (5)**. As we describe in Chapter 11, you normally have a -4 penalty to your skill if you try to use a weapon in your nondominant or off-hand. With the Ambidexterity advantage, this penalty is waived (which is particularly useful with the Extra Attack advantage, which lets you attack one more time each round).

An advantage related to having multiple attacks is **Enhanced Tracking (5 per level)**, which has nothing to do with following someone and everything to do with shooting at more than one target within a round. Check with the GM, however, because Enhanced Tracking is usually available only as a racial trait; we include it here because we generally allow one or two levels for normal humans.

Advanced combat — including martial arts — is also described in Chapter 11, but you should be aware of some advantages that provide similar capacities, including

- ✔ **Extra Attack (25):** The ability to take an additional attack without penalty; frequently not allowed by the GM.
- ✔ **Gunslinger (25):** Eliminates the need to aim to get any accuracy bonus from a weapon used with the Gun skill.
- ✔ **Trained by a Master (or TBAM) (30):** Improves both your attack and defense with unarmed and melee weapons; also grants access to several martial arts abilities. More on this in Chapter 11.
- ✔ **Weapon Master (Variable):** Gives you increased damage as well as benefits similar to TBAM for known weapons.

These advantages are relatively expensive, though they're worth the investment if your character focus is primarily combat-related. Check with your GM about restrictions on these abilities because they are generally inappropriate in a realistic campaign.

Defensive options

Most of your character's defensive abilities come from your combat skills and the type of equipment you purchase; however, a few advantages that you can take can help protect you. Of particular usefulness are those discussed under the Enhanced Defense advantage, the uses of which are discussed in Chapter 11.

Being harder to detect

Silence (5 per level) is useful in avoiding being heard, particularly when sneaking up on or following someone. In general, your character does not get any advantage from it in combat unless his foe is using a hearing skill to target him. A related advantage is **Chameleon (5 per level)**, which makes your character harder to see and is discussed in Chapter 10. Both advantages are meant as racial traits, but we generally allow one level of Silence for normal humans.

Similar effects can be created by taking levels of the **Obscure (2 per level)** advantage, which makes it more difficult for others using the targeted sense to detect you (each level of obscure subtracts one from their sense role).

Obscure can be tailored to one or more senses and gives you the flexibility to mold how it works to your character conception. We believe, in direct contradiction of the standard *GURPS* guidelines, that reasonable levels of this advantage are appropriate for all types of characters, but we agree that higher levels should be restricted to those outside of normal human.

Having a tougher skin

Normal humans can have certain forms of the **Resistant (Variable)** advantage, which protects against such insidious dangers as disease and poison. The cost depends on the threats against which you are protected and the degree of protection. The **Damage Resistance (5 per level)** advantage is needed to block actual physical damage, and is not available for normal humans (see Chapter 11 for its description). Two other advantages that improve your survival chances are **Hard to Kill (2 per level)** and **Hard to Subdue (2 per level)**.

Falling gently

A good advantage for thieves working those second-story jobs, **Perfect Balance (15)** can help a character avoid falling. Even better, if your GM permits it, **Catfall (10)** reduces the damage from falls, and we believe it should be available for normal humans.

Healing

Perhaps the most useful advantage from a party perspective is **Healing (30)**, which can make you the most popular party member (at least immediately after combat when everybody else is hurting). Including a party member with this advantage (or its magical equivalent) greatly increases the survival chances of everyone in the party. Of course, this is a supernatural power, and the GM might not allow it in the campaign.

In completely mundane campaigns, the **Rapid Healing (5)** or **Very Rapid Healing (15)** advantage should be considered. Note that characters with either of these advantages still require much more time to recover from damage than a character who has been healed by someone else.

Turning the odds

The **Daredevil (15)** advantage rewards you for taking risks. Although not specifically a combat ability, it most often comes into play when you rush foolishly into battle. We generally don't recommend this advantage unless you as a player are likely to take such risks with your character. A useful disadvantage to combine Daredevil with is **On the Edge**, which encourages such behavior.

The more general **Luck (Variable)** advantage lets you have a bit more control over the dice — well, at least occasionally, and only to the extent that you can pick among three rolls of the dice. You can reduce the cost of the advantage by limiting its usefulness, making it much more cost-effective for a wider variety of characters.



Serendipity (15 per level) can be a great boon to a campaign and quite a bit of fun for your character. Used primarily as a useful plot device for the GM, this advantage ensures that your character will be involved in the most interesting and unusual occurrences. Simply put, you'll be at the right place at the right time to serve the GM's evil ends.

Getting More from Your Environment

Most adventures include some element of exploration as well as combat. Even if the campaign is primarily oriented around a series of combat scenarios, improving your ability to gain information from the environment is well worth the investment. For the most part, advantages in these areas are less central to character concept. The exceptions would be characters based on a particular role, such as a mercenary who is highly aware of his environment or a character with paranormal abilities that let her see things invisible to a normal human.

Sight and sound

Because advantages don't usually play a role in the way characters glean information from their surroundings, you'll probably have to rely on your senses. All of your senses can be improved both in terms of sensitivity and range. Sense rolls are generally based on the Perception (Per) characteristic, so one way of improving your awareness of the environment is by investing in this characteristic (see Chapter 3 for advice on purchasing attributes). Another option is to raise the perception of a specific sense by investing points in the **Acute Sense (2 per level)** advantage. Buy this separately for each sense that you wish to improve (taste and smell count as a single sense for this advantage).

You can see a bit more around you with the **Peripheral Vision (15 per level)** advantage, which is particularly useful in combat. And if you think combat is likely to occur at night or in dim light, the **Night Vision (1 per level)** advantage is a good investment. Extending the range of a sense beyond the norm is usually not available to normal humans — this is discussed more fully in Chapter 10.

Perceiving the other world

In a magical or occult campaign, the ability to extend your senses beyond the mortal realm can be valuable. If you think you'll be encountering ghosts or need information from unusual sources, then these are the advantages for you. However, you want to make sure that this functional role is useful to the party before investing heavily in this area. Also, in a campaign with magic, many of these abilities can be handled with spells rather than advantages (see Chapter 7 for more information). All of the advantages in this section are intended only for campaigns in which occult abilities are permitted; check with your GM.

Communicating with spirits

Non-magical communication with the dead requires a greater understanding of the GM's worldview. Some GMs may rule that it is entirely impossible, whereas others may make it very easy. The general category of *spirits* can include the dead (ghosts), fairies, elementals, and angels/demons. You need to find out from the GM which of these are likely to appear in your campaign.

You may also need to have a sense of the attitude of these spirits. Are the local spirits likely to be friendly? Are they likely to be intelligent? And what sort of spirits are there? The **Spirit Empathy (10)** advantage lets you sense the intentions of and influence the spirits around you but not necessarily perceive or speak with them. The **Medium (10)** advantage provides you with the ability to sense spirits nearby and to speak with them but not to influence them.

The **Channeling (10)** advantage allows you to open your body up to nearby spirits, but it takes you out of the action. Spirits can use your body to communicate with the mortal world, but you have no control over your character for the duration. You need to coordinate this advantage with other party members for it to be useful. Note that this advantage in and of itself does not give you any information about nearby spirits or control over which spirit takes over.

Communicating with the natural world

If you are interested in playing a character slightly outside the norm, and your GM allows communication with plants and animals, you might consider the **Speak with Animals (25)** or **Speak with Plants (15)** advantages. Both provide useful sources of information and offer an opportunity to create an interesting character particularly in tune with nature. The related advantage, **Animal Empathy (5)**, lets you sense the emotional state of animals in your general area and to influence them through persuasion.

Seeing through time

The **Precognition (25)** advantage lets you have glimpses of the future. Although this sounds like an amazingly useful advantage, be very aware that you have no control over the types of things you see or when you catch the glimpses. This advantage is best viewed as a way of making a very useful plot device available to the GM.

The **Psychometry (20)** advantage works in the other direction — you can get a sense of the history of a place or object. You must be able to touch the object and you must specify the time frame that you are targeting. On a practical level, being able to understand how a place was previously used can give insights into where valuable items were likely to be placed. For epic campaigns, this advantage can provide the party with insights into how their current actions fit into the grand scheme.

Having a relationship with a higher power

The **Blessed (minimum of 10)** advantage represents a relationship with a higher power that can grant you insights via visions. The advantage can be extended to include the ability for the higher power to increase your attributes temporarily. If you have this advantage, followers of your higher power will react to you favorably, but you do not necessarily have official standing in any church hierarchy (for that, you need Clerical Investment and Religious Rank). If you don't want to be associated with a higher power, the **Oracle (15)** advantage provides a similar ability through other mechanisms.

Other advantages used to represent the influence of a higher power include the following:

- ✔ **True Faith (15):** True Faith gives you the ability to repel some supernatural creatures (as determined by the GM), which is very handy if you expect to be fighting the undead.
- ✔ **Illuminated (15):** This advantage lets you have insights as to the true nature of the events around you, particularly as they relate to supernatural happenings.
- ✔ **Destiny (5, 10, 15):** Destiny lets the GM determine your fate, but it may also mean you receive deific assistance to aid you in achieving that fate.

The ability to use clerical spells is granted by the Power Investiture advantage, which is covered in Chapter 7.

Increasing Your Skill

Advantages and skills frequently interact. For example, extending the range of any one of your senses extends the range of any skill that uses that sense (for instance, the Night Vision advantage and the Lip Reading skill give you the ability to read lips in a shadowy alley or darkened theatre). Some of these interactions are fun to discover during play, but the specifics of the advantages in this section should be negotiated in advance with the GM.

Under the skill section on your character sheet, be sure to mark each bonus to a skill and what advantage contributes to that bonus. When you list the advantage, you may choose also to list each skill for which it applies; that way, if you acquire a new skill during play, you already have a note to remind you to add the bonus.

Higher Purpose (5) is an advantage with which any action associated with your purpose gains a plus to skill. A Higher Purpose does not need to be spiritual in nature but does need to be specific and defined at the start of play.



One advantage that deserves special mention is **Eidetic Memory (5, 10)**. In campaigns in which the GM does not require a learning roll, good note-taking on your part can mimic this advantage without you having to spend any points. However, if you prefer the GM to do the note-taking and to remind you of important facts, then this is the advantage for you. After the campaign has started, Eidetic Memory is useful when rolling to determine whether you have learned a new skill (if your GM requires such rolls), but unlike the third edition, it does not add a bonus when calculating skill levels.

Advantages related to specific skills

Several advantages directly affect how you can use one of your attributes. For instance, the **Flexibility (5, 15)** advantage provides a bonus to any skill that is based on being able to work in tight spaces. If you have the Flexibility advantage, your dexterity is not adversely affected by tight spaces, and you get advantages for squirming out of restraints. **High Manual Dexterity (5 per level)** provides an improvement for your dexterity related to fine motor skills, such as working with small objects — jewelry-making, surgery, clock repair, and other such precise handwork.

Versatile (5) is a mental advantage that provides you with improved creativity, which comes into play when you are trying to use a skill to solve a problem. How much this advantage helps you with unfamiliar equipment or finding replacements for missing items is up to your GM.

Single-Minded (5) is another advantage that can add to your skill rolls. Ill-suited for combat situations, this advantage allows you to focus intently on a task and generally do much better at it. Just be sure that you are in a safe location or that someone else is watching your back because when you are fully focused, you are likely to ignore any interruptions, like that charging orc over there.

Talents

Any collection of skills can be grouped into a Talent with the GM's approval, though *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* lists a standard reference set on pages 89–91. In the short term, Talents can be useful for reducing the number of points spent by grouping a set of six skills in which you have invested 2 points each. But Talents really come into play in the longer term and are most useful for groups of skills for which you intend to invest more than 2 points in most of the skills in that group. Chapter 6 provides guidelines for optimizing your points in this regard.



Talents also provide character depth either by making you a natural in that area, by making you a trained expert, or both. In game terms, your character gets a reaction bonus from other characters who are likely to recognize the talent and appreciate it. You do not get such a bonus simply from having high levels of skill in an area.

Bettering Your Social Standing

Many of the available advantages are intended to aid you in your role playing. In some campaigns, situations may arise in which the party's success or failure depends entirely upon whether one of the party members possesses a particular advantage (such as Status). Social-standing advantages give you a foundation on which to build a character who can gain entrance to the appropriate social setting and navigate adroitly in such environments.

Defining your social role

The importance of Status and Rank varies dramatically by campaign. An adventure set in a culture with nobility or a strong military presence requires careful thought about investments in these areas. An adventure that takes place mostly in the outdoors far away from most people doesn't require any investment in these advantages.

Social standing and rank

Rank (5 per level) is a general advantage that addresses the hierarchies that exist in many social structures. The military and most bureaucracies have some form of rank system; each form of Rank is a separate advantage. **Clerical Investment (5)** is required to possess Religious Rank and enter into the church hierarchy.

Status (5 per level) reflects your character's social standing. In some cultures, this can be equated closely to Rank; in others, it is more related to Wealth or simply to how well-known your character is. Status can determine where your character is admitted and which people will accept him as an equal (and, in some cases, which people will automatically reject or scorn him). **Social Regard (5 per +1 reaction)** reflects the general social standing of your character's ethnic group, gender, race, and so on, in a setting, but not his personal rank in society.

The **Social Chameleon (5)** advantage can serve as a replacement for Rank or Status if you have other ways of getting in the door. With this advantage, your character tends to blend into whatever social situation she finds herself in. But be careful — she always runs the risk of exposure, and the GM may require you to role play your bluff into a given situation. This advantage is particularly useful in campaigns in which you expect to be exposed to a variety of cultural settings.

Some advantages are very campaign-specific. **Tenure (5)** makes sense only when academic institutions play a role in the adventure. And **Unusual Background (Variable)** can be required by the GM to explain your character having any advantages that are typically not available to normal humans. **Reawakened (10)** is a special form of Unusual Background in which a character acquires skills from a previous life.

Languages and culture

Cultural Adaptability (10, 20) provides a character with a general understanding of cultures, making any new culture that he encounters reasonably familiar (take the high-cost advantage for similarity with non-human cultures). For a more limited investment, your character can learn individual cultures with **Cultural Familiarity (1, 2)**. Either choice provides you with knowledge of customs and behaviors — something frequently more useful than the language itself.

Dealing with (or being) the Law

Legal Enforcement Powers (5, 10, 15) are advantages that provide for the ability to enforce laws. On the other side of the coin is **Legal Immunity (5 to 20)** — for whatever reason, local laws do not apply to your character.

Being able to acquire information from agencies of which your character is not a member (and even within some agencies of which she is a member) is based on the **Security Clearance (Variable)** advantage. The GM may require you to specify the types of agencies for which your character has clearance. Remember that not all agencies within a given government necessarily cooperate with each other.

Alternate identities

If you are concerned about how your character's actions might influence his social standing (or his relationship with the authorities), you can cover his tracks by purchasing one or more **Alternate Identity (5, 15)** advantages. If a character has no trackable identity, he is **Zeroed (10)**. Alternate or Zeroed identities are most useful in campaigns in which your opponent is the government or a similar large organization.

Altering social interactions

A great many advantages pertain to the way in which an individual interacts with others. These advantages can take the place of role playing in many situations, but the specifics are, you guessed it, up to the GM.

Influencing others

In any campaign in which social interaction plays an important role, **Charisma (5 per level)** is probably one of your better investments. Each level provides pluses to any skill involving influencing others as well as to reaction rolls.

And in any campaign that involves extensive travel on a reduced budget or in which access to a particular subculture is critical, a **Claim to Hospitality (1 to 10)** is a significant advantage. Minor nobility, the Church, and academia are all examples of the types of subcultures that recognize such claims.

Having empathy

Knowing the general emotions of those around you can be useful in just about any type of campaign. **Empathy (5, 15)** works with others of similar races and, in addition to general knowledge about the target's emotional state, gives you pluses to any skill that benefits from insight into the other person (most notably, Detect Lies).

Animal Empathy (5) is most useful for those who will be working with a variety of animals, particularly wild beasts.

Resisting influence

In many situations, those you encounter in a campaign may attempt to influence your actions. The **Indomitable (15)** advantage lets your character shrug off their attempts without even having to bother with the hassles of making a resistance roll.

Appearance

The more **Attractive (Variable)** you are, the more likely the typical person is going to respond to you in a positive way. Therefore, attractiveness is a type of advantage, whereas a disturbing appearance is a disadvantage. In general, we do not consider this a particularly useful advantage in most campaigns, but it can make a character much more fun to play (after all, many of us would love to have the looks of our favorite movie star). In order for it to be useful, you need to be willing to exploit your character's attractiveness and use it to influence others.

A related advantage is **Voice (10)**, which provides a bonus to any skill that relies upon the sound of your voice. Singing is the obvious example, but other useful skills include anything related to charming another person or talking your way out of a tight situation.

Wealth

In addition to spending points to define your character, your character needs to be able to purchase equipment. Each campaign has a standard starting wealth that can be modified through the purchase of various advantages. Wealth levels — **Comfortable (10)**, **Wealthy (20)**, **Very Wealthy (30)**, **Filthy Rich (50)**, and beyond — adjust both how much money you start with and how much money you earn through working. In many campaign settings, having one party member with Wealthy or above can be very useful; however, there is no reason for more than one character in the party to have such resources. Unless you have the **Independent Income (1 per 1% of starting wealth per month)** advantage, it is assumed that you spend a significant part of the normal week working to earn your money (managing your investments if nothing else).

You can also reduce the amount of starting wealth you have with the **Dead Broke (-25)**, **Poor (-15)**, or **Struggling (-10)** disadvantage. In general, the items you encounter and the money you may acquire through adventuring are not adjusted based on these modifiers (though there are disadvantages, such as a Vow of Poverty, that may require you to adjust how much you keep). Your success in business or other such ventures is aided (or limited) by your Wealth level.

There are two ways to get more material possessions at the start of play. The first is to trade character points for cash — one point is worth 10 percent of the campaign's starting wealth. The other is via **Signature Gear (Variable)**, which lets you directly spend points to acquire equipment, bypassing the need for the starting money to purchase the equipment. Both of these advantages can typically be used during play.

Patrons, Allies, and Contacts

One of the most useful long-term investments is in people who are likely to help your character meet her goals. A character may have one or more of the following to provide this support:

- ✔ A **Patron (Variable)** is a powerful individual or organization that sponsors your character. Such sponsorship translates into access to both information and equipment. In some cases, a Patron may also provide support in the form of individuals to work with your party.
- ✔ **Allies (Variable)** work with your character in more of a support role. In general, an individual Ally is slightly less powerful than the character himself. Allies lend help in tough situations (including combat in some cases) and share what information or resources they have available. You may have a single Ally, a small group of Allies with distinct identities and personas, or a fairly large group of interchangeable Allies; the larger the group, the more points it will cost.
- ✔ A **Contact (Variable)** or **Contact Group (Variable)** is a less intense relationship — the relationship persists over time but not as an ongoing association. The primary goal of having a Contact is acquiring information. The Contact may grant access to restricted resources, such as legal documents or secret information, but he will not involve himself directly in the adventure.

All of these advantages both benefit the player and provide a useful plot device for the GM. The cost of this support may be balanced by disadvantages, such as Duties to the individual or organization, shared Enemies, or a restrictive Code of Honor. The **Favor (Variable)** advantage can be used to represent a one-time resource with little commitment, rather than an ongoing relationship.

The cost of Patrons, Allies, and Contacts is modified based on how much help they can provide and how likely they are to provide that help. In general, we believe that the more powerful an associate, the less frequently he should appear. Otherwise, your character will come to depend on him and you will find yourself calling for help rather than living the adventure yourself.

Sample characters: Advantages

Stuart's "Normal" Character

In my character's business, knowing when trouble is coming is important, so the first thing I want for my 100-point character is Danger Sense, which costs me 15 points. I'd also like to be able to equip her well, so that means a bit more spending money. It's unlikely that I'll have 20 points available to pay for Wealthy (though I'd like to), so I'm going to just go with Comfortable (10 points) for now. If I have more points after I buy skills, I can always come back and raise this. I'm going to set aside 10 points for Contacts. I'll need to talk to the GM about specifics for these, but it seems like a good investment for now. I also expect my character will end up with a talent or two, but that will wait until I have skills in place. As to perks, I bet she's read almost every horror story in print, so she can provide author and character names for any reference.

Bjoern's Mage Character

Naturally, this character needs Magical Aptitude, and I want this little guy to be tough, so I give him Magery III, the maximum this campaign allows, for 35 points.

Now, I have to deal with that pesky Mundane Background disadvantage. After conferring with the GM, I have the first individual advantage for this character — Unusual Background: Trained Mage for 15 points. The GM insists that

I pay 15 points for this because it is *highly* unusual in the game world for a halfling to be trained, and I have to work this Unusual Background into the character's history. I like the Signature Gear advantage, but what I want (a Fine Mithril dagger) would cost 40 points — more than I want to spend for something like this, so I have to let that drop. These advantages cost me a total of 60 points, which (if I take all the allowable disadvantages) gives me 91 points to spend. I might have the points left over for a Familiar (whoo hoo!), which I discuss in Chapter 7.

Adam's Supers Character

Advantages are the centerpiece for a character who has supernatural powers as a core concept. I first need to decide on a source for my character's powers so that I can select appropriate advantages to match. After thinking about it, I decide that she is a disciple of an ancient snake god and gets her powers from this source. Therefore, I want to give her advantages with a snaky theme. She's going to be primarily a fighter, so I also want to give her advantages that will help in that capacity. I decide on Double Jointed, Combat Reflexes, and Enhanced Parry. I decide she should be beautiful, in the classic heroine tradition. The rest of her advantages are built as supernatural abilities and will be described in Chapter 9.

Chapter 5

Finding Your Hero's Flaws

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the purpose of disadvantages
 - ▶ Calculating the value of a disadvantage
 - ▶ Exploring the types of disadvantages
 - ▶ Adjusting disadvantages with self-control modifiers
 - ▶ Recognizing good disadvantages from bad disadvantages for your character
-

All of the things that make life more challenging, from health problems to mental disorders to social stigmas, are represented in **GURPS** as *disadvantages*. A disadvantage is a character trait that undermines or limits your character's abilities. It would seem natural that the wise player would want to avoid disadvantages. Not so. For each disadvantage you take, you get points back that you can spend on attributes, skills, or advantages. Your goal is to take disadvantages that limit you in areas that are not central to your character's success in order to have the points to pay for things that are critical for success. Not only that, but disadvantages can be fun to play!

As with advantages, as discussed in Chapter 4, some disadvantages are intended to be used as part of a racial template rather than taken by individual characters. In *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, these disadvantages are indicated as either exotic or supernatural. Although a few are discussed in this chapter (and indicated as requiring GM approval), Chapter 10 provides information about working with these disadvantages. The disadvantages that make sense only in a futuristic campaign are discussed in Chapter 9.

The information presented in this chapter is useful for deciding which disadvantages to consider. To help you compare disadvantages, the point value is included in parentheses in the paragraph in which the disadvantage is explained.



Before adding a disadvantage to your character sheet, make sure to read the complete description in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*. To help you find the specific disadvantage, use the Disadvantages section of the Traits List on page 299 in that book.

Getting the Point of Disadvantages

From our perspective, the most important thing about disadvantages is that they are a large part of what makes playing a character fun. Just like with the people you know, characters' quirks and oddities make them interesting.

The disadvantage of disadvantages

The least fun thing about disadvantages is that they really only count if they limit what you're able to do. The more a disadvantage is likely to be a problem, the more points you get for taking it. Many disadvantages have a variable value because you have to make decisions about the extent of the disadvantage or, in some cases, work with the GM to determine how important the disadvantage is likely to be in the current campaign.

Think back to your character concept and make sure you know the primary function the character will serve in the party and any secondary areas. Then step back and identify any areas that you really don't care about. You probably don't want to take any disadvantages in your primary area and want to focus most of your disadvantages in those areas that aren't critical. You may also want to think about your character's personality, both in terms of other characters in the party and other players in the room.

Deciding how many disadvantages to take

The GM has the right to restrict the number of points in disadvantages any character is permitted to take in the campaign. For higher-point campaigns, we recommend that a GM set a limit to avoid creating a set of very powerful and highly dysfunctional characters in your campaign. A limit of -40 or so points is good for most campaigns, although it's okay to allow a character to take one big disadvantage worth more than -40 points.

If the GM does not impose a limit, then a rough rule to use is to take about half the points of the campaign as the total of disadvantages and quirks.

In some campaigns, a GM may introduce *required* disadvantages. Most commonly, these are elements that serve to bring the party together, such as a shared Enemy or a common Duty. Whether these disadvantages count toward the campaign point limit is up to the GM. Racial templates (discussed in Chapter 10) also have required disadvantages; remember that the racial template disadvantages do not count toward any campaign total.

Adjusting disadvantages during play

Unfortunately, bad things can happen to your character during play. Characters can get hurt, traumatized, or acquire vicious enemies. Even more unfortunate is that you as a player don't get any points for these newly-acquired disadvantages. On the other hand, the GM isn't charging for the fame and fortune that you acquire in your adventure either. These types of disadvantages are usually temporary and often can be undone in the course of the adventure — all you have to do is encounter a magical cure, get therapy, or finally defeat the evil villain.

On the other hand, if you have gotten points for a disadvantage, you might not want to have the disadvantage removed. As soon as the disadvantage stops being a problem, you owe the GM those points back. Some GMs allow a payment plan, but others may demand the points upfront. And, unlike credit card offers, you can't shop around and get the best deal. What your GM says is the rule is, in fact, the rule.

Quirks

Quirks are worth -1 point each and describe a minor aspect of your character. Your character may have up to five of them. In general, a quirk has to be something that limits your character's actions or causes others to react to your character differently. Quirks can be physical (such as mismatched eye color), superstitious (avoids the number 5), mental (counts in different languages), or just plain annoying (drums fingers while talking).

You should always talk with your GM about quirks that you want to have before making them a part of your character concept. In some cases, something that you consider a quirk may be something that the GM decides is worth significantly more points (a superstition may become a phobia if the situation is very common). In other cases, the GM may feel that the quirk would be too annoying, either to other players or just to the GM.

Quirks are one part of your character sheet that many GMs let you fill in as you play. We frequently start the campaign with five points in quirks (which we've already spent on advantages or skills) and decide what our characters'

particular quirks are as play progresses. Sometimes a small incident grows into a major component of the character's personality by becoming a quirk. Like disadvantages, quirks acquired during play do not give you more points to spend.

Embracing Human Nature

The disadvantages in this section are the ones that give characters personality. For the most part, these are the sorts of issues that you've probably observed in coworkers and family members. And frequently, they are the sort of characteristics that we use when we describe the essence of a person — he's got a bad temper, she always tells the truth, or he just never gets the joke.

You should think through how comfortable you'll be playing a particular disadvantage. If confrontations make you uncomfortable, then you probably don't want to play a character that has a bad temper. Also keep in mind that your character's traits shouldn't become your own. Just because the character you're playing is stubborn doesn't mean you as a player have to be stubborn when making plans with the other players.

Acting out — A matter of degree

The disadvantages discussed in this section are ones that most of us possess to one degree or another. If minor enough, the characteristic may be a quirk or not even worth mentioning. The more intensely your character is defined by the trait, the more her actions become limited. In the course of the adventure, as in life, it is sometimes in your best interest to act against your nature. In those cases, you need to exert self-control to take an action that is counter to the trait.

Most of the disadvantages in this section work with a modifier based on the value used when making a self-control roll to go against the nature of the trait. In order to act against the disadvantage, you must roll under the self-control modifier value. Players may make such rolls in order to act against the character's nature or at the request of the GM. The lower the self-control modifier value, the less likely you are to successfully roll that number and thus the more limiting the trait is (and the greater the point value of the disadvantage). The cost listed for each disadvantage within this section (and in *GURPS* sourcebooks) is for a self-control roll of 12. Using a self-control roll of 9 for a trait increases the value to 1.5 times that listed. Raising that value to a 15 halves the cost; lowering it to a 6 doubles the cost. In general, you should consider any trait with a self-control roll of 6 to be one that you must be willing to live with constantly (because you are unlikely to successfully roll to behave differently).



The point values of disadvantages that have a self-control roll modifier are indicated in this book by the term *SCM* following the point value.

There's one in every party . . .

Some very positive character traits can become disadvantages in an adventure setting. For example, the character who has **Honesty (-10 SCM)** is forced to obey the law, regardless of whether he thinks it reasonable or not — no crossing the street against the light, even when there are no cars (well, unless you make your self-control roll, that is). A character with **Truthfulness (-5 SCM)** cannot tell a lie; she can avoid answering a question, but she can't lie.

Two disadvantages that some players bring to each and every character are **Curious (-5 SCM)** and **Impulsiveness (-10 SCM)**. If you're going to go ahead and open the locked door and rush on through, you might as well take the points for your character as well. Of course, rushing in is not always a very good idea, so pay attention to the self-control roll value that you agree to.

Although the trait can be a tremendous problem in real life, playing a character with **Gullibility (-10 SCM)** can be great fun. The GM usually likes it, too, because your character can be told elaborate stories, and she'll believe every word — and act on them, too. As a consequence, be careful about what other disadvantages you take with Gullibility (avoid ones like Impulsiveness).

Relating to other people

A wide range of disadvantages describe to what extent your character needs other people around. For example,

- ✓ **Shyness (-5, -10, -15):** How easily one begins to interact with new people
- ✓ **Loner (-5 SCM):** How much one values one's private time
- ✓ **Chummy (-5)/Gregarious (-10):** How much one needs interactions with other people

A related disadvantage is **Xenophilia (-10 SCM)**, which relates to how your character reacts to individuals of other species or, depending upon GM interpretation, other cultures.

Another set of disadvantages relates to how giving you are, both in terms of your time and energy as well as your money:

- ✓ **Miserliness (-10 SCM):** This money-related disadvantage means you hate to part with a penny and always seek the best deal.
- ✓ **Greed (-15 SCM):** This money-related disadvantage means you'll do anything for a buck.

- ✔ **Gluttony (-5 SCM):** This applies not to wealth but to craving food and drink; a related disadvantage is **Increased Consumption (-10 per level)**, which means your character needs more sustenance (usually restricted to exotic characters).
- ✔ **Selfish (-5 SCM):** If status is important to your character, then this disadvantage perhaps captures the feeling. Any slight to your status can quickly give you the Bad Temper disadvantage.
- ✔ **Charitable (-15 SCM):** On the other end of the spectrum, this disadvantage is less about money than it is about attitude. Your character honestly wants to help those around him by sharing his resources.
- ✔ **Selfless (-5 SCM):** This is a trait similar to Charitable, but it comes into play only during a conflict of needs, in which case you'll sacrifice your own needs to help the other person.

Taking risks

When evaluating risky situations, two disadvantages can dramatically change your character's options:

- ✔ **On the Edge (-15 SCM):** If you have this disadvantage, the fact that a situation is risky just makes it more attractive. After all, the bigger the risk, the bigger the payoff. With On the Edge, your character can accurately assess the risk and plan for it (including listening to the advice of other characters), but won't let the risk stop her.
- ✔ **Overconfidence (-5 SCM):** On the other hand, this disadvantage means that you misjudge the risk. You are convinced that you can overcome almost any obstacle, despite what other characters may try to tell you. Be careful to avoid mixing Overconfidence with any other trait that might make it difficult to work with other party members. It's actually in your overconfident character's best interest if the other party members care about preventing your character from being hurt.

Focusing on people, places, or things

Four disadvantages describe the negative ways in which a PC might respond to a stimulus such as a place, a symbol, or any other identifiable item or collection of items. In many campaigns, stimuli specific to the adventure may be appropriate (for instance, in a real-world campaign, a fear of vampires is probably a quirk, but in a horror campaign, it's a valid Phobia).



- ✔ **Phobias (Variable):** Phobias are fears of something. When your character encounters the object of her fear, you make a self-control roll. If you fail, you then make a roll to determine the form your character's fear takes. Because you add the amount that you failed the self-control roll by to your fright check, the lower the self-control value, the greater the risk of extremely negative consequences.



Even if your character faces his fear — when you successfully make your self-control roll — your character receives a penalty to how well he is able to perform any task. And any exposure to the object of the Phobia is a stressful situation and so triggers any stress-related disadvantages.

If your character has a phobia, consider taking a quirk or two that relate back to the fear — it makes it more fun to play. For example, you might combine a fear of darkness (nyctophobia) with a quirk of always checking the batteries in your flashlight or carrying both a flashlight and a candle.

- ✓ **Squeamish (–10 SCM):** This is a specific disadvantage for the general category of “yucky stuff.” It’s a fun disadvantage, and as long as you have a reasonable self-control roll, it’s not likely to prevent your character from being successful at most endeavors. You do, however, have to respond in such a way as to limit your actions (mild panic, screaming, or hysterical giggling can all work).
- ✓ **Compulsive Behavior (–5 to –15 SCM)** is the general category for addiction to a type of behavior. If your character doesn’t have an opportunity to indulge in the behavior, she suffers from Bad Temper until she gets a chance to again immerse herself. Specific examples of compulsions include gambling, carousing (partying), generosity, lying, spending, and vowing, but you are allowed to create your own. The GM may impose immediate negative consequences for having the compulsion in the first place (for instance, someone with compulsive spending has a higher cost of living). Compulsive behaviors are calculated both in terms of the cost of the habit, the likelihood for it to disrupt life, and the value of the self-control modifier.
- ✓ **Obsessions (–1, –5, –10 SCM):** These are goals that your character *must* pursue — even when the rest of the party wants to go do something else and when the pursuit is not in your character’s best interest. It’s not enough just to talk about it; having an Obsession influences your character’s actions as well. It’s entirely up to the GM as to whether an obsession can ever be satisfied.

Use with caution

The set of disadvantages that can be most challenging to play are those that run counter to the traits of a good player. In particular, the following disadvantages are very difficult to play unless you tend to nap through most of the action:

- ✓ **Incurious (–5 SCM):** The opposite of Curious — your character has no natural inclination to find out what’s behind doors or to try new things.
- ✓ **Indecisive (–10 SCM):** Your character has difficulty making decisions. In fact, he tends to spend more time deciding than acting.

- ✔ **Confused (-10 SCM):** Your character has trouble understanding the world around her, or at least new situations. This can be quite crippling for a character and is just annoying to play because you have to limit your own thinking.
- ✔ **Clueless (-10):** You just don't get jokes. You may appreciate other forms of comedy, but verbal wit is just beyond you. We tend to find that most **GURPS** players are far from Clueless, and, for our players, the verbal interchanges of our characters are a source of great amusement.

The GM may rule that the player of an Indecisive or Clueless character is restricted in how much he can influence other players. Indecisive is not a disadvantage, for example, if you as the player get to be decisive and talk other players into your course of action. We've always wondered why Incurious characters ever leave home; make sure your character story explains that.

Sometimes you can conceive a character who's a bit grumpy or not so nice to be around. And of course, **GURPS** provides disadvantages for those situations as well:

- ✔ **Bad Temper (-10 SCM):** This disadvantage covers the entire range of short fuses and hair-trigger reactions that can transform a simple greeting into a barroom brawl.
- ✔ **Intolerance (Variable):** This is an active dislike for members of a specific group. When you encounter members of this group, you don't wait for an excuse; you go out and start the problem.

The difficulty with these disadvantages is that they are traits that most of us do not like to see in our friends. It can be a challenge for other players in the party not to become frustrated with your character's behavior.

Other difficult disadvantages include the following:

- ✔ **Lecherousness (-15 SCM):** This is a particularly tricky disadvantage in some parties. If all of the players are comfortable with sexual situations, and everyone has a good sense of humor, being Lecherous can offer endless opportunities for amusement (particularly when it is creatively combined with other disadvantages, such as Shyness, Xenophilia, or Impulsiveness.) The key is making sure that the players are comfortable with this; the other *characters* don't have to be, however.
- ✔ **Short Attention Span (-10 SCM):** This disadvantage requires extra work on the part of the GM. If the character is supposed to be concentrating on something, the player is also likely concentrating. That makes it harder for even the most honorable player to remember that his character can't really concentrate. GMs should remember to step in and remind players about making self-control rolls.

- ✓ **Chronic Depression (-15 SCM):** This is similar to Short Attention Span, though a bit more troublesome because the GM could require a roll at the start of any new action, particularly one that requires getting up out of a chair.

Failing to fit in

Although how well your character gets along with the rest of the party is an important factor to consider as you select disadvantages, you may want to consider some that make getting along a bit more challenging. Most of the disadvantages in this category won't dramatically change what you are able to do, but rather influence how you go about it. None of these, however, are recommended for a character destined to play a primarily social role.

How you react to others

The individual with **Low Empathy (-20)** just doesn't understand the emotions and motivations of those around him, neither innocents that the party encounters nor other party members. This means that he is at a disadvantage with many social skills.

The **Callous (-5)** individual may understand other people very well; she just doesn't care about them. The Callous disadvantage can create conflicts with other party members who have traits like Charitable.

Jealousy (-10) makes social interactions a bit more awkward (particularly with those of a higher social class or who are obviously more talented) but doesn't affect most of your day-to-day adventuring. The only time that it can cause serious problems is if you become jealous of someone else in the party.

Limiting your own actions

Some disadvantages require more role playing skill than others. Not all characters contribute to the party equally, and no matter how excited you as a player are, or how much you want to contribute to the campaign, you may limit your character's abilities within the party with disadvantages such as the following:

- ✓ **Stubbornness (-5)** is a great disadvantage for the annoying character who won't cooperate with the rest of the party. Keep in mind that this is not the "stupidness" disadvantage. If a good plan is suggested, your character should be able to (eventually) recognize that fact.
- ✓ A **Guilt Complex (-5)** is a relatively safe disadvantage in that it comes into play only if something happens to those to whom your character feels close. In that case, he becomes severely depressed and may try to withdraw from the action.

- ✓ **Laziness (-10)** means your character wants to withdraw from the action all the time. Most GMs allow that even lazy characters are motivated to adventure because it's supposed to be easy money; it's only hard work that a lazy person tries to avoid.
- ✓ **Hidebound (-5)** requires strong role playing abilities (or napping through parts of the adventure discussions) because your character cannot contribute new ideas. How much the player is limited in this regard is up to the GM. We find this disadvantage almost impossible to play. Hidebound does not prevent your character from acting on the ideas of others.
- ✓ **No Sense of Humor (-10)** requires both good role playing, and, strangely, the *player* has to have a very good sense of humor. The player can laugh at jokes and should still have a good time, but the character needs to be the perpetual straight man — never quite getting the joke and setting everyone else up for humor. We've seen some great role playing in which other characters have patiently tried to explain the joke over and over again.
- ✓ **Killjoy (-15)** is a very different disadvantage in that the character cannot feel any pleasure. The character with No Sense of Humor may not laugh a lot but still enjoys life, even taking pleasure in the amusement of others. Not so the person with the Killjoy disadvantage. For that character, life is always a flat gray with no peaks of enjoyment.
- ✓ **Lunacy (-10)** combines the Laziness disadvantage on the new moon with a moderate degree of Impulsiveness or similar trait on the full moon. If being tied to the moon is critical to your character conception, this is a good disadvantage to take, but otherwise, the bookkeeping required to track the phases of the moon tends to make it more of a headache than a pleasure.

Delinquent behavior

Both **Kleptomania (-15 SCM)** and **Pyromania (-5 SCM)** can dramatically affect the standing of the entire party in a social setting. In most cases, the local community will blame the entire party rather than the specific individual for any crimes caused by these disadvantages. But each of these can be great fun to play and can come in handy on adventures (you never know when that little thing your character “picked up” may prove useful), and we tend to have at least one of each per party. Note that both have self-control modifiers.

Odious Personal Habits

An **Odious Personal Habit (-1, -5, -15)**, frequently referred to as *OPH*, is a catch-all for things that make other people react to your character in a negative way. You need to negotiate the specific point value with the GM before play begins. Some OPHs are passive (such as a tendency to stare at people),

and the GM can assume that your character is always doing it. Other OPHs are more active (a tendency to pick one's teeth in public), and you need to remember to include it in your character's actions frequently. In either case, a good player continues to mention the OPH when describing her character's actions. (If the rest of the party can join in when you start your description, you're doing a good job with incorporating the OPH.) If a specific behavior is listed separately as a disadvantage, use that description and value rather than crafting your own OPH.

Physical problems with social impact

In real life, you probably avoid being around certain people as much as you can. In a *GURPS* world, you can make your character the one people (including others in your party) try to avoid.

- ✓ **Bad Smell (-10)** means that people (including other party members) tend to keep their distance. This disadvantage is relatively harmless unless your character has to travel in a small vehicle along with the rest of the party.
- ✓ **Noisy (-2 per level)** means that your character makes noise and actually applies even when she's not moving. This is particularly a problem when one is trying to be stealthy but can be annoying at the best of times.
- ✓ The **Social Disease (-5)** disadvantage is one that we tend to not recommend because, if your character is cured, you owe the points back, but if he isn't cured, the GM may be tempted to increase the physical symptoms, which certainly is going to kill his social life. This is definitely one to talk over with the GM beforehand to define the particulars.

Vows, compulsions, and addictions

Grouping religious vows and addictions may seem a bit odd at first, but both types of disadvantages describe things that your character must do regularly. When taking these disadvantages, you lose some control over the day-to-day actions of your character. The more control you sacrifice, the greater the value of the disadvantage.

Faith and duty

The most general disadvantage in this category is the **Vow (-5 to -15 or Quirk)**, in which your character has committed to an ongoing course of action for a period of time. The more restrictive the Vow, the greater the value. A Vow can be structured to require the performance or avoidance of an action or set of actions. The same Vow may have dramatically different values in different campaigns. For instance, unwillingness to ride a horse is a major problem for anyone in a rural setting but is not an issue for someone in

a city. Any Vow can be ended during play, though the GM may impose restrictions on the process and, of course, you'll need to pay off the points. One approach to buying off a Vow is to replace it with a Secret, Reputation, or Enemy disadvantage.

Disciplines of Faith (-5 to -15) can be thought of as a collection of minor Vows or quirks that are grouped together; the focus is your own thoughts and self-actualizing behaviors relating to religious or philosophical beliefs. **Code of Honor (-5 to -15 or Quirk)** is a closely related disadvantage, but the focus is on your attitudes and behaviors to others. You can create your own Disciplines of Faith or Codes of Honor, and they don't have to be all about quiet and calm life. The key is that the individual Vows and quirks share a common theme and help set a framework for the character's general behaviors.

Although they sound similar, **Duty (Variable)** and **Sense of Duty (-2 to -20)** are very different disadvantages. A Duty is imposed upon you based on your relationship to another individual or organization. The responsibilities are part of your job. A Sense of Duty is internally motivated and directed toward a group of people, usually an obligation to protect them.

A disadvantage worth mentioning here is a **Trademark (-5, -10, -15)**. The point value of a Trademark is based on how difficult it is for you to leave your mark and how much it increases your risk of capture. Slashing your initials with your sword, writing a phrase on the wall in spray paint, and leaving a single rose are each examples of simple Trademarks.

Diet and health

Both **Restricted Diet (-10 to -40)** and **Increased Consumption (-10 per level)** refer to modifiers of what your character eats and drinks. If the impact on his day-to-day life is noticeable, you probably should take one of these disadvantages instead of or in addition to a Vow. Note that Increased Consumption is not generally available to normal characters.

Maintenance (Variable) is a related disadvantage, but it refers to a service or treatment that your character must obtain on a regular basis. Difficulty in obtaining the service and frequency of the service determine the cost.

Addictions

Addiction (Variable) is the general category for addiction to a substance. The value of the disadvantage is based on the cost, the legality, and the effects of the substance (both of taking the drug and going without). Smoking and drinking coffee on a daily basis can both be counted as minor addictions in some campaigns. Note that you can have an addiction as a quirk if it's critical for your character concept. **Alcoholism (-15, -20)** is a specific example of

an addiction. Overcoming an addiction in play frequently results in the acquisition of a new disadvantage that is determined as part of the initial write-up of the addiction (for instance, a tremor or mental problems).

Fanaticism (-15) is a very specific form of Obsession more suited to organizations or individual leaders. Fanaticism works in a campaign only if the GM has created a world with a worthy organization for characters to focus upon and is willing to invest in developing that as a significant part of the plotline.

Limiting Your Mental Abilities

If your character doesn't need to rely on her wits, then these are the disadvantages for you. For a primarily physical character, these disadvantages add flavor to the personality without particularly limiting usefulness. Even for the "brainy" types, these disadvantages can be fun if they don't interfere with your character's core competencies.

Characters who don't need to worry about mathematics can take **Innumerate (-5)**, whereas characters who aren't concerned about reading and writing do well to take **Dyslexia (-10)**. As long as someone else can lead your character around (and you're not playing in a cyberspace campaign), **Non-Iconographic (-10)** — not being able to process abstract symbols like maps, magical symbols, and graphical computer interfaces — is a good disadvantage to consider. Depending on the systems being used, Dyslexia or Non-Iconographic or both can prevent a character from becoming a mage.

In some campaign settings, being illiterate (having a language skill of None for written comprehension only - 3) or semi-literate (having a language skill of "Broken" for written comprehension only - 2) may also be available. If you're convinced that your character never needs to know anything and is only normal in his DX and IQ, then consider the **Cannot Learn (-30)** disadvantage, but we really recommend this only if your character is complete brawn.

Absent-Mindedness (-15) is quite fun to play. Your character can be very intelligent; her mind just tends to wander. Note, though, that this is a very dangerous disadvantage in any combat situation and limits all of your character's intellectual skills to only those topics of personal interest. She just tends to forget what she's doing at the moment.

Low Self-Image (-10) doesn't cause any problems in normal situations, but let a shadow of doubt creep in and your character will find herself having difficulty with most tasks. Specifically, at moments when the GM rules that your character believes that she will not succeed, your skill roll is at a penalty. Like Absent-Mindedness, this is risky in combat situations.



Avoiding anti-social tendencies

We tend to either disallow entirely or severely limit a number of disadvantages. Several of these are included in the disadvantages listings primarily for GM use when creating villains.

Manic-Depressive, Megalomania, and Paranoia add a grim element to any character and make it more difficult for that character to function within the party. We allow these disadvantages but prefer that the character generally exempt other party members from the dramatic elements of these characteristics. In other words, it's okay to believe that the rest of the world is out to get you, but you should have at least minimal trust for your other party members.

Berserk, Bloodlust, Bully, and Sadism are all disadvantages that easily come into play the first time the party engages in combat. They are directly in conflict with any Sense of Duty or Vow that protects noncombatants, and they also frequently go against the typical player's sense of fair play. Because we have seen arguments erupt among players about the ethics of actions taken under the influence of these disadvantages, we tend to disallow them unless they are required for the character concept or if everyone in the party is creating characters with similar ethics.

Five disadvantages that we enjoy, but that require a lot of work to incorporate into a campaign, are Destiny, Enemy, Split Personality, Trickster, and Weirdness Magnet. The main problem in GMing Destiny and Enemy is coming up with scenarios that target the single individual rather than spilling over to the rest of the party (who didn't get any points for the disadvantage). Split Personality and Trickster require that you give the player opportunities to make the best use of the disadvantage. Weirdness Magnet requires that the GM continually come up with unusual things to have happen to the party. We recommend allowing only one of each of these five disadvantages per campaign, and only if you are the sort of GM who enjoys coming up with interesting plot twists for individual characters.

On a similar note, we have mixed feelings about allowing Cursed, Klutz, Total Klutz, and Unluckiness. They can add a sense of fun to a campaign, but they force the GM to keep coming up with negative consequences, and that's difficult to do without affecting the rest of the party or having the situation become absurd.

Tackling Physical Disadvantages

Physical disadvantages aren't just for the noncombatants. Many great warrior figures have one eye or have taken such damage that their appearance is altered in other ways. Also included in this category are those disadvantages that have to do with getting a good night's sleep.

Dealing with long-term illness

Two major physical disadvantages require negotiation with the GM:

- ✓ **Neurological Disorder (Variable)** is a catch-all for any disorder that is not a wasting disease or physical damage. The effects are ongoing and permanent. The GM determines the value of the disadvantage.
- ✓ **Terminally Ill (-50, -75, -100)** is meaningful only if the campaign is intended to span a long enough period of time. You should take it only if you really are willing to lose the character to the illness.

Looking not-so-good

Several disadvantages change the look of your character. Most of these change only how other people respond to the character.

An unattractive appearance is a disadvantage ranging from **Horrific (-24)**, through **Monstrous (-20)** and **Hideous (-16)**, to **Ugly (-8)** and finally **Unattractive (-4)**. The Appearance disadvantage relates only to how people react to you initially. By itself, Appearance does not change your skills in areas such as disguise or shadowing, nor does it increase the likelihood that someone will recognize you. However, if you have **Unnatural Features (Variable)**, those skills are affected. **Hunchback (-10)** is a specific variant of this and makes you even more easily identifiable.

There are two modifiers for size — **Dwarfism (-15)** and **Gigantism (0)**. Each makes you much easier to identify and more difficult to disguise. Gigantism's cost includes the advantage of being able to purchase ST and HP at a discount, and this is reflected in the adjusted value.

You can also get points for your weight, ranging from **Skinny (-5)** to **Fat (-3)** to **Very Fat (-5)**. All of these limit your ability to disguise yourself and limit the maximum HT that you may obtain.

Having trouble sleeping

Most campaigns involve action that spans many days or weeks. If you don't get enough sleep (either the player or the character), your performance suffers. Although you don't get any points for problems that keep you personally awake, your character can.

The requirement for **Extra Sleep (-2 per level)** is an absolute and is required each day. Other disadvantages are more variable in when they take effect. If you are a **Workaholic (-5)**, your problem is that you may forget to sleep because you are distracted.

If your character is a **Light Sleeper (-5)**, he just has trouble falling asleep and may awaken during the night if there are any disturbances. With Light Sleeper, you roll against your HT to determine whether he falls asleep, and you make the roll only in uncomfortable or noisy surroundings. You can roll again after a single hour without sleep. If your character is an **Insomniac (-10, -15)**, she is subject to episodes of sleeplessness. When an episode starts, you make the roll against HT-1, so it's slightly more difficult to fall asleep. If you fail, you automatically lose two hours of sleep (or the entire night if you *really* fail your roll). When it hits, Insomnia is much worse than Light Sleeper, but you stand a chance of avoiding it for longer periods.

Nightmares (-5 SCM) can be either a simple disadvantage that's basically like Light Sleeper but rolled in the morning rather than before you go to sleep, or it can be an opportunity for the GM to introduce sub-plots and allow players to have mini-adventures in the character's dreams. Being a **Sleepwalker (-5 SCM)** can be a real problem if the party is trying to hide out and catch a nap. This can be a fun disadvantage for both player and GM as long as it isn't abused. Nightmares and Sleepwalker have self-control rolls, so their impact depends on the self-control modifier value the player selects.

A **Slow Riser (-5)** also faces her problem in the morning, but this disadvantage is all about taking longer to start the day. Note that having a party member who is a slow riser pretty much forces the GM to at least occasionally have the characters attacked at dawn.

Having sensory problems

Limitations on your character's ability to perceive the world or to communicate are generally relatively minor inconveniences. You have to be careful to think about whether a particular sense is important either in the current campaign or for your character, but most characters can make do with limits to their senses.

Vision

In terms of vision, one of the easiest disadvantages to manage is **Colorblindness (-10)**. Be warned: It can get your character into trouble when she's trying to evaluate jewels or anything color-coded (such as when deciding which wire to cut).

Most other vision disadvantages come into play during combat. **Night Blindness (-10)** is particularly problematic and is not recommended. Trust us that any good GM will make sure that you have at least an occasional battle at night if you take this disadvantage.

Restricted Vision (-15, -30) makes your character more vulnerable to attacks from the sides. **No Peripheral Vision (-15)** reduces his arc of vision so that he has no awareness of the areas directly to his left or right. **Tunnel Vision (-30)** reduces this even further so that he has no ability to see other than almost directly in front of him. This limitation can quickly become obvious to opponents in battle and is particularly a problem in melee situations. However, it does not present as significant a problem if your focus is ranged attacks.

One Eye (-15) and **No Depth Perception (-15)** are variants on not having binocular vision (the ability to judge distances). This is a particular problem for ranged attacks but also reduces DX in any task requiring hand-eye coordination. The reduction is not as great, however, as it is for Bad Sight.

Bad Sight (-25) can be either nearsighted or farsighted. Both are going to give your character problems during combat; it just depends on whether it's close combat (a problem for farsighted individuals) or a ranged attack (nearsighted). From that perspective, we recommended nearsighted, though it also limits your character in reading signs and other important sources of information. Note that if you can correct the problem with technology, the value is reduced to -10.

Blindness (-50) is the most dramatic of the vision disadvantages. Of course, your character can compensate with a trained animal companion (particularly a familiar for a mage) or by relying on other people. You cannot rely upon technology without reducing the value of the disadvantage. Because they have to be activated to be useful and don't provide as much information, the Scanning Sense and Vibration Sense advantages (if available) can be used to compensate for the lack of sight, as can various magical spells and powers.

Hearing

Hard of Hearing (-10) characters are lousy scouts, but for most situations can get along reasonably well. The GM may rule that you need to make rolls to understand spoken instructions or your character may not get all of the information when someone is talking to him. The creative GM can make this a particularly challenging handicap.

Deafness (-20) is much more limiting and requires that you come up with some other way of communicating with party members and others. Note that knowing Sign Language or having the Gesture skill are useful only if those around you also have that knowledge; the Lip Reading skill is probably the better investment. If you use a skill, you are learning that skill as you use it

and will naturally advance in it. The GM may rule that technology can reduce this advantage to Hard of Hearing or that the technology modifies the cost (to -8 for corrected Deafness and -4 for corrected Hard of Hearing).

Other senses

No Sense of Smell/Taste (-5) is generally a fairly safe disadvantage, though the creative GM can turn it against you in dramatic ways. Note that your appreciation of food and drink is reduced, but you also aren't bothered by the smells of your surroundings or of others in your party.

Numb (-20) is mostly a problem when performing tasks that require hand-eye coordination. It does not reduce the amount of shock or pain you take from damage, and, again, a creative GM should find interesting ways to turn it against you.

Motion Sickness (-10) comes into play any time your character travels in a moving vehicle. It's mostly discomfort unless you happen to end up in combat on top of a moving train or on a boat or anything else the GM happens to come up with (and trust us, he'll come up with something).

Having trouble talking

Stuttering (-10) negatively influences the reaction of those who meet your character and can, at the GM's discretion, slow down her communication. It always reduces the skill in any area that relies upon clear speech. In a similar vein, **Disturbing Voice (-10)** means that your character's voice is not typical. How it is different is up to you, but the overall effect is not an improvement.

If the problem is forming words, you can have either the **Cannot Speak (-15)** disadvantage, which lets your character form sounds other than words, or the **Mute (-25)** disadvantage, which prevents your character from forming any sounds. In either case, you need to have another mechanism for communicating. The Gesture skill and or a knowledge of Sign Language are the two most likely solutions, but realize that they require that another person also has the same ability. You may find yourself writing quite a bit if you take this disadvantage. Technology that allows you to communicate with sound reduces the value to -10.

Having trouble with limbs

Reducing the functioning of one's hands is represented by **Ham-Fisted (-5, -10)**, which reduces DX for any action involving fine motor skills, or **Bad Grip (-5 per level)**, which affects skill for anything that involves using one's

hands. The penalty is slightly worse for Ham-Fisted but applies to a smaller number of skills. **Missing Digit (-2, -5)** also reduces skills, this time for all skills involving DX. Missing a thumb is much worse than missing one of the other fingers and is not recommended.

If your character is missing an entire arm (**One Arm, -20**), she takes a penalty for any task that normally uses both arms. If she is “only” missing the hand (**One Hand, -15**), she can use the arm with a shield, so the value is reduced. Any technological solution that reduces the inconvenience also reduces the value.

If a character lacks the use of one or both legs, he's considered **Lame (Variable)** with the specific value being based on the degree of loss. Having a leg that doesn't function (**Crippled Legs, -10**) means you suffer a penalty to any skill that usually involves both legs (including melee and close combat), and your Move must be reduced to half its normal value. If your character's leg is missing (**Missing Legs, -20**), the penalty is greater, and you must reduce your Move to 2 and use crutches or similar technology. If both legs are affected, your character is either **Legless (-30)** or **Paraplegic (-30)**, and your Move is reduced to 0. Further mobility impairment is represented with **Quadriplegic (-80)**, which we do not recommend without powers that can make up for the limitations (see Chapter 9). Technological solutions reduce the value if they replace the leg; a solution such as a wheelchair does not fall into this category. Note that when reducing your Move, you calculate the reduced cost of the characteristic and do gain those points.

Risking a nasty surprise

Several disadvantages require a roll to determine whether your character is struck by their effects. The roll can be required at regular intervals, when your character performs a certain type of task, or when he is under stress. The result of a failed roll is a reduction in functioning — either a loss of skill or an inability to interact with the environment. We consider these disadvantages to be relatively risky because they can strike during combat and make a character completely vulnerable.

- ✓ **Bad Back — Mild (-15)** is triggered by any action requiring ST, and a failed HT roll results in a loss of DX until your character can rest or get help. In the case of **Bad Back — Severe (-25)**, the roll is against HT - 2, and you lose both DX and IQ. The loss can be reduced by having a High Pain Threshold, but you also adjust the value by the cost of that advantage. The GM determines which, if any, weapons you can use without risking an attack of back pain.
- ✓ **Chronic Pain (Variable)** can range from mild pain that occurs rarely and vanishes after an hour (-1) to agonizing pain that lasts for hours and occurs frequently (-90). Mild pain is not a tremendous problem unless it

lasts for 8 hours and occurs frequently. Severe pain should not be taken to occur with a frequency of appearing on a roll of 15 or less and probably should not last more than 4 hours an episode. We recommend taking agonizing pain only when it appears infrequently (on a 9 or less) and lasts 4 hours or less. In other words, don't take Chronic Pain worth more than -30 points unless you want it to be the focus of your character.

- ✔ **Flashbacks (Variable)** and **Epilepsy (-30)** are both triggered by stressful events. The point value for Flashbacks is determined by the severity and duration of the episode. The duration and severity of a particular epileptic episode are determined randomly but, on average, are more extensive than that for a Flashback.
- ✔ **Phantom Voices (-5, -10, -15)** are also triggered by stress but don't have a physical component; they can drive you mad and cause you to perform unsavory acts, but your character doesn't lose any coordination while doing so.

Fighting a Losing Battle

You might think it a bad idea to take anything that limits your abilities in combat, and to some extent, you'd be right. But it can also be quite a bit of fun, and most of the disadvantages in this section don't really prevent you from hurting your enemies. The key is to make sure that you don't increase the chances of your character getting hurt too dramatically.

Making it hard to fight

Pacifism (Variable) is actually a common and reasonable disadvantage for many characters. In fact, it is a core characteristic of some types of characters. Pacifism doesn't prevent a character from stopping his enemies, and only in its most extreme form does it even prevent him from killing the bad guys. We highly recommend **Cannot Harm Innocents (-10)** and **Self-Defense Only (-15)** if they fit with your character conception. We also recommend **Cannot Kill (-15)** because it doesn't mean that your character can't *disable* an opponent.

We do not recommend **Total Nonviolence (-30)** because it is so limiting. Part of taking any of the Pacifism disadvantage is trying to encourage others in the party to not kill the opponents as well. Think carefully about how other players will react to this. We generally don't recommend **Reluctant Killer (-5)** because of the skill penalties, but it can be reasonable if your character will primarily play a support role in battle.

Cowardice (-10 SCM) is an entirely different approach and affects only your character's ability to enter into battle. After the fight starts, your character is actually extremely motivated to win. Keep in mind that part of going off on an adventure is seeking out danger; failing a Cowardice self-control roll can mean that you miss out on portions of the adventure.

Combat Paralysis (-15) is probably the most crippling of the combat-related disadvantages. If you fail an HT roll (or roll 14 or greater regardless of your HT), your character is stunned. This can mean that your opponents get a free attack. And you cannot roll until the actual moment that the danger strikes.

Making it hurt more

Low Pain Threshold (-10) doubles the effects of any shock from damage; it can be very crippling in combat unless you have a way of avoiding damage in most rounds. Being permanently **Wounded (-5)** makes this even worse because it provides a target for the attack (and the resulting damage is multiplied by 1.5 before calculating the shock).

Susceptible (-1 to -20) does not make your character more vulnerable to direct attacks but can make him more vulnerable to secondary damage and attacks, such as poison gas. The value varies based on how common the substance is and the amount of damage that it causes.

Easy to Kill (-2 per level) is a risky proposition and is rarely worth it. It's an awkward disadvantage for the GM because, to make it really count, the GM must put the character at actual risk of death on a relatively regular basis.

Making it harder to recover

Unfit (-5) and **Very Unfit (-15)** affect both your initial resistance rolls to various types of attacks and your rolls to remain conscious and avoid death. You also lose fatigue points (FP) at a greater rate for exertion (but not for spell-casting or other effects that specifically draw on FP).

Post-Combat Shakes (-5 SCM) take effect only after it is clear that your character is going to survive. The problem is that the shakes make him useless in helping the rest of the party clean up after battle, including hunting for treasures or finding a way out of a desperate situation. However, this disadvantage can be fun to play and generally is not too crippling. The cost can be modified by adjusting the self-control roll as described previously, in the section, "Acting out — A matter of degree."

Slow Healing (-5 per level) is meaningless in campaigns in which technologies (including magic) are available for instantly restoring health. In other situations, it frequently means that the time between adventures is longer (unless the GM chooses to push the party into situations unprepared).

Hemophilia (-30) is worse — your character continues to take damage from any wound that draws blood. You also can't have an HT higher than 10. In many ways, Hemophilia in a combat adventure is just a strange form of Terminal Illness.

Worsening Your Social Standing

Just as advantages can make your character's life easier, disadvantages await to make it even more challenging. Be cautious when taking these disadvantages if social interactions play an important role in your adventure. Though do keep in mind that good role playing (along with advantages such as Social Chameleon) can make up for some of your character's shortcomings.

Defining your social role

If your character starts out in an unfavorable position relative to the normal person in society, this counts as a disadvantage. However, the possibilities for disadvantages relating to social standing go far beyond simply being poor or of a lower-class background. In particular, anything having to do with the character's relationship to society offers potential for disadvantages due to secrets or misunderstandings.

Social standing

Status and Reputation are discussed in Chapter 5. A negative value for either of these traits counts as a disadvantage. Keep in mind that the social standing of characters can influence what social situations are accessible to them.

A **Social Stigma (-5 to -20)** is a trait such as ethnicity, gender, personal beliefs (such as religious affiliation), or past deeds (such as a criminal record) that your character is unwilling or unable to change, and that causes others in her society to react poorly toward her. Frequently, Social Stigma is used to replace the Secret disadvantage if the Secret becomes known. Social Stigma can interact with Status, Reputation, or both.

In campaigns in which unusual backgrounds are the norm, having a **Mundane Background (-10)** can count as a disadvantage. Not only does it limit your character's abilities and knowledge while you have the disadvantage, but he's left with nothing to talk about during the cocktail hour.

Having an unknown past or present

The mysterious **Secret (-5 to -30)** is one of our favorite disadvantages. Even if the rest of the players know the secret, it can still be fun to watch how it plays out. Secrets can cover any aspect of your character — her past, her physical being, her beliefs, her relationships. When defining a Secret, you must know what the consequences of having the Secret revealed will be; these consequences are used in calculating the disadvantage's point cost (as is the likelihood of your character's secret being revealed). A **Secret Identity (Variable)** is a special form of a secret that is worth more points if your character is of a higher social class because the secret is more likely to be discovered.

The ultimate secret is **Amnesia (-10, -25)**; your character doesn't know the details of his own past. In fact, at the higher value, you as the player may not know all of the details. It is possible to have Amnesia as a Secret, and it is also possible to have social standing with Amnesia (just because you don't know who you are doesn't mean that others don't). Don't believe that having Amnesia prevents you from developing a character background or role playing; playing an amnesiac well requires as much if not more work than any other character. Beware of having to pay Amnesia off, however, when your past is revealed.

Altering interactions with others

Interacting with NPCs is a key part of most adventures, and a number of disadvantages influence those interactions. Some directly influence how NPCs respond to your character (such as Easy to Read), but many come into play as NPCs observe you interacting with your environment (such as when you act upon a Delusion).

- ✔ **Easy to Read (-10)** makes it harder for your character to deceive others and actually makes it easy for others to manipulate him by observing his reactions. Playing a character that is Easy to Read requires making sure that the GM and others really do know what's going on with your character. You can't be a secretive player and be faithful to playing an easy-to-read character.
- ✔ **Fearfulness (-2 per level)** also makes your character easier to manipulate, but only in situations in which Intimidation is being applied. The more general application of this disadvantage is anytime that a situation is startling or frightening and you must make a fright check to determine your character's reaction. This is a general attitude and, unlike Cowardice, is not related to combat.
- ✔ **Oblivious (-5)** refers to how well your character understands what drives other people and relates mostly to influencing others and being influenced. Note that it is not about understanding their emotions; that disadvantage is Low Empathy.

- ✓ **Mistaken Identity (-5)** definitely changes a character's interactions with others, but not in any way that can be controlled. The GM needs to invest in making this disadvantage interesting without making it so threatening that the risk outweighs the relatively small value of the disadvantage.
- ✓ **Delusions (-5 to -15 or Quirk)** are true to your character and false to others. If your character tells others about his Delusions (and he no doubt will), their reaction to him is likely to be reduced. Furthermore, Delusion may cause your character to react in unpredictable ways because of the beliefs he forms about the individuals he meets. If he thinks the merchant down the street is actually an agent of the King, he'll need to find a different merchant to use.

Surrendering your self-will

Slave Mentality (-40) is a very tricky disadvantage to permit in a campaign because it means that the character is very limited in her actions due to her relationship with her "controller." If the controller is an NPC rather than another player, it can be an interesting disadvantage that the GM can use to his own ends. In some cases, with players who enjoy working closely on their characters, a partnership can be formed such that the disadvantage is also workable. But, in general, we don't recommend using this disadvantage.

Wealth

The various levels of Wealth are discussed in Chapter 4. One thing to keep in mind when taking a lower level of Wealth is that it affects your character's ability to earn money throughout the campaign, not just the amount of money he starts with.

Creating problems with other people

Characters don't exist in a social vacuum. Just as positive forces in any character's life contribute to her success, other individuals in turn require support or actively work against the character's success. Both dependents and enemies provide excellent plot devices for the creative GM. And both must be fully negotiated with the GM prior to the start of play.

Supporting dependents

Calculating the cost of a **Dependent (Variable)** requires taking into consideration the Dependent's point cost relative to your character's, his relationship to your character, and his frequency of appearance. The value for the

disadvantage comes from the fact that the dependents are at risk. Keep in mind that the GM gets to determine the dependent's actions, so you can't count on them going to safety when your character orders them to (think teenagers and parents). Magic users have an opportunity to take a familiar as a dependent (see Chapter 7).

Recognizing enemies

Everyone has an enemy or two, but not every character has an **Enemy (Variable)**. How powerful your character's Enemies are and how serious they are about coming after him determines how many points they're worth as a disadvantage. In some campaigns, all of the characters may share an Enemy as a required disadvantage. Enemies are also very useful for replacement disadvantages in the event a Secret becomes known or a Vow must be broken. We recommend keeping the total point value under 15 for a personal Enemy. Anything of greater value than that both puts the entire party at risk and may require the GM to frequently adjust her plans to address your character's Enemy seeking him out.

Keep in mind that when the Enemy disadvantage is paid for by an individual, the Enemy should target that character rather than other party members.

Having trouble with a deity

Although the GM is the only omnipotent power in a **GURPS** campaign, he may have a few deities at his disposal to wreak havoc on your characters. The following two disadvantages bring those higher powers directly into your character's life, and not in a good way:

- ✔ The **Divine Curse (Variable)** disadvantage definitely indicates that your character has annoyed a higher power, and She's out to get him. Your character might not have done something personally to irritate the gods; he might be cursed simply because of his family or even his nation.
- ✔ **Destiny (Variable)** means that the higher power is meddling in your character's life, and the consequences are not going to be to his liking.

Both of these disadvantages require coordination with the GM, who may disallow either or both of the disadvantages entirely or may request or require one or the other to provide a plot device for the GM's use.

Sample characters: Disadvantages

Stuart's "Normal" Character

Without a doubt, she's Stubborn and Curious. Curious has a self-control modifier, but I'm going to take it at the default so each of these costs only -5. I keep thinking about a limp, but that would cut her Move in half, so I'm not willing to risk it as a full disadvantage; I can treat it as a quirk (at -1), though. I see her with glasses for being Nearsighted, so that's Bad Sight with a 60% limitation, making it -10 points. Looking through the options, I think No Sense of Humor might be fun to play, and that's another -10 points. I'm going to try to have -40 points in disadvantages plus -5 or so in quirks. Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) seems like a good constraint on her behavior, and it's -10 points, so that rounds things out. As for quirks, I definitely see her playing with her rosary a lot, and she always dresses like a 1950s gumshoe. I'm thinking she supports herself writing stories about what she encounters, so perhaps she's always taking notes. That's three quirks, and our GM lets us add more as we play, so I'll leave two blank for now.

Bjoern's Mage Character

I need to come up with -100 points in disadvantages and -5 points in quirks. I've chosen 3 quirks at this time, and the GM is going to let me save the points for the other two and figure them out during play as I get to know the character. The disadvantages are more important and more significant. I know I want this character to be basically a "nice guy," so after perusing the list of disadvantages, I've come up with the list you can see on page 93.

I decided to give this guy Weirdness Magnet (-15), not only because it can be a lot of fun, but also to help explain why this halfling character was able to get training as a mage. I also gave him a -20 point Enemy, which I'll let the GM decide the identity of, but I didn't pay for Secret Enemy, so the GM will need to let me know who is after my character before the campaign starts (I hope). The GM wouldn't let me get away with the Social Stigma amongst other halflings because he's a mage. Apparently, that either comes with the territory or it has already reduced the cost of the Unusual Background. Either way, it won't work; so I had to come up with a replacement — Truthfulness for -10 points.

Adam's Supers Character

The campaign has a limit of -40 points for disadvantages. Trying to stick with her snake theme, I gave her Bad Temper, but at a level she can control fairly well (a resistance roll of 15). I also gave her Gluttony, which seems to keep with a snake's eating style. I picture her as brash, so I gave her Overconfidence. I decided to give her Sleepwalking, which is something I think the GM can have fun with and could prove interesting for me. Because she is supposed to be a good guy out to save the world from forces of evil, I gave her Cannot Harm Innocents. Lastly, I gave her a Code of Honor as the basis of her religion. This will be important for her other powers, as I show you in Chapter 9.

Chapter 6

Finalizing Your Character with Skills

In This Chapter

- ▶ Selecting appropriate skills for your character
 - ▶ Calculating skill levels
 - ▶ Making final adjustments to your character points
-

The attributes, advantages, and disadvantages you select for your character determine the potential of that character as well as the foundation of his personality. What that character will be able to accomplish is mostly determined by the skills that you select for him. Each skill that your character has is represented by a base skill level. For any particular task, that skill level may be modified by the situation (such as darkness, complexity, or the types of tools available).

For most actions in the campaign, you roll three six-sided dice and then compare the result to your modified skill level to determine whether you were successful at the task. If the number you roll is equal to or less than your modified skill level, you were successful. For some skills, how much you succeed by (the modified skill level minus your roll) determines how well you actually did.

Generalist characters tend to have many skills at moderate levels (12–14), whereas specialist characters tend to have fewer skills but at higher levels (14–16). Frequently, we select one or two skills as the focus for a character and make sure to have those skills at an extremely high level (17+). Combat skills are a special class of skills that all characters have to consider; they're discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11. Mages take each of their spells as a skill, which is discussed in Chapter 7. All these aspects of skills are discussed in the first part of this chapter.

Increasing attributes, adding advantages, and selecting skills are all very easy tasks when it comes to creating a character. Picking disadvantages is a bit tougher, but only because you have to limit what your character can do. Toughest of all is getting the character's point value to match the campaign's limits. In order to balance your points, you'll probably have to give up some advantages, reduce your abilities in some skills, and perhaps even take additional disadvantages. But when you're done, you'll have a completed character ready to begin her first adventure. The last part of this chapter shows you how to put the finishing touches on your character.

Deciding Which Skills to Take

The first thing to realize as you begin selecting skills is that, as in real life, your character is probably not going to be able to do everything you want her to do as well as you want her to do it. There simply aren't enough points to cover all the bases, and if there were, you'd probably be tempted to spend them on attributes or advantages instead of on skills.

In Chapter 2, we introduce the idea of your character's functional role — identifying what your character would contribute to the party's success. Taking that a step further, you may want to identify a single skill or very small subset of skills that you will focus on developing as the campaign progresses. Not only does that help in deciding how to spend your points during character creation, but it gives you a direction for your character to develop.

We suggest you begin by writing down all of the skills that you think are relevant to your character's functional role, adding any that are appropriate to the campaign setting, and then adding any that appeal to your sense of the character. After you have created that list, you can reduce it to a manageable level by prioritizing the various items. In this case, a manageable level is a number of skills (including any for combat or magic) less than approximately one-third of the campaign's point total. When you are done with your character, you will probably have one-third of the campaign's point total invested in your skills but because some skills will have more than one point, you will have a fewer number of skills.



As you work with finishing your character, you'll want to compare the points in various areas to make sure that you have both kept all the basics that you need and covered all of the areas that you want. We find it useful to do this in an electronic format, either in an MS Excel spreadsheet or an MS Word document. The advantage of the spreadsheet is that you can sort things more easily; the advantage of the simple document is that you don't have to know how to use a spreadsheet. Chapter 13 gives more advice on managing your character sheet.



GURPS Basic Set: Characters organizes all of the skills alphabetically, which makes it much easier to find things for reference. But when you are looking at creating your character, it's also useful to be able to consider the skills based on categories. In the following sections, we provide two such collections (sorted by those appropriate to common functional areas and those appropriate to typical campaign settings). Steve Jackson Games offers a very good list organized by type of skills on the e23 Web site (e23.sjgames.com, search for "skill categories").

Selecting skills based on your character's role

One very useful reference for finding skills appropriate to your character's role is to look for character templates that are similar to what you want yours to be. The ones in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* provide a good starting point. You may not want to build your character on a specific template, but you may see some of the less common skills you want to have. Also, consider whether you are willing to lock your character into a single role or whether you want to have enough variety in your skill set to allow you to function in a variety of situations.

Fitting into society — Cultural skills

In a campaign in which gathering information is important, being able to fit into society can be critical. Among the skills that are useful in almost any social situation are

- ✓ Diplomacy (negotiating a resolution)
- ✓ Fast-Talk (the art of the con)
- ✓ Savoir-Faire (knowing the proper behavior).

For those interactions that take place in a darkened bar, the appropriate skills are Carousing and Gambling (and what good campaign doesn't eventually end up in some dive somewhere?). And for those actions that take place in even more unsavory surroundings, Streetwise might be the more appropriate social skill.

Of course, you'll need to have some idea whether the information that has been provided is actually true, so the Detect Lies skill is also crucial. Even more crucial is remembering to use it to check someone's story during play.

Being able to get information out of someone (not necessarily through violent means) is covered by Interrogation, whereas being able to get someone to do something for you through threats is covered by Intimidation.

Frequently, your character can gain entrance to a variety of social situations by having a very high level of skill in an area such as Musical Instrument, Singing, Performance, or Artist that makes him a “star.” Most GMs also require that you pay some points for a Reputation advantage to be able to use your position to gain favor. If you simply wish to appreciate the arts, then the Connoisseur skill is more appropriate (and can be applied to areas outside the traditional arts as well).

Dancing can be particularly important in some cultures with certain types of events, such as a Grand Ball, requiring the ability to participate in order to be accepted.



The four Enthrallment skills (Captivate, Persuade, Suggest, and Sway Emotions) and the Musical Influence skill are special in that they allow you to influence others through the force of your will. Make sure that the GM allows these skills before making them an important part of your character. And if you’re the GM, think carefully about how these skills will change your campaign.

Hitting the streets — Sneaky skills

The same basic set of skills is appropriate for your character whether he’s a thief, a spy, a private investigator, or just very streetwise. Most campaigns provide an opportunity to take advantage of these skills, and in many, they’re absolutely necessary. In addition to the skills in this section, a number of social skills (particularly Fast-Talk and Detect Lies) are appropriate, as would be a knowledge of a variety of languages and areas.

We’ve already mentioned Stealth as a skill that we believe everyone should have. Being able to follow someone is covered by Shadowing (keeping the person in sight) and Tracking (following his trail). Hiding an object (or yourself) outdoors is covered by the Camouflage skill. The skill to counter your foes’ use of any of these skills is Observation, which is also highly recommended. Another good skill to have with Observation is Lip Reading so that you don’t have to get so close to overhear the secret plot.

The ability to hide an object on your person is Holdout and the skill that works against it is Search. Being able to quickly access such an object is Sleight of Hand (probably one of the most overlooked skills — yet a surprisingly useful one).

If you wish to impersonate others or even just modify your appearance, you need to consider the Acting, Disguise (or Makeup), and Mimicry skills. In order to successfully impersonate someone else, you need all of these at reasonably high levels.

And what sneaky character would be complete without the skills for finding hidden doors and unlocking them? Architecture includes the ability to find hidden structures (such as doors). Traps is useful both for creating traps of your own and for making sure the door is safe to open. And then, of course,

Lockpicking is necessary for getting the door open. Unless, of course, you've met someone with the key, in which case Pickpocket might be even more useful! And if things go wrong, Escape is a useful skill for getting out of ropes and other restraints.

Scrounging is the ability to locate things that your character needs — not necessarily exactly what she needs, but something that will work for the situation. For instance, if she's trying to pry open a blocked doorway, she might not find a crowbar but rather a long piece of metal that will work nearly as well. Filch is the ability to take things you need or want without being noticed; rarely legal, but often useful.

Many sneaky people are quite financially successful, but sometimes it's fun to play a character that lives by her wits on the rough streets. For such a character, Streetwise, Panhandling, and Urban Survival are all important skills.

And no discussion of sneaky spy skills would be complete without mentioning a knowledge of Poisons. Note that knowing about poisons includes knowledge of how to treat them but not necessarily knowledge of how to obtain them in an urban environment.

Weighing, analyzing, and fixing — Nerdy skills

The skills in this section improve your character's ability to gather and understand information.

Intelligence Analysis is a general-purpose skill that lets your character see patterns in large amounts of data. This can be particularly useful in revealing enemies' plans but is equally useful when deciding to break into a building. Accounting and Administration are more specialized skills that let your character understand information related to money or organizational structure (as well as being able to apply the corresponding practical knowledge). Cryptography is a very specialized skill that relates to codes (creating, using, and breaking). Check with your GM to see how relevant any of these skills will be within a given campaign.

Many campaigns benefit from someone with knowledge of the basic sciences and the ability to do research within them. Criminology and Forensics can be the most fun and the closest to investigative skills within the sciences (as demonstrated by a variety of television shows). Naturalist is a particular skill that can come into play if your character spends time in the wild. And in a low-tech campaign, Naturalist is a pretty good "catch-all" of a foundation in all of the natural sciences.

Medical skills of all sorts are useful, though we generally recommend focusing on the Physician skill and taking defaults from there. In an environment that lacks supernatural forms of healing, having a physician in the party can literally be a matter of life or death.

Many of the other sciences can be useful but are most appropriate for a character with a scientific or inventive focus. Any inventing that takes place in a modern setting probably has focus on Electrician, Electronics Operation, Electronics Repair, Engineer, Machinist, or Mechanic because they provide the skills for building the technology we are most used to seeing. Weird Science is a specific skill that gives you the scientific understanding of the strange events that normal publications are afraid to report. Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, and Physics are general science and can have specializations, but creating new theories or inventions is time-consuming.

Facts, figures, and faces — Know-it-all skills

We take for granted a certain level of knowledge about our own society. In a campaign, it can be very useful to represent that knowledge with skills such as Area Knowledge, Current Affairs, Heraldry, History, and Geography. For understanding other cultures in your own world, Anthropology is frequently a good choice (depending, in part, on the opinion of the GM as to the breadth of this field). Research is a general skill that lets you find out information from existing resources. The ability to invent and to do creative research is covered by the corresponding “nerdy” skills discussed previously.

Writing is a general communication skill, but it is particularly important for anyone who will produce reports for other people to read. Teaching is useful for helping convey knowledge to those interested in learning or improving their skills.

Being physical — Rough-and-tumble skills

The skills in this section are related to athleticism and physical training.

Acrobatics is a skill that can be substituted for DX in a variety of situations (such as jumping or falling). You can also take advantage of acrobatic skill when dodging an attack. Brawling is another useful physical skill that provides for a variety of basic attacks with hands and feet; think of it as the general unarmed combat skill. If your character is at all the physical sort, he should have both Acrobatics and Brawling.

Several skills, specifically Climbing, Jumping, Lifting, Running, Swimming, and Hiking, allow you to perform specific physical tasks. Which of these will prove useful in a campaign depends upon the type of terrain that you are likely to encounter. The Survival skill requires specialization in a terrain type but is a necessary investment for any character who expects to spend significant time living outdoors.

Knowing the unknowable — Occult skills

If the campaign allows for the occult or supernatural, invest wisely in the Exorcism, Hidden Lore, Occultism, Religious Ritual, Thaumatology, and Theology skills. In these cases, a little knowledge can be much more effective than weapon skills. This is particularly true if your GM rules that your character doesn't know about silver bullets unless you have one of these skills.

Selecting skills based on setting

Another approach that we recommend when deciding upon skills is to evaluate what skills the typical person in that setting or time period would likely have had. Those general skills are ones that your character should have acquired just from growing up in society.

To get a sense of what we mean, browse through the skill list summary found on page 301 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* and identify those skills that you consider yourself to have at a level that reflects some study or knowledge in the skill. Most of us have a general sense of history and geography, the biological and physical sciences, driving, computer operation, and perhaps several academic areas. Those skills are general to our time and place.

Our experience is that most GMs expect the players to adjust their characters' knowledge to reflect the time and place. Thus, in a Victorian campaign, your character is expected to have no knowledge of modern science, even though you as a player may be quite knowledgeable. It is also possible for the GM to adjust the "normal" level of knowledge for skills by defining what sort of ability is associated at a basic level. We frequently use a skill of 12 to reflect the basic societal level of knowledge in a skill. Thus, a GM may decide that a Dancing skill of 12 in Victorian England includes several formal dances, whereas it includes only moving to the beat in a Modern setting.

Medieval campaigns

Characters in a medieval setting will have a set of skills much different than those in a modern setting. People at a lower tech level are more likely to have skills associated with living off the land (such as Naturalist, Survival, and Weather Sense), for example, as well as skills related to managing animals, such as Animal Handling, Riding, or Teamster. And of course Farming!

Those who interact with the upper levels of society are likely to know Heraldry. People are more likely to have a good grasp of the geography and customs of their local area but a very general understanding of a wider area, and this would be reflected in the types of Area Knowledge that they have.

Most characters embarking on an adventure have skills in both a melee and a ranged weapon. And because doctors are few and far between, most characters would have some form of First Aid.

Victorian campaigns

The Victorian and Elizabethan eras are periods of low technology but more centralization into the city. Individuals in the country may function at a lower tech level, and those in the city are likely to have a variety of social skills focused on large social events. Such skills could include Makeup, Dancing, Savoir-Faire, and Writing; appearance and decorum are major aspects of social

standing. Both gentlemen and ladies will still have Riding, but their styles will be very different (with the lady riding sidesaddle and for pleasure). Men of all classes and women of the lower class would also have Teamster (though the type of vehicle would differ from class to class).

Modern campaigns

The exercise of recognizing what skills you personally possess will definitely help with modern campaigns, but we strongly suggest a minimum of Computer Operation and Driving. Few modern people are familiar with close combat or bladed weapons, but most people at least believe that they could shoot a gun accurately.

Futuristic campaigns

The key thing to consider for futuristic campaigns is the environment, and that generally means some specialty of the Environment Suit skill (most often Vacc Suit) to protect from environmental hazards. Free Fall is also a good general skill to have in a space-based game. Piloting is more useful, in general, than Driving, and most people who travel are likely to have some level of one of the Crewman skills. You are more likely to use a Beam Weapons, a Force Sword, or a Force Whip skill than the traditional Gun skill.

Fantasy campaigns

If the campaign is in a fantasy setting, the characters are likely to have some knowledge of Hidden Lore or Occultism. Some characters may have magical knowledge (Thaumatology or spells).

Occult campaigns

With an occult or supernatural campaign, knowledge-related skills are the most useful — specifically Hidden Lore and Occultism. Because many interactions will come down to attacks against your Will (IQ), Mental Strength and Autohypnosis are very useful. The Hypnosis skill can also be very useful as is Exorcism, if it is appropriate for your character. If the GM will permit your character to have them, knowledge of Religious Ritual, Ritual Magic, and Symbol Drawing are all important, too.

Calculating Skill Levels

After you have created your list of skills, a good next step is to calculate your skill level with one point in each of the skills. The description for each skill (as well as the summary table of skills found on page 301 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*) lists the attribute used for each skill (the base attribute) and the difficulty level of the skill (Easy, Average, Hard, or Very Hard) as well as any

formula for calculating defaults for that skill. As you go through your skills calculating your starting level, note any formulas for defaults.

Also note that some skills are marked as requiring specialization. For many of these, you may wish to have the skill in several areas of expertise (for example, Armory — Small Arms and Armory — Melee Weapons). Track each area of specialization as a separate skill.

You calculate your skill level with one point by using the difficulty level listed for the skill to determine how to adjust the base attribute. Most skills are based on IQ or DX. One point in Easy skills gives them to you at the same level as the base attribute. Each increased level of difficulty lowers the starting skill level by 1. So, if you are looking at a skill that is IQ/E (based on IQ with an Easy difficulty level), then your skill level with 1 point is the same as your IQ. If it is IQ/A (also based on IQ but with an Average difficulty level), then your skill is IQ-1. Skills that are Hard are -2 and Very Hard skills are -3 with 1 point.

After you've calculated all of your skill levels with 1 point, calculate any defaults that you want to keep track of. Mark those defaults that are based on another skill so that you can identify those pairs of skills that are interrelated (with one being based on the other). That way, if you change the points in a skill that is used to calculate a default, you'll know to update the other skill as well.

Using a spreadsheet to calculate skill levels

If you are comfortable using a spreadsheet program, you can easily write a formula to calculate skill levels. Select a portion of your spreadsheet to hold the attribute levels. Use one column to record which attribute is used for calculating the skill (IQ or DX), another to record the skill difficulty (E, A, H, VH), another to record the points invested, and a final one to record any adjustments to the skill level (such as those based on a secondary attribute or from an advantage or disadvantage). Use a series of nested IF statements to compare the text values

and then multiply the points invested as appropriate. The following sample formula gives you a good starting point based on just IQ (in cell B1) and DX (in cell D1).

```
=IF(C2>=1,
  IF(A2="IQ", $B$1, IF(A2="DX", $D$1,
    "ERR")))
+IF(B2="E", 0, IF(B2="A", -1,
  IF(B2="H", -2, IF(B2="VH", -3,
    "ERR")))
+IF(C2<1, "ERR", IF(C2<2, 0, IF(C2<
  4, 1, INT(C2/4)+1)))
+D2
```

Pluses from advantages

Now go back to your advantages and identify each skill that benefits from a particular advantage. Mark down the amount of the bonus and also make sure to indicate where the bonus comes from. That way, when you're adjusting your total points, you'll be able to see what would happen to your skills if you got rid of a particular advantage. We strongly recommend color-coding related skills, including those that share bonuses from the same advantage.

Techniques

Finally, identify any *techniques* that you wish to acquire. A technique is a specific application of a skill. It is tracked separately and uses a different formula for calculating the skill level. In general, techniques relate primarily to combat styles, and many characters will have none.

Bonuses from defaults

You can get a reduction in the cost of raising a skill if the skill level from a default is higher than the skill level would be with 1 point invested in the skill. As described on page 173 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, calculate the default level for the skill based on one attribute and then figure out the number of points required to raise the skill to the same level using another attribute. The difference between the two is the bonus you get on learning the skill.

For example, imagine a character with an IQ of 14 and a DX of 9. Because Stealth is an Average skill based on DX, 1 point gives it to you at DX-1, or 8. Normally, to get your skill to a 9, you'd need to spend 2 points, and to get it to a 10, you would spend 4 points. But Stealth also has a default of IQ-5. So, for this character, the default based on IQ is 9 (14-5) — the same as having spent 2 points to raise the skill. Those 2 points are your bonus from the default. It is as though you have two “free” points invested in the skill. You can now raise your Stealth to a level of 10 by spending only 2 points (rather than the 4 it would have cost you without the bonus from the default).

Adjusting Your Character Points

Now for the hard part. At this stage in your character's creation, all the points you've allotted are invariably out of balance. You have to get your character's point value to match the campaign's limits. After you've drafted your character with all the attributes, advantages, disadvantages, and skills that you'd like to have, it's time to see how much adjusting you need to do. The next few sections show you how. Be sure that you have included any combat-related items (see Chapter 11) and any costs from magic or powers.

Adjusting for the world

When you have a rough idea of your character and before you begin worrying about balancing points, you should review your character sketch to make sure you have all of the requirements for the campaign.

Review any material provided by the GM for a list of required advantages or disadvantages. For each advantage and disadvantage, make sure to check whether it applies to your point totals and any adventure limits (such as a limit on the total points you can have in advantages).

If you are using a racial template, make sure that each advantage and disadvantage is properly recorded on your character sheet and that they are appropriately accounted for in your totals. In general, we recommend that you not record the point values for individual items that come from a template but do be sure to record each one (without the point value). Be sure to mark these items as coming from a template (using a different color works well) and to record the point value of the template somewhere.

Make sure you've met any required minimum skill or attribute levels. This is particularly important for weapons, which frequently have a minimum ST requirement.

Adjusting your point total

Total up all of the points spent in the various categories and see how that compares to the point limitations for the campaign. Don't worry if you've overspent — overspending is perfectly normal, and to fix it, you just need to make some adjustments.

Taking every point

If, as is likely, you have spent more points than you were supposed to, the first thing to do is make sure that you have gotten all the possible points available to you. Check to see whether you have taken the full complement of disadvantages allowed by the GM. If not, look for additional ones that you would consider adding to your character. Also, check to make sure that you have taken quirks. Many GMs allow you to leave empty slots for up to five quirks to be filled in as gaming progresses.

Making sure your character is competent

Review your skill levels to see which ones need to be raised. Starting with 2 points rather than 1 point raises your skill level by 1. Starting with 4 points raises it by 2 levels. After that, raising your skill level costs 4 points for each increase of a level. So with a DX/Easy skill, 1 point gives you a skill level equal to your DX, 2 points is DX+1, 4 points is DX+2, and then you can add +1 for each additional 4 points (DX+3 is 8 points, DX+4 is 12 points, and so on).

For each skill that is specific to a type of equipment, make sure that you have indicated familiarity (if appropriate) for that type of equipment, and also make sure you have a plan for acquiring the equipment (see Chapter 9, for more on that topic). Familiarity comes into play when a skill requires equipment that comes in a variety of models. Cars and guns are the two most common examples. You get starting familiarity with two models for each point you invest in the skill.

Giving up your dream

If you have spent too many points, the time has come to decide what items you are willing to give up.

If you are way over, look first at your advantages. Are there any that you could let go of without having to dramatically change the way you envision the character? If so, scratch off the most expendable one and recalculate your points. Repeat until there are no more that you're willing to sacrifice.

Then look at your attributes. Can you lower your attributes (or secondary characteristics) without changing your character concept? Perhaps your character wears excellent armor and so can afford to have fewer hit points. Or if you're a talented mage, perhaps you have horrible DX. Adjusting attributes is an effective way to free up significant numbers of points.

If you are just a few points over, look at your skills. Are there skills that you could keep at their default levels? If so, remove any points that you have invested in them. Do some skills seem like they'd be fun, but you're not sure exactly how you'd use them? Are some skills very similar? If so, reduce the total number of skills. Repeat until you have a set of skills at levels that you're comfortable with.



If you are concerned about maximizing your points, we recommend next that you look at your DX and IQ and how they relate to your skill levels. Looking separately at the skills based on each attribute, count the number of skills in which you have 2 or more points. If you have more than 20 such skills based on IQ or DX or 10 such skills based on any other attribute, you can benefit from raising the attribute and reducing the number of points in each skill. To be precise, what you want to total is the number of points that you have spent in raising each skill to the most recent skill level. So if you have five skills that have 8 points in each, you can lower them by 4 points each and raise your attribute for the same cost. Obviously, if you have more skills based on the same attribute, removing points from the skills and raising the attribute actually saves you points. But even at the same cost, it is a worthwhile approach because it raises any default skills based on that attribute and, in general, reduces the cost of raising those skills in the future.

Also look at the number of related skills you have that have 2 or more points in them. Consider whether you have more than 5 points invested in raising the skill levels in those skills beyond the first point. In other words, look to see whether you have one of the following:

- ✓ Six skills with 2 points in each
- ✓ Three skills with 4 points in each
- ✓ Two skills with 8 points in each

If so, investing in a Talent will be a more cost-effective way of having the same skill level (plus there are other advantages such as Reputation). See page 90 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* for a list of suggested Talents.



The only disadvantage to a Talent is that it can reduce the number of models of an item with which you are familiar.

You may need to repeat the process of adjusting your character a number of times. If you begin to feel frustrated, take a break and think about what's important to you in the character. That may help you identify things that you can let go of or reduce. You can also speak with your GM about whether there are aspects of the character that aren't necessary for the campaign. Have fun creating your character and don't worry if you don't have everything you want to start with — a good GM will give you a variety of opportunities for character development.

Sample characters: Skills and point balancing

Stuart's "Normal" Character

When I am ready to work on skills, I make sure that everything is in a spreadsheet that will keep track of my point totals and calculate skill levels for me. That way, I can see how many points I have available at any moment. I want Jessica to be able to take care of herself, so I'd like both Judo and Gun at a skill of 15, but Judo is a hard skill, so that gets expensive (a skill of 15 would cost 24 points). So I'm going to go with Judo at 12 (12 points) and Gun at 14 (also 12 points because it is an easy skill). I have 60 points in IQ, 36 in advantages and perks, -45 in disadvantages and quirks, and 24 points in combat skills. That leaves me 25 points for the various other skills.

I also see her as reading Latin but not speaking it other than for phrases to drive away spirits, so I take Broken Speech/Literate, which is 4 points. I want to give her all of the available occult skills, basic forensic skills, and some academic skills, so I give her Current Affairs, History, Criminology, Forensics, Naturalist, Exorcism, Hidden Lore, Occultism, Thaumatology, and Theology. First Aid and Driving will also probably come in handy. Given that I'm thinking she earns her living writing up her adventures for the tabloids, I also want her to have Writing. And for a reporter and an investigator, Fast Talk would be handy.

At this point, my spreadsheet tells me I still have 8 points to spend. I prefer to list a variety of additional skills that I frequently reference, so I'll go through and calculate all of their defaults next. Looking at those, I remember that Fast Draw has no default, so I want to add that. And I can't imagine her surviving with the defaults in Stealth (8) or Shadowing (8), so I put a point into each of those. Tough PIs also probably are Streetwise, so that gets a point, and someone in the party had best have Merchant, so I'll add that. That leaves me three points, which I use to

increase Fast Draw, Driving, and Merchant. For the specifics of the skills, see the character sheet on page 92.

Bjoern's Mage Character

Before I ever start purchasing skills for a mage character, I first get his spells down, which I did in Chapter 7. After going through the list, I came up with 37 skills that I want for this character, and, for simplicity's sake, I put 1 point in each skill. You can see the list of my choices on his character sheet, located on pages 93 and 94.

Now it's time for me to start balancing the points for this character. Oops, I'm 22 points over the 200-point limit for these characters, which means that something has to go. Well, I always expected that a Strength of 8/10 was asking for a bit much, so I cut that down to a strength of 7/9. That saves 10 points; 12 to go. Looking at the skills I took for this character, I guess a halfling with Erotic Arts is a little sick, and Connoisseur is a bit much, so those can go. Likewise, Thaumatology might be a bit hifalutin for a starting halfling character; he can pick it up later if he wants it. He doesn't need Lockpicking because he has the Lockmaster spell, so that skill is history; 8 more points to go.

On the magic side, I can easily get rid of the top end of the Healing spells I gave him — he's a Combat Mage, not a Healer. That saves 3 points. And likewise, he can lose Final Rest (and hopes it doesn't come back to "haunt" him). The Grease spell might be good for comic effect, but that's about it, so it can go. I can't really see this little guy using the Ethereal Body spell (with its very high casting cost) to great effect, so I eliminate that. Light Jet is a nice effect, but superfluous with a lantern, so I cut that, which leaves me at 201 points.

It hurts to do it, but given that it is a hard combat skill, and one that this character is not likely to spend much energy improving, I can eliminate

Judo without affecting this character much. And that gets us to the 200-point limit. And the character — Halfling Mage Opie Mossytoes — is ready to go.

Adam's Supers character

My natural inclination is to not devote too many points to skills in a new character. A character can learn new skills or put points in old ones fairly easily, but most advantages are not available after character creation. I often set aside 20–30 points and do as best I can with that number. Because this is such a high point campaign, and because I want to have a high combat skill, this time I set aside 40 points.

A few things are mandatory. She must have skill with her magic whip (see Chapter 9), or there isn't much point in having it. She also must have skill in using her Affliction ability. I gave her Acrobatics, which can give a bonus to Dodge, and Brawling, which can be useful for a number of combat things that I might have to make up at the spur of the moment.

Her background includes being an archaeology student, so I gave her skills in Archeology, Paleontology, and Research. I filled out her skill list with a few other things I believe will come in handy.

Jessica

ST	10	Advantages		Disadvantages	
DX	10	Danger Sense	15	Stubborn	-5
IQ	13	Comfortable Wealth	10	Curious: SCM 12 or less	-5
HT	10	Contacts		Nearsighted: Glasses	-10
BL	20			No Sense of Humor	-10
HP	10	<i>Irina Malcote (Tabloid Editor)</i>	4	Pacifism	
Will	13	<i>John Coyote (FBI Agent)</i>	6	<i>Cannot harm innocents</i>	-10
Per	13	Languages/Cultures		Quirks	
Fat	10	English (Native, Literate)	0	Slight limp	
Speed	5	Latin (Broken/Literate)	4	Fidgets with her rosaries	
Move	5			Dresses in 50s style	
Swing	1d				
Thrust	1d-1				

Skill	Pts	Class	Level
Acrobatics	1	DX/H	8
Architecture	1	IQ/A	12
Criminology	1	IQ/A	12
Current Affairs:			
Political	1	IQ/E	13
Driving: Car	2	DX/A	10
Exorcism	1	Will/H	11
Fast Draw: Pistol	2	DX/E	11
Fast Talk	1	IQ/A	12
First Aid	1	IQ/E	13
Forensics	1	IQ/H	11
Gun (Pistol)	12	DX/E	14
Hidden Lore: Occult	1	IQ/A	12
History: Occult	1	IQ/H	11

Skill	Pts	Class	Level
Judo	12	DX/H	12
Merchant	2	IQ/A	13
Naturalist	1	IQ/H	11
Occultism	1	IQ/A	12
Shadowing	1	IQ/A	12
Stealth	1	DX/A	9
Streetwise	1	IQ/A	12
Tactics	1	IQ/H	11
Thaumatology	1	IQ/VH	10
Theology: Christian	1	IQ/H	11
Traps	1	IQ/A	12
Writing	1	IQ/A	12

Opie Mossytoes

		Advantages		Disadvantages	
ST	8-7			Social Stigma:	
DX	12	Halfling Racial Template		<i>Trained Mage</i>	-10
IQ	14	Magery 3	35	Chummy	-5
HT	12	Unusual Background:		Curious (12)	-5
BL	9.8	<i>Trained Mage</i>	15	Pacifism:	
HP	9	Signature Gear: Fine		<i>Cannot Harm Innocents</i>	-10
Will	16	quality mithril dagger	40	Phobia: Ocean (12)	-10
Per	14	Ally: "Toby," a Wolpertinger	22	Lecherousness (12)	-15
FP	12	Familiar. <i>Appears on 12 or less;</i>		Enemy:	
Basic Speed	6	<i>grants 5 Extra FP; gives 2d Impaling</i>		<i>Medium group, appears</i>	
Basic Move	6	<i>Attack, Rapid Fire ROF 2.</i>		<i>on 9 or less</i>	-20
Swing	1d-2			Truthfulness (6)	-10
Thrust	1d-3			Weirdness Magnet	-15
		Quirks			
		Smokes a pipe	-1		
		Levitates or flies everywhere	-1		
		Ashamed of "provincial"			
		Halfling relatives	-1		
		Undertermined Quirk	-1		
		Undertermined Quirk	-1		

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Pts</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Pts</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Level</i>
Bolas	1	DX/A	11	Connoisseur		IQ/A	13
Bow	4	DX/A	13	Disguise	1	IQ/A	13
Cloak	1	DX/A	11	Erotic Art		DX/A	11
Fast Draw (Knife)	1	DX/E	12	Escape	1	DX/H	10
Fast Draw (Short Staff)	1	DX/E	12	Fast Talk	1	IQ/A	13
Innate Attack-Beam	2	DX/E	13	Filch	1	DX/A	11
Innate Attack-Projectile	2	DX/E	13	First Aid	1	IQ/E	14
Jude		DX/H	10	Lockpicking		IQ/A	13
Main-Gauche	2	DX/A	12	Observation	1	Per/A	13
Smallsword	2	DX/A	12	Occultism	1	IQ/A	13
Thrown Weapon (Knife)	2	DX/E	13	Sex Appeal	1	HT/A	11
Piloting (Contragravity)	1	DX/A	11	Shadowing	1	IQ/A	13
Acrobatics	1	DX/H	10	Streetwise	1	IQ/A	13
Aerobatics	1	DX/H	10	Urban Survival	1	Per/A	13
Body Sense	1	DX/H	10	Thaumatology		IQ/H	11
Mind Block	1	Will/A	15	Breath Control	1	HT/H	10
Stealth	1	DX/A	11	Tracking	1	Per/A	13
Area Knowledge:				Traps	1	IQ/A	13
<i>Marshberry</i>	1	IQ/E	14	Tactics	1	IQ/H	12
Carousing	1	HT/E	12	Architecture	1	IQ/A	13

continued

Opie Mossytoes *continued*

Spell	Pts	Class	Level	Spell	Pts	Class	Level
Haste	1	IQ/H	15	Cure Disease	1	IQ/H	15
Appotation	1	IQ/H	15	Neutralize Poison	1	IQ/H	15
Grease		IQ/H	15	Instant Neut-		IQ/H	15
Deflect Missile	1	IQ/H	15	Poison			
Levitation	1	IQ/H	15	Restoration		IQ/VH	14
Poltergeist	1	IQ/H	15	Regeneration		IQ/VH	14
Dancing Object	1	IQ/H	15	Magelock	1	IQ/H	15
Distant Blow	1	IQ/H	15	Shield	1	IQ/H	15
Lockmaster	1	IQ/H	15	Armor	1	IQ/H	15
Manipulate	1	IQ/H	15	Turn Blade	1	IQ/H	15
Winged Knife	1	IQ/H	15	Bladeturning	1	IQ/H	15
Flight	1	IQ/VH	14	Missile Shield	1	IQ/H	15
Flying Carpet	1	IQ/VH	14	Reverse Missiles	1	IQ/H	15
Ethereal Body		IQ/VH	14	Mystic Mist	1	IQ/H	15
Hawk Flight (VH)	1	IQ/VH	14	Light	1	IQ/H	15
Great Haste (VH)	1	IQ/VH	14	Continual Light	1	IQ/H	15
Pull	1	IQ/H	15	Colors	1	IQ/H	15
Repel	1	IQ/H	15	Darkness	1	IQ/H	15
Teleport (VH)	1	IQ/VH	14	Blackout	1	IQ/H	15
Blink	1	IQ/H	15	Glow	1	IQ/H	15
Final Rest		IQ/H	15	Flash	1	IQ/H	15
Lend Energy	1	IQ/H	15	Light Jet		IQ/H	15
Lend Vitality	1	IQ/H	15	Blur	1	IQ/H	15
Recover Energy	1	IQ/H	15	Hide	1	IQ/H	15
Relieve Sickness	1	IQ/H	15	Sunlight	1	IQ/H	15
Minor Healing	1	IQ/H	15	Invisibility	1	IQ/H	15
Major Healing	1	IQ/VH	14	Sunbolt	1	IQ/H	15

Anaconda (Anna Connors)

		Advantages		Disadvantages	
ST	12				
DX	14-15	Double Jointed	15	Bad Temper (15)	-5
IQ	12-13	Crushing Attack 2d		Gluttony (12)	-5
HT	12	<i>Cyclic 1 second (+100%)</i>		Sleepwalker (12)	-5
BL	29	<i>Linked to binding (+10%)</i>	21	Overconfidence (12)	-5
HP	12	Binding 15 (2/lvl)		Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents)	-10
Will	13	<i>Linked to Innate Atk (+10%)</i>	33	Code of Honor (Temple of Snakes)	-10
Per	13	Teeth	4		
FP	12	Venom 4 (4/level)			
Basic Speed	7	<i>Follow-Up -30% (melee)</i>	12		
Basic Move	7	DR 10 8			
Swing Thrust	1d+2 1d-1	Snake Lord Power modifier, -10%	36	Likes to eat raw eggs	-1
		Infravision		Night owl	-1
		Snake Lord Power modifier, -10%	9	Annoyed by cell phones	-1
		Toxic Attack 5d		Likes rain	-1
		<i>Melee Attack, -15%</i>		Fastidious housekeeper	-1
		Snake Lord Power modifier, -10%			
		<i>Link +10%</i>	15		
		Affliction 4 3			
		<i>Linked to Innate Attack +10%</i>			
		<i>Servants of evil Gods only, -30%</i>			
		<i>Follow-Up, -15%</i>			
		Snake Lord Power modifier, -10%			
		Disadvantage, Reptile Phobia, +20%			
		<i>(roll against a 6)</i>	20		
		Beautiful	12		
		Affliction 2 1			
		Disadvantage, Slave Mentality +40%			
		Sense-Based (vision) -20%			
		Snake Lord Power modifier, -10%			
		Malediction 2, +150%	26		
		+0.25 Basic Speed	5		
		Enhanced Dodge			
		Combat Reflexes	15		
		Enhanced Parry	5		
		Allies: 10 Snakes, 25% of pt value			
		<i>Summonable +100%</i>			
		<i>Minion, +50%</i>	15		

continued

Anaconda (Anna Connors) *continued*

<i>Skill</i>	<i>Pts</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Skill</i>	<i>Pts</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Level</i>
Acrobatics	2	DX/H	14	Innate Attack: Toxic	8	DX/E	18
Archeology	2	IQ/H	12	Intimidation	1	Will/A	12
Area Knowledge: Amazon	1	IQ/E	13	Occultism	1	IQ/A	12
Brawling	8	DX/E	18	Paleontology	1	IQ/H	11
Climbing	1	DX/A	14	Research	1	IQ/A	12
Cooking	1	IQ/A	12	Sex Appeal	1	HT/A	11
Driving: Car	1	DX/A	14	Stealth	1	DX/A	14
Driving: Motorcycle	1	DX/A	14	Tactics	1	IQ/H	11
Escape	2	DX/H	14	Throwing	1	DX/A	14
First Aid	1	IQ/E	13	Tracking	1	Per/A	12
Hypnotism	1	IQ/H	11	Traps	2	IQ/A	13

Part II

Enhancing Your Character

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I was afraid of this – select a GM over 50 and you end up with a campaign to pay off the mortgage and put the kids through college."



In this part . . .

We discuss the different ways you can create an enhanced character — someone with abilities beyond the ordinary. Each chapter addresses a different type of enhancement: magery and magic in Chapter 7, powers in Chapter 8, technology in Chapter 9, and playing nonhuman characters in Chapter 10. To get an idea of the breadth of characters available within *GURPS*, read all four chapters.

If you know what you want, then you can just read the chapter that is relevant to your character choices (within the parameters of what your Game Master allows for the campaign). However, when you are ready to start purchasing equipment for your character, we suggest that you read Chapter 9 — regardless of the Tech Level of your campaign — because it can help you decide what sort of purchases you should make.

Chapter 7

So You Want to Be a Wizard — Magic

In This Chapter

- ▶ Working within the *GURPS* system of magic
- ▶ Casting spells
- ▶ Deciding what type of magic user to be
- ▶ Supplementing your own magical abilities and energy with potions and magical items

Spells and other magical effects are the cornerstone of fantasy adventure. With the Magery advantage and the right spells, you can create a sorcerer fighting off monsters with a few well-placed fireballs. But magic users aren't all-powerful — each spell must be learned individually, and you need to think carefully about how you invest your points to ensure that your character has the breadth of abilities necessary for your campaign.

Although the variety of magic users presented in fiction and mythology is quite extensive, ranging from witches of Western Europe to the wizards of fantasy to priests with divinely granted abilities, almost all of them can be represented in *GURPS* within the same framework of advantages, skills, and *mana* (the energy used to power magic). The exception would be those with magical powers that are developed using powers rather than Magery (see Chapter 8). In this chapter, we use the term *mage* to describe a character with the Magery advantage.

This chapter shows you the basics of using spells and magic items in *GURPS*.

Using Magic in GURPS

In *GURPS*, *spells* are skills that have magical effects. **Magery (5 + 10 per level)** is the advantage that allows characters to cast spells. Strictly speaking, having Magery is not an absolute requirement for spell casting because any character can use some simple spells in areas of high mana. However, in practical terms, if you want your character to be a powerful user of spells, you want to buy the Magery advantage.

At its basic 5-point level, Magery simply gives you the ability to use spells. Each higher level of Magery gives you a bonus to all your spell skills. The more powerful spells may require higher levels of Magery to use, with the hardest spells requiring a Magery level of 3.



There is no maximum level of Magery, but you may want to put a cap on it. In third-edition *GURPS*, the maximum level was 3, and that is a pretty good standard unless you want really powerful magic users in your campaign.

Spells are generally powered by fatigue points (FP), which start out equal to your Health (HT). You can also power spells with external sources of power — such as powerstones and ceremonial magic, which are discussed later in this chapter — but you want to make sure that your character has enough FP to be effective as a mage. For this reason, good magic users tend to have relatively high HT, have purchased additional FP (at 3 points per level), or a combination of both. Abilities for recovering FP more quickly, such as the Breath Control skill or the Recover Strength spell, are also particularly useful for mages. (Note that the Fit advantage allows you to recover FP at an accelerated rate only for physical activity, not for spell casting.)

The mechanics of spell casting

At the most basic level, spells are simply skills. To cast a spell, you roll against your skill with the spell. Spells, however, have a number of characteristics that aren't like other skills.

Spells all have a *cost*, which is the number of points of energy the mage must expend to cast the spell. Mages may spend their fatigue as energy, but energy can also come from magic items such as powerstones; see the sidebar, “So what powers magic anyway?”.

Some spells can also be *maintained*. Maintaining a spell means putting more energy into it at the end of its duration so that it doesn't end as it normally would. For example, without maintaining the spell, Basic Illusion lasts a

minute. If a mage creates an illusion that he wishes to last longer than a minute, he could extend this duration by paying periodic “maintenance” energy costs. *Duration* is fairly self-explanatory; it’s the length of time that the spell lasts after your character casts it.

Spells also are listed with a *time to cast* (the number of turns of concentration, with no other action, required before your character can release the spell) and often have *prerequisites* (requirements the mage must meet to qualify for learning the spell). Usually, prerequisites are other spells the mage must learn first, but sometimes specific levels of Magery are required, and in a few cases, other advantages (such as Empathy or High Pain Threshold) or a minimum in a specified attribute are required.

Magic and mana level

Mana is the energy of magic in the surrounding environment. It determines how easily magic can be used in that particular area. Regardless of mana level, the caster must know the spell as a skill before using it (unless the GM allows for alternatives). There are five levels of mana:

- ✔ **No mana:** In areas without mana, spell casting is impossible.
- ✔ **Low mana:** In low mana areas, all spells are cast at –5 to skill.
- ✔ **Normal mana:** There is no bonus or penalty to any magic abilities in normal mana areas.
- ✔ **High mana:** In high mana areas, people without Magery can cast spells that don’t have Magery as a requirement. These are only the simplest and most basic spells.
- ✔ **Very high mana:** In very high mana areas, magic users recover the fatigue they spend casting spells instantly at the beginning of their next turn. This is really cool, although it is somewhat mitigated by the fact that in a very high mana zone, any failed spell roll is automatically a critical failure — with spectacularly disastrous results for the poor mage. And, of course, you still must have the energy points to initially invest in the spell.

Each level has an effect on how magic works. Mana levels may vary from one place to the next or may be consistent throughout the universe. This is up to your GM to decide, and it is important to have this information as you begin designing your mage.

So what powers magic anyway?

The actual mechanics of how *GURPS* spells work can be a little confusing. Mages must spend “energy,” which is measured by points of fatigue, but there is also this stuff called “mana” floating around that seems to be important.

The actual way it works can be up to the GM, but an easy way to think of it is this: Magic is powered by a magical energy called “mana” which is available in the environment. Mages

must force this energy into a spell to power it, but it is hard work, and thus requires fatigue to be expended. Thus, energy is measured in units of fatigue required to control it. Magic items like powerstones and manastones make the mana much more available to the mage, and so they don’t need to expend fatigue to use mana stored in such items.

Magic and skill level

As your character masters spell skills at higher levels, they become easier and quicker to cast. The breakdown is shown in Table 7-1.

<i>Skill Level</i>	<i>Effect</i>
9 or less	You must use an elaborate ritual to cast spells, and the time to cast listed under each spell is doubled.
10–14	The spell works according to the write-up.
15–19	You get a reduction in Fatigue cost of 1 point.
20–24	Casting time is halved, although it still takes you a minimum of 1 second, and your Fatigue cost is reduced by 2.
25–29	Casting time is divided by 4, and Fatigue costs are reduced by 3.



It is really worthwhile to get your spells to a skill level of 15. The one-point reduction in Fatigue might not seem like much, but it can allow you to cast some simple spells for free and, more importantly, to *maintain* them for as long as you want without running out of Fatigue. All spells are IQ-based, and most of them are Hard, with a few that are Very Hard. This means that if your character has an IQ of 14 and Magery 3, he learns all IQ/Hard spells at a minimum of 15.

The different types of spells

Spells are grouped into several categories:

- ✔ **Regular spells:** This is the most common category of spells. They affect only one subject and do not have much range (the mage is at –1 to cast the spell for every hex between herself and her target). If the target is bigger than human-sized, it costs the mage extra fatigue; see *GURPS Magic*, page 11, or *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, page 239.
- ✔ **Area spells:** These spells can affect multiple targets. The cost listed for area spells is the cost for an area of a single hex. For larger areas, multiply the base cost by the radius of the area you wish to affect (2 x for a 2-yard radius, 3 x for a 3-yard radius, and so on).
- ✔ **Melee spells:** These spells charge your hand or magic staff with a harmful force that affects your targets when you hit them. Unlike regular spells, your character *must* touch his target for the spell to work, and also unlike regular spells, the spell stays around until you do, rather than dissipating right after you're done casting it.
- ✔ **Missile spells:** These are spells that you throw over a distance. You don't have the –1 per yard range penalties you have with regular spells (although you still have the normal range penalties associated with distance attacks). Be sure to take the Innate Attack skill so you can use these spells.
- ✔ **Blocking spells:** These are spells that can be cast instantaneously and act as a defense against an attack.
- ✔ **Information spells:** These spells let you divine knowledge in some way. The main feature of this category is that the GM rolls for you and gives you information according to how well she rolls. On a critical failure, the GM will lie to you.

Some spells are successful as long as you make your skill roll. But spells that affect others, particularly those that can be used as an attack, can frequently be resisted or dodged. Spells that can be resisted list the attribute by which they can be resisted. This means that when you cast this spell on a target, the target can attempt to resist it by winning a Quick Contest (using the relevant attribute) against the roll you made to cast your spell. For example, say you know the Body of Air spell at a skill of 15. Body of Air is resisted by HT. You cast it on your foe and roll a 12, beating your skill by 3. Your target must now roll 3 or more under her HT score to resist the spell. If she does, your spell fails to take effect.

Ceremonial magic

Casting a spell is usually just a matter of rolling against your spell skill and keeping track of your expended Fatigue. Sometimes, however, you'll want to cast a spell that you don't have enough Fatigue to manage. This is the time for ceremonial magic.

If you know a spell at a skill of 15 or better, you can cast it with the help of assistants who can contribute energy to the spell. Anyone can be an assistant, but not everyone can contribute energy equally. The breakdown is shown in Table 7-2.

<i>Assistant</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Mages who know the spell with a skill of 15 or more	As many points of Fatigue as they feel like parting with
Mages who know the spell at a level of 14 or below	Up to 3 points of Fatigue
Non-mages who know the spell at a skill of 15 or more	Up to 3 points of Fatigue
Unskilled assistants	Can each contribute only 1 point to the spell. No more than 100 unskilled assistants can be used to cast a spell.



Other forms of magic

The standard magic system isn't your only option. Mages need not rely on a set list of spells skills. *GURPS Magic* lists several options for the GM to consider — *Improvisational Magic*, *Syntactic Magic*, *Symbol Magic*, and *Ritual Magic*. These systems are all optional and require both the player and the GM to be flexible.

Because these systems are optional, and because they are largely customizable by the GM, these systems fall outside the scope of this book. If, as GM, you are interested in incorporating one or more of these systems into your campaign, they are well worth looking over.

Casting a spell by using ceremonial magic multiplies the casting time by 10. For more details, see the sidebar in *GURPS Magic*, page 12, or on page 238 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*.

Deciding Your Magical Focus

With many dozens of spells available, mages in the typical campaign have to focus on a subset of the available spells. If your character is a mage, which spells should you choose? Several approaches exist, but the three that we prefer are

- ✔ Orienting the character around a specific magical profession, such as healer or battle mage
- ✔ Selecting spells that share a specific relationship with the magical energy, such as a nature mage or a necromancer
- ✔ Identifying a single highly advanced spell or small collection of spells to use as the core abilities of the character

Within *GURPS*, spells are arranged by *college*, a general category defined by the focus that all the spells in the college relate to. For example, the elemental college of Air contains spells that all have to do with air in some way: Walk on Air, Summon Air Elemental, Shape Air, and so forth. Colleges are definitely useful as a way of focusing your magic use; one way to do this is to arm your mage with spells culled from a single college. However, we find it more enjoyable (and more effective) to combine several colleges when creating a character. (Also, many advanced spells within a particular college require knowledge of spells from a different college as part of their prerequisites.)

The concept of a mage with a focus on a particular type of magical energy is one used frequently in fantasy literature and is well-suited for use with the colleges within *GURPS Magic*. Creating a collection of colleges around a type of magic energy is a very subjective process — any two people might create their lists differently. If your GM has created such a list, however, keep in mind that this defines how the game world works; it's no longer a subjective opinion but rather a fact for the world of the campaign. Some examples of groupings of colleges based on such a focus are as follows:

- ✔ A nature mage with spells from the Animal and Plant colleges also might have some spells from Body Control and Healing (because humans are just one form of animal).
- ✔ An elemental mage with Earth, Air, Fire, and Water spells also might have Light & Darkness and Sound spells.

- ✔ A mage associated with how things work might have Body Control, Making and Breaking, and Technological spells.
- ✔ A mage specializing in optical effects might have spells from the Illusion & Creation and Light & Darkness colleges.

Organizing your spells around a profession requires thinking about how the various spells might be applied in a society that relies upon magic. A very interesting way to tackle this problem is to think about common roles in our own society and then transfer them to a magic society. Some examples of roles might include

- ✔ A private investigator type of character with spells from the Communication & Empathy, Knowledge, and Protection & Warning colleges
- ✔ A performance artist type of character with spells from the Illusion & Creation, Light & Darkness, and Sound colleges
- ✔ A transportation expert type of character with Gate and Movement spells
- ✔ A doctor type of character with spells from the Communication & Empathy, Healing, Necromancy, and Mind Control colleges

Often, you will create your mage character with some particular spells in mind that you really want him to cast. By focusing on a few specific advanced spells, you end up defining your character around those spells because you've spent all of your points in order to acquire them.

Usually, spells within a college are arranged so that the simple and less powerful spells are available easily, while the more powerful spells cannot be taken until the simpler ones have been mastered. But each spell lists only its specific prerequisites. Each of those prerequisites may in turn have prerequisites of its own. To start your character with a spell that you really want to take, read the specific prerequisites for that spell, check each of those spells for additional prerequisites, and then work backward through the list of prerequisites to find all the required spells. However, another way to do this is to use the *GURPS Magic* Spell Charts available via Steve Jackson Games' online store at the e23 Web site (<http://e23.sjgames.com>), which presents a visual chart of how the spells interrelate. This is our preference.

You don't have to have a theme that unites the various spells that you take, but we find that it does make a character easier to understand and hence easier to play. It also provides a framework for how your character might develop over time.

Extending Magic with Magical Items

Magical items in *GURPS* are items that have magic spells forged into them. In most cases, the item is enchanted with a spell in such a way that the wielder of the item can cast the spell as if he knew it as a skill with the skill level of the mage who created the item. Some magic items are useable only by mages. The spell descriptions in *GURPS Magic*, pages 23–198, tell you how each spell functions when enchanted into an item and whether the item can be used only by a mage.

Some spells can be used to create items that give a slightly different effect than the spell enchanted into them would give if it weren't associated with an item. For example, the Insignificance spell, when enchanted into an item, is "always on," requiring no energy to activate, but it also can't be turned off while the item is worn. A number of spells are specifically for enchanting items, such as the Deflect spell, which gives a defensive bonus to enchanted armor.

Spells enchanted into magic items can be used time and time again and do not wear out unless the item is destroyed.

Using staves and powerstones — Useful magical accessories

Several minor magic items can be invaluable for a mage character to own. Whether or not they are available in your campaign depends on the GM and campaign setting. The following two items are the most common items and are more likely to be available than many other magical items:

- ✓ **Magic staves:** These are normal staves that have been enchanted with the Staff spell. The effect of this enchantment allows your character to cast spells through the staff as if the staff were part of him, extending his reach with a spell. A magic staff can be up to 2 yards long, so you could touch someone 2 yards away with it and cast a spell on them as if you were touching them yourself. Magic staves can also carry melee spells, giving them more reach and letting you parry more effectively while using them.
- ✓ **Powerstones:** These are magic items that store mana energy, energy you can use to cast spells. Think of it as a magic battery. Each powerstone comes with a limit to how much energy it can store. When your mage character draws on this energy, she removes it from the powerstone and puts it into a spell.

The powerstone will then begin to recharge slowly. The rate at which powerstones recharge depends on the mana level of the area it is in, varying from 1 point a week in a low mana area to 1 point every 6 hours in a very high mana area. If two powerstones are within 6 feet of each other, only the one with more capacity will recharge.

Manastones are like powerstones except they don't recharge. Think of them as disposable magical batteries.

Enchanting for fun and profit

Where do magic items come from? They could come from your character! Enchanting items is an attractive ability in *GURPS*, but you should go into it carefully. Enchantment takes a lot of time, and although the basics don't cost you an extreme number of points (especially if you're already a mage), to be effective at it requires you focus your character toward being an enchanter.

How enchanting is done

To enchant a magic item, at minimum your character needs to have the following:

- ✓ Magery 2
- ✓ One spell in each of 10 different magical colleges
- ✓ The Enchant spell at a skill level of at least 15
- ✓ The spell your character wishes to enchant into an item at a skill of 15 or better

To enchant an item, look up the spell you are interested in using in *GURPS Magic*. If it's possible to put this spell into an item, the explanation of the item and its energy cost will be listed at the bottom of the description.

All enchantment must be done using the ceremonial magic rules, with the exception that it is possible to do it with no one else present. There are two ways to enchant:

- ✓ **The quick-and-dirty method:** This method takes 1 hour per 100 points of energy the item requires. At the end of the time, you must pay the entire energy cost. This can be a lot of energy to get your hands on at once. To reach that total, you are allowed to use your FP (and HP, too, if you want, but you're at -1 to skill for every HP you use), and one powerstone. You may also use assistants who can contribute energy according to the ceremonial magic rules, and they can each use one powerstone.

Often, this isn't going to be enough energy. In these cases, you want to use the "slow-and-sure" method of enchantment.

- ✓ **The slow-and-sure method:** This method takes one "mage-day" for every point of energy you need. For a magic item that requires 100 points of energy, it would take 1 mage 100 days, 2 mages 50 days, 4 mages 25 days and so on. There is no energy cost for this method; or rather, the energy is put in so slowly that the mages are never actually required to mark any off their sheets.

Should you be an enchanter?

The ability to enchant magic items is obviously powerful and desirable. However, you should think about whether it's something you want your character to get into. Because most mages aren't going to be able to come up with 100 points of energy for even a simple magic item, enchanting usually takes a long time, and many of the more powerful options can take a single mage years to create. Most campaigns are going to require that the characters spend a good bit of time adventuring, so this won't really be much of an option.

Nevertheless, your character can do some good things with enchantment that don't take a lot of time. The main one is creating powerstones by casting the Powerstone spell on an appropriate object once for every point of energy you want it to be able to store. If at any point you roll a critical failure with the spell, your powerstone is destroyed. For every regular failure, your powerstone gains a quirk.

The Powerstone spell costs 20 points to cast, which is a lot but not entirely out of reach of many characters. If your character can get some people to help him through ceremonial magic, he should have no trouble casting this spell. Enchanting manastones is even easier; the spell requires only 5 points of energy per casting.

Most mages can also enchant a magic staff. The Staff spell takes 30 points of energy, which again is usually reachable through ceremonial magic.

A few easier weapon enchantments are also available. The Penetrating Weapon spell allows your weapon to divide the DR value of the armor it strikes; the better the divisor, the more it costs. Missiles, such as arrows or crossbow bolts, cost only one-tenth of the normal energy cost, so you can give them a divisor of 2 for 25 points. The Accuracy spell (which gives you a bonus to hit with the enchanted weapon) and the Puissance spell (which gives a weapon a bonus to damage inflicted) work similarly.

Creating Potions with Alchemy

In our opinion, Alchemy is the single most powerful skill in *GURPS*. With the Alchemy skill, you can create any of 68 different magical elixirs, many of which have extremely powerful effects. However, as with enchanting, the Alchemy skill is not right for everyone who can potentially use it. For some characters, it just plain doesn't make sense. In many campaigns, you won't have the time, money, or ability to be in one place for the extended period of time that is required to run an alchemy lab. Think about your character before you take the Alchemy skill because it will end up being something of a character focus.

You do not have to have the Magery advantage to create these elixirs, and in fact, having Magery doesn't help Alchemy in any way.

Alchemy is an IQ/Very Hard skill. Each elixir on the list is considered a Hard technique defaulting from the Alchemy skill. The default penalty is given in the description for each elixir. For example, the Beast Speech elixir defaults to Alchemy -1, and, if you want, you can pay off that -1 penalty with 2 points. You cannot know how to make an elixir at a higher skill than your Alchemy skill.

In order to make elixirs, your character needs access to some sort of lab. A basic lab requires a lot of containers and a place to make a fire and allows you to function at -1 to skill. To avoid that penalty, you need to spend \$1,000 on lab ware. More expensive labs can give you a bonus to skill (see *GURPS Magic*, page 211).

Elixirs can be made in several forms, but not all elixirs can be made in every form:

- ✓ **Potions:** A *potion* is a liquid that must be drunk to take effect.
- ✓ **Powder:** In *powder* form, an elixir must be dissolved in drink to be effective.
- ✓ **Pastilles:** A *pastille* elixir is a small tablet that is burned, creating a cloud of magic smoke 3 yards across and 8 yards high, and anyone breathing it takes the effect.
- ✓ **Ointments:** *Ointments* are topical elixir creams that are absorbed through the skin.

To make an elixir, you first need to gather the ingredients. This may be easy or it may be hard, depending on the elixir in question. The cost of brewing each elixir is given at the end of each elixir's write-up (see *GURPS Magic*, page 213-219), along with the amount of time it takes to make.

Sample character: Magery

Bjoern's Mage Character

The most predictable thing about me is that all my PCs must have whatever form of Flight is available in the game world. For this campaign, that means that my first choice of spells will be from the College of Movement. After that, Healing is always in high demand, and given the +4 Silence of Halflings, I think that the College of Light and Darkness (and its Invisibility spell) would be a natural choice. You can check out the spells I decided upon in Chapter 6.

I do think that I'll give this guy a Familiar. Because he's going to be airborne so much of the time, I want a Familiar who can fly and managed to talk the GM into letting me have a Wolpertinger — a carnivorous rabbit with wings and antlers. After looking at the rules for Familiars on page 38 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, I'm able to draw up to 5 Fatigue from my Familiar and can gain an Innate 2d Impaling Attack (drawing upon the magical power of its fangs). You can check out this Familiar, Toby, on page 112.

Elixirs are slow and costly to prepare but have some definite advantages over spells. For the most part, their effects are much longer-lasting. They also do not require energy to use.

Some alchemists can also make amulets, talismans, and exotic preparations (described in *GURPS Magic*, pages 220–221). Because these are powerful abilities that are not recommended for every alchemical campaign, they are a bit beyond the scope of this book, but we recommend you talk to your GM about them if you're interested.



Toby, the Wolpertinger Familiar (60 points)

ST	6	<u>Description</u>	<u>Modifiers</u>
DX	14	A very large (approximately 30 lbs) diurnal omnivorous rabbit with eagle wings, deer antlers, and teeth like a sabretooth tiger.	Frequency of Appearance: 12 or less.
IQ	6		
HT	14		
HP	6		
Will	6		
Per	12	Can speak in a high, squeaky voice.	
Fat	6	Familiar Abilities Given to Opie	
Speed	7	FP+5 (accessibility, Granted by Familiar, -40%)	
Move	9/18		
Bite	1d imp	Impaling Attack (2d): Magical essence of bite	
DR	2		
Dodge	10		
		<i>Accessibility, Granted by Familiar,</i>	-40%
		<i>Rapid Fire, RoF 2,</i>	+40%
		<i>Reduced Range/5,</i>	-20%
		<i>Limited Use, 10 uses a day,</i>	-10%
		<i>Full Power in Emergencies Only,</i>	-20%
		<i>Uncontrollable,</i>	-30%
		<i>Nuisance Effect: Makes sound of enraged wolpertinger,</i>	-5%
		<i>Nuisance Effect: Produces scent of wolpertinger musk (scent clings to Opie afterwards until he bathes),</i>	-5%
		(16 points)	
		Cost as Ally Familiar: 22 points	

Chapter 8

Powering Your Character

In This Chapter

- ▶ Introducing the core advantages for abilities
 - ▶ Calculating the cost of an ability
 - ▶ Grouping abilities into powers
-

Most people don't play role playing games so that they can pretend to be a regular person with a nine-to-five job who comes home to a mortgage and a yard that needs mowing. Most people prefer to play a character who is exceptional in some way, who rises above the limitations that most of us endure. In this chapter, we talk about how exceptional powers are designed and used.

GURPS uses the terms *ability* and *power* to mean separate and distinct things. An *ability* is an advantage that allows a character to do something that an average person can't, such as turn invisible or leap over tall buildings in a single bound. All abilities are advantages, but not all advantages are abilities, because not all advantages allow you to do exceptional things. Being wealthy or having high status is an advantage, for example, but not really an ability because wealth and status aren't things you can do. On the other hand, being able to fly is both an advantage and an ability.

A *power* is a group of related abilities that form a coherent whole. We talk about them later in this chapter.

For the sake of simplicity, we start this chapter by examining the mechanics of creating and customizing abilities before we move on to grouping them together into powers.

Although this chapter is in the player's section of the book, it is equally important for GMs to read. Most systems of power are designed by the GM for a specific campaign, and not by the players.

Understanding the Types of Abilities

The term *ability* is really just another word for *advantage*. We generally use the term *ability* to denote an advantage that a character acquires as part of a power. These abilities may be customized by the player, a process we discuss later in this chapter.

In this chapter, we discuss a set of advantages that are primarily used to create abilities and powers. However, keep in mind that any advantage is available for modification and use as a specialized ability if you can think of a way to use it, including the standard advantages discussed in Chapter 4 and the racial advantages discussed in Chapter 10.

We find that the easiest way to design an ability is by imagining what you want that ability to do, and then figuring out a way to manipulate an advantage or group of advantages through limitations and enhancements to make the bookkeeping work out. You will find that in practice, a particular ability can be built in more than one way; you should select the method that is the least convoluted, makes the most sense, and costs you the least number of points. Check with your GM to make sure that he agrees with your assessment of the situation.

Combat abilities

The following four advantages are the most common foundations for offensive combat abilities:

- ✓ **Innate Attack (Variable)**
- ✓ **Affliction (10 per level)**
- ✓ **Leech** (from the *GURPS* sourcebook *GURPS Powers*, **25 +4 per level**)
- ✓ **Binding (2 per level)**

Of these, Affliction, Leech, and Innate Attack are the most flexible, and you will find that most of your attack abilities will be based on them. The uses of these advantages are discussed in the sections that follow.



Several other abilities, although not specifically designed for combat, can nonetheless be useful for combat. Primarily, these are

- ✓ **Mind Control (50)**
- ✓ **Control (Variable, from *GURPS Powers*)**
- ✓ **Create (Variable, from *GURPS Powers*)**
- ✓ **Illusion (25, from *GURPS Powers*)**

Each of these can be useful in or out of a fight. All of these are discussed later in the chapter, in the section, “Mystic manipulation abilities.”

Innate Attack (Variable)

Innate Attack is an advantage that represents an ability to deal out damage directly, based on some destructive force such as fire, radiation, poison, or even large heavy objects summoned into existence and launched through the air. It is a terrific way to do a lot of damage without humongous strength.

Affliction (10 per level)

Affliction is a very general ability that can have a lot of different effects, depending on how you design it. Specifically, it can stun a target, give it a temporary advantage or disadvantage, temporarily lower one or more of its attributes, cause it to lapse into a coma, incapacitate it in a number of ways, make it drunk or otherwise distract it, negate an advantage, or even give it a heart attack! The thing it doesn't do is inflict hit points of damage directly; for that, you want Innate Attack.

In its most basic form, Affliction costs 10 points a level and causes your target to have to make an HT + 1 roll adjusted by -1 for every level of Affliction your character has, and with a bonus of +1 for every level of point of damage resistance (DR) the target has. Unless you've modified the basic Affliction ability, its effect is to stun a target, who gets to make an HT roll every round to recover.

The target's specific reactions to the Affliction advantage are enhancements to the advantage and drive the cost up. Enhancements, and how to calculate their cost, are explained later in the chapter.

We think that an Affliction ability is worthwhile only if you're willing to sink a *lot* of points into it or if you modify it carefully. Assuming that your average foes are going to have an HT of 10, a single level of Affliction means that they will successfully make their rolls 50 percent of the time. Even if they fail, they'll recover half the time on the following turn. Because it takes your character a turn to use this ability, you are essentially trading one of your character's actions for a 50-percent chance of your target losing one, and a lesser chance of him losing a couple more. And it's worse if the targets are wearing armor because they get a bonus to their HT roll equal to their DR. Targets with high HT or DR are going to be very hard to affect with Affliction.

For low levels of Affliction, choosing effects with a more extended duration can make the ability a better investment because when you do affect a target, it makes a real difference.

Also note that Afflictions can be useful for a lot more than just combat. Some Afflictions are beneficial, as in the case of giving advantages. With beneficial Afflictions, you are likely to be directing the effect to other party members rather than to your foes. And it is usually in the best interest of the character

being affected to allow you to succeed. If your character has an Affliction ability that is beneficial to a target, the target may *add* (rather than subtract) your character's level of Affliction to an HT – 1 roll and will be affected by rolling under its HT number, rather than over it.

Leech (25 for 1st level, 4 per level after that)

Leech allows your character to drain hit points from a foe and heal himself 1 hit point per 3 drained. This can be a nice combination in a campaign in which long combats are common. Leech is a very good choice if your character doesn't have a good defense or armor — its usefulness comes from being able to heal one's own damage while harming your enemies at the same time. If a character is uninjured, she can still drain HP from someone, but there's no healing benefit; this advantage doesn't allow you to increase your hit points above your base.

Binding (2 per level)

The Binding advantage allows a character to immobilize a target somehow; you determine the way this immobilization occurs when you design the ability. Your character could summon giant arms to rise out of the earth and grab your foe, shoot spider webs, or some such thing. Binding is similar in many ways to Affliction, at least in its unmodified form. Both stand the chance of taking your opponent out of combat in a temporary and nonlethal way. Unlike Affliction, unmodified Binding does not totally incapacitate foes; they can still do things, they just can't move. However, because resisting a Binding requires a quick contest of ST, it can be much harder to escape than a low level of Affliction, which just requires a modified roll against HT.

Defense abilities

Only a few defensive advantages are suitable as super-abilities, and they are listed in the sections that follow. **Damage Resistance (5 per level)** can be added to that list if you modify it in some way to make it an ability (for example, if the resistance is due to a force field created by the character). A number of other options are available for the creative player to increase her character's defensive capabilities. Advantages such as **Insubstantiality (80)** and **Invisibility (40)** can greatly reduce the chances of getting hit.

Mind Shield (4 per level)

Mind Shield warns and protects your character from mental attacks. The degree to which this is helpful depends entirely on the campaign — in a realistic, modern campaign, mental attacks just won't be directed toward your character.

Neutralize (50)

This ability lets you neutralize powers of one source. For example, you might be able to neutralize all psionic powers or all magic powers. You must touch your subject to neutralize and then win a quick contest of Will.

Obscure (2 per level)

This ability allows your character to “block” one sense in order for you to avoid detection. For example, *Obscure: Vision* would be something like generating a thick fog to hide you from view. *Obscuring hearing* might involve the ability to generate white noise. Each level of *Obscure* confers a penalty of –1 to Perception rolls to be detected by the sense being obscured.

Static (30)

Static is a lot like *Neutralize*, but it is passive. It prevents abilities from a particular source from affecting you. In many ways, *Static* is more useful than *Neutralize*. True, it doesn’t allow you to help your friends, but it protects you without having to do anything. On the other hand, *static* only affects abilities that are directly aimed at your person. If your character has *Static (Magic)*, an enemy wizard can’t burn him with a fireball, but could set the building he’s standing in on fire.

Movement abilities

Movement-enhancing advantages can get you where you want to go faster, or into places you couldn’t otherwise get. ***Clinging (20)***, for example, is the ability to walk up walls like an insect. It’s a bit pricey, but your character can use it in a lot of ways.

Enhanced Move (20 per level)

Enhanced Move allows you to double your speed in any one mode of movement (flying, swimming, running, tunneling through the earth . . .) that your character can already do. You can use it only while your character is going in a relatively straight line, so it doesn’t help you dodge.

Flight (40)

With this ability, the base assumption is that your character flies like Superman — that is, it just happens, you don’t need special fuel or wings or anything. You can take those modifications — fuel, wings, and so on — as limitations, however. *Flight* is an expensive ability, but it is good in many ways. It keeps you out of reach of ground-bound folk and allows you to reach anything, get over any wall, and so forth.

Super Climbing (3 per level)

This gives you +1 per level to climbing speed. You'll want to take this power only if it's part of your character's image or part of some special move you've worked out for your character. Otherwise, you'll probably not use it that often in most campaigns.

Super Jump (10 per level)

Super Jump allows a character to leap long distances, with each level doubling the distance he can go at a single leap. The problem with Super Jump is that at level 4, you're paying as much as Flight, which would let your character do everything Super Jump does and more. If you need high levels of Super Jump to make your character concept work, you might point this out to your GM and see if she will give you a price break or let you use a limited form of Flight instead.

Tunneling (30 + 5 per level)

Tunneling can be a surprisingly useful talent. Your enemies will rarely think to guard the floors of their compounds, and many times you'll be able to use it to dig under all their defenses. It's probably best in combination with some form of enhanced sense that lets you see where you're going, or at least with Absolute Direction.

Walk on Air (20)

Walk on Air is like flight, only you have to do the legwork. It's sort of a poor-man's Flight.

Walk on Liquid (15)

This advantage is a good visual effect but, in our opinion, is a bit overpriced. For 5 more points, you could walk on air, which would allow you to hover an inch above the surface of a liquid for the same general effect. This is another advantage that will probably be most useful if you have a specific character-based plan for it, like your character is a fairy who lives in a floating house, or something like that.

Jumper (100)

There are two styles of Jumper; one that allows your character to travel through time and one that allows him to jump to parallel worlds (you have to pick one or the other for your 100 points). You should not take **World Jumper** without the GM's assurance that it will come in handy. The rules specify only that a character can go to parallel worlds, not that any of them will contain anything worth visiting after he gets there. The base assumption with World Jumper is that a character can't go anywhere he hasn't been before (although he can if you pay extra for the enhancement), so don't take it at the basic level unless you know you'll be able to get in touch with other Jumpers.

Similarly, you should also have a long and possibly philosophical discussion with your GM before you take **Time Jumper**. Ask what restrictions she'll put on it. If your character makes a mistake, can he go back in time a few seconds and not make it? Or is the past fixed, and when he screws up, visiting the past means only that he'll screw up again? What happens if he goes into the past and kills his grandmother by mistake? If he does a Ray Bradbury and visits the dinosaurs and steps on a butterfly, does the world change?

Warp (100)



Warp is essentially teleportation. The name was changed from the third edition because if you take it with a special limitation listed in the write-up, it confers the ability to fly through hyperspace, which is not teleportation. Warp is very useful and also very expensive. Even in a fairly high-point campaign, it's going to be the centerpiece of your character.

In its basic form, a character can take weight of up to his basic lift (BL) with him when he goes, but you can take the Extra Carrying Capacity enhancement to increase this. If you can afford the points, it's good to be able to take things or even other people with you.

Sensory abilities

Not all of these abilities involve traditional senses, but they all include the ability to perceive in an unusual or enhanced way.

Clairsentience (50)

Clairsentience is the ability to project one's senses so they collect information from a point removed from one's body. It allows a character to see through walls and smell what her neighbor is having for breakfast. The base advantage allows a character to project all her senses; you can limit it to just one or two for fewer points, which is usually a good idea.

Mind Probe (20) and Mind Reading (30)

Mind Probe and Mind Reading are very similar advantages. Mind Probe allows a character to dig information out of a target's mind. Essentially, he can get a truthful answer to any question (or at least what the target believes to be truthful). Mind Reading gives him access to the target's surface thoughts and emotions, but not the things he isn't thinking of at the time.

Mindlink (Variable) and Special Rapport (5)

Mindlink and Special Rapport are likewise pretty similar. Mindlink allows a character to automatically succeed when he tries to communicate telepathically with one special other person whom you pick during character creation.

Note that you must either have the Mind Reading or Telecommunications advantage to use Mindlink; it doesn't allow communication by itself. Special Rapport creates an emotional link with another person, but does not allow the exchange of thoughts. On the plus side, you do not need Mind Reading or Telecommunications to use Special Rapport.

Telecommunication (Variable)

Like Mindlink, Telecommunication allows communication over distances. It can cover a number of mechanisms; for example, a character could be a telepathic psychic or a robot with a built-in radio. Communication isn't limited to only one person, although depending on the mechanism you choose, a character may be limited only to communication with people who have a radio or other specific device.

Scanning Sense (Variable)

The Scanning Sense advantage describes all senses that act as a built-in radar of some sort, although they need not be based on radio waves. For example, sonar would also be a type of scanning sense. It can be modified to have greater or lesser range or to give more or less detailed information.

Body-shaping abilities

These advantages allow you superhuman control over your own body.

Duplication (35 per copy)

Duplication allows you to make exact copies of yourself. This can be quite a nasty advantage in a high-points supers campaign — double your actions for 35 points!

Elastic Skin (20)

This advantage lets you alter your skin and features to mimic someone else. We are pretty lukewarm on this advantage. Considering that it doesn't allow you to change size or shape or give you new clothing, its uses are somewhat limited.

Growth (10 per level)

This ability lets you grow temporarily into a giant! Unfortunately, it doesn't give you the strength to go with it; you have to buy that separately, although if the extra strength is there only when you're big, you get a discount rate.

Shapeshifting (Variable)

Shapeshifting is the ability to change into a different form. There are two subcategories of Shapeshifting: Alternate Form and Morph. A werewolf is the most obvious example of an Alternate Form — your character has two possible shapes and can switch back and forth between them.

Morph allows much more flexibility — a character with Morph can in theory take on any form, limited only by the number of points she has put in the skill. At its basic level, Morph costs 100 points and lets your character take any form that has a racial template less costly than the character's own racial template. You can pay more points into the advantage and take on more powerful forms. For example, if you pay 125 points for Morph, your character can take on any racial template that is up to 25 points more powerful than her "normal" form.

Shrinking (5 per level)

This ability is like Growth, but it takes you in the opposite direction. It's only worth taking if you buy enough levels to be able to hide well, crawl under doors, and so on.

Stretching (6 per level)

Stretching allows you to increase the Size Modifier of any of your body parts by +1 per level. It's left to your imagination to figure out something useful to do with this ability.

Mystic manipulation abilities

These advantages allow you to exert supernatural control over things.

Super Luck (100)

As with regular Luck (see Chapter 3), Super Luck is directed more toward the player than the character. Once per hour of play, Super Luck allows you to dictate any dice roll you or the GM normally makes on behalf of your character instead of actually rolling the dice. This is obviously an enormously valuable ability, but it costs a lot of points and is a strange ability to build a character around.

Visualization (10)

Visualization gives your character a bonus to any task that he can spend some time visualizing before he attempts. You roll against your IQ and gain at least

+1 to the action you visualized if things go how you planned. A very good use of 10 points if your IQ is high enough that you are likely to roll well under it.

Snatcher (80)

This ability allows a character to “snatch” any item he can visualize from a parallel world. It has to be something small that can fit in his hand, and it has to exist or have existed at some time. A character can snatch only things that he can visualize, so you can’t have your caveman snatcher pulling laptop computers out of thin air.

The value of this ability varies a lot from campaign to campaign. In a futuristic campaign in which all the good stuff is illegal, Snatcher can be a huge boon. On the other hand, in a futuristic campaign in which you can buy anything, all it does is save you money. In a very low-tech campaign, you might only end up being able to pull arrows and animal pelts out of nowhere.

Telekinesis (5 per level)

Telekinesis is the ability to move things around from a distance without touching them. It is an incredibly useful and versatile ability, especially when you have enough levels to pick up really heavy things.

Create (Variable)

Create is an ability from *GURPS Powers* that allows a character to create one type of matter or energy out of nothing. The cost depends on how specifically defined the type of matter or energy is. For example, the ability to create any liquid costs 40 points per level, while the ability to create infrared light only costs 10 points per level. The level of Create you buy determines how much of the matter or energy you can produce. Everything you create is unstable, and must be stabilized by spending character points from a special pool. You get the points back when you make the substance vanish.

Control (Variable)

This ability allows a character to mentally control some form of matter or energy. It can be very specific, such as the ability to control all plaid potholders, or general, like the ability to control gravity or light. This sounds incredibly powerful, but there are a number of limits. For one thing, without modification, a character must touch the subject to establish control. Also, Control is not a substitute for Telekinesis — a character can reshape his target and even make it crawl along the ground, but not make it fly through the air. And the item can’t be made to move fast enough to make a good weapon. For example, if your character controls stone, she could shape stone into a statue but couldn’t make the statue bash her enemies over the head; its arm wouldn’t move fast enough to do damage.

Illusion (25)

Illusion allows your character to make visual and auditory constructs in a two-yard radius around her. You can increase or change the area of effect through enhancements and limitations, as we discuss later in this chapter.

Mind Control (50)

This is the ability to control others with one's mind. It can be enhanced to allow a character to implant suggestions and make other subtle changes to people's minds.

Possession (100)

A character with possession can occupy other bodies with his consciousness. To do so, the character must touch his target and win a quick contest — the character's IQ versus the target's Will. This ability is as permanent as you want it to be; you don't have to get out of a body until you're ready to.

Calculating an Ability

Abilities in *GURPS* are nearly infinitely customizable. You can get exactly what you're looking for by starting with a basic advantage and adjusting it with any of a number of *enhancements* and *limitations*.

As you might expect, *enhancements* are adjustments to advantages that make them more useful or powerful. For example, the basic Invisibility advantage assumes that a character is invisible all the time. If you want to be able to switch it off and on, that requires the *Switchable* enhancement. Enhancements increase the cost of an advantage by a percentage rather than by a specific number of points.

Limitations work in the same way as enhancements, but they give character point discounts rather than increases. For example, if your character is a pixie who is invisible, but not to people younger than age 5, that would be a limitation on your character's advantage because she wouldn't be invisible to everyone.

To figure out how much your ability costs, add the percentage values of your enhancements and limitations together (making sure to treat the limitations as negative values). If the number is negative and below -80 percent, make it -80 percent — even a heavily limited advantage is worth something. Add 100 percent to this number to take into account the base cost of the advantage, and then multiply the cost of the advantage by this percentage. This will give you the final cost of the advantage.

If this seems confusing, think of it this way: A 10 percent enhancement increases the cost of an advantage by 10 percent. A -20 percent limitation reduces the cost of an advantage by 20 percent. An advantage with both the 10 percent enhancement and -20 percent limitation is at a net 10 percent reduction. No matter what, your total limitations and enhancements can't give you a bigger reduction than -80 percent.

More bang — Enhancements

A lot of enhancements are available, and so to help you think about them, we have divided them into three categories in Table 8-1.

- ✔ The first category, labeled “How It Works,” includes enhancements that affect the basic form the ability takes. For example, a basic burning Innate Attack allows your character to shoot bolts of flame at her target. The Aura enhancement changes it so that she's wreathed in fire instead.
- ✔ The second category, “How It Takes Effect,” includes enhancements that adjust how an ability functions, but not its overall form. For example, Affects Insubstantial allows the ability to affect ghostly or insubstantial targets.
- ✔ The third category, “Effectiveness” includes enhancements that increase certain aspects of your ability. For example, Accurate gives you a skill bonus with your ability.

You will find it easiest to design a power if you progress through these categories by considering each of them independently and in this sequence. Knowing how an ability will manifest gives you a good start in figuring out how it will take effect, and how it will take effect (and how many points you have left over) will give you an idea of what sort of effectiveness modifiers you will want.

It's important to note that the lists in Table 8-1 do not include enhancements or limitations specific to particular advantages.

Table 8-1 Enhancements by Category		
<i>How It Works</i>	<i>How It Takes Effect</i>	<i>Its Effectiveness</i>
Affects Others*	Affects Insubstantial	Accurate
Area Effect	Affects Substantial	Armor Divisor
Aura	Based On Diff. Attribute	Cosmic
Blood Agent	Can Carry Objects*	Extended Duration
Cone	Damage Modifiers	Game Time*

<i>How It Works</i>	<i>How It Takes Effect</i>	<i>Its Effectiveness</i>
Contact Agent	Delay	Increased Range
Cyclic	Drifting	Long-Range*
Jet	Erosive*	Low or No Signature
Follow-Up	Guided or Homing	Once on, stays on*
Force Field*	Independent*	Reduced Fatigue Cost
Link	Mobile	Reduced Time
Malediction	Persistent	Reliable*
Overhead	Rapid Fire	Ricochet*
Ranged	Selective Area	Variable
Reflexive*	Selective Effect*	
Respiratory Agent	Selectivity	
Surprise Attack*	Sense Based	
Switchable*	Side Effect	
Time-Spanning*	Symptoms	
Wall	Underwater	
World-Spanning*	Very Rapid Fire*	

* These are enhancements from GURPS Powers.

What we think of enhancements

Too many enhancements exist for us to discuss them all individually, so we picked out our favorites. We recommend spending some time with the books getting to know them — if nothing else, it will give you some good ideas!

In our discussions below, we do not go into great detail about the nature of these enhancements. Refer to your *GURPS Basic Set* and *GURPS Powers* books for those specifics. The few that we thought we should comment on specifically are as follows:

- ✔ **Area Effect** can be a tremendously helpful enhancement. For a 50-percent increase in cost, you can affect a two-yard radius — if your foes are packed tight enough, you can in theory get seven with one blow! Abilities with this enhancement can still be especially nasty even against single foes because your target cannot use most active defenses against them, and if they are more than a yard from the edge of the area of effect, they

can't even try to dive for cover! The **Cone** Enhancement has similar virtues, but a different shape.

- ✔ **Armor Divisor** can be incredibly handy in some campaigns in which armor levels are high, such as futuristic campaigns. It's an inexpensive way of getting through otherwise impenetrable armor.
- ✔ **Affects Others** can be quite useful, but read it carefully before you make plans to use it. It allows an ability to apply to other people, but does not allow them to control it. If you want to allow them to control the ability, you must use Affliction.
- ✔ **Affects Substantial** (assuming you can turn insubstantial) can be so powerful that you ought to think twice about taking it in a campaign without a significant number of foes who will be able to affect you in your insubstantial state. There's not much challenge to attacking your enemies from a state of complete invulnerability.
- ✔ **Aura** makes your ability surround you, rather than shoot out like a bullet. Anyone touching you or anything striking you is affected by it. This is very powerful in campaigns in which foes are likely to use hand-to-hand weapons or bite and claw you. In a futuristic campaign in which everyone has guns, it's not so useful, at least not for combat-related abilities.
- ✔ **Cosmic** can be either extremely powerful or not all that useful, depending on what you apply it to. An attack that ignores DR is a big plus in a campaign in which foes are highly armored. Mind Control that ignores Mind Shield is useful only if there are a lot of Mind Shields about. This enhancement is especially deadly when used with an ability that has a lingering effect so that it can't be countered, such as a fire that can't be extinguished.
- ✔ **Guided** and **Homing** are very nice enhancements, but are best when combined with **Increased Range**. When applied to an Innate Attack, Guided and Homing convert the ability to a missile that either steers itself (Homing), or is steered by you (Guided). The speed of the missile is equal to the $\frac{1}{2}$ D range of your ability (that is, the range beyond which the damage for your ability is halved), which for Innate Attack is a base of 10. This isn't very fast. If an opponent can fly, has a vehicle, or is especially speedy, your character's missile won't be able to catch him. If your character is particularly fast or can fly, she might end up passing her own missile in flight. Adding Increased Range increases the $\frac{1}{2}$ D range, and thus your missile's speed.
- ✔ **Drifting** is not a very useful enhancement in our opinion unless you have some specific special use in mind. It removes a character's control over where his power goes and leaves it to the vagaries of the wind or water currents. There may be times when this enhancement means your character's power is blown back in his face.
- ✔ **Reduced Time** can be especially useful when reducing to less than one second the time it takes to use an ability, which makes it instantaneous.

This allows a character to use the ability and do something else in the same turn.

- ✔ **Mobile** is most effective when combined with Homing, so that your ability sticks with your target. Otherwise, your character is often as well off just using the ability again as he is moving the effect of a previous use of the ability.
- ✔ **Rapid Fire** is a good use of points. You can triple your potential number of hits for +50 percent! Remember, though, that to actually hit with your extra shots, you have to beat your attack skill by a number equal to your Recoil statistic for every shot. For example, if your Recoil number is 1 (the base for an Innate Attack), and you have a Rate of Fire (RoF) of 3, you get an extra potential hit for rolling 1 under skill, and another for rolling 2 under skill. If your attack has a high recoil, a high rate of fire won't do much good because most of those shots will miss.
- ✔ In our opinion, only a GM who is eager for paradoxes and headaches would allow the **Time-Spanning** enhancement. Did your party get into a mess? Take **Telesend** with Time-Spanning and inform yourself what not to do before you do it. Your enemy is giving you trouble? Find out where they were a week ago and blow them away with your Time-Spanning attack from the complete safety of the present.
- ✔ **Very Rapid Fire** ups the speed of the Rapid Fire enhancement, the result being that you can't spray shots over a wide area anymore (they all go virtually at the same time), but you hit your one target more often than you would with simple Rapid Fire. You can deal a lot of damage with this enhancement.

Fewer points — Limitations

As we did with enhancements, we've divided the limitations up into three categories in Table 8-2.

- ✔ The first category, "How It Works," includes limitations that affect the basic structure of the advantage. For example, an Area Effect fire spell with the Bombardment limitation works a lot differently than one without — the limitation means fire rains from the sky.
- ✔ The second category, "How Often It Works," covers limitations that make it less likely that the ability will function. For example, an ability with the Emergencies Only limitation will only function during emergencies.
- ✔ The third category, "Effectiveness," includes limitations that reduce the effectiveness of the ability. For example, Reduced Range limits the distance at which the ability can be used.

Table 8-2		
Limitations by Category		
<i>How It Works</i>	<i>How Often It Works</i>	<i>Effectiveness</i>
Active Defense*	Accessibility	All-Out*
Always On	Aspected*	Armor Divisor
Blood Agent	Costs Fatigue	Backlash*
Bombardment	Costs Hit Points*	Blockable*
Contact Agent	Emergencies Only	Damage Limitations
Dissipation	Fickle*	Dissipation
Emanation	Hard to use*	Extra Recoil
Environmental*	Insubstantial Only*	Inaccurate
Gadget Limitations	Limited Use	Maximum Duration*
Glamour*	Preparation Required	Minimum Duration*
Melee Attack	Requires Attribute Roll*	Minimum Range*
Pact	Requires Concentrate/Ready	Missing Damage Effect
Sense-Based	Requires Reaction Roll*	Mitigator*
Short-Range*	Resistible	Nuisance Effect
Specific*	Takes Extra Time	Onset
Uncontrollable Trigger*	Takes Recharge	Reduced Range
Usually On*	Trigger	Temporary Disadvantage
Visible*	Unconscious Only	Terminal Condition*
	Uncontrollable	
	Unreliable	
	Untrainable	

* These limitations are from GURPS Powers.

What we think of limitations

Again, space does not permit a thorough study of all the limitations. Some time spent gaining knowledge of them can be worthwhile and, as with enhancements, an exercise in stimulating the imagination.

In our discussions below, we do not go into great detail about the nature of these limitations. Refer to your **GURPS** books for those specifics. The few that we thought we should comment on specifically are as follows:

- ✔ The **Accessibility** limitation limits what your ability can affect. For example, you might take Mind Reading with an Accessibility limitation so you can only read the minds of children under 10 years of age. Accessibility can be a very handy limitation. Be sure to not just think of this limitation as being about what you can't do, because often you form an ability by thinking of what you want to be able to do and then whittling that effect out of a much more general ability. For example, if you want your character to be able to control wolves, you could base that ability on Mind Control with an Accessibility limitation: Wolves only.
- ✔ **Takes Extra Time** and **Preparation Required** can be a bit of a point crock (a term we use to describe a disadvantage or limitation that gives points without hurting you) depending on what you use it on. An ability such as **Psychometry**, which will almost never be used in a hurry, is not much diminished by taking a couple of extra seconds to use.
- ✔ **Pact** — receiving one's abilities from a higher source in exchange for following a strict moral code — is an interesting limitation and is well suited for whole powers as well as simple abilities. It is likely that if an entity grants you one ability, it will grant you most of your abilities.
- ✔ **Gadget Limitations** (Breakable, Can Be Stolen, and Unique) can give you a lot of points back, but you should be careful about having all your abilities based on a single item. If you get a lot of points back for an item being breakable and stealable, you've got to expect it to get broken or stolen from time to time, and you don't want your character to be totally crippled by this loss.
- ✔ If you take the limitation **Emergencies Only**, make sure you get the GM to define *emergency* before you finalize your character. Are all fights an emergency, or must your character come under personal attack? Will the emergency go away if no one takes a shot at your character for a while? These things can have a big effect on how limiting this limitation is.
- ✔ Like Takes Extra Time and Preparation Required, **Takes Recharge** can also be a point crock. Not only do some abilities not need to be used in a hurry, many are not likely to be used repeatedly.
- ✔ **Specific** restricts an ability to only interacting with one type of material, when normally it would allow you to interact with more. For example, the limited Clinging advantage might allow you to walk up wooden surfaces only.

This is essentially redundant with Accessibility, and we are not sure why both limitations were included in the rules.
- ✔ **Emanation** is much like Aura in that your character's power radiates from her. Unlike Aura, it is not a constant field, but is rather a pulse. Despite this being a limitation, it's not all negative. With an attack power, it's handy when your character is surrounded because it allows her to hit multiple targets simultaneously, including people standing behind her.



Combining Abilities into Powers

In *GURPS* terms, powers are groups of abilities that draw from the same *source* and share the same *focus*. Usually, a character who has supernatural abilities has them for some reason. Perhaps he's a wizard or a priest. Perhaps she's a ghost or a fairy. Be it from species or from training, some background explanation usually describes why the character has supernatural abilities. This explanation is the *source* of the power.

Similarly, abilities are usually unified by *focus*. A focus is an integrating theme for all the abilities, usually based on their source. A priest of the god of music might hypnotize listeners with song, but he probably isn't going to be able to shoot lightning from his eyes because that has nothing to do with the theme of music.

Not all abilities need to be part of a power. It's perfectly possible to just have one or more unrelated abilities that your character can use. However, you will generally have to be able to explain to the GM how you got any particular ability.

Examples of powers

An example makes this clearer: The superhero Fireboy has the abilities to fly, to shoot fireballs out of his fingertips, to create smoke screens, and to extinguish fires with a wave of his hand. Together, all these abilities make up the power called Fire Control. The focus of all these abilities is fire; that is, they all have something to do with the elemental force of flame. He gets these abilities from his patron, the volcano god Mal, who is therefore his source.

The psionics system detailed in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* provides a good example of power systems. There are six different psionic powers: Antipsi, ESP, Psychic Healing, Psychokinesis, Telepathy, and Teleportation. The source for all of these powers is the same — they come from mystical powers of the mind. They each, however, represent a different focus. ESP, for example, has as a focus the ability to perceive things in a supernormal way and includes a number of abilities, such as Clairsentience, Danger Sense, Precognition, and so on. Note that none of these powers is necessarily psionic; any of them could, for example, also come from a religious source.

Powers are generally created for a campaign by the GM and can represent any number of things — the special abilities of a style of martial arts, the mystical abilities of a system of shamanic magic, or the divine gift of a pantheon of gods. The GM may occasionally allow players to create their own powers — this will frequently be the case in superhero campaigns.

Power modifiers

A *power modifier* is a character point discount or bonus that is applied to all the abilities of a power. It is essentially just a collection of enhancements and limitations that must be applied to all the abilities in a certain power. Technically, all powers have such a modifier, although it's possible for it to be 0 percent.

The reason why a power might have limitations and enhancements that affect all of its constituent abilities is because all of the abilities come from the same source and are therefore subject to the same restrictions or benefits. A priest might gain powers due to a Pact with his deity, and therefore the Pact limitation would be appropriate for all of his powers.

Because all abilities in a power come from a common source, it is often possible to block those powers by interfering with that source. This weakness is a -10 percent limitation that is part of the power modifier. For example, entities with Antipsi abilities or anti-psionic technology can limit or block psionics. Because of this vulnerability, psionic abilities have a -10 percent power modifier.

Other powers might have other limitations. For example, a Shaman might have an assortment of abilities based on his ability to command spirits. Using these abilities might require some sort of ritual, which increases the amount of time it takes to activate them (Takes Extra Time limitation).



Designing powers for GMs

When players design powers, they are generally thinking of beefing up their characters. The situation is a lot more complex for GMs.

You'll find that players will usually want powers if they are available in a campaign. A psionic character or a priest with divine abilities is usually more interesting to play than a totally mundane person with a sword and skill as a merchant. Because of this, if you offer only one power, you may well end up with a party full of characters who have taken it. It's better to offer an assortment of powers that cover a range of

different important functions. You might consider presenting several that have useful combat abilities, one that is useful for healing, one or two that have information-gathering abilities, and so on.

These powers should also not just be free-floating options but should be worked into the fabric of the campaign. If a monastery full of monks can shoot lightning from their eyes and walk on air, how do they fit in with the rest of society? For more on this, see Chapter 20.

Sample character: Powers

Adam's Supers Character

Anna Connors, a.k.a. the Anaconda, has a power granted to her by the Snake Lord. I wanted the abilities included in this power to have a snake-related theme, but realized I was going to have to be a bit loose with the definition of "snake-related" if I was going to have more than a couple of abilities. I originally thought of giving her a poisonous bite, Infravision, something related to hypnotism, and perhaps an Innate Attack involving the summoning of a mystical energy snake to constrict her foes. I ended up keeping the Infravision, and I defined the hypnotic attack as an Affliction that gave Slave Mentality to her enemies. I reluctantly gave up on the poisonous bite because an attack that can only be used in close combat is a bit less useful, and it seems more sensible to put my points into one more functional attack than splitting them into two. I decide that, rather than summoning a constricting energy snake, she would instead be able to summon a magic whip made of an apparently living snake, that bites for toxic damage and causes fear of reptiles in servants of evil gods, who are her special enemy. I also give her the ability to summon snake minions to her aid. I also thought that some damage resistance was going to be necessary

for survival in this campaign and that, because snakes have tough, scaly hides, this wasn't too much of a stretch.

Her power, then, includes the following abilities:

- ✓ Infravision
- ✓ DR 8
- ✓ Innate Attack, Whip, toxic damage, causes fear in servants of evil gods
- ✓ Affliction: Slave Mentality
- ✓ Ally group: Snakes, summonable

The next step is to assign a power modifier. *GURPS Powers* gives several examples of basic power modifiers. One of them is for Divine powers, and this suits what I'm looking for very well. Anaconda's power will be granted to her by a deity and is contingent on her leading a life according to the precepts of her religion. In this case, she must help the poor and dedicate her life to hunting down servants of evil religions. This is a -10 percent power modifier, assuming that the precepts of an average religion amount to a -10-point Vow, Code of Honor, or Sense of Duty. This power modifier gives Anaconda a -10 percent discount to all the abilities in the power.

Power modifiers might require the character to take disadvantages. For example, a martial artist might have special abilities that require him to maintain a strict mind-body connection, requiring the practitioner to be a strict vegetarian and to work out two hours a day. These could be represented by the Vows and Disciplines of Faith disadvantages. The way to show the need for a disadvantage in a power modifier is to convert the point cost of the disadvantage to a percentage (for example, a -10 point Vow would be a -10 percent modifier).

Chapter 9

Tackling Tech Level

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding technology levels
 - ▶ Combining magic and technology
 - ▶ Equipping your characters
 - ▶ Inventing new technology
-

GURPS uses the expression *tech level*, or simply *TL*, to summarize the level of technological advancement for a given campaign. The tech level of a campaign dictates everything from the types of advantages that are most appropriate to the disadvantages and types of equipment that are available. For example, the advantages and skills relating to computers or space travel make sense for your character only if the technology to use them is available. Many physical disadvantages, such as Bad Sight, become less common as technology advances.

In the campaign description, the GM should provide a rough explanation of the technology level as well as any particular additions or restrictions. For instance, any technology level can be mixed with magic or powers to create a unique world. Such supernatural abilities may be in addition to or in place of the mainstream scientific achievements that most people think of when discussing technology. In fact, magical space travel is a subgenre of fiction and hence of the game.

This chapter discusses the meaning of the various tech levels as well as how they influence your character and your campaign. Included is a discussion of purchasing, using, and inventing equipment. In addition, we give special focus to gaming issues that are raised by more-advanced technology, such as the effect of extremely destructive weapons on combat. Finally, the topic of the interaction of magic and technology is introduced.

Understanding Tech Levels

The level of technology of a campaign is represented by its TL value. Our current standard of technology is described as early TL8. A TL3 civilization is generally considered primitive by today's standards and a TL9 civilization is perceived as futuristic. For most characters, TL primarily determines what type of equipment will be available; however, the TL value is also used in calculations when determining how difficult it will be to understand unknown technology or to invent an item.

Individual characters may come from a subculture with a distinctly different TL than the campaign setting. In such cases, the **Low Tech Level (-5 per level)** disadvantage or the **High Tech Level (5 per level)** advantage may be appropriate to reflect a subculture's relative technological knowledge.

Historical settings

Most campaigns set in TLs lower than modern time are described in terms of their corresponding historical period, such as Ancient (TL0–2), Medieval (TL3), Age of Exploration (TL4), Elizabethan (TL4), the Renaissance (TL4–5), Industrial Revolution (TL5), Victorian (TL5–6), the Roaring Twenties (TL6), or World War II (TL6–7). Such descriptors are more useful because they also convey a sense of society and culture. The only reason to convert the time-period to a TL is to determine what equipment is available.

Alternate earth campaigns and fantasy campaigns that are set in a lower TL may be described in terms of the corresponding period of history or simply with a description of what technology is available. In general, the primary distinctions are the advent of forged metal and gunpowder, the availability of printed books, and the existence of automobiles, radio communication, and mechanical flight.

Modern life

Campaigns set in contemporary society are identified as being TL8 (although all three of us started gaming back in TL7). The transition to TL8 comes about with the miniaturization of technology including laptops and cell phones.

Access to technology can be limited in all TLs, but modern society provides an easy reference for understanding the two factors that determine who can own what types of equipment:

- ✓ **Legality Class (LC):** How likely society is to restrict the availability of an item. This value applies only to items.
- ✓ **Control Rating (CR):** How permissive a society is in terms of access to such items. This value applies only to societies.

Items have an LC and societies have a CR. However, many individuals within a given society have exceptions to the general CR. These exceptions are reflected in the *GURPS* system with advantages such as **Security Clearance (Variable)** and **Legal Enforcement Powers (5, 10, or 15)** or any other social advantage that implies special treatment.

The other factors that control access to technology are as follows:

- ✓ **Economics** can determine who owns a technological item, such as a cell phone.
- ✓ **Infrastructure** can determine the range of effect of the item — where that cell phone works.
- ✓ **Social values** can determine common restrictions placed on the use of the item — how and when the cell phone is used. Social values are valid only to the extent that your character conforms to such values.



Just because an item is common and easy to get in your neighborhood does not mean that it will be equally available in the GM's world.

In many campaigns, the GM imposes his own restrictions which go beyond any of these factors. If the GM says that machine guns are not available in a TL6 environment, then machines guns aren't available — it doesn't matter what "the book" says. Some GMs will let you browse the Internet to do your equipment shopping, others require you to use materials published for *GURPS*, and others may come up with their own rules.

The near future

TL9 technology is just around the corner and is being created in laboratories as you read this. The ability to interface with computers via voice or gesture, human genetic manipulation, nanotechnology, and cybernetics already exist to a limited degree. In a TL9 setting, these technologies are commonplace.

When considering advantages for your character in such a setting, keep in mind that many physical advantages can be duplicated by technology. By investing points in starting cash, the character can acquire the necessary equipment to have enhanced senses and reactions. The only thing to be cautious about is making sure that the equipment will continue working and will be easily available. Goggles with enhanced sight do you no good if you can't find them to put them on!

Some TL9 campaigns take the cyberpunk path, in which the interface with computers has become virtual reality and the distinction between the physical and digital worlds is blurred. In such campaigns, computer skills — including specializations such as Cryptography — are critical, and characters may require advantages or expensive equipment to enable them to participate fully in the digital world.

Other near-future campaigns may introduce genetic modifications (generally implemented as racial templates; see Chapter 10) or mechanical enhancements blended into the human form (as described in the entry for Cybernetics on page 46 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*). At some point in the future, these enhancements may become commonplace. As a result, the campaign may require a higher starting point value in order to allow the purchase of such advantages. In order to keep the flavor of the campaign, however, many of the individuals that the party encounters will also have such enhancements. Thus, the average individual in the world has an increased value rather than the player characters being higher value than the norm.

Whether they come as part of a genetic template or via cybernetics, such improvements count as advantages. Many of the advantages normally restricted to racial templates may become available as cybernetic enhancements. One special advantage worth considering is **Payload (1 per level)**, which lets your character have a secret compartment within her body.

All such enhanced characters (including those from a genetic template) may have disadvantages to help offset the cost of the advantages, including such things as a **Self-Destruct (-10)**, **Unusual Biochemistry (-5)**, or **Maintenance (Variable)**. When creating a character with such advantages, make sure that the skills that you select provide you with activities beyond playing your enhanced abilities.

Somewhere around TL9/TL10, characters may be built entirely as robotic entities with human intelligence. In general, the physical attributes are calculated the same for a robot as for a cybernetically enhanced human. Their mental prowess can be represented with **Digital Mind (5)** and such characters may have the **Reprogrammable (-10)** disadvantage. Other aspects of being an artificial life-form can be expressed as meta-traits like Machine or AI, as described on page 263 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*.

Space

Space campaigns require an entirely different set of skills for the character. For instance, the distances covered by Area Knowledge become vast with Area Knowledge (Galaxy) being a relatively common skill for many space travelers. Survival may also require additional skills, such as Vacc Suit and Free Fall (to maneuver in weightless conditions). Space travel can range from slow colonization of our own solar system (TL9) to system-wide economics (TL10) to interstellar exploration (TL11) to interstellar colonization (TL12).



Starting wealth also poses a problem for both the characters and the GM. What's the fun of having a space campaign if the characters can't afford to ever get off the planet? But you probably don't want to introduce Acme's Used Spaceship lot with discount deals in order to present the party with an appropriately outfitted craft. Our recommended solution is either a party Patron or a party with ethics that don't preclude stealing a ship.

In a space campaign, each world can represent an entirely distinct social and physical environment and subplot, or an entire interrelated system can be created. The diversity of characters is dramatically greater than any other campaign other than the most extreme fantasy realms, and unusual situations become the norm.

The vast distances between worlds offer both an opportunity and a challenge. Depending on the style of campaign, space itself may be the place for interaction with friends and foes or it may be predominantly empty, serving only as a transportation medium. The more that action in space, particularly combat, will play into the campaign, the more diverse the party's skills need to be (particularly for piloting, navigation, and weapons).

From an equipment standpoint, most physical disadvantages become meaningless, and combat no longer has a strength component. Characters generally need much higher skill levels and will be more specialized (unless the GM elects to provide NPCs enough skills to manage the spaceship and other equipment). One of the reasons for the high skill levels is to allow for familiarization with a greater number of systems — each spaceport may have a slightly different technology.

In addition to more skills, campaigns that allow for space travel allow for additional advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages to consider relating to the increased gravity experienced with many futuristic propulsion systems are **G-Experience (1 to 10)** and **Improved G-Tolerance (5 to 25)**. Many space campaigns also introduce the option of playing nonhuman characters, and advantages such as **Pressure Support (5 to 15)** and **Vacuum Support (5)** may be available for them. In terms of balancing your points, the disadvantages are also more useful with both **G-Intolerance (-10 or -20)** and **Space Sickness (-10)**. These are reasonably manageable disadvantages unless your character is likely to be engaging in space combat.

Superscience

GURPS allows the reality that what can barely be imagined today may one day be commonplace. Just as the equipment of fantasy and science fiction of the last century has become part of our daily life, perhaps one day technology will provide transportation and other tools that seem miraculous to us now.

The three most commonly used motifs for such a campaign are

- ✓ Instantaneous travel (including technology such as the Star Trek transporter)
- ✓ Artificial life-forms who are indistinguishable from humans
- ✓ Time travel

Surviving when one hit can kill you

One of the greatest challenges we've faced as GMs is dealing with weaponry with advanced destructive capabilities. The problem is finding the balance between realism and risk. In general, the offensive power of technology advances faster than the defensive strength. In a simpler technology, a well-equipped individual can be protected from most weapons. But after guns are introduced, that's no longer really possible. And as tech levels advance, it gets worse.

A related aspect from the character perspective is that the dividing line between non-lethal and lethal attacks becomes much more dramatic. Whereas with a blade weapon, you can always choose to pull your blow and limit your damage, the same thing isn't possible after you've loaded your gun.

The solution? From a GM perspective, assuming it is a priority to, in general, keep your players' characters alive, first think about how blood-thirsty your players want the campaign to be. At all TLs, it is possible to craft a non-lethal campaign. Restrictions on the types of weapons allowed in society and vows or codes of honor that restrict the characters' actions are the two most common approaches. But such campaigns are not going to be satisfying if your players want a "hack and slash" approach.

Players need to focus on making sure that they consider defensive options as much as, if not more than, offensive options. Carefully examine the available defensive technology and consider that it is more likely to be readily available than weapons of a corresponding TL. Invest in technology that makes your character harder to detect and hit rather than just more able to absorb damage. If magic is available, consider having someone focus on protective spells — they are surprisingly effective against high-tech weapons.

Another strategy commonly used in movies, but usually shunned by role players, is giving up when your enemy has the drop on you. Sometimes, when your foe is staring at you down the barrel of his mark-12 death blaster, it's better to surrender and get rescued by your friends or stage a daring escape than to throw yourself on the tender mercies of your Dodge score.

Finally, think about what technology is available to recover from damage. Are there technologies that automatically start healing you if you fall unconscious? Are drugs available that can keep you going long enough to get the necessary medical help? If a party member dies, is death permanent? (It isn't for some very high-TL and magic campaigns.)

Of these, only time travel introduces special challenges, requiring a GM with a very flexible and creative mind. Related to time travel is the concept of exploring alternate earths (world-hopping), as described in *GURPS Infinite Worlds*. The following advantages and disadvantages are great for time travel campaigns:

- ✓ **Chronolocation (5):** This advantage lets your character know where (more accurately, *when*) he is in a timestream. This is a must-have skill for someone in any time-traveling party.
- ✓ **Temporal Inertia (15):** For those campaigns in which altering the timeline can influence the future (rather than causing a new timeline), Temporal Inertia probably should be a requirement for all characters (or at least those who want to remain active after the party makes a mistake). Without this advantage, when the timeline shifts, your character may cease to exist, and even if she does survive, she will have no awareness of the original history. When changes result in timeline branching, Temporal Inertia is something that at least one person in the party should have.
- ✓ **Unique (-5):** This is the reverse of Temporal Inertia, making you particularly sensitive to changes in the timeline. It is definitely *not* recommended.
- ✓ **Timesickness (-10):** This is actually a general disadvantage that applies to any form of instantaneous travel that violates Einsteinian physics (including teleportation). In a campaign in which such travel is commonplace, this disadvantage can be both reasonable and fun to play.

Mixing Magic and Technology

Magic can be introduced at any TL. Traditional fantasy campaigns set prior to the Industrial Revolution (TL5) can use the standard equipment and societies of those periods because to a greater or lesser extent, a belief in magic was already part of the fabric of the culture. In campaigns set in historically based environments after the Industrial Revolution, magic is usually secretive and limited in effect.

But many campaigns are based on imagining what would have happened had magic been available at the start of the Industrial Revolution. Some GMs take the path of imagining how magic could have been integrated into the development of technology as we know it (with, say, the steam engine requiring only a small bit of Fire magic). Others choose to envision magical and technological progress working in parallel, leading to worlds such as that of Castle Falkenstein and Fantasy CyberPunk. After space travel is introduced, perhaps the party members will encounter societies in which magic, rather than science, has led the way.

Technology magic

GURPS magic allows for magical control and interaction with a wide variety of forms of technology. Not only can spells be used to affect the components of technology (such as the metal used to build devices), but they can directly manipulate the energy used to power such devices as well as control the devices themselves.



The ability to convert physical energy into mana (the energy of magic), and vice versa, opens new vistas of magical effects. A mage who can draw upon the power of a nuclear power plant, for example, can perform amazing feats. The problem is that such feats can quickly rage out of control, making the mage an unstoppable and overwhelming force.

In campaigns in which computers have begun to develop artificial intelligence or independent mobility, any magical abilities that permit characters to cross the divide between the physical world and the digital realm introduce new directions in a cyberpunk campaign.

Comparing magical and technological effects

In terms of offensive capabilities, technology is generally much more effective than magic. Hurling an explosive missile takes both time and energy for a mage but is a simple purchase for the technologist, and the resulting technological explosion is likely to be more powerful. The one advantage that the mage has is the flexibility in types of attack and the fact that his arsenal refreshes as he regains energy (whereas after the technologist has thrown her last grenade, she's out of ammo).

From a defensive standpoint, on the other hand, magic is more powerful than technology until you pass TL9. The various shield spells are much more effective than armor. Likewise, although some effects can be duplicated with drugs, the various spells that enhance physical and mental abilities are extremely advantageous. In particular, alchemical potions (when permitted) beat technological drugs 100 percent of the time.

For matters of observation and detection, after you arrive at TL8, technology again wins, except for mind-reading and such supernatural abilities as Danger Sense or spells such as Sense Foes. Many communication spells are extremely useful until computers reach the point at which instantaneous translation becomes possible.

In general, for mundane opponents, we go with magic before TL5 and technology after TL7 with it being a bit of a toss-up from the Industrial Revolution (TL5) to World War II (TL7). For supernatural opponents, a healthy mix of the two is most useful, but the magical abilities (or some occult equivalent) are necessary as a foundation.



In general, we find that powerful magic is expensive in terms of character points, while powerful technology is expensive in terms of wealth. Mixing the two in the same campaign requires either creating rules that restrict both character points and wealth, or paying particularly close attention to the relationship of starting wealth to character points. Another interesting way to address the interaction between magic and technology is to craft a world in which technology works in some places and not in others, and likewise magic is sometimes available and sometimes not. Thus, the world itself forces the party to successfully integrate technology and magic into its solutions.

Purchasing Equipment

Often, having the attributes and skills for a task simply isn't enough — your character needs the equipment that makes it possible to use those skills. Depending upon the TL of the campaign and the role you want for your character, you may find that you need additional equipment simply to function as an adventurer, particularly in areas such as transportation and combat.

Unless your character has disadvantages that indicate otherwise (most notably, below-average Wealth), *GURPS* assumes that your character has the basics of life appropriate for a middle-class member of society. In general, that means she has a roof over her head but doesn't own the property; she has several changes of clothes but nothing expensive or extremely fancy; and she has the basic necessities of maintaining her household but probably not the items necessary for any professional occupation. What she won't have is any weapons, any specialized tools, or any items of better-than-average quality.

The starting wealth for the campaign is set by the GM. Depending on your character's Status, you will have a fixed cost of living that is generally paid on a monthly basis. You also have the opportunity to earn income from your job, but if you're always off adventuring, you may not be able to collect that paycheck. If you can't afford everything you think you need at the start of the campaign, consider converting points to cash — one point is worth 10 percent of the campaign's starting wealth.

Stocking up

The first things you should purchase are the weapons that your character needs. See Chapter 11 for more information about deciding upon weaponry. Next, focus on defense. Even if your character doesn't have armor, you want to make sure that he has some protection (such as a heavy jacket).

Then identify any of your character's skills that require equipment. Pay special attention to skills that aren't quite "aboveboard," such as Lockpicking and Disguise — items for these skills may be more difficult to acquire after the campaign has started. The listings on pages 288–289 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* is very useful for this. For higher TLs, several additional **GURPS** titles are available, including *High Tech* and *Ultra Tech*.

Finally, consider the transportation needs of your character and of the party. In lower TLs, most people are forced to walk, and you probably can't afford your own transportation (such as a horse). At higher TLs, the type of transportation you start with is up to the GM (in TL8, the official rule is that you start with a car of some sort).

Limiting what you buy

Don't think that you have to purchase everything before the campaign begins. Consider the type of adventure and what opportunities for acquiring new items may present themselves. In most campaigns, shopping will be available when your character has some cash. And he may be able to negotiate an exchange of service for other items. And, depending upon your character, he might be able to beg, borrow, or steal what he needs. Of course, strange as it may sound, some people even like to have money left over for future purchases.

Each TL has different requirements as to the typical items required for comfortable survival. The following gives you some guidelines as to the items we believe are most important for the different tech levels and campaign types:

- ✔ **Historical Reality (TL1–3):** Personal basics (and someone in the party should purchase group basics, a collection of useful items that can be shared among the party), your weapons, a small backpack, a blanket, candles or a lantern, a means of trapping food, a wineskin or two, traveler's rations, a pole (or staff), and rope. Depending on the type of adventure, a crowbar and shovel may also come in handy. Most of your money will go to your weapons; consider investing in at least one weapon of good quality. A general-purpose knife is also a good investment.

- ✔ **Historical Reality (TL4–6):** Include all of the things from TL1–3 above plus a tent and a mule or horse if you can afford it (and a saddle if you can afford that). If you have a mule or horse, your money will be split about equally between transportation and weapons. Depending on how much of the campaign will occur in social settings, you may need to invest more heavily in wardrobe.
- ✔ **Modern Urban (TL7–8):** A cell phone (if available) and a laptop (if your character has the skills to use it). If you expect the adventure to take your character into the wilderness, invest in the same items as for a TL1–3 campaign but add a compass, a tent, and a camp stove, and replace the candles with a flashlight. Transportation is less of a concern because public transportation is likely to be available. Technology to improve your character’s observation skills is very useful and readily available. And someone in the party needs an electronic lockpick (and the skill to use it) as well as a first aid kit or crash kit (and the skills to use that). You character will probably want a knife in addition to any other weapon, and a silencer can be a wise investment.
- ✔ **The Near Future (TL9):** Add to what you get for a Modern Urban campaign and invest in items that can enhance your character’s abilities (including drugs). Pay special attention to weapon options, looking for a style of weapon that matches your character’s preference for close-up versus long-distance engagements. Make sure your character has plenty of ammo and batteries (or alternative power sources).
- ✔ **CyberPunk (TL9–10):** Microcomputer technology — the best you can afford. Explore what enhancements are available both for your character and for his equipment. In campaigns set among urban decay (a common theme for this genre), consider more of the items recommended for lower TLs.
- ✔ **Space (TL10+):** Find out from your GM whether individuals typically own their own spacesuits and what sort of transportation is common. Look at the various defensive technologies as well as weapons. A wider variety of beneficial drugs are available, including ones for enhancing abilities and healing wounds.
- ✔ **Fantasy (All Levels):** Consider the items needed for a historical reality campaign but, wherever possible, purchase the magical equivalent. If they are available, invest heavily in potions (particularly healing ones). Also consider investing in a magical weapon or shield. Note that many GMs use the cost of magical items as a way of managing their availability, so how much you can acquire may be severely restricted.

The more your character has to carry, the slower he moves, so you need to pay attention to the weight of the objects you purchase as well as their cost. One of the advantages of items of higher quality is that they are generally lighter. Likewise, items of more advanced TLs are both lighter and smaller.

Creating Gizmos and Gadgets

Not sure how to equip your character? Not to worry! You can rely on Gizmos and “gadgets” to get you through the adventure.

Gizmo (5) is an advantage that lets you decide what equipment you have available during play rather than before. Many players find it difficult to track their equipment and to think about how equipment and skills are interrelated. The Gizmo advantage gives these players a mechanism whereby they pay the points to have more flexibility on their equipment list. Such characters are given wild-card “Gizmos” that can be “identified,” or replaced with actual items of equipment, later in the adventure. In the fourth edition, Gizmos must be appropriate to the TL and must be available to the character as if they had taken the time to go out and purchase them in advance. They also have to be small enough so that they could have been plausibly carried by the character. No character can have more than three Gizmos. After a Gizmo has been identified during the night’s play, it cannot be changed into something else. If the character wants to keep the item, the GM can require payment of the cash cost of the item when the object first appears.

The **Gadgeteer (25 or 50)** advantage completely changes your character’s relationship with equipment. Rather than being a consumer of technology, she creates it. The rules already allow for *any* character to create a new invention up to one tech level beyond the one with which they are familiar. However, that is a painstaking, time-consuming, and expensive process. In general, such inventions can only be accomplished within extremely long campaigns. Gadgeteer, on the other hand, makes it possible to create new items within a typical adventure or even within a single night’s play.



Gadgeteer requires quite a bit of effort on the part of the GM. In order for the character to design any new invention, the GM must determine the invention’s relative TL and its relative complexity. Based on those numbers, the gadgeteer can then determine how long it will take to create the device and the estimated cost of creating it. One additional word of caution: As with wealth, one character can supply the entire party with all they need unless restrictions are placed on how things are shared.



The complete rules for the Gadgeteer advantage can be found in *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns* starting on page 475.

The 50-point variation on the advantage, **Quick Gadgeteering**, reduces penalties to the point at which the character functions as a superhero — or at least a television “MacGyver” type with a Swiss army knife and the ability to find just the right object at just the right time and the skill to create just what is needed in the nick of time.

Chapter 10

Playing Races Outside the Norm

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding racial templates
 - ▶ Creating undead characters
 - ▶ Shapeshifting
 - ▶ Creating nonhuman races
-

Many advantages and disadvantages within *GURPS* — such as Discriminatory Smell and Mind Reading — are intended to be unavailable to normal human characters. Including these advantages and disadvantages in a campaign dramatically changes the setting from realistic to some type of alternative reality. How different that reality is from the human norm depends on what is permitted by the GM. In *GURPS Basic Set*, these are marked with two icons:



Exotic: Traits that are most likely available via modification to the human norm (for instance, via genetic improvements) or as a racial ability. **Discriminatory Smell (15)**, the ability to identify and track a specific smell, is an example of such an advantage.



Supernatural: Traits that are not part of the rational scientific world but that may be available to anyone in certain types of campaigns. **Mind Reading (30)** is an example of such a trait.

We believe that some of the otherworldly advantages discussed in Chapter 4 can be incorporated into most campaigns without dramatically changing the environment. However, many of the advantages and disadvantages discussed in this chapter require a campaign tailored to their inclusion (generally focused either on fantasy, horror, or space exploration).

Although GMs may allow individual characteristics from this chapter (possibly mixed with a selection of the supernatural abilities, as described in Chapter 8), the most common means of creating a character that strays from the human norm is through the use of racial templates or meta-traits.

A *racial template* describes a specific type of creature or variant of the human race. They frequently include advantages or disadvantages that hint of a racial personality and may include abilities specific to that race. On the other hand, a *meta-trait* describes a more general form of a creature and is usually limited to advantages and disadvantages specific to that form. Racial templates are intended to be the basis of a character; meta-traits are more often used to define an alternate form for an existing character — an alternate form accessed via the Shapeshifting advantage. In some cases, a meta-trait may be used to define characteristics of the primary form if it is based on but differs in key ways from the human norm. In fantasy, a racial template may include one or more meta-traits as characteristics of the creature. For example, a vampire is a racial template but the form of body of air is a meta-trait (one that many vampires may have). But there are no hard-and-fast rules maintaining these distinctions.

Examples of racial templates and meta-traits appear in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* on page 260 and in *GURPS Fantasy* on page 105. Many of the third-edition *GURPS* titles also contain racial templates that can be modified for use with the current system. Feel free to use the information provided in this chapter to create your own racial templates.

Understanding Racial Templates

On a template for a normal human character, all attributes are valued at 10, and the character has no innate advantages, disadvantages, or special abilities. A racial template provides a different starting point. Racial templates permit a collection of attribute values, advantages, disadvantages, special abilities, and even skills to be purchased as a complete package for a fixed point cost. The values of the racial template then become the base for character creation.

In comparison, a meta-trait is intended to function much more as a character modifier rather than the basis of a character. Meta-traits may adjust attribute values, advantages, or disadvantages, but they serve as supplements to a core character concept. Going back to an earlier example, a vampire is a type of character; the very name relates to myth and an entire body of literature about what it means to be a vampire. Being able to change into body of air or even only existing as a body of air is simply one aspect of a character; it's not enough on its own to define a type of character.

Required advantages and disadvantages

Core to the concept of the racial template and meta-traits are the required advantages and disadvantages. These advantages and disadvantages are

built into the cost of acquiring a racial template or meta-trait and do not count toward any general point limitations imposed by the GM (though, of course, the GM may modify this rule as well). Removing any of these advantages or disadvantages requires your GM's permission, and the corresponding change in point cost does count toward any campaign disadvantage limits.

Supplementing the advantages and disadvantages with ones of your own choosing is part of making the character your own. However, a racial template may list advantages or disadvantages as being "taboo," which means you cannot add that advantage or disadvantage to the racial template. The intent is to avoid characteristics that run counter to the concept of the race or that are incompatible with fundamental elements of the description.

We recommend that you detail the components of any racial template or meta-trait, listing each advantage and disadvantage separately but indicating that the entries are part of a package. One method is to enter this information in a different color. Another is to not include costs for these individual entries but instead list only a cost for the package itself. Knowing what comes as part of the package makes it easier for you to predict what others of your kind are like (and often the GM will ensure that you encounter others of your kind, either as allies or as foes). During character creation, also identify items that you cannot drop from your character without GM permission (because they are part of the package).



Think carefully about any disadvantages that you provide as part of a racial template or meta-trait. You must provide enough so that the overall cost of the template is reasonable. But remember that these disadvantages also must keep with the general vision of the race and must be simple enough that most players can successfully incorporate them into their own characters.

The physical form

Most racial templates and meta-traits describe characters that look notably different from normal humans. The differences may be subtle (feline pupils) or dramatic (four-legged half-humans). Be sure to consider these characteristics when crafting your character description.



For many players, having a good visual image of a race is critical to being able to successfully play a member of that race. Therefore, the more detail you can provide, the easier it becomes to understand the vision conveyed by the racial template.

Attributes

Variations from the normal human base attributes generally indicate a variation in size and body structure. Obvious exceptions occur, such as with vampires, who are notably stronger than normal humans yet look the same.

Size modifiers

Some racial templates include variations in size that are important to note, primarily for movement and for combat. Being of a different size is always a mixed blessing. If your character is smaller, she's harder to hit, but she has a difficult time performing many common tasks. If she's larger, she's generally stronger and able to do spectacular feats but also makes an easy target.

Features

Many racial templates also list characteristic features that are required as part of your description. The cost of these is minimal (-1, 0, or 1), but they are important to character concept (for instance, the cat people purr and have tails).

Personality

The advantages and disadvantages of a racial template combine with the general description to create a personality type for that race. Some aspects of a personality may be written out as part of the description as quirks (-1) or, less commonly, perks (1) but much of the personality comes from the interactions of the disadvantages and advantages. If your view of that race or of your specific character requires a different personality type, then you need to supplement the racial template with advantages or disadvantages that reflect that.



Meta-traits generally do not imply a personality type.

For both racial templates and meta-traits, considering the advantages and disadvantages of a racial template may give you insights into personal advantages or disadvantages that you will want to include.

Special abilities

Many fantasy races have magical or fantastic abilities, such as the ability to fly or pass through rock. Alien races may have natural attacks, such as shooting bolts of energy or poisonous fumes. To represent these special abilities, a racial template may also include advantages that are based on the abilities discussed in Chapter 8.

Knowledge and skills

In some cases, a particular race may require specific skills in order to function. For instance, a winged race in which the typical member of the race flies

frequently should require the Flight skill at a basic level. Skills that are required to use the advantages or special abilities of a racial template should be included in the description. Additional skills that are critical aspects of the personality type for that race may also be included. Meta-traits do not include skills.



Be sure to keep the concepts of racial templates and character templates distinct. A racial template or meta-trait describes only the characteristics shared by all members of that race. Abilities that go with a specific societal role (such as a priest, noble, or assassin) should be part of a character template. On a more practical level, the elements you put into a racial template are not available for the player to adjust, whereas the ones in a character template are. Skills and knowledge, in particular, are more appropriate for a character template than a racial template.

Reviving the Undead

The classic undead creatures of the horror genre can also be represented as racial templates. The most common of these are the various forms of the vampire (from movies and print), but other undead, such as zombies and liches, can also be created. Campaigns that allow racial templates with these advantages and disadvantages generally also allow the otherworldly advantages and disadvantages discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 (but, of course, check with your GM).

Resistance to death

One of the standard characteristics of the undead is that they're even harder to permanently kill (even though you'd think that they had a head start, being dead and all). Here are some related advantages:

- ✔ **Supernatural Durability (150)** lets you shake off the effects of blows, but you still take damage.
- ✔ **Unkillable (50, 100, 150)** lets you ignore the fact that your character is dying until he is at $-10 \times \text{HP}$. The various costs of Unkillable determine what happens when your HP reaches that level — from death to becoming a skeleton to becoming a ghost. With the latter two options, you regain hit points while in that state. Several special limitations reduce this to a more accessible cost and to mimic the standards of the horror genre (for example, most undead traditionally have an “Achilles’ heel,” such as silver, which reduces the cost of the advantage by 10 percent to 50 percent, depending on how common it is).
- ✔ **Extra Life (25)** doesn't prevent you from dying but does let you come back to life after death. The details are left to you and your GM.

- ✓ **Unaging (15)** is a separate advantage that is most commonly used to explain how your character looks 38 but has amassed a fortune over the last two centuries.

On the other side of the coin, many undead have particular Vulnerability to a substance (such as silver) or form of attack (such as magic), taking greater damage from it. Some may even have a **Dread (Variable)**, **Revulsion (-5 to -15)**, or **Weakness (Variable)** to a substance or symbol so that simply being in the presence of the substance can cause fear, incapacitation, or injury.



Within campaigns that allow the undead, paying attention to the complete rules that surround damage and injury is critical, in particular the risk to limbs and the loss of functioning at reduced HP.

Substance dependency

Of course, what supernatural campaign would be complete without characters who require a special substance, such as blood or a magical potion, to remain alive? Here are some related disadvantages:

- ✓ **Draining (Variable):** If failing to ingest the substance on a daily basis causes damage, use the Draining disadvantage. The value is determined by the ease of obtaining the substance.
- ✓ **Dependency (Variable):** This disadvantage is more flexible than Draining and can refer to ingesting a substance, spending time in a location, performing a ritual, or any other type of action. The value is based on the difficulty and frequency of the required task.
- ✓ **Uncontrollable Appetite (-15 SCM):** This related disadvantage refers to the craving for a substance.

You can have any combination, such as a Vampire who craves blood (Uncontrollable Appetite), which he must have nightly or lose health at day-break (Draining), and who must also sleep in a coffin containing dirt from his birthplace (Dependency).



Note that many of these characteristics are also appropriate for aliens, fantasy races, and modified humans. Many races have an unusual reaction to a substance, ranging from a Dependency on an exotic mineral to a deadly reaction to a common household product, such as bleach.

Specialized advantages and disadvantages

The following advantages and disadvantages can help round out your undead characters:

- ✓ **Frightens Animals (-10) or Lifebane (-10):** For that truly horrific character, consider Frightens Animals or Lifebane, or even both. Animals will run and the grass will wither as your character passes by. Strangely, because it can be used as an attack, the corresponding ability to cause **Terror (30 + 10 per level)** is an advantage. **Supernatural Features (Variable)** and the more extreme negative appearances — **Monstrous (-20)** and **Horrific (-24)** — are also quite appropriate for horror-genre characters.
- ✓ **Vampiric Bite (30 + 5 per level)** is another specialized supernatural attack and, despite the name, is not restricted to vampires. Any creature that draws energy from its victim should take this advantage. Note that the victim must be either helpless or willing. An added advantage is that, when a character bites, he drains the victim's HP and can use the points to heal himself.
- ✓ **Possession (100)** is the ability to move your consciousness from one body to another. You can either risk a contest for control of an unwilling victim or plan ahead by taking an Ally or Dependent who is your **Puppet (5)**. Your character pays the cost for the Puppet advantage; the Ally or Dependent is then unable to resist his control. All the members of a group of Allies may be your Puppet (10) for the slightly higher cost.
- ✓ **Dominance (20) or Infectious Attack (-5)** represents the ability to create others of your own race. With Dominance, you have an opportunity to make the victim your unwilling servant if you have the points to purchase him as an Ally. The Infectious Attack disadvantage is particularly well-suited for those with lycanthropy (that is, werewolves) because it represents the infectious nature of the illness.

Shapeshifting

Any creature that can change forms is represented with the **Shapeshifting (Variable)** advantage. Though traditionally the alternate forms are animals, the same advantage can be used to represent shifts to any other type of form, including shifting between a normal human and a superhero or among various races.

If your only interest is in being able to change the look of your human form, you can accomplish most of that effectively with Disguise or with an extremely limited form of Shapeshifting.

Note that when specifying alternative forms, you are required to identify a “reasonably common” external influence that can cause your character to revert to his base form (for instance, the setting of the moon or rising of the sun for the traditional werewolf). This disadvantage is part of the core description of the ability and cannot be avoided. We also recommend identifying what controls the shift away from your character’s base form, even if the trigger is something completely internal, such as focusing his intentions on making the change. To determine the cost of alternate forms, follow these steps.

1. Create racial templates for each of your alternate forms.

For each of your forms, you must have a racial template or set of meta-traits. For each form, be sure to think about how you will communicate with other party members in your alternate form.

Include the cost of any advantages that are part of that form. Do not include the costs for any advantages or disadvantages shared by all of the forms; these should be added to your base form. An alternate form does not have to be a completely different form — a human with tiger paws is a specific alternate form. Be sure to include any required disadvantages or innate limitations to help keep the point costs down (for instance, tiger paws have reduced dexterity).

2. Determine your base form and the racial template cost for it.

See Chapter 9 for information about calculating the cost of a racial template. The cost for the normal human racial template is 0.

3. For each alternate form, record the base cost, adjusting the base cost of each alternate form by any enhancements or limitations as described in Chapter 8.

With no enhancements or limitations, this is 15 points.

4. For each alternate form, subtract the cost of the base form from the cost of the alternate form.

Imagine an alternate form that costs 60 points for someone with a base form of a normal human. 60 minus 0 gives us 60.

5. For resulting values greater than zero, multiply that value by 90 percent and add it to the base cost of that form, rounding up. For any values less than or equal to zero, the cost remains at 15 points.

60 is greater than 0, so you multiply it by 90 percent, resulting in 54. That is added to the 15-point cost of the base form for a total cost of 69 points.

Almost all of the advantages that allow for changing your form are very expensive and would be a core characteristic of any character who acquires them. Because of the high cost of any of these advantages, taking some sort of limitation is generally necessary.

On the other hand, be careful to consider how long it will take you to switch forms. The default is 10 seconds, but any switch that takes more than a few seconds will not be useful in a surprise combat situation. Reducing the time requires using the Reduced Time enhancement. Bringing the shift down to 3 seconds requires an increase of 40 percent in the cost, 1 second requires an 80 percent increase, and instantaneous requires doubling the cost.



The templates for many common animal forms are presented in *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns* starting on page 455.

Becoming an energy form

Shapeshifting also allows changing into nonphysical forms, such as having a body of fire, becoming a spirit entity, or whatever else you can imagine. In general, these types of forms are represented by meta-traits rather than by complete racial templates. The process for determining the cost for the Shapeshifting advantage is the same, however.

Having (nearly) unlimited forms

The Morph advantage enables you to take any form up to the point value that you have invested in **Morph (minimum of 100)** plus any points that you paid for your own racial template (zero for human normals). If you take this route, be prepared for extensive bookkeeping — you will frequently want to modify forms (for instance, keeping human intelligence when turning into an animal), and thus you need to calculate the cost of each to determine whether you can take it. One suggestion is that the Trigger (Full Moon) limitation is particularly appropriate.

Drifting Away from Human

The advantages and disadvantages in this section are most commonly used for creating fantasy races, aliens, and genetically modified humans. Many of them can be added to a character and still enable the character to fit into

typical society. But they can also be combined to create races that have little or nothing in common with the normal human.



These advantages and disadvantages are really intended to be part of a racial template so that advantages can be balanced with disadvantages. If these advantages are allowed to only a subset of characters in a campaign, each of the characters in the subset should be required to take the **Unusual Background (Variable)** advantage to explain how they acquired their abilities.

Having a better fighting chance

A variety of advantages directly improve your character's chances in combat, either by providing additional attacks or by improving defenses. In general, these are most useful in campaigns with lower tech levels because technology can neutralize many of the attacks and provides much better defenses (see Chapter 9).

Natural attacks

Natural attacks are particularly important for creating racial templates for animals or for races that have an animalistic heritage. The costs of the various advantages are generally proportional to the amount of damage that each does. The available physical attacks are:

- ✓ **Claws (Variable)**
- ✓ **Constriction Attack (15)**
- ✓ **Spines (1 or 3)**
- ✓ **Striker (5 to 8)**
- ✓ **Teeth (0 to 2)**

Natural defenses

Natural armor is an innate trait that deals with any damage that passes through your character's armor. The most basic form of this type of advantage is **Damage Resistance (5 per level)** and its numerous modifiers. The modifiers allow you to reduce the cost (for instance, by having ablative armor that wears away with use) or increase the usefulness (by bouncing the damage back at your attacker). Unfortunately, in most campaigns, this advantage is not available to normal humans. If you do take this advantage, pay special attention to the Limited Defenses box on page 46 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* for ways to reduce the cost. The related advantage, Resistant,

which protects against indirect attacks, is discussed in Chapter 4. Here are the natural defenses advantages and disadvantages:

- ✔ **Injury Tolerance (Variable)** is an advantage that describes your character's invulnerability to various types of harm. This can mean anything from your character lacking certain organs (which therefore cannot be targeted) to your character being constructed of a fluid or swarm of floating particles. The more extensive the resistance to harm, the more expensive the advantage is. This doesn't protect your character from damage but rather determines how damage may affect your character.
- ✔ **Silence (5 per level)** is the ability to move without making a sound and is invaluable to those who must sneak around for a living.
- ✔ **Chameleon (5 per level)**, much like Silence, provides an advantage against someone seeing you by looking in your general direction. You're not at all invisible, but you are harder to see. This is a very limited advantage in practice because you need to remember to activate it and it is inhibited by most clothing and by movement.
- ✔ **Obscure (2 per level)** can be used to provide more specific control over what others fail to perceive. You can specify the sense that is being blocked (including hypersense such as radar) and the degree to which the sense is blocked. Be sure to consult with the GM before grouping senses (for instance, "sound" may or may not include sonar, depending upon the specific GM ruling).
- ✔ **Slippery (2 per level)** doesn't make you any harder to find, but it certainly makes you hard to hold.
- ✔ **Shadow Form (50), Invisibility (40), Insubstantiality (80), and Permeation (Variable)** are also available as modifiers of your natural form. Each of these is extremely useful for defense and any sort of espionage work. Each is a separate advantage rather than being a meta-trait, so you don't have to have Shapeshifting in order to have these advantages.

Permeation is the ability to pass through solid objects — be sure to consider how you'll see and breathe as you do so.

With Shadow Form and Insubstantiality, if you lack the ability to control your shift between forms, the cost of the advantage is significantly reduced. Invisibility, on the other hand, is always on by default — you have to pay extra to be able to turn it on and off.

In some cases, another option for reducing the cost is having the ability be uncontrollable. Both of these limitations can be great fun but can also be extremely challenging to play (both because they require good role playing and because the GM may turn them against you).

Health

Several advantages and disadvantages exist that affect your character's health.

The three R's of healing are **Recovery (10)**, **Regeneration (Variable)**, and **Regrowth (40)**. Recovery helps you regain consciousness; Regeneration helps you heal damage with faster recovery of HP; and Regrowth takes care of pesky dismemberment problems, such as having had an arm chopped off.

Extended Lifespan (2 per level) and **Short Lifespan (-10 per level)** only really come into play in campaigns that stretch over an extremely long time. However, they can be useful in creating the motivations or behaviors that underlie a racial template. The classic alien who is extraordinarily powerful yet still childlike can be expressed with a racial template that has Extended Lifespan as one of its advantages.

Extending the senses

Human senses are actually able to perceive only a small portion of the information in the environment. Modified humans, fantasy races, and aliens are likely to have a much wider ability to see, hear, and otherwise detect information around them.

Extending the range of your character's vision can be done with **Infravision (10)**, which lets a character see into the infrared spectrum; **Ultravision (10)**, which lets a character see in the higher portion of the spectrum; or **Hyper-spectral Vision (25)**, which combines Infravision and Ultravision to enable a character to see across all spectrums. Infravision is *not* the ability to see in the dark, though some ability to detect heat is included. To actually see with no light requires **Dark Vision (25)**. You can also control your character's ability to see small objects, with **Microscopic Vision (5 per level)**, or distant objects, with **Telescopic Vision (5 per level)**.

Extending your character's hearing is done with **Subsonic Hearing (5)**, for hearing in the low ranges, or **Ultrahearing (5)**, for hearing in the high ranges. The ability to communicate in those ranges is covered with the corresponding Speech advantages — **Subsonic Speech (10)** and **Ultrasonic Speech (10)** — which include the ability to both hear and speak in those frequencies. Be sure to think about who you are going to communicate with using these abilities. If no one else in the party can hear you, speaking outside the normal range is not very useful. Note that if a character can *only* speak or hear in one of these ranges, then the advantage has no cost — it is balanced by the disadvantage of not being able to communicate with normal humans.

Mimicry (10) provides the same abilities as the Mimicry skill but is hard-wired into the character. It should only be used when the ability is innate to the race (such as with, say, a human modified with parrot DNA); normal humans would have this as a skill rather than an advantage.

Sensitive Touch (10) enables your character to detect subtle changes in surfaces, such as residual heat/color or texture differences — useful for finding hidden objects in some cases. **Parabolic Hearing (4 per level)** lets a character focus his hearing to filter out noise and concentrate on a particular sound, such as a foe's voice.

The ability to identify people or objects via a particular sense, as well as improving your tracking skills, are available as the **Discriminatory** advantage for **Hearing (15)**, **Smell (15)**, and **Taste (10)**. Note that taste and smell are separate senses for this advantage, and taste is more useful for identifying substances than for tracking. You must have this advantage in order to separate the track of one individual from a group. Memorizing the characteristic sound, smell, or taste requires concentrating at the time you encounter the person or object, so this is one advantage that you have to think about using before you need it.

Any of your enhanced senses, but most notably sight, can be overwhelmed with a sudden change of intensity (for instance, walking from a darkened room out into bright sunlight). The **Protected Sense (5 per sense)** advantage is useful to minimize the time it takes for you to adjust to such changes. Protecting a sense is particularly important when that sense has a broader range or you have a greater dependency on it.

You can also have supernatural senses that go beyond the normal five senses of the typical human. These include the following:

- ✔ The **Detect (Variable)** advantage lets a character locate a particular substance or identify a particular characteristic of a person or object (such as a person being a magic user or an area having a strong magnetic field). The character does not have to be able to see the object or area.
- ✔ **Penetrating Vision (10 per level)** lets a character see through substances and can be combined with other vision enhancements.
- ✔ **See Invisible (15)** is useful in any campaign in which magic spells or the Invisibility advantage is available.
- ✔ **Vibration Sense (10)** lets a character locate objects around him but does not enable him to perceive details. Note that Vibration Sense is a passive sense; if you want to create the effect of sonar or radar, so that your character emits a signal and detects it bouncing off the objects near her, then you should consider **Scanning Sense (Variable)**.

Thinking differently

Intelligence is an attribute that can be determined for any type of character. But what about characters whose fundamental way of thinking is entirely different? Characters can have thought processes so fast that normal humans seem to move in slow motion, or they can have brains that allow multitasking as separate personalities, or even have memories from all of their ancestors.

Time sense

Being able to think and respond faster than the human norm is represented by **Enhanced Time Sense (45)**. Actually living at a faster rate, with the corresponding ability to take more actions, is represented by **Altered Time Rate (100 per level)**. The reverse, **Decreased Time Rate (-100)**, is also available, but is very risky unless you can afford to miss every other turn of combat.

Being **Nocturnal (-20)** is a serious disadvantage unless everyone in the party is willing to function only at night. With the Nocturnal disadvantage, you cannot function during daylight hours. This is far more than a preference, but rather a biological condition.

If the amount of sleep your character requires is significantly greater than normal (12 hours or more), then you can take the **Sleepy (Variable)** disadvantage. It is *not* true that one of the other authors has this disadvantage. Not sleeping at all is an advantage called **Doesn't Sleep (20)**, and none of the authors have that either, although we wonder whether our editors think we do.

Analytical thought

These advantages and disadvantages affect the way your character thinks:

- ✓ **Compartmentalized Mind (50 per level)** provides the ability to engage in multiple distinct mental tasks simultaneously, including having separate conversations. If possible, also purchase **Extra Arms (Variable)**, **Extra Head (15 per head)**, or some combination to enable you to take advantage of this ability.
- ✓ **Racial Memory (15 or 40)** provides a way of accessing information that was known to your character's ancestors. How this works and what is included is up to the GM, but the higher-cost version can be quite powerful and useful.
- ✓ **Modular Abilities (Variable)** lets you have a set of points that you can move among different skills. Although this is an obvious advantage for computers, other races can have the ability if a reasonable explanation can be provided. One interesting option is to combine this with Racial Memory, enabling you to tap into both the knowledge and skills of your ancestors.

Animal forms

The primary form of a racial template may be based on animal characteristics or adapted to an environment that in the human world is the domain of other species. In futuristic campaigns, the best explanation for some sets of characteristics is that there is animal DNA in the mixture, whether through evolution or manipulation.

Adapting to other environments

Races that live underwater generally have some combination of **Amphibious (10)**, **Speak Underwater (5)**, and **Nictitating Membrane (1 per level)**, which protects their vision. Note that if a character can live only underwater, the point value of Amphibious is zero because of the disadvantage of not being able to survive on land. Reptilian races are likely to have **Cold-Blooded (-5 or -10)**, which has significant disadvantages because a cold-blooded character cannot modify his own temperature and becomes slow-moving in cold climates.

For those who prefer to swing from the trees, the **Brachiator (5)** advantage is appropriate. This is frequently balanced by the **Semi-Upright (-5)** disadvantage. Even more extreme are those races that rarely stand upright to any degree and are built to be **Horizontal (-10)**.

Some races, particularly those living in neutral gravity, can develop without any skeletal structure. In *GURPS* terms, they are described as **Invertebrate (-20)**, which dramatically limits what a character can lift (but does let him squeeze through small spaces). Not worth it generally, in our opinion.

The dark aspects of an animal heritage

The following disadvantages are for characters who are trying to overcome their feral natures:

- ✓ **Bestial (-10 or -15)** characters cannot act in a civilized manner; however, the character may become civilized over the course of play by buying off this disadvantage. Bestial is not about being out of control or violent, but rather about not being a member of a civilization.
- ✓ The **Stress Atavism (Variable SCM)** disadvantage refers to the tendency to revert to an animal state when threatened or otherwise stressed. Note that the animal state is not necessarily bestial; the degree of incapacitation is part of the calculation to determine the value.

Looking the (alien) part

Not being human can be a good thing in an adventure, particularly because it often includes advantages that are not available by any other means.

However, not *looking* human is frequently a disadvantage. Most notably, having **Supernatural Features (Variable)** can set your character apart from mortals who tend to have a negative reaction when they notice people who aren't human. More specific features are often a mix of good and bad.

Having a different number of parts

Some creatures have **Extra Arms (Variable)**, **Extra Legs (Variable)**, or an **Extra Head (15)** or **Extra Mouth (5)**. Extra Arms are the most useful of these, in general (particularly when those arms can attack). Extra Head and Extra Arms can be quite useful if you also have the Compartmentalized Mind advantage.

Having **360° Vision (25)** is a very useful advantage and does not actually require having extra eyes.

The most dramatic disadvantage in terms of physical form is having **No Manipulators (-50)**, which prevents a character from using most technology and limits her physical interactions with the environment. A less severe version, **No Fine Manipulators (-30)**, is also available.

No Legs (Variable) is entirely a racial template disadvantage and refers to racial lack of the ability to traverse the ground. Your race may have other means of locomotion (including flight) but the race lacks the ability to walk. If your race normally can walk but your character cannot, use the **Lame** disadvantage instead.

The **Hermaphromorph (5)** advantage is used for racial templates in which biological gender is under the control of the individual.

Interacting with an alien environment

Sometimes the environment around you is a dangerous place, and being able to avoid interacting is a useful thing.

For the more complete protection, the **Sealed (15)** advantage separates you from your environment but does not protect against environmental extremes of temperature, radiation, or pressure. **Filter Lungs (5)** serves a similar but more limited function, protecting you from respiratory threats, but not threats to your overall system, such as radiation or contact poisons. Both of these still require that your environment has what you need to breathe — you're just protected from any toxins in it. **Breath-Holding (2 per level)** and **Doesn't Breathe (20)** are ways of avoiding even that dependency.

Futuristic campaigns in particular may introduce environments with extreme conditions that require **Temperature Tolerance (1 per level)**, **Radiation Tolerance (Variable)**, or some combination.

The need to gain nourishment from the environment is another area where you can limit your character's risks. The **Doesn't Eat or Drink (10)** advantage takes care of the problem completely, whereas **Universal Digestion (5)** just makes it much easier to find things to eat.

Metabolism Control (5 per level) gives a character voluntary control over his need to eat, drink, or breathe but does not remove the requirement to do so.

Slow Eater (-10) is primarily an entertaining disadvantage unless your GM likes attacking your party at meals. On the other hand, **Doesn't Sleep (20)** can be extremely useful because it means the GM can never catch your character asleep.

If your environmental requirements are different from normal humans, you may have the **Increased Life Support (Variable)** disadvantage. Note that your character's natural environment may, in fact, be dangerous to normal humans. In that case, the bases for advantages such as **Temperature Tolerance** and **Pressure Support** are adjusted to be based on what is normal for you.

If your character's biochemistry is different in subtle ways that prevent her from using human medication, then she has **Unusual Biochemistry (-5)**. **Maintenance (Variable)** and **Restricted Diet (-10 to -40)** are other ways of representing similar restrictions and are discussed in Chapter 4.



GMs should allow the **Unusual Biochemistry** disadvantage only in campaigns in which the ability to take human medications may be important or as part of a racial template.

A particularly interesting interaction with environmental conditions is represented by **Fragile (Variable)**, which describes the effects of damage to your system. Note that this is not how things damage your character, but rather what happens afterward — he might shatter, explode, or simply crumble to dust.

Having a form that is **Electrical (-20)** in nature makes you more vulnerable to electrical attacks and may make it difficult for you to interact with parts of the environment around you (such as using sensitive equipment).

Sample character: Racial templates

Bjoern's Mage Character

Whenever I'm going to run a nonhuman, my first step is determining what race I'm going to play. That determines my base attributes, advantages, and disadvantages and has an initial point cost that I have to account for. After looking through the list of races in *GURPS Fantasy*, I decide to go with a halfling character. The halfling racial template costs 20 points, which includes the following modifiers:

- ✓ **Attributes:** ST -5, DX +1, HT +2, SM (Size Modifier) -2, Will +2
- ✓ **Advantages:** Green Thumb I, Hard to Kill +4, Silence +4
- ✓ **Disadvantages:** Mundane Background, Overweight
- ✓ **Quirks:** Fond of food and drink; prefers to live underground

Unfortunately, the Mundane Background disadvantage prevents your average halfling from starting a campaign knowing how to cast spells, *unless* . . . I'll have to talk to the GM, but for now, I'll assume that I can work around this disadvantage and start looking at personalizing his attributes.



Part III

Playing with Your Character

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



“Before you call animal services, find out how many character points I’d get for this as a disadvantage.”



In this part . . .

We help you with some of the toughest parts of actually *playing* your character. At this point, we assume that your character is created and you're ready to begin the campaign. Combat can be a frightening and confusing experience, especially if you're new to **GURPS**, and Chapter 11 helps you make sense of the process.

In Chapter 12, we help you develop a system to keep on top of the bookkeeping side of **GURPS** — taking and recovering fatigue and hit points, accruing and spending experience points, amassing vast amounts of wealth (you wish!), collecting information, and handling gaining, losing, and using equipment. Chapter 12 also discusses the importance of developing a character background and keeping a character log; all these things help the entire campaign if each player is organized and keeps his or her character's information up-to-date.

Finally, in Chapter 13, we guide you through the process of learning how to role play — not only the abilities of your character, but the personality and motivations of this persona as well.

Chapter 11

Doing Unto Others: Combat

In This Chapter

- ▶ Choosing armor
 - ▶ Making good choices in combat
 - ▶ Defending yourself
 - ▶ Picking a weapon
-

Although it's possible to have a *GURPS* campaign without any fighting at all, for the most part, the ability to club someone over the head is a vital social skill in *GURPS* games. Your success in combat starts with your investments in skills and equipment. After play begins, *GURPS* has a detailed combat system that can work to your advantage, if you know the rules well enough. This chapter outlines the basics of *GURPS* combat.

Chapter 15 introduces the mechanics of managing combat within an adventure. Players will find the information in that chapter useful for knowing what to expect in terms of combat sequence. Chapter 9 talks about how the tech level of the campaign influences your weapon purchases.

Selecting Combat Skills

In *GURPS*, you are much better off putting your points in one or two primary combat skills than knowing how to use a lot of weapons. This is more true in the fourth edition than it was in third, the reason being that, in the fourth edition, you can make your character's attacks more effective by taking penalties to your skill roll. The higher the skill, the more of these penalties you can afford to take. For example, if you're willing to take a -9 penalty to hit, you can target your opponent's eye. If you're willing to take a -6 penalty to hit, you can make your foe defend at -3 . If you have a skill level of 30, you can do both at the same time and still have an effective 15 skill!

In a campaign with a low technology level, you probably want to concentrate your points on a skill with a hand-to-hand weapon, and also perhaps with a weapon that can attack over long distances (for *ranged* fighting) as well. You

may also want to consider a skill with a weapon for use in close combat, because some weapons that can be used in regular hand-to-hand combat cannot be used for close combat. If an opponent closes into your hex, you'll want to have a way of protecting yourself (we recommend an unarmed style or a close weapon like a knife).

In futuristic campaigns with guns or beam weapons, you may not bother with melee weapons at all, or have one only as a backup.

Melee weapon skills

You can choose a weapon based on a sense of style. If you think a particular weapon is cool and fits your character's style, that is a perfectly reasonable reason to choose a weapon. However, if you want to pick a weapon based on effectiveness, start by looking at your character's Strength score.

Each weapon has a minimum Strength (ST) required to use it. Using a weapon that requires more Strength than your character has results in a penalty of -1 per point of Strength your character lacks. You generally want to avoid this penalty, so unless your character has a high Strength, the minimum Strength stat will eliminate a lot of weapon choices.

After that, it's a balancing act between damage and defense. Many weapons allow your character both to attack and to *parry* (attempt to redirect an opponent's attack), but most of the more deadly weapons can't do both in the same turn. And remember that your character can't use a shield with a two-handed weapon either, so whether it's a good idea to use two-handed weapons depends on how good your character's Dodge is.

The following are our favorite weapons, listed by the ST required to use them. The list is organized in this way to help you ignore weapons your character isn't strong enough to use.

One thing to watch for is weapons that are marked with a double dagger after the ST statistic on the chart on pages 271-274 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*. These weapons become *unready* after use, which means that you can attack with them only every other turn unless you have 1.5 times the minimum Strength needed to use them. It also means you can't parry with them at all unless you care to give up your attack.

Because all of these the weapons with this restriction require either a 12 or 13 ST to use, weapons marked with a double dagger force you to give up half your attacks unless your character's strength is at least 18. In our opinion, it's not really worth it to use those weapons unless your character is that strong. Even though they usually do a lot of damage, giving up half your attacks is too great a penalty.

This list is primarily for low-tech-level campaigns, although Force Sword does make the list. There are only a few high-TL melee weapons listed in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*; the majority of high-TL weapons are ranged weapons. See *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* for more information on these weapons.

Here are the weapons we prefer for each ST:

- ✓ **ST 3–4:** Not many weapons are available for a Strength of 3. Force sword is the best one, and in fact is the best melee weapon listed in the *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* book. Unfortunately, you can use it only if the tech level is high enough.
- ✓ **ST 5:** In our opinion, the smallsword is the best weapon available at ST 5 and 6. The damage is decent (Thrust + 1), and it gets the fencing parry, which means you can use a retreat with your parry for a +3 to Parry.
- ✓ **ST 6:** The large knife is worth a look at this Strength level. It doesn't do a lot of damage, but it can be used with the Main-Gauche skill and another weapon and give you an additional parry, which is quite handy.
- ✓ **ST 7:** The quarterstaff is our favorite at this Strength level. Base damage is good (Swing + 2), although it's crushing and therefore doesn't get any bonus damage. However, the staff has the best Parry of any weapon, with a straight +2 bonus.
- ✓ **ST 8:** The saber becomes available at ST 8. It's only a little bit of an upgrade over the smallsword, and it does the same Thrust damage. It gives you the option of a cutting attack, but you'll usually do more damage with the Thrust unless your character is very strong. However, you might want to have the ability to cut for utilitarian reasons.
- ✓ **ST 9:** The spear is our favorite weapon at this Strength level. You can use it one-handed with a shield and do decent damage (Thrust + 2) or use it two-handed and do better damage (Thrust + 3). Use this weapon two-handed, and you can attack someone two hexes away. Because the Quarterstaff skill allows you to thrust, you might talk your GM into letting you use a spear with the Staff skill, giving you good damage *and* the +2 parry. The spear is worth considering at any Strength level over 9.
- ✓ **ST 10:** Two weapons bear mentioning at this level: The broadsword and the pick. The broadsword is a good all-around weapon. You get to attack and parry in the same turn, do decent damage, and still use a shield. A pick cannot attack and parry in the same turn, but it does Swing + 1 impaling damage, which can be deadly.
- ✓ **ST 11:** Nothing really stands out at this Strength level, but a couple weapons are worth mentioning. An axe does good damage (Swing + 2), but cannot both attack and parry in the same turn. The bastard sword (essentially a broadsword with a hilt that allows it to be used either one- or two-handed) can match the axe's damage if used two-handed, or do one less if used one-handed, and can attack and parry in the same turn if used two-handed. The glaive (a curved slashing blade on the end of a

pole) does great damage (Swing + 3 or Thrust + 3) and has good reach (up to three hexes), but requires two hands and thus can't be used with a shield, and it cannot attack and parry in the same turn.

- ✓ **ST 12:** Two weapons deserve mention at this level: the greatsword and the morningstar. The greatsword does Swing + 3 cutting damage and can parry and attack in the same turn. The morningstar (a spiked ball connected to a handle by a length of chain) does similar damage, although it does crushing damage and it cannot both attack and parry in the same turn. However, morningstars are parried at -4, and fencing weapons cannot parry them at all.
- ✓ **ST 13:** Of the weapons that require ST 13, our favorite is the halberd. As is typical for polearms, you can attack only once every other turn with this weapon unless you have extreme Strength, so this is probably not a good weapon unless you have a Strength of 20 or more. However, the damage it deals is truly awesome. You can chop with the blade for Swing + 5 cutting. If you really get tired of someone, you can hit them with the spike at the rear of the blade for Swing + 4 impaling. If someone gets too close, you can poke them with the spike on the end of the haft for Thrust + 3 impaling.

The actual weapon you pick need not be based on Strength. Even if you are going for maximum effect rather than style, different characters might have different needs in a weapon. If your character can shoot 5d lasers from his or her eyes, you might want to take Staff skill just for the parry. Or if your character is ambidextrous, you might choose to fight with a pick in each hand, even if you have a high ST. Many characters are better off with a weapon that can parry or that allows the use of a shield, even if they're strong enough to use a halberd.

Ranged weapon skills

The ability to damage your foes at a distance can be incredibly handy. Not only does this allow your character to attack from the protection of cover, but it also prevents situations in which your enemies are able to attack you while you're too far away to do anything to them in return.

When choosing ranged weapons, remember that you can't parry with them, so you don't need to take defense into account to any great degree. If you really like to use a shield, you might consider taking a thrown weapon rather than something like a bow or a rifle that requires two hands. Otherwise, your choices will be based more on damage, range, and rate of fire.

Thrown weapons

We think of thrown weapons as being in three categories:

✔ **Small, easily concealed weapons**, such as

- Shuriken (Japanese throwing stars)
- Thrown knives

Neither of these weapons do much damage, and if you don't plan to use them to deliver poison, they are more of a last-ditch attempt to do damage than a "plan A" combat skill.

✔ **Large, dangerous weapons**, such as

- Axes
- Harpoons
- Javelins
- Maces
- Spears

These weapons do good damage and leave you an arm free to carry a shield. The drawback is that because the weapons are large, you can't usually carry a lot of them around. Of these, the harpoon deserves special mention. It does a lot of damage (Thrust + 5) and is attached by a tether, so you can retrieve it to throw again. Pulling the barbs out of your foe causes him half the damage they inflicted going in.

✔ **Entangling weapons**, such as

- Bolas
- Cloaks
- Lariats
- Nets

Of these, the bola is the only one that does damage, and that's a mere Thrust - 1 crushing. But these weapons render your target temporarily tangled. The net is the most effective of these weapons. If you hit your foe and he fails to dodge or block, he is entangled until he can cut his way out or make three successful DX - 4 rolls. Bolas and lariats must be targeted at specific areas of the body, which means that for them to be effective you have to attack at a penalty, and they cannot completely entangle a foe.

The advantage of thrown weapons is that they often take only one hand, so you can use them with a shield, and you can throw them as fast as you can

draw them. (See the description of the Fast-Draw skill in the upcoming section, “Supplementing Your Character’s Combat Skills.”) The disadvantage of these weapons is that the range is not that good.

Muscle-powered weapons that shoot things

This is what most people think of when they think of ranged weapons. The classic example is the bow and arrow, but this category also includes the crossbow, the atlatl (a spear thrower), the sling, and the blowpipe. Because a tool is used to launch your weapon, its range is usually much better. The crossbow does good damage but reloads slowly. Bows do only slightly less damage and reload more quickly. The atlatl does great damage, especially if you have high Strength (Swing + 1), but its ammo is large and cumbersome. The sling is a good weapon to consider if you’re taking only a ranged weapon as a backup to your melee weapon. The damage is pretty good (Swing crushing), you can find stones to sling just lying around on the ground, and it doesn’t cost or weigh much.

High-tech ranged weapons

Guns make wonderfully effective weapons. So much so that they have generally consigned most other weapons to the scrap heap of history. The rate of fire can be high, the damage large, even for weak characters, and the range extreme. *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* lists a lot of different projectile guns and ray guns; rather than go through them all, we just tell you what to look for:

- ✔ **Damage:** Obviously, weapons that do more damage are more potent and wreak more destruction.
- ✔ **Armor divisors:** If the weapon has a number in parentheses following the damage, this is an *armor divisor*. Every object within *GURPS* has some degree of protection from damage — its damage resistance (DR). With an armor divisor, your target has to divide its DR by this number when you use the weapon. This can be more important than overall damage in some high-tech campaigns. A gun that does 5d of damage with an armor divisor of 5 averages 11.5 points of damage against a DR30 target, while a gun that does 10d damage with no armor divisor does an average of 5 points against the same target.
- ✔ **Rate of fire (RoF):** A high rate of fire can be a tremendous boon, but when evaluating this, make sure to think about how many shots you actually stand a chance to hit with. Weapons that have high rates of fire still only roll once to hit, but you stand a chance of hitting with multiple shots. If you fire several shots, you get one extra potential hit for every multiple of the weapon’s recoil number that you make your skill roll by.

For example, say your character has a revolver, .44M (see page 278 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*), and a gun skill of 15. This gun has a RoF of 3, so you can take 3 shots in a turn. The recoil number is 4. To hit with one of those three shots, you have to roll a 15 or less. If you roll an 11 or less, you hit with two shots. You have to roll a 7 or less to hit with all three. Clearly, you’re usually going to miss with your last shot, especially

considering range penalty that is often involved. Note that weapons with rates of fire over 5 give you a bonus to hit, as shown on the table on page 373 in *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*.

Unarmed combat skills

A number of non-weapon skills are useful for combat. This includes both unarmed fighting skills and skills you use in combat but are not in themselves direct attack forms.

Fighting without a weapon isn't usually as effective as fighting with a weapon. This is, after all, why weapons were invented. A martial-arts fighter, though, can be lethal without any weapons at all. In fact, you could have an entire martial-arts campaign without the use of any weapons at all. However, even in a campaign in which weapons are available, an unarmed fighting skill can make your character more versatile. We recommend having at least one of these skills listed below if your character is focused on combat.

A dedicated unarmed fighter would probably want to take both Karate and either Judo or Wrestling. If you don't want your character to fight unarmed, but prefer to hedge your bets, Brawling is probably worth a point or two. Here are the basic unarmed combat skills:

- ✔ **Brawling:** Brawling is a good all-purpose unarmed skill to have. If your character is caught without a weapon, Brawling can help in a sticky situation in a number of ways. Not only does it increase punching and kicking damage (+1 per die of damage if your character's skill is at DX + 2 or better), but it gives two parries per turn! Unfortunately, these parries are at -3 against all but thrusting attacks. Brawling is also the skill that characters use to attack with claws, bites, horns, and so forth. Your GM might have you roll against this skill to hit someone over the head with a stool or use other improvised weapons. It's a DX/Easy skill and can be a good investment of a point if you just want to be versatile in emergencies.
- ✔ **Karate:** Karate is like Brawling, but better. It's a DX/Hard skill, so it's also more expensive to get. It allows a character to do more damage — +1 per die of damage at a DX + 1 skill level, +2 per die at a DX + 2 skill level or above. It also gives two parries per turn, and it doesn't have the -3 penalty to parry non-thrusting weapons like Brawling does. Unfortunately, you cannot base claw or bite attacks off Karate.

If you are strong enough to roll two dice for your thrusting damage, Karate can be an okay combat option. Because it gives you up to +2 damage per die, if you can do 2d thrusting, it makes a punch do Thrust + 3 instead of the base -Thrust - 1, which is the same damage as a Spear used two-handed! Of course, it's crushing damage, but then Karate also gives you another attack with your off hand.

- ✔ **Judo:** Like Karate, Judo gives two attacks and two parries per turn. Unlike Karate, the attacks are throws, not punches. Throwing your opponents doesn't do much in the way of damage, but it stands a chance of stunning them and allows you to throw one enemy into another, and that sort of thing. Having the Judo skill also allows you to use a number of grappling techniques.
- ✔ **Wrestling:** Wrestling is similar to Judo in that it's a grappling skill. Wrestling does not allow throws, but does allow access to the same grappling techniques. In fact, it works better with grappling techniques; if a character knows it at a skill level equal to DX + 1, he gets +1 to Strength for making or resisting the Choke, Grapple, Neck Snap, Takedown, or Pin techniques, and if he knows it at DX + 2, he gets a +2 ST.
- ✔ **Boxing:** Boxing is sort of midway between Karate and Brawling. It gives two parries, like Karate does, and the same damage bonus to punch. However, parries are at -3 to non-thrusting weapons, the same as Brawling. Boxing does not teach you any kicking attacks.

Doing Damage

Doing damage is not always as simple as rolling your dice and reading off the numbers. Most weapons have modifiers that change how much damage you do after your target's armor has absorbed its allotment.

Damage modifiers

For some kinds of attacks, the amount of damage you do is modified after it passes through your opponent's Damage Resistance. Whether this happens or not is determined by the weapon you have, and the modifier is listed in the weapons chart. The basic damage modifiers are as follows:

- ✔ **Small Piercing (pi-):** Weapons that do small piercing damage are relatively good at getting through armor but don't do as much damage to the person underneath. Weapons with the small piercing damage modifier inflict only half the damage that gets through armor as injury. For example, if your foe has a DR of 4 and you roll 10 points of damage with a small piercing weapon, 6 points would get through, but you would halve this and inflict 3 points of injury.
- ✔ **Burning (burn), Corrosion (cor), Crushing (cr) Fatigue (fat), Piercing (pi), and Toxic (tox):** All these types of damage have no modifiers. The points that get through DR equal the injury you inflict.

- ✓ **Cutting (cut) and Large Piercing (pi+):** Weapons that do these types of damage multiply damage that penetrates DR by 1.5. For example, if your foe has DR 4 and you roll 10 points of damage with a cutting weapon, 6 points would penetrate his DR. With a 1.5 damage modifier, you inflict 9 points of injury.
- ✓ **Impaling (imp) and Huge Piercing (pi++):** Weapons with these modifiers inflict injury equal to twice the damage that penetrates DR. In our example situation, with 6 points penetrating DR, an impaling weapon would do 12 points of injury.

Blunt trauma

Sometimes you can do a bit of damage even if you don't do enough to penetrate DR. Flexible armor (like a leather jacket or chain mail) may keep the weapon away from your tender hide, but a really hard blow is going to send some painful shockwaves through anyway. For every 10 points of cutting, impaling, or piercing damage you do, 1 point of blunt trauma damage will get through the armor. This damage is not modified because your weapon didn't actually penetrate to cut or impale. Crushing weapons are better designed to inflict crushing damage, so 1 point of damage gets through for every 5 points inflicted.

Crippling, stunning, and knocking your foe down

In addition to doing straight points of damage, your blows can have secondary effects. If you target a certain part of your foe's body, you can cripple it if you do enough damage. Limbs (arms, legs, wings, and so on) are crippled if they take over half the character's hit points in a single blow. Extremities (feet, hands, fins, and so on) are crippled if they take more than one-third of the character's hit points. Eyes are crippled if they take one-tenth of the character's hit points.

Any wound that cripples a body part or takes more than half of the target's hit points in a single blow can stun or knock down your opponent. Such a blow requires that the target roll against HT to avoid being knocked down and stunned. If the wound is to the face or vitals, they roll at -5. If the wound is to the skull or eye, they roll at -10.

If you are stunned, you can't do anything (except defend at -4) until you make a HT roll — this time with no penalty. You get one HT roll per turn.

Preparing Your Defense

In many ways, avoiding getting hit is more important than being able to hit someone else. After all, the other characters in the party can always clean up the bad guys, but you only have one skin!

There are two parts to defense in *GURPS*: avoiding getting hit and wearing armor to absorb damage if you do get hit. Unfortunately, lots of sturdy armor can get awfully heavy. This increases your encumbrance, which lowers your Move, which lowers your Dodge. Setting up a good defense for your character requires you to keep these factors in mind so as to achieve a good balance.

Shields

If a character wears a lot of heavy armor, a shield becomes more and more of a good idea. If a character's Dodge is at a penalty due to the heavy weight she's carrying, she'll do well to have another active defense to use instead of dodging. Shields provide the easiest access to a high defense score that you can get. Even when you're not blocking with them, their defensive bonus will help you with your Parry and Dodge scores.

Your character's Block with a shield is equal to one-half his Shield skill plus 3 plus the shield's Defense bonus. Your GM might also use the optional *Damage to Shields* rule (*GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*, page 484), which treats shields as consumables, so your character may want to bring a spare or two on long trips. For high-tech campaigns, you can get a force shield, which never wears out as long as you have enough batteries.

Armor

Choosing armor is usually an exercise in balancing encumbrance with protection. If your character has a good Parry and Block, you may well want to go with the heaviest armor possible. How heavy that is depends on your character's Strength.

A full set of the heaviest low-tech armor consists of

- ✓ A heavy steel corselet
- ✓ Heavy plate arms and legs
- ✓ A greathelm

- ✓ Heavy gauntlets
- ✓ Sollerets (foot protection)

All this weighs 100 pounds for a human. Add a 25-pound large shield, and a character with a Strength of 10 will have an impressive DR of 7 but be practically immobile, probably with a Move of 1 yard per turn.

There are several ways to deal with this problem. One is to get a horse and stay on it most of the time. Another is to skimp in armoring some of the areas of your body to save weight. You will get hit in the torso most often because there is no penalty for hitting the torso. But you can save a few pounds by getting less sturdy armor on your arms and legs.

Most characters choose to just wear light armor, which is less protective but doesn't make you immobile.

Active defenses



Active defenses are your character's options for avoiding a blow. In the third edition, there was also the possibility of passive defense — sometimes your armor would deflect blows without you having to do anything. However, passive defense is gone in the fourth edition.

Your character has three active defenses available:

- ✓ **Dodge:** Dodge is the most basic active defense, and you get an unlimited number of dodges per turn. Your character's Dodge is equal to her Basic Speed rounded down, + 3. Dodge is the hardest active defense to improve; there is no skill or equipment that can help a character dodge. You can, however, improve your character's Dodge by buying increased levels of Basic Speed, the Enhanced Dodge advantage, and the Combat Reflex advantage. You can maximize your character's Dodge by not carrying much equipment, as encumbrance gives you a penalty to Dodge. Consider putting everything you don't need in a fight in a pack that you can drop easily when trouble begins.
- ✓ **Parry:** Parry scores are based on half of your weapon or unarmed combat skill + 3. There may be other adjustments depending on the weapon you're using. For example, staves parry at +2, and fencing weapons can combine their parry with the +3 bonus you get from the retreat.
- ✓ **Block:** Blocks are the same as parries, but use shields. Shields get a Defense bonus depending on how big they are, otherwise blocks are just like parries. The Defense bonus of shields, it should be noted, adds to all three defenses — Block, Dodge, and Parry.



Working the curve

At the front of the skills section in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, you'll see a handy chart that tells you what your chance of success is for any skill level. The table at the end of this sidebar shows you what this looks like.

One of the things you'll notice is that there is not a consistent change in percentage as you move from one skill level to the next. Going from a skill of 3 to a skill of 4 only gets you a 1.4% better chance of success, while going from a skill of 9 to a skill of 10 improves your chance of succeeding by 12.5%. If you were to graph these

chances of success, you'd get a curve, not a straight line.

The secret to success in combat is in working this curve. If your opponent has a defense of 11, and you can somehow give him a -2 penalty, his chance of avoiding your attack will fall tremendously. Similarly, if your defense is 10 and you can get a +2 by taking a certain action, this is going to help a lot. If your defense is already a 14, there's no need to worry about it, and if it's a 5 you might as well get used to being hit.

<i>Skill level</i>	<i>Chance of success</i>	<i>Skill level</i>	<i>Chance of success</i>
3	0.5%	10	50%
4	1.9%	11	62.5%
5	4.6%	12	74.1%
6	9.3%	13	83.8%
7	16.2%	14	90.7%
8	25.9%	15	95.4%
9	37.5%	16+	98.1%

Understanding Combat Flow

Because the *GURPS* combat system gives you a lot of different options, you can bring a lot of strategy to bear to make your character more effective in combat. In this section, we delve into the ins and outs of combat in *GURPS*.

Maneuvers

All your actions in combat are described by maneuvers. Maneuvers range from *Do Nothing* to *Attack*, *Aim*, *Move*, and pretty much anything else you can

think of. The first step in knowing what to do in combat is to understand your options and how they affect your character.

Movement maneuvers

Being in the right place at the right time can be critical. The following maneuvers are how your character gets around during combat:

- ✔ **Do Nothing:** Not much to say about this; if you don't have anything to do, it's a good option. Do Nothing doesn't get you anywhere, but at least you leave all your character's defensive options open. If you are badly wounded, taking the Do Nothing maneuver allows you to stay conscious.
- ✔ **Move:** This maneuver simply describes the act of moving your character. You may move anywhere up to full Move and still retain all your character's defensive options.
- ✔ **Change Posture:** This lets your character switch among postures: standing, sitting, kneeling, crawling, lying prone, and lying face-up. The main reason to use this maneuver in combat is if you want to hide behind something or get up after falling down.

Attacking maneuvers and options

Attacking maneuvers are your choices for offense. They are either direct attacks or setups for an attack. Attack options are not distinct maneuvers, but modifications of the Attack or All-Out Attack maneuvers. In practice, it is less confusing to think of attack options as the same as maneuvers; they both just offer choices of things to do on your turn in combat.

- ✔ **Aim:** Aiming means taking a full turn to draw a bead on your target. It is used only with ranged weapons and gives you the Accuracy bonus of your weapon. You can gain a further +1 for bracing your firearm or crossbow on something.

Because aiming uses up a turn, it's only worth doing if the bonus it gives you moves you up a significant portion of the curve mentioned above. It is well worth aiming if it will, for example, raise your effective skill from 9 to 13. If your effective skill is already 13 or higher, it's probably not worth taking the time unless everything is riding on that shot.
- ✔ **Evaluate:** This is similar to Aim but for melee weapons. You take a turn to evaluate your opponent, and this gives you +1 for an Attack, Feint, All-Out Attack, or Move and Attack maneuver you take in the next turn. You may Evaluate for up to 3 turns and the effect will be cumulative, for a maximum bonus of +3.

Gaining a +1 bonus isn't all that useful in most situations, but it's still worth keeping this maneuver in mind. If your foe is rushing toward your character and won't be within reach until the next turn anyway, you might as well take the Evaluate maneuver while you wait and get your +1.

- ✔ **Attack:** This maneuver is the basic one for whacking your foe. In its basic form, attacking is simply a matter of rolling against your weapon or unarmed combat skill of choice. If you make the roll, you hit; if not, you miss. There are, however, a couple of other options that you can take to increase this maneuver's effectiveness:
- **Deceptive Attack:** You must declare that you're doing a Deceptive Attack before you roll. For every 2 to hit, your foe has to defend at 1. This maneuver is a really good idea if you have a high combat skill, and we recommend you get a high combat skill just for this purpose. Unlike Feint, it doesn't rely on your opponent having a lower skill than you, and it does not cost you an attack.
 - **Rapid Strike:** Like Deceptive Attack, Rapid Strike is an option that can be taken with an Attack or All-Out Attack maneuver. This maneuver lets you get an extra attack in the same turn, although they are both at -6. This is another excellent reason to have a very high weapon skill. If you have a weapon skill of 19 or more, you should choose this maneuver against someone with a low-to-medium defense level, and Deceptive Attack against someone with a higher defense.
- ✔ **Ready:** This maneuver is necessary if, for some reason, you haven't taken Fast-Draw for the weapon you want your character to use. It is also necessary if your character just swung a really heavy, unbalanced weapon, such as a halberd.
- ✔ **All-Out Attack:** This maneuver has you swinging aggressively, with no thought for defense! You can choose from a list of possible effects — you can make the attack at +4 to hit, gain an extra attack, make one feint and one attack in the same turn, or make an attack at +2 damage (or at a +1 damage per die of damage you do, if better).
- The downside is that you lose your active defense until your next turn, so all your foes can thump your character and he just has to stand there and take it. The best reason to take this maneuver is if you're in a position in which you know you aren't going to be attacked before your next turn. Otherwise, it's a bit suicidal.
- ✔ **Move and Attack:** Your character can both move and attack in the same turn. Moving while attacking throws your aim off and gives you penalties. If your character is using a ranged weapon, she shoots at -2 or whatever the weapon's Bulk rating is (you'll see this on the weapons chart in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*). If she's making a melee weapon attack she's at a straight -4 and your final effective skill is limited to 9. She also cannot parry or retreat while doing a Move and Attack, although she can still dodge or block.
- This obviously isn't the ideal maneuver to use, but it's often better than wasting a turn just moving. This is one of the reasons it's good to have a very high weapon skill.

- ✔ **Concentrate:** This is the maneuver to take when preparing for a mental task. You'll most often use it when casting a spell, which is why we categorize it under attacks.
- ✔ **Feint:** This maneuver is a fake attack to throw your foe off-guard. To use it, you roll a Quick Contest of melee weapon skills with your foe. If you make your skill roll and your opponent fails, determine the amount you made your roll by. Your opponent has to subtract this amount from his or her next defense against you (although it must come within the next second). On the other hand, if both of you make your skill rolls but you make yours by a wider margin, your foe subtracts only the margin of victory from his next defense roll against you. Finally, if your foe rolls better than you or you fail your skill roll, nothing comes of your Feint. Feint can be learned as a Technique; see "Techniques," later in this chapter.

Defensive maneuvers and options

The following maneuvers are choices you can take to avoid getting hit or to increase your chances of surviving the fight:

- ✔ **All-Out Defense:** This is the opposite of All-Out Attack; you stand there and think of nothing but defense. You can either gain a +2 bonus to any one active defense, or apply two different defenses to the same attack (for example, a dodge and a block). Of course, doing this means you don't get an attack. It can be a good strategy to use when two characters are attacking a single foe who does a lot of damage; the one getting attacked can All-Out Defend while the other character attacks.
- ✔ **Wait:** This maneuver is like Do Nothing, but you get to take it back if something you specify happens before the end of the turn. For example, you can say, "I hold the gun on him and shoot him if he moves."
- ✔ **Retreat:** This is an option for modifying your active defenses. A Retreat is taking a step backward for defensive purposes. It gives you a +3 to your Dodge, or +1 to your Parry or Block score. With some weapons (such as fencing weapons) you can get the +3 normally reserved only for dodging. You can Retreat only once a turn. We suggest that you make it a point to use this as often as you can; the +3 bonus is huge.

Techniques

Techniques are specific things that your character can do with a skill that she's practiced until she's better at it than normal. Techniques don't have to be combat skills. However, there are some really good combat techniques to consider.

Techniques are based on one skill or another. For example, Kicking can be based on either Brawling -2, Judo, or Karate -2. You can then pay points to

buy off the -2 penalty and can raise your level with Kicking to as high as Brawling or Karate. See page 229 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* for more details on techniques.

Here are some basic combat techniques:

- ✔ **Arm Lock** (Judo or Wrestling): This is a great technique if you have it at a high level. After you get hold of a foe, you do damage automatically until you break his arm or he breaks free, and if your skill is high enough, that won't be anytime soon.
- ✔ **Back Kick** (Karate -4): This is the skill of kicking someone standing behind you without turning around. Back Kicks are an act of desperation, and if you're lucky or plan ahead, you'll never need this technique.
- ✔ **Choke Hold** (Judo -2 or Wrestling -3): This technique is useful, but not as good as Arm Lock. It's harder to get your foes in this position, and it's easier for them to fight back when you've got them.
- ✔ **Disarming** (Any unarmed or weapon skill -4): The art of taking weapons away from people. It's good if you want to capture someone, or if someone has a weapon of terrifying effectiveness you'd rather they quit using on you.
- ✔ **Dual-Weapon Attack** (Any one-handed melee weapon -4): Normally, you are at -4 to attack with a weapon in each hand in the same turn. This technique allows you to pay that penalty off. It is absolutely worthwhile for anyone who is a dedicated fighter. Combined with Off-Hand Weapon Training or Ambidexterity, it gives you another attack each turn with no penalty. It is, however, listed as not being realistic, so check with the GM to see if she allows it.
- ✔ **Elbow Strike** (Brawling -2 or Karate -2): Points in this technique allow you to strike with the elbow without the usual penalty. The only real benefit to this is that it allows you to injure someone grappling you from behind, say with a Choke Hold technique.
- ✔ **Feint** (Any unarmed or melee weapon skill): The details of this maneuver are listed in the section on offensive maneuvers earlier in this chapter. Taking it as a technique, however, allows you to get better at it.

Feint is a great maneuver against a foe with a good defense but a lower weapon skill level than your own. If his skill is higher than yours, it's not as good of an option because he's usually going to win the Quick Contest and you'll just end up wasting attacks. It works well in combination with hitting a vital spot on your enemy because it doesn't cost you a to-hit penalty like Deceptive Attack does.

- ✔ **Finger Lock** (Arm Lock -3): This maneuver is like Arm Lock, only you twist fingers. The only advantage is that it's easier to cripple a hand than an arm.
- ✔ **Ground Fighting** (Any unarmed or melee weapon skill -4): This is the art of fighting while lying on the ground. This is another "preparing for the worst" technique; hopefully your character will do most of his fighting on his feet.
- ✔ **Horse Archery** (Bow -4): You definitely want to take this if you plan to shoot a bow from horseback.
- ✔ **Jump Kick** (Karate -4): Jump Kick lets you put a kick at the end of a jump. You do +2 damage, and your opponents parry at -2! Unfortunately, you have -2 on all of your defenses for the rest of the turn.
- ✔ **Kicking** (Brawling -2 or Karate -2): Normally, kicking is at -2 to these skills; this allows you to buy that off. A good idea if Karate or Brawling is your regular fighting skill.
- ✔ **Knee Strike** (Brawling -1 or Karate -1): Essentially, a Knee Strike is a kick you can do in close combat.
- ✔ **Neck Snap** (ST -4): This is a nasty close-combat attack for those strong enough to win Contests of Strength with their enemies. You can buy this ability up to ST +3, so if your character spends a lot of time in unarmed close combat, consider taking this technique.
- ✔ **Off-Hand Weapon Training** (melee weapon -4): Normally, a character is at -4 to attack with her off hand, and this buys that penalty off. However, you're still stuck with the -4 for attacking with two weapons in one turn, so if you don't have a Duel Weapon Attack or a very high weapon skill, it's not as useful.
- ✔ **Retain Weapon** (any melee weapon): This is the technique of resisting the Disarming technique. You can probably wait and see if your GM uses Disarming against you a lot, and if not, keep the points you would have put in this.
- ✔ **Sweep** (Polearm -3, Spear -3, or Staff -3): This is the technique of knocking your opponent's legs out from under him — a handy technique against foes with DR too high for you to penetrate or to keep a nasty fighter from hitting you for a turn or two as he gets up.
- ✔ **Whirlwind Attack** (Broadsword -5, Staff -5, or Two-Handed Sword -5): This technique lets you attack every foe in an adjacent hex all in one turn. It is an All-Out Attack, so you get no defense when using this. This seems like a really neat technique, but in practice it's not as useful as you might suppose. It can give you a very large number of attacks, but if your character doesn't put all his enemies out of commission, he winds up standing in a large hostile crowd without any defenses available.

Supplementing Your Character's Combat Skills

The following supplemental skills enhance your fighting ability but are not weapons skills. Taking a few of these increases your character's chances of success in combat and perhaps makes your character more flexible.

- ✓ The **Cloak** skill is the skill of using a cloak as a weapon. You can use it to throw over an opponent's head and grapple him, or to wrap around your arm as a shield, or to block your opponent's vision (treat as a Feint). It's a cool skill, but a cloak is not exceptionally useful as a weapon.

It is, however, quite useful as a shield, especially if your GM is not using the optional Damage to Shields rule. (See *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*, page 484.) A light cloak gives you a +1 bonus to your active defenses, and a heavy cloak gives you +2. At 5 pounds, this makes a heavy cloak as good as a 15-pound medium shield! However, if your GM is using the Damage to Shields rule, at DR 1 and 5 hit points, the cloak's going to last for only a blow or two.

The other advantage of this skill is that you can take a cloak to places where you would draw attention if you were carrying a shield. Otherwise, being able to grapple someone at a range of 1 isn't something you're going to want to do every day, and while feinting is a good technique, you're better off just taking your primary weapon to a high skill level and feinting with that.

- ✓ **Throwing** is the general skill of throwing anything that fits easily into your character's hand and that doesn't have a point you need to hit with — a baseball, a rock, a jar of holy water, and so on. We're listing it as a combat skill only because, from time to time, you'll find your character needing to throw something in combat for a special effect. It is not a frontline combat skill but makes your character more versatile.
- ✓ **Acrobatics** is not primarily a combat skill, but having it allows you to attempt an Acrobatic Dodge. If you make an Acrobatics roll before making your Dodge roll, your Dodge is at +2 (it is, however, at -2 if you fail). This is very handy, and the skill is well worth a point or two.
- ✓ The **Tactics** skill allows you to prepare for combat beforehand to give you an advantage. If you have time to prepare before combat, a successful Tactics roll allows you to put your character someplace that will give him or her strategic advantage. Otherwise, your character is just randomly placed. This is a useful skill if your GM actually uses these rules, although in our experience, most GMs place a character where the player said she was going rather than randomly, and this makes the skill less relevant.

- ✓ The **Strategy** skill is similar to Tactics but is used in large-scale military actions. A successful roll (or Contest of skill, if the enemy leader has this skill, too) lets you deduce your opponent's plans. This skill is vital if you are planning to lead troops; otherwise, you'll never use it.
- ✓ The **Fast-Draw** skill allows you to pull your weapon out and use it in the same turn, rather than taking the whole turn to Ready your weapon. You must buy Fast-Draw separately for each type of weapon you have. It is foolish to not buy this skill for at least your primary weapon. It is a DX/Easy skill, so usually you only need to put a point or maybe two into it, and it can save you a turn in emergencies. Almost equally useful, it allows you to go into precarious situations without having to provoke your potential foes by having your weapon drawn. For archers, Fast-Draw Arrow shaves a turn off your rate of fire. It's really too useful of a skill not to invest a point in.

Cinematic Martial Arts

If you want to play a martial-arts action hero straight from the movies, you'll be interested in two *GURPS* advantages: Trained By A Master and Weapon Master. These two are the basis of a character with supernatural skill with weapons.

Trained By A Master

Having the Trained By A Master advantage means that your character learned the hidden secrets of combat. It is helpful both with weapon fighting and with unarmed combat. It halves the usual penalty for the Rapid Strike option and for parrying more than once per turn. It also permits you to buy some of the cinematic martial-arts skills, such as

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| ✓ Blind Fighting | ✓ Mental Strength |
| ✓ Breaking Blow | ✓ Power Blow |
| ✓ Flying Leap | ✓ Pressure Points |
| ✓ Immovable Stance | ✓ Pressure Secrets |
| ✓ Invisibility Art | ✓ Push |
| ✓ Kiai | ✓ Throwing Art |
| ✓ Light Walk | ✓ Zen Archery |

Third-edition *GURPS* included a sourcebook for martial arts. If you wanted to learn a martial art, you had to pick a style and learn the skills and techniques for that style. As of December 2005, the fourth edition of *GURPS Martial Arts* was being developed for release in late 2006; until then, your GM may want to institute something similar.

Weapon Master

This advantage gives your character special aptitude with a category of weapons. This category can range from all muscle-powered weapons to only a specific weapon.

Weapon Master gives you the same penalty reduction as Trained By A Master for Rapid Striking and parrying more than once a turn. It also gives you a bonus to your damage: +1 per die of damage if you know your weapon at a skill level of DX + 1, +2 per die of damage if you know it at DX + 2.

Also, like Trained By A Master, Weapon Master gives you some access to the cinematic martial-arts skills, although not as many of them. They have to be something you can use with your weapon, so things like Light Walk and Invisibility Art aren't available.

For the most part, you get your best value with this advantage if you take it either for one weapon or for two weapons normally used together. In most campaigns, you aren't going to be running around picking up random weapons and using them. It's best if you stick with one or two weapons skills to put your points in, so why pay extra for an advantage that gives you a bonus to weapons you scarcely know how to use?

Overcoming Common Combat Problems

Fights in *GURPS* are like snowflakes; no two of them are the same. Each combat situation presents you with different situations to overcome. Nevertheless, there are some general categories of combat problems to think about.

My foe has a very high defense! None of my blows are getting through!

In situations like this, you either have to lower your foe's defense, or somehow get around it altogether. Deceptive Attack is a great option in these situations. If your foe has one terrific defense and then a so-so one — for example a very high Parry score and an average Dodge — you could also use multiple

attacks (like Rapid Strike or Dual-Weapon Attack). Make your foe use her good parry on the first defense, and then hope she fails her dodge on the second.

Along these same lines, arranging to have multiple members of your party attack single opponents is a great idea. Again, this gets through the usually higher initial defenses (parries and blocks) and into dodges, which are usually lower.

Feints can also be useful in this situation, although you really need to have a higher weapon skill than your foe for it to work well.

If you are really having trouble, and you have a buddy to help you out, one of you can engage in close combat with your foe. In order for this to be effective, you'll have to grapple with the foe or perhaps knock him down. This will prevent him from turning around, so your friend can attack him from behind, prevent him from using the Retreat option, or make him take defensive penalties for being on the ground. Most reasonable GMs assess a defensive penalty for someone being grappled.

If you have several buddies to help you, you should spread out so one of you can attack from behind or at least from the side. Your foe does not get an active defense from blows from behind and is at -2 to defend blows from the sides.

My foes are individually weak, but there are a lot of them!

Be very careful when your character is outnumbered. Surprisingly weak enemies can wipe you out if there are several of them. The big problem is that a lot of enemies take a lot of blows, and after you use up your parries and blocks, you're stuck with dodging. Also, a horde of enemies can surround your character and hit her from behind so that she can't defend at all.

Because of this, your primary goal is going to be not getting surrounded. Don't rush a large group. If you have a missile weapon, try and pick off some of them as they come. Move your character laterally as they advance, so that you put as much of the group behind a lead figure as possible. If you have room, back up as they arrive, so that they can't circle behind you. You aren't so much trying to get away from them as you are trying to get them to string out in a line so they arrive in ones and twos. Also use any available obstacles to funnel your foes into a single file.

Putting your back up against a wall or other obstacle is okay in a pinch, but you're better off retreating and attacking if you have the room to do it. If your character gets up against something, he'll have to stay there for the duration.

If you're fighting as part of a group, stick together so it's harder to all be surrounded. It's good to pick a few individuals within the larger group of foes to gang up on and put down as quickly as possible. Reducing their numbers is the name of the game, and unless you're sure you can wipe an opponent out in one blow, it's better to finish off one foe than spread damage among a lot of foes.

My foe has a powerful attack that I cannot withstand!

If your character is fighting someone who deals out so much damage that you'll probably be wiped out if you get hit, your main goals are not getting hit and taking the foe down in a hurry.



The simplest way to deal with such a foe is to try to use distance weapons and stay out of range, if possible.

As far as not getting hit goes, be sure to use the retreat option to get +3 on your Dodge and on your Parry if using a fencing weapon, Boxing, Judo, or Karate, and +1 on your Block or any other Parry. Also consider using an Acrobatic Dodge, if you have the Acrobatics skill, or a Feverish Defense (see *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*, page 357).

Consider going into close combat with your enemy if his or her weapon isn't useful in close combat and you have some sort of option. If you have a friend to help you out, consider having the weakest fighter get into close combat and grapple your foe's weapon arm just to take away the use of the nasty weapon. If the nasty weapon is useful in close combat, try to have whoever is getting attacked that turn take an All-Out Defense maneuver while the other characters attack.

To take the opponent out quickly, think about targeting his weapon arm, hand, stinger-tipped tail, or whatever body part would put his weapon out of combat. If your foe also has a good defense, this is probably the best time to break out the Feint technique. Although it costs you an attack, the Feint allows you to give your foe a defense penalty without inflicting an attack penalty on yourself, which makes it easier to take the hit location penalties and still have a good chance of success.

Putting your foe in an Arm Lock can be helpful, too, because a twisted arm can't swing a weapon. The Disarming technique can also be a huge boon here.

I can hit my foe just fine, but I can't get through her armor!

This is a tough one. The first thing to look for is weaknesses in the armor that your character can aim for (See *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*, page 400). If your foe is an armored knight, you might think about targeting his feet. The best foot armor is only DR4.

If there are no such chinks or weak spots, then you should probably start thinking in terms of things your character can do that are useful but that don't necessarily inflict direct damage. If you have enough people, you can probably knock your foe over and tie her up or something like that.

If the strongest fighters in the party are able to damage your foe, you should let them do the damaging attacks and stick to hindering moves, such as tripping your foe or throwing your cloak over her face. Attacking her weapon gives you a chance of disarming her.

The Arm Lock technique can be quite helpful here if your foe has flexible armor because Arm Lock ignores such defenses. If you have a staff, spear, or polearm, you might also try the Sweep technique to knock down a foe and keep her from attacking for a turn or two.

You can also consider using the All-Out Attack maneuver to increase your damage, although it is generally not worth it to give your defense a +2 to damage unless your foe's attention is focused somewhere else. You can also spend 1 point of fatigue to get +2 damage if your GM allows the optional *Extra Effort* rules found in *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*, page 357.

How do I use my character's healing magic to best advantage?

One way of looking at combat is that both sides have a certain number of total hit points, and the first side to reduce its opponent's total to 0 wins. Therefore, you can help your side either by damaging your opponents or by removing damage from your friends.

In practice, healing should usually be done in moderation during actual combat unless it can be done quickly enough so that it doesn't cost your party many attacks. If you have a mage with a high enough skill to heal at a

distance, then such healing is fine; but if you need to have fighters leaving combat to go to a healer, it can cost your side a lot of offensive resources.

The main goal of a healer during combat is to keep everyone in the combat. Keeping someone on your side conscious keeps his sword in the fight. Healing a wound that doesn't knock him out of combat might make him feel better but doesn't in itself help your side, and there will be time for healing when the fight is over.

Keep in mind that it's pretty hard to actually die in *GURPS*. Your character has to get to full negative HP, and then fail an HT roll by more than 2. A good general rule is to heal people when they get in negative HP range, but not much before that, unless you have a character who only heals and doesn't fight.



Chapter 12

Tracking the Details

In This Chapter

- ▶ Creating and fine-tuning your character sheet
 - ▶ Creating a background for your character
 - ▶ Tracking your points
 - ▶ Keeping your GM happy
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One of the great things about **GURPS** is that it is a very detail-rich system. Each character can be highly individual. In this chapter, we discuss creating the fine detail that gives your character a distinct place in the world, as well as how to keep track of all these details.

Creating a Character Sheet

One of the side effects of **GURPS** being such a terrific system for character creation is that documenting your **GURPS** character requires a lot of recorded information. Most players use their own homemade character sheet templates, but *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* gives you a well-laid-out character sheet template (pages 335–336) that is really worth considering. If you don't want to use this sheet, it is well worth your trouble to look it over carefully and make sure to include all the areas that this sheet covers, so that you aren't scrambling for the rule books during play. Organization is key; we highly recommend making sure that all your combat information is on the same page, so you can see it all at once.

Even if you do use the **GURPS** character sheet, there are several areas where you might want to add more detail. The next few sections describe these areas in greater detail.

Abilities

When you design an ability, it might be a conglomeration of any number of limitations and enhancements. It is a good idea to note all these down, and then write a clear description of how they work together. For example:

- ✓ Innate Attack: Burning Attack 3d; Area Effect, 4 yards, +100%; Cosmic, Irresistible Attack, +300%; Emanation, -20%) [72]

What does it all mean? When this power is activated, your body sprays out a wreath of blue-white flames (the Emanation limitation, the blue-white flame is just one possibility for visual effects) that do 3d of damage (3 levels of burning) to everyone within 4 yards of you (due to Area Effect). (See Chapter 8 for more on the Emanation limitation.) Damage Resistance is ignored (due to Cosmic, Irresistible Attack). If a series of actions must be taken in a specific order (for instance, you must activate before firing), it is worthwhile to note that as well.

Magic spells

Although magic spells can be listed under skills, if your character is a mage designed with ample character points, you may have too many to fit under the Skills section. It is also handy to copy down useful information about the spells, such as casting time, duration, point costs, and range. This will probably add another dedicated sheet to your character.

Chapter 7 describes the specifics of crafting a mage and generating the initial entries in your spell list. You can find the information to fill in the details for your spell chart in the Spell Table Appendix in *GURPS Magic*, page 223.

Reference material

Depending on the campaign, the GM may provide you with a basic description of the world your character will be adventuring in. Appending this to the end of your character sheet can be a useful reference, even if you think you basically know it. As the game goes on, the original details can grow fuzzy, and sometimes you can get a lot of advantage from remembering the background stuff. Will posing as a priest get you into the government building that citizens are usually denied access to? Perhaps the scrap iron that you stumble across can be sold at a profit to the notoriously metal-poor halflings of half-moon shire.

Contacts

Although Contacts are described in *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* as providing a certain skill to the character, that is not all there is to their story. For the price of a Contact you could simply buy the skill in question yourself. A contact's value comes in having access to sources of knowledge that wouldn't be available to you even if you had his skill. For example, a banker Contact might be able to give you off-the-record information about the financial activities of a cult you're investigating because she has access to their account information. Because of this, it's worth having a brief write-up of who your Contact is, and just what sorts of things he has unusual access to.

Wealth

There is not too much to say about wealth, but if your character has a steady income from a job, you'll want to make sure to keep track of time to make sure you get paid! You'll also want to keep track of any possessions and cash that you have. Don't expect the GM to do this for you. And you never know what item may prove to be useful later as the necessary component in some arcane ritual.



A last note on character sheets: Steve Jackson Games sells a program called *GURPS Character Assistant* that helps you design and print out characters in a convenient format. It also allows you to create your own custom character sheet.

Writing a Character Background

All characters have some sort of background to explain their circumstances. Even if your character is a robot that just rolled off the assembly line, he still must have some background that ties him in to the world. Why was he created? How did he become "free"? Or if he is not free, who controls him? Although it is not absolutely necessary to tell an elaborate background story upfront, backgrounds can add a lot to the richness of the role you play.

We usually create character backgrounds in one of two ways:

- ✓ The most common way to create a character background starts with looking over the character's sheet and getting an idea of the character's personality based on her advantages, quirks, disadvantages, and perks. Is she cowardly? Foolishly brave? Gullible? What factors do you see as

being central to her personality? Some of this information may have been part of the original character concept. Next, think about how to bring the world setting into it. How would a person with the previously described personality fit into the local culture? What would motivate her to be involved in the proposed adventure?

- ✓ Another way to go about creating a character background is to take this process in reverse: What role would you like to play in the campaign setting? A fighter? A healer? An encyclopedia salesman? Imagine yourself in such a role, and write your background to describe how you fit the image.

As with all creative endeavors, there is no one correct way of creating a character background. However, you should base it primarily on two things: The setting in which the campaign will be taking place and the character's own attributes, advantages and disadvantages. Another good idea is to make sure your character's background explains her involvement in the type of campaign being run, but this is less vital than the other two factors. It is not that uncommon for characters to be swept up in an adventure that is outside of the normal way they live their lives; however, in these cases you should explain how your character was sucked into the thick of the action, and why she doesn't run from it at the first opportunity.

A sample character background

Here is an example background one of us wrote for a character in a Victorian campaign setting where magic is part of day-to-day life.

Erica and Eryka were born on June 18th, 1856 in a suburb of Bath, England. Their parents, Harris and Mary Grey, are wealthy industrialists who had been trying to have children for many years without success. They finally achieved their goal by contracting with the king of a local faery shee, a being who calls himself Tippet of the Rolling Hills. The contract stipulated that Harris Grey was to pay Tippet two casks of fine dwarven ale in return for seeing that his wife would become pregnant with twins. Finding the specified ale to be outrageously expensive and knowing that faeries must always keep their word, Harris Grey purchased a single cask and had it divided into two smaller casks specially made for the occasion. In punishment for putting the "spirits" into two containers, Tippet caused the twins' two spirits to be put into one body, and thereby achieved a sense of balance. Harris Grey tried to make it up to the faeries by providing them with two more wine casks of traditional size, but rather than undo the curse (which he perhaps is unable to do) Tippet gave them another child, this time, a son named Harris Jr.

The twins now must share their single body, with one having possession of the communal body from noon until midnight, and the other from midnight until noon. For simplicity's sake, Mary Grey named them Erica and Eryka, so that she could use the same name no matter what time it was. Erica's hair is blonde, and Eryka's is black, but otherwise there is no change when they switch possession of the body. The two communicate through a shared diary, so that they can keep abreast of each other's activities. For the most part they get along well, but do occasionally play practical jokes on each other, the most popular one being to arrange to switch control of the bodies in a situation so as to leave the new occupant embarrassed.

Since birth, the twins have gotten along rather well with Tippet and his clan, who feel some small measure of remorse for afflicting innocent children with a curse. Harris Jr. is a year younger than the twins. They get along with him fairly well, but he is hungry for social position (he's trying desperately to get a peerage), which puts the twins off him a bit. It is also clear that when he inherits, he is not planning on making any generous offers of financial support.

The twin's mother dotes on them, but their relations have always been strained with their father. This tension is partly because he is by nature a gruff and unreasonable man, and partly because of the continued guilt he feels for getting the curse inflicted on them (he never admits to this guilt, however, even to himself). The girls went to boarding school in Salisbury, where Eryka learned the rudiments of magery and showed tremendous promise as an opera singer. Erica turned her hand to thievery, specializing in picking pockets, and has become quite an adept swordswoman. The pair later moved in with their aunt Stephanie so that Eryka could take advantage of the thriving opera scene in Vienna.

Logging the Adventure

Whether the campaign you're playing in is an epic adventure or a dungeon crawl, you will find tidbits of information along the way that you will want to keep track of. For example, in a dungeon crawl you may wish to create a rough map of the area you're exploring so that you can find your way out again or even notice areas that might contain hidden rooms. You will certainly want to keep track of any loot you find! With epic adventures, you will run across all sorts of important facts: names, places, clues, legends of missing artifacts, and

so on. You don't want to arrive at the climactic conclusion of a years' play by bursting in the door of the dungeon and saying, "We're here to rescue you, Princess . . . uh . . . what's your name again?"

Taking notes need not be cumbersome, and in fact it should not be. No one wants to sit around while you take elaborate notes on contents of the king's knickknack shelf. It is also not necessary that everyone in the group take notes, as long as someone is tracking the things you need to record such as:

- ✓ Names, places, and dates
- ✓ Special items you might find (be they magic or simply unusual). You should also note where you found them, so that the GM will know what you're talking about when you ask about them later.
- ✓ Legends, rumors, and other pieces of information you run across

It can be helpful to keep very rough notes on the action of the adventure so that your other notes have a bit of context.

Managing Your Points

During the course of play, your character earns character points to be used to improve and develop his skills, remove disadvantages, raise attributes, and sometimes even add advantages. How many points you are awarded depends on the GM and what occurred during that particular gaming session. The next few sections discuss the best ways to distribute these points to benefit your character.

Improving skills

At the end of each night's play, the GM awards each character a number of points (called *earned character points*) with which to advance. At the end of the evening (or before the start of the next session, depending on the flexibility of your GM), you can simply spend these points on any skills that you used to some significant degree during the night's play. Your GM will have to determine what counts as "significant." *Improving during adventure* (as this is called) is the simplest way to improve your skills.

The other way of improving your skills is through study, which usually has to happen between adventures. Using this method, your character earns extra character points for the time he spends hitting the books. Because different styles of study yield different results, the book uses the term "hours of learning" to mean something different than "hours of study." For every 200 hours of learning, you earn 1 character point in the skill you were studying. There are three types of study your character can engage in:

- ✔ Work experience
- ✔ Self-teaching
- ✔ Being taught by a teacher

The best form of study is being taught; every hour of being taught is an hour of learning, so your character earns 1 character point for every 200 hours of this kind of study. If you cannot find or cannot afford a teacher, you can learn a skill on your own (although the GM may not allow this with all skills) by

A sample character log

A fun but totally optional idea for keeping track of details is to write a brief log or journal for your character from the notes you take during gaming. Such a diary not only tracks important information, but also provides a narrative that keeps the action of the game fresh in everybody's head, which can really help when a couple weeks go by between sessions. It can also be a tremendous help in developing your character and in introducing either him or her to the other players in the game.

... I met Draco in the fish market, according to the instructions implicit in the hat she left me. I appeared as a plump balding man in his late 50s, and this time Draco was a middle-aged craftswoman. She (and I use the sex of the semblance, as I do not know Draco's natural gender) asked me how my cell was coming along, and I answered her in vague but positive terms. She then asked me if I was ready for our first assignment, and I answered that I was, and so she gave it to me.

It seems there is a mage named Arnie Boarmark, who specializes in researching new spells. He has authored two new combat spells, which were to be given to the throne in a month's time. Surreptitiously, he had made arrangements to turn copies of the spell over to an agent of Shah-dath, a notorious necromancer wizard. The spells were to be exchanged during a meeting in the Skydome Pleasure Palace on the 13th of

June, two days from the time I was given the assignment. The resistance did not know the exact time or place of the meeting, but did know that Boarmark had registered as Milo Boarman. Further, they had learned that the meeting terms allowed each side only two bodyguards. Our assignment was to kill Boarmark and the agent of Shah-dath, obtain or destroy the scrolls, and make it as hard as possible for the spirits of these folk to be summoned for questioning. I was warned that we were to leave the personal effects of the contingent from Shah-dath alone, as Shah-dath would use them to track us down and kill us.

I told her that my cell would be up to the assignment, though in truth I didn't like it too much. No self-respecting assassin likes to work on such short notice, with no time for background checks and having to rely only on the information of unknown allies. Boarmark, a mage who researches combat spells, was not going to be an easy opponent, and the situation left us little scope for improvisation. Further, the Skydome security is well-known for its competence, and because the building floats in the air, escape options are necessarily limited. Still, I felt that we could likely either pull it off or determine beforehand that the situation was hopeless, and I have always wanted to see the inside of the famous Skydome.

practice and reading. However, this method only gives you one hour of learning for every two hours of studying. You can also learn on the job, but this form of study only gives you one hour of learning for every four hours of study. And of course, your character has to have a job to take advantage of this.

As you can see, tracking all this can get complicated if you dabble in a few things here and there between adventuring and working a job. Again, it's handy to use a simple form such as the one in Figure 12-1 to track your hours.

Skill	Date	Hours of Learning	Points earned
Accounting	4/22/05	200	1
Boxing	4/22/05	100	
First Aid	4/27/05	50	
Escape	4/27/05	120	
Boxing	5/02/05	100	1

Figure 12-1:
A sample
skill log.

Changing advantages, disadvantages, and attributes

It is also possible to use your earned character points to buy new advantages; increase your ST, IQ, DX, and HT; and to remove disadvantages. Sadly, with the exception of a few advantages, you cannot earn points through study for these purposes; you are limited to character points you earned during adventure. The advantages you can gain through study are listed on page 294 of *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*.

In order to add an advantage, you not only need to come up with the points, but you also have to be able to explain how your character acquired the new advantage in the action of the game. With some advantages this is easy, but many advantages are not available after the start of play. There are no hard-and-fast rules as to which advantages you can add after character creation because so much depends on the campaign. Adding Military Rank might be trivial in a modern campaign, whereas in a swords-and-sorcery campaign there might be absolute limits on the Rank that someone who is not of noble birth can achieve. In a futuristic campaign, your character might be able to stop by the local tissue engineering lab and have gills installed. The GM is the arbiter of what is possible, and if you have your eye on adding a specific advantage later, you should ask about it.

Removing disadvantages works along the same lines. It is possible for a character to overcome a fear of heights, but she will not re-grow a lost limb unless there is something in the campaign that makes this possible. The GM, of course, is the final arbiter of that. Unfortunately, you cannot earn extra points by acquiring new disadvantages. If your arm is bitten off by a dragon during play, about the only benefit it gives you is a good story to tell at the tavern.

Raising attributes is usually just a matter of paying the points necessary to buy another level of the attribute (10 points for ST and HT, 20 for IQ and DX), but your character should expect to spend some game time working on this change. For example, she might lift weights if she wants to become stronger.

Tracking point changes

Tracking and spending character points seems like a straightforward and self-explanatory task, and for the most part it is. However, if you aren't careful, you'll be surprised how easy it is to lose track of your points. It's surprisingly easy to forget to write down points you've been awarded at the end of a long night's play. It's also easy to confuse yourself by adding points to a skill or advantage, but forgetting to mark them off the points in your character bank, or by talking to the GM about spending points between sessions, and then not remembering if you actually marked them off the next time you game.

Even if your mind is like a steel bear trap and you never make these mistakes, it's good to keep a detailed record so that you can always square your accounting with the GM's records. If she makes the mistake, you'll want to be able to show that your version is accurate.

The best way to do this is instead of just jotting points down in the corner of your sheet, scratching them out, and writing over them again, is keeping a chronological record of the points you earned and what you've spent them on, much like the one in Figure 12-2. When you earn points for a session's play, be sure to write down the date.

Notes	+ Points	- Points	Total
Session of 5/25/05	3		16
1 point to Broadsword skill		1	
1 point to Fast-Talk skill		1	
1 point to Singing skill		1	13
Session of 6/1/05	3		16

Figure 12-2:
A sample
point log.

What GMs Want from Their Players

GURPS (and any other role playing game) is an exercise in cooperative story telling. It's easy to fall into the habit of letting the GM shoulder most of the burden in this. After all, you just control one character; the GM controls the entire rest of the universe! But do not minimize your role in making the game fun, especially for the GM.

The fun of being GM lies in creating an engaging world for the players to explore. If you show your interest in the campaign by taking the extra time to really read and remember the campaign's background material, write a background to fit, and maybe even create a character log, the GM will feel rewarded for his work and in turn will become more invested in his creation, making the game even more fun.



As GM, you can encourage your players to become involved with a little bribery. Giving out occasional good-role-playing bonus points for creating a good character background and keeping a clear and detailed log can do wonders for your players' motivation.



Chapter 13

Playing the Role

In This Chapter

- ▶ Defining your character's personality
 - ▶ Getting into the character's role
 - ▶ Performing social interactions
 - ▶ Building your character's life
-

Roleplaying is what sets *GURPS* apart from games like Monopoly and chess. You don't just control a piece that moves around a board, you actually play the personality of a (usually) heroic figure, a personality of your own creation. In this chapter, we explore the idea of role playing, as well as ideas for getting the most out of your experience.

Sharing the Storytelling

It's easy to think of the GM as your enemy. After all, she spends an unsettling portion of her time thinking of ways to torment, kill, and generally thwart your character's dreams. Good GMs are often labeled "sadistic," a title they wear as a badge of honor. But really, *GURPS* is an exercise in shared storytelling, and the GM provides the main plotline and enough challenges to make the players' victories meaningful. If the GM were nice to you all the time and made things easy for your character, you would soon be bored.

Your job as a player is not merely to overcome everything the GM throws your way, but to give richness to the story of the campaign. You don't need to be a great actor to do this, but you should strive to make your character behave as if he has a realistic personality and is not just a strategically played game piece that always does what is most advantageous. If you've been through Chapter 3, you may well have your character's personality defined by now, but in this chapter, we attempt to help you smooth off the rough edges.

Being a team player

All the characters do not have to get along in perfect harmony all the time, but it really is a good idea to try and be part of a team with your party. Party fights get old in a hurry and take the fun out of gaming for everyone. Besides, it wouldn't make sense for a group of characters who hate each other to hang around together. For the sake of realism as well as harmony of the gaming group, try to create a character who is not just going to be a problem for everyone else.

This is one of the reasons you should talk about your character with other players in the group before the character is finalized. A wizard who specializes in fire spells brought into a party with three pyrophobics might be funny for a while, but the novelty quickly wears off. It's also a short step from characters that don't get along to players who don't get along. In the short run, a bit of character conflict can be both fun and funny, but if it's carried on too long, players' feelings start to get involved. No one likes to be picked on or teased continually, even through fictional character intermediaries.

Playing your disadvantages

You will find that your disadvantages are more likely to define your character's personality than anything else. This is because by their very nature, disadvantages limit your character's actions in one way or another. You'll notice that even traits which we think of as "good" are often listed as disadvantages — for example, Truthfulness and Charitable. Even though these are considered positive traits, your character is compelled to engage in them even when they are not convenient. If your character is charitable, he *must* aid *everyone* who asks, while a less kind person is free to pursue her own goals.

When you select disadvantages for your character, we highly recommend that you think about what they mean and take only the ones that you will be happy playing. (Chapter 5 gives some advice as you consider the various disadvantages available.) The game does provide a dice-roll mechanic for determining how often you succumb to your mental disadvantages, but it's the mark of a good role player not to have to roll too often. Take disadvantages that you will have fun playing and realize that playing them can be part of the fun, and try to roll to resist your disadvantages only when the character knows her butt is on the line if she doesn't.

Keep in mind that someone with a disadvantage is going to display fairly extreme behavior. Most people are somewhat honest, but a character with the Honesty disadvantage is going to wait for the light to turn green even when bad guys are hot on his tail! Most people are somewhat curious, but someone with the Curious disadvantage is going to unwrap all her Christmas

presents early, read her friends' mail when they aren't looking, and put her finger in the light socket because she just has to know what it's like.

Disadvantages often work together to define your character, and you should think about how you're going to explain your personality before you start play. Make sure your disadvantages work together in a rational way. For example, it's impossible to be both a Bully and Charitable at the same time. Here is an example of how two disadvantages can be matched to help form a personality:

Iff Lightpaw is a girl of 14 who comes from a primitive barbarian tribe, of which all the members are were-creatures. She was captured and forced to work for a circus at age 9, and has recently escaped to face life on her own. She has the following disadvantages: Bloodlust, Gullibility, Truthfulness, and a Wealth level of Poor.

Putting these together, the player has decided that she is young and naïve to an extreme degree, and thus neither lies nor expects anyone else to. Her worldview is simple — if someone is your enemy, you should kill him; if he isn't, there is no sense in trying to deceive him. She is kind and sweet-tempered to her friends. To her enemies, well, she turns into a panther and eats them!

Acting Out Social Interactions

In many ways, the crux of role playing games is social interaction. The combat parts are fun, but taken by themselves, they make for no more than a tabletop war game. Social interactions in the game are what separate role playing games from the rest of the herd. **GURPS** allows for two methods of running social interactions — with dice and by role playing the character. We discuss both of these methods, although in practice they are most often used together.

Role playing social interactions

When your character meets an NPC he is interested in talking to, you as a player are expected to speak to that NPC through your character. In doing so, you have to keep in mind who your character is and act like the character rather than like yourself. Your disadvantages do not just determine when you have to roll dice to complete an action; you must incorporate them into your vision of the character and into your role playing. If your character has the Shyness disadvantage, you shouldn't be chatting up a beautiful NPC. Similarly, if your character suffers from Lecherousness, you should be chatting up everyone who catches your eye, even if it's not convenient.

Role playing can become particularly challenging when your character has a markedly different personality or markedly different interpersonal skills than you do. For example, if you are called upon to negotiate a treaty with a neighboring kingdom on behalf of your king, and your character has a high Diplomacy skill score, your character should be able to do a good job at the bargaining table. This may not be something you are good at in real life, and you may have difficulty acting the part for that bit of play. If you find yourself in this situation, you should roll the dice against your skill level, and the GM should give you advice and responses according to the roll. If you make your skill roll handily, the GM should assume that your character is being convincing even if you yourself can't think of any smooth or clever circumlocutions to use. The GM should also give you a few hints as to whether you're asking for too much or not enough because your character is supposed to be an expert on the subject. But in the end, you should still try and come up with some dialogue for your character to say.

Resolving social interactions with dice rolls

From time to time, an important social interaction may take too long to role play, either because the negotiations are lengthy and intricate or because a character has skills that the player just doesn't have at all. In those cases, rolling the dice is the best way to handle these social situations. A character with high skill levels of Performance and Public Speaking, for example, can be expected to be able to give an impromptu speech that will hold an audience's interest. The player may not be able to do this, however, and it would be both painful and a waste of time for the GM to make you get up and talk. In such circumstances, the GM should just let you roll the dice and determine the audience's reaction based on how well you beat your skill.

Separating player knowledge from character knowledge

Good role playing requires that you keep information that you know separate from what your character knows. A lot of times, you will find that you know things that your character doesn't have any way of knowing. For example, if another player's character is kidnapped when your character wasn't present, your character shouldn't know anything is wrong. You really should try to do your best to act as if you don't know that information, and shouldn't have your character guess the truth based on flimsy evidence.

Rules lawyering for fun and profit

A *rules lawyer* is a player who spends a lot of time trying to get the GM to make generous interpretations of the rules. This is sometimes appropriate, but generally speaking, it's a bad habit to get into. The GM's word is law, and it's best to try to be a good sport about it and not ruin everyone's fun by carrying on about how you think the rules ought to be read. When you do engage in rules lawyering, we suggest the following guidelines:

- ✓ Say your peace and then accept the GM's judgment with good grace.

- ✓ Realize that the GM has to keep the game balanced in order for it to be fun. Don't ask for rulings that make your character an unstoppable force because, if your GM is foolish enough to let you get away with it, the challenge of the game will be ruined.
- ✓ Don't just argue to see what you can get away with.

The point of good rules lawyering, then, should be to improve the game for everyone, not just to make your character more powerful. If you are willing to give as well as take, the GM will be much more willing to give you what you want.

Another common problem comes from players knowing things that their characters shouldn't know because the technology level of the campaign may be much lower than modern technology. When playing in a campaign set in ancient times, it's tempting for players to want their characters to devise simple but useful items that they know of but that weren't around in the time of the campaign. For example, you might want your character to invent the stirrup, which is an attractively straightforward item that you can have a blacksmith bang out for you quickly. It may seem obvious with the benefit of hindsight, but a lot of horsemen rode horses without stirrups for a long time, and it was not obvious to them.



As GM, you should watch for characters acting on information that they should not have. If a character wants to invent items that the player knows about but the character does not, you should disallow it unless he has the Gadgeteer advantage. If he wants to become rich and famous off the item, you should require him to buy levels of Wealth and Reputation. Never allow an invention if it's going to ruin the flavor of the game. When characters act as if they know things they shouldn't know, you should be sure to penalize them character points for the session for bad role playing.

It's also worth noting that this issue cuts both ways — you have to be fair to your players and not have your NPCs react using your knowledge of the player character's capabilities. If a player comes up with a brilliant strategy to handily defeat your bad guys and mentions it beforehand, you just have to lump it and not have your NPCs react as if they knew about it. The game works best for both players and GM when the players are not penalized for saying too much too early.

Seeking fun versus success

One common element of all *GURPS* campaigns is that they all are set up to challenge the characters to succeed in some course of action. Be it carting back treasure from a dungeon or foiling a master criminal, the game is about the characters doing their best to succeed in the face of adversity.

In a good campaign, many of the rewards built into the game — magic or special items, money to buy needed equipment, or character points to make the character more effective — are designed to make the characters more capable. It's easy for you to focus on character power and character improvement as the primary goal of the game. However, overemphasizing this aspect of the game misses a good part of the point of role playing games.

Much of the fun is in the story of the game, and the characters who are the most fun to play are often not the most powerful ones, but rather the ones with funny or endearing personalities. Think of it this way: No matter how powerful your character gets, the GM will adjust your opponents to match you. If you gain a power to overcome certain obstacles, the GM will just find new obstacles to challenge you with. Over time, you'll notice that it isn't necessarily more fun to play in high-powered high-point-value games.

What to Do between Fights

Not every *GURPS* campaign involves a lot of fighting, but the majority of them do. This is why so many of the rules are about the finer points of combat rather than, say, diplomacy or contract bridge. However, we find that the game is much more fun if you don't concentrate solely on combat and make sure to enjoy the other parts of the game as well. The parts of the game that happen between fights can give you the most scope for role playing.

Solving puzzles and problems

If you are willing to concentrate on things other than fighting, you can often avoid combat or get a useful edge by spending some time having your character do some investigating rather than just charging into all situations with her sword drawn.

Are people disappearing into the mysterious temple and not coming out? It's much better to ask around and look for any hints, legends, or rumors that you can take advantage of before you knock on the door. Do the priests

of the temple come out only at night? Are large wolf tracks often seen around the temple? Does the town drunk claim to have seen the high priestess flying through the midnight air with horns and a barbed tail, but no one believes him?

Seeking out these things ahead of time can not only increase your chances of survival, but it can be fun as well. Sleuthing gives you a chance to match wits with the GM and to play your character's personality to the fullest by interacting with all the NPCs of the campaign.

Having a life

It can also be fun to give your character a life outside the plot of the campaign. Where does your character live? Does he have any family? Does she collect fancy hats? Does he belong to any social clubs? Having a life outside of the campaign can give your character richness and make her more fun to role play within the campaign. It can also give the GM something to tie your character into the plot with. Yes, GMs will sometimes use these details against you, but overcoming conflict is a major part of the fun.

These sorts of details make your character feel more real and therefore more fun to play.

Having goals

You can also go beyond just having a detailed life for your character and actually have goals that are not directly related to the plot of the campaign. They need not be complicated; in one campaign, a character dreamed of building a house with a large ballroom and throwing elegant social events. On the other hand, complicated goals can be even better; another character who was a member of the lesser nobility sought to carve out his own fiefdom from wild territory, and the player had a good time designing how his government would work and what the legal code would be like.

If you do this, it's best to not fight the GM on these things. Your character's goals should not interfere with the campaign or make the other players spend a lot of time watching you do things that bear no relevance to themselves. If you are careful not to intrude on the campaign in these ways, your character's goals will for the most part add to everyone's fun.

Sample characters: Biographies

Stuart's "Normal" Character

Jessica Delacourt was raised a devout Catholic and still attends church regularly. Her father was a cop, and Jessica was raised with a very strong sense of right and wrong as well as a belief that one should take action when possible. When the priest talked about evil in the night, she was one of the few who took him literally. As a result, she's made a career out of investigating the unholy and, when possible, putting it to rest. Frequently, this has led her into confrontations with human evil, and that has led to her developing contacts within the law enforcement community (particularly a friendly FBI agent named John Coyote). She supports herself by selling articles of her exploits to the tabloids, and her editor, Irina Malcote, is another key contact for her. These days, she's looking to find a group to work with as things have begun to get more dangerous in the city. She's 5'7", has long dark hair (usually in a ponytail), brown eyes, and olive skin. She's usually dressed in jeans, a loose blouse, and a cameraman's vest (with various artifacts in the pockets). She carries a Glock nine-millimeter but is familiar with a variety of handguns.

Bjoern's Mage Character

Opie Mossytoes was born and grew up in the isolated and idyllic halfling community of Marshberry. He is the eighth child and only son of Barney and Bea Mossytoes. Even as an infant, Opie was surrounded by odd goings-on; strange manifestations, visitations, and supernatural emanations became routine occurrences in the Mossytoes household. As Opie grew older and was able to play in and around the village, the

weirdness started coming to the attention of other members of the community, and sentiment against Opie began growing. Eventually, when Opie was 12 years old, the community elders sent him into exile. Fortunately for young Mossytoes, he was rescued by a wandering mage, Calgaron the Munificent, who took Opie in and trained him in magic and helped him bond to Toby, his Wolpertinger Familiar. In just the last few weeks, Calgaron was killed in an ambush by an old enemy, who now is tracking down Opie. This hero is looking for a band of stalwart companions that he can join who will fight for him when and if the enemy confronts him again. Of course, Opie won't admit anything to the party until he absolutely has to.

Adam's Supers Character

Anna Connors was an archaeology student working on a dig in the Amazon rainforest. One day, she got lost in the dense underbrush and ended up falling through the damp turf into an ancient buried temple. Fascinated, she spent the rest of the evening exploring, and at night took shelter in the largest room of the complex, under a massive statue of a serpent done up in unusual red pottery and gilded with gold leaf. That night, she dreamed that she was confronted by a magnificent serpent in the jungle, whose body stretched so far that it disappeared into the mist behind it. The serpent offered her the chance to be its champion against the dark forces of the world. It offered her some gifts of power to help her with the quest. She readily accepted and in the morning emerged from the temple as Anaconda, the Snake God's avenger.

Part IV

Running Your Own Adventure

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I'm in six different role-playing games six nights a week. I don't have the energy to play the role of a boyfriend right now."



In this part . . .

We take you into the wonderful and terrifying world of Game Mastering a **GURPS** adventure. In Chapter 14, we address many of the logistical and organizational issues that frequently confound first-time GMs. In Chapter 15, we walk you through the process of setting up a short-term adventure for your party with the assumption that you already have an available game world to use for your adventure.

Finally, in Chapter 16, we address the fact that most gamers need to be motivated by having their characters rewarded in some way throughout the campaign. We show you some good ways and point out some not-so-good ways to do this, and we guide you through the issues you have to consider when rewarding characters.

Chapter 14

Playing the GM

In This Chapter

- ▶ Reviewing the characters your players create
 - ▶ Organizing the information you'll need as the GM
 - ▶ Helping players manage their characters
 - ▶ Interpreting the rules
 - ▶ Streamlining your management of combat
-

A *GURPS* session requires not only a few players, but also one person to manage the adventure — the Game Master, or GM. The players' responsibilities include creating their characters and managing the actions of those characters during play. The GM has an entirely different set of responsibilities, including creating the adventure, managing the character-creation process, managing combat, and interpreting the rules. This section of the book introduces you to the wonderful world of GMing. It's a lot of fun, but also a lot of work, and it's best to start prepared.

We start by providing an overview of what's involved in being a GM. Chapter 15 gives you advice on creating your first adventure. And Chapter 16 gives some advice on interacting with the players as people, rather than as characters. If, after you've gotten a taste of GMing, you really want to get serious about it, be sure to check out Part V, which gives you information about turning your adventure into a campaign and even creating your own gaming world.

Introducing the Campaign

If you want to be a GM, you need two things:

- ✓ Players to provide a cast of characters
- ✓ Something for those characters to do

Even if you're just running a quick and simple adventure, you'll need to have some idea beforehand of what you want the party of characters to do. Will they be soldiers in ancient Rome? Or space merchants in the middle of a galaxy-wide civil war? The players will want some sort of basic introduction to the action so they can create appropriate characters.

We find it's helpful to give your players an introductory write-up for your world. This can be as simple or as complex as you'd like. A page or two is often fine, but in Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign, which we discuss in Part V, the introductory material was nearly 200 pages long!

The main things your players need to know are

- ✔ **What is the campaign about?** Are the characters villagers under attack by goblin hordes? Are they living on campus at a magical university? Are they CIA operatives?
- ✔ **What is the technology level of the campaign?** Will they be using flint spears or lasers?
- ✔ **What sorts of special or supernatural abilities are allowed in the campaign?** Can the characters be superheroes? Wizards?
- ✔ **What sorts of races are allowed as player characters?**
- ✔ **What special rules pertain specifically to the campaign?** Is the mana level very high or nonexistent? Do most people on the street possess a superpower?
- ✔ **What social, cultural, and resource issues are important?** Are all blond people killed on sight? Is everyone without skills in basket-weaving looked on as a barbarian? Is it a high-tech world, but one without metal?

You can add any number of other details to these basic categories, or anything else you want to, but at a minimum, make sure you let your players know ahead of time both what is expected of them and what is and isn't allowed.

No, Your Wizard Can't Have a Machine Gun — Reviewing Characters

One of the most important jobs of a GM is to review the players' characters at the start of a campaign. Because role playing games are an exercise in shared storytelling, it is important to have a good set of characters in your game if everything is going to come off correctly. If you envision a complex

campaign involving mystery and intrigue, with the characters engaging in subtle behind-the-scenes manipulation, and you are presented with a cast of characters consisting mostly of barbarians with the Berserk disadvantage, you're going to be hard-pressed to realize your vision. Ideally, you can minimize this problem by giving your players clear guidance on what sort of game you're hoping to run with your introductory world write-up. However, character review is your last defense against allowing a party that does not suit the campaign, so be prepared to speak up or forever hold your peace. As GM, you have veto power over any character you don't find suitable for your campaign, although this is a last resort; you should do your best to address problems before you get to that stage.

Character power levels

You'll find that some players seek to take advantage of loopholes, synergistic effects of certain abilities, and, in some cases, interpretations of the rules that you don't necessarily agree with. We find that you can save yourself quite a bit of effort by announcing up front your intention to do away with game-unbalancing abilities, whether they are technically legal or not. Encourage people to check with you during character creation to find out whether you're going to allow any tricky shtick they might have in mind so that they won't be disappointed after it's too late to change.

To look for this kind of thing during character review, pay special attention to supernatural abilities and spells, especially spells taken to such a high skill level that they can be cast quickly or maintained for free. Usually, when a player does this, he has something tricky in mind, and you should ask or figure out what it is.

On the other side of the coin, some players have a tendency to create ineffective characters. For several reasons, such players can present a bigger problem than players who try to unbalance the game with their powers.

- ✔ It's more fun if everyone is enjoying herself. If one of the players' characters is seriously outclassed, that player may not find herself with much to do during the game.
- ✔ In a group with several ineffective characters (or in a small gaming group), the party can end up being unable to accomplish the goals you set for them.

It is to your advantage, then, to try to get players to meet somewhere in the middle. You may want to give character creation hints to players whose characters do not seem up to snuff. Don't try to write the characters for them

(unless they want that much help), but try to urge them to get in line with the other players in the party. Sometimes you can get the players who excel at creating characters to work with the less experienced players. Not only does this get the party of characters working together from the start, but it also gives the power gamers a chance to feel appreciated.

Point crocks

Point crock is our house term for a disadvantage or limitation that gives a character more points than it's worth, or in some cases for an underpriced advantage. Other times, you can get abilities, limitations, or disadvantages that aren't well balanced with their points if you take them to the extreme. Often, the problem in that situation is that the possible responses of the GM become equally extreme. The **GURPS** system does a pretty good job of balancing things, but because the setting in which you play can vary so much, it's possible that sometimes the value of something is exaggerated, or the penalty for something is ignored.

For example, one of Adam's least favorite point crocks involves Gadget Limitations. Take a superhero campaign in which characters are built with 400 character points, with a 50-point limit to disadvantages. One player decides to build a gadget-based character called the Mad Hatter, who has a magical hat that gives him an assortment of powers. The hat is breakable, but magically tough with a DR of 5 and a -15 percent limitation. It has a size modifier of -4, so it is plainly visible for a -15 percent limitation. It can be stolen, but is held to the Hatter's head magically unless grabbed when he's not looking, which is a -20 percent limitation. The hat is Unique, so if it's stolen it can't be replaced, for another -25 percent limitation.

In total, the Mad Hatter gets -75 percent in limitations for every power the hat grants him. In other words, if the other characters in this campaign spend an average of 200 points on powers, the Mad Hatter gets to spend the equivalent of 800 points because of these limitations. This is a huge advantage, and the GM, who should often use those limitations to the character's detriment, may find herself at a loss. If you are the GM, how many avenues are really open to you? If you destroy the hat, the character becomes useless. The hat is Unique and therefore can't be replaced. If you're just planning on destroying the character's powers, why not ask the player to make a different character in the first place? You can have the hat stolen, and make the party work to get it back, but how many times can you use that plot thread before everyone gets bored? At the same time, because the Mad Hatter has 800 points of abilities before the gadget limitations are taken into account, you're going to have a heck of a time coming up with villains to oppose him that don't totally outclass the rest of the party. And will villains who don't outclass the rest of the party even be able to approach the Mad Hatter to steal his hat? These

limitations force a binary response from the GM; either the character's powers are extremely powerful or else they're not there at all — there isn't any intermediate way to respond.

Other point crocks include

- ✓ Codes of Honor that require the player to do things the whole party was going to do anyway
- ✓ Phobias of things that aren't likely to come into play in the campaign
- ✓ Low levels of Wealth in a campaign in which the characters can expect to loot large sums of cash off the fallen villains (though it can be fun to continually push such characters back into poverty)

Some point crocks can be unintentional. The player may not know that her disadvantage is not going to come into play very often. As the GM, you should have at least some kind of idea of what sorts of things the party is going to encounter, so make sure to think about these things during character review.

Things that drive GMs crazy

As a GM, you will find that some perfectly legitimate advantages or disadvantages end up making you crazy, and you should discourage people from taking them, limit the number of characters who can take them, or make them outright off-limits. You may find that some things bother you that other GMs have no difficulty with or that you might not mind in a different campaign. Creating a party that consists of characters that you are comfortable with is important, so try to identify problems early on. Every GM ends up with a list of advantages and disadvantages that he doesn't want to deal with; create your list *before* people create characters.

From our experience, for example, Weirdness Magnet can be difficult to GM in a serious "realistic" campaign. Not only does it require you to come up with strange things to happen to the character, but because it's a fairly hefty 15-point disadvantage, those strange things really ought to cause problems for the character and not just be weird. In some campaigns, this would just be irritating rather than something you could fit into the plot. Our recommendation is that if you allow this disadvantage (and it can be fun), think carefully about allowing no more than one character to take it, unless you're prepared for an extremely surreal campaign.

You should also look over characters' special abilities to make sure you're okay with what they can do. A character who can fly can be a huge amount of trouble if you weren't planning to have foes with significant missile weapons.

A character who can read minds might be fine in one campaign but totally short-circuit your plot in another. Characters who can take down their enemies with a single shot (for example, a character with a powerful Affliction ability) can also cause you a lot of grief, especially if you were planning on using a few powerful foes rather than hordes of lesser ones.

Anachronisms

Sometimes your players will try to do something that you didn't mean to allow in your campaign. Some players will assume that because an advantage or disadvantage is in the book, it must be available in your campaign. You can avoid most of these issues by giving your players a clear campaign write-up to work with, but you'll be surprised how often players will find something you didn't think about. A player may see that you intend to run a TL3 swords-and-sorcery campaign, create a Gadgeteer, and blithely start building a machine gun, which may not be the flavor you had in mind.

Mistakes

Don't assume players have done their math right; even the most mathematically inclined make the occasional mistake. It's very easy to find yourself a couple of points off at the end of character creation when you're working and reworking your skills list.

It is also worth having a careful look at any special abilities the player may have designed. As we explain in Chapter 9, designing abilities can be quite complicated, and you want to make sure that they are planned in a sensible way and that both you and the player understand how they are going to be handled.

After the review

One last note about character review: Sometimes players don't get a good feel for their characters until after they've run them a time or two. If you feel generous, it's not a bad idea to give your players a chance to trade in a disadvantage or quirk that isn't working out as well as they'd hoped. The game is at its best if everyone has a character that he or she enjoys playing, and usually, switching a few disadvantages for ones of equal value doesn't disturb the campaign too much. However, we recommend against allowing players to switch advantages to ones they suddenly see will be more valuable than they thought.

One method of avoiding all the above problems is for the GM to help design each character based on an interview. Just sit down with the player and allow him to describe the character he wants to run, and help him translate his ideas into *GURPS* stats. This way, you can discuss the possible discrepancies before pen hits paper. Keep in mind, though, that this method is most useful with new players; more experienced players may resent that much GM interference into their creative process.

The GM Cheat Sheet

As the GM, you're expected to know all the rules (or at least enough to keep the game flowing smoothly) and to be able to make up new ones on the fly if the action of the game calls for it. This is not as bad as it sounds, but it is helpful to have some of the key rules noted down and at hand before you start the game.

The GM screen

How you organize your information is a matter of taste, but many GMs prefer to use a GM screen. A tear-out GM screen has been included at the front of this book, and we believe you'll find it very handy. GM screens serve the dual role of keeping charts and tables handy and keeping players from seeing your written material.

If you don't want to use a GM screen, the following are some things that you'll want to have readily available:

- ✓ The range/speed table
- ✓ The critical hit and critical miss tables
- ✓ The critical spell failure table (if you have magic in your campaign)
- ✓ The random hit location table
- ✓ The NPC reaction table
- ✓ The fright check table

This information can be found in *GURPS Basic Set*. Steve Jackson Games also sells an official *GURPS GM's Screen*, available through your local hobby store or online at www.warehouse23.com/item.html?id=SJG01-0005.

Keeping notes on your players' characters

GURPS characters can be quite complicated, and it's your job as GM to keep track of at least the most important details of each of them. One of the things you should do to prepare to GM a session is to make careful notes on the characters in your campaign.

Exactly what notes you keep are up to you, and different GMs do things differently. You want to find a balance between not leaving out pieces of information you're likely to need often, and having so much info at hand that you can never find anything without shuffling through a lot of papers.

A good place to start is to make a list of all the characters. Do this in order of Basic Speed, from the highest to the lowest. Because characters act in order of Basic Speed, it allows you to read down the list in combat situations or any time that people want to do things at the same time. Because it's possible for your players to adjust their characters' Basic Speed up or down, and because it's advantageous to bump their characters' Basic Speed up to the next whole number, you will likely have a lot of ties between the characters.

After you list all the characters in order by Basic Speed, you can start adding details to this list. You want to know each character's Damage Resistance, so when they take damage, you can subtract it and tell them the bad news. Be sure to be consistent when you do this — it is very frustrating for players to be uncertain whether the number you provide is before or after being adjusted for the effects of armor.

You might want to note any of the characters' abilities or disadvantages that you need to keep in mind, particularly ones that change the way you need to interact with the players. You need to be aware of advantages like Danger Sense because they take effect before the players can remind you about them. You also want to keep track of disadvantages, such as Phobias, Vulnerabilities, and Enemies, so that you can be sure to make the character who has them pay.

Finally, record any pieces of information about the characters that the players themselves don't even know, such as the details of an Enemies disadvantage when the enemy is unknown. And be sure to record things that happen during play that you want to remember about the character's interactions, possessions, or knowledge. Maybe that cool sword a character found in the last adventure was stolen from the Dragon Anthrax, and he's been looking for it ever since! Such items also should be noted on your sheet.

If any character has a complicated ability, it is handy to keep notes about how it works — what rolls the player has to make to activate it, and most importantly, what rolls your NPCs have to make to resist it. You might want

to check out the GM Control Sheet on page 568 of *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*; it's a handy way of keeping track of this kind of information.

Some GMs prefer to keep abbreviated character sheets handy for all the characters. You can find an abbreviated form on page 569 of *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns* that is designed for NPCs. If your gaming group isn't too big, you can fill out one of these for each character in your campaign.

Keeping Your Players Honest (Or Dishonest)

One of the jobs of the GM is to make sure that players play their characters properly. You don't need to micromanage them, and in fact you should be careful not to. A character's personality is up to the player, and you should give them leeway to figure out what it is. However, if a character is getting points for a disadvantage, that disadvantage should come into play.

It's worthwhile to take note of advantages that affect a player's personality. These include such items as Gullibility, Honesty, Truthfulness, Laziness, and Bad Temper. Such disadvantages require the character to act in certain ways in certain situations. Most of these disadvantages allow a self-control roll to resist having to act on them. Nevertheless, a good role player shouldn't always try to resist. Someone with a bad temper usually doesn't mind yelling and screaming, and a lazy person isn't going to try and whip himself on in anything but the direst of emergencies.

In practice, after a player gets the hang of a character, you won't have to pay as much attention to these disadvantages. But it's good to keep reminding your players of how their characters are supposed to behave until their personalities get good and established.

Some disadvantages require the GM's interaction in order to disadvantage the character. Examples of this sort of disadvantage include Enemies, Phobias, low Status, bad Reputation, and Weirdness Magnet. These are particularly important to keep watch of because if you don't work them into the campaign, nothing will ever come of them.

Before you sit down to write your adventure, you should review a copy of each character sheet. That way, you can be sure to take advantage of all the special character buttons at your disposal.

Making and Breaking the Rules

We strongly recommend the point of view that all the rules in *GURPS* are *suggestions*. Feel free to change or ignore any rules that you don't like. In fact, none of us have ever played with any GM who did everything absolutely by the book. In some cases, a rule that you really like will not be appropriate for a certain campaign you want to run. *Customizable* is the watchword of *GURPS*.

Keep in mind, though, that this doesn't mean that the rules can be applied arbitrarily. Whatever decisions you make about the rules, your players need to know them and will expect you to enforce them consistently.

Rules interpretations on the fly

The rules cannot anticipate every situation, and many times you will find yourself interpreting the rules (or in some cases creating new rules) on the spot. If a character wants to dump a barrel of acid on a foe standing at the bottom of a cliff, what skill does she roll against? How fast can a flying character push a boat? Are Hindu vampires afraid of crosses?

There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but there are more- and less-workable answers. You should decide based on several criteria:

- ✓ Is the resulting rule reasonable and fair?
- ✓ Does it threaten campaign balance?
- ✓ Is the situation going to come up often enough to justify a complex rule instead of a quick die roll?
- ✓ Is it reasonably consistent with other *GURPS* rules?

You make two types of rules interpretations: ones that have long-lasting effects on the campaign, and ones that just get you through a particular situation. With rules interpretations that cover things that are going to happen over and over, you are establishing how that rule will work for the campaign. The most common example of this situation is interpreting how characters' powers or skills work. For example, does the Iron Arm spell (*GURPS Magic*, page 169) stop a Force Sword that would normally cut iron?

You want to avoid making a ruling merely to get the result you want in the situation at hand. The players feel it's unfair for you to use harsh rules interpretations to undo their brilliant ideas just because you don't want to deal with

the results. On the other hand, if you let the players do things too easily, you rob them of a chance to rise to a challenge.

Take the question of whether Hindu vampires are afraid of crosses, as an example. You can interpret this situation in several ways. You could rule that repelling vampires is a property of the holiness of crosses, and thus the vampire's beliefs are irrelevant and Hindu vampires should still shy away from crosses. You could rule that vampirism is a Christian curse, and thus Christian symbols are relevant despite the beliefs of the vampire. Or you could rule that vampirism is a divine curse, and so the symbol of the divinity that cursed the vampire is what's relevant. Yet another way to rule this situation would be that the faith of the *wielder* of the cross is what's important, so without True Faith, no vampire of any sort is going to be repelled. What would not be a good ruling is to just decide on the spur of the moment that your vampire is Hindu so as to bypass a character's inconvenient cross.

Dealing with dice rolls

One of the traps that is easy to fall into as a GM is allowing all actions to be resolved by straight rolls against various skills. Although this is sometimes appropriate, not all actions are equally difficult. A person with a skill in Driving is going to have a harder time speeding through a slalom course with oil spilled on the ground than she is if the track is clean and dry. In most situations, you should impose penalties or give bonuses depending on how hard the proposed action is.

In many cases, an ordinary use of a skill does not necessarily even require a roll. A character probably does not need to make a Gardening roll just to take care of her roses. If she's trying to grow an elaborate and flawless hedge maze for her rich employer, that is another story! With many skills, it makes sense to allow a roll if the character wonders how well they did. For example, a character cooking dinner for his boss might roll against his Cooking skill to see if his meal was impressive. The more he makes his skill by, the better the food.

Assigning skill modifiers according to situation is more of an art than a science. We recommend starting from what you consider a typical use of the skill and then giving bonuses or penalties according to how much harder than this you think the action is. To use the previous example of Driving, perhaps a typical situation in which you might require a skill roll is if someone tries to change lanes into the driving character, requiring her to act quickly to get out of the way. If this happens in the driving rain, you could give the character a -1 penalty. If it happens on an icy road, maybe -3. If the characters were suspicious of the car trying to run them off the road and were watching it, maybe a bonus of +2.

There are a set of guidelines for this in *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns* (pages 345-346), although in practice you won't want to take the time and mull over it during play. This is the kind of thing you'll want to get used to assigning off the top of your head, so as not to interrupt play too much.

Contests of skill

Sometimes in *GURPS*, characters or NPCs will compete in a skill, and it will be important to know who does best. For example, a character might enter a singing competition against a group of NPCs. Also, sometimes two characters want to compete against each other using just their attributes rather than skills. For example, they might arm wrestle to determine who is stronger.

Such competitions can be resolved using Contests. There are two types of Contests of skill:

✓ *Quick Contests* are used primarily for competition between two people that takes place over a short period. An example might be an Old West-style gunfight, with the quicker draw shooting the slower one.

To do a Quick Contest, both sides roll against the skill in question (or in some cases, against an attribute score). If one side succeeds and the other fails, the one who succeeded obviously wins. If both succeed, the one who succeeds by the greatest margin is the winner.

✓ *Regular Contests* of skill represent longer contests, such as a tug of war. These are decided in much the same way as Quick Contests. However, instead of declaring the person who succeeds by the most to be the winner, you keep rolling until one side succeeds and the other fails.

The problem with Regular Contests of skill is that they can take a long time to resolve. The rules suggest that, if both sides have skills of 6 or less, you raise the lower of the two scores to 10, add the same amount to the higher score, and use those numbers. For example, if the Contest involves a skill of 4 against a skill of 6, you would make the 4 into a 10 and the 6 into a 12.

Similarly, scores higher than 14 should be lowered or you'll be rolling all day. Again, you adjust the lower score to 10, and the higher score is adjusted by the same amount as the lower. So a Contest between a 14 and a 20 would become a Contest between a 10 and a 16.

In our opinion, it's better to just ignore the Regular Contest rules and use Quick Contests for everything instead. The drama of watching people roll dice pales quickly, and the results just aren't going to be that different.

Critical successes and failures

In *GURPS*, a normal success is achieved when you roll under your skill level, with whatever modifications are applicable due to the situation. A *critical success* (or *critical*) is an extra-good result from your skill roll. In general terms, a roll of 10 under your skill is a critical success, although a 6 is the highest number you can score a critical on. That is, a roll of 7 against a skill of 17 is still not a critical. A roll of 3 or 4 is always a critical, no matter what your skill level is.

The chart on p. 556 of *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns* tells you the special result you get from a critical during combat. With most noncombat skills, it's up to you as the GM to determine what happens.

On a critical success, the GM should give the player an extra-good result. For example, a painter who makes a critical success roll against

her Artist skill might produce a painting worth twice as much as her normal paintings.

Keep in mind that a critical success is not necessarily a miracle. Even for a character with a low skill level, a critical success happens about 2 percent of the time, or 1 time in 50. Someone with a Jumping skill of 12 is not going to set a world record just because he rolled a 4.

The flip side of the coin is critical failures. A roll of an 18 is always a critical failure, and a roll of a 17 is a critical failure as well if the skill in question is 15 or less. A roll of 10 over skill is also a critical failure.

As with critical successes, critical failures mean an extra-bad result, but they don't necessarily mean the end of the world. Someone rolling a critical failure with the Cooking skill might burn the pot roast, but she won't necessarily put her eye out with a fork.

Creating house rules

House rules are rules used by a gaming group that are not official rules. Few GMs do everything exactly by the book; in fact, we've never met such a GM. A certain number of house rules are inevitable. Because the rule books cannot cover every situation, the GM must make up new rules to "fill in the cracks."

House rules can add flavor to a specific campaign, or they can fix things that annoy you with the official rules. The important thing is to make sure that you inform your players of them beforehand!

Here are some examples of house rules from our gaming group, along with their rationale.

- ✦ **No learned experience allowed.** Allowing characters to improve by studying requires a lot of tiresome bookkeeping. Furthermore, it gives a huge advantage to studious characters while punishing players who do a good job of role playing less-studious characters. Few real-life people spend every spare moment studying diverse lists of skills.

- ✔ **Healing spells do not incur a penalty for being used on the same person multiple times a day.** This rule generally allows for parties to face every combat completely healed and eliminates the bookkeeping and health rolls required for natural healing.
- ✔ **Calling what you want to see.** Sometimes a player wants his character to do something that calls for the addition of random chance. For example, he might need to prop a door opened so he can shoot approaching enemies with his hands free. Is there anything that can be used as a door stop in the room? Using this system as GM, you assign a rough chance of him getting what he wants. For example, if you think there is about a one in three chance of a useful doorstop being in the room, you say, “Call what you want to see, high, medium, or low.” You then roll one die and put your hand over it. A resulting die roll of one and two is “low,” three and four is “medium,” and five and six is “high.” If the player calls it correctly, he finds what he’s looking for. For different probabilities you can say, “Call what you want to see, high or low,” “Call the number you want to see,” “Call what you *don’t* want to see, high, medium, or low,” or anything else that fits the situation.
- ✔ **Movement is assumed to happen simultaneously.** This is a bit of a complicated one. The way that *GURPS* movement works is easy and straightforward, but it has a few disadvantages. Because characters move sequentially, it allows for some strange character interactions. The most common issue is that it allows characters to not have to make up their minds about where they’re going and what they’re doing until their names are called in combat. If two characters are chasing one foe, the slower one can wait and see if the faster one has successfully dealt with the enemy before deciding whether to continue the chase that turn.

Our house movement rule requires everyone to move their characters at the same time, at the beginning of the turn. If they want to take an action part way through their move, they tell the GM what their plan is during the movement phase. This means that characters have to commit to a plan before they know how the turn is going to develop.

Many house rules are specific to a campaign. Perhaps in some worlds, it is impossible to have Status without being a member of the priesthood. Or perhaps Riding is an IQ-based skill because the common mounts are telepathic.

Time management

One of the jobs of the GM is to manage how the action of the game fits into the time your group has allotted for gaming. As GM, you have to come to the session prepared with enough things for the characters to do so that you can fill the time you have to play. It’s also nice to not have to end at an inconvenient moment because someone has to go home.

One of the main things to keep in mind with regard to time management is that combat in *GURPS* can take a long time. The amount of time it takes goes up significantly the more characters there are in the game, the more opponents they're fighting, and the higher everyone's defense scores are. If most attacks end with a successful dodge, you can be in for a long fight. In some of our more complicated campaigns, it's not uncommon for us to have fights that last five or six hours.

Because of this, it's usually a good idea not to start any combat sessions toward the end of the evening's play. If you interrupt a fight in the middle, it can be a pain to recreate where everyone was and what condition they were in later on.

Managing the Flow of Combat

In our experience, the two things that are most likely to slow combat down are

- ✔ Players who do not know their character's abilities well and take time to figure out how they are going to complete an action.
- ✔ GMs who spend lots of time shuffling through page after page of information on all the characters who are involved in that particular battle.

Each of these problems is easily dealt with if you're willing to take the necessary steps.

Kick-starting your players

The best way to deal with players who can't seem to get their act together requires you to use your authority as a GM to insist that your players develop good role playing habits. If you find that your players spend lots of time dithering about or insisting that they *did so* have that Potion of Resurrection, even if it isn't on their possessions sheet, you may have to develop some fairly hard-line policies, but you need to be careful that you don't behave in such a dictatorial way that your players begin to resent you. You'll probably need to come up with your own policies to help the players stay on track. Here are some typical policies that we have had to institute to get different players off their behinds and get involved appropriately in combat scenarios:

- ✔ **The five-minute rule.** When his or her name is called in each turn of action, a player has 5 minutes to decide on and take action. Any player who fails to do so within the allotted span of time forfeits his action until the next turn. This may seem harsh, but if you consider that a party with six players would then take over 30 minutes to complete one turn of combat, it doesn't seem so unreasonable.

- ✔ **If it isn't on your sheet, you don't have it.** We can't count the number of times a player has acquired some special item and hasn't written it down on her character's possessions list. This then leads to confusion down the line when that player "thinks" she has some kind of item that she wants to use, but she can't remember its parameters, so she asks the kindly GM to halt play and look through his notes for something that may have been acquired in a gaming session that was months — if not years — in the past. Instituting this simple rule significantly speeds up combat.
- ✔ **Keep off-topic conversations and external distractions to a minimum.** Yes, the members of your gaming group may all be the best of friends, but the purpose that brought all of you together for an evening of gaming was *gaming*. This isn't the right time to gossip about your coworkers or to swap recipes; find some other time to get together for something like that. To minimize distractions, televisions and radios should be turned off, and the *only* reason for a player to be working on a laptop is if he has his character sheet on the laptop and is taking notes on the campaign.
- ✔ **Bribery.** Experience-point awards can be partially based upon both degree of involvement and effectiveness in the campaign. Players who constantly need to be pushed to keep on task and keep the action moving can find themselves penalized one or more experience points at the end of the night.

Creating an electronic combat grid

The biggest problem most GMs have with maintaining the flow during combat is the lack of adequate organization. Players can get bogged down in all the details of running each character and spend too much time trying to find information than actually running combat. One way GMs can speed up a battle is to develop a system to keep control of the flow of information about all the player characters and all of the NPCs simultaneously through the creation of a *combat grid*. This is where computers (especially laptops) come in particularly handy. We recommend that you create a combat grid by using a spreadsheet program that helps you keep track of everything that you need during the height of battle. Figure 14-1 shows you a combat grid from one of Bjoern's campaigns, created using Microsoft Excel. If you look closely, you'll notice that several columns (C, G, O, and Q through AA) are hidden because you don't need them most of the time during play. (To hide columns, select the columns and choose Format⇨Column⇨Hide.) Also note the called-out comments — we use these to track details that we don't need to have visible most of the time but need to have readily available.

	A	B	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	P	AB	AC	
Avonlea Combat Grid																
1																
2	Valdir Vialles	7	7	35	Arrows	10	10	10	10	4	9	-1				
3	Ilf (Human Form)	6.25	6	18	Arrows	11	11	11	11	2	9	0				
4	Ilf (Panther Form)	6.5	10			20	22	20	22	1	9	0				
5	Ilf (Ket-Zal Form)	7	7/14			14	33	14	33	3	10	0				
6	Bredir Kieran	6.5	6	15	X-Bow bolts	11	11	11	11	5	9	-1				
7	Harmonie	6.25	6	6	Shuriken	11	11	11	11	2	9	-1				
8	Rafael Kadarin Mor	6.25	6			11	13	11	13	5	9	-2				
	Kieran's Stats	Advantages														
	ST: 11	Fat 11	Weapon Master--Katana													
	DX: 15	MD 15	Trained by a Master.													
	IQ: 12	Will 14	Off-Hand Weapon Training (8)													
	HT: 11	HP 11	Disadvantages													
		Per 12	Claustrophobic													
			Fanatic													
			Honest													
			Sword Brother CoH, Vow, & Duty													
			Servant of the Light													
			Valdir's Attacks													
			Spear: 15 1d imp													
			(2 hand) 1d+1 imp													
			Staff: 15 1d+2 crushing													
			Disarm: 16													
			Hit Location: 14													
			Staff Vault: 9													
			Whirlwind Attack: 11													
			Karate: 15													
			Punch: 1d crush													
			Kick: 1d+2													
			Drop Kick: 12													
			Sweeping Kick: 13													
			Bow: 15 1d+2 imp													
			FD Arrow													
			Knife: 14 1d-2 cut, 1d-2 imp													
			Harmonie's													
			Active Defenses													
			Dodge 9													
			Parry 10 (Sabre)													
			No Block													
			Armor													
			Head 0													
			Body 3 (Elven Silversilk)													
			Arms 3 (Elven Silversilk)													
			Legs 3 (Elven Silversilk)													

Figure 14-1:
The combat grid for Bjoern's Avonlea campaign.

The primary elements that you need to record on your combat grid are

- ✓ Basic Speed
- ✓ Move
- ✓ Total and current Fatigue Points
- ✓ Total and current Hit Points
- ✓ Damage Resistance
- ✓ All active defense rolls (Block, Dodge, and Parry)
- ✓ Weapon skill levels

These items aren't the only pieces of information you need on the combat grid, they are just those items that you need pretty much for every character for every turn of combat. Beyond this, you need the secondary information. You don't want to put this information in columns like the primary information, that would make your tables way too large and unwieldy. As in the figure, we recommend that you either use the "Comments" feature of the spreadsheet to insert the information into fields that pop up when you hover your mouse over the appropriate cell, or you can put this information into regular cells and then hide the columns so that they don't take up space. The secondary elements that you should probably include on the combat grid are:

- ✓ Character attributes
- ✓ Advantages and disadvantages

- ✓ Damage Resistance by hit location (if you use hit location in combat)
- ✓ The details of all active defenses (for example, Shield skill for blocking and which weapon skill is best used for parrying)
- ✓ Details about each character's weapons, such as type and amount of damage, rate of fire and range for missiles, and so forth
- ✓ The skills, spells, or powers that the character is most likely to use in combat

You certainly don't have to use a spreadsheet — or even a computer — to create a combat grid, but we've found that the spreadsheet applications are the best method for packing the most information into the smallest space possible. If you also use the same spreadsheet for character sheets for all your NPCs and player characters (as we did in Figure 14-2; if you look along the bottom edge, you'll notice tabs for the PCs in the campaign — the tabs for the NPCs aren't visible in that figure), you can write formulas that will automatically transfer and update the data on the combat grid any time you change that information on the character sheet.

Creating a battle log

A *battle log* is a table you can create to keep track of all of the combatants' actions during a melee and for tracking Basic Speed, Fatigue Point and Hit Point loss, and equipment usage of all characters. You can create a battle log as another worksheet in the same spreadsheet as the combat grid or as another document altogether. Or, if you're not interested in using a computer during play, you can create a table on paper to do the same thing — but it is not as quick or efficient as a computer application.

How is a battle log different from a combat grid? A combat grid has all of the relevant information you're likely to need about the combatants, while a battle log records the progress of the battle on a turn-by-turn basis. Figure 14-2 shows you a battle log from Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign.

As you can see, the first 7 columns are identical between this figure and the combat grid in Figure 14-1. (The worksheet was specifically designed for this.) These are the items that we have found that we must have for every character in every combat. We then select cell K2 and use the Window⇨Freeze Panes command so that everything to the left and above that point is always on screen when this worksheet is active. This allows us to scroll to the right (or down) for the battle log, and you won't have to enter any data onto a separate sheet. Just be sure that you keep the entries for the PCs on this sheet between combat sessions.

Figure 14-2: A battle log can be used to organize and track the progress of each battle and can be organized by each combatant's initiative.

	A	B	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	L	M	P	AB	AC	AK	AL	AM	AN	AO	AP	AQ	AR
	Speed	Move	Ammo Left	Type Ammo	Current Fat	Current HP	Fat	HP	DR	Active Defense	Combat Attacks	Combat Skills	Combat Equip	Round 1 Taken Action	Round 2 Taken Action	Fat Used	HP Dam	Ammo Used	Round 2 Items used	Round 3	Taken Action	Notes
1																						
2		6.5	10			20	8	20	12	1	9	14								6		8
4	5.25	5	10	40	Sling Bullets	13	10	11	13	7	9	13			Concen-Ice Dagger, 3 turns	XX	14					Concen Ice Dagger, 3 turns
6	6.5	6	15		X-Bow bolts	11	11	11	11	5	9	17				XX	4					
7	6	7				14	8	12	14	3	9	12				XX	18					
8	6	-				14	6	12	14	2	9	14			Unconscious	XX	6	-14				Unconscious
9	5.75	5	3		Wand Fireball	11	10	11	10	4	9	13			Illusion Disguise	XX	12	-2				Illusion Disguise
10	5.75	6				11	12	11	12	2	10	14			XX	2						
11	5.75	6				11	12	11	12	2	10	14			XX	10						
12	6.25	6	6		Shunken	9	4	11	11	2	9	15			-2 for Phobia	XX	8, 16	-3				-2 for Phobia
13	6.25	7				12	14	13	14	5	10	14			XX	9						
14	6.25	2				12	-1	13	14	5	10	14			Unconscious	XX	10	-6				Unconscious

In the sample battle log, we designate seven columns for each turn of combat, as follows:

- ✓ One column that you mark for each character when they've taken an action
- ✓ One to track (by row number) the foe or foes that each character is fighting
- ✓ One to record lost Fatigue Points
- ✓ One to record lost Hit Points
- ✓ One to track the use of ammunition (including arrows, sling bullets, and power cells)
- ✓ One to record the use of any other expendable items
- ✓ One last column for general notes

This allows you to track exactly when each event occurs — especially those situations for which you have to count turns, such as if a character is stunned, concentrating on a spell, or taking damage on a turn-by-turn basis. You don't need to record *every* action in combat; you simply need to record actions whose results you may have to track later.

Combat sequencing and initiative

Keeping track of who goes when during combat is one of the most strenuous tasks of any GM. Few things cause even the most mild-mannered player to lose his cool like having his action skipped over during combat — although the players rarely complain if the GM skips over one of the foe's turns. Like most things with **GURPS**, keeping track of Basic Speed is not really that difficult with a good battle log.

To create the formula to track current Hit Points, follow these steps:

1. Create all the column headings for your combat grid and battle log.

This includes the battle log columns for at least 10 turns of combat (we suggest 15 or 20).

2. Enter the information for the first character you're including in the battle log.

3. Click the cell where you want current Hit Points to be displayed.

If you use our column organization, this would be cell I2, the first row under the column heading "Current HP."

4. Enter an equal sign (=) and then click the cell that has character's base Hit Points.

5. Enter a plus sign (+) and then click the "HP Dam" cell for the first turn of the battle grid (cell AH2 in figure 14-3).

6. Repeat step #5 to include each "HP Dam" cell for that row and then type) after the cell range.

7. Press Enter.

8. Click again on the "Current HP" cell and, with your cursor, grab the + in the lower-right corner of the cell and drag the information down the column for at least 30 rows.

Your formula is now set up for all the characters you enter into the combat grid.

Then, when you are running combat and a character has taken an injury, click the "HP Dam" cell for the current turn of combat and enter the injury the character has taken, using a minus sign (-) to make it a negative number. If the character receives healing, enter the amount of HP healed as a positive number.



Whenever you're adding the records of new characters to your combat grid or battle log, you can insert the relevant formulas into the new records simply by using the Copy and Paste commands in the appropriate cells from another character's information. Most spreadsheet programs are smart enough to update the cell addresses in the formulas to use the same row.



After combat is over, you can go ahead and delete the rows of the NPCs who had been in the battle. Be careful that you don't delete the rows that contain the information about player characters — if you do, you'll have to re-enter all the data you had so carefully entered before. Also, we do not recommend that you delete the columns in the battle log; if you delete a cell that is

included in the formula used in another area, that cell address is removed from the formula. You can't Copy and Paste columns and have the formula references copy over to the new columns like you can with the rows of a spreadsheet.

Using the tactical map

Playing *GURPS* is a lot easier and a lot more fun — especially the combat part — if you can create a visual representation of the action. This is most commonly done through the use of a *tactical map* (or *hex map*) and miniature figures. The tactical map is typically a vinyl sheet with a uniform hex grid printed on its surface (you can also purchase and use maps with square grids, but *GURPS* is designed with a hex-grid system in mind, so we recommend you stay with that). If you can't find the product in vinyl, you can also sometimes purchase (or make) oversized sheets of paper with the hex grid copied onto it. The advantage of the vinyl sheets is that they are reuseable — you can use dry erase markers and water-soluble nonpermanent markers to draw the terrain or floor plan of your current scenario and then simply erase your marks when you're done.



Painful experience has taught us two things about using the vinyl tactical maps: 1) Don't use red markers on them (the marks don't come completely out), and 2) *always* clean your maps at the end of each gaming session. If you allow even the "nonpermanent" markers to stay on the vinyl for very long, your marks won't come all the way out.

Tactical grids come in a number of different scales; we recommend that you use a scale in which each hex is one inch (2.54 centimeters) across. If you go larger, your maps will take up more space than you need, and if you go smaller, you will have difficulty with your figures crowding each other. The one-inch-per-hex scale is nice because it simplifies the math, too; remember that the default scale for each hex in your game world is one yard. With the 1 inch = 1 hex = 1 yard scale, you can easily use a ruler to draw (for example) a 9-inch line to represent a 9-yard-long wall.

You have a number of options for figures representing both the player characters and the NPCs. Lead figures are specifically produced for role playing games, but these are expensive, heavy, easily damaged, and need to be painted to look decent. You can also simply use six-sided dice, or even squares of paper with names written on them, but that's pretty boring. We recommend that you use *Cardboard Heroes*, produced by Steve Jackson Games. They're lightweight, inexpensive, durable (we've been using the same set for over 10 years), and don't need any preparation other than being cut out and folded before they can be used.



SJ Games also sells little plastic bases that you can fit the *Cardboard Heroes* onto. We recommend that you invest in more than a few of these as well. If you don't have them (or don't have enough), you can keep your figures standing upright by taping a penny to the bottom of the figure.

One of the problems a lot of GMs face during combat is keeping track of which figure represents which NPC. The nice thing about the plastic bases that you can buy for the *Cardboard Heroes* is that you can write on them with a temporary marker to indicate which NPC each figure represents. Trust us, it makes things go much more smoothly.

Figure 14-4 shows you what a tactical map with *Cardboard Heroes* figures looks like. Notice that the base of the ant figure has a hand-written code to represent *which* Giant Ant the party is currently fighting.



Figure 14-4: The tactical map clearly shows the danger faced by our fearless adventurers.

Managing movement

How far a particular character can move during combat is one of the most abused elements of combat in *GURPS*. As the GM, you need to keep track of what each character can accomplish in a turn of combat, and the tactical map is the best tool at your disposal for keeping the abuses to a minimum.

The fourth-edition rules give each character a number of *movement points* based on his Move score in the combat environment (usually one of ground, air, or water). How far a character can actually move depends upon how

much weight he's carrying (his *encumbrance*), terrain, obstacles, and many other factors. Some simple rules that apply well for 90 percent of all characters are

- ✔ On land, a character gets a number of movement points equal to his Ground Move — or simply Move — which equals his Basic Move modified downward for encumbrance.
- ✔ If he is flying, he gets a number of movement points equal to his Air Move, which usually equals twice his Basic Speed rounded off and modified downward for encumbrance.
- ✔ If he is swimming, he gets a number of movement points equal to his Water Move, which is $\frac{1}{2}$ his Basic Move, rounded off, unless he is Aquatic or Amphibious, in which case it equals his Basic Move. Once again, modify this for encumbrance.

The new rules in *GURPS* fourth edition assess some costs to movement points' economy. In general, a character can use one movement point to move one hex in a straight line during a turn; changing facing, turning, moving over uneven or difficult terrain, and other such impediments all increase the number of movement points it takes to cross a single hex.

When you're arguing with your players about how and where their characters can move during combat, we suggest that you use a tactical map and pay close attention to its details in order to make your decisions. Using the hex grid system allows you to quickly determine exactly what a character with a given Move score can accomplish in a single turn and can allow you to graphically illustrate the layout of the combat scenario, including any obstacles, barriers, areas of cover, and routes of escape.

Chapter 15

Building a Simple Adventure

In This Chapter

- ▶ Creating a world setting
 - ▶ Stealing ideas from books, movies, and history
 - ▶ Choosing a power level
 - ▶ Writing the evening's adventure
-

So you've rounded up a group of players with ideas for characters, and now you want to play! What should you do next? What type of adventure will you create for your players? How can you be sure your goals and plot ideas will translate into enjoyable play?

Have no fear. This chapter deals with the ins and outs of making a simple adventure to be played out in a session or two. For guidance on a more elaborate campaign with a unique world and society, see Part V.

Covering the Basics

The first thing you need to start a game is a game setting, a place for your characters to do things. You don't need to work out an elaborate world full of political intrigue and unique new laws of physics if you're just planning to run a few sessions. However, you do have to outline the basics because they will be integral to what goes on in the campaign.

Brainstorming

Usually, when you create a simple adventure (or a complex one for that matter), you start with some kind of milieu in mind. Will it be a sword-and-sorcery adventure, complete with elves and dwarves and beautiful maidens captured by local dragons? Will the action take place in a domed city on an

asteroid where miners are trying to repel an alien invasion fleet? Will the characters be beset by mutants in a post-apocalyptic Earth setting? After you decide on the basic setting, you're halfway to an adventure.

But where do you get inspiration?

Stealing from books and movies

The local library is a treasure trove of ideas for adventures. Even if you don't want to crib directly from the world described in a particular book, you can borrow parts here and there or use ideas as a jumping-off point for your own imagination. For example, you might want to run a *Star Wars* campaign, complete with the entire cast of characters. Or perhaps you want to use the *Star Wars* universe but not the specifics — you'd prefer the action in your game to take place far away from the action of the movies. Or, on the other hand, maybe you just want to use *Star Wars* as a model for your own game world — a futuristic campaign involving an elite group of Jedi-like priest-warriors.

You can also take bits and pieces from various books that strike your fancy and combine them into one whole. In his *Avonlea* campaign, Bjoern drew liberally from Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover*, Andre Norton's *Witch World*, Margaret Weis's *Star of the Guardians*, *Star Wars*, and the *Heralds of Valdemar* series by Mercedes Lackey. He used *The Darkover Concordance* liberally for all personal names and much of the etiquette and ethical information.

Perhaps you decide that the Jedi-like priest-warriors have become the wicked ruling class and are opposed by a secret society of wizards modeled loosely on the *Harry Potter* books. All sorts of possibilities exist if you put things together in creative ways.

Reworking classic themes

Sometimes it can be good to stick with ideas that have worked for many in the past. A straight sword-and-sorcery campaign set in a medieval-Europe-like setting or a post-apocalyptic struggling-to-rebuild-society plot may not seem original, but they're tried and true and will seem familiar to everyone, which can be a good thing. If you aren't planning on having a special world setting, you can save a lot of time by sticking with tradition.

This option can work well when combined with other options. The basic campaign theme might be fairly standard, but you might be inspired by a book or movie for the actual plot, for example.

Borrowing from history

You can get some good adventures by lifting settings straight out of history books. The action can take place in ancient Rome, Carthage, or Napoleonic France. The only real issue to watch for here is to make sure you don't have players who know a lot more about the time period than you do, or there will

be a lot of arguments. You can get around this problem simply by stating that your world is an alternate world, and none of the players can count on anything that they know about a particular historical period being true for your world.

These campaigns can easily work into an “alternate history” type of story as well. You can explore what you think would have happened if Hitler had won World War II, to take the most common example.

Asking yourself “What if . . .”

One way to create unique world settings is to pose yourself a question and then let your imagination run with it. For example, say you turn on your TV and see the news discussing a hurricane that is forming in the Pacific. Make up some “what if” questions about the situation. What if something happened so that the entire surface of the world was covered with hurricanes all the time? How would people live? Perhaps in little underground enclaves? Perhaps their mail delivery is now in the hands of a heroic clan of adventurers who risk their lives dodging between enclaves when weather permits, keeping people in contact with each other.

Or perhaps hurricanes are generated by particularly powerful air elementals. Maybe humanity has to walk a very fine line to keep from annoying the forces of nature and causing them to wreak mighty vengeance on them.

Buying premade adventures

If you want to GM, but you really don’t have the time to create your own adventure — let alone a campaign — you can buy premade adventures.

Because *GURPS Fourth Edition* is still fairly new, there won’t be a lot of fourth-edition adventures readily available. Don’t let this stop you. Converting a third-edition adventure is pretty easy, especially considering that the fourth edition doesn’t require you to keep track of how many character points your NPCs are worth.



Steve Jackson Games has a Web site called e23, which allows you to purchase *GURPS* materials for download. The address is <http://e23.sjgames.com>. You can find a few third-edition premade adventures there and also download some handy reference material for free! There is a free download on this site called *GURPS Update* that will help you convert third-edition characters to the fourth edition.

With only a little more effort, you can modify premade adventures from other gaming systems. You just have to assign appropriate statistics to any monsters or NPCs from the other gaming system. There aren’t rules for this; you can do it off the top of your head. Because you are the GM, there is no need for painstaking point-balancing; points are for player characters, not GMs.

Setting goals

After you've got a good world setting for your adventure, you need to figure out what you want your party's goal to be. If you've chosen a classic sword-and-sorcery adventure, perhaps they're out to save a princess or slay a dragon. Or maybe they're out to infiltrate the palace of the evil Overlord of Seven Worlds and steal the secret of his mind-control machine. Or perhaps they're merely going to be looting some ancient ruins. Identifying the goal of the adventure is the first step in figuring out what the action of the adventure is going to be and what you need to know before you can run it.

One style of game that can work very well if you have the right players is to let the characters decide on the goals. For example, you might have a game in which the entire party is made up of thieves of one sort or another and allow them to plan elaborate crimes. Such a game requires a flexible GM who is willing to improvise because you're probably going to have to make up a certain amount of stuff as you go along. However, such games have the advantage of taking less time to prepare for.

Having fun stuff for your players to do

Because the goal you set for your party represents the end of the adventure, you have to make sure that goal is either complicated enough to require a lot of effort to solve, or is supported by other complications along the path to solving it. If the party is hired to save young prince Hubart from the evil clutches of the Ogre of Castle Blarg, you have to figure out a way to prevent the whole adventure from being endless episodes of the party chopping the ogre to bits. Perhaps finding Castle Blarg is an adventure unto itself. Perhaps the Ogre of Castle Blarg can be killed only by a certain artifact that the characters have to locate first. Or maybe Castle Blarg is a huge and rambling edifice full of guardian monsters, and navigating it turns the whole adventure into a dungeon crawl.

The main point of any game is to have fun. However, this requires more thought than just mechanically planning a certain number of fights, and so on. Different players have different things they like, but in general, role playing game aficionados like some or all of the following elements in a given adventure:

✓ **Role playing:** One of the obvious attractions of role playing games is that you get to play the role of someone different from yourself. It therefore stands to reason that you should try to include some situations in your adventure that allow players to flex their personalities a bit.

In our adventures, we usually try to provide the characters some amount of non-combat interaction with NPCs. This gives the characters

a chance to talk, argue, persuade, and engage in diplomacy. But allowing characters to use their personalities goes beyond that. You also should give characters with the Curious disadvantage a chance to snoop, characters with Charitable a chance to do charity, and so forth.

- ✔ **Problem solving:** Most people enjoy the thrill of thinking their way through problems. Whether it's planning the perfect crime or deciding how to stop criminals, victories are a lot sweeter if you've had to put some thought into them, rather than just rolling a bunch of dice.

When we add problem-solving to our adventures, we prefer a flexible approach. If you set up a situation with a preconceived "correct" way of solving the problem, 9 times out of 10 your players will think of some other way of approaching it. If you just accept that this is going to happen a lot, you can save yourself a lot of heartbreak and hard work. Rather than fixate on the details of things you think they ought to be thinking about, go for a lot of general details and be ready to ad-lib the fine points of whatever they end up deciding to do.

- ✔ **Exploring:** If you are able to make your world seem real enough to your party, they'll get a fair degree of satisfaction by just exploring it. You can greatly increase their interest if there are a few rewards worked into the exploration. Perhaps they find an abandoned fort that they can convert into a base of operations, or a shop that sometimes sells a few useful and unusual items.
- ✔ **Developing characters' personalities:** Although some role players just want their characters to be killing machines, many like to role play social situations, establish friendships and relationships with NPCs, and so on. Giving them a chance to do so builds their connection with your campaign. If the party spends the evening making friends in the tavern, the next day, when the goblin hordes attack, they will be that much more emotionally invested in defending the town.

Adjusting the Level of Might of Your Campaign

Besides the starting character point level for the campaign, the main thing that influences the power level of your campaign is what kinds of powers, abilities, and magic are available. A party that can fly, read minds, and brew alchemical potions has a lot more options in solving the problems you present (and thwarting your plans) than a party made up of totally mundane characters with high attributes and skills, even if the supernatural party has a lower point level. We strongly recommend that you go over all the specific abilities that you're allowing in your campaign before you make them available, rather than simply making blanket statements such as "psionics are allowed."

If this statement makes us sound anti-powers, we most certainly are not. Most people play fantasy role playing games because they want to pretend to be someone more than human. Special abilities can add a lot to the game. To a certain extent, the involvement of such abilities in the game can make life easier for the GM; a party that can do many things can meet a wider variety of challenges, which means the GM is less limited. We do think, though, that deciding what abilities to include in a campaign requires a bit of thought beforehand. We like to think about abilities in several different categories, such as the following:

✓ **Healing abilities:** In a campaign with a fair amount of fighting in it, characters are going to spend a certain amount of time being injured. If you allow a good selection of healing abilities in the campaign, it is likely that the party will never have to go into a fight already nursing wounds.

There are two ways to look at this category. On the one hand, having to worry about party damage can be an interesting strategic problem for a party. It adds another dimension to all the things they have to think about and keeps the players on their toes a little bit.

On the other hand, healing is an ability that is very difficult to abuse. Allowing healing such that the party always faces each challenge with full Hit Points doesn't particularly unbalance the game, and such parties are not particularly difficult to GM. In fact, a party with ready access to healing is probably a bit easier to GM because you can gauge each fight you prepare with the assumption that the party will come into it at full Hit Points. Whether you allow much in the way of healing abilities is pretty much just a matter of taste.

✓ **Combat abilities:** Both offensive and defensive combat abilities can be unbalancing in a campaign. The main problem comes when the individual characters end up with a wide range of damage resistances and offensive capabilities. If one character is DR 30 and the rest are DR 2, it's difficult to plan combats in which your foes can injure the first character without obliterating everyone else. You'll have a similar problem if one character is dispensing 10d damage and everyone else is running around with daggers.

Advantages such as Insubstantiality and Invisibility can also have a huge effect on combat, and you ought to allow them only if you know how you're going to deal with them during play.

✓ **Detection abilities:** By *detection abilities*, we mean anything that helps your character gather information. We include things like enhanced senses, the ability to detect magic, or even the ability to read minds.

Whether or not detection abilities are likely to unbalance your campaign depends in large part on what sort of campaign you're running. In many cases, those abilities can make it easier for you to distribute information to the players. However, in a campaign where the goal is to uncover

hidden information, you have to be careful not to allow characters to short circuit your plot. If a character has Mind Probe with enough enhancements, she might wind up reading your villain's mind from miles away completely undetectably.

- ✔ **Movement abilities:** Movement abilities (such as Enhanced Move, Flight, and Warp) can limit how you challenge your party, especially when it comes to breaking into places your enemies don't want them to be. A flying character is not hindered by castle walls and will often break into a house through a third-floor window. Additionally, warping characters or characters with the Teleport spell may be able to circumvent a lot of your defenses if you aren't prepared. If you allow these powers, try to make up ways to counteract them so they won't destroy your plot.
- ✔ **Other:** Besides these larger categories, there are many other abilities that are less easy to categorize. Be sure to spend some time thinking of the various ways each ability can be used before you allow it, to avoid nasty surprises later on.

How many points?

One of the challenges of GMing is figuring out how many points you should allow players to build their characters with in your campaign. There is no hard and fast rule on how to do this. If you choose too low of a starting point level, you may have a difficult time adapting your adventure so that it's easy enough for the party to handle. If you choose too high of a level, you may have a tough time challenging them.

On page 487 of *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*, you are given advice about how starting points equate to relative levels of power. We don't have any particular quarrel with this list, but keep in mind that an average person (who the **GURPS** rules rate at 25–50 points) makes a below-average adventurer. If you want your party to be capable of even minor heroic deeds, they should probably be at least in the 100- to 125-point range.

If you're used to third-edition rules, fourth-edition characters tend to be more costly. The point levels you are used to are going to seem a bit

less powerful in the fourth edition. This is primarily because DX and IQ are more expensive at the lower levels and because you can no longer put half a point into skills.

You should also keep in mind that a lot depends on how many disadvantages you allow characters to take. A 50-point character with –100 points in disadvantages will have more Achilles' heels than a 50-point character with only –40 points in disadvantages, but they will also have gotten 60 more points to spend on powerful abilities. Our advice is to read the list as if you were assuming a –40 point limit to disadvantages, and if you're going to allow more disadvantages than that, assume the characters will function at a higher level of power than the guide in the book.

Overall, err slightly on the side of giving out too few points rather than too many. Because points are awarded after each night of play, characters grow more powerful over time, but if you start them off too powerful, you're pretty much stuck with it.

Naming your NPCs

One of the nasty habits many players have is deciding to interrogate various NPCs you didn't bother to write up, forcing you to make up these NPCs' characteristics on the fly. They often will ask for their names. "Maybe the stable boy saw something," they will say, and pretty soon they'll be putting him on their Christmas card lists.

Rather than fumble for a good name, you can just tell the players that it's not important, but

that gives away that you weren't planning for them to get useful information from that NPC. It's a good idea to go into each night's session with a list of 8 or 10 names of both genders. That way, you can just glance at the list and read the last unused one. If your campaign uses normal Earth names, a baby-name book can be a valuable resource.

Providing Starting Information

When you've got an idea of what the characters in your campaign are going to be doing, you want to provide a basic write-up of the world to your players to aid them in character creation. For a simple adventure or two, you don't need to go all-out, but you should provide the following information:

- ✓ **Technology level:** Does the action take place in a medieval setting? The present? The future? Perhaps the biological sciences have advanced tremendously, but the mechanical sciences lag far behind. In any case, your party will need to know whether they should buy bows and swords or lasers and force shields.
- ✓ **Supernatural and supernormal abilities and powers:** Are there wizards and priests with magical powers? Are psionics available? Do martial artists have mystical knowledge beyond mortal ken? Will the party be comic-book superheroes? If there are any powers available, you'll need to give your players information about them.
- ✓ **Races:** What races are available? Can your players choose to be goblins or centaurs? Or little green men from Mars?
- ✓ **Setting:** You should provide a paragraph or two about the setting of the campaign. Is it a large futuristic metropolis? A domed city on an asteroid? A merfolk village at the bottom of the sea?
- ✓ **Character templates:** If you have any character templates for the campaign, you'll want to include the basic world information. Templates are good for all players. Newbies can use them as-is, and veterans can review them for an idea of what you consider acceptable.
- ✓ **Cultural and social information:** For a quick and simple adventure, the social aspect of the game may be insignificant. However, be sure to

include any social information that is important. What languages do people speak? How important is wealth and status? What are the local religions?

- ✓ **Limitations:** How many points will the players be allowed to make characters out of? Is there a limit on the number of disadvantages? Are any advantages or disadvantages mandatory or off-limits?

Preparing for the Session

So now you have a basic world setting worked out, an idea for what you want your adventure to be about, and a cast of characters. Now it's time to get down to the nuts and bolts of planning out a gaming session. An evening's adventure is a microcosm of a campaign; you should go into it with a goal for the party to aim for for the session (although they may not actually complete it in one session).

It is common to begin a campaign with an “opening scene” in which the party members meet each other and officially become involved in whatever problem they will be set to solving in the game. You can certainly do this with a quick adventure as well, although in some cases you might want to dispense with it and just tell your players to assume their characters already knew each other. If you are just running an individual adventure for the night, you may not want to spend a lot of time on the characters getting to know each other.

Writing the adventure

If you are just running a simple adventure, one that takes only a few sessions of play, there is no need to create an elaborate write-up of the world the action takes place in. However, you are still going to need to create some fairly specific details about the people, places, and things your party will be interacting with. Also, in many cases, a little background detail can save you creative energy in the long run. If you've already decided that the town the characters start in is run by a corrupt crime syndicate, and the mayor is just a puppet, it makes your decisions a lot easier when deciding things like whether or not the police will take bribes or how difficult it is to find a local black market.

A good way to start is to write a quick outline of the story you're planning. This is just for you, not for sharing with the players. An outline would go something like this: “Anna Connor's sister is kidnapped by the Dark Priests of Sett. They plan to sacrifice her on the night of the new moon. She is being kept in the basement of an abandoned warehouse down by the pier, in which an elaborate temple has been constructed.”

From this outline, you can easily see the basics you need to create. You're going to need at least a rough sketch of the Dark Priests of Sett, so that Anna and her friends can fight with them. Do they have special powers or special resistances? What sort of weapons do they have? It is not necessary to write all of these foes up as if they were characters, and it would be overly time-consuming to do so. However, you need to know enough about them so that they can do whatever you plan for them to do in the adventure, be it to fight, give information, plant hypnotic suggestions in the back of the heroes' minds, or what have you.

You are also going to need a map of the Dark Priests' temple and to figure out where in it Anna's sister is and what other hazards await there. A rough sketch will do, but you want to make sure you have all the rooms and their approximate sizes jotted down, where the doors are, the location of any traps, and so on. You'll find it helpful to label each room with a number and make a numbered key as to what is in each room following the map.



Just as it is possible to buy premade adventures, it is also possible to buy premade maps. Maps of castles, temples, towns, and houses are available for a number of different gaming systems but can be used for any system. Little to no conversion is necessary because you're mostly just concerned with where the doors are and what shape the rooms are. Check out your local gaming store to see what they have.

Many maps are also available on the Internet. Try a Google image search and you may just find what you need for free.

Now you fill in the less obvious parts. Anna and her allies are going to want to go looking for Anna's sister, so you need to make it possible for them to find her. That means that you need to figure out what clues to leave and perhaps create some NPCs who know things they can tell the party.

Generating enough material

One thing you have to worry about with a single adventure that you don't have to think about in a whole campaign is making sure you have enough material to keep the players busy for however long you plan to be playing that day.

It is actually fairly easy to guesstimate how long a combat will take. It will vary somewhat depending on the number of characters, the number of enemies, the level of power of the campaign, and how brisk you are as GM at keeping things moving along. But after you've run a couple combats, you can count on future battles unfolding at approximately the same rate. The party will also tend to explore unknown areas at a fairly consistent rate.

More difficult are the sections of the campaign in which the party is supposed to be gathering clues, having social interactions, or planning something sneaky. These things can either go very quickly or take up the whole session, depending on how your players' brains are functioning that night.

There isn't a good way to make these situations more predictable, but it can be a good idea to make your adventure a bit flexible, so you can take things out or leave them in depending on how much time your party is taking. Perhaps in your write-up, two different people might have pieces of information the party needs. During the actual game, you might give both pieces of information to whatever person the party finds first if you feel they aren't moving as quickly as you'd like.

Avoiding being caught by surprise

One of the challenges of GMing is trying to figure out what your players are going to be doing in the gaming session, so you can figure out the necessary information. If you are willing to lead your players through the action by the nose, you can be pretty sure of what they're going to be doing, and therefore be sure what you need to write up. The more autonomy you allow your players, the more flexible you're going to have to be.

Players have a nasty habit of wanting to go off on tangents you hadn't considered or trying to get information from sources that you didn't think they would check. There are several things you can do about that:

- ✔ **Make them trip over a clue.** If your party is on the verge of going off on a wild goose chase, you can sometimes drop a clue to what they're supposed to be doing right in their laps. This usually takes some improvisation on your part. Subtlety can be good, but it isn't always necessary with this kind of thing. Something dramatic, like an NPC staggering into the room with a knife in the back and coughing out a clue with his or her dying breath will always grab the party's attention.
- ✔ **Keep a store of NPCs and maps for all occasions.** Sometimes you want to just let the party go on their wild goose chase. There isn't any particular reason to expect the party to be on track at all times. The problem comes when their side trip is into a situation that you have not created the details for. It's possible to head this problem off at least partially by keeping a few extra NPCs in a folder so you can pull them out as needed. You can also make up a few simple building maps in case the party feels the need to explore (for example) an abandoned warehouse that has nothing to do with anything you have planned.

In an emergency, if you are a *really* nice GM (which we generally discourage), you can move the underground Temple of Set from its original location into that stupid warehouse and keep the adventure on track.

- ✓ **Be prepared to wing it.** Sometimes your players' scheme will make more sense than what you had planned for them to do. In general, we think it's fair to reward the players for their cleverness by letting them get away with more than you intended. However, if their clever plot threatens to short-circuit the adventure, you should make something up to short-circuit it. Try to be as subtle as you can, and hopefully they won't notice.

Making sure your players' characters don't die on their first outing

One of the many arts of GMing is being able to scare the heck out of your players without actually doing their characters in. Even if your GM philosophy includes the idea that characters must occasionally die, you don't want it to happen all the time. Players will not become emotionally attached to their characters if they keep going away.

The more you get to know the characters in your campaign, the more you'll know what to expect out of them. On the characters' first outing, however, it can be a bit tougher to know what they're capable of.

One thing you can do to help yourself out is make a list of the characters' combat capabilities. This list should include all the characters' defenses, damages, and abilities that are useful in combat. Include abilities like Invisibility and Flight, which are not only useful in combat but can help a character stay out of sight or out of reach. Take extra special note of area-effect abilities that can attack multiple foes or that are difficult or impossible to dodge (you can dodge an area-effect ability only if you're near enough to the edge to jump out of it). This list can help you plan out opponents, both so they can be the right level of power, and so you can make sure that the party is challenged.



One easy way to scare your party is by attacking them with a large party of weaker (but not obviously weaker) foes. If the party looks seriously outnumbered, it's going to cause them some concern. If you do this, you should make sure the foes' defense isn't too high, otherwise the combination of their sheer number of attacks combined with their ability to defend means they'll likely wipe the party out.

Chapter 16

Motivating Players

In This Chapter

- ▶ Campaigning from the players' perspective
 - ▶ Keeping your players happy
 - ▶ Working characters into the campaign
-

GURPS is a game, and like all games the point of it is to have fun. Unlike most games, the duties for keeping it fun are not evenly distributed. Because the GM creates the world that the players play in, and adjudicates all the action in it, it is the duty of the GM is to keep the players interested and motivated. Bored players ring the death knell of any campaign! In this chapter, we examine some of the factors that keep players interested and on their toes.

Understanding Your Players

In order to get the most out of your campaign, you must understand your players. What exactly are they looking for in the gaming experience? Do they just like a little simulated mayhem, or are they looking for deep involvement in a complex story line?

It's easier to understand what your players want after a few sessions of gaming, but you can tell a fair amount from how they create their characters. How much do they seem to be interested in social advantages and disadvantages? Did they bother to pay points for things like Appearance, Status, or Charisma? Did they take disadvantages such as Lecherousness that require social interaction to come into play? Taking advantages and disadvantages that affect a character's social interactions indicates that the player is interested in interacting often with NPCs.

Talking to your players during character creation is also a good plan. Feel free to ask if the reason a character seems 100 percent geared to combat is because that's what the player prefers doing or if that's what the player expects the campaign to be about.

How you mix your players' preferences with your GMing style is a matter of give and take. The truth is that if you attempt to GM far outside of your comfort zone because it's what you think your players expect, you're probably not going to have any fun, and neither will your players. However, you can use your knowledge of what the players want to make small adjustments to accommodate your players, and that will be good for everyone. If a player is interested only in combat and doesn't enjoy talking, plan to leave the talking to someone else and maybe work in a few more fights than you would usually include.

Lastly, don't be afraid to push players a bit if they make characters that are not well-rounded. You don't want to take GMing to players' interests to the extreme of playing to their characters' strengths all the time. If a character is deficient in certain areas, you can and should take advantage of that.

Rewarding Your Players: Scrooge or Monty Hall?

Rewarding your players is an important and surprisingly subtle task. Some GMs seem to come by it naturally, and others struggle to find balance. In this section, we explore some of the ins and outs of keeping your players happy.

As GM, you might have a strong urge to shower your characters with cool stuff to keep them happy. Such campaigns are called "Monty Hall" campaigns, and despite how it might seem, they are not as much fun as campaigns in which you have to work for your reward.

It is also possible for a GM to be too stingy, although it's a much rarer problem. It is one thing to make a party work for their reward, but quite another to deny them any reward whatsoever.

Money

Money is the most common and obvious, and in many ways the least effective, way to reward your characters. The main trick with rewarding your players' characters with money is making sure that they have a need for it. Uncovering a chest full of gold coins is no particular thrill if a character is just going to take it home and throw it on the pile.

We find that the best way to make a player enjoy finding money is if you instill a sense of desperation for cash in the characters in your game and not just offer them interesting things to buy. This is one situation in which the players have more fun when the GM is harsh. If you charge your characters taxes, high fees for training, high rent, and large salaries for hirelings, they will usually be a little bit worried about cash, and that much happier to see it

when they find it. It's okay, and even a good idea, to let them have periods of richness, but the more often their wallets are full, the less of a motivator money will be.

You can also work expenses into the campaign plot. Put your party in a situation in which it needs to hire ships or mercenary armies or purchase large pieces of equipment to complete a task. Another trick is to have the characters pick up dependents who require upkeep, such as jobless people on the brink of starvation, or young parentless children with magical talents that make them perfect for expensive schooling.

You have to be careful with the other side of the equation — giving characters useful things to buy with their money. Even though it's good to give players something interesting to spend their money on, be careful about letting them buy too much power. Not only will it upset the balance of the game and make GMing more difficult, but they won't appreciate what they have as much. This is where it's really a good idea to work with the character's personal interests. Have they always wanted to open an art studio? Let them stumble across a really good property for that project. Do they like fancy cars? Let them find their dream car . . . but it's only available if they act now. These sorts of things can add flavor to a campaign without unbalancing it.

Special items

The biggest feeling of triumph Adam ever had in finding a special item was in a sword-and-sorcery campaign he played in long ago. Through tremendous effort, his character was able to locate and acquire a magic sword that added +1 to skill, and +1 to damage. This was certainly not a powerful magical item by most standards, but it was the only magical item in the campaign outside of a few potions and scrolls. It allowed his character to face the were-rats that were plaguing the party without resorting to only partially-effective silver weapons. And the people marveled at its soft blue glow. Conversely, in another campaign, Adam's character collected magic swords that no one else wanted to lug around and used them as garden stakes. The differences in how often magic items appeared between the campaigns determined how important a magical sword was to the character.

A special item might be something magic or a piece of technology not commercially available. It can be anything that increases a character's abilities in a desired way. As with money, the main thing when using special items to reward players is to create both need and desire and then do the minimum to meet it. The fewer special items you hand out, the more they will be appreciated.

For purposes of reward, it's probably best to limit special items to one or two per character, or maybe even less. If you feel like handing out magic or special goodies more often than that, consider using consumables, such as magic elixirs or high-tech drugs, magic scrolls, unchargeable wands with a

set number of charges, grenades that have special effects (sleep gas, stunning, smoke clouds), and so on.

Also, don't forget to use social rewards when appropriate. Sometimes a character's exploits can earn him titles, the favor of powerful people, grants of land, or just fame and fortune. This form of reward can be particularly powerful because it accentuates the players' feelings of pride of accomplishment.

If you want to have your bad guys stocked with magical things but don't want the party to end up overstocked with them, you can use a number of strategies. One favorite method is to have magic items powered by forces of evil, such that they have some negative or corrupting effect on the wielder. Another is to charge character points for any special items obtained, using the rules for gadget-based powers. See Chapter 8 for more on adding powers to your character. Of course, you will sometimes want to hand out special items because they're important to the campaign. We have had campaigns in which magical items were designed with a certain character in mind for specific use in the campaign plot. You might even have a campaign in which magical items are freely available. That's okay; just plan to reward them primarily through other means than the acquisition of special items.

Character points

You should also consider rewarding your characters with extra character points. These are awarded as bonuses at the end of the session for good play. You'll find that players are always happy to get extra character points, but you don't want to hand them out so often that your players come to expect them.

The critical issue with handing out extra character points is that you need to keep people's gaming styles in mind and try to be even-handed. Some people are more outgoing than others and have a tendency to grab center stage. Others are clever strategically and do more than their share of fighting for the good of the party. If you reward the same players over and over and never reward the players who are less proficient in the things you're interested in (or for the things they're interested in but you may not be), you may end up making them feel overlooked and undervalued. We do not think you have to go all out to achieve an "everyone gets a trophy" attitude, but it's good to try to notice when people are doing a better job than they normally do.

Awarding character points is both an art and a science. As a general rule, awarding an average of a point a night leads to very slow character development. An average of two points a night is the standard in the *GURPS* community. Higher point awards lead to the characters in your campaign developing dramatically faster — probably too fast.

The difference of a single character point per session may not seem like much, but it is quite dramatic over the long haul.

Beyond awarding extra character points, one trick to consider is to award advantages or skills based on the characters' actions — without making them pay for it. For example, a brave and heroic action could earn a character a rise in status or reputation, or some valuable contacts. A particularly brilliant strategic move could give a character the Strategy skill, or an extra point in it if they already have it.

Success

Lastly and most importantly, the main way to reward your players is to give them a chance to succeed. Of all the ways to reward your players, this is the most powerful, and if you do it well, the other methods become much less important and can be adjusted or ignored as suits your campaign.

As with giving out treasure, the secret of rewarding through success lies in being tough and not letting it come easily. Tough challenges are much more fun to overcome than moderate or weak challenges. But it helps to go beyond merely challenging your players, instead trying to give them the fear that their characters really might lose: the murderer they're tracking might get away, the person they're guarding might be kidnapped, or something of that nature.

Some GMs feel that in order for their players to appreciate winning, they have to actually kill a few characters from time to time. Without the actual risk of losing a character (the theory goes), combat loses its spice. Many excellent GMs subscribe to this philosophy, but we have not found it to be necessary.

There are both pluses and minuses with the strategy of killing the occasional character: It does set the stakes high, but if you regularly kill off characters, players won't care about them as much. It can also take some of the flavor out of an epic campaign if the cast of characters keeps changing. If a character stands over the smoking remains of his village, shaking his fist and yelling, "*You WILL pay for this, Bertram the Black! I swear you will pay!*" and then he gets killed a week later by someone else and is replaced with another character . . . well, you lose some of the passion. If your campaign is a basic dungeon crawl in which continuity of the story line isn't important, you probably should plan on killing the occasional character. But otherwise, we don't feel it's necessary.

So how do you scare your players if you aren't particularly trying to kill their characters? This question isn't as hard to answer as it may seem. We've found that a character dying isn't really the ultimate failure in a campaign — after all, you can always just write up a new one (or have a dead one come back in another form, such as a ghost).

Realizing this, you should make good use of the other ways of losing. Important NPCs can be killed, characters can be captured, things can be stolen from the PCs, the party's base can be destroyed, the enemies can make effective moves in areas the PCs aren't watching, and so on. Perhaps

Bertram the Black, mentioned in a previous paragraph, lures the party out of town by using a clever ruse and then burns the town to the ground. These types of threats can be as or more motivating than fear for a character's life.

Even if you decide that you aren't especially planning to kill off a certain number of characters, you still need to scare the party. The question becomes how to walk the knife edge between giving them a serious challenge and killing them off.

We find it is almost always a good idea to lean toward overestimating your party and, if necessary, throw them a few extra hints or clues or fudge their enemy's dice rolls if they don't come through. As GM, it's okay to cheat to make the game better, although you should do this as little as possible. It is a lot easier to scale down a challenge in a smooth and unobvious way than it is to scale an insufficient one up when it's proving too easy.



You can always add one more clue, but you can't take clues away. You can have an ogre fall under a sword blow when it really had a couple more hit points left, but it looks bad if a couple extra ogres just happen to wander by and join in a fight that is going too well for the characters' side. Any fudging you do should be in the spirit of fine tuning. You shouldn't automatically let your gaming group win every combat. If they get in over their heads, they may have to run away, get captured, or — if they truly insist on being pigheaded — be killed.





In this part . . .

We show you how to create your very own **GURPS** universe for your campaigns. Do you want to have technological space explorers discover a world where magic works? Or would you rather have the citizens of your highly technological world cope with an invasion of space-mages? One of the most unique and wonderful things about **GURPS** is that your campaigns are not limited to one specific milieu or genre; **GURPS** is literally *generic* — the only real limitation is your imagination. But this versatility creates some added complexities that new world-building Game Masters must confront.

In Chapter 17, we expose you to the different types of campaigns you can create and what each one entails. Chapter 18 gives you the keys to determining the most fundamental features of your game universe — the “laws of physics” that govern your campaign. After you have the basic structure of your gaming universe established, you can get down to the nitty-gritty of creating a plotline for your campaign. We address these concerns in Chapter 19.

Of course, you’re going to need to populate your world with nonplayer characters (NPCs) — the outlaws, allies, bullies, and bystanders that your player characters meet and interact with. Sometimes, how well-developed and memorable the NPCs in a campaign are makes the difference between a good GM and a great GM. We guide you through the process of creating memorable NPCs in Chapter 20.

A fully realized and developed game world is rich with nuance and zest that make it unique — even from other campaigns in the same genre. We walk you through the best ways to add flavor to your campaign in Chapter 21.

Chapter 17

Creating a Complete Campaign

In This Chapter

- ▶ Finding starting ideas
 - ▶ Selecting a style of adventure
 - ▶ Creating game balance
-

If you're going to be a Game Master and run a campaign, the first thing you have to do is decide on a game world to fit that campaign into. Steve Jackson Games sells any number of different "worldbooks" that you can use for this purpose, but if you're like us, you may want to create a game world that is uniquely yours. Even if you do use one of SJ Games' "canned" worlds, you may want to modify the world you're using to throw off the expectations of any players who have a copy of the worldbook that you're using.

One of the greatest strengths of **GURPS** is its versatility and adaptability to allow you to create any game world, or *milieu*, imaginable. Do you want a swashbuckling campaign set on one of the moons of Jupiter? What about a twenty-third-century space campaign in which the characters run afoul of the horrors of the *Things Man Was Not Meant to Know*? Or can you imagine a sword-and-sorcery campaign that has characters fighting off alien space invaders? All of these campaign scenarios — and more — are possible with **GURPS**. Your only limitations are the limitations of your own imagination. This chapter shows you how to improve your campaigns by creating your own unique game world.

Finding Inspiration — Worldviews and Plot Seeds

When you're deciding on a campaign, the first thing you have to do is find a source of inspiration to draw upon for its creation. The source for this inspiration can be as grandiose as a vision of an entire universe, or it can be as simple as an idea based on a punny punch line. We frequently use favorite

science fiction or fantasy novels, movies, or TV shows for inspiration — remember that you don't have to be true to the spirit of the book or show, you merely use it as a jumping-off point to begin development of your campaign. You might want to start by thinking up a single adventure and then fleshing out the world around that one adventure. Some GMs find inspiration by posing hypothetical problems in their own mind and then use the campaign as a means of examining possible solutions.

Here are some examples:

- ✔ **A grandiose vision:** The GM creates the city “Tarn Attala,” which is positioned at the junction of all dimensions, and which depends upon the stability of transdimensional gates for its existence. Tarn Attala sends agents to worlds that have had their gates destabilized to do whatever is necessary to alleviate the problem and to ensure the city's continued existence.
- ✔ **A punny punch line:** The GM makes finding the identity of an interdimensional traveler — one “Sir Strong-Arm” — an integral part of a puzzle the party has to solve. At the end of the campaign, the party finds out that “Sir Strong-Arm” is none other than U.S. astronaut Neil Armstrong. (In the real campaign in which this took place, the entire party groaned and threw food at the helplessly giggling GM at the moment of revelation.)
- ✔ **Inspiration from literature:** Bjoern drew upon Andre Norton's *Witch World* series, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Darkover* series, Patricia McKillip's *Riddle of the Stars* trilogy, and Mercedes Lackey's *Valdemar* series for inspiration for his Avonlea campaign. He freely and shamelessly stole elements and features from those (and other) fictional worlds to flesh out Avonlea.
- ✔ **Fleshing out from a single adventure:** The party goes on a traditional dungeon crawl that winds up in the Tomb of Thal-Karsh. In the process, the GM decides that Thal-Karsh is an ancient Necromantic Priest-King and a dark cult of his followers are trying to raise him from the dead. Then the GM creates an order of holy warriors to oppose this cult and builds the respective societies that support the actions of each side.
- ✔ **Brainstorming hypothetical problems:** “What would happen if a TL3 magical society were invaded by space aliens?” Or, “I'm sick of these high-powered campaigns; how will these players do if I limit them to a 50-point campaign?”

It doesn't really matter what you use for your inspiration, just so long as you find something to inspire you to develop your world beyond the demands of a single adventure. One word of advice: Don't be afraid to discard ideas that don't pan out — all three of us have probably discarded three or four “inspired ideas” for each campaign we've run. Before you start running your first adventure, you might want to come up with a couple of “adventure seeds” and develop them to the point that you think you can maintain this campaign through several adventures.

Deciding on the Type of Campaign

Often the inspiration you use for your campaign will take you a long way in deciding the milieu for the campaign: It may determine the setting, tech level, available powers (if any), typical races, and general surrounding culture. But one thing that it may not give you is help with deciding what *type* of campaign it is going to be.

Regardless of the milieu or plot structure, there are five basic types of campaigns, with several subcategories:

- ✓ Dungeon-crawl campaigns
- ✓ High-adventure campaigns
- ✓ Combat-focused campaigns
- ✓ Puzzle-focused campaigns
- ✓ Masquerade-type campaigns

Don't do it all yourself — Using sourcebooks

Even if you're planning on running a campaign that sprang out of the depths of your own subconscious without any outside inspiration, you don't need to do all the work of creating *every* detail of the game world. If you do, your players will need to sit on their hands for a few months as you hash out every last detail. Instead of doing everything from scratch, consider the wealth of resources that you can find from Steve Jackson Games, as well as other reference material that can give you a considerable leg up on having a complex, memorable, and fun campaign — and one that you get to run in this decade.

As an example, consider Avonlea, which you were introduced to earlier in this chapter. When he created this campaign, Bjoern drew on everything he could get his hands on to provide descriptive detail, gaming statistics, and filler details to flesh out the game world. The different **GURPS** worldbooks from Steve Jackson Games proved to be an invaluable aid in this. In some situations, he may have taken an animal here, a

monster there, or a world-specific power from a third book. But, even though Avonlea is essentially a jigsaw puzzle of pieces from different **GURPS** game worlds, it ended up flowing together seamlessly, and even the other experienced GMs in the party frequently missed bits and pieces that came out of worlds that they were intimately familiar with.

Besides the assets of SJ Games, you have other options for reference material. If you are basing *any part* of your game world off of a popular fantasy or science fiction series, you might want to look for any concordances, technical manuals, glossaries, or other references that can give you more information. Encyclopedias are also a great help, and these days the Internet can give you information on pretty much anything you're curious about. Just keep your mind and your options open, and take the time to do a bit of research; you'll more than make up the time you expended in the amount of time you would otherwise spend hashing out trivial gaming details.

Each of these basic types determines the primary focus of interaction between the GM and the party, as well as the type of action that will take most of the time in each adventure. This is usually a matter of your personal preference — but you should take the preferences of your gaming group into consideration as well. Ideally, each campaign will have each of these types mixed into its structure, but you'll find that one campaign type will generally predominate.

Please remember that you are not limited to using only one of these types in any campaign, but if you do mix types, you need to let the players know that the brain-teaser campaign you've promised might also include combat or might have a diplomatic exchange as a decisive component of its activity.

Determining what type of campaign you're most interested in creating affects the shape of the individual adventures that you create for that campaign. You need to convey this information to your players so that they can create characters who appropriately fit into your campaign setting.

Dungeon-crawl vs high-adventure campaigns

Most gamers with some level of experience have been through at least one *dungeon crawl*. This is a campaign scenario in which all the action takes place in a *dungeon* — typically a warren-like series of rooms and corridors built in a series of subterranean levels. Dungeons are filled with a collection of foes, monsters, puzzles, traps, and treasures. The deeper levels are generally more difficult and more dangerous than the upper levels, but other than that, there is no logical organization to explain how this dungeon is able to feed and support all the random monsters and bad guys who have made it their home, or why they haven't all eaten each other by now. The earliest role playing campaigns focused all their attention and all their action in dungeons.

Contrast the dungeon crawl with the high-adventure campaign, one similar in scope to the epic or high adventures of science fiction and fantasy literature, such as J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, the *Lensman* novels by E. E. "Doc" Smith, or the *Witch World* collection by Andre Norton. In each of these stories, the protagonists are fully-integrated members of a society that is menaced by a hostile force that threatens to destroy the society and all its people. In order to remain true to themselves and their ideals, the protagonists find themselves in situations that require them to oppose the conquering evil by traveling through the wilderness (or outer space), and into the depths of evil's domain, pitting their individual valor against The Enemy's

awesome power. Although they ultimately emerge from their struggles triumphant, they find that every victory has a price. They may find that their world has become diminished by their victory, or their battles have made them strangers in their own homes, or that the cost of success means that they can never return to their homes. They may even have been called upon to voluntarily sacrifice their lives to overcome The Enemy.

These days, the more sophisticated, complicated (and difficult) campaigns more closely resemble the epic nature of the high adventures of fantasy and science fiction than they do the dungeon crawl, and *GURPS* is an excellent system for realizing this. *GURPS* allows the GM to create a world and a society that are uniquely his or her own and yet are internally consistent, well-developed, remarkably detailed, and able to sustain the players' willing suspension of disbelief for the few hours every week (or whenever) that the party has to explore the twists and turns of the GM's imagination. NPCs can be more than a collection of stereotypical classes, and each of the party's encounters can be with unique individuals who have their own motivations and drives that can't easily be discerned by knowing what they do for a living, or by checking out their aura. The society of the world takes on a richer and subtler flavor that can force both the GM and the players to stretch themselves in order to fully take part.

These campaigns demand a more meaningful ethical stance by the GM and the player characters than an arbitrarily assigned "alignment" — in other words, it isn't sufficient to simply give the player characters a designation of *Good*, *Lawful*, *Chaotic*, or *Evil* without defining what those terms mean and how they restrict a character's options and decisions. With the judicious manipulation of situations affecting the player characters' social status or mental disadvantages or the well-being of player characters' Dependents, Allies, or Patrons, the GM can find nearly any kind of emotional hook to motivate the characters' nobler natures to stand up against The Enemy and to make the party more than just a collection of glorified bandits and grave robbers.

For example, in some game worlds, high Social Status (an advantage), or a Code of Honor or a Vow (both disadvantages) can include an obligation to protect the well-being of the common people. Characters with these abilities ought to have a strong game-world-based reason for living up to these obligations, whether it be the threat of a loss of privilege or power, or the compulsion of the character's ethical code. Depending on the advantage or disadvantage, this can apply even if the campaign is set in a prosaic setting — such as, say, the cynical world of industrial espionage, where The Enemy is the mega-corp your neighbor works for, and the threat is a chance at a greater market share; the campaign can still carry overtones of the epic adventure.

Combat-focused campaigns

Combat-focused campaigns are the most common type of campaign for most role playing systems, and they are the reason for the extensive dice-rolling rules that determine outcomes. These campaigns rely primarily on the player characters using force of arms to achieve their objectives. A good GM takes several issues into consideration when creating a campaign in which combat is common, such as the following:

- ✔ If you have an ethical good/evil dichotomy in your game world, and if your party members are supposed to be the good guys, how do they justify engaging in violence as a matter of course?
- ✔ What legal consequences does the party have to face if they leave a trail of bodies in their wake?
- ✔ What type of healing, if any, is available to the party as well as to their foes?
- ✔ What are the consequences of the death of a player character? Is resurrection a possibility? Is it commonly available? If not, how will you deal with an upset player who has just lost a character that she spent many hours creating and playing?

There are three subcategories of combat campaigns. We call them

- ✔ **The party vs foes of equivalent strength**
- ✔ **The party vs foes of enormous strength**
- ✔ **The party as the dominant power in the game world**

Each of these subcategories is independent of scope or milieu of the campaign and can be played in any situation. They are described in the next few sections.

Titanic battles: The party vs foes of equivalent strength

This type of campaign pits the player characters against foes of equivalent strength. It doesn't matter if the two sides are nearly omnipotent, 1,000-point supers or the military commanders of two different armies, or if they are merely 100-point street fighters squabbling over a disputed block of territory. This subcategory of the combat campaign pits the players' wits and strength against that of the NPCs in a toe-to-toe conflict to determine dominance over whatever prize or turf is at stake. Although there can be considerable strategic and tactical maneuvering, and even the occasional use of guile, there is little demand for problem-solving skills in this type of campaign beyond those needed to determine how you can kill your foes more efficiently.

This is a difficult subcategory of combat campaign for a GM to maintain over a long period. It typically escalates through a progressive series of tougher and tougher opponents as the party defeats successive foes and gains in strength, resources, allies, and followers. You have to keep a careful balance in this sort of campaign; you cannot allow the party to earn too much too fast, but you have to keep the rewards commensurate with the risks and threats that the party faces. If the campaign continues for some time, the party will logically become major players in the political/social structure of your game world, even if they started the campaign as 100-point characters who were only a little tougher than normal. As the stakes get higher, the battles will logically involve more combatants on each side, and so you had better be ready and willing to arbitrate over the movements and actions of armies rather than of parties.

Another logical conclusion of this type of campaign is that, as the party becomes more powerful and politically prominent, the demands of their exalted status require the campaign to evolve into as much a diplomatic wrangling campaign as a combat campaign. (For more on this type of campaign, see the section, “Wrangling the diplomats: Negotiations and diplomacy,” later in this chapter.)

Against all odds: The party vs foes of enormous strength

This subcategory of the combat campaign is based on a common plot engine in epic or heroic fantasy literature. In it, the party forms a band of intrepid adventurers who single-handedly work to thwart the objectives of some significantly more powerful foe. This type of campaign requires as much guile and problem-solving as it does battle and is a good choice for blending a combat-focused campaign with any type of puzzle-focused campaign. (For more on puzzle-focused campaigns, see the section, “Puzzling campaigns,” later in this chapter.)

Regardless of how powerful the player characters become, the enemy is *always* bigger, *always* more powerful, or *always* more numerous than the party. One advantage of this type of campaign is that typically it can take a long time before the party can directly oppose and overcome the Mastermind at the head of their enemy forces. Even then, the party can discover that their long-time foe has been little more than a puppet working at the behest of a greater, more powerful entity or organization, a development that makes it easier to keep a plot line going over the long term, provided the party doesn't make stupid mistakes that end up pitting them against overwhelming forces without hope of rescue or escape.

The likelihood of those stupid mistakes makes for a serious disadvantage to this type of campaign. Players and player characters must have a high degree of maturity and good planning and problem-solving skills; otherwise the campaign can turn into a disaster. Some players refuse to exercise the necessary

caution that this type of campaign demands and take actions that would naturally alert The Enemy to the party's existence before they are ready to face such scrutiny, or — believing that the GM will not wreck the campaign by destroying them — they may foolishly provoke The Enemy in a way that logically would call down an *overwhelming* response.



You should decide what you will do in these circumstances when you are creating the campaign. Our suggestion: Tailor a response that logically fits the operational model of The Enemy and give the party a means of escape or rescue — but *not* before you have exacted considerable punishment for their foolishness. You may destroy their secret hideout; make them lose a significant portion of their wealth, technology, magic, or other treasure; or even deliberately target and kill the character or characters who are being the most problematic to the campaign. And then let the survivors get away to lick their wounds, nurse their injured pride, and perhaps learn to approach the campaign with a little more caution and a little more wisdom.

Overlords of the world: The party as the dominant power

This type of campaign sets the player characters up as the dominant power in the environment. We hesitate even mentioning this type of combat campaign because we intensely dislike it. Theoretically, it is possible to create a campaign that puts the party in the role of righteous protectors of the game world, using their powers to keep the forces of evil subdued. This type of campaign caters to the players' darker natures; the party can ride roughshod over all opposition, terrorize the common people, and pillage with impunity. Frankly, we don't see any point in a campaign of this sort, though it seems to appeal to some players. This becomes, quite frankly, an "evil" campaign; the only point to it seems to be to create a venue for the players to demonstrate just how amoral and violent they can be, and just how much depravity they can think up.

We don't recommend that you create a campaign of this sort; in our experience, both you and your players will quickly become sickened by it.

Puzzling campaigns

Although there are several varieties of puzzling campaigns (also known as *puzzlers*), the general drift of this sort of campaign is to require the party to follow a set of clues, solve problems, answer riddles, and uncover mysteries as the primary means of achieving the campaign objectives. This sort of campaign requires much more mental effort on the players' part than a combat campaign; it is not sufficient to be able to roll three dice and "solve" the puzzle. Regardless of the personality and powers of any character, it is the *player's* ability to deduce the answer based upon the clues provided by the GM that determines the campaign's success or failure.

We break down the basic types of puzzling campaigns into the following categories:

- ✓ Mysteries
- ✓ Espionage campaigns
- ✓ Riddles
- ✓ Treasure hunts
- ✓ Conspiracy
- ✓ Exploration

Each of these subcategories is independent of scope or milieu of the campaign and can be played in any situation. They are described in the next few sections.

Who-dun-it?: Mysteries

This is your basic mystery to discover the hidden truth about a person, location, or object based upon a series of clues that the party uncovers and follows. It might be a standard murder mystery, or it might be a quest to uncover the secret of a mysterious artifact or to find the location of lost Shangri-la. This sort of campaign can also involve more supernatural matters, such as a party of paranormal investigators tracking down Cthulhian horrors. The party may or may not face direct opposition from a foe or foes who desire to keep them from discovering the secret; this type of campaign may require the party to face some combat, or it may require them to run from everyone who tries to stop them.

A Who-Dun-It campaign can be a risky proposition for any GM because a number of questions have to be answered:

- ✓ Are you able to create a scenario that will set the party in the right direction without giving away something that will lead them directly to the answer?
- ✓ Are you able to develop a credible trail of clues that the party can follow?
- ✓ Are you sure that your party members (both players and PCs) have the ability to ask the right questions and follow the right clues?
- ✓ Are you sure that your party members (both players and PCs) have the ability to solve the puzzle after they have all the clues in place?
- ✓ Are you sure that this sort of campaign will keep the interest of all the players in your gaming group?
- ✓ Do you have an alternative scenario to allow the campaign to continue if the party cannot solve any particular puzzle you throw at them?

If you cannot answer “yes” to each of these questions, be prepared to see your mystery campaign fail.

Despite the risks, this type of campaign can be remarkably entertaining and rewarding for both GM and players. Don't be afraid to lay down a trail of false clues (*red herrings*), provided that you can be sure that you can put the party back on track *just* at the moment when they realize the crushing truth: that they have spent *weeks* following the wrong track. When done well, a mystery campaign keeps the players intrigued and guessing about the ultimate outcome of the adventure up to the very end. But, after one mystery is solved, where do you go from there? Another mystery? The answer is up to you.

Double-O-who?: Espionage campaigns

An espionage campaign is the puzzler equivalent of a “the party vs foes of enormous strength” combat-focused campaign because the party goes up against an enemy organization that is much more powerful than the party itself. The main difference, however, is that the “agents” in the party are attempting to ferret out information about the doings of The Enemy, ultimately foiling whatever dastardly plot is afoot and using any means at their disposal to do so — preferably while keeping The Enemy ignorant of their identities, activities, or the agenda of the agents' own organization. Despite what you may have seen in the movies, this sort of campaign typically includes very little party-wide combat, although the elimination of the odd guard or goon may be necessary.

This type of campaign is probably best for a small party of two or three player characters. No party will ever have enough clout to take on the minions of The Enemy in head-to-head combat. The more people who are involved, the more difficult it is to avoid discovery while infiltrating The Enemy's stronghold, especially if the goal is to get out with the needed information while remaining undiscovered.

An espionage campaign is also best for a short series of brief adventures against a variety of foes. Each individual adventure to gain information is by its very nature of much more limited duration than an adventure intended to eliminate a particular threat. By definition, espionage campaigns can't allow the time-intensive set-combat scenarios of other types of campaigns, so the adventures move much more quickly. Although there can be an escalating series of adventures to uncover clues that lead the party deeper into the heart of the conspiracy they need to uncover, it may stretch the players' abilities to suspend disbelief if the campaign doesn't lead to the center of The Enemy's stronghold relatively quickly. After they have been in evil's heart, there isn't much more allure or threat to working against that particular foe and they will want to move on to the next target. Quickly, the characters in an espionage-type campaign overcome most of the conceivable obstacles the milieu has to offer. Unless all the members of the party are die-hard espionage aficionados, or there is a means of changing to another game world or setting, the adventures can go stale at this point.

Brain-teasers: Riddles

We know a GM who would put a “test” at a key point in each of his adventures. This test required the *players* to solve a problem or riddle in order to successfully conclude the adventure. With this particular GM, the test was almost always based upon a series of clues that the PCs gathered during the course of the adventure; those clues became the elements of a story problem in quantum mechanics, music theory, geometry, or higher mathematics. It didn’t matter *what* skills the characters had, the adventure stalled until the *players* could provide the GM with the right answer. In one instance, an entire adventure depended upon the party’s ability to solve problems relating to the mathematical structure of a tesseract in order to repair a system of inter-dimensional gates. (Yes, the GM was working on a PhD in Mathematics — Topology to be precise.)

This is an extreme example of a brain-teaser campaign. More rational examples still depend upon the players’ ability to solve riddles by using their real-world knowledge rather than on the game knowledge of the characters. This is very different than a Who-Dun-It campaign and is very dependent upon the GM’s knowledge of the cognitive abilities and educational levels of the players. Its greatest appeal is to people who are geeks of the same stripe as the GM in the real world (math geeks, computer geeks, English lit geeks, history geeks, and so on), and it runs the risk of being boring or alienating to everyone else. This type of campaign can be fun in very small doses, but we don’t recommend forcing anyone to endure a steady diet of it.

X marks the spot: Treasure hunts

In this type of campaign, you give your party something like a partial map to some fabled treasure, lost city, or other great and worthy prize. There they go! Galloping off to find fame and fortune. And so does everyone else who either has a portion of the same map (or other device) or who covets the treasure and is willing to let the party do most of the legwork for him. The treasure hunt gives you *carte blanche* to throw any sort of puzzle, combat, or masquerade in the party’s way, provided it makes sense as a defense devised to protect the coveted treasure. That means that if the treasure is the Death Mask of the Atlantean God-King, you shouldn’t include brain-teasers about Edwardian fashion — unless, of course, some time travel is involved.

This type of campaign is a staple for both literature and gaming and is good for one good, long adventure at most. It can require the party to follow obscure clues, engage in espionage and counter-espionage against both friends and foes, fumble their way through brain-teasers, battle the minions of The Enemy that menaces the successful conclusion of their mission, battle the near-equal forces of their rival treasure hunters, and engage in the masquerade, both socially and diplomatically, while searching for clues.

However, when the adventure reaches its conclusion — victorious or not — that is it. You would be stretching the abilities of even the most credulous and gullible players to suspend disbelief enough for them to find *yet another* mysterious map or guide to yet another far-off prize; and even if you could make it believable, the treasure hunt eventually becomes such an exercise that only the die-hard fans of Indiana Jones and Lara Croft will continue to enjoy. Many players find it difficult to feel any excitement after the second or third time. If this is the case, let it go and either evolve the scenario into another type of campaign or start a new campaign.

They ARE out to get you: Conspiracy

You don't have to be paranoid to play in a conspiracy campaign, but it helps. If the GM does her job right, even if you aren't paranoid when you start playing in a conspiracy campaign, you will be by the time it is over. In a conspiracy campaign, nothing is as it seems; the bad guys may or may not be "bad," and the good guys certainly aren't "good." Nothing that is known about *anyone* — not even the PCs — can be presumed to be true. **GURPS** is remarkably effective for conspiracy campaigns, and the *Illuminati* game world produced by Steve Jackson Games is an excellent example. Fnord. If you want to explore the true depth of a paranoid fantasy, we recommend that you read the *Illuminatus!* trilogy by Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea. Fnord.

A conspiracy campaign is built with layer upon layer of lies, deception, and misdirection. At its heart are the Secret Masters who may or may not be in complete control of the game world and utilize their abilities to generate misinformation and misdirection to retain their control — *if* they truly are in control.

A conspiracy campaign is most effective if the players don't know that they are *in* a conspiracy campaign. That means that you present it as any other type of campaign — and even run an adventure or two to lull your players into thinking that they know what's going on — but then, at some point, you start inserting inconsistencies into the plotline. Running a conspiracy campaign requires the GM to have a remarkably subtle approach; you can never give *anything* away and you have to be able to control even your nonverbal body language so that the players never catch on that their characters are trapped in a web of lies and deceit.

In this type of campaign, the party's ultimate goal is to uncover the truth and expose the ultimate underlying conspiracy. Your objective as the GM is to manipulate the emotions of the PCs and the players so that they are terrified, outraged, and suspicious of everything and everyone — including each other. To achieve this level of emotional manipulation, you have to be willing to play tricks on both the players and their characters; see Chapter 21 for advice on doing this.

One strategy that really helps a GM running a conspiracy campaign is to recruit one of the players as a secret accomplice (a *ringer*). This player will still run a PC — and doesn't know what is *really* going on any more than anyone else — but his character is built with a motivation to support some level of the conspiracy and to sabotage the efforts of the party to uncover the truth. As GM, you have to lie to this player just as much as the rest of the party — but your ringer knows that you're lying to the rest of the party, too, and believes that you are telling him or her the "real" truth. If you want to be a truly evil GM (and give yourself substantially more work), you can recruit each player in the party as your ringer, and lead each person to believe that they are the only one you've approached.



Sometimes, you'll need to provide information that only one PC has access to. In a conspiracy campaign — more than any other type of campaign — you need to let the player decide what, if any, information the PC shares with the rest of the party. This means that you need to get information to and from the player outside of the awareness of the rest of the party. This can be through passing notes, taking the player into another room, or — if your gaming group is especially high-tech — Instant Messaging them or calling them on their cell phone. However, if the GM goes off repeatedly to have a private conference with the *same* player, the rest of the party will begin to suspect that that player's character is up to something, which reduces the effectiveness of that PC as a ringer. You also need to be careful that you don't abandon your players for extended periods of time — leaving them bored, twiddling their thumbs, comparing notes amongst themselves, or even worse, losing interest in your adventure.

A conspiracy campaign can be put into any sort of game world or milieu you can imagine, and allows for any type of power or character level you want. How the game progresses really depends on how devious you can be as a GM. Are the Secret Masters a malevolent force or are they secretly trying to protect the world from destruction? Is that *really* the Secret Masters' agenda or is it something else entirely?

A conspiracy campaign can keep a party endlessly entertained. However, before you create a campaign of this type, consider the members of your gaming group. Some people are emotionally and intellectually unsuited for this type of campaign, and if you allow the paranoia to run unfettered through your game world, you may cause them significant emotional distress. We wouldn't recommend that you start this type of campaign for players whom you don't know well.

Where no one has gone before: Exploration

In an exploration campaign, the party of player characters are explorers out to discover or map what lies beyond the boundaries of the known universe. This can fit into any milieu or game world. Here are several examples:

- ✔ The campaign could be set in the Renaissance with characters out to discover the “New World” or to land upon the newly-discovered lands and trek into the continental interiors, meeting and coping with the customs of totally new cultures and civilizations.
- ✔ In a fantasy, high magic, or ultra-tech campaign, the characters could be using inter-dimensional transportation to explore other dimensions or realms of existence.
- ✔ Victorian-era characters could explore the heart of Africa, the polar regions, or they could find the lost route into the Hollow Earth.
- ✔ In a modern campaign, characters can explore locations such as the depths of the ocean and the heart of the solar system. High-magic fantasy worlds can also use their own magical technology to explore space, the subaquatic realms, and even subterranean environments.
- ✔ Explore the past — or *alternate* past — in a time-travel campaign. (If you are interested in time-travel campaigns, then *GURPS Infinite Worlds* is an invaluable resource to draw from.)

Exploration campaigns can be a great challenge to a GM and are fun to play; typically they require a unique blend of the qualities of many of the other types of campaigns described above. Regardless of the setting, exploration campaigns all have several features and issues in common:

- ✔ The quest for exploring new horizons must be motivated by something more significant than simple curiosity. Usually this incentive is economic or strategic in nature, or motivated by a specific threat.
- ✔ The party should face completely unfamiliar environments — unfamiliar to the characters and, ideally, to the players as well. We think this ought to be the case even if the party is exploring a historically well-known territory. Keep in mind that you are not limited or restricted solely to historically authentic campaigns; if you want, you can always explain away the discrepancy as the result of a plot by historians to keep the real truth from the people.
- ✔ The areas being explored should confront the party with threats to their survival that are outside of the characters’ experience. Whether it is a salt-sucking vampire from classic *Star Trek*, an entirely new form of disease, or navigational hazards never encountered before, the characters

need to be confronted with challenges that require all of their ingenuity to overcome.

- ✓ The inhabitants of the areas being explored must represent cultures that are totally *alien* to the PCs' experience — preferably to the players' experience as well. That way, the party is forced to navigate and negotiate their way through a tangle of strange local customs and beliefs.

Exploration campaigns can be maintained through many different adventures; and a single campaign can have a wide range of problems and situations for the PCs to address. The only potentially negative aspect of this type of campaign is that exploration campaigns are a *lot* of work to GMs, who are forced to constantly create new and strange environments, cultures, and creatures.

The masquerade

GURPS is the foremost role playing system for this type of campaign, and the nearly-infinite variety of worlds available for a campaign takes the “shared storytelling” element of role playing games to an entirely new dimension beyond the reach of other systems. The focus of a masquerade-style campaign is on the *social interactions* among the player characters and among the characters and the NPCs. A masquerade-style campaign can be set in any milieu and can further nearly any campaign plot. The emphasis here is on role playing; the players *must* interact with each other and with the GM in their characters' personas.

Masquerades can be incredibly fun campaigns to play. We once played in a campaign that spent several sessions (and countless e-mails between sessions) doing nothing but role playing our characters at a dinner party; no one but the GM needed to make any dice rolls the entire time. However, be warned that some players (and GMs) find these campaigns to be deadly dull if there isn't some kind of battle against bad guys. You should also be aware that some people may become a little too emotionally involved with the game versus reality, and if two or more *players* in the party are secretly nursing grudges against each other, this type of campaign *might* bring those grudges out into open hostilities.

We've identified two different subcategories of masquerade-type campaigns for you to consider:

- ✓ Social interactions between players and NPCs
- ✓ Negotiations and diplomacy

Each of these subcategories is independent of scope or milieu of the campaign and can be played in any situation. They are described in the next couple of sections.

Socialites and sociopaths: Social interactions

Social-interaction campaigns focus on the personal nature of the interactions among player characters and among player characters and NPCs. Frequently, these campaigns don't really have a "party" so much as a collection of player characters in the same campaign, each working toward her own personal agenda, potentially at the expense of the other player characters. Much of this type of campaign can revolve around trying to figure out what makes the other characters tick, what makes them twitch, and what you can either get out of them or get them to do for you. We call this type of campaign "socialites and sociopaths" because the objective frequently becomes identifying which very charming, dangerous, and seriously deranged individual is out to get you and to get to them first.

Wrangling the diplomats: Negotiations and diplomacy

Your party has been running a combat campaign for some time, and they've amassed a sizeable portfolio of real estate and other assets that they now control. Suddenly, the possibility that a battle in their territory can cause catastrophic damages to the party's assets *even if they win* makes even the most hard-line hawk think twice. It's time to seriously consider the use of negotiating skills rather than force of arms to further the party's aims. In diplomatic campaigns, the party members are all on the same side (more or less), and the focus is to find ways to forge alliances with NPC Warlord *X* to defend against — or attack — NPC Warlord *Y*, and at the same time try to negotiate to delay and deceive Warlord *Y* until the party has all the alliances it needs to achieve a crushing victory (possibly involving negotiations with Warlords *Z*, *Q*, *M*, and *W* in some way).

Another variation of this type of campaign is focused on mercantile trading and is most popular with the fans of *GURPS Traveller*, although it can fit into any milieu we can imagine. The mercantile campaign uses the masquerade for the PCs to locate and open new trading ventures, markets, or suppliers. The primary motive here is financial profit rather than fighting evil or defending territory. Although many enjoy this type of campaign, others will find the financial aspects dry as dust. We recommend that you make sure your players are interested in such a campaign before you get them involved.

Establishing and Maintaining Game Balance

Now that you've gotten the initial physical and social dynamics of your campaign in place, you need to start thinking about game balance.

What is game balance? It is a nebulous, poorly defined, and even more poorly understood concept that is integral to all good (that is, enjoyable) campaigns. It is based as much on the GM's instincts and quick thinking as it is on careful planning and calculation, and sometimes you feel like you're never going to get it right. Game balance is completely the responsibility of the GM, and it is game balance that distinguishes a good Game Master from a good world designer.

In essence, game balance is that delicate, constantly-moving point at which the threats, rewards, dangers, and pleasures of a campaign are perfectly in sync with the abilities of the party of player characters. When you've achieved game balance, the party cannot walk roughshod over your adventure, but the adventure doesn't overpower them, either. The party has the chance to ultimately prove victorious against foes, but only if they exert themselves to the utmost to do so. As well, good game balance means that the treasures, rewards, and information that characters get are emotionally satisfying to them but are commensurate with their current abilities and do not risk making them inappropriately powerful to face the next set of problems you're going to throw at them. Good game balance means that the player characters are more or less following the plotline that you've established, while they still feel like they are in control of their own destinies and have the freedom to make their own choices.

How do you find and maintain game balance in your campaign?

If you know of a formula, let us know. We certainly don't know of a surefire way of maintaining game balance, but we can give you some pointers. Here is a list of tips that help us keep our campaigns more or less balanced:

- ✔ **Understand motivations.** Everyone in your campaign has two sets of motivations: the player's and the player character's. When we start a campaign, we ask our players to briefly describe what motivates their characters . . . and then we take it with a grain of salt. Well, not really, but we also try to understand what it is that the players find most motivating, regardless of what they say their characters want.

For example, Stuart may *say* that his Bardic Assassin is most interested in promoting the interests of her clan, but those of us who know him know that he's most interested in establishing a personal power base that is independent of the external authority of his character's clan. We also know that he prefers to use his character's Fast-Talk and Diplomacy skills much more than her Knife skill.

A GM who faces this situation struggles to find a plot scenario that *hooks* Stuart emotionally by extending the offer of increasing his character's personal power base through negotiation *while at the same time* setting the scenario so that the character is promoting the best interests of her clan. The character may feel guilty that she suddenly finds herself at the head of a small force of warriors who owe total allegiance to her and not to her Clan Lord, but Stuart is tickled pink.

Any GM who has Bjoern for a player quickly finds out that gaining or improving his character's ability to *Fly* puts a ring through Bjoern's nose that has him willingly following wherever the GM wants him to go, regardless of the character's skills, powers, or motivations.

- ✔ **Have two backup plans for each adventure.** You created an adventure that led the party into a combat situation that you *thought* they would be able to handle. Everything seems to balance out by the numbers, but the party is getting *trashed*. Half the characters are unconscious, the other half are all wounded and can't heal, and the foes are barely scratched. You see no way for them to survive *this* battle, let alone the next situation that you have waiting for them.

Alternatively, you're in the same combat scenario and the situation is reversed; the enemy is being quickly defeated, and the party hasn't broken a sweat. Players are becoming complacent, and people are wandering in and out of the room. They're not really interested because they've realized that they're not that threatened in this particular battle.

In either situation, you've lost game balance. How do you restore it?

By having *two* different backups. One for times when things are going badly for the party — so badly that you doubt they will survive to continue the adventure — and one for when the situation is too easy for them and you need to quickly turn up the heat on the entire party. Exactly how you do this depends on the nature of the party and of the campaign, and we can't decide that for you, but here are some suggestions:

- **Fudge some die rolls.** If your party faces annihilation, you can make some of the bad guys suddenly fumble (be sure to swear convincingly when you do, the players will never guess otherwise). If your party is demolishing your NPCs, your bad guys can suddenly get in some "critical hits" to even the score and knock the complacency out of the players (it helps to be a little smug then).

- **Bring in some help.** This could be a “wandering” NPC who comes to the party’s — or the enemy’s — rescue. This contingency plan is effective, but unless you handle it very gently (and use it very sparingly), it is not very believable.

Or, if you have an NPC in the party, he might “decide” to rescue a dying party by using that invocation, magic item, transdimensional portal, nerve-gas grenade, or other device that either calls in help, lets the party escape, or throws the enemy off-balance. The same saving device might also put some life into your dying NPCs: The leader of the enemy forces could have some equivalent device or spell that he uses as a last-ditch measure to save his hide.

- **Have a back door in place.** A *back door* is a plot-device in the campaign that can be used only once to turn the tables in a battle. Setting up the back door takes some initial groundwork on your part. Its success depends upon the ability of the players to remember to use the back door in the first place. If they don’t remember, you can either find a way to prompt them (if you’re a *very nice GM*), or you can let them get what they deserve.

If your NPCs need a quick escape, you can always ad lib a back door if you need it unexpectedly.

- **Change the rules.** By this we mean make some change to the environment that favors whichever side is losing. If the battle is on a space station, say, and the losing side has the advantage in free fall, then cause the artificial gravity to fail (caused, of course, by some action of the party, intentional or not). Or make the lights go out. Or make the room fill with water. You can make the change to either even the tables or to force both sides to break off combat.

Regardless of which tack you take, you need to make some effort to make it *appear* that whatever happened was the result of either sheer chance, blind luck, or good planning on the party’s part. Don’t let them realize that you’ve manipulated the situation to either keep them alive or to make them work harder.

- ✓ **Modify on the fly.** Don’t feel like the situation you have written down is cast in stone. Pay attention to the problems you’ve had to deal with in earlier stages of the adventure and adapt the current scenario to address those problems. If the party got whipped and needed your intervention in the previous combat, then you should consider cutting back on the numbers or abilities of the next foes they encounter. Or if their last battle was a cakewalk, then you should beef up the strength of the next enemies that they face. At all times, you need to be flexible to keep the campaign flowing in the direction you want it to go.

- ✔ **Expect the unexpected.** We've mentioned something like this at several points previously in this chapter. You will function best as a GM when you come to terms with the fact that the party is going to — some way, somehow — throw all your most carefully laid plans into disarray. They may decide to take a completely unexpected route into the evil overlord's lair, one you didn't expect and didn't prepare for; they may completely bypass all of the evil overlord's minions and find a way to confront him immediately; or they may solve the puzzle you've spent weeks crafting in half the time and with half the clues than you wanted. As GMs, we've had all of these things happen to us. All you can do is accept it, get over it, and adapt: maybe the evil overlord filled in that old, unused sewer line with concrete, so the party can't get through; maybe the evil overlord has a hidden escape route to a helicopter and flees just before the party crashes into his Inner Sanctum; maybe the puzzle they solved turns out to be only the first piece of an even greater puzzle.
- ✔ **Follow the party's lead.** During the course of an ongoing campaign, pay attention to what you hear the players say about their characters. Listen for clues as to what they might find interesting, intriguing, challenging, terrifying, or motivating and then build an adventure that incorporates those elements. The more you can tie up the emotions of your players and their characters in the purpose behind any given adventure, the more willing they are to go where you want them to go.
- ✔ **Don't let them have their own way all the time.** Who says that every clue has to lead in the right direction? Who says that every snitch has to give accurate information? Who says that every adventure has to be successful? Nothing cuts into player complacency like ignobly fleeing from an adventure and facing censure and ridicule from patrons and allies because of it. The campaign loses its edge when players are assured that they will always be successful in the end.

We don't recommend that you do this all the time, or even often, but occasionally pitting them against a situation that leaves them with the taste of crow in their mouths will keep the edge on your adventures.

The same goes for death. Even in campaigns in which characters can "recover" from death with a quick trip to the Healer's Guild, there needs to be *some* final consequence that the players feel hovering in the background from time to time. Bjoern has occasionally inserted an NPC into the party whose sole purpose was to be killed after she became accepted as a valuable party member. And yes, sometimes even player characters (especially ones who have created ongoing conflicts in the party) ought to face the "final darkness."

- ✔ **Be sensitive to player sensibilities.** We once played in a campaign in which the GM had determined that the reason his game world had so many half-orcs was because orcs habitually gang-raped all prisoners, and the GM used this as a constant threat every time the party encountered orc opponents. This was offensive to many players, especially the



young woman in the party who had actually been raped. There can be such a thing as *too much realism* in a campaign, especially when it ends up being hurtful and cruel. Enough said.

- ✔ **Sometimes the piper has to be paid.** If members of the party end up breaking with impunity the ethical or legal strictures of your society — or even worse, if they do really *stupid* things in your campaign — they need to face the consequences of their actions. And the consequences need to be within the realm of the game world. If they break the law, sic the police on them. If they break *divine* law, make them face divine retribution. If they do something stupid, let the situation run to its logical conclusion. The players may wind up cursing and taking your name in vain whenever discussion of the situation comes up in the future, but they'll quickly learn to appreciate the consequences of their actions. (Stuart is still mad at Bjoern — 13 years after the fact — because Bjoern allowed the party's secret hideout to be blown up by the enemy after another player stupidly led the enemy to their lair. He might still be mad, but he's never allowed another situation like that to develop in one of Bjoern's campaigns ever again.)
- ✔ **Don't give away the moon.** When the party finishes the adventure and tallies up the loot, they should not wind up significantly wealthier or more powerful than when they started. Sometimes this takes cunning and finesse on your part, especially if you enjoy seeing the greed shining gleefully on all of the players' faces when they finally pry open the door to the demon-king's treasure vault. Or, if you're like Bjoern, you may gain even greater pleasure in seeing the looks on the players' faces when they realize that they might have overcome all of the demon-king's minions, figured out all of the traps and curses that lay upon the treasure, found their way into the hidden vault, and then ultimately realize that they can only take away the smallest fraction of what they have won because they know that reinforcements are en route, a speedy escape is their only means of survival, and carrying all those billions of copper coins will only slow them down.

When it comes to motivating the characters, GMs must walk a fine line: dangling the promise of great treasure over the heads of the party is a surefire way to get them interested in your adventure, but if you actually *let them have it*, you've unbalanced the campaign, potentially beyond repair. You can set them on a quest to find the Sword of the War God, but we suggest that when they find it, it is either useless (perhaps it's 15 feet long, or totally rusted through, or requires them to sacrifice 1,600 innocent people before they can benefit from its powers), or they find only a part of it and have to go on additional quests to find the other parts. In the latter case, you can make the part that they find give them some minor advantage, which increases with each piece that they acquire. If you handle it correctly, by the time they have the full artifact assembled, they have sufficiently increased their abilities to the point that an item with that much power is in keeping with their personal abilities and doesn't become an unbalancing element in your campaign.

Introducing *Avonlea* — An epic adventure

Avonlea is the setting of a campaign that Bjoern created and that we have been gaming in off-and-on for the last 11 years. We refer to *Avonlea* throughout Part V as an example of creating a unique game world for a campaign. Although it was initially based on *GURPS Third Edition*, it is proving remarkably easy to transfer over to the new *GURPS Fourth Edition* rules.

Avonlea is an extremely complex game world. On one level, it's a basic TL3 fantasy campaign with lots of additions. Players have the option of using standard *GURPS* magic, rune magic, psionics, a unique paranormal power called *Land Rule* (see Chapter 21 for a description of *Land Rule*), several different martial arts, alchemy, and shamanism. Most player characters are human, but some are members of diverse races such as the *Were Folk* (racial shamanic lycanthropes), the *Fur Folk* (bipedal felines with innate electrokinesis), the *Lizard Folk* (three-foot-tall reptilian Telepaths), the *Feather Folk* (humanoids whose arms work as functional wings), and more.

Avonlea is a land with a “dark and storied past.” The current human settlers arrived in *Avonlea* approximately 500 years ago, fleeing from some devouring evil on their own world through a transdimensional gate. In *Avonlea*, they found many ruins and the now-savage descendants of a previously enlightened and advanced civilization that had destroyed itself in a cataclysmic battle between the opposing forces of “Light” and “Darkness.” Over the intervening centuries, humanity faced and overcame innumerable obstacles and foes to eventually spread through the entire land of *Avonlea*. During that time, their culture evolved and adapted to better deal with the demands of their new environment.

When Bjoern initially conceived of this campaign, he saw two primary ongoing plot threads:

- ✓ The first thread is the ever-present threat of the residual evil from the distant past that still exists in pockets of supernatural power called *Fanes*. Some *Fanes* are “Of the Light,” others are “Of the Shadow,” but most are “Of the Dark.” Unwary travelers who disturb these *Fanes* could find themselves gifted with healing or strange powers of protection (but at a cost of forming pacts with different supernatural forces) if it was a “Fane of the Light,” or they could find themselves facing soul-consuming evil if it was a “Fane of the Dark.”
- ✓ The second thread is the quest for knowledge. Because of how the people of *Avonlea* arrived on this world and because of the centuries of warfare, loss, and deprivation that they have endured, much knowledge has been lost. Whether it is finding the lost skill of making carbon steel, hunting down a legendary spell to add to the severely restricted spell lists of the mages, or discovering the ancient history of the local Dale to find a way to bind the Fane of the Dark that has been luring children to hideous fates for the past three months, learning more about the world and regaining lost knowledge are imperative for the survival of society.

In gaming terms, *Avonlea* is considered an epic adventure scenario because the action centers around more than a simple quest for treasure and personal enrichment. The characters are fully integrated into the surrounding society and act in response to threats to their families, their allies, and their leaders. They are fighting to hold back “the Darkness” and to improve the fortunes of everyone they know.

Chapter 18

Setting the Stage for Your World

In This Chapter

- ▶ Considering the forces within your world
 - ▶ Deciding on the role of the divine
 - ▶ Determining the availability of supernatural abilities
 - ▶ Establishing the level of technology
 - ▶ Creating culture in your world
-

If you've decided to create your very own campaign world, you need to start with the most basic of all issues: the laws of physics in your game world, which determine much of how your campaign progresses. No, you don't have to work out your own version of the Laws of Thermodynamics, but you do need to determine what is and what is not possible in your game world. In order to share the benefit of our collective experiences and to make matters as easy for you as possible, in this chapter, we present a decision-making process for determining the physical, metaphysical, and cultural aspects of your game world.

Deciding on Deity

The first issue we suggest addressing for your game world (the first “law” of its reality, if you will) is whether you want to include divine forces that can affect the course of events. Your answer to this question will have a profound, but perhaps hidden, impact upon nearly every aspect of the campaign. Remember, you not only get to determine what is *real* in the campaign, but what the player characters *believe to be real*.

You may have a game world in which the reality is that, whatever god or gods exist, the divine take(s) no active role in any events. That doesn't mean that the characters in your world — including the players or their characters — *know* this; they may either be devoutly religious themselves, with firsthand

empirical experience to support their beliefs, or they may know NPCs who *claim* that they have had such experiences. Who knows? The power of belief may be all that is needed to unlock the hidden potential for power in your world.

Another twist would be to tell the players that the god or gods are not real in your world, when in fact, they are not only real, but they take an interest and actively interfere in world events. You could weave this into an ongoing plot of the campaign; the party repeatedly and (at least initially) unknowingly interacts directly with one or more deities. The mounting evidence gradually forces them to realize that they are dealing with a being or beings that are much more than merely human.

Keep in mind that you can also create a cosmology that has supernatural beings that aren't exactly deities but do receive worship from human beings. Most shamanic worldviews and religions, like Shinto, venerate spirit beings that are not gods on an individual basis, but collectively can take on that role. In *Avonlea*, the cult of the High Ones worships the spirits of nature and teaches that the Land Rule Powers of the Kindred originate from an ancestor who was a nature spirit who took human form.

Many GMs don't consider using deities in high-TL campaigns, having determined that the presence of technology makes matters of faith and belief superfluous. Even so, you may want to consider how the presence of the divine may manifest itself in your high-TL campaign. There's no reason you can't use both.

We're not going to tell you what decisions to make on this issue. This isn't a test with right and wrong answers, but each decision you make has consequences in the development of your campaign. We have included a list of 20 questions below that you can use to help you clarify whether a deity exists in your game world and, if so, what its nature and role will be. When you're reading over these questions, keep in mind that every time you decide to answer "Yes," you have just increased the complexity of your campaign and the amount of work you'll have to put into it. If you're planning a high-TL campaign, you may want to ask these same questions about the role of technology in your campaign.

The following questions can help you determine the nature of deity in your campaign:

- ✔ Does a deity exist in your game world? More than one?
- ✔ Is the deity a discreet, self-aware, and intelligent entity?
- ✔ Is the deity actively involved in the affairs of the world?
- ✔ Does the deity have supernatural messengers or servants?
- ✔ Do different deities represent opposing ideologies? Do they fight?
- ✔ Is it possible for mortals to communicate with a deity?

- ✔ Do mortals accept or believe in the existence of a deity?
- ✔ Do the deities impose or enforce specific moral or ethical codes on their worshippers with rewards or punishments?
- ✔ Do mortals have an afterlife in your game world?
- ✔ Can deities manifest in the physical realm?
- ✔ Do deities grant special powers or abilities to a priesthood or other class of worshippers?
- ✔ Does the priesthood have any special social or political status in mortal society?
- ✔ Do the deities demand that their worshippers oppose any of their counterpart's worshippers?

Go back over this list, and for each question that you answered “Yes” to, write a series of bullet points listing the ways you want to set up *how* that particular issue translates to your campaign. We’ve included an example of how Bjoern answered three of these questions for his *Avonlea* campaign:

✔ **Can deities manifest in the physical realm?**

YES, but only in certain locations without dire consequences.

- The Great War of Adepts ended with a cataclysm 5,000 years ago, which caused the fabric of reality to be *brittle* — unable to withstand the strains of great Power manifesting in any single location.
- Because of this brittleness, deities may physically manifest — and channel their Powers — only into areas that have been specially prepared and fortified to support the strain their divine manifestation puts on the space-time continuum. These areas are the Temples, Abbeys, Monasteries, and Fanes.
- *Any* divine manifestation outside of these special areas has a high probability of creating a rupture in the space-time continuum with dire and catastrophic consequences for anyone in the immediate vicinity — including the deity.

✔ **Do deities grant special powers or abilities to a priesthood or other class of worshipper?**

YES, different deities do it in different ways depending on if they are categorized as Old Ones or Quantum Powers — and they have different types of servants: the Old Ones turn their servants into Wizards; the Quantum Powers select favored worshippers into Priests.

- Priests receive Power Investiture for specific Colleges of Magic that are appropriate for that particular deity. Generally, Priests must learn the spells of those Colleges through ordinary means, although a deity *may* grant them the knowledge of a specific spell if the Priest has sought a Boon, has been particularly devout, and has adhered to the ethical strictures of the cult.

- Wizards receive a supernatural Power for specific abilities that are appropriate for the deity in question and that match the personality of the particular Wizard. Each Power has a *Geas* (taboo) attached to it — a responsibility that compels the Wizard to further the interests and agenda of that deity. The point cost and specific purposes of each *Geas* depend upon the deity and the powers granted to the individual Wizard. If the Wizard does not fulfill the *Geas*, he loses the Power — and all experience points that he spent on it.

✓ **Does the priesthood have any special social or political status in mortal society?**

YES, but it's different for each cult and can be grouped into two categories:

- The word *Priest* refers to the servants of a deity that *Avonlea* society “approves” of. These are the Druids and Bards of the Cult of the High Ones, the Dames of the Temples of the Undying Flame, and the Monks of the Order of Adamantine.
- The word *Wizard* refers to the servants of the “Old Ones” who are the deities who reside in the different *Fanes* scattered around the countryside. Some of the Old Ones are *Of the Light*, and some are *Of the Darkness*; all are feared and mistrusted by humans, as are their servants, the Wizards. Anyone who is known to be a Wizard, even if he serves one of the Old Ones of Light, can expect to be shunned, outcast, even stoned by the Dalesfolk.

After you have expanded upon each of the 20 primary questions with general points, you can then go on to flesh out each point in more detail. In the example from the *Avonlea* campaign, Bjoern might flesh out the first question he answered above with a table of possible consequences for divine manifestations outside of their special areas. For the second question, he might list the specific Power Investitures each of the three priestly orders could receive, and so on.

If you follow this structure, you'll develop a complete cosmology for your game world before you know it.

Having a divine presence in your campaign can be a lot of fun and can significantly add to the overall feeling of realism and completeness for the players; however, we suggest that you exercise some caution when handling some aspects of this issue.

Be considerate of players' sensitivities

This is especially true if your game world is modeled after the real world. Some GMs have the tendency to use their campaigns to mock or ridicule

certain religions that they dislike. This can be especially problematic if, unbeknownst to the GM, one or more of the players is sympathetic to — or is even a member of — the religion being denigrated. Typically this can result in an angry exchange of words, hurt feelings, the withdrawal of a player from the group, and even the loss of one or more friendships. Our advice: Don't use a real religion as "The Enemy" or as a source of comic relief. Don't even closely model your evil or silly or ridiculous cults after any religion that has adherents in the real world.

Make your miracles miraculous

If you're running a campaign with a low voltage of paranormal elements or activities, then *anything* that comes outside the bounds of the expectations of the players or the characters can seem pretty darn miraculous. You can have entire villages dropping to their faces in awe from someone who can dance a flame on the tip of her finger — something that would be greeted with yawns in most campaigns with *any* kind of reliable magic or power usage.

But what do you do in those campaigns in which any quick trip to the local Healer's Guild can resurrect your dead companions, and flying castles don't even spook the village cattle? The abilities of a deity need to be infinitely *greater* than the highest level of power mortals can attain in your game world, regardless of what that level might be. Don't let the deities of your game world become little more than super-powerful mages; if you let that happen, they'll lose their effectiveness as guides, guardians, or sources of inspiration for the characters.

Use divine intervention sparingly

No matter how many holy orders the characters in the party have taken, remember this: If the actions of a *deity* become commonplace and miracles abound with every trial the party faces, then your players and their characters will become jaded, and you can do next to nothing (short of scrapping that campaign) to inspire them with awe and wonder or terrify them with their insignificance and futility. The *last* thing a GM wants to hear out of his players is "Ho Hum. Do we have to deal with *another* Mad God? Well, let's get it over with before the pizza arrives."

Chapter 20 addresses the issue of NPCs who tend to overpower or dominate a campaign. More than anyone else, deity NPCs are the most naturally inclined to assume this role.

Pondering the Perils of Powers

After you've decided on the what, when, how, and why of the divine in your campaign, you need to focus on magical and paranormal abilities. What are your mere mortal player characters going to be able to do? What are they going to have to face from other mere mortal characters? In this case, we're talking any type of ability a PC or non-supernatural NPC can gain, if any. This includes both magic, discussed in Chapter 7, and any and all other "non-magical" but still paranormal abilities, discussed in Chapter 8.

Steve Jackson Games has published a plethora of books about different paranormal abilities for third-edition *GURPS*. Among the titles covering various forms of magic and supernatural abilities, are

- ✓ "Standard" magic, covered by the books *Magic* and *Grimoire*.
- ✓ "Alternate" magical systems such as *Religion*, *Castle Falkenstein*, *Voodoo*, *The Cabal*, and *Technomancer*, among others.
- ✓ "Supernatural-but-not-really-magical" milieus such as *Horror*, *Spirits*, *Undead*, *Faerie*, *Goblins*, and *Shapeshifters*.
- ✓ "Paranormal-but-not-necessarily-magical" abilities had *Psionics*, *Supers*, *Lensman*, and more.
- ✓ "Not-paranormal-but-definitely-cinematic" categories such as *Martial Arts*, *Cyberpunk*, *Bio-Tech*, *Robots*, *Time Travel*, and who knows what else. We're not even going to try and categorize *Illuminati U*.



Currently with *GURPS*' fourth edition, the distinction is between Magic (*GURPS Magic*), Powers (*GURPS Powers*), and Martial Arts (*GURPS Martial Arts*), yet all of these variations are still possible. (And, we should note, more *GURPS* fourth edition titles are forthcoming.) For simplicity, we use the phrase "paranormal abilities" to refer to anything a PC or NPC can do that is outside the capabilities of normal folk in the real world.

So, as a budding world-builder, you have to decide what is and is not going to be possible in your game world. Through the rest of this section, we present you with questions that we'd like you to consider (both the pros and cons) and make a decision for each one.

Is your game world going to have paranormal abilities?

If the answer is yes, are these paranormal abilities going to be

- ✔ Based on interaction with the supernatural? This can be through spells, rituals, binding spirits, prayer, or any other means of tapping into the *unknown*.
- ✔ Based on meta-human capabilities and an expanded human potential? This can be via psychic abilities, super-powers, and even through extreme physical and mental conditioning in the martial arts.
- ✔ The result of an advanced technology?
- ✔ Of more than one type?

For example, technology and magic could coexist in your world, as could super-powers and technology. Or perhaps the mages and the psionics are fighting for dominance in your world.

How much do the people in your world know about paranormal abilities?

For that matter, how much will the player characters in your game world know about paranormal abilities? What is the societal position on the subject of paranormal abilities? Is the existence of paranormal abilities taken for granted, or is it a closely guarded secret, shrouded by centuries of religious dogma? Your decision on this question will determine a lot about how your world works and how the characters with a paranormal ability interact with those without one. You could choose to have the knowledge of paranormal abilities in your world be any of the following:

- ✔ **Common knowledge:** The average person can look in the phone book under “Superheroes” to get his cat out of a tree, or the local magic shop sponsors its own peewee baseball team. Anyone with exceptional abilities can easily find someone to help him figure out how to use them.
- ✔ **An open secret:** Everyone *knows* that people with exceptional abilities exist, but they don’t advertise or announce it and do their best to blend in with everyone else. People with paranormal abilities have probably established certain gathering spots to meet each other, and anyone looking for them will eventually be able to find them with a little detective work.
- ✔ **In the closet:** The public suspects that paranormal abilities exist, but the people with these paranormal abilities take active steps to keep from letting their family, friends, and neighbors find out about them. Having a paranormal ability may be considered shameful or demonic. Finding a teacher or companions who also have these paranormal abilities is more difficult, but certainly not impossible. It’s possible that the people with these abilities send out their own watchdogs to identify new manifestations of paranormal abilities and quickly bring them into the family so that they learn how to keep their abilities out of the public eye as well.

- ✔ **A guarded secret:** The existence of such paranormal abilities may be the subject of the mythology of the local religion, or there may be superstitious beliefs about them, but for some reason, the people who have the paranormal abilities (or the people who control the people who have the paranormal abilities) take active, sometimes drastic steps to keep their existence under wraps. Anyone who begins to demonstrate these types of abilities is quickly identified and snatched up by the “secret orders” of people who have these paranormal abilities. Ironically, this situation typically makes it extremely easy to find teachers and trainers.
- ✔ **Top secret:** Perhaps the paranormal abilities exist because of government experiments on a limited number of people. The people who are blessed (or cursed) with these abilities are either totally under government control or are on the run from government agents who seek to impose these controls on them.
- ✔ **Ridiculed and denied:** Only those in the know are aware of the existence of paranormal abilities beyond normal human ability; everyone else has been indoctrinated to completely disbelieve even the evidence of their own senses. Anyone who claims to have seen a demonstration of a paranormal ability is labeled *delusional* and is subject to social or legal sanctions. The most common scenario for this situation is a “Secret Masters” campaign in which the people with the paranormal abilities are secretly in control of nearly every aspect of society.
- ✔ **Completely unknown:** For some reason, nobody is aware of the existence of these paranormal abilities. No, really. Not even the government. Even the local folklore doesn’t have anything to say about it. This would lead to a lonely and paranoid existence; the characters who had such abilities would have next to no hope of ever finding someone else like them or of getting someone to teach them how to use their abilities wisely and safely. Intelligent people would do everything possible to keep *anyone* else from ever finding out about their abilities, lest they become guinea pigs for power-hungry tyrants.

You may want to think of these seven options as a continuum and fit your game world somewhere in the middle of two of the choices we’ve given you here.

How common are paranormal abilities?

This is different from the previous question, which was about public knowledge. Something can be kept very secret and still be a common occurrence. On the other hand, when something extremely rare occurs, it is probably going to make the evening news and be discussed around every water cooler the next day. You could run a campaign in which the people who do *not* have paranormal abilities are the distinct minority (and are viewed as pitiful cripples), or you can create a world in which people with paranormal abilities are a statistically nonexistent anomaly. More likely, you will choose something more middle-of-the-road.



An interesting exercise is to create a graph using the possible answers to this question and the previous question as the X and Y axes and to chart the possible social climate you would create for your campaign based upon how these two decisions interact in your game world.

What are the upper levels of power?

When deciding on the limits of powers in your campaign, you ought to consider both the *practical level* and the *absolute level*. The practical level is the reasonable degree of skill and “wattage” that a person with these abilities can hope to achieve. The absolute level is the most powerful (mortal) NPC you’re willing to create for this world. This defines what your player characters are going to hope to achieve (the absolute) and what they can actually attain (the practical).

Are you willing to consider running a campaign in which the PCs can aspire to Godhood? Or are you more comfortable with a campaign in which even the most powerful practitioner is little more than a prestidigitator with a good stage crew? Or were you thinking somewhere in between? Your decision on this issue will help you determine the campaign’s starting level and help you determine the answers to the questions in the sections that follow.

Will you make any modifications to the paranormal abilities you allow?

You can substantially personalize your campaign by making one or more modifications to the way that paranormal abilities work in your game world. You can create new abilities, like Bjoern did with the Land Rule Power in *Avonlea*. You can also add restrictions on the way powers can be used, or have some means of augmenting the use of powers, or all of the above.



GURPS already has some of these restrictions or augmentations built into the system, and we talk about a lot of them in this very book. Check out Chapter 7 for some pointers on how these work with the **GURPS** magic system, and Chapter 8 addresses the enhancements and limitations on the use of the other types of powers.

Just because the system has limits and controls in place doesn’t mean you can’t add to them (or subtract from them), if it suits the designs of your game world. Manipulating the system in this way makes your campaign *much* more memorable for everyone involved. In his *Avonlea* campaign, Bjoern liked to use what he calls his *caged-carrot* approach; he would hold out the carrot of some tremendously powerful ability and then put it in a cage of limitations and restrictions so that it was either unwieldy, frustrating, or unpalatable to use (and sometimes all three), and the characters would really have to

decide if the hassle and the cost to use the ability was worth the benefit of the ability. Not only does this approach make things more interesting, but it helps maintain game balance.

The following list is a partial list of some ways you can modify the use of paranormal abilities to make your campaign just that much different than the next GM's, along with examples of how Bjoern may have used it in *Avonlea*.

- ✓ **Impose racial restrictions or bonuses:** Bjoern imposed several racially-based limitations on psionic-powered humans in *Avonlea*; he determined that humans absolutely could not have either Psychokinesis or Teleportation. He also determined that most human psionics were still partially latent and required the use of special crystals to access the full scope of their abilities. These crystals could be found only in a distant and dangerous land and were rare even there, so gaining access to these crystals became a significant motivator for most psionic characters. He also determined that, for humans, powers required specific advantages — also known as *latencies*. In order to take a power, human characters had to first take advantages that Bjoern determined would be latencies for that power, (such as Empathy for Telepathy, Danger Sense for ESP, and so on); these points could be translated into active psi abilities, and the players could use the points saved from limitations only on those abilities, or specific power-related disadvantages, to take higher power levels. This created a significant bar on how powerful any given human could start out being.
- ✓ **Include knowledge-based limitations and enhancements:** Much of the focus of the *Avonlea* campaign is on the struggle to regain lost knowledge. Mage characters start out with access to a *severely restricted* list of available spells and can learn spells outside of that list only if they can locate that spell during the course of adventuring. (This has an added bonus of preventing any mages from knowing spells that the GM doesn't want to have used until and unless he decides to allow the party to have them.) However, if a character has the guts (or stupidity) to bargain with an Old One (see the section, "Deciding on Deity," earlier in this chapter), he *might* be granted the knowledge of a previously unknown spell; but possibly at the cost of his soul . . .
- ✓ **Include energetic limitations and enhancements:** *Avonlea* is a *low-mana* environment. This means that all spell use is not only at -5 to use, but powerstones take significantly longer to recharge, and mages have to know the Recover Energy spell at a level of 20 before it will benefit them. This puts a significant damper on the effectiveness of mages in battle and prevents the profligate use of magical energy on trivial matters. But then Bjoern added a magical carrot that allows mages to use Energy Spells to

tap into and draw upon the ambient mana in the environment, but *only in certain locations* called *ley lines* and *mana wells*. This turned the locating and exploitation of the ley lines and mana wells into a preoccupation for all mage characters and spawned many different plot scenarios.

- ✓ **Include ideological limitations and enhancements:** Perhaps the most significant limitation that Bjoern imposed on *all* users of paranormal abilities (any paranormal ability) in *Avonlea* is based upon the ethical strictures of the different religions to be found in that world. He set up a system that punishes any character for using paranormal abilities in any capacity that violates the principles of the ethical system. Any inappropriate use of a paranormal ability *stains* the aura of the character and has a chance of attracting the attention of the deities and servants of the opposing ethical system. The more a character's aura is stained, the greater the chance that the enemy will notice her activity. This leads to packs of vile Fell Wolves chasing after the party and means that they were more likely to catch the *Evil* that was *supposed to be asleep* in the ruins they need to explore while it is "between naps."

What were some of the ways these ethical strictures could be violated? That is unique to the campaign, but in *Avonlea* the *Powers of the Light* generally demand that its followers confront their foes face-to-face, *never* harm an unarmed or innocent person, and *never* deprive another being of its free will. This means that it is okay to use one's Invisibility spell to escape the clutches of one's foes, but it could call the attention of a much greater enemy if you use that same spell to sneak up and stick a dagger in an opponent's back. It means that, although it is perfectly fine to fry your enemies with a Lightning Bolt, using *any* ability that controls their minds, bodies, or emotions creates an auric stain that no bleach can get out, because doing so affects the free choices each being is allowed to make.

It also means that the forces of evil (who know full well the prohibitions the good guys have to operate under) will quite happily drop their weapons and surrender if the battle starts going against them because they know they can't be harmed if they are unarmed. And yes, in some cases, the party had to fight the same foes *time after time* because the bad guys kept surrendering and the party had to let them go free. Listening to the players groan and swear when they'd realize that they were having to face Eduin Haldar *yet again* always filled Bjoern with glee.

As you can see, by coming up with a few simple rules, you can tailor how any paranormal ability is limited or enhanced in your game world so that it is uniquely yours and will stick in the memories of your players for years afterward.

How can paranormal abilities be improved?

How you answer this question depends on what you want out of the campaign and how you answered the previous question about power levels. If you want to keep the power level of your campaign within shouting distance of how it started out, you should either severely restrict any increase in strength (but not skill) level, or make it very difficult or expensive to do so, or both. If, however, you want a campaign to start out relatively weak and then let it grow until the party becomes a force that will make the deities tremble in fear, then you have to make advancing in power level as easy as possible — and be generous with the experience points.

Whatever you decide, it *must* be a policy that is fair, can be administered equally among all players, and is internally consistent. If it isn't, players will scheme to find loopholes around your rules, obnoxiously whine about your capriciousness, and fight amongst themselves if they have *any* reason to think (whether it's accurate or not) that you're playing favorites.

Putting it all together

Once again, now that you have determined the general answers to the six primary questions about paranormal abilities in your game world, you need to go back and expand on each of your answers until you establish a unified, internally consistent, and comprehensive set of guidelines. We have just a few quick observations for you to consider before we move on to the topic of world development.

- ✔ The more *types* of paranormal abilities that you make available in your campaign, the more complex and difficult that campaign will be for the GM.
- ✔ The more *types* of paranormal abilities that you make available in your campaign, the greater your versatility and flexibility in your ability to come up with different and exciting scenarios for your parties to deal with.
- ✔ Whatever decision you make about the societal implications of the use of paranormal abilities, there will be unforeseen and unintended consequences for you to deal with.
- ✔ Be judicious in your application of limitations and enhancements on the use of paranormal abilities; you want to make the campaign fun, and maybe even a little confusing (to people newly introduced to your world, at least), but you don't want to hamstring your players' characters *too* severely. If you do, the players will lose interest in both the characters and the campaign.

- ✔ The greater the strength of paranormal abilities in any campaign, the greater the chance that it will throw the game balance out of whack.
- ✔ Keeping the players — and their characters — a little “hungry” is better than letting them “fill up” on whatever paranormal abilities may be available. Hungry characters are more motivated to jump into adventures that hold out the promise of meager rewards than full players are motivated to jump into adventures that promise everything under the sun.
- ✔ It is a Law of Nature, as reliable and unbeatable as gravity, that no matter what a paranormal ability is or what you intended it to be used for, the players will find some way to use it to screw up your campaign. Get over it and adapt; ad-lib as needed.

Tackling the Terrors of Technology

The third and final law of the physics of your game world is what technology is available and what is possible. This establishes the basis of the *tech level* (TL) of your campaign. Keep in mind that you don't have to decide that the TL of your campaign is necessarily the absolute level of your game world; but you do need to decide what types of technology exist and what is possible and what is impossible. Deciding this in advance makes your job so much easier in determining the results — and possible consequences — when some wisecracking player figures out a way to argue that her character ought to be allowed to invent gunpowder in what is *supposed* to be a Bronze Age campaign. Remember, you determine how the physical laws are applied in your campaign; with the above example, you may determine that in your game world the chemical mixture that we know as gunpowder does not combust when exposed to heat — perhaps it dissolves into a sticky, gooey mess instead.



Making decisions about technology in your game world is usually a lot easier than decisions about deities and powers, unless you decided to include no deities and powers at all. You *can* simply choose the tech level from the list on page 511 of *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns* that matches your vision for the campaign. This gives you a basic level that can be applied across the board in all areas of technology. Or, you can do some personalization by creating a split tech level, turning to page 512 of that book and using the “Tech Levels by Field” sidebar instead. If you are considering advanced technology (beyond what we experience in the world today), we recommend that you check out Chapter 9, “Tackling Tech Level,” to get the skinny on a lot of the technological issues in *GURPS*.

Depending upon the nature of the campaign and the history you give to your game world, you can create an interesting scenario in which a society has one consistent tech level in all areas *except* for one specific technology that is either substantially advanced from the norm or significantly behind the norm. Consider the societies in fantasy literature that are still in TL3 except

for their flight technology, or their use of some kind of ray gun. Now, think of the alternative; imagine a version of 21st-century North America in a world that never invented gunpowder, TNT, or any equivalent explosive propellant that could be used to create firearms. The point we're trying to make is that you should keep your options open and your imagination active. Those are the only limits to your campaign — well, that and the ability of players to create bizarre situations that have consequences no sane GM could ever anticipate.

Arthur C. Clarke said, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." This is something that you need to keep in mind; the higher the TL of your campaign, the more its technology is going to duplicate feats that otherwise only people with paranormal abilities have any hope of achieving, but with one notable difference: Technology allows *anyone* to achieve the near-miraculous. Think about it: After you've hit TL5, any idiot who puts a point into the Guns (Rifle) skill and has the \$200 to afford a cartridge rifle has the potential to inflict as much or more damage (5d) as most mages who have spent upwards of 50 points learning how to cast Fireballs.

Technology is a lot less easily controlled by the GM than paranormal abilities. In any campaign, it's unlikely that the party will ever have access to magic items or advanced spells that you haven't put in their path. In a campaign with technology, however, it is difficult for a GM to come up with a rationale that can keep the players from buying anything that is available in the open market. And money is a lot easier to come by than experience points!

Regardless of what you decide on for tech level, you ought to consider certain issues in anticipation of how you will respond to some of the situations that you may have to face in your career as GM.

- ✔ No matter how many times you tell them otherwise, some players absolutely refuse to believe that some modern technologies cannot be reproduced in a low-tech setting.
- ✔ You can have such a thing as *too much* realism. Regardless of how much the Reconstructionist societies try to romanticize it, by modern standards, life in the past was not just unpleasant, it was *nasty*. If you're running a low-tech campaign, you don't need to make your players deal with the realities of chamberpots, open running sewers, and no antibiotics.
- ✔ You should develop a strategy for how you will deal with the fact that the higher the tech level, the more likely it is that a single successful attack will result in the loss of more Hit Points than any normal character can hope to live through.
- ✔ If you create a campaign that involves both a high tech level and high levels of paranormal ability (especially magic), how are you going to deal with the interaction of technology and those paranormal abilities? For example, are the Missile Shield and Reverse Missile spells going to be effective against beam weapons?

We've addressed just a few of the issues you need to think about, but you probably get the idea. Again, don't worry about having right or wrong answers in your decisions about technology for your campaign, just so long as you think through some of the ramifications of your decisions.

Considering Culture

Nearly every GM spends at least some time addressing the physical laws of her game world (perhaps not to the level of detail that we're encouraging), but she more often tends to give the "social laws" a short shrift. We urge you not to do that. In many ways, the social organization of your game world is even more important than the physical laws; it's usually of more immediate concern to most people, and most players seem to be more rigid in their social thinking than in their acceptance of different physical realities.

Make the strange seem normal

In our experience, most players can more readily adapt to the idea of a world in which bubble gum makes the best ammunition for firearms or a world in which superheroes with super-powers that can shatter mountains go begging for work by advertising in the local weekly newspaper than the same players can adapt to radically different cultures; say for example, a culture with no concept of "family," where all children are raised in *crèches*, and where all social and political advances are based strictly on merit and not on inheritance. In Chapter 21, we talk about *crafting a mood* to your campaign to hook the players' emotions into the action; the things we talk about here are the first steps to use toward crafting a mood in your game world.

Creating a society that is subtly dissimilar (or bizarrely similar) to reality can make the biggest dent in breaking down the players' expectations, exposing them to strange and peculiar concepts that throw them off-balance. Overall they can become better players because of it.

The party that played in Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign had a difficult time coming to terms with the ambitions of the Land Rulers, who murdered their fathers to inherit their domains, who fought tooth-and-nail to retain their positions against all challengers, and who knew that their own sons would kill them before they turned 50. At first, some of the players couldn't come to grips with someone who would still aspire for the job enough to fight to keep it. Other players had problems with the concept of a society that not only sanctioned patricide but rewarded the murderous sons with the greatest power levels and the highest social status attainable in the society. Playing in this campaign forced these players to stretch themselves outside their comfort zones, and eventually they became ardent supporters of the social structure they once found so bizarre.

Again, the decision of how your society is structured is totally up to you. You've probably already had your inspiration for the campaign and know what sort of game world you're creating, and you probably already have a good idea of what kind of society the players will find themselves in as well. But you probably don't have more than a nebulous idea of how it's organized beyond (for example) "an egalitarian interstellar democracy," or have thought about how people live, what their dreams are, or the true sources of the conflicts in your society.

Like in the earlier sections of this chapter, we ask you to consider a few questions, decide how you want to answer each question for your campaign, and then take those answers and flesh out the details in your own gaming notes. Don't let the length of the following lists scare you or put you off; you can always choose to ignore a particular question and answer it only if you feel moved to define its issue.

We divide these questions into three basic categories and provide a brief description of the *Avonlea* society in each category to give you a frame of reference for the questions that follow.

Social organization

Avonlea's basic unit of social organization is the *Garth*, a settlement in which several families from the three distinct castes live and work in the same dwelling but stay distinctly separate from each other. The three castes in the society are Peasants (workers), Nobles (warriors), and Kindred (with the Power of the Land Rule). Each caste lives distinctly different lives side-by-side, and movement between the castes is extraordinarily rare.

The kinship structure is patrilineal; children belong to their father's clan. The clan is the central institution of the social structure; every person, regardless of social status, belongs to a clan that sees to his well-being. Marriage is strictly exogamous (outside of one's own clan) but is kept within the bounds of one's own caste; cross-caste relationships are harshly punished. Women live with their husbands but retain membership in their father's clans.

The Kindred caste practices polygamy; a man takes one *sealed wife* for life but may have any number of *contract wives*, primarily to produce children to cement an alliance between clans. When the contract expires, the contract wife returns to her own clan, leaving behind her children, but with a hefty bride price that she can use to enhance her own dowry for an honorable sealed marriage later on.

Women have the primary responsibility for raising children, but after a child turns seven, that child is usually fostered to the wife's clan for part of each year. The foster family takes on the responsibility of educating the child in what she has to know as an adult.

Literacy in Avonlea is relatively uncommon; most Peasants have no need to know how to read, and few warriors of the Nobility do, either. Literacy is common only among the Kindred and those members of the Nobility who have chosen a scholastic or mercantile life over a martial one.

Ethically, *Avonlea* is an honor- or shame-based (rather than guilt-based) society that values honesty, forthrightness, free will, and facing danger squarely without qualm. A person's honor is his most important possession and is something that is shared with the entire clan. The primary ethical strictures of *Avonlea* society are based upon maintaining the honor of the clan; any person who acts in a way that is publicly recognized as "dishonorable" stains the name of his entire clan, and if that person refuses to make reparations for his dishonorable behavior and eliminate the stain, it is up to the clan to do so on his behalf.

Disputes are settled by a *code duello*, and every adult, male or female, is expected to enforce his or her own rights by challenging to a duel anyone who has wronged him. This *code duello* can range from individual battles to clan wars that involve every member of the clan or clans on each side. *Avonlea's* history is full of these wars, and many clans have become extinct as a result.

Now that you have an example from *Avonlea*, think about the game world you're creating while you answer the following questions:

- ✔ What is the basic unit of social organization in your game world?
- ✔ What is the basis for determining kinship in your game world?
- ✔ What central institution maintains your game world's social structure?
- ✔ What is the nature of the relationship between the sexes?
- ✔ Is there more than one human ethnicity in your game world? If so, what is the nature of the relationship between the different ethnicities?
- ✔ Are there intelligent nonhumans in your game world? If so, what is the nature of their relationship with humans?
- ✔ Who has primary responsibility to rear and nurture the children?
- ✔ Who has the responsibility to educate the youth?
- ✔ What is the standard level of education in your game world?
- ✔ How does society treat the elderly, the infirm, and the disabled?
- ✔ What are the moral and/or ethical strictures in society?
- ✔ How is social conformity enforced?
- ✔ Are there stratified social classes? If so, what are they?
- ✔ Is advancement (or demotion) between social levels possible?

Economics

The economy of *Avonlea* is primarily agrarian, and food production is the work emphasis of over 80 percent of the population. Most of this work is the responsibility of the Peasant caste, but the Kindred caste also uses its Land Rule Powers to enhance the fertility and prosperity of the fields. Even though the Peasants do most of the work, the land is owned by the local Land Ruler, who appoints subordinates in the Kindred as Landed Knights to administer individual Garths and manage their resources. In return, the Landed Knights owe the Land Rulers rent and taxes, which are used to pay for the production of any manufactured goods that the Garths can't produce themselves.

Avonlea has not advanced to the point at which the concept of “money” has relevance; merchants use trade goods and *specie* (gold, silver, and jewels that are valued by weight) to manage their businesses. Most of the transactions within and between Garths are based upon barter — frequently with the promise of a day's labor as one medium of exchange.

Avonlea is a fairly poor society economically. Most of the surplus food produced by the Peasants goes to support the Kindred and the Nobility. The Kindred do contribute by using their Land Rule Powers to increase crop yields by as much as 400 percent, but muscle-based technologies can cultivate only as much land as they have workers to do the labor. The Nobility are a class of professional warriors who have the job of keeping both Kindred and Peasant safe from attack by rival clans, rival domains, outlaw raiders, and the forces of evil that still plague the land. If peace could be brought to *Avonlea*, the Dalesmen would be able to build their population and technological bases and start achieving real prosperity.

Using this general outline of *Avonlea*'s economics as an example, consider these questions as you think about your game world's money matters:

- ✔ What is the economic basis of your game world?
- ✔ Who does most of the work in your game world, and who profits most from it?
- ✔ What determines *wealth* in your game world?
- ✔ How are wealth and resources redistributed within your game world?
- ✔ What is the basis of economic exchange in your game world?
- ✔ How is property and wealth transferred between generations?
- ✔ How is surplus production used in your game world?
- ✔ What role do “non-producers” play in the society?
- ✔ What role does trade play in your game world's economy?
- ✔ Are there corporations or other rich, powerful organizations in your game world?
- ✔ Has your game world advanced beyond a scarcity-based economy?

Political and legal structure

Avonlea is primarily feudal in nature, with no centralized authority. Each clan is ruled by a Clan Lord who is the strongest member of the Kindred in that clan (determined by a combination of factors, such as strength of Land Rule Power, economic clout, number of armed followers, and reputation), who claims the allegiance of all members of the clan and acknowledges no higher authority aside from the collective deities known as the High Ones.

The clan is not the only political structure in *Avonlea*; not everyone in a clan lives and works under the authority of an overlord of the same clan. War, intermarriage, and migration have caused people to live and work in Dales and Garths owned and ruled by members of different clans, and each individual owes allegiance to his local Land Ruler, regardless of clan, as well. This can result in tension due to potentially conflicting loyalties if one's clan goes to war with the clan of one's Land Ruler.

Each Land Ruler achieves his status by killing his predecessor and taking the Land Rule Power from him; usually, this is the case of a son killing his father with the sanction of society, but anyone of the Kindred who can wield the Land Rule has the right to challenge a Land Ruler to a duel to the death. This means that each Land Ruler tends to view all of his peers, their sons, and any other members of the Kindred with the strength to hold the full power of the Land Rule with suspicion and mistrust, and he fortifies his Domains and forbids any unallied adults of the Kindred to enter into his lands.

The only unifying authorities between clans and domains are the three religions in *Avonlea*, along with the secular Orders of the Sisterhood of Wisdom, and the Seers and Guardians of Starlight. In their own way, each of these organizations provides links that keep the different demands of political allegiance from getting out of hand, and when an outside threat arises, they are able to mobilize the different clans and domains to create a unified front until the threat abates.

Keeping the example of *Avonlea* in mind, answer these questions about politics in your game world:

- ✓ What is the basis of political authority in your game world?
- ✓ How is political authority transferred?
- ✓ Who has the authority to enforce the laws in your game world?
- ✓ How are laws enforced?
- ✓ How are disputes settled?
- ✓ What institution or institutions keep your society together?

Putting it all together

Now that you have answered each of these questions, use your answers to create a more detailed description of the culture that is the backdrop of your campaign. You may find that some of your decisions are incompatible with others. That's okay; you can change your mind, or you can figure out a way to make the two conflicting issues work together. (After all, no one has ever claimed that human society is entirely logical or internally consistent.)

With a little bit of work, you'll have a detailed and unique culture for your campaign that will keep your players involved from start to finish.



Chapter 19

Mapping, Planning, and Plotting

In This Chapter

- ▶ Developing and managing a plotline
 - ▶ Keeping the party on track
 - ▶ Puzzling your parties
 - ▶ Mapping your world
-

If you've read through Chapters 17 and 18, you have all the physical and cultural concerns about your campaign figured out. But you still don't have your campaign ready to go yet. You need to develop even more detail about your world — and these details put you a definite step closer to having a campaign for your party of eager players.

After you have developed the general information about your game world and determined the type of campaign you want to run, you need to get an idea of your world's geography — the simplest way to do that is to develop maps, which you can use as the basis for your descriptions. Later on, you'll need to make smaller-scale maps of the areas in which your campaign will take place, especially the floor plans of the dungeons your party will be adventuring in. (Please note that throughout this chapter we use the term *dungeon* generically to mean any adventuring location.) Because you need to make sure that all the necessary locations for your campaign are represented on your maps, this is the time to start figuring out what sort of plotline you envision for your campaign, a process that includes determining the types of clues and plot devices you are going to utilize. This chapter deals with all of these essential issues for putting your very own campaign together.

Developing and Managing a Plotline

We mention throughout this book that role playing is a process of shared storytelling, and any good story needs a plot behind the action. Bjoern's mother and Adam's father are both professors of English literature (you can send your sympathy cards c/o the publisher of this fine volume). This means that

the criteria for developing good plots, information that most of you had the luxury of sleeping through in your high school lit classes, is probably encoded in our DNA. But if you're going to create a sustainable plotline for your campaign, this information will actually prove helpful.

Crafting a basic plot

When boiled down to their bare essentials, all good plots can be identified by the *Three Cs*: Choices, Conflict, and Consequences.

Choices

In any plot of any story, whether it's a short story, a novel, or your campaign, the primary characters are confronted with making one or more choices. The choices they make are caused by or result in conflict, or both. These choices can be as mundane as what they're going to have for breakfast or as significant as deciding to toss a piece of tawdry jewelry into a volcano.

Your first concern in developing a plot for your campaign is creating a scenario that forces your party with one or more choices that they must make to address the situation you've presented. You need to decide what choice or choices will move the campaign in the right direction (and be sure to include adequate clues to this effect in the campaign's scenario), what choices will have detrimental consequences for the party, and what choices you need to find ways to steer the party clear of so that your campaign isn't derailed.

Conflict

In some of the dreary drivel that's passed off as literature, this conflict is sometimes completely internal to the psychology of the character, but this is generally not the case in role playing. In a **GURPS** campaign, the conflicts the characters face are due to external influences (in the form of NPCs or other player characters) interacting directly with them. When creating your plotline, determine what types of conflict the party could face for each choice they are *likely* to make.

Keep in mind that *not all conflict must be combat*. Negotiating a trade agreement is a type of conflict; in some cases, going out to a singles' bar could be considered a type of conflict. All that is really needed for "conflict" is for two or more parties to have incompatible interests. The resolution of the conflict could result in severed heads or in learning how to peacefully coexist; it all depends on the campaign. This is the bulk of the work in preparing the campaign. You need to create the NPCs who are allied with the party and NPCs who are antagonistic to the party and then determine their likely responses to the different choices the party could make.

A gothic vampire-hunter plotline

To quickly illustrate how these 10 steps work together to create a plotline, imagine that you're preparing a classic "gothic vampire-hunter" campaign. Here's how it might play out in the sequence that the players will experience it:

- 1. Setting the stage and scene with Allies and background characters.** The party is a random assortment of travelers who coincidentally arrive in a remote Carpathian village on the same day and they all stay in the village's sole inn. That evening, a band of ruffians attack the inn with the intent of robbing the travelers, forcing the group to band together to fight off the attack, coincidentally saving the life and livelihood of a merchant who is a prominent member of the village's ruling council. In gratitude, the merchant pays for a week's lodging in the village for the party, which gives them time to get to know each other and to become acquainted with the villagers.
- 2. Present the party with a problem.** Soon they discover that there are more problems in this little hamlet than just the ruffians. They hear rumors of children disappearing out of their beds, and one morning they wake up to discover that the young daughter of the innkeeper has gone missing.
- 3. The conundrum.** The villagers are all convinced that the disappearances are the responsibility of a "night-walking Nosferatu," a creature that the sophisticated party members know does not exist. (They know this because the GM has told them — using the PCs skill-sets to convey this information — that such creatures don't exist in this world.)
- 4. The encouragement and another Ally.** The innkeeper tearfully begs the party to track

down the night-walker and rescue his daughter because he knows that she'll be kept alive until the night of the next full moon, and the merchant offers to cover their expenses and introduces them to a local guide.

- 5. The pot-o'-gold and dungeon.** Because they are decent sorts, the party investigates and begins collecting stories about the Nosferatu. They discover that legends say that the Nosferatu dwells in a castle in the mountains that has the collected treasures of several centuries' worth of victims, and that the treasure would be the property of anyone who kills the creature.
- 6. The mini-minds and minions.** The party begins exploring the mountains, unaware that the Nosferatu has servants guarding the approaches to his lair who are powerful in their own right, and each servant commands a group of skeletons.
- 7. The Mastermind and climax.** The party fights its way to the castle and confronts the Nosferatu. In a bloody battle, they finally destroy the creature, end its reign of terror, and rescue the innkeeper's daughter.
- 8. The theme and scale.** They *do* find the Nosferatu's treasure hoard and leave rich, triumphantly returning the girl to her parents, only to learn that the Nosferatu is *not* dead. Such an evil can be permanently killed only by a few very special means, and anyone who steals from it will *become* Nosferatu after the full turning of the moon, *unless* he finds a way to bring an end to the creature once and for all. They'd better hurry!

Consequences

A consequence doesn't have to be negative. Winning a bucket full of powerstones is a consequence — just one you want to prevent your party from ever getting. In terms of your plot, every conflict the party faces will include consequences for the player characters. These consequences may then require the characters to make new choices, which results in a new conflict with its own consequences, and so on.

Creating a plot in ten easy steps

Now that you have the “Three C’s” of plot development in your consciousness, here are the steps that you need to walk through to develop your plots. For an example of how these steps relate to an actual plot, see the sidebar, “A gothic vampire-hunter plotline.”

1. Create your world.

Chapters 17 and 18, as well as the “Basic Cartography” section (later in this chapter), can help you create your game world. You need to do this in order to create a “brief” for your players to create their characters.

2. Set the scale.

How much territory do you think your campaign will cover? A single city? A small country? A continent? A few solar systems? You need to set the scale of your initial map to allow for the full scope of your campaign. To do this you need to answer the following questions:

- How long do you want this plotline to continue? Is this an adventure that you want the party to be able to resolve in one or two nights of play, or do you want to create an epic plot arc spanning months of play?
- Do you want this to be a single, ongoing plot or a series of subplots, mini-adventures, and side trips that eventually lead to a conclusion?
- How important is the plot to the *game world*?

3. Choose a theme.

This could also be considered the “moral of the story.” No, you don't *have* to have a theme for your campaign, but having one helps the GM stay focused while creating the campaign and provides a “compass” for the party, even when they're not consciously aware of it. You can have a single theme for your plot, one *great* theme with several subthemes, or a series of small themes that are only nebulously connected.

For example, in Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign, he used the subthemes of recovering lost knowledge, balancing the needs of self-determination for each individual against the needs of the social contract, and the need to sacrifice one's own well-being in order to oppose oppression. But the greater theme of *Avonlea* is the ultimate imperative to take responsibility for the consequences of all of one's actions, whether intentional or unintentional.

Heavy stuff, and not suitable for all campaigns. However, some fairly standard "boilerplate" themes are the staple of science fiction and heroic fantasy fiction: the essential futility of evil; the destructiveness of greed, selfishness, or hatred; the value of personal freedom; and so on. Even if you don't *deliberately* choose a theme for your campaign, the chances are that in the future, when looking back on your campaign, you may be able to identify a unifying theme that ran through all of the adventures.

4. Create the climax.

You want to start at the very end of the campaign and how you envision the conclusion of the plotline. The plotline's climax could see your party doing any number of things, such as

- Unmasking the killer
- Driving the alien invaders from your game world's soil
- Finding the lost *Toilet Brush of the Elder Gods*
- Repairing the damage caused by past mistakes and "patching" the dimensional rift in the fabric of the universe, as is the case with *Avonlea*

When you know how you want the campaign to end, you can start working backward toward the beginning. When you have determined the climax, you can figure out what steps will be needed to achieve the conclusion, what *essential* clues the party *must* find, and any other criteria that are needed to get to that point. (Later on, you'll be able to determine when and how you convey this information to your party.)

5. Create the enemy NPCs.

Chapter 20 handles this topic in detail, so check it out. But at this point, you want to create your enemy NPCs in three discrete tiers:

- **The Mastermind:** The Mastermind is the character who is the ultimate cause of the situation that the party must confront, usually (but not always) the leader of the forces opposing the party's actions. At this point, you are best served if you create your Mastermind as a fully-developed NPC, even though your PCs are probably not going to meet him/her/it for a long time. If you do this, you'll better understand this character's psychology and motivations and be better able to decide how this character will respond to the PCs' actions during the campaign.

- **The mini-minds:** Mini-minds — the lesser villains who do the Mastermind’s bidding — also ought to be created as fully-developed and realized characters at this time — at least the first several mini-minds you plan on throwing at the party. If you are planning an extremely long-term plotline, you can hold off developing the ones the party won’t encounter for quite a while, but you should at least have an idea (perhaps a list of names and one-sentence descriptions) of who the Mastermind’s lieutenants and agents are. Naturally, you can always add to this list at any time during the campaign’s progress.
- **The minions:** Minions are the faceless, nameless characters who can be created *en masse* (through the use of a template) and who typically exist to serve the Mastermind’s will.

6. Develop your dungeons.

Again, a lot of the detail work of this step can be done as the campaign progresses, and you need to complete only the first dungeon or two the party will adventure in before the start of the campaign. However, we’ve found that it is extremely helpful to draw up a list of the different dungeons that your party will encounter as part of the plotline — as well as what you expect them to gain (in terms of knowledge, treasure, and clues) from each. If you have more than a couple of dungeons ready to go at the start of the campaign, you have the liberty of presenting the party with a number of options to choose from, which makes the players feel less constrained by GM whim and more in control of their character’s destinies.

7. Create the other NPCs.

Only the smallest-scale campaigns can work without the party finding NPC Allies who assist the party in pursuing the plotline. Again, Chapter 20 talks about creating Ally NPCs; check out that chapter for information about how to create Allies as well as bystanders.

Primarily, you need to consider at this point whether the party will have any Patrons — who may drive the plotline by assigning tasks to the party or may provide the party with initial or ongoing resources — and Allies — who adventure with the party, essentially acting as a GM-controlled player character. These will be the most important NPCs from the party’s perspective, but there are certainly many other categories of NPC Allies that you need to develop — anything from the various Ally NPCs that the individual player characters have paid character points to get (Contacts, Allies, individually or in groups) to the proprietor of the local inn where the party stays between adventures, and who acts as the party’s “fence” for all their ill-gotten gains.

Whether it’s the tavern maid with the infectious grin or the asteroid miner who knows every off-color joke in the solar system, don’t forget the background characters; these can oftentimes become some of the most compelling components of any campaign, even if they’re not directly involved with the plotline. These NPCs add color and a sense of

realism and provide the characters with a chance for interactions that aren't fraught with portent and meaning. Or are they? Sometimes you can include background characters and mislead the party into thinking that they are significant to the plot, or hide significant NPCs amongst the local color. If you have a campaign in which the forces of evil threaten the lives and souls of ordinary people, providing characters with personality that the party can get to know *before* they disappear or are threatened adds a deeper emotional component to the plot than just causing mayhem amongst faceless masses.

8. Add a pinch of conundrum and a cupful of encouragement into a pot-o'-gold.

Most campaigns have at least one mystery that the party has to solve (the conundrum). This can be the goal of the campaign, such as finding the identity of the serial killer, or it can be an integral part of achieving the goal, such as breaking the secret code on the treasure map. The mystery may not even really be necessary to completing the campaign — such as identifying “Sir Strongarm” as Neil Armstrong — or it can be completely tangential to the purposes of the plot but be a lot of fun anyway. You get to decide. You don't necessarily need a mystery in your campaign, but you may lose the interest of some of your more intellectual players if you don't.

We also find that some players (and hence their characters) require some kind of motivation (the encouragement) to induce them to start on an adventure, especially if the scenario that the GM presents is obviously dangerous. Simply presenting these players with a chance for adventure — and even treasure — isn't enough; there has to be some lure, some hook, or some goad that compels the PC to get involved.

Finally, some players expect to find or achieve some kind of great reward at the end of a campaign (the pot-o'-gold). This is different than the motivation; motivations are sometimes necessary to get the party going on an adventure. The rewards are sometimes necessary to *keep* the party on track in the adventure. Typical rewards for campaigns are the promise of a title or sovereignty over some territory, or the eradication of some great evil — although for plotlines that have a smaller scope, gaining control of a particular street gang, or paying off the mortgage on a tramp space-freighter may be sufficient promise to keep the action going.

9. Present the party with a problem.

The plotline of a campaign may start with the party being confronted with a problem that they are asked to solve. For example, this problem could be the peculiar disappearance of the tritium ore shipments (and the party is hired to investigate), or it could begin with the mysterious disappearance of local villagers. Whether or not the problem is actually connected with the greater plotline — or if it is merely a means of getting the party involved in a scenario so that you can introduce them to yet another problem that will lead into the greater plotline — is up to you.



In general, if you're planning a campaign with a long and convoluted plotline, we recommend that you get the party started with an issue or problem that is either tangential or not associated with the greater plot. This creates an "introductory" period for the players to get used to their characters and for the party to become more cohesive before being thrown into the more serious situation.

10. Set the stage and the scene.

You could consider this to be the "opening movement" of your campaign. You have already decided on where the campaign will take place, now you need to fit the party of PCs into it. Is the campaign going to take place in their hometown or in one they just wandered into? Do the player characters have established relationships and histories with each other (a tack which seems to be rarely taken but can be effective, especially if the players have gamed together for a long time), or are they going to meet and form the party during these opening sessions? (This is much more common; the "classic" means of bringing a party together is the "tavern brawl" that they are all drawn into "accidentally.")

Yes, we have had you work up your campaign in reverse order from how it will be played, and if you follow our instructions in the sequence we've suggested, you'll thank us for it later.

Keeping the Party on Track

Trust us when we say that if your party has a chance of getting side-tracked, they will probably take it and run with it. We think that the most difficult part of GMing is keeping the party going in the right direction and *not* jumping ahead to where they shouldn't go. Over the years, we've discovered a few ways of keeping your campaign going in the direction that you want.

Allowing for free will

One of the problems with keeping the party on track is that those pesky players demand to have free will, or at least the illusion that they have free will, and that they get to determine the course of their characters' actions. This is an important illusion to maintain; as soon as your players start to feel like their characters are nothing but your puppets, they'll begin to lose interest in the campaign.

This means that they have to be given *choices* throughout the campaign. They have to be able to make a choice of whether or not to assault a particular enemy, and choices about whether or not to take a specific approach to attack an enemy's lair, and choices about how they take on that enemy, and choices about what to do after they vanquish their enemy. This can mean a

lot of work on your part if you want to fully develop your campaign to be ready for *any* choice they make. We don't know about you, but we don't have that much time in our lives for creating our campaigns.

Just because the players believe they have choices doesn't mean that you really have to *give* them choices. For example, say you present them with the choice of assaulting one of three different dungeons. Unless you *want* them to go on a wild goose chase, you don't have to create three different dungeons — just create one, and regardless which of the three the party chooses, they wind up in the same dungeon. Trust us, if you handle this well, neither the players — nor their characters — will know the difference.

You can (and should — at least part of the time) give players the option of going off on wild goose chases, especially if you have given them *all sorts* of clues and they still are not paying attention to the information you've given them. In this case, we suggest that you *let* them undergo a difficult and dangerous adventure — one that does absolutely nothing to further their objectives — as an object lesson to pay closer attention to clues.

However, if they have really tried and still made the wrong decision, and you do *not* want to let them go on an adventure that runs after the feral wild fowl, you *can* be nice and allow them to gain *something* of benefit from the mission. Perhaps the hidden laboratory that they attacked wasn't where the secret experiments on space aliens are taking place, but it does have information that the party can find that *will* more firmly give them the coordinates of where they can find Area 51.

This can also play out if the party misinterprets a series of your clues and has gone off in a direction that you realize makes sense (yes, this sometimes happens, when players see more potential ramifications of a clue than the GM who actually created the world). You can always either make some modifications to your scenarios so that their course of action leads them back to your established plotline, or you can “throw them a bone” by giving them something of benefit by going in what was essentially the “wrong” direction. Why would you want to do this? You want to *encourage* your players to think creatively, to look for alternative solutions, and to take the chance to figure out your puzzles even at the risk of being wrong.

This illustrates another problem with keeping parties on track; all the information that they get has to be in the context of the game world and has to be in the form of clues or (at the very best) incomplete information. You can't just tell the party “Go to ‘X’ dungeon, kill the Evil Overlord and all his minions using the tritium-powered ray guns that you found in your last adventure, and, by the way, don't pick up the cursed crystals you'll find in the overlord's desk drawer.” Such a campaign wouldn't be able to sustain the interest of many players (unless such information came from an NPC, and it turned out that the Evil Overlord was immune to tritium-powered ray guns, and the crystals weren't cursed, or maybe the overlord wasn't immune, but the crystals weren't cursed either).

The whole purpose of forcing the party to gather and figure out the clues that you provide is to force them to think and solve puzzles; unfortunately, that means that sometimes they will either miss one or more clues or misinterpret the clues and not get the message you're trying to convey. This can be extremely frustrating for a GM. The section, "Dropping, sprinkling, and hitting your players over the head with clues," later in this chapter, may be able to help with this problem.



A GM who *compels* the party to a particular course of action is not a good GM, but a GM who *manipulates* the party into choosing the desired course of action is an excellent one.

Exploiting disadvantages

Although players can always misinterpret your clues and riddles, you do have a tool that can encourage your players to make the necessary choices that will further the plotline: the characters' disadvantages. Exploiting disadvantages sometimes takes some creativity, but the more you can hook the players through the disadvantages that *they* chose for their characters and manipulate them into following your plotline in order to stay true to their characters' personalities, the easier your job will be.

The easiest and most obvious disadvantages you can use are Dependents and Enemies. For example, in Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign, he manipulated the party's course of action for years through one Dependent NPC, the eight-year-old son of one of the party members who was also in the line of royal succession for one of the *Avonlea* domains. The boy fell under a curse and was in danger of turning into a soulless monster unless the party found a way to lift the curse (which turned out to require the blood of the wizard who laid the curse). Until they were finally able to track the wizard down and trap him long enough to bleed him, every member of the party essentially had a ring through his nose — all Bjoern had to do was *suggest* that there was a clue to lifting the boy's curse and they went haring off in whichever direction he pointed.

Of course, other disadvantages are at your disposal as well. The so-called "positive" disadvantages (Vows, Codes of Honor, Honesty, Sense of Duty, and so on) can be extremely useful in this regard. A character with a Vow to serve a particular deity, for example, is pretty much *obligated* to take actions that would further or protect the service of that deity.

A creative GM can even use the negative mental disadvantages. For example, say that a party member has (and is known to have) Bloodlust. If a local bigwig is butchered by a mysterious assailant with a vague resemblance to that party member, suspicion will naturally fall in that character's direction. If handled correctly, the party would then need to take action to prove their comrade's innocence, which may include finding and apprehending the real perpetrator. And if, in the course of the investigation, they uncover information that acts as a more serious hook for the party, that disadvantage has more than done its job.

Manipulating emotions

From some of the other things we've said in this chapter, you may have been able to figure out another strategy you can take — with or without the exploitation of disadvantages — and that is getting the party (both players and characters) emotionally invested in the game world. We won't lie to you: This isn't easy, and it takes more work on your part, but we think it's worth it. When your party is emotionally attached to one or more parts of your game world, all you have to do is threaten that attachment and they will line up for their marching orders. We've found this is especially true if we allow the party to have a home, stronghold, or base of operations that they can call their own. After they've joined the ranks of the landed class, all you have to do is menace their home with any kind of threat (anything from invasion to infection), and most parties will do anything in their power to protect their land.

In the final analysis, the key to keeping your party on track is to figure out what interests them — both players and characters — and then to show no mercy in manipulating those interests to get the results you desire. Yes, the PCs can always *choose* to ignore your manipulations, but chances are they won't.

Dropping, sprinkling, and hitting your players over the head with clues

Sometimes the greatest fun in a campaign comes from tracking down, collecting, and then figuring out the clues the GM provides to figure out what's going on, what the party is supposed to do next, and what great calamity the party is barely able to forestall by their actions. You can, of course, simply have the party's Patron hand them a mission brief detailing the location of the target, the objectives, and the consequences of failing at the mission, complete with a dossier containing floor plans, security codes, and fake identity cards. There is nothing wrong with setting up an adventure this way, and we recommend that you occasionally start an adventure like this to keep variety in your GMing style. But if this is the *only* way you get your party moving, your players may start feeling like they're your puppets and start plotting a coup against you.

Say your plotline calls for the party to infiltrate, rob, or assault a facility that is controlled by your Mastermind, a secret laboratory conducting mutagenic experiments during local PTA meetings that is located in the basement of the local offices of the Department of the Treasury. How do you convey that information to the party? How do you get them to *want* to go on this suicidal mission? How do you let them know what they're supposed to do when they get into the place? All of these are difficult questions for any good GM.

The steps below show you how to answer these questions. As you look over the list, keep in mind that you probably don't want to force your party to gather clues to get all the information they need for every detail of the campaign. If you try it, you'll probably find (as we did) that it results in an incredible amount of blithering, floundering, and unproductive dithering. Do both your party and yourself a favor and allow them to uncover or receive some of the information they need at the very start of the adventure.

Follow these steps to figure out how to dole out information about your plot-line to the party:

1. Decide what information the party must have.

Typically the information that your party needs falls into one of eight categories:

- The past activities of the Mastermind that have direct bearing upon the adventure.
- The identity of the primary opponent for this adventure.
- The location of the next dungeon.
- The Mastermind's objectives.
- The Mastermind's next course of action.
- The consequences of the Mastermind achieving his/her/its objectives.
- The actions the party needs to take to foil the Mastermind.
- The actions the party needs to take to further their personal objectives in this particular adventure.

2. Determine what information you will *give* to the party.

You have many ways of giving information to the party; any time any of the party members encounters an NPC, the GM has an opportunity to parse out information. This includes pretty much any information that the party members receive from any source. For example, this could be a briefing from a patron, ally, or another kind of employer. There are lots of other mechanisms you could use as well.

3. Decide what clues you're going to give the party (which you have because you have already fully developed your climax and Mastermind like we told you to, right?).

The information you decided not to give the party in Step 2 will have to be divined by the characters in the party, and they can do this only if you leave a trail of breadcrumbs for them to follow.

If a clue is especially important, you might want to come up with a back-up plan for how you'll get it to the party if they consistently miss finding it the way you initially conceived.





4. Make up a few red herrings (false clues).

Keep in mind that no investigator can realistically expect all clues to be relevant and accurate, which is why we include this step here. Perhaps the *majority* of clues should be so, but not necessarily. Some sources of information are simply misinformed, others may deliberately attempt to mislead the party, and many clues may be subject to different interpretations. When assembling the clues, make sure that the right path is the one that has the *most* clues that make sense and that your red herrings can be proven to be incorrect or irrelevant — if your party is willing to go through the steps of verifying their legitimacy.

5. Decide the source for each clue.

Here's a short list of some of some of our favorites:

- **Informants.** NPCs who the party knows because of an advantage like Patron, Ally, Ally Group, or Contacts are usually the most reliable sources of information — and provide more complete access than other sources.
- **Research.** In modern campaigns, this can be as simple as the party geek turning on his laptop and Googling; in low-tech campaigns, you can create mini-adventures by making the PCs trek to libraries housed in remote monasteries. You can even make them go through a quest to find out where they can get the information to go on their *real* quest. Be sure to have whatever ancient tomes of obscure knowledge they find be appropriately decrepit, smudged, and worm-eaten.
- **Supernatural advice.** This may come from the mad prophet who is chained to a stake in the village square and spends all day screaming out the visions that plague him. Or it could be a summoned spirit or demon. If you use this route, make sure that the clues are couched in vague, convoluted, or metaphorical language, use bad poetry (rhyming couplets are usually both pretty easy to throw together and pretty dreadful), and can be easily misinterpreted.
- **Treasure maps.** This can be any sort of data source that somehow falls into the party's possession (it could be a map, a diary, a video recording, and so on) that has the information they need *in some kind of encrypted format*. With this as a source of knowledge, a substantial chunk of the adventure ought to be figuring out how to decipher the clues and avoid the traps that the person *who produced the data source* set up to keep people like the PCs from surviving their investigation.
- **Witnesses.** These are NPCs who have observed — or been affected by — the situation the party is investigating. These are just ordinary people who got pulled into the matter unknowingly and unwillingly. Typically, they may not *know* that they have information that would be of value and need to be *gently* interrogated before they can divulge their clues.

- **Enemies.** Perhaps this is one of the Mastermind's own minions that the party has been able to capture for interrogation (be careful about what you allow the PCs to get away with in terms of torture). Regardless of the exact scenario, these sources of information are hostile to the party and will attempt to slip in at least some harmfully incorrect information.
- **Espionage.** Consider this a catchall phrase for active steps the party has to take to collect clues without getting caught at it. They may have to tap someone's phone line, break into some company's confidential records, or tail a courier. In all events, the party has a vested interest in keeping the person they're spying on from finding out what they're doing.

6. Set up your clues in a series of "layers."

How you structure your clues depends on how much effort you want your players to have to put into their investigations. If you want them to expend significant effort to unravel the mystery — and spend a substantial amount of campaign time investigating — then you don't want them to suddenly get the key piece of information on their first night out.

All players seem to have a mystic gift for screwing up campaigns, so if you don't make allowances for this in advance, we can almost guarantee that you'll be scrambling to recover as your party winds up blitzkrieging your Mastermind a long time before you're ready for them to do so. So you want to have some control over how and when the party gets its information. What we like to do is allow them to get the information in a steadily increasing stream; their initial informants, witnesses, or torture victims won't necessarily know much — just enough to keep the party moving. Each encounter typically offers more and better information than the prior attempts (although we try to vary this somewhat so that the pattern isn't easily recognizable to the players).



At some point — and you'll probably have no idea *when* this happens — the information the party has gained will achieve a critical mass, and they'll suddenly know what they need to do. Most parties then go charging off to do it, swollen with pride that they have solved your mystery. This is great, but they may be acting prematurely, especially if they haven't gained all the information that they need to successfully complete the campaign and survive. You would be well advised to develop a strategy for how you will handle this situation without appearing to be heavy-handed.

- You can find some way of letting them know that they don't have everything they need.
- You can find some way of dropping the critical information in their laps.

- You can remove some element of the next phase of the adventure so they don't *need* the missing information
- You can let them go ahead with their plans without changing anything.



If you decide on the latter (and we're not saying you *should*), remember to be polite and smile sweetly when you hand them back their heads — and use the good silver platters to return their cranial appendages, rather than just the everyday dishes.

Puzzling Your Parties

In Chapter 17, we talk about some of the different types of campaigns that you can create, including the “puzzling campaigns.” Keep in mind that even if you're not running this type of campaign, you can still use puzzles in nearly any type of campaign; if nothing else, a puzzle can change the pace from the same old, same old of slaughtering hundreds of orcs every week. But you need to keep some things in mind when you set up puzzles for your parties, and we're here to give you some pointers. We're not going to tell you *how* to create a puzzle for your campaign, though. (Do you really want to give any of your players who happen to read this chapter that kind of an advantage?)

When you're creating a puzzle for your campaign, you always need to keep in mind who is playing in your campaign, not just who the PCs are. Regardless of anything else, the *players* must be able to solve the puzzle, regardless of what abilities or knowledge their characters possess. It doesn't matter whether you have somehow allowed a character to have a skill level of 25 in a skill that essentially translates into “Knows Absolutely Everything About the Campaign,” you shouldn't allow any of your puzzles to be solved by a roll of the dice. At the very most, all that a skill or knowledge roll should be able to give a party is some kind of hint — and then only if the character has a skill that is relevant to the puzzle — but definitely *not* the solution to the puzzle.

You have to be aware of who your players are so that you can develop a puzzle that you *know* they have the ability to solve. For example, if you have a graduate degree in physics and everyone else in your gaming group is a liberal arts major, it is neither fair nor appropriate to create a puzzle that requires someone to have training in quantum mechanics in order to solve it. Nor is it fair to create puzzles that only one or two players in the group have the knowledge, training, or ability to solve. We recommend that you try to develop puzzles that *everyone* has the ability to solve. This essentially means that you shouldn't use intensely specialized or restricted knowledge *at all* unless everyone in your gaming group has equivalent education in basically the same field.

We do feel that it is fair to draw upon modern popular culture for your puzzles, even if your game world has nothing to do with 21st-century Earth. (However, if that's the case, we think you ought to find some appropriate justification for why an anachronistic puzzle shows up in your world at all.) It is also fair to create puzzles based on being able to think rationally and logically and make associations without needing specific knowledge, like the kind of questions that are asked on standardized IQ and proficiency tests.



If you need inspiration for puzzle ideas for your campaign, we recommend that you hunt around for an SAT study guide. Several different varieties are available, and you may be able to find them in a used bookstore for cheap. These books are chock-full of sample questions for high school students studying for their SATs, which is about the highest level of difficulty we recommend for a puzzle, and they are usually based upon problem-solving skills more than on a specific knowledge base. Check them out.

Keep in mind that not every puzzle *must* somehow be involved in furthering the plot; sometimes they can just be there to create distractions or to torment the players. Here are two examples for you about hugely successful puzzles that didn't further the adventure one whit, both of them from Bjoern's *Space Mages* campaign:

- ✔ **Sir Strongarm.** In the first example, the party literally spent *months* agonizing over the identity of the mysterious alien known as “Sir Strongarm,” who, in the legendary past, had assisted the mages of that world with developing magical space flight — a technology that was then lost and forgotten for centuries. The fact that Neil Armstrong had been magically summoned to that world to assist the project had absolutely no relevance to the completion of the party's mission or the fulfillment of the plot, but when they finally solved the puzzle, the maniacally giggling GM was chased out of the room by the enraged players hurling handfuls of popcorn and potato chips at him.
- ✔ **Amphibious assault tank.** At another point in that same campaign, the party ran across an artifact that was described as a very large metal barrel lying on its side. Inside the barrel they found two chairs bolted to the sides in front of a panel with a total of 149 knobs, switches, and levers; all of them with labels written in an unknown language (the GM provided the players with a lovely diagram with each feature carefully numbered to represent the undecipherable labels). Because the party had not one, but *three* characters with the Curiosity disadvantage, we spent a thoroughly enjoyable and exciting evening while the party figured out how to make the magically powered amphibious assault tank operate. But alas! The artifact had only enough (irreplaceable) fuel left for the party to figure out how to use the thing, and then it sputtered to a stop, becoming a huge rusting and unusable hulk.

The Ins and Outs of Architecture

It is possible to have a campaign in which nearly all the action, encounters, and adventures occur outside in an interesting wilderness flavor, but eventually you'll need to start creating floor plans for buildings where some of the action takes place. This can be anything from the abandoned farmhouse where your party takes refuge to the L5 orbiting space station that they need to wrest from the Evil Overlord before he uses it to rain devastation upon all living things on Earth.

Creating structures isn't as simple as creating geographical maps. You need to take many different features (the different kinds of rooms, the furniture and decorations in those rooms, and so on) into consideration when creating the structures where your party will engage in life-or-death confrontations (which can be an apartment building, a barn, a castle, or a space station, but which, for convenience sake, we simply call "the dungeon" from here on). Although you can simply randomly draw in rooms, it won't make much sense, and it will eventually tell your players that you didn't care enough to create a dungeon that had a feeling of intelligent design behind it. If you pay attention to the following list, you'll create dungeons that keep a party's interest.

In preparation, you might want to check out some floor plans of real buildings; your local library is *full* of architectural books that can provide a wealth of information. Even many gaming stores have books on castles, fortresses, and other historical structures that you can draw from. We urge you to see how builders from different cultures and different time periods organized their structures. You don't have to imitate anything that you run across (unless you want to), but doing a little bit of research and thinking about how buildings need to fit together will add that feeling of reality to your dungeons that is readily apparent; players who like to think *before* they start killing everything that moves will be very appreciative.

It's time for Dungeon Building 101. The following steps show you how to create the architecture of a functional dungeon:

- 1. Consider the personality and purpose of the designer and builder of the dungeon.**

You could *conceivably* have an NPC in the dim history of your game world suddenly exclaim, "I'm feeling grouchy today, I think I'll blow all my fortune and squander the lives of a few thousand slaves to erect a building that serves no purpose other than to be a death trap for parties of adventurers long after I'm dead." That might be what the dungeon is *now* (and that might even be in keeping with the builder's wishes), but that is not what *motivated* him/her/it to go through all the hassles of

getting the dungeon built in the first place. That motivation is going to determine much about the design of the place.

2. Consider what else is in the immediate vicinity of the dungeon.

Unless the dungeon really *is* an L5 space station, your party is going to want to know what is around it (and even if it is an L5, they'll probably want to know what the next-closest stations, ships, or satellites to it are). Is it in the middle of a thriving city? In the ruins of a ghost metropolis? On a mountain peak? Deep in a swamp or under the sea? Each of these is a valid choice, and each has its own demands on how you prepare the dungeon. A good party is probably going to want to know the answers to some of the following questions:

- How close can they get to the dungeon unobserved?
- What structures around the dungeon could house enemy forces that they have to deal with?
- What structures can they use around the dungeon for a base of operations?
- What structures around the dungeon can they use as an observation post?
- What structures around the dungeon could hold secret entrances or exits into or out of the dungeon?

3. Consider all the ways — both overt and covert — into and out of the dungeon.

Of course there's a "front door," and there's probably also a "back door," but is there a secret "rabbit's hole"? What about sewer tunnels? Or sally ports? Or kitchen doors? Or roof access? Trust us on this: The one route you forget to consider is going to be the way the party *wants* to get into the dungeon.

4. Determine what types of rooms are going to be in your dungeon.

If the dungeon was built to be a military stronghold, it will have barracks, dining halls, kitchens, armories, meeting rooms, and so on. If it was built as the tomb of the Evil Wizard, then it probably won't have any of those, but it *may* have ritual rooms, treasure rooms, a crypt, and a *whole lot* of traps. We recommend that you make a list of all the different types of rooms that you would expect to find in the type of structure that the dungeon was intended to be.

5. Consider how air, water, and heat will move through your dungeon, and how waste will get out.

If the dungeon is any bigger than a single-family residence, it needs to have space devoted to water pipes, air conduits, and sewage pipes, and you need to determine how rooms are heated. Even in a low-tech campaign in which all heating is done by burning wood or coal, you can't just stick a fireplace in every room — you would need to make allowances for all those chimneys, if nothing else.

You don't need to come up with a separate floor plan showing all of the ductwork, but you need to make allowances for it in the thickness of the walls and ceilings, and maybe even allow for the lighter and more nimble members of the party to move from room to room through these outlets — unless they're booby-trapped, of course.

6. Consider how traffic flow will be affected by corridor width.

Standard *GURPS* rules say that a character needs at least a one-hex wide area to move and fight unimpeded. That means that, in a dungeon, a one-hex-wide corridor typically allows for single-file movement, a two-hex-wide corridor is needed for either two people to walk abreast or single-file movement in both directions. The wider the corridor, the more options for movement.



For logistical reasons, we consider a typical city sidewalk to be at least two yards (two hexes) wide in most urban areas, and may be as narrow as a single hex (one yard) in older or poorer neighborhoods, and as much as four to six hexes in locations that are more amenable to pedestrian traffic. As in the case of our sidewalks, your architecture needs to represent a reasonable place to campaign more than it needs to reflect reality.

Allowing for character movement really chews into your available space, but it can't be helped. The broader the corridor, the more likely it is to move large numbers of people quickly; however, the narrower the corridor, the more defensible it is by small numbers. This is how you can have characters heroically defending a castle single-handedly against an army; if a critical point of access is made into a one-hex-wide choke point, a single determined defender can single-handedly stop hundreds of invaders.

7. Consider how rooms are arranged to maximize the utility of each space.

For example: Unless other factors (such as technology, aesthetics, or social position) take precedence, food storage facilities are located close to major access points; kitchens are near food storage facilities *and* with clean water in close proximity; dining rooms are located close to the kitchens; and so on.

8. Consider the hows and the whys of the current occupants.

If the dungeon's creator is still using it, this isn't an issue. But if your dungeon is a ruins, has passed out of the original builders' hands and into someone else's control, or is merely the current manifestation of *Mad Morkol's Home for Wandering Monsters*, you ought to put some thought into how the current occupants came to possess the dungeon, why they decided to take possession, and how they support themselves in the dungeon.



Stuart developed an ingenious way of using Microsoft Excel (you could likely use any old spreadsheet program) to create dungeon floor plans. To get started, select all the cells in the worksheet and format your cell height to 18 and the width to 3. This gives you approximately ¼-inch square cells. You can then draw walls by using the Borders tab in the Format⇨Cells dialog box. You can

use different colors or types of lines to indicate different features. You can fill cells with different colors inside the borders to color-code your rooms. You can even draw diagonal lines to get 45-degree angles.



If you are concerned about fitting this onto a hex grid, simply make sure that the size of the squares in your spreadsheet is the same as the hex paper you use, and use the hex paper when you print your maps onto hard copy.

Figure 19-1 shows you a partial floor plan using this technique. The figure depicts a floor plan of the ground floor of an art gallery/studio/secret laboratory that a party might have to infiltrate. Notice the tabs at the bottom of the figure: Each worksheet can be a different floor in your dungeon. You can also create forgeries on a separate worksheet for the party to see (check out the sidebar, “Foisting forgeries on the party,” later in this chapter, for more about this).

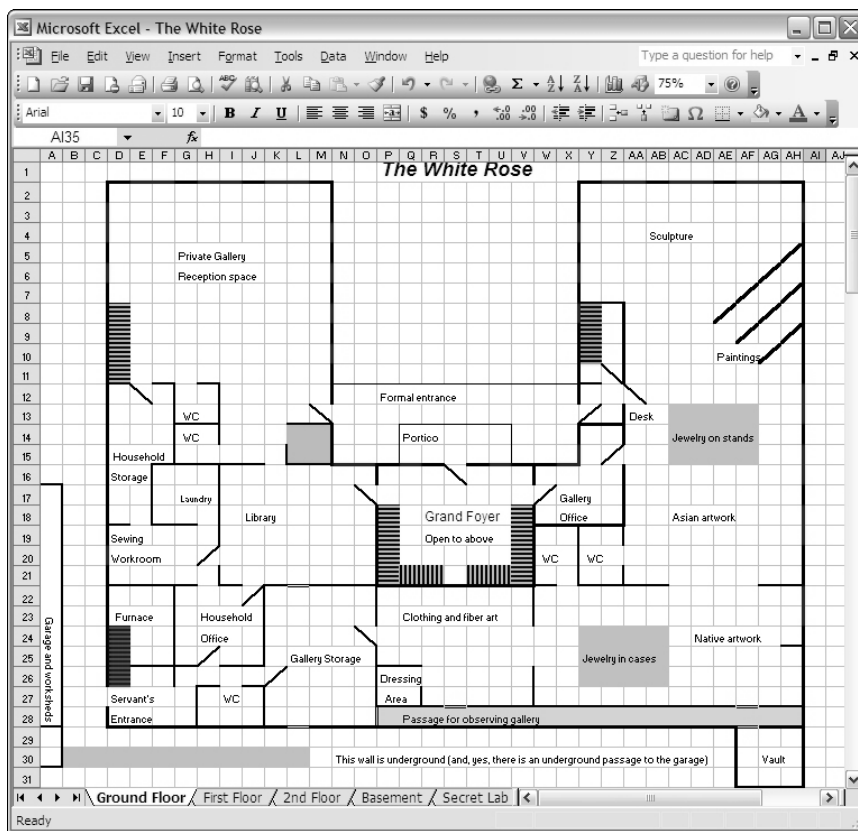


Figure 19-1:
A floor plan
created in
Microsoft
Excel.

Traps, tricks, and dead ends

GMs have been putting traps in their dungeons since the earliest days of role playing games. You have probably already encountered (or used yourself) the “poisoned needle in the keyhole” trap to guard against incautious thieves, or the “pressure switch under the floorboard” trap that can send javelins, lightning bolts, or machine gun fire into the unwary party. If you haven’t, you’ve missed out on some of the great fun of gaming — the feeling of dread and terror at every locked door and the sense of relief and accomplishment with every defused land mine.

We heartily recommend that you sprinkle a few traps into your dungeons to keep your party on their toes. But don’t overdo it. We had a GM who put so many traps in his dungeons that our party put a mannequin on wheels at the end of a 10-foot pole to trigger any traps first — and we were still creating new characters on a regular basis. We suggest that you find an appropriate middle ground, one that will keep your players alert and attentive to business but not to the point at which the terror of the trap is dulled from overuse.

Here’s one little tactic that we have used to good effect: Set up the initial trap the party will encounter as an overwhelming death trap, one that not only would be impossible to survive but has a spectacular effect as well (a massive explosion, for example). Then put some other traps — ones that are more reasonable, and may even be survivable for anyone caught in them — in a few strategic locations throughout your dungeon. Then, when your party is going through this dungeon, you *deliberately* cause that first death trap to misfire before the party has a chance of triggering it. (Be sure to swear and cuss appropriately so that they don’t realize that you had no intention of ever inflicting

that trap on them.) Make sure the entire party sees this trap go off, and make sure that they can see what the consequences could have been if they’d been caught in it. If you do this right, you will inspire dread, terror, and caution in the hearts of your players (the three favorite emotions of all GMs) without causing the campaign to stall because they have to stop every five minutes to disarm yet another trap.

Be sure to put some tricks in your dungeon as well: rotating walls, shifting floors, trans-dimensional portals — whatever is appropriate for your milieu. We once had a campaign in which the party had to assault a wizard’s tower. It turned out that it was not one tower, but *three*, with each tower in a different dimension. The three towers interpenetrated each other (like the circles in a Venn diagram), and where the three towers joined lay a *fourth* tower that was a prison for anyone who didn’t know the secret of the towers and could only be escaped by learning how to operate the magical portals that connected all the towers.

And don’t forget the *dead ends* — anything that can attract (or distract) the party’s attention but that has absolutely nothing of relevance or value for the adventure. One GM included in his campaign a way to use magic to create ball bearings and had his Evil Wizard build a ball-bearing factory in the middle of his fortress. It was a hugely interesting place, with not a trap in evidence, and we had to explore it from top to bottom to make sure that it wasn’t relevant to our quest. This resulted in several highly entertaining theoretical discussions about the appropriate application of magic in that game world, and it also allowed the evil mage a chance to make a leisurely escape before we could finish our explorations.

Basic Cartography

For campaigns that involve any travel or outdoor action, both you and your players will have an easier time conceiving of the game world if you produce one or more maps of where the campaign will take place.

We recommend that you produce a general map of the entire geographic area that the average character in your campaign is likely to know. How much area these maps cover is up to you and is dependent upon the campaign milieu. For a space campaign, you need to have star charts of the areas the party is likely to be traveling through. In Hellenistic Egypt, you shouldn't have to worry about anything outside of the Mediterranean Sea and its adjacent lands. If you're running a "modern" campaign, you need at least a map of, say, the United States — or its analog in your game world. In general, because travel is more limited, lower tech levels need smaller areas mapped.

You should also have a detailed map of the *immediate vicinity* where the campaign will take place. This could be the city, town, village, and surrounding countryside where the campaign will start out — along with any other areas that the party is *likely* to travel to in the immediate future.

If you're going to be running your campaign on Earth, or a near analog of Earth, the simplest thing to do is to get a real-life map of the area where the campaign will be run. You can even find historical maps for pretty near any epoch in the historical period for an area. The closer your game world matches the real world, the more you'll be able to leverage existing maps rather than having to create your own.

If your game world is entirely of your own imagining, then you need to do a little more work. But keep in mind that, because the world is entirely of your imagining, there is no such thing as *accuracy*. The world is *exactly* as you map it, but check out the sidebar, "Foisting forgeries on the party," in regard to this.

When mapping, we find that using graph or hex paper is extremely helpful. It automatically provides a scale to the map and allows you to focus on specific grids if you need specific locality maps later on. You'll probably need *lots* of sheets of paper as you work through the process, so we recommend that you pick up a pack — you should be able to pick one up at your local gaming store.

The following steps walk you through mapping an area in a new game world. Following these steps will make things more quickly and easily for you in the long run.

- 1. Figure out which direction is going to be North.**

Please note that this doesn't have to be "north" in the traditional sense of the word (the top of the world). All the compasses in your world might point toward the mountain where the Gods live or where the sun sets. It's up to you; just put this at the "top" of your map.

2. Determine the scale for this map.

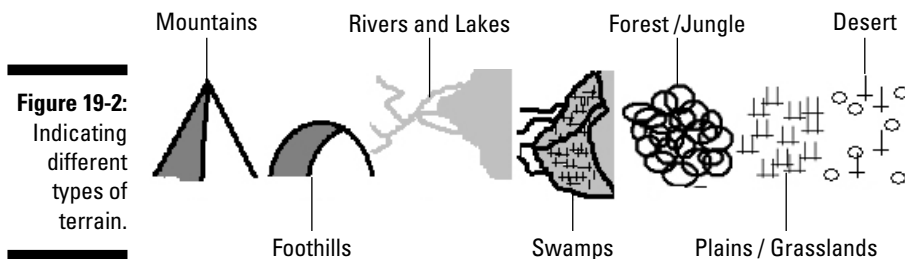
For low-tech campaigns, we like to set the scale so that the distance a character can travel in a day using the typical method of transportation can be counted out easily by the number of grids. For a high-tech campaign, you might think about creating your scale so that the typical distance that people travel between actions can be determined by simply counting the grids (for example, giving the grids a scale that is divisible by the average speed of travel).

3. Determine and draw in the geographical "boundaries" for this map.

The charted area within every map typically ends with some boundary, barrier, or landmark in each direction — even if the physical map continues on past that boundary, the presumption is that another map exists to detail the area on the far side of that boundary. Typical boundaries are coastlines (lakes or oceans), mountain ranges, rivers, political borders, the extent of the explored territories, or even of the known world — beyond which "Here Be Dragons" is an appropriate label.

4. Determine what geographical barriers are inside the map area and draw them in.

Geographical barriers are anything that blocks, restricts, inhibits, channels, or impedes transportation. Typically, the location of mountain ranges determines the location of foothills, and together they determine the course of rivers, which affects the placement of lakes and swamps, so these boundaries are added in that order. Figure 19-2 shows our suggestion for how you can draw in these different features in a way that you can easily identify the different areas on sight. The figure shows seven different symbols you can use on your map to indicate different types of terrain. Adding these features in color makes them even more clearly distinguishable.



5. Fill in the “wilderness” areas on your map.

The wilderness areas are forest/jungle, plains/grasslands, and desert. You want to make good use of color on your map to distinguish between the different wilderness areas (a light green for forest, a dark green for jungle, a yellowish-green for plains and grasslands, a blue-green for swamp, a yellow for desert, and so on). Figure 19-3 shows a black-and-white version of what your map *might* look like at this point. We wish you could see this map in color; it's really pretty.

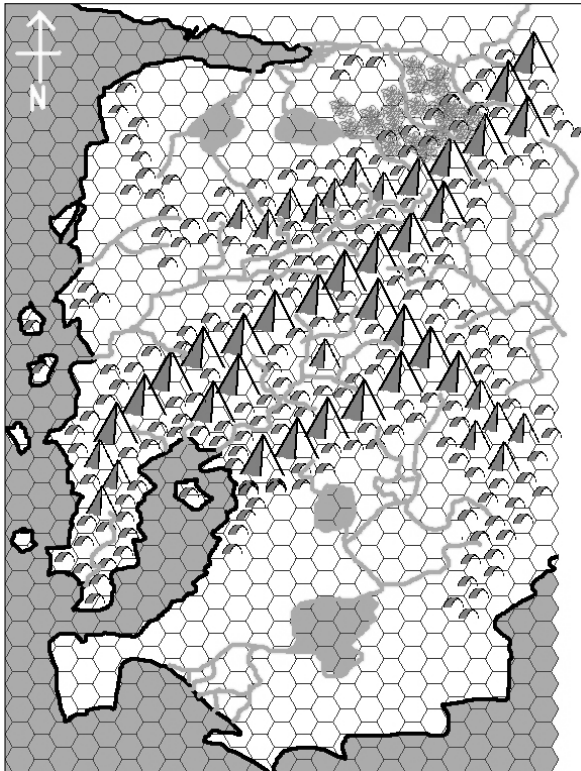


Figure 19-3:
We have just started filling in the wilderness areas near the top part of the figure.

6. Put in your major population centers, both active and deserted.

Unless your game world is built upon different cultural imperatives than Earth's, cities are usually built along or next to major waterways and at the junctions of natural routes of travel. If your campaign calls for ancient ruined cities from lost civilizations, they will probably occur in the same sorts of areas, although the course of a river may have changed or a rich

mineral deposit played out to make the ancient site no longer attractive — or it could be the hordes of *restless dead* who haunt the streets and alleys on moonless nights that have kept people away!

7. Extend roadways between the populated areas.

8. Identify rural areas, fortresses, farmlands, and outlying settlements.

Typically, these grow up in concentric circles around the cities and then flow down corridors between cities that are formed near roads and rivers and will cut into any intervening forests, jungles, and grasslands.

9. Determine political boundaries, if any, within your mapped area.

Political boundaries generally follow some easily identifiable line that represents something that is both easily described in treaty negotiations and easily fortified if the treaties are broken.

10. Make any necessary corrections.

We doubt that anyone could get all this right in a single pass of the previous nine steps. What is more likely is that as you go through this process, you'll think of things that you want to add to your game world. You might have an epiphany of a brilliant plot device that requires that one particular area be just so, or you'll want to have a place where the halflings can live in peace, or some such. The point is, don't let yourself get locked in at this stage. Be willing to redo some or all of the map enough times that you have your game world work out exactly the way you want.

Foisting forgeries on the party

Unless your campaign is set in a world that has satellite mapping, it's highly improbable that your players would be able to have a map of the game world that is as comprehensive or as accurate as the map you're working from as the GM. (Even if there is satellite imaging, who's to say that the government hasn't left out certain features that it doesn't want the public to know about?) This applies to territorial maps, illicitly gained floor plans, treasure maps, and any other type of map that the player characters may have acquired. We recommend that you make a separate map that is *based on*, but

subtly different from, the map that you use for GMing. You can change the scale, alter the terrain, and add or remove map elements, especially removing the potential objects of quests. If you intend on sending the party on a quest to find the Lost City of the Necromantic Halflings, you certainly don't want it to show up on any of the maps *they* are likely to get their hands on. This is where doing your maps on the computer can be a *big* help; you don't have to start from scratch, and making little modifications can be done relatively easily.



What a wonder the computer can be for the modern GM! Regardless of where your campaign takes place, you can use your computer and scanner to make mapping a snap! All you need to do is find a map of an area that *resembles* how you want your area to look and scan it into your computer. Save it as a graphic file that can be manipulated with a low-end graphics application (if you're running Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Paint is more than adequate for your needs). You can then erase any areas that don't fit your conception and redraw the world to fit your needs. You can then even scan in a sheet of hex paper or graph paper and paste your map onto it as a transparent overlay so that scale is readily apparent.



If you think you'll want or need to create some new feature in the middle of a campaign, you may want to leave some undefined area on your map that you can fill in after you have a new, brilliant idea. The safest thing is to reserve this area on one edge of the map — it's less likely to be noticed by snoopy players if it's not taking up space in the middle of the map.



Chapter 20

Creating Memorable NPCs

In This Chapter

- ▶ Creating the three types of adversary NPCs
 - ▶ Producing the Patrons, Allies, and Contacts for the party
 - ▶ Generating Dependents who are dependable troublemakers
 - ▶ Making the neutral NPCs interesting
 - ▶ Building up the background characters
-

As the GM, you are responsible for creating and controlling every non-PC character that populates your game world. You are not only every single minion of the Evil Overlord, you are also every non-evil person or entity. You play every enemy, every Ally, every Dependent, every Patron, and even the innocent bystanders on the street. To a great extent, the interaction between the party and your NPCs determines how your players experience your campaign. You want the characters who are important to the adventure to be more than two-dimensional cookie cutouts; you want them to seem *real* and to be *memorable*.

This chapter helps you create all of these characters and shows you how to make them interesting by involving aspects of your game universe.

Getting Good Mileage out of Your Bad Guys — Adversaries

GMs spend most of their time and energy creating challenging adversaries — those characters who are hostile to the party and must be overcome in order to successfully complete the mission. We categorize adversaries into three distinct groups:

- ✓ Masterminds
- ✓ Mini-minds
- ✓ Minions

Not all NPCs are created equal

You would be quickly overwhelmed if you tried to create all of your NPCs with a level of depth and sophistication to make each one unique; that would be a *huge* task that could consume all of your available time, and we don't recommend it. Instead, you need to determine which characters are unique and memorable additions to your campaign, and which ones are merely templates that you use as "spear-carriers" in combat scenarios or for background color.

By sheer numbers, most of your NPCs can simply be templates that you can draw upon when you need them; you can personalize them as needed by giving them a specific advantage, disadvantage, or quirk or by changing what weapons they carry or armor they wear. In many cases, you can simply ad-lib, and for the most part, your players won't know the difference

between these characters and the ones that you have spent hours laboring over to make unique.

One thing that we strongly advise you to let go of right now is any urge to calculate the point values of your NPCs or to try to balance the NPC characters by using the same point limitations that you set for your PCs. If you do this, you're just setting yourself up for lots of extra work that doesn't really get you anything. Instead, we recommend that you create adversaries for the party with abilities that make them credible — but not overpowering — threats and give them however many (or few) disadvantages that you need to create the psychology that you want for the character. This does not apply to what we're calling Companion NPCs (described later in this chapter).

We talk about each of these groups individually in the next few sections.

The Mastermind

We first encountered the concept of the *Mastermind* in the *Harkwood* campaign module that was one of the earliest products by Steve Jackson Games, and it made so much sense to us that, with some modifications, we've continued to use it to the present day. In terms of the plotline for your campaign, the Mastermind is the NPC who is ultimately behind the problems the party faces, even if he/she/it doesn't even know the party exists. The Mastermind may be the Dark Lord determined to achieve dominion over your world, the "hive mind" of a sentient virus that seeks to infect and colonize your game world, or the nine-year-old daughter of a character's neighbor who unintentionally sets a series of events in motion that the party is called upon to address.

Typically, the party's actions have a profound effect upon the Mastermind's fortunes, so it is a good idea to create the Mastermind as a very detailed NPC, even if you have no intention of the party *ever* coming face-to-face with him/her/it. Creating such an NPC involves more than just writing down a

list of attributes, advantages, disadvantages, and skills; it involves developing the character’s psychology, the potential reactions he/she/it might have to the party’s efforts (especially as they come closer to the goal), and how the Mastermind may try to stop — or help — the party in achieving its objective.

One of the Masterminds that the party has dealt with in Bjoern’s *Avonlea* campaign was a millenia-old sorcerer from the Bale race (*GURPS Fantasy Folk, Second Edition*, pages 32–35) named Sariel, the Lord of the Keep of Wasted Flesh. Figure 20-1 shows Sariel’s character sheet. Notice that along the right edge, Bjoern created a short biography of the character to get a handle on his psychology.

We think that GMs need to develop, to the best of their ability, the background and character psychology of the Mastermind, even if they never plan on having the characters in the party directly confront this NPC. This allows you to get a better understanding of the Mastermind character and to better be able to determine how the Mastermind will respond to the characters’ actions — especially when you have to make spur-of-the-moment decisions in response to party actions.

SARIEL, LORD OF THE KEEP OF WASTED FLESH								
Speed	9.75	Dodge	11/16	IQ	15	Will	17	Short Biography: 1200 year old Bale. Wizard of Fendarl, the Jaguar-god of Destruction.
Move	7	Block	-----	DX	15	Fatigue	20	
DR	7/12	Parry	13/18	HT	14	HP	20	
Encum	Light		ST	12	Per	15		
Racial Template:	DR+2, No Eat/Drink, Immune Disease/Poison, Metabolism Control x5, Regeneration, Unaging							Family: Father—the legendary Bale Warlord Sarank the Unbound. Mother—Demoness Marika the Flayer. (Living) Children: Sarash, Sasha, Seraph, Lilandra, & Rafael Kadarthin.
Bale	Bloodlust, Dependency: Blood, Fantacism, Intolerance, Megalomania, Paranoia, Sadism							
Advantages:	Magery III, Mana Enhancer II, Power Reserve 20, Nat Spellcast, Patron: Fendarl, Soul Stone.							Sariel has ruled the Keep of Wasted Flesh for 700 years (200 yrs before Dalemén arrived). His father was Fendarl’s general during the War of Shattering & Sariel took the Keep when he was able to murder his father after Daddy had gorged himself on Unicorn blood one night. Because the Keep is also the site of the Primus Fane of Fendarl, Sariel pretty much HAD to become a Wizard if he wanted to retain his new home. He has been furious for 500 years because Avanel was able to get the Dalemén established in Avonlea right under his nose and has kept him from dislodging the stupid humans all this time.
Disadvantages:	Enemy: Avanel, Stubbornness, Overconfidence, Cowardice, Addiction							
Quirks:	Thinks Elylions are delicacies. Tortures captives to C&W music, Paints w/blood, Favors his daughters, Hates psonics.							
Powers:	Word: Dark Lance. 5d-5 imp		Innate Attack 15					
	Word: Enslave		Affliction 15					
	Word: Wither Limb		Affliction 15					
	Summon Jaguar Spirit		Calling 15					
Magic:	(assume that he has all spells in College at minimum skill of 18.--Named spells are 21+)							Considers himself an "ARTISTE." He is constantly working on some new bizarre artistic creation—his favorite medium is using the blood of different species (and the slight differences in hue) to create "Hell-scapes" upon canvases made from the skins of Scale-folk. His favorite music are choral arrangements "performed" by torturers working on slaves altered to only be able to produce one note. His favorite musical style is Country & Western (picked up when he visited Earth in the 20th century while trying to claim the Girdle of Ket-Zal).
	Necromancy		Rotting Death					
	Mind Control		Panic					
	Light & Dark		Invisibility					
	Body Control		Dexterity, Might, Vigor, Deathtouch, Curse Missile (Blindness)					
	Protect & Warn		Shield, Armor, Reverse Missile, Sense Danger					
	Fire		Burning Death, Expl. Fireball					
	Movement		Blink, Blink Others, Ethereal Body					
Magic Items:	Cloak of Rotting Death: DR 5, Blur 5, Causes 1d-1 of Key of the Warm Matrix:							

Figure 20-1:
The first page of Sariel’s character sheet.

In some campaigns, it might be sufficient to have the Mastermind repeatedly send out hordes of underlings to rampage through your game world with no strategy other than to engage the party in combat. But if your party is composed of sophisticated players, you will need to develop a plan of action for your Mastermind to follow, especially if your Mastermind character is deliberately creating the situation that the party is forced to confront. It's rarely enough to say that the Mastermind's goal is to "find X artifact and use it to dominate the world"; you need to develop a strategy for the Mastermind to achieve his objectives that is both credible and sustainable.

In the case of Sariel, he had several objectives that he needed to achieve to meet this demand. Figure 20-2 shows how Bjoern set up the initial strategy that Sariel used to pursue his objectives. Bjoern set up Sariel's strategy and activities and the general status of his operations at the start of the *Avonlea* campaign.

Looking at the figure, you can see that Sariel has a lot of irons in the fire. With these general guidelines, Bjoern was able to quickly decide on adventures that fit into the overall plot, even though it took the party many months to realize that one single personality was behind all the crises that they were constantly being called upon to solve. We recommend that you do the same thing to keep your adventures on track and further the overall plotline of your campaign.

SARIEL'S OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES				
Long-term Objectives:				
Destroy the political & religious structure of Avonlea & achieve military				
Seize the Warp Matrices stored in the Valley of Verdant Majiques				
Destroy the Primus Fane of Avanel, Mt. Mormengil, & the Valley of the Gates.				
Specific Objective	Why	How	Lieutenant Assigned	Status
Corrupt & recruit "5th column" agents among the Kindred.	To put agents in position to destroy strongholds & create confusion when he is ready to make his move against the Dalemén.	Seduce disaffected members with promises of Wizardly powers and the ability to seize control of lightly-held Dales.	Seraph	Agents are in place to seize Rulership in the following Dales: Ulmsdale, Summerdale, Haversdale, Safedale, Kathardale, Loqansdale, Marksdale.
Destroy the rule of the Kindred	Destroy any organized military response to his invasion plans.	Inspire a peasant uprising by terrorizing the lower classes and "proving" to them that the Kindred were not able to protect them against the forces of the Darkness.	Sarash	"Hunting Parties" of Hoar Wolves & Gray Riders plague many of the most rural Dales. Flame-Weavers have arisen along the coastal Dales.
Destroy the infrastructure of the Cults of the High Ones, the Sisterhood of Wisdom, & the Servants of the Undying Flame.	To break the "Watch" upon the Fanés of Darkness and allow Sariel to recruit allies from the Powers within those Fanés.	Corrupt disaffected members of the Cults with promises of Wizardly powers.	Seraph	Agents are in place in the centers of all 3 orgs as well as agents in the following Dales: Brightdale, Summerdale, Holmsdale, Ulmsdale, Safedale, Habbdale, Scardale.
Disrupt the bonds of clan structure.	To further break any chance of organized resistance against his military activities.	Use agents to provoke clannishness between clans that have interlocking allegiances.	Seraph	Abdiel's War 100 years ago all but destroyed the Kartharin Clan & bred generations of distrust and hatred that can still be exploited.
Seize military control of the area around the Valley of Verdant Majiques	Gain control of the Gate to the true Valley to overwhelm the forces of Morven and Ethred & seize the Warp	Military invasion once the social & political structure of Avonlea is sufficiently	Sasha	Three armies are ready to invade the Dales, one to strike at the Valley directly, one to block support coming from

Figure 20-2:
Some of Sariel's strategy and activities, created at the start of the *Avonlea* campaign.



Masterminds are not necessarily evil. A mastermind can be a, say, well-intentioned scientist who accidentally releases a threat into the world. A mastermind doesn't even have to be a person; it can be a deity or a force of nature or anything else your imagination can create.

The mini-minds

We came up with the concept of *mini-mind* on our own. Very early in our separate careers as GMs, we learned to keep the party a *long* way away from encountering the Mastermind until very late in the evolution of the plot. (In one notable situation, a member of the party killed the Mastermind *with a single blow* in the first combat of the first adventure in the first night of a campaign. We learned our lesson after that.) Because of this, we created the concept of the mini-mind.

Mini-minds are NPCs who, through their actions — again whether intentional or unintentional — further the scenario that the Mastermind brought into being. In the most typical type of campaign scenarios, these are the Mastermind's lieutenants or surrogates who act in his/her/its name. If we used *The Lord of the Rings* as an example, then the various Nazgul and Saruman would all be mini-minds to Sauron's Mastermind. (Actually, Sauron himself was only the highest-ranking mini-mind. Morgoth was the *true* Mastermind of Tolkien's world, even though he had been long-since vanquished by the start of *The Hobbit*.)

We recommend that, after you've fully developed the Mastermind as an NPC, you then do the same thing with the mini-minds. Pay more attention to the stats with them, though; the party can conceivably encounter — and battle — the mini-minds much more directly and perhaps even more frequently than they ever will deal with the Mastermind. Coming up with a cadre of core "officers" in the effort of your game world to prevent the party from achieving its goal — especially if you develop their psychology in the process — gives you the ability to operate on several different levels and come up with dramatically different responses.

For example, in Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign, four of the highest-level mini-minds were the children of Sariel, each of whom had been made a lieutenant in furthering Sariel's objectives. These four children acted as the top-level mini-minds of this stage of the campaign. Each of them had his or her own psychology, loyalties, ambitions, and rivalries, as well as his or her own magical abilities and military forces. Thus, Sariel's eldest son, Sarash, despised his twin sister Sasha and spent as much energy attempting to foil Sasha from earning their father's favor as he did in trying to bring about the downfall of the heroes.

Sariel's second son, Seraph, was a coward — anytime the party made significant headway against Seraph's efforts, he would pull out and flee the field (usually abandoning his underlings to serve as a rear guard, of course) in order to protect his own hide — which forced the party to deal with him again and again, to their great frustration.

Dealing with the Enemy disadvantage

Disadvantage: Enemy Variable.

GMs have dealt with seeing this entry in a PC's character sheet in many different ways; some good, others less-than-good. Some GMs have allowed their entire plotlines to be derailed as a PC goes on a personal vendetta to destroy his foe. We've also seen campaigns in which a character with a valuable Enemy hasn't faced his foe over dozens of gaming sessions because the GM doesn't want to deal with the hassle of creating new NPCs and coming up with a scenario that doesn't further the plot; making the Enemy disadvantage a free source of points that never truly affects the character.

It doesn't have to be this way. We suggest that you take one of three tacks when faced with the Enemy disadvantage.

- ✔ Don't allow your players to determine the identity of their Enemy. Then you can make the Enemy one of the mini-minds (or even the Mastermind) of your campaign, so that dealing with this foe actually gives the players a motivation to further your plotline.
- ✔ Allow the players to determine *who* their Enemy is, but then *secretly* make the Enemy one of the mini-minds of the campaign and incorporate them into the scenario through an avenue that you hadn't initially conceived of.

- ✔ Allow the players to determine the identity of their Enemy, but make this foe someone who possesses crucial knowledge, a key component, or some other vital factor that the party must acquire before they can vanquish the Mastermind. This can be a really fun variant — you could set it up so that the party and the Mastermind both strive to gain this factor from the Enemy character.

In all cases of Enemies or any other advantage or disadvantage a PC might have, we advocate that you find a way to turn it into something that *further*s your plotline, even if you have to fudge on the information that the player thinks is true in order to do it.

You need to find ways to have the Enemy character create more problems for the character who took the disadvantage than for the rest of the party. If you just make the Enemy a foe for the whole party, the whole party should get points for it or else none of them should. You have to balance this so that you're not spending a lot of gaming time focusing on a single character's issues and making the other players sit around, uninvolved and twiddling their thumbs. The party must understand that if they share the benefits of some PC's advantages (such as Wealth or a Patron), then they also share the penalties of some disadvantages (like an Enemy) as well.

Having lieutenants, each with his or her own personalities and forces, allowed Bjoern to develop diverse strategies and tactics within the disparate forces that owed Sariel allegiance. When they came to know the different mini-minds and their eccentricities, the party was able to predict with some measure of accuracy the way in which each faction of Sariel's forces would attempt to deal with them. Figure 20-3 shows Sariel's organization with his primary lieutenants and their responsibilities and powers. Note that this is only a partial list — most of the underlings had their own subordinates.

Continuing with the *Avonlea* example, the first of Sariel's brood that the party tangled with directly was Seraph, the Huntsman. In the very first adventure, one of the PCs realized that her husband had been murdered and her son had been cursed by the forces of the Darkness (the work of Sarash) and she fled her home to seek the aid of her sisters. One of Seraph's jobs was to run down anyone who could reveal Sariel's plots, and he tracked the party the length and breadth of *Avonlea*, attacking them whenever he could catch them in a vulnerable position. As mentioned previously, Seraph was a coward; he chased the party over hundreds of miles — and they even knew who he was — but every time they got within striking distance, he would order some minions to engage in suicidal attacks so that he could get away.

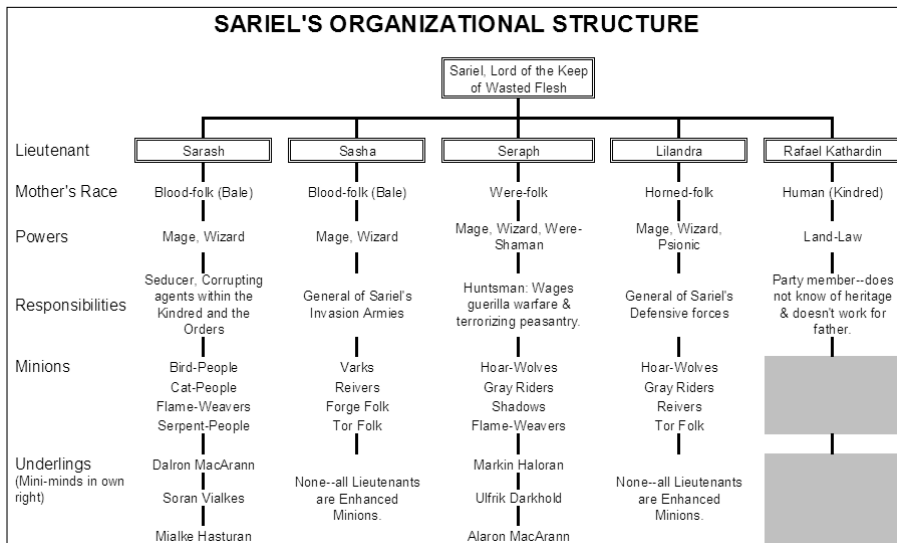


Figure 20-3:
Sariel's organizational structure.

However, he had other duties to perform (terrorizing the peasantry whenever they were left exposed by their overlords among the Kindred), and his Sadism demanded that he take at least one prisoner alive to torture at his leisure. This weakness eventually gave the party a means of tracking him down and destroying his power base, ending his usefulness to his father. Ultimately, Sariel (acting upon the psychological imperatives that Bjoern established for him at character creation) sacrificed his own son because of this, and the party was able to eliminate one of their greatest foes, in part through his own fallibility. Figure 20-4 shows the first portion of Seraph's character sheet. Notice that along the right side is a description of the character's history and motivations. The party who played in the *Avonlea* campaign was frequently frustrated by Seraph's cowardice, but they eventually found a way to use his Sadism to effect his downfall.

We think this is a good illustration of why it's in your best interest as a GM to get your important adversaries' psychology firmly established before your campaign ever starts. From the very first time the party encountered a village that had been raided by Seraph's forces, Bjoern was able to lay a trail of clues (based upon Seraph's disadvantages and objectives) that was able to consistently point the party in a direction that ultimately gave them the means to achieve his downfall. If Bjoern had waited to create Seraph until the first time the party actually *met* him face-to-face (months and months after the start of the campaign), he wouldn't have been able to do that.

Seraph, The Huntsman				Night-Stalker Form				
Speed	9.25	Dodge	11	IQ	15	Will	15	<p>Short Biography: 2nd son of Sariel. Mother was captured Were-folk Shamaness. 537 years old. Huntsman of Sariel. Leader of the Hoar-Wolf pack & commander of the Gray Riders. His job is to terrorize the peasantry of Avonlea & to make them fear and distrust the Kindred. He also has the job of tracking down anyone who catches wind of Sariel's plans and eliminating them.</p> <p>Seraph is a Coward and a Paranoid. He's convinced that his siblings are conspiring to kill him (he's partially correct--Lilandra and Sarash are plotting to remove him once Avonlea falls. Sasha only holds him in contempt and is more concerned with Sarash). Even though he is physically tougher and more powerful than any of his siblings, he is terrified of physical conflict and uses his Word of Teleportation whenever he is directly confronted by an enemy.</p> <p>Seraph is also a Sadist. He truly loves terrorizing the peasantry and always tends to take at least one victim with him from any attack so that he can torment them at his leisure. This is a weakness, because the appropriate magic will let the party track him down by tracking a someone that they know he has prisoner.</p>
Move	7	Block	DX	13	Fatig	15		
DR	7	Parry	13	HT	12	HP	20	
Encum	Light	ST	14	Per	18	Encum	None	
Racial Template:	DR+2, No Eat/Drink, Immune Disease/Poison, Metabolism Control x5, Regeneration, Unaging							
Bale/Were	Night-Stalker form, Alertness +3, World Sight, Combat Reflexes Bloodlust, Dependency: Blood, Fantacism, Intolerance, Megalomania, Paranoia, Sadism							
Advantages:	Magery III, Patron: Fendari, Shamanic Initiation, Lvl 5, Mystic Symbol x3, Second Sight.							
Disadvantages:	Enemy: Avanel, Cowardice, Megalomania, Paranoia, Sadism, Stubbornness							
Quirks:	Loves to torment his victims (only if they're helpless). Doesn't like to use fire unless necessary. Hopes to use Lilandra as Commander of the Defensive Forces of his Father's Keep. Wishes he was brave enough to kill Sarash. Hates the Mac Arann clan more than any other.							
Wizard Powers:	Word: Rotting Death 15	Innate Attack 15	(1d-1 dam/turn)					
	Word: Death Daggers 14	Innate Attack 15	(2d-2 imp)					
	Word: Teleport 16	Body Sense 13						
	Summon Jaguar Spirit 15	Calling 15						
Shaman Powers:	Path of Protection	Spirit Guard	Night-Stalker Attacks Claw (x2): 16 1d+2 cut Bite: 16 2d-1 imp Kick: 4d-1 cut (only if both claws have connected)					
	Path of the Spirit	Sanctuary						
Assume all Path Rolls at 13	Path of Health	Ghost Shield						
	Path of Luck	Obscure						
	Path of Dreams	Steal Mind						
Magic:	(assume that he has all spells in College at minimum skill of 14.--Named spells are 18+)							

Figure 20-4: Part of Seraph's character sheet.

Minions

Without his Storm Troopers (or his Clones), the Emperor of the *Star Wars* universe would not have been anything more than a personal menace with a great need for a plastic surgeon and a better fashion consultant. And where would Sauron have been without his orcs? The great power of most Masterminds lies with their *minions* — the faceless hordes who exist to do (literally) only the Mastermind's bidding and work their evil upon the game world. The distinguishing feature of minions is that they are *generic*. Whether they're orcs, Storm Troopers, street thugs, robots, or everyday folk who are controlled by an intelligent virus, they are all basically the same and can be represented by a single set of statistics, as demonstrated by the minions displayed in Figure 20-5. In the figure, the columns are organized so that Bjoern can merely copy and paste the first row of each listing into the Combat Grid that he uses to manage tactical scenarios (as discussed in Chapter 14).

Figure 20-5:
The write-ups for two different types of minions in Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign.

Minion	Base Speed	Move	Ammo Left	Type Ammo	Current Fat	Current HP	Fatigue	Hit Pts	DR	Active Defense	Attack #1	Parry	Combat Skills	Combat Equip
Variations	IQ	DX	ST	HT	Will	Per	Man Dx	Advantages/Disadvantages	Attack #2	Parry	Combat Skills	Combat Equip		
Cat People		9.5	8		None			19	17	2	10	11		
(+1 to Speed, +2 to HF & Fat, +3 to Dam)		15	17	17	19	15	18	17	Combat Reflexes, 2x Jointed, Telepathy Pwr 15, In-Betweenner Invulnerability		Bite 17 2d-1 cut	XX	Mind Sword: 13 Id+1HT, 2d+1 Fat // Illusion 14 // Mental Blow 13 Id+1 Fat // Mental Stab 13 3HT	
Knights		7.25	3		Xbow			12	13	4	9	10		
(+2 Sw SC, +1 Dodge, +3 HP)		12	13	12	13	12	10	12	Combat Reflexes, Social Status II+		X-Bow: 15 1d+2 Imp	XX	Disarm 12, Feint 12, Hit Location 12, Wrestling 13, Arm Locks 13	20 X-Bow bolts, Chain Armor, 2-Hand Sw, Knife

For the most part, the figure shows you pretty much all you need for each classification of minion. Now, if your campaign distinguishes between “Orc: Tracker” and “Orc: Warrior,” then you may want to make separate entries for the different types of orc — that is up to you. The key thing here is that you can field literal *armies* of foes for your party — or even *dozens* of different combat scenarios — all using the same NPC minions over and over again.

You can create variations of one or two points in different stats, or even simply arm your minions with slightly different weapons — for example, substituting a Javelin for a Sabre. Little changes like this can be done on the fly and take next to no time to make, but they make the players believe that each foe is unique.

Making the Most out of the Good Guys — The Cronies

Your game world will be a very cold, inhospitable, and hostile place if the PCs don't have *someone* they can rely on for aid and comfort when the going gets tough. And you'll have a tough time keeping them motivated in their efforts if there isn't some kind of reward — beyond heaps and mounds of treasure — that they can experience, even if it is just official recognition from their peers, friends, and neighbors for a job well done. One way to help is through the use of *crony* NPCs. We're using the term *crony* to describe those NPCs who are friendly to or allied with the player characters and are supportive of their actions and adventures.

Like adversaries, crony NPCs come in several different categories:

- ✓ **Superiors:** More powerful characters, such as Patrons and rulers.
- ✓ **Equals:** Characters of a strength nearly equivalent to that of the party, such as Allies, companions, and Contacts.
- ✓ **Support Staff:** Characters weaker than the party, like Dependents, groups of weaker Allies, and other incidental personalities.

These categories are discussed more fully in the next few sections.

Patrons and Controls: Managing your plots

A *Patron* is an advantage and can either be a single NPC or an organization within the game world. In either case, the Patron has for some reason decided to look out for the best interests, causes, or well-being of the PC(s) with the advantage, and therefore, the Patron can be called upon for assistance. A *Control* is our word for a Patron that the PC owes a Duty to, and whom the GM can use to directly influence the actions of the PC and hence the development of the campaign. All Controls are Patrons, but not all Patrons are Controls. Throughout this section, we talk about decisions you need to make about Patron NPCs.

From a player perspective, a Patron can be a great investment of points — it gives that character someone who can be called to come charging in in the nick of time to save the character (and hopefully the rest of the party) from certain death. Sound good? It can be — sometimes too good.

As a GM, you need to think carefully whenever someone wants her character to get a Patron. Patrons can be a double-edged sword for the campaign if

they're not handled with caution. They can be a great means of giving the party the information or some fancy widget that it needs, and they can be great for pulling the party's bacon out of the fire if things go horribly wrong on an adventure. But they can also be potential sources of conflict between party members, especially if the Patron is a Control that pulls the PC's loyalties away from the party (which we think is never a good idea), or they can turn into a crutch for the GM who takes self-determination and personal responsibility away from the players, which can result in disgruntled and lazy players (see the sidebar, "Avoiding *deus ex machina*"). You should consider the following questions when setting up Patron NPCs in your campaign:

- ✔ **What is the nature of the Patron?** Is the Patron a single powerful individual, or an entire organization? If you choose to go with a single powerful individual, then you most likely will need to create the Patron as a fully developed NPC (just as if she were a Mastermind — or at least a mini-mind) because the chances are that on at least a few occasions, the Patron will wind up helping the PC during combat. If the Patron is an organization, then the party will deal with NPCs who are the agents of the Patron; in most cases, the agent characters can be handled simply by treating them as a template and then developing the objectives and strategic approach for the organization. Controls can be either individual or organizational Patrons.
- ✔ **What is the basis of the relationship between the player character and the Patron?** This is much more than the standard relationship between a boss and employee — the typical boss isn't going to stick his neck out to rescue an employee who has gotten into trouble during an off-the-clock adventure. Having a boss as a Patron is pretty much appropriate only if the PC was adventuring as a part of her job — in which case, the Patron is a Control. If a Patron is not in a Control position, the best way to think of the relationship is that the PC is the Patron's *dependent* — and to consider the nature of the relationship then as limiting the Patron's freedom to act against the PC's best interests.
- ✔ **Who gets to choose the identity of a character's Patron?** The benefit of letting the GM choose Patrons is that (hopefully) your party won't have two or more Patrons with conflicting interests or agendas. You can even use the same Patron for every party member who has the Patron advantage. Although the Patron advantage suggests guidelines for adjusting the usefulness of the Patron based on the proportion of the party for whom the Patron's appearance roll is a success, the reality is that if the Patron appears, the help will be shared among the entire party. The downside of this is that the Patron advantage, in effect, dictates that the entire party receives the benefits of associating with the Patron, whether the individual PCs have paid the points for the Patron or not. If you're inclined to use Controls, then we really recommend that you insist on determining — or at least approving the selection of — the identity of the Patron for each character.

- ✔ **Is the Patron advantage required for some or all of the PCs?** Requiring all PCs to have the Patron advantage is desirable or reasonable in many types of campaigns, especially if the Patron is a Control. It is perfectly reasonable to require everyone to take the Patron advantage if, for example, you run a Special Ops or Espionage campaign in which all the PCs are agents of some organization. Another similar type of campaign (requiring a Control) is one in which the game world has a feudal-style society; in these cases, an individual's social position is based upon whom he owes allegiance to and who owes allegiance to him. A character who does not have a Patron in a campaign of this type would be considered an outlaw or barbarian and viewed with hostility and fear. These are just a few examples; there are certainly other situations in which a campaign naturally demands that every PC take the Patron advantage — including the perfectly valid reason of GM whim. Another option we use when we want everyone in the party to share a Control is to describe the Control as a required Duty, which does not count toward the campaign's disadvantage limitations. The Duty is then balanced by a Patron and not recorded on the character's sheet. (For example, if your party has a 15 point Patron to whom they owe a -15 point Duty.)
- ✔ **What type of aid will the Patron grant to a player character?** A Patron can assist a PC in many ways that justify the expenditure of points for the advantage, perhaps too many. Some of the types of assistance that Patrons can provide are
 - Training in new skills
 - The use of expensive, experimental, or highly advanced equipment
 - Healing between adventures — perhaps even cloning or resurrection in the event of death
 - Refuge and sanctuary from pursuit
 - A venue to sell or fence the party's ill-gotten gains
 - A reliable source of information
 - Rescue when the PC is captured
 - Combat support when the going gets too rough

Regardless of what you decide, the parameters of the relationship should be spelled out with the PC at the outset. If the Patron is an elderly Sorceress who is willing to teach the PC new spells, she is most likely not going to be willing to also break into the Warlord's castle to break the PC out of the dungeon. Feel free to set whatever limits you wish upon exactly what support the Patron can provide a PC.

One of the benefits of using Patrons as Controls is that it creates a tremendous amount of leverage on both characters and players to pursue the plotline. So, your party refused to follow the clue (or they ignored it) that they needed to investigate the Old Crossroads Cemetery, did they? Not to worry, it

just so happens that the mage PC's Control (which is an arm of the Mages' Guild) has just ordered the player character to collect a vital spell ingredient; which just happens to be the dust on the tombstone of one specific grave . . .

One of the problems we have encountered with Patrons is that the players come to expect — and sometimes demand — that the Patron will do what they want. Now that they've identified the eldritch evil in the Old Farmhouse, say, they expect the Patron to go deal with it for them. Our response when this has happened is for the Patron to chuckle and say to the party, "You're right. I should take care of the matter. The assignment is yours." This, of course, is when the PCs' having a Duty to the Patron comes in so handy.

Both GMs and players need to keep the difference between plain old Patrons and Controls clear in their minds. To illustrate this, let's look at superspy 007 — the movie version, not James Bond as Ian Fleming wrote him. Who is Bond's Patron? If you immediately thought of MI6, you'd be only partially correct. Yes, Bond is an agent of MI6; he owes the agency an Extremely Hazardous Duty and takes his orders from M. But is MI6 his Patron? MI6 does not have a policy of sending other agents to extricate him from the clutches of the mad Mastermind *du jour*, but Mr. Bond does get all those nifty widgets from Q. And it is those widgets — whether it be the laser wristwatch or the nerve gas in the key ring — that James uses to win his way free.

So, yes, because of Q and his widgets, the Duty disadvantage is offset by a Patron advantage. Representing the relationship with both the Duty and the Patron emphasizes that MI6 is not only a Patron, but is a Control Patron. MI6 itself then has its own Patron — the British government, which is the route through which any tactical force aid must be provided.

Separately, in quite a few movies, a CIA agent named Felix Leiter shows up because he's on the same case as Bond. Even though they owe each other nothing and they work for different agencies for different countries, Felix is able to make available the logistical — and occasionally tactical — resources that Bond needs to complete his mission. Because the CIA ultimately furnishes these resources, we would argue that James has paid the points to take the CIA as a Patron as well as MI6 (or perhaps the U.S. Government as well as the British Government).

You should also always keep in mind the difference between the actual Patron and the *Patron's agent*. The actual Patron may never directly appear in the adventure. Keeping with the example of our favorite British spy, we can unequivocally state that no Bond movie has ever included either of Bond's Patron characters — the actual government organizations can, at best, only intervene by sending individuals to act on its behalf. Q certainly is not his Patron, because he acts only upon orders from someone else in MI6 (otherwise he'd never give Bond all those gadgets that Bond never manages to return). Q and various British forces that step in to help Bond are the Patron's agents in dealing with Bond, but not the Patrons themselves.

If you're creating a Patron who is a very powerful individual, you need to go through much the same process as you would to create a Mastermind — you really need to know what makes this person tick and be able to play him in a combat situation if that ever comes about. You may also want to create some additional lieutenants for the Patron as well. One thing you ought to think about with an individual Patron: What do you do if the Patron character dies?

Fourth-edition *GURPS* allows deities to act as Patrons as well. Such Patrons behave differently: they rarely (if ever) appear personally; their agents can be omens, passersby, or animals; and their favored ones owe them faith and devotion, if not a Duty. Most importantly, the god chooses what aid to give, and the supplicant's appeals to affect that choice are only as good as the player's role playing of the prayers.

Avoiding *deus ex machina*

Deus ex machina is a term from the Classical Greek and Roman theater. It refers to the character of a god who descends into the action of the play to suddenly resolve the situation and save the hero. In literature, it has come to mean an improbable, artificial, or unexpected device or character used by the writer to untangle a plot; it's a term usually loaded with contempt for a writer who let things get out of hand.

Some GMs are prone to use Patron or Ally NPCs as their own *deus ex machina* — usually either because they are unwilling to let the party members act as independent beings, or because they've allowed their campaign's plot to completely go off course. Anytime you feel tempted to have *any* NPC simply step in, take matters into their own hands, and fix things (even little things) for the party, you have succumbed to the lure of *deus ex machina*.

Please don't do this. When we've had GMs do this, we've quite frankly been insulted at the implication that we aren't capable of getting ourselves out of the mess we're in. Introducing an NPC as a *deus ex machina* makes us feel devalued, and it tends to cheapen the campaign

for us — if a GM does it more than a couple of times, we'll simply withdraw and refuse to play in that GM's campaigns any more. And *that* is the harshest criticism a GM can face.

How can you avoid getting to this point? You need to always remember that, although your players *think* they want the Patron to rescue their characters, what they *want* is for their characters to have the chance to rescue themselves. For example, if the character is imprisoned in the Dark Tower, you *could* have the Patron come blasting her way in to break the party free. If you do, the party may be grateful, but they will also be resentful; they will probably feel more like sidekicks and tag-a-longs rather than who they *should* be — the central characters in the campaign. Instead, the Patron could arrange to have a key to the dungeon smuggled into their cell. The party will still have to overpower the guards, fight their way to the exit, and make their escape. When or if the party does manage to win its way free, they will be jubilant at what they managed to accomplish with the assistance — not the interference — of the Patron NPC.

If the Patron is an organization, you will need to create a few characters who function as the Patron's agents; for 007, we'd make sure that we had the psychology (if nothing else) figured out for M, Q, and Money Penny on the MI6 side; for the CIA, we'd have a character sheet for Felix Leiter so we could use him in combat, as well as several different templates of SEALs, Marines, RAF, Navy, and shuttle-launched Space Rangers to act as the cavalry riding to the rescue.

Allies and Companions: Giving the party an edge

Within the James Bond universe, Felix Leiter isn't an Ally because his aid comes in the form of the resources of the CIA rather than his own abilities. A more appropriate character to think of as one of his Allies would be the character of Wai Lin, played by Michelle Yeoh in *Tomorrow Never Dies*. She is an agent for the External Security Agency of the People's Republic of China, but because of a shared agenda, she teams up with Bond to destroy Elliot Carver (a Mastermind who attempts to start a war between Great Britain and China in order to improve television ratings). Wai Lin doesn't bring the resources of her own organization to Bond's aid, merely her own considerable abilities.

Just like with Patrons, the Ally advantage gives a player character the benefit of the support of an NPC. The difference between the advantages is that the Ally is considered more of a peer than a superior. Allies typically cannot bring the resources of the Patron to the benefit of the player character; instead they bring their own presence and abilities to support the activities of the player character. We think of Allies as coming in three distinct flavors:

- ✓ Sidekicks
- ✓ Companions
- ✓ Ally groups

These are discussed more fully in the next few sections.

Sidekicks

Allies do not have to be combat-oriented characters. In fact, in our experience, Allies are most helpful to the PCs when they are primarily supportive noncombatants; hence the label of *sidekick*. Think of how important Watson is to Sherlock Holmes, Sancho Panza is to Don Quixote, or Alfred is to Batman, and you'll get what we mean. Supportive noncombatant NPC Allies can do a great deal in supporting the player character that they are allied to; whether it's providing a cover that allows the PC to go off adventuring, assured in the knowledge that his home and business life continues running like normal, or it's providing logistical and technical support for the PC during the adventure.



Although the player gets to determine whether his or her character gets an Ally, you may not want to let the player create the Ally character, and you certainly should not let the player determine the Ally's actions during play. If you do let the player create the Ally, you might want to consider making some changes to the character by the time the campaign starts and not allow the player to see the Ally's character sheet again. Sidekick Allies are not secondary PCs that exist solely for the benefit of the player's PC. They should be fully realized characters with the advantages, disadvantages, hopes, dreams, fears, and quirks of their own. Likewise, they should not simply acquiesce to the whims and demands of the PC; you need to give them personal lives of their own — lives that sometimes interfere with their usefulness to the players who paid the points for them.

Likewise, remember that an Ally NPC is the Ally only of the individual PC, not of the entire party. For example, in a party of costumed crime fighters, one of the player characters (who goes by the name of Amethyst) augments her own powers with the gadgets that she gets from an Ally who is a Gadgeteer. Just because Amethyst gets a bunch of cool toys to use on adventures doesn't mean that her friend is going to give them to the other party members. If the other players in the group start nagging the GM or Amethyst to get some of those goodies, the GM ought to let them have the goodies — and then charge them the character points to take the same NPC as an Ally.

We've seen many GMs keep the party's Allies completely in the background as personality-free cardboard cut-outs that can provide a needed service on demand but nothing else. This is a *huge* mistake. You can really make a mark on a campaign and make it memorable by doing more than throw new and bigger monsters at the party. What can make a campaign memorable is how much the players get emotionally invested in the lives of their characters, and Allies can go a long way toward creating that investment.

Companions

The official **GURPS** rules do not have a mechanism for (but do not prohibit either) another sort of Ally character that we have occasionally found very useful. To distinguish them from the conventional Ally, we call them *Companions*. Companion characters are NPCs who team up with the party for one or more adventures. They are created and run by the GM and could essentially be considered to be "PCs for the GM" (something very distinct from other types of NPCs). Their presence does not cost the players any points, and the players have no claim on dictating the actions of the Companion any more than they can dictate the actions of another PC.

As GMs, we insert a Companion into a party when we feel that the composition of the party needs rounding out. Perhaps your party consists of a bunch of bloodthirsty barbarians and you can't get anyone to create a character with adequate healing abilities. Or perhaps you've created an adventure that requires someone with a specific set of skills (or even a specific individual skill) that no one in the party has and you don't want to show your hand by even hinting that they learn them. Or maybe you just want to be able to be a player as well as GM. For whatever reason, a Companion is a perfectly acceptable NPC who gives you lots of opportunities for emotionally investing the players in the campaign.

Bjoern is notorious for creating an NPC who turns into a love interest for one of the party members, and includes the love interest in an adventure or two before having her go off to do something else, like becoming the sheriff of a small town — sometimes while still maintaining the relationship with the PC. When this happens, the party finds that they become bound up with the fortunes of the Companion, and this can be used as a hook to get the party involved in a scenario at any time in the future. If the paramour/sheriff NPC calls on the party for help because all of the corpses in the local cemetery are rising from their graves and attacking the living, the party will be much more immediately focused and involved in dealing with this threat than if they were called upon by an NPC that they have a more ambiguous relationship with.

Companions do not have to be “good guys.” If you want to instill a lot of paranoia in your party, give them a Companion who is a *sleeper* — an agent for one of the party's enemies who joins them, earns their trust, learns their secrets, and then betrays them to his true employer. If the party survives the experience, we guarantee that their level of paranoia will be ratcheted up by several degrees.

You can also insert Companions into a party with the deliberate intention of killing the NPC. Why? Depending upon the power level and tech level of your campaign, actually killing a PC during play can be very difficult. Also, we find that our players (including ourselves) tend to personally identify more with our **GURPS** characters than with characters we've created and played in other gaming systems. **GURPS** is designed so that players are prone to become much more emotionally invested in their characters. After all, they may have spent *weeks* fine-tuning the character before they began to play her. And **GURPS** campaigns tend to include more role playing than your average hack-'n-slash dungeon crawl, and that helps players identify with their characters as well. For whatever reason, having your **GURPS** character die can be a truly traumatic experience. The purpose of role playing games is to have fun, not to be traumatized, and killing PCs is not necessarily good for most campaigns.

But you don't want your players to start taking their invulnerability for granted. They need to *feel* the thrill and fear of death but may not need to *experience* it. You can solve this by including an NPC Companion who, when you feel it is appropriate or necessary, you target for death during combat. You don't want to do this often, and you don't want to go out of your way to slaughter an NPC Companion just to manipulate the party's emotions, but it is an appropriate and effective means of creating a campaign that your players will get excited about and invested in.



Don't let your Allies and Companions outshine and outperform the characters run by the players. As the GM, you have to be cautious when running any NPC Ally so that the character only knows the information that is appropriate for him to know. This requires you to develop a sort of multiple personality. Even if the party is stymied over a riddle, puzzle, or mystery, you should *never* have your Ally or Companion solve it for the party — doing so just becomes a form of *deus ex machina*. Check out the sidebar, “Avoiding *deus ex machina*,” to get the lowdown on this dangerous plot device.

Likewise, regardless of the die rolls, the Ally or Companion should not be the one to make the killing blow in combat or take the key action to resolve a situation because doing so takes that opportunity away from the players, and they will feel cheated. It is fine to have an NPC join the party in combat, but if you've made him so tough that he outshines the PCs, the players will resent you for it. (And if the NPC is a liability or is incompetent, they'll resent you even more.)

Ally Groups

Ally Groups are essentially the minions that a player character can acquire. The official **GURPS** rules state that an Ally Group consists of six or more identical and interchangeable NPCs that the player character can have at a “bulk discount.” This means that you essentially create a template to handle all NPCs covered by this advantage. We encourage you to go a little further in order to create the *appearance* that each member of the Ally Group is a unique individual without it affecting combat significantly. As an example, imagine that your campaign is based in an *urban blight* scenario in which thugs and street gangs are at the top of the social pecking order, and a PC decides to pay for the privilege of having one of those street gangs — the Screaming Leopards — as an Ally Group. The player pays the points for 6 to 10 NPCs, and you determine that the group has a total of 8 members, all with identical combat statistics. Table 20-1 shows the information you could come up with to individualize the different members of this group — at least as far as the player is concerned.

Table 20-1		The Screaming Leopards
<i>NPC #</i>	<i>NPC Name</i>	<i>Description</i>
SL1	George	Lieutenant of the gang. Coolheaded, street smart, cautious. Implacable when angry. Dresses impeccably and stylishly and wears a diamond stud earring.
SL2	Bobby	Troublemaker and loudmouth. Picks fights when he's bored. Undisciplined and sloppy. Drinks too much. Thinks he's a better hand-to-hand fighter than anyone else.
SL3	Frank	Likes to think of himself as a ladies' man. Uses too much cologne. Constantly trying to seduce Chrissy (see SL5, below). Has reputation as best marksman in the crew.
SL4	Tom	Practical jokester. Likes to set up elaborate situations to pull a prank. Constantly teasing other people. Gets angry when he is teased. Likes explosions.
SL5	Chrissy	Best driver and mechanic in the crew. Loves cars of all types. Can't stand Frank. She has the hots for George (see SL1) but is afraid to tell him.
SL6	Mikey	Best hacker in the crew. Constantly fiddling with computers. Hustles at billiards. Doesn't understand that other people don't speak binary. Acts as crew's medic.
SL7	Jesse	Good negotiator. Talks fast and thinks faster. Hates combat. Mother of a 2-year-old girl (Terry). Constantly concerned for Terry's safety.
SL8	Louise	Best at breaking and entering. Constantly stealing other peoples' stuff. Will fight viciously if cornered. Cheats (poorly) at poker.

With just a few lines of text per person, we've created eight unique personalities with their own strengths and weaknesses that don't affect how they are played in combat, but these "personalities" give the PC information that

makes each one seem different from the rest. Of course, if the PC had an Ally Group that was any larger than this handful of people, you wouldn't want to do a separate entry for each person, but you wouldn't have to. Simply having the profiles for a few different people is enough to keep most players feeling like you've worked like a dog to make each and every member of their Ally Group a unique individual.

Contacts: Providing information and resources

A Patron is willing to expend significant resources to see to the well-being of a PC. An Ally will go to considerable effort and risk on the PC's behalf. A Contact will do neither. According to the rules, a Contact provides information *or* does a favor for the PC, but only if that favor meets at least two out of these three criteria:

- ✓ It must be quick.
- ✓ It must be nonhazardous.
- ✓ It must be inexpensive.

Fortunately, Contacts — and Contact Groups — are, on the whole, less expensive than either Patrons or Allies.

Individual Contacts are categorized by their effective skill in *one* specific skill, and then by their Frequency of Appearance, and Reliability. Contact Groups are grouped the same way, except that rather than being called upon for only one skill, a Contact Group can be used for a single category of skills. For example, a PC could take the local Thieves' Guild as a Contact Group for information that could be known with a collection of Thief skills, rather than a specific thief as an individual Contact who could answer only the questions that a person with the skill of Pickpocket would know. Contact Groups are, therefore, much more useful — and they are five times more expensive than individual Contacts.

The key thing about Contacts is that neither the players nor their characters should be absolutely certain about the Contact's true allegiances or motivations. With the exception of Unwilling Allies (which cost significantly less) and the potential that a Companion Ally is an agent of their adversaries, the individual PCs can usually be pretty confident that their Allies and Patrons have the same, or similar, agendas as their own and are concerned for the PC's well-being.

However, the same cannot be said for Contacts. Each Contact has her own agenda that may or may not be sympathetic to the PC and his cause. This is in part covered by the Reliability rating for the Contact, which affects the total cost of the Contact. The lower the Reliability rating, the more likely the Contact will provide false information or notify the PC's enemy of the PC's interests.

We don't think that player characters should be able to determine the Reliability rating of their Contacts; player characters should *never* be certain about where they stand with a Contact. To reflect this, when a PC wants to acquire a Contact, we recommend dictating a point cost without breaking it down between skill level, Frequency of Appearance, and Reliability, and tell the player only the total point cost — not the breakdown.

Another difference among Contacts, Patrons, and Allies is that Contacts and Contact Groups expect more of an equal exchange of favors and information than Patrons or Allies. If a PC is not willing to make favors and information a two-way street, or is not willing to pay a bribe, then the Contact's well of information ought to start drying up. The official rules state that a bribe can give a +1 to +4 to the Reliability roll. We think that these bonuses should apply to a bribe (or service, or donation) that is *above* an equivalent exchange of favors between the Contact and the PC.

When we establish a Contact NPC (or Contact Group), then we make a brief entry with the name, what the PC knows of their affiliation, their effective skill level in which skill or group of skills, Frequency of Appearance, Reliability, and *the Contact's true allegiance* (based upon his or her Reliability rating). The player determines the Frequency of Appearance and Reliability based upon the number of points he paid for his character's Contact, but the GM (and *only* the GM) gets to determine where that Contact's true allegiance lies. For example, let's say the PC takes a Contact who is a local cop with a Reliability rating of *Somewhat Reliable*. That means he has some other agenda the party may not be aware of. Perhaps he is also on the payroll of a local mob boss. If he is, and he finds out that the party is investigating said mob boss, he is going to notify the gangster of the party's interest *regardless of the die roll*. Now, if the party is investigating another mob boss, he wouldn't necessarily let that person know — but if the mobster he's associated with goes down, then, as a crooked cop on the payroll, he will likely go down as well, and he's going to protect his own interests first, not the party's.

Leading the Party by the Nose — Dependable Dependents

We call Dependents “dependable” because, as GMs, we can always count on motivating the party with a threat to that Dependent’s well-being. And for Dependents to be a legitimate disadvantage that justifies their negative point value, the GM must — at least occasionally — integrate a threat to his well-being into the plotline of the campaign.

As the GM, you have the right — indeed it is part of your *job* — to put a limit on any disadvantage (including Dependents) that is not appropriate for your campaign. In some types of campaigns, a PC having a Dependent is very inappropriate — and highly improbable — especially a high-point-value Dependent, which is almost always a small child. Most responsible parents, if they know they have to go into danger, will find an alternate caretaker for their children while they’re away, in which case the parent no longer has a Dependent because someone else has assumed temporary responsibility for the child.

Keep in mind that there is a difference between a situation where the *player* knows that the character will be taking a Dependent into danger, and where the *character* knows he will be taking a Dependent into danger. For example, there is a significant difference between starting a campaign with a character and his small daughter boarding a plane bound for London — even though the *player* suspects that the plane is going to end up someplace like the Bermuda Triangle — and a character and his small daughter boarding an experimental FTL ship en route to explore the vast unknown. In the first example, the character does not know he’s putting his child at risk, and the Dependent is a perfectly legitimate disadvantage. In the second, he’s knowingly and willingly putting his daughter into a dangerous situation, and we would rule that the character could earn no character points for as long as the child was at risk.

Of course, many more types of relationships exist between a PC and her Dependent than simply parent and child; that’s simply the most easily described and understood. If a player is interested in taking a Dependent, you should encourage him to consider some of the other options as well. Anyone can be a Dependent for a PC, provided the Dependent has a lower point value than the PC and the PC has accepted responsibility for that NPC’s welfare and safety.

All disadvantages exist to create problems for the characters — a disadvantage that doesn't create problems shouldn't be worth any points. Dependents, like Enemies, have the added appeal of causing problems completely under the control of the GM and can therefore be easily adapted to further the campaign's plotline. However, the kidnap-the-hero's-kid-so-that-he-has-to-brave-the-terrors-of-the-bad-guy's-domain-to-rescue-the-kid scenario can only be used once or twice before it gets stale. The Dependent disadvantage is still worth your time, though, considering other ways you can use a character's Dependents to cause him pain.

Keep in mind that Dependents are *supposed* to be free-willed beings — they are not merely appendages of the PC who gained the points for the disadvantage. They should have minds of their own, their own opinions, agendas, motivations, and behavioral problems, all role played by you, the GM. And the existence of the Dependent should cause problems for the campaign every time you make the Frequency of Appearance roll for that particular Dependent.

Including infants in a campaign would bring an adventure to a standstill — there'd be no time for adventuring between stinky diapers, feedings, bathing, colic, and all the other joys of parenthood — but you can include older Dependents to make the PCs miserable without needing to involve an Enemy. Teenagers (whether they are your character's children, students, or apprentices) are going to be alternately sulky and rebellious and will need to be dealt with regularly, even if it's at a highly inappropriate time. Elderly or infirm Dependents can inadvertently create chaos and disruption with their health issues. Even healthy, active adult Dependents can decide that they want a raise or have a policy dispute and require mediation *right now*, even if it is inconvenient for the character. And consider the implications of the mage's Dependent who begins studying dark and forbidden magics against the PC's wishes.



We've seen GMs set up scenarios that have been downright sadistic in the ways they've used Dependents to motivate or manipulate the party's actions and emotions. *GURPS* allows for so great a degree of character identification that GMs need to be careful when using Dependents in this way, or they risk traumatizing the *players* by the situation. Whenever possible, you should go for the *threat* of harm rather than the *infliction* of harm. You'll usually get responses from the party that are just as strong (sometimes stronger) with this threat as they would be with the actual infliction, and you save the NPC for use again at a later date.

Preventing Dependent abuse

We've found that players try to overinflate the point value of a Dependent more often than any other means of abusing the system, and we have become pretty harsh and conservative in what value we will set on a Dependent. Keep in mind that the point value of a Dependent is widely variable, depending upon the Dependent's competence, importance to the PC, and frequency of appearance. As a disadvantage, Dependents can be as insignificant as -1 point, or they can be worth as much as -120 points! Be very careful about what you approve in the way of Dependents and consider the following:

As a standard baseline from personal experience, we use being a single parent and sole caretaker of an infant as being worth -90 points. This means that the Dependent character is essentially a 0-point or lower character (at that time) that has absolutely no ability to take care of even its most basic needs (which is worth -15 points). It is a loved one, and its well-being takes priority over all other considerations (which doubles the point value to -30 points), and — with no other ongoing caretaker — it needs care and attention 95% of the time (rolling a 15 or less), which equates to 22.8 hours a day, during which time the PC better try and rest (1.2

hours of sleep a day is just about what new parents seem to get for the first few months). When is a PC going to have time to go on an adventure with that kind of responsibility?

Now, imagine your player says, "My character's mother can watch the baby at least a few hours a day." At this point, we chuckle evilly. It will be great if Grandma takes care of the baby for 6 hours a day, which is 25 percent of the time; that's fairly close to being a "Quite often" Frequency of Appearance roll (12 or less, or 74 percent of the time). That means that the value of the darling child as a Dependent just dropped from -90 points to -60 points.

The point we're trying to make here is that the greater the value of the Dependent, the more that Dependent is going to consume *anyone's* available time and energy, and we really dislike the concept of a PC bringing a completely helpless infant into an adventure. Even a young child (who is at least potty-trained, can feed himself, and can run away in case of danger) is significantly better, and can be justified (for a single parent as sole caretaker) for as much as -60 points, but no more.

Encountering the Outré — NPCs Who Really Stand Out

Some of the most fun we've had with NPCs — as players and as GMs — has been with those characters who didn't have a point-based or plot-defined relationship with anyone in the party. We can't imagine a game world in which every character that the PCs are going to meet is going to be either allied with them or arranged against them. The vast majority of them are going to be neutrally disposed, and — while they may not advance a specific

plotline — you can have a lot of fun spending one session or several sessions with the PCs getting to know some interesting and eccentric characters in your world. And sometimes you can hide a significant plot device in the guise of a seemingly irrelevant encounter.

Even in the most serious and convoluted campaigns, there is room for whimsy, fun, and having a good laugh. Sometimes what a party needs isn't a new deadly peril to face, but an absurdity to unravel and enjoy. The players will remember the bizarre but harmless encounters much more than they will remember another dungeon full of nameless dread.

Providing Background Texture — Extras and Walk-ons

Finally, the last group of NPCs to discuss are all the other people in the world who are not in the least involved with the cares and conflicts that consume the party, otherwise known as the 99.99-percent majority. In most campaigns, these characters barely exist even in the mind of the GM, let alone in the player's consciousness. A world where the vast majority of people aren't considered, described, or integrated is mostly colorless and of interest only to those gamers who want the hack-'n-slash dungeon-crawl, Monty Haul style. (In other words, a world with plenty of foes to kill, no real thought or character development, and an obscenely undeserved amount of treasure and magic available.)

Creating the people in the background really isn't that big of a deal if you give it just a little bit of thought. You should start during the world-design stage of your campaign development and come up with (at least) one visibly distinctive quality about the style or fashion of dress for people in your culture. For example, in *Avonlea*, every adult of either gender (except for women who were pregnant or nursing) always wore a knife (called a *skeiyn dbuh*) prominently upon their person as a sign that they were ready to defend their own honor, even in a fight to the death. Anyone who did not wear a knife (and who wasn't willing to fight for their honor) could not be legally murdered, but was considered to be a dishonorable coward and was treated as a social outcast with a disfiguring communicable disease. Having this visually distinctive feature gives you an anchor to start building people's awareness of others. What is the condition of this or that person's *skeiyn dbuh*? Where is it worn? Are there regional differences for how or where it is worn? What does it mean when there's a green jewel in the pommel of a person's *skeiyn dbuh*? You don't have to come up with definitive answers for any of these questions, just let your players *think* that there are definitive and significant answers without telling them anything.

Next, we create a template for the Average-Joe-in-the-street and then a list of 15 or 20 NPC personalities, much like we did for the Ally Group in Table 20-1. This just contains information like name, gender, social status, occupation, condition of *skeiyn dbuh* (if it were *Avonlea*), one thing this person likes, and one thing this person dislikes. In *Avonlea*, it was vital to also list their clan and domain affiliations, but you certainly don't need to go that far.

Whenever the party is in an environment where they need to interact with the locals, have this list available. If they need to talk to someone, roll to randomly pick one person from this list (or pick someone deliberately, it doesn't matter) and assume that persona. You have enough information to describe them visually because the party has a cultural anchor to connect to (like the *skeiyn dbuh*), and you'll be surprised how quickly you'll be able to fall into the role and begin ad-libbing that character's personality to have that simple chat with the player character. You might think it was simple, but your players will be very impressed and get more interested in the game world and its people because of it.

Populating your game world with a cast of seemingly unique individuals doesn't have to take a lot of work. Remember that you're creating an illusion that your players *want* to believe. Give them one distinctive thing about each NPC they meet — whether it's while clanking beer steins together in toast at the local tavern, or crossing swords in mortal combat — and your players will come to care about your world as if they really lived in it. Then, when your Mastermind sends his hordes of Lovecraftian terrors into the streets to feast on the brains of the innocent, the party will be much more horrified and determined to protect the people at all costs.

Chapter 21

Flavoring Your Campaign

In This Chapter

- ▶ Creating campaigns that are a feast for the imagination
 - ▶ Making your game world a unique environment
 - ▶ Creating your own skills, advantages, and disadvantages
 - ▶ Creating character and racial templates
 - ▶ Using character backgrounds to get players emotionally invested
-

By now we hope that you are aware that we believe that the traits that distinguish a good GM from a great GM do not include the ability to create bigger and nastier monsters or bigger and more spectacular treasure. We believe that the key to being a great GM is the ability to craft a campaign into an experience of shared storytelling that gets the players emotionally invested in the plot to the point at which they aren't concerned with the immediate rewards of treasure or character points but in the ability to achieve their characters' objectives.

In the previous chapters of Part V, we walk you through many of the most significant issues you have to address if you're going to create a game world and campaign of your own. While addressing these different issues, we repeatedly touch on the importance of creating a game world that has the illusion of vitality and life and involves the players as much in the minutiae of characters' lives as in the great and epic events that the PCs (hopefully) experience. Probably the best term to describe this quality is *flavor*.

A good role playing game ought to feed the imagination like a feast feeds the body. Any gourmet can tell you that flavor is much more than just taste; it embodies the entire sensory experience of sight, texture, smell, temperature, and even sound. A great campaign is one that has a full, rich emotional flavor that captures and delights the imaginations of the players the same way a sumptuous feast captures and delights the appetites of the feasters.

In the previous chapters, we talk about the basics of building a game world, developing a plotline, and creating NPCs that your players will talk about for years to come. In this final chapter of Part V, we try to give you the final tools you need to turn your campaigns into truly remarkable feasts for your players' imaginations.

Setting the Mood

Great GMing demands true artistry. Being a great GM is like being a great novelist, musician, painter, or filmmaker; each one has the ability to convey specific emotions that the player, reader, listener, or viewer directly experiences. This is the *mood* of a campaign; it is not something that you can write into a world description, plotline, or NPC write-up. Creating a mood depends on your *delivery* during the actual gaming sessions and requires that you be descriptive, adaptive, flexible, and able to impersonate different characters at the drop of a hat.

Don't be intimidated. It really doesn't have to be difficult, and everyone improves with practice. The key quality that you *must* bring to your Game Mastering in order to convey emotional content is a vivid imagination and the ability to *see* the scenarios in the campaigns. One of the things that all of the great GMs we've known have in common is that they have the ability to visualize the settings and characters of their game worlds and then can convey their vision to their players. It is not enough to simply describe a setting to your players, you need to — at least part of the time — paint a verbal picture of the scene for them.

Adding special effects

There are other tricks you can use to manipulate your player's emotions. For example, if the gaming session occurs in your home, you can manipulate the thermostat and lighting levels to affect the moods of your players. If you turn the thermostat down a few degrees (enough to give the players a slight chill), they will tend to be more fearful; and if you turn it up a few degrees (enough to make them slightly sweaty), they will tend to be more belligerent. If the room you use for gaming has a rheostat on the lights, you can set it at a level that is just slightly dimmer than comfortable — while still allowing people to read clearly — and many people will experience some feelings of anxiety because they're struggling on a subconscious level in order to see; and lights that are just slightly too bright will have an entirely different effect.



Of course, individual responses will be unique; these are simply very general observations based on the people we've gamed with. Please note that all of these techniques work only if you are subtle and sparing in their use. If the players figure out what you're doing, these techniques will no longer be as effective — and may alienate some people as well. Be careful using them.

As the producers and directors of movies and television shows can attest, using the appropriate background music can be a powerful tool for inducing the desired emotional responses from your players. No, we're not going to

Fright checks, critical failures, and other tables

Imagine that you're playing in a campaign in which the GM has done a good job of creating an emotionally engaging milieu, and you and the other players have become engrossed in the action. You're in the middle of combat, people are excitedly chattering, and the adrenalin is running high; a couple of party members have already fallen and you're afraid that your party might not make it. Your character is suddenly attacked by something particularly scary, and the GM calls for you to make a Will roll. You roll your dice and . . . oh no! An 18! That is 5 over your character's Will! Your character is in trouble and your breath catches as your heart leaps into your throat in fear. You grip the arms of your chair waiting to hear the bad news. You hear the ominous rumble of dice from behind the GM screen and then you wait, almost ready to scream in anxiety.

Finally, the GM looks up from behind the screen, looks at you and says, "Uh, the Fright Check table says that you panic and are going to run around screaming or you can sit down and cry for 1d minutes. You can make another Will roll to get over it then."

What?

What a let down! It sounds absurd, but you probably feel gyped. Not by the result of the Fright Check roll, but by how the GM conveyed those results. Reading those results from the book almost verbatim disrupted the illusion that the GM had worked so hard to create. Although it certainly didn't affect the outcome of the battle, now you don't care quite as much as you did a moment ago because the reality of the game and the rules intruded at one of the most emotionally charged moments.

So how should the GM have handled it? Start with an evil chuckle. The GM then says, "You lose it. You lose it completely. You stop thinking or caring about anything but getting away. You forget about the battle, you forget about your friends, you even forget about the *Toilet Brush of the Elder Gods*. You start screaming hysterically. You throw whatever you have in your hands to the ground and you start running. Oh, later on — if you survive (again, an evil chuckle) — you'll discover that you wet yourself in the process."

GURPS uses several tables to provide the results for especially good and bad die rolls (critical successes, critical failures, backfires, and so on) to determine the part of the body struck by untargeted attacks (Hit Location table) and to determine the results of losing control of one's fear (Fright Check table). Using these tables can significantly enhance the quality of playing the game, but only if they are handled appropriately.

Regardless of how well you immerse your players in your game world, even the most adept GMs can find it difficult to have to suddenly translate the official rules into how they affect the imaginary reality of the game world.

It takes flexibility, quick thinking, and imagination, but we urge you to strive to keep the rules from affecting the game. Take the results of those tables and do your best to translate them into descriptions of the way the effects manifest in your game world. Your players will thank you for it.

give you a playlist of the best music for each milieu and mood — you can do that for yourself. But just keep it in mind as you’re developing your campaign. We suggest that you also play the appropriate mood music throughout the process of creating your game world, building your campaign, and writing your adventures. This is a good way of auditioning recordings for your scenarios and may generate emotional responses that stimulate your imagination. You may want to create a list of musical pieces you want to associate with specific parts of your adventure and include the list in your campaign notes.

There are many more things you can do to set the mood for your players. Try as many as you can think of. Yes, they require you to do more work, and there is always the potential that your efforts will be flat-out failures, but the satisfaction of knowing that you have been able to create a campaign that your players talk about for years to come (or even better, a campaign that causes your players to dream about their characters after the gaming sessions) is more than ample reward for most GMs.



If your campaign is based on a movie or television series — or even just heavily influenced by a movie or TV show — one thing you can do to set the mood is to set up your gaming group to have a “Movie Night.” Get everyone together, load the DVD of the movie or show, and allow your players to get immersed into the milieu. If your campaign is based on a TV series, you could start each gaming session with an episode of the TV show to get the players in the mood.

Thinking outside the box: Who says the world has to be round?

In a very early session of one of Adam’s campaigns, he announced to the group that the world we were adventuring in was not a sphere — it was shaped like a burrito. Furthermore, this world possessed two moons; one moon was the home of the gods of this world, and the other moon was a world-sized sleeping serpent coiled in on itself.

These little tidbits of information never came to practical use in this particular campaign — our party never tried to circumnavigate the burrito, and we never tried to travel to either moon — but it still altered the players’ awareness of the game world. If there was such a profound change in something so fundamental as the shape of the world, that meant that natural phenomena could not be predicted to act the way we expect phenomena to act on Earth, and we couldn’t take even something so basic as gravity for granted. We had to let go of our assumptions about anything — not only in comparing Adam’s game world to the real world, but also in comparing Adam’s game world to any other game world.

Avonlea visualization

"I would like you all to sit back, get comfortable, and close your eyes. Take a deep breath and let it all the way out, letting out tension as you exhale. Relax. I want you to use the inner eye of your imagination to see the world that I will describe: the world of Uerth, the world of *Avonlea*.

"You get to first experience Uerth the same way that the Dalesmen of *Avonlea* first encountered their land: by entering through a Gate. In your mind, I want you to see a rectangle of darkness that appears to have depth to it; it is encased in a frame of light that sparks and flashes as if it were a conduit of static electricity, except that you've never seen an electrical charge that glowed this shade of orange. You take another deep breath, let it out slowly, and step into the deep black, and your awareness of this world vanishes and you find yourself *elsewhere*.

"The air smells much different than what you're used to. It is cleaner, richer, more primal. You smell a mix of ozone, pine sap, crushed moss, and the scent of rain. The air is damp and sends chills up your arms and along the back of your neck. You look back and see the rough-hewn stone of a dolmen altar; the vertical stones are at least twelve feet tall and at least five feet in diameter, the crosspiece is of equal size and weight. All three stones are a rich, royal blue; a color you've never seen appear in natural stone on your home world. Inside the menhir, you see the same crackling orange light before it quickly fades away to nothing. You see that you are surrounded by other dolmens that are basically identical to the one you just stepped through; there are at least ten other portals formed into a ring, but at the moment they are all quiescent. Your gaze rises to look beyond the dolmen

circle, and you see that you are surrounded by tree-covered hills on all sides.

"From your vantage point, you can see millennia-old cedar trees reaching hundreds of feet into the air, and with a trunk diameter larger than many houses. You see hemlock with needles that are such a dark green it appears almost black. You see a species of oak, and another of ash, and birch as well. The forest you see is alive with the sounds of bird calls, the cry of deer, and the cough of something that can only resemble a leopard. You can literally *feel* the life surging, ebbing, dancing, and twirling through the trees and around you; with just a little effort, you can see the nature spirits — called *High Ones* on this world — who are the embodiment of the life force and reside in every tree, shrub, and unhewn rock.

"You look up and catch your breath. It must be daytime, for there is more than enough light, and yet the sky is a deep blue, of the shade called *royal*, and you can see a handful of stars shining in the day's sky. You locate the Sun; it is a dim orange ball that produces a richer — and dimmer — light than you are used to. You see that this world has not one, but five moons of different sizes and colors — scarlet, bluish green, greenish blue, honey and cream, and a rich vibrant violet — and they are scattered along the sky like the marbles cast by a careless, giant child. And you see, east to west in the southern quadrant of the sky, a shimmering translucent arch that glows golden against the dark blue of the sky. When you see that arch, a name springs into your mind. That name is The Bridge of the Gods, and you know that it is directly above the equator and encircles the entire world."

We want you to realize that you are free — not only free, but encouraged — to make *any* changes to the nature of your game world to match the vision you have of your campaign. This not only enhances the uniqueness of your campaign, but it encourages your players to become emotionally invested in your campaign; and as your players become more emotionally invested, they are also more susceptible to your attempts to convey the desired mood. Why is that?

If gaming is meant to be a feast of the imagination, and the game world is identical to the real world, it's more difficult to fully engage the full strength of our imaginations. This doesn't mean that you need to run your campaigns in the *Bizarro* universe of DC Comics. Very small changes can have a profound effect, but only if the players are able to incorporate the alteration into how they imagine your game world to be.

One very powerful way to do this is to start your campaign by taking your gaming group through a guided visualization to describe your game world. The sidebar, “*Avonlea* visualization,” gives you the text that Bjoern used when he did this at the start of the *Avonlea* campaign. This demonstrates only one of several different ways you can start feeding your players' imaginations with how different your game world really is.

Filling in character backgrounds

In the days of our misspent youth (translation: the pre-**GURPS** years of role playing games), pretty much every campaign started out with the PCs just arriving in the adventure locale as total strangers — not even knowing each other. We always played our PCs in a vacuum; we rarely shared a background with another PC and had no personal history with any of the NPCs we encountered. Even when we played in campaigns based in our characters' theoretical homelands, we never met the kinsfolk, friends, or associates who knew our characters before the campaign began.

GURPS changed a lot of this; players have always had the option of taking socially based advantages and disadvantages that demand the PCs be located in areas where they are known to the locals, have a reputation, jobs, and probably family. But still, in our experience, most **GURPS** GMs limit the NPCs from our characters' pasts to those individuals who have been specified as Patrons, Allies, Dependents, Contacts, or Enemies. Usually, most other relatives are kept strictly in the shadows. We urge you to change that.

One thing that we've discovered gets players *very* invested in their characters and in the game world is requiring them to write a biography for their characters. With these bios in hand, you can interweave the characters'

backgrounds into your campaign scenario. Players get a whole different perspective on an adventure when (for example) one of the members of the street gang they're squaring off against is a childhood friend. Or if the victims of the hideous attacks staged by the Mastermind's minions happen to belong to the family of a business rival of a PC's parents. It requires more work, but it really is worth it.

For example (returning to Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign once again), at the beginning of the campaign, three of the players had decided to play women who were members of the Kindred (the ruling caste). On further discussion, they decided that the three women would be half-sisters — each sharing a common father and a different mother. (In *Avonlea* society, it was a common practice for a man to have a single legal wife and multiple concubines — the children of the concubines were of lesser status than the wife's children, but were still legitimate.) Because of this decision, the GM and involved players sat down and created the sisters' families: father, mothers, sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents — to four generations out. Because everyone involved were members of the ruling caste, and all marriages had to be made outside of one's own clan, this family tree ended up linking the sisters by blood or marriage to nearly half the Land Rulers in the country. Granted, they were pretty insignificant, "shirttail" relatives, but they still could claim kinship with the sovereign ruler of nearly every place they visited — which created more plotseeds, adventure leads, political shenanigans, and trouble for the party than they had ever imagined. Yes, the party did end up attending a family reunion, where they got ample demonstrations that the three sisters' families were just as dysfunctional as any real family.

It also gave the entire party an emotional anchor in the well-being of the sisters' family members (many of whom they got to know over time as they repeatedly mooched off of the family's hospitality). Not only did the characters get upset if some of Sariel's minions attacked the estate of one of the sisters' siblings or cousins, but the *players* themselves took those attacks as personal insults. These people would get truly and deeply upset when, as happened in one circumstance, they received a report that one of the sisters' cousins had been murdered by one of their enemies. And when they heard that the domain ruled by the sisters' grandmother was about to be taken over by an imposter, they dropped everything in order to race to save — not their grandmother, who was dying anyway, but something even more important — the prestige and property claimed by their clan.

Frankly, this is a rather extreme situation; not all campaigns benefit by having nearly half of the characters in the party be closely related to each other. But nearly every campaign can be significantly strengthened and made more interesting if the GM integrates the characters' backgrounds — and the people from a characters' past — into the campaign.

Adding details: Hemlines, haberdashery, and upholstery

As far as we are aware, the only gaming milieu that regularly pays attention to issues like style and fashion in the game world is *cyberpunk*, in which most characters are not only typically cybernetically enhanced killers, but much of their reputation can depend upon how stylish they are — both in their enhancements and in their combat techniques. This is a shame, and we urge all **GURPS** GMs — regardless of campaign style or milieu — to spend the time and energy to incorporate details about clothing styles, interior design, fashion, and general artistic trends for their game worlds.

Using style, fashion, and design adds a level of richness and detail to a game world (which is exactly what we've been harping about all through Part V), and some other considerations for doing so are dependent upon milieu and style of campaign. In the following list, we mention the ones that we consider most important:

- ✔ **Historical authenticity:** If your campaign is set on the streets of Imperial Rome, your players need to visualize what their characters are wearing. What exactly is a toga, and who wore them? What about those funky skirts all the Roman soldiers wear in the movies? What did women wear? You need to be able to answer these questions and — unless you are emphasizing that your campaign is in an *alternate* Rome — you probably ought to be as historically accurate as possible. You'll be best served if you provide this information as part of the initial background information.
- ✔ **Social conformity:** With its absence of sumptuary laws, our modern culture is actually a historical anomaly because most human cultures throughout history have had such laws in place. A *sumptuary law* legislates the modes and styles of dress that the society considers acceptable for people of different social classes. Specifically, sumptuary laws existed to prohibit people from the lower social classes from wearing the styles, articles of clothing, or colors that a particular society reserved as a prerogative of a higher social position. For example, in the ancient Celtic lands, a person's social status determined the number of colors that could be used to trim his cloaks. The higher the status, the more colors were permitted; only the very highest-ranking people were permitted to have their cloaks trimmed with five colors.

If your game world is rigidly stratified, then sumptuary laws most likely exist, and if someone in the party wants to impersonate someone of a higher social status, they will be breaking the law simply by putting on the clothes they'd need to play the role. This is much more effective in terms of play if the players know what styles of clothes each social class is permitted and expected to wear.

Inspiring players: Veils

In recent chapters we recommend that you establish during the world-creation phase at least one culturally significant accessory or article of clothing that can be used as a touchstone for the characters in your campaign. In Chapter 20, we talk about the *skeiyn dbuh*, or “honor knife,” in Bjoern’s *Avonlea* campaign. Another example from *Avonlea* is the veil.

As he was creating the world of Uerth for the *Avonlea* campaign, Bjoern decided that women in his world were much more likely than men to be mages and telepaths, and Telepathy was the more common ability of the two. This would cause women of Power to be both revered and feared by the general populace because they wielded powers that could strip bare the innermost secrets of a person’s mind, and eye contact was believed to be the most common mechanism for connecting with another person’s mind. So, within *Avonlea* society, it became customary for women of Power or high Status (which meant to be a member of the Kindred caste) to go veiled in public — not due to a demand for modesty, but to insulate the woman from the fears and anxieties that could

overwhelm a telepathic sensitive, and to lessen the fears of the common people by protecting them from eye contact with these powerful women.

In the actual *Avonlea* campaign, the players created four characters who should — by the customs of the culture — wear veils, even though one of the characters was a fencer who started the campaign with very little in the way of paranormal ability, and another was primarily a warrior even though she was also a telepath. This led to some interesting discussions between the players about how their characters would wear — and keep from disarray — their veils while in combat, and there was a constant tension because one of these characters had a quirk that she would go out without her veil — much to the consternation of her older sisters!

We provide this example to show how using an idea as simple as “women of power or high social status will always go veiled in public” can be a vehicle for role playing and for inspiring the players’ interest and imagination.

✔ **Subtle messages and codes:** Traditional Japan is an excellent example of a culture that is so elegantly complex in its simplicity that an individual can communicate a significant amount of information by how she wears her clothes. For example, in some game worlds the way the belt of a robe is tied may convey specific messages — anything from “I will love you forever” to “I have taken out a contract to have you murdered.” Any game world that has a society that is even remotely similar to traditional Japan ought to incorporate such a degree of subtlety; and not by the GM simply saying, “the way she tied her kimono means that you really ought to check your ammunition levels.” The GM can develop a code and give the players a translation key and then describe what a character is wearing so that the players have to figure it out using the key — likewise the players should be required to describe what the PCs are wearing when they’re sending messages through this medium as well.

- ✔ **Affiliations and allegiances:** Woven cloth was incredibly valuable to pre-technological societies, and weavers jealously guarded the many secrets of its making. In some cultures, each family knew a specific weave pattern that they taught only to their younger family members; in these cultures, a person's family could be identified simply by the weave of the clothing they were wearing. The best-known example of this is the clan tartans of Scotland, but other cultures have similar — and much more subtle — customs. Heraldry also falls into this category; if your game world uses heraldic devices such as coats of arms, we consider it worthwhile to spend the time to come up with a description of the devices that are most germane to the campaign.
- ✔ **Clues in a mystery:** In classic mystery literature, sleuths frequently detect inconsistencies in the way the clothing is worn. Of course, one of the greatest difficulties that we've seen in GMing a mystery campaign is how the GM can convey the information about the vital clues without giving away that they *are* clues simply by mentioning them. You can handle this by creating a game world that has specific customs or rules about how clothing is properly worn (such as in traditional Japan). This information would then be emphasized through the world description, character creation, and early sessions in the campaign — the goal here isn't to give the players each and every specific datum about the culture's fashions, it is to give them enough information that they know which questions to ask. Then you can let the players know that the only information they'll get is information that they actually ask about.

Like with every other aspect of your game world, you are free to make your own decisions about the fashions of your world. If you want to try for true authenticity in your campaign, then you need to do a fair bit of research. But don't be afraid to be only partly authentic. Feel free to make stuff up. Do you want to have your Roman legions wear beanie caps? You are certainly free to do so. Put beanie caps on your legionnaires, and if any of your players claim that it doesn't make any sense, just remind them about how much sense men's neckties truly make.

We consider interior design to be just as important for the flavor of your campaign as clothing styles. The more you can impart to the players a sense of the nature of their surroundings, the more that they can imagine themselves in your world. This can cover architectural style and how buildings are organized, as well as little things like upholstery styles — it all helps build the shared reality for the imaginations of you and your players to romp in.

Creating Your Own Skills, Advantages, and Disadvantages

One way to create a totally unique flavor for your campaign is to introduce an advantage, disadvantage, or skill that is totally unique to your game world. This is a *lot* of work and has a high potential of unbalancing the campaign, so it is not something that we recommend that you do lightly. *GURPS Basic Set: Characters* gives you some very good guidelines on how to modify or create new advantages (pages 117–118) and disadvantages (pages 165–166). We suggest that you start there if you want to do this.

Sometimes all you need to do is add a *special effect* to an existing ability (advantage, disadvantage, or skill) that has very little impact on game mechanics. For example, Bjoern wanted the mages in his *Avonlea* campaign

Tips that make your players care about their characters

Whether or not the players of any particular campaign are able to become emotionally invested in their *GURPS* characters is in large part dependent upon how much the GM allows them to become so. Emotions rarely happen in a vacuum, and most people need emotional anchors before they engage their feelings on behalf of an imaginary person. The GM provides the framework that allows the players to find these anchors, and then it is up to the GM to permit some playing time for establishing and maintaining those anchors. The following list provides you with five tips that give players emotional anchors to their characters. None of these tips needs to be taken as either an advantage or a disadvantage, and theoretically they won't create complications to your plotline, but they can have a big effect on your players' experience and enjoyment of your campaign.

✔ **Define their ambitions:** When it comes time for the players to write a character background, ask them to include a description of

that character's motivations, ambitions, and personal goals. If these give you an idea for an adventure that you can reasonably include in the campaign, write in opportunities for the characters to explore — and maybe even achieve — these objectives.

✔ **Build a home:** If it is appropriate during character creation, have the players create a floor plan of the place where their characters live, subject to your approval, of course. If, during the course of an adventure, they take over some place that would be an appropriate headquarters/home for the party, let them have the floor plans from the adventure and insist that they spend some time with any redecorating or remodeling (and make them pay for it, of course). If they decide to acquire a building that wasn't part of an adventure, you can make them create the floor plan themselves. Again, this is subject to your final approval and modifications.

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- ✔ **Bring in the family:** During the process of character creation, sit down with each player and come up with a list and description of each character's family, including both living and dead relatives. If the character is an orphan, make the player write a description of what the character knows of her childhood, how she became an orphan, and who ended up raising her. Choose a few of the people on the family lists to use as walk-on NPCs and have them show up occasionally, not as no-point Dependents (although you can do that, too), but simply as family members maintaining relationships. This is most interesting and entertaining if you make sure that these families are *dysfunctional*; use the character's mental disadvantages and quirks as your guide to what those dysfunctions might be.
- ✔ **Define friendships and romantic relationships:** Do the same thing with voluntary relationships as you did with family of origin. If the player wants her character to be in a committed relationship but has not taken the spouse as an Ally or Dependent, have her explain the nature of the relationship and why the spouse either is unable to assist the character or is completely safe from danger.

Remember that Allies can cost as little as 1 character point, and Dependents can be worth as little as -1 character point. A -1-point Dependent is essentially a quirk and could be a girlfriend who periodically calls the PC on his cell phone — usually at an inconvenient time.

- ✔ **Give them hobbies:** Everyone has a hobby (yours is probably role playing games), and so should most PCs. During character creation, you can have each player come up with one hobby that his character is interested in, even if it doesn't require a skill to practice. Then you can give them opportunities to indulge in their characters' hobbies during the course of play. For example, say a player determines her character collects perfume bottles as a hobby. That's fine; you can simply throw this in almost any time you want. If the party is stalking their enemy through a shopping mall, you could have that PC notice that they pass a small boutique with an interesting collection of perfume bottles in the window. Does the character stop stalking the enemy to go shopping? Or does the character decide to return to the store at a later date?

to throw off eerie lights when they were casting a spell. Borrowing a page from the *Witch World* series by Andre Norton (and the third-edition world book, *GURPS Witch World*), he determined that the different colleges of magic would be grouped into different categories of color magic. For instance, Red Magic included all the spells of the colleges of Body Control, Fire, and Healing. Whenever a character cast any one of these spells, he would glow red, and when the spell was released, the glow would transfer to the subject of the spell before it faded. This created an effect that felt completely unique, made enemy mages much scarier (especially if they started glowing purple, which was the color of Mind Control and Necromancy), and helped shape the identities of the PC mages.

Of course, you may envision some ability in your game world that simply cannot be handled appropriately by the established rules, in which case you have to create the ability from scratch. Be very careful when you do this. We see a lot of GMs (ourselves included) who have been overly generous with the ratio between what the ability can do and how many character points it costs. This is a natural tendency, but one you must control. In essence it tends to reward the players who take your pet ability and penalize those who do not. We recommend that you look very closely at anything in the established rules that is even remotely similar and try to balance your new ability to be equivalent to what you're comparing it against.

In the nearby sidebars, we include two examples from Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign: a new power (Land Rule), and a new disadvantage (Servant of the Light) to illustrate how some GMs handle creating new abilities for their campaigns. In the case of the Servant of the Light (SOL) disadvantage, Bjoern envisioned a campaign with two diametrically opposed ethical alignments: the Powers of Light and the Powers of Darkness. In this world, most people tended to stay ethically neutral; being neutral was called being "in the shadow," and an individual who was sworn to adhere to either one of these alignments faced some very real limitations, not only in what she could and could not do, but also because, in Avonlea, a devout commitment to an ethical position was readily apparent in a person's aura to anyone who could read auras (which included a sizeable percentage of the population). This could occasionally be an advantage — not only did being a Servant of the

Sample disadvantage: Servant of the Light, –15 points

You have made a conscious choice to ally yourself with the Powers of the Light in your world and have actively opposed the actions of the Powers of the Darkness whenever you've encountered them. You adhere to the Light's Code of Honor to

- ✔ Never attempt to control or deceive another entity to cause them harm
- ✔ Always honor your oaths
- ✔ Never throw a curse
- ✔ Never steal
- ✔ Never attack an innocent or unarmed person

- ✔ Never use poison covertly
- ✔ Never attempt to cause harm to another without first declaring yourself and giving them a viable opportunity to respond

Your adherence to the ethos of the Light is apparent in your aura and is easily recognizable to anyone who can perceive the Hidden Realms. You are automatically the foe of anyone who is a Servant of the Darkness, but you can call upon other Servants of the Light for aid whenever they are encountered. You may enter the Temples and Fanes of the Powers of the Light without fear of harm.

Light attract the attention of the bad guys, but it also opened certain doors that would not otherwise open and gave the Servant of the Light characters access to certain powers that were otherwise unavailable. Thus, the ability combined aspects of existing disadvantages (Vow, Enemy, Code of Honor), advantages (Patron, Contacts), and some special effects (the changed aura).

In the case of the Land Rule power, Bjoern envisioned a society that was culturally unified but had a barrier to the political unification of the different clans and domains. Duels of honor were common, and political dominance was based on possessing a paranormal ability that tied the rulers to the land and demanded that these rulers defend the land at all costs. He used *The Riddle of the Stars* trilogy by Patricia McKillip for inspiration, modified it heavily with the Celtic concepts of Sacred Kingship, and came up with the Land Rule Power.



One of your players might present you with an ability that she has created and wants to give to her PC. Be wary! Even if she has done this with the best of intentions, your player most likely has some uses for this ability that she has not informed you of, and if you allow her character to have the ability she created, she will probably spring her hidden use on you during play. At the very least, players are notoriously generous in deciding the point value of an ability they have created. How can you handle this? First off, do not simply accept the ability as it is presented to you. Take the description, tell your player that you'll consider it, and run some test scenarios with it. See if you can identify the loophole that the player built into it, and if you find it unacceptable, see what you can do to close that loophole. Even if you decide that the ability is

Sample advantage: Land Rule

Characters with this ability are mystically attuned to the natural world. They possess a heightened awareness of their surroundings that rivals the perceptions of even the most sensitive psychic. There are three levels to this ability, each level signifying a different degree of attunement to the land. In *Avonlea*, an individual *must* possess one of the three levels of Land Rule to qualify as a member of the caste of the Kindred.

✓ **Land Sense (10 points):** Characters with Land Sense possess a subliminal awareness of their environment. All characters with Land Sense can identify a sense of rightness or wrongness about the land, but

little else. Areas tainted by pollution, supernatural evil, or disease will feel somehow wrong to their senses. In practical terms, this ability amounts to a Talent encompassing all Outdoor skills (Survival, Tracking, Fishing, Navigation, Climbing, Naturalist, and Seamanship).

✓ **Land Empathy (25 points):** Land Empathy is a more profound attunement to the land than Land Sense. Characters with Land Empathy receive much more detail in their subliminal perceptions. Characters with Land Empathy have all the advantages of Land Sense, and in addition, this power counts as a Talent granting a +1 to all Animal skills,

Agronomy, Area Knowledge (for the area they are in), Gardening, Geology, Meteorology, Prospecting, Surveying, Camouflage (outdoors only), Scrounging (outdoors only), Shadowing (outdoors only), Stealth (outdoors only), and Traps (outdoors only).

Characters with Land Empathy are physically affected by the state of their environment. If the land is blighted, diseased, or under a killing drought, the character must roll against HT every day. A failure of this roll means that the character is -1 to one of his attributes (HT, ST, IQ, and DX), whichever is most appropriate to reflect the problem with the land.

- ✔ **Full Land Rule (40 points):** Initially, the distinction between Land Rule and Land Empathy is very subtle, and one is easily mistaken for the other. The full powers of the Land Rule Power manifest only when the character has successfully passed a ritual called the Ordeal. Passing the Ordeal requires the Full Land Rule Power; failure is lethal.

Before the Ordeal, Land Rule gives all of the abilities of Land Empathy along with the equivalent of a +1 Talent for the skills of Tactics, Strategy, and the ability to divine sources of water or minerals with a roll of IQ - 3. These characters are subconsciously aware of events in their environment and frequently have dreams that inform their conscious minds of significant events in their vicinity. They may (on a roll against IQ - 5) perceive the Nature Spirits in their immediate environment, but this perception is nebulous and usually limited to a sense of the Spirits' emotions.

A character who survives the Ordeal experiences a profound change in perceptions. At this point, this power truly reflects the adage that "the King and the Land are One." In many ways, characters with Land Rule become the conscious extensions of the

land. This awareness can be described as "a third eye, ear, and hand." They are able to fully perceive and communicate with the Nature Spirits, and the Spirits become the source for the development of one focus of the five "Land Powers" (Earth, Air, Water, Animal, Plant). An individual is able to undergo the Ordeal multiple times; each time he survives, the character is able to claim another focus of Land Power. When a character has passed the Ordeal, he may spend available character points (now or at any point in the future) to gain or improve his Land Powers.

Furthermore, passing the Ordeal gains the character the right to claim Sovereignty Powers over a specific territory, which he then claims as his domain. A character with Sovereignty Powers binds the Nature Spirits of an area to his will and takes them as an Ally Group. The Full Land Rule Power has a built-in compulsion to claim and rule territory, and only one person may claim Sovereignty Powers over a particular area. Land Rulers become very territorial about their domains and react with instinctive hostility if another Land Ruler so much as enters their territories. Treat this as Intolerance toward all other Land Rulers.

The connection between the condition of the Land and the Land Ruler's health is more pronounced than with Land Empathy. Land Rulers suffer the same ill effects of being in an area under blight; however, after a Land Ruler has claimed sovereignty over an area, the state of the Land Ruler's health affects the conditions of the land. If the Land Ruler becomes ill, so does the land, to the degree of severity proportionate to the ruler's illness. In this case, age counts as an illness: As a Land Ruler ages, the Land loses vitality and fertility and will continue to do so until the Land Ruler dies and the bonds of sovereignty are released.

totally hunky-dory as written, we recommend that you make some modifications to it before giving it the green light. If there is *anything* about the ability that you dislike and cannot correct, *do not allow it in your campaign*. You are the GM, and although you want your players to like you, you have to protect your campaign from something that could rise up and bite you during play.

Creating Your Own Character Templates

The fourth edition of *GURPS* introduced character templates as a core component of the official rules, and we think it is a darn good addition that makes playing — and GMing — much easier. To be honest, at first glance, we weren't too sure; we were afraid that Steve Jackson Games was shifting to creating “classes” in *GURPS*; something that we would heartily oppose.

But such was not the case. As the *GURPS Basic Set* repeatedly emphasizes, templates are *not* rules, and players are *not* expected to be confined to creating characters within the parameters of established templates. However, templates are an excellent way of giving your players examples of characters that are *appropriate* in a particular campaign, and what level of character ability they're expected to create. You can find an excellent description of what you need to consider when creating character templates for your campaign on pages 445 to 449 in *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns*; please read it thoroughly and carefully; you'll be glad you did.

Character templates can help your players create characters that fit within the parameters of your campaign. Frankly, some players will ignore your world description and character-creation guidelines and try to get you to approve characters that are not suitable for your campaign. Templates are a fairly concrete means of communicating the information about your campaign in ways that make your players pay attention.

For an example of a character template, we return to Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign. Bjoern found that when his players were creating characters for his campaign, they had difficulty comprehending the complexity of the system of interlocking relationships based on kinship, oaths, obligations, and duty. In such a society, the higher an individual's status, the more they were bound by their feudal and familial obligations, but also the more freedom they had to move through the countryside, and the more access they had to the courts of the elite and the powerful. Some players had difficulty understanding the value and necessity of taking high Status and the need to take the additional abilities that were integral to that Status in this society. By giving them templates — like the one in the sidebar, “Sample character template” — Bjoern was able to illustrate the differences in the traits of characters from the three castes. This, more than anything else, best demonstrated to the players what qualities the society of Avonlea demanded of its members.

Sample character template

Note: This character template is suitable for a 200-point campaign with a –100-point limit in disadvantages. Please note that, even though the template is for a 150-point character, the template includes only –50 points in disadvantages. If a player took the last –50 points in disadvantages and –5 points in quirks, this character would have 105 points available for a player to personalize the character. The numbers in brackets are each item's cost in character points.

Knight of the Kindred

150 points

You are a Landed Knight of the Kindred; a low-ranking member of the royal caste of Avonlea. Your Domain Lord has granted you authority over a *Garth* and all its inhabitants.

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d – 1/1d + 1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

Advantages: Land Sense [10]; Status 3 [15]; Patron (Domain Lord as liege, appears on 6) [5]; Ally Group (10 Vassal Warriors, appear on 6) [6].

Disadvantages: Duty (To Land, Lord, and Clan) [–15]; Duty (Feudal) [–5]; Dependents (Vassals) [–15]; Code of Honor (Chivalric) [–15].

Primary Skills: Great Sword (A) DX + 1 [4] – 14; Spear (A) DX + 1 [4] – 14; Knife (E) DX + 1 [2] – 14; Bow (H) DX [4] – 13; Brawling (E) DX [2] – 14; Riding (A) DX – 1 [1] – 12; Administration (A) IQ [2] – 12; Heraldry (A) IQ [2] – 12; Law (H) IQ [4] – 12; Savoir Faire (Kindred) (E) IQ [1] – 12; Savoir-Faire (High Ones) (E) IQ + 2 [4] – 14.

Secondary Skills: Survival (Forest) (+1) (A) IQ [1] – 12; Tracking (+1) (A) IQ [1] – 12; First Aid (E) IQ [1] – 12; Leadership (A) IQ [1] – 11; Strategy (H) IQ [1] – 10; Tactics (H) IQ [1] – 10; Stealth (A) DX [2] – 13.

Background Skills: Naturalism (+1) (H) IQ [2] – 12; Area Knowledge (E) IQ [1] – 12; Farming (A) IQ – 1 [1] – 11; Dancing (Kindred) (A) DX [2] – 12.

One thing that Steve Jackson Games repeatedly emphasizes about character templates is that, unlike racial templates, the disadvantages listed *do* count against the disadvantage limit imposed by the GM. There are some exceptions; for example, if the GM requires all PCs to take a particular disadvantage, then it is not part of the disadvantage limit.



In the third edition of *GURPS*, the standard campaign was based on 100-point characters with a limit of –40 points in disadvantages. *GURPS* fourth edition has changed all that. Not only is a standard character built more along the lines of 150 to 200 points, but Steve Jackson Games has made disadvantage limits up to the discretion of the GM. We do recommend that you establish some limit on disadvantages; at the most, it should be half the campaign's point value, so a good limit for a 200-point campaign is –100 points in disadvantages.

Despite the official rules, we use two other situations when a disadvantage does not count against the personal limit:

- ✔ **If a disadvantage represents a quality that the GM wants to encourage but not require the characters to have.** For example, Bjoern established that the Servant of the Light disadvantage, which appears in the “Sample disadvantage” sidebar, would not count against the personal disadvantage limit. From a campaign design standpoint, his rationale was that he wanted to encourage — but not require — a party that could be counted on to oppose the depredations of the Powers of the Darkness. From a game world perspective, the rationale was that the additional points this disadvantage made available were earned by the character’s greater level of life experience gained by actively opposing the Powers of the Darkness in the past.
- ✔ **Allowing human characters to take disadvantages above the personal disadvantage limit if the character belongs to an Order or Secret Society.** These organizations provide intensive training in a highly specialized set of skills. Examples of an Order are an Assassins Guild, a Mages Guild, a martial arts school, or a monastic religious organization. The rationale for this is that a character receiving the intense training has also accepted the onus of furthering the objectives of the organization. This could manifest as additional Duties, ethical strictures, restrictions on behavior, or extra Enemies or Dependents beyond those that a “lay” character could be expected to assume. An example of such an Order from *Avonlea* — an order of Priestess-Healers called “the Wardens of the Eternal Flame” — appears in the sidebar, “Sample Order template.”

If using Orders is appropriate to your game world, you need to keep game balance in mind constantly. The extra disadvantages must both be reasonable for the organization and must lay a heavy burden upon the character, with severe penalties for not meeting those obligations. Using the example of the Wardens of the Eternal Flame (or simply “the Wardens”), the members of this Order are required to take these disadvantages: Pacifism — Cannot Harm Innocents, Disciplines of the Faith, and a Vow (“Provide comfort and healing to any and all beings who request it”). Even though a Warden has significant benefits over other characters with the –35 points of extra disadvantages at her disposal, the obligation to heal anyone on request — even a mortal enemy — neutralizes many of her personal and strategic advantages. Should a Warden fail to live up to these standards, she would quickly find that the Power Investment granted to her by the Eternal Flame that she worships will cease to be effective, and she will find that both her Reputation and her Patron advantages will work to her detriment unless she makes amends for her failings.

Sample Order template

Wardens of the Eternal Flame

132 points

Suggested Minimum Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 10 [0].

Required Advantages: Minimum Social Status 2 [10]; Clerical Investment I [5]; Reputation + 1 (Excellent Healers, recognized almost universally) [5]; Power Investment (“Red Magic” — the Colleges of Body Control, Fire Magic, and Healing) [10]; Power Investment (“Blue Magic” — spells of divine magic and purification) [10]; Patron (Wardens of the Eternal Flame, appears on 6) [8].

Suggested Advantages: Choose between Magery I and Empathy [15].

Required Disadvantages: Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [10]; Disciplines of the Faith (Mysticism and Ritualism) [–10]; Duty (Serve the Eternal Flame, provide comfort and healing to any who request it) [–15].

Required Skills: Physician (H) [8]–14 and Esoteric Medicine (H) [8]–14; Diagnosis (H) [2]–12; Surgery (VH) [4]–12; Hypnotism (H) [2]–12; Physiology (H) [2]–12; Naturalism (H) [2]–12; Poisons (H) [2]–12; Meditation (H) [2]–12; Breath Control (H) [2]–12; Theology (H) [2]–12; and Alchemy (VH) [4]–12.

Suggested Skills: Dame Staff (a specialized weapon unique to the Wardens) (H) DX [4]–10.



Membership in an Order isn’t a blank check to take a bunch of extra goodies with those extra points from disadvantages. When creating a template for an Order, we recommend that you require the character take *at least* as many points in specific advantages or skills as you allow in “extra” disadvantages. These represent the specific knowledge and abilities that each member of the Order is expected to possess.

Unlike character templates, the template of an Order is *not* optional for a character who belongs to that Order; it represents the *minimum* standards required for a character who is considered competent enough to be permitted to go out into the world — whether on a mission for the Order or on the character’s own recognizance. It is possible that some Orders provide a series of choices between abilities of the same point value, but specific standards for specific abilities need to be set.

Orders can be of great value to your campaign. They establish organizations that characters can belong to and that give them a support network that can work in furtherance of your plotline. They also guarantee that the PC’s motivations and objectives are more predictable. In our experience, using Orders and mandating their activities does not make the players feel like you are depriving them of their free will; not if the players freely chose to play a member of the Order.

Creating Your Own Races

You can have a fully engrossing and involving fantasy campaign using only the stereotypical Tolkien races in your game world — elves, dwarves, halflings, and orcs . . . oh, and humans, too. But that doesn't help you much if you're not running a fantasy campaign. Even if your campaign is considered to be fantasy — regardless of how much you work to make it your own world — it is going to be considered somewhat derivative.

Creating new races for your game world can create a unique feeling for your campaign. Pages 450 to 454 of *GURPS Basic Set: Campaigns* gives you excellent guidelines for the process of creating new races for your campaign. Check it out.

Creating nonhuman races can be a lot of fun. Unless the race is very closely related to humans, don't take any quality as a given; you get to start out with a totally blank slate. Even if a race looks very human — or *almost* human — doesn't mean that it *is* human. Especially within a high-tech space campaign, an alien race could have evolved with a nearly identical physical *appearance* but be substantially and profoundly different in terms of abilities, attitudes, and motivations. (One motif that science fiction writers have explored over the years is the dichotomy between a race that *appears* human but is inhumanly evil compared to races that are obviously *not* human but share humanity's ethical and spiritual qualities.) Races that are essentially human in all but appearance are — quite frankly — pretty boring; if these races are nothing but window dressing for your campaign, we suggest that you don't bother. They really won't add anything to your campaign and could alienate (pun intended) some players if they figure it out. A nonhuman race needs to *be* different in ability, attitude, *and* appearance.

When you start building a new race, you need to consider how this race fits into your milieu. Are they going to be a race whose members live parallel — and more-or-less in harmony — to humanity, or are they going to be a built-in adversary? Does your race possess innate abilities that are as mundane as the average human, or does every member of that race possess powers beyond the comprehension of most humans? What hopes, dreams, and ideals does your race have in common with humanity? What is different about them? These are much more important questions than what a race looks like, and how you answer them determines how well one of your nonhuman races goes over in your campaign.

In Chapter 20, we introduced you to Daisy, an NPC Ally of the party in Bjoern's *Avonlea* campaign. Daisy was a member of a race called the Lizard Folk. This pacifistic race had tied their fortunes to the much more warlike Daalesmen by placing themselves under the protection of the Kindred in exchange for some

Sample racial template

Lizard Folk

33 Points

Lizard Folk are a pacifistic race of amphibious, reptilian telepaths who live along the banks of the lakes and rivers of Avonlea. They stand an average of 4½ feet tall, have scaly skins that are typically emerald green with bronze highlights, and have reptilian faces and jewel-like eyes. They do not wear clothing. The Lizard Folk are under the protection of the Kindred, and, in exchange for protection, every generation of Lizard Folk sends some of its members to serve in the households of their local protectors.

Attribute Modifiers: ST-2 [-20]; DX+1 [20]; HT+1 [10]

Advantages: Amphibious [10]; Metabolism Control 1 [5]; Damage Resistance 1 (scaly hide)

[5]; Sharp Claws (ST-cutting) [5]; Chameleon Ability 1 [5]; Silence 1 [5]; Stricker (Tail: Crushing; Acts as extra leg underwater, +20) [6]; Nictitating Membrane 1 [1]; Telecommunication: Telesend (*Telepathic*, -10%) [27]; Mind Shield 1 (*Telepathic*, -10%) [4]; Telepathy Talent 1 [5]; Reputation +1 (Good Neighbors) [5].

Disadvantages: Pacifism — Self-Defense Only [-15]; Cold-Blooded [-5]; Short Life Span 1 [-10]; Curious [-10]; Chummy (Gregarious)[-10]; Social Stigma (considered a cross between “primitives” and “intelligent animals”) [-15].

Skills: Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Climbing (A) DX [2]-11; Gesture (E) IQ [1]-10.

Features: No voice, scaly skin, claws, thick tail, jewel-like eyes.

of their members serving the Kindred as nearly incorruptible domestic servants and spies. The Lizard Folk had a much more important presence than merely being scaly telepathic domestics with tails; they had their own beliefs, imperatives, and prejudices, and their presence in the campaign extended beyond Daisy’s service to the PC Ysabet. They were always in the background, ubiquitously serving and watching and remembering everything that went on around them. Although no one could ever consider the Lizard Folk to be a threat, they served the Kindred, protected the domains of *Avonlea* in other ways, and created a unique presence in the world.

Ad-libbing

Many years ago, we were players in a campaign in which our party had to stage a raid on the hidden laboratory of a mad scientist located amongst the ruins of an ancient city on a deserted island. While we were planning our strategy, the GM gave us a map of the island. We instantly noticed that there was a direct-line “front door” route through the ruins (which we *knew* were loaded with all sorts of nasty booby traps and minions), but we also noticed

that, if we were to sail around the island, we had access to a back door into the laboratory that avoided the vast majority of the ruins. We liked the idea and informed the GM of this plan.

The GM flat out declared that we couldn't do this. Why not? We had a boat (and — just as importantly — someone with the skill to pilot it), we had a route, and while we were under a deadline to accomplish our mission, we had ample time to make it around the island to reach the back door. That didn't matter; the GM still flatly refused to let us take this course. The conversation got heated and tempers flared; the players demanded to know why we couldn't even *attempt* to do what we wanted. Finally, obviously frustrated and near tears, the GM blurted out "Because I don't have an adventure set up for you to go that way!"

Oops.

It may sound cold-hearted and callous, but it's just human nature: The GM lost her players that night. After that moment, we were unwilling to overlook the little bumps and foibles that are present in every campaign. We were unwilling to give her the benefit of the doubt, and she had lost our loyalty and our commitment to stay within the plotline she established. The campaign died from lack of player interest soon thereafter.

The GM committed several grievous errors that evening because she forgot the three most important rules of GMing:

- ✔ Always assume your players are going to do something to mess up your plans.
- ✔ Always keep your plotline moving forward while giving the players the illusion that they are acting of their own free will.
- ✔ When in doubt, ad-lib.

The GM could have taken several different strategies in this situation, any one of which would have been better than her outright refusal to let us follow our desired route:

- ✔ She could have thrown some wandering monsters and other delaying actions at the party while we were sailing around the island long enough to keep us from reaching the back door until the next gaming session — that would have given her a week to prepare for the change in plans.
- ✔ She could have allowed us to follow our course until, at some point, she introduced an insurmountable barrier inside the game world that would have forced us to return to the plan of attack she had prepared for.
- ✔ She could have quickly shuffled some parts of her adventure around so that we faced some of the exact same threats that we had tried to avoid with our attempt at a back-door attack.

Notice that we did *not* say that she should have been prepared for us to go the alternative route. No GM can possibly anticipate or prepare for all the different ways the innate perversity of players (all players, ourselves included) can twist a campaign out of its planned course. It is not only an unwise investment in your time (after all, in the long run, the party can only take a *single* course of action in any given scenario), but it should be unnecessary, provided that you're willing to ad-lib in these situations.

We've found that when we've had to ad-lib, we've come up with some truly *brilliant* ideas. Some of the features of our campaigns that have most impressed themselves on the minds of the players happened because we were forced to run an adventure off-the-cuff. This is one of the great advantages of creating your adversaries (at least the minion NPCs) as *templates* rather than as unique individuals tailor-made for each situation. If you have the templates available, you can throw something together at the last minute, which keeps the game going, lets the players believe they have their characters' destinies under control, and can keep the plotline from getting too far off the mark.

Goofing Up

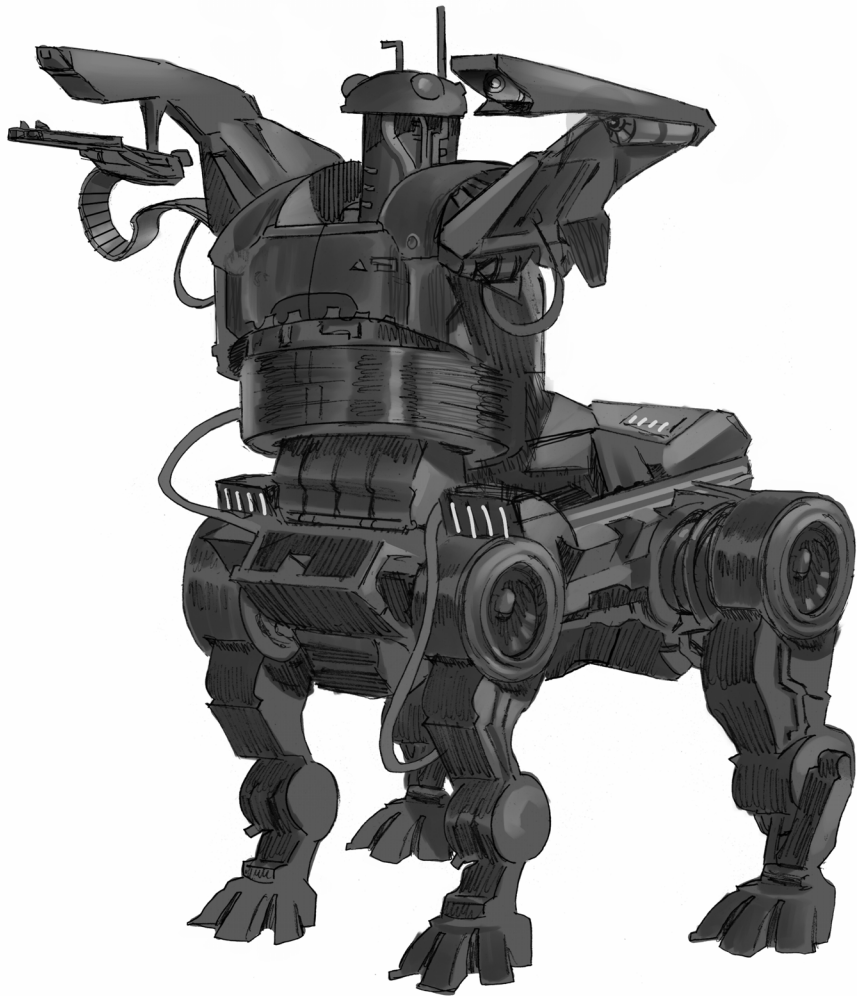
No GM is infallible; we can pretty much guarantee that sometime during your career as a GM you *will* goof up. There will come a time when you make an error in your campaign that you can't ad-lib your way out of, can't explain away, and can't allow to simply continue. This could be one of several different things, from throwing an enemy at the party that is just too powerful, to allowing the party to have a power or ability that is just too much for your game world to handle, to introducing a plot element that doesn't work the way that you had hoped, to simply making a ruling that you come to regret.

When you goof up, you need to fess up. Admit your mistake to your players, correct the problem in the game world, simply by saying, "I made a mistake, here is how things are going to be," and then get on with the adventure.

If you try to hide your mistake from the players — whether from a misguided expectation that you should appear to be omniscient in your campaign or from a fear of losing the players' respect — then you most likely *will* lose some or all of the respect of some or all of your players. No one likes being lied to or deceived, and if your attempt to bury your mistakes becomes apparent, you will alienate people.

You will be called upon — probably many times during the course of a campaign — to make rulings and to interpret the official rules in situations that don't allow you to spend a whole lot of time ruminating about every potential factor or variable. The way we started handling it years ago was by

establishing a policy that any time we make a ruling in a campaign, our ruling is in effect *only for that particular night of play*. No ruling remains in effect for more than a single night of play unless the GM confirms that ruling in writing. This allows us to keep the adventure going when a question arises but does not lock us into a decision until we have had the opportunity to consider it and all of its variables without the pressure and tension of an actual gaming session. We've found that our players accept our need to occasionally make reversals of our rulings with a great deal more grace and good humor since we've instituted this policy. We suggest that you consider using it as well.



Part VI

The Part of Tens

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



"Gary locked himself in the bathroom again. While I call the locksmith, you ask him if he wants to buy stupidity as a disadvantage."

GURPS[®]

In this part . . .

You get to reap the benefit of our collective 30+ years of playing **GURPS** in a different way than that of the rest of this book. Here, we get to share with you our favorite selections in a number of different categories.

Because so much of a **GURPS** campaign depends on having appropriate player characters, we focus most of this part on character creation. One way to do this is to maximize the value of the character points you spend at character creation, so Chapter 22 gives you ten great ways to do this. Some advantages give you more bang for your buck than others, and Chapter 23 lists our ten favorites. We've discovered that some disadvantages are more fun to play — and less limiting or restrictive to the characters than others; Chapter 24 lists ten of the best disadvantages.

We're constantly amazed at how some players don't think about some skills that they really *ought* to have. Chapter 25 lists ten skills every character ought to have. Finally, we've discovered that having a well-rounded library really helps when we're GMing, so in Chapter 26, we share our picks for the best books GMs should own.

GURPS[®]

Chapter 22

Ten Rules for Spending Points

Actually, there are no rules for spending points other than being accurate in your math when checking your totals. This list of ten is more a set of guidelines that describe how we create our characters and approach the problem of getting the best possible characters with the points available to us.

Have a Character Focus

When we talk about *having a focus*, we mean having some specific set of abilities that defines what your character is all about. Often, this focus describes the career of the character, such as a sharpshooter or a thief, but it also might consist of an unusual ability that makes him special, such as telepathy or martial arts expertise. We find that having a focus for your character makes deciding how to invest your points much easier. Having a focus also provides a blueprint for developing your character during play. If you're struggling to find a focus for your character, consider starting with a character template.

Raise Attributes Rather Than Skills

Think of attributes as the foundation of your character and skills as the specifics. Investing in attributes can benefit many aspects of your character all at once. For example, an increase in DX raises both your Basic Speed and any skill based on DX. Particularly keep in mind that if you find yourself investing 2 or more points in a wide variety of skills based on the same attribute, it may be more cost-effective to raise the base attribute instead. This is especially true if you have lots of skills based on an inexpensive secondary characteristic such as Will or Perception.

Increase Your Basic Speed to a Whole Number

Basic Speed is one of the most critical numbers in combat, because it determines your Dodge, Basic Move, and when you get to take your turn. But because your Basic Move is based on the integer value of Basic Speed, we always recommend spending the points to bring Basic Speed to a whole number to get the additional hex of movement. In other words, a Basic Speed of 5.75 gives a Basic Move of 5, but raising that to the whole number of 6.0 gives your character a Basic Move of 6.

Consider Splitting Your Stats

By *splitting your stats*, we generally mean having a difference between the level of a basic attribute and any of the secondary characteristics it determines. Buying IQ without buying as many levels of Will or Perception is an example. IQ costs 20 points per level, and Will and Perception are both 5 points per level. Normally, when you purchase IQ, it includes Will and Perception. But you can elect to raise the basic attribute of IQ without raising Will and Perception and then pay only 10 points per level. This also reflects certain subtypes of characters (the smart person who is easily influenced or who doesn't notice things around him). The advantage is that skills based on IQ are still calculated using the high value (but note that skills based directly on Perception use its level). We're in favor of doing this when you are looking for a few additional points to invest in something that you really want and don't want to reduce all aspects of an attribute.

You can also raise a secondary characteristic above the basic attribute. For example, you can lower ST and purchase HP to represent the not-so-strong but tough character. A common variant is to raise your FP (3 points per level) above your HT (10 points per level). We recommend this if you are a mage or if you need a fatigue to power a specific ability. (Note that such adjustments can count against limits on maximum disadvantages. See *GURPS Basic Set: Characters*, page 11.)

Always Take All Your Quirks

Quirks are one of the things that we love most about *GURPS*. They give us a chance to have fun with our characters in ways other systems don't. And with the standard five quirks allowed, it's five points that we can spend on advantages or skills.

Usually Take Maximum Disadvantages

If your GM has put a maximum on disadvantages, trust that she is planning on you taking that many points in disadvantages. Although a good disadvantage does limit your character in some meaningful way, it also frequently adds depth and interest to your character. And, as with quirks, disadvantages give you points to spend on advantages and skills.

Defer Purchasing Advantages

Learnable advantages, such as Combat Reflexes, make as much if not more sense to acquire during an adventure than beforehand because they reflect the changes that person might experience as a result of adventuring. An investment in attributes and skills is almost always worthwhile regardless of the campaign. Waiting to see how the world actually works can be extremely useful before deciding on advantages. Of course, before taking this advice, make sure your GM will allow you to add the advantage you're considering after gaming has started.

Make Sure You Can Attack in Combat

One of the saddest sights in the gaming universe is watching a player realize that his character is totally unprepared for battle. Having a form of attack doesn't mean that your character has to be focused as a fighter. Just make sure that you have something useful to do during a battle other than serve as a distraction for your enemies. At the very least, we recommend Knife, or if technology permits, Gun (Pistol). Not only is this important for the success of your character, but combat is frequently a major portion of a gaming session, so having one of these skills ensures that you as a player have something to do.

Make Sure You Can Defend Yourself

Another really sad sight is the look on the face of a player who discovers that her mighty warrior can be knocked down with a feather. A defense in this sense can be a skill — in fact, it can be a combat skill — but it can also be armor or magical abilities. Just make sure that your character can withstand being hit once or twice by a typical weapon in the campaign or that she has some way of avoiding being hit at all.

Use Talents

On a practical level, Talents provide an efficient investment of points if you have a group of skills that you will likely want to increase beyond a single point. But our reason for liking Talents has more to do with the way in which they provide a collection of skills that represent an interest or specialization. When your character has a focus, you will often find that that focus is on a related set of skills, the perfect situation for taking a Talent. You'll also frequently find that Talents provide a useful way of finding a collection of skills for secondary interests of your character (for instance, being good with animals). Also consider advantages that directly improve your abilities in related skills such as Absolute Direction, Charisma, Flexibility, High Manual Dexterity, and Voice.



Chapter 23

Ten Advantages We Like

We've never met an advantage that we didn't like, but these are the ones that we think are the best investments. Of course, no single character is likely to have all of these advantages, but most of our characters have one or two from this list. Several of these advantages are not available in realistic campaigns, and two of them — Gadgeteer and Magery — would likely define the focus of your character if you took them. The others supplement any character concept that you may have. And, yes, there are actually 11 items rather than 10. We couldn't find one to cut, and our GM . . . I mean our editor . . . didn't place a point limit on the chapter. We focused our choices on advantages that are internal to the character, and thus didn't include some useful advantages relating to the character's social network, such as Status, Patrons, and Allies.

Combat Reflexes (15)

As the name suggests, the Combat Reflexes advantage is most suited to campaigns that require a lot of combat. The improvement in your character's active defenses makes this a very worthwhile investment. We often end up adding this advantage after gaming has started, but we always want it whether we can afford it or not.

Damage Resistance (5 per level)

Damage Resistance is not permitted in most campaigns, but when it is available, it is definitely a good investment — unless you can buy armor from TL5 or above. In lower TLs, armor is generally heavy, restrictive, and not that good. Having an innate DR is a tremendous advantage in those situations.

Extra Attack (25) or Weapon Master (25)

If an adventure involves a significant amount of combat, being able to strike extra blows (Extra Attack) or more damage (Weapon Master) is worthwhile. Either of these advantages tends to make your character more combat-focused, but neither of them is so expensive that combat has to be your character's only interest. Weapon Master halves the penalty for rapid strike, so it gives you a portion of the advantage of Extra Attack. We generally recommend the 20- or 25-point level of Weapon Master, though any of the higher levels is equally useful (though perhaps not as cost-effective).

Flight (40)

The ability to travel faster than average and to take the high ground in combat provides significant tactical advantage. And, besides, flying is a lot of fun. Of course, Flight is not available in most campaigns, but in a world where NPCs can fly, it's a good idea to make sure you have at least one flying PC. When possible, take Flight as part of a racial template — the cost is usually balanced with some disadvantages that don't count toward any campaign limits. If you want to have the ability to fly only in certain situations, consider an Alternate Form that has natural flight (such as a bird of bat).

Gadgeteer (50)/Gizmos (5)

Being a Gadgeteer is a full-time occupation. If you take this advantage, it needs to be the focus of your character. But if the campaign is suited to having a Gadgeteer, we find it one of the most enjoyable roles to play. We only recommend the 50-point version because, otherwise, the time limitations may make it difficult to bring your inventions into play. The other aspect of the role that is particularly fun is the Gizmos advantage, which gives you the ability to pull what you need out of your pocket.

High Manual Dexterity (5 per level)

Any characters who intend to work with their hands (thieves, mechanics, or musicians, for example) benefit from this advantage. It is much more cost-effective than raising each individual skill.

Intuition (15)

No matter how carefully you gather information and try to plan, some decisions seem to come down to the toss of a coin. Intuition means that the GM has to give you some advice as to which is the better choice. The only difficulty with this advantage is remembering to use it. Unlike most of the others in this list (which are always available), Intuition is most useful if you remember to ask the GM the appropriate questions.

Luck (15)

Luck is useful at any level, but we feel the 15-point version is the one that you are most likely to be able to afford. With Luck, you have the ultimate safety net — if you don't like the outcome of a die roll, you may change it (the level of Luck you have purchased determines how frequently you are able to use this ability). Luck is particularly valuable in a high-risk campaign.

Magery (5 + 10 per level)

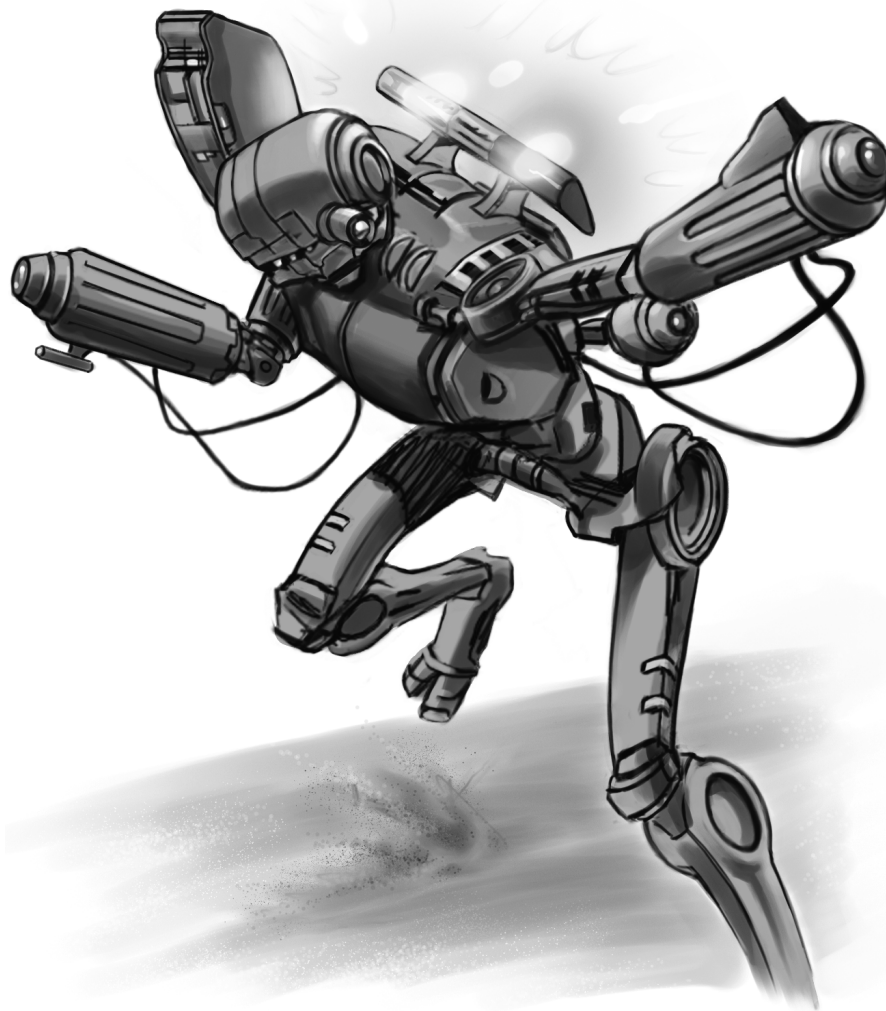
In the minds of many people, being able to wield magic is what role playing games are all about. That isn't true of *GURPS*, but playing a mage is certainly fun and is a definite departure from anything you are likely to experience in your own life. When Magery is available as an advantage, at least one member of the party should have it.

Rapid Healing (5)/Very Rapid Healing (15)

Much of adventuring is about combat, and one of the consequences of combat is being injured. Unless magical healing is readily available, investing in Rapid Healing is a very wise decision and one we heartily recommend. Also consider High Pain Threshold for dealing with injuries during combat instead of after.

Talent (5, 10, 15, or 20 per level)

For us, creating a character is about knowing the interests of that character and having a concept of his role both within the party and in the society of the world. Talents represent an interest or a “natural gift” in collections of skills. Adding a Talent or two to a character provides a depth of personality that individual skills do not.



Chapter 24

Ten Disadvantages That Aren't Too Painful

Any disadvantage should limit your character in some meaningful way, but a disadvantage should never make your character less enjoyable for you to play. Selecting disadvantages is possibly the most personal aspect of defining a character. What one person can shrug off or enjoy as a challenge, another may find extraordinarily frustrating and limiting. This list represents our recommendations for disadvantages that we've enjoyed playing and that don't limit our characters' success in most campaigns.



Note that SCM stands for *self-control modifier* and is discussed in Chapter 5.

Appearance (Variable)

Deciding to be less attractive isn't something that most of us would willingly do. But when creating your character, it is definitely something to consider. In fact, you can use a less-than-normal appearance to add richness to your character. The homely hero has a lot of potential for fun.

Charitable (–15 SCM)

We admit it: We tend to play good guys. And if your character is going to be nice to everyone he meets, you should probably consider taking a disadvantage that represents that. Of course, Charitable means more than just being nice — it means you'll help others with less consideration of the risk or cost to yourself. But unless your character has another trait that makes that a problem, or if your GM runs the campaign with an eye toward the economics of the world, this gives you an opportunity to do good works and get points for them. If appropriate for your game world (and if your GM approves), you can achieve a similar effect with a Sense of Duty.

Curious (-5 SCM)/Incurious (-5 SCM)

No *player* is completely uninterested in the mysteries of the campaign, but you may decide that your *character* isn't interested, in which case we recommend taking the Incurious disadvantage. Or you may recognize that your character really wants to know what's going on, so Curious is more appropriate. But whichever route you go, we find that our characters almost always have one or the other of these disadvantages. That said, don't be foolish and abandon your free will — make sure that you keep your self-control modifier at a reasonable level so that if you need to resist temptation (or want to go exploring some option if you have Incurious), you can try to overcome your character's natural inclinations.

Colorblindness (-10)

Do *not* take this disadvantage if you want to be a merchant, a thief, or an electrician. But if your character is mostly about hitting things or having abstract knowledge, Colorblindness is a reasonable disadvantage to consider. In real life, Colorblindness comes into play very frequently. In most campaigns, a good GM will make it matter occasionally, but you will frequently be able to work around the limitation with a bit of creativity or some help from others. Do *not* take this disadvantage if you want to be an alchemist, demolitions expert, or tracker. For those, creative GMs can turn coloblindness into a crippling disadvantage.

Duty (Variable)

Giving your character a Duty disadvantage provides a framework for your character's personality, career, and decision-making because you must consider how the consequences of each action relate to fulfilling your character's Duty. Certainly Duty isn't appropriate for all characters, but we find that for many, it is a good disadvantage to explain why they're involved in such a crazy adventure in the first place. Be warned, however, that Duty exists primarily to give the GM a way of influencing your actions, so don't be surprised when she takes advantage of the opportunity.

Impulsiveness (-10 SCM)

If you are naturally impulsive or impatient and are going to play your character that way, then by all means take this disadvantage. If, however, you are very cautious by nature, then we actually recommend against this disadvantage because you may become frustrated when your GM forces you into situations that you would rather avoid. Having an impulsive character in the party has its upside, too: It is one good way of making sure that the action continues to flow along. Overconfidence is a related disadvantage to consider; however, we find it a bit riskier than impulsiveness because it changes how you engage in combat.

Odious Personal Habits (-5/-10/-15)

An Odious Personal Habit (OPH) is something that all the other characters in the party find annoying. Make sure that the other *players* in the group don't find it annoying as well. But as long as you keep that in mind, an OPH provides a cornerstone for your character's personality. OPH is also a good catch-all disadvantage for some negative aspect of your character that you can't represent with other disadvantages. (Minor things should be represented with quirks and positive aspects with perks.) Compulsive Behavior is a related disadvantage to consider, although it's less amusing to play.

Pacifism (-5/-10/-15)

We can't conceive of a situation in which we would create a character with a goal of harming innocents, so the 10-point version of Pacifism, Cannot Harm Innocents, seems like a natural disadvantage for many of our characters. It does definitely limit your actions, however, and often calls for greater creativity in planning attacks, but it's usually a good match for our characters' (and our) personalities. The 5-point version, Reluctant Killer, is another good option, though we find it requires more role playing and thus a bit more work from us as players (so the 10-point version seems a better investment).

Both of the 15-point versions of Pacifism (Self-Defense Only and Cannot Kill) can be run and are appropriate for some characters in some campaigns. The key item to keep in mind with the higher-point version is that you are responsible for limiting the actions of the rest of the party as well. These are also dangerous disadvantages in any world in which your characters may be put

into the role of guerrilla warriors. We don't recommend the -30-point version (Total Nonviolence) as we find it too limiting for most campaigns. Other Codes of Honor are equally good choices, although they must be appropriate for the campaign and should be approved by the GM.

Phobias (Variable SCM)

We love phobias for our characters. A phobia adds an element of personality that can come into play in all sorts of situations, from the humorous to the life-threatening. With a little bit of research, you can find a phobia to match any character concept and then write a background story to explain how it came about. Of course, it will be harder to find one if you have Cyberphobia (a fear of computers). Be cautious about taking Phobias at too high of a point value, however; a Phobia truly can be a crippling disorder.

Weirdness Magnet (-15)

Almost all of our adventures have had someone in the party with Weirdness Magnet. As GMs, we tend to restrict how many party members can have it, but as players, we enjoy being the one who will have strange and possibly wonderful things happen randomly. The only people for whom we do not recommend Weirdness Magnet as a disadvantage are those who need predictability in the way in which their characters will develop.

Glossary

Ability: An *advantage* that gives a character something special he or she can do. Abilities may or may not be modified with *enhancements* and *limitations*.

Active defense: An active defense is a conscious attempt to avoid an attack; a *dodge*, *parry*, or *block*. Active defenses require a *roll* to determine whether a *character* successfully defends.

Advantage: A useful character quality that gives you the edge over other characters with your same attributes and skills. You purchase them with character points.

Adventure: What *characters* do during the game. One adventure is one operation, mission, or intrigue that characters engage in. Several related adventures are called a *campaign*.

Adversary: 1) Any *nonplayer character* who is hostile to the party of *player characters*. 2) An assistant GM show plays enemy NPCs.

Attribute: A number that describes and defines a character's mental and physical assets. There are four basic attributes: *Strength (ST)*, *Intelligence (IQ)*, *Dexterity (DX)*, and *Health (HT)*. Each attribute may have secondary characteristics that it determines.

Basic Speed: A measure of how fast a character reacts to things, determined by adding a character's Dexterity and Health scores and dividing the sum by 4.

Campaign: A series of *adventures* presided over by the same *Game Master*, usually forming one storyline.

Character: The person one pretends to be in a role playing game or any other personality played in the game.

Combat monster: A character designed primarily to fight and controlled by the *Game Master*. Not an official **GURPS** term.

Companion: A *nonplayer character* whom the *Game Master* includes in the campaign as a member of the *party*, without being an Ally, Patron, Contact, or Dependent. Not an official **GURPS** term.

Control: 1) An *advantage* from *GURPS Powers* that allows a *character* to control one specific element, material, or force. 2) A Patron *nonplayer character* whom one or more player characters owe a Duty toward. Controls can be very helpful in maintaining plot focus. Not an official **GURPS** term.

Crony NPC: NPCs who are friendly to or allied with the player characters and are supportive of their actions and adventures.

Damage resistance (DR): A characteristic describing a *character's* ability to resist damage. Each point of damage resistance (DR) absorbs one point of damage a character would otherwise take. A *player* increases DR by buying armor, by playing a species with a tough hide, or by some similar means.

Default: A *character's* skill level with a skill that has no points in it. Defaults can be based on another similar skill that a character does have points in or on an *attribute*.

Dexterity (DX): One of the four basic *attributes*. Dexterity is the most common base for physical skills, and along with *Health*, determines a character's Basic Speed and movement.

Disads: Short for *disadvantages*.

Disadvantage: A limiting or disadvantageous character quality that a player receives extra character points for taking.

DR: See *Damage resistance*.

Dungeon: Any dwelling or structure that may act as a setting for the adventure.

DX: See *Dexterity*.

Exotic: A term used to describe *advantages* that are not available to *mundane* characters.

Fatigue and fatigue points (FP): A secondary characteristic equal to *Health* (unless otherwise adjusted), Fatigue is a measure of how quickly a character grows tired. Fatigue points are temporarily expended to use magic spells and other special abilities.

Fnord: If you have to ask, you're not ready to know yet.

Game Master (GM): The person who creates the *campaign* and plays all the *nonplayer characters* and adjudicates the rules.

Game world: The fictional or fictionalized world created by the *Game Master*, in which *characters* act. A “world” need not be a planet, but could be a country, asteroid, universe, or whatever background setting the GM creates.

GM: See *Game Master*.

Health (HT): One of the four basic attributes in *GURPS*, HT is the measure of how robust a character is. HT determines how many points of fatigue a character has and, along with Dexterity, what a character’s basic speed is.

Hit Points (HP): A secondary characteristic equal to *Strength* unless otherwise adjusted. Hit Points indicate how much injury a *character* or object can take before it dies, goes unconscious, or is destroyed.

HT: See *Health*.

Injury: Temporary Hit Point loss due to an attack, found by subtracting the target’s Damage Resistance from the attack’s basic damage and modifying the resulting penetrating damage for damage type. Weapons do points of damage; characters take points of injury.

Intelligence (IQ): Character skills that reflect knowledge or mental prowess are usually based on the basic *attribute* IQ. IQ determines the starting value of the *Perception* and *Will* secondary characteristics.

Mage: A character with the Magery advantage.

Mana: The energy that powers magic. Mana is usually an environmental factor and may be present in greater or lesser amounts.

Mana level: The amount of mana that is locally available. There are five levels of mana: none, low, average, high, and very high. Mana levels affect how spells work.

Maneuver: The actions available for a character to perform during a combat turn. For example, Attack, Move, All-Out Defense, and so forth. In the third-edition *GURPS*, these were called “actions,” and third-edition “maneuvers” are now called “techniques” in fourth edition.

Mastermind: The *nonplayer character* (usually an *adversary*) whom the *Game Master* determines is the guiding influence and intellect behind the *campaign’s* conflict. Not an official *GURPS* term.

Milieu: The setting or environment in which a campaign takes place.

Mini-mind: One of potentially several individually created *nonplayer characters* who work to promote the agenda of the *Mastermind* in the *campaign*. Not an official **GURPS** term.

Minion: 1) An enhancement to the Ally advantage that means the Ally is loyal to a character no matter how he is treated. 2) One of the numberless hordes of *nonplayer characters* who are described by a template and exist to do the will of the *campaign's Mastermind* (usually). Not an official **GURPS** term.

Modifier: 1) A number added to or subtracted from the target number of a success roll — or the actual die roll, for a reaction roll — in order to allow for a specific situation. 2) A limitation or enhancement.

Move: Movement speed in yards per second. Find ground Move by modifying Basic Move for your encumbrance level.

Mundane: Normal. Without supernatural or superhuman abilities.

Nonplayer character (NPC): A character controlled by the *Game Master*.

Party: The collected group of *player characters* and *nonplayer characters* who go on *adventures* together.

PC: See *Player character*.

Perception (Per): A secondary characteristic based on *Intelligence* that determines how likely a character is to notice things in his environment.

Perk: A 1-point advantage, often designed by the player.

Player: Someone who controls and plays the role of a character and who is not the *Game Master*.

Player character (PC): A character that a player role plays.

Point crock: Our term for an *ability* that is worth more points than were paid for it, or a *disadvantage* that gives more points than it's worth. This is not an official **GURPS** term.

Power: A group of related *abilities* that all come from or are granted by the same source. For example, a priest might have the abilities to heal the injured, cure the sick, and turn to the undead. This collection of abilities would constitute a power. The source would be the priest's deity.

Quick contest: A competition between any two *characters* that is mediated by dice rolls. Each competitor makes a dice roll against a specified skill or *attribute*. The competitor who has the greatest success is the winner. Frequently a quick contest is between the skill of one character and an attribute of another to see whether the skill succeeds. Another common form of quick contest is using the same attribute for each of the characters; the one with the higher attribute has an advantage but does not necessarily succeed.

Quirk: A character trait designed to round out a character. A quirk is essentially a –1-point *disadvantage*, but does not necessarily have to be disadvantageous.

Role: The persona one takes when role playing one's *character*.

Roll: The resulting total of rolled dice.

Run: To control an aspect of the game. As a *player*, you “run” a *character*. As a *Game Master*, you “run” a *campaign*. This is not an official **GURPS** term.

Scenario: The scene or situation in which the *adventure* or *campaign* takes place.

Self-control modifier (SCM): A multiplier that adjusts the point value of some disadvantages (marked with SCM). The higher the modifier, the more points the disadvantage is worth, and the lower your self-control number is.

Self-control number: In some mental disadvantages, a number that represents your character's chances of overcoming the disadvantage by willpower. You must roll under this number — always a 6, 9, 12, or 15 — to avoid applying the disadvantage in a given situation. Taking a disadvantage with a lower number is worth more points, but it is harder to overcome.

Sidekick: An Ally *nonplayer character* who functions in (and was created to function in) a supportive, logistical role rather than attempting to go into danger with the *player characters*. Not an official **GURPS** term.

Skill level: A number representing how competent a character is with a given skill. It is the number a *player* must roll under to succeed with the skill, which may be modified according to the difficulty of the situation.

Spear-carrier: A nameless, faceless *nonplayer character* enemy. An opponent that wasn't important enough for the *Game Master* to spend a lot of time developing. Not an official **GURPS** term.

Spell: A skill with a magical effect. Usually only useable by *characters* with the Magery advantage; some weaker spells can be used by characters without the Magery advantage in areas of high *mana*.

Strength (ST): One of the four basic *attributes* in **GURPS**, Strength determines how many *hit points* a character has and how much damage a character does with muscle-powered weapons.

Technique: A specialization in a specific procedure in a more general skill, which a *character* may train in and thereby increase independently of the skill itself. In third-edition **GURPS**, these were called *maneuvers*. Techniques are frequently associated with martial arts but can be used with many types of skills.

Technology level (TL): A number used as a rough guide to how technologically advanced a society is. Technology level determines what equipment, weapons, and armor are available to the *characters*.

Turn: The time that a character gets to take an action during combat. A turn is one second long.

Will: A secondary characteristic equal to *Intelligence*, if not otherwise modified. Will represents the strength of a character's mental focus and is useful to resist fear, stress, and many supernatural effects.

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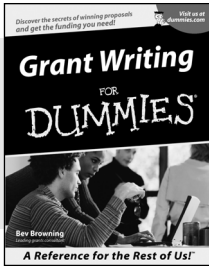
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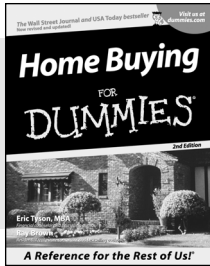
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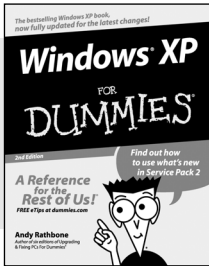
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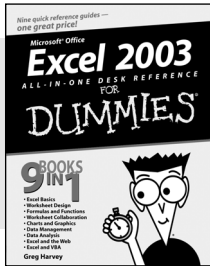
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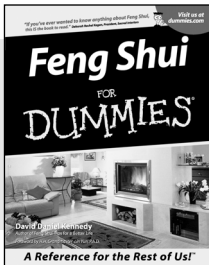
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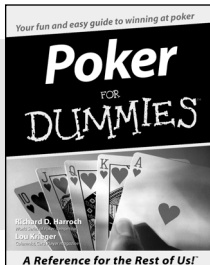
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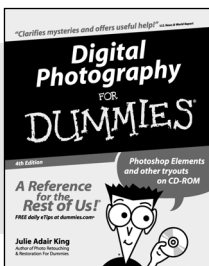
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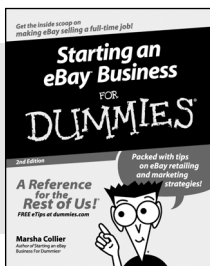
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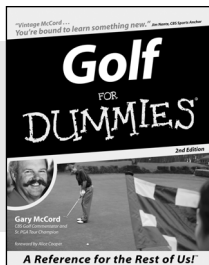
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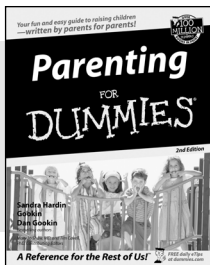
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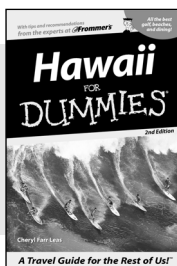
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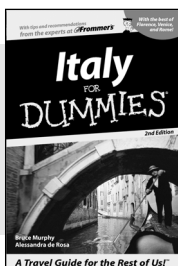
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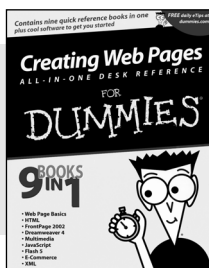
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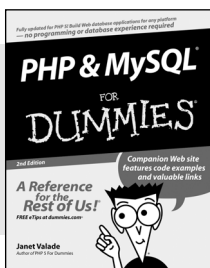
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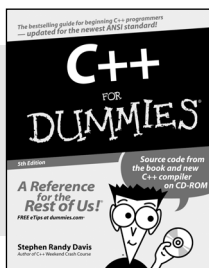
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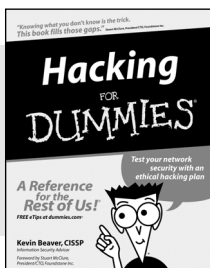
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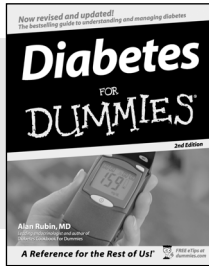


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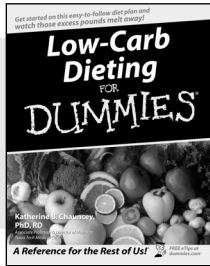
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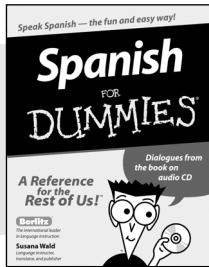
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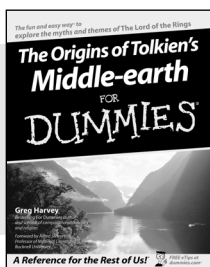
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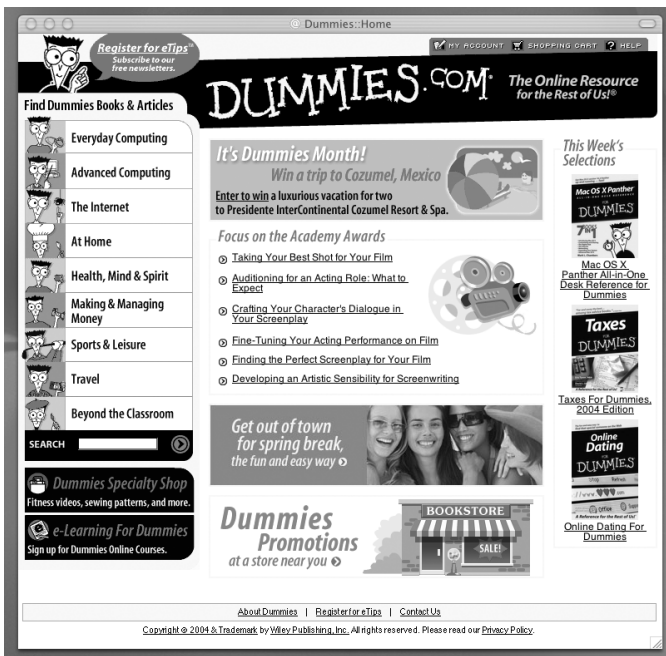


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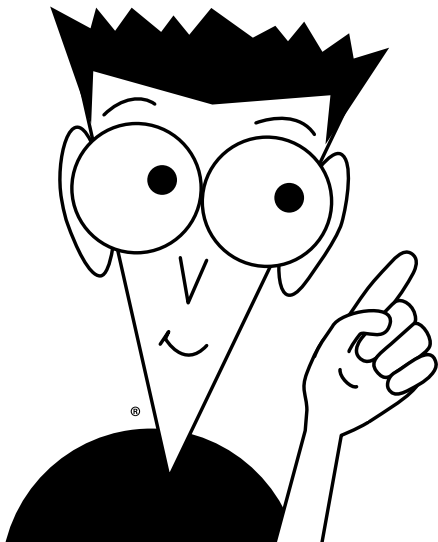
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