

PYRAMID[®]



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ACTION II



THE THRILL OF THE CHASE

Kelly Pedersen

BLACK GEMINI

David L. Pulver

MORE SKILL SETS FOR SPECIALISTS

Christopher R. Rice

THE GRINDER

Andy Vetromile

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Do I really look like a guy with a plan? You know what I am? I'm a dog chasing cars. I wouldn't know what to do with one if I caught it.

*– The Joker, in **The Dark Knight***

ARTICLE COLORS

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features

Purple: Systemless Features

COVER ART

Bob Stevlic

Now is the time for action. **GURPS Action**, that is! Strap in and get ready to floor it, as we bring the world of the cinematic to the gaming table once more.

When matters get tricky and it's a group of heroes against the world, you need *More Skill Sets for Specialists*. Building on the modular system presented in **GURPS Action 4: Specialists**, this feature by *Dungeon Fantasy Traps* co-author Christopher R. Rice presents 34 new skill sets that can be added on to any hero looking to fulfill certain functions. It also includes supernatural and ultra-tech options, making the *Specialists* core an enticing concept to consider for other genres. Become a movie star, professor, exorcist, or space pilot . . . and then get in the action!

When it comes to keeping games exciting, nothing beats *The Thrill of the Chase*. Expand the possibilities of the chase rules from **GURPS Action 2: Exploits** with terrain complications and unusual events. Go full tilt through narrow alleyways, save endangered bystanders, and navigate out of dead ends. Your life depends on it!

Can your heroes handle the challenges presented by *Black Gemini*? This month's Eidetic Memory offering from David L. Pulver – author of **GURPS Spaceships** – flings the heroes from situation to situation, all in an effort to shut down a dangerous international faction. This adventure includes **GURPS** stats for the many adversaries and obstacles the investigators must overcome.

When it comes time to handle the action that heroes face, sometimes it boils down to who has *The Football*. Gain insight into how to make exciting scenes *without* resorting to “who shoots whom,” by establishing interesting situations that have the adventurers scrambling.

If you need a vehicle that handles the impossible with aplomb, you need to get yourself to *The Grinder*. Discover all the secrets of the mysterious Bolivar Snow: his super-equipped garage, details of his organization, adventure possibilities, and even **GURPS** stats for the enigmatic Snow himself. If you want to drive yourself to the edge, the keys are waiting in the ignition . . .

This issue concludes with a Random Thought Table takes inspiration from unlikely places, all in service of making your action campaign as awesome as possible. When it comes to keeping the excitement flowing, this issue is like drinking from the fire hose of frantic options.

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FROM THE EDITOR

THE ATTRACTION OF ACTION

Assembling a *GURPS Action*-themed issue of *Pyramid* is a daunting task. One of the elements that most defines an action-packed game is . . . well, its *action*. Its devotion to the instant, its speed. After a while, as I craft words like this, there's a part of me that just wants to delete them all and say, "WHY ARE YOU STILL READING THIS? HURRY UP AND GO BE AWESOME!"

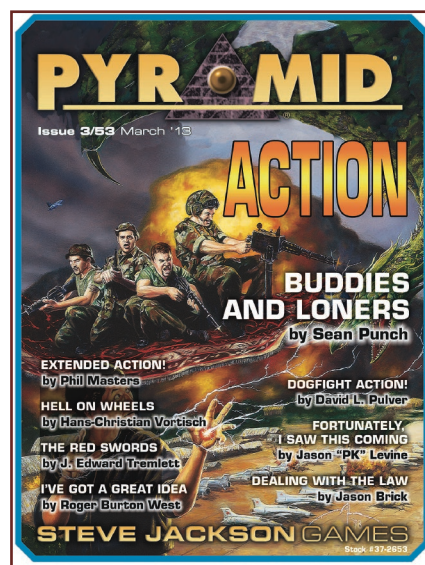
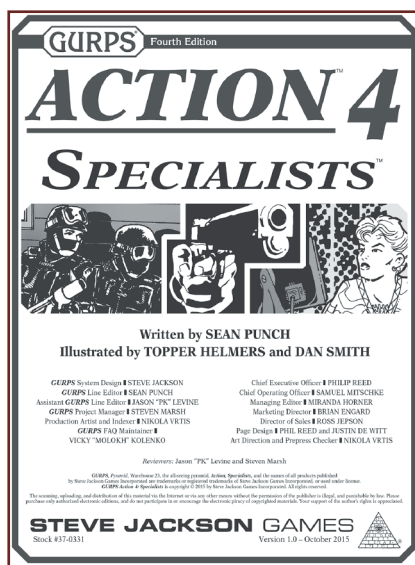
Still, even a true-blooded action hero needs to rest a bit as the frame wipes between new segments of story, and it's in those brief quiet moments that we can hopefully squeeze in some inspiration.

Of course, it's a bit of an exaggeration to say that action tales are *all* action, all the time. There need to be some pauses, if only to give the heroes a chance to catch their breaths and engage in witty banter. It's like a horror movie; if the soundtrack is stuck on "all terrifying strings and screams all the time" mode, then the audience just tunes it out.

Similarly, while there's plenty of adrenaline to enjoy in this issue's offerings, there's also some material to make you rethink stakes, approaches, and even the core atoms that make up the heroes themselves (pp. 4-11). And, once again, in sneaky *Pyramid* tradition, a fair number of articles herein can prove useful for other parts of the *GURPS*iverse, should your tastes not run full-throttle to action all the time.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of which, what are you actually doing with this issue? Did a feature or two find its way to your gaming table immediately? Did something stick in your cranium to be used later? Is there an article herein that didn't quite serve as the antidote to the doldrums we *spiked your drink with?* (BWAH-HAH-HAH!!) We want to hear about it! Use your favorite cryptogram-scripting program to write to the private codebreakers at pyramid@sjgames.com, or jump aboard the freight train of fun with the *GURPS* fandom at forums.sjgames.com.



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MORE SKILL SETS FOR SPECIALISTS

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

GURPS Action 4: Specialists allows both the players and the GM to create cinematic action heroes who have particular specialties, honed over a lifetime, that make them a nightmare for certain people. The rules in *Specialists* allow bizarre creations like a reporter who is good at hostile rendition or a winter survival expert who just happens to be hell on wheels. It also assists with the creation of those who are *very* good at one particular thing or group of related things.

Add in the fact that skill sets are fast, easy to notate, and versatile, and you have a quick-start system that's useful in any *Action* game that includes *Specialists*. Since this article references *GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents* and *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks* several times, those books are also required. Games with psionics, magic, higher TLs, etc. will need books appropriate for such campaigns before taking them before taking them.

MORE MUNDANE SKILL SETS

More options can be useful when designing characters to make them "just right." Some of the following skill sets have traits in them that are not immediately useful in typical *Action* campaigns, so players should check with the GM before taking these.

Does Mademoiselle find gambling an adequate source of income?

– Nicole Dubois, in *Mission: Impossible* #5.23

Animal Handler

25 points

You know how to train, handle, and take care of a particular animal or animals. Maybe you were a lion tamer or trained working dogs. Whatever your experience, you're good with beasts and it shows.

Combine this set with Area Security (*Specialists*, p. 11) or Law Enforcement (*Specialists*, pp. 17-18), for dedicated K-9 units. Add Bushwhacker (*Specialists*, p. 12) to create backwoodsmen like Crocodile Dundee or Grizzly Adams.

Advantages: Animal Empathy [5]; Animal Friend 1 [5].

- Spend 4 points to purchase a particular animal as an Ally with a constant appearance (p. B36) or receive two additional skill choices.

Perks: Call of the Wild* [1].

Skills: Animal Handling (any) (IQ/A) [2]; Animal Handling (any other) (IQ/A) [2]; Veterinary (IQ/H) [2]. • Two of Animal Handling (any) (IQ/A) [2], Falconry (IQ/A) [2], Packing (IQ/A) [2], Riding (any) (DX/A) [2], Teamster (IQ/A) [2], or increase Animal Handling or Veterinary by 2 points.

* See *Power-Ups 2*, p. 12.

Celebrity

You're in the spotlight, and you love it. You're well-known as an actor or musician or simply for being famous. *Any* character concept might benefit from one of the following skill sets, but spies and ex-military types who pose as rock stars or have become actors are common enough in movies that they don't require much of a stretch! Some celebrities pick multiple options, to account for varied talents or reasons for fame.

Dilettante/Heir

25 points

You have money. Lots of money. Because you have so much scratch, you're popular. Combine this skill set with Famous for Being Famous (p. 5) and/or Femme Fatale (*Specialists*, p. 15) to create vacuous-seeming party animals who use their looks to get what they want.

You can select this package up to three times. At the second level, Wealth (Wealthy) becomes Wealth (Very Wealthy), for 10 points and add Independent Income 15 [15]. At the third level, Wealth (Very Wealthy) becomes Wealth (Filthy Rich), for 20 points, and Independent Income becomes 20, for 5 points.

Advantages: Status 2 [5]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Famous for Being Famous

25 points

You were in the right place at the right time, got famous for *something*, and the clock stopped at 14:59. Combine this with another Celebrity lens for a someone who capitalized on the fame in order to *do* something. Add Spin Doctor (*Specialists*, p. 22) if you're good at convincing people to keep paying attention to you, or Femme Fatale (*Specialists*, p. 15) to be one of the "beautiful people."

Advantages: Luck [15] or Serendipity [15]; Reputation +2 (Famous; Everyone; All the time) [10].

Model

25 points*

Fred said it right – you dance on the catwalk and mime blue steel (on the catwalk, yeah). Like the Femme Fatale (*Specialists*, p. 15), you are enthralling and can beguile others with your charms. The GM may allow you to learn any of the Enthrallment skills (p. B191), switching Sex Appeal for Public Speaking to represent cinematic sexual magnetism.

Being a model is a *perfect* cover for spies. They can gain access to high-value buildings by being arm candy for the wealthy or influential, have a reason to range all over the world, and are often overlooked – what's another beautiful face in a crowd of beautiful faces? Add at least one of Special Agent (*Specialists*, p. 27) or Tradecraft (*Specialists*, p. 23) for such characters. Those involved in network (and for the same reasons, they might become spies) should consider one or more of Close-Quarters Battle (*Specialists*, p. 12), Silent Killing (*Specialists*, p. 21), Sniper School (*Specialists*, p. 22), and Toxicology (*Specialists*, p. 22). Impersonation (*Specialists*, p. 17) suits both spies and assassins!

Advantages*: Allure† 2 [10] and Appearance (Handsome/Beautiful) [12].

Perks: Sexy Pose‡ [1].

Skills*: Professional Skill (Modeling)§ (IQ/A) [1]; Sex Appeal (HT/A) [1].

* When doubling up, increase Allure to 4, increase Appearance to Very Handsome/Beautiful, add Voice [10], and increase either Professional Skill (Modeling) or Sex Appeal by 1 point.

† See *Power-Ups* 3, p. 6.

‡ See *Power-Ups* 2, p. 15.

§ You know how to pose to best show off an angle, can substitute a DX-based roll for DX to avoid tripping, can shed or don clothing rapidly (each point of success on this roll shaves off a second when changing clothing or armor), and so on. You also have a smattering of legal skills, regarding copyrights and contracts; this lets you make an IQ-based roll to see if a contract or similar legal document actually says what it means versus what it appears to say.

Movie Star

50 points

Lights! Camera! Action! You're a movie or TV star. Actors learn a *very* odd assortment of skills, and any other skill set could make sense for someone who went "full method" for a particular role. Most actors also have Physical Training (*Specialists*, p. 19).

Advantages: Status 3 [15]. • *One* of Born Entertainer 2* [10], Charisma 2 [10], or Reputation +2 (Famous; Everyone; All the time) [10] – or select Appearance (Beautiful/Handsome) [12] instead, but reduce the skill choices to three instead of four.

Perk: Starry Eyes† [1].

Skills: Performance (IQ/A) [8]; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (IQ/E) [4]. • *Either* Diplomacy (IQ/H) [4] or Sex Appeal (HT/A) [4]. • *Four* of Carousing (HT/E) [2], Current Affairs (Headline News, People, or Popular Culture) (IQ/E) [2], Dancing (DX/A) [2], Public Speaking (IQ/A) [2], Singing (HT/E) [2], or Stage Combat (DX/A) [2].

* See *Power-Ups* 3, p. 6.

† You can use Performance as an Influence Skill (p. B359) on anyone who has seen your work; you get +2 when dealing with fans of your work!

Rock Star

25 points

Rocker, country music singer, pop star – whatever you are, you're musically inclined, attractive, and/or magnetic. Add Cowboy (*Specialists*, p. 14) for country music stars; most rock stars also have Bon Vivant (*Specialists*, p. 11). Music stars who write, produce, and record their own tunes often have the Creative (below) skill set as well.

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive) [4]. • *One* of Charisma 2 [10], Musical Ability 2 [10], Reputation +2 (Famous; Everyone; All the time) [10], or Voice [10]. • Alternatively, improve an existing trait from this list, or raise Appearance, and spend any leftover points on perks or skills.

Perks: *Either* Musical Voice* [1] or Penetrating Voice [1].

Skills: Musical Instrument (any) (IQ/H) [4]; Performance (IQ/A) [2]; Singing (HT/E) [4].

* Your voice is naturally resonant. This gives you a +1 to reaction rolls *after* you speak for an extended period (at least a minute in regular conversation), or after a successful performance using Performance, Public Speaking, Singing, etc. This stacks with Voice (if you have it).

Creative

25 points

You're a painter, writer, musician, or similar artistic type. While this may not be readily useful, those who use their imagination to earn a living tend to be out-of-the-box, innovative thinkers.

Advantages: Versatile [5*]. • Spend 15 points on Gifted Artist 1-3 [5/level], Musical Ability 1-3 [5/level], or Wordsmith 1-3† [5/level].

Perks: Efficient (one art-related skill)‡ [1].

Skills: Spend 4 points on artistic or related skills that epitomize your work. For example, a sculptor would have Artist (Sculpting) (IQ/H) [4], while a *GURPS* line editor might have some combination of Games (*GURPS*) (IQ/E), Professional Skill (Editor) (IQ/A), and Writing (IQ/A).

* The GM may wish to treat Versatile (p. B96) as a *leveled* trait; if so, each level costs 5 points and gives +1/level to the listed tasks or skills.

† Gives +1/level to Connoisseur (Literature), Literature, Poetry, Professional Skill (Editor or Journalist), Research, and Writing. Gives +1/level to reaction rolls against anyone who has read your work.

‡ See **Power-Ups 2**, p. 16.

Knife-Fighter

25 points

You're well-trained with knives, and can maintain, throw, and attack with maximum efficiency. This is primarily useful when something goes badly wrong at close range. Add Close-Quarters Battle (**Specialists**, p. 12) for military types who've drilled endlessly with knives. Knife-fighter thugs tend to have Criminal Past (**Specialists**, p. 14) or Goon (**Specialists**, p. 16)

Perks: Quick-Sheathe (Knife)* [1]; Quick-Swap (Knife)* [1].

Skills: Armoury (Melee Weapons) (IQ/A) [1]; Fast-Draw (Knife) (DX/E) [1]; Holdout (IQ/A) [4]; Knife (DX/E) [8]; Thrown Weapon (Knife) (DX/E) [1].

Techniques: Arm Lock (Knife) (A) Knife+3 [3]; Armed Grapple (Knife) (H) Knife+1 [2]; Targeted Attack (Knife Thrust/Vitals) (H) Knife-1 [3].

* See **Power-Ups 2**, p. 7.

Politician

25 points

You are (or were) an elected public official. You know how to work a crowd, speak to your constituents, and negotiate with other politicians. Politicians who are currently in office should take appropriate levels of Administrative Rank. Combine this with Researcher (**Specialists**, p. 20) and/or Businessperson (**Specialists**, p. 12) to create a civil servant who can do more than talk. Those who want to be more persuasive should take one or more of Negotiator (**Specialists**, p. 18), Social Engineering (**Specialists**, p. 22), and/or Spin Doctor (**Specialists**, p. 22). Diabolical politicians should take Mastermind (**Specialists**, p. 18) . . .

Advantages: Either Intuitive Statesman 1* [10] and Charisma 1 [5] or Smooth Operator 1 [15].

Perks: One of Convincing Nod† [1], Disarming Smile† [1], or Political Doublespeak‡ [1].

Skills: Politics (IQ/A) [1]; Propaganda (IQ/A) [2]. • *Either* Diplomacy (IQ/H) [4] or Fast-Talk (IQ/A) [4]. • *Two* of Expert Skill (Political Science) (IQ/H) [1], Leadership (IQ/A) [1], or Public Speaking (IQ/A) [1].

* See **Power-Ups 3**, p. 11.

† See **Power-Ups 2**, p. 15.

‡ Allows you to use Politics as an Influence Skill (p. B215).

Professional Athlete

25 points

You are cinematically good at playing a sport. Specialists should put points from the Natural Athlete talent into a specific Sports or Games of choice. **Action** GMs should be very generous in allowing Sports skills to perform as other skills (especially combat skills!). Most professional athletes should have Physical Training (**Specialists**, p. 19) and possibly one of the Celebrity subtypes (pp. 4-5).

Advantages: Natural Athlete* 1 [10]; Fit [5].

Perks: Skill Adaptation (Broader Sports defaults for skills)† [1].

Skills: One of the following 9-point packages:

1. Sports (any) (DX/A) [8]; Games (same specialty) (IQ/E) [1].
2. Professional wrestlers can spend 9 points in some combination of Brawling Art (DX/E), Performance (IQ/A), Wrestling Art (DX/A), and Wrestling Sport (DX/A). A single point may be spent on a Trademark Move perk, which is *de rigueur* for such athletes!

* See **Power-Ups 3**, p. 13.

† See **Power-Ups 2**, p. 17.

Religiously Ordained (Non-Supernatural)

25 points

You are an ordained minister and have the weight of a religious organization behind you. This offers benefits that others lack, even in the modern day. Decide which religion or philosophy you follow.

When doubling up, the additional 25 points may be spent on applicable skills (raising skill levels or taking additional ones) and on buying additional advantages: Contact Group (City priests, local congregation, etc.; Skill-12, 15, or 18; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [5, 10, or 15] Contacts (Local priest, Vatican administrator, etc.; Skill-12, 15, or 18; 9 or less; Usually Reliable) [2, 4, or 6], Legal Immunity [5 to 20], or Patron (Church, holy order, etc.) [10 or 20].

Advantages: Clerical Investment [5].

Skills: Either Religious Ritual (any) (IQ/H) [4] and Theology (any) (IQ/H) [4] or Philosophy (any) (IQ/H) [8]. • *Either* Diplomacy (IQ/H) [4] or Teaching (IQ/A) [4]. • *Either* Psychology (IQ/H) [4] or Public Speaking (IQ/A) [4]. • *Either* Hidden Lore (Religious Secrets) (IQ/A) [4] or Meditation (Will/H) [4].

Teaching

You're a fully accredited teacher or professor. Any skill set combination is possible! You teach others what you know. A classic trope is the martial-arts instructor who has Martial Arts (**Specialists**, p. 23) and/or Martial-Arts Master (**Specialists**, p. 26), but a history or archaeology teacher might have a lot to offer as well.

Teacher

25 points

Advantages: Charisma 1 [5]; Sensitive [5].

Perks: Efficient (Teaching)* [1]; Unique Technique (Teaching Montage) [1].

Skills: Teaching (IQ/A) [8].

Techniques: Teaching Montage† (H) Teaching-6 [5].

* See **Power-Ups 2**, p. 16.

† You can rapidly teach a skill you possess to PCs or NPCs, allowing them to spend earned character points immediately; critical success gives them a *free point!* Abusing this may result in the GM inflicting "training accidents" to offset the free points the munchkin is bestowing.

Professor

50 points

Advantages: Charisma 1 [5]; Empathy [15]; Reputation +1 (Popular; Current or former students; All the time) [2].

Perks: Efficient (Teaching)* [1]; Understanding Educator† [1]; Unique Technique (Teaching Montage) [1].

Skills: Teaching (IQ/A) [16].

Techniques: Teaching Montage‡ (H) Teaching-2 [9].

* See *Power-Ups 2*, p. 16.

† When you successfully use your Empathy advantage, add +3 to your Teaching rolls (+1 for Sensitive).

‡ You can rapidly teach a skill you possess to PCs or NPCs, allowing them to spend earned character points immediately; critical success gives them a *free point!* Abusing this may result in the GM inflicting “training accidents” to offset the free points the munchkin is bestowing.

PARANORMAL SKILL SETS

One aspect *Action* lacks – and which classic examples of the action genre in general lack – is weird, strange, or outright supernatural abilities. Many modern action films have used these tropes, and the GM who wants to add these to the toolkit can use the following skill sets to follow suit.

MAGICAL SKILL SETS

These skill sets are suitable for games with magic, spells, etc.; basically, combining *Action* and fantasy, whether it’s elf-punk or hidden magic in a contemporary setting.

Magical Detection

25 points

You can smell magic. You can even track its “scent” and the scent of those who use it. You automatically get a Tracking or Smell roll when in the presence of a spellcaster, magic item, ongoing spell, etc. Success means you know there is something magical nearby and allows a second roll at -4 to identify *what* it is. You use Long-Distance penalties (p. B241) for this roll. This requires no additional action on your part! It’s considered a passive sense, like sight, hearing, touch, etc.

Even mundane items, or people, often have residues left from nearby magic. This allows your ability to boost your *traditional* tracking abilities where that applies.

The second level of this skill set removes the need to make a second roll to determine what you’ve successfully scented. You get +3 to *mundane* Smell and Taste rolls and use the Long-Distance penalties for such rolls.

Magic Tracker

25 points

Advantages: Detect Magic (Based on Perception, Own Roll, +20%; Long-Range 1, +50%; Reflexive, +40%; Smell-Based, -20%) [19] + Detect Spellcasters (Based on Perception, Own Roll, +20%; Long-Range 1, +50%; Reflexive, +40%; Smell-Based, -20%) [4]*.

Skills: Tracking (Per/A) [2].

* Alternative Ability (x1/5 cost) to Detect Magic.

Magic Hound

50 points

Advantages: Acute Smell and Taste 3 [6]; Detect Magic (Analyzing, +100%; Based on Perception, Own Roll, +20%;

Long-Range 1, +50%; Reflexive, +40%; Smell-Based, -20%) [29] + Detect Spellcasters (Analyzing, +100%; Based on Perception, Own Roll, +20%; Long-Range 1, +50%; Reflexive, +40%; Smell-Based, -20%) [6]*.

Perks: Long-Range Smell† [1].

Skills: Tracking (Per/A) [8].

* Alternative Ability (x1/5 cost) to Detect Magic.

† Allows you to use the Long-Distance range penalties (p. B241) for Smell rolls (p. B358).

Spellcaster

You’re a trained mage. The value of this depends on what sort of magic the campaign features. Included here are skill sets for standard, sorcery, and ritual path magic. If using a different magic system, the GM may use these as templates. Your slush fund points can be used to buy higher levels of Magery, more spells or Paths, etc.

Ritual Path Magic Hedge Caster

25 points

Selecting *this* skill set again allows you to add more levels of Magery or invest more points in the listed skills.

Advantages: Magery 1 [15].

Skills: Hidden Lore (Sacred Places) (IQ/A) [2]; Thaumatology (IQ/VH) [2]; 6 points in Path skills or Ritual Mastery perk(s). See either *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions* pp. 32-39) or *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*.

Ritual Path Magic Adept

50 points

Prerequisites: Hedge Caster.

This skill set requires you to have bought the Hedge Caster skill set (above), and the GM may require other prerequisites, based on the campaign. This is *not* the same as “doubling up” on Hedge Caster! In other words, to be a Ritual Path magic adept, you will have paid a total of 75 points (at least), or 100 if you doubled up on Hedge Caster.

Advantages: Ritual Adept [40].

Skills: 10 points in Path skills or Ritual Mastery perk(s). See either *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions*, pp. 32-39, or *GURPS Thaumatology: Ritual Path Magic*.

*Add the weird,
strange, or outright
supernatural to your
action adventures.*

Wizard (Standard Magic)

25 points

What spells someone chooses is highly subjective. For example, investigators might have Alertness (*GURPS Magic*, p. 133), which is useful for spotting evidence, and Images of the Past (*Magic*, p. 107), which allows them to see what really happened at a crime scene.

Advantages: Magery 1 [15].

Skills: 10 points in whatever spells you choose; see either pp. B242-B253 or *GURPS Magic*.

Sorcerer

50 points

Advantages: Sorcerous Empowerment 1 [20]; Sorcery Talent 1 [10]. • Spend 15 points on known spells or a higher level of Sorcerous Empowerment; see *GURPS Sorcery*.

Skills: Innate Attack (any) (DX/E) [1]; Thaumatology (IQ/VH) [4].

OCCULT SKILL SETS

The following skill sets are suitable for *Action* games that feature supernatural, horror, etc. elements. To deal with the monsters, sometimes you need one foot in their world.

Exorcist

25 points

Whether the power of Christ compels them or you're just more stubborn than they are, you're no stranger to spiritual warfare. With skill, faith, and cussedness, you can cast out the demons, ghosts, and stranger things that pester the living.

Attributes: Will +2 [10].

Perk: Occult Exorcist* [1]; Secret Knowledge (Exorcism (Comparative)) [1].

Skills: Exorcism (Comparative)† (Will/VH) [8]; Hidden Lore (Demon Lore) (IQ/A) [2]; Hidden Lore (Spirit Lore) (IQ/A) [2]; Occultism (IQ/A) [1].

* Allows you to ignore the requirement of having Blessed, Power Investiture, or True Faith to avoid the -4 to rolls for Exorcism, but *requires* you to succeed on an Occultism or Hidden Lore roll to identify what sort of spirit you're dealing with. Those with Blessed, Power Investiture, or True Faith can spend that point elsewhere.

† This optional specialty changes Exorcism to a Will/VH skill, but allows its use on *all* possessing entities.

Monster Hunter

25 points

You are a bona fide monster hunter, with the reflexes and training that implies. Pair this with at least *two* different combat skill sets (Obsolete Weapons, *Specialists*, p. 19, is especially handy), and pile on power-ups to ensure your survival.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes* [15].

Skills: Occultism (IQ/A) [4]. • 6 points spent on any occult or magical skills of choice.

* When doubling up, the second instance gives Unfazeable [15]. When taking this skill set three or more times, add the

options of up to 25 points in your choice of Higher Purpose (Slay Monster) [5/level] (up to 3), increased physical attributes, and additional Will.

Occultist

25 points

You've tangled with the forces of darkness and survived to tell the tale. When doubling up on this skill set, you may spend the extra 25 points on any described advantage or any skill listed as gaining a bonus from the Occultist talent.

Advantages: Occultist 1* [10]. • *One* of Common Sense [10]; Language Talent [10]; Single-Minded [5] *and* Will +1 [5]; Spirit Empathy [10]; *or* increase Occultist to 2 [10].

Perks: Efficient (Research) [1].

Skills: Occultism (IQ/A) [2]; Research (IQ/A) [2].

* See *Power-Ups 3*, p. 14.

Religiously Ordained (Supernatural)

25 points

You are vested with the power of your god or religion. Combine this skill set with the non-supernatural version (p. 6) for a full-fledged priest, imam, rabbi, etc. Add the Exorcist skill set (above) to create a master of spiritual warfare.

Attributes: Will +1 [5]

Advantages: *One* of True Faith [15] or True Faith (Chosen) [15].

Skills: Exorcism (Will/H) [2]; Occultism (IQ/A) [2]; Hidden Lore (Demon Lore *or* Spirit Lore) (IQ/A) [1].

PSYCHIC SKILL SETS

The following skill sets are suitable for games with psychic powers.

Psi Expert

25 points

You are an expert on psionic powers – and may be psychic yourself, but it's not required.

Advantages: Parapsychologist 1* [5].

Skills: Expert Skill (Psionics) (IQ/H) [4]. • *Eight* of Electronics Operation (Medical, Psychotronics, *or* Scientific) (IQ/A) [2], Hidden Lore (Astral, Psis, *or* Tricks) (IQ/A) [2], Hypnotism (IQ/H) [2], Mind Block (Will/E) [2], Occultism (IQ/A) [2], Physics (Paraphysics) (IQ/H) [2], or Psychology (IQ/H) [2]. • You can spend additional choices on a single skill to increase its level or three choices to increase it *two* levels. The GM may opt to allow you to improve Parapsychologist and a psi-related perk instead.

* See *Power-Ups 3*, p. 14.

Psychic

25 points

You are psychically active. Pick one of the 25-point psionic packages in Chapter Three of *GURPS Psis*. Each level of this skill set allows you to choose another package or one that's worth more points.

ULTRA-TECH SKILL SETS

Action is a perfect fit for running ultra-tech games – especially space opera or cyberpunk. The following options expand *Specialists* for use in such campaigns.

You have the most powerful personal tech available.

Battlesuit Operations

25 points

You're an elite warrior, equipped with the most powerful personal combat tech available. You're expected to be equally capable with brute force and delicate technology.

Perks: On the Bounce* [1]; Suit Familiarity (Battlesuit) [1].

Skills: Battlesuit (DX/A) [8]; Electronics Operation (Communications) (IQ/A) [2]; Electronics Operations (Sensors) (IQ/A) [2]; Forward Observer (IQ/A) [2]; Mechanic (Battlesuit) (IQ/A) [4]; Soldier (IQ/A) [1].
• Four points in Gunner (Beams, Cannon, Machine Gun, or Rockets) or Guns (any), both (DX/E).

* You've trained extensively to maintain your aim while using your suit's super jump or jets to bound across the battlefield. You can ignore up to -1 in bulk when firing weapons while jumping when operating a battlesuit, minimum of -1. The GM may allow this to be a leveled perk; if so, each level reduces Bulk by -1.

Cybernetic/Biomod Enhancements

You've been genetically or cybernetically modified to be more than human. Anyone might have civilian (LC3+) modifications, but only spies, spec ops, etc. have military-grade prosthetics and enhancements. The GM *might* relax these restrictions in the same way that it is relaxed for gear (*GURPS Action 2: Exploits*, p. 44). Optionally, you may purchase "minor" cybernetic enhancements in the form of perks and/or Low Rejection Threshold (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 14).

Civilian Cybernetic/Biomod Enhancement

25 points

Advantages: Spend 25 points on any LC3 or higher cybernetics (see *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, pp. 208-218) or biomods (see *GURPS Bio-Tech*, pp. 168-184).

Military Cybernetic/Biomod Enhancement

25 points

Advantages: Spend 25 points on any LC1 or higher cybernetics (see *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, pp. 208-218) or biomods (see *GURPS Bio-Tech*, pp. 168-184).

ADVANCED CYBERNETICS AND SIMPLIFIED MAINTENANCE

The cybernetics listed in *GURPS Ultra-Tech* assume implants need maintenance by a skilled technician, spending one hour *per* implant, per month. If not, the implant has -1 to its HT *and* requires a HT roll against the current HT, or some other minor breakdown happens; this is a built-in monthly Maintenance (p. B143). While it may seem like this should lead to a -70% Mitigator limitation, cybernetics are also unlikely to be stolen, broken, or misplaced; glasses or a standard prosthetic are far more vulnerable than the average implant!

Implants *are* vulnerable to shorting out and other hazards, as per *Electrical* (p. B134). Unhealing (Total) is effectively a feature here, since *most* Mitigators don't heal on their own. The fact that it's a cybernetic replacement or modification doesn't matter.

However, having 20 one-point implants *shouldn't* take 20 hours of work per month, when one 20-point implant takes only an hour. Thus, the GM may rule that the monthly time required to maintain cybernetics is either one hour per 5 character points, *or* one hour per implant, whichever is *less*.

Some advanced cybernetics might not need this monthly Maintenance, aren't Electrical, or are capable of self-repair and thus not Unhealing. One of these would be a Mitigator worth -80%. If an implant has *two* of these benefits, that would be a Mitigator worth -90%. If it had all three, it would be as good as the thing it replaces and simply get rid of the disadvantage altogether – or turn it into an advantage, if the replacement is better than the original. A perk allowing High Pain Threshold for a single limb may also be appropriate.

The Cyber-Ham Clause

Like the *Ham Clause* (*GURPS Action 1: Heroes*, p. 20), this rule permits those with cybernetic implants to take a penalty in trade for not needing as much cybernetic maintenance. In this case, it helps them to ignore their monthly maintenance schedule in return for taking a penalty during a pivotal scene – though it need not be an *action* scene! Having your arm squirt oil all over the corporate wage-slave you're trying to get a job from can be as manic as a hoverbike chase! Thus, every 5 points (or fraction thereof) the implant is worth inflicts -1 on all success rolls for the remainder of the scene. You may specify how this works and may opt to use a portion of your total cybernetics this way. For example, if you had two bionic legs that could get stuck on "dance mode" forcing you to moonwalk everywhere (and thus giving you -3 to rolls), you could avoid the maintenance period for them for the next month.

Space Flight School

Like Flight School (*Specialists*, p. 16), but for space- and starships.

Civilian Space Pilot

25 points

Advantages: 3D Spatial Sense* [10].

Skills: Electronic Operations (Communications) (IQ/A) [1]; Electronics Operation (Sensors) (IQ/A) [1]; Mechanic (for Piloting specialty) (IQ/A) [1]; Navigation (Space) (IQ/A) [2]; Piloting (Aerospace, High-Performance Spacecraft, Light-sail, or Low-Performance Spacecraft) (DX/A) [8]. • A total of two points in Freight Handling and Smuggling, both (IQ/A).

* When doubling up, add Excellent Balance [10] (*Pyramid* #3/21: *Cyberpunk*, p. 34).

Military Space Pilot

25 points

Advantages: 3D Spatial Sense* [10].

Skills: Electronics Operation (Communications) (IQ/A) [1]; Navigation (Space) (IQ/A) [1]; Piloting (Aerospace or High-Performance Spacecraft) (DX/A) [8]; Savoir-Faire (Military) (IQ/E) [1]. • Two of Artillery (Beams, Bombs, or Guided Missile) (IQ/A) [2], Gunner (Beams, Cannon, Machine Gun, or Rockets) (DX/E) [2], or Tactics (IQ/H) [2].

* When doubling up, add Excellent Balance [10] (*Pyramid* #3/21: *Cyberpunk*, p. 34) or 10 more points in skills of choice.

Skill Sets In . . . SPAAAAACE

Many of the tropes that *Action* draws on are from science-fiction movies; it's part of the genre's "DNA." *Specialists* reveals that with how easy it is to adapt for use in sci-fi games. Most skill sets can be used "as is," while a few may require a little rejiggering to work properly. For example, Airborne School (*Specialists*, p. 11) could logically have a "Suborbital Insertion" option, giving Acceleration Tolerance [1] (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 13). Most should be simpler than that – for example, allowing Beam Weapon specialties for Close-Quarters Battle (*Specialists*, p. 12) instead of (or as well as) Guns specialties.

Space Operations

25 points

You're a true space rat, adept with vacc suits, free fall, thruster packs, and shuttlecraft. This skill set often augments Battlesuit Operations (p. 9), Space Pilot (above), Spacer (below), and can join Close-Quarters Battle (*Specialists*, p. 12) or Demolitions (*Specialists*, p. 14) for boarding actions.

Advantages: Immune to Space Sickness [5]; Striking ST +2 (Only for increased zero-gravity move, -80%) [2].

Perks: Special Exercises (Striking ST for increased zero-gravity Move) [1].

Skills: Aerobatics (DX/H) [4]; Free-Fall (DX/A) [4]; Navigation (Space) (IQ/A) [2]; Piloting (High-Performance Spacecraft) (DX/A) [2]; Spacer (IQ/E) [1]; Vacc Suit (DX/A) [4].

Spacer

You have experience as a crewmember aboard a merchant or navy spaceship. Either way, you're comfortable in the depths of space, light-years from those dirty gravity wells called planets.

Civilian Spacer

25 points

Perks: Seasoned Spacer*† [1].

Skills: Free Fall‡ (DX/A) [2]; Piloting (Aerospace or High-Performance Spacecraft) (DX/A) [2]; Mechanic (Spaceship) (IQ/A) [4]; Navigation (Space) (IQ/A) [4]; Scrounging (Per/E) [2]; Spacer (IQ/E) [4]; Vacc Suit (DX/A) [2]. • A total of 4 points in Freight Handling and Smuggling, both (IQ/A).

* You have +1 on all DX, HT, Free Fall, Piloting, Spacer, and Vacc Suit rolls to resist personal (not vehicular) disasters aboard ship: space sickness, blown suits, being cut loose, etc. This includes rolls to grab lifelines and crew lifeboats.

† When doubling up, add 1 point in G-Experience.

‡ Optionally, replace Free Fall with two points in G-Experience.

Military Spacer

25 points

Perks: Seasoned Spacer*† [1].

Skills: Free Fall‡ (DX/A) [2]; Piloting (Aerospace or High-Performance Spacecraft) (DX/A) [2]; Mechanic (Spaceship) (IQ/A) [2]; Navigation (Space) (IQ/A) [4]; Savoir-Faire (Military) (IQ/E) [1]; Scrounging (Per/E) [1]; Spacer (IQ/E) [4]; Vacc Suit (DX/A) [2]. • Three of Artillery (Beams, Bombs, or Guided Missile) or Forward Observer, both (IQ/A) [2], Gunner (Beams, Cannon, Machine Gun, or Rockets), or Guns (any), all (DX/E) [2].

* See *Civilian Spacer*, above.

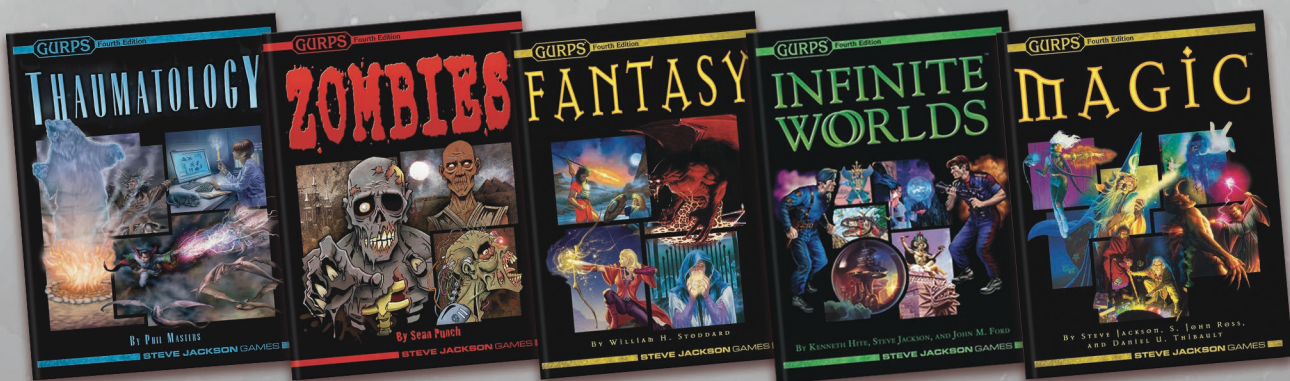
† When doubling up, add 1 point in G-Experience.

‡ Optionally, replace Free Fall with two points in G-Experience.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice is a specialist of sorts, having honed a certain set of skills over a very long life. Skills that make him [FNORD] . . . From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's spinning words and whimsy into gold. Of course, if he's not writing about *GURPS*, he's blogging about it. Visit his site "Ravens N' Pennies" (www.ravensnpennies.com) for more *GURPS* goodies. He's the co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* and *Dungeon Fantasy Traps*. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group (the Headhunters); Beth "Archangel" McCoy, the "Sith Editrix"; Erik Michalik; Blake Chapman; and Euan Hastie, for being most excellent sounding boards. A special thanks to Celti for their help with the ultra-tech skill-set entries.

Any adventure you can imagine . . .



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THE THRILL OF THE CHASE

BY KELLY PEDERSEN

The chase system on pp. 31-35 of *GURPS Action 2: Exploits* resolves pursuits in a fun, quick way. This article provides optional rules to add effects from terrain and dramatic events that can spice things up, plus a system to insert such challenges randomly.

TERRAIN

The following rules add modifiers to chases based on the sort of land- (or sea-, or air-) scape they pass through. The starting terrain is usually obvious, based on how it has been described prior to the chase. As a pursuit progresses, it may lead through other types.

The terrain classes are listed below. Each includes *Prohibited Size* (the Size Modifiers of people, vehicles, etc. that cannot enter that terrain at all), *Restricted Size* (the Size Modifiers that treat the terrain as Rough, p. 13), and *Maximum*

Range (the farthest range band a foe can occupy and still be attacked with ranged weaponry, with -2 for cover in addition to other penalties; farther ranges are impossible, while closer ranges have no cover penalty unless the GM wishes to impose one). If the quarry is beyond the Maximum Range band for the terrain, they are always considered to have appropriate conditions to make a Hide maneuver.

If a chase enters an area that participants can't pass due to their size, they must either find a new conveyance or continue on foot, or else treat it as a dead end (p. 14). If a participant can't *personally* fit into the space due to his own SM, he has no way to proceed. Either way, this provides an excellent chance for a smaller pursued party to win the chase!

Open

The easiest sort of area to move through, open terrain doesn't feature prominently in dramatic chases. There are no significant barriers, and movement in all directions is relatively easy. Examples includes wide-open prairie, vast deserts, and the open sea.

Prohibited Size: None.
Restricted Size: None.
Maximum Range: None.

Normal

Normal terrain has wide but present boundaries and only a few hazards. This includes most typical highways, freeways, country roads, the sea near navigable coasts, and airspace above a city with few tall buildings.

Prohibited Size: None.
Restricted Size: SM +7 or higher.
Maximum Range: Extreme.

Tight

Space where the limitations to movement are always a factor in maneuvering and the view is restricted. Some examples are city streets with heavy traffic or narrow lanes, light forests, canals or rivers, or the airspace among mountain ranges or skyscrapers.

Prohibited Size: SM +7 or higher.
Restricted Size: SM +6 or +5.
Maximum Range: Long.

Hyper-Pinched

This extra-restricted form of terrain is passable only by human-sized or smaller characters, and even then, only with difficulty. It includes ventilation ducts, tunnels dug by jungle insurgents, and similarly claustrophobic spaces. Chases that don't start in such terrain rarely go there, and it certainly shouldn't be added randomly – only as a deliberate choice for a really tense pursuit.

Prohibited Size: SM +1 or higher.
Restricted Size: SM 0 or -1.
Maximum Range: Close.

Tiny Chases for Tiny Races

It's not common in the action genre, but *GURPS* games contain multitudes. Sometimes, chases involve very tiny participants and very tight spaces. As a general rule, use the largest SM of an object that can fit into the width of the path along with the next-lowest SM as the Restricted Size range, with smaller creatures moving easily; anything larger is prohibited. For example, a 10"-wide pipe would fit SM -6 or -7 people, vehicles, and so on, but restrict their movement, while those smaller than that could travel freely. Maximum ranges much shorter than Close are usually appropriate.

Cramped

Very narrow areas or ones with many unpredictable hazards: alleyways, heavily forested regions, or rocky waters. Aerial zones are a special case, considered cramped when both horizontal and vertical movement are constrained.

Prohibited Size: SM +5 or higher.

Restricted Size: SM +4 or +3.

Maximum Range: Medium.

Pinched

The narrowest form of terrain a chase typically travels through, impassable to all but the smallest vehicles. This includes interior passageways of a building or caves. Very few air or water situations are this restricted.

Prohibited Size: SM +3 or higher.

Restricted Size: SM +2 or +1.

Maximum Range: Short.

Rough

Rough terrain isn't a category of its own. Instead, it modifies other terrain types. It represents circumstances that make moving across it difficult, independent of how much space is available: unpaved or degraded roads, slick ice fields, turbulent storm clouds, roiling seas, and so on. While in such areas, everyone controlling a vehicle must roll against their relevant operation skill (pedestrians roll against the better of DX or Acrobatics) at the *start* of each round, before maneuvers are declared or chase rolls made. For particularly unfriendly conditions, apply a penalty from -1 to -5. A chase participant whose SM is in the Restricted Size range for the terrain always treats it as Rough, with an additional -2 to control rolls if it is *otherwise* Rough. If anyone fails a control roll due to such conditions, but by no more than the their vehicle's SR (a regular failure on foot), treat it as if they suffered a close call last round – they must take the Emergency Action or Stop maneuvers this round or suffer a wipeout. If the roll failed by more than their vehicle's SR (a critical failure for a pedestrian), they *immediately* suffer a wipeout!

CHASE EVENTS

The most thrilling chases involve more than just racing through the landscape – other stuff gets in the way, people interfere, and fate takes a hand! The following occurrences can be inserted into a chase to spice things up. The GM should always describe an event at the *start* of a round, so that participants can choose maneuvers and make other decisions in response to it.

Obstacles

Obstacles are anything that blocks the forward progress of a chase – cross traffic, a fruit stand, even the old standby of a pair of workers carrying a sheet of glass. Obstacles are different from the omnipresent hazards of a landscape because they

must be *specifically* reacted to. Although they may be similar to other elements of the area, they have inserted themselves into the chase dramatically and force the participants to adapt to them on the fly.

There are several options when faced with an obstacle. If you don't want to deal with it, you can Stop, take a static maneuver (such as Attack), or try a Reverse or Reverse Escape (p. 14) to come back the way you came. In general, if any circumstances cause a participant in a chase to take a static maneuver on a round where obstacles appeared, the obstacles are still in the way. To continue on the path, the obstacle must be *evaded* or *plowed through* in the next round, unless that side is giving up entirely. Something that appears in front of one party affects them and everyone behind them, though the GM may declare that after enough people plow through it, it's effectively destroyed and no longer presents a barrier.

UNEQUAL TERRAIN

When chases involve very different types of vehicles, it sometimes makes sense to say that they are in different types of terrain. A car driving through empty city streets might travel through Normal terrain, while the attack helicopter flying after them and dealing with guy-wires, overhanging balconies, and so forth would have to cope with Tight terrain. In these circumstances, use the size limitations that apply to each chase participant individually, but use the *shortest* maximum range for everyone. Mismatched terrain like this usually gives the party with less-restricted movement opportunities for Mobility Pursuits or Escapes.

The most common case is for the Rough terrain modifier to affect participants asymmetrically. This is easy – just apply the penalties for Rough terrain to everyone that it affects and leave the others alone.

Evading an Obstacle

Evading requires a Stunt or Stunt Escape maneuver (which gives its usual bonus to the chase roll if successful), at a penalty appropriate to the obstacle. Some obstacles, such as oil slicks or gaps in the road, can only be evaded. A failure to evade results in a wipeout (**GURPS Action 2: Exploits**, p. 35), just like any failed stunt.

Plowing Through an Obstacle

Plowing through means deliberately hitting the obstacle in the hopes that you're tougher than it! You may choose any available maneuver, but resolve hitting the obstacle first. Treat this as a collision, using the rules in **Wipeouts (GURPS Action 2: Exploits**, p. 35). ST for the obstacle is up to the GM; he can roll 1d×10 and decide on an object that might have that ST value, or he can use the table on p. B558 (reading HP as ST) to pick an appropriate value for the obstacle he has in mind. Plowing through always inflicts the appropriate damage and means that *next* round, you must choose a Stop or Emergency Action maneuver to maintain control. Objects with ST twice yours or more cannot be plowed through at all and must be evaded, while obstacles with ST half or less than yours can be plowed through without requiring a subsequent control roll.

Dead Ends

A dead end is a special case of obstacle. It's the end of the road, a barrier that completely blocks the path. Evasion and plowing through are not options when confronted with a dead end. However, clever use of equipment or skills (or the use of a Lucky Break) might somehow change the terms of the chase so that the dead end isn't – climbing a sheer wall or parachuting off a cliff, for instance. This may constitute a Mobility Escape, Stunt Escape, or other maneuver the GM feels is appropriate. It should always require a different skill on the Chase Roll than what you were previously using – otherwise, it wasn't a dead end!

New Chase Maneuver: Reverse Escape

You turn around and head back at your pursuer, trying to get past them and take another route. Unlike a Reverse, you don't switch pursuit and pursuer.

Chase Rolls: -5. On foot, you can make your Chase Roll against **Acrobatics**. In all cases, regardless of the Quick Contest of Chase Rolls, failing your roll sends you to *Wipeouts* (**GURPS Action 2: Exploits**, p. 35). If you win and don't wipe out, you've successfully reversed course and don't have to deal with whatever obstacle or inconvenience was in your path. Win or lose, treat the chase as if your pursuer was at Close range last round.

Bystanders

These are people (or animals, robots, etc.) who get in the way, provide some unexpected help, or join in the chase.

Threatened

Threatened bystanders are endangered by the chase. If they appear in front of the heroes, they must be responded to as per obstacles (see pp. 13-14, although they usually don't remain next round). You *can* plow through a bystander if you're callous enough, but this should have serious consequences. Somehow, in action movies, all the traffic mayhem never seems to hurt anyone, but *deliberately* running over old Granny is a different matter.

If the bystander appears in front of the foes the heroes are pursuing, they'll be left in peril in some way: knocked to the edge of a bridge, left sprawled right in the path of traffic, and so on. The driver must choose to either perform a Stunt (at -4) to save the person while continuing the chase, or Stop to get out and save them (which is automatic). When the heroes are being pursued, bystanders rarely step into a chase after the team has passed but in time to be menaced by the foes.

Useful

A useful bystander can help with the chase in some way: point pursuers in the wrong direction, move to block an escape, and so forth. Getting help from a bystander requires a reaction roll. Influence rolls generally take too long to be useful in a chase context, but a **Fast-Talk** roll at -5 can be substituted if you have a means of communication. If a bystander is in a hierarchical organization, a hero with relevant Rank

can try an Assistance Roll (at -5 for the difficulty of displaying authority in the midst of a chase) to order assistance.

On a "Good" or better reaction, the person will help in whatever way is appropriate. He may provide the heroes with directions (treat this as a successful Area Knowledge roll to choose the event on the next round; see *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Action*, p. 15). He can supply the enemy with *bad* directions or similar distractions (imposing a penalty on their Chase Roll from -1 to -5). He can create an obstacle (pp. 13-14) if he has the means, or even attempt a Force or Ram.

On a "Poor" or "Neutral" reaction, the bystanders refuse to get involved. On a "Bad" or worse result, they actively help the *enemy*, reversing any of the suggestions above to aid the heroes' foes!

Involved

Finally, bystanders can be *involved* – people who, for whatever reason, want to participate in the chase. This can include authorities trying to contain the situation, thrill-seekers seeing a chance to indulge their impulses, or aggrieved individuals angered by collateral damage. They become a third party in the chase, coming in behind the current pursuers. Treat this as a three-way chase (**GURPS Action 2: Exploits**, p. 34). The GM can assume a vehicle operation skill of 12 for purposes of control rolls, Chase Rolls, etc.

Opportunities

These represent chances to pull off something special. They can constitute the special circumstances required for a Hide, Mobility Escape, Mobility Pursuit, Stunt, or Stunt Escape maneuver. The exact description is up to the GM – there's really too many possibilities to describe here!

One special case is the opportunity to change vehicles, upgrading one or both sides' mobility. In a foot chase, it could be finding bicycles or motorbikes; in a car chase, a parked sports car. Or it can even be a chance to change the mobility type completely – abandoning a minivan on an airport runway and stealing a crop duster, for instance. The GM should bear in mind that allowing only one side a major mobility advantage will quickly end the pursuit. However, opportunities tend to come in packs; a full bike-rack or more than one plane in the hangar, for instance.

Trouble Runs in Packs

A round doesn't have to contain just a single obstacle, bystander, or opportunity. Adding several can make the situation even more interesting, although the GM should be careful not to let the action get too complicated too often, or risk absurdity.

For multiple obstacles, a driver can choose to evade all of them, plow through all of them, or evade some and hit others. To evade multiple obstacles, roll at the highest penalty among them, with an extra -2 per obstacle evaded past the first. Treat each obstacle plowed through as a separate collision. If the driver chooses Emergency Action on the subsequent round, he is at -1 on the Chase Roll for each obstacle past the first he hit.

Multiple bystanders of the same type are simply treated as a more dramatic example of a *single* bystander – a bus full of nuns teetering on the edge of a cliff is a threatened bystander, a biker gang trying to catch both parties is an involved bystander, and so forth. If a driver uses a Stunt to avoid a group of bystanders, treat them as a single obstacle.

Simultaneous opportunities are usually mutually exclusive – if chances to both Hide and take a Mobility Escape present themselves, a driver can do one or the other, not both. If an opportunity appears at the same time as an obstacle, the obstacle must be dealt with *before* the opportunity can be used, either by evading it or colliding with it (taking a static maneuver or otherwise refusing to engage with the obstacle means giving up the opportunity, too). In either case, choose the maneuver appropriate for the opportunity; do not use a Stunt or Stunt Escape maneuver to evade. However, if avoiding the obstacle, make a control roll before the Chase Roll, at the penalty appropriate for the obstacle. Success grants a bonus equal to half the penalty on the control roll to the Chase Roll, while failure results in a penalty equal to the size of the control roll penalty. If plowing through an obstacle, collision damage occurs as normal, and the Chase Roll is at -2.

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE ACTION

The GM can insert terrain changes, obstacles and so forth according to a predetermined plan, an established map, or on the fly. To randomly determine what happens, roll 3d and consult the *Chase Circumstances* table, below.

Obstacles usually appear in front of the heroes, while stunt opportunities appear in front of whoever is in the lead. Bystanders arrive in a dramatically relevant way: threatened ones can show up either in front of the enemies (and need saving) or in front of the team (and require evading); useful bystanders appear where their help can be taken advantage of; and involved bystanders always join the chase at the rear. A team member can use a Lucky Break to shift an established obstacle in front of the enemy or ensure only the protagonists can take advantage of stunt fodder. A Lucky Break can also be used to declare any result on the table below. A negative

result (such as an obstacle) appears as normal, and requires a second Lucky Break to ensure it affects only the enemy.

A pursued hero may, on any round, roll **Area Knowledge** (a driver or a pedestrian makes both this and his Chase Roll at -2 due to distraction). If successful, he can choose on the *next* round any table result from 7-14.

Normally, if the heroes use a Lucky Break or Area Knowledge to declare a result, the GM doesn't need to roll, though he can still decide that other events also occur that don't contradict the results the players chose.

Chase Circumstances

3d	Event	Notes
3	Opportunity to Hide or Mobility Escape.	
4	Terrain narrows two steps.	[1]
5	Opportunity for a vehicle change.	[2]
6	Terrain changes to or away from Rough.	
7	Useful bystander.	
8	Terrain narrows one step.	[1]
9	Stunt opportunity.	[3]
10-11	Nothing special.	
12	Obstacle.	[3]
13	Terrain widens one step.	[1]
14	Involved or threatened bystander.	
15	Roll twice on the table; use both results.	[4]
16	Opportunity for Mobility Pursuit.	
17	Terrain widens two steps.	[1]
18	Dead end.	

Notes

[1] If terrain would narrow beyond Tight, apply the Rough modifier *instead* of narrowing the terrain – this persists through future terrain changes. If terrain would widen past Open, remove the Rough modifier instead of widening.

[2] Roll 1d: 1-4, upgrade to previous vehicle; 5-6, opportunity to change mobility type.

[3] To determine penalty of stunt, including to evade obstacle, roll 1d+2. To determine ST of obstacle to plow through, roll 1d×10.

[4] Roll again if the circumstances are contradictory or if this entry comes up again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kelly Pedersen lives and works in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. He rarely gets into thrilling chases himself, although he's been known to chase after a delivery vehicle carrying a new gaming book with some determination. He's been using **GURPS** for a variety of games for over 10 years now, and *that's* a somewhat worrying thought!

EIDETIC MEMORY

BLACK GEMINI

BY DAVID L. PULVER

This episodic adventure for *GURPS Action* involves an attempt to shut down the intertwined operations of a faction of international organ traffickers and militants. It is the best fit for a counter-terrorist, task force, or spy vs. spy campaign. The default assumption is the PCs are operators associated with a Western intelligence or covert-operations agency tasked with performing foreign missions, such as the CIA or FBI, the UK's Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, also known as MI6), or a fictional agency or task force of agencies with similar scope. They could also be "deniable" contractors hired by such an agency. Throughout this adventure, the party will be referred to as "the team."

MISSION BACKGROUND

"Blood antiquities" are archaeological artifacts that were looted from museums and archaeological sites in conflict zones and sold on the black market. The ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria led to a great increase in this activity. While extremist groups destroyed some pre-Islamic period artifacts out of religious zeal, they came to realize that these treasures could provide a significant funding stream.

Thus, monitoring and countering the trade in illegal antiquities is of interest not only to law enforcement but also to counter-terrorist organizations. Antiquities that might sell for a few hundred dollars in a European antique shop (such as pieces of stone funerary covers, ancient vase or glass fragments, or common Roman-era coins) are handled by freelance scavengers who pay a tax to the militants to retrieve them and smuggle them out of conflict zones. The more valuable museum-grade pieces (such as intact statues or gold objects) could bring in hundreds of thousands or even millions, so careful track is kept of where the money goes to ensure profits are returned. However, the trail can run both ways . . .

Mission Background

Five days ago, an American citizen sent a tip that she had spotted an artifact which the online FBI Stolen Art File lists as a theft from a Syrian museum.

The report came from the smartphone account of Nina Rogers, age 20, an American college student and art history major. She was vacationing in Rome, Italy with a school friend, Kelly Tran. Rogers reported seeing an object that closely resembled the artifact – a small golden griffin of Roman origin, with an estimated value to a collector of \$250,000 – and attached a high-res photo that confirmed this identification, while also querying about a reward. She indicated that if someone confirmed the item was stolen, she would send more information. The FBI office flagged this as an object of high interest and encouraged her to reply, which she failed to do.

At this point, the FBI opened a case file. Examination of Nina Rogers' social media showed her profile had been scrubbed. Further investigation revealed she had posted a low-res image on her primary social-media account the day before she contacted the FBI, commenting "saw this on a guy's yacht: is it real thing?" and received a few unimportant comments from a small circle of friends in the United States and a few comments from fellow college classmates back in the United States indicative that it was either a fake or stolen goods. Shortly after this post, her friend, Kelly Tran, commented "no drama: we checked – fake." The roommates, who had previously posted every few days, ceased to update their accounts after this point. Rogers scrubbed her own account the next day with a short "tired of drama bitches, xo" post.

This suspicious activity would normally be a matter for the American embassy and the Italian police authorities, except that just five weeks prior, a raid by a NATO special-operations team on a militant headquarters in northwestern Syria recovered records that included a photo and line item of this very artifact. It was part of a cache in the possession of a rebel unit led by one Hassan al-Uzbeki, who had been flagged as a person of extreme interest. This was because al-Uzbeki's unit recently overran a forward-deployed Syrian army munitions dump. Analysis of panicked Russian and Syrian signals revealed the dump had held a stockpile of a sophisticated binary nerve agent, code named Black Gemini. Syrian and Russian retaliation was swift, and major air strikes by Russian jets destroyed the dump and most of al-Uzbeki's unit.

However, there was no sign of a chemical release, and the various agencies that track these activities believe he and a few subordinates escaped the net. There are indications he may have decided Syria was too hot. Like many rebels, He likely fled to Turkey or Egypt and is now a rogue operator.

The golden griffin was small enough that it is quite possible that it was in al-Uzbeki's personal possession, or that of one of his men, and left Syria with him. If so, that the artifact turned up in the hands of an Italian collector so soon after al-Uzbeki's disappearance suggests two things: First, he may have needed funds in a hurry and second, that he sold it without going through a more tortuous chain of cutouts.

In other words, if the PCs' team tracks the buyer of the griffin, it may lead the agency to al-Uzbeki and Black Gemini. It is imperative that this WMD is secured or destroyed before it is either used or sold to a group that will use it for a mass-casualty attack.

Mission Objectives

The team is deployed immediately to the Mediterranean to follow up the FBI's lead relating to the missing American students. Initial leads are:

- The missing students' parents and American acquaintances have already been interviewed by the FBI, generating no useful intelligence – they were ordinary student tourists visiting sites and having fun before they vanished.
- The agency does have the address of the rented villa the two young women stayed at (which would be a logical starting point for any investigation).
- Attempts to track the smartphones owned by the students failed. The phones were disabled, destroyed, dumped underwater, or in a RF-proof enclosure.

The GM is free to generate any biographical details should the players be interested.

Primary Mission Priorities

- Locate and, if they are still alive, rescue and debrief American citizens Nina Rogers and Kelly Tran.
- Investigate black-market connections that might exist between the owner or owners of the golden griffin artifact and Hassan al-Uzbeki or his subordinates.
- Determine the location and status of the Black Gemini nerve agent. Secure the agent, or provide actionable intelligence so that a strike can secure or destroy it.
- Take all necessary action to prevent imminent release of Black Gemini nerve agents in circumstances that may result in a mass-casualty incident.

Secondary Mission Priorities

As long as they do not compromise primary priorities, the team can pursue secondary priorities, which the GM could award additional bonus points for completing.

- Engage in force protection.
- Maintain low profile.
- Avoid causing diplomatic incidents with Italy or other friendly or neutral governments (that is, don't get caught publicly breaking laws).

- Act to degrade al-Uzbeki organization, their associates in the criminal black market, or other hostiles offering or supporting a terror threat against national interests and citizens, or those of their allies.

*He seems quite determined to interfere;
it would be unwise to delay things any longer.*

– Serafis, in Golden Salamander

PALERMO

The capital of the region of Sicily in southern Italy, this ancient town is a bustling port city of 670,000 people. The women's last known address is a cheap rented house on the edge of a rather sketchy neighborhood in the northern outskirts, just outside the bounds of the grim San Fillippo Neri (ZEN) housing projects. If the party chooses to investigate themselves (e.g., successfully using appropriate social, computer, or forensic skills), they can learn the following information.

The authorities will discover the same clues, but the party will need to use appropriate Influence skills to get the police to *reveal* what they have learned. The team may also get a run-around, as some of the local cops have been bribed by the mob . . .

Success gathers one or more of the following leads.

The Apartment

The young women's apartment landlady, a gruff elderly person, lies and says she doesn't recognize their names or faces. If pushed, she's frightened and her son Bruno, a big bruiser (a mook except ST 15), will come out to protect her. If that fails, they may break and try to claim the nice young American women moved out suddenly, left the place really clean . . . If the team can get into the room, anyone with Forensics skill or who makes a Per-6 or Criminology-4 roll may recognize a "professional" job.

Some neighbors reported sounds of a fight, argument, or struggle late at night and saw a white van leaving. This matches the date of Nina's last social-media post.

The Bar

The Etruscan, a cozy neighborhood coffee bar with a number of both Italians and foreign clients, is the closest establishment to the women's apartment. Vittorio, a handsome barista, remembers two young American women, a brunette and a very pretty blond, who flirted with him, but as he is talking, he's angrily called into the kitchen by his boss before he can say more. When he comes out, he looks scared and "doesn't really remember." (His boss reminded him that the mafia goons said not to talk to anyone, especially cops, about those women – or else). If the investigators lean on or influence Vittorio or his boss anyway, the major takeaway is a day before they disappeared, the young women met two handsome and probably mob-connected guys, one of who looked Middle Eastern, and went out with them – probably a bad idea. Neither one was a regular, but one of them drove a Maserati luxury sports car.

Local Gossip

Gossip on the street or at local bars and restaurants from migrants, street vendors, or honest cops:

Rossini Import/Export, a big warehouse in a shady part of town, is said to have mafia connections. The place used to be involved in cigarette smuggling. Now it seems to be connected with the migrant trade. Undocumented immigrants – often kids – are sometimes taken there. Migrants who owe passage money to the mafia-connected traffickers are sometimes taken to Rossini to “pay their debt.” They don’t come out.

The local mafia is making big money off migrants. The senior cops and maybe even the public prosecutor’s office has been paid off; whenever an inspector shows up, there’s nothing there

Fancy sports cars are occasionally seen parked near Rossini Import/Export. Despite it being a bad area, no one ever touches them.

Two “higher-ups” in the mob sometimes visit Rossini, but they do not live in town. Both are playboys. One of them is a Middle Eastern man who drives a Maserati; the other looks Italian. Both have an eye for foreign women and sometimes pick them up.

Anyone who badly fails Streetwise, Carousing, or other information-gathering rolls may attract attention and lead to an attempted ambush by a number of mob torpedoes (statistics as per the mafia goons, p. 19) seeking to grab, intimidate, or kill them, possibly also including a drive-by or abduction with the aid of a number of mobsters in a van.

ROSSINI IMPORT-EXPORT

This warehouse is run by the mafia-associated trafficking gang. It is used to process migrants and refugees trafficked to Italy who were unable to pay the traffickers’ fees, or who simply caused trouble.

Front Office: Maria, a bored secretary, works here behind a countertop, reading a novel and entering data into a laptop computer, keeping track of intakes and outtakes (identified by code numbers for tissue types and ages, not actually descriptions or names). She’s aware of what’s going on, but it would take a threat to her life to get her to admit it. She knows the most recent “intake” was unusual: a young adult woman with an American accent, rather than the usual Syrians and North African kids or teens.

Warehouse Floor: The largest room. No longer seriously used as a warehouse. There’s a card table in one corner and three or four mafia goons smoking and drinking, or eating takeout. A small forklift sits in one corner. Stacks of shipping crates form a maze. A double garage door leads out. A second story catwalk surrounds the floor. A white delivery van (used to transport patients) is parked near the exit.

Examination Room: A tissue-typing laboratory. If it’s daytime, one of the kids from the holding pen may be here while a lab tech and nurse run tests to determine tissue type and transplant compatibility. A mafia goon stands guard.

Surgeon’s Office: A well-lit office used by the surgeon when he’s not operating. On the desk sits a laptop computer (password-protected) with details of transplants. A large plastic plant sits in a corner, and cuckoo clock and print of *The*

Scream are on the wall. Behind the print is a wall safe with \$19,200 in Italian currency. The surgeon (Dr. Gagliardi) and Maria both have the combination.

Operating Room: Two operating tables dominate the center of this room, with an elderly anesthesia machine. On a cart are various surgical gear and jars of preservative solution. Everything is surprisingly sterile. There may be someone on the table. While the adventure assumes Nina is in the recovery cell, for some extra drama, she could be on the table being prepped for another (possibly fatal) transplant operation. If there’s an operation going on, Dr. Gagliardi, the anesthesiologist, nurse, and lab tech will all be working, with the patient strapped down and sedated.

Scrub and Supply Room: Closet with shelves of medical and surgical supplies and racks of hospital gowns and lab coats. There are also two stainless-steel sinks.

Cold Storage Room: Containers with sterile ice and preservation solutions. A liver and two kidneys are packed in insulated ice-packed containers in the van. The actual transplants are not done here. Rather, the organs are given fake documentation and shipped off to their buyers (as brokered by Marco Silvestri and Ahmad Aziz; see pp. 20-22), who then take them to high-end private clinics elsewhere in Italy or other parts of Europe (often in Germany or Ukraine) for the transplant itself. The recipients and doctors do not know where the organs come from. Criminal mafias kidnap and conduct compatibility tests on children in illegal clinics. A kidney can net \$280,000 for the mafia, while for a liver, the figure would be around \$165,000. The donors get only a few hundred dollars, usually credited to their “debt.”

Morgue: Blood-stained white shrouds wrap the bodies of three children and two young adults, all Syrian migrants, each missing multiple organs.

Holding Pen: A barred door and a locked room. A mafia goon is usually outside here. Inside are two scared children in hospital gowns (Fatima, age 11, from Syria; Ayan, age 9, from Libya; both girls are orphans). They have water but no food. They haven’t been operated on yet, but Fatima has a good idea what is coming and is trying to comfort Ayan.

Recovery Cell: Nina Rogers (female, age 19) and Mohammed Dobow (male, age 13) are handcuffed to beds. The room has barred doors and no windows, and a bare electric bulb for light. They have IV drips.

Dr. Ignazio Gagliardi (“The Surgeon”)

The surgeon will try to get away or bargain, fighting only if cornered. He knows the names of the organ brokers, Marco Silvestri and Ahmad Aziz.

ST 11; DX 12; IQ 12; HT 10.

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 12; Per 12; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8. 5’11”; 165 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Callous; Greed (12); Wealth (Filthy Rich).

Languages: Italian (Native); English (Accented); German (Native).

Skills: Diagnosis-12; Driving (Automobile)-13; Guns (Pistol)-12; Holdout-12; Interrogation-12; Knife-12; Leadership-11; Streetwise-11; Surgery-14.

Equipment: Knife (scalpel); .38 pistol; sports car; white lab coat; smartphone; medical kit. • His phone has the number for Marco Silvestri.

Noncombatants

If it's necessary to roll for any of the extra staff, use 10 for any stats.

Anesthesiologist; lab assistant; nurse; secretary: None are armed and will flee or surrender in combat situations. All can speak Italian (Native) and English (Accented).

Fatima, Ayan, Mohammed: Young illegal migrants or refugees victimized by the clinic.

Nina Rogers

ST 9; DX 11; IQ 12; HT 9.

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 (7*); Will 12; Per 12; FP 9 (6*).

Basic Speed 4.75; Basic Move 4; Dodge 7; Parry 8.t
5'6"; 120 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Appearance (Attractive).

Languages: English (Native); French (Broken); Italian (Native); Latin (Accented).

Skills: Bicycling-11; Computer Operation-12; Driving (Automobile)-10; Driving (Motorcycle)-11; Diplomacy-13; Hiking-10; History (Classical)-12; Literature-11; Swimming-12.

* Parenthetical values are due to injuries and fatigue. Nina had HT 11 and the Fit advantage before her ordeal.

NINA'S STORY

If the PCs can rescue Nina, she can tell them what happened, and give the name of the yacht her friend is (hopefully) still imprisoned on. This will allow them to track down the golden griffin and its new owners, Ahmad and Marco.

She was staying in a rented house and enjoying Palermo's nightclub scene, along with her friend Kelly Tran. They met the handsome Italian playboy Marco and his gorgeous Egyptian buddy Ahmad. They visited his yacht, the *Ultima Cena*, taking a short trip around the harbor. As the young men were charming, the young women agreed to spend the night aboard the yacht; Kelly was obviously taken with Ahmad, though Nina wasn't sure about Marco, but finally agreed to sleep with him. It was a mistake.

That night, Nina awoke and got lost hunting for the toilet. She ended up blundering into Marco's study. There she noticed it decorated with a number of expensive pieces of antique art. One stirred a memory in her art-student brain, and she snapped a picture with her phone to look at later, then returned. There she found Marco, Ahmad, and Kelly in her bed together, and urged her to join in. Nina wasn't comfortable with that, refused, and locked herself in another guest room.

Next morning, Nina told Marco she was leaving. She tried to convince Kelly to return home, but her more adventurous roommate was still enraptured with Ahmad. Marco had also promised to take her scuba diving in Sicily. Nina told her friend to be careful, but wanted nothing more to do with Marco, so she returned ashore. While waiting for a taxi, she updated the pictures she'd taken aboard the yacht to her social-media

MAFIA GOONS

These rough men and women help the villains in various capacities, largely having to do with hurting people.

ST 11; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 10.

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8. 5'8"-6'1"; 155-190 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Bully; Duty (To boss).

Languages: Italian (Native); English (Broken). • Some have Somali (Broken).

Skills: Brawling-11; Driving (Automobile)-10; Guns (Pistol)-11; Intimidation-11; Shortsword-11; Streetwise-11.

Equipment: 9mm auto pistol; baton; handcuffs; Taser; cheap suits but lots of gold.

page, asking if any of her archeology friends recognized it, but then forgot about it, went out to dinner, did some sightseeing, and then to bed.

Next day, however, she got a shock: a social-media friend (a college buddy) who thought the antique picture she'd posted was real because it looked very similar to something from a museum. Nina's memory was jogged, and she decided to check it out for herself: image surfing found a match – on the FBI's Stolen Art page! It was a valuable museum piece looted from an Aleppo museum during the ongoing Syrian civil war. In fact, there was a big reward for information leading to its recovery!

Nina was now concerned for her friend's safety; she was out of cell phone range, but she figured that since the two guys knew she knew their names and where they were, they wouldn't try anything. Meanwhile, the idea of busting creepy Marco and getting a big reward from the FBI or Homeland Security sounded good, with her student debt coming up . . . Still, she might be wrong and didn't want to get Ahmad (who had been okay) into trouble if she was. She sent a cautious email query to the FBI page, attaching a picture and a few details, then went to sleep – only to have a very unpleasant awakening.

Early in the morning hours, a pair of thugs broke into her house. As she struggled into wakefulness, she was hit with a Taser, hooded, bound, and stuffed into a trunk. Her bad dream became worse when, after a lengthy drive, she found herself in a cold medical examination room with three other frightened young adults and kids who she soon learned were refugees from North Africa or Syria who had run afoul of a trafficking gang.

It got worse as she underwent a medical examination, then was returned to her cell. The next day, she was dragged out to an operating room where a green-clad medical team, using barely adequate anesthesia, removed one of her kidneys. Then she was taken to a dirty "recovery room" and chained to a bed. She shared the room with Mohammed, a Somali boy of 12, who had recently had a portion of his liver taken. He had lost his parents at sea, he told her, and had been unable to earn the money the traffickers had demanded for the passage of his entire family.

THE PORT

If the PCs investigate the port, they won't get anywhere unless they have the names of the yacht owner or the yacht *Ultima Cena* itself. The port is very busy with numerous private and commercial vessels, and foreign tourists and visitors. Once they get those names (either from the surgeon or Nina), they can check port authority records and find that it left the day before Nina disappeared. Asking at the specific marina it was moored at (a local yacht club) may find other yachtsmen who know Marco is the owner, and that he visits this port on occasion, but spends most of his time at sea. He is often sighted with women and with a Egyptian man, who he is friends with. When the yacht last departed, there was a very pretty blond woman hanging on his arm, waving at someone ashore.

Once the team has the ship's description, they can use assets such as satellites or maritime traffic control (*Ultima Cena* isn't trying to be stealthy and is following all marine traffic regulations posting its position) and either try to intercept and board it on the high seas or wait for it to make landfall.

Well, it's ironic, isn't it? Something so beautiful should be mixed up with so much ugliness! Beauty brings out the worst in people.

– Elias Blackwell,
*The Inspector Lynley
Mysteries #4.4*

THE ULTIMA CENA

This luxury yacht is currently sailing between Palermo and Cyprus, with Marco Silvestri and Ahmad Aziz aboard along with the captive Kelly Tran. Ahmad is keeping Kelly until she ceases to amuse him, at which point she will be turned into spare parts. Kelly has a certain inkling of this and is trying to keep a low profile.

Also aboard and securely hidden in the back of Marco's closet are refrigerated bags containing a chunk of liver and a kidney packed in sterile ice for two special VIP customers waiting in Cyprus, each of whom has paid a small fortune: Sergei Malinkov, a Russian shipping oligarch whose sickly 12-year-old daughter Vasilisa's liver is failing due to biliary atresia; and Hassan al-Uzbeki, who happens to be a match for Nina's kidney.

If uninterrupted, Marco and Ahmad will dock at Cyprus' major port (Limassol) and invite Malinkov (who has his daughter with him) to come aboard. After making sure he has received payment (to his Swiss bank account), Marco will deliver the liver. Then he will head to northern Cyprus to deliver Nina's kidney to Hassan. After meeting with Hassan (perhaps hosting some of his militants aboard the ship to pick up the kidney), Marco and Ahmad will head to Cairo for a few days of business (meeting with potential clients), then take another four days to sail back to Palermo. If the PCs have not done anything by this point, Nina will have likely had other organs removed, killing her, and Ahmad will tire of Kelly and send her to take Nina's place on the transplant table.

The Yacht

Ultima Cena is a 90' motor yacht built in 2002 in Viareggio, Italy. It has a composite hull and teak wood deck. It is powered by two 2,000-kW diesel engines with a top speed of 27 knots (31 mph).

The bridge has heavily automated "glass cockpit" controls and inertial/satellite map displays allowing two people to operate the vessel, with a 20-mile range radar, radio and satellite communication system, Internet connection with Wi-Fi, and depth-finding sonar. Currently the vessel has a course programmed to take it to the northern Cyprus coastal town of Kyrenia.

The main salon dining area seats up to eight guests. It also has a well-stocked pantry, heavily automated kitchen, and an impressive liquor cabinet.

Three guest cabins accommodate up to six guests, all furnished with king-sized beds. The owner and first mate's cabins (used by Marco and Ahmad) both have Jacuzzis, thick carpets, and gold fittings. Marco also has hidden video cameras for recording his adventures, mood lighting, a mirrored ceiling, and a collection of kinky accessories.

A media room packed with electronic entertainment systems seats six. There are crew quarters with three cabins for up six people.

The study is configured to Marco's antiquarian tastes. In addition to a shelf of books (mostly Italian on classical subjects and archeology), and two comfy armchairs, he has one wall devoted to a display of ancient Greek and Roman coins from Syria, an impressive 18" wide Palmyrene stone funerary relief bust of an aristocratic woman (second century A.D., used to cover the opening of her tomb) and, at pride of place, a glass cabinet holding a Roman-era gold-plated bronze figure of a griffin (originally stolen from the national museum of Aleppo). The collection is worth over \$300,000 and weighs some 200 lbs.

The engine room is largely automated. A couple of small storage closets and rooms run off from the engine room; one holds spare parts, and the other cleaning supplies.

Luxury Yacht Table

Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Loc.	Draft
Luxury Yacht	248	-1/6	12f	1/15	145	25	+7	11A	10	3,000	\$18M	gS	12

BOATING (LARGE POWERBOAT)

One of these closets has a lock on it, and contains a small hidden room with a chain and bucket, in which prisoners like Kelly can be restrained.

A large aft deck can be used for outdoor dining or entertaining. It also has a heated spa pool. Mounted on deck are a dinghy, inflatable life rafts, and a locker holding scuba equipment.

Kelly Tran

A beautiful woman with long black hair and brown eyes, dressed in a bikini and shorts. Energetic, passionate, impulsive, and cheerful when not scared out of her mind.

ST 9; DX 12; IQ 10; HT 12

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 20 lbs.; HP 9; Will 12; Per 10; FP 12.

Basic Speed 6; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9.

5'8"; 121 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Appearance (Beautiful); Impulsiveness (12); Truthfulness (9).

Languages: English (Native); French (Broken); Italian (Accented); Vietnamese (Native).

Skills: Climbing-12; Computer Operation-10; Dancing-13; Driving (Automobile)-1; Driving (Motorcycle)-11; First Aid-10; Housekeeping-10; Scuba-12; Sex Appeal-13; Swimming-13.

Marco Silvestri

ST 12; DX 13; IQ 12; HT 11.

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12; Will 12; Per 13; FP 11.

Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 10; Parry 11.

5'8"; 200 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Appearance (Handsome); Callous; Combat Reflexes; Fit; Greed (12); Wealth (Filthy Rich).

Languages: Italian (Native); English (Accented); German (Accented); Russian (Accented); Turkish (Broken).

Skills: Administration-11; Boating (Large Powerboat)-13; Brawling-14; Current Affairs (Business)-14; Detect Lies-13; Driving (Automobile)-12; Guns (Pistol)-13; Holdout-12; Intimidation-15; Knife-13; Merchant (Trafficking)-15; Savoir-Faire (Mafia)-12.

Equipment: .357 revolver; concealable vest; .40 auto backup pistol in boot; large knife; smartphone.

Ahmad Aziz

ST 12; DX 13; IQ 12; HT 12

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12; Will 12; Per 13; FP 12.

Basic Speed 6.25. Basic Move 6; Dodge 10; Parry 11.

6'; 170 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Appearance (Very Handsome); Callous; Combat Reflexes; Fit; Greed (9); Wealth (Filthy Rich).

Languages: Arabic (Native); English (Accented); German (Accented); Russian (Accented); Turkish (Native).

Skills: Administration-11; Boating (Large Powerboat)-13; Brawling-14; Current Affairs (Business)-14; Driving (Automobile)-12; Guns (Pistol)-13; Guns (Rifle)-11; Holdout-12; Knife-13; Merchant (Trafficking)-13; Savoir-Faire (Mafia)-12; Scuba-11; Sex Appeal-13; Swimming-12.

Equipment: .40 auto pistol; concealable vest.

Crew

There may be additional crew aboard if the GM wishes. For an extra challenge, add one to two mafia goons (p. 19) per PC, working below decks.

KELLY'S STORY

What Nina hadn't counted on was that Kelly had asked Ahmad to let her use their boat's Wi-Fi booster to access her own social media (to post pictures of her adventures aboard the yacht). In the process, she'd guilelessly logged onto and showed her new boyfriend Nina's main social-media page . . . which now had the picture of the stolen golden griffin, and a few comments from Nina's archeology friends wondering where it had come from and if it was real – or stolen.

When Ahmad read Nina's social-media post, he lost it. His friend's hobby of buying illicit art could attract attention. He panicked and grabbed the phone away from Kelly and shouted for Marco, calling him an idiot for having let Nina see his stash of black-market antiquities.

Marco tried to calm things down, but after Ahmad's meltdown, Marco's protestations that the pieces were fakes rang hollow. Kelly was now scared and insisted they go home. When she grabbed her phone and tried to send a text, Marco pulled his gun and pistol-whipped her. Now convinced that things had gone south, the two criminals went into damage-control mode. Ahmad at gunpoint forced Kelly to post to the social-media account saying she'd confirmed they were fakes, but Marco was convinced Nina was a bigger problem. Both women had to be disposed of – they couldn't have cops nosing into their operations.

THE YACHTSMEN'S STORIES

Ahmad Aziz and Marco Silvestri were not merely rich playboys with a taste for black-market art. They were professional criminals, part of a thriving Italian-Egyptian-Eritrean crime network, based in Mediterranean port cities, that specialized in human-organ trafficking.

They worked as both brokers and middlemen, connecting wealthy Europeans and Russians in need of organ transplants with black-market organ harvesters and human traffickers in Egypt, Turkey, and Sicily. They preyed on desperate migrants and refugees. In many cases, kidney or liver was the price of a rickety boat ride for a family from Egypt or Lebanon or Africa.

The pair used their ill-gotten properties to fund a lavish lifestyle. Ahmad liked to buy expensive cars, high-end scuba gear, and beautiful women, while Marco spent money on fine wines and decorating his yacht with black-market art. Both enjoyed expensive clothes and lavish parties. And they could afford it: A single liver would sell for \$40,000 or more. They took 40% (minus a 20% tax to the mafia), the street hospitals that did the actual harvest took 50%, and the donors, if they were lucky, got 10%. Sometimes the unfortunates didn't get anything; indigent migrants who couldn't cough up their "debt" to the human traffickers were often made to pay with their entire bodies.

Marco had visions of police digging into affairs and finding how dirty they really were. Fortunately, they could still clean things up if they acted ruthlessly and quickly.

They could dispose of Kelly easily enough, though Ahmad wanted to keep her around for a bit to have “fun” before she was sacrificed. As for Nina, she had to go now. After a brutal interrogation of Kelly got the address of their rental, Marco called his mafia connections back in Sicily. Within an hour, a pair of enforcers arrived at Nina’s villa. They ransacked her place to remove any evidence. A mob cleaner then went over it. Some threats, and a few hefty bribes, to the landlady and neighbors made sure that “the girls were never there.”

Ahmad wanted to keep Kelly around aboard the ship until they reached their next destination. She could post a few “fake trail” social-media updates in case of any questions. They were between jobs, as it took a week or so to arrange a good deal. Meanwhile, Marco simply had Nina “sent to the clinic.” He has told Kelly what is going to happen to her, and Kelly believes Nina is most likely already dead.

The criminal pair had planned to head back to Rome and take Kelly to the hospital as well, but Marco received a call from one of his business clients. This required that they divert the vessel to Cyprus, where they were to meet a rich Russian and broker a deal aboard the yacht.

Marco thought of just killing Kelly and tossing her overboard while the meeting went down, but then decided it would be okay to keep her locked in a closet in the bilge. After he got tired of her, they’d send her to the same clinic her friend Nina had gone to. Marco got a kick out of showing her pictures of a client: “You’ll be a part of this guy.”

A VILLAGE IN NORTH CYPRUS

The team will need to catch Marco and Ahmad to learn of their connection to Hassan al-Uzbeki. The investigators might also develop additional leads. Careful interactions with local or international law enforcement could uncover that Hassan al-Uzbeki is also known as “The Mechanic,” a leader of a local Syrian rebel force who has a love of tinkering with drones. He has some kind of connections with a particular shady antique dealer in Cyprus (simply known as “A”), who is linked to the trade in “blood antiquities” – valuable artifacts looted from Syria by militants and smuggled into Europe to sell to unscrupulous collectors.

Turkish Authorities

Northern Cyprus is under de-facto Turkish control, and a sizable military garrison is maintained there. If the team get into loud firefights or chases, the Turkish army may intervene in platoon or greater strength and with APCs or helicopters in support. At that point, bugging out is a good idea.

Hassan al-Uzbeki (“The Mechanic”)

This 50-year-old Syrian rebel leader is preparing for a kidney transplant (or recovering, depending on whether the PCs reach Marco before or after the kidney transfer). He is often on dialysis, but uses a drone as his eyes to patrol the area around the village. The local villagers are accustomed to his eccentricities. He spends a lot of time at Kazam’s Bicycle and Hobby Shop, along with his bodyguards.

ST 10; DX 12; IQ 13; HT 10.

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 13; Per 13; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9. 5’8”; 120 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Charisma 2; Duty (The cause); Skinny; Terminally Ill; Unfit.

Languages: Arabic (Native); English (Accented); Russian (Accented).

Skills: Artillery (Bombs)-12; Bicycling-12; Brawling-12; Computer Operation-14; Electronics Repair (Communications)-13; Explosives (Demolition)-12; Guns (Pistol)-12; Guns (Rifle)-12; Leadership-13; Piloting (Helicopter)-11; Tactics-11.

Equipment: 9mm auto pistol; drone controller; smartphone; four quadcopters, one unarmed (for reconnaissance) and three fitted with improvised grenade bombs.

Hassan’s Fighters

ST 11; DX 10; IQ 10; HT 10.

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10. Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9. 5’5”-6”; 135-175 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Fanaticism.

Languages: Arabic (Native); English (Broken). • One of Turkish, Russian, or French (all Broken).

Skills: Brawling-12; Driving (Automobile)-10, Guns (Pistol)-12, Guns (Rifle)-11, Intimidation-10; Soldier-9; Streetwise-11.

Equipment: The bodyguards in the waiting area each have a 9mm auto pistol in a shoulder holster. The bodyguards outside additionally carry golf bags containing a compact 9mm SMG and a compact pump shotgun, 12G, which if time permits, they take out to use.

Kazam’s Bicycle and Hobby Shop

The shop is in a sleepy coastal village of Karakum, a few miles from the resort town of Kyrenia (also known as Girne). The little town is filled with well-kept whitewashed houses and quiet streets. This particular shop sells bicycles, diving supplies, and imported electronics. A hidden workshop has *al saqr* (“the falcon”), a homemade drone assembled from ultra-light aircraft parts, parts from smaller drones, and motorcycle components that will be big enough to carry the Black Gemini nerve-gas cylinders. So far, though, it can’t fly . . .

The Black Gemini is hidden in the workshop. The GM can decide how much searching the investigators need to do to locate it.

QUADCOPTER BOMB DRONES

Weaponized commercial hobby drones were successfully used by militant groups operating in Iraq and Syria. These attacks were eventually defeated when the U.S. military provided specialized communications-jamming equipment to their allies. While no longer viable tactics on the battlefield, such drones can be useful for other “soft” targets . . .

Quadcopter drones are steered remotely via a camera through a commercial tablet or cell phone that is plugged into a small game console-like controller (that contains the radio link and flight-control sticks). Various drones have been repurposed in this way. A popular model is the Chinese DJI Phantom quadcopter. Reports that their drones are being misused have led manufacturers to implement geo-fencing protocols so that they don't work in regions where they aren't marketed (e.g., the Middle East), but a skilled hacker might circumvent this with an Electronics Repair (Communications) roll (failure breaks it).

Quadcopter bombers are created by attaching improvised plastic bomb racks armed with lightweight bombs made from 40mm grenades. A typical quadcopter can carry two such bombs, each weighing under half a pound. Use the statistics for the reduced-sized hand grenades detailed in **GURPS Action 2: Exploits**. However, a hobby quadcopter doesn't do complex dive bombing maneuvers. It simply bombs targets by flying over them, stopping, and dropping the bomb vertically from about 10 or 20 yards up. The bomb has a two-second fuse. Bombs have Acc 0, use Artillery (Bombs) skill, and will usually use *Attacking an Area* (p. B414); apply an extra -2 for doing so through the teleoperation link. Remember that bombs that miss scatter by a distance equal to the square of the margin of failure. Improvised bombs aren't reliable (roll 3d: on 14+, it fails to detonate.)

Countermeasures

An actual area radio jammer will interfere with drone control, causing it to wobble off course and crash. The

GM may wish to allow wire rats with several minutes to kit-bash various radio parts into an improvised jamming device, probably with about 1/10 of the radio's range. Roll vs. Electronics Repair (EW) skill to assemble it and Electronics Operation (EW) to zero in the right frequencies to make it work.

The drone's body is 1' across. It has a 400' electrically limited flight ceiling (19,000' if this is hacked) and uses satellite navigation. The vision system provides a 60° field of view (as per Tunnel Vision). The remote controller has a three-mile range. Spare batteries are a half pound. Its onboard camera is limited to daylight vision, but can record live video or still photos. The drone has a 1.1 lb. payload, enough for two mini-bombs.

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

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

Quadcopter Table

Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Loc.	Stall
PILOTING (HELICOPTER)													
Attack Quadcopter	6	+1/3	11	6/22	4	1	-5	N/A	1	21*	\$1,300	H	0

* Controller has 3-mile range limit.

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THE FOOTBALL

BY JASON BRICK

How many of your gaming sessions resemble this? You've enjoyed hours of action, drama, suspense, and deep roleplaying. You've resolved plot points and resolved character arcs. Then somebody draws a sword or pulls a gun, and then . . .

. . . everybody does algebra for the next hour and a half.

Combat is an integral part of many campaigns, but that move from roleplaying to roll-playing can derail other important aspects of the game. A good tussle can be fun, but can also be a real problem for pacing and engagement. For some types of roleplayers, it can spoil an entire session. A few things that contribute to this problem include:

- Fights can feel like they're happening in a vacuum. Mathematics replaces story goals; statistics trump character; position replaces personality.

- Good encounter design is weighted in the PCs' favor, which can make combats feel too similar to each other.

- The complex rules and tighter time sequencing of combat make fights take up a disproportionate amount of time at the table, as compared to its contribution to the overall story.

- Character death – usually the primary conflict of a combat sequence – is an empty threat in most campaigns. Most GMs won't actually kill the stars of the story, which reduces the threat and tension of the battle.

If you run a “kick in the door” campaign for players who love thumping skulls week after week, you don't have a problem. If your group suffers from combat malaise, you can find a solution in non-fatal consequences to combat. This doesn't mean pulling punches at the last second, fudging your dice rolls to save lives, or putting losing PCs in a prisoner adventure instead of the boneyard. It means setting up consequences for action in combat that are as bad as character death and obviously connected to player goals outside of the fight.

This is why the bad guys keep kidnapping Lois Lane, and why Leonidas and his 300 Spartans willingly died to delay and discourage the Persians. It's why every *Indiana Jones* movie includes a fight over an artifact among its most compelling action sequences. We *know* Indy and Superman aren't going to die. If that was a realistic possibility, the movies would have different names. Adding a non-fatal consequence gives a scene uncertainty it previously lacked. That uncertainty creates tension, and tension is what makes any work of fiction fun.

It works just as well in a *GURPS* game. The author's gaming group calls the concept a *football*, owing to how much a fight over an object starts to resemble that game – or better yet, rugby or hockey. Using this approach for every dustup in an alley is impractical, but combats with a football are often the most engaging and memorable of a campaign. They have a variety of advantages.

- Including the consequences – or simply a reminder of the consequences – in the action of combat provides an immediate connection between the math of a fight and the story or character arcs that math represents.

- It keeps the overall story in play, with key elements of plot and character getting screen time in the middle of the demands of combat.

- The GM can weight an encounter with an even chance of PC failure, since losing the fight makes things just as interesting as winning.

- The GM can threaten players with a consequence that doesn't hurt feelings or grind the game to a halt – both of which are a common consequence of character death.

Most combats have some kind of story significance, if only the fact that dead adventurers can't save the day. But if you take some time to get reminders or artifacts of that significance on stage, your encounters will benefit from the effort. Here's a step-by-step process for making that happen.

STEP 1: LAY THE FOUNDATION

Decide what aspects of your campaign story you want to see reflected in the fight. The three key categories are:

- Characters – people, animals and other sentient beings the party wants to protect, capture, or kill.

- Belongings – portable objects the adventurers must take from the bad guys, or keep the bad guys from taking from them.

- Ground – a stationary object, building, or piece of terrain the protagonists must get to despite opposition, or keep the enemy out of.

Deciding which aspect to use in combat will help you develop the rest of the encounter. Protecting a Dependent will create a different scenario from capturing a briefcase handcuffed to a messenger's arm.

If you need ideas for how to insert an aspect into a fight, look at some of the alternate play options in shooter games. These were designed for people bored with just killing and getting killed. They add new context to the fight, which is exactly what you're trying to do.

For the GM who plan far enough ahead, this step can also include laying down some foreshadowing in the sessions leading up to a fight. It's a little extra work, but it can make the scenario that much more compelling and satisfying.

You are finished with this step when you can state in a tight sentence what the party wants the fight to look like when they're done with it (even if there's a chance that might not happen).

STEP 2: SET THE SCENE

Once you know what form your “football” will take, brainstorm for the best places for people to fight over it. If you’ve decided the party will defend or assault some ground, your options are limited if the protagonists have already seen the objective. Otherwise, you should design the terrain to create the most intense and entertaining fight you can.

Consider the actual ground on which the combatants will face off. A street is fine, but a rooftop or the pitching deck of a ship is better. Adding difficulty and danger – especially if either side can use them as a weapon – makes for a more dramatic rumble than a blank room with flat ground.

Dress up your basic stage with a hazard or three. Hazards can be natural and obvious, like falling from that rooftop or being swept overboard by a rogue wave. Others need you to highlight them in the scene, such as a storm drain that combatants might drop a treasured item into. As with the difficulties from your basic scene, these work best if both sides can use and be threatened by them.

You are finished with this step when you can close your eyes and imagine the battlefield like a stage set ready for the actors to come out.

For tips on where to *GURPS* modifiers for various environments, see *How to Be a GURPS GM*, pp. 29-30. For adding detail to chases, check out *The Thrill of the Chase* on pp. 12-15 of the this issue.

STEP 3: CREATE THE RULES

A great combat, especially one involving factors other than combatants, requires complex new rules and new applications of existing rules. If you go in winging it, you’ll land in one of two situations. Either play will slow to a crawl as you look up the applications in your favorite *GURPS* manual, or play will stop entirely while everybody negotiates an ad-hoc ruling. You are better off if you spend some energy anticipating situations that might happen, and jotting down the rules you’ll use most often during play (and flagging the pages of other likely guidelines).

That fight on the pitching deck will need rules for how the different deck angles affect movement, and for how often waves sweep across and how they affect everybody on board. If the deck has machinery or equipment, you’ll want notes for the ways combatants might use them to help themselves or hinder the other side.

While you’re doing this, it’s worthwhile to review your players’ character sheets for relevant skills and advantages. This will let you know what abilities they like to use, so you can insert opportunities to highlight them. It also gives you a rough guideline for how difficult to make skill and attack rolls that special situations might call for.

You are finished with this step when you have a list of simple notes that handle the most likely weird situations the combatants might end up in.

STEP 3.5: ADD COMPLICATIONS

This is an optional step, and one you should skip the first few times you try this idea. Adding complications means

scheduling some kind of change to the fight that raises stakes or increases tension. Some examples include a storm hitting the ship everybody’s fighting on, the arrival of reinforcements or an interested third party, or a building catching on fire. When creating complications, run through steps 1-3 to create what’s essentially a second, more demanding, combat that happens in the middle of the one you’ve already designed. When the time comes, you’ll drop it into the action and watch what your players do with it.

One risk of adding complications is that players can easily misinterpret your motives. If you’ve scheduled the arrival of reinforcements eight seconds into a battle, and the PCs have taken the football at the end of seven seconds, they might view that as you throwing in extra bad guys to “win” the conflict. There are two good ways to avoid that perception.

You can make the challenges neutral by making them bad for everybody involved. Instead of having reinforcements arrive to back up the rival drug gang, have the DEA show up and try to arrest everybody. It achieves all the same goals as the reinforcements, but feels fair and gives clever players a resource to manipulate.

Another option is to foreshadow the complication. This is especially important if the obstacle will favor the bad guys. It helps the challenge feel more natural, even inevitable, and less like a *deus ex* the GM is desperately trying to *machina* into the fight. If reinforcements have to arrive, they need to have been mentioned or seen (even in passing) at some earlier point. The party might have crept past them, or just seen a “Guard Room” label on their map.

You are finished with this step when you’ve completed steps 1-3 for what the fight will look like after you’ve inserted the complication.

In-Combat Footballs

Another kind of football is a goal that’s only important during the fight, but makes a decisive difference to the outcome. Some examples include a sniper’s nest that needs to be approached and overcome, a door to open before reinforcements arrive, or a machine-gun emplacement currently in the hands of the enemy. Even though these footballs don’t matter much once the fight is over, they still add tension and unique goals to in the middle of the fight.

STEP 4: SPRING THE TRAP

This is the easiest step, since it amounts to starting a fight just like you always have. All the pieces are in place, so you can just run the encounter. As things start, make the goals and conditions of the fight as clear as possible. Hopefully you made them clear in the scenes leading up to the fight. However, players aren’t always the most predictably attentive audience – and the “combat in a vacuum” factor could lead them to miss otherwise obvious cues. It’s worthwhile to restate important information, either with in-game dialog or by laying it out as you set up your combat map.

TWELVE KINDS OF FOOTBALLS

The Gantlet Run: The party has to get from point A to point B. There's resistance in the way, but killing opponents isn't the point.

Hostage Crisis: The bad guys have possession of a good guy, Dependent, or innocent bystander. The group must free the captive and get him out alive.

Close Protection: The opposite of a hostage crisis, this happens when the good guys have possession of an important person, and the bad guys want to take her away. It gets harder when "take her away" means "kill her."

Stand Your Ground: Some piece of territory – be it a castle gate or the top of a hill – can't be allowed to fall to the enemy. It's the adventurers' job to keep that from happening.

The Enemy's Gate Is Down: On the flip side of standing your ground, the enemy is guarding territory and the party must take possession. This one's even more exciting when the "ground" is moving or trying to explode.

The Dingus: Everybody wants a specific item and is willing to do violence to get it. Examples range from a huge diamond, to a disk of valuable data, to the one gun in a room full of knife fighters.

Having a Threesome: Most fights involve two sides, but a three-sided battle becomes interesting on a bunch of different levels. In this case, the "football" is the allegiance and cooperation of one of the other sides.

You Break It, You Buy It: The opposition wants to destroy something, and the protagonists are charged with preventing that. When action breaks out, they might have to accept harm to their bodies to prevent damage to the item.

Job Interview: This might be an assessment of ability prior to an offer of employment, but it can represent any other kind of oddly specific assignment. Combatants want to accomplish something particular, and the mayhem roiling about it is just one obstacle in their path.

Search Party: Looking for a needle in a haystack is more interesting when the barn is on fire. It's even more challenging when the barn is in the middle of a firefight.

Remember to keep your mind on the goal as you make decisions for the opposition. It can be easy to lose focus and start bashing on the PCs instead of going straight for the intent of the encounter. For the same reasons, you might need to subtly remind the players of their goals if they become disproportionately focused on the general mayhem.

One problem you'll see too often here is when players make decisions that don't work with the combat as you've designed it. They'll go in the back door instead of the front, or ace a skill roll that opens a door in a second instead of the four you needed to make things interesting. When that happens, you can just roll with it. That's fair, and lets the players off with an easy win. Alternatively, you can simply set the encounter in the situations the protagonists have created. There's no reason the fight you put behind door B can't move to the room behind door A that the players actually went into.

You'll be finished with this step when you get to sit back, light a cigar, and wax poetic about how much you love plans coming together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Brick is a freelance writer whose 30-year gaming habit has included all four versions of **GURPS**, plus countless other systems. His work can be found in magazines worldwide. In his spare time, he enjoys travel, martial arts, and time with his family. Read more at his blog, brickcommajason.com.

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THE GRINDER

BY ANDY VETROMILE

Bell swung wide as she rounded 10th Street, ending the life of a lonely mailbox and turning a garbage can into, well . . . garbage. "You want to go easy on the corners, Bell?" Mason called out from the back seat. As their pursuers made their appearance, he unloaded his gun through the hole where once there was glass. The rear windshield was a memory three intersections old.

"Don't tell me you're carsick" was the unwavering reply.

"I'm just thinking how this story will play out back at the precinct." The undercover detective reloaded. "Which is pretty optimistic considering you and Snow's men are equally determined to see us all dead." Before he could aim again, Mason heard the rev of the thieves' engine and watched as they filled up his field of vision. He ducked behind the seat and slapped into the cheap upholstery as they were rear-ended. Bell cursed with all the enthusiasm of someone announcing the current time and temperature. Her partner responded by emptying his second magazine.

"My driving is better than your shooting."

"Then why didn't you steal something better?" Mason demanded, casting about for something, anything to use as a weapon. The floorboard was littered with junk, but he uncovered a small carton of motor oil and some ancient duct tape. "A dozen cars on Snow's lot, and you had to skip the Mustang for this junker." The next turn was sharp, and Mason, flat against the doorframe, was pretty sure that was Bell getting some payback.

"We were interrogating Pilcher. You want a better car, hire a richer snitch."

"Want something done right . . ." Mason sighed. He taped his lighter tightly to the oil, cracked the seal on the carton's cap, flicked the wheel of his Zippo, and tossed it hard the next time he and their pursuit were in line with each other. The container

burped open and oil sloshed everywhere on the hood and windshield. This produced not so much a flame as a rough smoke, but whoever was driving the rear car was easily spooked. He panicked, hit the gas, and clipped Bell's ride.

As for who was unluckier: The bad guys ran straight into a wall and, a moment later, burst into flames. Mason and Bell skipped over the curb, flipped on their side, hit a lamppost, and spun around it like a maypole, finally ending upside-down. The two police officers crawled out over broken glass and stood up slowly, watching the flames consume the other vehicle. "Next time, I'm driving," Mason assured her. "You are terrible at this."

"Could be worse," Bell said.

"How do you figure that?"

There was rapping and a muffled cry from their trunk.

"You could be Pilcher."

If you're an action hero, sooner or later you're going to be behind the wheel of a car. Chances are it starts out a beauty, and by the time you're done with it . . . eh, not so much. Where'd you get it? Never mind, it's probably better if the brass doesn't know. But Bolivar Snow knows. If it rolls, slides, floats, or flies, he knows. This article describes his operation, known colloquially on the streets as the Grinder, a vehicle chop shop for every Game Master's hot-rodding needs.

Bolivar Snow goes to pains to camouflage his participation in anything illegal. To that end, his shop is owned on paper by a nonexistent person, and it's run on a day-to-day basis by a knowledgeable underling named Carlos Nunez. To the world at large, it's a perfectly ordinary garage called Nunez Motors. It's a fully functional body and engine repair shop, but it has special features to facilitate car thefts and the distribution of the ill-gotten goods.

THE LOCATION

There are two broad elements to consider in understanding Snow's business: the actual location and the activities carried out. This section provides information about how the facility is laid out and how it protects itself. Daily operations are dealt with in greater detail in the next section.

THE PERIMETER

Snow's operation begins long before anyone sets a foot on the grounds of his garage. The Grinder is in the middle of the city, in the warehouse section. It is surrounded by abandoned properties with no owner – or so it appears. Since no one is interested in anything other than the shop, few people

think to ask who really holds title to those buildings. Many are Snow's. Most of them are as empty as passersby believe, but henchmen are assigned to several to act as early warning systems. Some sit atop the roofs while others have created for themselves small bolt-holes where they can watch the streets without being observed themselves. These people report on any activity they perceive; people in general are watched carefully, but any official vehicles like cop cars that roll by send up a red flag. The thugs are not cleared to start shooting or to otherwise attack these potential invaders, but the guards are nevertheless well-armed and equipped to spend a night alone in a warehouse.

THE YARD

Surrounded by a chain-link fence 10' high and topped with barbed wire, the shop is uninviting. Anyone who approaches has already appeared on the radar thanks to the watchful eyes at the perimeter, but just walking by or even up to the place doesn't trigger an armed response. The gate is locked, and anyone who makes it clear they're interested in the garage is approached from inside the fence by a worker who asks them what they need. Someone who wants to come in is politely told the business is by appointment only and the place is backed up. If the visitor is insistent, he's informed that he can leave a business card or other contact information and the owner will be in touch when there's an opening in the schedule. Those who ask for tours or peeks, or inquire why a high-end shop is in the middle of the city's armpit are politely told about lower rents, unassuming discretion . . . and privacy. They are also investigated or followed, since they've proved themselves unwanted busybodies who may be employed by the police or the competition.

From the yard, observers can spot security measures like cameras and laser tripwires near the building's doors. They seem fancy, but nothing to send up a warning flag given the valuable contents of the average garage. The gates and doors are all equipped with keypads for entering codes. Anyone familiar with security systems will know the significance of the line of metal sunk into the ground across the fence exits – retractable spikes that, depending on the whim of the operator, can blow out the tires of those coming in or going out. The yard is cluttered in a workmanlike fashion: There are

employee vehicles, a couple of junkers (mostly for show), some barrels, and the odd hubcap, but it's unremarkable otherwise.

THE GARAGE

There are windows and doors on all sides, though the windows are either blacked out or the panes have been replaced with one-way glass. The major portals face away from the open blocks and streets. These doors are left open during work, but seeing inside means standing on the opposite side of the street next to abandoned buildings, overpasses, and the like, where few people have any business going. Short version, it makes the nosiest people easy to spot. Some of the expensive vehicles undergoing work are in view from there, as well as the employees' bikes and cars if they didn't leave them parked in the yard.

More cameras are inside; most point out the windows, though a few keep tabs on things inside the Grinder. Laser tripwires sound an alarm if someone comes in a door they aren't supposed to, and the windows are wired in case someone breaks one.

There's no gratuitous supply of actual weapons lying around to fend off assaults, but there are plenty of power tools, pneumatic jacks, noxious substances, catwalks, and hard metal surfaces the GM can put to good use when the time comes. Conversely, there is no end to the flammable materials set to go off from a stray bullet or arc welder. Some of these fluids are stored outside in containers that feed into the building, but random gunfire is a bad idea in any case.

CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU

As part of an ongoing investigation, the investigators may not be looking for just one chop shop. Snow's operation may consist of several secret locales dotted around town – he might even have facilities in multiple cities. That makes tracking them a good job for members of the FBI, trying to put a stop to interstate commerce. Or the GM can parlay that into a "rogue cops" scenario: "All right, you hotheads, I had a word with your captain in New York. The city has agreed to overlook your little 'accident' on the 'L,' and you can follow our investigation – but as observers only! You don't have jurisdiction here, and that's not the way we do things here in Chicago, understand? You can keep your shields, but give me your piece. And that one. And the backup. And . . ."

With a network to fall back on, chopping the head off the snake won't be as simple. Snow can simply divert some of his backlog to another location. This also means he has more people in a nearby town he can call in on a moment's notice to fortify the ranks, and that he thinks little of destroying one of his warehouses if he believes it means he can immolate his pursuers in a blaze of glory. Each facility is set to self-destruct somehow; this could be as fancy as a series of bombs, but maybe his henchmen all have standing orders to just torch the place with cans of gasoline should evidence of their activities be imperiled by nosy investigators.

THE DEEP, DARK SECRETS

Finally, there are some finishing touches that make the Grinder a true villain's lair. This may seem like a lot of effort to go to, but this is not an enterprise run for chump change. Some of his targets go for more than a half-million dollars, and Bolivar Snow doesn't touch a car for less than \$100,000, so the numbers add up. The peace of mind and safety net these features offer also let the owner sleep at night.

The office, marked "Carlos Nunez, Manager," controls the security of the location. The cameras can all be monitored here, and the alarms can be set to go off audibly or silently (the signal is always sent to Snow's cell phone as well). There are no lethal weapons in the office; a couple of cans of mace and some Tasers are the only arsenal. Nunez isn't much of a fighter anyway.

A hidden compartment is underneath the floor. The underbelly of the shop opens up if a code is punched into the keypad behind the supply racks or the computer in the office. It is deep enough to hold and hide several vehicles, and has a ramp for getting in and out. No one wants to be in the way when the door seals. When closed, it's almost impossible to distinguish what's a secret panel and what is just the area where slabs of concrete or slats of metal form the building's construction.

Then there's the escape tunnel. Accessible by a chute behind the metal stairs that lead up to the office (and through a panel in the secret underground compartment, in case someone is stuck in that section when the cops arrive), this is big enough

that the user (read: Snow) can make his way to a few other exit hatches a block or three away. A grown man can stand up in the tunnel (though he should be careful about running), and someone riding a quad or motorcycle can race to safety.

THE OPERATION

During the day, it's business as usual, with the employees working on fancy cars owned by well-off criminals. The day-work is from people to whom Snow is paying off a debt or favor, criminals he wants a favor from or who are willing to pay extra for no questions, or contacts with whom he wishes to cultivate an acquaintance. The work is often done gratis.

If the timing of the crime demands that something illegal must be done in daylight, then the schedule is altered and the employees are briefed so that it gets done. The whole thing is shut down at night unless there's a big job. That's what makes it dangerous for investigators: There's no telling who's going to be here and when. It all depends on the whims of whoever is ordering that a fancy car be stolen on his behalf that night.

If something is in the works the mechanics are instructed to be on standby, waiting to go to work on the shipment. When the cars arrive, the employees go into action, dismantling the vehicle if someone wants parts, or repainting it and switching out the vehicle identification number if they want the whole thing. However, the shop is not open to any car thief who wants to drop off a hot ride; see *What'll It Take to Put You in This Beauty?*, below.

THE STAFF

All the men in Snow's employ are vetted by him and their activities assigned. There is no freelancing, and anyone who "moonlights," even small-time crimes, is rebuked or beaten for drawing unwanted attention to his bread and butter.

Not surprisingly, most of Snow's men have criminal records (and it's been exclusively men up to this point, though if the right woman with the right skills showed up at his door, Snow might reconsider). He doesn't want bleeding hearts involved in his activities, and he knows he can keep his people in line if they have something to hide (it's also a simple matter to toss pawns to the wolves to save his own skin). None of them want to go back to prison, and some are immigrants who would be sent home if the INS or police found them here.

Although some of the employees have records that include violent acts, most are just thieves who would rather steal under cover of night. In other words, they aren't thugs and fighters. All of them would take up a crowbar to defend the place from intruders if asked, but that's only a defense against street scum. Cops would be another story, but Snow has standing orders that no one is to take up arms against the cops anyway. He'd rather schmooze his way out of something with a wall of lawyers, and assaulting officers makes that difficult.

WHAT'LL IT TAKE TO PUT YOU IN THIS BEAUTY?

The cars brought to the yard are requested by buyers. Someone of means wants a certain model but doesn't want

to pay dealer's dollars, so he asks Snow to secure one. Snow assigns it to one of his men, who scopes out parking lots in affluent areas, calls in favors from contacts in the department of motor vehicles, or tracks buyers at legitimate dealerships. The thief waits for the right moment, disables any alarms or tracking devices, hotwires the vehicle (or, if he's really good, finds a way to steal or duplicate the key), and drops it off with Snow. The mechanics obliterate any identifying marks like VINs or serial numbers on the parts, repaint the body, and provide new detailing.

Some shady dealers want replacement parts for high-end vehicles and are no more interested in paying top dollar for them than buyers are in going through channels for the car in the first place. The process is the same, but several such models are gathered and dismantled for their pieces. It's harder to isolate multiple cars of the same line, but there's more leniency as far as quality since they're only utilized piecemeal.

Snow knows his customers and the market, so he doesn't always have to wait for a special order to get some work done. He may get cars to use as gifts, collect them to fill orders he knows are coming up, or even use them to exact some revenge against proud owners.

Special Staffing Needs

The GM should feel free to bring out the villainous henchman if he thinks it'll help. There's always one guy the boss can't control, someone who's been aching for a fight, and he can snap if it makes life tough for the PCs. A fight may also break out if Snow feels cornered – undercover cops who catch him at the site (instead of Nunez and other miscellaneous underlings) can't be allowed to talk, and they're easier to "disappear" than a beat cop. Also, no one is supposed to carry guns on the premises, but not everyone is as careful as Snow.

TAX, TAG, TITLE, AND HANDLING CHARGES

Parts are sent out in trucks or cars of all sizes and types. For entire cars, the GM should decide on a specific mode of transport. Realistically, a top-end car would be delivered by a closed truck, but it's much more in keeping with tradition that the fleeing criminals use a car-carrying trailer, a double-decker skeleton full of late-model vehicles, throwing (or driving) cars (or enemies) off the end of it as they go.

HOSTAGES

Since every car has an owner, the GM should decide ahead of time how Bolivar Snow deals with hostages. It's not always possible to find an unoccupied vehicle to lift, but even when carjacking someone in midday traffic, a thief prefers to yank the hapless owner from his driver's seat and speed off.

If he's played as the heavy, Snow may not go looking for trouble but he probably doesn't worry about icing anyone unfortunate enough to get in the way, either. It's R-rated stuff, and while it's unpleasant, it would also give heroes an added incentive to take down the cold-blooded villain (so long as the policy is not overplayed and doesn't enrage the players needlessly).

Playing Snow as a gentleman thief means he has to be a bit more careful about his criminal activities. More to the point, he has to manage the people under him. He'll make it clear he won't brook one of his underlings hurting their targets when car theft can be a "victimless" crime. Snow knows grand theft auto carries a far less daunting penalty from the justice system than assault or murder – in fact, he's more likely to be violent toward a minion whose bad judgment and unnecessary brutality calls down the wrath of the police force on his operation.

If the GM wants to layer on the troubles, any one of the hostages could be a complication or form the basis for an entire adventure. Snow can hold them up for ransom or use them as bargaining chips against the heroes, though if he's the thief with a sense of honor, he may be confoundingly trying to divest himself of his unwanted prisoner before things get out of hand with the PCs or the police.

This is one instance in which Snow does not eschew the use of weapons. It's far too easy to target a truck as it leaves his lot, so he protects them. The truck crew isn't armed at first – only when it has left the Nunez property does the transport pull over and accept a contingent of guards. It may be one man literally riding shotgun in the case of a one-car load, or

a half-dozen men with small automatic firearms hiding with a multi-car delivery. The latter is more likely with a covered truck; with a car-carrying trailer, the only way to avoid exposure is to place people in the vehicles themselves, and that's not ideal. Instead they'll get into one or two smaller cars and drive in front of and behind the transport. Escorts on motorcycles are also common if speed is of the essence (no one wants to spend more time than they need to in full view, wearing leather and a shotgun). The greater the overall value of the load, the more protection it enjoys, though the GM can assign however many foes he thinks are enjoyable and cinematically appropriate.

Another possibility is a truck dolly, a small trailer that snugly accommodates one vehicle towed at the rear of most any other vehicle. The villains might prefer something that's easier to maneuver on city streets. These aren't worthy of the conclusion of a big adventure, but they're a tasty appetizer to draw the heroes into a larger story involving Snow and his people.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER CRIMINALS

Bolivar Snow stands on pretty good terms with most of the underworld. He does them favors, his activities are fairly limited, and he doesn't have to step on a lot of toes to get his work done. Even with others operating chop shops around town, few of them can lay claim to the kind of clients Snow has or the value of the cars he steals. Criminals can get bodywork done at his shop with no questions asked (Snow likes having a number of crooks beholden to him for not mentioning the many bloody bumpers he's replaced), and if they're powerful, he can form a relationship with them.

ADVENTURES

Obvious avenues for stories include vehicle theft and undercover work, but there are other ways to involve Bolivar Snow and the Grinder in the next game session.

Management is not responsible for loss or theft: The car becomes the MacGuffin for the adventure. Someone has stolen The Wrong Car. The heroes want to put Snow out of business, and they go undercover with his garage to do so, but the last vehicle they boosted belonged to some unpleasant people. The car may be expensive, but it's what's hidden inside that has everyone in a tizzy. A local mob boss had his little black book inside, and he wants it back. The good guys have to maintain their cover, bring down Snow, evade the opposing gang, and take the address book to the proper authorities – some of whom are in the document, listed as payoffs.

Scavenger hunt: The heroes need a car back from Snow's lot for evidence. It's a little late to get the whole thing back from him – he already turned some of it into a block of scrap metal – but he sold the bulk of it to various interested parties.

If the team consists of undercover policemen, they need to sneak into the Grinder and get a look at the books to figure out who has the hubcap that holds the former owner's DNA and fingerprints. Then they need to track that person down and get it from him. If they're not undercover, or if they aren't even police at all, things get even stickier out in the open.

Under new management: The protagonists work for Bolivar Snow as car thieves, and so far, everyone has been content to do just that. Now a vicious gang has moved into the neighborhood and started making demands on everyone – Snow included. They expect to use his business to carry drugs throughout the city and, when international orders warrant it, play mule overseas (in the meantime, they'll just store the smack in the garage). To nip this in the bud, the "heroes" have to find a way to get rid of the new gang, or else find a way to make staying a costly and unwise decision. It's a dangerous game to play, but the protagonists may find a way to set the police onto their tormentor without blowing the lid off their own operation.

OTHER VEHICLES FOR YOUR STORY

As a source for adventures, the Grinder transplants easily to other settings, though some worlds make a smoother transition than others.

Space

The action plays out on a bigger scale. In the cities of Mars, hovercars are always a tempting target for anyone looking for a getaway vehicle for their bank job, but the pursuits are tougher now that some of the laws of physics have been quite literally suspended. Instead of storage in the warehouse district, the chop shops are found on the upper floors of buildings or perhaps even sealed under a body of water somewhere at the edge of town. Cars that outright fly make tracking down the shop harder still.

Snow's ambition isn't limited in this setting – why should it be? He expands his business into planetary orbits and the space lanes, where spacecraft are highly prized but difficult to swipe. His crew specializes in replacing RFID chips, altering ship silhouettes, spoofing sensors, disguising stolen cargo, and cloaking escape routes.

Fantasy

There's not much money to be made stealing ox carts, but in an agrarian society, Snow becomes a cattle rustler or horse thief. The GM would have to alter the villain's character sheet severely to include animal husbandry skills, farming abilities, and Riding, but it would still be the sort of challenge Snow is into. After working out how to get the livestock, he has to determine how to transport them through the woods or across great fields unseen, and how to alter the brand so the owners cannot ID them. He could be the fantasy equivalent of Robin Hood, poaching animals from His Majesty's lands in order to feed the people. Then again, he might just steal only those

animals necessary to pull the rich carriages he waylays on the lonely road to market.

Espionage

Think of Bolivar Snow as a sort of egalitarian quarter-master – he doesn't work for the government; he's a freelance gearhead. Anyone who wants something special – a sports car that spews oil, perhaps, or an amphibious motorcycle – can go to him if they have sufficient funds. If they're working with him, they're probably already off the reservation, so getting Snow to help their cause is going to demand some diplomacy and finesse. He doesn't get involved or take sides in the Great Game, and he doesn't take credit (especially from unaligned spies), but sure, they can "borrow" his aerial Grasshopper. He just needs them to do him one little favor first, something that involves getting the local cops off his case about a missing parts shipment that has nothing to do with him. Not only will his vehicles have all the fun toys agents love to play with, the Grinder is also equipped with state-of-the-art alarms and detection systems, trap doors for disposing of incriminating vehicles (and spies), secret passages for entering and exiting, and munitions intended to be installed on assault craft.

Supers

Meta-humans have better things to do than to go after petty thieves for grand theft auto, but the GM may decide that's the perfect arena for street-level masked vigilantes trying to make a difference in their neighborhood. However, nothing says Bolivar Snow has to be an ordinary car thief. He may have powers of his own (controlling machinery, perhaps, or magnetism), and he uses them to level the playing field. He sets his sights on bigger things. He can steal aircraft carriers for delivery to a foreign power, or maybe he just wants the heroes' Souped-Up-Mobile as a trophy. Finally, returning to the idea of Snow as head of Q Division, he could be the guy who designs all the best crime-fighting cars and gives supers "those wonderful toys."

Yeah, yeah. These monkeys are following me because I just took this car. Obviously the car doesn't belong to me, it's not my style.

– Xander, in xXx

BOLIVAR SNOW

Bolivar Snow started life as a petty thief but rose a few steps in the estimation of his gang when he displayed a penchant for hotwiring and driving cars. He went into juvenile detention and his records were sealed up because he was released before his 18th birthday. While inside, he spent more time than he cares to think about in small rooms as punishment for his various infractions. It left him with a slight case of claustrophobia, one that doesn't cripple him on the outside . . . it just gives him a do-or-die attitude about not going back

inside ever again. He knows the next time it will be big-boy prison, and there it's all small spaces.

In juvie, his many infractions included fights with other boys. He received a puncture wound in the gut and a gash along his neck that left him scarred on the right side. The abdominal injury bothers him to this day, but the throat wound actually helped him gain sympathy and an early release, and he wears it proudly (he kind of has to, unless he wants to proudly wear an ascot or neckerchief).

Since returning to society, Snow has become the big man in the car-theft industry. Others have tried to muscle in on his territory, but he has repelled all comers. Never one to look for a fight, Snow usually adopts a defensive position and tries to accommodate anyone who wants to work with him. For one thing, he's made it clear he's not interested in protection rackets, drugs, or anything else the criminal element in the city wants to fight over. He won't even go after other car thieves unless they're more successful or skilled than he, or they try to wrest away elements of the luxury-car market. Even then, he'd rather recruit people who start out taking standard stuff he has no interest in. They usually make good protégés. This is an excellent opening for undercover investigators with vehicle skills to exploit.

Snow is not above the patient route. If the competition won't back off or join him, he can offer incentives to his buyers no one else can. Only if it's an intolerable situation that impacts his bottom line will he take on competitors in his chosen field, and most of those are smart enough to take Snow's first offer of a ticket out of town. Carefully targeted police bribes and even frame-ups have served him well in disposing of enemies. Too often, their own pride or indiscretions do in a promising rival.

The thief has avoided confrontations with the law since he got out. He now lives a fairly comfortable life stealing cars for high-end customers or offering spare parts on expensive models. His operations have been hard to track since he distances himself and allows trusted lieutenants to take on the bulk of the workload. He has a cop on the payroll, so he usually knows about stings coming down the pike. If he doesn't find out about the sting in time, he has a "scorched earth" policy when folks nose too close to him. He's patient and considerate, but his caution is not boundless.

BOLIVAR SNOW

161 points

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 10 [0].
 Damage 1d-1/1d+1; Basic Lift 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0];
 Per 13 [0]; FP 10 [0].
 Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9.
 5'11"; 195 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Absolute Direction [5]; Ally (Criminal henchman; 25% of starting points; 9 or less) [1]; Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Charisma 1 [5]; Contact (Police officer on the take; Effective Skill 12; 9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [1]; Daredevil [15]; High Manual Dexterity 1 [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].
Perks: Acceleration Tolerance [1].

Disadvantages

Addiction (Tobacco) [-5]; Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Chronic Pain (Mild; 2 hours; 9 or less) [-5]; Claustrophobia (12) [-15];

All gone, we didn't get a single one of them, and we are talking about professionals. No visible damage to locking mechanisms, steering columns, or ignitions, and as you can see, these are not Honda Civics. This is one of three brand-new Mercedes, a car they say is "unstealable."

– Drycoff, in *Gone in Sixty Seconds*

Enemy (Determined cops with an attitude; 9 or less) [-10]; Reputation -1 (Go-to man for stolen vehicles; All the time; Almost everyone) [-5].

Quirks: Distinctive Features (Neck scar); Proud. [-2]

Skills

Accounting (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Area Knowledge (Campaign city) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Boating/TL8 (Large Powerboat) (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Boxing (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Camouflage (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-13; Connoisseur (Wine) (A) IQ [2]-13; Cooking (A) IQ [2]-13; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Driving/TL8 (Construction Equipment) (A) DX [2]-12; Driving/TL8 (Heavy Wheeled) (A) DX [2]-12; Driving/TL8 (Motorcycle) (A) DX [2]-12; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX [1]-12; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-12; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-12; Holdout (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-13; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [2]-14*; Lockpicking/TL8 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Mechanic/TL8 (Automobile) (A) IQ [2]-13; Mechanic/TL8 (Motorcycle) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-13; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-13; Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-13; Thrown Weapon (Knife) (E) DX [1]-12; Urban Survival (A) Per-1 [1]-12.

* Includes +1 from Charisma.

Equipment

Snow carries some first-class tools in the trunk of his car – absolutely nothing damning about them, but in his hands, they can be used for all manner of vehicular crimes. He wears a fine leather jacket, weather permitting, with good cigars stuffed into the inside breast pocket. He has a utility knife, his preferred weapon since learning how to use it in juvie, but it's usually in his front seat or in a leather pouch so he can dismiss its possession as part of his job (he claims to have a stake in several local new and used car dealerships – which isn't *precisely* a lie). He has an unlicensed Beretta Mod 92F, but this he leaves in the hands of whomever he's with at the moment so he can deny ownership. If bullets start flying, his henchman will hand the gun to him.

BOLIVAR SNOW IN OTHER SETTINGS

Bolivar Snow won't change much unless the new world background is dramatically different.

If he's transplanted to a futuristic world, update his skills to different TLs or vehicles, depending on which advances faster (cars could become antigravity devices, or the society might retain wheeled technologies that become overall more advanced). His Beretta could become a laser pistol (Beam Weapons/TL (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-12).

However, even if spacecraft ply the heavens, that doesn't mean Snow abandons his earthbound enterprises. Depending on whether he works with ground vehicles, spacecraft, or some combination of (or between) the two extremes, he might have: Battlesuit/TL (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Driving/TL (Hovercraft) (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Driving/TL (Mecha) (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Navigation/TL (Hyperspace) (A) IQ [2]-13; Navigation/TL (Space) (A) IQ [2]-13; Piloting/TL (Aerospace) (A) DX [2]-12; Piloting/TL (Contragravity) (A) DX [2]-12; Shiphandling/TL (Spaceship) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Shiphandling/TL (Starship) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Spacer/TL (E) IQ [1]-13; and Vacc Suit/TL (A) DX-1 [1]-11.

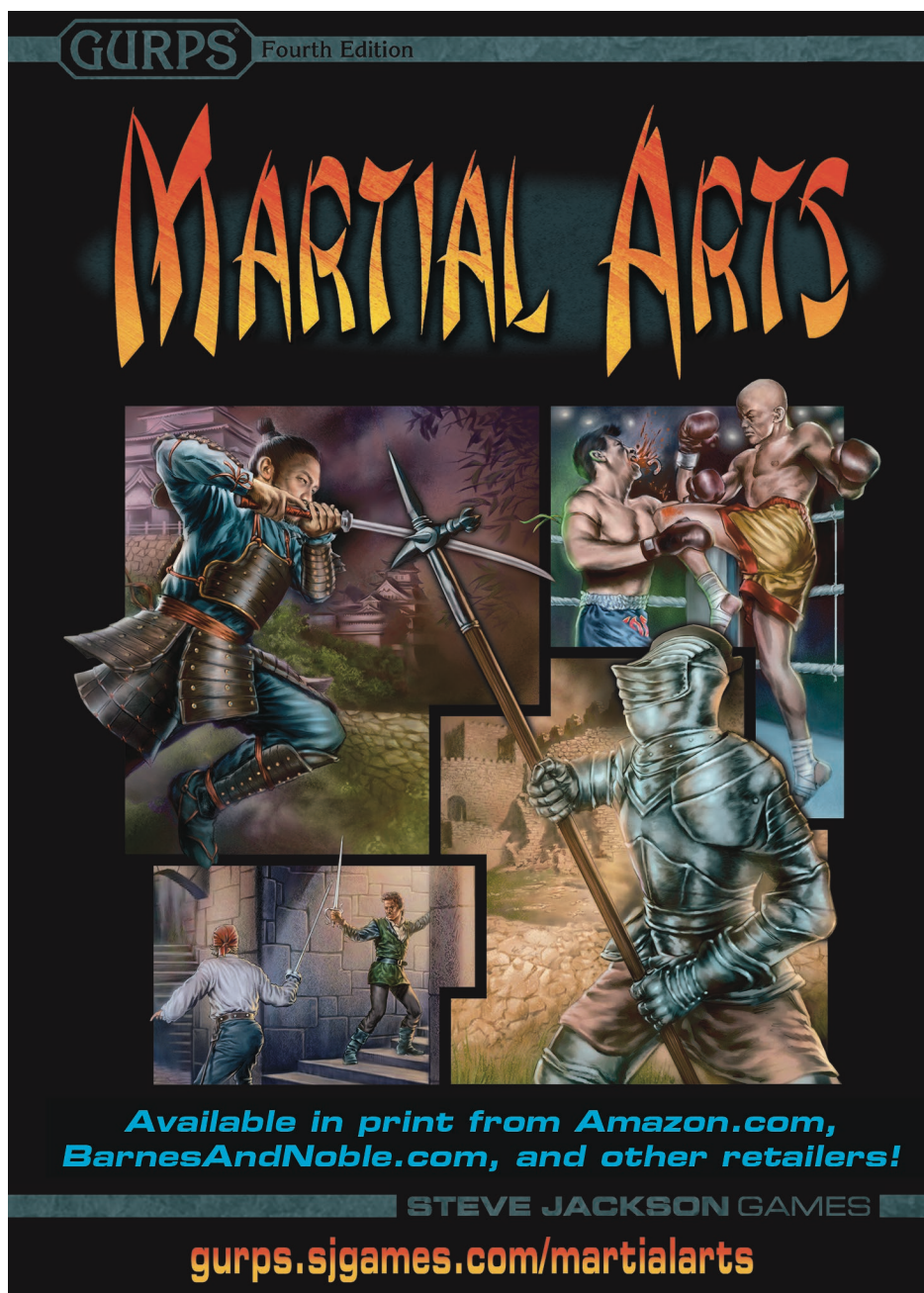
For *GURPS Cliffhangers* or *GURPS Steampunk* settings, biplanes and blimps could be the targets of choice, in which cases Snow should probably get some combination of Airshipman/TL (E) IQ [1]-13, Navigation/TL (Air) (A) IQ+2 [1]-15 (at +3 for Absolute Direction), and Shiphandling/TL (Airship) (H) IQ-1 [2]-12. Again, he's not likely to abandon ground-based travel, so these are in addition to his current skill set.

The bigger changes entail his operation. How and where he maintains the Grinder become critical campaign decisions. He might have a space station to which he pulls stolen craft, or a small steam-tech city held up by massive rotating fans. Guarding a generous perimeter isn't feasible if it's aircraft you're trying to monitor or ward off, though there may be laws demanding others stay a certain distance from such private establishments. Snow's outermost agents could be stationed on other platforms nearby, especially those known to have the widest array of travelers and traffic. Not only does Snow want to keep his ear to the ground (so to speak) about who's

in the vicinity, he might hear about valuable vessels parked close by. Then he and his men can develop ambitious plans for thieving the latest gyro or some hyperspace-capable spaceship . . . or hire the PCs to do it for them. His plots must adapt – he can no longer run a car through a secret passage if everything is floating in midair – but coming up with getaway plans and smuggling tricks in these instances becomes half the fun for both the GM and the heroes.

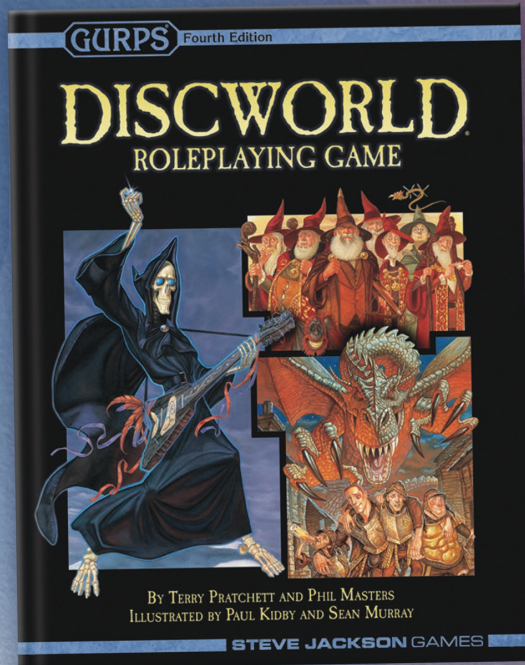
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Vetromile is a freelance writer, editor, and reviewer with an insatiable taste for games. He has worked with Steve Jackson Games, White Wolf, and Holistic Design, among others. Barbecue is his friend.



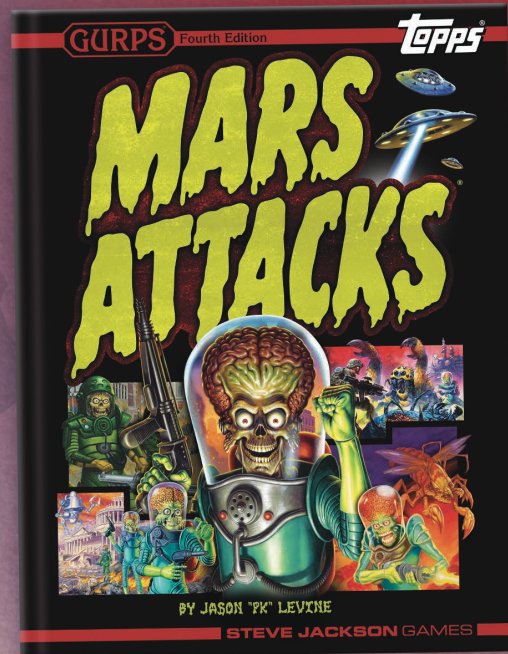
The image shows the cover of the *GURPS Martial Arts* Fourth Edition rulebook. At the top, it says "GURPS Fourth Edition". The title "MARTIAL ARTS" is written in large, stylized, orange and yellow flame-like letters. Below the title are four illustrations: a samurai in blue and black armor with a spear, a boxer in a ring, a knight in full plate armor with a long polearm, and a character in a white shirt and blue pants fighting a character in a green tunic. At the bottom, there is a blue banner with white text: "Available in print from Amazon.com, BarnesAndNoble.com, and other retailers!". Below that, it says "STEVE JACKSON GAMES" and the website "gurps.sjgames.com/martialarts".

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RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

FOCUSING ON THE WHAT AND THE NOW

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

There's a really interesting series of videos from YouTube film critic MovieBob (also known as Bob Chipman) that I'm not going to talk about. That series is called "Really That Good," and therein he critically analyzes movies that are popular in the public imagination (*Ghostbusters*, *Independence Day*, *The Transformers: The Movie*, etc.) and tries to evaluate them to determine *why* they've found popularity; for example, his dissection of *Ghostbusters* delves into matters of "faith vs. science" and what that says about society.

I'm not going to talk about that series, because – even though it's excellent and insightful – it's merely a catalyst to talk about a spin-off of the series, called "Really That Bad," where he applies the same analytical tools to a movie that's exceptionally bad. In this case, what was originally intended as a one-time experiment turned into a three-part series spanning 3 hours, 51 minutes (4 hours, 9 minutes if you count the "why am I doing this?" prologue), all devoted to a hyper-attentive dissection into what happened with one movie: *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*.

I found the critiques to be incredibly watchable, primarily because they weren't just typical Internet "let's yell at dumb stuff" so much as actual, thoughtful studies. (I got a lot out of the series even though I haven't seen the movie it's critiquing yet!) In fact, the series basically inspired the two prongs of this column – one where I agree with the "Really That Bad" series and one where I disagree for our purposes. (Although, ideally, this column stands perfectly fine on its own if you haven't seen the shows; I'm having to bring in the ideas tangentially regardless since *Batman v Superman* isn't technically an "action" movie . . .)

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

One of the series' core critiques of *Batman v Superman* was that there wasn't a clear realization of *why* the creators were doing what they were doing. Did the movie require an understanding of the titular heroes, or were they specifically trying

to detach them from their established roots as their own thing? What was the purpose of the bleak characterizations, or killing or reinventing established members of the super-heroic mythos?

The question of "What are we doing here?" is one of the most fundamental ones in any roleplaying game, but it's especially important in an action game. Think about it: The action genre encompasses both "when suddenly!" adventure stories, where events transpire explosively from one scene to the next with barely time for a transition; and "heist" tales, where every moment of a prospective caper is planned to meticulous detail by the heroes . . . oh, and everything in between. That's insane! It's like saying, "I love animated films, like *The Care Bears Movie*, *The Polar Express*, *Loving Vincent*, or *Grave of the Fireflies!*"

If the action genre can take on such a varied tone, it's vital for the players and the GM to be on the same page as to what, exactly, they're expecting. Of course, if the gaming group is happy with anything that comes their way, then there isn't a problem! But otherwise, it's wise to align those gears.

Fortunately, the action genre has a ready-made opportunity denied most other genres: a filmography. To that end, a great technique is to have each player select the action movie they most love and would want to play in, and then show them to the group, to either refresh memories or introduce them to newcomers. Obviously this'll take a while . . . probably at least a session or three before gameplay can actually begin, depending on how much overlap there is in viewing choices. If time is precious, the group might want to "assign" movies for folks to watch on their own time, or have everyone pick out favorite movie *scenes* and share those.

If everyone chose a film with a similar style of action, then great! There likely won't be any problems. If there are conflicts, though, it's best to sort them out ahead of time. Here are some things to look out for:

- How much planning are the heroes expected to do?
- How much damage can the adventurers dish out?

• How “good” are they? Are they amoral, cops who work the edges and in danger of losing their badges, or straight-up honorable folks?

• What are their primary weapons? “Guns are likely, but it’s quite possible for the heroes to get by primarily with their fists, or – if you assume that (say) *Now You See Me* is an action-heist film (albeit with a “magic” twist) – even their wits.

• What are the odds of success? Some action movies present the heroes as always in control, emerging victorious or nearly so in all situations; others have them careening from narrow loss to narrow loss, barely eking out a win at the end.

• What social structure do the heroes adhere to? Are they all loners, or are they assumed to be part of some kind of team (a military operation, police department, underworld group, etc.)?

And many, many other concerns.

After watching a movie as a group, if anyone else has any bits that they especially like (or don’t like), they should feel free to share them . . . perhaps anonymously, if any of the gamers aren’t particularly keen on voicing their negative responses in public. “I’m really uncomfortable with the heroes’ lawless disregard for human life” or “I really liked how much of the movie was given over to extended vehicular chases” would be valid comments from gamers hoping to inject those elements more firmly into the game.

*Let us not go over old
ground; let us rather prepare
for what is to come.*

– Marcus Tullius Cicero

PRETEND THAT DIDN’T HAPPEN

The original reason for the “Really That Good” series’ timing was to be out around the same time as *Justice League*, which was a direct sequel to *Batman v Superman*. One aspect of the *Justice League* film that struck MovieBob as particularly interesting was the realization that they were just going to flat-out ignore bits of the previous movie that they didn’t want to deal with. (**SPOILER ALERT** for both *Justice League* and *Batman v Superman*!)

So, for example, *Justice League* leans hard into the idea of “Superman was a beacon of hope for the world!” or “Superman was a really popular, not-brooding guy!” That’s pretty much the opposite of what much of the plot of *Batman v Superman* concerned itself with, but they just decided to ignore that. (**END SPOILER ALERT.**)

Now, MovieBob presents this tendency to ignore bits that don’t work with something akin to bemusement and mild outrage. But, for a gaming group, I consider it to be one of your most powerful assets.

The thing is, movies and books tend to have a *lot* more room to workshop and work out the bugs before they’re exposed to

a paying audience, which then gets to experience pretty much the whole thing all at once. Gaming groups are working out plot, story, world building, and characterization completely on the fly. Oh, and there’s no paying audience.

So, it makes sense to just ignore elements in an action game that landed with a thud at the gaming table. Did you introduce rumors of a conspiracy in the police department that were met with derision? Yeah, offhandedly mention that was just an overzealous staffer with an axe to grind. Or was a beloved NPC’s spouse kidnapped, and it’s right on the heels of a mission failure and the group can’t bear the pressure of potentially endangering such an important character? Yeah, it was all a ruse for a more interesting (but lower-stakes) adventure. Was the tone too dark in previous adventures? Just ignore ‘em.

See, the great thing about the action genre is that it is perhaps more preoccupied with the “now” than any other genre. Oh, Tallahassee is ablaze after the last epic scene-ending battle? Well, now you’re in Aspen, dodging snipers on skis . . . and they’ve *got the thumb drive* **move move MOVE!** An action plot almost requires the group to reaffirm what’s important from scene to scene, since otherwise it tends to sweep away anything that seems to be cruft in an effort to keep the story going forward.

In fact, particularly ambitious groups might go so far as to explicitly *state* what’s important from scene to scene. This can be done with index cards; simply write down any big elements that were used in a story on index cards as they are presented, and put them in the middle of the table. When a scene ends, you can leave any elements that’ll still be important – the stolen Declaration of Independence, the quantum-laser blueprints, the missing reporter – and remove any that aren’t going to be vital again, like Tallahassee or the mayor’s rabbit. The GM can bring back cards at any time – useful for those situations when it turns out the plans were hidden in the collar of the mayor’s rabbit – but the players are discouraged from doing so. However, it’d be a fine compromise to have the GM say, “I’m about to sweep these cards; did any of you have any unresolved bits before I do, or have a *really* compelling reason to keep them around for the next scene?” (You probably don’t need to write down the heroes on their own index cards, since they’ll persist for the whole game, but it might still be helpful to do so since it’s a good visual representation that can be used to establish where heroes are in the scene . . . and/or in relationship to the other cards.)

With a firm idea of what you’re doing, a vague idea of where you’re going, little interest in where you’ve been, and a laser-like focus on what’s going on right now, you can keep your action game as adrenaline-packed as you like. And, no matter what, expect to be surprised like a bad pun at the twitching face of the mayor’s bunny . . . above all else, the rabbit *knows*.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

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

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