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What Status Gets You

Subsidiary Privileges of Status in *GURPS Fourth Edition*

by Matt Riggsby

The description of the Status advantage notes that, in addition to reaction bonuses, it grants "various privileges," which must be determined by the GM. Unfortunately, except for a brief sample of the kind of lifestyle the cost of living associated with Status can buy, that's where the guidance on those privileges stops. While application of Status is moderately clear in feudal societies, where there are few organizations to complicate the picture with Rank and other advantages, it's rather less clear in more organized, bureaucratic societies (does a Byzantine logothete have Rank, Status, or both? And how much of each?). It's even possible to wonder if Status is still relevant in a modern, "democratic" society where there's no officially acknowledged and supported ruling class and other advantages, such as Rank, Reputation, and Wealth, could be feasibly be used to represent power and position. This article examines a number of privileges a GM might consider awarding as a result of Status, how they might manifest differently in a number of settings beyond the usual feudal system, and what the limits of those privileges might be, giving way to other distinct advantages.

Personal Staff

Someone with Status has "people." These may include domestic servants, secretaries and other junior bureaucrats, legal advisors, and the like. Their purpose is to take care of tedious everyday tasks which keep the character from getting on with more important work. They might deliver messages on the character's behalf, make arrangements for transportation or lodging away from home, keep an eye on the character's residence while he's away, and take on similar tasks.

At low TLs, a character with Status 1 or 2 will have a single full-time servant, with at least one more per additional level of Status. For modern societies, where full-time servants are rare, a character will probably have a lot of part-time help. That might include such things as a nanny for the character's children, maid and landscaping services, and a part-time cook for dinners and special meals. At higher levels of Status, one's staff may include professional advisors. A high-status Medieval nobleman may retain a priest or monk, an early modern traveler may bring his personal physician with him, and a modern businessman or politician might keep a lawyer, broker, or personal spokesman on retainer.

Followers or employees who come with Status aren't invariably reliable. Some may have deep loyalty to the high-status character, but for most, it's just a job, and they'll bail out if the going gets too rough for them. They will be reluctant to take on what they see as dangerous or potentially illegal tasks. For example, a servant might mail a package for the character if there's no reason to believe the act will endanger him, but might balk at it if he knew that he was mailing a bomb or a box full of drugs. They are also unlikely to participate in anything which could reasonably be

regarded as an adventure. For more generally useful followers, particularly ones who would be useful in or around combat and illegal activities, a character must use the Ally advantage.

Group Membership

People with high Status can join organizations (the cost of which is likely covered by the regular cost of living) not open to those beneath them. The most obvious type for modern characters is an exclusive country or gentleman's club. Indeed, some country clubs could be described in terms of the minimum Status required to join. A modern game world could also include shadowy, semi-secret groups, somewhere between a fraternity and a conspiracy (Yale's fabled Skull and Bones society would qualify), where powerful individuals with similar interests and objectives meet for companionship and more formal business or political activities. High Status would be a prerequisite for membership here as well.

Deferential Law Enforcement

The higher a character's Status, the more likely law enforcement is to give him the benefit of their discretion. This may be out of respect for the high-status character or simply because of the officer's desire not to make trouble for someone who could ruin his career. Someone with high Status will be able to make parking and speeding tickets go away with relative ease (for friends and relatives as well as for himself) by overawing the ticketing officer or by asking a sympathetic judge or senior officer to fix the problem. He will also receive more responsive service when he calls the police, taking priority when higher authorities hand out assignments.

As long as there's no strong reason for an officer to detain him, a high-status character may be able to escape questioning if he is discovered under mildly suspicious circumstances. For example, if a character with high Status is encountered near a bank which has just been burgled at 3 AM, an officer might send him off with a warning to watch out for dangerous thieves (not bothering to check his briefcase, which is full of \$100 bills and a ski mask), whereas one without Status might be searched and arrested. He may also receive advance notice that he may be investigated for a crime, so long as the character is not a prime suspect.

There are limits, though. Status gives a character legal courtesies, but few lawmen could ignore someone strolling down the street with a loaded weapon and taking cheerful potshots at widows and orphans along the way. The ability to willfully ignore significant criminal laws requires the Legal Immunity advantage.

Access to Events

The higher a character's Status, the more other people will want him around. A character with Status 1-3 will regularly be invited to events of local importance: charity fundraisers, local political victory parties (assuming the character wasn't a notable opponent of the victor), theater openings, home-team sporting events, and the

Access To Peers

Although it may manifest in many different ways, many of the advantages of Status could be summed up as "access to peers." One of the biggest advantages of high Status is access to other people with high Status. The average man on the Medieval street is less likely to meet the Duke of Earl than the Count of Bassie is, even if that man happens to live across the street from the Duke while Count lives 50 miles away. The Count and the Duke, being members of similar social strata, will associate with the same people, attend the same parties, and consider one another's children as material for marriage alliances. Going by raw reaction penalties, someone with Charisma or Appearance is far more likely to impress someone with high Status than a character who has just Status. However, a character with Status is

like. In settings where personal bonds are particularly important (say, anything resembling a feudal system or other system of personal patronage), weddings, rites of passage such as christenings and bar mitzvas, and religious ceremonies are part of the mix. He may even be asked to preside over such events.

far more likely to be able to get close enough for that such advantages will matter.

Characters of higher Status are invited to such events *constantly* (or, if they haven't been invited, can get in anyway) to the point where they could never even think of attending all of them. They also start to receive invitations to events of regional and national significance: sporting championships, major theatrical events to which some connection to the character can be made (e.g.: starring someone from the character's home town), concerts by nationally famous performers, royal weddings, inaugurations, and coronations. By Status 6, a character can attend just about any event he cares to whether he has been invited or not.

High Status also means better treatment at such events. At many Roman theaters, high-status families and civic officials were guaranteed front-row seats. In many churches, high-status families were likewise visibly seated in front. At modern concerts and theaters, a high-status character might get good seats and enjoy backstage access, allowing him to meet artists who are otherwise protected from the general public. Clubs and parties might also have VIP rooms, where a high-status character can talk exclusively to other high-status or otherwise notable people.

Easy Credit

Financiers will be more likely to provide high-status characters with funds when asked. This is particularly the case in historical societies, where moneylenders were frequently in a precarious social position and bought security by accumulating obligations from needy noblemen and governments. Moneylenders will be driven by the hope that high-status debtors will have access to reserves normal people don't (a wealthy merchant with low Status may be conventionally a better credit risk, but a high Status nobleman might be able to confiscate somebody else's estates to pay off a debt) and the fear that not providing loans will trigger retribution. That can be useful in the short run and is very good for business-savvy characters who might need capital to start a business or outfit an expeditionary force to attack a loot-rich target, but historically this made it very easy for characters with Status to end up with a lot of points in the Debt disadvantage.

Extravagant Display

Status-based legal limits on display and consumption are essentially a thing of the past, but they were once common. Many historical societies were rife with sumptuary laws governing who could own or use certain kinds of clothing, vehicles, homes, symbols, and other items. Needless to say, the best things were reserved for people with higher Status. For example, the size and design of one's carriage, the number of horses allowed to pull it, and the number of footmen one could bring along might be governed by one's Status. Higher Status means a bigger carriage and more horses and retainers. Clothing colors, styles, and materials were regulated by a dizzying array of laws. Only Roman patricians could wear a particular shade of purple derived from murex shells, only Medieval knights and noblemen could have coats of arms, and only the upper class in Renaissance Venice was allowed to wear silk. This kind of distinction has largely vanished in the modern world, but in many historical societies, the powerful were easy to spot.

Offices

When it comes down to it, Status means power. Someone with Status probably holds an official position of power in his society, and if he doesn't, is in a good position to obtain one, or at least can

influence who does reach such offices.

At lower levels of Status, the character may simply have the privilege of voting. Until the past century or so, republics from Athens to early modern Britain have had a middling-sized middle or upper class which was able to pick members of the government. In a society where eligible voters are limited by multiple significant factors (for example, two or more of sex, ethnicity, property or income, additional age past legal adulthood, religion, family membership) and voters are consequently a small minority, the right to vote is probably good reason to buy at least Status 1.

Someone at the top levels of Status for his society is a decision-maker with more direct authority over official policies and the lives of others. For characters without other advantages, this influence will be indirect or constrained. High-status characters may be legislators, who ultimately set rules for society but have little day to day control, or judges, who have considerable power over anyone brought before them but only within the bounds of the law. Characters in executive positions (this includes many historical noblemen as well as modern officials) are likely to have Allies, Law Enforcement Powers, Rank, and other advantages as well, though some may have Status only.

In societies where political rights are restricted by Status, Status is also a likely prerequisite for Rank, particularly Rank within official bodies. For example, a Renaissance city-state might employ anyone good enough with a sword as a guardsman or soldier (Rank 0), and senior men might become sergeants (Rank 1; historical organizations tend to have flat hierarchies and not many ranks). However, the captain of the guard and any officer in the army (Rank 2) would have to be at least Status 2 or 3. This can easily create a glass ceiling, with competent underlings stalled out at junior ranks while watching less competent aristocratic officers come and go. Administrative Rank is another area where Status is a likely prerequisite.

In modern societies, it's likely to be the other way around: a high level of Rank may confer Status as well. Any boy can grow up to be President, but having become President, he retains influence and a number of social privileges for the rest of his life.

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