

# The Path of Cunning



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# The Path of Cunning

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# Editorial: Immersion

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John Dallman and Roger Bell\_West

John: Fairly soon after Roger and I started gaming together, we found we agreed that “immersion” was our preferred kind of role-playing. However, some other gamers whom we respect, such as Bill Stoddard, do things very differently.

## What does it mean?

Playing the game, as far as possible, from inside the character’s head. Ignoring the things that they don’t know, solving problems the way they would, *being* them as well as I can achieve. In one theory of role-playing, this is called “Actor stance.” There are other stances in that model:

In Actor stance, a person determines a character’s decisions and actions using only knowledge and perceptions that the character would have.

In Author stance, a person determines a character’s decisions and actions based on the real person’s priorities, then retroactively “motivates” the character to perform them. (Without that second, retroactive step, this is fairly called Pawn stance.)

In Director stance, a person determines aspects of the environment relative to the character in some fashion, entirely separately from the character’s knowledge or ability to influence events.

Therefore the player has not only determined the character’s actions, but the context, timing, and spatial circumstances of those actions, or even features of the world separate from the characters.

[indie-rpgs.com](http://indie-rpgs.com)

Actor stance is – for me – a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for immersion. When immersed, I cease to consciously perform my role, and to some degree mentally *become* the

character. This is not something I can do instantly: it usually takes me several hours of playing a character for them to start asserting themselves, and become able to “take over.” This seems to resemble [Stanislavski's](#) system of acting.

Naturally, I’m fond of game frameworks that let me keep playing the same character for a long time. I joined a D&D meta-campaign in 1979, and still have characters from that period who get played in it occasionally.

A great thing about immersing myself in a character, setting aside parts of my own identity and personality, is that it lets me escape from the *limitations* of my own personality. I have been more eloquent, more devious, and more ingenious while in character than I can manage as myself. Inspiration happens to me in-character, in accordance with the character’s personality rather than my own.

There is a “session management” stance that I use when hosting face-to-face game sessions, for making tea, drawing maps, and so on. I can switch into that and back to playing or GMing without breaking immersion, although I’m fairly pre-occupied with the game while doing it.

## Illumination

“You know what’s going on, and you know it intuitively.” *Basic Set*, p.60.

Reading a thread on ENWorld, which reckoned that a very detailed setting, with massive amounts of scripting and record-keeping by the GM was a prerequisite for immersive play, I moved rapidly from “no, it isn’t” to describing why not, and realised immersive GMing works like a limited form of the Illuminated advantage.

When I have run a setting for a few tens of sessions, thought about it quite a lot during that time, and started to realise how it really works, I do start to instinctively understand what's going on. Session preparation becomes brief and general, although I try to think of names beforehand, being poor at improvising those. As the characters act, I can respond as the setting almost without thought, and with a reasonable level of consistency. I don't always know why things in the setting are a certain way, although I usually realise after a while. It's quite a bit like this:

"I think a lot of this kind of work goes on at other (to say lower, deeper, or higher introduces a false gradation) levels, when one is saying how-do-you-do, or even 'sleeping'. I have long ceased to invent (though even patronizing or sneering critics on the side praise my 'invention'): I wait till I seem to know what really happened. Or till it writes itself." J.R.R. Tolkein, *Letters*.

Another way to look at this method is that I'm immersed in playing the *Genius loci* of the setting.

## Identities

After I've played a character a lot, and can easily immerse in them, they start popping up in my head outside game sessions, and having ideas or making comments. I don't find this worrying because I've always had ideas happening at me spontaneously, based on things I thought or

learned in the past. Having them happen in-character is a variation, but not a huge one.

The ability to immerse goes away if I don't play the character for a long time. That's a loss, but one I have to accept: games don't last forever. Also, characters evolve. One of my then-favourite characters gradually became incomprehensible to me as he developed a deep insight into the nature of reality and the relationship of illusion magic to it. I can't play him any more: I can't think like him.

Just occasionally, I can apply a character's personality to the real world. This can be quite effective: most of my characters are better at making decisions than my own personality.

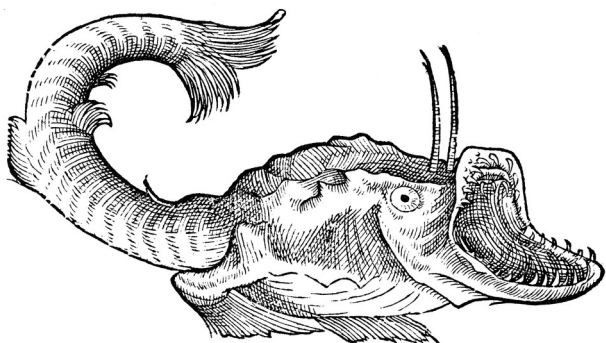
## What's the price?

Roger: As a player, I want to spend as much time as possible in the model of my character's mind; I'm quite happy to think about decisions the character can make ("do I use the special arrow now or save it for later") but I get irked when asked to step out and make an authorial decision, like "what disadvantageous thing happens as a result of that die roll" or "do you want to spend this metagame resource point now or later?"

John: **GURPS** Luck is a metagame currency, but it's usable without switching viewpoints nearly as much as is necessary for some other games' currencies. That suggests multiple viewpoints within actor stance, such as:

- Character in-the-moment, reacting in real time within the game.
- Character's rational supervising mind, like the Freudian Ego, anticipating events and looking back at them.

The supervising mind can use Luck, as a manifestation of the "Oops – got that wrong"





feeling that we all frequently have, but can be acted on in a game, if you've bought that privilege. Making suggestions for **GURPS** Serendipity can also be done in this mindset.

Also, other players are a fruitful source of disadvantageous things to have happen!

Roger: Yes. For me at least, “every X real-time minutes” is better than “X times per game session”, which in turn is better than character points that you could otherwise save up and use for other things. The more complexity and long-term implication, the more out-of-character thought is needed.

(I've noticed a strong trend in other systems away from “If you don't spend them, you can use them later to make your character better” to “If you don't spend them, you lose them, so *SPEND THE THINGS*.” Many gamers are born hoarders.)

## How do you do this with rules?

John: You can't *enforce* this with rules; some gamers simply prefer Author or Director stance. Some games I have read about claim to provide immersion, but when you look at how, they're requiring very detailed design of character motivations and the changes in their motives and feelings, in advance.

I think we can call that “Scriptwriter” stance, and it seems to me to inevitably cause frustration, either of the player as their script gets derailed by events, or of the other players and the GM as the character sticks to their script in defiance of events within the game.<sup>1</sup>

If you're going to respond effectively to the other players and the GM, a lot of the character's

reactions have to be played in the instant, and for me, that's just *easier* when I'm immersed.

## Effects on play style

Immersed in actor stance, some things that are important in other play styles don't seem relevant to me. I have no interest in genre tropes, because I'm not emulating a different form of story, like a novel or a film. I'm creating story through the medium of role-playing, which is its *own* form, and works best when it's done in its own way. Jokes and references made by the *characters* are fine; some of them engage in humour to relieve the tension of the situation.

This is primary creation, not adaptation. It is on a small scale, with a limited audience, but that doesn't make it worthless: done right, it can be very entertaining. I don't regard writing novels or making TV programmes as “better” or “superior” forms of story creation, just *different* ones.



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<sup>1</sup> Helmuth von Moltke: “No plan survives contact with the enemy.” Many players: “Our plans don't survive contact with *us*.”

I frequently have a fairly detailed mental picture of the characters and their surroundings. This is helpful when I'm GMing, less so when I'm a player. I have learned to discard it without regret when the GM invalidates it. When thoroughly immersed, I can see it "in the mind's eye" and it's at least as detailed as my picture of my surroundings: my mind's eye has better vision than my physical eyes.

## What helps with doing this?

A game system that behaves reasonably like reality, as opposed to a highly abstracted environment, helps a lot, and is one of the reasons why I like *GURPS*.

Understanding the setting is important, and spending time thinking about it helps a lot. If it's researchable, owing to being historical, semi-historical, or a fictional setting with a lot published about it, then reading helps. This is a lot like the work the GM has to do to keep coming up with scenarios, but it's done from the *character's* viewpoint. Don't become a "genre fiend" in the course of doing this: other players often have different priorities in the game, and will be annoyed if you try to enforce your interests on them.

Talk to the GM, if they're willing, and many are. You may well give them ideas, or help them flesh out the setting. Don't try to force this on them.

I've never played – as far as I know – in a group where all the players were trying to do

immersion in the same way. It could be interesting, but it might go too far.

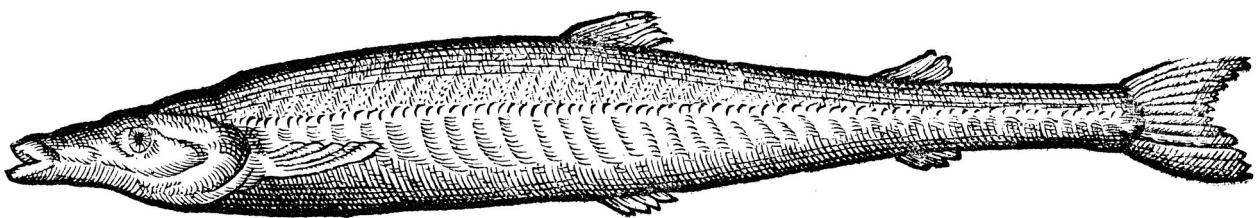
## Effects on other players

Because RPGs are social games, it's necessary for characters to be reasonably sociable and expressive, with a strong attachment to the group of PCs. If you're thoroughly immersed in a sociopathic killer, or just someone who wants to be alone all the time, the other players' experience is likely to suffer. This may well be the problem that puts some gamers off the idea of immersion, with complaints that immersed players stop communicating, or otherwise fail to engage with the party.

Roger: Even without considering immersion, a *GURPS* character with Loner or similar disadvantages is unlikely to work well in a party. Part of Session Zero is coming up with a character concept that'll work in this game with this group, rather than relying on "it's what my character would do" as an excuse to behave badly.

John: A related concept is entertaining the other players when your character is having a solo scene. One way to do this is "internal monologue," describing your thoughts and plans during the scene. Immersion makes this pretty easy, but don't try to do it while the characters are together, or you'll hog the spotlight.

That's our version of "immersion." Tell us about yours?



## Concluding Irresponsible & Right

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John Dallman

Roger's *Weird War II* campaign, *Irresponsible and Right*, has now reached the end of the war. There will be an epilogue, someday, but everyone wanted to keep on playing in the setting, while giving Roger a rest. Two more strands of the game have started, both at the beginning of the war and dealing with different theatres:

- *Neutral Currents*, run by Zyg, is dealing with the neutral countries of Europe. The PCs are working for MI6, covered as the crew of an Imperial Airways Short Empire flying boat.
- *Lions, Tigers and Dragons*, run by John, is based in British India, with a team working for the Delhi Intelligence Bureau of the Indian Imperial Police, MI5's counterpart in the region. This is intended to range across the whole China-Burma-India theatre of the war.

We plan to have articles about these campaigns in the future. The epilogue should serve for all three strands of I&R and will hopefully feature characters from all three strands. It is clearly years away.

### Meanwhile, in late 1944

By this time, the setting was becoming significantly different from conventional history. However, some things were still working the same way. German magicians were aware the war would be lost without *Wunderwaffe*, and tried anything they could make work, without much organisation or strategy. There were increasing numbers of dragons, although they had little interest in human affairs, with the exception of nuclear explosions.

Ah, yes, the nukes. Let's try to tell this as coherent themes. It wasn't very coherent for the characters, just busy. After the war ended, Admiral Canaris, the former head of German intelligence, said that the British clearly had at least five magical action teams in Europe. As far as the characters knew, there were them, and another group that wasn't very successful.

The campaign became a fine example of what I call "emergent story" – a complex sequence of events from which a large and complex story takes shape without much deliberate shaping.

Real history is the emergent story of the world; few campaigns last long enough or are complex enough to form fictional history in the same way, but this one did.

### The Amazing Adventures of Heinrich Himmler

Historically, Himmler was the senior Nazi with a strong interest in the occult. In the I&R setting, the SS had multiple quarrelling magical groups, but the characters didn't think he was personally involved until D-Day, when a dragon was one of the counter-attacks at Pegasus Bridge. Once Vincent Alexander had explained that "no, the invasion was humans, not undines seeking to flood the land," it went off to have a word with "Heinrich, the nice man in black" who the characters wrongly assumed was Himmler.

The next we heard of Himmler, he'd been shot on Hitler's orders, for being either culpable in the 20<sup>th</sup> July Plot, or negligent in failing to prevent it. One of his groups of magicians, based at Wewelsburg Castle, proved to have manipulated the plot, with the aim that Claus

von Stauffenberg would take the blame, but this had not gone according to plan. The characters had been in intermittent contact, via Lisbon, with the Wewelsburg group since summer 1941. Both groups were definitely fighting on their own sides, but cooperated to abort an NKVD project that would have (unintentionally) incinerated most of the cities of Europe<sup>1</sup>.

Himmler was next encountered as a ghost<sup>2</sup>, rousing a large proportion of the ghosts of Germany to defend it. All they could do was frighten people, but they were *good* at that, and the rout through France and Belgium after the Battle of Normandy stopped cold at the German border. This allowed Roger to revert to an approximately historical timeline, and puzzled the characters for a while.

Some of the ghosts managed to start possessing Allied senior officers. The characters had unfortunately contributed to this by involving Bradley's senior "Chaplain Assistant" – a group of officers charged with defending the US Army



against German magicians, although they weren't very effective – with the investigation of the ghosts. He got possessed, and it spread from him. It all got sorted out, and Eisenhower was only possessed for about an hour.

Eventually, the characters summoned, interrogated, and destroyed Himmler, and the other ghosts gradually returned to their graves.

## Detection and counter-detection

At the start of the campaign, all sides were using magic pretty freely whenever they could. The skill penalty for low mana gradually decreased, and more and more magicians appeared. It became clear to all sides that any use of magic near the front was likely to be detected, and should be treated as significant. Clearly, a secret group often operating far behind enemy lines needed to avoid detection.

For Magic as Powers users, we adapted the *Low Psychic Signature* enhancement (*Psionic Powers*, p. 20) into Low Magical Signature, which gives -2 to rolls to magically detect use of magic per +5% enhancement. Buying -10, for +25%, made it undetectable, and we did not indulge in Cosmic detects, hierarchies of detectability, and similar complexities.

For magic done via spells or rituals, we allowed, as best memory serves, -1 to detect a magical effect per -1 to the casting roll, though it might have been -1 to detection for -2 to casting. We failed to write that down.

The characters adopted these methods, to varying extents. They also tried to kill or capture all the enemy magicians they encountered, to prevent information about them from getting

1 *The Path of Cunning* #2, p. 33.

2 Roger "That's fanaticism. After your leader has you executed as a traitor, you're still working for him."



out. German magic evolved towards the subtle, because the unsubtle ones tended to die.

## Industrial Magic

In late 1944, the Germans were using magic on a truly industrial scale. The most awkward part was the highly effective anti-aircraft guided missiles, and it took a while to find out where they were getting the power for the enchantments.

That was the huge and magical storm that had been static over Köln Cathedral since the end of October 1944. In late December, Argas and Nordmann sneaked in, and discovered that young “racially pure Aryans” were being sacrificed for magical energy, which was being buffered in the structure of the cathedral. The energy was being used to maintain the storm as a defence, and transmitted towards various industrial areas in Germany. This was a prime example of “Human Evil,” as described by Roger in *Path of Cunning* #2, p. 34. It also showed they’d learned that a sacrifice has to be a *sacrifice*, something you value, or it won’t work.

Dealing with this presented a problem; there was no way to bomb it from the air through the storm, or carry enough explosives to the site. Destroying Köln Cathedral seemed undesirable, too. The solution was a device the characters had acquired when a rogue American anti-magical unit, “The Pond,” was suppressed. That was essentially a [Warlock’s Wheel](#), capable of draining magic from an area. However, that was dangerous for reality. This was risky, but they could not find an alternative. It worked, and the universe survived. Industrial enchantment ended at that point, although left-over missiles were still usable.

## Orichalcum and uranium

I&R dragons, when they breathe on metal transform it into gold and/or orichalcum. The characters never found out precise details, having more sense than to ask dragons personal questions, but first encountered orichalcum as an “augmenter” on the pulse-jet engine of a Fi 103<sup>3</sup> that was shot down during the German counter-offensive. It changed shape to improve efficiency at different altitudes (this is real physics, just not worthwhile with real-world technology) and was extremely magical.

The Germans were clearly unhappy about it being captured, judging by the way they could locate it and the air attacks; Kirilov’s Tunnelling let the characters bury it deep and escape, and the Germans did not manage to recover it before the counter-offensive was pushed back.

The subject went quiet until Niels Bohr was shown some, and a few experiments were done. While an orichalcum sample’s mass stays constant, its atomic mass and atomic number vary spontaneously, which was worrying.

Then the Germans tested a nuclear weapon.

The shock-wave in the magical field was noticeable to the magically sensitive, across national boundaries, and at distances of thousands of miles. The characters flew reconnaissance missions, found the site, and discovered that its magical environment was shattered, but beginning to heal up. Photo-recon revealed digging at the remains of a blockhouse inside the crater, while air sampling in the area showed orichalcum and uranium particles.

Attempting to find out what the British intelligence services knew about the area put the characters in touch with the group that were

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3 An aircraft that is essentially a manned V-1 with guns in place of a warhead.

attempting to find out about German nuclear research by mundane means. They knew of three other sites, all in south-west Germany. A trip with the RAF Pathfinders and a few squadrons of Lancasters backing them up confirmed that all three sites had orichalcum, one had missiles, and the other two were bombed flat.

By this time, Niels Bohr had developed a method (don't call it "enchantment") to confine the magical shock effect of a nuclear weapon. He'd also found out that persuading orichalcum to become uranium-235 was quite easy, and it didn't have to stay that way for very long, if the shape was a critical mass. So a small nuclear bomb was tested on the island of St Kilda, and then the characters got back to countering the German nuclear project.

We respected the missiles, so Highfield, Argas and Nordmann went in by parachute, with Alexander on standby to pick them up in an aircraft. The missile-control system was sabotaged, not being guarded against invisible infiltrators. Sneaking into the project building allowed overhearing an argument between Werner Heisenberg and Carl von Weizsäcker, revealing that they *didn't know* who was head of their project. That was very interesting, since the characters were reasonably sure it had been Kurt Diebner, and the project head would obviously have been at the test site. Had he been deleted from history?

The characters considered trying to help the scientists escape, but things would have been difficult if they wouldn't cooperate. They settled for stealing all the orichalcum and as much engineering data as they could carry, and calling in a bombing raid that flattened the project building once the scientists had left. There was no point in killing them now.



## Revising History

By early 1945, it seemed that someone in Germany had information about a different WWII, *maybe* the one the Knight-Fuller document described. However, they seemed to be assuming that this version of history would always match reality. This had first shown up in the capture of Antwerp and the River Scheldt<sup>4</sup>, where German troops had been given orders that assumed the historical course of events. "Time travel ruins everything", but the assumption that an amazing source of information is *trustworthy* is distinctively Nazi, a worthwhile piece of characterisation by Roger.

The players could also see that the German leadership was being a bit more rational than the historical WWII. This was, at least in part, because the characters were having some strategic influence, using their limited foreknowledge, but Roger felt that a walkover victory wouldn't be much fun. Himmler's ghost army had stopped the rout through France, but the Allies were further into Holland and Belgium than they had been historically.

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<sup>4</sup> *Path of Cunning* #2. p. 38.

That made the basic idea of Operation Market Garden – taking the Rhine bridges at Antwerp with paratroopers and advancing ground forces through the Netherlands to secure them – more practical than it was historically. I got interested in this idea, and found [someone interesting](#) on the staff of First Airborne Army to use as a character viewpoint. Making the plan went fine until I reached the “how do the Germans react?” stage and realised that having only one route across the Rhine is just asking for a concentrated response. So how could I get the Americans across the Rhine too?

They were busy with the [Battle of Hürtgen Forest](#), which they needed to win to get control of dams on the River Rur (not to be confused with the Ruhr). While the Germans controlled those dams, any attempt to cross the Rur to reach the Rhine on the north of the American front was suicidal: the Germans would open the sluices and wash the crossing troops away. Bombing the dams had been tried, with no success, and the RAF weren't interested in using the “bouncing bomb” again, because it got too many aircrew killed. But magic was somewhat public by now, as was the idea of magic-homing smart bombs.

So the characters, in a scenario outlined by John but run by Roger, got the job of planting homing devices on narrow bits of land near the dams, so that Tallboy bombs could blast the land away and let the water bypass the dams. That worked fine.



This had to happen two weeks before the attack on Arnhem, so that the water would have gone down and the Americans could cross the same day. The idea was that the German high command would realise when they learned of the Arnhem crossing that (a) they couldn't reinforce the Arnhem area from the American front and (b) the last two weeks had been planned by the other side.



The Arnhem operation went *roughly* to plan. The airborne troops were dropped in smaller groups than the historical attack so that they could be close to their targets. Their relief force didn't have to come nearly so far. There was a Luftwaffe magical unit nearby, based at an airfield north of Arnhem that was one of the targets, but their orders assumed that the attack was just like the historical one and would get bogged down in the town. The Panzer divisions that were responsible for that happening in our history had been wrecked in the German counter-offensive, so the orders didn't make much sense. All the Luftwaffe magicians got killed, and the demonic altar on which they'd been making high-powered zombies was captured.

## Crocuses and Kernels

The altar from Arnhem had been made fairly recently, by lowering a block of old wood into the demonic plane for a few hours. The magical operators had lost assorted limbs, eyes and so on

during the process<sup>5</sup>, suggesting there weren't huge numbers of altars. The altar in Köln Cathedral had looked fairly similar, but there had been no opportunity to examine that, and it had vanished when the Warlock's Wheel was used. Scrying from aircraft inside the German manifold revealed there were several others.

The two in Kassel were destroyed by magic-homing bombs. There were three in Berlin where the altar operators had found ways to defend themselves against bombing. OK, a point to them.

By this time, a British precognition operation that the characters *didn't need* to know any details about was reporting visions of a giant flower, perhaps a crocus, growing in Berlin, with its roots ripping up the city. After a ground trip to Berlin – see below – had disposed of the altars and Berlin's defence against magical detection, there was only one detectably magical site left in Berlin, in the garden of the Reich Chancellery<sup>6</sup>, which seemed to be the early stages of a vast enchantment. It got a magic-homing Tallboy bomb, which had a substantial effect: the giant flower was replaced in visions by many small ones, scattered across Germany, some in Japan, and maybe a few in South America.

Later analysis on the giant flower enchantment indicated it was meant to take a huge amount of energy – nuclear bomb level – and oscillate the magical environment to destroy the “impure” according to Nazi ideology about the pastoral life. Preventing that was worthwhile, but what did the smaller flowers mean?

The Wewelsburg magicians knew that; the “kernels” were small groups of SS troops with equipment, concealed outside space and time, to re-appear later and take over. Oh, *lovely* – and a bit like the Raven Division's ‘Kerne’ (*Infinite*

*Worlds*, p. 67). The troops would have had to travel to their locations before the rituals were done, and there were no known magicians among them.

Since there was a site on the Allied side of the front, the characters investigated it. The twisting of space was subtle, but just about detectable, and the troops inside it were willing to negotiate a surrender when space un-twisted to reveal they were surrounded by occupation forces. There were more kernels to be done, but there were more urgent tasks, too.

## In and Around Germany

The characters ran several ground operations in German-controlled territory in March and April 1945. These were on the ground, since there were several demonic altars in German hands and at least one of them was being used to monitor aircraft for magically sensitive people, and concentrate the air defences on those aircraft.

### Wewelsburg

The first operation was intended to collect a group of magicians at Wewelsburg Castle, mentioned above. They were ready to surrender if they could be got out of German-controlled territory, but they shared the castle with other magicians who were still loyal to the Nazi cause.

Those belonged to the *Echtes Deutschland* (“True Germany”) group, which had absorbed all the other German magical groups by late 1944. Its head was Gervas von Ettingshausen, who had first been met during the Battle of Britain, and had escaped custody by dying. His spirit had left the UK in the direction of Wewelsburg and he'd been installed in an artificial “glorified” body, made of heavily enchanted iron. The other

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5 Sacrifices again. Psychometry is *really useful* in this kind of campaign.

6 Nothing was known of the Führerbunker outside Germany until after the war.



Germans with those bodies by this stage were Guderian and Rommel, and all three had a strong sense of invincibility and great self-confidence, a major advantage in Nazi circles. Their inability to use amphetamines was a beneficial side-effect.

A convoy was put together from salvaged and repaired German vehicles, sneaked across the lines, and went to the Wewelsburg area. Argas and Nordmann sneaked forwards at night to scout, got into the castle<sup>7</sup>, located the bedrooms of the Ehtes Deutschland loyalists, and quietly killed them, one by one. Every really long-running campaign should feature a dungeon, but the Wewelsburg was cleared by people more frightening than the monsters there.

Then it was “simply” a matter of Nordmann going back to call the convoy forward, waking up the people we’d come to rescue, convincing the guards to leave, looting the place and returning to Allied territory. There were some odd symbolic things that seemed to date from the Germans’ nuclear test, but they burned with the rest of the castle.

The Wewelsburg magicians were able to confirm much of the information the characters had pieced together about German magical organisation, including Ehtes Deutschland’s responsibility for the human sacrifices at Köln.



<sup>7</sup> A spirit who can manifest a hand, to open a window or draw a bolt, is a *very* effective partner for an invisible infiltrator.

## Altars in Berlin, via werewolves

The next thing to go after seemed to be the demonic altars. The characters went covered as Volkssturm training and admin officers. They took a new type of weapon which had been built at their request. Captured Panzerfausts, with the metal lining of the shaped charge replaced with uranium. They were a lot easier to justify to Germans than a bazooka or PIAT, and at least as effective; the shaped charge was for iron bodies, or demolition in general, and the uranium for the anti-magical properties of its radioactivity.

The drive to Berlin wasn’t too hard, given Alexander’s ability to convince people of the party’s *bona fides*. There was an encounter with werewolves during the overnight stop, which wasn’t surprising. The Germans had sent a couple to Britain with other agents. One had been killed in action, and the other captured. She had told and shown us a fair amount about werewolves. Their natural form was wolf, and most did not use their human form much; her wolf-woman form was formidable, but she seemed to need magical assistance to use it.

Oh, and *all* wolves were werewolves by then. Allied armies had been warned to leave wolves alone unless they attacked, and silver-plated bullets had been supplied to snipers. Shooting wolves had been a popular activity among senior Nazis, and the wolves were not going to put up with it any more.

Arriving in Berlin, the characters went to the film studio where Alexander had worked between the wars. A director there was willing to help them set up a cover, after Alexander persuaded an SS officer –who wanted to conscript everyone at the studio for the Russian Front – that making propaganda films might be a better use for them. So the characters went

around filming preparations for the heroic defence of Berlin, which was an excellent way to get an idea of the situation.

There was a magical dome over the city, which hampered detection. It had first been detected from the air, and inside it there was a lot more demonic influence than normal. Kirilov tried his precognition and learned that his own school of elementalism would be mixed with this demonic style, and that Morozov, the Soviet leader, would be involved.

The centre of the dome was an innocuous linden tree in the Tiergarten, which had a guard, and seemed to be consuming a lot of nutrition from the soil, with a strong interest in any corpses that might be around, and a mental suggestion that you should lie down next to it for a long rest. Not very frightening, since an average bramble bush can manage it.

The three altar sites weren't hard to locate, since the buildings had more gargoyles than the rest of central Berlin. Rather oppressive, evil-looking gargoyles. Tired troops were being marched into one of the buildings, and coming out later looking more determined, demonic, and more like each other, with shiner uniforms.

The characters were clear they wanted to leave Berlin after making their attacks. Roger was a bit surprised about this, but the characters were sure they'd be caught if they hung around. Now I've read *The Labyrinth*, the memoirs of SS counter-intelligence chief Walter Schellenberg, I can see Roger's point, but there seemed to be plenty of organisation in Berlin at the time.

To make the operation quicker, the characters split up, after "borrowing" some anti-aircraft shells from a bored gunner for close-up filming, and extracting the explosives.

Alexander, as an SS officer, went to Tempelhof airport, and took command of the Ju 290 waiting there, claiming he had orders from SS General Baur, Hitler's personal pilot, to prepare for a flight, and that nobody was to observe who got out of the vehicles that were expected. That was taken as code for "getting Eva Braun out of Berlin" and the airport staff complied.

The linden tree at the centre of the dome had an accident with some explosives and a jerrycan of petrol, and the dome went down. At that point, Kirilov's precognition produced a vision of a puppeteer, who looked a bit like Morozov, and seemed quite annoyed.

The three altars were all destroyed with uranium Panzerfausts, after assorted fights with guards. The altars had been in use for various horrible pieces of magic aimed at the Soviets, and those had to be dealt with too.

The characters met at Tempelhof for the Ju 290 flight ... into the night's RAF raid. Hasty work with the radios made contact with the leader of the escorting night fighters, who knew Alexander but didn't like him. Flying back to the UK with a Mosquito on their tail wasn't much fun for the characters, but they had survived.

### **"We're not time travellers ..."**

Now it was the turn of *Echtes Deutschland*, and its leader, von Ettingshausen. He had defences against scrying, but the Wewelsburg magicians had supplied the names of some of his assistants and the only one who could be located was in the centre of Berlin.

Arriving back, with a different cover and route, the characters made camp in a ruined building, and Kirilov used his precognition in a *different* building. A fire tornado emerged from the River Spree, and destroyed the second building, although there had been time to escape, and no

pursuit. There was some remote magic-detection checking the building afterwards. The precognition had revealed a chain of puppeteers, alternating von Ettingshausen and Rasputin, with Hitler at the bottom of the chain.



Defences were being set up in the streets and buildings of Berlin. There weren't any detectable magical defences, but the characters knew *Echtes Deutschland* HQ had had bomb-distracting magic.

Argas found, close up, that EDHQ had slightly less than normal background magic, as seen from outside, but contained a hive of sorcery and enchantment: necromantic summoning for things like the fire tornado, stealthy magic detection, and preparation of charms for later use. Those included twisting pockets of space, differently from the kernels, and imposing complete and utter trustfulness on someone who was a Taurus<sup>8</sup>. On cue, a portal opened and von Ettingshausen and Hitler emerged. Nordmann, possessing a raven, went to fetch the others.

This was clearly the fashionable location in town, since soldiers with the insignia of a Soviet magical unit were approaching the building, led by General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Morozov. He seemed to be

part-way through being possessed by the spirit of Rasputin.

The culminating magical battle of the war in Europe took place on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1945 between von Ettingshausen and Morozov/Rasputin in the courtyard car park of *Echtes Deutschland* HQ, with contributions from the characters. When it ended, Hitler had been killed<sup>9</sup> by Alexander, von Ettingshausen by Matthews, Rasputin and Morozov, and Rasputin by Kirilov, leaving Morozov alive. The Allied forces left Berlin together, towards Soviet lines, with Hitler's body in the trunk of a car.

There was an autopsy, more investigations, and then a cremation with plenty of witnesses and photography. The souvenirs of Hitler were shared out, and a carefully worded report sent to London.

When things were pieced together later, it was clear that Hitler had been in the bunker under the Reich Chancellery garden when the magic-homing Tallboy was dropped on it. Von Ettingshausen had shifted himself and Hitler to another world to avoid dying. Hitler had remained there until von Ettingshausen brought back. He'd been in a rural Bavaria, maybe 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century, which appeared to have only been in existence for a few days before he arrived.

Oh, and the penalty to success rolls for magic, which had been steadily reducing from its initial -5 since December 1942, had gone from -1 to 0 at about the time of Hitler's death.

## Unconditional Surrender

London got back to us suggesting that it would be helpful if someone on the German side could be persuaded to issue a formal surrender.

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<sup>8</sup> When you've been playing an occult game for 14 years, remembering that Hitler was a Taurus is the kind of thing players do automatically.

<sup>9</sup> And forced onwards to his afterlife by Argas.

Hitler's death had been blamed on von Ettingshausen by Goebbels. He seemed to be in charge and was on radio, talking about how well Germans could die. Göring was still the *official* successor, and scrying revealed him in the [RLM building](#), at a desk, but clearly intoxicated. Bormann was North-West of Berlin, and travelling further in that direction – that went back to London ASAP.

The characters sneaked back into Berlin, where there didn't seem to be magical defences, or much else that was organised. Nordmann went into the RLM basement, where Göring was asleep, and applied healing magic, while Argas and Alexander got into the building. Then Rommel showed up, in his "glorified" body, carrying a 30mm aircraft auto-cannon as a shoulder weapon. He'd pragmatically decided to get Göring to issue a surrender, and was happy to co-operate.

The surrender of Germany was written and signed in the RLM basement, followed by a trip to a German radio station for Göring and Rommel to announce it. The Germans obeyed the surrender order (helped by the seizure of Prague in history's first major magical-mundane combined operation, with Soviet paratroops, deploying magical gates for tanks to arrive in the German rear), but there was a lot of clearing up to be done. As the characters were the only Western troops in Berlin, they got to do some of it.

Goebbels was dead, presumably by his own hand, and his spirit was persuaded to pass on. Dönitz donated his baton as a trophy for the Admiralty in London, and lists of the *Echtes Deutschland* magicians were collected for occupying forces. Bormann was magically located in Hamburg, while Speer and Jüttner (Himmler's successor) gave no trouble.

## Mopping up

After assisting the Soviet shamans with an unusual set of ghosts at the remains of a concentration camp, it was off to Hamburg after Bormann. He and two other senior Nazis had left on a ghost aircraft designed by [Richard Vogt](#), who in real history was something close to the stereotype of a Nazi mad scientist, and in this setting, with industrial necromancy available, had done something *horrible*. Nobody knew where they'd gone, so the characters went back to Berlin to look for clues in their backgrounds.

Martin Bormann, Artur Axmann and Baldur von Schirach had left clues they were heading for Argentina. But they didn't speak Spanish, and allusions to building up a new power structure in plain sight didn't make sense there.

There seemed to have been a concealed flight through UK airspace at the right time; if it was on a great circle course, it was heading for the eastern half of the USA. Von Schirach's mother was American. Flying there, checking in with contacts in the FBI, and an attempt at magical location produced a ping, with magical defences fuzzing the location. Of course, that made it more interesting.

A couple of days of scrying and detective work led to a newly-established newspaper's building in Birmingham, Alabama, containing magically screened rooms with a lot of seditious literature and the missing Nazis. The FBI took on tracking down whoever had done the screening and two Nazis (Axmann killed himself) went back to Germany for trials. The characters were around 700 points by now, and generally brushed naive opposition aside easily.



## Japan

The characters had got used to having good contacts in the British high command, thanks to Kingsthorpe's Patron in the Imperial General Staff. They had no influence with American commanders and needed an excuse for being in the Japanese theatre.

Their relations with No. 617 Squadron RAF were helpful there, because that unit had capabilities that the US air forces lacked, using Tallboy and Grand Slam bombs. Getting their Lancaster bombers to Iwo Jima was solved by Alexander's long-standing friendship with Howard Hughes, whose [H-4 Hercules](#) had been going better than in conventional history and was ready to fly.

The Battle of Okinawa was underway. There didn't seem to be organised magical defences, but some Japanese soldiers were spontaneously manifesting an ability that the Germans had given to a few of their men: burning their own souls to power strength, defences or other abilities. They aged very rapidly and would die soon, but weren't worried about that. This did not bode well for an invasion.

At this point, Alexander had an idea. The Japanese were clearly losing the war on a material level, but their code of honour forbade surrender. Since their honour structure was based on the Emperor, defeating him would allow ending the war. Preferring a rapier to a katana, he sent a message to Howard Hughes to ask Basil Rathbone to send a good one.

Meanwhile, detecting magic from aircraft showed plenty of the spontaneous kind, plus some organised sites in Tokyo, Kyoto, and at Nagoya University and the nearby Atsuta Shrine. Alexander's challenge to the Emperor was issued by radio from a ramjet-powered Mosquito in a supersonic dive over Nagoya.

Nagoya University seemed suspiciously free of bomb hits. When 617 Squadron were asked to rectify that, the university revealed magical defences in the form of gravity control, causing smart bombs to fall short, then breaking a wing off a Lancaster. Since more subtlety was clearly required, Nordmann's ghost went in possessing a seabird.

The Atsuta Shrine had something quite impressive underway: magical separation of uranium. The product was being taken to the university, well-known for physics and chemistry. This was getting quite worrying. While Nordmann was able to do a little sabotage, this didn't look as if it would delay the work for long.

Then the Emperor accepted Alexander's challenge.

His messenger was the Empress, disguised as a fisherman, so the acceptance was credible. After the arrival of the rapier, plus "Mad Jack" Churchill and David Niven as seconds, there was a Dakota flight to the suggested site, a shrine north of Tokyo.

The duel was formal, and observed by film crews and the Japanese General Staff. The Emperor left an opening, possibly deliberately, was hit, and declared himself defeated and the war over.

This declaration was obeyed, and the war actually ended, in mid-May 1945. The last line of in-character dialogue is worth quoting:

*Alexander: Gentlemen, I give you the King. And absent friends.*

Karen Gilham had by this time died of multiple sclerosis. We miss her greatly.

# The Afforestation of *GURPS Power-Ups 10: Skill Trees*

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Sean Punch

As I write, my most recent *GURPS* release is *GURPS Power-Ups 10: Skill Trees*. You could see this as “*GURPS Power-Ups 9: Alternate Attributes* for skills,” in that it replaces a core subsystem of *GURPS* — skills this time around — with a completely different one that spans the gamut of the original while offering dials and switches that empower the GM to fine-tune the rules to the needs of their campaign and gaming group. It would be equally valid to regard it as a replacement for Talents and wildcard skills — and thus for *GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents* and *GURPS Power-Ups 7: Wildcard Skills* — because it groups a huge number of skills under a modest number of umbrellas of the GM’s choosing (again, to accommodate individual preferences), but in a radically different way. It’s both of these things and more.

That’s the marketing pitch. What does it actually mean? To answer that, I’ll start by explaining my motivations.

In my role as *GURPS* Line Editor, I receive endless questions about and critiques of *GURPS* from current, former, and would-be players and GMs, and from freelance writers. Many of these concern the skill system. Oft-mentioned problems include:

- Hundreds of skills lead to decision paralysis, overlooked key abilities (especially ones for tasks that other RPGs deem unskilled, and so which players might not think to add to character sheets), and “gotchas” wherein the GM trips up players by locking key rewards or story developments behind obscure traits.
- Multiple ways to subdivide or elaborate on all those skills — grouped skills,

required specialties, *optional* specialties, techniques, familiarities, etc. — many of them user-defined and nested in ways that make *GURPS* frustrating to understand.

- “Busy” character sheets as a result of the previous two points, slowing game play as gamers try to understand what all the stats mean.
- Several approaches to unifying related skills — notably the aforementioned Talents and wildcard skills — which aren’t 100% inter-compatible and lead to different competence at a given point cost. Moreover, while wildcards simplify the skill list, they’re cinematic and not suited to all campaigns, and also costly enough that making them attractive means complicating game play with extra benefits.
- A skill cost scheme that — while veterans love it — often confounds newcomers. One issue is the four-level jump from default level to the 1-point level, leading to confusion about what “–” means on the *Skill Cost Table*, and to fiddly workarounds like the Dabbler perk and reintroducing past editions’ ½ and ¼ points. Another is an inconsistent cost per level that requires an effort to memorize, and lookups for those with bad memories. Smaller but still significant wrinkles are the cost offsets for different skill difficulties and the separate *Technique Cost Table*.
- Rules for using skills with different attributes that feel tacked on at the last minute — because they were, in 2004, after *GURPS* had thrived for 18 years without them — and that GMs often overlook as a result, leading to players putting all their eggs in one or two

attribute baskets (DX and/or IQ) instead of focusing on skill buy-in even for character types *defined* by skills.

- A haphazard inter-skill default web developed unsystematically over 38 years and four editions. Another thing that veterans adore, it can be a nightmare for beginners — how it works has become a FAQ despite a detailed explanation in the *Basic Set*.
- Rampant optimization owing to the previous two issues: Players create characters with high attributes and minimal skill investment, and — where skill-buying is inevitable — buy one skill at a stratospheric level and default as many as possible others to that, even if the resulting set of traits doesn't suit the character. Dramatic and real-world sense take the back seat to the mathematical and economic kind, damaging story and suspension of disbelief.

My goal was to replace everything — ordinary skills, wildcard skills, Talents, grouped skills, specialties, techniques, etc. — with a unified system featuring a flat per-level cost scheme running from “no training” to “master” without gaps. I wanted it to have no attribute bias, so that buying skills would mean *buying skills*, not betting on the GM's indifference to assigning tasks to appropriate attributes. And while I wanted competence in one area help in another, related one, I also wanted to discard fussy default structures.

Starting from that last point, I decided that it would be good to have a small number of ultra-broad areas of competence, corresponding to niches and dramatic roles, that players could buy to create characters *quickly*. Below each of those would be a number of narrower capabilities that people who excel at specific parts of their domain could improve individually. And so on, for two more tiers. I

settled on four steps by reasoning that I needed something roughly comparable to wildcard skills or Talents at the top, broad skill groups or skills with specialties after that, individual skills or specialties beneath *that*, and coverage for specialties-within-specialties, techniques, familiarities, and other fiddly bits at the bottom.



Such a telescoping scheme would make it possible to create characters as broadly or narrowly competent as desired, while making it less tempting to “game the system” by seeing what's cheaper: high ordinary skill with lots of defaults, Talent, wildcard skill, or whatever. It would also mean less to list on character sheets, as players with solid character concepts could improve and write down a couple of highest-tier items, plus a small handful of lower-tier ones. The idea of calling the resulting structures “skill trees” occurred as I was writing (early working titles were *Sliding Skills* and *Telescoping Skills*), because trees grow up and out into progressively smaller bits, like my skill replacements. Whimsically (and controversially, it turns out!), I called these — from broadest to narrowest — Trunks, Branches, Twigs, and Leaves.

To deal with cost schemes complicated by skill difficulty, skipped levels, changing cost per level, technique pricing and difficulty, etc., I decided that each tier would have a fixed cost per level, at every level. Thus, competence at skilled tasks would have a flat per-level price, like attributes or Talents, because it would be the same sort of thing, particularly in the case of Trunks. To account for breadth, Trunks would cost more per level than Branches, Branches more per level than Twigs, and Twigs more per level than Leaves—but nobody would have to memorize more than four numbers.



I also realized that the best way to make skills more important than attributes for skilled tasks — removing the largest incentive to optimize point costs — would be not to involve attributes in skill-buying! Instead, when the GM decides which skill trees and tiers seem important for a task, they would also choose the most fitting attribute. Conveniently, this led to simply listing each tier as a number that could be added to any attribute. There'd be no need to list absolute level, relative level, controlling attribute, difficulty, or anything else that clutters character sheets and templates.

I cannot lie: This wasn't easy.

First came providing a comprehensive set of Trunks and then distributing skills, specialties, techniques, and the like among them. For this I drew from the top-level classifications in *GURPS Skill Categories*, the Talents in *GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents*, the wildcard skills in *GURPS Power-Ups 7: Wildcard Skills*, the ideas for extra attributes in *GURPS Power-Ups 9: Alternative Attributes*, and the character niches in *GURPS Template Toolkit 1: Characters*. In the process, I stumbled upon exceptions that seemed fairer on a lower (or more rarely, higher) tier than my basic rules suggested. I also felt it necessary to show GMs how to create their own Trunks, Branches, Twigs, and Leaves, and to tell players what they can and cannot buy piecemeal.

After that, of course, I owed “in play” advice: Words to GMs on how to judge which Trunks, Branches, Twigs, and Leaves — and which attributes — should apply to a task in play. Thoughts on what to do when several of these traits seem relevant and overlap. Reformulations of rules that implicitly assume the existing skill system, particularly those that envision skill level as being associated with and relative to attributes. Shortcuts for when all of this seems like too much work.

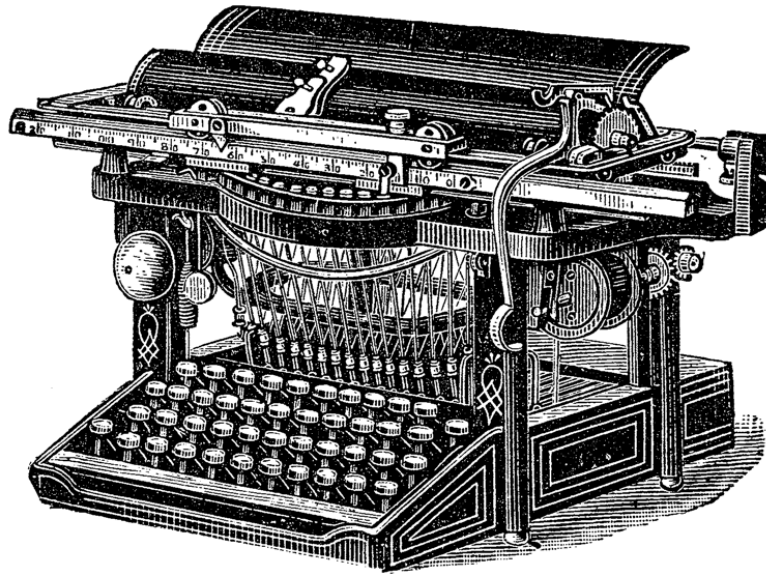
This being a *GURPS* book, I deemed two other things essential: One was to show my math, so that gamers who disagree with any of my assumptions can easily change them and see the results. The other was optional rules for hackers and heretics; e.g., associating Trunks with templates, letting players define Trunks, making obscure Trunks competitive with mainstream ones, adjusting the difficulty of tasks and thus the point outlay needed to achieve competence, mixing skill trees with ordinary and/or wildcard skills, and extrapolating to magic, cinematic martial-arts skills, etc. This ended up filling a third of the supplement!



Talking of length, my mandate was for 21 pages, with slack to go to 22-23 pages in a pinch, but I ended up at *24 pages*. (All *before* the ad at the end, which doesn't count.) As I was writing on the clock, SJ Games let that slide . . . but I couldn't go longer. For the curious, that's why there are no complete worked examples of how existing templates would look with "template Trunks," how the *GURPS Magic* system would

look if it used skill trees, and so on. I had to stop somewhere — and anyway, this item was intended as a hacker's toolkit, so get out there and hack!

If you like the standard skill system, stay tuned — I've already written *GURPS Power-Ups 11: Roll Your Own Skills*.



## GURPS Community Contacts

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SJ Games *GURPS* page: <https://www.sjgames.com/gurps/>

SJ Games *GURPS* forum: <https://forums.sjgames.com/forumdisplay.php?f=13>

GURPSDay blog index: <https://gamingballistic.com/gurpsday/>

GURPSNet-L mailing list: <mailto:gurpsnet-l%2Bsubscribe@sjgames.com>

RPG.NET GURPS: <https://forum.rpg.net/index.php?tags/gurps/>

Stack Exchange GURPS: <https://rpg.stackexchange.com/questions/tagged/gurps>

# GURPS Fantasy Folk, Thrice

## Designer's Notes, In Brief

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Phil Masters

Every now and again, I realise that there's something on the **GURPS** Wish List at which I could take a stab, and sometimes this leads to other ideas. One of these was the suggested "Fantasy Folk" line... Okay, it helped that Alden Lovesshade had shown how it could be done with Elves.

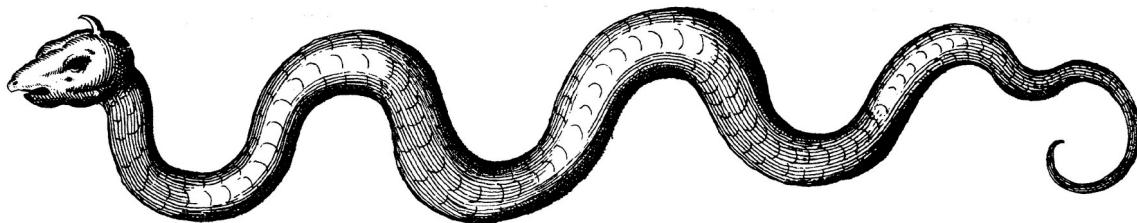
I glommed onto "Goblins and Hobgoblins" as a title to tackle, noting that there were at least two distinct versions of each in **GURPS** 4<sup>th</sup> edition sources—one for Banestorm's Yrth, one for Dungeon Fantasy. These drew on 3<sup>rd</sup> edition versions, and were perfectly fine sword and sorcery creatures, but of course, they were products of the post-D&D fantasy memesphere, and didn't have overly much to do with the mythic or folkloric origins of the terminology. So I set to work and integrated multiple variants as best I could, filled out some of the backstory of the Yrth version (originally trans-dimensional exiles from the world of Gabrook), filled them out with some gear and training and such, and adapted some concepts to other genres, such as Monster Hunters.

Which was fine, but it left me knowing a bit more about related topics than I could let lie. Proving that kobolds could sustain a book of their own (well, a 16-page booklet) was almost an act of perversity, but it seemed worth trying to make them a bit more game-useful, and hey,

showing that true mythic kobolds should be 245-point creatures was a point I liked making.

The third book in this line was perhaps partly a matter of completing a set, as reptile men are the other Yrth-dwelling race with origins on Gabrook. The "Reptilian Races" could be filled out with Dungeon Fantasy's dragon-blooded and lizard men and, dipping back to third edition, Cabal's serpent-lords—plus variations, of course. However, the tone was perforce different here. Indian mythology's nagas aside, reptilian races don't have much in the way of mythic or folkloric roots; we have to credit them more to Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert E. Howard, from whom they were transmitted, by way of horror and SF as much as anything, to modern Ufology and conspiracy thinking. So the game mechanics here were less about emulating myth and more about what the attributes and capabilities of humanoid reptilian sapients might actually be. And some freaky ancient magic (and weird tech), obviously.

Which leaves the Gabrook trilogy complete - though it's less about integration than it is about spinning off variations. Well, at least I've made a bit more canon about that world - and had a chance to snark at some Victorian folklorists along the way. Honestly, if you think I extrapolated too much or mishandled any translations, you should see what those people did.



# Designer's Notes: Atlantropa

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Josh Kilburn

When writing *GURPS Infinite Worlds: Atlantropa*, one of the things that I focused on was the tectonic clash of civilizations. The narrative structure is very much one focused on global matters, treating civilizations as characters in a slowly unfolding drama that eventually expands into orbit. In doing so, I cover a lot of ideas in a very limited amount of space. There was also a lot of material that was cut from earlier drafts, either due to space considerations or simply just because it didn't fit with the overall structure. Thus, in these designer's notes, I hope to touch on some things that I didn't get a chance to discuss in the original draft, and to introduce new depth to the world.

## Philosophy and Politics

One of the things I never got a chance to address was philosophy and politics. These were simply too small scale or abstract to focus on. Anytime I did, it felt like I was zeroing in on a specific country for far too long. When telling a global narrative, a global perspective is needed, but the global perspective is a very low-resolution one. You lose a lot of details that can be interesting.

## Neoliberalism and Postmodernism

Neoliberalism is an economic philosophy that promotes austerity, limited government intervention in the economy, deregulation, and global free trade, among other related policies. It's a reaction to the failures of Keynesianism that occurred during the 1970s stagflation. Postmodernism, meanwhile, is a philosophy that is sharply critical and sceptical of grand narratives. Postmodernism arose as a reaction to modernism. One is connected to the other; neoliberalism is an outgrowth of

postmodernism. While it's too simplistic to say that no postmodernism means no neoliberalism, no postmodernism would mean a radically different type of neoliberalism.

Atlantropa doesn't have either of these philosophies. Postmodernism was indirectly influenced by the Cultural Center for Freedom, an organization run by the CIA that promoted artwork and philosophy which ran counter to the more traditional propaganda put out by the Soviet Union. However, the CIA was removed very early on, and this means that artists like Jackson Pollack and Andy Warhol, and works like *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* never became major pieces of art in the United States or globally.

The early death of postmodernism means that the philosophy of Atlantropa is dominated by three different schools, at least in the West: Phenomenology, Structuralism, and Existentialism. Of these, Structuralism is the most important, and it is the philosophy that had the most impact on the book. Structuralism is the analysis of structures. It promotes a more coherent unified theoretical framework than postmodernism, resulting in a more organized and systematic approach to studying and understanding society. It focuses on understanding underlying structures and places an emphasis on analyzing these systems and frameworks. It lends itself to a radically different social and political landscape; one that is focused much less on individualism, subjectivity, relativism, and diversity overall.

The biggest impact is the acceptance of centralized planning and organization as a fact of life. This is most apparent with the EAF, as the analytical reasoning in Structuralism places an emphasis on, "how do we make this

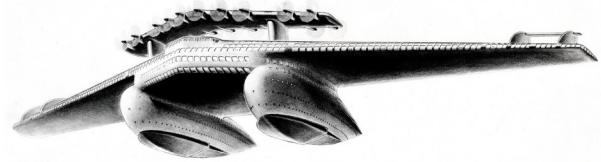
bureaucracy run more efficiently?” This is also visible in the ACCP, as the corporate governance is concerned with efficiency and engages in heavy centralized planning. The ACCP is a remarkably efficient bureaucracy; it needs to be. Otherwise, it’d fall apart.

The absence of neoliberalism can be felt here, as well. There is more of an emphasis on public good, especially in Europe, with technological advancement, and across all the major blocs, there is an emphasis on solidarity. The media landscape is fragmented, but only because there are five main power blocs that don’t get along. Within these power blocs, there is a focus on public service journalism (even if that public service journalism is little better than propaganda, as is the case of the Soviet Union, China, and ACCP). Media companies tend to prioritize quality over profit, as they are funded by the public sector and don’t feel the pressure towards a profit-first motive.

In terms of artistic, literature, and architectural styles, I mentioned “Stalinist Gothic” in the text (*Atlantropa*, p. 10), but more general styles such as modernism, surrealism, expressionism, and futurism persist. There is less of an emphasis placed on deconstruction, irony, and pastiche. Individuals across the whole of Atlantropa are surprisingly sincere in their intentions and speech, as the use of irony and sarcasm are not nearly as widespread.

There is also a reduction in the importance of the individual. In the ACCP, this is the primary dividing line between the corporate governance and the counterculture, as the counterculture expresses individualism and individuality, while the ACCP looks for solidarity and uniformity (coincidentally, this is a world where labor unions do get along well with the ACCP management – to an extent). In this way, the counterculture in the ACCP is very similar to left-leaning libertarians. The McCarthyites

strangled Buckley’s fusionism in the crib, Ayn Rand’s ideas were never promoted by a post-CCF culture, and the United States didn’t last long enough for Alan Greenspan to become influential. All these things mean right-leaning libertarianism and its cousin, Objectivism, doesn’t exist.



## Religion

Early on, I dove into Russian Cosmism and the influence it had on Russia, and I was curious about the impact that Cosmism would have on the Soviet Union; given I knew Malenkov converted to Orthodox Christianity later in life, I could imagine him being influenced on some level by a more cosmist Soviet Union. And while I abandoned that early on – it didn’t really fit the grand theme – it is still something that was in the back of my mind.

While the Soviet Union was amazingly hostile towards some religions, it’s important to remember that Stalin was trained at a seminary and his mother was a devout Orthodox Christian. It’s precisely because of his mother that Stalin ended persecution of the Orthodox Christian church. Over time, this allowed the Soviet Government and the Orthodox Church to grow closer together.

Thus, there’s no reason why a Malenkov administration couldn’t be even more friendly towards religion, especially religions like Orthodox Christianity and Islam, which the Soviets already had experience with through their Central Asian empire. In our timeline there were individuals like Qaddafi and Ali Shariati who were attempting to fuse some Marxist or historical materialist ideas into Islam and Arab Nationalism (Shariati was Iranian, it should be

noted). With a more active Soviet Union receptive to these fusions, it's possible you could see a fusion of some type of Soviet-style materialism with Islam, even if that would be a profoundly uncomfortable alliance for both halves of the coin.

On Atlantropa, then, the presence of these "Red Crescent" Muslims results in interesting complications in the Middle East. Europe, rather North America, finds itself constantly embroiled in this region as the different factions of Muslims clash with one another in sectarian conflicts inflamed by Soviet influence.

Pivoting to a different religion, the collapse of McCarthyites in the United States does not spell the end for Christianity. It's important to remember that while the McCarthyites stymied a lot of the counterculture and the civil rights movements, they were not the same sort of right-wing evangelical Christian that exists today. That's a unique response to the counterculture and various civil rights movements, which the McCarthyites have already smothered. The collapse of the McCarthyites on Atlantropa meant a rebirth in the Jesus Movement, and a fusion of left-leaning anarchism with Christianity has resulted in a flourishing of religious philosophies. Religion in the ACCP is much smaller, much more group-focused, and often, considerably more left-wing, anarchist, and evangelical than one might initially consider. Some of these groups embrace technology, especially biotechnology, both for its impact on reproductive health and the potential to improve humanity. There's also an apocalyptic undertone to some of these left-leaning anarcho-Christian groups, with a belief that the return of Jesus is one nuclear warhead away.

## **The American Consortium for Corporate Partners**

Another area I would like to have explored deeper is the ACCP more generally. Initially, the ACCP comes across as cyberpunk. This isn't wrong, and the ACCP can certainly be played as such. However, the ACCP is more complicated than I had room to express.

The ACCP initially appears as a decentralized government, with corporate control over the development zones varying from region to region. In some, corporations have direct control over local politics, while in others, the corporations take a more hands-off approach. In some areas, there are several corporations that might directly influence local leadership.

However, this is devolved government, not decentralized government. The ACCP is a unitary state, with a bicameral, parliamentary type of government. The two houses are the American Congress and the American Senate. Representatives for both are elected by the population, and the elections are usually fair. The rigging starts long before the elections happen, as the ACCP is a single-party state. Thus, the people who can be elected are already approved by the corporations. Someone cannot run for government unless they have the stamp of approval from the corporate partners.

This is less true in other areas; in particular, Central America, where the Desarrollo system is much older, and the territories are considerably more feudal. But this is the case in the former United States of America.

The ACCP is highly centralized, with several ministries and bureaus that are involved in long-term planning. The corporations accept this, since their primary purpose is to stop communism, and that's a long-term project. However, they demand influence in these

ministries, and many ministries exist to serve them first.

For this reason, the ACCP calls itself a democracy, and the population in the former United States still generally see themselves as a free and democratic people, albeit ones that are trapped in a vast structure designed by corporations to fight the spread of global communism.

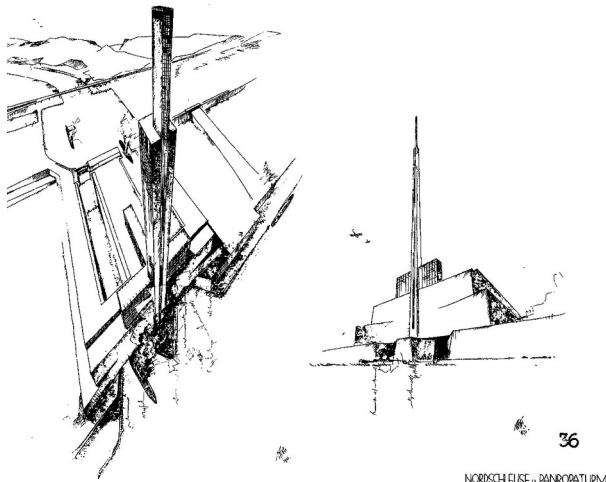
## The ACCP and the Counterculture

The ACCP is not at war with the counterculture, and the counterculture is not at war with the ACCP. The approach taken by the ACCP is a “live and let live” vibe. If an individual or groups of individuals want to live naked in the forest and have free love, take psychedelics, and worship Jesus, then the ACCP is not going to intrude. They may face problems when they attempt to leave their local development zone (*Atlantropa*, p. 12), but few do. The biggest problem these people present is when they attempt to interfere with large-scale building projects in the name of environmentalist causes.

For some within the ACCP, however, this is a wasted opportunity. The counterculture is suspicious of the USSR. Consisting primarily of anarchists, libertarian Marxists, and leftists, the counterculture tends to see the USSR as a warped caricature of what communism and socialism could be. For this reason, some within the ACCP are actively trying to reach out to these groups, in the hopes of establishing a “big tent” style philosophy.

That many of these counterculture groups have embraced bioengineering, often using the tools to protest the environmental impacts of the large-scale projects the ACCP engages in, plays a role in this approach by the ACCP. Some of these groups are very good at what they do, and

the ACCP would like to engage with them on an equal footing. After all, the ACCP is vested in the public good – their idea of the public good, but public good all the same. And new advances in technology can help further that good.



## Adventures

While I ran out of space in the original draft, here are a few more adventure ideas for *Atlantropa*, based on the content of the book and this article.

## A Cure for the Common Cold

The Gotha viruses are terrifying (*Infinite Worlds*, p. 128). However, Homeline has heard rumors that the advanced biotechnology on *Atlantropa* has discovered a universal panacea; a technological cure that fixes all ailments and reverses damage done by diseases. While the Gotha virus doesn't exist on *Atlantropa-1*, the prospect of something that can cure the virus in some or perhaps even all cases and undo the damage it does is too promising. So, the players are sent to find the individual who invented the cure.

The individual who invented the cure is a well-known doctor in the Soviet Union. Motivated by a type of Neo-Cosmism, he believes that technology and religion should unify to purify



the human body and cure all ailments. He's seen as something of a crank, but perhaps there's more to his mysticism than meets the eye – a reality shard, for instance. Regardless, he is a guy who knows his stuff and understands a lot of things.

Unfortunately, this understanding does not extend to politics, and he's crossed a high ranking official within the Soviet Union. As a result, he's now on the run, taking his research with him on a cross-country tour of Asia.

Can the players catch him? Will they get him before the KGB does? Where is he going? What will they find as they undertake a cross-country road tour of the Soviet Union, post-Malenkov? More importantly, will the cure work, or will it have been for nothing all along?

And who wants to travel to a Gotha parallel, jab a zombie, and find out?

## Born Again Bioengineering

Despite having a reputation for taking drugs and engaging in free love, many of the counterculture groups count among their number skilled biotechnicians. Those that do take money, usually from the EAF or the USSR, often have resources that they can use to expend on problems, which can lead to interesting results.

It's entirely possible that one or more of these communes could create a variant human genotype; in this case, the *Mahatma*-series genetic upgrade (*Transhuman Space: Bioroid Bazaar*, p. 14) or any of the early, problematic designs (pp. 15-16) are the most likely. The Mahatma is an especially fitting variant to use, but if the commune has access to more advanced technology, the Ranger-series could emerge (p. 16). The explosive social potential of a commune developing the Ariadne-series

parahuman (p. 11) can't be understated, either. Similarly, while bioroids don't exist on Atlantropa the technology for them is there. It would just take the right technician with the right creative spark to make the leap from "printing organs" to "printing organisms." In all these cases, the players might be members of these communes, or they might be outsiders from homeline or the ACCP sent in to spy on the communes to figure exactly what is going on.

Perhaps one such group engineers a creature (or bioroid monster; *Transhuman Space: Biotech 2100* has a fine selection to pick from) that escapes, and now the players, contracted by the ACCP, must come in and fix the problem – or perhaps they are members of the commune who can solve it themselves, without outside help. This could lead to an interesting *Monster Hunters* scenario, where the group are variant parahumans or genetic upgrades in a commune or collective of communes in the middle of the American Midwest, far from any authority, dealing with things like engineered Chupacabra, Sasquatch, or other monsters created and escaped from their labs – or ACCP black labs in the vicinity. This becomes even more interesting if psychic powers (see *Infinite Worlds*, p. 22) are involved. When adapting Monster Hunters, remember Atlantropa is a no mana parallel without any aliens – or is it?

## Spirit in the Sky

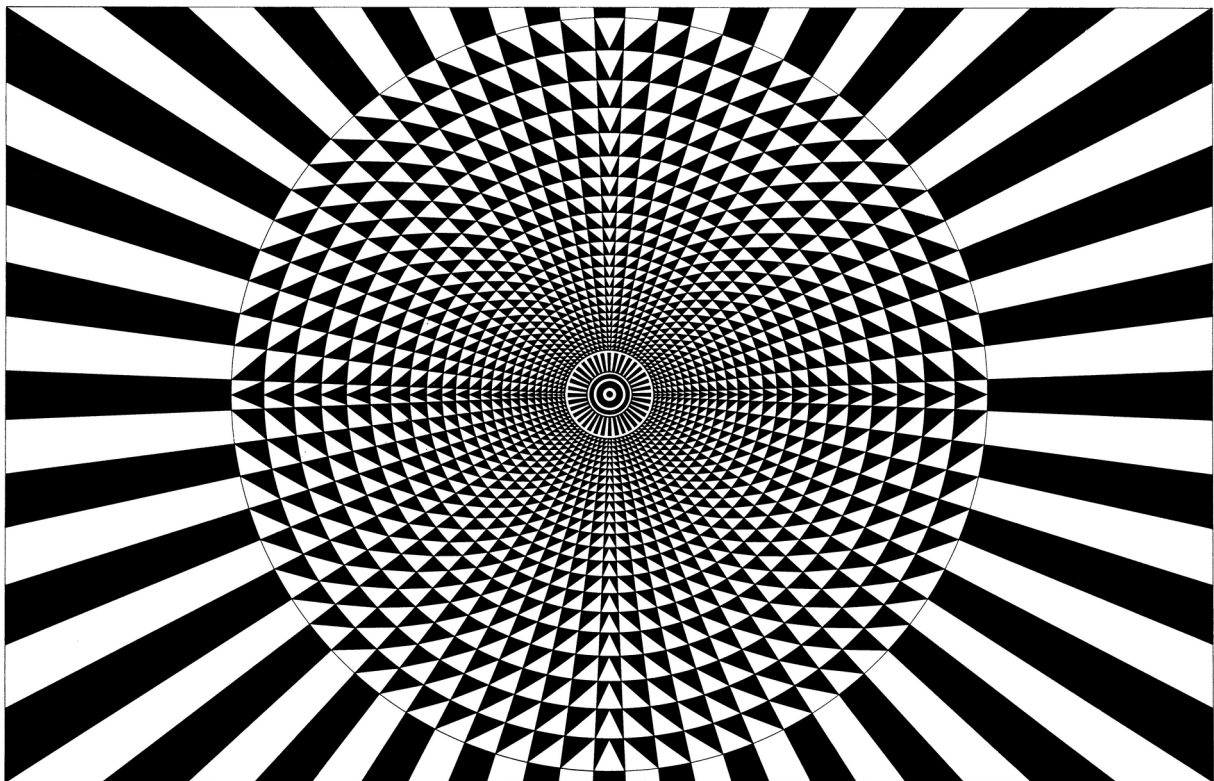
The ongoing attempts to save the rainforest on Atlantropa have resulted in extensive infrastructure investment. Things like the Biodome Loop and PARTS (*Atlantropa*, p. 14) are not only potential tools to save the rainforest, but they also present very juicy targets for terrorists and other groups looking to make a statement. They're easier targets than the Grand Gibraltar Dam, that's for sure. One of these groups, an anarcho-Christian group from

the ACCP, is looking to do just that: they want to blow up the Biodome Loop and PARTS. This group believes that by triggering a nuclear war, they will be able to instigate the end of days, break the seals, and Jesus will return.

While the obvious roles for the players are either as agents from the EAF, Brazil, or even the ACCP looking to stop this group and prevent war, an interesting option would be to draw Centrum in. Centrum knows exactly what's waiting for this timeline in the event of a nuclear holocaust, so if a rogue faction within them gets wind of the attack, they might take it upon themselves to become more active in this timeline and stop this terrorist group.

The consequences could be interesting for a long-term campaign. A more active Centrum on this timeline, especially one dragged in kicking

and screaming by radicals within their own ranks, is likely one that attempts to revitalize Malenkov's Soviet-style communism. However, Structuralism is the defining philosophy of this timeline. As an overall philosophy, it is one that suits Centrum just fine, so it may lead to disagreements over who exactly they should be supporting. Some may not find the ACCP as disagreeable as they initially thought, given how it blurs the line between government and corporation, while others within Centrum might find an ideological home with the Chinese. What happens to Centrum in this case? Whatever it is, if Infinity gets word of it, they're likely to try to make it worse, and the consequences for the dimension war may be profound.



# Infinite Cabal afterthoughts

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John Dallman

It's several years since I finished Infinite Cabal, and I can now look back on it with more objectivity. Some of its features seem worth explaining, in the hope they'll be useful to other GMs.

## Emergent phenomena

While it was the most complex campaign I've ever run, I did it in the largely-improvised way I described in "Jazz and the Art of Campaign Maintenance" in *The Path of Cunning* #1. I did not have an overall story arc planned, nor an ending. I discovered the setting rather than inventing it, usually somewhat in advance of the players, but sometimes simultaneously.

This, of course, meant I had occasional crises behind the scenes when could see that I needed a new challenge for the characters, or a new place for them to go, those being much the same thing in this setting.

The solution to the first crisis was to make more use of the decans, using them as a means for the characters to describe the universe. That worked for portraying a gradually increasing understanding of the Infinite Worlds.

The second crisis' solution never got used. It was going to be a philosophical quest for kinds of truth, but Emmy Noether hit her problem with decan representation first, and Newton knew where to look for that solution. Yes, my NPCs develop minds of their own, like my PCs, after lengthy play.

The final crisis was "Who is the head of the Cabal?" That ended up as the demiurge, but the alternative answer was God. The Cabal does not seem consistent with that idea, although it

concorde with Ken Hite's description of Atziluth (*Cabal*, p. 54). Also, I felt that Janos, who maintained his status as a good Catholic throughout the campaign, would be upset by it, although his player would not have been.

## Little, Big

It took me quite a while to realise that the Pearl-Bright Ocean followed the rule from John Crowley's novel: "The further in you go, the bigger it gets." I'll take John Crowley as an antidote to Aleister of that ilk.

I had not *planned* to change the characterisation behind the universe from an ancient and culture-shocked Egyptian magician to a 20<sup>th</sup> century female German Jewish mathematician with a strong sense of duty, but it does seem like an improvement.

The lack of disease transmission between the worlds when travelling via the Astral was because the demiurge had learned of germ theory, but didn't believe it. The limitation of the Astral to TL4 was because that was as far as he'd progressed.

## An Infinity of errors

Once I had understood the nature of my Infinite Worlds a bit better, I had to explain how Van Zandt had persuaded the governments of Homeline to let Infinity operate in the manner described in *GURPS* sources (p. B525 and Infinite Worlds p. 6).

He had concluded that the universe was alive and self-willed in some way. He negotiated with an entity that was one of the fragments of the old demiurge's personality (there were several,

and the great eye over Cabal Rome was another). That being was happy to have a leading-edge world misled about the nature of the universe.

Because of his agreement, he was able to demonstrate reality being altered at his command at the UN, and to claim that he had a contract with the mind of the universe. I took care never to decide to what degree he was bluffing, as opposed to not understanding what he really had.

Some of his audience thought he had demonstrated the truth of the Simulation Hypothesis, at least partly because they'd heard of it. I've always regarded it as implausible, so using it to deal with the implausible freedom of Infinity seemed like fun.

The power to alter reality in a specific place on Homeline implied a lot about what the demiurge could do, although it left open the possibility they had more power on leading-edge worlds. It also made clear that the demiurge's mind was on a human scale, capable of being fooled.

The Infinity Patrol, and Centrum's Interworld Service, are rather like the Lensman series' Galactic Patrol, which was never well-rationalised. This is *obvious* for Centrum's Unattached agents, who are based on Unattached Lensmen, clearly deliberately on Ken Hite's part. Centrum could use some more fleshing out, but I didn't find myself needing to do that.

## The Olympians

I found myself having to roleplay the twelve Olympians quite a lot in the later stages of the campaign. This mostly isn't too hard, if one assumes that they have aspects for dealing with

mortals, but some of them were more challenging.

Zeus is a bit pompous, and somewhat insecure, but does know how to be a leader and accept responsibility. He will undermine himself by giving in to lust if given a chance, but usually avoids this at home.

Hera is very interested in everyone's families, and somewhat disappointed by adults who don't or can't have them. She offers advice unsolicited, and it's very insightful.

Poseidon *is* the ocean, even on Mount Olympus, where I placed his home in a salt lake of ambiguous size and seemingly infinite depth. He wants to know about voyages of all kinds. Davy Jones is one of his servants, and can produce anyone drowned at sea for consultation.



Demeter is friendly, helpful and very organised. She needs to be, because she's incredibly busy keeping Olympus (and the world) running on a mundane level. She looks after many semi-mundane things for the other Olympians because they all trust her.

Apollo is the prototypical golden youth, intelligent and highly skilled, but mostly content to relax and sing.

Artemis, his twin sister, is more driven, but shy. I had some difficulty understanding her at first, until I realised she represent the brave young woman who does things outside her social role, and does them supremely well. Jacqueline du Pré was a modern-day exemplar, with a tragic ending.

Ares is a bit of a thug. He is the sharp end of warfare, the actual killing. He's capable of deep comradeship and discipline, but his social virtues end there.

Athena is wisdom, skill and warfare, the intellectual and planning side of the art. She conceived the scheme to replace the demiurge, and got the characters, the other Olympians, and assorted others to carry it through.

Hephaestus is a master creator, jealous of others' new uses of his work. He can accept new ideas and even enjoy them, but he has a deep inner conviction that his ways are best. To get on his good side, please his wife.

Aphrodite is selfish, shallow and proud. But she is amazingly good-looking, and when she's pleased, everything seems better.

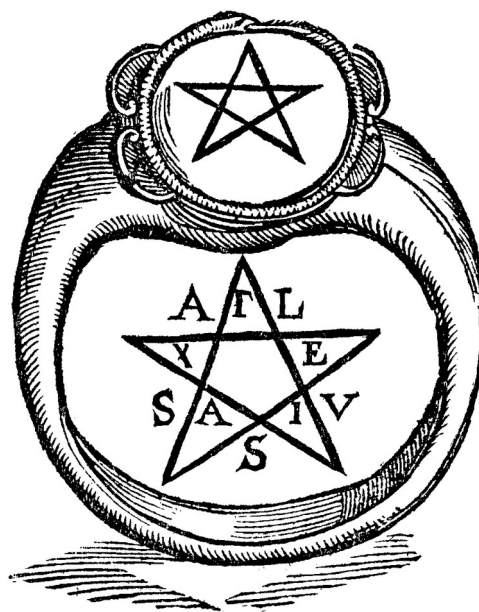
Hermes is about boundaries and crossing them, and the things that are brought across them. The Hermetic philosophy that the Cabal uses was not his creation, and he's sometimes puzzled by it, but he willingly accepts the status this brings

him. He "borrows" from every magical tradition, which made him valuable in the preparations for killing the old demiurge.

Dionysus is simple on the surface: wine and lack of self-control. Below that, his portfolio includes aspects of all the other Olympians. I realised he was their hidden power, kept in reserve during the actions the characters saw, apart from the celebrations afterwards.

## Cabalism

Within the Royal Society, there was a social rule that you didn't buy up your IQ to equal Newton's. When Nell broke that rule, it was taken as a declaration of independence by the party. However, they did not conform to normal Cabal behaviour by starting trying to kill their Grand Master. Instead, they carried on with their assigned task, and co-operated with the society. Newton carried on meeting them, although he took major precautions against betrayal.



## An Infinity of questions

If you're thinking of running an Infinite Worlds campaign, here are some questions to ask yourself about your plans.

What's the cross-world scope of the campaign? Will it be world-of-the-week, into which plot arcs can be added, or something more ambitious?

What's the geographic scope of the campaign? There is real advantage in limiting it to less than Earth-wide scope, because it makes coping with the variety of languages and cultures far easier.

Who are the PCs working for? What resources can they call on? Maintaining the expertise, costumes, equipment and training to let the same people infiltrate different worlds as natives is *expensive* and needs a large organisation.<sup>1</sup>

Assuming there will be a lot of worlds in play, is it known how these came into existence? The obvious possibilities are that they're created, possibly in more than one way, or that they split off from each other in some way.

Is there a "latest date" in the worlds, as per Shikaku-mon (*IW*, p. 147) and is this actually significant? If so, are there any other worlds at the "leading edge" and what are they like?

Are the quantum levels a real phenomenon, an artefact of defective physics theories, or something else?

How accurate is Centrum's theory of cross-world physics? It's canon that Infinity's theory is worse, but is that true? Is there anyone who knows a better theory?

Is the leading edge at the same point in time in all parts of the setting and on all quanta?

How will the characters travel between worlds? This is likely to be tied to their employer, but a magician, psi, mad scientist, or someone who recovered outworld equipment might be doing it independently. Try to make it possible for all the characters to travel together, because searching for each other gets boring quite quickly.

Read and think about "Infinite Darkness" and "Centrum Dark, Centrum Light" (*IW*, pp. 36 & 56). Consider the possible differences between their visible and true faces. My Infinity was played fairly straight, but was the British branch, rather than the American central organisation. My Centrum was a bit more pragmatic than the default version, and more aware of the amount of weirdness in the worlds.

## A few treasured moments

Janos became troubled by the amount of violence he was using, and in the early 1960s on New Renaissance, but with knowledge of later versions of England, consulted [Basil Hume](#) on when it could be justified. Hume's reaction was:

"This is a test, isn't it? I don't know which side you're from, and it doesn't really matter anyway. Sometimes there *is* no solution except violence, but violence is very often the *easy* solution. When you think there's no choice, think again. There is often another way."

The discovery that a Reich-5 mad-science world-gate, based on the brains of many sacrificed psis, was quite reluctant to explode. Reich-5 has actual "Health & Safety Nazis," a common term of abuse for inspectors from the British Health

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<sup>1</sup> Phil Masters' article "II&E: Helping Form Match Function" article #5985 in Pyramid #2, is helpful with details for an Infinity campaign.

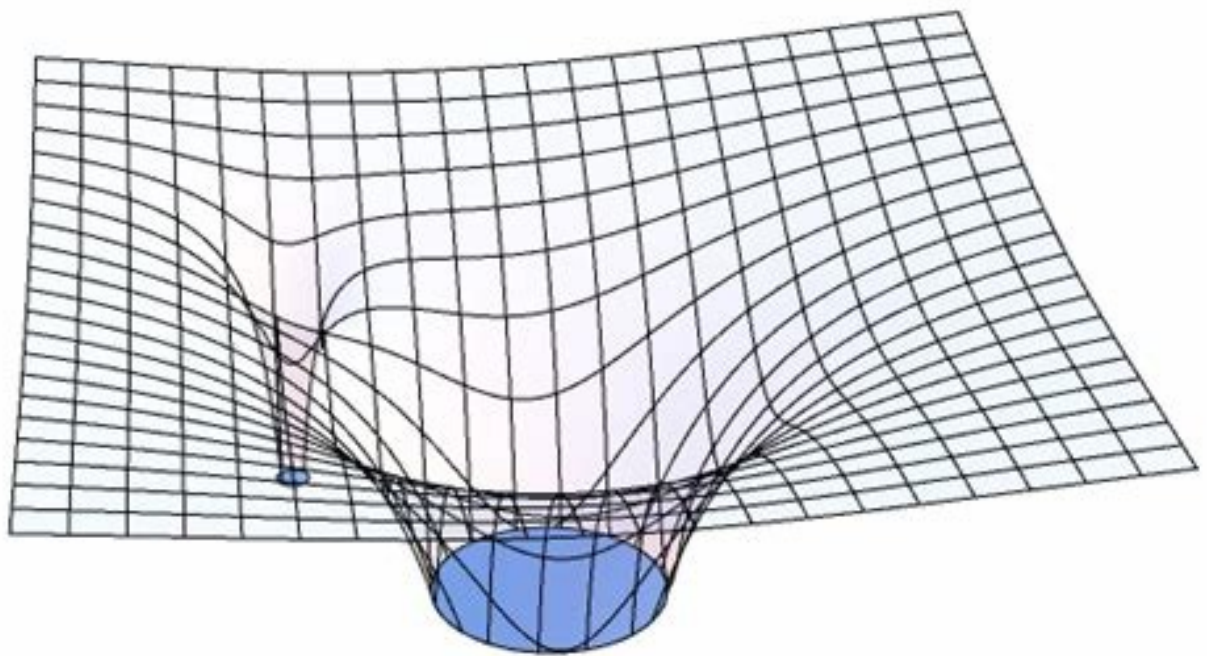
& Safety Executive, the equivalent of the American OSHA.

Discovering that I had to decide on the spot which language group Etruscan belonged to, on the basis of what I could look up in-session in a few seconds. This is not exactly a normal GMing challenge, even for **GURPS**, but I liked it. I picked the Aegean language family theory, which made the characters' lives easier in Minos' Crete, years later.

While playing Mebahel, Lady of Peace Restored, Aethyr of Naôth, decan of language and communication (*Thaumatology*, p. 251), I was

asked "Basque ... why is it like that?" Mebahel would know that, but I don't. The inspiration of immersion struck, making it a surviving language of the Neanderthal inhabitants of ancient Europe.

Mara, the Huntress, was present in disguise among Artemis' followers at the battle with the demiurge. She's been a friend of Artemis for millennia, although the other Olympians are terrified of her. She was there to make sure of victory, although she was not needed.





# The GURPS I Run

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Roger Bell\_West

I've been playing **GURPS** since the 1990s and running it semi-regularly since Fourth Edition came out in 2004. It's a notoriously complex system, and people sometimes ask: how do I keep it all in my head?

Well, I don't. And the reason I don't have to is that it's modular; rules may have more or less core-ness about them, and you're unlikely to see a game of **GURPS** that doesn't have at least the four standard attributes, but anything else is potentially up for grabs.

Another game may try hard to be balanced: if a warrior and a wizard are both going to be spending most of their time going down dungeons and hitting things, they should be about as useful as each other in that context. But a **GURPS** party may be anybody, doing anything: many **GURPS** games involve very little combat, because the main activity is investigation, or interpersonal influence, or exploration.

So there is no such thing as a balanced **GURPS** game – because the worth of a skill or power varies massively depending on the specific genre, but costs are more or less fixed (with some arbitrary tweaks available from narrative traits like Unusual Background, which in effect serves to increase the cost of a weird power in a world that's not used to it). Rather than represent a character's power level in combat, or in any other single specialised field, point values end up being just a loose indication of how much influence they'll be able to exert on the world over the course of play.

And because there is only that basic balance, things that alter it are less prone to break the game. If I can't bring to mind a particular rule, I don't stop to look it up; I make a call in the

moment which will be right-enough. So the **GURPS** that happens at the table tends to come out a lot like a loop of this sequence, which is pretty much what I do when running almost any game:

GM: description description.

Player: suggested action.

GM: roll [skill] with [modifier].

Player: passed by [margin].

At the same time, I increasingly feel that the hardest work I do in **GURPS** is character generation. So I don't do it more than I have to. For a PC, sure; for the vast majority of NPCs, I write down a single number, which is their skill in the thing they do best, guided by the "Choosing Your Skill Levels" box on p. B172. (That'll be the merchant's Merchant, the guard's Sword, etc.) That gets penalised more the more they're asked to act outside their area of competence. Their combat number is also their hit points, and  $(\text{combat}/2)+3$  is their defences, maybe with a bonus point or two for people who might reasonably have Combat Reflexes.

Things that don't add complexity to play are more likely to get used. Attribute limits, for example: most of my games are about normal humans, or at least people who can pass for them, and **GURPS** is already prone to players boosting their stats rather than their skills, so it's helpful to cap DX and IQ in particular. Remembering the Basic Set::

**15 or more:** *Amazing.* An attribute this high draws constant comment and probably guides your career choices.

By the time you're getting into IQ 16+ territory, you're a polymath's polymath, with useful levels

of knowledge and capability in things that you've never studied because you can work them out from what you already know. At DX 16+ you move like an expert martial artist and ride a bicycle perfectly the first time. If that's not part of the character, it really shouldn't be on the sheet.

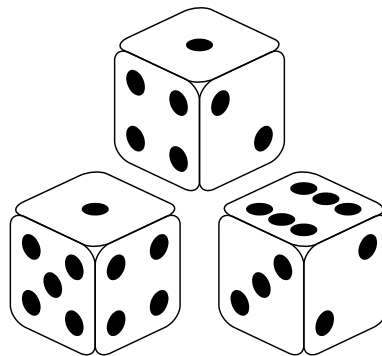
On the other hand, Talents can do the same job, and a free hand in allowing custom talents both during character generation and in play removes some of the upward pressure on attributes for characters who want to be really good at something. I like to keep the components of a talent thematically related, a predisposition to certain skills that I find plausible, but even that is helpful especially for starting characters.

There are also some house rules John and I have variously found handy. For example, *Irresponsible and Right* as a WWII game is canonically on the boundary between **GURPS** TL6 and TL7, but the TL rules are designed primarily for big changes: the high-tech medic has trouble using primitive equipment just as the low-tech hero had trouble using a computer. So I wrote up a set of rules to allow characters a smoother transition when living across a TL boundary (<https://tekeli.li/wwii/techskills.html>) which have since proved useful in a post-war campaign.

Things which haven't come into play yet are more flexible than things which have. For example, if your character hasn't made their first aging roll, and you've accumulated the points to pay for it, maybe you had Longevity all along. And since it's always hard to know which skills will be most useful in a campaign until one actually plays it. I allow things which haven't been used yet to be bought down to pay for things which turn out to be important.

An extreme version of this is to treat the first adventure as a "pilot episode": once it's over, players are free not only to make major changes to their character, they can replace them completely if they have an idea that they think will work better. This is always an option, of course, but having that explicit choice helps remind players that it's available.

When personal characteristics seem irrelevant and one just wants a random outcome, we use a "luck" roll inspired by the *Hero* system mechanics: roll 3d6, count 1s (bad) and 6s (good). This gives an overall impression of how things are going (and a character with the Luck advantage can choose to use it for a reroll). Mixed luck and unluck sometimes needs some hasty improvisation, but it's a pleasing prompt to step outside the way things usually happen.



I don't tend to run at the sort of power level where it's relevant, but where characters have preternaturally high intellectual skills it can be helpful to allow an extended critical success range: 7- if you make the roll by 20, 8- if you make it by 30, 9- if you make it by 40. These are not just highly skilled people, these are people who in some sense *are* that skill.

These are modest tweaks compared to some of the options in the "Alternate **GURPS**" series of *Pyramid* issues, but they work for us.

# Running GURPS without system expertise

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John Dallman

**GURPS** is often considered a game that requires a fair bit of rules knowledge and system expertise. Traditionally, the GM has that expertise, translates the player's intentions into mechanics, and tells them the results. If the players are also experts, then the game can go faster and use more of the detailed rules. There's another case which is not often discussed, where at least one player has expertise, but the GM does not.

I've played two campaigns that way, and I'm currently in a third. It works surprisingly well, and I'd like to describe how that happens.

## Three campaigns

The first **GURPS** campaign I played was *Witch World*, using the setting book, 3e Basic Set, and bits from *Swashbucklers*. The GM had played a lot of RPGs, was an Andre Norton fan, and talented at plots and acting, but was not a game system hacker. I'd played one or two sessions of **GURPS**, and spent some time learning the system, designing characters and so on. We made some mistakes, but it *worked*; the sessions were satisfying, the characters developed, and the players kept wanting more.

After that, I played and ran quite a lot of **GURPS**, and my second campaign supporting the GM came much later. That was *The Long Night*, urban fantasy noir, in a 1930s New York where the fay were powerful. It ran in the Wednesday night sessions I hosted pre-pandemic. The GM had done a lot of LARPing, played a couple of **GURPS** campaigns with us, and wanted to try running it, "if we promised

not to take advantage." We promised, and explained ourselves whenever we got close to the edge of the rules. Again, it worked well, with the players having fun, the characters developing, and some lasting effect on the world.

The third campaign, which is ongoing, is the "Neutral Currents" strand of *Irresponsible and Right*. Our GM knows the basics of **GURPS** quite well, but leaves it to the players to solve system problems, which is fine with us.

## Playing these games

It isn't actually much different. You don't try to confuse the GM with rules tricks, but you shouldn't do that anyway. Designing characters with clearly-defined capabilities who don't need lots of GM judgement is wise. Don't expect lots of detail, especially in combat, but concentrate on the overall objectives and how your character relates to them.

The game goes much like Roger's description ("The **GURPS** I run", above), with conversation and skill rolls. Running **GURPS** this way is very much like *Call of Cthulhu*, which *The Long Night's* GM knew.

With less game-mechanical detail happening, I find I'm freer to think in-character about what's going on, and how my character relates to it. This is good: my character in *The Long Night* had not realised what his life needed until quite close to the end of the campaign (neither had I, until it came to him), and then he was able to achieve it readily, and thereby create a plot twist.

# GURPS Pathfinder

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Roger Bell\_West

Sounds crazy... no, certifiably insane! But while running a **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** campaign I found myself reaching for the extensive library of *Pathfinder* adventures and campaigns, and converting them on the fly to **GURPS**. For a start, it's really handy to have a standardised monster stat block...

This is not a formal recipe with reproducible inputs and outputs. It's more of a set of guidelines as to how I produced opposition that was a reasonable challenge to the Dungeon Fantasy party while not being overpowering.

One thing became apparent very early in the process: *Pathfinder* hit points are there to be expended. Just as in the old days of *Dungeons & Dragons* they must represent fatigue and luck as well as actual physical injury... unless you believe that a heroic warrior really can take ten times as much punishment as would kill a normal human and still stand up to fight at full strength. What a **GURPS** character has instead is defences that aim to stop them losing their rather smaller number of hit points in the first place, to the extent that a party winning a fight without losing any hit points isn't a sign of imbalance but evidence that they did things more or less right.

Similarly, armour class covers both agility and actual armour; the roll "to hit" is in effect a roll to deliver damage against a target, whether it's armoured, dodging around, or both. *Pathfinder* has developed Damage Reduction too, which reduces the damage delivered by each hit, but it doesn't feel well-integrated into the system, and many monsters that rely on armour plate have both an armour class that makes them hard to hit *and* points in DR.

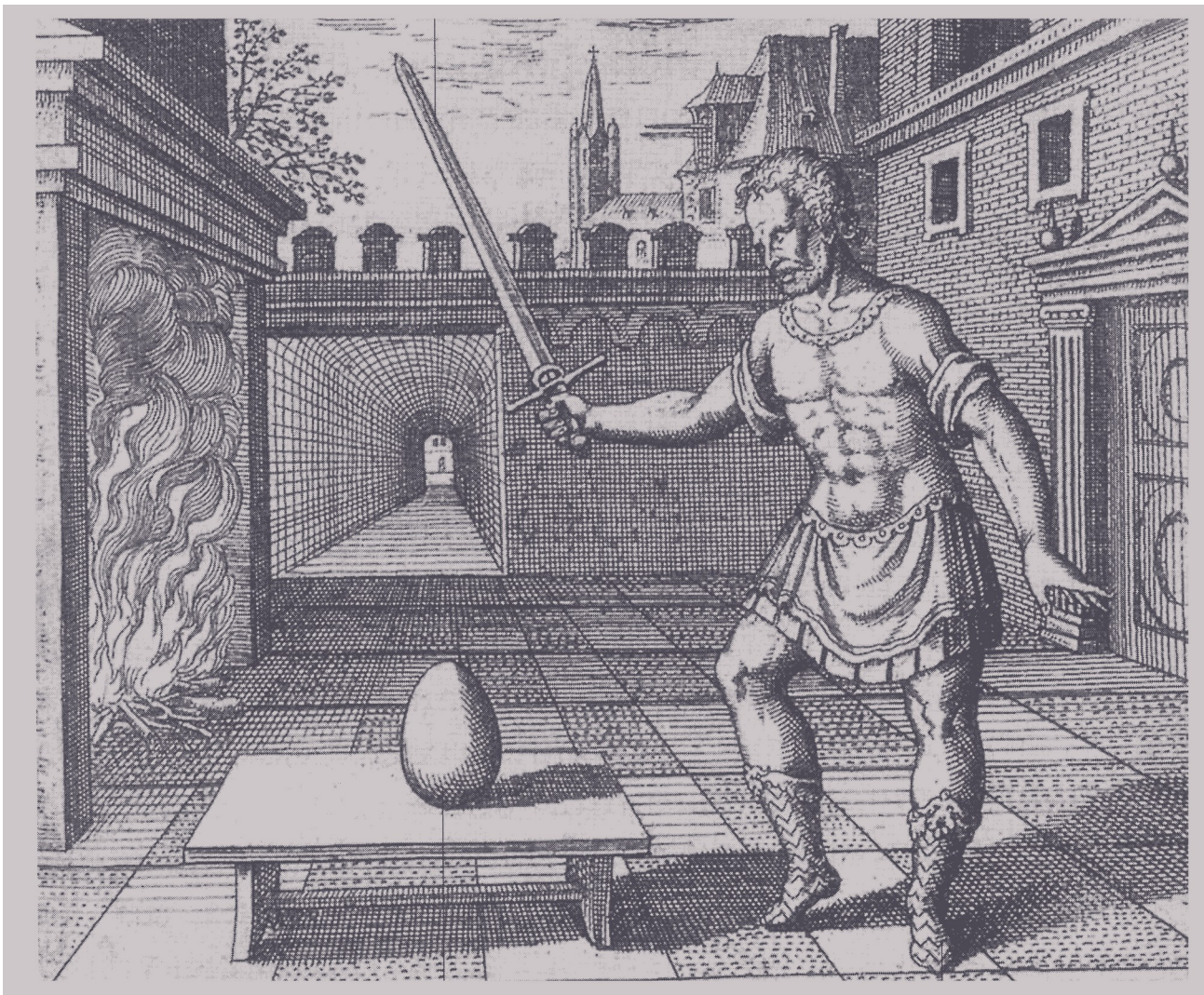
So looking at a *Pathfinder* monster stat block (and its consistent layout is a great boon to the busy GM), I start with armour class. "Flat-footed" AC tells me how much actual *armour* the thing has, and I'll add that to DR to get an idea of **GURPS** DR. The difference between flat-footed AC and basic AC tells me how able the creature is to dodge, parry, or otherwise prevent an attack from landing (and the Reflex save value will also inform the creature's Dodge).

The real incompatibility seemed to me that *Pathfinder* fights are designed to be attritional, using up spells and hit points even when they're very lop-sided, while **GURPS** fights are often about who lands a blow first and how hard. If each goblin sands away two hit points before you kill it, fifty of them are a problem; if you can parry the three of them who can reach you at a time with your back to a wall, then strike back, all you have to worry about is getting fatigued (or one of them getting in a lucky critical before their morale fails).

So I could keep the amounts of damage done by the monsters mostly at their *Pathfinder* values: yes, one hit will leave a player character badly injured, but those hits are rarer now. In the other direction, I kept an attritional approach by leaving HP generally about the same, but giving at least some monsters a chance to avoid damage.

Most of the traps and other hazards could be remodelled into the wider range of effects possible in **GURPS**. The feel of the hazard was more important to me than a replication of the mechanics. Does this suffocating effect drain hit points? Well, we have suffocation rules already, and they say that you lose Fatigue Points rather than Hit Points, so let's build on that.





Magic and “masterwork” weapons are very common, as are creatures that need magic to hit them. For basically physical creatures this usually became more defences or DR; more weird ones retained their invulnerability. *Pathfinder* “masterwork” is not only **GURPS** Very Fine, it’s the necessary basis for a magic weapon.

Currency is tricky. **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2** suggests a gold piece should be worth about G\$80, but *Pathfinder*’s gold pieces are clearly worth rather less, perhaps G\$10; on the other hand they’re handed out in huge numbers (and training in **Dungeon Fantasy** costs \$20-40 per point, which isn’t even worth accounting for

when you’re getting a few hundred gold pieces from a minor monster). I never found a definitive answer to this; neither system really has a working economy, but they’re broken in different ways.

I gave *Pathfinder* spells and spell-like abilities essentially the same effects translated to **GURPS**, and the same the other way round. Relatively few of the spells from either system needed to engage in detail with crunchy character mechanics; they did damage, or they imposed a condition or a penalty.

I ended up running several of the *Kingmaker* modules, which lean towards exploration of a

wilderness, and these showed up another incompatibility: in *Pathfinder*, natural weapon attacks (claws, teeth, etc.) are just attacks. In **GURPS**, if you parry a natural weapon with a blade, you get the chance to do damage to the attacker. So an animal attacking a competent sword-wielder may end up taking two lots of damage per round... in *Pathfinder* if anything this falls the other way, with many natural attacks doing as much damage as common mêlée weapons without the possibility of being disarmed or broken, and getting extra damage for strength and Power Attack compared with the weapon-wielders.

A more general problem in adventure design: flying is often cheap, especially for magicians. (The **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** wizard could do it full time, but I understand that most *Pathfinder* parties can manage something similar, certainly by the time they get to 10<sup>th</sup> level or so.) Yes, I know castles are all symbolic and stuff, but an adventure's author really should take into account the number of things (including PCs) that simply don't care about your pressure plates, unscalable walls and bottomless abysses.

All the players had long experience of dungeon bashes, and insisted on acting distressingly sensible. For example, here's a stronghold with a band of kobolds. The adventure assumes that the party will charge straight in, having a series of fights and letting each set of defenders prepare their ambushes. (But not all mass together, for some reason.) No; this party sneaks in under cover of stealth and magic, evaluates the situation, eliminates the warmongering kobold shaman, and gives the rest of them (quite impressed by his swift defeat) the choice of joining their new kingdom or, well, they wouldn't like the "or." The kobolds may be a bit on the dim side compared with standard humans, but they can see that continuing their living by banditry isn't going to work, and

what's this about being allowed to collect bridge tolls if they repair the bridge?

**John:** Our neo-sensibilist tendencies were encouraged by the *Kingmaker* modules. Those are about founding and expanding a realm and come with a simple management and government system that requires you to declare a D&D-style alignment for your polity. Since several characters had Honesty, we took Lawful Good, which does bring some system benefits, and we stuck to it.

Going around trying to make peace, free the oppressed, and raise funds for public works is not exactly normal behaviour for *Dungeon Fantasy* characters, but it was fun. You still get to kill the determinedly evil and unthinkingly aggressive, and there were plenty of them around.

A lot of modern scenarios seem to be designed to not be too challenging for characters run by teenagers who are trying to show off to each other. Players with forty years of dungeon tactical experience and good co-operation are more efficient, although we made a few serious mistakes.

I have the impression the way the characters spent their bonus points was atypical for *DF*. We were mostly dealing with opponents that fought in melee, trying to win battles of hit point attrition. Quite naturally, we improved our capabilities in that direction.

The accounts of more typical *DF* and *DFRPG* campaigns I've read indicate they have a larger supply of opponents who use exotic attacks, have significant immunities or are otherwise difficult to fight. The characters from this campaign might well struggle against those, but they were great fun to play in the setting they were used to.

# Libraries for GURPS: Traits for Librarians

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Shimmin Beg

## Overview

Librarians are not typically adventurers – but there are plenty of exceptions in the literature, from Professor Armitage (*The Dunwich Horror*) to Giles (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), Lirael (*Lirael*) and the Librarian (Terry Pratchett’s *Discworld* series). Others contribute to group efforts in a quieter way.

The following traits are useful for librarian PCs, as well as researchers. Some are more widely applicable as “everyman” abilities.

## Skills

Many of a librarian’s activities don’t fall under any of the traditional skills. The following skills and specialties are relevant to libraries in certain settings. See also Hidden Lore (L-Space) and Survival (L-Space), both from **GURPS Discworld**, if libraries are gateways to extradimensional realms.

## Area Knowledge

see p. B218

Many institutions of learning are sprawling places with a population rivalling the adjacent town. Those who work and live there often remain ignorant of the wider settlement, no matter how well they know their immediate surroundings. The following speciality reflects that.

*University:* You know all the departments, faculties, dorms, halls, and laboratories; all senior staff, student officers, societies, and research groups; event locations and the cliques they tend to attract; the “university underworld”; factions within the student body

and the wider university; the teams responsible for different aspects of university life (e.g. plumbing); and where to obtain information, items, and materials. This skill covers the entire university, whether it has a neat campus or is scattered throughout a city – but *only* applies to the university itself.

## Hazardous Materials

see p. B199

In a world where knowledge can be metaphysically dangerous, a new required specialization is available:

*Information:* This speciality covers training in handling and storage of dangerous knowledge, and procedures for dealing with accidental exposure or disclosure. While this can be used for state secrets, it’s intended for information that is directly hazardous: memetic contaminants, linguotoxins, true names, maddening revelations, and secrets that attract the attention of unspeakable cosmic entities. It defaults to Hazardous Materials (Linguistic)-5 and Hazardous Materials (Magical)-5, if these are present in the campaign.

## Hidden Lore

see p. B199

For campaigns whose libraries and librarians have genuine secret powers, use the following required specialization:

*Libraries:* This speciality represents knowledge of esoteric and paranormal aspects of books, libraries, and librarianship. The actual content is highly campaign-dependent – anything from L-Space (**GURPS Discworld**, p. 115) to secret orders of immortal librarians, otherworldly



predators that stalk the shelves, or the use of books as portals to parallel worlds.



## Law

see p. B204

The following speciality is relevant for anyone working in academic environments. Students rarely have it, relying on defaults; but Victor Tugelbend (*Moving Pictures*) is an expert.

*University Regulations:* This skill represents knowledge of the legal and administrative rules of a particular academic institution. A successful answer lets you remember or work out the answer to a question about proper procedures, requirements, and offences. The institution has final say, but this skill is useful for arguing a case – and, in particular, for pleading clemency on the grounds of a plausible misinterpretation or mitigating circumstance. The outcomes of any disciplinary or bureaucratic case are normally determined by a Quick Contest. Specialities within the same nation default to one another at -4; otherwise, the default is -6.

Students generally rely on defaults; however, those who frequently run into bureaucratic hurdles, disciplinary issues, or discrimination

(e.g. those with chronic illness or from disadvantaged backgrounds) are often forced to master this skill. Many law students also learn it. Victor Tugelbend (*Moving Pictures*) is an expert.

## Professional Skill (Archivist)

see p. B215

The professional skill of operating an archive of books or other materials. It is mostly found in archivists; museum curators and private collectors in certain fields may also have the skill. It involves acquiring and processing new stock, organizing and caring for the collection, maintaining accurate records, and helping others to consult it.

An archivist uses it to develop collection policies; organize, catalogue, and store materials; locate relevant materials for a query; help visitors consult the archive; analyse usage statistics; judge the quality and relevance of a collection; perform routine inspection and conservation; negotiate acquisitions; operate specialist equipment; and so on.

The skill should be used in situations that are part of an archivist's job but aren't covered by more specialist skills like Research, or are routine parts of the job: for example, Search to locate misplaced records within an archive.

Archivist includes narrow, basic training in some areas covered by other skills. These include identifying common archival pests without Biology, using an archive's environmental controls without Electronics Operation, and neutralising acidic paper without Chemistry. Archivists also learn *basic* biohazard precautions (including use of simple masks and gloves) for dealing with minimal hazards, such as mould, that regularly occur in collections. It can stand in for Law when dealing with issues of privacy, data management, copyright, ownership rights, and other professional issues. While it doesn't replace Connoisseur, it can assess an item's

*archival* value with respect to a familiar archive in a familiar field. In a situation where someone with one of those skills would roll at +4 or better for a routine task (see *Task Difficulty*, p. B345) that is a believable part of an archivist's training, you may roll against Archivist instead; you don't receive the +4 bonus. Normal situational modifiers apply.

Realistically, Archivist is a TL-dependent skill thanks to developments in collection management theory, cataloguing practices, and the tools of the trade. Professional archivists may take an optional specialty in a type of archive, such as government or medical records, seed banks, digital archives, art, weaponry, hardware, taxonomic specimens, and almost anything else; many of these cross into museum curation.

### **Professional Skill (Librarian)**

see p. B215

The professional skill of operating a library of books or other materials. It is mostly found in library staff and archivists; museum curators and private collectors in certain fields may also have the skill. It involves dealing with the library's clients, acquiring and processing new stock, organizing and caring for the collection, and maintaining accurate records. A librarian uses it to operate security equipment; explain the library's policies and materials to new members; locate relevant materials for a query; analyse usage of the collection; judge the quality and relevance of a library; and so on. The skill should be used in situations that are part of a library staff member's job but aren't covered by more specialist skills like Research or Diplomacy. It also covers routine use of common skills, such as Diplomacy to placate visitors who can't find what they want, Intimidate to ensure fines are paid, or Search to locate misplaced books. It can stand in for Research to find bibliographic information, and Law when dealing with copyright, plagiarism, and other common queries. In a situation where

someone with one of those skills would roll at +4 or better for a routine task (see *Task Difficulty*, p. B345) that is a believable part of a librarian's training, you may roll against Librarian instead; you don't receive the +4 bonus. Normal situational modifiers apply.

Realistically, Librarian is a TL-dependent skill thanks to developments in collection management theory, cataloguing practices, and the tools of the trade. Professional librarians may take an optional specialty in a type of library, or in a technical area such as cataloguing.

### **Savoir-Faire**

see p. B218

The following speciality is relevant for academic librarians, or anyone else working in academic environments. Students rarely have it, relying on defaults.

*Academic:* Conduct according to the written and unwritten rules of universities. This includes knowledge of obscure roles and hierarchies, old traditions, codes of conduct at formal events, and the appropriate way to wear a gown or recite a benediction. Combinations of Administrative Rank, professional expertise, and Status determine relative standing, depending on the cultural context. Realistically, cultural familiarity applies at the level of individual institutions.

### **Perks**

#### **Armload of Books**

You've mastered opening doors and climbing ladders while carrying a heavy pile of books in both hands. You can even unlock a door or scan an ID card without putting anything down. This lets you move around freely, but doesn't help with other tasks.

This is a noncombatant, non-cinematic variant of Akimbo. Versions of this perk exist for other

professions. Soldiers can learn it, but it doesn't replace Akimbo; in particular, it doesn't allow reloading.

### **Brotherhood (Tomes)**

Whether through natural talent or a concerted campaign of threats and bribes, you've learned to get along with even the grumpiest grimoires. Sentient tomes refrain from eating you, cursing you, or enticing you onto a path of destruction with blasphemous secrets – providing you treat them with respect. While you can entreat them to behave or stand between them and a tasty-looking researcher, anything more hostile makes you a valid target – at least for now.

### **Cross-Trained (Research)**

You're familiar with all the major library classifications and archiving systems, as well as common local variants. Research databases and bibliographies are grist to your mill. You never suffer familiarity penalties when using Research under normal circumstances. Bespoke classifications – and collections with no real classification – still require familiarization.

### **Health and Safety Trained**

Thanks to workplace training, you know how to deal with minor emergencies. You roll at +3 to the normal default to notice common workplace hazards, operate basic safety equipment (such as fire extinguishers) as intended, recognize hazardous materials, and identify work-related health issues and injuries. The benefit applies only in situations you're likely to encounter in your workplace. This perk is unsuitable for characters whose workplaces are unusually perilous.

### **Library Sense**

Even in the depths of the stacks, you never get lost and always know which direction you're facing. You can retrace your steps within any library you have visited in the past month, as though you had 3D Spatial Sense. Magic and

supernatural phenomena, as well as deliberate trickery, may impair your sense of direction – and it doesn't work in L-Space!

### **Memory for Authors†**

Seeing the same books so many times has drilled their details into your memory. You can use Professional Skill (Librarian) in place of a subject skill when rolling to recall the details of authors and books in that field. This is One-Task Wonder (Remembering books and authors).



### **Microwave Whisperer**

You've studied countless manuals for everyday appliances and office equipment. You can roll against IQ to 'hack' microwaves, photocopiers, boilers and washing machines using corporate codes and leaked engineering logins. This doesn't let you alter code or introduce malware, but you can view and clear logs, restore factory settings, perform diagnostic routines, and get free copies – anything an authorized engineer could do.

## **Professional Discretion†**

Your profession calls for quiet, inconspicuous movement that doesn't disturb your employers. In appropriate environments, you can use Professional Skill in place of Stealth for the sole purpose of moving about and performing mundane professional tasks without drawing attention to yourself. Servants, nurses, waiters, and librarians often have this perk.

## **Rifle Pages**

You absent-mindedly flick through books, and instinctively note bulging covers. You get +2 to notice anything hidden or tucked away inside a book, and to identify heavily-used sections by the way the pages fall.

## **Standard Operating Procedure**

see *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 15

These perks are appropriate for most modern settings, not just libraries.

### Citation Wrangler

You keep a record of every book you consult and the source of any fact or quote, which you store somewhere secure. In high-tech settings, it's all accessible online. If there's any doubt as to whether you know where the information came from, you do! If you need to find the materials again, or even reconstruct your research from scratch, you can shave off up to -2 in penalties for haste.

### Fire Escaper

Whenever you enter a building, you automatically note the fire exits, alarms, extinguishers and labelled evacuation routes.

### Password Protection

You always remember to lock your computer, phone, tablet etc. when they're not in use, and

to put away 2-Factor Authentication devices. You never allow browsers to save your password.

## **You Mean This Book?\***

You always seem to have just the right book to hand. Within your own library, you can roll against Professional Skill (Librarian) to have a requested book on hand *immediately*. If the book is lost, stolen, in use, or otherwise out of its place, the attempt fails automatically. A *critical* failure retrieves the wrong book! You can't try again if you fail. Regardless of the result, nobody watching notices anything out of the ordinary. Mostly useful for impressing researchers.



*Notes:* Finding a book on its shelf within a librarian's own library is normally an automatic success (p. B345). A librarian with this perk can accept a -10 modifier for haste and make a flat roll against Professional Skill (Librarian) for instant retrieval (p. B346).

## Library Quirks

### **Compulsion (Shusher)**

see *GURPS Power-Ups 6 – Quirks*, p. 27  
In quiet places, you can't bear people to make noise. You instinctively shush people talking, ask them to turn down music when it spills out of their headphones, and glower at those eating noisy snacks or whose chairs creak too much. This works as Bad Temper (12) in such situations, and gives -2 to reactions from anyone prone to making noise.

### **Compulsion (Tidies shelves)**

see *GURPS Power-Ups 6 – Quirks*, p. 27  
When you find books and documents misfiled or crammed in anyhow, you can't help but tidy them up. This leads to wasted time whenever you visit bookshops, offices, etc., and makes you conspicuous to anyone observing you. At crime scenes, it leaves evidence of your presence – and you might accidentally cover up a clue! If you restrain yourself, your distraction gives -2 to any task involving the books. Your compulsion gives the occasional -1 from peeved hosts and shopping companions.

### **Enemy (Book Banners)**

see p. B135

Your community or institution has a zealous group of individuals who object to your library's collection. While they do no real harm, they keep track of you to an annoying degree, raise complaints, and generally waste your time. This is Enemy (Small group; Watcher; 6 or less).

## **Odious Personal Habit (Inappropriate bookmarks)**

see *GURPS Power-Ups 6 – Quirks*, p. 11

You use whatever's at hand to mark your place, regardless of hygiene, common sense, or social mores. Anyone interacting with your books and documents reacts at -1 as they stumble on used tissues, candy wrappers, strips of bacon, and the marks they've left. Librarians react at -2, you risk library bans, and few friends are willing to lend you books!

### **Stage Whisper**

You're firmly convinced that whispering is the same as being quiet. Whispering doesn't improve your Stealth, and is treated as normal conversation for the purpose of overhearing you. In places where silence is expected, your resounding whispers annoy bystanders as much as normal conversation would.

## **Advantages**

Librarians tend to have professional and academic advantages: Contacts in the relevant fields, Patron (Wealthy benefactor), or scholarly Talent.

While of minimal use for adventuring, the abilities below could be *professionally* useful to librarians. Some are explicitly supernatural, but others can represent honed skills – for example, Shush might simply represent an authoritative, intimidating presence within the library. In settings where strange powers are widespread, these abilities offer alternatives to technology.

### **Bibliokinesis**

1 point/level

You can move books with your mind. Each level of this advantage allows you to move books within 5 yards, as though taking extra time to lift two-handed with ST equal to your level. Thus, the first level allows lifting a book

weighing up to 1.6 lbs., the second allows up to 6.4 lbs., and so on. You can't use the books to attack or interfere, and the power is useless under stressful conditions (such as combat). As far as anyone else is concerned, you are handling books in an entirely mundane fashion.

Paperbacks typically weigh 0.5 lbs., hardbacks 1-2 lbs., and atlases or coffee table books weight roughly 5 lbs.

*Statistics:* Telekinesis 1 (Accessibility, Only books, -80%; Cannot Attack, -20%; No Signature, +20%; Reduced Range, 1/2, -10%; Reduced Time 3, +60%; Useless Under Stress, -60%) [1].

### ***It Had a Blue Cover***

6/12 points for levels 1-2

When someone asks you about a book they can only vaguely remember, you can pull the answer from their memory. Concentrate for one minute and roll against Professional Skill (Librarian); use *Long-Distance Modifiers*, substituting "days since they last encountered the book" for "miles." Success means you recall the book as clearly as the subject: if they saw or handled it, you recall its appearance, texture, and even scent, as well as the circumstances in which they encountered it. This normally reveals the title, author, etc. On a failure, you can't try again with that subject for 24 hours. An unwilling subject results in automatic failure.

At level 1, this requires a face-to-face conversation, whether spoken or scribbled on a scrap of paper. Level 2 allows you to identify books over the telephone, by mail, or to answer an online post.

*Statistics:* Mind Reading (Accessibility, Only to identify books, -80%; Based on Professional Skill (Librarian), +20%; Sense-Based, Verbal or written description, -20%; Immediate Preparation Required, 1 minute, -30%;

Increased Immunity 2, -20%; Reduced Range, Close enough for normal conversation, -10%; Sensory, +20%; Short-Range 1, -10%; Time-Spanning, Past Only, +0%) [6]. The second level removes Short-Range and Reduced Range, and adds Remote [12]. The Remote enhancement is borrowed from Empathy.

*Note:* The second level could also be built by adding two levels of Long-Range [27]. Due to the restricted circumstances under which it can be used, Remote felt more appropriate.

### ***Lending Copy***

1 point/level

You can preserve the precious originals in your care by simply duplicating them for loan. Each level of this power allows you to duplicate a total of  $10 \times (\text{level squared})$  books – 10 books at level 1, 40 books at level 2, 90 books at level 3, and so on. These may be duplicated individually, in batches, etc. You can dismiss a lending copy at any time, regardless of its current location or condition, allowing you to reclaim its "slot."

Lending copies preserve the text and general appearance of the original; however, they lack any special properties, and analysis (such as carbon dating) reveals them to be modern replicas. You decide when creating the copy whether to replicate marginalia, highlighting, and other features. Damage and omissions are always replicated.

Depending on setting, copyright regulations may restrict the use of this power – or require a scaling licence fee!

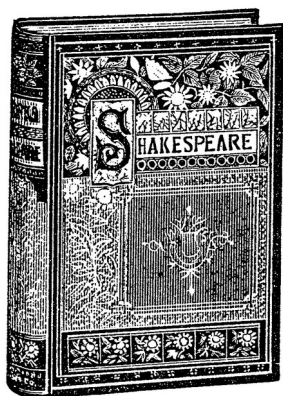
*Statistics:* Create Books (Accessibility, Copies of library books under your jurisdiction, -80%) [1/level].

## Library Step

10 points

Librarians are known for popping up unexpectedly, and you're no exception. Provided you're free to move (not bound, locked away etc.) You can step "into" any part of your library, and emerge anywhere else within it, providing both locations are unobserved and you could have got there by normal means, given sufficient time. You can carry up to your Medium encumbrance while doing so.

*Statistics:* Permeation (Books; Accessibility, Only while unobserved, -20%; Accessibility, Only within own library, -80%; Accessibility, Only places you could get to, given time, -20%; Can Carry Objects, +50%; Meld 2, Limited by only traverse, +150%; No Signature, +20%) [10].



## Reach Bookshelves

6 points

You can get to inconvenient shelves without straining yourself. In normal circumstances, this allows you to move and tidy books within five yards, at roughly half your normal working speed. Exactly *how* you do this is unclear, but there's nothing uncanny for anyone else to observe. In stressful situations, such as combat, it's useless.

**Note:** Stretching gives a more elegant alternative to Bibliokinesis – but it's far more expensive for the same benefit, and slower.

*Statistics:* Stretching 5 (Accessibility, Only to reach books, -80%; No Signature, +20%; Reduced Time 2, +40%; Useless Under Stress, -60%) [6].

## Recall Loan

16 points

You can name any library book that you have professional jurisdiction over and summon it back from its loan. This requires ten seconds of concentration, 2 FP, and a Professional Skill (Librarian) roll. A *critical* failure retrieves the wrong book! The borrower is aware that you have recalled their book. If the book isn't on loan – for example, if it's been lost or stolen – the attempt fails.

*Statistics:* Snatcher (Accessibility, Only books belonging to the library currently on loan, -80%; Based on Professional Skill (Librarian), +20%; Nuisance Effect, Borrower informed, -5%; Recall, -25%; Specialised, Only books, -20%) [16].

## Shush

14 points for level 1, then +2 per each additional level

Within libraries, you don't just request silence – you compel it. You must take a Concentrate manoeuvre and audibly "shush" your target. Roll a Quick Contest of Will. On a success, the miscreant *cannot* vocalize for a number of minutes equal to your margin of victory. In addition, Hearing rolls against the target are at -1 per level. However, rolls to notice the unnatural silence are at +1 per level. Each failed attempt gives -2, cumulatively, for the next 24 hours.

Fearlessness grants targets +1 per level in the Quick Contest, and Indomitable grants



immunity. Fearfulness gives -1 per level, while Honesty gives -2.

*Statistics:* Affliction (Will; Accessibility, Only within libraries, -80%; Advantage, Obscure Hearing 1, +20%; Based on Will, +20%; Disadvantage, Mute, +25%; Hearing-Based, -20%; Increased Immunity 2, -20%; Malediction, +100%; Nuisance Effect, Must shush audibly, -5%) [14]. Subsequent levels increase Obscure, one level at a time.

## Disadvantages

Librarians are prone to many of the same disadvantages as scholars and office workers. A few in particular deserve new treatments.

### Appearance

see p. B21

Fictional librarians – *especially* if female – are prone to a particular version of this.

*Ugly Duckling:* Frumpy clothes, thick glasses and a stern bun of hair give an unattractive impression – but a makeover in the final act will sweep that away. This is Unattractive, but at a time of the GM's choosing, it *must* be replaced by Attractive or better (your choice) at full price. This is a form of Potential Advantage (p. B33), and isn't compatible with Fashion Sense. If you don't have points to spare, it's traditional to acquire a jealous Rival when you make your debut. *0 points.*

## Code of Honor

see p. B127

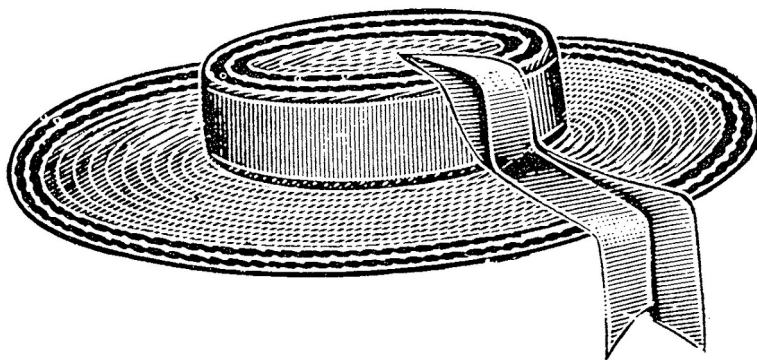
*Librarian's:* Adhere to the ethics of your profession; do your job to the best of your ability; keep reading histories and book requests confidential; resist restrictions on the freedom to read; support your professional association. Many librarians also support free access to information, and a neutral attitude towards books and archive materials – but this is *not* culturally or historically universal. *-5 points.*

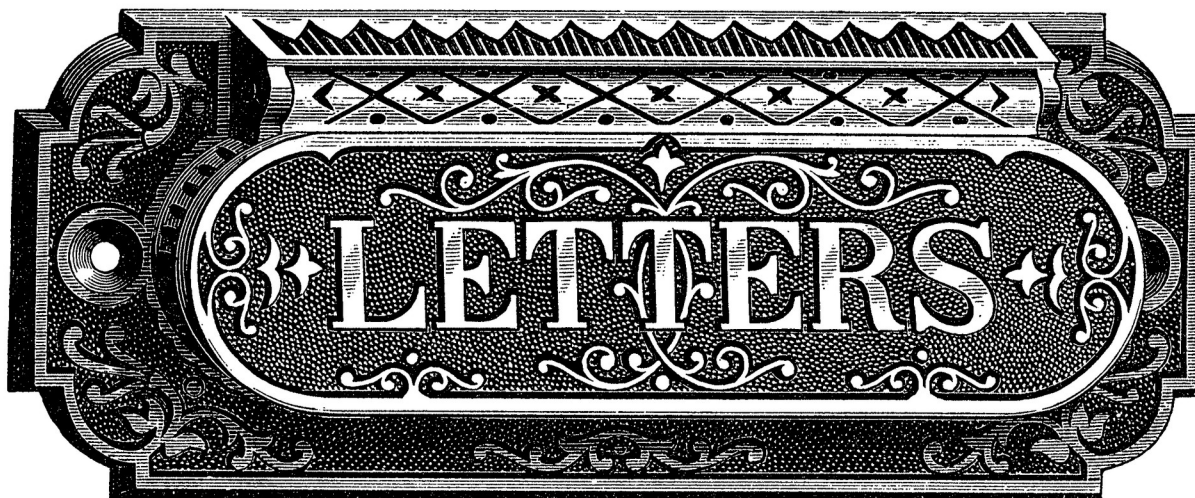
If this conduct risks serious legal or personal harm in a particular setting – for example, defying autocratic authorities or “moral militias” by destroying reader records and refusing to censor library collections – this may be worth -10 points.

### Sense of Duty

see p. B127

*Books:* You can't bear to see books damaged or mistreated, particularly those that are rare or precious. You will squander income to pay for book repairs, accept anything your friends intended to throw out, and otherwise inconvenience yourself. Unless you're on the brink of death, you won't consider using books as fuel or abandoning them to lighten your load. If you know a building contains books, you won't countenance arson – and you'll rush into a blazing building to snatch books from the flames. *-10 points.*





## David L Pulver

My sympathies with your health troubles and so glad your heart condition was diagnosed and treated. My mom and brother also extend their good wishes. I hadn't heard of cardiac ablation but it sounds referable to invasive surgery despite having to stay awake through it.

Sean: Enjoyed your many designer notes ... and I somehow overlooked the *Horror Magic* book, something I'd wanted for a while. Must read that.

Shimmin: Very comprehensive! Probably overkill for some settings, but very useful for certain types of campaigns, especially monster hunting, magic school, etc. I also liked the sections on theft prevention; locking a reader into a cage with some storied volume of occult lore (and then going away, and returning later to find out something weird has happened to them) could spark many a scenario).

Roger: Very useful atmospheres article; the rules needed that. Enjoyed the well-researched article on contemporary coilguns. Coilguns of this sort may be the sort of thing deployed by technically-skilled PCs if they need to arm

themselves in an area with sensible gun control and one of them is a hobbyist...

Phil: *Osiris Worlds* is another one I missed that I want to look at, especially as I was recently doing some Egypt-inspired stuff. Back when I did a proposal for *GURPS Furies* I proposed a Xena Warrior Princess-inspired (i.e., lots of stereotypes) take on Egyptian history with furies ("In a time of ancient gods, warlords, and cats...") For some really odd spins on Egypt, did you ever read Roger Zelazny's manic science-fantasy novel *Creatures of Light and Darkness*?

Carol and Jaine: That was fun.

Paul: You can do a lot with those advantages, but I wonder if a point each in Mechanic and Survival would fit the generalist idea, since a competent-all rounder in an action scene shouldn't be stumped if their car breaks down or they actually are shipwrecked/crash in the middle of a jungle, etc. One might excuse an action hero of not being able to fix an electronic gadget, but one imagines they are too cool and self reliant to need to take a vehicle to a garage. Likewise Swimming, or am I missing a trick that covers it?

Bill: I like having the pixies template; I did one for a fantasy campaign a while back, but this is better. The most fascinating was the fauns with their musical communication. Be challenging to run as PCs, though!

Matt: Enjoyed the spicey article! Not being a huge fan of Far Trader's complexity, I appreciated the decision to focus on the specific.

Though I'm sure you could port the basic concepts elsewhere...

## We Also Heard From

Bridget Wilkinson, Carol Tierney, Sean Punch

*Thanks to Bill Burns and Amanda "Dr Bob" Kear for help with distribution and publicity.*

## Campaign Seed: Why Apollo Shut Down

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John Dallman

The classical explanation, according to H P Lovecraft, for why R'leyh is at the bottom of the Pacific, and Cthulhu sleeps there, is that the shedding of Earth's Moon from what became the Pacific sank the city, and forced Big C into dormancy. While that was a [solid theory](#) of the origin of the Moon in Lovecraft's time, it isn't now plausible as a natural event. And besides, it's kind of a Hollywood explanation.

It's more plausible the other way around. Detaching the Moon from Earth would be a mighty work of astro-engineering, not to be done without some good motive. Like separating Cthulhu's "mind," or something like it, from him, and separating it by a significant distance. This lets us make some deductions about his historical manifestations — they're something more like his dreams — makes sense of "lunacy" as a concept, and makes Cthulhu The Man in the Moon.

Or, perhaps, the Man Behind the Moon. There's another American New England fantasist of the nineteen-twenties, James Branch Cabell, whose story *The Music Behind The Moon* seems to need some careful examination, along with the rest of his works.

Who did it? Someone powerful: a Great Old One, or just conceivably the Elder Things at the height of their civilisation. The idea that they were sharing the Earth with an active Cthulhu and his minions has always been rather implausible.

And at this point, one has to start to worry about the Apollo programme, and what its hidden objectives, prior to its rather hasty shutdown, might have been. Calling it *all* a conspiracy to put Cthulhu back together is probably going far too far. But if someone had a magical reason for wanting to make contact with the moon, influencing JFK would have been a good way to enable it, once the technology was available.

Much of the development of American rocketry had been done at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, one of whose founders was [Jack Parsons](#), the only black magician with a lunar crater named after him. He died in 1952, but who else did he indoctrinate? Someone who was a friend of both Aleister Crowley and L. Ron Hubbard would surely have wanted to make sure his work continued. Or at any rate, taking a risk on him not having done so would be most unwise.

# Descriptions as Powers

Shimmin Beg

## Why?

Punchy metaphorical descriptions crop up everywhere, but they're particularly beloved of authors. A protagonist with a thousand-yard stare but a heart of gold is an evocative shorthand for readers – or indeed, gamers. If a relative is described as an airhead who's inclined to talk your arm off, we all know what to expect, and player characters can plan how to work around (or exploit) those traits.

But what if that heart *really was* a lump of lustrous metal with atomic number 79? The rake's acerbic wit made mouths pucker? Aunt Sarah could *literally* sever your limbs with a barrage of conversation? More importantly, how would we build that in **GURPS**? A selection of ideas follows.



## Airheaded

5 points

Your noggin is gaseous. This ability comes in several varieties.

*Gaseous Brain:* Instead of cerebral tissue, your skull contains a complex mixture of gases. Since they're inherently fluid, it's hard to inflict lasting damage. Blows to the eye, skull, or directly targeting the brain don't get a wounding modifier or cause a knockdown penalty. You're immune to toxins and diseases that harm the brain, brain parasites, and forms of mind reading or mental control that require solid tissue. Loss of your head is still fatal (unless you have Extra Heads), and attacks that *extract* parts of the brain or open the skull can vent your brain! These have the normal  $\times 4$  wounding modifier. Medical scans reveal an empty skull, giving -2 to reaction rolls and +2 on rolls to deduce your secret. You can't rely on drugs to deal with headaches, insomnia, or any other ailment of the brain. In low or high-pressure environments – anywhere that might make your ears pop – you suffer -2 to IQ and IQ-based rolls. 5 points.

*Inflated Head:* Your head is a tough, flexible membrane filled with gas. It visibly changes size in response to air pressure, temperature, and even your moods; this gives -2 to reaction rolls and +2 on rolls to deduce your secret. You can deliberately expand or deflate your head at a rate of  $\pm 1$  SM per second, modifying hit penalties for targeted attacks accordingly. A larger head means a bigger mouth, and wider eyes that can ignore up to -2 in range penalties per step of inflation. While expanded, your head allows you to float like a balloon; you drift with the wind,

rise on thermals, and can move up to 2 yards per second by flapping your arms furiously. On the downside, any critical failure on the HT roll for a major head wound (or a failure by 3+ on HT rolls to avoid death) causes your expanded head to pop like a balloon, reducing you to -10×HP with a thunderous bang. 5 points.

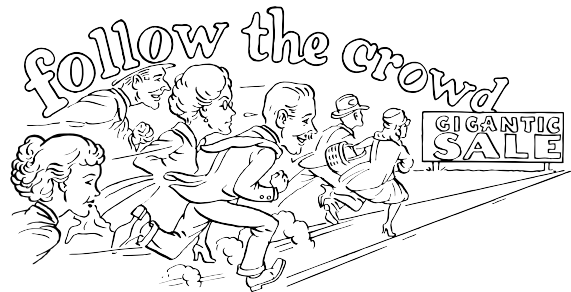
*Vaporous Head:* Your entire head is composed of gases, held in a vague approximation of human form (or your racial equivalent). In windy conditions, you suffer penalties to IQ-based rolls: -1 in breezes (30mph and above), and -2 in stronger winds. You have no skull, and you can't meaningfully headbutt; however, you're immune to crippling head injuries. Attacks to your eyes and skull don't deal additional damage or increase knockdown penalties. Impaling and piercing attacks are capped at 1 HP of injury, while most other attacks are limited to 2 HP. However, area attacks deal normal damage, while those based on wind or vacuum deal *double* damage. Anyone touching your head or observing you in strong wind has -2 to reaction rolls and +2 on rolls to deduce your secret. By concentrating for 10 seconds, you can shift your facial appearance to another member of your species; roll Disguise to impersonate an individual. This ability gives +4 to Disguise rolls that rely on vision – but you also take penalties for wind speed (as the *Size and Speed/Range Table*, p. B550). 5 points

*Statistics:* Gaseous Brain is Reduced IQ 2 (Accessibility, Extreme pressure, -80%) [-8] + Immunity to Brain-Based Mind Reading [5] + Immunity to Brain-Based Mind Control [5] + Immunity to Brain-Based Possession [5] + No Brain (Can be removed, -20%) [4] + Supernatural Feature (No Brain) [-5] + Unusual Biochemistry (Brainless) [-1].

Inflated Head is Air Move -8 [-16]; Flight (Accessibility, Only with head expanded, -20%; Controlled Gliding, -45%; Lighter Than Air,

-10%) [10] + Fragile (Explosive; Partial, Head, -40%) [-9] + Growth 5 (Partial, Head, -60%; Nuisance Effect, Easier to hit, -20%) [10] + Shrinking 5 (Partial, Head, -60%) [10] + Telescopic Vision 10 (Accessibility, Scales with head, -20%; No Targeting, -60%) [10] + Unnatural Features (Expanding Head) [-10]. Adjust Air Move and price as necessary for Basic Speed.

Vaporous Head is Cannot Headbutt [-1] + Elastic Skin (Environmental, Not Wind, -30%; Partial, Head, -20%) [10] + Injury Tolerance (Diffuse; Has Blood, +5; Has Vitals, +5; Limited, Head, -60%) [36] + No Skull [-2] + Reduced IQ 2 (Environmental, Wind, -50%) [-20] + Unnatural Features (Gaseous Head) [-10] + Vulnerability (Limited, Head, -60%; Vacuum and wind-based attacks ×2) [-8].



## A Nose for a Bargain

2/8 points for levels 1-2

You can literally sniff out a good deal. Make a Smell roll, applying separate penalties for distance, speed, and wind speed according to the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550). A successful roll reveals there's a bargain nearby, the approximate discount involved, and indicates its direction. A follow-up roll against IQ gives you a general sense of the type of purchase involved. At level 1, stressful situations are too distracting for this ability to be useful. Level 2 allows you to benefit during even the most no-holds-barred of seasonal sales.

*Statistics:* Detect Bargains (Accessibility, Useless under stress, -60%; Smell-Based, -20%) [2]. The second level removes the Accessibility limitation [8].

## An X to Make a Bishop Kick a Hole in a Stained-Glass Window

29 points

Any bishop who gets a good look at you (within 8 yards) is subject to a Quick Contest of your Sex Appeal against their Will. Apply -1 per yard of distance between you. Anyone who succeeds in the Quick Contest is immune to your charms until the following day. If they lose, they have the overpowering urge to break windows – stained glass or otherwise! – and must make a self-control roll at 6 or less whenever they have the opportunity. Kicking out a single window is normally enough to sate the urge for a while.

*Statistics:* Affliction 1 (Accessibility, Only on bishops, -80%; Area Effect, 8 yd, +150%; Always On, -10%; Aura, +80%; Based on Sex Appeal, Own Roll, +20%; Disadvantage, Fenestromania, +10%; Increased Immunity, 1 day, -30%; Malediction, +100%; Melee Attack -30%; Vision Based, -20%) [29]. Fenestromania is Compulsive Behavior (Window-Breaking) (6) [-10].

### Under the Hood: Bishops Only

There are fewer than 6,000 living Roman Catholic bishops in the world, and fewer than a thousand each of Orthodox and Anglican bishops. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints boasts some 18,000 bishops! Less well-known denominations have hundreds more.

Clergy of other religions sometimes translate their titles as ‘bishop’; to avoid disputes over the correct translation of Chandler’s words vis-à-vis such titles, and

keep this power as culturally flexible as possible, we can double the total above. Assuming a total of 52,000 bishops, this is fewer than 0.01% of the population. GURPS Powers (p. 99) suggests a limitation of -50% if supers are “much less than 1% of the population”, but supers are by their nature likely to be relevant to adventuring; bishops less so. “Useless under stress” is a -60% limitation “since it makes the ability worthless in most adventuring situations!” Combining a very small percentage of the population with very limited use in combat, an Accessibility limit of -80% is appropriate.

## Balls of Steel

2 points for levels 1-2

Your testes are solid lumps of stainless steel. This leaves you infertile and subject to magnetic influence – you set off a lot of security gates. Attacks to your groin do no additional damage, and are treated as torso hits. However, anyone striking you unarmed must resolve Hurting Yourself (p. B379) against DR 5!

*Statistics:* Accessory (Steel Athletic Cup) [1] + Affected by Magnetism [-1] + Injury Tolerance (No Vitals; Partial, Vitals, Groin only, -60%) [2] + Sterile [0].

## Bedroom Eyes

4/10 points for levels 1-2

A quick glance at any room reveals whether it is a bedroom and how many people it can comfortably sleep. With a follow-up IQ roll, you can determine how comfortable it would be and its general state of maintenance and hygiene. You disregard up to -5 in penalties for darkness in bedrooms, though total darkness still leaves you blind. While in a bedroom, you

always know the direction you entered from and you can perfectly retrace your steps, without needing to see.

At level 2, gazing into your eyes is as good as a night's rest. Make eye contact for one minute and roll against IQ. If you succeed, the subject loses the Drowsy condition (p. B428) and may also regain FP lost to missed sleep, at a rate of one per minute. This requires continued eye contact, and you lose FP at the same rate (these are not considered lost to missed sleep). After a successful treatment, each subsequent attempt within the same day is at a cumulative -3 penalty.

*Statistics:* Absolute Direction (Accessibility, Only in bedrooms, -80%; Vision-Based, -20%) [1] + Detect Bedrooms (Analysis Only, -50%; Vision-Based, -20%) [2] + Night Vision 5 (Accessibility, Only in bedrooms, -80%) [1]. The second level adds Healing (Cure Affliction, limited by Only Drowsy, +12%; FP Only, Only Missed Sleep, -50%; Nuisance Effect, 1 FP per minute, -25%; Onset, Exposure Time, 1 minute, -30%; Reduced Fatigue Cost 1, Only to cure Drowsy, +4%) [6]. Feature: Rather than requiring physical contact, Healing requires eye contact at equivalent range.

## Big Fish in a Small Pond

0 points

In any confined space, you can't help taking up even more. Any time increasing your SM by up to +6 would make you occupy at least 20% of the space, you grow as large as possible! Growth is +1 SM per second. Your growth never harms others or causes significant damage, but you frequently knock over vases and squeeze others into uncomfortable positions. Equally, you might find yourself hunched over beneath a low ceiling. You clothes grow with you; other items don't, but you can still use them normally (don't ask how). The expansion has no material effect

on your capabilities, other than increased reach and a potential bonus to Intimidation. You get from -1 to -3 on reactions from those inconvenienced by your growth, depending on how much of their space you're taking up. As soon as you leave the confining space – which your growth *never* prevents – you shrink back to normal size at -1 SM per second.

*Statistics:* Odious Personal Habit (Accessibility, Only while grown, -20%) [-12] + Growth 6 (Accessibility, Only where Growth would take up 20% or more of a space, -80%; Can Carry Objects, Light, +10%; Cosmetic, -80%; Unconscious Only, -20%; Uncontrollable, -10%) [12].

## Chip on Your Shoulder

-2/-5 points for levels 1-2

An injury or accident of birth has left a prominent chunk missing from your shoulder. This weakness reduces your Lifting ST by 1 when only using that arm, and gives -1 to resist arm locks. Choose the affected arm when you take this disadvantage.

At level 2, the injury leaves your whole arm vulnerable to detach. If an injury cripples your arm (not your hand), it breaks off entirely! Reattachment through surgery or magic may still be possible.

*Statistics:* Arm ST -1 (Lifting ST Only, -50%) [-1] + Vulnerability (Arm Lock, One Arm Only) [-1]. The second level adds Fragile (Brittle; Cosmic, Does not shatter, -50%; Partial, One Arm, -40%; Not Death, -20%) [-3].

## Disarming Smile

7 points for level 1, then 1 point/level

With a flash of your smile, you can end a fight. This ability affects everyone within 8 yards who can see your smile (you needn't be able to see



them) and is holding a weapon. Roll a quick contest of Sex Appeal vs. weapon skill (or the Retain Weapon technique) for each target. If you win, you disarm your foe; his weapon flies one yard in a random direction. If your foe wins or ties, he keeps his weapon, but it will be unready unless he won by 3 or more; he gains a +2 cumulative bonus to resist your smile for the next hour. All the normal limitations and modifiers for Sex Appeal apply. Higher levels of this advantage double the radius, cumulatively; the GM should agree a maximum appropriate to the tone of the campaign.

*Statistics:* Crushing Attack (Accessibility, Only to disarm, -10%; Area Effect, 8 yd, +150%; Based on Sex Appeal, Own Roll, +20%; Cosmic, No Die Roll Required, +100%; Emanation, -20%; Increased Immunity, Cumulative -2 for one hour, -10%; No Wounding, -50%; Partial Dice, Does only 1 point,  $\times 0.25$ ) [3] + Skill Adaptation (Disarming based on Sex Appeal) [1]. Further levels add to Area Effect, one step at a time.

## Dressed to Kill

27 points

You can put together an outfit that will truly slay your rivals. This requires time and effort: you must spend at least an hour and make an IQ roll to plan your outfit. Success gives you +1 to reaction rolls from anyone who sees it, and enables a lethal follow-up.

At any time, you can tweak your outfit, pose, or otherwise draw attention from a chosen victim who can see you. Roll a Quick Contest of Will vs. HT, at -1 per yard; unless you tailored the outfit to this specific target, they resist at +4. Victory overwhelms your target with Agony or Ecstasy (p. B428), as the GM feels appropriate: admirers tend towards ecstatic visions, while jealous rivals and exes are more likely to be tortured. If they lose by 5 or more or suffer a critical failure, they also suffer a heart attack!

Those capable of neither envy nor attraction to you are immune to this ability. At the GM's discretion, traits may give a bonus or penalty to resist: for example, a Jealous Enemy (Rival) might roll at -2, but Clueless could give +2. Regardless of the outcome, you can't use this ability again without preparing a new outfit.



If you've ever successfully caused a heart attack, an ominous reputation begins to follow you. This gives -1 to reactions from people in the social circles of your previous victims. Your ability is subtle, leaving no mundane evidence – but supernatural powers may detect it.

*Statistics:* Affliction (Accessibility, Only with Fashion Sense, -10%; Accessibility, Only targets capable of envy or attraction, -20%; Accessibility, Weaker unless target specified beforehand 4, -20%; Agony or Ecstasy, +100%; Increased Immunity 3, -30%; Malediction, +100%; No Signature, +20%; Preparation Required, 1 hour, -20%; Secondary Heart Attack, +60%; Vision-Based, -20%) [26] + Fashion Sense (Self Only, -50%; Requires IQ Roll, -10%) [2] + Trivial Reputation (Bad luck) [-1].

## Eye for Talent

7/12 points for levels 1-2

A successful Vision roll reveals any innate talent someone possesses, whether or not they have exploited it. You learn whether the target has any Talents or racial skill bonuses (p. B452), and the magnitude of the bonus granted. You can follow up with an IQ roll to determine the general area of talent; for example, Natural Copper might be classed as “investigation”, while Trivia Sponge could be “knowledge”.

At level 2, you can sense the subject’s general aptitude automatically. A success on the IQ roll reveals the specific skills that benefit.

*Statistics:* Detect Talent (Cosmic (Metagame), +50%; Vision-Based, -20%) [7]. The second level adds Analyzing [12].

## Head in the Clouds

77 points

You can remove your own head and store it in the sky for safekeeping – or to monitor the situation from above. To do so, you must have line of effect to the sky and take a Ready action; you grasp your head and hurl it into the air at tremendous speed. If the exact location matters, roll against DX to place your head accurately. Regardless of distance, it lands within one turn. If your head goes astray, it doesn’t take damage – instead, it *bounces* wildly, leaving you physically stunned and landing in an inconvenient location of the GM’s choice.

Your body acts as an ally of your head, and they are mentally linked; they share senses, and can “speak” at the speed of speech. Your body lacks vision or any sense of smell or taste. However, it navigates as though using Para-Radar (p. B81), without any of the special bonuses or benefits of that ability. Your head has no inherent ability to move, but it can rest safely on even the thinnest

clouds and rotate freely. Breathing, eating, and speech occur at your head’s location – a means of surviving thin atmosphere is advisable. While in the clouds, your head can freely see through them to the ground, and ignores up to -12 in range penalties for Per rolls and Per-based skill rolls (but not attacks).

Retrieving your head likewise requires line of effect to the clouds and a Ready action. Roll DX to catch it! On a miss, it bounces as above. Reattaching it requires holding it in place for one minute.

If you have other means of reaching the clouds or placing your head there (such as Flight or Warp), these offer a more reliable option.

*Statistics:* Bouncy Head [1] + Injury Tolerance (Head Only, -100%; Detachable Head, +15%) [7] + Mindlink (Own Body) [5] + Telescopic Vision 12 (Accessibility, Only detached head, -80%; No Targeting, -60%) [12] + Telesend (Accessibility, Own body only, -80%; Sense, Limited by Body has few senses, +60%) [24] + Throw Head into Clouds [1] + Walk on Air (Accessibility, Only detached head, -80%; Environmental, Clouds, -20%) [4]. *Feature:* You can detach your head freely, but it has no special interaction with cutting attacks.

Bouncy Head is an exceptionally limited Flight (Accessibility, Only to prevent injury to detached head, -80%; Nuisance Effect, Bounces wildly and stunning, -20%), worth a perk. Throw Head into Clouds is an exceptionally limited form of Super Throw 13 (Accessibility, Only to place own detached head in clouds and retrieve it) worth no more than a perk.

### Under the Hood: Independent Body Parts

This form of Injury Tolerance (from *GURPS Powers*, p. 52) doesn't define the sensory capabilities of your severed body parts. It's stated that they can move and act with only minor penalties, even making attacks. This implies *some* degree of perception – enough that they aren't considered blind, at least.

If unhappy with this, add the following:

While headless, your body lacks any sense of vision, smell, taste, or hearing – instead, it receives whatever your head perceives. Your head shares its remaining senses: its touch sharpens, granting the benefits of Sensitive Touch and Vibration Sense. You can “hear” with a successful Touch roll, even through obstacles (soundproofing applies), and read by feeling the impressions of ink or (with a roll against Touch-5) minute differences in electrical fields.

*Statistics:* Sensitive Touch (Accessibility, Detached body only, -50%; Stethoscopic, +50%; Ultra-Fine, +30%) [18] + Vibration Sense (Air; Accessibility, Detached body only, -50%) [5]. 23 points.

## Heart of Actual Gold

3 points

Your heart is a chunk of solid gold. When an attack would strike your vitals, roll 3d; on an 8 or less, treat it as a hit to the torso instead. If an attack specifically targets your heart (such as the Stake to the Heart technique) this ability always activates; if an attack specifically targets another

organ, this ability always fails. You're not at risk of heart disease or cardiac arrest. While your heart doesn't actually beat, it still somehow keeps your blood flowing. Because you still have a heart, you can still be killed by effects that destroy or remove your heart outright.

Petrification changes it into stone, but since it's already a homogenous lump, that doesn't stop it from functioning normally. Detect (Metal), X-rays, etc. have their normal effects.

*Statistics:* Detectable as Metal [-1] + Injury Tolerance (No Vitals) (Unreliable, 8 or less, -40%) [3] + Immunity to Heart Disease [1] + Immunity to Heart Attacks [5] + Supernatural Features (No Heartbeat) [-5].

## Roaming Hands

10 points

Your hands have minds of their own. Without your constant attention, they get into mischief: doodling, dialing on phones, adjusting other people's ties, and playing minor pranks. This gives you -2 to reaction rolls. Worse, they have a tendency to wander off entirely when you're asleep, bored, or otherwise distracted. When the GM feels it's appropriate, you must make a Will roll to stop one or both hands from detaching and scuttling away! A roll of 14+ always fails. The effect is subtle, and you don't notice a missing hand until circumstances make it inevitable. You can reattach a missing hand by holding it in place for one minute... providing you can catch it!

While detached, and at any time when you're asleep, unconscious or otherwise incapacitated, your hands are in full control of themselves. They never harm you or deliberately sabotage your interests – they're part of you! At times, their antics may be a useful distraction, or bring new evidence to light. They may even rescue you from danger. For the most part, they just make a nuisance of themselves, like naughty pets.

While your hands are behaving themselves, their independence can be useful. They can play the piano while you're otherwise occupied, or knit while you're asleep, and you can play chess against yourself. In non-stressful situations, because they can wriggle into small spaces, you roll at +2 on Housekeeping rolls to clean rooms and Mechanic rolls to fix internal problems. You also get +2 on Esoteric Medicine rolls to give massage, and on Erotic Art rolls (best made in the dark, unless your partners are very open-minded). Finally, you roll at +2 on tasks where fine manual control of both hands is all-important: Hobby Skill (Juggling), Musical Instrument (Piano), Sewing, Surgery, and even Explosives (EOD) in situations when steady hands are the primary factor.

The GM should adjudicate reactions. At an important diplomatic meeting, during a police interview, or in an antiques shop, a -4 penalty may be appropriate. Conversely, an occasional NPC might respond well to hands in unexpected places – but perhaps not in a way the PC would prefer.

*Statistics:* Compartmentalized Mind 2 (Limited, One Hand Each, -80%) [20] + Injury Tolerance (Independent Body Parts; Accessibility, No Injury Tolerance, -50%; Nuisance Effect,

Mischievous, -10%; Nuisance Effect, Unnoticed, -10%; Partial, Hands, -40%; Uncontrollable, -10%) [7] + No Fine Manipulators (Accessibility, Only with IBP, -80%) [-6] + Odious Personal Habits (Touching Things) [-10] + One Hand (Accessibility, Only with IBP, -50%) [-1]\*.

\* Bought as an Alternative Disadvantage (1/5 cost) to No Fine Manipulators).

## Russian Fingers

3 points

Your fingers – but not the rest of you – are thoroughly Russian. You can write the language fluently, use a Cyrillic keyboard without difficulty, and sign in flawless Russian Sign Language. This doesn't grant you any comprehension, however. Your fingers exert a mild influence over other activities: any fiction you write tends to drift towards the Dostoyevskian, and while you might start a piano recital with Chas and Dave, it takes great effort to avoid it ending in Tchaikovsky.

*Statistics:* One-Way Fluency 2 (Speaks Russian Sign Language fluently) [2] + One-Way Literacy 2 (Writes Russian fluently) [2] + Quirk (Russian drift) [-1].

## Sea Legs

59 points

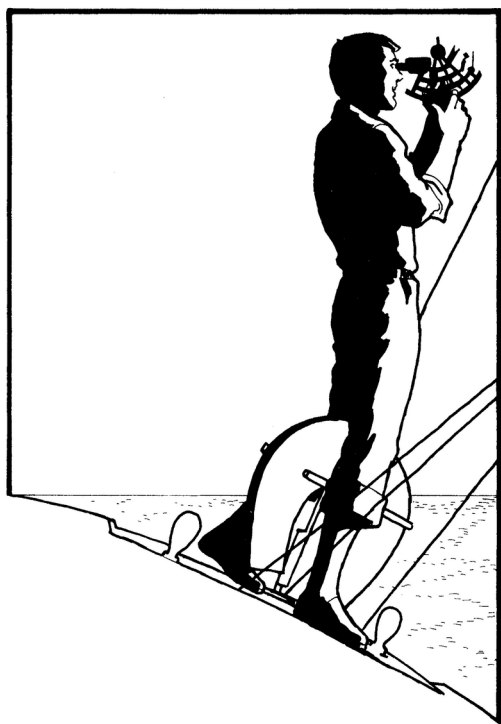
Rather than flesh, your legs are composed of animated saltwater. This makes them immune to crippling injuries. Impaling and piercing attacks can't do more than 1 HP of damage to your legs, and other attacks can't do more than 2 HP – unless they're an area, cone, or explosive attack. The exception is dehydrating attacks, which do double normal damage to your legs. You can also walk across seawater as though it were solid ground. You can store up to BL/5 lbs. by stashing items within the water of your legs.



This may damage them, if not waterproof. Fish and other aquatic creatures can survive indefinitely in your legs.

The lack of bones makes your legs both flexible and weak. Use only 1/4 your BL for lifting, carrying, or pulling when using your legs or standing up. Your legs can pass through much smaller openings than normal (reduce their effective SM by 2), and can bend freely in any direction. This gives +2 on Climbing, Erotic Art, and Escape rolls, rising to +5 if the roll primarily involves your legs. You also get +5 on attempts to break free when your legs are bound, grappled, etc.

While your legs are covered, this isn't obvious – but a mere glance at your uncovered legs reveals your secret. A thorough pat-down, rough tackle in a football game, etc. will note the squishy, boneless consistency of your legs.



*Statistics:* Double-Jointed (Partial, Legs, -60%) [5] + Injury Tolerance (Diffuse; Not No Blood, -5; Not No Brain, -5; Not No Vitals, -5; Partial, Legs, -20%) [68] + Invertebrate (Partial, Legs, -60%) [-8] + Payload 2 (Nuisance Effect, Wet, -5%) [2] + Vulnerability (Dehydration Attacks, ×2; Partial, Legs, -20%) [-8] + Unnatural Features (Legs made of water) [-10] + Walk on Liquid (Specific, Saltwater, -40%) [10].

## Talk the Hind Leg Off a Donkey

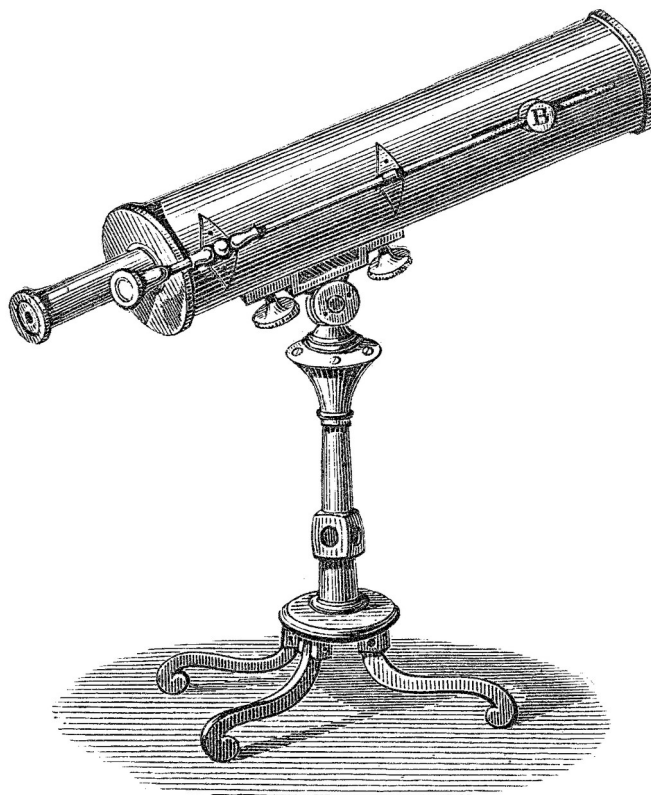
9 points/level

With an endless stream of chatter, you can cause limbs to simply fall off. This requires a full minute of conversation and a Quick Contest of Will-2 vs. your target's HT. Each success contributes 1 point of effective injury per level to a specific limb; if this ever reaches the limb's crippling injury threshold (normally HP/2), it falls off! The limb is unharmed, and can be reattached by holding it in place for one minute. While your power isn't obvious, the victim is conscious of a growing pain in their limb as they approach the point of severance. You may target a hand or foot instead, at a further -2 to Will.

*Statistics:* Cutting Attack 1 point (HT; Accessibility, Only to sever limbs, -50%; Hearing-Based, -20%; Malediction, +100%; Onset, Exposure Time, 1 minute, -10%; Symptoms, 1/2 HP, Lose Limb, +360%) [9/level].

Lose Limb is Injury Tolerance (Independent Body Parts; Reattachment Only, -50%) [18].

*Notes:* the Accessibility limitation combines the requirement to target a hit location with the inability to cause injury (due to how Independent Body Parts work).



## Thousand-Yard Stare

25 points for level 1, then 24 points for each additional level

Your gaze can warp space so that whatever you stare at is displaced to half a mile away. To use this ability, take a Concentrate maneuver and make a Vision roll (minus range penalties, p. B550). If successful, the object of your gaze is treated as being 1000 yards away from you for all purposes as long as you continue to concentrate. This makes physical contact (including melee) impossible, and hinders ranged effects, including conversation. The object's position isn't otherwise affected; someone you stare at can still reach out to shake hands with the person next to you! This ability doesn't move anything, apply force, or do anything other than define the distance between you and the object of your gaze. While using this ability, even if your attempt fails, you can see things that are about 1000 yards away as clearly as though they were next to you.

Each level allows you to adjust the distance by one step on the Size and Speed/Range chart. At level 1, you can only affect objects that are currently between 700-1500 yards away (ranges 15 to 17). At level 16, you can influence items right next to you – or 250 miles away, if you can see that far to begin with!

*Statistics:* Control Distance 1 (Common; Accessibility, Only to set at 1000 yards, -80%; Increased Range, LOS, +40%; Link, +10%; No Signature, +20%; Ranged, +40%; Requires Vision roll, +0%) [24] + Telescopic Vision 1 (Accessibility, Only at 950-1050 yards, -80%; Cosmic, +50%; Link, +10%; No Targeting, -60%) [1]. Feature: Telescopic Vision 1 allows you to ignore penalties for one step on the Size and Speed/Range chart; Cosmic changes which step is affected, so it applies to the -16 rather than the -1 penalty. Subsequent levels add to Control Distance.

*[The author's metaphor privileges have been withdrawn—Ed]*

# Managing growth in long-running campaigns

Roger Bell\_West

The guidelines in the *GURPS Basic Set* suggest that characters should receive between zero and five points per play session depending on quality of play, plus more for completing major objectives. I've mostly averaged this out to about three points per session (2-3 hours) for characters whose players show up, rather than grading each of them on quality of play.

Which is fine if a campaign only lasts a few sessions, or if the players immediately spend points on a new skill here and a perk there rather than saving them up for the big purchases like attribute increases or new advantages. But what if the campaign lasts for a while, and the players have some concept of deferred gratification? In time, there *will* be growth in the PC's abilities, both in the level of competence at the main thing they're good at, and in the number of things at which they can at least get by. So how does one keep the game interesting?

In a combat game, one can just bring in more powerful opposition in greater numbers. But *GURPS* is far more than that: characters will grow in technical skills like Lock-Picking or Stealth, in social skills like Diplomacy or Fast-Talk, and in any supernatural abilities the campaign allows.

I try to give them a chance to show off those abilities. In *Irresponsible & Right*, some of the PCs grew in political influence, so they were exposed to considerations they'd never have met as mere covert operatives: yes, this is clearly the right thing to do for immediate gains, but how will allied powers (starting with "rival British intelligence agencies" and running up to Roosevelt and Stalin) react? As with real-world considerations surrounding the Enigma intercepts, can you find an excuse to be *here* and ready to react to an enemy operation without

letting the enemy suspect how you found out about it? Even the most mundane of campaigns may well offer opportunities for greater wealth, status, and influential friends.

Niche protection was retained more or less automatically, as building up a high-grade capability in something *ab initio* is clearly more expensive than improving the one you already have. (*GURPS* characters tend in my experience to become DX specialists or IQ specialists anyway, especially the latter in my campaigns, with a solid base stat and just a point or two in each relevant skill, so this had been something of a concern.) Experienced *GURPS* players tend to drift more into stat maximisation as the scope of the campaign broadens (and thus the same PCs are expected to tackle more different things); and while I don't like hard limits, I usually set an IQ cap of 15-16 depending on the intended realism level. (The higher a *GURPS*





IQ a character has, the harder it is to see them as having normal human priorities, and as a GM I care about those priorities.)

More generally, even if the PCs are merely combatants, they become *more capable* combatants, and will get involved in politics whether they want to or not: ruler A doesn't want them causing trouble in her realm, so drops hints that there are horrible monsters just across the border...

Wealth is a special case, because the default approach to possessions in **GURPS** is that everything has to be tracked. Particularly when things are happening in broadly civilised areas, I almost always house rule that "normal things" are available anyway; my players don't find it fun to write down the entire contents of their characters' pockets, and I don't find it fun to read them. In effect, every character has the Gizmos power in senses 2 and 3, without the special implausible bits (so you might have the box of matches on you, but they're probably not miraculously dry after your recent swim). If a character gains Wealth as part of the campaign, I'll probably award extra points to pay for it.

One problem with **GURPS** in general is that most abilities can be used repeatedly, unlike the one-per-day or once-per-encounter powers common in other games. If your best damage per effort comes from a specific power, spell, or attack, you might as well just use it all the time rather than trying other spells, and the game becomes an exercise in mechanics which as GM I find rather dull (also for the players, though at

least they have the fun of the power fantasy). This can be mitigated to some extent by having foes that are less vulnerable to it, but that's not a complete answer. More significantly, an action with a bit of possible variation can help to maintain interest: as a high-grade warrior, do I feint? Aim for the weapon arm? Rapid Strike? The best answer to that may vary even for the same opponent as the fight progresses; for the PC whose best action was always "Lightning Stare to the eyes", there was no further choice to be made, and the mechanics predominated.

Particularly if characters are reasonably competent to start with, growth may not be important: the films and television that **GURPS Action** seeks to replicate generally don't make a big point out of improving capabilities, because the characters are pretty darn awesome already, and the same is true of their PC equivalents. Of course this needs to be discussed with the players, because a treadmill of escalating power is a standard RPG convention from the original *Dungeons & Dragons* days, but having a low rate of character point awards can help players settle on using the powers their characters already have rather than spend time planning to shop for new ones.

Some things may make a character so famous as to become unplayable: The Man Who Duelled Hirohito (on camera) is not going to have a normal life, even if he ever decides he wants one, and he certainly won't be able to be any kind of covert agent. To my mind this sort of thing really needs to be kept to the end of a campaign.

## Irresponsible & Right: World Profile

John Dallman

The *Irresponsible & Right* setting was not created with Infinite Worlds in mind. But with that out of the way, how might it work as an element in that setting?

There are no unique natural resources or manufactured goods here that can't be had more easily from other parallels, with one exception. This world's orichalcum is potentially useful as a short cut to smart materials, although it depends on a mana field to work or indeed to exist at all.

Outworlders' policy here starts to look a bit like their policy for Merlin-1: there's a reasonably consistent and rational sort of magic which they'd like to learn, at least for use on worlds with mana, but at the same time there's magical mind-reading. There are also people who would take in the concept of parallel worlds easily, and have experience spotting and countering new kinds of magic. On the really large scale, they would probably want to learn why the mana level has risen, and (depending on outlook) how to duplicate that, or prevent its duplication, elsewhere.

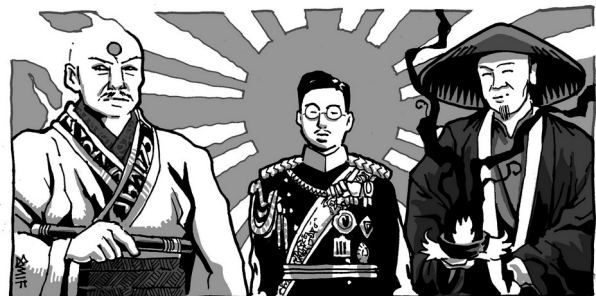
Infinity tends to think in terms of the US first, and would want to get information from their magical research programmes. If they were wise, they'd recruit local agents and insert them into the programmes, rather than risking their own people being exposed. They'd have an advantage in those programmes having started later than in other countries. This kind of "false flag" operation is a bit complicated for gaming, but was important in the historical Cold War that the Infinity-Centrum conflict mirrors.

If Centrum had access to this world, they might try to subvert Nazi leadership but would have more luck in the UK. They would probably be

smart enough to avoid von Ribbentrop's mistake, by going after the politicians rather than the nobility.

It seems possible that this world is the result of a large-scale Cabal experiment. Decanic modifiers are widely used by skilled magicians, although they're a Cabal secret in many worlds. Cabalists who aren't part of any such experiment might want to exploit a world where magic can be done on a large scale. The biggest thing to be learned would be a scientific explanation of magic, although many Cabalists would not be interested in that. If they simply wanted to infiltrate, posing as individuals wanting to learn magic, and becoming "gifted students" would be simple. They could work through that route to find the most capable magicians, and try to recruit them.

Reich-5's Armanen Order have several possible attitudes. Their first reaction would be wanting to save the situation for Germany, but when they found out that Himmler was executed on Hitler's orders, they might decide that they were dealing with a "false Hitler." To rescue Germany, they'd need to provide significant resources, far beyond Raven Division's capabilities, and therefore to reveal the existence of other worlds to their own government back on Reich-5, which carries its own risks. They might do best by simply rescuing talented people and magical resources for their own projects on other worlds.



## Weird War II-5, January 1945

### Current Affairs

This world's version of World War II started out looking normal, but all the major powers and several minor ones are using assorted schools of magic in attack and/or defence. It looks as if the Allied powers will win, approximately on schedule, but there is real potential for last-minute surprises.

Much of the world is now aware that magic is real, and social changes are beginning. The post-war world is clearly going to be quite unusual. Stalin has been overthrown, and Beria has been tried and executed.

Several of the leading physicists of the mid-20th century, certainly including Bohr, Einstein, Heisenberg, Teller and von Neumann, are engaged in fruitful research into the relationship between magic and physics. The Manhattan Project ended when CP-1 was started and Chicago was destroyed by an unnatural storm, but the potential creativity of younger physicists, such as Richard Feynman, Luis Alvarez and Ted Taylor, is intimidating. The prospect of magical interrogation under the guidance of such minds is responsible for the world's Z1 rating.



### Divergence Point

Unknown, but evidence points to it being prehistoric, with cycles of waxing and waning magic. The latest waxing became apparent in about 1912. Since there appear to have been several reality quakes, the evidence is of dubious value.

Outsiders can observe that when history is perturbed, it tends to move back towards that of Homeline WWII. There's no obvious reason for this, and it goes beyond normal historical inertia.

### Major Civilisations

Western (multipolar), Chinese (empire), Orthodox (empire with rivals), Japanese (empire), Indic (empire).

### Great Powers

United States (representative democracy, CR3), British Empire (representative democracies and oligarchies, CR4), Soviet Union (dictatorship, CR5), Nazi Germany (dictatorship, CR6), Japanese Empire (military oligarchy, CR6).

### Worldline Data

TL: 6, in transition to 7, with some magically-assisted 6<sup>^</sup> and 7<sup>^</sup>.

Quantum: 3.

Centrum Zone: Inaccessible.

Mana Level: slowly increasing, now just below Normal (-1 to casting).

Infinity Class: Z1.