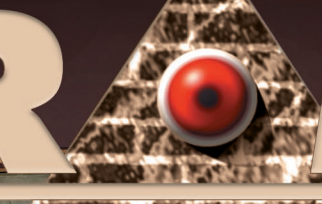


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/84 October '15



PERSPECTIVES

THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT
by Sean Punch

HEROES ON THE MASS SCALE
by Christopher R. Rice

**THE DISAPPEARANCE
OF FATHER COHEN**
by David L. Pulver

THE ELVEY INSTITUTE
by Steven Marsh

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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*I like to turn things upside down,
to watch pictures and situations
from another perspective.*

– Ursus Wehrli

ARTICLE COLORS

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

- Pale Blue:* In This Issue
- Brown:* In Every Issue (humor, editorial, etc.)
- Green:* Columnist
- Dark Blue:* *GURPS* Features
- Purple:* Systemless Features

COVER AND INTERIOR ART

Brandon Moore

IN THIS ISSUE

We at *Pyramid* delight in stretching your mind, exploring untapped realms, and looking at things in whole new ways. This issue, we've put the spotlight on that tendency, with an edition devoted to perspectives. Get ready to look at things in a whole new way . . .

GURPS can handle a campaign that covers the multiverse as well as one set in a single building. It works for one-shots and miniseries. It lets you play heroes who will live days, and those who are older than time itself. But sometimes there are special considerations to ensure everything's fair, balanced, and fun . . . and that's *The Long and the Short of It*. This supplement-length guide to extremes of time and space comes from *GURPS* guru Sean Punch (scribe of *GURPS Action 4: Specialists* – another supplement that changes your perspective on heroes). What happens, game-wise, when you have a campaign that lasts for generations . . . or one that's set in a tiny hamlet? The answers are herein.

Perspectives are everything when the heroes need to investigate *The Disappearance of Father Cohen*. This month's Eidetic Memory offering from David L. Pulver (author of

GURPS Banestorm: Abydos) is a horror adventure suitable for *GURPS Horror* or lower-powered *GURPS Monster Hunters*, with the heroes unraveling the mysteries at its core, trying to figure out if Father Cohen was a sinner or saint . . . and what greater horrors those answers unravel.

When adventurers and mass-combat conflicts collide, you need to worry about *Heroes on the Mass Scale*. These optional rules – from frequent *Pyramid* contributor Christopher R. Rice – greatly expand the guidelines from *GURPS Mass Combat*, letting players calculate the Troop Strength of individual heroes in more depth. Changing perspective from lone heroes to the field of battle has never been easier!

Lots of organizations try to solve immediate crises or investigate problems that will plague humanity in the coming decades. But when you have trouble that might rear its head in the 23rd century, that's when you need *The Elvey Institute*. Go on a tour with *Pyramid* editor Steven Marsh as he reveals a strange group that serves the higher purpose of tackling problems a century or more down the line.

This issue concludes with a Random Thought Table that examines other ways of changing perspectives, and an Odds and Ends with more Elvey Institute options and a look at this month's intriguing cover.

Open your eyes to new possibilities. This month's *Pyramid* is going to change the way you look at things . . . and your games will never be better!

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FROM THE EDITOR

WANT SOME PERSPECTIVE? WE'VE GOT LOTS!

Many of the world's greatest games came about with a change in perspectives:

- "What if, instead of epic space-opera heroes, we're random smugglers and traders flitting around the galaxy?"
- "I know Lovecraft was writing in his contemporary era, but what if we made a game that delved into the Lovecraftian world, but it took place during the 1920s?"
- "Horror games focus on heroes killing the monsters, right? Imagine if, instead, the PCs are the monsters!"

Similar changes in perspectives have become a staple in this modern ("golden") age of television. Points of view shift from heroes to villains – even innocent bystanders or *dead victims*. On many shows, time jumps forward months or years at a time.

The mindset that led to the creation of classic games or compelling television isn't an untouchable magical resource.

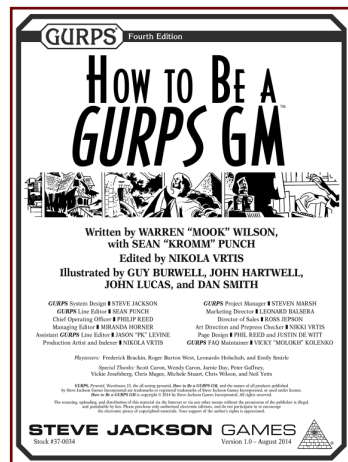


to Be a GURPS GM will likely appreciate Sean's in-depth treatment of the subject. It's also a fairly different kind of article – in its exhaustiveness if not its topic – and we look forward to hearing what you think (see below).

This issue also includes a guide to making the intersection between individual heroes and the larger forces of *GURPS Mass Combat* easier than ever. Nothing changes the perspective of a game more than going from an individual hero to large-scale conflicts (or vice versa). Rounding out this issue is a terror-tinted David Pulver adventure where perspectives are everything, and an oddball organization that takes the long view to extremes.

We love to shake things up at *Pyramid*, and hopefully this slightly different issue will change your own perspectives and give you food

for thought. The best gaming your table has ever seen may be just around the corner, awaiting a shift in perspectives to reach it.

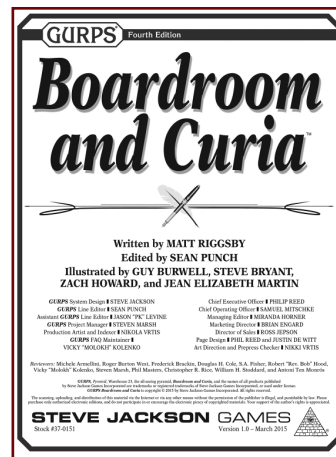


It just requires putting on your astronaut suit (metaphorically speaking) and going to strange new realms of imagination.

That's where this issue of *Pyramid* comes in. Its featured insight from Sean Punch on the nature of time and space – and how those matters affect a *GURPS* campaign – is a perfect way to reflect on two of the more important conceptual considerations in a game, and fans of the bestselling *How*

WRITE NOW, RIGHT NOW

So, what's your perspective on this month's *Pyramid*? Did we open up whole new vistas for your group? Or was our fish-eye lens a bit askew some place? Let us know privately via email pyramid@sjgames.com, or wade into the perceptive perspectives of the community at forums.sjgames.com.



Additional Material: Jason "PK" Levine

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THE LONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

BY SEAN PUNCH

There is no “typical” RPG campaign. Some gamers favor short stories, preferably told in a single game session; others prefer sagas in which the heroes have children and grow old, which might take years of real time to game out. Some want

a galaxy, a universe, or *several* universes to play in; others find exploring life in a town or even a household to be fun. **GURPS** can accommodate all of these possibilities, but the rules require a little fine-tuning in each case.

TIME

In offering rules for hours of sleep and study, days of healing and travel, months of work, years of aging, etc. – and by charging character points for traits tied to such things – **GURPS** silently assumes that the campaign will last for a while. That isn’t always a good assumption, though. Even when it *is*, the GM might not fully appreciate the work involved in keeping track of this stuff!

detailed rules (e.g., *Tactical Combat*, pp. B384-392) are best avoided, as they eat up precious gaming minutes.

Keep reading for many examples of these principles . . .

Power Level

Starting points in a short-term campaign should be whatever the story calls for – the briefest of adventures might star 0-point kids or 5,000-point gods.

Society

Most short-duration campaigns offer insufficient time for the heroes to feel the social consequences of their actions, from answering (or denying) duty’s call to currying favor. This limits the useful depth to go into with the rules governing society. For instance, such considerations as *Control Rating* (pp. B506-507) and *Legality* (p. B507) *could* matter in a short-and-sweet crime story or street drama, but if there’s no time for the PCs to get into trouble – or if that outcome would derail the campaign – then these are complications best ignored. At most, CR and LC might modify skill rolls to procure gear, bribe authorities, and so on, with high CR giving penalties, especially where items of low LC are concerned.

Consequently, traits like Alternate Identity, Claim to Hospitality, Clerical Investment, Duty, Legal Enforcement Powers, Legal Immunity, Rank, Reputation, Secret, Security Clearance, Social Regard, Social Stigma, Status, Tenure, and Zeroed are tricky. In each case, the GM must consider whether the story will run for long enough for the PCs to encounter NPCs who would care, or for any innate drawbacks or benefits (e.g., access to information) to emerge – or whether the adventure is *about* that trait. If any of that is the case, point cost is unchanged . . . though with plot importance *guaranteed*, it’s advisable not to permit cost reductions for people affected or low appearance rolls. Otherwise, the advantage or disadvantage is background color (p. 6).

Same Old Same Old

Traits and mechanics require tuning to a campaign’s *genre*, but not always to its proportions. Any rule not singled out in the main text doesn’t interact strongly enough with scope (great or small, temporal or spatial) to rate special treatment. Still, don’t overlook the fact that if the notes recommend modest starting points or earned points, the PCs will have fewer specialties apiece and less capability in such “universal” areas as combat and social interaction. Likewise, realism level is *almost* beside the point, but as cinematic tales tend to favor epic proportions, the GM of a brief or pocket-sized campaign will have to work harder to maintain a larger-than-life mood.

SHORT AND SWEET

An ultra-short campaign is really a one-off adventure. The most important advice for such an endeavor is this: If the game won’t run for long, then the range of likely events is limited. Thus, it’s important to use only traits and rules that are likely to arise before the curtain drops. Ditch the rest!

A related concern is economy of play time. While it isn’t *always* the case that a short-term campaign fills an extremely limited real-world time slot, that’s the smart bet. Where true,

Social Chameleon (p. B86) is a common casualty here. This advantage matters only if Rank or Status does. Where those are irrelevant, it, too, is just background color.

Technology Level

Campaign tech level is generally fixed in short stories, allowing the GM to simplify a great many rules. However, if the plot features token “primitives,” highly advanced aliens or mad scientists, etc., then *individuals* may hail from other TLs, possess Low TL or High TL, and buy technological skills (p. B168) associated with their personal TL.

Friends and Foes

Allies, Contacts, Enemies, Favors, Patrons, etc. should obey the guidelines for social traits. If they’re guaranteed to be part of the adventure, they need high appearance rolls – most likely 15 or less, though 12 or less works if the adventure offers repeated openings to involve them. Otherwise, they’re background color (p. 6).

Money Matters

Independent Income and Debt won’t matter if insufficient time passes for a payment to change hands. *Jobs* (pp. B516-517) and *Cost of Living* (pp. B265-266) likewise won’t have time to arise, meaning that Wealth serves exclusively to establish starting money and therefore gear. If equipment is central to the adventure, then it’s certainly fair to use Wealth that way, though replacing it with *Strictly Gear* (p. 8) is worth considering. Otherwise, *all* cash-related traits are background color (p. 6) . . . it isn’t as if they will matter in, say, a one-off adventure about a CEO, a doctor, a mechanic, and a penniless stowaway stranded on a beach.

Similar advice holds for traits that influence *Finding a Job* (p. B518), that concern applying oneself to an *existing* job (e.g., Laziness and Workaholic), or that affect cost of living (like Compulsive Generosity and Compulsive Spending). A campaign that won’t run for long enough to need monthly job rolls and payouts renders such problems mere quirks that won’t meaningfully limit what the PCs can accomplish. Miserliness belongs in the same boat. Greed is universally acceptable, though – it’s a wonderful motivator!

Character Concepts

To tell a quick, contained story, the right actors must be present. The GM has to spell out what’s needed, perhaps offering detailed character templates or even pregenerated characters – especially if the short campaign is a direct consequence of limited gaming time. When using free-form character creation, here more than ever it’s important to guide the players . . . an adventure about professors working in the lab for an afternoon doesn’t need a “combat monster” with Guns skills and Gunslinger, while on an hour-long WWII commando raid, it’s best to ignore scientific abilities.

Disadvantages

A disadvantage that won’t have time to trouble the character is no disadvantage – it’s background color (p. 6). Examples of this general principle are discussed in specific contexts

above and below. In support of this, the GM may set a minimum appearance roll (probably either 12 or less or 15 or less) for complications such as Duty or Enemy, and a maximum self-control roll (6 or less – or 9 or less if there will be many chances for it to arise) for anything that has one. Anything less likely to arise becomes a quirk or a feature.

Disadvantages tied to long-term degradation or goals should likewise matter less or not at all. Alcoholism is acceptable, but as it earns extra points for being difficult to buy off and inflicting an annual HT+2 roll to avoid attribute loss, the GM ought to knock -5 points off its value. Obsessions are worth a base -5 points whatever their focus, because they’re *all* “short term” in a short-term campaign. Cannot Learn is never going to come up, so it’s just color. And so on.

Skills

Short adventures call for rolls against relatively few skills, but telling the players *what those are* is liable to give away too much too soon. Forbidding skills for tasks that take longer than the game’s planned duration is worth considering – though a point or two can add interesting background color (p. 6). It’s perhaps best to curb investment in these and other “useless” capabilities not by listing skills to avoid or that don’t exist, but rather by clearly spelling out the campaign’s vital character roles.

Character Development

Earning and spending points, studying, and completing *Time Use Sheets* (pp. B499, B569) are unimportant in a short-term campaign. The GM will probably want to ignore such rules. *Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347) calls for unspent points, though, so if it’s going to be part of the game, then either warn players to hold back a few starting points or give out points especially for the purpose (see *GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys*).

Jumping Around

Time-travel plots are fine for short adventures, but player-controlled Jumper (Time), time-travel spells, etc. otherwise make a mess of things. The heroes can *look* forward or backward in time using divinatory magic, Precognition, Psychometry, and the like, but when they *act*, they should be limited to the stretch of game time the GM has reserved for the campaign.

Special Considerations

Fate and Fortune: In most short stories, Destiny (pp. B48, B131-132), good or bad, is extremely unlikely to matter, making it background color (p. 6) at best. In a tale *about* that fate, though, it has its full point value!

Lifespan: Ignore Age (p. B20) and *Age and Aging* (p. B444), and treat traits affecting life expectancy (Extended Lifespan, Longevity, Self-Destruct, Short Lifespan, Terminally Ill, and Unaging) as zero-point features. Extra Life is an exception; returning from the dead is still useful in a short-and-brutal game. (*Note*: These recommendations are worth considering even in not-so-short campaigns that aren’t intended to run for lifetimes and generations.)

Biology: Aging isn't the only process of living beings that's meaningless in a short-term campaign. Natural healing and related traits (Rapid Healing, Slow Healing, and Unhealing) – and ordinary illnesses and *their* traits (e.g., Immunity to Disease) – won't matter if the story doesn't run for days. Be warned that if there's no speedy supernatural or ultra-tech healing, this severely limits how much the game can involve in the way of combat and hazards. If the story is extremely short, even eating (and thus Doesn't Eat or Drink, Reduced Consumption, Universal Digestion, etc.) and sleeping (and Deep Sleeper, Doesn't Sleep, Extra Sleep, Insomniac, Less Sleep, Light Sleeper, Nightmares, Nocturnal, Sleepwalker, Sleepy, Slow Riser, and the like) might not

matter. Metabolism Control with Hibernation almost certainly won't be relevant. All of the advantages and disadvantages here are background color (above).

Limited Uses: As Luck, Super Luck, and other traits based on real-world time can verge on meaningless if the projected play time is short and the GM can't promise pacing that spaces out events that they could affect, it's often best to allow a flat number of uses (e.g., four uses of Luck in a four-hour one-shot game). Addiction, Chronic Pain, Lunacy, Maintenance, Oracle, Trickster, or any other trait – negative or positive – that arises once per game day or other limited time period faces similar problems, and should be allowed only if the campaign will go on for long enough for the drawbacks or benefits to kick in. The Limited Use modifier is permitted for advantages only when it would be a genuine limitation; "once per day" isn't a legitimate cost break on something that's only going to matter once in a short campaign! However, per-session traits such as Manic-Depressive, Serendipity, Unluckiness, and Wild Talent are fine – they'll work just once, but that doesn't change their point cost.

Long Tasks: Many traits (such as Gadgeteer) and rules (notably *Long Tasks*, p. B346, but also *New Inventions*, pp. B473-474, *Enchanting*, pp. B481-482, and similar specific cases) take a long time to use or even *matter*. If the GM wants to incorporate such things, the adventure should include a stretch of game-time compression to justify that; otherwise, leave them out. Any advantage with a Preparation Required limitation that would take more time than the story offers falls into this category, meaning that the GM ought to forbid that drawback.

Too Long! The GM must keep an eye out for any PC-generated effect that lasts a very long time. In particular, if an advantage is enhanced with Extended Duration to the point where it won't end during the campaign, the GM has every right to insist that it either get a more modest level that *will* end or be treated as permanent (+150%) even if it isn't.

BACKGROUND COLOR

Much of this advice talks of "background color": reducing inapplicable traits to perks or quirks – or even to zero-point features, which is tantamount to omitting them. That way, disadvantages that aren't actually inconvenient won't generate points (which is unbalanced), and players won't squander points on worthless capabilities (which is unfair). Some guidelines to help the GM categorize such things:

Perks: Anything that would *cost* points if the campaign wasn't of such vast or tiny scope, *and* that could conceivably offer a near-trivial edge, becomes a perk. For instance, being the monarch of an ordinary country demands Status 7 [35] in a campaign set at home, but it's just a perk in a galactic space opera with billions of worlds, perhaps giving +1 to reaction rolls from other starlost royalty. Likewise, Multimillionaire is worth 75+ points if jobs and investments factor into the story – but in a brief shipwreck drama, it may be nothing but a perk explaining why your clothes are better-made. And in game set entirely in an inland town, Navigation (Sea), Seamanship, Shiphandling, etc. could be replaced by a "Sailor" perk that allows an IQ roll to answer nautical questions.

Quirks: Similarly, anything that would *give back* points *and* that the GM could use against the character becomes a quirk. For example, Terminally Ill is a huge disadvantage in a long-running campaign, but in a short-term one, it's at worst a quirk that lets the GM assess an extra 1 FP or -1 to HT rolls when you overdo it.

Features: If the GM is disinclined to give the trait *any* credence – if it's just a talking point ("Don't you know who I am?", "An hour ago, I was worried about living out the year. Now I'll be lucky to survive the week!", etc.) – then it's worth zero points. This might mean that the GM agrees not to use the feature against the PC and the player promises not to argue for advantage; if the either party is hesitant, then call it a perk or a quirk, as appropriate. If the player and GM can agree, though, a fun alternative is to give it both upsides *and* downsides.

Skills: A point in a "worthless" skill amounts to background color. The player can suggest minor uses – and the GM may go along with these, provided that the requests don't turn to pestering.

OVER WHEN IT'S OVER

A long-term campaign offers the heroes and possibly their offspring or replacements the opportunity to live out entire lives in play. The spotlight might shine on epic deeds – such as revolutionizing technology, fighting wars, and building empires – or on forging and exploring ordinary relationships (making *GURPS Social Engineering* essential!). The structure may consist of successive adventure arcs, each practically a campaign in itself, or slice-of-life vignettes. Whatever the approach, plenty of uneventful downtime, fast-forwarding, and time compression are necessary to shoehorn game-time lifespans into real-time hours.

Such a saga demands a campaign that runs for a long time in real life. Many gaming groups have managed to meet weekly for over a decade, logging *hundreds* of sessions. This means there's room for the fussiest rules and bookkeeping; for instance, nobody will object *too* much to an evening devoted to the preparations necessary for a *GURPS Mass Combat* battle if it's just one gathering out of hundreds.

Power Level

The story comes first – but if the GM desires slow-but-steady character improvement throughout, then it's a good idea to start with low-powered heroes. This makes their rise to power a campaign theme, which aids storytelling and eases the group into roleplaying movers and shakers. *Starting* at the top risks leaving nowhere else to go!

*The true test of civilization
is not the census, nor the size
of the cities, nor the crops –
no, but the kind of man
the country turns out.*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Society

Long-term campaigns require significant world-building. The GM must pore over *Law and Customs* (pp. B506-508), *Society and Government Types* (pp. B509-510), *Economics* (pp. B514-519), and so on; decide on the setting's social landscape; and then spell out the ramifications for the PCs. Considerations such as the Legality Class of gear and exactly what Status implies have to be addressed up front. With plenty of time to tell the tale, it's workable – and exciting – for the heroes to be arrested, hold political office, lead rebellions, and a hundred other things.

Consequently, any trait that could be deemed “social” – Duty, Legal Enforcement Powers, Rank, Reputation, Social Stigma, Status, etc. – is likely to become relevant in play. Though some might be prohibited for story reasons, campaign duration alone isn't cause to rule them out, as anything suitable for PCs might matter eventually. The players must be prepared to accept change in these areas as fortunes rise and fall, but if factors outside their control can erase advantages or add disadvantages, lowering point totals, then it's only fair for advantages gained or disadvantages shed as part of the plot to raise point totals for free (all *other* improvements still cost earned points!). Alternate Identity, Secret, and Zeroed are particularly ephemeral . . . given enough time, somebody *will* discover the truth, negating Alternate Identity or Zeroed, or causing Secret to balloon into other problems.

Technology Level

Campaign TL may well change as time passes. It's recommended that the GM map out TL transitions and perhaps offer the players ways to shift the boundaries somewhat by inventing things (or by *obstructing* innovation). Low TL and High TL relative to the starting TL are allowed, but the campaign's *current* TL is always worth zero points and personal TL is priced relative to that. If overall TL later increases, heroes who don't keep themselves up to date lose points; if TL plummets, they gain points. This process is automatic – if an apocalypse

knocks society back to TL0, TL8 heroes gain High TL 8 [40], while if society attains TL9, they acquire Low TL 1 [-5] unless they pay 5 points to change with the times.

As for technological skills (p. B168), the GM decides whether long-lived PCs who keep up must pay for constant relearning. If so, it's fairest to let players trade in points from lower-TL skills to buy higher-TL versions. If not, it's reasonable to allow heroes who live through multiple TLs to express their skills' TL as *ranges* at no extra cost; e.g., if society advances from TL2 to TL3 in play, a PC with Smith/TL2 might end up with Smith/TL2-3.

Friends and Foes

Associated NPCs and Contacts (see *Friends and Foes*, p. B31) are *made* for long-running campaigns. If they depart for distant lands or die off, the GM decides whether someone else takes up the torch or if the relevant trait just fades away, changing the PC's point total. It's probably fairest to assume continuity but to offer the *option* to buy off Enemies and reassign points in Allies, Contacts, and Patrons when such an NPC exits the campaign.

Dependents are a special case: Young ones age, grow more competent, and end up giving fewer disadvantage points. Generally, a “free” increase in PC point total over such a lengthy time period is a fair payoff for all those years spent looking out for the NPC. This is especially true of children born in play, who initially lower their parents' point totals with a sizable disadvantage!

Of course, many longtime NPC colleagues aren't Allies, Contacts, or Patrons. Quite a few work for pay or out of a sense of professional obligation. While *Loyalty of Hirelings*, *Loyalty of Slaves*, and *Loyalty Checks* (pp. B518-519) are fussy rules, the extra detail is worthwhile in a lengthy campaign.

Money Matters

In the long run, Wealth-related traits (pp. B25-26) – as well as woes like Compulsive Spending, Greed, and Miserliness – are highly relevant if the background isn't cashless or otherwise financially egalitarian. Fortunes can be made and lost over the course of a long campaign, so the GM is advised to track the PCs' expenses and holdings. Net-worth increases after the game begins don't cost points *unless* the player wants to lock them in as credit rating, family holdings, investments, job security, etc. Such social connections require the purchase of Wealth or Independent Income; cash alone does not, but never enjoys plot protection. Thus, these advantages are really “finances as Signature Gear,” without which a person enjoys no guarantee of a job or the benefits of *What Cost of Living Gets You* (p. B266), and must accept that lawyers, taxes, and rivals will thwart empire-building.

Jobs (pp. B516-517) and *Cost of Living* (pp. B265-266) have been hinted at already, and for good reason: In a long-term campaign, most PCs are likely to have employment, need to eat, and owe upkeep, taxes, etc. on holdings. The aforementioned rules – as well as *Finding a Job* (p. B518) and *Professional Skills* (pp. B215-216) – should see regular use. When not just months but years or decades pass, job rolls and monthly credits and debits offer ways to make workaday matters significant without filling an excessive amount of real-world time with boring detail.

Character Concepts

If the campaign is going to go on and on and on, it's important not to place excessive constraints on the players' choices, as most gamers can only play the same character for a long time if it's one they truly *want* to play. Years, decades, and centuries contain the germ of hundreds or thousands of hours of gaming, so it's worthwhile – and ultimately just a drop in the time bucket – for the GM to sit down with each player and spend a few hours fine-tuning the hero's background, traits, and place in the universe. Consequently, character templates are rarely optimal for PCs, though the GM will find them wonderful for generating the army of *NPCs* who will march through the campaign.

Disadvantages

Most disadvantages are acceptable in a long-term campaign. If the GM can't make a drawback meaningful over the course of years, generations, or lifetimes . . . well, that isn't the *player's* fault! Indeed, to keep disruptive problems such as Enemies and Berserk from constantly derailing the campaign – which gets tiresome after dozens or hundreds of sessions – the GM may restrict appearance rolls to no higher than 9 or less or even 6 or less, and set a minimum self-control roll of 12 or less, rising to 15 or less for seriously troublesome traits.

Skills

If an activity fits the campaign in the first place, then enough time will make it nearly impossible to avoid. As a result, heroes ought to have access to *all* skills that suit the setting and genre. The timeframe may afford them the opportunity to affect large-scale change, too, which calls for such oft-overlooked skills as Economics, Finance, Politics, and Strategy. The same goes for skills relevant to inventing – especially Engineer. It's worth reminding the players of all this. In a *really* long-term campaign, the GM might also give out a free point in History every few decades or generations!

Character Development

In long-term campaigns, character-point awards are best kept modest or infrequent, unless the heroes' meteoric rise to power is an *intentional* theme. The GM may want the players to fill out *Time Use Sheets* (pp. B499, B569), too, and might even declare study to be the primary means of improving skills. Whatever the case may be, the GM must paint a clear picture of what earned points can and can't buy, as there will be countless requests. Finally, it's wise to take an easy-come, easy-go view of PC point totals: losses (such as crippled limbs) reduce points while gains (e.g., Reputation or Status awards for great deeds) increase them – and the latter are “free” as long as they're part of the story rather than player fiat.

STRICTLY GEAR

Wealth (pp. B25-26) and related rules tacitly assume medium- to long-term campaigns where the heroes have bank accounts and jobs. However, that's a bad assumption in short stories, adventures set in tightly confined areas with little access to the outside, and epics that cover so much ground that financial standing “back home” carries no clout. There, *gear* matters – not money – and the GM may want to pick one of these options:

Linear Gear: Everyone begins with gear worth whatever amount the GM sets. More than that costs 1 point per extra 50% of dollar value.

Exponential Gear: The GM sets a gear budget. Those who want more look up points spent in the “Size” column of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) and read some fraction of “Linear Measurement” in yards as the budget multiple. A fraction of 1/2 is nice; that way, 0 points give $\times 1$ and every 6 points give $\times 10$.

Either way, some riders apply:

Flat-Cost Signature Gear: Signature Gear neither has a variable point cost nor provides gear. It's just a perk that buys the usual “plot protection” against permanent loss for one item of any value. The GM decides what articles qualify. Personal kit is fine; huge things (like spaceships) might not be.

Upper Limit: An upper limit is advisable! This might be quite low if the PCs are confined to a short adventure or a small region, impressively high if their quest spans time or space.

Poverty: Having less gear is a disadvantage, but without jobs in the picture, it's less meaningful than low Wealth: -2 points for $\times 1/2$, -3 points for $\times 1/5$, or -5 points for *no* gear.

What Gear?

The question of what gear to allow overlaps the *Society*, *Technology Level*, *Money Matters*, and *Character Concepts* headings. In general:

- If the campaign type recommends detailed social mechanics, the GM should enforce Legality Class, Status-based restrictions on going armed, and so on.
- The GM's decisions about TL and the PCs' access to different TLs will limit the gear available. If the PCs can hail from many TLs, the GM will have a lot of questions to answer!
- Gear that's bought rather than assigned is subject to the campaign's money mechanics: Wealth, Signature Gear, or *Strictly Gear* (above). The GM's decision here therefore affects how well equipped the PCs will be.
- If character options are limited, gear should be, too. If character options are almost unlimited, gear should support this. This refers to the number of options per item type – not to the number of articles a PC may own. Even if there are just a few pregenerated loadouts, each can include heaps of stuff; e.g., in a short story about a military operation, nobody can go shopping but the army might assign hundreds of items. Especially in short-term campaigns, time devoted to equipping PCs is time not spent roleplaying!

Jumping Around

Arguably, Jumper (Time) is best-suited to long-term gaming, as the GM presumably has an idea of where the campaign is headed. However, it becomes important to keep good notes on campaign history to consult when the PCs hop backward, and also to cook up some technobabble for why the heroes didn't notice themselves visiting the past back when the players were gaming it out. It's equally essential to record jumps *forward*, so that the PCs can encounter or avoid themselves when the campaign reaches the relevant junctures. It's probably simplest to declare that time travel splits off separate timelines – but even then, a sense of continuity inspired by what happens in play is better for player suspension of disbelief.

Abilities that look forward or backward in time – e.g., Precognition and Psychometry – demand similar diligence. In particular, the GM must ensure the Psychometry reveals events consistent with what the PCs witnessed at the time, and that current events are at least somewhat consistent with past precognitive visions.

Many complications become important and worth introducing into long-term campaigns.

Special Considerations

Culture and Language: Given enough time, Cultural Familiarities and Languages evolve. This doesn't change the traits or point totals of people who live through such evolution – but the GM may consider linguistic drift important enough

to charge a point for an Accent perk (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks*, p. 12) if somebody wants to master the speech of multiple eras.

Sickness and Health: Crippling Injury (pp. B420-423), *Recovery* (pp. B423-425), *Illness* (pp. B442-444), and similar complications are worth introducing into a long-running campaign, as there will be time for PCs to weaken and recover – and to feel meaningful consequences if recovery isn't complete.

Lifespan: Age (p. B20) and *Age and Aging* (p. B444) become important, along with traits like Longevity, Self-Destruct, Short Lifespan, Terminally Ill, and Unaging. The GM must rule on how Extra Life interacts with death from old age, too – do the elderly come back that way or are they reborn as their youthful selves? And if there are child PCs, the GM has to decide whether the players pay points for or simply gain attribute levels (and thus points) as their characters grow up. Since losses to aging deplete point totals, the campaign will feel more consistent if youthful increases are also “free.”

Lastly, if high levels of Metabolism Control are possible, allowing heroes to spend a long time in a trance, the GM needs to think about whether to allow those roleplaying sleepers to play more-active (and perhaps less-powerful) characters in the interim.

Resource Tracking: A theme implicit in several of the previous discussions is worth spelling out: Long-running campaigns make it worthwhile to do detailed book-keeping – for ammunition, for money, for meals and starvation fatigue (p. B426), for maintaining personal gear (pp. B483-485), for *everything*. Lengthy sagas are often ultimately *about* struggles for resources, be those beans, bullets, land, or troops in fighting form. If such details matter, play them up!

SPACE

GURPS quietly assumes that the PCs will travel. Why else would the *Basic Set* offer traits covering linguistic and cultural differences, skills like Area Knowledge (Galaxy) and Navigation (Hyperspace), and everything from hiking rules to stats for faster-than-light starships? Or a whole chapter on the Infinite Worlds setting? Yet a campaign may well not require such complications. On the flip side, it *might* – and at extremely large scales, the sheer volume of planning involved means some details may be overlooked.

GOOD THINGS, SMALL PACKAGES

A campaign set entirely in a town, village, hamlet, or other small space – including a soap opera staged in a palace, manor house, suburb, office, or similar – doesn't require rules for things that don't exist or can't occur *within* its confines. It ought to recognize the outside world, with rare exceptions (e.g., tiny, inescapable prison dimensions), but it can abstract away events at the borders. The GM can save a lot of time by dispensing with anything that isn't central to what happens *inside* the setting.

On the other hand, the *setting itself* needs extra detail. If the players are honor-bound to keep their characters there,

they'll be exploring and pushing the boundaries. The GM may find *GURPS City Stats* helpful for defining local conditions – or use the *GURPS Spaceships* series (notably *GURPS Spaceships 5: Exploration and Colony Spacecraft*), if the backdrop is something like a generation ship on which the heroes are passengers.

Power Level

No particular power level works better or worse here, but the heroes can often get by on fewer points, because the range of probable situations and interactions – and therefore essential capabilities – will be smaller.

Society

In a confined campaign, it's vital to set limits on what social interactions happen “on screen.” For instance, if there are law enforcers and the heroes risk being arrested for wrongdoing, *Control Rating* (pp. B506-507) and *Legality* (p. B507) are definitely worth the fuss – but if that would derail the campaign, ignore those rules. Such thinking holds for *all* social mechanics. Like a short-term game, a highly localized one can often get away with treating greater society as a “black box” outside the story's boundaries and abstracting its concerns as modifiers to dice rolls.

Thus, social traits are reasonable only if they don't reach outside the story's borders. If something like Clerical Investment, Duty, Legal Enforcement Powers, Rank, or Tenure matters at work, but "work" happens off-stage and the game focuses on the heroes at home, then it's background color (p. 6) unless it influences details we *do* see; e.g., the size of a PC's residence. Within those constraints, traits with variable scope or frequency of appearance are fine, but require adjustment for their significance to the campaign. For instance, in a small-town drama, Claim to Hospitality is worth 10 points if you're greeted warmly in *every* household, Legal Immunity costs 15 points if *nothing* you do will be challenged, and a Reputation with *all* the townsfolk gets no cost reduction for a small group.

Narrow spatial scope, like tight temporal scope, frequently renders Social Chameleon meaningless; allow it only if Rank or Status appears in the setting and getting along with those who possess it is meaningful. Similar advice applies to Intolerance, Sense of Duty, Xenophilia, Xenophobia, and related disadvantages: If nobody the PC would particularly like or hate will visit the setting, it's background color.

Technology Level

A small location generally has a fixed TL, which needn't be that of the surrounding society. Heroes with a different personal TL must take Low TL or High TL, even if they would be "average" in the outside world. Or perhaps setting and surroundings share the same TL, and these traits reflect distant origins. Such details are relevant only as color, as the PCs won't be leaving; their standing is always priced *relative to the locals*.

Many traits are worth points only if they have influence within the campaign's boundaries.

Friends and Foes

Allies, Contacts, Enemies, Favors, Patrons, etc. are similar to other social traits: They are worth points only if they have influence within the campaign's boundaries. Provided that's the case, any frequency of appearance can work. For instance, even in a hamlet of 20 souls, an Enemy might represent anything from bit part (like the token jerk in a 1970s sitcom) to full-time local villain.

Restricted spatial scope can also cast doubt on Mindlink and Special Rapport. These advantages are best avoided unless the other person is within the campaign's borders – or the GM wants to feed in outside information to advance the plot!

Money Matters

Wealth-related traits (pp. B25-26) and the rules to which they refer matter only if the backdrop is one in which the PCs work and confront social differences. This is possible

in the smallest of settings! For instance, a drama that never leaves the office and focuses on professional life will find *Jobs* (pp. B516-517) and *Cost of Living* (pp. B265-266) indispensable. Something similar goes for a soap opera where the workplace is off-screen but homes and financial woes are not.

On the other hand, many tiny settings are isolated in such a way that NPCs or institutions with an interest in the heroes' financial standing have no presence or power within the campaign's borders. In those circumstances, the GM can jettison finicky money-related rules and reduce the associated traits to mere background color (p. 6). In a cabin in the middle of nowhere, nobody *cares* how much you own or owe on account. Equipment is dear to most adventurers, and a common exception; where important, the GM can handle it with *Strictly Gear* (p. 8).

Character Concepts

Compact settings typically support only a modest range of character types, which the GM must outline for the players. Keeping the inhabitants appropriate to the backdrop is essential to bringing the place to life. Character templates are a powerful tool here, as it's often possible to define a near-complete set of suitable roles.

Disadvantages

To summarize a concept that appears repeatedly above and below: If a disadvantage's trigger doesn't exist within the campaign's boundaries, then the trait isn't a disadvantage but background color (p. 6).

Addiction, Dependency, Draining, Increased Life Support, Maintenance, Restricted Diet, and similar problems that rely on the availability of a substance or an action merit vigilance for almost the opposite reason: If their demands can't be met within the setting, the character is doomed! It's reasonable to adjust such problems to be worth more points to reflect *scarcity*, but *absence* typically amounts to Terminally Ill – if so, call it that. And anything that leads to "dead shortly after the campaign starts" is best forbidden.

See *Rarity* (p. 11) for further, related considerations.

Skills

Campaigns of limited spatial scope call for fewer skills, as many things simply won't arise in the course of the game. By contrast with short-duration campaigns, though, it's more acceptable – even advisable – to warn the players away from worthless skills. In a campaign about gang members in an American inner city, it wouldn't even *make sense* for the PCs to know Animal Handling (Camels), Area Knowledge (Arabian Desert), and Survival (Desert)! A few points in marginal skills can add background color (p. 6), but that's about it. Well-constructed templates are a great way to convey the desired balance.

On the other hand, this is a chance for narrow specialties to shine. The GM may want to define Area Knowledge and Current Affairs skills for particular neighborhoods or even buildings. Ultra-specific kinds of Hidden Lore covering such trivia as the secret of Mrs. McGruder's garden shed are also fun.

Finally, it just about always makes sense to ignore *Planet Types* (p. B180), the need to specialize Naturalist and Survival by world, and comparable rules.

Character Development

A campaign that unfolds in tight quarters merits serious thought about what can be learned there. Options will be limited, even (or especially!) when it comes to abilities valuable in the specific context; for instance, in the Prison Dimension, the Escape Prison Dimension spell is surely useful and just as surely unavailable. It's also prudent to make improvement slow and/or to set upper limits, so that the heroes don't rapidly outgrow the setting; e.g., in a manor-house soap opera that's *supposed* to feature the occasional awkward relationship, the GM should take steps to prevent everyone from racing toward level 20+ in social skills.

Jumping Around

The GM will want to forbid Jumper and Warp (and similar capabilities, such as the Teleport spell) in little campaigns, for what should be obvious reasons: If the PCs just leave, there won't be much of a game! If limited access to resources is part of the plan – and especially if gear is important – Snatcher is also a bad fit.

Be aware that Flight, Tunneling, Walk on Air, Walk on Liquid, and similar potent movement abilities (even high Enhanced Move) can be equally disruptive. If the GM intends to douse the spotlight when the PCs step out of the setting – or won't *permit* them to leave – then it's fairest not to let players waste points on such capabilities.

Special Considerations

Cartography: A tiny campaign can forgo extensive atlases of countries, planets, solar systems, etc., but requires detailed maps of the immediate setting – possibly including building floor plans. If the PCs must spend all their time there, it's only fair to show the players what “there” looks like! This means many area and room maps (*Maps*, pp. B490-492). If the heroes have personal residences, the GM might ask the *players* to share some of the workload.

Travel: Anything travel-related is of limited utility if the PCs stay put. The GM may ignore the rules for hiking, flying, and so on unless the heroes will be taking an awful lot of short-range jaunts for some reason. Likewise, the GM can omit the likes of Absolute Direction, Motion Sickness, Area Knowledge specialties for faraway places, Current Affairs (Travel), and skills for long-range vehicles (e.g., almost all Crewman, Piloting, and Shiphandling skills, plus Navigation specialties besides Land), leaving them off pregenerated characters, templates, and possibly the list of what's available in general. These become background color (p. 6).

Hazards: The GM can safely ignore rules for hazards such as cold, unusual gravity, high altitude, and seasickness *except* when these things define setting status quo. As a result, advantages, disadvantages, and skills that interact with environments not found inside the campaign boundaries become background color (p. 6). Examples include Amphibious and Speak Underwater in a campaign set entirely in parched desert, Space Sickness if nobody can visit space, Timesickness if there's no jumping around, and a great many Survival skills.

Culture and Language: Campaigns set in offices, castles, towns, etc. often feature an extremely homogeneous cast and don't absolutely require *Culture* (p. B23) or *Language* (pp. B23-25). The GM may reduce the associated traits (Cultural Familiarities, Cultural Adaptability, Languages, and Language Talent) to background color (p. 6), unless the story focuses on something like first contact, translating old texts, or foreign exchange students; in cases like those, such things have their usual point costs and the GM may want to build them into templates.

Physical Appearance: Unless the campaign packs a lot of different races into a small space, it's best to forbid the Universal enhancement on Appearance, as it will be mostly meaningless. Mistaken Identity is *exceedingly* unlikely to matter if the cast is very small.

RARITY

When an advantage (such as Permeation or Resistant), a disadvantage (e.g., Dread or Vulnerability), or a modifier (like Accessibility, or Limited for DR) judges price based on how often something turns up, it's usually simplest to stick to the examples in the *Basic Set*. At the extremes of temporal or spatial scope, though, it's fairer to assess such things on the basis of rarity *in the campaign*.

Short-run campaigns and one-off adventures may not run for long enough for many substances or conditions to turn up. Tiny settings might not include many (or *any*) examples. In either case, this justifies a rarity increase.

Campaigns of epic proportions should take the long view. For instance, “Only on a planet” isn't a meaningful limitation on Earth, but it's a restrictive condition if the heroes mostly travel through outer space. On the other hand, something like interstellar dust is rare on Earth, but those spacemen won't have trouble finding it.

In all cases, beware of traits with rarity “baked in.” If enormous *or* tiny scale – in time *or* space – makes an advantage less useful or a disadvantage more severe, subtract a few points to reduce advantage cost or raise disadvantage value. If the opposite is true, add points.

Finally, if an ability is so rarely useful – or a disadvantage is so unlikely to be troublesome – that rarity drops off the end of the scale, just call it background color (p. 6).

KNOW NO LIMIT

GURPS was designed to support campaigns of vast spatial scope. There's *GURPS Space* for galaxy-sized adventure, and *Other Planes of Existence* (pp. B519-522) and *GURPS Infinite Worlds* for gamers who feel that one Creation isn't enough. But with great size comes great headaches. Here's something to help with that . . .

Power Level

Huge campaigns demand lots of points. It isn't *fun* for the heroes to drift between planets or universes without the means to perform suitably epic tasks. If the GM feels strongly about starting out small, rapid advancement is recommended.

Society

In large-scale campaigns, world-building rules such as *Law and Customs* (pp. B506-508), *Society and Government Types* (pp. B509-510), and *Economics* (pp. B514-519) very much matter. However, each part of call has its own answers to questions like “What’s legal?” and “Who’s in charge?”, and the GM must answer these. This makes it tricky to price traits that interact with such concerns, as their value may fluctuate widely or average to nil.

Broadly, any social trait limited to a small corner of the setting could fairly be given the modifiers under *People Affected* (p. B27), while anything more localized than those multipliers allow for becomes background color (p. 6). To be worth full price, advantages and disadvantages require campaign-wide scope. Groups affected should be adjusted with setting size in mind – as should frequencies of appearance, where these emulate the odds of running into somebody who cares or simulate the effects of vast distances on such people catching up with the character. On the other hand, social traits related to powerful, setting-wide cultures and organizations cost full points, and where they come in levels, the universe may well be populous enough to go past Earthly limits; e.g., Rank 15 or Status 20 might be meaningful if there are enough people to fill out the hierarchy.

Finally, note that expansive backgrounds are often highly multi-racial. Traits such as Alternate Identity, Mistaken Identity, and Secret Identity are unlikely to matter if most races can’t tell individual aliens apart. Likewise, Social Regard and Social Stigma may be too tied to alien cultural norms to be relevant on the next planet or timeline. The GM might want to declare these things background color, too.

Technology Level

It’s best to establish a “campaign TL” that reflects the setting’s dominant, average, or most common technology. Low TL and High TL are priced relative to this standard for *everyone*. That way, no matter where the story goes, point totals reflect TL differences: NPCs from primitive worlds have lower point totals; those from advanced ones, higher point totals. PCs hailing from these places can either operate at the campaign TL at no cost – and be more or less advanced than their homefolk – or keep their native TL and claim or pay 5 points per TL, respectively.

This makes it essential to specify how much Low TL or High TL starting PCs can have, and what technological skills (p. B168) are available at each TL. The GM must set clear limits on not just *how advanced* the heroes can be, but also *in what areas*.

Finally, when the background is genuinely cosmic in scope, the odds of encountering alien or simply incomprehensible technology are high. Everybody should read *Different Technologies* (pp. B513-514), and the GM may occasionally invoke *Futuristic and Alien Artifacts* and *Weird Technology* (pp. B478-479).

Friends and Foes

Friends and Foes (p. B31) who are tied to one place in a campaign of sweeping scope work like other social traits and amount to background color (p. 6). Those who travel should have appearance rolls that reflect their mobility.

Vast organizations like galaxy-wide brotherhoods (and their representatives) ought to get appearance rolls that match their reach. And if an associated NPC – usually a Dependent or an Ally, but possibly a Contact, an Enemy, or a Patron aboard the PC’s starship or whatever – travels *with* the hero, appearance rolls can have the usual range of values.

Chancellor Palpatine: I don’t know how much longer I can hold off the vote, my friends. More and more star systems are joining the Separatists.

Mace Windu: If they do break away – Chancellor Palpatine: I will not let this Republic that has stood for a thousand years be split in two!

– *Star Wars Episode II: Attack of the Clones*

Money Matters

Wealth-related traits (pp. B25-26) and *Cost of Living* (pp. B265-266) matter only if there’s a near-universal standard of solvency *and* a way to communicate credit rating, debt, and so on over vast distances. *Jobs* (pp. B516-517) likewise falls by the wayside if there’s no way for bosses and employees to contact one another. Barring a far-reaching financial system, Wealth ends up establishing starting gear and little else. The GM may want to dispense with all this and use *Strictly Gear* (p. 8) – perhaps the exponential variant with a high upper limit, if the heroes own pricey starships or parachronic tech. It’s even simpler to have someone issue the PCs their initial means of travel, or to give it to them as a campaign assumption, and possibly to do the same with other plot-essential equipment.

When the campaign has a clear home base, though, the rules for money, jobs, and cost of living work normally *if* the PC’s return there between missions. In that case, money-related traits have their usual point value and gear has its usual cash cost. The GM may still want to make special exceptions for conveyances, however.

Character Concepts

With no sure-fire way to know what might eventually prove useful, an expansive mindset is best. Before saying, “You can’t do that,” the GM might make a counteroffer: “If you want to do that, here’s the version I’m comfortable with.” This isn’t the same as devoting a large amount of time to fine-tuning each PC, which is only worthwhile if the campaign also has significant temporal scope; rather, it’s about having a comprehensive set of character guidelines that answer questions about how the setting works. Such an approach would benefit any campaign, but one that might go almost anywhere *requires* it – and given the possible range of PCs, it’s a more practical tool than character templates.

A campaign that sweeps between planets, even universes often features numerous playable races, too. The GM must create racial templates ahead of time and think about how they'll interact when they meet and what the included traits imply for regular travel between worlds. A race that has to stay on its home planet, or that can't survive without mana in a game where most of creation lacks mana, *isn't* very suitable for PCs.

Disadvantages

Vast spatial scope makes certain problems easier to avoid. To account for this in the case of disadvantages with appearance or self-control rolls, simply restrict the former to 9 or less or 6 or less, and the latter to 12 or less or 15 or less. That way, players won't be raking in as many points for troubles their characters are ducking out on.

Rarity (p. 11) can cut either way: Something that's rare on one world might be easy to find when you can visit dozens or *millions* of worlds . . . but if it's tied to a single world among a multitude, it can be impossibly hard to find. The GM may alter point value to match, making the disadvantage more severe if the rarity shift inconveniences the hero, less severe if it benefits the PC.

A road that does not lead to other roads always has to be retraced, unless the traveller chooses to rust at the end of it.

– Tehyi Hsieh

Skills

In this kind of campaign, almost anything goes when it comes to skills. However, the GM must decide whether to bother with extremely narrow *regional* specialties, because something like Area Knowledge (Hometown) or Current Affairs (Hometown) can be a waste of points in a game that starts with everyone leaving home, never to return. A good compromise is to allow “useless” character points to migrate to more-valuable skills; e.g., points in narrow Area Knowledge and Current Affairs specialties might slide over to Area Knowledge (Galaxy), Free Fall, Spacer, and Vacc Suit as the heroes explore the galaxy in their starship. Generally, it's fairer to let characters make IQ rolls to recall stuff from back home, should that matter, than it is to require skills for such knowledge.

If “vast” means “lots of worlds,” it also becomes important to enforce *Planet Types* (p. B180) and the requirement to specialize Naturalist and Survival by specific planet. However, if the number of specialties is too large, characters can end up with hopelessly diluted skill lists – or pouring endless points into rarely used skills. It's often best to err on the cinematic side and quietly ignore these rules.

One thing that can't be ignored is the skill set needed to travel. Going from A to B to C by starship many times per adventure (or even game session!) calls for people to know

Spacer, at least, and maybe more-technical skills. Constant use of Jumper or Warp – or equivalent tech – necessitates Body Sense. The GM's templates, if any, ought to offer these things, and players shouldn't omit them when creating characters free-form.

Finally, *Familiarity* (p. B169) can become a big deal in a large setting. There might be endless weapons to shoot with Guns, dances to perform with Dancing, and plants to grow with Gardening. In a realistic campaign, this makes it important to keep track of starting familiarities and those acquired in play. These cost only a few hours to acquire, so the issues of dilution and wasted points don't arise.

Character Development

If the campaign spans many worlds, the GM can be free and easy with character-point awards, as there are always new horizons, scarier foes, and so on in the universe(s). There's lots to learn, too, making it simpler for the GM to list the few things that *don't* fit the campaign vision than to detail every possible option. Finally, as travel will fill large swaths of game time, use of *Improvement Through Study* (pp. B292-294) and *Time Use Sheets* (pp. B499, B569) is recommended.

Jumping Around

Warp and Jumper (World) fit best into campaigns of vast physical scope. The GM must address questions about what modifiers are required, common, and forbidden on those advantages, and prepare lists of distances for Warp and accessible worlds for Jumper.

Special Considerations

Cartography: If the campaign ranges far and wide, planetary and solar-system maps – and perhaps schematics of other dimensions – become important. The details of any one building, town, or even nation become a whole lot less significant, as the PCs won't be there for long. An exception is the deck plan of any vehicle the heroes use; if they'll be aboard their conveyance much of the time, then it's the only “home” and small area of relevance, meaning it merits extra attention. See *Maps* (pp. B490-492) for more on this topic.

Range: If distances are truly cosmic, many important traits, devices, and effects might end up being too short-ranged to matter. To battle insurmountable range penalties for an ability, use an enhancement like Malediction (p. B106) or Long-Range (*GURPS Powers*, pp. 108-109) to shift modifiers from the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) or worse to *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241), or to shed them altogether. The GM may wish to do something similar for vital spells and technologies. If the absolute range of a capability is so small as to be irrelevant, consider lots of Increased Range (p. B106) for advantages, and boosting the maximum range of gadgets. Such measures aren't absolutely necessary, but they're a good idea on galaxy-spanning adventures featuring telepathy, FTL radio, and so on. And when the gap is between *planes of existence*, don't overlook World-Spanning (*Powers*, p. 109), and consider allowing communications and similar abilities to work at a flat -10 per boundary crossed, as in *Casting Interdimensionally* (*GURPS Thaumatology*, p. 86).

Transportation: It should be amply clear by now that travel is a very big deal in an expansive campaign. The GM will want to be conversant with *Vehicles* (pp. B462-470), and possibly use supplements such as the *GURPS Spaceships* series. *Interdimensional Travel* (pp. B529-535) may be relevant, too, depending on the direction the game takes. Operation skills are essential, and the GM must ensure that they appear on any templates offered. And if the journeys are between planes of existence, read up on *Travel Between Game Worlds* (p. B520).

Hazards: When the PCs might end up anywhere, any danger might turn up! The GM must be familiar with *Hazards* (pp. B428-437) – particularly those encountered during travel, such as *Seasickness* (p. B436). The same goes for carefully tracking food supplies and worrying about *Fatigue* (pp. B426-427). Space travel means that *Different Gravity* (p. B350), *Hazardous Atmospheres* (p. B429), *Gravity and Acceleration* (p. B434), and *Vacuum* (p. B437) are never far away, while interdimensional journeys frequently risk something akin to *Fascinating Parachronic Disasters* (p. B532). Traits that mitigate such difficulties become important,

whether that means G-Experience, an exotic Environment Suit skill, or Temporal Inertia; the GM should direct players toward these and build them into any templates.

Culture and Language: The GM must list all significant, *known* Cultural Familiarities and Languages ahead of time, so that the players have a crack at buying the important ones. It's also necessary to indicate which Cultural Familiarities are "alien," and thus cost double and benefit only from Xeno-Adaptability. It's often convenient to establish a pretext for "universal" or "common" examples that everybody has – possibly at no point cost, in addition to a free native culture and language.

Physical Appearance: In a truly huge setting, the GM owes it to the players to define clusters of "very similar races" for Appearance. If the possibilities are open-ended, it may be best to treat Appearance as a zero-point feature with no meaningful effect unless it has the Universal enhancement. Similar advice holds for Unnatural Features: If endless races trot across the stage, this loses its meaning, though the GM may treat *everyone* as "unnatural" for 0 points when they're the alien visitors!

And Other Conundrums: The GM will face endless questions about how traditionally world-bound or planetside traits work when the heroes zoom between solar systems, galaxies, or universes. For instance, Lunacy assumes that there's a moon with monthly phases, but in a large-scale campaign, the question of *what* moon arises, and if the answer is tied to a specific planet – or to being on a planet that has a moon, at least – this trait slips from being a disadvantage to background color (p. 6). Nocturnal gets horribly confusing for similar reasons, and is best forbidden. Then there are puzzles like "What's the mana level in outer space?" and "Does Night Vision work on the Plane of Shadow?" The precise answers depend on the campaign, but it's imperative that the GM anticipate such questions and *have* answers.

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Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the *GURPS* Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every *GURPS* product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of *GURPS Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created *GURPS Powers* (with Phil Masters), *GURPS Martial Arts* (with Peter Dell'Orto), *GURPS Zombies*, and the *GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, and *GURPS Power-Ups* series . . . among other things. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, mixology, and Argentine tango.

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EIDETIC MEMORY

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF FATHER COHEN

BY DAVID L. PULVER

This mystery adventure is for a modern *Horror* (or low-powered *Monster Hunters*) campaign. The party investigates the disappearance of a priest, Father Michael Cohen. They begin with several leads, each presenting different perspectives on the missing priest's recent actions. What leads they pursue and the order they do so will likely to influence how the PCs view Cohen, as saint or sinner, and whether they choose to act . . .

ST. JOSEPH'S

The setting is a generic North American city, likely the party's hometown. The PCs are assumed to have sufficient reputation as supernatural investigators that people will seek their aid. They're contacted by Father Thomas Brock, a Catholic priest. Maybe he's a "friend of a friend" connection – perhaps they helped a parishioner or fellow cleric in a prior adventure, or he provides them holy water. Brock knows just enough to realize he's over his head. (If they require pay, he can squeeze something from church funds.)

Brock is newly assigned to St. Joseph's Church, another priest's parish. Brock was brought in because the regular priest, Father Michael Cohen, suddenly – last week – contacted the bishop and insisted on a leave of absence "for personal reasons." Cohen has not answered any calls from the bishop's office or left a forwarding address, all very irregular; Father Brock was sent to minister to the congregation until things were settled.

St. Joseph's is a modest neighborhood church built in the 1920s. The priest resides in the attached rectory (part office, part apartment). In addition to Father Brock there's five part-time staff (lay pastors, cleaning staff, choir director, etc.) Brock has been at St. Joseph's Church only five days (two days after Father Cohen left). He is overworked – recently the church's secretary Olivia Kramer called in sick.

So what made him summon occult investigators? A series of odd events:

1. Soon after arriving, he was called upon by Monsignor Wright, an elderly priest, Father Cohen's mentor and confessor. Wright expressed concern for Father Cohen, asking if Brock had heard from him: Cohen had not taken confession in nearly a month.

2. Just after mid-day mass, an upset parishioner, Mr. Paul Webster, asked to talk to a Father Cohen, but spoke with Brock. His daughter Elizabeth's grave had been defaced: a bizarre symbol is now carved into the headstone – he fears it may be Satanic! Father Cohen had officiated at his daughter's recent funeral, so Webster came here seeking answers. Just kids . . . or worse? The priest promises he'll come look at it.

3. Later that day, the choir director told him a plainclothes police officer, Detective Wilma Morris, had spoken to a few of his parishioners and lay staff, asking leading questions about Father Cohen and what relationships, if any, he had with children in the parish. Brock called the police department but had been told it was "just routine questions."

4. The next day – three days ago – Brock received a call from a local clinic. "Please tell Father Cohen his rabies test came back negative." Father Brock asked Olivia if she knew about this. "Father Cohen was attacked by a dog," she told him primly "the same night young Elizabeth Webster passed away." Then she told him, "Father, I don't think I am feeling well," and insisted on leaving early. She has called in sick ever since.

5. Yesterday, Brock was working late in the church's office, sorting a month's worth of papers and administrative work and worrying. Then the phone rang. He answered it. "I can't stop," a man's voice groaned. "He's just a child . . . but the hunger! God help me, I just can't stop!" He heard something in the background, it sounded like a moan . . . and a chewing noise? Or slurping? Then the phone went dead. Brock felt a chill go through him. Father Brock doesn't know who the voice was. He feared it was Father Cohen . . .

Father Brock now believes something uncanny is going on! He considered contacting his superior, the local bishop.

However, he knows that man doesn't believe in the supernatural and would likely push it under a rug. Instead, he wants the party to look into this and find Father Cohen, or figure out what he's mixed up in.

Brock or any laity at St. Joseph's can tell them a little about Father Cohen: he's 32 years old, a good priest, well-liked until recently when he began neglecting his duties. There are several pictures of him in the church: 5'11", white, thin build, balding, average features, brown eyes, horn-rim glasses. But where is he now? Brock doesn't know.

THE LEADS

Brock's story provides the investigators with certain leads they can easily follow up. Others can be developed based on any skills or abilities the party has or things they discover.

Contacting Monsignor Wright

Monsignor Wright is an elderly (67 years old) priest of St. Martin's, a neighboring parish. Off duty, his hobby is model railways: he has a set in one room (popular with local children). Given a good reaction, he'll share information once he learns the PCs are working for Father Brock; he's protective of Father Cohen, believing him a good man.

Wright is Cohen's spiritual advisor, but lately the younger priest has avoided him, excusing himself citing "overwork." He is disturbed that Cohen had not come in for confession in over a month. Wright doesn't know about a dog attack or the Websters (or the grave symbol). He recalls Cohen mentioning that he feared for the mental and spiritual health of one of his parishioners, but not who (it was under the seal of the confession). In their last conversation, a month ago, Cohen brought up the Problem of Evil, and whether the Devil was a real force or a metaphor.

He's happy to discuss better times: Father Michael Cohen grew up right here in the city. His dad, John, was a banker; his mother, Catherine, a nurse – "fine, church-going people." Michael was interested in the church from an early age, sang in the choir, and joined Catholic youth groups. He felt a calling to be a priest, and Wright recommended him to the seminary. He became an associate parish priest, then took a leave of absence to gain a masters degree in social work, then returned to the diocese a year ago to resume his ministry.

Wright describes Father Cohen as well-liked by his parishioners and respected by the bishop. He is diligent. He ministers to troubled families, visits sick parishioners, and helps organize local charities. He is driven by his vocation; the only relaxation he engages in is a few days he takes off every year to go bird watching. "He has a cabin in the woods and loves photography. Says birds remind him of angels. I joined him one year, a restful place. Drove me out there in his pickup. A little cold for my old bones, though. No electric heating." If asked if Cohen could be in his cabin: "This time of year? I suppose it's possible." While he can give them the address (20 miles out of town), he knows it has no phone. If asked, he can describe Cohen's pickup truck: a dark blue GMC.

If the party mention the police visit, or hint or ask if Cohen might be a child molester or the like, Wright will indignantly defend him: "Not a chance! Father Cohen is as morally upright a priest as you could find."

The Police

Brock mentioned a detective Morris' visit, so the investigators may wish to speak with the local police to see what they know. The police aren't likely to divulge information unless they believe they'll gain something in return, but more assistance is possible if the party includes anyone with police Contacts, a relevant job (e.g., press credentials, lawyers), or Legal Enforcement Powers. Appropriate social skills, high reaction rolls, mind powers, etc. could also elicit cooperation. In fact, the police hold several clues, but haven't connected them, so answers depend on who and what questions the investigators ask.

Father Cohen: Detective Wilma Morris is in child protective services. A week ago, a teacher at Thorncroft Elementary, a local school, glimpsed a man taking pictures of children playing outside at recess. The photographer was described as a tall, lean, middle-aged white man, balding, wearing a maroon polo shirt; he left before the teacher could get a closer look. The principal reported the incident to the police, and a police artist drew a sketch to check against photos of registered sex offenders. When one officer said he thought the sketch resembled his pastor, Father Cohen, Morris decided to ask a few routine questions at St. Joseph's. She found Cohen's unexplained absence a bit suspicious, but as no actual crime had been committed and her questions revealed Cohen had no history of impropriety toward or responsibility for children, her investigation has gone no farther.

The party may later have other questions for police if they've followed other leads:

Elizabeth Webster's Death: This is in the police files, but not suspicious. Ruled an accident: the driver of the car (local plumber Todd Venkman) and Father Cohen both corroborated that she ran into traffic. The fierce dog was never found; probably a stray dog.

Albert Rayes: See *Investigating Albert Rayes* (pp. 18-19).

Olivia Kramer

The party may believe that Olivia, the secretary who called in sick, knows more than she told Brock. They're right. Her address is in the church files. She's a lay employee, Father Cohen's administrative assistant. Other staff know she's had to assume more of a burden due his neglect of his duties. Perhaps it got to her?

Olivia is a widow who lives alone in a small apartment a few blocks from the church. She is scared. Strange events have been happening. She doesn't want to get Father Cohen in trouble, but if treated kindly (or pressed), she may agree to meet with a PC and tell her story. She is 49 years old, a bird-thin, petite woman with large eyeglasses and honey-blond hair pulled back into a bun. She has dark circles under her eyes.

Olivia can tell them Father Cohen is a good priest, caring deeply for his parishioners. If they ask, she says he has no interest in the occult or supernatural, although he does clearly believe in God, angels, and saints. The Devil? Not so much.

"That changed seven or eight weeks ago. It was that woman, Elizabeth Webster," Olivia says. Olivia describes Elizabeth as in her 20s, big sad eyes, blond, tall and thin but pretty, like a model. Unmarried, but she'd gotten pregnant with an out-of-wedlock child. Yet that clearly wasn't all of it.

Father Cohen was her confessor, and Olivia could tell from the way he reacted that she told him things that clearly troubled him. He was an experienced priest; he had heard it all. What could disturb him so?

Father Cohen took the seal of the confession seriously, so he'd never say whatever it was that Elizabeth told him. But Olivia could see that each time the young woman and the priest spoke together, Cohen grew increasingly uneasy. The secretary began to notice a change in his behavior: He neglected his sermons and helping with Catholic aid groups, and he spent time on long walks or reading or praying. He stopped going to confession himself.

Then it happened. Five weeks ago, Olivia and the priest were closing up the church in the evening when a phone call came from Ms. Webster for Father Cohen. He took it. Olivia was in the next room, not eavesdropping, but she overheard some of Father Cohen's side of the conversation when his voice was raised. The distraught girl was apparently considering suicide, a late-term abortion, or both, and Cohen was trying to talk her down. After she hung up, Father Cohen was sufficiently concerned that he packed a bag and drove off in his truck to counsel her. As instructed, Olivia remained by the phone in case the girl should call back, instructed to keep her calm and tell her the priest was on the way.

Instead, an hour later, the secretary received a call from the hospital. There had been an accident, and Father Cohen and Elizabeth Webster had been admitted to the ER. Olivia says she rushed off to the hospital. She found Cohen in a hospital bed, his arms and legs bandaged, his eyes haunted. He spoke in a monotone that chilled her: Elizabeth was dead.

He had been talking with Elizabeth in front of her house in the driveway; she had agreed to come back with him to the church when a stray dog had loomed out of the shadows and attacked them. He had tried to stop it, but frightened of the dog, the young woman had panicked. While trying to get away, she ran into traffic at the intersection. She was struck by a car. She and her unborn baby died. Father Cohen got out of the hospital a day later. The dog was never found by animal control, so the priest had to undergo a sequence of rabies shots.

Afterward this incident, Father Cohen was a grim, changed man. "He never smiled again," explains Olivia. "He took care of Ms. Webster's funeral at her father's request, but seemed to lose interest in his calling. Often he missed sermons or cut them short. He left the church for hours at a time during the day or at night. He did odd things – just before he left, he had me go online and print him out hundreds of city maternity and birth records. He prayed a lot. I guess that's good?"

Then, a bit over a week ago, he insisted on a leave of absence – and he just disappeared. That's all the assistant knows. The whole thing – and then the business with the grave, and occult symbols – it has her spooked. She wants no more part of it!

Paul Webster

Paul Webster, 57, is a wealthy stockbroker and widower with a penthouse apartment. He's concerned about the defacement of his daughter's grave, but more irritated than afraid. "It's just another damn thing," he says. He hadn't visited the grave since her funeral (too painful), so it could have been any time in the last four weeks.

He will talk freely about his daughter if asked. She was 22. He has a picture of her: a tall, beautiful blond girl with great cheekbones and a tentative smile. She died in a car accident a month ago when "some damn dog chased her and she ran into traffic." The driver, a guy named Venkman, wasn't at fault. He continues: "She was pregnant, but she never told me who the father was. Maybe she didn't know. She used to go clubbing, fooled around, took drugs, diet pills . . ."

"Lizzie worked as a fashion model," he explains. "There was a lot of pressure. But she was getting help! She'd gone to a shrink, had beaten the eating disorder, but then she found out she was pregnant. It was tough, but Father Cohen was helping her."

If they ask who the shrink was, Webster replies, "Dr. Rayes, up on Able Road. She'd been seeing him for a while. I was paying the bill. It seemed to help. Rayes came to the funeral. Tall guy in a suit, English accent. He was as angry as I was. He told me her death and the baby's were a terrible waste, a sacrilege . . ." Webster shakes his head. "He's gone now too, you know? I read in the paper he died in a fire just two weeks ago."

*The Kishin's power
surpasses human
understanding.*

It is evolution itself.

*– Medusa Gorgon,
in Soul Eater*

The Webster Grave

Elizabeth Webster lies buried in the Catholic section of one of the city's multi-denominational cemeteries. Her grave has fresh flowers (left by Webster on his last visit) and a headstone with the dedication "Elizabeth Webster, beloved daughter." (Webster won't give permission to exhume the body, but if the PCs do so anyway, there's nothing unusual.) The mysterious symbol is carved into the headstone with a chisel. Webster intends to get it fixed as soon the investigator is over.

The Symbol

The figure is a spiral whose head divides into a vertical three-pronged fork, crossed by a hemispherical arc. A successful Thaumatology roll – or some library work and Occultism or Research skill – can identify it as a sigil of late medieval origin that represents Baalkaluzu, a demon associated with fornication, gluttony, and despair. A few obscure occult reference works add more details: Under the guise of worship of Pan or Bacchus, the dark spirit Baalkaluzu was called upon by depraved mystery cultists in ancient Rome and by Satanists in the Hellfire Club of 18th-century England.

Its cultists believed that when the stars were right, every seven years, their high priest could use black magic and ritual sacrifice to summon the demon to mate with a human vessel, producing hybrid spawn, the Harbingers. The cult tried to create multiple Harbingers to place them in positions of powers – the Roman emperor Caligula was said to be one – to better corrupt humanity. No other information is available: The cult's last outbreak was 200 years ago, and local constabulary and monster hunters succeeded in stopping the summoning ritual in time.

The party may think to check if other graves were defaced. There are hundreds of headstones, but a diligent search taking a few hours finds one other: the headstone of "Dr. Albert Rayes" (the inscription indicates he was born 48 years ago, deceased this year). "Do what thou wilt is the whole of the law" and the same symbol lie beneath his name on the marker, with the words in the same script as the rest of the text on the headstone. (Nothing's odd about his body.)

Cabin in the Woods

One way to hunt for Father Cohen is to check whether he owned property. His tax records are still filed in the rectory office; the PCs may think to ask to check, or Brock may stumble on them. (Hackers might also access government databases or other public records.) He pays taxes on 12 acres of woodland and a cabin, and has a GMC pickup. Another way to learn of the cabin is Monsignor Wright, who reminisced about visiting it.

The address is 20 miles out of town, past a rural area with several dilapidated-looking farms, through a gate, and down a narrow winding dirt road through bleak woods. In a clearing in the woods squats a small log cabin (with outhouse and well). The door is padlocked, and the two lower windows are shuttered.

Inside the cabin is a living area with a pair of wooden chairs, table, and a simple stove and counter. There's a crucifix and several blown-up high-quality photos of local birds on the walls. One corner has a fold-up bed. A side door leads to a bathing room with a tub, mirror, and cabinet (empty). A ladder runs up to a loft. On the table is a chess set and a well-used Latin Vulgate Bible. (The book falls open to 1 Timothy 4:1 – "The Spirit has explicitly said that during the last times some will desert the faith, and pay attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines that come from devils . . .") Closets and cabinets under the sink hold carpentry tools, canned tuna and vegetables, powdered milk, instant coffee, and an empty box of .38 pistol ammo. A bookshelf has a typical mix of Christian authors (Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, C.S. Lewis, Karl Adam, etc.), plus books on bird watching. An antique Polaroid camera with a telephoto lens rests on the top shelf.

The Loft

Lit by a small circular window, the loft has a low ceiling. A neatly made bed in one corner on the floor. A small desk is covered with papers, and the walls are plastered with photographs.

The pictures show children playing or walking, mostly elementary school kids age 6-8. Three group shots depict kids supervised by parents or teachers at local parks or a school. A dozen other photos zero in on a specific child: a single blond seven-year old boy, well-dressed, at an elementary school. The name "Thorncroft Elementary School" is

visible in one shot. Some show him followed by a lean greyhound-like dog in a park, and a few depict him with a skinny but attractive and expensively dressed blond woman with him, presumably his mother.

The sprawl of papers all seem to be billing records for "Albert Rayes, licensed therapist." They list hundreds of patient addresses and names or health insurance companies over a 10-year period. Many but not all of the patients are women. A careful hunt will find E. Webster billed with a dozen sessions over the last year. Other papers are numerous printouts of hundreds of online newspaper and social media maternity and birth announcements in the city, all dating back seven years.

*Let's give them a little
welcome. Now that
we've finished the initial
preparations . . .*

*– Clear Note,
in Zatch Bell!*

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

The following leads may be picked up after the initial investigations.

Locating Father Cohen

Cohen isn't at the cabin, but PCs may have skills or abilities that can track him. The GM should allow any reasonable effort to do that. It's also possible the party could do so with paranormal abilities, magic, etc. If the investigators guess that he might still be near Thorncroft School, they can check motels, gas stations, and convenience stores within a few blocks of that neighborhood. Pounding the pavement (roll vs. Streetwise, Carousing, or the like) turns up information about a man who matches the priest's description buying gas, driving a blue pickup truck, and checking into Edgewood Motel, one of three motels closest to the area.

Investigating Albert Rayes

The party may come upon the name Albert Rayes during their investigations. Local phone books and a surviving website advertise "Dr. Albert Rayes, Licensed Therapist" as a state-certified psychologist specializing in hypnotherapy to treat eating disorders with "10 years experience." A home office address is 17 Able Road in the suburbs. Attempts to call the location get "this number is disconnected." Email is unanswered.

Visiting the site reveals a burned ruin. Research in news archives turns up this story (two weeks old):

Suspicious Fire Linked to Murder, Arson: Detectives believe the man reported dead in a fire at 17 Able Road on Tuesday was killed by someone who intentionally set the blaze to destroy evidence of a crime. The county medical examiner's office has determined the victim, identified as psychologist Dr. Albert Rayes, 48, died of gunshot wounds to the chest before the fire was started. Police are still pursuing leads . . .

Investigation: If the party talk to the police (see *The Police*, p. 16) Detective Vince Cooper of Major Crimes division has an open case file, but the news story is sadly correct: no leads. His theory is "burglary gone bad" but he can't ruled out "disgruntled patient or lover." Unfortunately, the psychologist's home office was attached to his house, and all patient files were lost in the fire. A few former patients that the detective has identified are rich, well-off women who struggled with eating disorders. Rayes had no surviving next of kin or known enemies; he had funeral insurance, but his will has not been found.

Asking around: Any neighbors confirm the above accounts; Raye was a quiet professional. Oh, and supposedly kept a dog, but no dog body was found in the ruin.

Thorncroft Elementary School

This school name comes up if they find the pictures in Cohen's cabin or talk with Detective Wilma Morris. If the party researches it, they'll find it's an expensive private school in a rich neighborhood (principal: Mrs. Ellen Dixon). But there's been recent controversy:

1. Eight months ago, a young student teacher, Alice Page, fell ill, dropped out, and then died – from complications related to *anorexia nervosa*.

2. Three months ago, an eight-year old boy, Robert Purcell, shot himself with his father's handgun. Bobby was grossly obese, a sudden weight gain blamed on stress after his pet rabbit was mauled to death by a dog (never found). News reports say he was bullied by other children. There was an investigation and anti-bullying campaign and some teachers were replaced; the bullies were not identified.

Hacking into, visiting, or otherwise researching the school's students helps the group identify the blond boy who appears in the cabin's photos as Alistair Banner, age 7, a current student and son of Carson and Loraine Banner.

See *Banner Residence* (below) if they decide to visit his home rather than confronting him at school. Due to a recent scare of a prowler, an armed security guard now patrols the school.

Edgewood Motel

This cheap, run-down motel is located off the highway, just on the border between "nice suburbs" near the Thorncroft school and an "industrial and highway" area. A blue pickup matching Father Cohen's is one of several vehicles parked in the lot.

The clerk is a bored hipster type, long hair, mostly stoned out of his mind on weed. He rented room #22 to Cohen.

When asked if anything stood out about the person, he replies: "Yeah man, like, there's been a humongous amount of fast food deliveries the last two days. We had, like, I dunno, maybe six pizza deliveries and a couple of other takeout places. Now I think of it, at least some of 'em were for room 22. Maybe all of them. I guess the dude is having a party – or got the munchies real bad."

Room 22

This room is located at one end of the hotel, farthest from the office. Visitors may notice an unpleasant odor wafting under the door. Inside, the room is *littered* with dozens of pizza boxes, soft-drink cans, and Chinese takeout cartons – all empty. Crumbs are scattered across the floor.

An awful smell emanates from the bathroom. On the floor lies a balding adult male, a chunk of pizza clutched in a death-grip in one hand. His stomach is hideously bloated, his clothes stained with pizza sauce and fecal matter. Flies buzz around him.

The corpse is Father Cohen, a few days dead (from when the party were retained). Forensic examination will reveal he died of a bowel infection from a ruptured stomach. He literally ate himself to death. The index finger on his left hand is torn off, but bandaged; the wound predates death by a day. There are older bite scars on his right leg and arm.

In the motel closet is a change of clothes, including Father Cohen's formal clerical clothing (cassock, etc.). In the room's desk next to the bed is a .38 revolver, three hollow-point cartridges, a tablet computer, a catholic Bible, and a gas station map with a city address circled (14 Cherry-Peach Boulevard; see *The Banner Residence*, below).

If the revolver is given a ballistic test (or turned over to police to do so), it matches the bullets in Raye's body.

A little child, she was. But also a fierce killer . . . Now capable of the ruthless pursuit of blood, with all a child's demanding.

– Louis, *Interview with the Vampire: The Vampire Chronicles*

THE BANNER RESIDENCE

A modern ranch-style mini-mansion is located at 14 Cherry-Peach Boulevard, in the same expensive suburban neighborhood as Thorncroft Elementary School. It's flanked by a garage larger than many homes (and stores a Hummer, BMW, and Lamborghini). A tall, white picket fence surrounds the lot. It has a good burglar alarm, but the main security is Stalin, their lean greyhound. Stalin – not actually a dog, as his occasional red-glowing eyes attest, but rather a demonic servitor, lean and athirst – was a present from Dr. Rayes on the birth of Lorraine's child.

Whether from school records or a reverse look-up from the address found at Edgewood Motel, the investigators discover that this home belongs to Carson and Loraine Banner.

THE GM'S TIMELINE

These dates are relative to the day the PC party became involved.

10 years ago: Hypnotist and psychologist Albert Rayes, initiate of the ancient cult of Baalkaluzu, emigrates from England to America and sets up business.

Eight years ago: At a planetary conjunction, the stars are right for the ritual! Rayes uses hypnosis and black magic to impregnate his patient Lorraine Banner with Baalkaluzu's seed while she is a trance; she believes the child is her own.

Seven years ago: Alistair is born. Rayes begins preparations for the second Harbinger, a baby girl he later plans to mate with the boy to create a dynasty of horror, but he must wait seven more years for the next alignment. He watches over Alistair, guiding him via Stalin, a demonic familiar; the child grows in power and mischief.

Three months ago: The second astrological conjunction approaches, and Rayes selects his new dark Madonna, fashion model Elizabeth Webster. Although unmarried, he expects her Catholic upbringing will lead to her keeping the baby while her club-hopping ways explain the pregnancy. However, he fails in his hypnosis; weeks after the diabolic ritual, Elizabeth begins remembering elements of it as terrifying fragments.

Eight weeks ago: Elizabeth begins to reveal her dreams and fears to Father Cohen under seal of the confession.

Six weeks ago: Elizabeth tells Cohen she is pregnant – and fears the child is not natural, but rather the result of a demonic assault orchestrated by Rayes. She also becomes nauseous while taking communion.

Five weeks ago: The panicked call from Elizabeth to Father Cohen (as related by Olivia). She wants an abortion and threatens to kill herself. Cohen drives to meet her. As he tries to calm her, they are attacked by a hellhound (conjured by Rayes). Cohen is bitten and knocked down; Elizabeth flees into traffic and she and her baby die.

Four weeks ago: Elizabeth's funeral. Cohen buys a .38 pistol. Rayes, mourning the demon-hybrid fetus who perished with Elizabeth, marks her grave with the sigil of Baalkaluzu.

Two weeks ago: An angry Father Cohen confronts Rayes late at night at his house. The haughty sorcerer invites the priest in. He accuses Rayes of demonology and hounding

Elizabeth to her death. Rayes says the hellhound was to protect her, not kill her, but boasts Elizabeth was not the first of his conquests, nor the last! He prepares a spell, but Cohen pulls his gun and, taking the sorcerer by surprise, shoots him dead. Cohen ransacks the psychologist's personal files. He finds the names of the other women that Rayes had seen. Then he sets fire to Rayes' office.

One week ago: Police investigate Rayes' death. Rayes is buried in a prepurchased plot (headstone marked with the sigil of Baalkaluzu). Cohen has his secretary copy maternity announcements for him, then takes his leave, retreating to his cabin with his files. Going through billing files, he looks for women who received "treatment" from Rayes and cross-indices maternity notices. He finds that seven years ago, a Lorraine Banner became pregnant eight months after her last session with Rayes, with a son named Alistair.

Six days ago: Cohen discovers seven-year-old Alistair now attends Thorncroft Elementary School. He catalogs the deadly occurrences that followed. He begins photo surveillance.

Five days ago: Father Brock arrives at St. Joseph's.

Four days ago: Police receive reports that someone is lurking around Thorncroft school and investigate St. Joseph's.

Three days ago: Cohen rents a motel room in the suburbs a few minutes' drive from the Banner home. Paul Webster finds the sigil of Baalkaluzu.

Two days ago: Cohen acts when the boy is left at home with a teenage babysitter. Armed with holy water, crucifix, and gun, he hopes to shoot the hellhound, frighten the sitter, and exorcise the child. Instead, he finds the babysitter in the kitchen, vomiting up her dinner (Alistair convinced her she was hideously overweight), the boy laughing. Father Cohen attempts to exorcise him, but Alistair is too strong, his hybrid powers developed under Stalin's tutelage! Cohen is cursed by the half-demon and wounded by the hellhound. He drives off and retreats to the motel in a daze, overcome by a terrible compulsion to eat. He has the strength to make one call to his church before the first pizza he orders arrives.

One day Ago: Cohen spends the next day eating himself to death. Alistair resumes his normal activities, hoping to corrupt the teenage babysitter. The PCs are called in.

The supposed father, Carson Banner – a big overweight man struggling with diabetes – is rarely home, spending most of his time running his multi-million dollar company, Banner Pharmaceuticals, which makes dietary supplements.

Lorraine, Alistair's mother, is usually present. She dotes on their son Alistair, who she calls the "little king" as he's heir to his father's corporation. Lorraine is a model-thin woman in her 30s who is obsessed with keeping her youth through plastic surgery, exercise, and pills. She was once overweight, but hypnotherapy sessions with the late Dr. Alan Rayes showed her how to "keep her figure" even after she gave birth to her "beautiful boy" Alistair. (Unknown to her,

while she was under hypnosis, Rayes impregnated her in a demonic ritual.) He also gave her a "wonderful puppy" as a gift for her son . . .

Young Alistair can be found attending school, home studying, or, occasionally, home with a babysitter (few of whom last long). His hobbies include precocious reading, tormenting small animals, bullying, and listening to his dog talk to him.

Stalin the Hell Hound

Stalin is capable of talking (in a harsh whisper), but he usually only does so for Alistair, his current master.

He was summoned by Albert Rayes to protect the hybrid. When not doing so, he gets his kicks from killing local pets.

ST: 13 **HP:** 22 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 11 **Move:** 12
IQ: 10 **Per:** 14 **Weight:** 80 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** 13 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 9 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 4

Bite (15): 1d+1(2) cutting; Reach C.

Traits: Discriminatory Smell; Dread (Holy Symbols); Fanaticism (Serve master); Frightens Animals; Fragile (Unnatural); Quadruped; Regeneration (Fast); Sharp Teeth; Striking ST 2.

Skills: Brawling-15; Occultism-12; Teaching-12; Tracking-14.

Alistair Banner (Spawn of Baalkaluzu)

Alistair is half-demon, half-human. He appears to be a precocious seven-year-old boy with short blond hair, a disturbing smile, and hungry violet eyes. He is aware of his powers and heritage, thanks to late-night conversations with Stalin.

Alistair likes to play psychological games with children and adults to subtly undermine their self-esteem, especially regarding body image and eating issues, for such is the specialty of his demonic father. He has instigated bullying of overweight kids, and he has influenced others into unhealthy weight loss or weight gain. His powers and influence are sure to increase as he gets older and gains the opportunity to work on more vulnerable teenagers.

With greater effort, Alistair can call upon his full demonic powers and induce a suicidal compulsion to eat. However, this is stressful, and he will usually only do so if threatened (or very bored) as its effects are inexplicable and he has learned not to draw undue attention to himself. This was what he used on Father Cohen.

ST 7; **DX** 9; **IQ** 13; **HT** 14.
Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 9.8 lbs.; HP 14; Will 14; Per 12; FP 13.
Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.
SM -1.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Compulsive Behavior (Cause body image problems) (12); Dread (Religious Symbols); Sadism (12); Secret (Demon Spawn); Weakness (Holy Water; 1d/minute).

Skills: Brawling-11; Occultism-12; Observation-12; Psychology-15.

Innate Spell (Uncontrollable Hunger): Roll a Quick Contest between Alistair's Will (at -1 per yard of range to the subject) and the victim's Will-3. Each attempt takes one second of concentration and costs the child 4 FP. If Alistair wins, the subject is compelled to eat continuously for five hours times the margin of victory; he may make a self-control roll (against 6) once per five hour period to temporarily stave off this craving. His appetite is for normal food, nothing exotic, but he will not stop upon becoming full! This is a magical form of Prader-Willi syndrome, blocking signals sent by the stomach from reaching the brain so the victim continues to eat rather than vomiting. The subject must roll HT+1 after the first five hours of eating, then HT after 10 hours, HT-1 after 15 hours, and so on; any failure causes his stomach wall to tear, spewing its contents into the body. Without surgical intervention, infection leading to a painful death is certain. **Statistics:** Affliction 4 (Will-3; Based on Will, +20%; Costs Fatigue, 4 FP, -20%; Disadvantage, Uncontrolled Appetite (6), +30%; Extended Duration, 300x, +100%; Malediction 1, +100%) [132].

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

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



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SKID IN A WALL 6 RIGHT: Play on any immediately. Swoosh or takes 3 points either LEFT (player of CANNOT second Sw

LASER 3 LEFT: Play on any their success Reverse. S That plays damage to Debris ma another Sw

DEBRIS 3 LEFT: Does 3 Points of Damage to Left

MACHINE GUN 3 LEFT: Does 3 Points of Damage to Left

2. Open Fire!

SCRAMBLER 12 FRONT: 12 LEFT: 12 RIGHT: 9 TIRE S DRIVER: 5 SPECIAL: 12 BACK

3. Scrap Them All!

HAMMER 12 FRONT: 12 LEFT: 12 RIGHT: 9 TIRE S DRIVER: 5 SPECIAL: 12 BACK

SCRAMBLER 12 FRONT: 12 LEFT: 12 RIGHT: 9 TIRE S DRIVER: 5 SPECIAL: 12 BACK

HOT HOT 12 FRONT: 12 LEFT: 12 RIGHT: 9 TIRE S DRIVER: 5 SPECIAL: 12 BACK

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HEROES ON THE MASS SCALE

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

GURPS Mass Combat provides a quick, playable framework for the GM who wants to emulate enormous battles often seen in fiction, without the hassle of tracking thousands of NPCs. What's more, it has its own system for spotlighting player characters and making their actions important to the battle – as is usually the case. *Mass Combat* gives some guidelines on how to calculate Troop Strength (TS) for PCs, but this article seeks to clarify the rules further to better help the GM and players alike. These guidelines replace the rules governing Hero elements (*Mass Combat*, p. 9) completely. Additionally, while these rules *can* be used to create non-Hero elements, the TS values will not be exactly the same as *Mass Combat*. The rules are based on the system from *It's a Threat!* from *Pyramid* #3/77: *Combat*. It has been modified to better suit *Mass Combat*.

DETERMINING TROOP STRENGTH

Troop Strength can be determined by assessing a unit's damage-dealing capability, its resistances to such attacks, its speed and mobility, and so on. Once TS has been figured out, the GM can apply a multiplier based on the austerity of the campaign: $\times 0.1$ for "realistic" or "gritty" campaigns, $\times 0.5$ for typical campaigns, $\times 1$ for "cinematic" campaigns, and $\times 1.5$ to $\times 2$ for "larger than life" campaigns. Round down in all cases. Minimum TS is always 1. The GM may ignore this austerity modifier for all elements *other* than player character units for multipliers of less than $\times 1$, or increase them by whatever value he feels comfortable with – hero elements (*Mass Combat*, p. 9) are *supposed* to be special!

Determining the other statistics of a *Mass Combat* element (class, mobility, etc.) is covered on pp. 26-29.

Example: Torlah Longshadow (used in the examples below) has a total TS of 61. The GM decides his campaign is "cinematic," so uses the base TS of 61. If he had decided his campaign was "larger than life," the TS would instead be multiplied by $\times 1.5$, for a TS of 91.

If the GM decides that hero elements require a cost to raise or maintain (see *Everyone Has a Price*), Torlah costs \$21,500 to raise and \$4,300/month to maintain since she is in a TL3 fantasy setting. See *Mass Combat* (pp. 7-8) for more on an element's cost.

Troop Strength (TS) is based on the following traits.

Active Defense

Take the character's Dodge *minus* eight, and multiply by two. Substitute the *best* Parry *minus* eight if it's higher than the character's Dodge. If the person can parry multiple times without penalty (usually because he has two weapons or can parry unarmed), add 2 for each additional parry. Add 1 if Trained by a Master or Weapon Master applies to this Parry. Substitute Block *minus* eight if it's higher than Dodge. For Block, add 1 for Weapon Master (Shield). Treat Blocking spells as a Block for the purposes of this calculation. Factor into the total any Defense Bonus (from shields, magic rings, etc.). In all cases, add 20 per level for Altered Time Rate.

Example: Torlah has Dodge 11 and Shortsword Parry 12, so $2 \times (11 - 8) = 6$ and $12 - 8 = 4$, +1 since she has Weapon Master (Knife). Her Dodge is higher, so use that value: 6.

EVERYONE HAS A PRICE

If the GM uses these rules to assign statistics for entirely new (non-heroic) elements for his campaign, he also may wish to know the cost to raise and maintain them. In all such cases, use the following formula:

$$\text{Base Cost to Maintain} = (\text{TL's Average Monthly Pay}) \times (\text{TS} / 10)$$

Once the cost to maintain is figured, multiply it by five to determine the total cost to raise the unit, round up to the nearest hundred. This represents time, training, equipment, etc.

As an optional rule, the GM may reduce an element's cost to maintain by increasing its cost to raise. For every -1% in an element's maintenance cost, increase its cost to raise by +5%. Minimum Maintenance Cost is 20% of the original value. This is common for elements that can forage effectively for their food thanks to high Naturalist or Survival skills, or those who have Doesn't Eat or Drink (p. B50), Reduced Consumption (p. B80), and other similar traits.

Affliction

Characters with an attack mimicking an irritating or incapacitating condition (pp. B428-429) add a value equal to 1/5 of its worth as an enhancement to Affliction (pp. B35-36). Do this once for the *costliest* such Affliction. If an attack inflicts damage *and* an Affliction, use the higher of the damage value or the value of the Affliction, plus 1/5 of the lower value. For Mind Control, Possession, Terror, True Faith with Turning, and similar traits, add 1 per 5 character points the attack has in such traits (rounding up). For Binding, add its ST as a bonus amount. In both cases, these values are in addition to any other Affliction-like attacks.

If the best affliction is from a spell or similar FP-using ability, divide the final score by two.

Example: Torlah has access to the Binding Shot Imbuement Skill (*GURPS Power-Ups 1: Imbuements*, p. 11), this gives her a Binding attack with a ST of 8 (average damage of $1d+4$ is 7.5, or 8). Since this is a FP-using ability, her final score is 4 ($8/2 = 4$).

Logistical Capability

Logistic troops are covered briefly on p. 13 of *Mass Combat*. They are given as a number instead of statistics like other elements. *Super-Healing and Force Replacement* (*Mass Combat*, p. 14) suggests that elements can also provide some measure of Logistics Support. As a highly optional rule, elements can provide Logistical Support in addition to contributing their Troop Strength normally. This is treated as a special class: Logistical Support (Log).

Attack

Attack is determined by taking the hero's best attack, minus five. If the character's primary skill is 15 or higher *and* if would be beneficial to do so, take the skill level for his second-highest skill and subtract 10. If the character's secondary skill is 15 or higher, take the skill level for his third-highest skill and subtract 15. As an optional rule, the GM may allow this to continue indefinitely if the character has suitable epic skill levels. For example, if a character has other high skills, you may optionally add (next best skill - 10), (third best skill - 15), (fourth best skill - 20), etc. Add only positive values!

For ranged attacks, add a bonus equal to the Accuracy+2 of the attack; for *innate* ranged attacks, assume Acc 3 if none is listed. This bonus does not add for determining if you can count another skill or not.

Add 5 *per attack* if the character is capable of multiple attacks, *other* than a *Rapid Strike* (p. B370), due to an advantage (e.g., Extra Attack or Altered Time Rate). If he is capable of *multiple* Rapid Strikes, use the following formula instead: (adjusted skill for number of rapid strikes for attack - 10; minimum of 12) \times number of attacks. For example, if a target was capable of four Rapid Strikes and had an adjusted skill of 14, then he would gain $(14 - 10) \times 4$, or +16 to TS.

Add a cumulative +3 for Gunslinger, Heroic Archer, Trained by a Master, and Weapon Master. Add any bonuses from *Rapid Fire* (p. B373). If an attack hits automatically, add

15; do not add this for attacks that require another attack to hit first (e.g., an innate attack with Follow-Up).

A character's best attack(s) can be any mix of mundane (e.g., Broadsword to swing a sword), exotic (e.g., a martial artist's *dim mak*), or supernatural (e.g., a mage casting Fireball) attacks. For example, a hero could use Fireball-15 as her primary skill and Broadsword-13 as the secondary skill.

Example: Torlah has a Shortsword skill of 15 and a Bow skill of 14, so $15 - 5 = 10$ and $14 - 10 = 4$. She has both Heroic Archer and Weapon Master (Knife), which grant +6. Thus, her total is $10 + 4 + 3 + 3 = 20$.

Damage

Take the number of dice of damage for the character's best damage type of his best attack (see above) – including follow-up or linked damage – and multiply it by 3.5, rounding up. If the attack has a modifier, like “2d+1” or “3d-2,” add or subtract the modifier (e.g., +1 or -2). Damage can be from a weapon, spell, special ability, and so on. Multiply this amount by any bonus to skill from *Rapid Fire* (p. B373) *plus* one. Include bonuses for equipment, traits, etc. Further modify this by the damage's type: multiply by 0.5 for small piercing attacks, by 1.5 for cutting or large piercing attacks, and by 2 for corrosion, fatigue, huge piercing, or impaling attacks; round up the total to the nearest whole number. Add 0.5 to the damage-type modifier if the attack is also explosive, or 1 if it's a “vampiric” attack.

Attacks with Cyclic (p. B103) get a bonus equal to the total number of cycles that could affect a target within 90 minutes, rounded up. Attacks with Armor Divisors add 5 per “step” (e.g., Armor Divisor (3) would add 10).

A unit receives the Neutralize Armor feature if it possess an attack that does at least 6d damage, has at least one level of Armor Divisor, *and* the combined values of damage and Armor Divisor is equal to at least 25 (see above).

If the damage dealt is from a spell or similar FP-using ability, divide the final score by two.

Example: Torlah's best attack is with her bow, which does $1d+4(2)$ piercing. This is calculated as 7.5 (the dice of damage plus modifier) \times 1 (for piercing damage) = 7.5, rounded up to 8. She adds +5 since her attack has an Armor Divisor of (2) for a total of 13.

Damage Resistance

Add the DR values for each major location the character has and divide by four (round up); use a value of 0 for each location without armor. Major body locations are: head, arms (or anything used for manipulation), legs (or any limb used for locomotion or balance), and torso. Include bonuses for equipment, traits, and so on. Damage Resistance with split values (e.g., mail armor) uses the *average* of the two values. DR that only protects against a specific threat (e.g., DR vs Heat/Fire or DR with Tough Skin) adds +1 per 5 character points (rounded up) of such protection. Damage Resistance with Hardened adds 5 per “step” (e.g., Hardened 2 would add 10); do not include the Hardened *enhancement* when counting character points for this step.

Add 1 per 5 character points a character has in combat-useful defensive traits like Injury Tolerance, Resistant, Supernatural Durability, Unkillable, and so on. Apply -1 per -5 character points he has in traits like Dependency, Fragile, Vulnerability, Weakness, etc. Add levels of Magic Resistance as a bonus to this amount.

Example: Torlah wears leather armor that covers her entire body (except her head). This grants DR 3. She also has a magical ring that gives her an additional +1 DR. Therefore, she has DR 4 (arms) + DR 4 (legs) + DR 4 (torso) + DR 1 (head) = 13; when divided by four, this gives a score of 3.25, rounded up to 4.

Fatigue

Take the character's basic FP (the maximum FP before any given due to special abilities or equipment), and subtract 10. Additionally, subtract a fixed amount based on the character's current encumbrance level: -1 for Light, -2 for Medium, -3 for Heavy, and -4 for Extra-Heavy.

Add any bonus FP gained from special abilities (e.g., Energy Reserve) or equipment *after* subtracting 10. Add 1 per 5 character points (rounded up) for traits that enhance FP recovery (e.g., Fit or Regeneration (Fast; FP only)). Recover Energy (p. B248) is a special case: add 2 if the skill is 15, or 5 if it's 20 or higher. Breath Control at any level adds 2.

Beings who do not lose FP from regular exertion add a flat +10 and ignore the rules for encumbrance levels (see above). This can be due to having the Machine meta-trait, having a FP of "N/A" from strange biology, or having Indefatigable (see *The Relentless Warrior*).

Example: Torlah has 14 FP, so $14 - 10 = 4$. Since she has Light encumbrance, she subtracts -1, but adds 1 because she has Fit. Her total is thus 4.

Health

Take the character's HT score *minus* 10. Add in bonuses to HT for Fit or Very Fit, or subtract penalties for Unfit or Very Unfit. Add *half* the level of Hard to Kill or Hard to Subdue; round up. Subtract *half* the level of Easy to Kill; round down. Apply +2 for each of High Pain Threshold and Recovery.

Example: Torlah has a HT of 12, so $12 - 10 = 2$. Add +1 because she has Hard to Kill 2, for a total of 3.

Hit Points

Take the maximum number of HP the character has, subtract 10, and take the square root of that value. Include any bonus HP gained from special abilities.

Add 1 per 5 character points (rounded up) for traits like Rapid Healing, Regrowth, Regeneration, etc. Those with the ability to heal others add *half* the amount of HP they can

restore in one use of their ability to this amount (cumulative with all other bonuses); if *all* lost HP are restored, add 10. Those who can cure afflictions add a bonus equal to 1/5 the ability's worth as an enhancement to Affliction (pp. B35-36). Use only the better of the ability to heal damage *or* remove afflictions.

Example: Torlah has 14 HP; square root of $(14 - 10) = 2$.

THE RELENTLESS WARRIOR

Fiction is full of heroes who can fight all day and all night. One possible method for representing this in *GURPS* is to buy a high levels of FP, Fit, or Very Fit, and move on. But even that assumes that the character eventually wearies. The following new trait is perfect for the truly tireless.

Indefatigable

30 points

You do not lose Fatigue Points through normal exertion. You can sprint indefinitely and fight all day. You can still lose fatigue from starvation, thirst, sleeplessness, etc. Likewise, any use of extra effort has its normal costs. You are assumed to recover fatigue normally; if this is not the case, apply the Slow Recharge or Special Recharge modifiers from Energy Reserve (see *GURPS Powers*, p. 114) to this advantage.

Special Limitation

Substitution: Instead of losing fatigue to starvation, extra effort, etc., you lose another attribute or suffer some other effect. Treat this as a modifier equal to the percentage cost of the effect as an Affliction (p. B36) *minus* 150%; choose which effect you suffer at character creation. If you lose levels of another attribute instead of FP, multiply that attribute's value by 10 as an affliction before using the above calculation (e.g., if you lose HT instead of FP, this would be worth +50%, not +5%). Will or Perception is worth +5% per -1.

Tireless Elements

If an element can march longer or the *entire* force's elements have reduced (or no) need to sleep or rest, they can effectively force march (*Mass Combat*, p. 28). For those with Less Sleep (p. B65), reduce the penalty by one for Administration (this cannot give a net bonus). For those with Doesn't Sleep (p. B50), *ignore* the rules and apply the $\times 1.5$ movement multiplier *all* the time. Conversely, elements that require Extra Sleep give a penalty equal to -1 per level.

Move

Take the character's best Move score and subtract five. For those with Enhanced Move or similar mobility-enhancing traits, use their *highest* Move score for this purpose. If they're encumbered, use their *modified* Move. Move also determines the element's *Mobility* (p. 27).

Example: Torlah has a Move of 8, but she has Light encumbrance so her modified Move is 6, so $6 - 5 = 1$.

Will

Take the character's effective Will score and subtract 10. Add *half* of any levels (round up) of Fearlessness. Add 1 for Combat Reflexes, and add 8 for Unfzable.

Example: Torlah has a Will of 12, so $12 - 10 = 2$. Add 1 for Combat Reflexes and 1 for Fearlessness 2, for a total of 4.

DETERMINING OTHER MASS COMBAT STATISTICS

After figuring TS, the GM needs to assign any other traits that are appropriate to the character.

Special Classes

Elements with special classes count their TS normally, but also determine which side has superiority in their particular class. This can turn the tide of a battle if one side has the bulk of special-class superiority.

- *Air Combat (Air)*: If a character has a ranged attack *and* has air mobility of any type (p. 27), it also has this class.

- *Armor (Arm)*: If a character's TS-determining scores for Damage Resistance (pp. 24-25) and Hit Points (p. 25) equal 40 or more, it counts as an Armor element. To qualify as an Armor element, a unit must have sufficient DR to ignore typical small arms of the battlefield. The easiest way to find this cutoff is to multiply the dice of damage inflicted by the heaviest anti-personnel weapon by 6; this is the minimum DR to qualify as Armor for the setting. Alternatively, the following quick and dirty method can be used instead. If a unit's DR equals or exceeds a specific minimum based on TL, it gains the Armor class: DR 15 or less at TL4 or lower; up to DR 20 for TL5; DR 25 for TL6; DR 50 at TL7; DR 75 at TL8; DR 100 at TL9; DR 200 at TL10; DR 500 at TL11; and DR 1,000+ at TL12.

OPTIONAL SPECIAL CLASS: PHASING

For some campaigns, the following, *highly* optional special class might be available.

Phasing (P)

A unit that can phase out of reality temporarily cannot be harmed except via an element with Neutralize Phasing. Each turn of battle, elements that have this special class must decide whether they are "out of phase" or "in phase." Out of phase units do not contribute TS to their side and suffer no casualties. There are two exceptions to this: units with the C3I class contribute their TS to that special superiority normally; and if an opposing force has elements with the feature Neutralize Phasing or is of the Phasing class itself, then count the TS of each side normally.

Let them come! There is one dwarf yet in Moria that still draws blood!

– Gimli, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

- *Artillery (Art)*: If a character has a ranged attack that does at least 6d of damage, ignores barriers or can fire without line of sight, *and* has a 1/2D Range of 300 or more, it may also count as an Artillery element.

- *Calvary (Cv)*: If a character has the Motorized or Mounted land mobility types (p. 27), it may also have this class.

- *Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence (C3I)*: C3I units are almost entirely vehicles (satellites or spy planes), groups of people led by a single person (spy networks), or those with supernatural abilities that can see long distances or know the future (a mage scrying or a precognitive psi). Characters may be classified as C3I elements if they have any of the following traits: Clairsentience (p. B42), Mind Reading or Mind Probe (pp. B68-69), Precognition (p. B77), Scanning Sense (range must be at least 2,000 yards; p. B81), or Telecommunication (range must be at least 2,000 yards; p. B91). Spells emulating any of the above also count (e.g., Wizard Eye is similar to Clairsentience).

- *Engineering (Eng)*: Engineering elements are characters who have at least four character points between the skills Electrician (p. B189), Engineer (Civil or Combat) (p. B190) or Explosives (Demolition) (p. B194). This requirement can be replaced by having any ability to breach walls. This can stem from an attack that does 12d damage or more (or 8d if it's burning, corrosion, crushing, cutting, or huge piercing), Control (*GURPS Powers*, pp. 90-92), Insubstantiality (p. B62), Permeation (p. B75), or similar abilities. Spells emulating any of the above also count (e.g., Walk Through Earth is similar to Permeation) for this purpose.

- *Fire (F)*: Characters with ranged attacks whose 1/2D Range is at least 200 *and* inflicts at least 3d (1d+2 if impaling) have this class.

- *Naval (N)*: Characters who have Amphibious (p. B39), No Legs (Aquatic or Semi-Aquatic) (p. B145), or access to underwater-survival gear (e.g., SCUBA gear) can have this special class. The GM also can grant this class to those who can hold their breath for sustained periods of time (Breath-Holding, Doesn't Breathe, Breathe Control, etc.) *and* who have a Water Move of 5 or more. For characters possessing an ability that allows them to attack underwater (almost always via the Underwater enhancement, p. B109), use Neutralize Naval instead.

- *Recon (R)*: Characters need a minimum Stealth of 12 and Basic Move of 6 to qualify for this class. Optionally, if they possess abilities that allow them to extend their senses or predict where the enemy will be (see *Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence*, above, for a small list), they may also have this class – though assigning C3I instead of Recon is probably a better idea in most cases.

NEW MOBILITY TYPE: TELEPORTATION

Mass Combat (p. 9) suggests that characters who can teleport should simply ignore the mobility rules – but this might not be advisable if teleportation or gate magic is as much a strategic resource as anything else. In such campaigns, the following new mobility type might be appropriate.

Teleportation (Tele)

Elements with this mobility type can move up to 100 miles per level of their Teleport Rating in any direction once per day without a chance of mishap. This value is expressed as a number attached to the mobility type (e.g., Tel3 would indicate a Teleportation Rating of 3). Optionally, they can bring along another unit or lend that element their teleportation ability (they create a gate, tunnel, etc.),

but must subtract its WT value from their Teleportation Rating in either case. If the adjusted Teleportation Rating is 0 or less, roll 3d; on a (9 plus the Teleportation Rating) or less, nothing happens. Otherwise a mishap of some kind occurs – the unit goes the wrong direction, members of the element are scattered, etc. A natural 17 or 18 means the element (and any element it was trying to transport!) suffers *causalities* equal to (margin of failure × 5)%.

Use the same rules for things like gates or portals, but assign a higher Teleportation Rating to represent the fact that such doorways can stay open longer.

When creating a hero element with this feature, use the rules for Transport Weight (p. 27) to determine their Teleportation Rating by using the *maximum* weight they can teleport (not including themselves).

● *Transport (T)*: Elements who can transport other elements are limited mostly to vehicles (see *Monsters and Motorcycles*, p. 29). Characters who possess a 2,000 lb. (or more) Payload gain a Transport rating of 1. For every additional 2,000 lbs. of capacity, increase the Transport rating by one. Optionally, if a character is SM+2 or bigger (or SM+1 if also a Quadruped) and has Medium encumbrance of at least 2,000 lbs., the GM can assign a Transport rating using the previous guidelines.

He who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.
– Aristotle

Transport Weight

Since transport weight is an abstraction of both volume and weight, the GM will have to compare the character he is converting to the examples listed in Chapters 2 and 3 of *Mass Combat*. Most SM -1 to SM+1 characters (even groups of them!) will have a transport weight of 1. A good formula is:

Weight for a one-person element = SM

Weight for a multi-person element = SM × 2

Minimum Transport Weight is always at least 1.

For cavalry or similarly mounted units, calculate the transport weight for rider and mount separately and then add them together.

Mobility

The way a character gets around determines what his mobility is. It is possible to have more than one mobility class. It's also possible for an element to belong to a special class (pp. 26-27) without having the required means to move. For example, an ocean buoy might count as a Naval element but lack any kind of water-related mobility. In rare cases, mobility may be "0."

● *Air Mobility*: Air mobility class depends mostly on how the flying element is being used rather than how fast it can go. Fast Air (FA) elements typically operate from an air base or over a regional theater, while Slow Air (SA) elements move with land elements and are typically limited to a range of 100 miles (doubled per TL past TL6). In most cases, this will make many hero elements Slow Air units. However, the GM may deem that an element capable of *both* roles might have an optional mobility class: Variable Air (VA). This would allow a unit to switch roles, but would require 1d-1 battle rounds (*Mass Combat*, p. 32) to do so.

● *Land Mobility, Foot (Foot)*: If a character's ground Move is 10 or less, use this land mobility class.

● *Land Mobility, Mechanized (Mech)*: If a character ignores terrain penalties via an advantage (e.g., Terrain Adaptation) or some other trait (e.g., Light Tread), use this land mobility class.

● *Land Mobility, Motorized (Motor)*: If a character suffers normal terrain penalties everywhere except when on a road or on flat terrain or has Enhanced Move (Ground; Road-Bound) and/or No Legs (Wheeled), use this land mobility class.

● *Land Mobility, Mounted (Mtd)*: If a character's ground Move is 11 or more, use this land mobility class.

● *Water Mobility, Coastal or Sea (Coast or Sea)*: If a character can survive in the open ocean for months at a time, he has Sea mobility; otherwise, use Coastal.

Optional Features

Not all elements have optional features, but many Hero elements (e.g., player characters) do have them. Use the following guidelines to assign appropriate aspects.

● *Airborne*: Those with Flight (Gliding) (p. B56) or Walk on Air (p. B97) have this feature, as do those who have at least one point in Parachuting (p. B212) or Piloting (Flight Pack or Glider) (p. B214).

● *All-Weather*: No trait matches this feature, but the GM may permit a variation of Terrain Adaptation, allowing those who possess it to ignore skill penalties for being out in inclement weather.

NEW SPECIAL FEATURES

A few new optional features for *Mass Combat*.

Self-Sufficient

+50% to Raise

Prerequisite: Terrain for appropriate environment.

This feature allows an element to temporarily reduce its maintenance cost by 25% when in one of the environments covered by its Terrain special feature.

(Specific)-Affinity

+0% to Raise and Maintain

Add this special feature to elements that rely on supernatural power or energy (mana, psi, sanctity, and so on). Most of the time, this doesn't affect the unit one way or the other, but areas with higher or lower levels of the element's particular energy source increase or decrease its effective TS. Each "step" in power modifies the unit's TS by $\pm 50\%$. For example, if a group of Battle Mages has this special feature, then they'd get a +50% increase to TS in high-mana zones, but a -50% decrease in low-mana zones.

Ask the GM before you take this feature! If it exists in the campaign world, then certain environments take on strategic value. For example, a *Banestorm* Megalan legion might think twice before chasing bandits into mana-poor Caithness!

Swift

+20% or +40% to Raise and Maintain

This feature allows an element to increase its travel speed (*Mass Combat*, p. 27) by 10%, or by 20% for Very Swift elements. Add this movement increase *after* any TL modifiers.

• *Disloyal, Levy, or Mercenary:* These features are rare on hero elements, but it should be the *player's* decision, rather than the GM's, whether the element has it or not.

• *Fanatic:* Characters with Fanaticism (p. B136), Intolerance (p. B140), Sense of Duty (p. B153), or similar disadvantages often have this feature. The player, rather than the GM, decides if the element has it.

• *Flagship:* Characters with the C3I special class (p. 26) can have this feature if they also have a Water mobility (p. 27). The GM may allow elements to purchase Flagship at an additional +25% cost to raise and maintain (per flagship) if they don't actually count as a naval fleet's flagship (e.g., a fleet could have another flagship). Most individual characters will not have this feature unless they can coordinate multiple naval elements via some ultra-tech or paranormal methods.

• *Hovercraft:* Characters with Terrain Adaptation (Island/Beach, Sand, Swamp, or Water) (p. B93), Walk on Air (p. B97), or Walk on Water (p. B97) can have this feature.

• *Impetuous:* Characters with Bloodlust (p. B125), Daredevil (p. B47), On the Edge (p. B146), Overconfidence (p. B148), or similar traits may have this feature. The player, rather than the GM, decides if the element has it.

• *Marine:* Characters with four or more points in Swimming (p. B224), Soldier (p. B221), or Naval Training (*GURPS*

Power-Ups 2: Perks, p. 6) have this aspect. Those with Amphibious (p. B39) or Terrain Adaptation (Water) (p. B93) also have this feature.

• *Neutralize (Class):* Characters who possess a particular type of Neutralize should be obvious from the character's abilities and the description of such abilities in *Mass Combat*, p. 10. For example, those with Neutralize Recon might have Obscure.

• *Night:* Characters with Dark Vision (p. B47), Infravision (p. B60), Night Vision (p. B71), Scanning Sense (p. B81), or similar traits possess this feature.

• *Nocturnal:* Those with Night Vision as a feature (*GURPS Fantasy*, p. 130) qualify for this aspect, as do those who have the Nocturnal disadvantage (p. B146), Weakness to light or sunlight (p. B161), and so on.

• *Sealed:* Characters with Sealed (p. B82), Pressure Support (p. B77), and Vacuum Support (p. B96) have this feature.

• *Super-Soldier:* This trait is inappropriate to hero elements, but if the GM is creating a new base element, it may be applied normally for exemplary units.

• *Terrain (Type):* Characters with Terrain Adaptation (p. B93) for an appropriate terrain are a given, but so are characters with eight or more points in a relevant Survival skill (p. B223). Terrains that require special motive skills (e.g., Skiing for Arctic conditions) can have points split between the necessary motive skill and an appropriate Survival skill. As an optional rule, the GM might allow Terrain to specialize in "Urban" for elements especially trained in FIBUA (*Fighting In Built Up Areas*) or building-to-building fighting. Additionally, he might allow "Underground" for subterranean races accustomed to combat in cramped quarters (e.g., dwarves) or "All-Terrain." The latter is similar to the Super-Soldier (*Mass Combat*, p. 10) and costs +100%, not +20%.

Quality

Hero elements (and *any* character using these rules who already has purchased equipment) don't gain a bonus for either equipment quality or troop quality – nor do they pay a cost to raise or maintain these features. However, the GM can use the following tables to gauge each of those traits if he wishes:

Equipment Quality	Total Cost of All Equipment
Best*	Average Starting Wealth \times 100
Very Fine	Average Starting Wealth \times 50
Fine	Average Starting Wealth \times 20
Good	Average Starting Wealth \times 5
Basic	Average Starting Wealth \times 1
Poor	Average Starting Wealth \times 0.5

* Best quality gear is *above* state-of-the-art – it's bleeding-edge technology, just short of the next TL. This is equivalent to the "Best equipment possible at your TL" (p. B345) and may require an Unusual Background if purchased for a player character (see *GURPS Supers*, p. 75).

Troop Quality	Average Combat Skill Level
Legendary*	18 or higher
World-Class*	16 to 17
Elite	14 to 15
Good	12 to 13
Average	10 to 11
Inferior	9 or less

* World-class troops give +150% to TS, and add an additional +250% to raise and +60% to maintain. Legendary troops give +200% to TS, and add an additional +300% to raise and +80% to maintain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice ain't no hero – but he writes about them. From Portsmouth, Virginia,

he dreams of being able to write full time, or at least eke out a living doing it. Of course, if he's not writing about **GURPS**, he's blogging about it. Visit his site "Ravens N' Pennies" (www.ravenspennies.com) for more **GURPS** goodies. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group; Antoni Ten Monró; the Sith Editrix, "Archangel Beth" McCoy; David Pulver; Alan "Tyneras" Cullers; and Timothy "Humabot" Ponce, for being most excellent sounding boards. *Indefatigable* (p. 25) was created by Jason "PK" Levine and has been reproduced with his permission.

I am Daenerys Stormborn of the blood of old Valyria and I will take what is mine!

– Daenerys, in *Game of Thrones* #2.6

MONSTERS AND MOTORCYCLES

These guidelines assume it's a PC with a character sheet being converted to the **Mass Combat** rules, but what about adding a specific racial template to existing elements? Or better yet, what about vehicles?

For racial templates, simply figure their TS increase and features as you would normally. For vehicles, this requires a bit of extra work. Use the previous guidelines with the following changes.

- **Troop Strength:** Use the rules on pp. 23-26, but count only Damage Resistance, Health, Hit Points, Affliction, and Move. Finally, add a special modifier based on the vehicle's TL: $\times 0.01$ for TL3 or less, $\times 0.02$ for TL4, $\times 0.05$ for TL5, $\times 0.25$ for TL6, $\times 0.5$ for TL7, $\times 1$ for TL8, $\times 2.5$ for TL9, $\times 5$ for TL10, $\times 10$ for TL11, or $\times 20$ for TL12. *Double* this if the vehicle uses superscience weapons.

- **Special Classes:** Use the rules on pp. 26-27, but be willing to eyeball equipment that gives advantages. Of

special note is the rules for vehicles that can transport other elements. Multiply the vehicle's Load statistic (p. B463) by 2,000 and then add +1 per 2,000 lbs. to the Transport rating of the element, rounded to the nearest multiple of 2,000.

- **Transport Weight:** Vehicles with a Motorized mobility, water mobility, or a mobility of "0" have a WT equal to 1 per five tons of Loaded Weight. Mechanized mobility has a WT equal to 1 per 7.5 tons of Loaded Weight. Air mobility has a WT equal to 1 per 18.75 tons of Loaded Weight.

- **Mobility:** Vehicles use their Top Speed for all calculations.

- **Optional Features:** Many vehicles have obvious equipment analogues that may make it easier to convert than a regular character. Of particular note is the sensor system for TL8+ vehicles which is often as good as Hyperspectral Vision but out to a much farther range.

- **Quality:** Use these rules as is.

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THE ELVEY INSTITUTE

BY STEVEN MARSH

Although the modern world has many troubles, not all of them can be resolved by throwing money, personnel, or firepower at them. In fact, some problems are such distant worries that hardly anyone devotes much thought at all to them, let alone devoting resources to fixing them preemptively. One such exception – perhaps unique in its scope and breadth – is the Elvey Institute.

THE LORE

According to official records and company lore, the Elvey Institute incorporated shortly after World War II, when Franklin and Dorothy Elvey began gathering contacts among electrical engineers, especially those with experience and education using computational devices. The Elveys turned a deep and personal interest in futuristic philosophy and forward thinking toward action, putting their resources into a long-term think tank and (to a lesser extent) action center. The company's mission remains the same now as it was then: identifying and resolving issues that will become a problem for the world, primarily those issues that will come to fruition 100 years or more in the future.

Since then, the Elveys have maintained a modest existence, somehow generating (or having access to) enough wealth to keep the company seemingly successful, but not so ostentatious in its fortunes that they attract attention.

Remaining privately held among the Elvey family, the Institute has flown under the radar ever since its inception. This is understandable; by the Institute's own admission, any problem they were likely to devote considerable attention to wouldn't even be showing up on the Earth's radar for another few decades . . . and if they *did* succeed, those problems would simply cease to exist, in the way that replacing a frayed wire that would have led to a skyscraper fire is an uneventful fix.

Still, those who know and (claim to) understand what the Institute does speak highly of it and its efforts. The company also claims that several top-100 companies seek its consultation.

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE FUTURE

The Elvey Institute is a more-than-cutting-edge pioneer in the field of predictive computer models. What it purports to

predict defies even the best extrapolative technology available elsewhere, and – if what the Institute professes is true – seems to defy several theories of what *should* be possible.

The Institute avows that it has proprietary computational algorithms that allow it to make more accurate and more far-reaching predictions than its competitors. However, if anyone were to investigate their software, they would see it's all fairly mundane . . . yet, somehow, their computational models are able to access a sort of "X element" that serves some kind of higher purpose. This is represented in *GURPS* as "super-science," but the reality of what's "really" going on is left up to the GM (but see p. 32 for ideas).

THE REALITY

The Elvey Institute's origins and history get even murkier the more they're investigated. The Elvey family is poorly documented, and there aren't any official death certificates or notices for Franklin or Dorothy. Nor are there extensive notes about who their successors were; the company is currently run (it is claimed) by Matthew and Kelly Elvey.

There doesn't *seem* to be anything sinister about this lack of information; it just seems the company has escaped notice. As a privately held corporation, it isn't beholden to stockholders and can keep its finances and dealings mostly private. However, the relative paucity of information, the owners' general reclusiveness, and the oddity of their mission makes them a somewhat (un)popular target for conspiracy theorists.

The Elvey Institute mostly pursues its own goals, although it does occasional consulting work. What it charges makes no sense to outsiders; the company is as likely to accept a mom-and-pop operation for a pittance as it does a multinational conglomerate for millions of dollars. Some observers speculate that such consultations are only done when it furthers the Institute's own goals, with money being largely irrelevant . . .

STRUCTURE

The Elvey Institute has about 50 employees. There are three members of the top tier (Rank 3) – presumably Matthew Elvey, Kelly Elvey, and an unknown third person (or "person," if one is paranoid enough). They have no named rank and are almost never involved in day-to-day operations.

Below them (at Rank 2) are the five to seven Elvey Planners. Each Planner has projects and areas of expertise, but there is overlap and very little friction between Planners.

They are allowed near-complete latitude in choosing, implementing, and resolving their own missions.

Below them (at Rank 1) are about 30 Elvey Implementers – technicians, programmers, researchers, and agents. They're the ones who get things done. Each Planner usually has about five Implementers that directly report to him. A handful of floating members flit between projects as needed.

Below them (at Rank 0) are eight to 10 untitled supporters: clerical, janitorial, etc.

The Elvey Institute always has had considerably more female employees than male, especially at the Implementor and higher levels; at present, all but one of the six current Planners are women. This seems to be because almost all of the initial nuts-and-bolts Elvey workers were originally female programmers who brought the computers and proto-computers of the 1940s and 1950s to life, and their legacy has become corporate memory. (Of course, many also argue that this is a result of one of their long-term projects . . .)

GETTING THINGS DONE

The Elvey Institute has considerable (but not unlimited) resources at their disposal. They can accomplish their goals economically, physically, persuasively, or through information. Thus, if the Institute has determined an earthquake will destroy a city 100 years from now, an Implementer agent might influence local elections to get forward-thinking politicians into office, start a propaganda campaign to get citizens to leave, or explore caves and use dynamite to diffuse and collapse a fault line.

Implementers generally prefer to work within the law, but they're not above working outside the bounds of society if it'll get the job done. They draw the line at inflicting injury or death upon others; regardless, there is a strong company culture of "the Institute will deny all knowledge of your actions if you are caught . . ."

Sample Problems and Solutions

- A grain-destroying blight in 268 years will lead to mass famine. An Implementer bribes several influential farmers to begin using Elvey's chosen (blight-resistant) seed, with the idea that it will become the dominant seed within a couple of centuries.

- Freak solar radiation will render humanity infertile in 400 years. An Implementer ensures plans will be in place the century prior to gather enough frozen genetic material (along with the knowledge to use it).

- A granite mountainside will collapse in 840 years, causing damage and misery to a nearby city that hasn't come into existence yet. An Implementer uses explosives to cause the mountainside to collapse *before* the city is founded.

The Elvey Institute isn't averse to using its powers to resolve sooner situations, and it's certainly feasible for its computers. (See *Predicting the Future*, below, for the game mechanics of the company's predictive capabilities.) However, the Institute takes the mindset that mundane actors will discover and resolve more imminent problems, and that it best fulfills its purpose by focusing on far-future problems. Still, the Institute needs to balance between what it can *predict* versus what it can actually do; more impending problems are often easier to

resolve. The Institute sometimes stretches itself to do near-future predictions as an aid to longer-term goals; for example, making economic forecasts 10 years out to ensure funding will be in place to support a project 100 years out.

The existence of the Elvey Institute results in some *weird* requests, and lawyers and executors around the world are used to odd mandates: "In early 2162, your agency will need to bury 10,000 MREs outside Muncie. Then make sure that this video commercial airs daily throughout October 2162 on whatever media exists . . . don't watch it before then."

Predicting the Future

The system used by the Elvey Institute is weird when it comes to foreseeing the future, in that its algorithms actually get *more accurate* the further out it goes. A standard Elvey Institute roll uses a base skill roll of 15 (its technological skill) plus the Size modifier bonus from *Size and Speed/Range Table*, p. B550, for the number of years in the future (reading "yards" as "years") minus 10.

Thus, a prediction for 100 years in the future has an effective skill of 15 (15 + 10 - 10), while a forecast for a thousand years in the future has an effective skill of 21 (15 + 16 - 10), and a forecast for a year in the future has an effective skill of 3 (15 - 2 - 10). Note that any roll for 100 years or more benefits from the Institute's Higher Purpose (see *The Elvey Institute*, p. 32), giving an additional +1.

A standard prediction takes a week, but this can be modified for time spent (p. B346). Most standard queries (100 years or more) are done in half the time – thus two predictions a week – at -5. Generally, the Institute has computational power to handle between 10-15 questions per week (that is about two per Planner).

The more *unique* data that can be supplied to the Institute, the better its predictions; this adds a bonus ranging from +1 (trivial data) to +10 (utterly irreplaceable). For example, if trying to determine a 100-year forecast of Detroit, providing extensive access to its historical and modern archives would warrant +3, a person-by-person survey of 10% of the populace would warrant +6, and a brain-scan of a time-traveling resident from Detroit 80 years from now would provide +10.

The more specific the question, the better. "What will Detroit be like in 100 years?" will result in a fuzzier answer than "What will be the greatest threat to an average Detroit citizen's well-being in 100 years?"

Answers are generally accurate, but only in a "yes/no" sense; thus "Will Los Angeles be around in 500 years?" will return "no" both if the Earth is predicted to be destroyed by an asteroid in 400 years *and* if the city is destined to be destroyed by an earthquake in 120 years.

Because of all this, Institute researchers will generally pose and re-pose questions as they get more data.

THE ELVEY INSTITUTE IN A CAMPAIGN

Most groups in games are designed to deal with pressing problems: "The Agency needs you to stop this madman before he holds this office building hostage. Here's a dossier . . ." In contrast, the Elvey Institute is geared to be much more oddball, in both its requests and what it's *trying* to accomplish.

It turns most notions of urgent action on its ears, as missions can require years or decades of (sporadic) preparation.

If the heroes have direct ties (such as through the Patron advantage), the Institute allows for an unending source of unusual adventures. Alternatively, as a more tangential Ally or

Contact, the Institute enables a flavorful but limited form of prognostication: "I need to figure out where the Atlanta Boiler will strike within six months; can you give me any leads?"

The Institute also can hire the protagonists as support for any number of its own missions. Accumulating unique data is one of the most obvious, but the number of PC-level agents within the Institute is laughably small, so outsourcing adventure-level exploits to more competent heroes is a common occurrence.

For a summary of the company's inclinations and capabilities presented in *GURPS Boardroom and Curia* terms, see *The Elvey Institute* (above).

Of course, the Institute can form the basis of many adventures itself, as PCs stumble onto the organization's own actions and secrets . . .

THE ELVEY INSTITUTE

Mission Statement: The Elvey Institute is devoted to attempting to preemptively resolve problems before they become an issue; such issues usually extend beyond a human lifetime (and most *much* longer), although it can turn its attention to a shorter timeframe if persuaded.

Capabilities

TL: 8[^]

Members: 50

Wealth: Comfortable

Contacts: Administration-15 [2]; Business skills-15 [10]; Expert Skill (Long-Term Problems)-18 [3]; Technological skills-15 [10]

Member Traits: Higher Purpose (Solve problems 50 or more years in the future) [5]; Unusual Background (Occasional access to TL[^] future forecasts) [5]

Notable Resources: The Elvey Institute has its headquarters in an office building in a moderately large city. Its offices are designed to accommodate up to 120 people, but in recent years, its staff has hovered around less than half that. Its computers are considerably high-tech. Given enough notice, it's willing (and able) to buy considerable special equipment, but for the most part, it maintains an unassuming, discrete profile.

Reaction Time Modifier: +1

Costs and Values

Startup Cost: \$4,212,000

Resource Value: \$21,060

Patron Value: 10 points

Enemy Value: -30 points

Ally and Dependent Value: The Elvey Institute can provide a wide range of NPC associates, from low-level (and low-point-value) scientists or scholars, to a couple of high-point-value agents who qualify as individual Allies.

Social Attributes

Type: Aid, Investigative

CR: 2

Loyalty: Good (15; +1)

Rank: Administrative Rank 0-3 [2/level]

Income Range: \$2,600 (Average) to \$4,500 (Comfortable)

Reputation: +2 (among people who support their true purposes); -2 (among conspiracy theorists)

Notes

Almost all members above Rank 0 have a Sense of Duty, Code of Honor, or similar trait that pushes them to dedicate their lives to the negotiation and planning of long-term crises. There are many – potentially hundreds or thousands – of powerful, influential people who view the Elvey Institute favorably; if the need arose, the Institute could bring considerable resources and power to bear with a few persuasive phone calls. To date, it has never done so . . .

THE FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN

The Elvey Institute works perfectly fine as a straightforward, honest (if weird) group. However, if the GM wants it to be a bit more inscrutable or sinister, here are some options to pick from. (They're not all mutually exclusive, so choose as many as desired!)

- "Elvey" is a play on words of "LV" – that is, "Long View." This points to an acronym- or future-based origin . . . perhaps the Elvey Institute actually has some sort of time travel?

- The "Elvey" family are actually *elves*; their lengthy outlook means they have to do what they can to resolve issues down the road. In the same way many humans make plans for 10 years down the road, the Elvey family's focus on 100 years down the road is just their version of "short-term planning."

- Not only did Franklin and Dorothy Elvey never die (as some theorize); they never *existed* in the first place. This would explain the fairly reclusive nature of the entire Elvey family. However, the implications of who's *really* running the Institute are that much murkier.

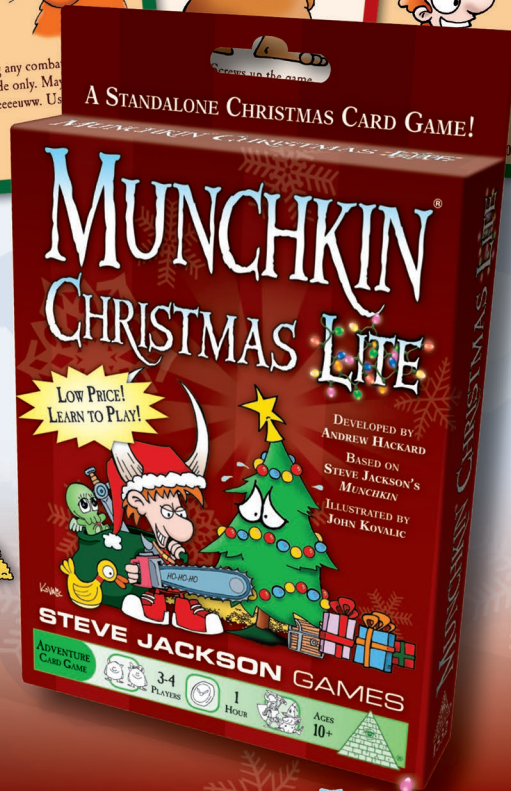
- The Elvey Institute is accomplishing long-term goals, but the exact nature of its goals is more sinister. Their computers are lying about what they're striving to do. "Prepare the world for the arrival of our Lovecraftian masters" would closely resemble "Save the world of the future" if the Implementers don't know what they're *really* doing . . .

- The whole "cutting-edge computers" thing is 100% false; the Elvey Institute's policies are *actually* informed via some other method: perhaps magic, or a time traveler who can only make periodic visits from the future to let the Institute know how well or poorly their actions are working.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

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RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

LOOK OUT . . . OUTLOOKS!

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Many forms of media involve some sort of change of perspective, including novels (Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*), films (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show*), television (countless episodes of *The Twilight Zone*), comic stories (Alan Moore's four-page "Brief Lives" from *Omega Men*). Often these changes in perspective are designed as a trick or a twist; if you go into a movie like *The Sixth Sense* knowing there's buzz about a mind-shattering twist, it's not impossible to figure out said twist within the first nine minutes . . . speaking hypothetically.

However, a change in perspective doesn't need to be implemented for shock value (although I've certainly done so in some adventures). Rather, it can result in a fundamentally different outlook for a new or existing campaign. The RPG setting *Xcrawl* casts the PCs as corporate reality-TV-style dungeon crawlers, with sponsorships, viewers, and rewards depending on how successful they are in their exploits. It doesn't change the fundamentals of what the game is about – it's mostly still an excuse to kill monsters and get loot – but it *does* make things feel fairly fresh. Similarly, it's possible to envision two games based on *The Truman Show*: one where the players are kept in the dark about the unreality of their situation until the Big Reveal, and another where the players are made aware of it early on (even if their heroes are still in the dark). Neither option is right, but changing your perspectives can help you crack new possibilities you might have overlooked.

Here, then, are some ideas for how to alter your preconceived notions. Sean Punch already tackled two of the

biggest – time and space – in *The Long and the Short of It* (pp. 4-14). But there's still plenty of options . . .

POWER LEVELS

One easy method for tweaking outlooks is to change the power level of a game. A superheroic campaign with cosmic-level heroes feels very different from one told from the point of view of street-level low-powered vigilantes . . . even in the same universe. (Witness the tonal difference between the *Daredevil* Netflix series and the *Iron Man* movies.) However, it's possible to tinker with power levels within a campaign. As a couple of examples . . .

In the Shadows of Giants

Imagine a standard *GURPS Action* campaign, or even something a bit lower-powered (say, 200 points – see *GURPS Action 4: Specialists* for info on how to make such heroes easily). However, it's set in a cinematic super-powered universe. The heroes aren't allied with any ultra-tech agencies, secret organizations, heroic groups, or the like. It's just them and their capers (if they're on the wrong side of the law), police assignments (if they're on the up and up), or everyman adventures (if they're just trying to get by). However, they keep intersecting whatever global crises befall the world thanks to spandex-clad titans vying for supremacy. Imagine a bank heist set during 2012's *The Avengers* film, or the heroes trying to stop a serial killer during the climactic destruction of Metropolis in *Man of Steel*.

Gods Made Men

The GM tells the players to each make more-or-less average folks (150 points in *GURPS*). However, the GM goes to one of the players and informs him that he's actually a deity in disguise, and to make a secondary character (2,000 points in *GURPS*); the first character is his mortal disguise.

*Resemblances are the shadows
of differences. Different people
see different similarities and
similar differences.*

– Vladimir Nabokov

The GM tells the player to be careful with that information, and choose best when – or if – to reveal it; the hero remembers that he *did* do this and that he can switch back, but he doesn't remember why he assumed mortal form or what will happen if he becomes a god again.

He then privately tells the same thing to all the other players.

Presumably the heroes will have standard (if interesting) adventures for a period, before one of them bites off more than he can chew and realizes there's no incentive *not* to reveal the truth now, since he's going to die anyway.

When that happens, it's quite likely that one or more of the other heroes will reveal their *own* origins.

Then the GM can transition to a new ultra-powered campaign, quite possibly centering on trying to figure out the whys and hows of having assumed mortal form in the first place. Were they hiding from something? Trying to learn something about humanity? Trying to protect the world from themselves?

This campaign can work in pretty much any genre. Dungeon-crawling adventurers could transition to ultra-powerful deities, or space-faring voyagers might become beings of pure energy.

As an added twist – if the GM has a player who would appreciate the challenge – don't tell that one player that he's a deity. When all his allies (that is, those who have "PC" stamped on their foreheads) transform, he's left wondering: Why haven't I transformed? Am I truly just a mortal among gods? Will my friends desert me?

A SHIFT OF POWER

One of the other big shifts in perspective comes from a recasting of a power source. For example, the classic game *Starflight* (and **SPOILER ALERT** for a game from 1986) has the revelation that the Crystal Planet doomsday super-weapon that's destroying planets in the galaxy was actually made by the Ancients. . . and, oh yeah, the dilithium-crystal-lesque fuel source used to power all starships in the game was – in fact – the Ancients. They hadn't gone away after all; they were just crystalline entities whose sense of time was radically different from the rest of the cosmos. (**END SPOILER ALERT**)

It's possible to change the perspective of a game universe by shaking up the origins or foundations of its energy. Some examples include:

- Magic can actually be learned by anyone . . . not just those with appropriate advantages or Unusual Background.
- Each usage of super-powers actually brings the wielder closer to death. (See the comic *Strikeforce: Morituri* for one related example of this idea.)
- Being the target of psionic powers – including wielders for self-directed powers – opens one up to possession from Things Humanity Was Not Meant To Know, such as the case with character designed using *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi*. (This is a case where the tinfoil hats really work well!)

Of course, what counts as a "power source" can vary from campaign to campaign. For example, the perspective of a space-faring game changes considerably if the heroes discover a device that allows them to hyperjump instantaneously between worlds – rather than the usual days or weeks that standard hyperjump takes. Suddenly the cosmos

becomes much smaller for them . . . or at least their perception of it does.

*Every man takes the limits
of his own field of vision for
the limits of the world.*

– Arthur Schopenhauer

THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

As a final idea for messing with perspectives in a campaign, reflect upon the nature of the adversaries. The most obvious idea is to make those who were formerly enemies now more closely aligned with the good guys. For example, Magneto reformed and led the X-Men for a time, while *Star Trek: The Next Generation* recast the Klingons – former villains of the original *Star Trek* – as allies of the Federation.

However, it can be more fulfilling to open up the mindset to allow for different possibilities. For example, maybe – in one campaign – zombies are a plague upon humanity (as always believed) . . . but they're a *symptom* of a larger evil that's attempting to work its way into the world. The walking dead spread like infectious cells, hoping to weaken its host's defenses – that is, the Earth – to allow for a more-horrifying entity to arrive. (See *GURPS Horror* for many icky possibilities.) In this way, the perspective of the campaign changes as zombies are no longer an evil unto themselves, but a manifestation of a larger problem.

Or perhaps super-powers cause an inherent instability in most of those who acquire them, turning them away from sanity toward evil. This would explain why most super-powered entities are villains instead of heroes (besides the campaign-world reason of giving the heroes plenty of folks to fight). This probably wouldn't affect the game too much, but it shifts the perspectives a bit if most adversaries are now not evil by their own conscious decisions, but victims of the side effects of the same abilities that the heroes utilize. This can become even more poignant if the heroes start wondering if *they* will turn evil someday . . .

As a final idea, what about – in a fantasy setting – the undead are a bleed off of energies that must be leached from the world, lest those forces threatens it? Like lancing a wound, a certain amount of undeath must be permitted into the world. In this case, a long-term goal of such a campaign might be trying to convince necromancers and servants of darkness to *help* humanity, by summoning their foul minions in controlled environments. "Diplomatic relations to Abydos, City of the Dead" never felt so ominous . . .

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. For more details on his background, see p. 32.

ODDS AND ENDS

ALTERNATE ELVEYS

Although designed for a modern setting, the Elvey Institute (pp. 30-32) can be used in a variety of campaigns without much adjustment. Furthermore, some core assumptions of the Institute can be tweaked to change its flavor a bit. Here are some additional ideas.

- There's nothing that would keep the Elvey Institute from being founded further back in time. However, the further back you go, the more you need to address what successes – or failures – they've had in the intervening years. (Post-WWII works well because we haven't hit 100 years out from that yet, so we don't have anything concrete we need to worry about the Institute having thwarted or not thwarted.) If you use the Institute in modern times but establish it in (say) the 1700s, then you'll need to explain why they didn't stop many of humanity's worst excesses in the 20th century. On the plus side, you can also point to more positive things that have happened and say that they're the result of Institute tinkering.

- The Institute can work well for fantasy settings. Since such campaigns already feature elves and other long-lived races, *and* many such worlds have ready sources of divination, the Institute can be much more open and forthright in what they're doing and hoping to accomplish.

- The Institute can be larger, if desired. As written they're designed to be somewhat out of the way – the eclectic information source tucked in a corner of the game world. However, there's no reason they couldn't have branch offices in multiple cities, dozens or hundreds of trained agents working on pre-crises centuries ahead of time, etc. In fact, going this route would make them an even more formidable adversary if it's ever revealed that there is something more nefarious going on within the organization.

Of course, any radical revision of the Institute will require you to tweak the stats with *GURPS Boardroom and Curia*, but that should be fairly straightforward.

ABOUT THE COVER

This month's cover was a challenge. How do we convey the idea of perspectives? After some brainstorming and chin stroking, we realized that one of the ideas explored in Sean Punch's article (pp. 4-14) was how extended periods of time can affect the outlook of a campaign. Would we be able to convey an encounter that gave that larger sense of time?

Fortunately, artist Brandon Moore – still busily at work bringing visual elements together for the forthcoming *Car Wars* – came through in a big way. The link between the old painting and the person is obvious but intriguing; is it the same guy? If so, *how*? And what's going on here, with the protagonist being held at gunpoint? The expression on the target's face is exactly the kind of cocksure confidence that an immortal would probably have in this situation – this is just another mildly diverting situation in a lifetime that's been full of them.

Here is the preliminary sketch of the cover. A text-free version of the finished artwork is on p. 37. Notice some of the nice touches on the final artwork, like the identical pin both portrait and target are wearing, and how the painting looks weathered and textured. For more artwork from Brandon, visit his digital domain at artofbrandonmoore.com.





ABOUT *GURPS*

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Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

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