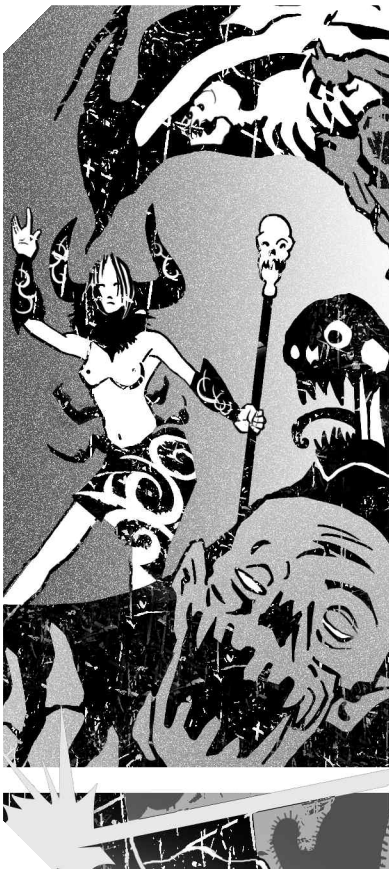


GURPS

Fourth Edition

POWER-UPSTM 5

IMPULSE BUYSTM



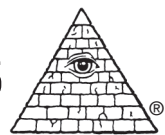
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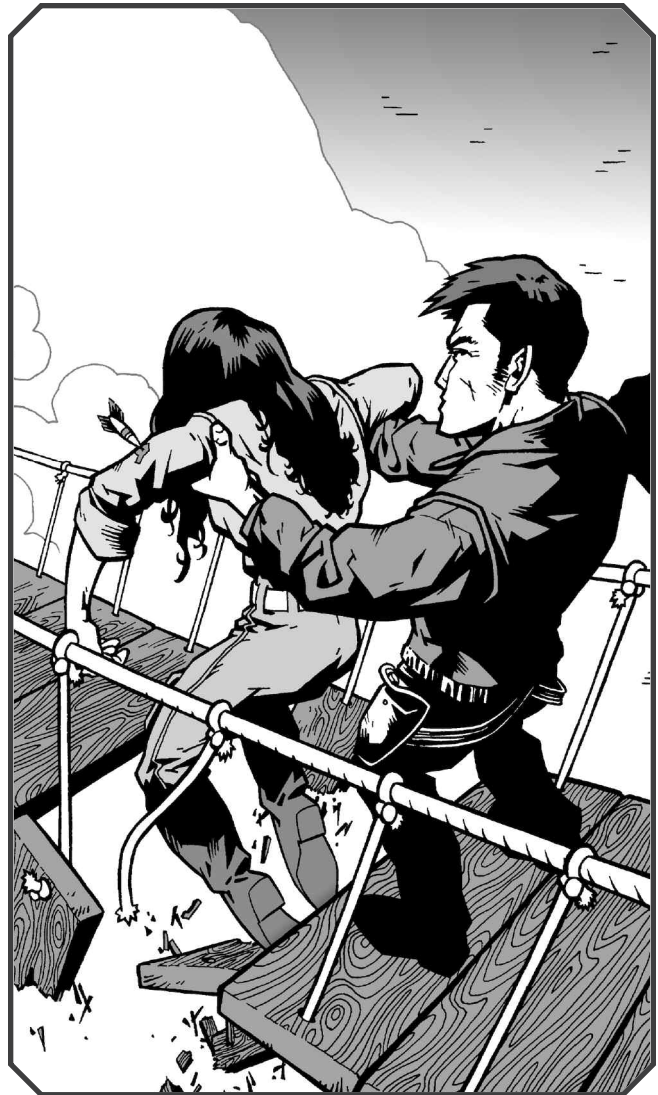
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Reviewer: Steven Marsh

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INTRODUCTION

Preparing a hero for all possible contingencies would mean pouring infinite character points into single-purpose advantages and powers, and specialized perks, skills, and techniques. While an ability for every occasion would be lovely, strategies that demand bottomless budgets are impractical. Burning a few unspent points for a one-time bailout *right now* is often affordable, though – and when the alternative is meeting a sticky end where those points don't matter anymore, it's also sensible. Even if the circumstances aren't especially deadly, they might be so rare that it's more efficient to deal with them *once*, cheaply, than to buy a costly permanent capability that won't see use ever again.

Moreover, not every problem is amenable to a solution that can be framed in terms of abilities. Dramatic challenges demand dramatic resolutions. While this most often means roleplaying, there are times when what the player hopes to accomplish and what the GM regards as plausible don't *quite* line up. In that case, the process escalates to negotiation – and the bargaining chips are character points.

These sorts of bailouts and bargains are the realm of **GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys**. It examines character points not in their better-known role as units of account for purchasing “goods” such as attributes and skills, but as a currency for buying “services” from the GM. Because not every power-up lasts forever!

PUBLICATION HISTORY

The notion of spending character points to affect outcomes in play first appeared in the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition** (p. B347). Later options turned up in **GURPS Martial Arts**, **GURPS Supers**, and **GURPS Thaumatology**, and in the series **GURPS Action**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, and **GURPS Monster Hunters**. **Impulse Buys** is inspired by all of these sources but takes little from them verbatim.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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), and the **GURPS Action**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, and **GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . and the list keeps growing. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, cooking, and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie, and their two cats, Banshee and Zephyra.

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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CHAPTER ONE

PARTING YOU FROM YOUR POINTS

First, a caution to players: Spending character points to alter in-game outcomes is optional and requires the GM's permission. It's tampering with the plot and often the setting – elements that fall in the GM's domain in a traditional RPG. Even if the GM is open to sharing control, he might feel that using a purely game-mechanical resource to influence events and circumstances in the campaign is too “meta” in certain cases. Thus, the following qualifier is implicit, if not explicit, in every one of these rules:

With the GM's permission . . .

If the GM allows an option, he'll set a price in character points for the desired effect, using the numbers in the text as guidelines – which is all they are! If the player wishes to proceed, then that's how many *unspent* character points he must pay (see *Paying Fate's Price*, p. 5). The player may spend or pass . . . but no backsies.

Rejecting the GM's offer means choosing to go with the flow instead of swimming upstream (or diverting the river). The player can't opt not to spend the character points, see what happens next, and then ask for his opportunity back when he doesn't like how things are going. He can petition the GM to let him spend points to affect events going forward, but he can't undo the past unless he gets the GM's permission to exercise an option that specifically allows that (e.g., *Flesh Wounds*, p. 10).

Likewise, once the player has spent character points, they're gone, used to improve his situation. They don't raise his character's point value. If he dislikes the outcome, too bad – spending points is sometimes a gamble! He can take heart in the knowledge that if he roleplays the situation well enough, the GM might award him more points.

Perking Things Up

Each major section of *Impulse Buys* includes a *Perking Things Up* box that notes a few perks from *Power-Ups 2: Perks* (and sometimes other sources) that might seem too powerful as permanent, one-point abilities in a gritty or low-powered campaign. Even in a game where they're balanced, PCs won't necessarily enjoy equal access to them all. In either case, the GM may rule that the effects of a perk that lends itself to interpretation in terms of “uses,” and that looks like a hero pushing his luck, repete, or abilities, can be bought in play for a character point per *use* instead of costing a point for keeps. The cost is *always* 1 point per use, regardless of the general rules for point expenditures found in the associated section.

These boxes strive to reproduce the relevant benefits of the listed perks. Gamers who use these rules extensively will find the full write-ups in *Power-Ups 2* helpful, however.

BUYING SUCCESS

The most basic use of character points in play comes from p. B347: A player can spend points to alter the outcome of his *immediately previous* success roll. The cost schedule:

- *Critical failure to failure*: 2 points
- *Failure to success*: 1 point
- *Success to critical success*: 2 points

Multiple shifts are possible. In that case, these costs are additive. Critical failure to success, or failure to critical success, costs 3 points; critical failure to critical success costs 5 points.

Buying Failure

When a player is *required* to attempt a success roll that he wants to fail or even critically fail, apply these point costs in the other direction; e.g., critical success to failure costs 3 points. This has its uses! For instance, a deadly warrior, mind-controlled to attack a defenseless ally, might spend points to critically miss and drop his weapon, while an interrogation victim may prefer paying once to fail a HT roll that means he passes out from torture to purchasing a success each time he's asked a question and blows his Will roll to resist Interrogation.

the Dramatic Death option in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11) is common; the magic rules under *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and the Rest in Pieces option in *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) are apt when they're rare (cost points to use); *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13) and even *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13) are frequently the only way to use strategic spells and powers; and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) is similarly fitting for individuals with suitable abilities, although those are often rare.

Especially Inappropriate: The more self-serving options under *Survival* (pp. 10-11) cheapen the sacrifice and struggle that characterize heroic fantasy. The dramatic tradition of fantasy differs from that of action movies; with few exceptions, then, the combat rules mentioned under *Opt-In Options* (p. 12), and *Bullet Time* (p. 15), are a poor match.

GURPS Horror

Arguably, allowing anything in Chapter 1 is unwise in horror. Such easy outs militate against doubt and suspense. Inasmuch as it makes sense to spend points in play, sacrifice and debt (*Paying Fate's Price*, p. 5) are highly appropriate. The GM might make these the *only* ways to mess with game-world outcomes in a horror campaign! It can't hurt to throw *Karmic Balance* (p. 18) into the mix, either. Horror is also a good match to *The No-Growth Campaign* (p. 19) and fertile ground for *Wagers* (p. 19), which can help convey mortality and tension, respectively – but the two rules don't mix well.

Especially Appropriate: *Buying Effect* (p. 6), when slamming the stake into Dracula's heart or otherwise acting with finality and conviction; *Divine Intervention* (p. 9), provided that the results are double-edged; *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13), when the points come from sacrifice and the energy empowers black magic; and *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13) and *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13), once again paid for by sacrifice, when the abilities are creepy or painfully modest.

Especially Inappropriate: *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7), *Perking Things Up: Buying Success* (p. 6), *Defense vs. Effect* (p. 6) against Fright Checks, and everything in *Survival* (pp. 10-11) constitute a long list of ways to poison suspense; *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) is almost as bad, as it offers far too much safety; *Divine Intervention* (p. 9) is out-of-genre when the intervention is purely beneficial; the Covenant of Rest rule in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11) and Rest in Pieces option in *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) are end runs around zombie plagues, vampirism, etc., and need careful monitoring if allowed; and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) is inherently monstrous and unsuitable for the protagonists.

GURPS Infinite Worlds

Any of the other sets of recommendations could apply in a suitable world. Those below consider the overarching setting. In that greater context, Destiny Points (*Wild, Wild Destiny*, p. 5) offer a way to handle parachronic travelers who are unusually important in the big picture – ones fated to shift timelines or prevent such disasters.

Especially Appropriate: World-specific traits are difficult to price for people who jump between alternates; far simpler to let them spend points on the Immunity option under *Perking Things Up: Buying Success* (p. 6) to resist a world's plagues, on *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) and the social options in *Perking Things Up: Player Guidance* (p. 9) to operate socially, and so on. *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) is easily justified in a background full of alternate outcomes; *Miraculous Recoveries* (pp. 10-11) and *Resurrecting Allies* (p. 11) can be explained as replacing the original with a parallel self; and *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) seem like suitable ways to liven up a campaign where anything is possible.

Especially Inappropriate: While not uniformly unsuitable, *Divine Intervention* (p. 9), the Covenant of Rest option in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11), *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13), *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13), and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) are supernatural and/or superhuman enough to merit close scrutiny.

GURPS Monster Hunters

This genre resembles “Action with monsters,” not **Horror**. Reserving a few starting points for tinkering with fate is an excellent idea; see *Paying Fate's Price* (p. 5). *Wild, Wild Destiny* (p. 5) was invented for **Monster Hunters**, *Serendipitous Guidance* (p. 8) offers a similar idea, and going all the way to *Other Kinds of Points* (p. 18) might work.

Especially Appropriate: *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7), the No Nuisance Rolls rule in *Perking Things Up: Buying Success* (p. 6), *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9), and everything under *Survival* (pp. 10-11) all play to genre conventions; *Dooming Foes* (pp. 5-6) and *Bullet Time* (p. 15) are excellent against hordes of zombies and cultists (but best not allowed vs. bosses); *Divine Intervention* (p. 9) suits champions with demonstrable holy power; the Dramatic Death option in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11) is fun, especially with enough explosives; *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13) befits the genre's powers; and *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13) meshes well with the way mentorship works in genre fiction.

I am puzzled afresh about Renfield . . . when I went to see him after his repulse of Van Helsing, his manner was that of a man commanding destiny. He was, in fact, commanding destiny, subjectively.

– Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

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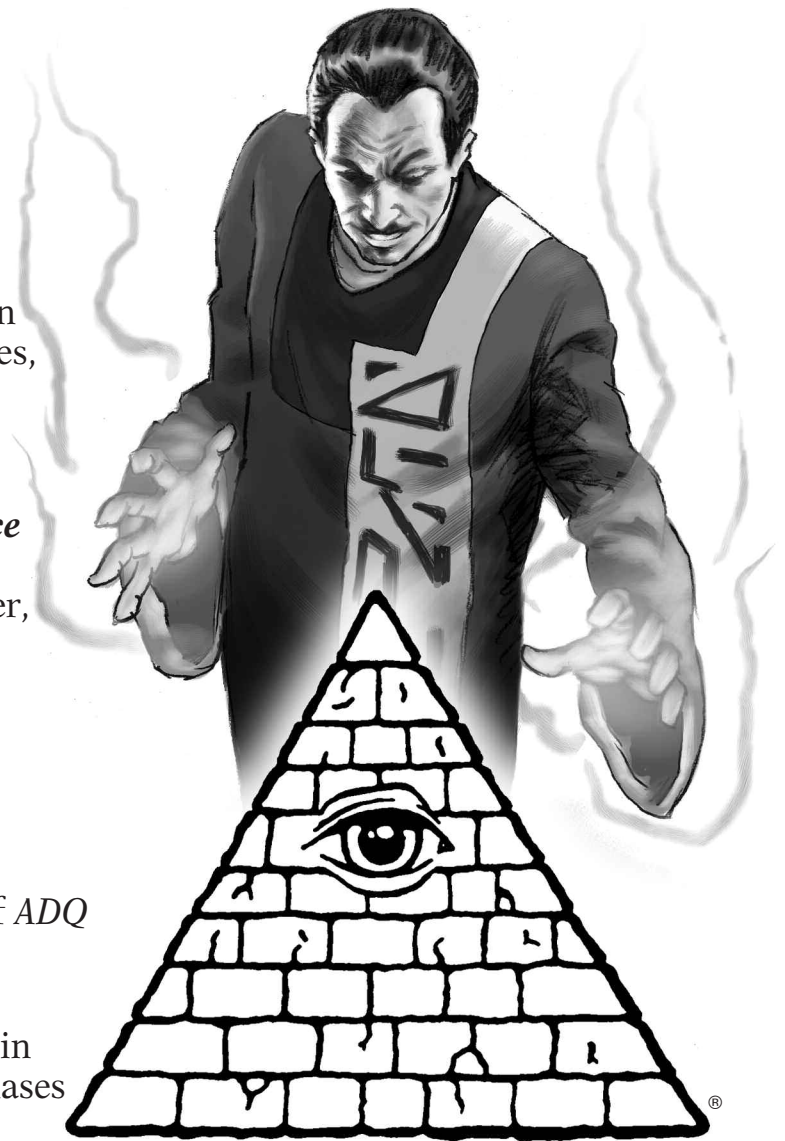
*A consistent soul believes
in destiny, a capricious one
in chance.*

– Benjamin Disraeli

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