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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.

# INTRODUCTION

Action is an overwhelmingly urban genre. The templates in GURPS Action 1: Heroes assume that the heroes have buildings and vehicles to break into, streets to cruise, tech to play with, and lots of people to manipulate and fight; GURPS Action 3: Furious Fists introduces the traceur, who craves buildings to climb. GURPS Action 4: Specialists provides a few skill sets for rugged outdoorspeople (Bushwhacker, Cowboy, and military training for wilderness ops) - but these are seriously outnumbered by modules suited to built-up areas (Car Thief, Construction, Fireman, Parkour, and Urban Assault are made for this!) with offices (to accommodate Academics, Businessperson, and Researcher), ubiquitous technology (many examples), and lively social environments (for Bon Vivant, Femme Fatale, Social Engineering, Spin Doctor, etc.). As well, while GURPS Action 5: Dictionary of Danger explores plants, farms, and the sea, the majority of the alphabet tours construction sites, garbage dumps, high-rises, industry, and infrastructure. The bias is so pervasive that GURPS Action 8: Twists treats departures from it as extraordinary.

Which is as it should be! Action cinema is dominated by tales of crime and grime that unfold on the mean streets, spy flicks that showcase fancy restaurants and hotels, capers where high-rises are scaled and casinos are robbed, and thrillers whose terrorists aren't satisfied unless they're endangering millions of lives and billions of dollars of property. Car chases race the wrong way through rush-hour traffic, foot chases disrupt thronged shopping districts, and Parkour across rooftops has become obligatory. Memorable fights occur in contraband-filled warehouses, dark alleyways, and dangerous factories. Action stories owe their energy to the pressures built up in crucibles of wealth and humanity, to the decay – physical and sometimes moral – of all things urban.

There's a supplement for defining cities in relatively simple terms: *GURPS City Stats*. The catch is that it provides stats that aren't obviously useful with *Action*, which chooses not to get caught up in urban demographics, infrastructure, economics, and politics. But much as *Twists* proposes uses for *GURPS Social Engineering: Keeping in Contact* and *Pulling Rank, GURPS Action 9: The City* makes *City Stats* useful.



### **Required Books**

*GURPS Action 9: The City* shows how to use *GURPS City Stats* with *GURPS Action 2: Exploits*. Thus, both are necessary – and also valuable even in modern-day campaigns that don't otherwise use *GURPS Action*. If you *are* using that series, everything else in it is recommended but not required.



## **About the Author**

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as GURPS Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to hundreds of GURPS releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to Pyramid magazine. From 2008, he has served as lead creator of the GURPS Action and GURPS Dungeon Fantasy series; work on the latter led to his design of the Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango. He lives in Montréal, Québec with son amour, Geneviève.

INTRODUCTION

## CHAPTER ONE CITY, STAT!

So, you open up *GURPS City Stats*, or look at a city written up using it, and see a wall of descriptive terms and numbers. Some provide a good idea of what the burg is like – *if* you're running a game where the heroes, say, have Status and Wealth, or must capture or defend the place in a war. Others seem *almost* useful to *GURPS Action* ... but not quite. Let's make like a mayor at election time and build some bridges!

#### An Explosion of Information!

*Action* is supposed to move quickly, which is why it simplifies existing rules more often than it coins new ones. Yet Chapter 1 offers so many categorizations, modifiers, numbers, etc. that using them all would make the game more complex. So, *don't do that!* Everything in this chapter is *highly optional*. The GM picks only the possibilities that improve the story – and these needn't be the same for each settlement in the campaign or adventure.

### **POPULATION**

In *Action*, population rarely matters in its own right. Most of its effects manifest through *Search Modifier* (below). An important exception is when a villain threatens to unleash *WMD* (*GURPS Action 2: Exploits*, p. 29). Similar thinking applies to a non-villainous *Outbreak!* (*Exploits*, p. 40).

Military-grade nukes are likely to kill 10-25% of a sprawling metropolis, or 80%+ of a more densely packed one. The GM could fairly roll 1d×10 for this percentage, reducing it to 1d×5, 2d, or 1d for a *makeshift* device. Biological, chemical, and radiological ("dirty") attacks are less immediately deadly – consider bumping them down a category or two – but often as bad or worse over time.

Thus, population sets the upper limit on how many lives are in danger. This matters when the heroes' actions can prevent or, more interestingly, *divert* the catastrophe; 100% of 0 out in the middle of nowhere is an obvious win, but a mere 1% of New York City is still over 80,000 people, which is like 10% of San Francisco or 100% of a college town. Numbers can motivate the *players* by making the menace feel more real, forcing dramatic choices.

#### Search Modifier

This modifier (which might be extended, p. 5) can affect *many* rolls in *Exploits*, and not only for searches!

The larger the city – in population or in the more abstract sense of physical scale – the more likely, better, or worse lots of things become. Below are several examples to use "as is" or inspire others.

*Reversed Search Modifier:* Many of the examples flip the sign of the search modifier; e.g., -3 for population less than 100 becomes +3 for a roll where smaller is better, and +3 for population 100,000+ becomes -3 for one where larger is worse.

*BAD* (*Exploits,* pp. 4-5): If the search modifier is positive, the GM might reverse it to estimate BAD when facing that locale's gangs, police, etc. This could *add* to the BAD for opposition with more resources in a town (e.g., -2 in general, -5 in Big City). Such BAD affects henchman skill levels normally (in that example, skill 12 becomes skill 15 in Big City) – competent minions are easier to find in a population center! In a campaign where the heroes venture abroad as agents of an organization that projects power, the GM may apply the search bonus to Assistance Rolls (*GURPS Action 1: Heroes,* pp. 24-25) made at "home base." *Ignore* all of this advice in small places with negative search modifiers – smalltown opponents never have "positive BAD" and smalltown employers never suffer AR penalties, because what they lack in resources they make up for by knowing their turf.

*Chases* (*Exploits*, pp. 31-35): When a chase tears through a packed mall or rush-hour traffic, apply the reversed search modifier to *everybody's* Chase Rolls. If *Collateral Damage* (*Exploits*, p. 35) occurs, use the *worse* of the reversed modifier or -(1d-1) when the quarry's wipeout causes the pursuer a penalty. If it's the *heroes* who wipe out, start the penalty to Assistance Rolls for endangering people at this level, too; e.g., in a city with search modifier +3, even the first wipeout in a crowd gives -3 for being reckless. *Don't* modify Hide rolls, though – the disruption of a chase draws enough attention to cancel any benefits from hiding in the masses!

*Cover-Ups* (*Exploits,* p. 26): The more people there are to blame, the easier to deflect said blame. Apply the search modifier to rolls for cover-ups where almost anybody could be guilty ("Crime boss stabbed in alleyway, pictures at 11!") – but *not* in "locked-room mysteries."

*Finding Things:* The search modifier does its usual job in *Action*, too! Apply it to all rolls to *find* anything there's more of in a bigger town – clients, gear, jobs, payphones, useful garbage, etc. However, reverse it when bad guys could've hidden something bad anywhere; it's harder to find a terrorist nuke in a city (-3) than in a hamlet (+3). This is likely to affect *The Job (Exploits,* p. 6), *Black Market (Exploits,* p. 6), *Dropping a Dime (Exploits,* p. 9), *Dumpster-Diving (Exploits,* p. 14), and *Detection (Exploits,* p. 29).

### TAZHICHENG

Action is a genre of stereotypes, and Tazhicheng ("City of Towers") plays on many of these: Parkour chases through crowded areas that resemble Hong Kong's late Kowloon Walled City, noodle carts to upset, stern cops reminiscent of the old Shanghai Police, the modern towers of international businesses, and every martial art in Southeast Asia. This is a place for heroes to live and work – or for foreign agents to visit on secret missions.

#### Action Items

*Population:* Tazhicheng has a densely packed core holding 1.3 million inhabitants – terrorists would target that, and nerve gas or a modest nuke could plausibly cause 80%+ casualties (call it a million). The GM should consider using an extended search modifier of +4, if not +6, to hasten searches where multiple attempts would be boring. Use +3 for attempts to hide in the crowd, get away with swiping things, or train people (there are *many* great candidates); -3 for penalties caused by crowds (e.g., in chases) and as the noise penalty for any kind of surveillance; but the full -4 or -6 as BAD for local police. Go with the standard Will 12 to resist rabble-rousing – crowds here aren't prone to rioting.

*Physical Environment:* The built-up area tapers off so gradually that **Urban Survival** is all that matters. On city streets, Move is unaffected but **Tracking** is at -6! The port is ideal for underwater action sequences, boat chases, and dumping corpses, but sheltered enough to avoid nautical dangers other than drowning and manmade hazards (cranes, ropes, winches etc.). The GM could interpret Hygiene -1 as an excuse for a HT-1 roll to resist a minor illness after swimming in the harbor, and impose an extra -1 to resist yucky stuff in dumpsters and sewers.

*Culture:* The official language is Chinese – specifically Mandarin – but most people understand English (mandatory in schools), and there are significant Cantonese, Filipino, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Tamil, and Thai communities. Literacy is nigh universal, and signs are in Chinese and English at least, and often more languages. Though Tazhicheng is TL8, the GM might choose to include flavor in the form of TL6-7 relics owned by older citizens – you can hotwire a

decrepit car or houseboat at +1 or +3, but you'll have -1 or -3 in the chase!

*Economy:* Tazhicheng is a vast cosmopolis with broad Wealth and Status profiles. No special rules are needed – although **Merchant** is applicable in more situations than usual, and the GM might let it work in any interaction where it doesn't seem downright wrong (as it would be when dealing with the police or the governor).

*Political Environment:* Tazhicheng is democratic enough that heroes can work for it – fighting crime (domestic and foreign) and Chinese spies – without hating themselves. But the fact that the place is so *bureaucratic* means adventures are sometimes less John Woo and more John le Carré; it can be a wilderness of mirrors. Yet in a free city, people who do "interesting" jobs ultimately answer to the governor,

## TAZHICHENG, 2021

**Population:** 6,500,000 (Search +3)

#### Physical and Magical Environment

**Terrain:** Island/Beach, Jungle inland **Appearance:** Average (0) I **No Mana** (No Enchantment)

Hygiene: -1

#### *Culture and Economy*

Language: Mandarin TL: 8 Wealth: Average (×1)

Literacy: Native

Status: -2 to 6

#### Political Environment

**Government:** Representative Democracy, Bureaucracy, Free City

CR: 4 (Corruption 0)

Military Resources: \$84.5M

Defense Bonus: +4

#### *Notes*

The City of Towers is often described as being a little like a cross between Hong Kong before the handover and a dirty, freewheeling Singapore. The GM could place it on any coast on the outside rim of the Chinese sphere in Southeast Asia. It's on a small bit of land and thus *crowded*; this and nearby jungle make it somewhat unhealthy (Hygiene -1).

Tazhicheng is administered by an elected governor (Status 6), currently Lee Lam, who oversees a domineering-but-honest bureaucracy (CR4 and Corruption 0) that operates semi-autonomously from the surrounding nation. In effect, the city is its own province. It's CR1 for mobilization, its generous Military Resources representing a bewildering number of police services: City Police, Border Patrol, Port Service, and even a municipal Counterespionage Bureau.

The city is a hub for maritime trade (+2 to search rolls), and a hotbed of both Chinese defectors and Chinese spies (+2 to search rolls).

which can appeal to gamers who dislike being cogs in a vast machine with faceless controllers. On the CR front, this is a place where heroic actions are never penalized but irresponsible ones generate -4 to BAD or Assistance Rolls, and where *foreign* actors who take on the authorities have an extra -4 BAD to deal with (-6, if using that for the local police as noted earlier).

*Military Capabilities:* Military Resources put Tazhicheng at 15 points as a Patron, but that's strictly the police; the GM could round up to 20 points for the city. Turned Enemy, that's -20 or -25 points. Call it BAD -5 for the cops or -6 for all departments, and use the *worst* of this and the other BAD values suggested above, unless the adventure is meant to be impossible. Go with -5 to illicit entry for the police at the borders *instead of* the -2 or -4 implied by Defense Bonus – the Border Patrol is exceptional.

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Vincent: Tell you the truth, whenever I'm here I can't wait to leave. It's too sprawled out, disconnected. You know? That's me. You like it? Max: It's my home.

Vincent: 17 million people. This was a country, it'd be the fifth biggest economy in the world and nobody knows each other.

- **Collateral** (2004)

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