

GURPS

Fourth Edition

MACGUFFINTM ALPHABET



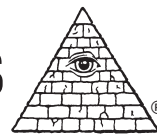
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About GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of **GURPS** players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: info@sjgames.com. Resources include:

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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.

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T IS FOR TALETELLER

No one knows how long Taleteller has been around. Elder races gossip about it; it is depicted in cave paintings found on the home world of the long extinct Charsommo. It came into possession of humans some 20 years back, and has changed hands nearly a dozen times since then.

Taleteller consists of a gnome-like animatronic mannequin and a small but massive throne. The mannequin is bipedal (at least currently) with mitten-like hands and facial features that look like they've been caught halfway through a morph between something unspeakably alien and those of a wise old man. (This is exactly the case; images of the mannequin from a few years before show a face that is far less human.) Its skin is a warm, rough, rubbery material. It wears a robe of what appears to be blue and white silk, but is actually something exuded from its body since coming to be owned by humans. The strands of strong plastic join the mannequin's posterior to its seat; the strands are just long enough to allow the figure to stand up and bow. The mannequin has DR of 2, and can take 16 points of damage before becoming inoperable.

Taleteller's throne masses nearly half a ton. It appears to have been carved from a single piece of polished marble. Sonic sensors will show that it is actually hollow. The shell, which is about 1/8" thick, consists of a super heavy metal alloy enameled with a lustrous mineral mined from the surface of dead suns. Inside is a small fusion power plant (runs on ordinary water; emits a mild flux of neutrinos), a store of nanotech repair bots, and a fabulously advanced AI computer. Given time and materials (hydrocarbons, fluorocarbons, fullerene carbon, and cellulose) the throne can generate a whole new mannequin. The shell has DR 15. 20 points of damage will

pierce the case, releasing a flood (100 RAD) of gamma rays. 25 points of interior damage will render the throne inoperative for 2d6 weeks; another 25 points of damage will ruin the self-repair function and put an end to Taleteller's career.

When introduced into a new culture, Taleteller carefully watches and listens to what goes on about it. Like a small child, it first communicates with gestures, enthusiastic babbles, and gurgles. With time (two or three weeks if properly stimulated) it becomes fluent in the local languages and eventually attains Savoir-Faire, Public Speaking, and other useful skills at level 16. When it feels as though it knows the psyche of its hosts, it lives up to its name and begins telling stories. These are always entertaining, and seem deeply "meaningful" in a Aesop's Fable sort of way. If allowed to banter with its audience and listen to gossip, Taleteller will eventually weave stores good enough to win awards and shake the composure of tyrants.

Taleteller's only goal is entertainment. It has no agenda. The best it can provide by way of advice or sage counsel is parables with rather obvious lessons.

Most frustratingly, Taleteller remembers almost nothing of the hundreds of peoples it has entertained through the millennia; its stories are always set in its current hosts' culture, or an allegorical variant. It can provide at most a two or three sentence description of each of its former patrons. It generally refers to them only when "dropping names" while setting up a tale. ("I have seen many great ships: The fabulous Golden Wheel of Schartaz; the dreadful Black Hive of the Hubrino; the ten thousand rafts of the Banquastine City Ship. But none compares to the mighty *Titanic*.")

U IS FOR UNUSED PORTION

The seething nanite muck custom-ordered from the shadowy Coalition of the Twelve and *The One* worked as promised. Over the course of two decades Meatta's native flora and fauna withered and died, leaving behind a layer of sterile, nutrient-rich humus. The thriving marine ecosystems took longer to die, but in the end the world's oceans were scummed with innocuous green algae. Knowledge of the makeover was on a need-to-know basis. Meatta Settlement Concepts' own ecopoeisis teams found the job of creating a new life-web trivially easy, but were secretly horrified. The nanites couldn't erase fossils, and a few stray survivors of the old biological regime remained in caves and mountain peaks.

That was nearly a century ago. Meatta is heavily settled now, with dozens of thriving agricultural settlements. Its founding corporation was effectively disbanded decades ago, after paying a hefty premium in the form of land-shares to its stockholders. But Meatta Settlement Concepts is still alive on paper, its trivial remaining affairs tended by two paralegals and an assistant working out of a cluttered, second-story office. Unknown to them until recently, the firm has one remaining physical asset . . .

The cloaked but obviously nonhuman envoy from the Coalition of the Twelve and *The One* barely fit in the office door. It demanded the return, per contract, of unused materials provided to the company. It provided proof, based on chemical signatures left behind in Meatta's soil, that five canisters of terraforming goo were not used by MSC. Failure to return the unused material would result in penalties, up to and including reversal of the work the materials had done.

The office staff, whose working days consist of paying decades-old bills, disbursing fractional-credit royalty checks, and arguing whose turn it was to go for coffee, obviously felt a bit overwhelmed, and began looking for help. They can't provide many clues. The last definitive sighting of the canisters took place two decades ago, when they were shrink-wrapped to a pallet before delivery to a low-rent warehouse which has since changed hands four times, been abandoned, and burned down.

The nanites were tailored to Meatta's ecosystem, but they could still pose a danger. The tiny mechanisms' "discovery" mode, in which they explore their surroundings looking for target organisms, resembles a virulent, but usually non-fatal, plague. It affects everything, from people to house plants.