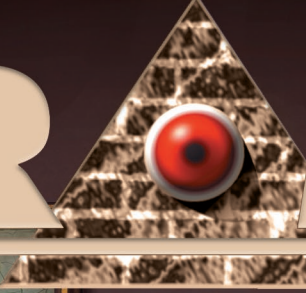


PYRAMID[®]



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

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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.

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*

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).

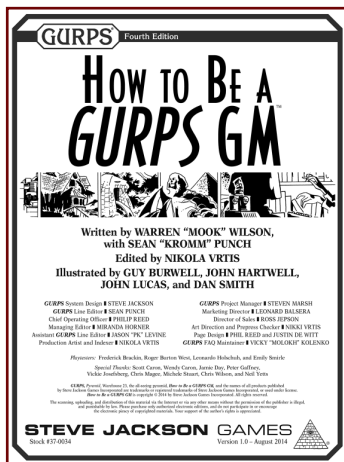
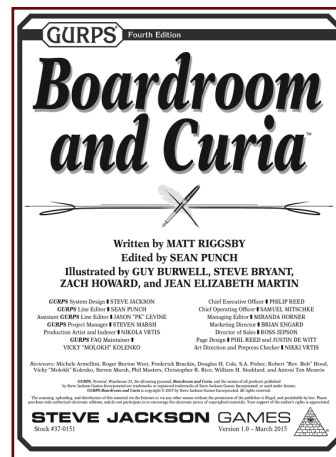
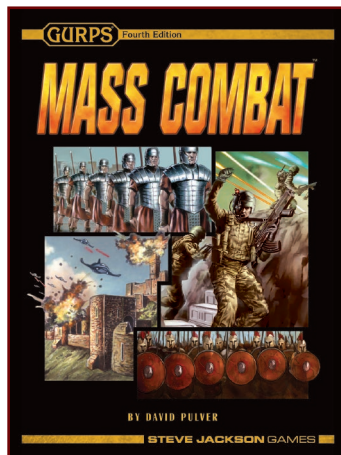
This issue also includes a guide to making the intersection between individual heroes and the larger forces of *GURPS Mass Combat* easier than ever. Nothing changes the perspective of a game more than going from an individual hero to large-scale conflicts (or vice versa). Rounding out this issue is a 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.

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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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!

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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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.

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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