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INTRODUCTION

GURPS stands for "Generic Universal RolePlaying System." The name was originally a joke . . . a code-word to describe the game while we looked for a "real" name. Years went by – literally! – as the game developed. We never found a better name. **GURPS** may sound strange, but it really fits.

"Generic." Some people like quick, fast-moving games, where the referee makes lots of decisions to keep things moving. Others want ultimate detail, with rules for every contingency. Most of us fall somewhere in between. **GURPS** starts with simple rules, and – especially in the combat system – builds up to as much *optional* detail as you like. But it's still the same game. You may all use it differently, but your campaigns will all be compatible.

"Universal." The basic rule system emphasizes realism. Therefore, it can fit *any* situation – fantasy or historical, past, present or future. I've always thought it was silly for game companies to publish one set of rules for fantasy, another one for Old West, another one for science fiction and another one for super-powers. **GURPS** is *one* set of rules that's comprehensive enough to let you use *any* background. There are world-books and supplements that "fine-tune" the generic system for any game-world you want. But they *are* still compatible. If you want to take your Wild West gunslinger and your WWII commando and go fortune-hunting in Renaissance Italy . . . go for it!

"RolePlaying." This is not just a hack-and-slash game. The rules are written to make true roleplaying possible – and, in fact, to encourage it. **GURPS** is a game in which you take on the persona of another character – and pretend, for a little while, to *be* that character.

"System." It really is. Most other RPGs are *not* "systems" – they started out as a simple set of rules, and then were patched and modified, ad infinitum. That makes them hard to play. **GURPS** is a unified whole. We've gone to a great deal of effort to make sure that it all works together, and it all *works.* **GURPS** will let you create any character you can imagine, and do anything you can think of . . . and it all makes sense.
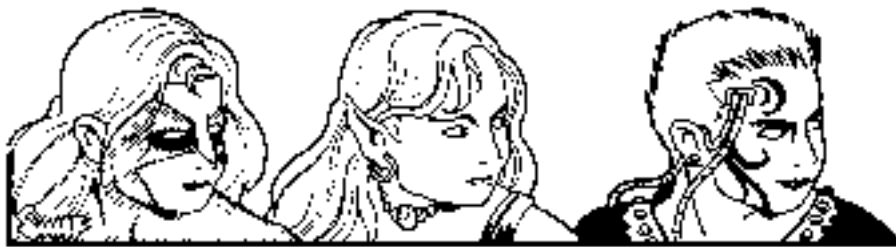
I've wanted to do this game for a long, long time. Several years ago, I designed my first fantasy roleplaying system.* It was good, but it had flaws. For one thing, like other RPGs, it "grew" from a simple set of rules, and had many inconsistencies. And, though it had the potential to be a universal system, it was never developed past the basic "fantasy" game-world. When the publisher went out of business, the game went out of print. I was disappointed . . . but it motivated me to start on a new and better system.

I've never tried to design in a vacuum; every game builds on the ones that came before. We learn from our successes – and from the successes of others. I think the best games are those that are simple, clear and easy to read, and I've tried hard to make **GURPS** "friendly." One important influence was Hero Games' **Champions,** for the flexibility of its character-creation system. Another was Flying Buffalo's **Tunnels & Trolls,** for its appeal to solitaire gamers. Finally, M.A.R. Barker's **Empire of the Petal Throne** is noteworthy for the detail and richness of its alien game world.

But there's more to **GURPS** than trying to repeat past success. The failures of earlier game systems are important, too. In **GURPS**, I've tried to achieve several things I think earlier designs missed.

The Fantasy Trip (Metagaming), comprising several products released from 1977 to 1980.

How to Learn GURPS

Most of you have some experience with roleplaying games already. You should find **GURPS** easy to pick up. But if this is your first RPG, you'll have a little more to learn. Relax; if you got this far, you'll be fine.

Don't be alarmed by the thickness of the book. There's a lot of material here – 250,000 words, more or less – but we've done our best to make it easy to use. Both the Table of Contents and the Index are as detailed as we could manage.

Several features have been designed specifically to make the rules easier to learn. These include:

The Quick-Start section (p. 9). This is a one-page description of the basic **GURPS** game mechanics.

The Glossary (p. 250). This is a listing of definitions of the terms used in the game, along with page references.

"All In A Night's Work," the introductory solo adventure, which starts on p. 218. This adventure is designed for one player (no Game Master is needed). You can play it as one of the pre-generated characters (pp. 214-217), even if you don't yet know the rules. It's written to help you learn as you go; it can also be used by an experienced GM to teach the game to friends.

Here's a good way to learn **GURPS:** Start by skimming through this book, just to get the flavor of the game. Don't worry about the details yet.

Then read the *Quick-Start* section to understand the basic game mechanics. After that, read through the *Characters* section, just to get an idea of the different things characters can do.

Then play *All In A Night's Work.* Any time something is unclear, use the *Glossary* or *Index* to find the rule sections you need.

Then try creating your own character, and play again. Try to design a 100-point character that can best survive the adventure.

Finally, read the rest of the rules in detail, including Chapter 21, *Game Mastering.* Now you can be the GM and run a few of your friends through the solo adventure . . . either one at a time, or all cooperating at once to play the thief! You'll find that you already know enough to get along, and you'll learn fast. These rules were designed to fade into the background and let you play the way *you* want to.

Now you're ready to invent your own adventures – see Chapter 23. You can do whatever you want . . . that's the whole point of the system.

Have fun!

Materials Needed for Play

The **GURPS Basic Set** is a 256-page book; its major sections, after the introductory material, are *Characters, Adventuring, Game Mastering* and *Charts and Tables,* plus the adventure.

Also included is a 16-page perforated section in the back of the book. It is intended to be removed from the book. First is the "Instant Characters" play aid, a reference for you to use in creating characters. Also supplied are two blank character sheets.

There is a two-sided 11"×17" map with a hex grid (you'll have to tape two pages together to form the map). One side of the completed map represents a building interior; the other side shows an outdoor area. Each hex on the map is a yard across. Blank hex paper is also provided in two sizes.

Three forms for the GM to use are also provided. They are explained in more detail in the chapter on *Game Mastering.*

You will also need:

Photocopies of the Character Record Sheet, and the other planning and record sheets, for player use. Make as many copies as you need (for your own use only – not for resale) before you start to play. Likewise, you may copy the various charts and tables, and the *Random Characters* section, for your own use.

Three six-sided dice.

Pencils and scratch paper.

Removable tape – to hold the maps down on the table (optional).

The GM will need his maps, notes, etc., for the adventure you're going to play.

About the Author

Steve Jackson has been playing games for entirely too many years, and designing professionally since 1977. His other game design credits include *Ogre* and *G.E.V.,* the award-winning *Illuminati,* the best-selling *Car Wars* and many others. He has served as secretary of the Game Manufacturers Association, and is the youngest person ever inducted into the Origins "Hall of Fame."

He is the founder of Steve Jackson Games, in Austin, Texas.

Steve is an active member of the Science Fiction Writers of America. He is also an active science fiction *fan,* and wastes a great deal of time writing for various zines and attending (or helping to run) conventions.

When he's not at a game or science fiction convention, his hobbies include BBSing, beekeeping, gardening (especially water lilies) and tropical fish.

First and foremost, of course, is the *flexibility* of a "universal" system. Others have tried this, but have fallen into the twin traps of watered-down combat (where a lightning bolt is just like a .45 pistol) or incompatibility (where players have to learn so many alternate rules for each new game that they might as well be learning a new game, and characters don't easily cross over). I think that **GURPS** presents a single, unified system that allows for great diversity without losing its coherence. This Third Edition includes several complete sections (*Magic, Psionics, Modern and Futuristic Weapons* and more) that were originally parts of separate worldbooks. They seemed important enough to bring into the Basic Set – so here they are.

Second, and almost as important, is *organization.* Any realistic RPG has a lot of detail. After all, *life* has a lot of detail! So RPGs should be well-organized. But few are. Every gamer has had the experience of hunting frantically through one book after another, looking for a rule . . . and not finding it. **GURPS** is extensively cross-referenced, with Table of Contents, Index and a Glossary of terms used in the game. I hope this helps.

Third is *ease of play.* In **GURPS**, most of the detailed calculations are done before you start play . . . they are entered on the character sheet, and saved until you need them. Once play actually begins, it should not be complex. I've tried to make **GURPS** as fast-moving yet realistic as possible. It's up to you to decide whether I succeeded.

Most roleplaying systems depend for their success on a continual flow of "official" supplements and adventures. **GURPS** is different. True, we've released a lot of material already, and we plan to do much more; a totally universal system offers great leeway, and we've got a supplement list as long as your arm. See the next page for details.

But **GURPS** is designed to be as compatible as possible with supplements written for *different* games. The reason? Simple. Suppose that you're a **GURPS** player. You're at the hobby shop, and you see a really interesting supplement package. But it's by another publisher, for another game.

So what?

The **GURPS** system breaks everything down into plain English and simple numbers. Distances are given in feet and miles, rather than arbitrary units; times are given in minutes and seconds. That's what makes it generic. That also makes it easy to translate. If you see an interesting supplement for another game, go right ahead and get it. You can use it as a sourcebook for **GURPS.**

Likewise, if you really insist on playing another game once in a while (sigh) . . . you can still use your **GURPS** adventures. As long as that other game uses units that you can translate into feet, minutes and other plain-English terms, you can use your **GURPS** adventures in that system.

To be honest, we hope **GURPS** will become the "standard" roleplaying system. But we don't expect to do that by driving everyone else out of the market, or even by forcing them to conform to us. Instead, *we* are conforming to *them* – by producing a system that will work with *any* clearly-written adventure.

At any rate, here it is. I'm satisfied that **GURPS** is the most realistic, flexible and "universal" system ever developed. It was five years in the making, and this Third Edition is the product of another two years of development and player comment after the initial release. I hope you like it.

– Steve Jackson

World-Building

A game world is a complete background setting for a game. It takes in *everything* described on p. 198 for adventures, and more. Creating an original, believable, interesting world is a real challenge. "World-building" can be the beginning of a campaign, but more often it's the *result* of a long and successful campaign. Designing an entire game world is complex and time-consuming. Many of the best game worlds started out as individual fantasies, and developed over a long period of time. Tékumel, the fictional creation of Professor M.A.R. Barker (**Empire of the Petal Throne**) is a perfect example.

To "design" a historical game world will require many hours of research. Worlds based on fiction (novels or TV series, for instance) require research too – to make sure every detail conforms to the source, and to fill in logically where the original story gave no information.

Some things you must consider when designing a game world are:

Cultures and Customs
Adventure Settings
Skills, Jobs and Professions
Monsters and Animals
Transportation
Medicine
Technology and Communications
Weapons and Combat
Special Advantages and Disadvantages
Maps
Politics and Religion

For examples, see any of the many game worlds already released by SJ Games. These are listed and described on p. 7.

We're Professionals (Don't Try This At Home)

Oh, never mind. Go ahead and try if you want to. We might even pay you for it! We've found that the people who enjoy our games are often the most creative, and the most likely to write good new material.

SJ Games is always interested in finding new writers of adventures or game worlds. We don't insist on previous experience. Send us a sample of your work; it will speak for itself.

But first, get our writer's guidelines. Send us a legal-sized stamped, self-addressed envelope (our address is on p. 7), and we'll send you complete information on our rules and requirements. Or get them from our web site at http://www.io.com/sjgames/.

Or, if you want an easier way to break in, try submitting an article to *Pyramid* magazine. Just send it attn: Pyramid Submissions, to the address on p. 7. *Pyramid* accepts submissions for any game system, not just **GURPS!**

Warning: we're perfectionists. So be prepared – if you send us a manuscript, we'll nit-pick. Good luck.

DON'T PANIC. You don't have to do all this at once. Most campaigns just "grow," a bit at a time. One adventure leads to the next, and before you know it, you've been playing for a year, and you've got a campaign going. Much of the flavor of a good campaign will come from the players themselves. The PCs' patrons, dependents and enemies will become continuing NPCs . . . old foes will reappear when they are least wanted . . . maps will become more detailed each time you play. Players come and go, but the campaign goes on. And nobody learns to run a campaign by reading the rulebook. Experience is the best teacher.

A campaign consists of one adventure after another. Each adventure may consist of many sessions. The GM decides what goes on in the game world *in between* game sessions – and *especially* between adventures. The important NPCs will go about their own affairs. Wars, weather, politics and trade can go on in the "background" of the campaign, giving rise to new adventures. Your players will be a good source of suggestions . . . and they will be tremendously pleased if their adventures affect the "whole world" in some way, whether they turn aside a catastrophic war or simply find a cure for the Queen's wart.

TRAVEL BETWEEN GAME WORLDS

One of the chief purposes of the **GURPS** design is to let players move freely between different game worlds without learning a whole new set of rules each time. A player can participate in several different campaigns, each in a different place or time, and play a different character in each campaign. Each character stays in his own world. But the *characters* can also move from one game world to another. This can happen in two ways:

(1) A player can develop a character in one game world and then bring that character into another game world. An example might be a medieval wizard, hurled hundreds of years into the future by a magic spell, participating in a WWII adventure.

(2) An entire campaign can move from one game world to another. For example, suppose the party is the crew of an interstellar trading ship. They crash-land on a primitive planet. Until they can make their way to the spaceport, on the other side of the world, they have effectively been dropped into the 12th century!

Differences in Worlds

As a rule, the more different two worlds are, the harder it should be for PCs to move between them deliberately. Significant differences would include:

High-mana (magical) world vs. low-mana (technological) world.
Very low-tech world vs. very high-tech world, regardless of magic.
Largely-human or all-human world, vs. world with many races.
War-wracked, plague-ridden world, vs. peaceful, decadent world.
Fantasy world vs. strictly historical, "real" world.

Certainly any or all of these differences could exist on a single planet! But they would not be found next door to each other. Likewise, GMs should make travel between incompatible worlds *difficult.* This achieves an effect that is very rare in gaming; it improves both realism and playability. Players will appreciate the fact that "rule changes" come only with warning.

Possible obstacles to inter-world travel include all the standard geographical barriers: high mountain ranges, wide oceans, extensive deserts or badlands, swampy jungles, etc. Magical barriers are also a possibility, as are intervening hostile lands. GMs may also have their different worlds located, *literally, on different worlds.* The problems of interplanetary travel at low tech levels are not to be taken lightly, but powerful magic can do almost anything. Of course, such powerful magic is not likely to be within the PCs' own control . . .