

G U R P S[®]

CLIFFHANGERS[™]

SECOND EDITION



By BRIAN J. UNDERHILL

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

LIVING ON THE EDGE!

Sprint along the crumbling brink of disaster, dodging the jaws of death without a pause for breath from one peril to the next. This is the world of the dauntless men and daring women of the 1930s adventure serials. Visit exotic trouble spots, travel the trackless wastes, and soar through the skies.

GURPS Cliffhangers includes:

- A guide to the world of the 1920s and '30s, including a detailed timeline and a chapter describing each continent.
- Rules for creating heroes with the style and stamina for cliffhanging adventures.
- Campaign and adventure seeds, including suggestions on adding the cliffhanging style to other genres.
- Sample characters, both dashing heroes and dastardly villains.

Travel back to a time of adventure and romance, when one person could still make a difference – the world of **GURPS Cliffhangers!**



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GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised and *Compendium I: Character Creation* are required to use this supplement in a **GURPS** campaign. **GURPS Cliffhangers** can also be used as a sourcebook for any roleplaying system.

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GURPS[®]

CLIFFHANGERS

TM



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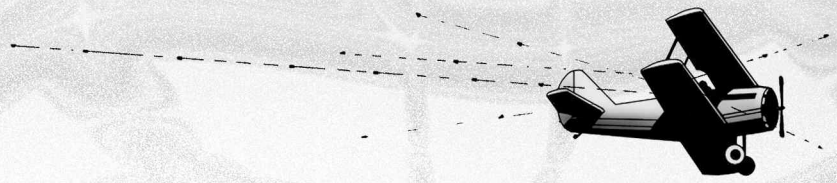
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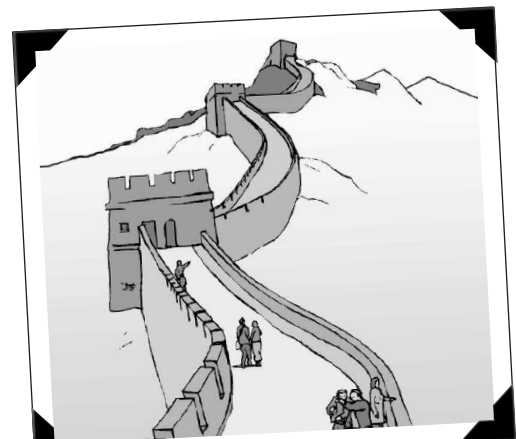
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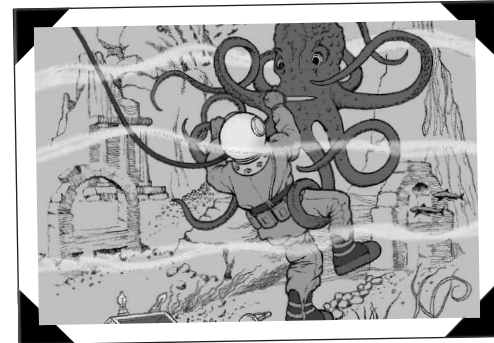
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ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the **GURPS** system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources include:

Pyramid (www.sjgames.com/pyramid/). Our online magazine includes new **GURPS** rules and articles. It also covers *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and many more top games – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *In Nomine*, *Illuminati*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre Miniatures*, and more. *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online!

New supplements and adventures. **GURPS** continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. A current catalog is available for an SASE. Or check out our website (below).

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata sheets for all **GURPS** releases, including this book, are available from SJ Games; be sure to include an SASE. Or download them from the Web – see below.

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Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for an online catalog, errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. **GURPS** has its own Usenet group, too: rec.games.frp.gurps.

GURPSnet. This e-mail list hosts much of the online discussion of **GURPS**. To join, e-mail majordomo@io.com with “subscribe GURPSnet-L” in the body, or point your web browser to gurpsnet.sjgames.com.

The **GURPS Cliffhangers** web page is at www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/cliffhangers/.

Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the **GURPS Basic Set** – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the **GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition**. Page references that begin with CI indicate **GURPS Compendium I**. Other references are BE for **GURPS Bestiary**, CII for **GURPS Compendium II**, HT for **GURPS High-Tech**, MA for **GURPS Martial Arts**, MO for **GURPS Monsters**, PM for **GURPS Places of Mystery**, VE for **GURPS Vehicles**, WT for **GURPS Warehouse 23**, and WWi for **GURPS Who's Who I**. A full list of abbreviations can be found on p. CI181, or see the updated web list at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

INTRODUCTION



Welcome to a world of mystery and intrigue, excitement and danger, gunplay and glory. It's a world filled with lost treasures, exotic lands, villainous masterminds, and unspeakable horrors. This is the sensational world of the adventure stories of the 1930s . . . the “pulp!” **GURPS Cliffhangers** contains game mechanics, campaign suggestions, background information, exotic settings, and historical details from several sources . . .

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian J. Underhill has spent over two decades roleplaying, and half that time writing about it. His publishing credits range from book and movie reviews for various periodicals to tongue-in-cheek humor bits on a whole gamut of gaming topics. He is both the author and revisor of **GURPS Cliffhangers** and has several other projects on the burner, including a pulp-era adventure novel and more than one **GURPS** project.

He is ever grateful to the Internet for transforming research from a tedious, headache-inducing search for minutiae in a dusty library into a tedious, headache-inducing search for minutiae in the comfort of one's own home.

SECOND EDITION

Readers familiar with the original edition of **Cliffhangers** will notice several changes.

Chapter 1 now contains a detailed description of the 1920s and '30s in general, with an expanded timeline covering the years 1925-1939. Information on 1940-1945 can be found in **GURPS WWII**, allowing GMs to run a **Cliffhangers** campaign spanning some 20 years!

The subsequent chapters now contain revised and expanded information on adventure locations around the world, including Australia, the Caribbean, and more. The chapters focus not only on adventure sites, but also politics and government, for use in espionage- or military-oriented adventures.

Finally, in addition to adding templates for quick-start adventures, and updating material to reflect improvements in the **GURPS** system over the years, an entire chapter has been added to help GMs apply the **Cliffhangers** style to over a dozen other genres!



LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD

The following is a list of countries (or regions) and some of their major languages. Those who are fluent in one of the languages listed below will be able to communicate with at least some.

- Africa, north: *Arabic, Tuareg (rare), French, Spanish*
Africa, sub-Saharan: *Kiswahili, Kingwana, English, French*
Arabia (Saudi Arabia): *Arabic*
Argentina: *Spanish*
Austria: *German*
Belgium: *Flemish, French*
Bolivia: *Spanish, Aymara, Quechua*
Brazil: *Portuguese*
China: *Mandarin, Cantonese, Soochow, Min*
Denmark: *Danish*
Eastern Africa: *Kiswahili*
Ecuador: *Spanish, Quechua*
Egypt: *Arabic*
El Salvador: *Spanish*
Ethiopia: *Amharic*
Guatemala: *Spanish*
India: *Hindi, Persian, English*
Indonesia: *Bahasa, Dutch*
Iraq: *Arabic*
Libya: *Arabic*
Malaysia: *Malay*
Mexico: *Spanish*
Nepal: *Nepalese*
Netherlands: *Dutch*
Palestine: *Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, English*
Paraguay: *Spanish, Guarani*
Persia (Iran): *Farsi, Kurdish*
Peru: *Spanish, Aymara, Quechua*
Samoa: *Samoan, English*
Singapore: *Cantonese, Malay, English*
South Africa: *English, Afrikaans*
Sudan: *Arabic*
Tibet: *Tibetan*
Thailand: *Thai, Cantonese*
Turkey: *Turkish, Kurdish*
Wales: *Welsh, English*
Yugoslavia: *Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian, Slovenian*

Dialects and Lingua Franca

Follow the rules on pp. B54-55 when dealing with dialects. Related languages may also default to one another. For example, some dialects of Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish are mutually intelligible at -3 or -4.

Several languages are widely used for commerce and diplomacy. Kiswahili is spoken over most of sub-Saharan Africa, Arabic over most of North Africa and the Middle East, Pidgin English in most of the South Pacific, and Malay in most of the East Indies. English is the most widespread language in the 1930s; there is a chance of finding an English-speaker almost anywhere.

Adventuring Around the World

In the shrinking world of the 1930s, travelers can go farther and faster than ever before. They must, however, pay strict attention to the laws and customs of foreign nations.

Passports and Customs

Entering most foreign countries requires a passport and a visa. These papers may take several weeks to process, depending on the destination. If they are confiscated, lost, stolen, or destroyed, it may take days, weeks, or even months to get replacements. In some countries, anyone without proper papers may find it impossible to leave . . . or even to get a room and a meal. False papers cost many times the legal price, and possession of false papers is a serious crime.



Guides and Translators

Unless someone in the party is fluent in the local language, foreigners may find themselves unable to do business. Guides and translators can usually be found in any major city or frequently visited locale.

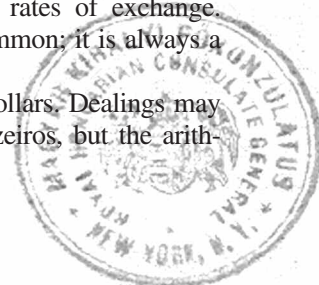
Local guides in primitive countries charge from \$0.10 to \$5.00 per day (use 3d×10 cents to generate an average fee, then adjust it depending on quality, honesty, the local economy, demand, and so forth). An advance payment may help relations, or may tempt the guide to take the cash and leave without doing the job. Check the reaction of the guide as described on p. B204; increase the penalties if the guide has been patronized or mistreated, the job is dangerous, or it violates local customs and mores. High-paying strangers will be swamped by would-be guides, each one “the best you can find.”

“European” guides in exotic locales (Old China Hands, Great White Hunters, etc.) are much more expensive. Use 2d + (Area Knowledge/5) + (Reputation as a guide)×dollars per day as a price guide. High skills in useful areas such as Tracking, Guns, Survival or Naturalist may cost more.

Currency

Depending on the country, American dollars may be worthless or highly desirable. They may be exchanged for local currency; the GM determines rates of exchange. Black-market currency dealing is common; it is always a serious crime.

All prices in these rules are in dollars. Dealings may actually be in rupees, rubles, or cruzeiros, but the arithmetic will be the same.



ADVENTURING IN EQUATORIAL AFRICA

Hunting

The 1930s are a great age for safaris. There are comfortable modern cities; the plains and deserts are accessible to cars, trucks, and rough-field airplanes; and portable electric generators can keep the beer cold. Safari clients have a reputation for eccentricity, and a trophy hunt is good cover for less acceptable activities. Great White Hunters can do well, if their nerves can take it.

Poaching

By the '30s, hunting is already government-controlled in all of Africa. The game laws are strictest and best enforced in British territory, and laxest in Portuguese. Elephant ivory, rhino horn, and leopard skins can be a fortune for a good shot with a ruthless nature (or for a rugged individualist not trammied by the petty rules of a bureaucracy). Protecting the game is a satisfying job for noble spirits, except for the occasional nasty chore such as dealing with a man-eating lion or rogue elephant.

Soldiering

All of the colonial powers maintain garrisons in Africa, and all of them sometimes see action. Not all the natives appreciate the blessings of civilization. Most of the garrison troops are Africans, with European officers and sometimes European NCOs. Any sophisticated rebels are glad of experienced mercenaries, but "traitors to the white race" don't get prisoner-of-war treatment if they are caught!

Exploring

A lot of Africa hasn't been mapped yet. Somewhere in the deserts and plains and jungles and mountains may be riches or the solution to riddles. Lost cities, lost mines, lost races, lost civilizations, or maybe just lost explorers may be found almost anywhere. Mysterious native rumors abound: the white queen of the cannibals, the child raised by animals, the huge things that go *Ghroonk!* in the night. Only dauntless searchers will find the answers.

Cannibals

A good *Cliffhangers* campaign will find cannibalism in many parts of Africa, especially in the Congo region, as well as throughout the islands of the Pacific. Many natives believe that if you eat a portion of your enemy after his death, you gain his strength. This tradition should not be confused with cannibalism for the sake of food.

Some tribes even eat human flesh just for variety. The practice of capturing and "fattening up" other humans is probably not common, but it is up to the GM to determine each tribe's cannibalistic practices.

GMs including cannibals in their campaign are encouraged to find entertaining ways to put the PCs in peril while still providing them an opportunity to escape. Being roasted on a spit or boiled in a large black cauldron (complete with lots of vegetables) are pulp classics.



Organized Crime

One of the staples of the crimefighting adventure is the organized crime ring. GMs should establish the exact nature of the underworld's influence over whatever city the campaign is in; how many factions are vying for the same "turf," who are the principal NPCs, and what areas they excel in (e.g., racketeering, narcotics, prostitution). Private investigators, G-men, police, crusaders, and reporters are all excellent candidates for this type of adventure. See pp. 100-103 for information on appropriate villains for a crimefighting campaign, including gangsters and henchmen.

Global Crime

Throughout the pulps we find master criminals who are not content with controlling a section of a city. It is not greed that drives them to carry out their fiendish plans, but megalomania – they want to rule the world.

World-conquering villains are the natural foes of crusaders and soldiers of fortune. Of course, anyone adventuring with a globe-hopping crimefighter has ample opportunities – perhaps more than they would like – to test their wits and weapons against a megalomaniacal mastermind.

Global crime is especially suited to *Supers* campaigns (p. 114).

HORROR

The pulps did not create the horror genre, but they certainly popularized it. *Horror* campaigns may include anything from ghosts, vampires, and zombies to Ancient Slobbery Things With Unspeakable Names. See *GURPS Horror*, *GURPS Monsters*, and other related supplements.

Old Favorites

Ghosts, vampires, werewolves, graveyards, and haunted houses – these and other cliché horror trappings can provide hours of enjoyment. They make adventures easier to design for GMs, and players love the familiarity.

GMs must be careful, however, not to let familiarity lead to boredom. There isn't too much that hasn't been done in this area, and the players are likely to have already seen it. One way to keep the players on their toes is to change one or more of the elements that they are so sure of – a werewolf that sucks the blood of its living victims is sure to cause some confusion . . .

Eldritch Horrors

H.P. Lovecraft and his peers created an entire mythos, intricately tied in with accurate historical facts. Most of the stories involved "normal" people uncovering, and often unleashing, evil entities of tremendous power (many times worshipped as gods). The tales almost always had a tragic ending. The mythos is too complex even to begin to detail, and GMs would do well to read some of the works of Lovecraft and his emulators (e.g., August Derleth, Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch). More suggestions can be found in *GURPS Horror*, *GURPS CthulhuPunk*, and especially in Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu*, the licensed roleplaying version of Lovecraft's mythos.



STREET TALK

Detective stories of the Thirties were laced with slang. To add to the atmosphere of a crimefighting campaign, use some of the terms listed below. The more detective pulps you can get your *meat hooks* on, the better your slang will be. So get off your *kiester* and go find some.

Instead of just pulling a gun, *jack out your heater, rod, hardware, blaster, or iron.*

Don't talk about the good-looking girl that came into your office . . . brag about the *dish, looker, peach, lolla-palooza, babe, skirt, or dame.*

Nervous? You've got a case of the *heebie-jeebies, jitters, willies, or creeps.*

Kill anybody lately? Well, now that you *put them on ice*, the *cops, heat, or coppers* are going to send you *up the river* or lock you in the *hoosegow, clink, slammer, or pen.*

Shoot someone: *drill or plug him. Fill him with lead, give him a case of lead poisoning.*

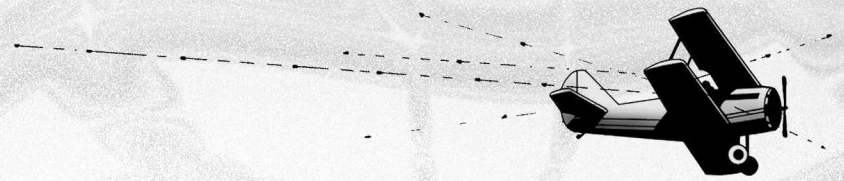
On the run: *on the lam.*

A clumsy idiot: *lummock, lunkhead, oaf.* Excellent for verbal abuse among thugs!

Money: *lettuce, bacon, dead presidents, jack, scratch, dough.*

A dollar: a *buck, clam, bullet, peso, or simoleon.*

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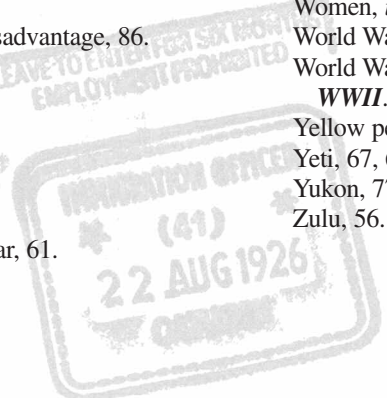
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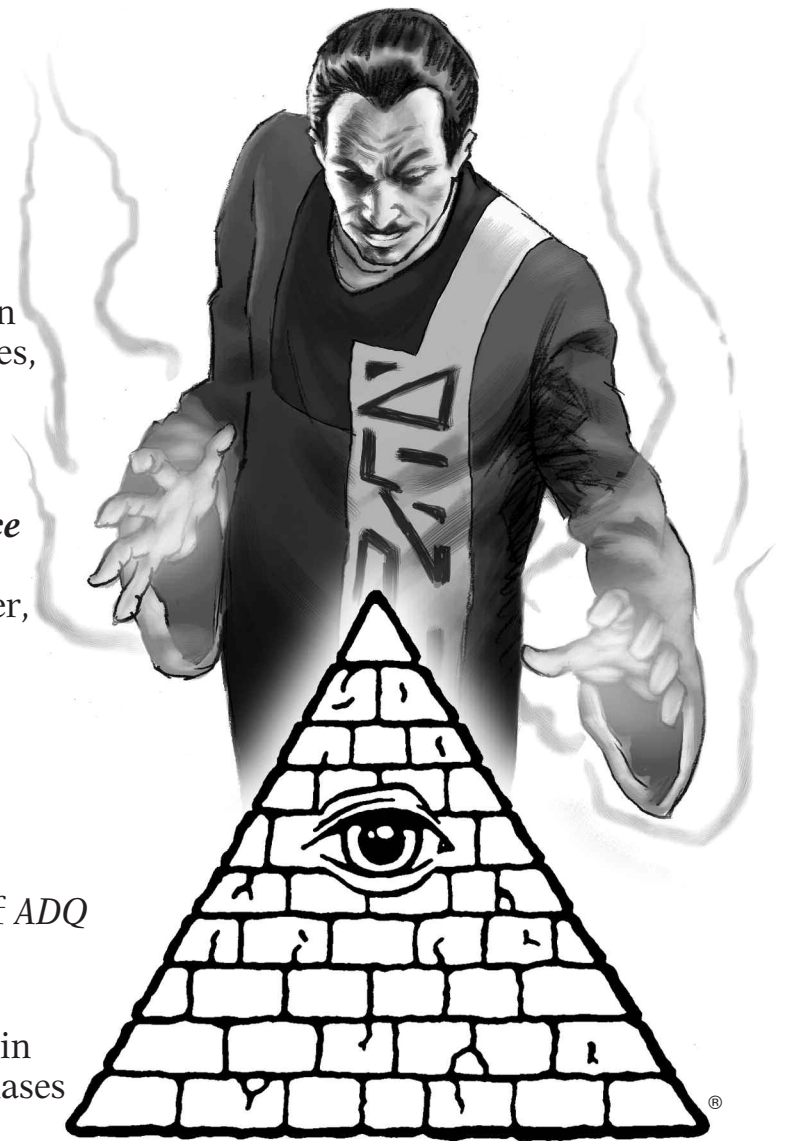
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