

GURPS

Fourth Edition

MASS COMBAT™



BY DAVID PULVER

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

There Will Be War!

Hordes of orcs. Axis invaders. Starbeasts of Jupiter. Sooner or later, your campaign is likely to encounter battles too large to resolve with ordinary *GURPS* combat. The answer: *GURPS Mass Combat*!

This powerful abstract system lets you resolve land, sea, and air battles at *any* tech level with just a few die rolls. Features include:

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- Integral treatment of air superiority, amphibious assaults, airborne troops, sieges, and everything else that's important when the enemy *is* in sight.
- Round-by-round resolution that puts the commander in control of dozens to tens of thousands of warriors, lets him choose his strategies, and then instantly shows him the results of his skill and cunning.
- Equal attention to the *aftermath* of battle: pursuit, casualties, looting, recovering losses, and more.

GURPS Mass Combat provides extensive examples, quick-reference tables, and ready-to-go stats for the strength, weaponry, and mobility of the units involved. It's all *generic*, too, covering traditional, fantastic, and superscience troops at every tech level, and providing guidelines for customizing their quality, special training, and equipment. And it never loses sight of the fact that *GURPS* is a *roleplaying* game – every hero gets a chance to shine, and the rules emphasize *what the PCs do* and *what happens to them*.

GURPS Mass Combat requires only the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*.

By David L. Pulver Edited by Sean Punch

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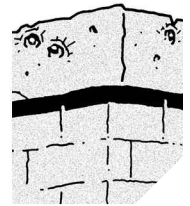
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INTRODUCTION

GURPS Mass Combat contains rules for the abstract resolution of battles between armies containing from hundreds to tens of thousands of warriors. Its focus is *cinematic* – it emphasizes dramatic clashes over the duller (if no less important) business of logistics and campaigning that often win real conflicts. Nevertheless, it does provide simplified rules for moving and supplying troops, and for raising and maintaining armies.

This system is not a set of “war game” or “skirmish” rules for tactical combat, nor is it focused on grand strategy. It’s designed to resolve a big battle that features massed companies of troops *quickly* – with a few die rolls – while still giving commanders scope to make important decisions that could decide the fate of a battle, an army, or even an entire war.

These rules work best when the PCs command their side, or at least a significant portion of that force, in battle. However, they give all heroes – commanders or otherwise – *some* control over their own destiny.

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the latest version of the *GURPS* “Mass Combat System.” It’s significantly revised from the rules in *GURPS Compendium II* (compiled by Sean Punch), which were themselves adapted from an article by Brett Slocum in *Roleplayer*

30. This in turn was a codification of rules first published in *GURPS Horseclans*, by Steve Jackson and Jerry Epperson, and which later appeared in various forms in *GURPS Conan*, *GURPS Japan*, and *GURPS Vikings*.

*You cannot simultaneously
prevent and prepare for war.*

– Albert Einstein

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David L. Pulver is a freelance writer and game designer based in Victoria, British Columbia. He is the coauthor of the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition* and the author of *Transhuman Space*, *GURPS Spaceships*, and numerous other gaming products. David has a history degree from Queens University, and once upon a time was taking graduate courses in military history at the Royal Military College before he left to design games.

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.

Additional Material: Sean Punch

Playtesters: Richard Bing, Charles Bingham, Shawn Fisher, Eric Haste, Leonardo Holschuh, Nathan Joy, Norman Lorenz, Kelly Pedersen, Christopher Rice, Wayne Roberts, Ryan Williams

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UNITS

Elements belonging to a regular military organization may be grouped into permanent *units* – companies, regiments, battalions, cohorts, brigades, fleets, legions, corps, armies, and so on, as appropriate to the period and culture. In game terms, this means creating several smaller forces (the units) and then totaling their statistics as a single force before a campaign or a battle. Existing “unit” distinctions play no role in the rules, which deal strictly in elements and forces, but often determine what elements a particular force commander has under his control.

For instance, an NPC major might tell a PC captain:

Captain, I want you to take your 7th Roanoke Rifles (the captain's battalion-sized unit: 16 elements), Battery A of the 2nd Artillery (another four elements), Graham's Irregulars (three elements commanded by another PC, representing a force of local partisans), and that nut with the balloon (another single element) and capture Elk's Crossing. Questions?

In game terms, the individual elements that make up the Rifles, the attached Battery A, the local partisans, and “that nut with the balloon” (a PC inventor treated as a Hero element) constitute the captain's *force*. However, since they're existing units, the GM already has their elements worked out, so it's just a matter of adding up their statistics.

BUILDING AND MAINTAINING YOUR FORCE

As previously mentioned, these rules distinguish between the *fighting force* (combat troops) and the *logistic force* (rear-area support). When they refer simply to the “force,” they mean the fighting force – and that's the kind of force described here. Rules for establishing and operating a logistic force come later (pp. 13-14), as the attendant complications are only relevant to lengthy operations in which PCs are in charge of supply as well as battlefield command.

ELEMENT TYPES

Elements are the building blocks of a fighting force: soldiers, crewed vehicles, or weapons teams. Each element type has a name and is rated for Troop Strength (TS), special class (Class), transport weight (WT), mobility (Mob), cost to raise (Raise), cost to maintain (Maintain), and TL. Descriptions of specific elements (e.g., “Heavy Cavalry” or “Light Infantry”) appear in Chapters 2-3, along with stats in tabular format, like so:

<i>Element</i>	<i>TS</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>WT</i>	<i>Mob</i>	<i>Raise</i>	<i>Maintain</i>	<i>TL</i>
Light Infantry	2	Rec	1	Foot	40K	8K	1

This shows that for the “Light Infantry” element type, Troop Strength is 2, special class is Recon, transport weight is 1, mobility type is Foot, and costs for each squad-sized element of 10 men are 40K (\$40,000) to raise and 8K (\$8,000) to maintain per month. The element is in use from TL1.

Customization

You can customize stock elements by selecting the following details:

Features: Special features added to tailor the element (see *Optional Features*, pp. 8-11.)

Quality: The quality of the troops and their equipment (see *Quality*, pp. 11-12).

If you customize an element, adjust its TS, costs, and possibly other characteristics based on your decisions, as described in the associated rules. The GM may wish to create a new element record that reflects these changes and gives the element its own name and description.

For example, suppose we take the bare-bones Light Infantry element, add the Airborne, Neutralize C3I, and Night features, and then upgrade quality with both Fine equipment and Elite troops. The result is a more interesting element that we name “Airborne Ninja.” Use the following format for customized element records:

Mini-Glossary

element: The smallest part of a *fighting force* that's assigned game statistics – a squad of troops, a vehicle, a weapons team, etc.

feature: A special trait that an *element* may have; e.g., “All-Weather.”

fighting force: All the combat *elements* that one side has in play.

logistic force: An abstract representation of the supply and support capabilities and personnel that maintain a *fighting force*.

mobility (Mob): A classification that indicates how an *element* (and by extension, a *fighting force*) will move; e.g., “Foot” or “Fast Air.”

special class or class: *Elements* that aren't just foot soldiers with melee weapons may belong to one or more special classes; e.g., “Artillery” or “Recon.” *Troop Strength* superiority in a particular class can provide combat bonuses in certain circumstances.

transport weight (WT): An abstract measure of how bulky and massive an *element* is. Some elements are too large to transport!

Troop Strength (TS): A numerical measure of fighting power that is assigned to each *element* and added up for an entire *fighting force*.

LAND ELEMENTS

The majority of battlefield elements in a low-tech force are infantry and cavalry. Starting at TL4, these are often supplemented by an increasing proportion of artillery, thanks to the rapid evolution of gunpowder cannon.

Artillery

Heavy Artillery (TL2): At TL2, this means torsion-powered stone- or bolt-throwers, which at TL3 are sometimes supplemented by counterweight trebuchets and early bombards (breechloading gunpowder cannon), usually firing stone projectiles. At TL4-5, this element consists of increasingly effective smoothbore cannon, mostly firing round shot or canister – or possibly inaccurate but impressive rockets! Heavy Artillery lacks tactical mobility, and has far less range than at TL6, but is useful in pitched battles and sieges.

Light Artillery (TL2): These are semi-portable torsion-powered bolt throwers such as scorpions (TL2-3), or light cannon or rockets (TL4-5).

Horse Artillery (TL5): This is a light field gun and its ammunition carriage, drawn by a team of horses. The gunners ride with the guns.



Cavalry

Heavy Chariots (TL1): Battle carts drawn by horses or sometimes by other beasts, such as asses or – in fantasy settings – bears, tigers, or even monsters. Heavy Chariots are used to transport, support, and (if need be) retrieve an armored infantryman, who usually dismounts to fight on foot.

Light Chariots (TL1): Lightly built chariots, typically pulled by two fast horses and driven by a charioteer who's accompanied by a heavily armed archer or javelin thrower (often of aristocratic birth). Chariots become obsolete by TL2, as bigger horses and better equipment allow *each* horse to carry one fully equipped soldier, doubling their effective fighting power.

Heavy Cavalry (TL2): Big men riding heavy warhorses or similar steeds, trained for shock action, and charging in close formation with spear, lance, or sword.

Horse Archers (TL2): Lightly equipped riders on swift horses or similar steeds, armed with bows. They fight in a loose swarm or circulating relays, occasionally charging with sword when tactically advantageous.

Light Cavalry (TL2): Lightly equipped riders on small, swift mounts, usually armed with throwing spears, javelins, light lances, or swords. They prefer to skirmish rather than to charge home, but can be effective in close combat. Their principal utility is in scouting, pursuit, foraging, and raiding.

Medium Cavalry (TL2): Cavalry that are (expensively!) trained and equipped for both shock *and* missile action – usually on somewhat lighter horses than Heavy Cavalry, and in looser order. They're typically armed with both a bow and a sword, and sometimes with a light lance and a shield, too.

Cavalry Pistols (TL4): Heavy cavalry in close formation, wearing decent armor, and armed with a sword and a brace of wheel-lock pistols at TL4 (e.g., German Reiter). From TL5, they have more reliable flintlocks or short carbines.

Infantry

Stone-Age Warriors (TL0): A hunting party or war band equipped and fighting as per Light Infantry (below), but with more primitive weapons; e.g., flint-tipped spears and arrows.

Bowmen (TL1): Soldiers trained to stand fast in formation and fire volleys with bows or crossbows. They usually carry swords or other sidearms, and will fight in melee if needed. On the defensive, they sometimes make use of large shields, wooden stakes, or other cover.

Light Infantry (TL1): Swift-footed soldiers who would rather skirmish by throwing missiles, striking from ambush, or making hit-and-raid raids than stand and fight. They wear little to no armor, but may carry bucklers or small shields. Usual arms include clubs, darts, javelins, long knives, short spears, short-swords, shuriken, slings, and similar light "skirmish" weapons. This troop type also includes all bowmen and TL4 musketeers who don't fire in massed formations, and most low-tech special-operations forces such as spies, assassins, and – in fantasy backgrounds – stealthy "little people" (halflings, gnomes, etc.).

Reading the Element Statistics

TS: Troop Strength (p. 6). Parentheses indicate a *support* TS that only counts at full value when calculating special class superiority.

Class: The element's special class (pp. 6-7), if any. *Air* is Air Combat; *Arm* is Armor; *Art* is Artillery; *Cv* is Cavalry; *C3I* is Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence; *Eng* is Engineering; *F* is Fire; *Nav* is Naval; and *Rec* is Recon. A class in parentheses is one that the element *neutralizes*; e.g., (Cv) means the element neutralizes Cavalry. *T* is transport capacity; the number is the WT that the element can carry.

WT: The element's transport weight (p. 7). A dash indicates that it's too large to transport.

Mob: The element's mobility type (p. 7). *Foot* is self-explanatory, while *Mtd* means Mounted. Naval elements have either *Coast* or *Sea* mobility. Low-tech air elements all note *SA* for Slow Air. A "0" means the element must be transported by other elements if it's to travel rather than merely defend.

Raise and Maintain: The costs to raise and maintain the element, respectively (p. 8). *K* means "thousands"; *M* means "millions."

1. RISK

Each force commander and any individual PC involved in a battle must choose a *Risk Modifier* between -3 and +3. The lower the modifier, the fewer risks that person is taking relative to his position in the battle. His choice will also affect his Misfortunes of War roll later on (pp. 37-38).

Example: In the Battle of Drake's Cross, Sir Richard and Strykland (an NPC) must each choose a Risk Modifier, as they are force commanders. Sir Richard chooses +1, leading from the front. Strykland is more cautious; he chooses 0. One other PC is fighting in Sir Richard's force: swashbuckling swordswoman Sheryl Navarre, whom Sir Richard has assigned to command a unit of spearmen. In keeping with her impetuous nature, she chooses +3!

2. SIGNIFICANT ACTIONS

Any PC who accompanies the fighting or logistic force and who *isn't* the force commander may try to distinguish himself by performing a *significant action* during the battle. In mass combat, glory and heroism are the results of being in the right place at the right time – and PCs are customarily much more likely to find themselves in such situations!

Every PC other than the force commander may attempt a *Heroism* roll on 3d. The base target number is 5.

Modifiers: The PC's Risk Modifier; +1 if he has level 15+ in at least one skill that might logically be of some use in a battle, or if he has an especially useful advantage, spell, or piece of gear; +1 if he's personally in command or second-in-command of one or more elements; +1 if he's with an element that has the Fanatic or Impetuous feature; -1 if more than one element is involved in the fighting and he's with a support element (that is, one with parenthetical TS), or if he's with the logistic force.

Any success means the PC performed a significant action that – through chance or design – influenced the course of the entire battle. This gives +1 (+2 on a critical success) to his commander's Strategy roll this round. Failure means he may

have been heroic (if he chose a high Risk Modifier) or not (if he didn't), but with little effect on the broader course of events. Critical failure means he blundered in some egregious way that had an impact on the battle: -1 to his commander's Strategy roll this round.

The GM should weave this into the narrative of the battle, perhaps letting the players add elements that fit their PCs' personalities; see *Examples of Heroism and Blunders* (below). If a player cooks up an implausible story, the GM can say that's what the PC *believed* or *claimed* he accomplished in the heat of battle. Actual events might have been less impressive! For instance, a pilot who claims to have killed the enemy general by bombing his headquarters might only have managed to force the general to run for cover at a crucial moment.

Example: Sheryl Navarre chose a Risk Modifier of +3, taking a lot of chances. Her skill of Broadsword-15 is obviously useful in a battle, so that adds +1. She also commands an element of spearmen, giving her a further +1. This raises her Heroism chance from 5 to 10. She rolls a 9 on the first round – success. Her player says that she leads her spearmen from the front, hacking and slashing a path through the enemy center, inspiring the rest of the army's troops to follow her!

Detailed Actions

When the players describe their characters doing something *especially* cinematic or clever, the GM is encouraged to shift out of the battle rules for a few moments to resolve the situation. Imagine a war movie: The camera gives us some sweeping shots of the battle, and then zooms in to focus on the main characters! It usually isn't necessary to go into a great amount of detail, but the GM may require a couple of extra skill rolls or a few minutes of roleplaying.

For example, the GM might give each PC who's attempting a significant action several turns to accomplish some goal that he deems important: kill the leader of an enemy unit, disable the crew of an artillery piece, capture the bridge of a ship, etc. If the PC accomplishes the task within the allotted time, his force commander gets +1. Otherwise . . . no bonus.

Examples of Heroism and Blunders

Tess Davenport is a medic assigned to a rifle company. She chooses a Risk Modifier of +1. She has First Aid-15, which the GM agrees is a useful skill (+1), giving her a total Heroism chance of 7. Her player rolls a 7, so Tess performs a heroic action significant to the battle. Her player says that she was able to patch up a wounded officer at a crucial moment, when his element's presence was needed to turn the tide of battle.

Quintus Petronius is a legionary soldier fighting in the ranks of his element. He chooses a +1 Risk Modifier. He's also an exceptional swordsman with Shortsword-17, which is obviously useful, so he gets another +1. He gets lucky and rolls a 6 – success! Petronius' player suggests that he cut down one of the opposition's standard-bearers in single combat, demoralizing an important enemy formation. The GM agrees.

Max Knoedel is an ordinary corporal working as a truck driver in a supply company. He chooses not to be heroic. Nevertheless, he rolls a critical failure and influences the battle . . . the wrong way. Since his player can't think of anything, the GM rules that Max got lost and a much-needed ammunition convoy didn't reach a key forward artillery battery, leaving it short of shells. The commander suffers a -1 Strategy modifier. Max's blunder is never discussed.

Corporal Norris is an assistant orderly in the Imperial Marines. He rolls an 18 – critical failure! The player gets into the spirit of things and tells the GM that while delivering a thermos of hot coffee to General Morgan, he trips over a power cable and accidentally spills it over her and the command APC's map display. The entire battle-management system shorts out for five crucial minutes: -1 to Strategy.

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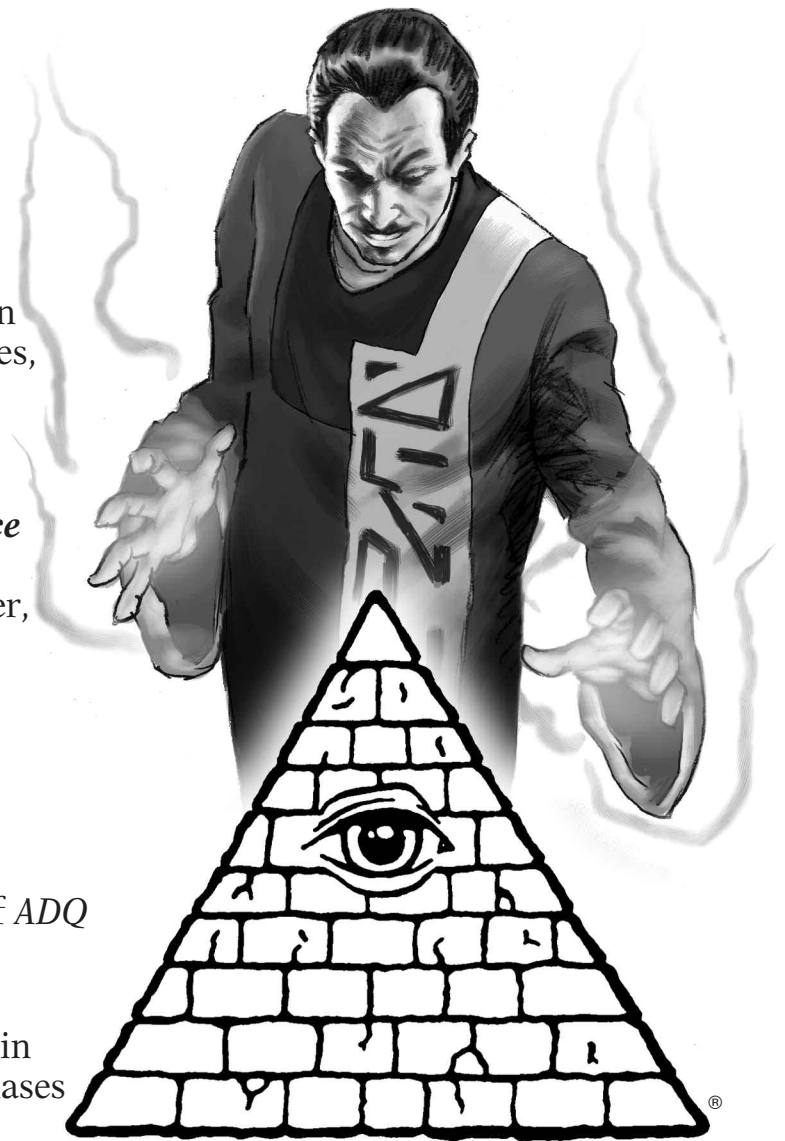
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