

**GURPS** Fourth Edition

# **ACTION 1**<sup>TM</sup> **HEROES**



By Sean Punch

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

# IN A WORLD . . .

. . . where danger lurks in every shadow, death can come around any corner, and every sentence sounds like a movie trailer, there are those who would risk their lives to save the day. These brave souls are persons of fortune. They are persons of fate. They are persons of . . . action!

*GURPS Action 1: Heroes* draws its inspiration from the heroic individuals of action movies of the 1980s and beyond, bringing high-octane, high-stakes adventure to *GURPS*.

With templates, focused options, and lists of appropriate gear, players and Game Masters alike can create characters looking as though they were shot on 35mm film, ready for some shooting of their own. *Heroes* is a guide for gamers who want to get their action-movie campaigns going quickly and explosively!

*GURPS Action 1: Heroes*  
requires the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*.

By Sean Punch

Cover Art by Tithi Luadthong and Warm\_Tail

Illustrated by Dan Smith



**STEVE  
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Written by **SEAN PUNCH**

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## About GURPS

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# INTRODUCTION

The modern cinematic thriller seems like simple-minded entertainment but is hardly simple. *Centuries* of adventure stories proved the timelessness of its key motives: honor, loyalty, and revenge. Many of its essential plots and archetypes originated in 1920s and '30s pulps. Its visual style borrows from the gangster flicks, war movies, and Westerns of the '30s, '40s, and '50s. Its edginess owes a debt to '60s and '70s directors, who took great risks with graphic violence, raw language, and controversial but highly influential exploitation films. And the fancy guns and gadgets snuck in from Cold War spy fiction.

**GURPS Action 1: Heroes** provides character-design guidelines for the sorts of lead roles common in action films and television series made and set in the 1990s and 2000s. As befits their origins, these men of action are more complex than their screen portrayal suggests. The ambition of **Action 1: Heroes** is to bring that depth to the game without doing violence to the genre (violence should happen in play!).

Most important, action heroes engage in nonstop thrills. This doesn't always mean fighting: creeping through jungle, chasing bad guys, defusing bombs, crash-landing planes, saving the President, hacking computers, disposing of evidence . . . that's action, too. Thus, **Action 1: Heroes** focuses on abilities useful in risky situations (described in **Action 2: Exploits**). Realistic but less-exciting skills mostly just get a nod.

Next, cinematic heroes usually work alone – or perhaps with a partner, a sidekick, or specialists who get little screen time. This *doesn't work* in an RPG unless you're running a single-player campaign. **Action 1: Heroes** assumes a more typical four- to six-gamer group. It divvies up heroic competencies and elevates traditional "bit parts" (e.g., geeky technical experts) to leading roles. Thus, all the thrilling stuff that needs doing *will* get done, but the PCs must pull together to do it; think *Ocean's Eleven*, *Ronin*, or *Sneakers*.

Finally, skills and actions – not paychecks – define heroes. Soldier, spy, cop . . . it doesn't matter. In action movies, they all get into dicey situations, do what *they* feel is the Right Thing, and have skills to match. A detective might do things that military and intelligence organizations handle in real life, but if he shoots straight, drives fast, takes down bad guys, and stays true to his values, he's still a "good cop." Thus, the character templates in **Action 1: Heroes** sort heroes by specialty, not by job – although there are also "lenses" for specific backgrounds. This makes it much easier to run a team game.



## Action Who's Who

**bad guy:** Anybody who opposes a *hero*. He might be a legitimate ambassador, law officer, banker, etc. That isn't important! What matters is that he's on the wrong side.

**boss:** The lead *bad guy* – usually either incredibly competent or an utter wimp hiding behind *henchmen*.

**cannon fodder:** A lesser *bad guy* whose only job is to fight or otherwise obstruct a *hero* so that the *boss* can execute evil plans . . . or the hero.

**crew:** A group of *heroes*. Most often used in caper stories.

**henchman:** A *bad guy* midway in importance between *cannon fodder* and *boss*. A henchman often has a full name (unlike fodder, who are all "Hey you!" or "Louie!") and a trademark weapon, and sometimes leads fodder.

**hero:** One of the protagonists in an action story, whether or not he's a nice guy. The title character of the movie *Léon* is an assassin – but still the hero (the cop, Stansfield, is the *bad guy*).

**mook:** See *cannon fodder*.

**squad:** A group of *heroes*. Most often used in military and police campaigns.

**team:** A group of *heroes*.

Be warned that **Action 1: Heroes** isn't about real-world intelligence, police, and military personnel. Realistically, even heroic cops don't carry on like John McClane in *Die Hard*, spies can't afford to behave like James Bond, and soldiers aren't trained to act like John Rambo. And the fact that the same rules also let you create super-crooks *isn't* a suggestion that real-world government agencies are corrupt – it's just an admission that in the movies, "super-crook" vs. "super-spy" is mostly an issue of whose guards you're eluding and what safe you're cracking. Use **Action** in *serious* games at your own risk!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every **GURPS** product since. During the **GURPS Third Edition** era, he compiled both **GURPS Compendium** volumes, developed **GURPS Lite**, wrote **GURPS Wizards** and **GURPS Undead**, and edited or revised over 20 other titles. With David Pulver, he produced the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition**, in 2004. His latest creations include **GURPS Powers** (with Phil Masters), **GURPS Martial Arts** (with Peter Dell'Orto), and **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 1-4**. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec.



# WIRE RAT

250 points

*Okay, boss, this LTX-71 concealable mike is part of the same system that NASA used when they faked the Apollo Moon landings.*

– Mother, *Sneakers*

You're the crew's ears and eyes. Cameras, mikes, tracking beacons, wiretaps, lasers bounced off windows, optical fibers under doors . . . no act of electronic privacy invasion is too small. Small is good, actually, because it's harder to see. When there's nothing on CCTV, you entertain yourself rigging remote detonators for the demolition man (pp. 8-9), running cable for the hacker (pp. 10-11), and cutting power for the infiltrator (pp. 11-12). You're truly a hotshot with the soldering gun.

**Attributes:** ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 15 [100]; HT 11 [10].

**Secondary Characteristics:** Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 15 [0]; Per 16 [5]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0].

**Advantages:** Circuit Sense 4 [20]; Gizmos 1 [5]; Luck [15]; and Quick Gadgeteer (Solder and Duct Tape, -50%) [25]. ● A further 30 points chosen from among lens advantages (pp. 4-5), ST +1 to +3 [10/level], DX +1 [20], IQ +1 [20], HT +1 to +3 [10/level], Acute Hearing [2/level], Artificer 1-3 [10/level], Daredevil [15], Gizmos 2+ [5/gizmo], High Manual Dexterity 1-4 [5/level], Mathematical Ability 1-3 [10/level], Serendipity 1-2 [15/level], Signature Gear [Varies], Wild Talent 1 [20], or replace Luck [15] with Extraordinary Luck [30] for 15 points.

**Disadvantages:** -20 points chosen from among Duty (Agency, mob, service, or similar; 9, 12, or 15 or less) [-5, -10, or -15], Greed† [-15\*], Honesty† [-10\*], Secret (Illegal wiretaps, etc.) [-5 or -10], Sense of Duty (Team) [-5], or Social Stigma (Criminal Record)† [-5]. ● Another -10 points chosen from among those traits or Curious [-5\*], Clueless [-10], Delusion (“They are listening!”) [-5], Odious Personal Habit (Nosy) [-5], Oblivious [-5], Trademark (Device or wiring scheme) [-5 or -10], or Workaholic [-5]. ● A further -20 points chosen from either of the previous lists or Bad Temper [-10\*], Cowardice [-10\*], Impulsiveness [-10\*], Overconfidence [-5\*], Paranoia [-10], Post-Combat Shakes [-5\*], Shyness [-5 or -10], Skinny [-5], Stubbornness [-5], or Trickster [-15\*].

**Primary Skills:** Electrician, Electronics Operation (Communications, Security, and Surveillance), and Electronics Repair (Communications, Security, and Surveillance), all (A) IQ+3 [1]-18‡. ● Four of Electronics Operation (Media or Sensors) or Electronics Repair (Computers, Media, or Sensors), both (A) IQ+3 [1]-18‡; or 1 point to raise any primary skill by a level.

**Secondary Skills:** One of Boxing (A) DX [2]-12, Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-13, or Karate (H) DX-1 [2]-11. ● Either Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-11 or Wrestling (A) DX [2]-12. ● Guns (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-12. ● Computer Operation (E) IQ [1]-15. ● Seven of Fast-Draw (Gizmo) or Forced Entry, both (E) DX [1]-12; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-15; Holdout, Photography, Smuggling, or Traps all (A) IQ-1 [1]-14; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-16; Body Language, Lip Reading, Observation, or Search, all (A) Per-1 [1]-15; or 1 point to raise one of those skills by a level or buy a remaining primary skill.

**Background Skills:** Choose a 20-point lens (pp. 4-5). ● Driving (Automobile or Heavy Wheeled) (A) DX-1 [1]-11.

\* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† Honesty is for lawmen, and normally *precludes* Greed or Social Stigma (but *not* the Secret!).

‡ Includes +4 for Circuit Sense.

## Customization Notes

Customizing a wire rat means choosing primary specialties and secondary skills that complement some forte. For instance, a surveillance man boosts Surveillance specialties, learns Media specialties for tweaking recordings, and supplements this with Camouflage and Smuggling for concealing bugs, Photography for cameras, and Body Language, Lip Reading, and Observation to understand what he's seeing. The cinematic geek, however, adds Media *and* Sensors specialties to primary skills, and learns Fast-Draw and Holdout for gizmos, Scrounging for finding parts, and Traps for digital surprises.

Likely background options:

**Criminal:** An expert at cutting power and defeating alarms requires Electrician skill and Security specialties at high levels to work *quickly*, plus *physical* lens skills: Filch, Forced Entry, Stealth, etc.

**Intelligence:** Spies are frequently surveillance experts. Combining secondary and background points allows high levels of Holdout (for “wiring” people) and Smuggling (for concealing vehicular tracking beacons). Shadowing – for prowling around in the surveillance van – is common.

**Law Enforcement:** Wiretap experts resemble spies, but SWAT teams also deploy wire rats in the field to scout criminal hideouts before raids. This activity calls for Stealth, and for background skills like Guns and Tactics.

**Military:** The squad “comms” expert has Communications specialties for radios, plus Sensors specialties for thermograph and radar. Background points go into effective Guns skills – and Forward Observer turns a radio into a deadly weapon.

**Security:** The intelligence and law enforcement notes apply, but security agents often specialize in *countersurveillance*, and train Search to high levels for finding bugs.

*The closer you get to being a pro, the closer you can get to the client.*

– Léon, Léon

## Everyman Skills

There are certain things that it's hard to imagine an action hero being unable to do, but that require skills in **GURPS**. To avoid embarrassing situations where a slick operator is reduced to default rolls, be sure to put at least a point into each of the following:

- *Computer Operation*: In movies made and set in the 1990s and 2000s, only heroes whose shtick is "rabid technophobe" *can't* use computers. In particular, this is the skill to use for a simple web search; save Research for *serious* cyber-stalking.
- *Driving*: Many real-life urbanites do without wheels, but no action hero would be caught without the ability to drive. The typical specialty is one of Automobile, Heavy Wheeled, or Motorcycle.
- *Guns (Pistol)*: While not all action is fighting, even the mousiest hackers and wire rats can fire handguns well enough to justify a point in this skill.
- *Stealth*: When the team sneaks around as a group, it can only do so as well as its *least-stealthy* member.

The GM is advised to limit Incompetence (p. B164) to the above skills (for Driving and Guns, this punishes *every* specialty!) and the primary skills on a hero's template.

## SPECIALTIES

Many high-tech skills require specialization (p. B169). The GM is welcome to *ignore* specialties to simplify the game – but it's generally wise to enforce them in order to give each team member his own niche. However, a few skills need only a small subset of their usual specialties in an action game:

*Animal Handling*: The Dogs specialty is useful around guard, police, and sniffer dogs. Few other specialties matter (although Pigs is handy for disposing of corpses).

*Armoury*: Typical action heroes mainly need the Heavy Weapons and Small Arms specialties.

*Boating*: Zodiacs and other small landing craft often appear in action movies, and call for the Motorboat specialty. Other specialties are primarily hobby skills.

*Driving*: Automobile (cars), Heavy Wheeled (trucks), and Motorcycle (bikes) are the specialties of major importance.

*Electronics Operation*: Common action-movie specialties are Communications (for radios), Media (for manipulating photos and recordings), Security (for alarms), Sensors (for radars, thermographs, etc.), and Surveillance (for wiretaps, miniature cameras, etc.).

*Electronics Repair*: As Electronics Operation, but add the Computers specialty.

*Engineer*: Only the Combat specialty sees regular use in the field.

*Expert Skill*: Hackers need Computer Security to defeat rivals. Medics likely to face terrorist bioweapons require Epidemiology. Nonmilitary heroes who want to recognize military weapons and vehicles should learn Military Science.

*Law*: The Police specialty – to avoid procedural errors during arrests and searches – is the sole area of importance to PCs (as opposed to NPC lawyers).

*Mechanic*: The specialties corresponding to the Boating, Driving, Piloting, and Submarine skills named here are most relevant.

*Piloting*: Glider, Helicopter, Light Airplane, and Ultralight are the usual specialties for small aircraft. A pilot *might* want High-Performance Airplane on the off chance that someone leaves a jet fighter sitting around, *Tomorrow Never Dies*-style.

*Riding*: Only the Horse and Camel specialties are commonly available in modern settings.

*Submarine*: The Free-Flooding Sub specialty is needed to handle the large "swimmer delivery vehicles" used by naval commandos (small ones use Scuba).

## FAMILIARITY

Simply ignore *Familiarity* (p. B169) in an action game. In the movies, every action hero knows how to shoot just about every gun within his specialties, drive any car he hops into, and so on.

## DEFAULTS

Defaults between skills are a complication best ignored in an action game. However, since experts at Driving, Explosives, Gunner, Guns, and Piloting tend to know multiple specialties of those skills, defaults between *those* are worth using!

For instance, the Light Machine Gun (LMG), Pistol, Rifle, Shotgun, and Submachine Gun (SMG) specialties of Guns all default to each other at -2. Action heroes generally improve one to a high level and raise the others from default (p. B173).

*Example*: Victor has Guns (Pistol) at DX+3, for 8 points. This gives him all the other common Guns specialties at DX+1 – the 2-point level – for "free." If he decides to learn Guns (Rifle) and Guns (SMG) at DX+3, too, he can save 2 points on each and buy that level for 6 points per skill.

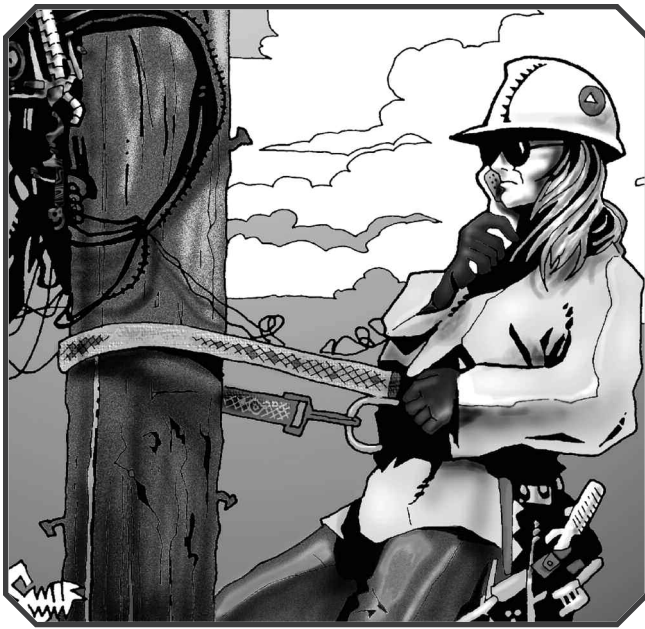
The templates on pp. 7-16 already consider inter-specialty defaults, where applicable.

# WILDCARD SKILLS

The skill table (pp. 20-22) and templates (pp. 7-16) include only a subset of the skills in the **Basic Set**. That's still lots of skills! The GM who's just learning **GURPS** or running the game for new players, or who finds it tedious to match skills to

tasks and doesn't have **Action 2: Exploits** for advice, may want to simplify. One way to do this is with wildcard skills (p. B175).

Below is a wildcard skill for each template. Find the wildcard skill that matches the template, remove the ordinary skills



*Whistle.* For signaling. \$5, neg.

*Wristwatch.* High-quality versions don't improve skills but can have one built-in gadget (compass, camera, GPS, etc.) per full \$100 added value. \$25, neg.

## SPY AND SURVEILLANCE GADGETS

Proper use of this gear to record useful intelligence – as opposed to record a TV show or whatever – requires Electronics Operation (Surveillance).

*Audio Recorder, Digital.* Holdout +1. Runs for 12 hours. \$100, 0.25 lb.

*Camcorders, Digital.* These can record *indefinitely* when linked to a computer with external power. *Full-Sized:* Gives Night Vision 3, Telescopic Vision 2. Runs for 1 hour. \$500, 1 lb. *Miniature:* No vision advantages, but Holdout +2. Runs for 1 hour. \$200, 0.25 lb.

*Cameras, Digital. Full-Sized:* Basic equipment for Photography. Runs for 10 hours. Quality affects weight, and fine camera is a digital SLR that can accept a telephoto lens (Telescopic Vision 5, \$500, 8.5 lbs.). \$75, 0.5 lb. *Miniature:* Can take high-quality stills of documents. Holdout +1. \$500, 0.1 lb.

*Cellular Monitoring System.* Monitors up to four cell phones at once, logging, jamming, and/or tracing their calls. In heavy case: \$20,000, 7 lbs.

*Computer Monitoring System.* Reads video displays from radio emissions. In the city, effective range is 100 yards. Requires a Complexity 3 computer. \$5,000, 6 lbs.

*Mike, Laser.* Eavesdrops through glass. 900-yard range. \$5,000, 2 lbs.

*Mike, Shotgun.* With headphones. Gives Parabolic Hearing 3. Runs for 10 hours. \$800, 3 lbs.

*Scanner Pen.* Resembles a pen. Scans a page in 4 seconds. Stores 100 pages in memory. \$150, 0.1 lb.

*Surveillance Endoscope.* A yard-long fiber optic for stealthily peering under doors, around corners, etc. Spotting the protruding tube requires a Vision-5 roll. \$4,500, 2 lbs.

*Thru-Wall Radar.* Can see through wood, brick, or gypsum 1' thick and spot things 20 yards beyond. Range is less than 1' through concrete. Runs for 3 hours. \$30,000, 10 lbs.

*TV Set, Mini.* A 7" flat-panel, used as a spare monitor by hackers and wire rats. Runs for 4 hours. \$100, 2 lbs.

*Video Recorder, Digital.* Good or fine model can be linked to a Complexity 3 computer for media manipulation with Electronics Operation (Media). \$200, 10 lbs.

*Wire Rat Kit.* Heavy case has a 40-channel audiovisual transceiver (controls 40 bugs, trackers, etc., and can feed signals to computers and recorders) in one half and enough gear enough for a serious surveillance job packed in the other: 10 audio bugs (SM -13, 1/2-mile range, 1 month endurance), 10 contact mikes (SM -11, self-adhesive, 1 week endurance), 2 generic transmitters (makes *any* attached camera, mike, etc., a bug, 1/2-mile range, 4 hours endurance), 2 headphone sets, 10 keyboard bugs (transmit by phone or Internet), 2 microphones (full-sized), 10 phone taps, 10 pinhead mikes (SM -16, 8-yard cable manipulated with DX-based roll), 4 spike mikes (give Parabolic Hearing 4 into *adjacent* room when driven into wall), 5 tracking beacons (25-mile range, 1 month endurance), and 10 video bugs (SM -9, 2-mile range, 1 week endurance). \$10,000, 40 lbs.

## TOOLS

These are heavier tools. Some are intended for repairs; others are used to attack doors, locks, etc., with Forced Entry. See *Burglar's Tools* (pp. 26-27) for stealthier break-in gear.

*Bolt Cutters.* For cutting padlocks and chains. *Light:* 8d(2) cut. \$30, 15 lbs. *Heavy:* 12d(2) cut. \$50, 30 lbs.

*Chainsaw.* Carbide teeth do swing+1d cut per second. \$300, 13 lbs.

*Crowbar, 3'.* Treat as a small mace in combat, at -1 to skill. \$20, 3 lbs.

*Cutting Torches. Full-Sized:* 1d+3(2) burn per second, \$75, 7 lbs. (gas bottle good for 30 seconds: \$50, 5 lbs.). *Pocket:* 1d-2 burn per second, \$25, neg. (gas bottle good for 20 minutes: \$1, neg.).

*Duct Tape.* As a restraint: ST-3 or Escape roll to break free. 60-yard roll: \$1, 2 lbs.

*Fire Axe.* Gives +1 to Forced Entry. Treat as a great axe in combat. \$100, 8 lbs.

*Go-Bar.* Gives +1 to Forced Entry. Treat as a maul in combat, at -2 to skill. \$175, 17 lbs.

*Hacksaw.* Carbide blade does sw-2(2) cut per second to bars, chains, and cables. \$10, 2 lbs.

*Hand Ram.* Miniature battering ram does sw+3d+1 cr every *three* seconds. Not useful as a weapon. \$150, 35 lbs.

*Shovel, Folding.* Treat as an axe in combat, at -2 to skill. Holdout -4. \$10, 3 lbs.

*Sledgehammer.* Treat as a maul in combat, at -2 to skill. \$10, 15 lbs.

*Tool Kit, Mini.* Belt-sized and simplistic: -2 to skill. For Armoury, Electrician, Explosives, Machinist, or Mechanic: \$200, 4 lbs. For Electronics Repair: \$400, 2 lbs.

*Tool Kit, Portable.* Basic equipment for *one* of Armoury, Electrician, Explosives, Machinist, or Mechanic: \$600, 20 lbs. For Electronics Repair: \$1,200, 10 lbs.

*Tool Kit, Shop.* As portable kit, but +2 to skill. For Armoury, etc.: \$15,000, 2,000 lbs. For Electronics Repair: \$30,000, 500 lbs.



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