

GURPS[®]

Fourth Edition

ACTION[™] **5**

DICTIONARY OF DANGER[™]



Written by SEAN PUNCH

**Illustrated by JOHN HARTWELL, SEAN MURRAY,
AARON PANAGOS, DAN SMITH, and NIKOLA VRTIS**

GURPS System Design ■ STEVE JACKSON

GURPS Line Editor ■ SEAN PUNCH

GURPS Project Manager ■ STEVEN MARSH

Production Artist and Indexer ■ NIKOLA VRTIS

GURPS FAQ Maintainer ■

VICKY "MOLOKH" KOLENKO

Chief Executive Officer ■ PHILIP REED

Chief Creative Officer ■ SAM MITSCHKE

Chief Operating Officer ■ SUSAN BUENO

Director of Sales ■ ROSS JEPSON

Page Design ■ PHIL REED and JUSTIN DE WITT

Art Direction and Prepress Checker ■ NIKOLA VRTIS

Reviewer: Steven Marsh

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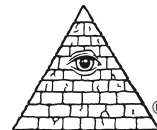
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*Don't tell me
the moon is shining;
show me the glint of
light on broken glass.*

– Anton Chekhov

INTRODUCTION

To hold somebody's face to a table saw, force his head into a rolling mill, etc., grapple him as usual.

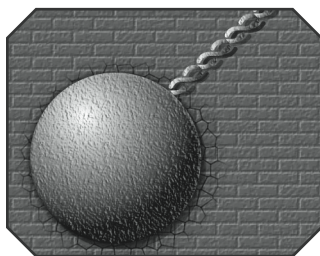
– **GURPS Action 2: Exploits**

And then what?

Exploits hints at many opportunities for heroes – and villains! – to put modern-world dangers to deadly use in action scenes. But while it mentions dispatching enemies using everything from car doors to hammer mills, it's light on the particulars. **GURPS Action 5: Dictionary of Danger** is your guide to the gory details.

This supplement's title hints at its gimmick (every action movie needs one!), which is that it organizes perils from A to Z. Each letter represents not a single, ultra-narrow Bad Thing, but a broad category of loosely related hazards. That's to minimize page-flipping: Most violence happens in specific environments tied to the plot, and the menaces lurking in the crime lord's stereotypical ethnic restaurant aren't the same as those waiting in his junkyard across town.

What do you do with this stuff? Call it “foreshadowing” or call it “Chekhov's gun,” but in an action flick, it's a given that in a showdown at the steel mill, someone *will* have a fatal encounter with massive hammers or molten metal, and that if a sculpture bristling with pointy bits is sitting in front of the villain's headquarters, somebody – probably the villain – *will* end up impaled on it. The GM's job is to ensure that encounters take place around suitably perilous scenery, while the players'



task is to illustrate just how unsafe those surroundings really are (to which end the key traits – especially *skills* – for doing so appear in **boldface**, as in **Exploits**).

Like most dangerous tools, this material comes with a warning: These rules simplify real-life complexities and adjust deadliness to satisfy the Rule of Cool. Handle with care unless running a **GURPS Action** game or an equally cinematic campaign – in *that* case, handle with extreme carelessness!

PUBLICATION HISTORY

This is the first edition of **GURPS Action 5: Dictionary of Danger**. While the *stats* it assigns to hazards previously defined in other **GURPS** releases – notably **GURPS High-Tech** – are consistent with those supplements, the *text* doesn't come verbatim from those works.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985 and ended up as **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995. In that capacity, he has written, edited, or contributed to some 150 **GURPS** releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to *Pyramid* magazine. From 2008, he has served as the lead creator of the **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** series, which led to his design of the **Dungeon Fantasy Roleplaying Game**, released in 2017. Sean has been a gamer since 1979, but devotes most of his spare time to Argentine tango (and occasionally tending bar). He lives in Montréal, Québec.

ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of **GURPS** players. We can be reached by email: info@sjgames.com. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. **GURPS** continues to grow – see what's new at gurps.sjgames.com.

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with #GURPShook on Twitter. Or explore that hashtag for ideas to add to your own game! The web page for **GURPS Action 5: Dictionary of Danger** can be found at gurps.sjgames.com/action5.

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Bibliographies. Bibliographies are a great resource for finding more of what you love! We've added them to many **GURPS** book web pages with links to help you find the next perfect element for your game.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Errata pages for **GURPS** releases are available at sjgames.com/errata/gurps.

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.

CHAPTER ONE

DANGER!

Now for the good stuff. Well, the *bad* stuff. But first, some words of wisdom on its use and abuse.

TAKE-OUT

When danger is something a fighter can wield – like a fire extinguisher or a fire *axe* – it usually takes one Ready maneuver to snatch it from a table, workbench, rack, etc. It must be within one yard, and no movement is allowed, not even a step. The GM may rule that preparing something ridiculously unwieldy (e.g., unrolling a fire *hose*) takes two or more Ready maneuvers.

Fast-Draw skill isn't applicable to random objects in the environment unless they're *a lot* like real weapons; e.g.,

a kitchen knife or screwdriver with **Fast-Draw (Knife)**. But a *DX*-based roll against a suitable technical skill works the same way for non-weapons: **Chemistry** to seize a flask, **Machinist** or **Mechanic** to grab a tool, **Physician** to acquire a defibrillator, and so on. In all cases, success shaves off one Ready maneuver.

If the object is somehow secured – say, in a cabinet or latched in place – it calls for one *extra* Ready maneuver per step needed to liberate it. For instance, if you must smash the glass, pull the safety lever, open the box, and finally grab the fire axe, that's *four* Ready maneuvers. Success against **Forced Entry** shaves off one such Ready maneuver.

If skill rolls let you prepare the item with *no* Ready maneuvers, readying it is a free action!

THAT'S GOTTA HURT!

Representing every hazard realistically – or sufficiently *cinematically* – would fill many supplements. Consequently, this volume is quick and dirty, which may frustrate players who enjoy exploiting the scenery. The most likely complaint is inadequate damage, which the GM can dismiss by saying *this* example is small, weak, or annoyingly safe.

Which suggests that big, strong, or unsafe examples should hurt *more*. Here are some options:

Dramatic Danger: Its simple and fun to say that every scary-sounding qualifier adds +1 damage. For instance, an electrical generator that shocks for 1d+2 burn might be “overloaded,” “rain-soaked,” and/or “a dangerous Chinese knockoff,” for 1d+3 to 1d+5 damage.

BAD Stuff: The current BAD might influence the damage of scenery linked to the main plotline; +1 damage per *full* -3 in BAD is recommended. Thus, if BAD is -10 in the final showdown, things in the villain's factory might be dramatically hot, sharp, and toxic, for +3 damage.

I Bypass the Safety! The GM may let heroes roll against *suitable* skills (GM's judgment) to add complementary skill bonuses (**Exploits**, p. 5) not to another skill but to damage. To do so, the PC must stand within a yard of the dangerous object or its controls and take at least one Ready maneuver – and they need a toolkit in hand to exploit **Armoury**, **Electrician**, **Electronics Repair**, **Machinist**, or **Mechanic**. For trivial proposals, like running scalding water so a mook shoved in a sink takes 1 point of burning damage while drowning, the GM can let one *further* Ready maneuver replace the skill roll, for +1 damage.

These possibilities might be exclusive, not cumulative; e.g., if the GM was too pressed to qualify all the reasons why something is dangerous, *BAD Stuff* could be an abstraction that replaces *Dramatic Danger*, while *I Bypass the Safety* may not count if the proposal duplicates a qualifier in *Dramatic Danger*. The maximum damage bonus is +4, which the GM may convert to +1d.

DELIVERY

Other hazards are part of the scenery: The GM says they're there at the start of a fight, and as most (sane) people avoid them, exposing enemies to such perils means forcing or tricking them into a danger zone. There are several ways to accomplish this. In all cases, if the hazard is ongoing, it affects the victim immediately on initial exposure and *again* at the end of any turn they remain in the threatened area.

Knockback

One of the most common ways to endanger someone. As *Knockback* (p. B378) explains, causes include:

- Crushing attacks, including *Cinematic Explosions (Exploits*, p. 38). Some less-lethal ammunition (beanbag and baton rounds) doubles its crushing damage for this purpose.
- Powerful cutting attacks *that fail to penetrate DR*.
- “Knockback only” attacks – notably *Shove* (p. B372), the **Push** skill (p. B216), and technological means, like high-pressure water from a pipe (*Perilous Pipelines*, p. 26) or fire hose (*Up to Code*, p. 34).
- *Slam* (pp. B371-372).

Manhandling

Another option is to frog-march someone into danger! Anyone who has grappled an enemy may try this on later turns;

Washing Machine: Adults can't be stuffed into washers and dryers, even in cinematic combat. Treat a top-loader as a sink (above), but if it's running and the shutoff is bypassed (DX-based **Housekeeping** roll while manhandling someone), the churning suds cost the victim 1 FP *extra* due to suffocation every *other* turn (so winning the Quick Contest for four turns saps 6 FP, not 4 FP). A front-loader isn't useful for this, but being within a yard and not in front of it allows an attack at DX-based **Housekeeping** on a foe within a yard who *is* in front, who can only dodge *and* retreat; if this works, the

water and laundry gushing out mean the target must roll vs. DX at -2 or fall down.

Wire Clothes Hanger: Bent into an "O" (one Ready maneuver) or straightened (three Ready maneuvers), this serves as an improvised garrote – an ordinary crushing one, not a wire one – that works at -2 to **Garrote** skill. A straightened hanger can also thwack for 1 point of crushing damage (use **Whip** skill and the rules for arm/hand wounds on p. B406), or jab for 1 point of impaling damage (use **Knife** at -2), at reach 1.

H IS FOR HEAT

We live in a technological world. We can debate whether that *actually* started with cavemen learning to make fire, but heat is never far from technology: myriad *Tools* (pp. 33-34) generate it; it's essential for many *Generic* (pp. 15-16) fixtures, to *Industrial* (pp. 17-18) processes, and in the *Kitchen* (pp. 19-21); and it's the explanation for both hot *Pipes* (p. 26) and cold ones. Modern heroes and villains have ample opportunity to broil one another.

Hot Stuff

Heat sources inflict burning damage once per turn (second) of contact. This is large-area injury (p. B400), except when a particular hit location is targeted. *Delivery* (pp. 4-6) leads to momentary exposure for a single damage roll unless it involves repeated turns of *Manhandling* (pp. 4-5) – or a shove or throw that leaves the victim lying down *on* or *in* the hazard, crawling slowly or taking Change Posture maneuvers to escape.

The table below presents typical damage amounts *per turn*.

Amount	Cause
1 point burn	Dark-colored car in the sun*; household radiator*.
1d-3 burn	Hot machine-gun barrel*; hotplate*; running motor (car, heavy tool, etc.)*.
1d-1 burn	Just-lit woodstove*; ordinary fire (campfire, burning rubble, etc.); oven or stovetop on "low"*; overheated motor*.
1d burn	Fire with accelerants (e.g., gasoline).
1d+1 burn	Camp stove; housing* of furnace, incinerator, or kiln; oven or stovetop on "medium."
2d burn	Barbecue grill; blazing woodstove; hot coals; oven or stovetop on "high."
2d+2 burn	Interior of domestic furnace, incinerator, or small kiln.
3d burn	Interior of industrial kiln; molten metal; reactor shielding; thermite fire.
6d burn	Interior of huge foundry furnace; unshielded reactor.
6d×2 burn	Interior of <i>blast</i> furnace.

* Won't usually set fires, regardless of damage. All the rest will; see pp. B433-434.



Hot Times

Heat doesn't magically stop cold at some distance!

Sources that inflict 1d or more are hot enough that if you use *Manhandling* (pp. 4-5) to push a grappled foe into them – so *you* are effectively a yard away while your opponent is in close combat with the hot stuff – *you* take 1 point of damage per die as large-area injury, though this radiated heat won't set you ablaze. For example, holding a mook over a camp stove does 1d+1 to him (and might set him alight) and 1 point to you, while if you stand next to an open blast furnace rather than throwing someone in from afar, your screaming victim suffers 6d×2 while you take 12 points.

Sources that do at least 3d are even more dangerous! At an effective *two* yards, they radiate 1 point of damage per 3d. Thus, manhandling a foe to within a yard of an open industrial kiln while you remain behind them at two yards means they take 3 points while you take 1 point; doing the same with that blast furnace means they're cooked for 12 points while you suffer 4 points.

To avoid self-injury, only hold enemies *against* heat sources that do less than 1d; drag foes to within one yard of

those that do 1d or more but less than 3d; and satisfy yourself with manhandling victims to within two yards of dangers that do 3d or more. Or shove or throw them in from a safe distance.

CHAPTER TWO

STYLE AND USAGE

OR, PICKING YOUR PERILS

*Dictionaries often conclude with a grammar primer: guidelines for **using** all those words. We'll honor this custom, looking at how to weave this supplement's dangers into the game while respecting the conventions of action fiction and the structure of GURPS Action.*

The GM can fling this entire dictionary into the game haphazardly, but it's less jarring – and thus more fun – when menacing scenery has ties to the plot (*Your Mission, Should You Choose to Accept It*, below), setting (*Location, Location, Location*, pp. 44-47), or heroes (*A Very Particular Set of Skills*, pp. 47-48). Because such connections aren't always obvious, the main aim of this discussion is to help the GM choose appropriate dangers. Players may find it useful, too; *A Very Particular Set of Skills* and *Setting the Scene* (p. 45) offer hints as to what abilities to use, and when.

A lot of action movies today seem to have scenes that just lead up to the action.

– Jason Statham

YOUR MISSION, SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT IT

The strongest inspiration for hazards is the team's mission. The GM should ask these questions: What are the heroes trying to accomplish? Who are their opponents, and what are they attempting to do? What dangerous stuff does that imply – and *not* imply?

For instance, if the heroes are tasked with foiling a terrorist plot to blow up an oil rig and contaminate their homeland's shores, the dangers under *Nautical* (pp. 23-24), *Big Bada-Boom* (p. 26), *Pipes* (p. 26), and *Drilling* (p. 30) are *de rigueur* – with *Chemicals* (pp. 9-10) released if the mission fails. Incidental dangers could arise as the story develops; e.g., an oil rig needs a *Kitchen* (pp. 19-21), and may even boast a recreation room for *Sports* (pp. 30-32). *Botanical* (p. 8) and *Farm* (pp. 13-14) are probably a reach, though!

It's impossible to anticipate every conceivable plot, but *Campaign Types (Heroes)*, pp. 5-6 offers broad inspiration.

Brotherhood in Blue: Action cops get into chases where *Vehicles* (pp. 35-37) are a threat. Big-city plots unfold in back-alleys full of *Junk* (pp. 18-19) and *Yuck* (pp. 40-41),

and in buildings with dodgy *Architecture* (pp. 6-7), especially if run-down or under construction (implying *Worksite*, pp. 37-38) – and even ordinary homes hold the threat of the *Generic* (pp. 15-16). Ethnic mobs love ethnic restaurants, leading to *Kitchen* (pp. 19-21) combat. Specific crimes suggest other menaces; e.g., *Chemicals* (pp. 9-10) for drug labs, *Ordnance* (pp. 25-26) for bomb scares, and *Sports* (pp. 30-32) for illegal betting. And police officers often end up in *Medical* (pp. 22-23) settings, to question victims of violent crime or as victims of violence. Avoid things not native to urban areas – *Botanical* (p. 8), *Farm* (pp. 13-14), *Resource Extraction* (pp. 28-30), etc. – unless the heroes' beat is unusual, like a port or harbor with *Nautical* (pp. 23-24) dangers.

Caper: Crooks are the flipside of cops, so everything noted for **Brotherhood in Blue** applies – while “lovable criminals” are rarely drug lords or mad bombers, they may have to cut deals with such scum, bringing in the associated hazards. Capers are often complex heists that involve sneaking in via rooftops and elevator shafts, cutting power, and then getting away at high speed, making *Architecture* (pp. 6-7), *Electricity* (pp. 12-13), and specialized *Tools* (pp. 33-34) and *Vehicles* (pp. 35-37) relevant. These schemes are first and foremost clever, which brings the *Devious* (pp. 10-11) and *Generic* (pp. 15-16) into play, and means no danger is strictly off-limits. In rare cases where the job is a violent one, it's extremely likely that *X Marks the Spot* (pp. 38-40).

Commandos: Elite troopers traipse about in jungles full of *Botanical* (p. 8) hazards, scuba dive in *Nautical* (pp. 23-24) environments, and generally get parachuted into the great outdoors, where the occasional *Zoo* (pp. 41-42) scene is fitting. If operating in built-up areas, add *Architecture* (pp. 6-7) to the list. Commandos are often tasked with planting *Ordnance* (pp. 25-26) and tackling *X Marks the Spot* (pp. 38-40) scenarios. As they use and confront serious weapons, improvisations of the *Devious* (pp. 10-11), *Generic* (pp. 15-16), *Kitchen* (pp. 19-21), *Sports* (pp. 30-32), or *Yuck* (pp. 40-41) variety are unlikely except when off duty. On the other hand, they are conversant in the violent use of their own *Medical* (pp. 22-23) supplies, *Tools* (pp. 33-34), and *Vehicles* (pp. 35-37).

Mercs: The **Commandos** notes apply if the team is paramilitary, while **Brotherhood in Blue** is better inspiration for domestic operators. Either way, mercenaries are usually less lavishly outfitted than government-backed soldiers and cops, and so may creatively misuse *Chemicals* (pp. 9-10), *Generic* (pp. 15-16) hardware, *Sports* (pp. 30-32) equipment, and *Tools* (pp. 33-34), and mess with makeshift *Ordnance* (pp. 25-26).

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I always try to find something that makes a scene feel real, and what makes things feel true to me is usually something anomalous, a component you would never expect to find, so it doesn't look manicured or perfect. This can be a location, a gesture, an expression, a thought in somebody's head.

– Michael Mann

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Good action films – not crap, but good action films – are really morality plays. They deal in modern, mythic culture.

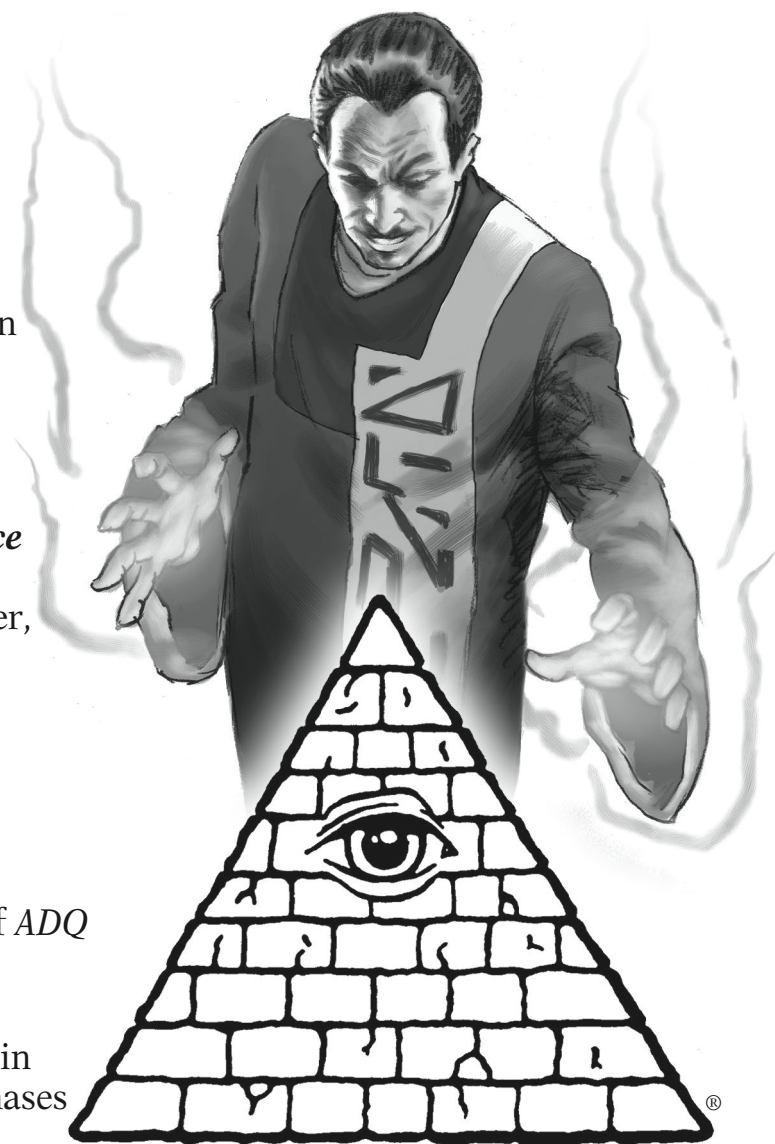
– Sylvester Stallone

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