

PYRAMID



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VEHICLES

MECHA OPERATIONS

by Kenneth Peters

THE ARSENAL OF MAGEOCRACY

by Matt Riggsby

HOT RIDES!

by David L. Pulver

THE BETWEEN-SPACE

by J. Edward Tremlett

SPIRITED RIDES

by Alan Leddon

THINGS FALL APART

by Jason Brick

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Getting there is half the fun!

Article Colors

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections.

- Pale Blue:* In This Issue
- Brown:* In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)
- Dark Blue:* **GURPS** Features
- Purple:* Systemless Features
- Green:* Distinguished Columnists

COVER ART

Alan Gutierrez

INTERIOR ART

*Greg Hyland
Matt Riggsby*

It's almost impossible to determine what drives a person to action; it's much easier to determine what someone drives *into action!* This issue of *Pyramid* is devoted to vehicles – realistic and fantastic – from past, present, and future.

Our journey begins with a look at everyone's favorite impossible automatons, in *Mecha Operations*. Written by **GURPS Ultra-Tech** co-author Kenneth Peters, these options push the **GURPS Spaceships** design system into new robotic realms. It includes stats for three models that will bring out the speed lines in you.

Fantasy realms love their fantastic vehicles . . . but who makes them? One answer is revealed in *The Arsenal of Mageocracy* by Matt Riggsby (author of **GURPS Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality**). It includes a map of the productive port, plus **GURPS** info on 10 of its creations. Behold the impossible swan boat and the iron-shod land dreadnought!

In the modern world, what's better than getting there fast? Getting there fast *in style*. With *Hot Rides!* – this month's *Eidetic Memory* entry from **GURPS Basic Set** co-author David L. Pulver – you'll get **GURPS** vehicle stats for eight of the most amazing real-world sports cars around. Discover what a million-dollar ride can do!

For as long as roads have existed, so have broken vehicles at the side of the road. *Things Fall Apart* looks at how to bring vehicular problems into a campaign, with three outlooks to suit different gaming styles. Whether dealing with an inefficient sailing ship, an out-of-control bus, or an immobile spaceship, you'll introduce the fun of cruising conundrums to your campaign.

Vehicles needn't just deliver you from place to place; they can be the adventure! With *Spirited Rides*, you'll discover three transports (with **GURPS** stats) that can take you to trouble – or deliver it personally! Discover the secret of the ghost ship's bargain, or travel from town to town in a trouble-solving truck.

If you've ever gone someplace and don't quite remember how you got there, you're halfway to *The Between-Space*. This massive impossible "vehicle" for any era will take the heroes where they want to go; it might even let them go home.

This issue also contains a *Random Thought Table* inspired by Steven Marsh's vehicular trivia, plus *Odds and Ends* we didn't have room for elsewhere (including a *Murphy's Rules* we could've sworn would fit in the trunk).

Hop aboard; this issue's sure to be a wild ride!

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FROM THE EDITOR

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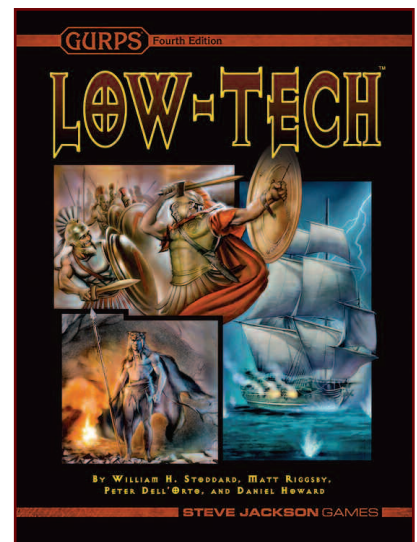
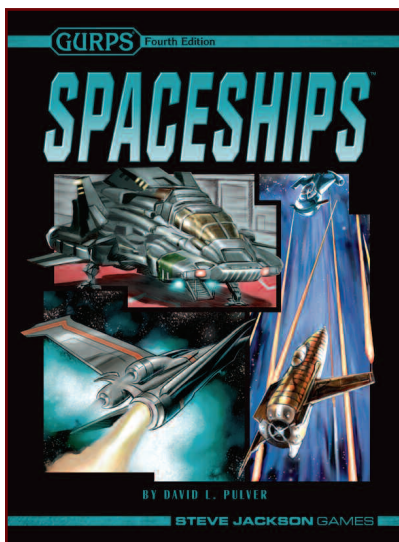
When I first picked up the *GURPS Basic Set* at the local Waldenbooks (back in 1989, I'm guessing), one element that struck me was just how *insane* the whole package felt, compared to other roleplaying games I'd been exposed to before then. I'd come from *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Star Wars*, *Marvel Super-Heroes*, and other specific-purpose games. However, here in this one book were rules for firearms, magic, psionics, vehicular combat, laser rifles . . . it had an "anything is possible" flavor that set it apart from any game I'd picked up before. This attitude extended to the rest of the *GURPS* shelf. Seeing all those supplements sitting next to each other on the shelf, my mind couldn't help but combine various possibilities: When you put *GURPS Fantasy* next to *GURPS The Prisoner* and *GURPS Ice Age*, strange and wonderful ideas formed in my 15-year-old brain.

While this issue is still devoted to a theme – vehicles, of course – I also realized this issue recaptured some of the "anything goes" attitude that I found so eye-opening in my first encounter with *GURPS*. There are transforming robots next to magical armorers, and modern-day sports cars parked alongside interdimensional portals.

I'm hoping there's something here for everyone, and that this issue captures the infinite possibilities that drew us all to roleplaying games in the first place.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Did our look at all things vehicular *drive* the point home for you? Or were we just spinning our wheels? Let us know what you thought about this month's installment, by sending a private note to pyramid@sjgames.com, or a public posting of your vehicular views at forums.sjgames.com.



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MECHA OPERATIONS

BY KENNETH PETERS

Although it began as a design system for constructing spacecraft, the *GURPS Spaceships* system has unofficially evolved and expanded to handle submarines and tanks (using *Alternate Spaceships* from *Pyramid* #3/34: *Alternate GURPS*), and all manner of strange and unusual craft that fly on aetheric winds or

burn the souls of innocents to ply the stars (*GURPS Spaceships 7: Divergent and Paranormal Tech*). The following “tricks” aim to expand the options for humanoid robot spacecraft (“mecha”), which were introduced in *GURPS Spaceships 4: Fighters, Carriers, and Mecha*.

DESIGN NOTES

GURPS requires few special exemptions to handle mecha; in almost all cases simply use the normal rules for vehicles (p. B462).

SIZE AND SHAPE

By default, *Spaceships* mecha designs have three broad hit locations. By convention, the Front hull of a humanoid mecha represents the front torso and head; the Central hull is the torso interior, shoulders, and back; and the Rear hull are the legs and “pelvis.” This is simply a set of guidelines, but will help you stay consistent with the published examples.

If you desire additional detail, assign vehicle hit locations (p. B463). A typical mecha with two robot arms and two legs has the locations 2A2L; it may have an independent turret (t) to represent the head and one or more small superstructures (s) if using handheld weapon batteries (*GURPS Spaceships 4*, p. 38) or equipment packs (pp. 6-7). Streamlined vehicles with wings add wings (Wi).

Smaller Arms: Mecha with robot arms smaller than normal for their SM cannot carry full-size handheld weapons except when using both arms (and they do not get the bracing bonus for doing so), and may not climb (p. B349) with their weedy limbs. Telescoping robot arms (*GURPS Spaceships 8: Transhuman Spacecraft*, p. 9) cannot climb or use *any* weapons!

MOVEMENT

Mecha are operated like any other vehicle . . . though one that tends to have arms and legs, and look like a giant mechanical human! Those with legs can maneuver well in almost any environment, and do not suffer any speed reduction for moving off-road. Their size means that they can stride over most low obstacles (three SMs smaller). Their mass lets them crash

through flimsy obstacles (small trees, suburban houses) at normal Move.

Thrust Vectoring Owns the Sky: Transformable mecha have even more options for movement. One common maneuver they use is to transform in midflight and swing their thrusters forward, allowing them to quickly decelerate and boost *backward* – evading enemy attacks and getting into a better firing position. This tactic is shown in the source material to almost guarantee combat advantage against conventional aircraft and space fighters in a dogfight (this may justify at least a +1 Piloting bonus on Closing Maneuvers versus nontransformable vehicles). To be true to the genre, you should also use *Airplane-Style Dogfights* (*GURPS Spaceships 4*, p. 33) in every environment, even underwater.

A mecha is maneuvered very simply: the pilot chooses any normal basic or advance combat maneuver and the mecha follows that maneuver, just as if it were a person.

– *GURPS Mecha*

Encumbrance

In addition to cargo transported in internal cargo bays, mecha can carry additional cargo strapped to their body or carried in their arms. High encumbrance reduces their ground Move just as it does for a character (p. B17) and will lower acceleration (and thus, air speed) like items attached to an external clamp (*GURPS Spaceships*, p. 15).

Casting Dancing Object on a galley requires 3,600 energy and \$4,500 in materials (a total of \$123,300, taking about a year and a half), or 4,000 energy and \$5,000 for a flagship galley (total \$137,000).

No, Seriously

It may seem implausible that a facility at a Renaissance level of technology can turn out massive warships on a daily basis. However, it's neither unrealistic nor, indeed, historically inaccurate. From the late Middle Ages, the city of Venice maintained a similar facility to build and maintain its all-important fleet, using efficient assembly-line techniques on a scale that would not be seen again until the 20th century. With a peak workforce of around 15,000 people, it could produce a galley about the size of the standard galley listed here in a day. It's even recorded that, as a stunt, they once assembled a galley in an *hour*.

Gnomish Land Dreadnought

This fearsome vehicle, the size of a modest two-story house, has been described as a self-propelled siege engine or an attempt to replace elephants with a mechanical equivalent. (In fact, it is internally divided into two levels.) However it's characterized, the land dreadnought is built to get its crew and occupants safely across the battlefield without exposing anyone to its dangers. It contains a set of capstans, turned by the dreadnought crew, which drive the vehicle's wheels (six pairs of wheels, each driven by a separate capstan pushed by a pair of crewmen). Passengers can fire on those outside the dreadnought with hand weapons through loopholes. The "basic" model is made from thick wood, while a slower but better protected version is armored with iron plates.

For most races the drawback is the size. It's scaled for SM -1 races. Gnomes, halflings, particularly short dwarves (and the like) can operate it without difficulty, but members of larger races are at -(1+SM) to drive or fire weapons from it.

Scythed Battlewagon

The scythed battlewagon is a prime example of the kind of work the Arsenal builds for outside customers. Though it's a fanciful weapon and of questionable value away from plains and other very level ground, it's terrifying where it does work. The axles of this vehicle are attached by a complex arrangement of gears to a set of scythe blades; these blades protrude horizontally from beneath the center of the cart about 1' above the ground. When the wagon is pulled forward, the scythe blades spin, cutting down anyone and anything immediately adjacent to the cart. When moving, roll against the driver's Teamster skill to hit anything in the yard adjacent to the cart's path on either side. Against humans (and similar beings), this automatically targets the legs. The scythes do sw+2 cut damage for ST equal to (12 + yards moved that second).

The scythed wagon has sufficient capacity to carry a small ballista in the back, or a few archers to hold off attackers who avoid the scythes. Though the Arsenal usually supplies just a wagon with a complex drive mechanism, owners frequently decorate it with skulls, scalps, and flaming torches. It's also frequently pulled by dire wolves or other domesticated carnivores.

Strolling Hut

A strolling hut is just that: an enchanted hut that walks around. A typical strolling hut is a small thatched structure, a round building 10' across with a low conical or slightly domed roof. It has a pair of thick wooden legs, themselves about 12' tall and 16" thick, on which it can tirelessly stroll about.

The hut is not driven like a vehicle. Rather, it is simply operated by whoever issues commands to it from inside, with more recent commands overriding any and all previous ones. It's no smarter than a fairly dim domestic animal. A strolling hut will follow simple, immediate instructions ("follow the yellow brick road" or "step over that wall there") and is smart enough to avoid obvious hazards like pits and bonfires, but cannot work through conditional commands ("stop if the ground feels muddy"). It is also largely incapable of combat. It can collide with other objects and step on things (where necessary, treat as though it had a DX of 9), but it cannot kick.

It can also *dodge only* when ordered to avoid specific individual attacks; treat as a Dodge of 6.

The hut assembly costs \$500. The enchantment is a variant of Golem that costs 1,800 energy, taking about a year.

Swan Boat

Strictly speaking, the swan boat isn't a boat, though it has a boat-like shape. Rather, it's a magical aircraft, drawn by a team of trained swans. The key to the swan boat is a variant of the Lighten spell. At a base cost of 1,500 energy (or 3,000 for the SM +1 swan boat), it reduces the weight of a container and its contents by 99%. In the case of the swan boat, this reduces the loaded weight to under 6 lbs., light enough for even a moderately powerful team of birds to lift.

The other important item is birds to pull to boat. Even a single bird is strong enough to get the boat off the ground, but for reasons of endurance and redundancy in case any are injured, the swan boat is usually pulled by teams of between four and eight; the harness is light enough that the cost and weight difference is trivial. What distinguishes draft swans from ordinary birds is exceptional intelligence, which renders them amenable to training. The following stats are typical.

Draft Swan

ST 4; DX 10; IQ 4; HT 10.

Will 10; Per 10; Speed 5; Dodge 8; Move 4.

SM -2; 30 lbs.

Traits: Domestic Animal; Flight (Winged; Air Speed 10) No Fine Manipulators; Peripheral Vision.

Cost: \$250.

*We can do without butter,
but, despite all our love of peace,
not without arms.*

– Winston Churchill

ABSTRACT RESOLUTION

This is the simplest and least time-consuming method for resolving a breakdown. It can represent a quick fix such as changing a tire, long-term maintenance on older equipment, or nursing a sick engine to the nearest repair facilities. It's best used when the GM wants to focus on the consequences of a breakdown, rather than on the breakdown itself.

Abstract resolution flows through three steps: naming the problem, identifying the solution, and describing the consequences. The players are passive for most of these steps. The GM describes what happens and chooses what skills work for making repairs. The players roll the dice, and then they deal with the results.

NAMING THE PROBLEM

This style of resolution doesn't require a detailed description of what went wrong with the adventurers' vehicle. The GM chooses a system to fail based on what threats or problems he wants to introduce during play. For complex vehicles, he can select from systems described in resources like *GURPS Ultra-Tech* and *GURPS Spaceships* – or use the vehicle's stat block for inspiration. It's rarely necessary to describe exactly what's wrong with a vehicle. It's enough to know that something's broken, and the heroes need to fix it.

IDENTIFYING SOLUTIONS

This step consists of naming the skills that can repair or mitigate the problem. *GURPS Spaceships*, *GURPS High-Tech*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and the *Technology and Artifacts* chapter of the *GURPS Basic Set* all provide appropriate repair skills for the vehicles and systems at different tech levels. The GM can also choose skills based on those the PCs have improved.

The nature of the repair skill roll is the most important game mechanics decision in abstract resolution. A single roll might be all that's needed to swap out a broken part. At the opposite extreme, the entire party might need to make various skill rolls to implement a complex repair. Another option is to require regular rolls over time, representing the tasks needed to keep a compromised vehicle going until there's time, money, or opportunity to make proper repairs.

DESCRIBING CONSEQUENCES

Satisfying abstract resolution focuses on the results of success and failure. Since it lacks technical details, there's little point to staging the breakdown if it's also short on meaningful consequences. Some appropriate consequences for failure include expensive repairs, missed opportunities, lost time, reduced vehicle statistics, or cargo spoiled from leakage. The GM can consider typical delays from car trouble or flight delays, then extrapolate those problems into the game. Successful repairs might shave hours off a journey or reduce maintenance costs for the next month.

Whatever consequences the GM decides on, they should impact the current adventure and possibly the overall campaign. A costly repair job on a starship could mean the crew does without that new laser battery they wanted. Failing to fix

a helicopter's control panel puts the party trekking for days through enemy territory. Jerry-rigging a dead car engine allows the heroes to arrive on time and save the day. The *Basic Space Combat* chapter of *GURPS Spaceships* has more ideas on what can happen when a vehicle's systems fall apart.

*Airline travel is hours of boredom
interrupted by moments of stark terror.*

– Al Boliska

USING ABSTRACT RESOLUTION

Tech levels aren't important in most abstract resolutions. The consequences of moving at half normal speed are the same whether it's in a Ford Model-A or a reactionless gravity drive. In abstract resolution, tech levels instead provide the details that make a scenario colorful and engaging.

Abstract resolution works best when vehicle trouble:

- Adds potential expenses in a campaign based on travel or trade.
- Increases pressure in a time-sensitive mission.
- Responds to a party's decision to skimp on maintenance and service costs.
- Establishes that a vehicle is old, unreliable, or otherwise quirky.
- Allows the party to coax out extra performance at the risk of damaging their ride.

Abstract resolution minimizes mechanics while it maximizes description and context. Storytellers and deep roleplayers will appreciate this method for its emphasis on story-based consequences. Players highly invested in system rules might dislike this approach, as it can feel arbitrary and inconsistent.

EXAMPLES OF ABSTRACT BREAKDOWNS

Here are a few ideas for using abstract resolution in adventures.

TL6: Race Against Time

Only the party's tank survived the battle on the Russian planes, but it didn't come through unscathed. Prisoners of war report an impending attack on a vital supply depot in the area. The adventurers are the closest Allied force with the power to assist – six hours away at normal speed. Their damaged engine can get them there in eight, but they can push it faster with a Mechanic (Tracked) check every hour. Each success cuts 30 minutes off of travel time. A critical failure stops the tank cold for an hour of improvised repairs.

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GURPS rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book.

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