PYRAMID

SCI-FI/TECH I

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR

In earlier years, when I had more free time, I was a casual reader of science-fiction magazines, especially *Analog* and *Asimov's Science Fiction.* (Those who are familiar with me are probably unsurprised I have a soft spot for Martin Gardner's "puzzle tales.") Over the course of *Pyramid's* third volume, we did over 40 issues with articles of interest to futuristic gamers. But there's one thing we've never gotten to do: a "general purpose" science-fiction issue . . . one devoted to all aspects of futuristic gaming. In other words, I wondered if we could re-create the wonder you could find in an issue of a general-purpose science-fiction magazine that's both specific as to its purpose (in this case, "futuristic") and yet broad in its surprises and possibilities. Here, then, is an assortment of tech, locations, things to do, and gamerly insight – enough to provide something of use for near-future cyberpunk spies, post-apocalyptic scavengers, and spacefaring surveyors.

Pyramid is nothing without its fans, so – as ever – we thank you for your support, and for helping to make this exploratory experiment possible. The future awaits; what treasures will you find?

*– Steven Marsh, **Pyramid** Editor*

ARTICLE COLORS

Each article is color-coded to help you find your favorite sections. Not all themes appear in every volume.

Red-Brown: In every issue.
Dark Blue: Character options.
Light Blue: Powers and magic.
Green: Locations.
Orange: Monsters and creatures.
Dark Pink: Gear.
Purple: GM advice and adventure ideas.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Your comments help us give you what you want! How are you using this material in your campaign? What do you wish we'd write about? Let us know via private feedback at **pyramid@sjgames.com**, or join the public discussion online at **forums.sjgames.com**.

IN THIS ISSUE

From post-apocalyptic possibilities to otherworldly excursions, this issue of *Pyramid* is a star chart to adventure, with out-of-this-world options set to inspire just about any futuristic campaign you could imagine.

Knowledge can be its own reward – and the focus of adventures – by *Putting Science in Your Fiction.* Unleash Sean Punch's insight into picking the right goal and the right skills, key traits for scientists, important supporting skills, and gaming the scientific method.

On a tiny artificial island somewhere in the Pacific is *The Divine Pacific Republic of Datastan.* Unclaimed by any greater nation, this bit of land is a cyberpunk or **Transhuman Space** destination for pilgrims of a new faith tradition – or those with data to protect. The article from **GURPS Hot Spots** guru Matt Riggsby includes an overview of residents, adventure seeds, and a map of the island's lone building.

Who *can't* use unusual abilities? Metatronic generators are weird-science devices that let you do the impossible, and in *More Options for Metatronic Generators,* longtime **GURPS** scribe Christopher R. Rice expands on previous material to give designers details on new varieties and sizes of generators, combination devices, damaging machines, and more.

Impossibly, the great beyond is now even more dangerous, thanks to the threat of *Space Zombies!* Become familiar with the origins, game stats, suggested uses, and variations of three new types of interstellar undead.

In the Infinite Worlds, there are many worldlines that don't follow normal physical laws. *Lord Kelvin's Icebox* is one of them. In this alternate history, the Earth slowly freezes as the sun is dying rapidly. Get tips for adapting this chilly location, ideas for campaigns, and suggestions for Infinity operations.

When you want to rewrite history or how long a second takes, it's simply a matter of *Mind Over Time.* From the datapad of **GURPS Sorcery: Sound Spells** co-author Aleksei Isachenko comes the new Chronokinesis power for **GURPS Psionics,** with its 10 time-altering abilities, plus techniques, perks, and related advantages.

Worlds await exploration in the grander cosmos – including *Ghost Planets.* Learn about three such abandoned worlds, each with **GURPS Space** data, an overview of what is to be found, and a few ideas for what's *really* going on.

The **GURPS Reign of Steel** setting needs bold fighters, sneaky scouts, and genius mechanics to fight against robotic overlords. *Reign of Action* – from **GURPS Reign of Steel: Will to Live** architect Roger Burton West – shows you how to make these heroes with the **GURPS Action** series. Plus uncover a new lens, a new skill, new gear, and new adventure ideas.
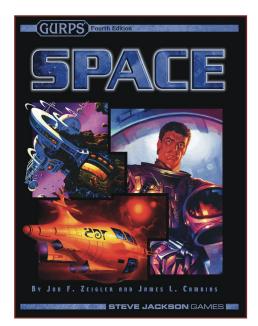
Push your skills to the limit with the thrill of multi-disciplinary competitive events in *The Toughest Race in the Solar System.* Learn about the elements of typical races, the necessary equipment, some potential dangers, and several adventures ideas.

If you're looking for someplace new, the answer may be just a footstep away, courtesy of what's on the other side of *The Murrinres Portals.* Discover possible origins, sample connections, new gear, and ideas for using these mysterious gateways.

What would sports look like in a dark future? Find out when you *Play Stupid Games, Win Stupid Prizes* with **GURPS** Line Editor Sean Punch. Get guidance on the nature of players, the playing field, winning, necessary skills, and more.

What you know can be a huge advantage or the beginning of problems, when you explore places that are *Gone but Not Forgotten.* Delve into the many ways that a humble map or schematic could complicate the average location search.

With this *Pyramid,* you've got a tachyon-powered trove that'll let you do six impossible things before breakfast. The future is now, and it's awesome!

Putting Science in Your Fiction

By Sean Punch

A curious thing about science fiction is how many scenarios concern *technology,* not *science.* They focus on computers, military hardware, spaceships, solving the Problem of the Week with a vaccine or modified deflector dish, and the like. Characters identified as "scientists" do work that looks suspiciously like inventing or adapting hardware.

In principle, there's nothing wrong with that! Technology *is* applied science – and the average person appreciates applications more than experiments, never mind theories. In practice, this can be disappointing for gamers playing scientists who lack such "design skills" as Bioengineering and Engineer. They end up spending many points on Hard and Very Hard science skills they use rarely or only to support inventors (who get the glory), or feel pressured to *become* inventors.

Here's a quick-and-dirty system to use when a character's objective – and perhaps an adventure's entire point – is to increase scientific knowledge. When the desired outcome is "just" a new or better gadget, use *New Inventions* (pp. B473-474) instead.

We're at a Loss, Professor

First, identify *what has to be figured out.* This could be nearly anything: how alien life functions, a revised theory of stellar evolution, a mathematical proof, even a theoretical model of a fundamental interaction. Unless those at the gaming table are scientists (and perhaps even then!), this is best left vague. What's crucial to roleplaying is *motivation:*

Pure curiosity. A scientist has made finding a result their work – possibly their life's work! The rewards are for the *player* more than the *character:* Scientific investigation is a mini-game that makes investing in scientific skills worthwhile, and that may provide a payoff in terms of traits; e.g., "buying off" an Obsession, learning a higher-TL version of a skill, or earning bonus character points for roleplaying Curiosity (or that Obsession).

Eye on the prize. Not all curiosity is pure. The real incentive might be recognition: Reputation among peers, or with *everyone* in a highly educated society; Rank in a hierarchical research institute or a military organization with a "science wing"; Tenure at a prestigious academy; or the evergreen cash prize, which could bestow Independent Income, Status, or Wealth.

Keeping up with the Joneses. In a campaign featuring factional hostilities – cold or hot – between nations, cyberpunk corporations, spacefaring races, etc., the goal might be less personal. The idea is to close a "knowledge gap" from below or widen it from above. For the former, homegrown science can suffice, and is also needed to understand data stolen via espionage; for the latter, original research is essential. While an individual scientist may still benefit, that's secondary.

The right tool. Particularly in action-adventure plots, existing methods and technology might be up to solving a problem – *if* the problem is sufficiently well understood to pick the correct solution, be that the precise target for a laser or the perfect planet for a colony. Again, while this can lead to personal prestige, the chief goal is to help a faction meet *its* goals.

Supporting cast. Don't reject plots where science supports invention, though! These can lead to great teamwork between scientist and technologist PCs – and if some of the above motivations are also in play, *additional* uses for science skills only make such skills more valuable and add much-needed variety.

A word of caution: These motivations shouldn't sideline PCs, even if the campaign is all about science. Like any mini-game – inventing, netrunning, crafting, etc. – this one can bore the uninvolved. Make sure that non-scientists can be part of the research team (p. 7).

Complexity

Like an invention (p. B473), a science project has a "complexity," set by the GM:

Complexity	Science Skill Level	Sample Projects
Simple	14 or less	Using existing ideas to explain something ordinary.
Average	15-17	Bending existing ideas to explain something unusual.
Complex	18-20	Developing new ideas to explain something atypical.
Amazing	21 or more	Revolutionizing a subfield to explain the "inexplicable."

"Science skill level" refers to the skills in *Science Skills* (p. 5) – not to *Supporting Skills* (pp. 5-6), which limit what's possible in other ways.

REIGN OF ACTION

BY ROGER BURTON WEST

GURPS Reign of Steel is a setting that calls for bold fighters, sneaky scouts, and genius mechanics – otherwise the innately superior robots would already have stamped out those pesky meatsacks. That's a call that *GURPS Action* can answer! But the *Action* templates assume you're in a functioning modern society, and even in the few places in the world after the Final War where that's still true, it's not quite like our world.

This article assumes you already have *GURPS Reign of Steel* and *GURPS Reign of Steel: Will to Live*, as well as at least the first two volumes of *GURPS Action*.

LENSES AND TEMPLATES

All templates and lenses that list Guns (Pistol or Rifle) may add the equivalent Beam Weapons skill (as an alternate or an extra). Very few humans know how to use the robots' lasers or particle cannon, but the protagonists are among the elite!

All templates and lenses that list Guns (Rifle) may add Guns (LAW) as an alternate or an extra skill.

Every combatant may wish to consider learning the basics of Explosives (Demolition) and Traps, either from templates or with spare character points.

Action Templates

The *assassin* is a precision killer, making single attacks from a long way off, and that usually means serious training. This person could be a Zone London SAS sniper, or a Washington WASP or Moscow info-commando with changed loyalties. Given the nature of the threat, assassins may add Artillery (Guided Missile) (A) IQ-1 [1]-11 to the list of available Guns skills. (Add Attribute Substitution [1] to turn it into a DX-based skill at 15; see *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks,* p. 15.)

The *cleaner* knows what the robots and their human lackeys are looking for, as well as how to hide it; Disguise and Knife may be less useful than Freight Handling and Forensics. This is an unusual skill set in a world that's just barely surviving, and this person probably has been specially trained for the task rather than picking it up through life experience.

The *demolition man* might choose Artillery (Guided Missile). This person is generally more useful with Explosives (Demolition) then with Explosives (EOD). Still, sometimes the smarter robots *set* the ambushes.

The *face man* won't work in a game that's just about dealing with robots, but plenty of Zones allow a few human or bioroid servitors and collaborators. Some of the hardest tasks may be persuading other resistance leaders to cooperate on a big operation. Since working with intelligent machines is a possibility, Psychology (Robots) (H) IQ-2 [1]-13 may be taken as a primary skill.

The *hacker* won't have an easy time of it going up against robots directly (see *Reading the Enemy's Mind*, **Will to Live** p. 42), but if the enemy has a single conceptual weakness, it's trusting their technology to do its job. Does that robotruck have the correct transfer codes to go into the high-security base? Does the census say the human infestation here has been eradicated and no further exterminations are necessary? Then that must be the way things are supposed to be.

The *infiltrator* could be anything from a scrappy camp escapee who knows the robots' blind spots to a high-tech professional with scavenged kit. This person may end up planting bugs for the wire rat or the hacker, or spying out sites for the demolition man to place charges – or getting into a collaborator's office to read or modify records.

The *investigator* doesn't fit well into most **Reign of Steel** games – unless someone is needed to take all the intelligence gathered from raids and robot-activity reports and synthesize it into an intentions-and-capabilities briefing to guide the *next* raid. In a small resistance band, this person may not have the luxury of sitting safely back from the action, so they'll pick up a few combat skills.

Everybody loves to see the *medic*. But they don't just patch up wounded fighters; they also design tests and treatments for the latest designer plagues, sort out disease and malnutrition among survivors, and even work out what's going on with the Green Men of Caracas.

The *shooter* is what people think of when they say "resistance fighter." No special changes are needed here, though Armoury is necessary for maintaining weapons in a world with limited resources.

The *wheel man* often goes unappreciated – until it's time to get in or out of a situation in a hurry. They may need to work with the hacker to bypass the bot brain of a Morag, a Wraith, or even a humble robotruck, but then this person can make that mobile tech pull maneuvers that no robot ever dreamed of. The wheel man might even convert a captured Hovercat to act as a cavalry mount! (Add Mecha to the list of allowable Driving specialties.)

The *wire rat* plants cameras and breaks into existing surveillance feeds, often getting physical access for the hacker to do their magic. The need to be one's own tech support makes Electronics Repair important.

The Toughest Race in the Solar System

By Carolyn Ivy Stein and Steve Stein

Adventure races are multi-disciplinary events in which athletic teams navigate challenging environments under their own power, often over days. Most contemporary adventure races – such as the Eco-Challenge (Fiji, 2019) and the Raid Gauloises (New Zealand, 1989) – involve running, hiking, bicycling, and paddling canoes, kayaks, or other watercraft. Some races require rock climbing, caving, rappelling (abseiling), and other activities. Racers navigate without modern equipment, relying on compass, sextant, and race-provided maps and charts – no GPS.

Near-future adventure teams race among asteroids, moons, and nearby planets. They brave exotic atmospheres and corrosive seas. They scale alien peaks. In the far future, perhaps contestants visit planets like Venus and use its high atmospheric pressure to hang-glide between floating bubble cities. Anything is possible.

Player characters might be race participants, race organizers, medical personnel, or security. They might be a camera crew embedded with race teams and required to endure the same harsh conditions. Perhaps the party must rescue stranded or injured contestants.

Overview

In stage races, participants have a day (or longer) to complete each stage. The sooner they finish, the more time they have to rest before the next stage begins. Contenders with the lowest cumulative time among the stages win.

One of the best-known contemporary stage races is the Marathon des Sables across the Sahara Desert in Morocco. Runners cover six daily stages of varying lengths and difficulties for 156 miles. The longest stage is 57 miles. Runners receive shelter and fresh water each night, but otherwise carry their own food and supplies.

Elements of an Adventure Race

Essential features of adventure races include exotic or scenic locations, challenging terrain, human-powered propulsion, and old-fashioned orienteering. Courses extend several hundred miles and require several days for the fastest teams to complete. Teams push through, night after night, with little sleep. They struggle through exhaustion, risking body and mind as they attempt to stay on course to each checkpoint before mandatory cut-off times.
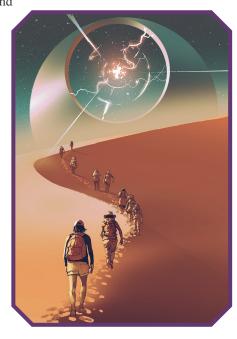
Team members must stay within sight of each other, help one another, and finish together. The most efficient team often wins against fitter groups. Accurate navigation, fast transitions, and sound planning matter more than raw speed. Only a handful of people finish the most challenging contemporary races, such as the Patagonian Expedition Race, which involves crossing 350 miles of mountains, glaciers, and freezing streams.

Pre-Race Interviews

Many races limit the number of teams, screening applicants through rigorous application processes and pre-race video interviews. These allow race directors to screen out those unready for the demanding race ahead and find charismatic competitors. Videos of successful applicants are incorporated into pre- and post-race media.

Briefing

Each race starts with a briefing, which often includes an inspiring story by the race director, fellow adventurers, or military veterans. The race director repeats rules, issues last-minute warnings, and provides contestants with the course map showing checkpoints and transition areas. After the briefing, they have a little time for last-minute preparations and then walk to the start line.

About the Authors

Jason Brick is a freelance writer whose 30-year gaming habit has included all four versions of **GURPS,** plus countless other systems. His work can be found in magazines worldwide. In his spare time, he enjoys travel, martial arts, and time with his family. Read more at his blog, **writelikehell.com**.

Roger Burton West wrangles computers near London, UK. He has had articles published in volumes 2 and 3 of *Pyramid,* co-wrote G*URPS Reign of Steel: Will to Live,* and wrote **GURPS Disasters: Meltdown and Fallout;** whoever's monitoring his web searches has probably dismissed him as a harmless crank. His gaming website is **tekeli.li.**

Aleksei Isachenko worked as an engineer at an aircraft plant and is now an associate professor in the department of manufacturing engineering. Psionic powers are used extensively in his games, be they science fiction or fantasy. He wishes to thank his gaming group for support in this foray into writing. Special thanks to Christopher R. Rice for some great suggestions.

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 hundreds of **GURPS** releases, revised the game into its fourth edition (2004), and been a regular contributor to *Pyramid* magazine. From 2008, he has served as lead creator of the **GURPS Action** and

GURPS Dungeon Fantasy series; work on the latter 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. He lives in Montréal, Québec with *son amour,* Geneviève.

Christopher R. Rice has been published in *Pyramid* multiple times, and now he's been published in the newest iteration. He's also authored, co-authored, or contributed to eight **GURPS** supplements (and counting!) on a range of subjects. Of course, if he's not writing about **GURPS,** he's blogging about it. Visit his site, "Ravens N' Pennies" (**www.ravensnpennies.com**), for more **GURPS** goodies. He wishes to thank L.A., for being the wonderful, amazing, inspiring woman that she is – not every man gets his muse personified in the flesh! He also wishes to thank his gaming group – the Headhunters – for alpha testing, his family (especially his mother), and Elizabeth "Archangel Beth" McCoy, his Sith Editrix mentor. The rules for Triggered Recharge for Energy Reserves were created by Antoni Ten Monrós and have been reproduced here with his permission.

Matt Riggsby is trained in anthropology and archaeology and, like the rest of his generation, has a job in computers. He works for an international healthcare IT company and lives with his lovely and talented wife, an above-average child, and a pack of dogs.

Longtime gamers, *Carolyn Ivy Stein and Steve Stein* have played **GURPS** since the release of the Third Edition in 1988. Carolyn is a freelance writer. Steve is a professor of military and maritime history at the University of Memphis, and has published three books, most recently *The Sea in World History: Exploration, Travel, and Trade* (ABC-CLIO, 2017). He also teaches strategy for the Naval War College.

J. Edward Tremlett, a.k.a. "the Lurker in Lansing," takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid,* was the editor of *The Wraith Project,* and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh*, *Worlds of Cthulhu,* and the anthology *Ride the Star Wind.* He's the author of the fictional blog *SPYGOD's Tales* (**spygod-tales.blogspot.com**), and lives in Lansing with one cat and enough Lego bricks to make a Great Old One. Maybe he already has.

Matt Wehmeier holds a master's degree in history from the University of Chicago. A Chicagoland native, he has been reading **GURPS** supplements and looking out with wonder at the infinite worlds for over a decade. His counterpart on Homeline is a senior analyst at Infinity specializing in Western and Central European comparative politics.