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INTRODUCTION

GURPS stands for “Generic Universal RolePlaying System.” It was originally a joke . . . a code word to describe the game while we looked for a “real” name. Years went by – literally! – as the game developed. We never found a better name, and now that the Fourth Edition is in your hands, the name is more appropriate than ever.

“Generic.” Some people like quick, fast-moving games, where the referee makes lots of decisions to keep things moving. Others want ultimate detail, with rules for every contingency. Most of us fall somewhere in between. **GURPS** starts with simple rules, and – especially in the combat system – builds up to as much *optional* detail as you like. But it’s still the same game. You may all use it differently, but your campaigns will all be compatible.

“Universal.” I’ve always thought it was silly for game companies to publish one set of rules for fantasy, another one for Old West, another one for science fiction, and another one for super powers. **GURPS** is *one* set of rules that’s comprehensive enough to let you use *any* background. There are worldbooks and supplements that “fine-tune” the generic system for any game world you want. But they *are* still compatible. If you want to take your Wild West gunslinger and your WWII commando fortune hunting in Renaissance Italy . . . go for it! And because that’s exactly the kind of game that so many of our fans play, the Fourth Edition adds an overarching background created to support just such campaigns.

“RolePlaying.” This is not just a hack-and-slash game. The rules are written to make true roleplaying possible – and, in fact, to encourage it. **GURPS** is a game in which you take on the persona of another character – and pretend, for a little while, to *be* that character.

“System.” It really is. Most other RPGs started out as a simple set of rules, and then were patched and modified, ad infinitum. That makes them hard to play. **GURPS**, more than ever in

the Fourth Edition, is a unified whole. We’ve gone to a great deal of effort to make sure that it all works together, and it all *works*. **GURPS** will let you create any character you can imagine, and do anything you can think of . . . and it all makes sense.

GURPS has been in print now for nearly 20 years. It was not designed in a vacuum; every game builds on the ones that came before. We learn from our successes – and from the successes of others. I think the best games are those that are simple, clear and easy to read, and I’ve tried hard to make **GURPS** “friendly.”

One important influence was Hero Games’ **Champions**, for the flexibility of its character-creation system.

Another was Flying Buffalo’s **Tunnels & Trolls**, for its appeal to solitaire gamers. Finally, M.A.R. Barker’s **Empire of the Petal Throne** remains noteworthy, even after decades of competition and imitation, for the detail and richness of its alien game world.

But there’s more to **GURPS** than trying to repeat past success. The failures of earlier systems are important, too. In **GURPS**, I’ve tried to achieve several things I think earlier designs missed.

First and foremost, of course, is the *flexibility* of a “universal” system. Others have tried this, but have fallen into the twin traps of watered-down combat (where a lightning bolt is just like a .45 pistol) or incompatibility (where players have to learn so many alternate rules for each new game and characters don’t easily cross over). **GURPS** presents a single, unified system that allows for great diversity without losing its coherence. This Fourth Edition incorporates dozens of rules that originally appeared in supplements published for the Third Edition. They seemed important enough to bring into the **Basic Set** – so here they are.

Second is *organization*. Every gamer has had the experience of hunting frantically through one book after another, looking for a rule . . . and not finding it.

GURPS is extensively cross-referenced, with a Table of Contents, an Index, and a Glossary of terms used in the game.

Third is *ease of play*. In **GURPS**, most of the detailed calculations are done before you start play . . . they are entered on the character sheet, and saved until you need them. Once play actually begins, it should not be complex. I’ve tried to make **GURPS** as fast-moving yet realistic as possible. It’s up to you to decide whether I succeeded.

Most roleplaying systems depend for their success on a continual flow of “official” supplements and adventures. **GURPS** is different. True, we’ve released a lot of material already, and we plan to do much more; a totally universal system offers great leeway, and we’ve got a supplement list as long as your arm. But **GURPS** is designed to be as compatible as possible with supplements written for *different* games. The reason? Simple. Suppose that you’re a **GURPS** player. You’re at the hobby shop, and you see a really interesting supplement package. But it’s by another publisher, for another game.

No problem. The **GURPS** system breaks everything down into plain English and simple numbers. Distances are given in feet and miles, rather than arbitrary units; times are given in minutes and seconds. That’s what makes it generic. That also makes it easy to translate. If you see an interesting supplement for another game, go right ahead and get it. You can use it as a sourcebook for **GURPS**.

Likewise, if your gaming group favors other systems . . . you can still use your **GURPS** adventures. As long as that other game uses units that you can translate into feet, minutes, and other plain-English terms, you can import your **GURPS** adventures.

When **GURPS** was launched, we dreamed of its becoming the “standard” roleplaying system. The hobby has grown hugely since then! There will never be a single standard . . . but **GURPS** is *one* of the standards, and that’s fine. We have never tried to drive others out of the market, or even to force them to conform to us. Instead, *we* are conforming to *them* – by producing a system that will work with *any* clearly written adventure.



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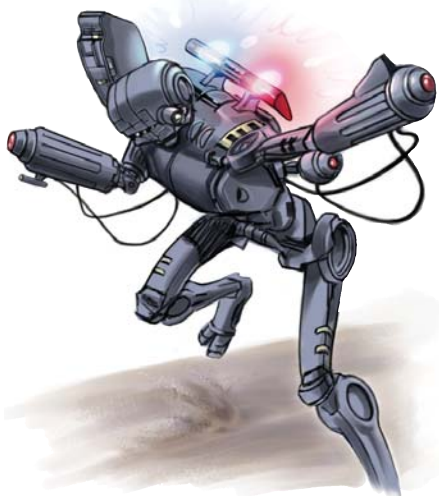
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INTRODUCTION

This is Book 2 of the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*.

Why two books? The last edition, after all, was a single book of 256 pages, plus the Instant Characters section.

The short answer is: we added a lot of material. Which translated to a lot of pages. This new edition brings in a great deal of material that's either brand new or previously appeared in other books (especially the two *Compendiums*). This new *Basic Set* weighs in at a total of 576 pages, more than double the length of the last edition. That's quite a stack of paper.

We could still have done it as a single book. But for two reasons, we didn't. First, that would be a thick, *heavy* book, suitable for stopping bullets but just a bit unwieldy to use. And second, it would be an expensive book. Really, too expensive.

By dividing the manuscript into two parts, we were able to get everything that a player *has* to have into Book 1. That book has the basic system rules and everything for character creation. What it didn't have, in the early drafts, was any combat at all . . . so we added a section with the basics

of combat. Now a player needs only Book 1 to get into the game.

Who needs this book? Well, first and foremost, the GM. This book goes into detail about physical feats and combat. It also covers vehicles and technology, animals and monsters, world design, and Game Mastering. "Tool kit" chapters let the GM create new creatures (and even PC races), artifacts, character abilities, and entire game worlds.

But it's not just for GMs. Players who enjoy detail and who want to participate in the creative side of the game will definitely find this book useful . . . and so will players who want to become GMs someday. The point is simply that it's not *required*. Nevertheless, the books *are* intended to work together. The pages and chapters are consecutively numbered, and the index covers *both* books and is repeated in both.

In the final analysis, the answer to "why two books?" is simply *accessibility*. We want the system to be easy to play, easy to learn, and easy to get into. By dividing the text into "necessary for the new player" and "everything else," we hope we've made the new *Basic*

Set not just easier to carry around, but also a better introduction to the system. Let us know how we did.

– Steve Jackson

OTHER SUPPORT AND GM TOOLS

Game Masters will also find useful material in the *GURPS GM's Screen*, which includes all the tables necessary to run a *GURPS Fourth Edition* game, copies of *GURPS Lite* and the tables of advantages, disadvantages, and skills from the *Basic Set*, Book 1, as well as several variant character sheets and other useful tools.

If you have access to the Internet . . . and nowadays that's almost a given . . . there's a great deal of support available, including:

- The free SJ Games webforums at forums.sjgames.com.

- *Pyramid Magazine*, which, for \$20 a year, gives subscribers several articles a week. A lot of these relate directly or indirectly to *GURPS*. There are also reviews, cartoons, and other bits of data and inspiration.

- **e23** is our electronic publishing division. Browse over to www.sjgames.com/e23/ and see what you find. We have already prepared dozens of PDFs, ranging from short adventures to whole *GURPS* sourcebooks, and we get more ready every week. This will be a very valuable resource. You can purchase game material online, in PDF format, in the same shopping cart you use for your Warehouse 23 orders!

- And, of course, the *GURPS* website itself (www.sjgames.com/gurps/) is constantly being updated with information about all *GURPS* products in and out of print. One brand-new feature will be implemented for many *GURPS* books by the time you read this: the book's complete bibliography will be online, and every book that's currently in print will have a hotlink to amazon.com!

