SPACESHIPS III

SO YOU WANT TO BUILD A SPACESHIP
by Roger Burton West and Timothy Ponce

HAZARD RATES
by David L. Pulver

BLACKBEARD STATION
by Ted Brock

BATTLE FOR THE EARTH
by Michele Armellini

STRANGE OBJECTS IN DISREPAIR
by J. Edward Tremlett

REMATCH
by Matt Riggsby

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Stock #37-2694
When it comes to off-world science fiction, spaceships make things happen! And in an infinite universe, there's always room for more awesome spacecraft and ideas for how to use them. Fortunately, we at the Pyramid shipyard have you covered, with the latest models fresh off the space lot. So You Want to Build a Spaceship with the possibilities of the GURPS Spaceships line. Great! But with eight volumes in that series, it can be daunting to decide which options are best for your campaign. Get inspired by four different types of science-fiction themes and adventure expectations, then learn what ship engine, power plant, and weapon options best fit the theme and expectations. And stay out of sight with IR masking, a new Spaceships system!

In a fast attack from space, aliens wiped out Earth's major cities and installations. Now it's time for humans to strike back in a Battle for the Earth. Michele Armellini – author of GURPS WWII: Grim Legions – uses GURPS Mass Combat to describe human and alien force elements, providing the modifiers needed to play out their final confrontation. Drop it into a myriad of science-fiction campaigns with the included tips!

When outlaws need a place to relax, refuel, and resell, they visit Blackbeard Station. This former mining asteroid hides in a distant system with the help of some special equipment. It includes both GURPS City Stats and Spaceships information for the gargantuan pirate haven, plus details on its history, politics, and key leaders.

When you expect a spaceship crew to actively seek out less-than-legal cargo, you'll need to pay them Hazard Rates. In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of the Spaceships series – offers tips (along with a new cargo table) for gaming the pursuit of "special" freight, plus ideas for interesting passengers and official mail routes.

When you're among the stars, it's quite possible you'll come across Strange Objects in Disrepair. Each of the three derelict alien vessels included herein has a story and a challenge, perfect for heroes of any game system to unravel and figure out.

This issue docks into port with a Random Thought Table that ponders how to prevent all extraplanetary vessels from looking the same and a Short Bursts vignette from the Car Wars universe that reveals how folks can keep a grudge even after they're dead. If the stars are your destination, this issue of Pyramid is your passport!

---

**Starbucks: Why can't we use the starboard launch tube?**

**Chief Tyrol: It's a gift shop now.**

---

**Battlestar Galactica, “Miniseries, Part 1”**
Fulfilling a Bold Mission

GURPS celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, and a few times lately, I’ve had occasion to reflect on where GURPS has been and where it might go. One of the joys of a well-defined, heavily supported game system is that there’s more breathing room to take some time and reflect on what it all means. In the early days of a game, a lot of time and effort is taken up by making sure you’re covering the basics: “Do we have extensive hand-to-hand combat rules? Because we need those.”

As time progresses, we can start branching out to things that are still important, but not as day-one vital: “What about a system for mass combat? How would that work?”

Eventually, as the must-haves and wouldn’t-it-be-nice elements are filled, we can start making sure that everything is working as well as it can, to achieve the desired result. As I type this, we’ve recently released GURPS Adaptations, a guide to adapting beloved fictional settings to GURPS, including insight into how to create specialty gear, stat up heroes, and get the feel of the setting just right with the myriad of options that are out there. This issue offers a similar look at GURPS Spaceships (pp. 4-9), with suggestions for how to select from the possibilities of that series to devise a campaign that fits your vision.

The magazine also supplies a number of elements that are designed to be dropped into as many campaigns as possible, whether it’s dealing with an alien mothership (pp. 11-17), taking on not-quite-legal cargo (pp. 21-25) or exploring derelict spacecraft (pp. 26-31). With the foundations of spaceships covered so thoroughly by the rest of the GURPS line, we have more room to explore strange new realms. And isn’t that the point of spaceships?

Write Here, Write Now

How was your trip among the stars? Please let us know! We love getting ship-to-ship communication via pyramid@sjgames.com as well public discussion on how well-received our Pyramid cargo is at forums.sjgames.com.
Crew members are generally good at what they do, but skill levels of 12-13 are often considered adequate.

**A Balance of Terror**

Secure all active scanners. Passive systems only . . . Quiet! There’s a destroyer hunting us . . . We’re in an intense radiation belt. Gamma rays are clouding their screens. If they can’t see or hear, they won’t find us.

– Commander Paul Gerald, in *Wing Commander*

Science fiction depicts space warfare in a dizzyingly wide variety of modes, but few inspire suspense like the life-and-death struggle between two captains hunting each other. Perhaps the most famous example of this genre is the battle between Captain Kirk and the commander of a Romulan Bird of Prey, but it crops up in *Babylon 5*, *Star Wars Expanded Universe*, and a variety of written fiction. As a whole, this sort of story emulates the feel of submarine warfare in which one of Prey, but it crops up in

Perhaps the most famous example of this genre is the battle death struggle between two captains hunting each other. A typical engagement involves one or both ships running on auxiliary power using their passive sensors to try to locate the other. This boils down to a series of Detect rolls. Once an enemy is spotted, the attacking vessel maneuvers into range – assuming it isn’t already – powers up, and fires its main weapons. This first shot, if it hits, should give the attacker enough of an advantage to finish off his target. Ships that use a fuel cell to maintain some energy don’t need to fully power up, but are at an additional +1 to detection if they are above auxiliary power. Their gunners may fire on any ship within range as they are detected. Once a ship fires, it reveals its location to all ships executing a sensor detection task (*Spaceships*, p. 52) that turn.

Some ships may decide to forgo stealth and scan their surroundings with active sensors (see *Spaceships*, p. 46). This automatically detects anything without the stealth hull feature within range on a successful skill roll. Ships with a stealth hull of the same or higher TL as the scanning sensor array impose a penalty equal to 3 + 2 per TL above the sensor. (This replaces the rule for passive sensors given above.) For example, a TL11 stealth hull imposes +5 on a TL10 sensor array. Remember, however, that using active sensors lets anyone within twice the sensors’ range to detect the scanning ship!

In particularly cinematic “Balance of Terror” games, a common trope involves hiding in nebulas or other environmental impediments to vision or sensors. Model this using *Nebulas, Ion Storms, and Gas Clouds* (*Spaceships* 4, p. 35). For even more unrealistic . . . ahem . . . cinematic games, consider having the crew make complementary Stealth rolls to avoid being heard by other ships. In this case, success gives a penalty to the hunter’s sensor rolls and a failure gives a bonus!

At all TLs, warships should have DR approximately equivalent to two unhardened armor systems of the current TL per hull section – fine-tuned up or down with smaller systems (*Spaceships* 7, p. 4). They likely have a conventional power plant and reaction drive for use when not engaged in stealth maneuvers. These are usually powered down for stealth operations so the ship can operate on auxiliary power or off of a backup fuel cell. When an enemy is detected, the ship either powers up and shoots at the target, or uses the fuel cell to fire weapons. While it may be unintuitive, missiles and potentially guns inflict far too much damage to make good torpedoes; no sense in arbitrarily killing the PCs because of one bad dice roll after all! Instead, use energy weapons as described below so that PCs’ ships can survive about three shots before being destroyed. This gives them a chance to retaliate or escape after getting hit, while still making direct hits frightfully dangerous.

---

**IR Masking [Any]**

An advanced coolant system that reduces the IR signature of any spaceship in which it is installed. Each system gives -4 to Detect rolls made to spot the vessel via passive sensors. No more than two systems can be installed. The penalty only applies if the IR masking is of the same TL as or higher than the array searching for it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SM</th>
<th>+4</th>
<th>+5</th>
<th>+6</th>
<th>+7</th>
<th>+8</th>
<th>+9</th>
<th>+10</th>
<th>+11</th>
<th>+12</th>
<th>+13</th>
<th>+14</th>
<th>+15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workspaces</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>300</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost ($)</td>
<td>150K</td>
<td>500K</td>
<td>1.5M</td>
<td>5M</td>
<td>15M</td>
<td>50M</td>
<td>150M</td>
<td>500M</td>
<td>1.5B</td>
<td>5B</td>
<td>15B</td>
<td>50B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Repair Skill: Electronics Repair (EW).*
The Battle

The Terrans are outnumbered and outgunned. They forfeit the air part of the engagement and are outclassed as to C3I. But their reconnaissance is superior, and they are the only ones with artillery (albeit barely enough to count).

The Alien General

The basic value to calculate the aliens’ chances to swat the Terrans away is their commander’s Strategy skill. Since the players can come up with their own character designs to fill in the shoes of the Terran officers, and give them any Strategy skill level they want, the GM can customize the scenario by deciding how clever the enemy will be.

It is suggested that the aliens, not being that used to ground battles, will not have more than Strategy-14.

The Terrans have a total modifier of +5 to their roll (see GURPS Mass Combat, p. 29); summing up: +1 because some of the troops have the proper Terrain feature, and +3 for their Recon Superiority.

The aliens are patrolling the area normally. They have a total modifier of +2; summing up: -1 because the locals are hostile and +3 for their Air Superiority. For the purpose of their roll, the aliens’ effective skill is 14.

The modified Terrain Rating is 2 (3 for a Built-Up Area which both sides begin the battle from, -1 for the bad weather).

Hopefully, the heroes will have high Strategy and Intelligence Analysis, and they will at least win initiative or possibly surprise the enemy!

Important Options

The players should be made aware of the following options. The GM may require Strategy or Leadership rolls, and bestow information according to their success. Or he could listen to the players’ tactical ideas and see whether something they come up with goes along with any of the following.

Or he could use a mouthpiece – the general, or an experienced junior officer – to provide hints.

First thing, the Terrans have a huge disadvantage, as shown by the Basic Strategy Modifiers. Their best chance is to take the aliens by surprise.

Even then, however, they are heavily outnumbered, and it would make sense for them to choose – if they can – an encounter battle (see Mass Combat, p. 32). That reduces their Artillery Superiority bonus to +2, but it also reduces to +2 both the Air and C3I Superiority bonus of the invaders, thus reducing their overall modifier to +8.

The Terran force is a hodgepodge of diverse units.

Basic Strategy Modifiers

The Basic Strategy Modifier for the Terran force is +3 (for the Special Class Superiority in Artillery).

The Basic Strategy Modifier for the alien force is +12 (+6 for the Relative Troop Strength, +3 for Air Superiority, and +3 for C3I Superiority).

The Reconnaissance Contest

The Terrans have a total modifier of +5 to their roll (see GURPS Mass Combat, p. 29); summing up: +1 because the locals (what remains of them) are friendly, +1 because some of the troops have the proper Terrain feature, and +3 for their Recon Superiority.

The aliens are patrolling the area normally. They have a total modifier of +2; summing up: -1 because the locals are hostile and +3 for their Air Superiority. For the purpose of their roll, the aliens’ effective skill is 14.

The modified Terrain Rating is 2 (3 for a Built-Up Area which both sides begin the battle from, -1 for the bad weather).

Hopefully, the heroes will have high Strategy and Intelligence Analysis, and they will at least win initiative or possibly surprise the enemy!
Early in my *GURPS Space* campaign, the party acquired a tramp freighter – which I think they named the *Hungry Iguana* – and decided to try their hand as merchant adventurers. However, only one of them had a mercantile background, being the scion of an interstellar-trading family. Brought together by professional connections and a shared desire to leave the provincial capital a few steps ahead of various enemies, the group included an unemployed interstellar geologist, a retired space marine commando, an ecologist turned leftist revolutionary, and a psychic. They eked out a living with a mix of freelance black ops, interstellar salvage, tomb raiding . . . and free trading.

Due to their lack of experience and capital, their initial mercantile ventures proved unfruitful. After a few less than lucrative runs shipping electronic parts or grain for little profit, they turned up their noses whenever the speculative cargo table indicated a consignment of vegetables or farm machinery in favor of gauss rifles, drugs, or military robots. Now that the adventurers were actually seeking out illegal cargoes, it didn’t make much sense to roll on the standard tables. So, I ended up creating a special one along with rules for this type of work. A *GURPS Spaceships 2: Traders, Liners, and Transports* version is presented here.

And the *Hungry Iguana*? Their smuggling spree ended when a gun-running charter led them to a terrorist plot to use stolen nuclear missiles to blow up a passenger liner carrying a diplomatic conference and thus start an interstellar war. Their better nature prevailed, they stopped the plot, and ended up on the government payroll as black ops.

The motto: take the hazard rates . . . if you know when to stop while you’re ahead.

### Black-Market Cargos

Not all space merchants are law-abiding space truckers! Some are smugglers who work for criminal organizations . . . and others actively go into business for themselves, specializing in illicit speculative trading. The trading system in *Spaceships 2* allows a merchant to occasionally discover an illegal cargo shipment, but what if they’re specifically looking for shady goods like blaster rifles, stolen air-cars, or illegal drugs? As an alternative for the free-spirited (or black-hearted), the following Low-Legality Cargo Table (p. 22) is provided.

When deliberately hunting illicit cargoes, rely on the usual rules from Chapter 3 of *Spaceships 2* but add an extra penalty equal to the local Control Rating. (If looking for focused cargo, add that to the normal modifiers.) Moreover, if any roll fails by 5+, it means a potential encounter with either rival criminal gangs or law enforcement. This could range from an attempted robbery, arrest, or sting to a demand to be cut in for a piece of the action.

#### Using the Table

Roll two dice, one at a time. If this world is TL5 or less, halve the first die roll, rounding up. After any halving, apply the following modifiers:

- On the first die, -1 if the world is Non-Industrial; +1 if Industrial.
- On the second die, -1 if the world is Non-Agricultural, +1 if Agricultural.

Treat results that are less than 1 as 1, and those greater than 6 as 6. Read the two modified numbers consecutively as a two-digit number from 11 to 66, and consult the “Commodity” column on the Low-Legality Cargo Table to find out what sort of lot was discovered.

Next, determine the lot size in tons. The “Lot (tons)” column shows the die roll to figure the actual lot size (in tons).

Abbreviations in the “Price Modifiers” column are per *Trade Classifications, Spaceships 2*, p. 36. See *Speculative Trade, Spaceships 2*, pp. 35-39, for more details on determining the purchase and selling prices.

Special conditions are as per *Spaceships 2*, p. 39, except that every cargo on the table may be low-legal; roll 3d against the number in parentheses to see if the condition applies; if no number is listed, the cargo always low-legal. The GM should roll 1d against the CR of any given port the merchant plans to visit to see if the goods are illegal there or not.

As usual, attempts to sell illegal goods require getting them past customs, and have -2 when looking for a buyer but add +4 to the selling price.
Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of GURPS players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by email: info@sjgames.com. Resources include:

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

Warehouse 23. Our online store offers GURPS adventures, play aids, and support in PDF form . . . digital copies of our books, plus exclusive material available only on Warehouse 23! Just head over to warehouse23.com.


To discuss GURPS with our staff and your fellow gamers, visit our forums at forums.sjgames.com. The Pyramid web page is pyramid.sjgames.com.

Bibliographies. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we’re putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book’s web page and look for the “Bibliography” link.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all GURPS releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

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.

STUCK FOR AN ADVENTURE?
NO PROBLEM.

Warehouse 23 sells high-quality game adventures and supplements in print and PDF formats.

- Free downloadable adventures for GURPS and In Nomine!
- Fun gaming accessories – shot glasses, shirts, specialty six-siders, and more!
- PDFs from Atlas Games, Amarillo Design Bureau, Pelgrane Press, Goodman Games, and many others – plus gems from the up-and-comers.
- Original material for Transhuman Space and new GURPS supplements from Kenneth Hite, Phil Masters, David Pulver, Sean Punch, and William Stoddard!
- Digital editions of out-of-print classics, from Orcslayer and the complete run of ADQ to GURPS China and GURPS Ice Age.
- Buy board games and roleplaying PDFs in the same order! Download digital purchases again whenever you need to.

STEVE JACKSON GAMES
warehouse23.com