

GURPS®

Fourth Edition

POWER-UPS™

IMPULSE BUYS™



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An e23 Sourcebook for GURPS®

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Stock #37-0143

Version 1.0 – June 2012



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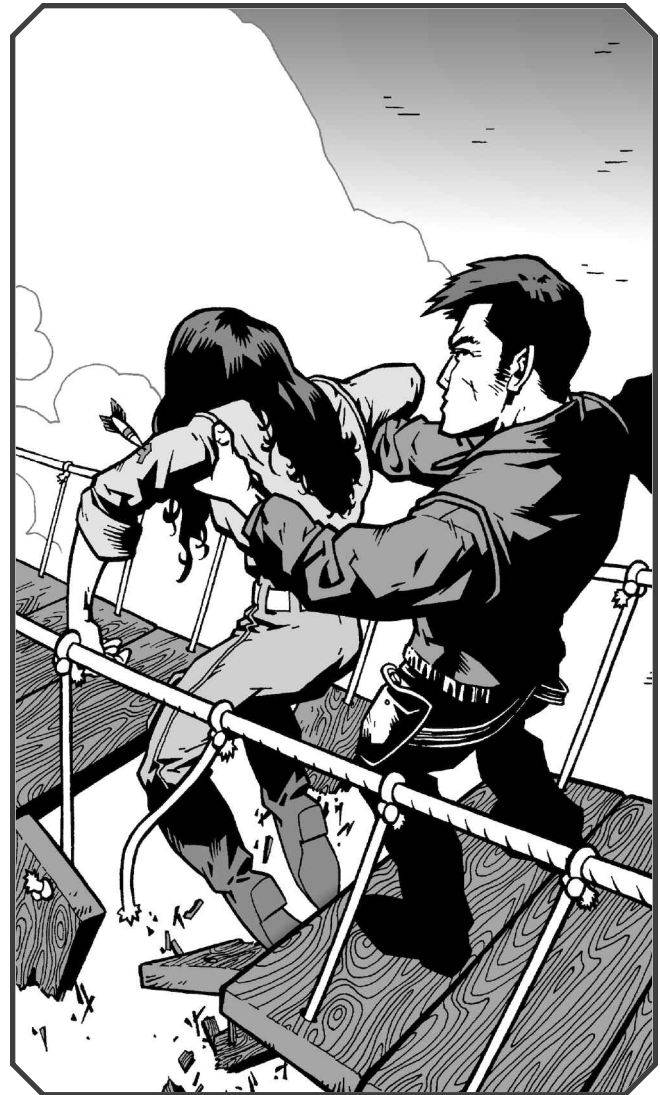
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INTRODUCTION

Preparing a hero for all possible contingencies would mean pouring infinite character points into single-purpose advantages and powers, and specialized perks, skills, and techniques. While an ability for every occasion would be lovely, strategies that demand bottomless budgets are impractical. Burning a few unspent points for a one-time bailout *right now* is often affordable, though – and when the alternative is meeting a sticky end where those points don't matter anymore, it's also sensible. Even if the circumstances aren't especially deadly, they might be so rare that it's more efficient to deal with them *once*, cheaply, than to buy a costly permanent capability that won't see use ever again.

Moreover, not every problem is amenable to a solution that can be framed in terms of abilities. Dramatic challenges demand dramatic resolutions. While this most often means roleplaying, there are times when what the player hopes to accomplish and what the GM regards as plausible don't *quite* line up. In that case, the process escalates to negotiation – and the bargaining chips are character points.

These sorts of bailouts and bargains are the realm of **GURPS Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys**. It examines character points not in their better-known role as units of account for purchasing “goods” such as attributes and skills, but as a currency for buying “services” from the GM. Because not every power-up lasts forever!

PUBLICATION HISTORY

The notion of spending character points to affect outcomes in play first appeared in the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition** (p. B347). Later options turned up in **GURPS Martial Arts**, **GURPS Supers**, and **GURPS Thaumatology**, and in the series **GURPS Action**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, and **GURPS Monster Hunters**. **Impulse Buys** is inspired by all of these sources but takes little from them verbatim.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean “Dr. Kromm” Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every **GURPS** product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of **GURPS Third Edition** projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition** with David Pulver. Since then, he has created **GURPS Powers** (with Phil Masters), **GURPS Martial Arts** (with Peter Dell’Orto), and the **GURPS Action**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, and **GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . and the list keeps growing. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, cooking, and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie, and their two cats, Banshee and Zephyra.

About GURPS

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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.

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CHAPTER ONE

PARTING YOU FROM YOUR POINTS

First, a caution to players: Spending character points to alter in-game outcomes is optional and requires the GM's permission. It's tampering with the plot and often the setting – elements that fall in the GM's domain in a traditional RPG. Even if the GM is open to sharing control, he might feel that using a purely game-mechanical resource to influence events and circumstances in the campaign is too “meta” in certain cases. Thus, the following qualifier is implicit, if not explicit, in every one of these rules:

With the GM's permission . . .

If the GM allows an option, he'll set a price in character points for the desired effect, using the numbers in the text as guidelines – which is all they are! If the player wishes to proceed, then that's how many *unspent* character points he must pay (see *Paying Fate's Price*, p. 5). The player may spend or pass . . . but no backsies.

Rejecting the GM's offer means choosing to go with the flow instead of swimming upstream (or diverting the river). The player can't opt not to spend the character points, see what happens next, and then ask for his opportunity back when he doesn't like how things are going. He can petition the GM to let him spend points to affect events going forward, but he can't undo the past unless he gets the GM's permission to exercise an option that specifically allows that (e.g., *Flesh Wounds*, p. 10).

Likewise, once the player has spent character points, they're gone, used to improve his situation. They don't raise his character's point value. If he dislikes the outcome, too bad – spending points is sometimes a gamble! He can take heart in the knowledge that if he roleplays the situation well enough, the GM might award him more points.

Perking Things Up

Each major section of *Impulse Buys* includes a *Perking Things Up* box that notes a few perks from **Power-Ups 2: Perks** (and sometimes other sources) that might seem too powerful as permanent, one-point abilities in a gritty or low-powered campaign. Even in a game where they're balanced, PCs won't necessarily enjoy equal access to them all. In either case, the GM may rule that the effects of a perk that lends itself to interpretation in terms of “uses,” and that looks like a hero pushing his luck, repote, or abilities, can be bought in play for a character point per *use* instead of costing a point for keeps. The cost is *always* 1 point per use, regardless of the general rules for point expenditures found in the associated section.

These boxes strive to reproduce the relevant benefits of the listed perks. Gamers who use these rules extensively will find the full write-ups in **Power-Ups 2** helpful, however.

BUYING SUCCESS

The most basic use of character points in play comes from p. B347: A player can spend points to alter the outcome of his *immediately previous* success roll. The cost schedule:

- *Critical failure to failure*: 2 points
- *Failure to success*: 1 point
- *Success to critical success*: 2 points

Multiple shifts are possible. In that case, these costs are additive. Critical failure to success, or failure to critical success, costs 3 points; critical failure to critical success costs 5 points.

Buying Failure

When a player is *required* to attempt a success roll that he wants to fail or even critically fail, apply these point costs in the other direction; e.g., critical success to failure costs 3 points. This has its uses! For instance, a deadly warrior, mind-controlled to attack a defenseless ally, might spend points to critically miss and drop his weapon, while an interrogation victim may prefer paying once to fail a HT roll that means he passes out from torture to purchasing a success each time he's asked a question and blows his Will roll to resist Interrogation.

Margins

Simple success or failure doesn't always matter as much as the margin. When margin matters, use these values for outcomes bought with points:

- *Bought critical success*: Margin of success is (effective skill)-3, but at least 1.
- *Bought success*: Margin of success is (effective skill)-10, but at least 1.
- *Bought failure*: Margin of failure is 10-(effective skill), but at least 1.
- *Bought critical failure* (when using *Buying Failure*): Margin of failure is 18-(effective skill), but at least 1.

Remember that 0 or a negative number is less than 1. Thus, effective skill 4 gets 1, 1, 6, and 14 for these margins; effective skill 10 gets 7, 1, 1, and 8; and effective skill 16 gets 13, 6, 1, and 2. At effective skill 3-4, it's unproductive to buy a critical success for margin alone.

Upgrading Margins: If the player rolls a natural success but with a margin so narrow that he may face miserable defeat – especially in a Quick Contest – his best bet is to buy a critical success for 2 points and take the margin noted above, which is

like rolling a 3! However, if his margin is less than that of a bought success (effective skill-10), he may spend just 1 point to improve his margin to that level, converting his regular success into a superior but not critical one. For instance, if the player of a PC with effective skill 18 rolled a crummy 16, giving success by 2, he could pay 1 point for success by 8 instead.

Dooming Foes

The GM will usually want to forbid bought critical successes in situations where they visit critical failure, serious injury, or comparable disaster upon an NPC or a fellow PC. “No buying critical hits in combat” is the most obvious facet of this. Critical successes at Resisted spells (and comparable advantages) and even on certain Influence rolls can also amount to “I win” buttons. These things tend to suck the fun out of games where risk and doubt matter – especially horror and mystery campaigns, and anything described as “gritty.”

On the other hand, in extremely cinematic campaigns where the heroes are *destined* to win, purchasing critical successes in combat against faceless, interchangeable opponents (“mooks”) is encouraged. Such adversaries are essentially scenery, not people. Spending points to brush them aside is in effect a creative application of *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9).

Paying Fate's Price

Everything in *Impulse Buys* costs character points, which can come from several sources:

Bonus Points: Points awarded for good roleplaying and advancing the story (see *Awarding Bonus Character Points*, pp. B498-499) can be spent this way instead of on permanent traits. Thus, players might want to hold some in reserve!

Starting Points: Players never *have* to spend every last starting point (see *Starting Points*, pp. B10-11). They may elect to save some for buying outcomes in play. The player who likes a challenge might set aside a substantial fraction of his points and roleplay a hero who enjoys “script immunity” rather than great ability – a common fictional archetype.

Sacrifice: A player with no unspent points might be able to sacrifice existing abilities for the points to influence fate. This requires the GM's agreement, both that this option is allowed and that the lost trait suits the desired results. “I punch him so hard my wrist snaps!” would be fine if it meant sacrificing High Manual Dexterity for points to influence a Brawling attack – but even 1 point from Guns wouldn't make sense, as a mangled hand would affect more than just Guns. If miraculous survival fits the campaign in the first place, the GM should consider permitting “Nearly dying weakened me” as justification for cashing in 25 points of physical capabilities to return from the grave (p. 10).

Friends: The GM may let players exercise any of the above options on behalf of *other* players. This might represent concrete assistance (e.g., providing 3 points to turn another PC's critically failed HT roll into a success by performing surgery), but it need not be selfless – one path to personal success is through group success!

Debt: The GM might allow a player with insufficient unspent points to go into “debt” – subtracting points spent in play from those awarded for the adventure – if this would save the PC's life. If the player has a negative balance at the end of the adventure, then the effects are as for sacrifice, except that the GM chooses what's lost.

Wild, Wild Destiny

At the GM's option, players can spend two kinds of renewable points on the options in *Impulse Buys*. Character points, Destiny Points, and Wildcard Points *can* be combined for this purpose. See *Other Kinds of Points* (p. 18) for related concepts.

Destiny Points: Instead of its usual effects, positive Destiny (p. B48) gives the player 1/5 of the 5, 10, or 15 points it costs as *Destiny Points*. The resulting 1, 2, or 3 points can be spent on in-game outcomes as if they were character points, improving the hero's odds of surviving to fulfill his destiny! Spent points refresh at the rate of one per game session, to a maximum of the original Destiny Points. These rules *replace* the usual ones for Destiny, the point cost of which now reflects not the hero's significance but the strength with which fate impels him to play his part, however trivial.

Wildcard Points: To reflect the great competence that wildcard skills (p. B175) represent, every 12 points spent on such a skill gives a *Wildcard Point* to spend on in-game outcomes that hinge directly on *that skill*. Buying success (p. 4) with it is obvious, but the GM may allow other options if the skill is fundamental to the situation. Wildcard Points are fully refreshed at the beginning of each session but don't accumulate if unused.

The GM may even allow players to use a variant of *Buying Failure* on their characters' hapless opponents:

Cursing Mooks: In a campaign inspired by larger-than-life fiction (superhero comics, over-the-top anime, mindless action movies, etc.), when a no-consequence NPC attacks a PC and fails his roll – or succeeds but is thwarted by the hero's defense or resistance roll – the would-be victim may spend 2 character points to inflict a horrible outcome on his attacker. If the mook's action is one for which there's a table of such dooms – examples include the *Critical Spell Failure Table* (p. B236), *Firearm Malfunction Table* (p. B407), *Critical Miss Table* (pp. B556-557), and *Unarmed Critical Miss Table* (p. B557) – then the NPC might roll on that. If the poor fool was doing something intrinsically dangerous, the player may invoke this peril instead; e.g., if the mook's weapon produces a backblast, this injures everybody in his vehicle, while if it's an experimental device supplied by his mad scientist boss, it chooses this moment to exhibit some dreadful bug (p. B476) or side effect (p. B479). If several tables or dangers apply, the individual spending the points gets to pick!

Perking Things Up: Buying Success

The following perks from **Power-Ups 2: Perks** amount to special cases of *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7) when they cost 1 character point per use:

Immunity to (Specific Disease/Hazard) (**Power-Ups 2**, pp. 11, 14): If a player wants his PC to shrug off a metabolic or environmental hazard, a point spent *before* trying the resistance roll will guarantee his resistance *this* time. This can be better than bought success – both because it costs less than the 3 points to turn critical failure into success after the fact and because it works regardless of whether the situation normally allows a resistance roll!

Low Rejection Threshold (**Power-Ups 2**, p. 14): Similarly, a point spent *before* an implant operation will guarantee flawless adaptation to whatever is being added.

No Nuisance Rolls (**Power-Ups 2**, p. 16): If the PC has 16+ in all the scores needed to carry out a rote "off-screen" task (e.g., Area Knowledge, Driving, and Navigation to get from A to B by car – or Acrobatics, Climbing, and Jumping to reach some place that's accessible by foot), the GM may let the player spend a point to skip the relevant rolls. This removes any chance of critical success (natural or bought), but also any chance of failure.

Rules Exemption (**Power-Ups 2**, p. 20): Many optional rules (e.g., *Maintaining Skills*, p. B294) impose extra success rolls. If the GM feels that perk-level immunity to certain of these would cheapen the campaign, he might still allow players to buy one-time exemptions at a point a pop.

BUYING EFFECT

"Success" isn't exclusively about success rolls. For many feats, *effect rolls* determine how well things went. This means damage rolls, primarily – but for someone with Terror (p. B93), it refers to his victim's roll on the *Fright Check Table* (pp. B360-361), while a hero with a sci-fi weapon might have to roll on a random table of effects for each zap. At the GM's option, character points can sway these outcomes, too. In this case, points are spent *before* the roll.

However the effect roll works, the player may spend 1 point to make up to two of the dice rolled come up at their maximum. This can affect some or all of the dice – the only limit is

points. For instance, 1 point could buy 6 on 1d or 12 on 2d; 2 points, 18 on 3d or 24 on 4d; 3 points, 30 on 5d or 36 on 6d; and so on. If the roll uses a multiplier, then take the product, subtract the affected dice, and roll what's left; e.g., 6d×2 is like 12d, so 2 points would buy 24 on 4d and the other 8d would be random (8d+24).

Rolls on tables add some wrinkles. A monstrous PC with Terror could spend 1 point to turn the 3d rolled for the Fright Check result into 2d+6 or 1d+12, or 2 points to guarantee an 18, although the *final* result would vary according to his victim's margin of failure. However, for a table where a lower roll is desirable, 1 point per two dice can buy the minimum instead. And if the player desires a *specific, intermediate result*, then neither high nor low rolls will do, but the GM may permit the purchase of specific table outcomes at the cost of 1 point *per die* influenced: 2 points if the table uses 2d, 3 points if it involves 3d, and so on. The elevated cost is the price of fine control – and of holding up game play to browse table results!

These options are fairer than allowing bought critical successes in combat, as the target *had* his chance to avoid being affected, and failed. For damage, Mighty Blows (p. B357) isn't a whole lot less effective, and costs just 1 FP per use. If the GM allows that option, then buying effect is most likely balanced.

Defense vs. Effect

The best defense is to avoid harm altogether – so when a PC gets a roll to dodge, parry, resist, or otherwise avoid a bad effect entirely, and fails, the player might elect to spend points to buy success. A defense isn't always possible, however. If the hero just performed an All-Out Attack, or is attacked by surprise, he doesn't get an active defense. And if the effect is something like a nearby explosion, *nobody* gets much of a defense.

In cases like these, the GM may allow players to invert the rules for *Buying Effect* to minimize the bad effects on their PCs. The price is the same: 1 point per two dice guaranteed to come up all 1s (or all 6s, if more beneficial). For instance, a soldier sniped for 7d+1 damage might receive no defense, because it was a surprise attack, but he could spend 1 point to make this 5d+3, 2 points to reduce it to 3d+5, 3 points to get it down to 1d+7, or 4 points to suffer just 8 points of damage.

In some cases, even buying the minimum effect for lots of points may fail to prevent a dreadful outcome. When this happens, see *Deflecting Disadvantages* (p. 10).

BUYING REACTIONS

Reaction rolls (pp. B494-495) are in essence effect rolls that use the *Reaction Table* (pp. B560-561). However, the most important of these can determine how adventures or even entire campaigns unfold! A spectacular combat roll *might* accomplish this if it kills off a major NPC, but most battles take several rolls to win – and victory often means little more than surviving to fight the *next* bunch of baddies.

A wonderful reaction roll, though, can result in cheap or free goods or assistance, or privileged information that short-circuits the plot.

In light of this, the GM shouldn't allow players to spend character points to influence reaction rolls as such. Instead, use *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) when somebody wants an NPC's cooperation. That option's higher cost balances its greater effectiveness.

This isn't a prohibition against using points to affect *success* rolls in social situations. While Influence rolls (p. B359) can achieve results identical to favorable reaction rolls, they're resisted. When bought success isn't forbidden for the reasons discussed in *Dooming Foes* (pp. 5-6), it yields a finite margin (*Margins*, p. 5) that could fail to sway a strong-willed NPC – it isn't a cheesy “I win” button. For more on success rolls that can replace reaction rolls, see *Social Engineering*.

Super Luck

Super Luck (p. B89) lets the player dictate the result of one roll per hour of play; thus, a PC with that advantage might never need *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7). However, the GM may want to subject Super Luck to the same restrictions as points spent to influence dice rolls – that is, the hero can specify success and effect, but has limits on his margins and cannot prescribe reaction rolls. This is fairest in a medium- to long-term campaign, where the trait's 100-point price will pay for itself many times over. In a short-term or one-off game, the GM might opt to let those with Super Luck specify the exact numbers on the dice for *any* roll, as Super Luck replaces 100 points of abilities the player won't get an opportunity to acquire later, and may well not have a chance to earn its keep. Either way, Super Luck never replaces uses of points other than *Buying Success*, and has no effect on the player's option to use the rules in *Impulse Buys*.

PLAYER GUIDANCE

A second important use of character points in play also comes from p. B347: A player can spend points to add a *plausible* element to the scene or game world. He may only do so *immediately after* making a success roll and obtaining a success or a critical success, or in a situation that didn't call for a roll in the first place. He *cannot* mitigate the effects of failure or critical failure this way – that's what *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7) is for!

Tank: So what do you need? Besides a miracle.

Neo: Guns. Lots of guns.

– *The Matrix*

In addition to being plausible, the suggestion must be acceptable to the GM and the other players. The GM should go along with suggestions that are imaginative, move the plot forward, or save a PC's life. The GM should *not* approve a suggestion that would short-circuit the plot, contradict a previously established fact, or harm or steal the scene from another PC. In borderline cases, the player(s) and GM can negotiate.

After weighing the above considerations, the GM sets the price for the proposed addition to the scene or world:

- *Minor*: An element that fits the scene *perfectly* – one the GM might have included if he had thought of it first. *1 point*.
- *Moderate*: A believable coincidence or addition, similar to the effects of Serendipity (p. B83). *2 points*.

- *Major*: Something that, while plausible, stretches disbelief – anyone watching would find the result quite unexpected! *3 points*.

If the player proposes this addition after rolling a critical success, and wants the effect he's proposing to replace the usual benefits of a critical success, reduce all of these costs by 1 point, to a minimum of 1 point.

The GM should make a note of any element added using this rule, as it becomes a permanent part of the game world!

All of the above assumes that the situation is one the PC can usefully exploit. He may need to make further success rolls to do so, but as the addition is permanent, he can keep trying if he fails. Occasionally, however, the proposed change is fleeting, and if the hero fails his first roll to exploit it, his points are wasted. In the interest of fairness, when the player specifies an adjustment to the world that merely lets him *attempt* something once, reduce the cost by 1 point, again to a minimum of 1 point.

Example: Cleome is exploring a post-nuclear wasteland and the GM has determined that she's perilously close to some giant soldier ants. He requests a Hearing roll, which succeeds. He tells the player that Cleome hears clicking noises nearby.

Cleome is a sniper, not a run-and-gun maniac, so her player wants to avoid close-range trouble. If the player proposes, “I sneak up behind some safe, solid-looking rubble to take a look,” the GM might charge 1 point; he didn't specify any rubble, but nuked wastelands have tons of it, and his guarantee that it isn't radioactive or crumbly, and is substantial enough to stop at least one attack, is worth a point. If she suggests, “I climb the rusty steel trestle of an old water tower and peer over the rise,” the GM might want 2 points; he hadn't mentioned any tower, but as Cleome is scavenging in a ruined industrial zone, it's plausible. And if she says, “I enter a mostly intact office building, bar the doors behind me, and snipe from a 10th-floor window,” the GM might insist on 3 points; a defensible 10-story building would be a valuable find! In all cases, the new scenery (solid rubble, rusty tower, or building) becomes a lasting part of the landscape – at least until it's nuked again.

Cleome's player would pay a point less (1, 1, or 2 points) if the original Hearing roll was a critical success, *or* if the GM requires a Stealth roll to reach cover, with any failure meaning that the ants cut her off before she gets there. If *both* situations apply, then even the building would cost just 1 point, so the player might as well ask for that!

Only suggestions offered with one particular PC or player's personal benefit in mind cost points. Players ought to feel free to propose interesting plot directions without fear of being charged for it! A useful test is for the GM to ask himself whether he would award bonus points (p. B498) out of gratitude for a wonderful idea. If he would, then it's simpler to incorporate the recommendation, avoid the accounting, and neither charge nor award points. And when the answer to "Who benefits?" is "The entire group, including the GM, because it tells a better story," it should *never* cost anybody anything.

Serendipitous Guidance

A useful way to view Serendipity (p. B83) is as giving heroes who have it one *free* use of *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) per level each game session. They may still spend character points after running out of free uses. The GM who doesn't mind some accounting might declare that each level of Serendipity gives 2 *Serendipity Points* to spend on *Player Guidance* as though they were character points; e.g., Serendipity 1 would allow two minor uses or one moderate use, or lower the cost of one major use to 1 character point. Serendipity Points are fully refreshed at the beginning of each game session but don't accumulate if unused. If used, this option *replaces* the usual rules for Serendipity.

TRADING POINTS FOR MONEY

Used in play, this option from p. B26 amounts to a special case of player guidance. Game mechanically, the player trades character points for money, each point giving back 10% of the campaign's average starting wealth in cash. The player must describe what happens in terms of events in the campaign, however. A settled individual might be paid a bonus, get a long-overdue tax refund, or see a minor investment pay off; a wanderer could find a wallet, win at cards during his downtime, or be mistaken for a beggar and receive unexpected charity. This is an example of guidance that requires no success roll – the player specifies events that benefit the PC financially, spends points, and lucks out. As with other forms of player guidance, the outcome becomes part of the game world; e.g., if an investment in a business pays off, then the company exists from that point on and might even act as a plot hook to draw the hero into later adventures.

At the GM's option, the player may instead trade points directly for goods with a fair market value equal to the money his character would have received. The fact that gear rarely fetches its full price when resold balances the convenience of not having to shop for it, negotiate its price, etc. It can be extremely handy to spend a few points to stumble across just the weapon or vehicle you need, no strings attached!

Some gamers might point out that since each point in Signature Gear (p. B85) provides equipment worth 50% of the campaign's starting money *and* immunizes it against casual loss, spending a point for 1/5 as much cash or gear without plot protection is a terrible deal. Optionally, the GM could have each character point sacrificed in play yield goods worth 100% of the campaign's starting money. Such things come with no guarantees at all, of course, and also count as *used*, meaning that resale value is unlikely to be better than half price. By that logic, having each point return cash equal to 50% of the campaign's starting money, not merely 10%, is probably fine.

In all cases, this rule never produces "instant" results, least of all in combat! The gear or money shows up via standard channels – courier at the door, envelope in the mail, electronic bank deposit at the start of the business day, etc. – while no action is going on. To conjure valuables out of thin air, get Snatcher and see *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15).

FAVORS IN PLAY

Another special case of player guidance is gaining the assistance of a particular NPC. This most often comes up in a situation that doesn't call for a roll, but the GM is free to have it hinge on a recent success if he doesn't see the target NPC helping or even being present. When a roll *is* required, failure costs nothing (because no help is available), while critical success reduces cost by 1 point, to a minimum of 1 point.

There are two cases of importance:

1. The NPC was present but not previously helpful. Points buy his assistance, as on a particularly good reaction roll. The GM may require previous success at an Influence roll to request aid – or at one of the many social feats described in *Social Engineering*, from searching for help to inciting a riot.
2. The NPC wasn't present but might plausibly show up. Points buy both appearance *and* assistance. The GM may require previous success at a call for help – whether vs. HT to holler or Electronics Operation to operate a police radio.

Appearance *without* assistance doesn't make much sense here. If the NPC's presence is worth points to the player, then presumably it benefits the PC. And if someone's mere appearance helps the PC – e.g., a cop walking past and scaring off a mugger – then that *is* assistance, however passive it might seem!

There's already a mechanic for an NPC who helps you once, after which your points are gone: Favor (p. B55). However, Favor differs in some important regards:

- A Favor has an appearance roll, and allows rolls in suitable situations until one day, the NPC turns up. When buying help with character points, however, either the GM has established that the NPC is present (case 1) or the whole motivation for spending points is to *make* him show up (case 2) – and when a roll is required, there's no point cost on a failure, while a Favor can cost points yet never pay off. Thus, reaching the stage where points can be spent *guarantees* appearance. This makes the effective frequency of appearance "Constantly," quadrupling base cost.

- A Favor requires the player to describe it ahead of time, tying it to a specific NPC. This limits use to certain places and times. In case 1, the GM has already specified that someone potentially helpful is present, which is really no less limited.

In case 2, though, the player specifies his helper, subject only to the rules for player guidance: the suggestion must be acceptable to the GM and the other players. Were that person a Patron, this flexibility would add Special Abilities, +100% to cost, the special benefit being that the NPC is whoever you need him to be.

Thus, the points needed to secure “spontaneous” Favors like this are the *base* cost of the Ally, Contact, Contact Group, or Patron; quadrupled for guaranteed appearance; and divided by five as for any Favor. If the NPC isn’t present because the GM put him there, but simply appears, double the cost again. The results:

- *NPC who is present decides to render aid:* $0.8 \times$ base cost of Ally, Contact, Contact Group, or Patron, rounded up.
- *NPC of player’s choice appears and renders aid:* $1.6 \times$ base cost of Ally, Contact, Contact Group, or Patron, rounded up.

Example: Hank is in a bad part of town when he’s jumped by two assassins sent by the mob boss he’s investigating. They were chosen to be Hank’s match; he’s worth 150 points, and while his player has no clue what the killers’ point totals are, he can safely assume that they’re worthy adversaries. Any help worth having would amount to an Ally worth 100% of his points, with a 5-point base cost. If the GM had previously mentioned a burly bouncer at a bar on the way into the area, Hank’s player might declare that the doorman comes to his assistance, and the cost for this help would be 4 points. If the GM had described the neighborhood as “lonely,” however, then having a competent fighter jump into a fight would cost 8 points. Either way, the GM might ask for a success roll to summon aid; if so, then failure would cost nothing but bring no help, while critical success would make these costs 3 and 7 points.

These costs are higher than those for most player guidance, or the 2 points if *Buying Effect* (p. 6) were allowed on a 3d reaction roll – but changing 2:1 odds to even odds for anything less than the 25 points for Extra Life is a bargain when assassins come calling!

DIVINE INTERVENTION

Any points-for-benefits exchange could be interpreted as “my gods favor me” – and in certain settings, this might even be true! But in some genres, ranging from grim horror to hack-and-slash fantasy, it may be possible to trade accumulated karma, in the form of earned points, for direct and unmistakable divine intervention. This can accomplish just about anything, perhaps even miracles like raising the dead (see *Miraculous Recoveries*, pp. 10-11) . . . so in return, it’s a gamble.

To use this option, the person asking must be reasonably faithful. He need not be a paragon of his religion, or even religious – but he *does* have to uphold the principles of the deity to whom he’s praying. A lone individual must spend *at least* 1 character point (more points improve the odds) and then roll against the *highest* of IQ, Meditation, or Theology.

Modifiers: A base -10; a bonus equal to character points spent; a bonus equal to 1/10 of the total point value of advantages that signify the petitioner’s holiness (Blessed, Power Investiture, True Faith, etc.), rounded down; a penalty equal to 1/5 of the sum of the absolute

point values of traits that would offend the powers that be (this most often means disadvantages such as Social Stigma (Excommunicated), but certain advantages can be a problem; e.g., Wealth, when the god in question considers poverty a virtue), rounded up. Disadvantages that reflect holiness *don’t* give a bonus, but if the conduct they require is linked to a Higher Purpose, then that gift gives its usual +1 *instead* of adding 5 points to the advantage total.

An actual priest with Clerical Investment can, in a suitably consecrated location such as a temple or a shrine, lead a group in a prayer for aid. Use the same rules, but now the roll is against Religious Ritual, the bonus for holiness is the *best* one in the congregation, the penalty for unholiness is the *worst* one present, and everyone who wishes to benefit must spend at least 1 point. The bonus for points is equal to *all* the points sacrificed, however!

Success means that a fortuitous coincidence befalls the suppliant(s), saving them from disaster or otherwise solving their problem in a subtle way. Critical success means an outright miracle – teleportation out of harm’s way, mass resurrection, etc. *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7) is *not* allowed here.

This is meant to be one step beyond standard player guidance, in that a deity may well make the implausible possible. If players get to abusing this, remember that they propose but the gods dispose. In some settings, there might be a lifetime penalty of -1 or worse per previous request for aid involving that person. In others, each prayer demands a major donation or sacrifice before another will be answered. The worst-case scenario might be spending points on a call that *won’t* be answered, whatever the dice say.

Perking Things Up: Player Guidance

These perks from *Power-Ups 2: Perks* work like specialized examples of *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) when they cost 1 character point per use:

Brotherhood (*Power-Ups 2*, p. 17): A point buys a beneficial case of mistaken identity with a group of potential foes, getting you past them (not gaining their assistance) *once*.

Disposable Identity (*Power-Ups 2*, p. 18): This perk only ever gives one use for a point, so the GM may allow players to spend a point to pass an ID check without having the perk beforehand.

Doodad (*Power-Ups 2*, p. 9): A point lets you whip out one bit of insignificant gear. It’s a stinky deal next to *Trading Points for Money* (p. 8), but it’s *instant*, even in combat.

Friend (*Power-Ups 2*, p. 18): Even if the GM allows Friend perks, he might permit a PC who doesn’t have one to “know a guy” who helps out in a trivial way consistent with Claim to Hospitality (pp. B41-42), once, for a point. Anything better calls for *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9).

Honest Face (*Power-Ups 2*, p. 4): A point guarantees that the PC will/won’t be the one picked out of a crowd – whichever is beneficial – when someone comes looking.

Standard Operating Procedure (*Power-Ups 2*, p. 15): A point lets the player retroactively claim that he reloaded, refueled, packed his bags, locked the door, etc.

SURVIVAL

The most basic ways to spend points to stay alive, intact, and sane are covered under *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7). Purchasing successful defense and resistance rolls, and invoking *Defense vs. Effect* (p. 6) when that fails, ought to do. However, the GM may not want to use all of those rules – he might feel that they’re too generous or simply not right for the campaign. And even if those options *are* allowed, danger doesn’t always come in the form of attacks that can be dodged, curses that can be resisted, and scares that can be shrugged off.

FLESH WOUNDS

Immediately after you suffer damage, you may declare that the attack that damaged you (which can include multiple *hits*, if your foe used rapid fire) was a glancing blow or “just a flesh wound.” This lets you reduce the final injury from that attack to 1 HP (or FP) . . . at the cost of 1 character point.

Be aware that this rule affects *injury*, not *damage*. It restores lost HP (or FP). If the hit inflicted knockback, knockdown, stunning, unconsciousness, crippling, or the like, *those* effects persist. In true cinematic tradition, a graze from a giant’s club can hurl the hero across the room, a bullet in the shoulder can cripple his arm, and a head blow with a tire iron can “just” knock him out, even if he’s in no danger of dying.

This rule has a profound effect on combat’s place in the campaign! Most or all of the survivors of a fight – or at least the victors – won’t merely be alive but *unhurt*. This suits superhero “realism” (in some comics, nobody ever dies) and many action-movie settings (cinematic detectives and cowboys often only ever get shot in the shoulder). However, it cheapens a campaign where violence is supposed to have consequences.

Second Winds: A similar rule can be applied to recovering FP. One character point restores *all* of the PC’s FP – and any Energy Reserves he has besides. Even heroes with 25+ energy points should compare *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13) before spending. That rule “only” provides 25 FP, but they’re *extra* FP up front, which can allow more impressive feats.

DEFLECTING DISADVANTAGES

Severe injuries and calamities – physical, mental, social, or supernatural – can saddle a hero with lasting, even permanent disadvantages, reducing his point value and possibly destroying his character concept. If such harm results from bad luck rather than *player* idiocy (like having his character leap off a cliff, attack the king, or hurl his Signature Gear down a volcano), and if the player didn’t or couldn’t avoid it by spending points sooner, then the merciful GM might permit salvation *after the fact*. This costs *half* the points that the PC would otherwise lose, rounded in his favor. The ill effects still apply until the end of the dramatic scene or fight that led to them, however.

Example: John the Fair suffers a critical hit to the hand in combat with a dragon. As a critical hit permits no active defense roll, John can’t use *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7) to ensure a parry. He’s bitten, fair and square.

Worse, the dragon rolls a whopping 6d+2 cutting damage, and John is barehanded, as he’s a swashbuckler who relies on

not getting hit, not some armored knight. John has HP 12, so 5 HP (injury over 12/3 = 4 HP) cripples his hand and twice that, or 10 HP, *bites it off*. Even if he spent 3 points on *Defense vs. Effect* (p. 6), he would receive 8 points of damage and suffer 12 HP of injury from the cutting attack, costing him his hand. Those character points would be wasted! And *Flesh Wounds* (above) would restore his HP but not change the crippling effects.

If the injury were merely crippling, John would get a HT roll to influence with points. This is *dismemberment*, though – there’s no HT roll! Thus, *Buying Success* isn’t an option here, either.

Thus, John faces One Hand [-15]. Fortunately, the GM opts to let John’s player pay 7 character points to save his character from this fate. John must still fight one-handed for the rest of *this* battle, though.

This is often a better campaign option than *Flesh Wounds* in a game where violence isn’t meant to be undertaken lightly. It’s costly enough that nobody will abuse it. At the same time, it keeps the heroes from ending up a mess of eye-patches and crippled limbs, which might not be the consequences the GM has in mind.

*And that was only one of
the **many** occasions on which
I met my death, an experience
which I don’t **hesitate** strongly
to recommend!*

*– Baron Munchausen, in
The Adventures of
Baron Munchausen*

MIRACULOUS RECOVERIES

Whatever options are in effect, it can happen that a PC *dies*. In some genres, though, it’s possible for a hero to recover even from this – the injury wasn’t as bad as it looked, mysterious monks nursed him back to health, his god restored him to life to complete his worldly mission, whatever. In effect, *Deflecting Disadvantages* (above) applies to the ultimate inconvenience: death.

There’s already a one-shot means of coming back to life in return for points: Extra Life (p. B55). The simplest way to convert this trait into an impulse buy is to permit a player whose character dies to spend 25 character points to resurrect him. That is, to extend the option of buying Extra Life retroactively.

In a campaign where heroes are allowed to start with Extra Life, this option is somewhat unfair. Players who choose Extra Life must make do with 25 fewer points of useful starting capabilities, some of which might not be available in play.

In many ways, they operate at a power level 25 points below that of their less-prepared associates . . . and as most gamers work hard to keep their characters alive, the investment may never pay off. It cheapens their sacrifice to let those *without* Extra Life spend 25 points only as needed.

To remedy this, the GM can take a page from *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) and decree that wishing Extra Life into effect retroactively costs double, just like conjuring an NPC out of nowhere. That is, it costs 50 character points to come back from the grave if you didn't buy life insurance. Think of this as applying *Deflecting Disadvantages* to duck the worst level of Terminally Ill (p. B158), which is worth -100 points. This cost is specifically for campaigns where Extra Life is available ahead of time, though. If the *only* way to return from the dead is to spend points in play, then it costs 25 points, because everybody is treated equally.

Whatever the price, this is a large character-point outlay on short notice. See *Paying Fate's Price* (p. 5) for ways to foot the bill. Those thinking of invoking *Flesh Wounds* (p. 10) to avoid the expense take note: Death, like unconsciousness and crippling, is just another injury effect. You can have your HP back (which *can* make it easier to resurrect you with magic or ultra-tech), but you'll still be a stiff!

I'm Not Dead Yet: This rule is for *dead* PCs. Undead, cyborgs, or anything else not-quite-alive and not-quite-dead can't use it to undo their situation! The GM might let the player of a PC who's killed in a way that ensures an unwelcome transformation pay up at the moment of death to return to life before the transition – but nobody can die, turn spooky, earn points as a monster, and then decide that he wants to be alive again. Neither can he willingly become such a creature, decide he doesn't like it, and pay points to rejoin the living. First he'll have to get himself killed or find a cure for his condition.

RESURRECTING ALLIES

If a hero's *Ally* dies, *Miraculous Recoveries* (above) won't help much. Allies advance by gaining character points as their PC improves, not by earning their own bonus points that sit around until needed (with some exceptions – see below). However, if the GM feels merciful *and* the player treated his Ally well, then the PC can spend points equal to the point cost of the Ally advantage to bring his associate back from the dead. It's up to the player and the GM to work out the explanation, which need only make as much sense as Extra Life.

Perking Things Up: Survival

Certain perks from *Power-Ups 2: Perks* are functionally additional options for *Survival* (pp. 10-11) when they cost 1 character point per use:

Dramatic Death and *Covenant of Rest* (both *Power-Ups 2*, p. 19): A PC who dies with unspent points and who for whatever reason cannot use *Miraculous Recoveries* (pp. 10-11) should be allowed to spend 1 point to *go out fighting* for 1d+1 seconds and/or 1 point to *stay dead* (granting total immunity to spirit-summoning, zombification, etc.), as a dying wish.

Sartorial Integrity (*Power-Ups 2*, p. 14): Whatever the heroes just endured, a point means the PC is presentable enough to avoid suspicion or reaction penalties. In effect, the player spends a point for the survival of his *clothes*. The GM may want to allow this for more important gear, perhaps permitting Sartorial Integrity as a permanent perk but always charging a point for the safety of tools, weapons, etc.

Likewise, if a Contact, Contact Group, or Patron represents people – or an abstract organization that stands to be *completely* wiped out – then the PC might be able to pay points equal to the original advantage cost to rescue them. This is subject to stricter GM oversight. The player *cannot* undo a town's destruction in a war by buying its citizens as a Contact Group again, or save his nation from a nuking by paying the cost to have it as a Patron, however much this might cost. Allies are personal in a way that these other traits aren't.

Finally, a player can combine this rule with *Deflecting Disadvantages* (p. 10) to keep his Dependent alive. Paying *half* the Dependent's disadvantage value in positive points in effect "deflects" whatever disadvantage would replace the Dependent were he killed. This penalty is likely more severe than the bonus points the GM would deny for letting the Dependent come to harm; if the player willingly spends points to protect his Dependent, the GM shouldn't inflict that penalty as well. The GM may want to use this rule to judge the size of such a penalty, though, effectively making its expense mandatory.

Allies With Unspent Points: The reason why Allies lack unspent points is to avoid player-GM friction. It prevents players from buying cheap Allies and arguing that they have unspent points sitting around, and the GM from creating Allies that have all their points banked for impulse buys that are unlikely to benefit their PC. Players and GMs who are above such squabbling are welcome to negotiate other options; e.g., the GM might wish to extend *Villainous Impulses* (p. 16) to all NPCs, including Allies. In those cases, Allies *can* make miraculous recoveries, if they have enough unspent points. Regardless, the GM should require the player to use his character's points to deflect danger or death resulting from deliberately endangering an Ally!

AMAZING FEATS

Beyond spending character points to succeed at deeds that anybody could attempt – as with *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7) and *Survival* (pp. 10-11) – is the possibility of points enabling feats that aren't normally possible. This is a little like applying

Player Guidance (pp. 7-9) to the PC's capabilities rather than the game world: The player asks for an exception to the usual limits on what his PC can do and then spends points to make it happen.

OPT-IN OPTIONS

If the GM likes an optional rule that allows an impressive feat or rules exception, but not enough to permit it as a “free” campaign option, then he might sell access to it for 1 character point *per invocation*. (If he wants a middle ground, he may permit the Extra Option perk from **Power-Ups 2: Perks**, which for 1 point grants a PC *permanent* access to a rule that isn’t in general use in the campaign.) The most balanced examples are rules that benefit the PC instead of harming or limiting his foes, and that don’t cost character points to invoke when adopted campaign-wide, although they might cost FP. The GM has the final say.

Below are some suitable examples from other **GURPS** supplements, along with page references to the complete rules. Anything marked “use” costs 1 point each time the PC reaps the benefits. Items annotated with “combat” endure for one battle per invocation.

- **Cinematic Combat Rules** (p. B417): Balanced applications are *Bulletproof Nudity* (combat), *Cinematic Explosions* (use), *Infinite Ammunition* (combat), and *TV Action Violence* (use). As *Cannon Fodder*, *Cinematic Knockback*, and *Melee Etiquette* mostly hose NPCs, none of them are especially appropriate. *Flesh Wounds* (p. 10) already costs a point to use.

Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats

Many perks from **Power-Ups 2: Perks** could instead be examples of *Amazing Feats* (pp. 11-15) that cost 1 character point per use:

Autotrance (**Power-Ups 2**, p. 12): If it’s vital that a PC who lacks this perk enters a trance, a point will guarantee a trance state.

Controllable Disadvantage (**Power-Ups 2**, pp. 12-13): The GM can safely allow a player to spend a point to afflict his own PC with any mundane mental or physical disadvantage for long enough to capitalize on it *once*.

Extra Option (**Power-Ups 2**, p. 20): See *Opt-In Options* (above).

Power Perks (**Power-Ups 2**, p. 11): In a campaign where the PCs have low-key powers and the GM doesn’t want flashy tricks dominating the action, a point allows a trick on par with a power perk suited to the spender’s power.

Rest in Pieces (**Power-Ups 2**, p. 19): When it really matters that a foe doesn’t come back – that he won’t be resurrected, become a zombie, etc. – a point might guarantee this. In a campaign where such returns are commonplace, this is an example of an option that’s “too good” as a perk but just right as a one-off expenditure.

The GM may also allow dramatic combat perks (**Power-Ups 2**, pp. 4-8) like Acrobatic Feints, Combat Vaulting, Quick-Sheathe, Quick Swap, Twirl, and Sacrificial Parry on a point-per-use basis if it’s *that* important to the player that his PC pulls off some feat without suitable training. Likewise, pp. 17-23 of **Gun Fu** lists *many* over-the-top firearms perks that might be kept under control in tenuously realistic campaign if recast as cinematic rules that cost 1 point per use – especially Area Defense, Bank Shot, Bend the Bullet, Cookie Cutter, Fireball Shot, Just Winged Him, No Friendly Fire, Recoil Rocket, Rope Shooter, Scattergun, and Trick Shooter.

- **More Cinematic Combat Rules** (**Martial Arts**, pp. 132-133): Good choices are *Shaking It Off* (use) and *Proxy Fighting* (use) – and *Imperial Stormtrooper Marksmanship Academy* (combat), if invoked at the start of combat as a kind of defense. But *Unarmed Etiquette* and *Gun Control Law* grossly limit NPCs; *Shout It Out!* is less effective than simply buying success; and *Bullet Time* (p. 15) costs points regardless.

- **New Cinematic Combat Rules** (**Action 2: Exploits**, p. 38): *Fast Reloads* (use) and *Super-Silencers* (combat) are fine. *Flawless Firearms* already costs character points. The other rules are out because they cripple NPCs. However, a point to use the *Kayo* rule on p. 24 of **Action 3: Furious Fists** might be fair in a semi-realistic campaign.

- Optional combat rules from **Martial Arts** that make the user more effective without directly penalizing his foe can work. Spend a point per use to attempt a technique that the GM doesn’t normally allow even at default, attack a hit location that the GM isn’t using in the campaign (joints, spine, veins, etc.), feint with a noncombat skill (such as Dancing or Sex Appeal), quick-shoot a bow, chuck a handful of thrown weapons, use *chambara* movement for a turn, etc. The cost stands whether or not the move works, so make sure your abilities match your ambitions!

- If the GM feels that any option under *Extra Effort in Combat* (p. B357) – and its expansions on p. 131 of **Martial Arts** and pp. 37-38 of **Action 2: Exploits** – is too cheap at 1 FP per use, he might allow it at 1 *character point* per use instead.

- By spending 1 point per casting, wizards might be able to invoke nonstandard rules: work a Regular spell with range modifiers from the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (**Thaumatology**, p. 35), adjust a spell’s effects if the GM doesn’t otherwise allow that (**Thaumatology**, p. 39), coordinate mass magic (**Thaumatology**, p. 51), etc. If enchantment is off-limits to PCs, a mage might buy permission to create a magic item!

POINTS FOR ENERGY

Spells, many exotic skills (like Power Blow), and a few advantages (such as Snatcher) always cost FP to use. Other abilities don’t strictly require FP but benefit from optional expenditures; e.g., burning FP can offset penalties to use Warp. And books like **Powers**, **Psonian Powers**, and **Supers** contain rules for spending FP on extra effort and stunts with superhuman gifts. While the above costs are typically quite low, truly powerful feats – notably enchanting magic items – can cost dozens or hundreds of FP!

At the GM’s option, a hero who’s strapped for energy – or one who wishes to stay fresh and keep his FP – may burn character points *instead* of FP. The “exchange rate” is one character point per 25 FP. Players may spend more than 1 point (e.g., 10 character points for 250 FP), but however many points are spent, the temporary FP can normally power just *one task*; excess FP are lost. Thus, this is most efficient when the ability in question can use at least a full multiple of 25 FP.

Heroes with actual *powers* in the **Powers** sense – interconnected advantages with a power modifier and a Talent – can make better use of this option.

They may convert character points to FP at the same rate, but keep the FP around as a temporary Energy Reserve (*Powers*, p. 119) for their power. Once the energy is spent, it's gone for good, but it is possible, for instance, to trade a character point for 25 FP and spread that out over 25 tasks that cost 1 FP apiece.

CHARACTER POINT-POWERED ABILITIES

Many impressive abilities that serve a narrative or dramatic purpose in media such as fantasy novels and superhero comics have the potential to wreck a campaign. A book's author or a film's director *controls* all of his characters, and thus can ensure that the ones who have amazing gifts only ever use their capabilities to help him tell his story. In an RPG, though, everybody involved has a say in the tale being told, and the GM can at best referee the players' actions.

One way to allow high-end abilities but keep them under control is to fuel them with a precious resource: unspent character points. Because the cost to use such capabilities is so dear, they should be a lot cheaper. Build a character point-powered ability normally, and then divide its final point cost (after enhancements and limitations) by five, rounding up. This buys the *potential* to use that gift. Each use costs character points, and in between uses, the capability is inert. The character-point costs for activation are adapted from *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9):

- *Minor*: The use fits the scene perfectly – it's dramatically appropriate and precisely in line with the GM's desires. *1 point*.
- *Moderate*: The use is believable, given the PC's other abilities, and can be made to fit into the story. *2 points*.
- *Major*: The use is about the *player* wanting to show off or make gains at the expense of the storyline. *From 3 points to the character point-powered ability's cost (that is, 1/5 of full cost), depending on the level of disruption.*

The GM decides what qualifies as a "use." One "scene" (battle, verbal exchange, long and uneventful trip, etc.) is recommended for abilities that produce ongoing effects; e.g., Invisibility. The goal is to serve the purposes of drama, after all, and few stories benefit from strict measures such as "10 seconds, no matter what's going on." For instantaneous shows of force, though, each use should last for one turn in combat or a single stunt.

Character point-powered abilities are a great way to represent impressive extra effort. A hero with a 100-point attack might buy another 500 points of the same attack subject to the restriction that it costs points to activate. This would cost him $100 + 500/5 = 200$ points but be as effective as an attack worth $100 + 500 = 600$ points when he's willing to pay points to use it!

This option is only cost-effective for large, expensive abilities. If the ability is merely rarely used, then it's more efficient to handle it as an alternative ability (*Powers*, p. 11). The two options can be combined; use the reduced cost of the character point-powered ability (1/5 of full price) when including it in a set of alternative abilities. For instance, a hero could buy an attack worth 500 points as character point-powered for 100 points, but stick it in a set of alternative abilities with another ability that's worth 100+ points and treat it as an alternative that costs 20 points. Alternative

abilities don't work if any part of the set is inactive, though – and while technically, anything that costs points to use fits this description when not powered-up, that's a little too punishing. As a compromise, the GM should shut down the entire group of alternative abilities for the *next* scene (for the rest of the battle, in the case of an attack) once points are spent to switch on a character point-powered ability.

Improvisations

There may be certain abilities that fit a hero's character concept but not his starting budget – not even at 1/5 of the usual cost. Another possibility is capabilities that the GM doesn't mind as one-offs but doesn't want locked in as permanent traits, not even ones that cost points to use. In either situation, the GM may allow players to spend character points to have their PCs use these as "stunts" completely out of the blue . . . provided that they're appropriate to the character *and* the story. Each "use" of such an improvised ability costs points equal to 1/5 of its cost as a permanent trait, as explained above.

It's up to the GM whether players can define such uses as alternative abilities to existing ones. If the GM likes this idea, then if the 1/5-cost improvised ability costs less than one of the hero's permanent abilities, the player may pay character points equal to 1/5 of *that* cost (1/25, all told) for the stunt. The catch is that by doing so, he'll disable all the other "alternatives" for the next scene.

Example: In a campaign where Jumper (Time) is considered "evil" and forbidden to PCs – even as a 1/5-cost character point-powered ability – a villain attempts to use a time machine to alter the past. One of the heroes is a sorceress obsessed with history, and the player asks whether she could spend points to cast a one-off "spell" to travel through time to deal with the villain. The GM agrees, and lets the player use Jumper with -80% in limitations, which would cost 20 points as a permanent advantage, by paying 4 character points. Another PC is a super with "dimensional" abilities such as Insubstantiality and Warp. His player wants to pay points to use Jumper (Time) [100] without limitations as an alternative to Warp. That would cost 20 points normally – but it's just 4 points as an alternative to Warp. The catch is that his Warp won't work in the dramatic confrontation that follows!

Open Your Eyes

In some settings, a hero with abilities such as Magery or psionic powers can guide others in their quest to awaken those gifts in themselves. The details vary widely (see *Powers*, pp. 34-37 just to start with), but if the GM allows this, one possibility is that the mentor can give of himself to assist the process. In game terms, he transfers some of his own unspent character points to his student for the sole purpose of enabling his apprentice to buy the capabilities that represent such an awakening.

CHANGING THE WORLD

Certain abilities let their wielders spend points to effect lasting changes in the game world, effectively invoking a variant of *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) that blurs the line between how those gifts affect the *character* and how they affect the *universe*.

Good examples are Dominance (p. B50), which lets the user create Allies in play; Possession (pp. B75-76) enhanced with Chronic, which makes it possible to purchase Ally and Puppet; and Wild Talent (pp. B99-100) with Retention, which offers the chance to spend a point on a skill. **Powers** adds possibilities like Regrowth with the Doubling enhancement (**Powers**, p. 71), which enables the possessor to spend points to acquire new body parts, and the Creation Pool mechanic for Create (**Powers**, pp. 92-94), which converts points into more-or-less stable matter. **Supers** lets Mind Control work much like Possession for creating Allies (**Supers**, p. 114).

However, all of the previous examples change the user's point total. He keeps his new Ally, Puppet, skill, or Extra Arm, or the points in his Creation Pool; these things increase his value as a character. That isn't the only possibility! Some abilities might extend the option of sacrificing points – as with all the other options in **Impulse Buys** – so that effects that would normally lapse after a certain time become permanent. This is a useful way of emulating super-powered wizards and even gods, and nearly always more balanced than allowing the Permanent level of Extended Duration (p. B105).

Some examples:

Affliction (pp. B35-36): If the victim fails to resist, the individual placing the Affliction can make it permanent by spending 1 character point per +1% of enhancement needed to produce the effect. This doesn't work for Coma, Heart Attack, or Stunning; for anything functionally equivalent to these modifiers (permanent Unconsciousness is no different from Coma); or for effects the GM feels can't be represented by traits added to or removed from the target. Someone cursed this way *can* "buy off" these problems by spending his own points.

Allies (pp. B36-38): The Conjured enhancement (**Dungeon Fantasy 9**, p. 4) is like Summonable but calls a different being each time and requires a reaction roll. Someone with Ally (Conjured) can spend character points to flood the world with demons, spirits, etc. Use *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) for this; each attempt calls for a Concentrate maneuver and a roll against the Ally's usual frequency of appearance. Success lets the summoner spend points equal to 1.6× the creature's base cost as an Ally – ignoring the frequency of appearance, modifiers, etc. on his permanent Ally advantage – to create that being. This entity becomes a free-willed, permanent resident of the conjurer's world, *not* his Ally, but on a Good or better reaction, it will grant its creator a minor favor or service before departing.

Control (**Powers**, pp. 90-92): If the effect – water sculpture, reverse gravity, bizarre reflections, etc. – would be unstable, and end when the Control ends, the user can make it permanent for character points equal to the Control level used. If the Control has the Natural Phenomena enhancement, the cost rises to 5 points per Control level used (so afflicting a one-mile radius with a permanent storm costs 50 points!).

Enhanced Time Sense (p. B52), **Trained by a Master** (p. B93), or **Weapon Master** (p. B99): See *Bullet Time* (p. 15) for a way to affect reality that suits video games and *wuxia* movies, especially.

Gizmos (pp. B57-58): Someone with this advantage can spend 1 character point to "recharge" one use per level per game session. A PC with Gizmos 1 could whip out an item and then spend 1 point to produce *another* article; one with Gizmos 2 could get four uses in a session by spending 2 points; and so forth. This isn't as cost-effective as saving those points for more Gizmos, but that isn't always an option.

Growth (p. B58), **Insubstantiality** (pp. B62-63), **Invisibility** (p. B63), **Shadow Form** (p. B83), or **Shrinking** (p. B85): If the user has the Can Carry Objects enhancement, he can transform with an item in hand and pay character points to *leave* it that way – even after he lets go and changes himself back. He can also do this in reverse; e.g., pick up something insubstantial and materialize it. Either stunt costs 1 character point per 5% of his Basic Lift that the object weighs in the *heavier* of its initial or final form.

Healing (p. B59): A healer who has the Cure Affliction enhancement (**Powers**, p. 51) can use his ability to remove his subject's physical disadvantages. This costs character points equal to the absolute value of the disadvantages cured. In effect, he's "buying off" the disadvantage for the beneficiary. If he also has Empathic, he may pay this point cost by acquiring the removed problem himself!

Illusion (**Powers**, p. 94-95): Permanent illusions no larger than the user's maximum radius are possible if this advantage *lacks* the Mental enhancement. Cost is 1 character point per yard of radius. Senses affected are limited to the ability's usual ones (that is, Auditory Only, Extended, and Visual Only work normally), but the illusionist can elect to include only some of these. Users with Independence or Initiative may add 40% or 100% (round up), respectively, to this cost to produce illusions with those effects.

Jumper (pp. B64-65) or **Warp** (pp. B97-99): With the Tunnel enhancement, the user can create

a *permanent* tunnel between two places, times, or planes. For Jumper, this costs a flat 10 character points. For Warp, it costs 1 point per -1 in distance penalties (minimum 1 point).

Mana Damper (p. B67) or **Mana Enhancer** (p. B68): With Area Effect, the user can create areas of permanently altered mana around where he's standing. Maximum radius and level are as usual for his advantage. Cost *per yard of radius* is 1 character point per mana level removed with Damper or 5 points per level added with Enhancer. For instance, Mana Enhancer 2 (Area Effect, 2 yards, +100%) makes it possible to pay 5 points to improve mana level by one over a one-yard radius, 10 points to raise it by one in a two-yard radius or two in a one-yard radius, or 20 points to leave a two-yard radius two mana levels above usual (*very high* mana in a normal-mana world!).



Bullet Time

At the GM's option, the player of a PC with Enhanced Time Sense, or possibly Trained by a Master or Weapon Master, may spend 3 character points to *stop time* and act out of turn. He can do so at *any* time – even between attack and defense rolls, or defense and damage rolls. He can't interrupt death, though; if a failed roll means the PC dies, the player can't stop time as a dying action.

Entering Bullet Time gives the hero *one* turn to do anything he could do with a normal turn. Then ordinary time resumes and the GM assesses the outcome of those actions. Possibilities include:

- Any maneuver that allows attacks lets him attack. Roll to hit normally. The targets are defenseless. The GM determines all damage and injury effects and applies them the instant time returns to normal, before *anything* else occurs.
- He can spend attacks to pluck projectiles out of the air. It takes a DX roll and an attack to grab each one. The player specifies how close he lets them get before he stops time. Snatched weapons lose their momentum and cannot injure anyone.
- A Concentrate maneuver lets him activate or deactivate an advantage, operate controls, etc., so that an ability or a device will be "on" or "off" when normal time resumes.
- Move or Change Posture means that when time speeds back up, he'll be in his new location or posture.
- Ready allows him to draw an item, reload a gun, open a door, etc. When the clock restarts, the item is in hand, the gun is loaded, the door is open, and so on.

If he moves even a step during Bullet Time, all "paused" attacks on him simply miss when time restarts! If he moves between a weapon and its intended target, the attack hits *him* when normal time resumes; he may defend normally. Should his actions move another person into the path of a suspended attack, it hits that person instead – but the victim may defend.

During Bullet Time, the PC sees everything but himself "freeze." He perceives everyone else paused in mid-motion, projectiles hanging in air, timers trapped between ticks of the clock, and so forth. He and items he's carrying are the only things that move. Everyone else sees *him* move in a blur.

If the GM allows this, he has two further decisions to make:

- *Can others buy in?* Optionally, when someone buys Bullet Time, others with access to the option can "buy in" for 3 points. They must declare this as soon as the first fighter antes up, or be stuck in regular time! Those in Bullet Time get *one* turn apiece, in descending order by Basic Speed, and affect one another normally. The rest of the world remains paused.
- *How much time?* The GM decides how many successive turns of Bullet Time can be bought. The default is just one, but the GM is welcome to permit 6, 9, or more points for 2, 3, or more turns. If others can buy in, everyone who wants to remain in Bullet Time must ante up before each turn of stopped time.

Mind Control (pp. B68-69): If the advantage has Conditioning, the controller can cure his subject's mental disadvantages by paying character points equal to the absolute value of the disadvantages eliminated. He's "buying off" his patient's disadvantages! This can happen for *free* if the user rolls a critical success on a Conditioning attempt, but this rule is arguably more balanced than that one. Even if the GM keeps using it, he may not want to allow *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7) to obtain critical successes that cure disadvantages. If he does, an analyst with Mind Control can spend a mere 2 points per fellow PC to erase the entire party's mental problems.

Neutralize (p. B71): If the victim fails to resist, the attacker can make this permanent at a cost equal to that of the abilities neutralized. This is all-or-nothing – and likely very expensive – unless the user has the Precise enhancement (*Powers*, p. 97) to let him pick what he erases. Keep track of what's drained; the subject doesn't lose his *potential*, and can restore his old abilities by buying them back with points.

Obscure (p. B72): The user can create areas of permanent obscuration around where he's standing. Maximum radius and level are as usual for his advantage. Multiply the magnitude of the penalty to Sense rolls by radius in yards and divide by 10, rounding up, to find the cost in character points. For instance, someone with Obscure 10 (Vision) could conjure a two-yard-radius zone of permanent darkness, fog, or whatever for $(10 \times 2)/10 = 2$ points.

Psi Static (p. B78) or *Static* (*Powers*, p. 98): With Area Effect, the user can create areas of permanent static around where he's standing. Maximum radius is his usual radius, and cost is 2 character points per yard of radius.

Snatcher (p. B86): The Permanent enhancement ensures that objects acquired don't vanish when you next use your ability. Optionally, the GM can forbid that modifier and charge character points for permanency, using the campaign's usual cost ratio for *Trading Points for Money* (p. 8). The advantage of Snatcher over that rule is that it's instant and gives access to almost *anything*.

Telekinesis (p. B92): This advantage can be stabilized to hold an object permanently off the ground at the cost of 1 character point per 5% of *telekinetic* Basic Lift that the thing weighs. Heroes whose have the Animation modifier (*Powers*, p. 83) and want to create permanently animated items may use the rules for Allies with Conjured, but at half the character point cost (0.8× the object's base cost as an Ally), since nothing has to be summoned.

Temperature Control (pp. B92-93): The user can create areas of permanent heat or cold. Maximum radius and level are as usual for his advantage. Multiply the temperature shift by radius in yards and divide by 20, rounding up, to determine the cost in character points. For instance, someone with Temperature Control 1 could leave a two-yard radius 20°F cooler or hotter for $(20 \times 2)/20 = 2$ points.

CHAPTER TWO

IMPULSIVE CAMPAIGNS

The rules in Chapter 1 are *optional* – the GM decides which to use and which to ignore. Options like *Miraculous Recoveries* (pp. 10-11) will give the campaign a cinematic or supernatural cast that might not suit its genre, realism level, and/or power level. Even the most subtle in-play uses of character points lead to “meta-game” assets intruding on the game world more than usual, although that doesn’t have to strain disbelief; some real-life people luck into windfalls and job offers without working or studying hard, and it’s easy to imagine that as **GURPS** characters, they’re spending more points on *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7) and *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) than on skills and social advantages. And a few rules are outright contradictory, because they’re intended as alternatives; a super with Snatcher and access to *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) won’t need the Doodad option in *Perking Things Up: Player Guidance* (p. 9).

The GM must also decide how often he wants to see these rules used. Several ways to enforce this decision are offered in *Impulse Control* (pp. 17-18), but don’t forget that character points are a finite resource. This naturally imposes limits on spending points in play:

- *The players can’t use these rules once they run out of character points.* As the one who sets starting points and awards

bonus points, the GM determines how many points the players have to spend in play. The least heavy-handed control on over-use is to avoid excess; e.g., don’t give out 5 points per session if 2 points better fits your vision.

The GM decides which rules to use.

- *A character point spent in play is one that doesn’t buy lasting capabilities.* Players may save bonus points or spend them on permitted options however they like. They are free to hoard them against disaster, guaranteeing favorable outcomes when the chips are down. However, the GM has an equal right to scale threats to where the PCs *would* be had the players bought permanent abilities. In a 150-point campaign where the GM has awarded an average of 50 points total, the challenges should suit 200-point heroes even if the players have spent many points on successes, player guidance, etc., or are hoarding them “just in case.”

Villainous Impulses

Another important decision for the GM is whether NPCs can use the rules in Chapter 1. Interchangeable mooks probably shouldn’t be able to spend points in play – they aren’t the heroes’ equals, and there’s even an option under *Dooming Foes* (pp. 5-6) to make their life a living hell. But what about *named* NPCs, like major villains?

It’s fairest to assume that in the sorts of campaigns where PCs get to spend points in play, NPCs intended as worthy adversaries – which need not be especially common – have pools of points for fueling similar options, at the same rates. The GM shouldn’t hose the PCs directly, however. A villain uses points to create evil magic items (*Points for Energy*, pp. 12-13), fund schemes (*Trading Points for Money*, p. 8), ensure that no cops happen by (*Player Guidance*, pp. 7-9), and return from the dead (*Miraculous Recoveries*, pp. 10-11). He *doesn’t* exploit them to slaughter the heroes with critical hits. If the GM wants that ending, there’s always “Rocks fall. Everybody dies.”

The GM should announce point expenditures made in the PCs’ presence. If a villain turns 10 failed defenses into successes, it may look like cheating if the GM does nothing but shout, “He dodges *again!*” Player complaints are less likely if the GM crosses off points and proclaims, “Wow, you’ve made him use up 10 points.” Even better is a handful of counters that represent the bad guy’s points, visible to everyone and set aside as points are spent.

And how many points should NPCs have? That mostly depends on the genre. A cinematic action-movie villain ought to have lots of points; e.g., for surfing to Earth from orbit. A far more powerful supernatural being in a monster-hunting game might have *no* budget – he’s *cursed*, and doesn’t enjoy script immunity. It’s best to be consistent within a given campaign, whether that means using 5% or 10% of the NPC’s point value, or simply rolling 1d or 2d. When using Impulse Points (*Other Kinds of Points*, p. 18), the same number of IP as the PCs works well.

IMPULSE CONTROL

While the fact that character points are a finite resource means that impulse buys don't strictly need controls, the campaign might be more *fun* with one or more of the following suggestions in effect.

ADJUSTING THE COST

Every point cost in **GURPS** is subject to GM fiat. This includes impulse buys! The GM might make "troublesome" uses costly (without banning them outright) but reduce the cost of manipulations that help tell a good story. This simple-but-effective measure benefits everyone – the players get more for their points while the GM gets to run his adventure unhindered. *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) and *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13) already include guidelines for adjusting cost per use, which can be generalized to any use of points in play:

If the effect is a perfect match to the GM's goals, the character-point cost is 50% off, to a minimum of 1 point per use. If it's at odds with the story, cost is 50% extra, with a minimum premium of +1 point.

*The first man had
his three wishes, yes . . .
I don't know what the first
two were, but the third was
for death.*

– W.W. Jacobs,
"The Monkey's Paw"

SEPARATE AWARDS

The GM might want to divide the bonus points he awards into two balances: one for short-term gains and one for long-term growth. These might be apples and oranges, and not convertible – but if the GM favors one use over the other, he could allow players to transfer points at asymmetric exchange rates, or to but not from his preferred category.

Example: In a campaign that uses long- and short-term points, the GM lets short-term points be converted to long-term ones on a 1:1 basis – but the ratio is 2:1 going the other direction. Over an adventure that lasts six game sessions, he awards each player 1 short-term point and 1 long-term point per session. At the end, the players could have up to 12 points for permanent abilities but only 9 for affecting events in play.

At the start of the campaign, it's better to set a limit on unspent points held in reserve; 10% of the campaign power

level is reasonable. Thus, in a 150-point campaign, players might be allowed to reserve up to 15 point for in-play use without having to "buy" them at a premium.

USAGE LIMITS

Limits on how often these rules can be used are simple and direct in play, but require some thought beforehand. A few examples:

- A player can use these rules at most *N* times per game session or adventure, but the specifics are unimportant; e.g., "You can use stuff from **Impulse Buys** twice each game session."
- A player can use a given option at most *N* times per game session or adventure. The value of *N* might be different for each rule; e.g., "On this adventure, you may have any number of flesh wounds, buy success up to three times, but request just one instance of player guidance."
- A player can use a powerful option *N* times, ever; e.g., "You can each buy a single miraculous recovery in this campaign. After that, dead is dead!"

In a campaign with supernatural elements, usage limits might be more generous or relaxed completely on a mission for a beneficent Higher Power . . . or more austere if the heroes end up cursed!

SPENDING LIMITS

Instead of thinking in terms of "uses," the GM can limit how many character points can be spent in play each session or adventure. This might be uniform ("No more than 10 points on this adventure."), have exceptions ("No more than 4 points each game session, excluding miraculous recoveries."), or be a lifetime quota ("No more than 25 points in this campaign – so don't use these rules if you think you want a miraculous recovery!"). Once again, blessings and curses might play with the limits.

SPENDING CAPACITY

A variant on *Usage Limits* and *Spending Limits* is to establish a capacity with a clever name – say, "Impulse Points" (IP). These can't be spent as such; instead, each character point spent in play *also* consumes 1 IP. Depleted IP recover at a modest rate, perhaps a flat 1 IP per session, or conceivably 1 IP per bonus point earned that session.

Example: Noemi has 23 character points saved up in a campaign where characters start with 10 IP and recover a flat 1 IP/session. She could spend at most 10 character points in play, reducing her IP to 0. If she did, she would start *next* session with just 1 IP. She could then spend at most 1 character point on impulse buys – not all 13 that remain!

The GM sets maximum IP and recharge rate. The numbers aren't *that* important, as the real limit is still available character points. But a low IP maximum will rule out costly options, while a low recharge rate will prevent excessive frequency of use.

It's up to the GM whether PCs can spend character points on better IP maxima or refresh rates as permanent advantages. Since they'll have to spend even more character points to capitalize on either benefit, the price shouldn't be high – perhaps 1 character point per +2 to the IP maximum or +1 to the per-session IP recovery rate. *Reductions* have too little impact to be meaningful disadvantages.

OTHER KINDS OF POINTS

The GM could even decide that the rules in *Impulse Buys* don't use character points! He might restrict players to spending the Destiny and Wildcard Points defined in *Wild, Wild Destiny* (p. 5), and the Serendipity Points discussed in *Serendipitous Guidance* (p. 8). This would make Destiny's role much larger, and render Serendipity and wildcard skills extra-attractive.

Bidding Wars

If two characters could both use points to affect the *same* outcome, and one of them actually does, the GM may allow a bidding war: The rival can spend equal points *plus one* to negate this outcome, the original spender can then see that point and spend another, and so on, until someone can't continue. All points are spent! This is always a one-on-one competition – after two parties ante up, nobody else can come in on either side.

Example: The heroic Zhang Zhu wants the police to spot the villainous Toru Otaka, and spends 4 points to “summon” an officer. Otaka would like the police to be busy elsewhere, and spend 5 points total to ensure this. Zhu goes up to 6 points total to get his way. Otaka can't afford the 7 points he'd need to win, so he loses 5 points, the Zhang loses 6 points, and Officer Smith steps out of a nearby donut shop.

Most radically, the GM could use *Spending Capacity* but have Impulse Points *replace* character points for in-play spending. It's up to the GM how many IP, if any, each PC starts with for free, and whether IP recharge. If IP never recharge, then points spent on extra IP are simply points set aside to use Chapter 1 as written, and IP should cost 1 character point apiece (and don't *really* need a special name).

If IP *do* refresh, though, then the fair price is 5 points/level – which matches Destiny Points – because the player will get to spend them over and over (and probably far more than five times). And if the PCs start with nonzero IP, selling off IP at -5 points/level seems reasonable. The default refresh rate is that for Destiny Points, or 1 IP per session. If an improved rate is available at all, this should cost *at least* 10 points per +1 IP regenerated per session.

It's up to the GM whether traits like Destiny, Luck, and Serendipity are needed in a campaign where Impulse Points and/or their refresh rate can be bought for character points. If the GM *does* allow both, then Destiny Points can be combined with Impulse Points for purchases – and so can Serendipity Points and Wildcard Points, where the purchase is one for which those are legitimate.

KARMIC BALANCE

A final possibility is to arrange matters so that the players don't *want* to push their luck more often than absolutely necessary. Maybe every 5 or 10 character points (or any other kind of points!) spent on impulse buys gives the character a point of “taint,” in the form of what *Horror* calls Derangement or Corruption. Perhaps each point spent gives the adventure's Big Bad Evil Guy a point – or half a point, or 2 points – to use in his own machinations (*Villainous Impulses*, p. 16). Such schemes especially suit horrific and supernatural campaigns where taking the “easy path” means submitting to sinister, even diabolical influences.

TRADING GROWTH FOR DRAMA

So far, we've discussed ways to control how many character points players spend on game-world outcomes. This isn't *just* to keep adversarial gamers from exploiting points as an “I win” button. There are also people who will – out of a well-intentioned effort to tell a good story and support the GM – spend so many points that their characters don't improve at all. Bonus character points *are* primarily intended for personal improvement, and as noted earlier, a point spent in play is one that doesn't buy lasting capabilities.

However, perpetual upward mobility – a tradition established by old-school RPGs and often known as the “zero to hero” arc – doesn't suit every campaign. There are entire genres where the protagonists usually prevail but rarely “power up”; e.g., classic comic-book supers. There are also storytelling methods for which this approach is standard. In an episodic campaign (or a traditional TV series), the heroes might look the same at the start of each adventure; from the viewpoint of *what the characters can do*, the episodes make

sense in any order. Development in such cases is about personality and character growth, not higher skills and more Hit Points.

In this kind of campaign, the GM might wish to invert some of the suggestions for controlling points spent in play:

- *Adjusting the Cost* (p. 17): Reducing the character-point costs for in-play outcomes might be all it takes to get the desired effect. For instance, if a critical success costs 1 character point rather than 2, or if a point buys 100 FP instead of 25 FP, then players may opt not to raise Guns or Energy Reserve quite as often.

- *Separate Awards* (p. 17): An effective tool here is to award more short-term points than long-term ones while offering favorable exchange rates when trading long-term points for short-term ones (perhaps better than even: “Each long-term point gives you two short-term ones.”) or even forbidding the exchange of short-term points.

- *Usage Limits* (p. 17): Inverting this idea is a matter of setting limits on how often character points can be spent on permanent improvements: “Each adventure, you can improve one trait that comes in levels by one level,” “Nobody can improve attributes, ever,” “Study (pp. B292-294) doesn’t earn points, it just allows one to spend that many earned points – so if you have no time for training, you can’t raise skills,” and so on.

- *Spending Limits* (pp. 17-18): Inverting spending limits likewise involves restricting purchases of durable capabilities, and can take many forms – from “You can spend no more than 5 points on skills this adventure” to “No more than 50 points of permanent improvements, ever.”

- *Karmic Balance* (p. 18): In a setting with sinister paranormal forces, a fun inversion of this idea is to declare that points spent on permanent *supernatural* abilities – but *not* to influence outcomes – are what causes “taint.” Thus, in the spirit of pulp fantasy, fate punishes wielders of “evil powers” by sending heroes who defeat them with daring and panache.

THE NO-GROWTH CAMPAIGN

All of these techniques still allow *some* growth, but it’s possible to run a campaign where the first and last time the players buy abilities with character points is when they create their PCs. Two options work best:

- *Separate Awards* (p. 17): Points are awarded for good roleplaying, etc., but these are all short-term points, useful only for buying game-world outcomes.

- *Other Kinds of Points* (p. 18): Impulse Points replace points earned in play, and aren’t awarded at all – they just refresh. To encourage good roleplaying without bribing players with points, the GM also invokes *Adjusting the Cost* (p. 17) and makes the IP cost lower for feats that help rather than hinder the story.

In either case, the heroes complete adventures not by brute force (by exploiting high attributes, heaps of advantages, and masterful skill levels) but through dramatic coups (spending points at pivotal junctures).

UPWARD PROGRESS IS
NEVER AUTOMATIC.

– Gary Gygax,
Dungeon Masters Guide

Wagers

Some gamers may enjoy *wagers* involving character points. The GM designs an adventure and sets minimum standards of success: “Steal the secret files,” “Escape the dungeon,” or “Save the princess before she’s sacrificed in 13 days.” Then he and the players mutually agree to some greater achievement that would be a real challenge – something like “Steal the secret files *without a fight*,” “Escape the dungeon *uninjured*,” or “Save the princess *by sundown today*.” Players can then bet points on this outcome, up to an agreed-upon table limit. If they pull it off, they get double their points back; if they don’t, they *lose* their points.

This only works if the GM is fair and doesn’t cheat, which requires trust. It’s acceptable to have a bad reaction or Stealth roll start a fight when trying to avoid one, but not to have NPCs jump the PCs at random. It’s fine to throw traps and monsters at PCs who are attempting to escape injury, but not “take damage, no saving roll” disasters. It’s okay to require a Riding roll to spirit the princess home before sundown, but not to have her flee laughing into the sunset.

The players *can* invoke options from Chapter 1 to succeed at their wager! This tends to be self-correcting. Getting 10 points instead of 5 for the adventure is wonderful – but the extra 5 points is actually an extra 2 points if you had to spend 3 points for success at Stealth, Traps, or Riding. The only thing that’s off-limits is spending points to short-circuit the entire challenge. It *isn’t* acceptable to use *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) to make the rival spies lose the secret files, declare that there’s a secret exit from the bottom of the dungeon, or find an amazing shortcut home with the princess.

A wager has nothing to do with any bonus points the GM might award for the adventure, which accrue regardless.

The GM may still permit “horizontal development” in such a campaign. Instead of spending earned points, the players get to *rearrange* their traits a few points at a time. For instance, the driver who spends more time shooting than behind the wheel might shunt 4 points from Driving to Guns, and the hero who witnesses a lot of death could see Selfless become Callous as a defense mechanism. Rather than set hard point limits, the GM should listen to suggestions from the players and allow them *if* they’re consistent with what the PCs have been doing.

Unless the GM wants the campaign to come to resemble a madhouse or a hospital ward, though, he should also provide some way to remove disadvantages gained in play due to crippling wounds, spectacularly bad Fright Checks, and so on. This can be done through detailed accounting (characters earn points that are useful only for buying off problems) or simply by being open-minded about having suitable treatments work.

Improvements that don’t raise character-point totals might be possible, too. For instance, the GM might award more short-term points – or increased Impulse Points – as the campaign progresses and the stakes get higher. And each use of *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) shapes the world a bit more in the heroes’ favor, which is definitely a benefit even if it doesn’t show up on character sheets (thus, the GM should keep good notes on such things).

Of course, many players will just *hate* this idea – gaming is all about leveling up for them. A compromise might be to forbid discretionary earned points but still allow new skills when the hero attends university for a semester, new advantages if he goes under the knife in a cyberpunk campaign, and so on. The cynical GM might have cyberpunk implants improve a character’s point total at a cost in Impulse Points, in classic ’80s gaming fashion!

WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T

If not every idea in *Impulse Buys* suits every campaign, it's reasonable to ask which options are good and not-so-good for specific types of games. The GM's word is final, but here are some recommendations. Possibilities that aren't mentioned are neutral – while they don't stand out as *bad* ideas, the genre in question isn't flush with examples of them.

GURPS Action and GURPS Gun Fu

Reserving a few starting points to fuel stunning exploits is *extremely* appropriate for action heroes. See *Paying Fate's Price* (p. 5), but *Wild, Wild Destiny* (p. 5) and *Other Kinds of Points* (p. 18) offer alternatives. If everybody has such a budget, then *Bidding Wars* (p. 18) can be fun in dramatic situations like high-speed chases.

The lists below exclude possibilities that imply paranormal, superhuman, or weird phenomena – notably *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15), *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13), *Divine Intervention* (p. 9), *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13), and *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13) – only because action plots rarely include such elements. There's nothing wrong with these if suitable powers coexist with guns and Corvettes!

Especially Appropriate: *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7); *Buying Failure* (p. 4), to accept pain and death before talking under interrogation; *Dooming Foes* (pp. 5-6), because mooks have no rights; the No Nuisance Rolls option in *Perking Things Up: Buying Success* (p. 6); *Defense vs. Effect* (p. 6); *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9), to ensure suitable scenery for stunts; almost all of *Perking Things Up: Player Guidance* (p. 9); *Survival* (pp. 10-11), particularly *Flesh Wounds* (p. 10); the Dramatic Death and Sartorial Integrity options in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11); and that timeless classic, *Bullet Time* (p. 15).

Especially Inappropriate: Both *Trading Points for Money* (p. 8) and *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) assume more complex social interplay than action stories demand, and short-circuit the budget and Rank rules in *Action*. *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) are needlessly conservative substitutes for using the action-appropriate suggestions on those lists full-time and campaign-wide.

GURPS Dungeon Fantasy

Treating *Destiny* and *Serendipity* as sources of *Destiny Points* (*Wild, Wild Destiny*, p. 5) and *Serendipity Points* (*Serendipitous Guidance*, p. 8), respectively, rather than as

more poetic traits, is *exactly* the sort of thing that suits munchkin power fantasies. In fact, most uses of points do – the trick is to forbid the stuff that's too easily abused.

Especially Appropriate: *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7); *Buying Failure* (p. 4), to weasel out of being dangerous to allies when mind-controlled; *Dooming Foes* (pp. 5-6), when fighting hordes of fodder; *Trading Points for Money* (p. 8) and *Divine Intervention* (p. 9) are essential genre canon; the Covenant of Rest option in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11), for holy avengers; *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) suggest things that aren't especially in-genre as full-time rules but work when used sparingly; *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13) befits some powers available to PCs; and *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13), to explain how delvers acquire supernatural gifts as they "level up."

Especially Inappropriate: *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) and the social options under *Perking Things Up: Player Guidance* (p. 9) lend themselves to abuse around monsters, and assume more of a society than is usual; all of *Survival* (pp. 10-11) badly devalues clerics and other healers; the GM who allows *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13) and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) is asking for trouble if the players of spellcasters and power-users are even remotely adept munchkins; and *Bullet Time* (p. 15) is out-of-genre.

GURPS Fantasy

Serious fantasy – by contrast to the dungeon-crawling variety – customarily involves prophecy, destiny, and *real* heroism. This makes

sacrifice (*Paying Fate's Price*, p. 5) a suitable source of points; the mightiest deeds (from enchanting artifacts to begging the gods to return your True Love to the land of the living) inevitably have a cost.

Especially Appropriate: *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) works well as fate favoring heroes on a quest; respectful *Divine Intervention* (p. 9) suits dramatic fantasy even better than the dungeon variety; *Resurrecting Allies* (p. 11) and *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13) are truly heroic when paid for by sacrifice;



the Dramatic Death option in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11) is common; the magic rules under *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and the Rest in Pieces option in *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) are apt when they're rare (cost points to use); *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13) and even *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13) are frequently the only way to use strategic spells and powers; and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) is similarly fitting for individuals with suitable abilities, although those are often rare.

Especially Inappropriate: The more self-serving options under *Survival* (pp. 10-11) cheapen the sacrifice and struggle that characterize heroic fantasy. The dramatic tradition of fantasy differs from that of action movies; with few exceptions, then, the combat rules mentioned under *Opt-In Options* (p. 12), and *Bullet Time* (p. 15), are a poor match.

GURPS Horror

Arguably, allowing anything in Chapter 1 is unwise in horror. Such easy outs militate against doubt and suspense. Inasmuch as it makes sense to spend points in play, sacrifice and debt (*Paying Fate's Price*, p. 5) are highly appropriate. The GM might make these the *only* ways to mess with game-world outcomes in a horror campaign! It can't hurt to throw *Karmic Balance* (p. 18) into the mix, either. Horror is also a good match to *The No-Growth Campaign* (p. 19) and fertile ground for *Wagers* (p. 19), which can help convey mortality and tension, respectively – but the two rules don't mix well.

Especially Appropriate: *Buying Effect* (p. 6), when slamming the stake into Dracula's heart or otherwise acting with finality and conviction; *Divine Intervention* (p. 9), provided that the results are double-edged; *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13), when the points come from sacrifice and the energy empowers black magic; and *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13) and *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13), once again paid for by sacrifice, when the abilities are creepy or painfully modest.

Especially Inappropriate: *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7), *Perking Things Up: Buying Success* (p. 6), *Defense vs. Effect* (p. 6) against Fright Checks, and everything in *Survival* (pp. 10-11) constitute a long list of ways to poison suspense; *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) is almost as bad, as it offers far too much safety; *Divine Intervention* (p. 9) is out-of-genre when the intervention is purely beneficial; the Covenant of Rest rule in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11) and Rest in Pieces option in *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) are end runs around zombie plagues, vampirism, etc., and need careful monitoring if allowed; and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) is inherently monstrous and unsuitable for the protagonists.

GURPS Infinite Worlds

Any of the other sets of recommendations could apply in a *suitable world*. Those below consider the overarching setting. In that greater context, *Destiny Points* (*Wild, Wild Destiny*, p. 5) offer a way to handle parachronic travelers who are unusually important in the big picture – ones fated to shift timelines or prevent such disasters.

Especially Appropriate: World-specific traits are difficult to price for people who jump between alternates; far simpler to let them spend points on the Immunity option under *Perking Things Up: Buying Success* (p. 6) to resist a world's plagues, on *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) and the social options in *Perking Things Up: Player Guidance* (p. 9) to operate socially, and so on. *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) is easily justified in a background full of alternate outcomes; *Miraculous Recoveries* (pp. 10-11) and *Resurrecting Allies* (p. 11) can be explained as replacing the original with a parallel self; and *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) seem like suitable ways to liven up a campaign where anything is possible.

Especially Inappropriate: While not uniformly unsuitable, *Divine Intervention* (p. 9), the Covenant of Rest option in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11), *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13), *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13), and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) are supernatural and/or superhuman enough to merit close scrutiny.

GURPS Monster Hunters

This genre resembles “*Action* with monsters,” not *Horror*. Reserving a few starting points for tinkering with fate is an excellent idea; see *Paying Fate's Price* (p. 5). *Wild, Wild Destiny* (p. 5) was invented for *Monster Hunters*, *Serendipitous Guidance* (p. 8) offers a similar idea, and going all the way to *Other Kinds of Points* (p. 18) might work.

Especially Appropriate: *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7), the No Nuisance Rolls rule in *Perking Things Up: Buying Success* (p. 6), *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9), and everything under *Survival* (pp. 10-11) all play to genre conventions; *Dooming Foes* (pp. 5-6) and *Bullet Time* (p. 15) are excellent against hordes of zombies and cultists (but best not allowed vs. bosses); *Divine Intervention* (p. 9) suits champions with demonstrable holy power; the Dramatic Death option in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11) is fun, especially with enough explosives; *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13) befits the genre's powers; and *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13) meshes well with the way mentorship works in genre fiction.

I am puzzled afresh about Renfield . . . when I went to see him after his repulse of Van Helsing, his manner was that of a man commanding destiny. He was, in fact, commanding destiny, subjectively.

– Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

Especially Inappropriate: *Trading Points for Money* (p. 8) is iffy when it undermines resources provided by a Patron; *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) is out if it would endanger random bystanders or expose secrets to them; *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) work better as campaign-wide options and genuine perks; and *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13) and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) badly devalue ritual path magic.

GURPS Mysteries

Superhuman and supernatural options aren't forbidden – they're just uncommon in classic *Mysteries* campaigns, which are traditionally hard-boiled detective stories, the investigative flip-side of a game that's more likely to use *Tactical Shooting* than *Gun Fu* for its violence. Still, when mysteries happen in *Fantasy* and *Supers* games, those guidelines override these ones.

Especially Appropriate: *Favors in Play* (pp. 8-9) and the social options in *Perking Things Up: Player Guidance* (p. 9), when limited to street-level uses that aid investigation. The non-supernatural possibilities in *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) – and even *Bullet Time* (p. 15) – can work if the mysteries are occasionally punctuated by two-fisted pulp violence instead of the realistic kind.

Especially Inappropriate: *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7) and *Player Guidance* (pp. 7-9) shouldn't be allowed to generate clues, as “paying points to solve the mystery” is (pardon the pun) missing the point; *Divine Intervention* (p. 9) is in the same boat (go ask Brother Cadfael about how well praying works); and *Survival* (pp. 10-11), especially *Resurrecting Allies* (p. 11), takes much of the fun out of murder.

GURPS SEALs in Vietnam and GURPS Tactical Shooting

The No-Growth Campaign (p. 19) is worth considering in a game where there isn't enough time between missions for believable improvement. Interpreting in-play point expenditures as mission preparation (rote learning to facilitate a specific assignment) or exceptional heroism can make impulse buys a surprisingly good match to realistic violence. Still, such stories rarely involve paranormal capabilities – so while options for those weren't ruled out for *Action*, they are here.

Especially Appropriate: No Nuisance Rolls (*Perking Things Up: Buying Success*, p. 6) and Standard Operating Procedure (*Perking Things Up: Player Guidance*, p. 9) are believable when each use costs points; the points represent prep time. *Buying Effect* (p. 6) can make firearms damage less variable, which is arguably more realistic; the Dramatic Death rule in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11) also improves realism in some cases, as people rarely die outright when shot; and

some of the combat options in *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12) work as heroics, if each player has extremely limited uses (even “once, ever”).

Especially Inappropriate: *Buying Success* (pp. 4-7), *Buying Failure* (p. 4), and *Dooming Foes* (pp. 5-6) undermine the genre premise that skill, not script immunity, determines the victor; Doodad, from *Perking Things Up: Player Guidance* (p. 9), feels silly in a campaign where every round of ammo is accounted for; all of *Survival* (pp. 10-11) is out in a game where maiming and death are essential sources of tension; and *Divine Intervention* (p. 9), the Covenant of Rest option in *Perking Things Up: Survival* (p. 11), *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13), *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13), *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13), *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15), and *Bullet Time* (p. 15) are too weird for tales of realistic gun violence.



GURPS Supers

Saving starting points for stunts is squarely in genre, as is using one's points to assist teammates or bystanders; see *Paying Fate's Price* (p. 5). Wildcard Points (*Wild, Wild Destiny*, p. 5) and Impulse Points (*Other Kinds of Points*, p. 18) also fit. Many superhero stories assume *The No-*

Growth Campaign (p. 19) – but if points can be earned, regular gambles like *Bidding Wars* (p. 18) and *Wagers* (p. 19) are dramatically fitting, and can burn up points to the same effect.

Especially Appropriate: Anything not described as inappropriate! In particular, *Buying Effect* (p. 6) and *Defense vs. Effect* (p. 6) fit power-vs.-power struggles; the social options in *Perking Things Up: Player Guidance* (p. 9) are more balanced than full-fledged favors in this genre; most of *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) works better if such feats costs points (but see below); *Points for Energy* (pp. 12-13), *Character Point-Powered Abilities* (p. 13), and *Changing the World* (pp. 13-15) are fine for those who have abilities that can exploit them; *Open Your Eyes* (p. 13) is the standard way to create new supers in many settings; and *Bullet Time* (p. 15) is tailor-made for scenes where one punch takes four panels.

Especially Inappropriate: *Dooming Foes* (pp. 5-6) and *Divine Intervention* (p. 9) are best forbidden to protect the niche of heroes who can do similar things using powers; *Trading Points for Money* (p. 8) is dodgy, as supers should buy important equipment with points via the rules for gadgets and Signature Gear; *Favors in Play* (p. 8-9) used for temporary Allies is far too good given the power level of most supers; and it's unfair to require supers with Gunslinger, Trained by a Master, or Weapon Master to pay points to use the combat rules in *Opt-In Options* (p. 12) and *Perking Things Up: Amazing Feats* (p. 12), as they should be able to do most of this stuff as often as they want.

Impulse Buys Cheat Sheet

This list is intended not just to speed play but for the GM to use as a checklist when planning his campaign. Feel free to copy it, delete forbidden options, tweak costs, and print the results!

Buying Success

Critical failure to failure: 2 points*
Failure to success: 1 point*
Upgrade margin of success: 1 point
Success to critical success: 2 points*

* Costs are cumulative.

Buying Failure

Critical success to success: 2 points*
Success to failure: 1 point*
Failure to critical failure: 2 points*

* Costs are cumulative.

Cursing Mooks

Enemy failure to critical failure: 2 points

Buying Effect or Defense vs. Effect

Per *two* dice set to 1 or 6: 1 point
Per *die* for exact table result: 1 point

One-Use Perks

Immunity to (Specific Disease/Hazard), Low Rejection Threshold, No Nuisance Rolls, or Rules Exemption: 1 point/use

Player Guidance

Minor change: 1 point
Moderate change: 2 points
Major change: 3 points
After critical success: -1 point*
Fleeting change: -1 point*

* Added to cost of change. Minimum cost is 1 point.

Trading Points for Money

Some campaigns may allow up to 50% of starting cash/point as money or 100% of starting cash/point as goods, but by default:

Per 10% of campaign average starting cash: 1 point

Favors in Play

NPC is present and renders aid: $0.8 \times$ base cost of Ally, Contact, Contact Group, or Patron, rounded up
NPC appears and renders aid: $1.6 \times$ base cost of Ally, Contact, Contact Group, or Patron, rounded up

Divine Intervention

Per +1 to intervention roll: 1 point

One-Use Perks

Brotherhood, Disposable Identity, Doodad, Friend, Honest Face, or Standard Operating Procedure: 1 point/use

Survival

Deflect disadvantage: $0.5 \times$ size of disadvantage cost, rounded up
Flesh wound (all but 1 HP): 1 point
Keep Dependent alive: $0.5 \times$ size of Dependent cost, rounded up
Miraculous recovery: 25 points (50 points in campaigns with Extra Life)
Resurrect Ally: Ally cost
Second wind (all FP): 1 point

One-Use Perks

Covenant of Rest, Dramatic Death, or Sartorial Integrity: 1 point/use

Amazing Feats

Awaken ability in other: ability cost
Bullet Time: 3 points/turn
Energy: 1 point per 25 FP
Opt-in option (cinematic or optional combat rule, spellcasting option, etc.): 1 point/use

Character Point-Powered Abilities

Minor use: 1 point
Moderate use: 2 points
Major use: 3+ points (up to 1/5 of full ability cost)

Improvisation: 1/5 of full ability cost, rounded up

Changing the World

Affliction, permanent on victim: 1 point per +1% of enhancement
Ally with Conjured, summoned and released: $1.6 \times$ base Ally cost
Control, permanent: 1 point/level
Control (Natural Phenomena), permanent: 5 points/level
Gizmo recharge: 1 point/level
Growth, Insubstantiality, Invisibility, Shadow Form, or Shrinking with Can Carry Objects, permanent on object: 1 point per 5% of Basic Lift
Healing with Cure Affliction or Mind Control with Conditioning, to cure disadvantage: size of disadvantage cost
Illusion, permanent: 1 point per yard of radius
Jumper, permanent tunnel: 10 points
Mana Damper, permanent: 1 point per level per yard of radius
Mana Enhancer, permanent: 5 points per level per yard of radius
Neutralize, permanent on victim: cost of abilities neutralized
Obscure, permanent: (Sense penalty \times radius in yards)/10, rounded up
Psi Static or Static with Area Effect, permanent: 2 points per yard of radius
Snatcher, permanent on object: as trading points for money
Telekinesis, permanent on object: 1 point per 5% of telekinetic Basic Lift
Temperature Control, permanent: (temperature shift \times radius in yards)/20, rounded up
Warp, permanent tunnel: 1 point per -1 in distance penalties (minimum 1 point)

One-Use Perks

Autotrance, Controllable Disadvantage, Power Perk, Rest in Pieces, or normally off-limits combat perk: 1 point/use

Man proposes, but God disposes.

— Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

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*A consistent soul believes
 in destiny, a capricious one
 in chance.*

– Benjamin Disraeli

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