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MARTIAL ARTS

HARDCORE
by Stephen Dedman

**THE THREE BROTHERS
SCHOOLS OF MARTIAL ARTS**
by Alan Leddon

**THE GROOM OF
THE SPIDER PRINCESS**
by J. Edward Tremlett

FIGHT WHILE IN FLIGHT
by Kelly Pedersen

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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*Victory is always possible for the
person who refuses to stop fighting.*
– Napoleon Hill

Article Colors

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

Brown: In Every Issue (letters, humor, editorial, etc.)

Dark Blue: GURPS Features

Purple: Other Features

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IN THIS ISSUE

The righteous battle never ends – certainly not with this, the *Martial Arts* issue of *Pyramid*. With two new adventures, eight new styles for *GURPS Martial Arts*, and other dojo-powered delights, this issue is sure to have something to add punch to your two-fisted campaigns.

Heroes need to get *Hardcore* in a modern-day adventure centered on illegal (and immoral) underground fighting. Do the PCs have the guts and skill to break up this operation?

What started as a school of martial arts run by three brothers has splintered into *three* different schools – each with its own focus. Sadly, although the schools teach effective skills, they do not teach particularly honorable ones . . . Learn the secrets of this family business, plus three *GURPS Martial Arts* styles, in *The Three Brothers School of Martial Arts*.

Many martial-arts students have been criticized for having their heads in the clouds, but *Fight While in Flight* shows the other side of this admonition. These five *GURPS Martial Arts* styles are designed for fighters looking to make best use of their ability to fly, jump, or aeri ally maneuver.

The Groom of the Spider Princess mixes *wuxia* with Lovecraftian horror, in an epic tale that combines the grandeur of exploring a strange land with the horror of a seemingly impossible dilemma. Arachnophobes should most definitely *not* read this generic adventure.

Sure, martial artists have the power to cripple, maim, and kill at their fingertips, but what challenge arises when a campaign explores a nonviolent ethos? This question is answered – somewhat whimsically – by *Pyramid* editor Steven Marsh, in this month's *Random Thought Table*.

Have you ever needed to come up with the conditions of an interesting martial-arts event on the spot? Then just draw a couple of cards from those presented in *Instant Tournaments*, and you've got yourself a ready-to-go conflict.

Alternatively, you might consider looking at the fight complication presented in *The Crumbling Ground*, which helps codify a classic element of martial-arts movies and anime.

As usual, *Odds and Ends* offers an assortment of goodies, including *Murphy's Rules*, a few more nonlethal challenges, and a campaign focus where you always know where your next challenge is – and he knows where you are, too.

Rapid-fire entertainment awaits inside!

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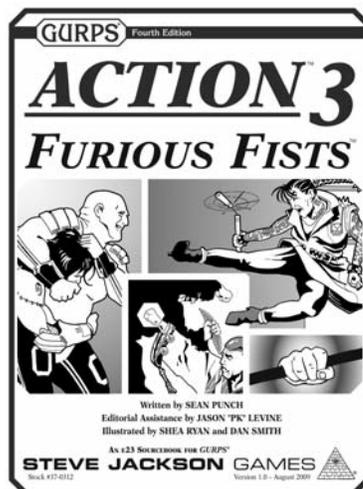
FROM THE EDITOR

HE'S MAKING A FIST, AND CHECKING IT TWICE . . .

I discovered something while putting this issue together: Martial arts isn't like magic. That is to say, from a gaming standpoint, you can't just say, "I'm running a magic game," and have that *mean* anything; it needs to be appended to something else, like, "I'm running a medieval magical game" or "This is an cyberpunk game where magic is real, too."

Martial arts *can* work the same way as magic; you can have a "cyberpunk game with martial arts," or a "medieval game with martial arts." But "martial arts" is enough of a genre unto itself that you can say, "I want to run a martial-arts campaign," and receive more than confused stares from gamers, even if the specifics of what a martial arts campaign entails are open to interpretation.

Saying, "I'm running a game that centers on magicians" doesn't have any focus. Are the magicians going out and attacking monsters?



Researching? Exploring strange realms? But if you say, "I'm running a game that centers on martial artists," that has a *specific* meaning: Your heroes are going to be butt-kicking fighters, and – no matter how philosophical they may be otherwise – adventures are almost certainly going to culminate in the heroes kicking butts or getting their butts kicked. Perhaps both.

Hopefully this diversity in what a "martial arts" adventure entails comes through in this issue. We've got a modern-day martial-arts adventure, a *wuxia* adventure set in a mythical China, an article about introducing martial arts to aerial artists, and another article containing martial-arts styles that could be used in practically any era. About the only thing we *don't* have is sci-fi-related martial arts – but long-time readers know we've touched on that in the past (that'd be *Fight the Future*, from *Pyramid* #3/9: *Space Opera*).

Hopefully the diversity of the martial-arts offerings in this issue will get your chi flowing sufficiently. We think it's a well-balanced issue – because balance is so important to martial artists, in more ways than one.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Have you got something to say to us? Yeah, we're talking to you! . . . Oh, right. Conversations in a magazine are one-directional. Anyway, let us know how we did! Send letters and comments to pyramid@sjgames.com, or post online on our forums at forums.sjgames.com.

. . . what I've read rocks. My subscription ends with this issue [#3/12], but I'll certainly resubscribe.

– Antoni Ten, on the Steve Jackson Games forums

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FIGHT WHILE IN FLIGHT

BY KELLY PEDERSEN

Human martial arts have developed based on certain basic rules: Combatants are limited by gravity, by momentum, by the need for stable footing from which to launch movement and attacks. These assumptions don't hold true in all settings, where supernatural powers, mysterious technology, or biological abilities expand the range of action available to characters. This article presents five martial arts designed to take the ability to fly – or at least to stay in the air for much longer than usual – into account.

An "*" indicates a new technique, described on p. 17. A "†" indicates the technique is from *GURPS Supers*.

NEW STYLES

These five new styles are best suited for the special circumstances of aerial combatants.

Aerial Jujutsu

3 points

Aerial Jujutsu is a style designed for fighters with perfect control of their movement in the air. Its moves and teachings are for those who can hover in midair, travel any direction at will, and completely control their orientation. Practitioners should have some way of getting the Flight advantage, unmodified by limitations such as Winged, Gliding, etc. that hinder perfect mobility.

This style focuses on grace and finesse while in combat. Stylists prefer to be in control of a battle as much as possible, letting their opponent do most of the rushing around, and allowing their foe's momentum to work against them. Observers often compare watching a combatant using Aerial Jujutsu to "flying ballet," and some stylists have taken this to the next step, learning choreographed dance moves and performing before an audience. However, the style remains a real combat discipline, and practitioners of Aerial Jujutsu learn to attack first and foremost. The standard methods for students of Aerial Jujutsu when attacked are to wait for the enemy to rush towards them and then use the foe's speed against them, redirecting the force of their flight so that they collide with whatever obstacles are near them. Whenever possible, stylists prefer to fight in relatively

crowded airspace, where their superior maneuverability gives them an advantage over others who must deal with inconvenient facts such as turning radiuses and stall speeds.

In combat, Aerial Jujutsu stylists take a cautious tack. A student will take Evaluate, All-Out and Committed Defense, and Wait maneuvers, holding out until the opponent leaves himself open. These openings are sometimes *created*, thanks to a stylist's unpredictable flight path in an Aerobic Feint. While on the defensive, an aggressive, athletic course is preferred – Aerobic Dodges are a signature of this style. When a gap in the foe's defenses appears, the practitioner responds with a flying throw. In crowded airspace, the throw is aimed to slam the opponent into an obstacle. In more open areas, the Aerial Jujutsu stylist tries to follow the opponent and use superior position to his advantage, establishing a hold or lock to inflict damage directly.

This style has developed only a couple of stories of impossible feats – outside the ability to fly itself, of course! Nevertheless, a few tales circulate of Aerial Jujutsu masters capable of fighting in pitch blackness, applying precise force to nerve clusters to disable opponents, and perfectly predicting the enemy's moments. Some stylists also claim to be able to so perfectly judge a foe that they can parry a weapon by catching it between their palms, or defend against a blow by instinctively flying in the direction of the force, reducing its impact.

Skills: Aerobatics; Judo.

Techniques: Aerial Throw*; Aerial Trip*; Aerobic Recovery*; Arm Lock; Attack From Above; Choke Hold; Evade (Aerobatics); Feint (Aerobatics).

Cinematic Skills: Blind Fighting; Pressure Points; Sensitivity.

Cinematic Techniques: Hand-Clap Parry; Roll with Blow; Timed Defense.

Perks: Aerobic Feints; Sure-Footed (Windy).

Optional Traits

Secondary Characteristics: Increased Air Move (if stylist's flight is natural, rather than provided by technology).

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Enhanced Dodge.

Skills: Combat Art (Judo); Dancing; Group Performance (Choreography).

Subplot idea: Have a recurring NPC master ally/associate challenge the heroes one-on-one routinely. When a hero is able to defeat the master, he must retire as a PC.

THE GROOM OF THE SPIDER PRINCESS

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

They say that, in ancient times, long before the first Emperor received the Mandate of Heaven, there was a darkness upon the land that no fire could rout, and no one hero could stand against.

In the lands far to the north, in a vast and blasted plateau none now dare speak of, there resided the One Who Wears No Mask. From his Dread Monastery, he commanded an endless army of creatures to come and take what he required from the lands. And he required much, for he served the Demon King of All Spiders, who was always hungry.

So the people also went hungry, for they could not raise enough food to feed themselves. Thus the army went further and further in to acquire enough to feed their master. This went on for many generations, until nothing remained of the North but burned fields, filled with the unburied dead. And the burning came further south each and every year.

But one season, a small and humble group of men made their way to the Dread Monastery. To get there, they faced many dangers, many battles, and many challenges that no battle could solve. When they arrived, they sought audience with the One Who Wears No Mask, to plead for mercy on behalf of the people. Could he not demand tribute every three seasons, instead of every one? This would give them time to raise enough to feed themselves, and his master, without laying waste to the land and its people.

Indeed, it was a wise request, but the One Who Wears No Mask laughed at them, saying that they were fools to ask such a question of the likes of him. Who were they to challenge his authority? Who were they to expect mercy? He should feed them to his master for even daring such an outrage!

But as he laughed, he heard a distant rumbling, and watched with horror as the land itself was raised up against him. For Heaven had taken notice of the people's plight, and the men had come with righteousness on their side. The spirits of the land, weary of being laid waste to year after year, caused the flat ground to become a wide and tall range of mountains that no army could cross. And the Demon King of All Spiders howled in anger and rained punishment down upon his foolish servant, whose haughtiness had now cost him everything.

In the confusion, the men left the Dread Monastery and traveled home safely. Their names are lost, but their wisdom is still practiced every day, when a humble stranger intervenes on behalf of righteousness.

The mountains to the north are a reminder to all, even the Emperor, that the Mandate of Heaven is a sword with two edges. One must know both when to be as inflexible as iron, and when to bend like a reed in the wind.

This story has been told, father to son, through endless generations in the North of China. As it stands as both parable and warning, so too does the mountain range stand tall and impassable, even to the mighty and vast armies of the Emperor.

If the tale is true, none care to speculate on it for long. Indeed, to even write the word "Leng" is to invite the attention of displeased spirits. There are some things man was not meant to know, some places he was not meant to see.

Unfortunately, it is true, after a fashion.

The dread Plateau of Leng is constantly in motion – shifting through the dark and unexplored parts of the cosmos like a disease. Once, long ago, it was "contracted" by the North of China, and the spider armies of the One Who Wears No Mask scuttled over the mountains, dragging food and victims back with them. This went on for many years, and then stopped as Leng moved away once again.

Those creatures left behind in the cosmic shift were stranded in time and space. They either settled in the mountains – carving vast and horrible cities deep within them – or wandered further inland, becoming a part of the mythology of the people. In those titanic, ancient cities in the mountains, degenerate things still perform abominable rites to the Demon King of All Spiders, bidding him to return when the stars are right once more.

That time is now.

The Groom of the Spider Princess gives a small group of somewhat-experienced *wuxia* fighters the chance to be witness to the horrible fury and hunger of the armies of the One Who Wears No Mask.

Campaign idea: Each PC has a pet companion! Build PCs as normal, then build animals for each character. GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 5: Allies might prove useful for cinematic animal companions.

ODDS AND ENDS

THE MARK OF THE MASTER

This campaign premise can provide a structured framework to get the heroes into the action – or bring the action closer to them. This premise assumes that everyone who has a certain level of martial arts (say, more than 25 points in styles and related techniques) can detect others who had achieved a similar level of mastery – they have acquired the “Mark of the Master.”

This ability is inversely proportional to the distance between the two fighters; the farther away they are, the better each is able to get a sense of where the other is. The direction of this detection is exact, but not the distance, nor the precise person. It is also *much* stronger if the martial artist is opposed in philosophy, morality, or action; an evil warrior 10 miles away who commits an atrocity will trigger the sense more than

someone 100 miles away who’s just cackling evilly but not doing anything.

From a gaming standpoint, the Mark of the Master provides an idea of “where to go next,” without giving them a direct detection device. It’s enough to get the PCs to the right area without obviating the need to do investigative work once they get there.

Although the broad idea can be used without needing dice rolls (“You sense you should meet someone to the north”), here is a system that lets you do so.

Make a Perception check, modified as follows:

More than 100 miles	No roll*
50-100 miles	-0
25-50 miles	-2
12.5-25 miles	-4
6-12.5 miles	-6
3-6 miles	-8
1.5-3 miles	-10
0.5-1.5 miles	-12
Less than 0.5 miles	-14
Thought opposed by detector	+5†
Minor deed opposed by detector	+10†
Major deed opposed by detector	+15†

* At more than 100 miles away, the master is aware that there are powerful beings everywhere; should he wish to pick a direction and start wandering, he may.

† Only one of these apply.

Remember that detection is a two-way street; it’s entirely likely that enemies who oppose the PCs ideals or actions may track *them* down with this!

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



Got a *Murphy's Rule* of your own? Send it to murphy@sjgames.com

Campaign Ideas

Random Thought Table (pp. 35-36) discusses the idea of “high action, low violence.” Here are two possibilities for incorporating that ethos into a game.

- *I can get us through this wall!* In low-violence shows, characters often get the chance to use powers in ways that don’t involve actually attacking anyone. For example, a martial artist might exhibit his lightning-fast reflexes by catching arrows fired at him, or use his diamond-hard fingertips to climb the walls of a building to the top floor and save someone in distress.

- *Release the inorganics!* In low-violence shows, opportunities frequently arise to show off those with martial prowess that don’t involve people beating up other *people*. One of the most common methods is to utilize (say) bunches of robots, golems, skeletons, or other entities that don’t bleed. These mooks are often ideal to unleash as many fists of rage as the heroes have handy.

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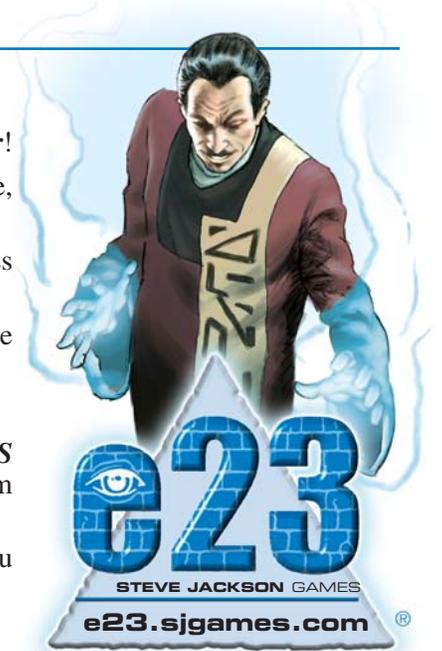
Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases are available on our website – see above.

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