



Adventurous Occupations: Journalist

for *GURPS*

by Paul Stefko

The journalist is often a standard feature of adventure fiction. Curious, resourceful, and dedicated, the reporter will often break the case, poking into holes and discovering clues that other investigators miss. They are also good at spotting lies as well as telling them, manipulating witnesses and sources into giving them the information they need.

The intrepid reporter fits into just about every genre and in any setting that includes organized media. Superheroes maintain secret identities as journalists because it gives them an excuse to disappear at a moment's notice, off to catch the latest scoop. Paranoia thrillers see conspiracies split open by the lucky reporter in the wrong place at the right time. Horror reporters are often the first to discover the mysterious and terrifying (and just as often the first to die).

Journalist PCs

As a player character, the journalist can often serve as a walking adventure hook. Three things make the journalist ideal for spring-boarding the party into an adventure: professional interest in solving mysteries and uncovering obfuscated truths, reliable sources of information, and strong investigative skills.

A reporter is nothing without the scoop. His job hinges on being able to recognize an important story, being in the position to investigate, and actually being able to unravel the case. Success in his career can lead the journalist to major awards (granting Reputation or even Wealth and Status), while failure can leave him discredited (a negative Reputation) or -- depending on the society -- facing harsh punishment (with the law as an Enemy, assuming the player won't retire the character to his justice).

Of course, the reporter's next big story will typically be the tale of the party's current adventure. This keeps the journalist character motivated, and his interest may be enough to draw the entire group deeper into the goings-on. And with his skills and resources, the reporter will also be a valuable part of the investigation.

Any good reporter cultivates a stable of informants, snitches, and friends that can feed him information from various corners. A low-level crook attached to a larger gang, a minor official at City Hall, or a RN at the hospital can serve as helpful Contacts. When the journalist finds himself in need of information, he might give any one of these sources a call.

But it's when the sources dry up that an adventuring reporter can really shine. A talented journalist will have sharp investigative skills such as Fast-Talk, Detect Lies, Body Language,

and Observation, but he could also be expected to have skills like Administration (for dealing with officials), Intimidation (to bully information out of a reluctant witness), Stealth and Shadowing, various Savoir-Faire skills, and Streetwise. In many genres, some combat ability wouldn't be out of line, either. (For players and GMs with access to *GURPS Martial Arts*, the discussion of self-defense styles on p. 145 would be a good place to start.)

Journalist NPCs

As an NPC, a reporter serves as a font of aid or information, an annoyance too nosy for his own good, or a legitimate threat to the PCs in the form of secrets revealed and dangers exposed.

A journalist as an NPC will rarely warrant the level of Ally. Reporters capable enough to be of use on an adventure should probably be reserved for PCs. However, an Ally reporter is possible in many genres, useful for establishing covers ("With your press pass, you could easily get one of us into the gala as your date") or providing "soft skill" backup for more physical (read: combat-oriented) PCs.

However, a journalist is perfectly suited to the roll of Contact. In fact, with his own wide-ranging network, the journalist Contact could serve as a filter of many different areas of expertise. With a high enough effective skill and reliability, the journalist could be the only information source the party needs.

Journalists make interesting Enemies. Typically, they will fall into the Watcher or Rival categories, dogging the PC and hoping to catch him in a compromising position. This will, of course, wind up on the front page, potentially exposing Secrets or alerting more dangerous Enemies to the character's whereabouts.

Journalist PCs will often have journalist Enemies through professional rivalries. Perhaps one reporter scooped the other on a major story, leading one to promotion and the other to disgrace. (This very relationship has even lead to the creation of supervillains in the form of Spider-Man rogue Eddie Brock, a.k.a. Venom.)

New Perk

Many settings grant members of the press certain special privileges, such as access to secured areas and important individuals. The following perk reflects this.

Press Pass: You possess credentials that allow you access (albeit potentially restricted) to areas a normal citizen may not be able to visit.

Disadvantages

The following professional Code of Honor is adhered to by most scrupulous journalists in the modern world.

Code of Honor (Professional Journalist): Remain objective; avoid conflicts of interest at all costs. Protect your sources; never reveal an anonymous source unless extreme circumstances require it. Report accurately and without bias; seek reliable sources and quote them faithfully and in proper context. -5 points.

New Skill

The frontier of the news in the early 21st century is online, and the following new skill allows Internet journalists to present themselves and their stories in a more appealing way.

Artist (Web Design)

IQ/Hard
Default: IQ-6.

This is the skill of making visually appealing web sites. While related, there is no default to Computer Programming; that skill can be used to add functionality to a web site, but it has no bearing on the site's aesthetics.

Modifiers: Equipment modifiers (p. B345); -2 if the medium is unfamiliar; -5 if the medium is difficult (mobile devices like cell phones).

New Templates

Blogger

25 points

You are a blogger, the modern vanguard of independent media. Bloggers are increasingly often the first to break the most important stories in many fields. Some are competent, clever, and ethical . . . and some are complete whack jobs. Most bloggers fall somewhere in the middle.

Contacts and Patrons: The best bloggers know people just about everywhere who can pass them information. The worst will pretend to have sources to legitimize their own pet theories. Some bloggers work for companies who are trying to capitalize on a "big name" in Internet circles.

Equipment: Blogs can be accessed from just about any location with an Internet-connected computer - public libraries, cybercafes, or an old PC at home. Bloggers don't need much in the way of equipment.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 10 [0]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 10 [0].

Advantages: 15 points chosen from Contacts [varies], Intuition [15], Patron (Minimal Intervention, -50%) [varies], Reputation +1 or +2 (small class of people, "the blogosphere"; 10 or less) [0 or 1].

Disadvantages: 15 points chosen from Chauvinistic [-1], Delusions [varies], Enemy (rival) [varies], Imaginative [-1], Nosy [-1] or Curious [-5*], Odious Personal Habits (vocally opinionated) [-5], Proud [-1], Reputation -1 or -2 (small class of people, "the blogosphere"; 10 or less) [-1 or -2], Trademark [-1 or -5], Wealth (Struggling or Poor) [-10 or -15].

Primary Skills: Artist (Web Design) (H) IQ+1 [8]-11, Writing (A) IQ+2 [8]-12.

Secondary Skills: Pick three of Computer Operation/TL (E) IQ+1 [2]-11, Computer Programming/TL (H) IQ-1 [2]-9, Current Affairs/TL (any) (E) IQ+1 [2]-11, Savoir-Faire (Internet) (E) IQ+1 [2]-11.

Background Skills: 3 points chosen from Fast-Talk, Propaganda/TL and Research/TL, all IQ/A; or Market Analysis, IQ/H.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. 120 of the *Basic Set*.

Journalist

55 points

You are a trained journalist working for a newspaper or broadcast outlet. You have resources, contacts, and credentials, and you always get your story.

Contacts: Sources are a journalist's lifeblood. Most reporters will protect their sources tenaciously. Reporters have even gone to jail protecting a source's identity.

Equipment: A journalist, regardless of medium, will typically carry a cell phone and some way to record notes (either a notebook or a tape recorder). Video or radio journalists will have more sophisticated recording and editing equipment.

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP 10 [0].

Advantages: 25 points chosen from Alternate Identity (Illegal) [15], Charisma [5/level], Contact Group [varies], Contacts [varies], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Favor [varies], Fearlessness [2/level], Honest Face [1], Intuition [15], Patron [varies], Press Pass [1], Sensitive [5] or Empathy [15], Smooth Operator [15/level].

Disadvantages: -30 points chosen from Addiction (tobacco) [-5], Alcoholism [-15 or -20], Attentive [-1], Broad-Minded [-1], Code of Honor (Professional Journalist) [-5], Curious [-5*], Enemy (rival) [varies], Imaginative [-1], Obsession [-5* or -10*], Stubbornness [-5], Truthfulness [-5*], Wealth (Struggling) [-10], Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills (24): Detect Lies (H) IQ [4]-11, Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-12, Research/TL (A) IQ+1 [4]-12. Pick one of Acting (A) IQ+2 [4]-12 and Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [4]-12, or Writing (A) IQ+2 [8]-13. Pick one of Area Knowledge (E) IQ+2 [4]-13 or Current Affairs/TL (any) (E) IQ+2 [4]-13.

Secondary Skills: Pick three of Body Language (A) Per [2]-12, Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-10, Electronics Operation/TL (Media) (A) IQ [2]-11, Intimidation (A) IQ [2]-11, or Observation (A) Per [2]-12.

Background Skills: 5 points chosen from Computer Operation/TL, IQ/E; Stealth, DX/A; Propaganda/TL and Streetwise, both IQ/A; or Law (Print or Broadcast), Market Analysis, and Sociology, all IQ/H.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Lens

Combat Experience (+20 points): You have served extensively as an embedded journalist with a military unit in a live combat zone. You have picked up critical skills for surviving in a battlefield. Add Combat Reflexes [15], Soldier/TL (A) IQ-1 [1]-10, and Tactics (H) IQ [4]-11.

Pulp Reporter

100 points

This template represents the image of the reporter in adventure fiction: brave, tenacious, and ingenious. These journalists are adventurers in the truest sense. They are typically able to handle themselves as well in a fight as they do at a press conference.

Pulp reporters are typically newspapermen (and -women), reflecting the age in which the pulps were written. However, with the miniaturization (or even implantation) of recording devices, broadcast journalists could easily become adventurers.

Allies and Contacts: The pulp reporter's contacts are wide-ranging and world-spanning. More often, also, a pulp reporter will have true allies willing to get involved in a tough story. These could be old war buddies, or maybe cops cleared of charges by the reporter's dogged investigations.

Equipment: Just as often as a microphone or notepad, a pulp reporter might have a gun tucked into his trousers or hidden in her handbag.

Attributes: **ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].

Advantages: Fit [5] plus 35 points chosen from Ally [varies], Charisma [5/level], Contact Group [varies], Contacts [varies], Danger Sense [15], Daredevil [15], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Favor [varies], Fearlessness [2/level], Intuition [15], Luck [varies], Patron [varies], Press Pass [1], Reputation [varies], Sensitive [5] or Empathy [15], Smooth Operator [15/level].

Disadvantages: -30 points chosen from Addiction (tobacco) [-5], Alcoholism [-15 or -20], Attentive [-1], Broad-Minded [-1], Chummy [-5], Code of Honor (Professional Journalist) [-5], Curious [-5*], Enemy [varies], Imaginative [-1], Honesty [-10*], Obsession [-5* or -10*], Stubbornness [-5], Truthfulness [-5*], Wealth (Struggling) [-10].

Primary Skills (24): Detect Lies (H) IQ [4]-12, Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-13, Research/TL (A) IQ+1 [4]-13. Pick one of Acting (A) IQ+1 [4]-13 and Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [4]-13, or Writing (A) IQ+2 [8]-14. Pick one of Area Knowledge (E) IQ+2 [4]-14 or Current Affairs/TL (any) (E) IQ+2 [4]-14.

Secondary Skills: Pick one of Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-12 or Guns/TL (any) (E) DX+2 [4]-12. Pick three of Body Language (A) Per [2]-12, Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-11, Electronics Operation/TL (Media) (A) IQ [2]-12, Intimidation (A) IQ [2]-12, or Observation (A) Per [2]-12.

Background Skills: 6 points chosen from Computer Operation/TL, IQ/E; Driving, Piloting/TL, and Stealth, DX/A; Propaganda/TL and Streetwise, both IQ/A; or Law (Print or Broadcast), Market Analysis, and Sociology, all IQ/H.

Lens

Psychic Scoop (+50 points): You possess mental powers beyond mere reporter's intuition. Maybe your ears itch when someone is lying to you, you can hear through walls, or you get glimpses of breaking stories before they happen. Add ESP Talent 1 [5] and 45 points chosen

from additional levels of ESP Talent and abilities from the ESP power (page 256 of the *Basic Set*).

Sample Reporters

The following are sample characters built using the Pulp Reporter and Journalist templates above. Carson Walburn is suitable as a PC and intended as an alternative to the traditional gumshoe in a 1950s investigation campaign; Molly O'Shea is his Ally/Dependent.

Carson Walburn

150 points

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0].

Basic Speed 5.5 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 10 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 7 [0].

CF: Western (Native) [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0]; French (Broken/Literate) [3]; German (Broken/None) [1].

Advantages: Ally (Molly O'Shea; 75% of starting points; 12 or less) [6]; Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Charisma 2 [10]; Contact (Johnson at City Hall; Effective Skill 15; Usually Reliable; 12 or less) [8]; Contact Group (Criminal; Effective Skill 15; Somewhat Reliable; 6 or less) [5]; Fit [5]; Intuition [15]; Photographic Memory [10]; Sensitive [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

Perks: Press Pass [1].

Disadvantages: Addiction (Tobacco; Cheap; Highly addictive; Legal) [-5]; Code of Honor (Professional Journalist) [-5]; Dependent (Molly O'Shea; no more than 75%; Loved one; 6 or less) [-2]; Enemy (Dirk Logan; equal in power to the PC; 9 or less; Rival) [-5]; Enemy (the Mob; 6 or less) [-15]; Honesty (9) [-15]; Obsession (Bring down McCarthy; Long-Term Goal; 15 or less) [-5]; Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Affects Intolerance of Communists; Alcohol Intolerance; Ashamed of his family; Only smokes Turkish cigarettes; Proud [-5].

Skills: Boating/TL6 (Unpowered)-12 (DX+1) [4]; Body Language (Human)-12 (Per+0) [2]; Brawling-14 (DX+3) [8]; Current Affairs/TL7 (People)-14 (IQ+2) [4]; Detect Lies-13* (Per+1) [4]; Driving/TL6 (Automobile)-11 (DX+0) [2]; Fast-Talk-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-13 (DX+2) [3]; Guns/TL6 (Rifle)-13 (DX+2) [4]; Intimidation-12 (Will+0) [2]; Law (Print)-12 (IQ+0) [4]; Observation-12 (Per+0) [2]; Research/TL7-13 (IQ+1) [3]; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-13 (IQ+1) [2]; Savoir-Faire (Military)-12 (IQ+0) [1]; Soldier/TL6-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Streetwise-12 (IQ+0) [2]; Writing-14 (IQ+2) [8].

* +1 from Sensitive

Carson Walburn was born to a well-placed Connecticut family in 1923, and he was afforded all

the comforts of wealth. He attended Deerfield Academy, where he was captain of the crew team. When he was young, Carson's parents toyed with emerging European fascism, but Carson didn't pay the idea much thought until December, 1940, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

By the time he was 18 and free of his father's control, Carson had set his mind on enlisting, and he soon sailed off to North Africa and Italy, where he served ably but without distinction. He was well-liked by his fellow soldiers and officers.

After he returned from the war, Carson turned his back on his parents and the family business and enrolled in Columbia University to pursue a degree in journalism. After graduating with honors, he took a job with the New York Globe, much to his dismay, working at the Society desk.

At the Globe, Carson met two fellow reporters, Dirk Logan and Molly O'Shea, and the trio quickly became friends. Unfortunately, the two men found each other vying for Molly's attention, and when Carson eventually won her hand, Dirk vowed to prove once and for all that he was the better man, both in love and reporting. The two have been bitter rivals ever since.

A few lucky (or perhaps not-so-lucky) breaks led Carson to a run-in with Mob boss Angelo "the Captain" Cantone. Carson's articles sent the Captain to prison, but the gangster's soldiers still harass Carson from time to time. More than once, the Cantone mob has targeted Molly, hoping to use her as leverage against her fiancée.

Today, Carson has his sights set on Senator Joseph McCarthy. He views the Senator's anti-communist witch hunts to be just as reprehensible as the persecution of Jews, Gypsies, and other "undesirables" conducted by Hitler and his ilk. While he publicly toes the line, Carson is slowly digging into McCarthy's activities, looking for anything that he can use to bring down one of the most powerful men in the nation.

Physically, Carson is a rugged young man in his late 20s. He stands 5'8" and weighs 145 lbs., with sandy blond hair and hazel eyes. He typically wears a well-tailored but relatively simple suit and hat. If he's expecting trouble, he'll carry a .38 snub revolver in a shoulder holster beneath his coat.

Molly O'Shea

100 points

ST 10 [0]; ***DX*** 11 [20]; ***IQ*** 11 [20]; ***HT*** 10 [0].

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5]; FP 10 [0].

Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Block 0; Dodge 8; Parry 0.

Social Background

TL: 7 [0].

CF: Western (Native) [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages: Ally (100% of starting points) (Favor; 9 or less) [1]; Appearance (Beautiful) [12]; Contact (Effective Skill 18) (6 or less; Usually Reliable) [3]; Contact Group (Effective Skill 12) (9 or less; Somewhat Reliable) [5]; Empathy [15]; Fearlessness 2 [4].

Perks: Honest Face; Press Pass [2].

Disadvantages: Code of Honor (Professional Journalist) [-5]; Curious (9 or less) [-7]; Stubbornness [-5]; Wealth (Struggling) [-10].

Quirks: Attentive; Broad-Minded; Imaginative [-3].

Skills: Acting-10 (IQ-1) [1]; Area Knowledge (New York City)-13 (IQ+2) [4]; Body Language (Human)-12 (Per+0) [2]; Carousing-11 (HT+1) [2]; Dancing-11 (DX+0) [2]; Detect Lies-15* (Per+3) [4]; Diplomacy-10 (IQ-1) [2]; Fast-Talk-12 (IQ+1) [4]; Guns/TL7 (Pistol)-11 (DX+0) [1]; Observation-12 (Per+0) [2]; Research/TL7-12 (IQ+1) [3]; Sex Appeal-13† (HT+3) [1]; Singing-10 (HT+0) [1]; Sociology-10 (IQ-1) [2]; Stealth-11 (DX+0) [2]; Streetwise-11 (IQ+0) [2]; Writing-13 (IQ+2) [8].

* +3 from Empathy

† +4 from Appearance

Molly O'Shea was born in Queens in 1927 and spent her childhood running all over New York City. Several of her older brothers are police officers, and Molly got to know a lot of New York's finest quite well. Many of them pass her information from time to time. One, Officer Sean Loughlin, owes her big after she introduced him to her sister, Mary. Their daughter, Liza, just turned three.

Molly talked her way onto the staff of the New York Globe at the age of 17, and the shortage of experienced journalists led to the "girl reporter" getting quite a few decent assignments. After the war, however, she was put back on more "feminine" topics, where she chafes vocally.

Still, the Globe introduced her to Carson Walburn, so the job wasn't all that bad. When Carson joined the paper, Molly had already been on staff 6 years, and she took it upon herself to show the college boy a thing or two about being a newspaperman. The two quickly fell in love, and Carson relies on her more and more professionally as well as he rises through the paper's ranks. As for her own career, Molly thinks that television is the future. She's beginning to look into broadcast journalism, a practically unexplored field.

Molly is a strikingly good-looking young woman in her mid-20s. She has fire red hair and green eyes and is slim and leggy at 5'7", a trait she accentuates with long, slender skirts.

Article publication date: November 23, 2007

Tell us what you think -- **Rate this article!**

- ☐ This article was a waste of time and electrons. Don't do stuff like this anymore.
- ☐ This article didn't do a whole lot for me, but it wasn't a complete loss.
- ☐ This article was fine. Informative, fun to read and worth my time.
- ☐ This article was very good. I will use this material, run this adventure, check out this game -- it had a positive impact on my gaming.

- ☐ This article rocked! If all your articles were like this, I wouldn't have to read anything else in my life but *Pyramid*.

For more info, visit the [ratings page!](#).

Copyright © 2007 by [Steve Jackson Games](#). All rights reserved. Pyramid subscribers are permitted to read this article online, or download it and print out a single hardcopy for personal use. Copying this text to any other online system or BBS, or making more than one hardcopy, is *strictly prohibited*. So please don't. And if you encounter copies of this article elsewhere on the web, please report it to webmaster@sjgames.com.



[Home](#) - [Subscribe!](#) - [Current Issue](#) - [Playtesting](#) - [Chat](#) - [Advertising](#) - [Index of Advertisers](#) - [Feedback](#)