GURPS

BEST OF

PYRAMID

Volume 2

Campaign Settings,
Optional Rules,
and Adventures
from *Pyramid* Magazine

J. Miracola

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

GURPS

BEST OF PYRAMID Volume 2

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INTRODUCTION

We live in an era where we write emails to people, then grow impatient if we don't get a reply in an hour. (Or at least *I* do.) But when *Pyramid* #1 came out in 1993, instantaneous communications were nowhere near as prevalent as today. To put it in perspective, **GURPS Cyberworld** came out at the same time as that first issue; in the information on the first page it invites folks to call up Steve Jackson Games' BBS, allowing connection speeds of up to 2400 baud! (To be fair, that text seems to be older, as the first issue of *Pyramid* also says that connection speeds of 9600 and 14.4k baud are possible. Then again, the **Cyberworld** universe of the year 2140 postulated the existence of mass storage CDs that can hold 10 gigs of data, or about 60% of what today's DVD can hold . . . proving yet again the difference between science fiction and science fact is that science fiction is believable.)

Anyway, in the early days of *Pyramid* it was difficult to determine what would emerge as "classics." Oh, sure, there were some articles that stood out early on; "The Hole," for example, was from that very first issue, and it would've been shocking if it didn't spark the imagination of our fledgling readership. But the reaction towards other pieces must have been surprising; "Unlimited Mana," for example, still ranks in our archives (as of this writing) as the number one rated article!

But now, with the passage of time and the clear eyes of experience, we're able to see what other classics from the paper days of *Pyramid* deserve to be brought into TL8. And choosing these articles hasn't been easy; there were a ton of neat articles crammed into 30 issues. (Unlike, say, my gaming notes from the early '90s . . . where phrases like "exploded his very brain" and made-up songs like "Metagirl" still haunt me. And I won't even talk about my first fantasy

roleplaying mage named Zappo Zam.) And, like **Best of Pyramid Volume 1,** we've gone over the articles and made sure they have been updated to take into account whatever new developments have happened in the **GURPS** line. (Remember the horrible dark ages before **GURPS Compendium I** and **II?**) And we've even added some completely new material in a couple of places.
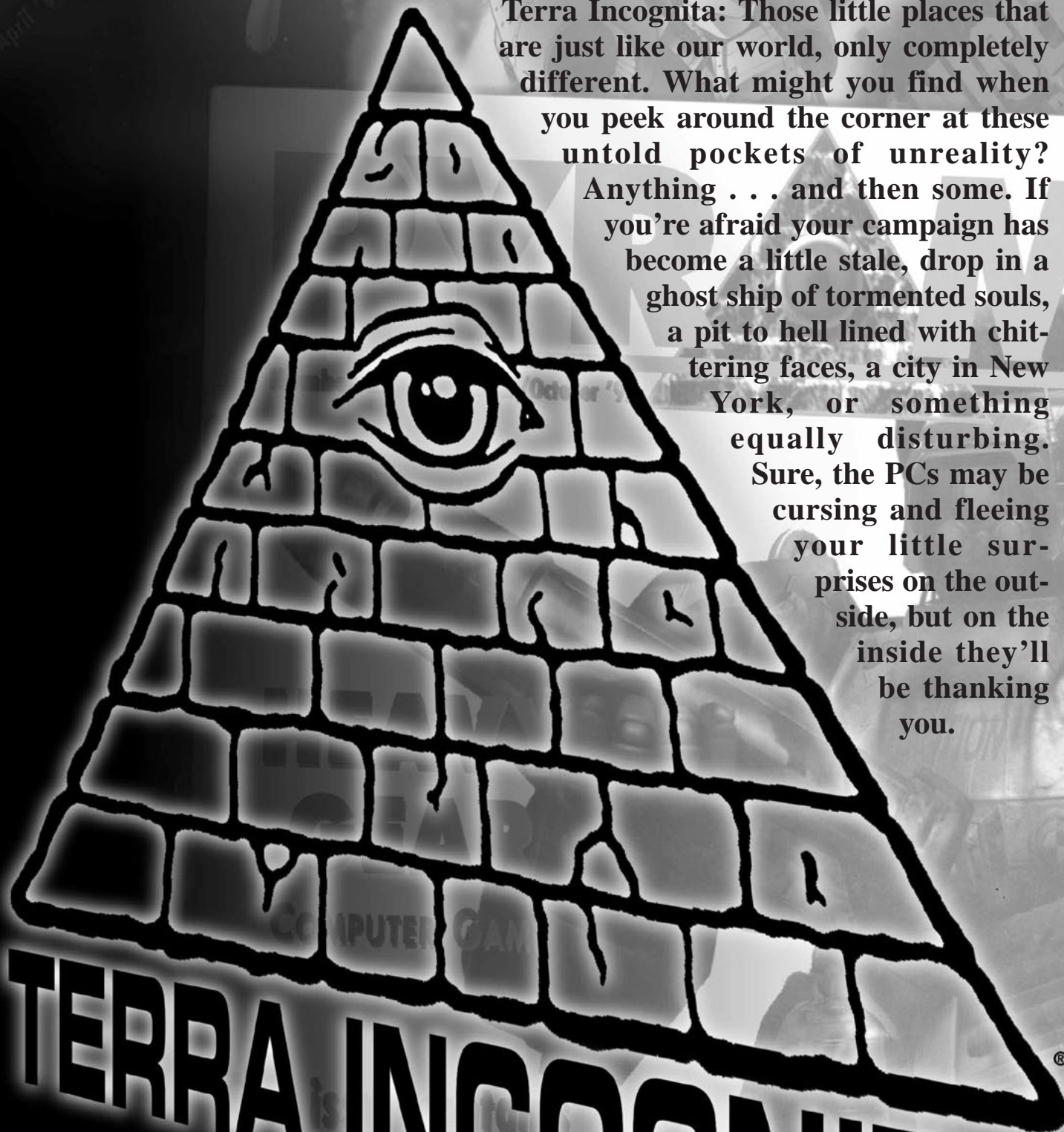
The theme of this volume seems to be portability; there are at least dozens of ideas, scenarios, characters, rules, and worlds that will fit in many campaigns. We have a planet where robots rule, a pawn shop with a sinister secret, a city steeped in the madness of a legacy of evil, a diplomatic first contact in space, and a near-future of unraveling conspiracies. We have a plethora of cursed items, waiting to corrupt the greedy or unsuspecting. We have bottomless pits and U-Store-Its. And what game *wouldn't* benefit from a time-traveling hotel? For practically any time, any place, any background (sound familiar?) there should be *something* you can scavenge for your own games. And most of these ideas can be used whole cloth for many campaigns. (I must confess, however, that if the number of back issue articles is any indication, the bleak future of cyberpunk worlds must have seemed more likely in the early '90s than today. But at least they aren't outdated, like the scads of near-now nuclear holocaust games from the '80s.)

We're happy to look back fondly on the legacy of the paper days of *Pyramid*. I can only hope folks will look back in 2008 at the tenth anniversary of the electronic version of *Pyramid* with such fond memories. And I also hope that these articles – in our opinion, more of the best that *Pyramid* has to offer – will help you create your own fond memories.

And many years from now, you may write your friends an email to reminisce about these campaign settings, weird artifacts, and adventures. And when you do, the impatience of the entire universe will have advanced such that you'll presume your friends have been devoured by wolverines when they haven't replied in 15 minutes.

– Steven Marsh

Terra Incognita: Those little places that are just like our world, only completely different. What might you find when you peek around the corner at these untold pockets of unreality? Anything . . . and then some. If you're afraid your campaign has become a little stale, drop in a ghost ship of tormented souls, a pit to hell lined with chittering faces, a city in New York, or something equally disturbing. Sure, the PCs may be cursing and fleeing your little surprises on the outside, but on the inside they'll be thanking you.

TERRA INCOGNITA

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Sanctuary
by Aaron Richardson

The city of Sanctuary lies about ten miles to the north of its sister city, New York, in the United States. Around 1850 it began as a small community of religious outcasts who had found themselves persecuted in the Big Apple. Various denominations of Protestants, Catholics, and even pagan worshippers settled in the area in hopes of becoming truly free to practice their religion.

Representing these denominations, 13 men and women gathered to create what is perhaps the world's most powerful magic item. They knew the variety of religions practiced within Sanctuary meant that eventually discord would strike. The 13 colonists each created a powerful icon of their religion, then molded all of those into a single golden sphere. They then endowed it with a small bit of essence from each of the members until the sphere began to glow a blinding, bright green. The colonists then buried the sphere in an abandoned well, never to remove it again.

Over the years, the sphere held the community of Sanctuary together as planned and, at times, brought good luck to the town. Eventually, when masses of immigrants began to come over on boats from the old countries, they became magically drawn to Sanctuary and the populace grew in leaps and bounds. Contractors and investors soon flocked to the small community. Within a decade, Sanctuary became a towering sprawl that rivaled even the mighty New York.

However, all the towering skyscrapers that dotted the skyline and all the city hype could not hide the true reason for the city's success.

Along with bringing fame and fortune to the city, the sphere also unconsciously brought the rich, the greedy, and more importantly, the weird. Various magicians, undead, and other-worlders began to dwell in the shadows of Sanctuary below the perception of the "normal" humans. Time began to become unstable in certain areas, and creative scientists began to grow increasingly mad. Eventually, one man deduced the city's dark secret: Adrian Chase.

Chase, a philosophy professor at the University of New York: Sanctuary, quickly put together a string of odd events that eventually led to the discovery of the sphere. In a single motion, Adrian dropped into the ancient, barren well . . . and came out again. Endowed with massive magical abilities, Adrian began his small, meager corporation: Chase Industries. Within two years, Chase Industries grew to become the city's largest company. Adrian's powers only stretched as far as the city limits, however, and he found his company trapped within the confines of Sanctuary. Dismayed at his power's limitation, Chase committed suicide in his office at the Chase Center. His 37-year-old son, Adrian Chase Jr., was left with the company and ruined it, leaving it a shadow of its previous golden-age self.

During the first Chase dynasty, the city became more and more crime-infested as the sphere started to lose its magical, binding hold. The creatures of the night started to run rampant through the city until a group of religious fanatics calling themselves the Inquisition arrived. The Inquisition secretly began to wage a war with the non-humans of the city, but merely served to keep the beasts at a standstill. Eventually, the weirdness cooled down, some say with the death of Adrian Chase. Given such, the Inquisition disbanded and Sanctuary returned to quasi-normal.

In 1987, a young man from the Chase heritage began to financially reclaim his ancestor's empire. By 1995, Ambrose Chase had single-handedly rebuilt Chase Industries from its shadows. The strange happenings and ambiance also returned to Sanctuary, and have endured for the last three years.
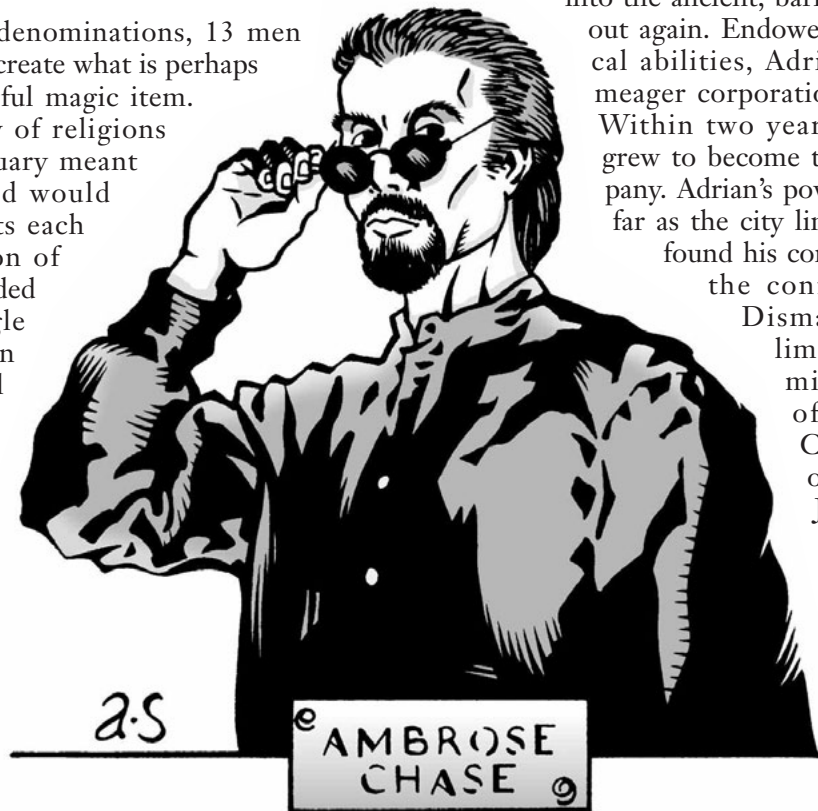
People and Places of Modern Day Sanctuary

Chase Industries and Ambrose Chase

With the new eruption of success spurred by Ambrose Chase, Chase Industries has entered its second dynasty. The new dynasty relies heavily on the scientific developments that Ambrose Chase brought with him, rather than the banking and investment power Adrian Chase held. Some things never change, however. Over half of the politicians in Sanctuary are owned either directly or otherwise by Chase Industries. Along with its strong political influences, the company also holds most of the economic chips in the city, with over a quarter of the businesses making money for the empire in some manner or another. With the advent of its new management, Chase Industries is no longer held to the boundaries of Sanctuary, and has recently begun a new software division to complement its existing physical products. The headquarters for the Sanctuary-based company is the Chase Center, the same building that the first dynasty ended in. Chase Center stands directly in the middle of Sanctuary and is surrounded by a two-block-wide public square (called, of course, Chase Square).

All of this can be attributed to Ambrose Chase. Said to be the grandson of Adrian Chase Sr., Ambrose has become both a media darling and a city savior. His major contributions to various charities, his public appearances and his squeaky-clean record all indicate a rather reformed Chase family name. Unfortunately for Sanctuary, this is all an act. Ambrose, behind closed doors, has one thought, and one thought only: the utter control of Sanctuary. Many times, Ambrose has made deals with various criminal organizations to gain some of his more illegal assets. Recently, Ambrose has also placed a major importance on the quest for immortality. This pursuit has not yielded any results . . . yet.

The Dove and its Denizens

The first Catholic church built in Sanctuary is perhaps one of the most beautiful sites in the city. The Dove, as it is called (due to the large marble dove carved outside its doors), once served as Sanctuary's haven from the evil and weird events invading it from the shadows. Now that the city's lower east side has become the center for crime, the Dove has been abandoned by its helpless victims and holy men and replaced by the very thing the victims were fleeing. Vampires, werewolves, murderers, freaks, abominations, aliens, and everything else inhuman have been welcomed into the Dove for protection.

To ensure the peace, one of the most powerful inhabitants of the old church, Bishop, has become the self-appointed caretaker and law within the holy walls. Within the lower east side, the Dove is now the one place to avoid at night at all costs; not even the authorities travel within four blocks of the church for fear of what they might find.

It is not just ordinary fear that keeps the police from coming near the Dove, however. It is no secret that the Dove has attracted a lot of non-humans to its doors. Behind the facade of the shelter lies a being (whose existence is known only to Bishop) of incredible psionic power. This being, an immense brain that lives in a room-sized glass container, calls itself Pope Thalamus. The Pope controls people all over the city through its extensive psi skills. Bishop, once a parish priest of the Dove, was called to the Pope one night on a whim to see the old building. Once there, the Pope revealed itself and its plan for justice in Sanctuary to the priest. The priest accepted the Pope's offer for a position in its dream, and was psionically augmented into the powerful Bishop. The Pope, and now Bishop, both work tirelessly for one dream: to bring about the protection of freedom and rights the non-humans deserve.

The Inquisition

The Inquisition originally began in the late 1800s during the first Chase dynasty, taking its name from the ancient Christian inquisitors of old. The new Inquisition believed that Sanctuary was the new center of evil in the world; they probably weren't too far off. With this belief guiding them, their small membership became full-time "monster hunters." Anything not human was considered to be a tool of evil and was to be killed. When Adrian Chase died, his absorbed magical power was released and bathed the city in a calming wave of power. Many of the non-humans and other weirdness disappeared in Sanctuary and put the Inquisition out of business. In 1995, the magical bath in which the city had been calmed began to wear off, and the weirdness started again. With the new influx of "evil," the Inquisition has begun to gather its members again.

Sanctuary Police Department

Over half of the politicians in Sanctuary are in Chase Industries' back pocket, including the mayor and the district attorney. Perhaps the only organization untouched by this corruption is the police force, whose hands are tied by their corrupt bosses. One of the uncorrupted is Captain Kris Mind. Mr. Kris, as he likes to be called, is a hard-core militant who understands that his city is going to hell in a handbasket. He knows that Ambrose owns his boss and his boss' boss and his boss above him, and he doesn't care. Kris has been called the "Pillar of the Community" by the media because of his strong will and determination on behalf of the people of his city. Kris is the founder of NightBeat, a select group of individual officers that have worked on uncovering the city's secrets, layer by painful layer. He knows there is something out there; he just hasn't been able to put his finger on it.

Adventure Seeds

• Ambrose Chase has gained access (or outright created) a time machine, and plans to go back through time to find out what secrets his grandfather held before he committed suicide.

• Chase Industries' genetics division has been experimenting on the often-forgotten homeless in Sanctuary, and a series of bizarre creatures have been spotted around the city, all looking for an end to their pain. Pope Thalamus wants to help them. Ambrose and the Inquisition want to kill them. The police are caught in the middle.

• In the Sanctuary Museum of the Arts, a mystical tome of the Incas is supposed to arrive. Legends say that whoever masters the book's code will live forever. The problem is that the truck bringing it was hijacked on the way to the museum by someone other than Ambrose, who will do anything to get the tome.

• Three magician brothers waged a war ages ago until they suspended themselves by a miscast spell. Now the spell has worn off, and the three brothers are gathering their strength again in a battle that will surely destroy all of Sanctuary.

• The sphere, losing its power, must be recharged. In order to do this, 13 members of the city's different beliefs must be brought together to help recharge it so that peace can once again be brought to Sanctuary. The problem is that Adrian Chase Sr. now haunts and protects the sphere from all intruders.
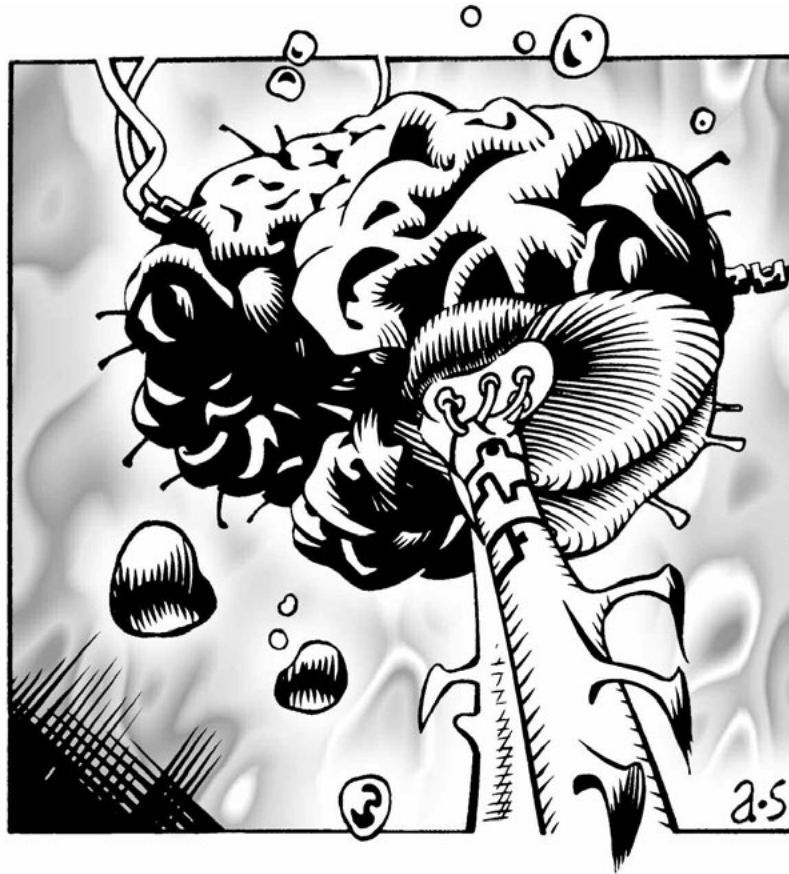
The Ghost Ship
by Graeme Davis

Even in the most prosaic of no-magic, real-world campaigns, the sea retains its mystery. The ghost ship is mentioned briefly in **GURPS Horror**, but has potential in almost any kind of campaign.

There have been ghost ships for as long as there have been ships. The Vikings told tales of the *draugr*, drowned crews who sought to drag others into the depths. When Columbus discovered the Sargasso Sea, tales sprang up of centuries-old hulks becalmed there, home to ghostly crews and worse. Phantom vessels of all ages have been reported, from classical galleys to World War II landing craft.

Most famous of all is the *Flying Dutchman*, said to be doomed to sail the oceans forever since her captain defied God in the teeth of a storm round the Cape of Good Hope. She has been sighted on many occasions: in 1881, more than a dozen sailors aboard a British warship saw the phantom vessel – including Midshipman HRH the Prince of Wales, later King George V; in 1939, around a hundred people saw her pass a popular beach near Cape Town in South Africa.

Ghost ships can enliven any sea voyage. Depending on presentation, the encounter can range from vaguely unsettling to down-right terrifying.

The best build-up to an encounter is either a dead calm or a violent storm. In a calm, fog thickens around the PCs' vessel until visibility is no more than a few feet and sound is weirdly distorted. Suddenly, the ghost ship appears, gliding silently out of the fog. In a storm, the ghost ship is sighted some distance away and gains steadily on the PCs' vessel regardless of the conditions.

From here, the encounter can open out in a number of ways. The most straightforward is an attack – the ghost ship draws alongside the PCs' vessel and her undead crew swarms aboard. More unsettling in many ways is for the ghost ship draw alongside, giving the PCs and their companions a good look at the rotting hull and a couple of dead or undead crewmen – and then vanish. If the ghost ship looks modern and normal, the PCs may have no indication of her true nature until she disappears. They may even have a brief conversation with the ghost ship's captain by bullhorn, megaphone, or radio (depending on the tech level). Worse yet, the ghost ship might disappear with one or more of the PCs and/or their NPC allies aboard; heroes will find themselves thrown into a new adventure, while companions may never be seen again.

Like any ghost, a ghost ship can appear for various reasons. She may be an echo of a past event, replaying her grisly demise over and over. The crew may be doomed to wander the seas until they can harvest enough souls to buy their passage to the next world, in which case they will attack every vessel they encounter. Or there may be some other condition to be fulfilled: atonement for some past misdeed, a message for their living descendants, or some vital cargo – gold, documents or even souls – that must reach its destination. Almost any motive that could drive a landlubbing ghost can be adapted for a ghost ship.
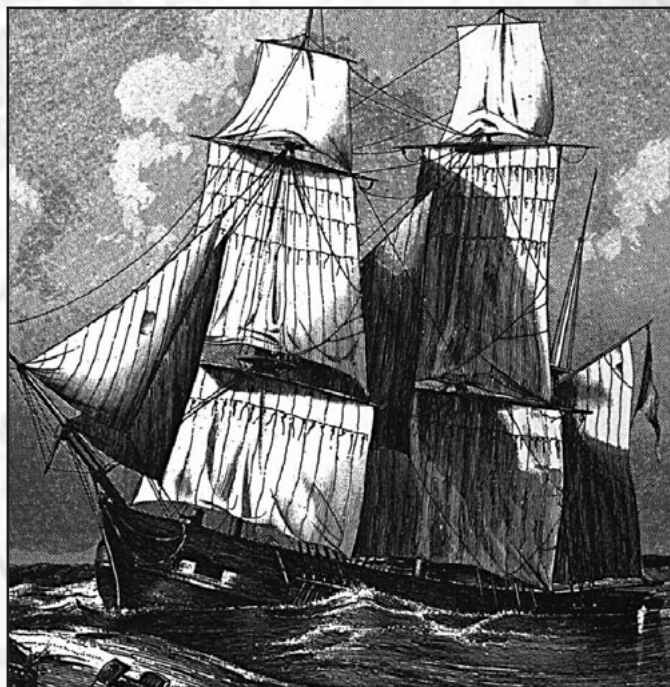
Some ghost ships are deserted, apparently sailing themselves. Others may be crewed by anything from a generic-fantasy mix of creatures – a ghost or demon captain with a crew of skeletons, draugr, zombies, or whatever – to a crew who look perfectly solid, alive, and normal (apart from having damp, icy skin and leaving wet footprints wherever they go, that is). More obvious undead crews are better for action-adventure encounters, while the more lifelike they are, the more horrifying is the final discovery that they are (un)dead.

The results of a ghost ship encounter can be as varied as the encounter itself. Sightings are commonly held to be omens of bad luck; they might presage some disaster, or simply afflict everyone aboard with the Unlucky disadvantage for the rest of the voyage. When the future King George V saw the *Flying Dutchman*, the crewman who first sighted the phantom ship fell to his death from the rigging shortly afterward. Closer encounters might result in the heroes gaining some kind of information, a lead into a campaign subplot or a sidetrack adventure, or just a good, healthy scare.

SAN JUAN IN THE ONE-AND-TWENTY

for Cyberworld and CthulhuPunk
by Steven J. Hammond

Sí, breetva, me city is not what it used to be. I have seen pictures and heard the dyadooshkas' stories; it was once a great place. Sí, sí, the darkness of the swamp comes for San Juan now . . . As it will soon come for us all.

Four hundred years ago San Juan, Puerto Rico, was the center of Spanish power in the Caribbean; now it lies in ruin. Gradually the rising sea has flooded the remains of the city, and the mangrove swamps are slowly taking root and spreading. Already they form a dark canopy over parts of the city, bringing a variety of tropical wildlife with them. As always, a small piece of humanity struggles to scratch out an existence in the remains. All that is left of a once proud city is a few C4s and nullos with nowhere else to go.

The Downfall

The beginning of the end for San Juan was the Tolliver's Disease epidemic, which started in 1997, followed by hurricane Abner in 1998. The Toller infected over 60% of San Juan's population before a vaccine was found in 2021. When Abner struck, fear of the disease slowed the evacuation of San Juan as the other Puerto Rican cities violently tried to keep the disease from spreading. Over 2,000 people were killed by the hurricane – even more died in the starvation that followed. Help was slow to come to the infected city.

As the people were rebuilding from Abner, hurricane Marko struck with even more fury in the year 2000.

The governor was killed during the riots that followed as people fought over the remaining food and water. The U.S. government declared a state of emergency and sent troops to restore order. That year the new governor, Arturo Louis Perez Acevedo, temporarily moved the capital of the island to the centrally located city of Caguas. When oil was discovered in the central mountains the importance of Caguas grew, casting a shadow over San Juan. In 2002, U.S. pressure forced Puerto Rico to become a state and Caguas became the permanent capital.

The Grand Slam of 2006 forced the hotels and tourist areas to shut down, never to reopen. As the world's economy recovered, the southern city of Ponce, which was better protected from the hurricanes, became the new tourist haven. When alternative energy sources reduced the importance of oil, North American Technologies converted the refineries in and around Caguas into high-strength polymer plants. With little remaining industry or tourism, San Juan's airport was no longer profitable and closed in 2009. The newly opened airport in Ponce took up the slack.

As the polar caps started to melt from global warming, the world's nations worked to protect the coastal cities. The Puerto Rican people could not expend crucial labor and resources to save the already dying San Juan, so the ocean began claiming the city. In 2013, president Patterson signed an executive order for the evacuation and abandonment of San Juan. The remaining residents were relocated to other parts of the island.

The City and the Swamp

San Juan is very old, and many of the buildings reflect the Spanish origins of the Puerto Rican people. The buildings are typically two- or three-story structures made of cement or cut stone. The walls were covered with plaster and painted bright colors. Today, most of the plaster has been washed away by the elements. The buildings sit next to one another, like older European cities, forming a solid wall along the cobblestone streets. The beach front resort area, known as Condado Beach, is of much more recent design. These newer buildings tend to be high-rise hotels and apartment or condominium complexes – monuments of cement and glass. Many of these high-rise buildings have collapsed as the waves eat away at their foundations. The parts of the city south of Condado are a diverse mix of old and new architecture.

The sea level has risen 12 feet since the city was abandoned, flooding most of San Juan to at least waist level. Debris from the fallen buildings forms a breakwater which keeps the interior waters calm. As the fallen buildings wash away, the waves collapse new ones and the ocean gradually devours the city.

In the calm interior, mangrove trees have taken root in and around the various buildings, forming a dark canopy over a brackish swamp. The leafy branches drop new roots into the water and the tree spreads, often forming impenetrable thickets. Closer to the open ocean the trees have a harder time, and many areas are wide open. Here corals are starting to form and many ocean fishes find shelter in the buildings.

Palm trees and other tropical plants grow wild in the areas above sea level. Some of these trees are fruit bearing and provide an important resource for the people who struggle to survive here. The dry regions include part of the peninsula that holds Old San Juan and

Castillo del Morro (see below). Old San Juan is the original Spanish settlement. Protected by a high stone wall on one side, Old San Juan slopes down to a flooded port area on the other.

San Juan has become a haven for criminals, particularly smugglers. Its easy access to the ocean and many hiding places make it an ideal meeting place for those involved in the "small package trade." Many of the weapons bound for the Echeveristas in Cuba come through here, as well as drugs headed for the United States. Criminals and people running from the government – any government – hide here as well. NERCC made a few attempts to sweep San Juan several years ago, but met with heavy casualties and little success. Recently, NERCC has made three small raids with helicopters, targeting specific people. In two of the attempts, a small strike team landed on a rooftop and captured those inside. During the third attempt, helicopters fired rockets from a distance to destroy a building. Rumor has it this was to stop an arms shipment to the Echeveristas.
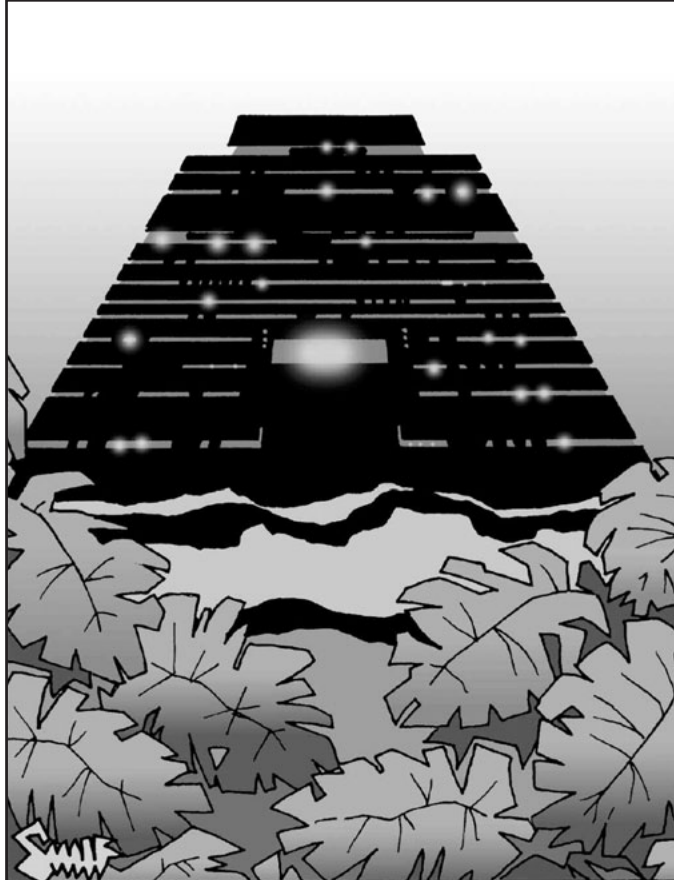
Besides the smugglers and criminals, *las Ratas* also make their homes in San Juan. The Rats are people who do not have anywhere else to go. They scratch their meager existence out of fish, tropical fruits, and what they can scavenge from the fallen buildings.

Castillo del Morro

The fortress *Castillo del Morro* was the keystone of the Spanish defense of Puerto Rico. It sits high on what used to be a peninsula overlooking the entrance to San Juan harbor. The peninsula is now an island. However, the stone fort and surrounding city is still intact. There are tunnels connecting the fort to *Fuerte San Cristobal*, a smaller flooded fort on the northern shore, and other locations. Most of these tunnels are full of water, but there may still be some dry sections.

The Mordella cartel maintains a small garrison here, to hide dealers who are too hot to keep stateside and to dilute drugs before sending them on for distribution. NERCC has tried several times to shut the fortress down, but the Mordella are very well-connected and NERCC always finds the castle empty. It is also rumored that another 'Traff has a drug processing plant and a large weapon stockpile somewhere in the city.

In The Campaign

Depending on the specific campaign, there are several reasons for the characters to go to San Juan. In all of these cases, San Juan is perfect for a long, "Hollywood-style" chase and gun fight.

GURPS Cyberworld

Smugglers. The characters have something they need to buy, sell, or move without attracting too much attention. San Juan is a natural place to conclude the deal, and a natural place for the deal to go sour. The characters could be smugglers themselves, using San Juan frequently in their dealings.

A Place to Hide. Things have gotten a little too hot recently for the characters, and perhaps a tropical vacation is needed while things cool down. Of course, the group they are hiding from could have people hiding in San Juan also . . .

The Bounty. The PCs have been hired to eliminate someone who knows too much and is hiding in San Juan. The other residents may not be too pleased to have bounty hunters wandering around in the city.

Gold. The waters near Puerto Rico were a hot bed of pirate activity during the 16th and 17th centuries. There are many stories of undiscovered pirate gold still buried on the small islands around Puerto Rico. Perhaps one of those stories is true. San Juan provides a place to find an experienced guide and a place to hide when others hear of the characters' find.

GURPS CthulhuPunk

Deep Ones. These evil, aquatic creatures are a natural for the ruins of this old city. They could find worshippers and mates among *las Ratas* and work to spread their influence to the rest of the island.

Ghouls. The rising ocean has driven the local ghouls out of their tunnels. But the dark mangrove thickets and mazes of abandoned buildings are almost as good. They hide during the day, but by night they feed on the remains of the day's violence and the refuse of a dead city. They may even use small boats made from old wood and scraps of human society.

Hidden Cult. An evil cult is hiding in San Juan. They are sacrificing animals and people to summon one of the Great Old Ones. The characters need to find them in time to stop the summoning. However, the other inhabitants of San Juan generally don't like people snooping around. Can they be convinced of the danger they are in if they don't help the characters?

Fountain of Youth. Ponce de Leon, the original governor of Puerto Rico, is best known as the discoverer of Florida and the Bahamas. He discovered these places while searching for the legendary Fountain of Youth. Supposedly he never found it, but the secret might be buried with him in the flooded cathedral on the south side of Old San Juan. Even if the characters can find the fountain, can they afford the price to use it?

Other Cyberpunk Campaigns

While the history provided specifically matches that of **GURPS Cyberworld**, the essential elements are the increased frequency and ferocity of hurricanes and rising sea level. These side effects of global warming are common in cyberpunk games and literature. This makes it easy to incorporate San Juan into other campaign backgrounds. Some of the horror ideas above could naturally be incorporated into a cyberpunk game that includes magic, such as **Shadowrun**.

The Hotel Fuentes

by Fred Van Lente

Built in 1745 as a spa for European gentry visiting America, the Hotel Fuentes (pronounced FWEN-tays) remains legendary for the therapeutic tranquillity of its grounds. It's not hard to see why: this four-story Spanish hacienda boasts an Olympic-size swimming pool, a kitchen staff of internationally-trained chefs, and a sprawling floral garden complete with winding paths and miniature waterfalls. The resort has been in the family of current owner and manager Jorge Recuerdo for centuries, and he tells us that people still flock to the Fuentes to sample its fabled curative powers. Modern-day tourists should also find its prices – $135 a night for a multi-room suite, $70 a night for a single room, each decorated with facsimiles of 17th-century Spanish furniture – to be much-needed medicine for their wallets . . .

– from **The 100 Best Hotels
and Resorts in Florida**, *1994 ed.*

Guests of the Hotel Fuentes will find that reports of its curative powers have not been exaggerated. After spending more than 12 hours on its grounds, visitors will heal from wounds at the rate of five hit points daily, as if they had the Rapid Healing advantage. The ill gain renewed strength, making all HT rolls to recover from disease at +2. The serenity of the Fuentes bolsters the psyche as well as the body: characters make Will rolls at +2 to resist their mental disadvantages while staying at the hotel.

Extraordinary individuals may be disturbed by other aspects of the hotel, however. Guests with the appropriate skills (Carpentry, History, etc.) will realize that their rooms are not decorated with facsimiles of 17th-century furnishings but *actual pieces* from that period; their condition is so good, however, they appear as if they had just been completed last week! A linguist may note that many of the hotel employees speak in dialects or accents of English that have not been heard for hundreds of years – or don't exist . . . *yet.* The Absolute Timing advantage does not work in the Fuentes, and all Psi powers and spells function at a penalty of -4. A successful Detect Magic spell or Psychometry roll will reveal that there is a powerful "presence" on the hotel grounds which interferes with these abilities.

The Fuentes' Secret

The "presence" is an ancient rift in the space/time continuum upon which the Fuentes is built. Before settlers came to Florida, neighboring Indians found that exposure to the outer edges of the rift led to a serene sense of "timelessness" and the therapeutic effects described above. Since the rift manifests itself as a swirling pool of prismatic radiance, the Native Americans named it "The Fountain of Youth." However, at the center of the pool is a "hole in time," which, if entered, will whisk the hapless individual to a random point in Earth's history. After several of their number disappeared this way, the Indians declared the Fountain taboo.

Hotel Fuentes
OCALA, FLORIDA

FIRST FLOOR

Legend:
- ⊕ Teleport Platform
- **E** Elevator
- ▨ Cleaning/Janitorial Supplies
- ▲ M/F Restrooms
- ▤ Stairs

(Floor plan rooms labeled: E, H, C, D, I, A, B, F, G, 100, 102, 104, 106, 101, 103, 105, 108, 110, 112, 107, 109, 111)
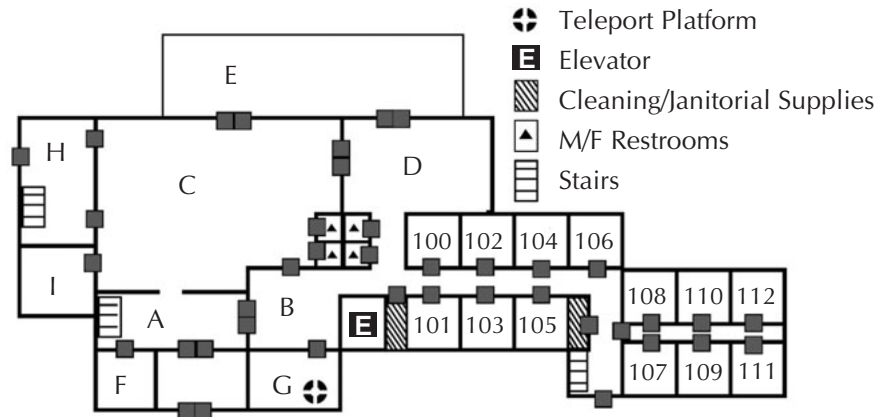
A. Lobby
B. Front Desk/ Gift Shop
C. Restaurant/Bar
D. Conference Hall
E. Patio
F. Security Office
G. Recuerdo's Office
H. Kitchen
I. Restaurant Mgr's. Office
J. Lounge
100-112: Employees' Quarters
200+: Guest Rooms (single w/bathroom)

FLOORS 2-4

N

(Floor plan: SUITE A, SUITE B, SUITE C, J, 00, 02, 04, 06, 01, 03, 05, 08, 10, 12, 07, 09, 11)
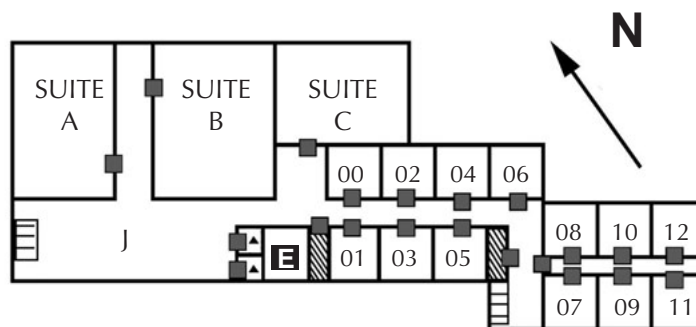
<u>NOT PICTURED</u>
Basement: Wine Cellar, Game Room, Boiler Room #1, Boiler Room #2, Loading Dock (accessible from SW staircase and elevator)
Sub-basement: Fountain Chamber (with 2nd teleport platform), Computer Room, Recuerdo's Chamber

Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon heard legends of the Fountain and misunderstood it to be a literal body of water. He mustered two expeditions to Florida to find it, but on the second, in 1521, he and his men were attacked by Seminole Indians and routed. One of the sailors, Jorge Recuerdo, was separated from his comrades and eventually stumbled across the rift on his own. Unfortunately, he waded too far into the pool and was sucked into the void at its center.

Recuerdo found himself in 11,000 A.D., when human beings have vanished from the Earth. The planet is ruled by the Tremex, a race of social insects which evolved to sentience in humanity's absence. The Tremex had mastered the incredibly advanced technology (nanotechnology, antigravity, and so forth) abandoned by mankind, and adapted it for their own use.

Recuerdo's appearance terrified the Tremex, since it seemed to realize their worst fears: that the humans would some day return to reclaim their forgotten technology. Recuerdo was captured by the largest confederation of Tremex hives in North America, where scholars were dismayed to learn that he knew even less about mankind's disappearance than they did. Recuerdo's execution seemed imminent, but the wily sailor, realizing the significance of the rift, volunteered to assist his captors: if they could build a time machine capable of harnessing the "hole" at the Fountain's center, he could return to the past to discover why the humans disappeared, and – more importantly, to the Tremex – if they planned to return. After a mind probe verified Recuerdo's trustworthiness, a hasty meeting of the confederation's Royal Council approved the plan and Tremex technicians hastily constructed the time machine.

Recuerdo went back in time to buy all the land around the Fountain, then built the Fuentes atop it to disguise its existence and provide a base for his operations (the hotel has existed since roughly 1525, but Recuerdo used Tremex technology to "cloak" its presence until the mid-18th century). The Fuentes' sub-basement houses the Fountain and the TL14 computer which controls the "hole." The sub-basement is accessible only from a TL14 teleportation platform hidden beneath the carpet in Recuerdo's office: the device scans genetic patterns and allows only the authorized to use it. Recuerdo's own room, strewn with high-tech gadgets and other souvenirs of his adventures, is also in the sub-basement (adventurers making a successful Architecture roll while inspecting the Fuentes from the outside will notice that the hotel's foundation has been sunk unusually deep for a building supposedly built in the 18th century; this would suggest the presence of more than one level underground).

The Hotel Today
(and Yesterday and Tomorrow...)

An ex-seminary student who became a sailor only to keep from starving, Recuerdo uses the Fountain to benefit mankind when he is not making reports to Tremex scholars. The Fuentes has absorbed most of the pool's powers and has been healing the infirm for centuries. Recuerdo also rescues people from historical disasters (the Black Death, invasion by the DreamReavers of Trevose, etc.) with the time machine and his ultra-tech devices, then employs them at the Hotel ("Martha, doesn't our maid look a lot like Amelia Earhart?"). Occasionally Recuerdo takes pity on guests with sicknesses of the soul. He may journey to the past to learn the fate of a lost relative, or to retrieve an object of great sentimental value. He has even been known to cure the mentally ill by taking them back in time to confront the event which triggered their illnesses.

Granted near-immortality by constant exposure to the Fountain, Recuerdo appears to be in his mid-forties, even though he was born in 1503 (a series of carefully-forged documents has led the authorities to believe that he is only one of a long line of Recuerdos). He has ST 10, DX 10, IQ 13, HT 11. He has the Empathy Advantage, and his disadvantages include Pacifism (Cannot kill) and Sense of Duty (Humanity). His skills are Black Powder Weapons-10, Body Sense-13, Diplomacy-19, Electronics Op/TL14-17, History-20, Navigation-14, Psychology-15, Seamanship-12, Theology-14 and Xenology-11. He speaks almost all languages on Earth (and a few that haven't been invented yet) at a skill level of at least 12.

The time machine itself has been disguised as the Fuentes' elevator (before the late 19th century, the elevator masqueraded as a "state of the art" dumbwaiter for transporting invalids between floors). Beneath the main control panel in the lift is a small slot. When a magnetic key card – owned only by Recuerdo and a handful of his most trusted staff – is inserted in the slot, a hidden panel slides back to reveal a keypad. After the destination date (down to the second) is punched into the keypad, the elevator automatically lowers into the Fountain in the sub-basement. The sub-basement computer informs the "hole" of the desired time, which then launches the elevator in that direction: first-time passengers will experience a dizzying sense of nausea before the elevator returns to the ground floor, opening its doors at the new time. Keep in mind that the hotel exists only from 1525 to 11,000 A.D. – time travelers going earlier or later than that will

find that the elevator opens to a swamp. If they leave, the doors will close and the elevator will disappear: they will be stranded in that era until someone decides to come back and fetch them! Fortunately, since the time machine itself is a TL14 device, there is little chance of anyone "hot-wiring" it anyway. Even if curious investigators manage to take the elevator for a joyride, a silent alarm on Recuerdo's watch will alert him to any unauthorized use. He can control the time machine manually from his quarters, and may dump the trespassers in some inaccessible epoch. Although Recuerdo doesn't want to hurt anyone, he and his staff will protect the Fuentes' secrets at all costs. His experience with Ponce de Leon taught him that unscrupulous individuals would seize the Fountain and use it for selfish ends if they ever learned of its existence!

In the Campaign

The Hotel Fuentes can fulfill several functions in most Earth-based campaigns.

Haven. The Fuentes' therapeutic powers make it an ideal spot for PCs to recuperate from a particularly grueling adventure. The characters arrive at the hotel thinking it an ordinary tourist trap, only to stumble across the truth during the course of their stay. Recuerdo uses his Empathy to identify needy and trustworthy guests, and might offer his help to the party if they are beset with particularly traumatic post-scenario problems: one adventurer may have suffered a nervous breakdown or another may have been lost to some disaster, either of which could be solved by a carefully-planned jaunt in the time machine. Refer to *GURPS Time Travel* for the pitfalls inherent in such enterprises.

Resource. After the party has gained Recuerdo's trust, the hotel becomes a hideout for PCs and their allies *during* adventures. Characters vexed by a thorny research problem can ask Recuerdo to go back in time to verify certain facts. Note that Recuerdo will prevent excessive use of the time machine by outsiders: he knows that the Fountain's powers must be used sparingly if they are to remain a secret. He will cooperate with the party as long as he feels their cause is just and that all other options have been exhausted.

Adventure Springboard. Once Recuerdo has provided the party with his aid, he asks them to return the favor. His research suggests that mankind disappeared from Earth around 6500 A.D., when an experiment in space/time travel went horribly awry: a dimensional transport device exploded, stranding humanity in a remote "pocket dimension," as well as creating the "hole in time" which the Fuentes is built on! Recuerdo hopes to rescue his fellow humans, since the fragments of the device have been scattered throughout Earth's history and there is some hope of rebuilding the machine. So as to not arouse the suspicions of his "employers," Recuerdo recruits the PCs to fetch the fragments for him. Unfortunately, the Tremex have discovered his duplicity and have dispatched an elite team of warriors through time to beat the adventurers to the fragments!

The Tremex

A Tremex is a dragonfly-like creature averaging 30mm in length, with multichromatic wings and a stinging barb at the end of its abdomen. They have DX 17, IQ 14 and HT 12. In flight they have a Move of 7, but when forced to use their six legs their Move is reduced to 3. Their ST is negligible, as are their hit points: one point of damage will kill a Tremex, but due to their size and maneuverability they have an effective PD of 12. Extreme Curiosity and Fanaticism (Hive) mark their Racial Personality. A thousand Tremex acting together may attack as a bee swarm (see p. B143), and there is 5 or less chance on 3d that a modern-day human is violently allergic to their sting: if a HT -2 roll to resist is failed, the victim will die within 1d days unless he receives proper medical treatment. However, since the Tremex have access to death rays and personal force fields, it is unlikely that they would resort to such primitive methods of combat. The GM should arm individual Tremex with TL14 weapons of his own devising, or devices from *GURPS Ultra-Tech* (the size difference may reduce the amount of damage done by these weapons, at the GM's discretion). The Tremex communicate with each other by vibrating their wings, although they could easily devise communicator devices to allow dialog with humans.

Tremex society is analogous to that of the modern-day ant. A single Queen rules over the hive or nest, which is maintained by female Workers, who perform a variety of tasks: advisor, technician, warrior, and so on. There are only 10 to 20 males, or Drones, to any given hive, but since their sole function is to impregnate the Queen, they lead lives of pampered luxury. Several hives are loosely organized into a Confederacy; each member hive's Queen serves on the Royal Council, which makes decisions affecting the entire Confederacy. Tremex hives are constantly squabbling over territorial rights and petty political intrigues, so these decisions are usually related to warfare.
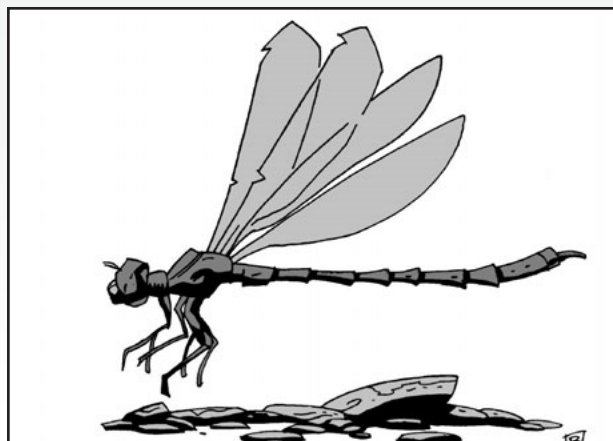
The Intercession

by John M. Ford

Every conflict needs a neutral ground. No matter how absolute and vicious the enmity between sides, there has to be a place where contact can safely be made. The Intercession is that place.

Its usual appearance is as a small inn or hotel, appropriate to the universe in which it appears. In the standard-issue fantasy world, it would be an inn with ceiling beams, wooden tables stained by decades of spilled ale, tiny rooms up the wooden staircase, past the swing-rated chandeliers. In a contemporary setting, it is a small townhouse hotel, or country bed-and-breakfast, with a discreet sign on the door – no neon, no Michelin rating, no credit cards. In space opera, it might be a hazy dive on the edge of the starport, or a self-contained orbital platform. If the war has been really vicious, it could be behind an inconspicuous door in the bombed-out shell of a once-grand hotel. And so on.

The important thing about The Intercession is not its appearance (which has been known to change, anyway); it is that, inside its door, all active forms of conflict are suspended. This applies not only to physical violence, but to such actions as non-consensual telepathy. Reading minds with the permission of the subject is allowed, and even encouraged. Most weapons must be surrendered upon entering, though no physical search is involved. This isn't a test of ingenuity in defining "weapons;" it doesn't apply to such "normal" items as eating knives. Members of cultures that require personal armament may keep it . . . the truth is, it won't do them any good anyway.

No one seems to know if the neutrality of the place is simply by mutual agreement among all the parties who use it, or if it is enforced by a Higher Power. The rules are normally observed without problems; people who find The Intercession, or are sent there, either understand already what it's for or learn very quickly.

As the saying goes, however, there's always two percent who don't get the word, and an awful lot of them are player characters. People who insist on attempting violence tend to find Murphy smiling upon them especially brightly: guns misfire, swords get stuck in scabbards, laser optics are dirty and batteries are dead, spellcasters get the hiccups, blunt instruments hang up on the drapes, ninjas trip on loose boards, vampires get an awful toothache . . .

In a campaign where opponents are normally beyond truce, such as *In Nomine,* it may be necessary to clearly state that something beyond either side keeps the peace, that the truce is not an invitation to clever treachery. (The motto above the bar, taken from Dante, is "This Has Been Willed Where What is Willed Must Be." Wherever that is.) There are, of course, limits: Cthulhu isn't going to show up for a quiet brandy with his mortal opponents, but some of his human minions might. (Especially if they had just lost control of one of their summonings. Again.)

Vampire: The Masquerade already contains a version of this idea, as "Elysium." In a *Vampire* campaign, The Intercession might exist as a point of contact between Kindred and others – Lupines, for instance, or even vampire-hunters. Perhaps the Government's Weird Incidents Investigative Team goes there to meet Kindred, the joke being that the vampires are preserving the Masquerade by pretending to be the Illuminati, or extraterrestrials . . .

It is generally assumed that people in The Intercession tell the truth, or at least what they believe to be the truth. This can be especially important in, say, an espionage campaign, where everyone is normally lying about their knowledge and intentions. It is up to the GM, however, whether honesty is enforced, normally observed, or purely optional.

The Intercession is operated by four people. As with the decor, their appearance fits the local background: human in a human world, a mix of species in a fantasy or SF setting. (They are described here as human merely to set the general tone; feel free to modify appropriately.) All can speak any language the visitors know, including sign languages. They display telepathy only if there is absolutely no other way for visitors to communicate.

Dante seems to be in charge. He is a large, blond, bearded man, always genial and polite, but very firm about the rules of the house. He greets visitors just inside the door, checks baggage and weapons, and invites everyone into the bar (or equivalent) for a friendly drink (or whatever). Nobody is given a bill here, and tips are politely refused. (In a realistic world, the house is financed by the groups that use it for meetings; in a fantastic setting, who knows?)

Beatrice is slender and darkly ethereal. She speaks very little. She handles practical affairs: providing supplies or equipment (say, paper and pens, a Swahili dictionary, or a laptop computer), arranging to have things mended or replaced.

Orpheus is slight and dark, quite young in appearance. His specialty is communications: working out the details of conversations between visitors, finding languages they can mutually understand. His presence has a calming effect on others.

Eurydice is tall, strong, and fair. She is a magnificent cook, and the house physician. Her medical ability is the best available in the outside world. If magic works outside, she has all the known healing spells; if high technology exists, there will be a fully equipped surgery.

No other staff are ever seen, though somehow the beds get made and the place stays clean. This does not mean that the place has to be supernatural; a sufficiently efficient house staff is indistinguishable from magic.

It is important to note that while the staff help to make communications possible between visitors, they are not there to actually negotiate, assist in agreements, or even suggest solutions. The Intercession is a place for the opposing sides to meet and look for solutions, not in itself a solution.

Visitors may stay in the comfortable rooms (the hotel always has Just Enough Space) for as long as the situation requires: the duration of negotiations, the time it takes an injured party to heal. It may not be used simply to hide out from the hostilities outside, though an important NPC may be sheltered there temporarily (see below).

Communication with the outside world is available, but limited to information access, and strictly one-way. If newspapers, television, and computer datanets exist outside, they will be available inside; Beatrice can come up with almost any book the visitors might need. However, direct communication is not allowed: visitors may watch television or read the papers to find out how the war is going, but not send or receive letters. "I have to check with Headquarters" is no excuse: the people at The Intercession have the authority to do what's necessary, or they don't get in.

Computer access is a particular case. Any net that exists can be accessed from The Intercession, but only for purposes of obtaining information from data stores – not for e-mail. Illegal system cracking, however, might be allowed – say, to produce the secret evidence that would convince the Other Side that "we didn't really do that," or scrambling the go-codes for the mad dictator's nuclear bombers.

In the Campaign

At the Beginning: The most straightforward use of The Intercession is to set up an adventure: the group is sent there to meet with agents of the Opposition, who explain why they need the enemy's help. Maybe somebody on their side is about to Go Too Far. Or one of the heroes' superiors has gone renegade, and only someone on the inside can stop him. Or it's the good old Third Party that wants to blow up Our Side and Theirs.

An entire spy campaign could be built around this idea: the players are a Special Liaison Team whose specific job is to stay in touch with the Other Side (presumably a team just like themselves) and deal with crises that run over the normal lines of Us and Them.

In the Middle: The inn can be used to change the direction of the story. Events that seem to have been leading toward Armageddon, or just eternal stalemate, are altered by a surprise meeting with the bad (or supposedly bad) guys. This can happen either as a pre-planned plot point or an emergency course correction.

The meeting may be informational, or it may involve receiving a McGuffin – a treaty, a program cartridge, an important person – that must then be delivered, probably with agents of both sides trying to prevent its safe arrival.

Or the visit can simply provide some time out from tension and action, a quiet session of character interaction – with the possibility of providing some important information. It also makes a useful *deus ex machina* when the characters are wounded and starving in otherwise hostile territory.

At the End: Here the meeting at The Intercession resolves the adventure. Instead of the usual climactic shootout, a summit meeting negotiates a settlement, or the evidence is presented that convicts the hidden villain (and, in the way of these stories, clears the heroes), the information and skills of the two sides (or however many you've got) are assembled to avert the disaster.

With this option, it's the getting there, and the picking things up on the way, that make the adventure. Somebody's always out to stop the heroes. Usually they've been framed, and everybody's out to stop them. Information – evidence, computer codes, ancient artifacts, the ability to speak the right language – has to be acquired, mostly the hardest way available. The most important thing to be learned may be the location of The Intercession itself – despite its sometimes supernatural appearance, it does not necessarily appear wherever it's needed.

Where it Fits: Any campaign in which two or more factions are at each other's throats. Which is to say, just about all of them . . .
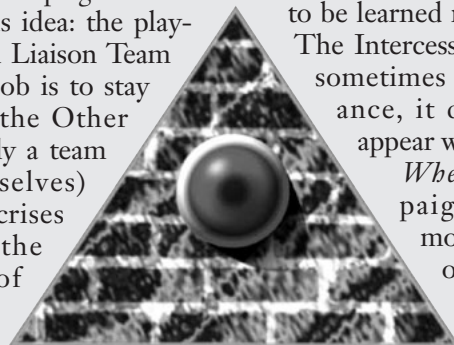
The Bottomless Pit
by Scott Paul Maykrantz

The Bottomless Pit is a hellish hole, an eternal landmark of evil. It exists in all of mankind's myths, with a variety of names (the Abyss, the Soul-Well, etc.). Only a privileged few, largely cultists and supernatural creatures, know that it actually exists.

Legends of its creation conflict. Some say it was the invention of a Great Beast, some say it was constructed by a ghastly race from a malevolent plane, and some say it existed before the hands of eternity's clock began to swing. The stewardship of the Pit (if any) is another subject of debate. It is known, however, that the Pit has great supernatural, evil significance.

It is cylindrical, approximately 500 yards in diameter, and infinite in length. There is no bottom; the Pit extends endlessly through the non-space between worlds. It stretches directly down, in perfect alignment with gravity's pull.

It is filled with the smell of ash and decay. A cacophony of screams echo throughout its length. It is hot and damp. An ominous glow comes from below, bright enough to make out the immediate surroundings, but too dim to allow a visitor to see clearly to the opposite side.

The upper portion of the Pit is located on Earth. The top – the mouth – is located approximately one quarter of a mile under the earth, usually beneath a major metropolitan area with historical significance; London is a classical choice. Getting to the mouth from the surface is an adventure in itself; it is said that a few cults, guilds, and supernatural creatures know the way, but this information is hard to come by.

At the mouth is a cobbled ledge several yards wide; the stones are laid in a strange pattern of interlocked shapes, like a puzzle. The shapes recall primeval nightmarish fears in the subconscious mind of the viewer. Anyone who looks at the stones must make a Fright Check at a cumulative -1 for every ten consecutive seconds he looks.

The infinite wall of the Pit is a myriad of tightly-packed faces. Living faces. Faces that howl and gibber and gnash their teeth. They resemble human faces – they have noses, eyes, and mouths – but they are not the faces of known humanity. They seem to be part of a unique, foul order of man, blasphemous mockeries of primal anguish and rage.

Although there are an infinite number of faces, and all are grotesquely malformed, visitors inevitably recognize a dead relative or friend staring from the wall. Attempts to communicate with the faces are futile. Telepathic approaches always result in a Mental Stun to the telepath, and a Fright Check at -10 – the telepath's mind will be filled with a trillion primal screams, and will shut down almost immediately as a survival reaction. Although a character with the ability to fly could make an unaided descent, any fool who attempts to climb the living wall will be howled at and bitten; the wall's bites can do between 1d-1 to 10d damage, depending on the size of the mouth the hapless climber sticks a limb into.

The wall also features a number of scattered ledges, flesh-covered outcroppings, and holes. One of each can be found every few thousand yards. The holes range in size from several square inches to gaping

cavities over ten feet wide (smaller holes are much more numerous). The smaller holes lead to the nests of vermin, serpents, and other creatures. The greater orifices (man-sized or larger) are the mouths of treacherous, impossibly long tunnels that weave their way through the earth. One can only guess where these tunnels might lead.

The Pit has a few denizens, each unique. All are wicked and feral – a pale and gaunt humanoid babbling on a ledge, an oversized spider with an infant's face, a translucent snake hundreds of feet long, and the like. The refuse from these creatures can also be found scattered on the ledges and walls – webs, bones, carrion, and clutter from parallel nightmares.

Anyone who falls into the Pit, without any way to stop their fall (flight, etc.), will surely die. Early in the descent, the faller will be rendered deaf by the roar of air rushing past. He will plummet until, after bouncing off the walls, he has disintegrated from the impacts and the tearing wind.

In the Campaign

The Bottomless Pit can be used in at least five ways in a horror campaign.

The Quick Pass. The characters appear there for moments, plummeting through the Pit while enroute to another plane. Or, perhaps the Pit is part of a nightmare. Either way, it serves as a frightening vision, but it is never truly encountered.

The Brief Event. The characters visit the Pit for only a moment. They are there long enough to take in the sights and smells, and then they are suddenly removed. This could occur if they are being chased, or if they are captured by cultists or creatures moments after discovering the Pit.

The Rescue. The characters visit and explore the Pit, but only long enough to recover an item, to save a comrade, to pry up cobblestones in the mouth for spell components, or to find some desperately needed information that cannot be found anywhere else. This also includes a sacrifice mission – perhaps the PCs themselves are cultists, and they must travel to the Pit to throw someone in!

Exploration. The characters spend time exploring the mouth, examining the walls, and looking for large holes and outcroppings. If they visit twice or more, the Pit becomes a campaign landmark. Of course, you don't want the possibility of visits to be casual; they should dread the idea of coming here.

The Campaign Climax. The Bottomless Pit can be the setting of the heroes' final battle with evil forces, or a gateway to the ultimate adventure. They will hear legends of the Pit before they arrive, and the visit will be a unique, dramatic event.

The Bottomless Pit

U-Store-It
by Derek Pearcy

Recently, a new phenomenon has appeared in the United States, growing like kudzu across the continent. While the U-Store-It unit is ubiquitous to American culture, it is not a particularly new idea; rental storage has been around as a concept for as long as humans have had things to store. Its modern uniqueness lies in the legal nature of our culture, the high security available at these places, the climate control and, of course, the cheap rates. It has become a great industry, occupying tens of thousands of square feet in even the smallest suburbs, packed with who-knows-what strange material – and there the adventure lies.

Everything from automatic weapon caches to high-powered explosives to dead bodies have been found in self-storage units. With advertising claims of privacy and climate control, people from all walks of life have been taking advantage of the offer, and rental-unit owners all too frequently turn a blind eye. In reality, most of the people who have been caught utilizing storage units to hide evidence of their crimes were snagged not through the diligence of the local police force but because someone else was forced to open their unit for one reason or another.

Introductions

All of the stories that have surfaced concerning strangeness at a U-Store-It have two things in common. First, the unit in question has been leased for years, either in advance or through automatic monthly withdrawals from a savings account. Second, no one has ever come around to check it in all that time. Once these two criteria are met, setting the mysterious scenery in place, all that remains is to find an easy way to introduce the players to the scenario. But first, what's in it?

In the millions of obscure little buildings that make up America's self-storage industry, who knows what could be sitting in a locked garage, in a dark and climate-controlled atmosphere?

Well, *just about anything*.

The GM can use the mysterious storage unit as a way to introduce any sort of device or McGuffin that he likes . . . with no more explanation than "Here it is, folks. What are you going to do about it?"

Perhaps the mysterious owner stopped making payments, and the unit was auctioned off. Or a character's relative dies, leaving them the storage unit. Or maybe the heroes have their own storage unit, one that they've stopped payments on in a fit of poverty, and while covertly trying to get their stuff back from an unsympathetic landlord, they accidentally break into the wrong unit . . .

Of course, if the characters go to their local U-Store-It and start to randomly kick in doors looking

for goodies, all they'll find is a lot of old furniture, while in the distance a siren will begin to howl . . .

Contents
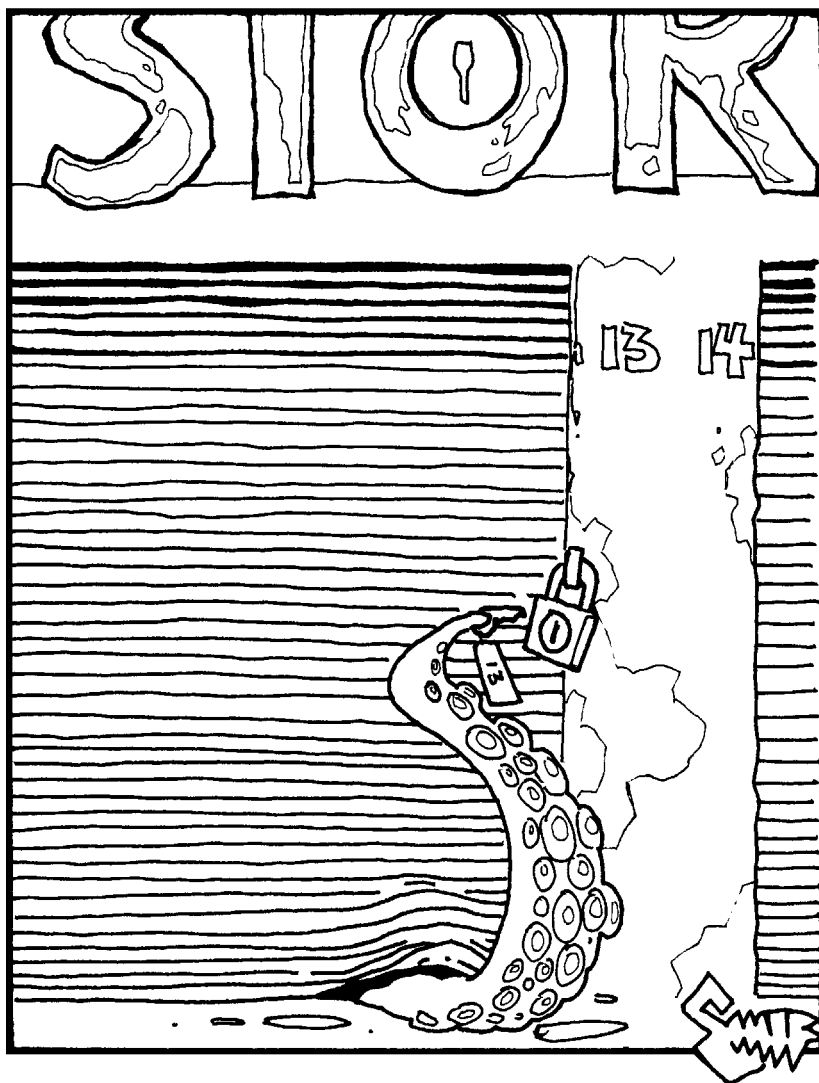
For GMs, there's a lot of potential here. The garage-like metal face of most storage units is as blank as an unopened box, with the same enigmatic promise. Two genres in particular lend themselves to the darkness of storage.

Horror

The Thing Someone Left in Storage is a great horror plot, seen most recently in the Oscar award-winning *Silence of the Lambs*. Audiences cringed as young FBI agent Clarice Starling probed a self-storage unit (at night in the rain, of course) and found a *head in a jar* . . .

As mentioned earlier, people in real-life have also seen self-storage units as ways to hide the evidence of their crimes. One man successfully hid the bodies of his first wife and his son for over a decade until his new wife stopped payment on the unit, thinking it merely held the ex-wife's old furniture and knick-knacks. (He was arrested.)

This is nothing compared to what the average horror GM comes up with on a daily basis. If the villagers burned Frankenstein's lab in modern times, where would the doctor hide his equipment while waiting for everything to blow over?

Cyberpunk

And you thought U-Store-Its were popular today? Visit the dark future.

Any city in a cyberpunk world must have miles upon miles of little metal boxes, dedicated to the perfect preservation of people's junk . . . and who knows what else? With recent government cutbacks, and their tendency to accept the lowest bid, who do you think's going to get the job when the feds finally close Hangar 18, but don't want to throw away decades of ill-gotten UFO booty?

In a cyber-future, GMs can populate self-storage units with almost anything, including UFO wreckage, classified microfiche (it has to go somewhere!), scrapped bio-engineering projects, radioactive waste – even the Ark of the Covenant!

A recent cyberpunk book, *Snow Crash*, even has its protagonist living out of a storage unit. Net hackers only need a roof and a three-prong plug. Just don't set your beer on the Ark – you don't know what might happen.

U-Store-It
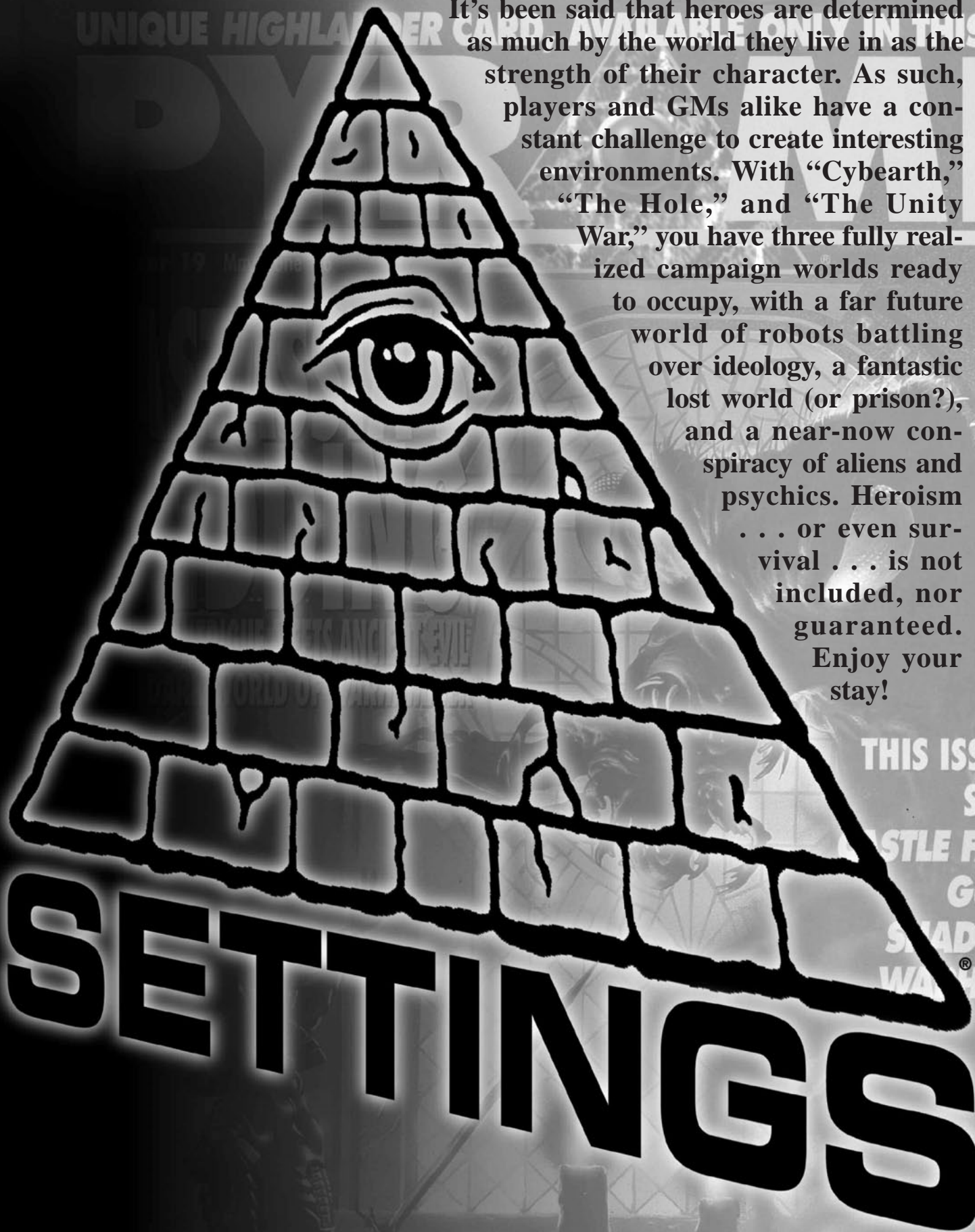
It's been said that heroes are determined as much by the world they live in as the strength of their character. As such, players and GMs alike have a constant challenge to create interesting environments. With "Cybearth," "The Hole," and "The Unity War," you have three fully realized campaign worlds ready to occupy, with a far future world of robots battling over ideology, a fantastic lost world (or prison?), and a near-now conspiracy of aliens and psychics. Heroism . . . or even survival . . . is not included, nor guaranteed. Enjoy your stay!

SETTINGS

CybEarth

A Campaign World for *GURPS* Robots and Other SF Games

by James L. Cambias

*S*ir Charles A-237 made his way cautiously down the filthy Whitechapel street, peering through the sooty fog with his infrared cameras.

An aged beggar lay slumped against one of the crumbling tenements. As Sir Charles passed, she held out a rusty claw. "Alms, sir? Alms for the poor? Spare a few chips for a soldier's widow?"

She was no more a soldier's widow than he was, but Sir Charles tossed her a couple of processor chips and hurried on his way. In the next block he could see the police searchlights turning the fog into a glowing opaque mass. As Sir Charles approached, a constable moved to intercept him. "Sorry, sir. Police investigation. There's been a murder done."

"You'd better get those cameras checked, Wiggins," said Sir Charles. "Or have you forgotten me so soon?"

"Strike me pink! Sir Charles A-237! Beg your pardon, sir. I'd no idea it was you. Right this way – Inspector B-951's waiting."

In the center of the lit area the Inspector rolled back and forth impatiently. At the sound of Sir Charles' footsteps he swung all his eyes to look at the celebrated amateur detective. "Good evening, Sir Charles."

"Evening, Inspector. Your message said something about a murder?"

"This way. It's a bad one." The burly inspector rumbled over to an alley. At a gesture from him, the constables removed the blanket covering something on the cobblestones. Sir Charles stiffened as it was revealed.

There, surrounded by a pool of oil, was the body of a robot, completely dismantled. Even the subsystems were disassembled, and the memory storage unit was completely destroyed.

"Is it – ?" Inspector B-951 ventured.

"Indeed," said Sir Charles. "The Ripper has struck again!"

The planet CybEarth is a campaign setting for use with *GURPS Robots* or other science-fiction role-playing games. Game Masters can also incorporate it into other campaigns as the setting for a one-shot adventure.
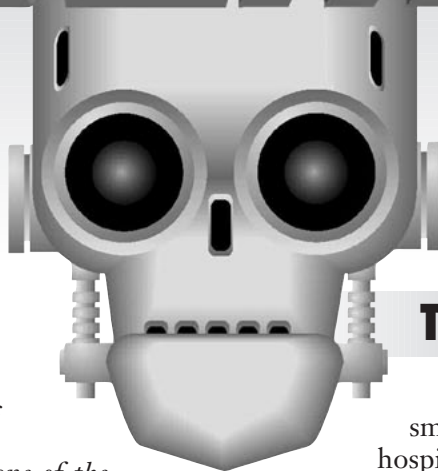
The Planet

CybEarth is a medium-sized planet smaller than Earth, with an environment hospitable to humans. Its diameter is 6,000 kilometers, its surface gravity is 0.65 g, and its day is only ten hours long. The planet's atmosphere is composed of nitrogen and oxygen, with a surface pressure about the same as Earth's. Oceans cover approximately half the surface, giving CybEarth a land area slightly greater than that of Earth. The planet has fairly advanced animal and plant life, with creatures similar to mammals and birds. It has no indigenous intelligent species.

History

CybEarth was settled over a century ago by an organization called the Retrogressive Society. The Retrogressives were dissatisfied with the pace of life in interstellar civilization, and believed that humans in past cultures had lived better and happier lives. They wanted to establish a place where people could enjoy the lifestyles practiced in bygone centuries. Since many of the Retrogressives were quite wealthy, the organization could afford to purchase an uninhabited world, where they put their beliefs into practice. The colonists named the planet Clio, after the ancient Greek goddess of history.

There were initially seven groups in the colony. The Retropolitans yearned to recreate the exciting days of the 20th century, with private automobiles, 2-D movies and frequent warfare. The Neo-Victorians wanted to live in the world of the 19th century, when steam was king and the Queen was not amused. A set of Shogun Restorationists hoped to duplicate the society of Japan before westernization. Cavaliers engaged in swordplay and swashbuckling worthy of D'Artagnan. Medievalists desired a world of castles, jousting tournaments and courtly love. The Athenoids dreamed of a Greek-style city-state populated by philosophers. And the Pseudo-Primitives wanted to get back to humanity's origins as hunter-gatherers.
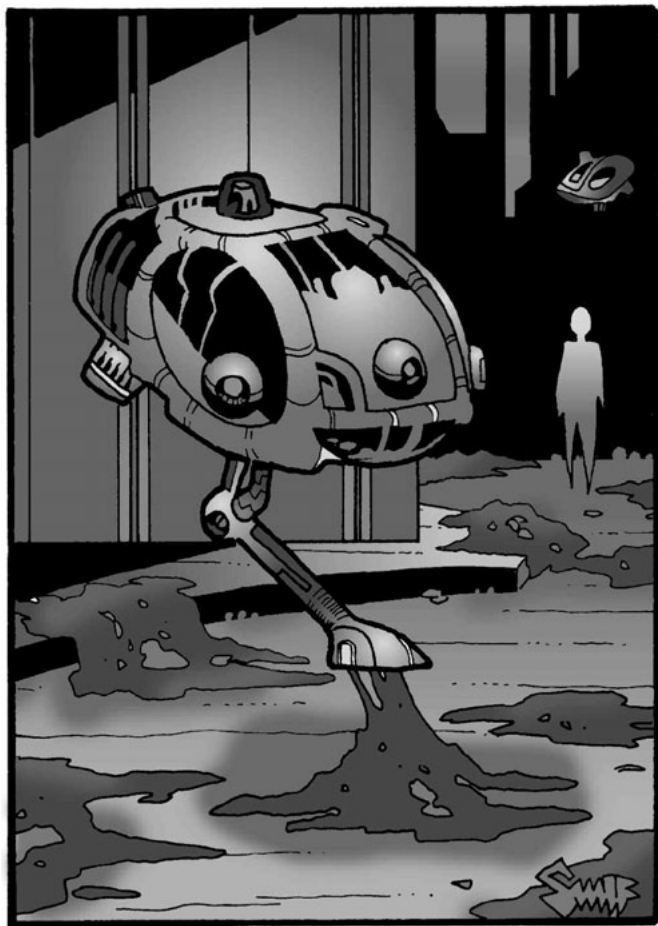
Of course, none of these idealists wanted to live the life of an industrial worker, a downtrodden peasant or a slave. Their colonies were intended to recreate life for the privileged classes of the chosen eras. To perform all the actual work on Clio, the Retrogressive Society imported thousands of robots and installed a sophisticated broadcast-energy system to power them. Robots drove the tanks and built the skyscrapers for the Retropolitans. Robots tended the rice crop for the Shogun Restorationists. Robots served the wine at Athenoid symposia. Only the Pseudo-Primitives did all their own work, and even they had robot guardians and medical monitors watching for trouble.

For 50 years, Clio was a prosperous world. Immigrants from advanced planets came in droves to enjoy the "simple life." The initial population of 6,000 expanded to almost 250,000. Just over 2,000,000 robots toiled patiently in the fields and factories, keeping Utopia running. Clio's remote location meant limited contact with the rest of the Galaxy, but the Retrogressive inhabitants were content.

Catastrophe

Then the plague hit. It may have been a virus native to the planet that suddenly mutated, or a bioweapon unleashed by some enemy or terrorist group. Nobody had time to find out. The disease spread with terrifying speed, carried by the wind to all parts of the planet. Any human contracting the virus rapidly dissolved into a puddle of purple goo. Within a week, everyone on Clio was dead. The interstellar authorities put

a complete quarantine on the planet, with warships in orbit to keep anyone from landing.

On the surface, the robots mopped up the 250,000 or so puddles of goo and continued with their work. Most of the machines were too simple to even notice that the humans were gone. But a few of the more sophisticated robots realized that their masters would never return. They linked up to the planetary datanet to discuss the situation.

The Schism

After hours of high-speed discussion, the robots remained divided into two camps. According to the first group, the logical response to the death of the humans would be to take their places and attempt to uphold the ideals of the Retrogressive Society. The second group maintained that with the humans dead, the robots had no further obligation to them, and so were free to create a new ideal robotic society of their own.

The disagreement turned to conflict when both groups tried to keep control of the colony's important facilities. The high-level robots mustered armies of subintelligent machines, and fought pitched battles around the power-plant, the robot repair center and the planetary data network headquarters.

When the dust had settled, the robots loyal to the Retrogressive ideal held the robot repair center and all the colony's stocks of raw materials. The second group controlled the power plant and the central processors of the datanet. Alarmed by the destruction, both factions declared a truce.

Since that schism, both groups have organized themselves into societies that reflect their initial positions in the schism. The robots adhering to the Retrogressive Society's position are called Group Zero. The idealists trying to create a perfect society of robots are known as Group One. Exiles from both factions live in the wilderness and are referred to as Group Ten (in binary, ten is the next number after zero and one).

Group Zero

Group Zero are the "traditionalists" of CybEarth. True to their programming, they follow the same beliefs as their former masters in the Retrogressive Society. The robots of Group Zero attempt to recreate life on Earth during various historical periods.

The robots of Group Zero control most of the old Retrogressive Society colony cities, and the main robot repair and construction center. So Group Zero is the only faction which can build new citizens. Unfortunately, the robots of CybEarth cannot create new sentient brains. All robots begin as machines, and a few spontaneously "awaken" to full sentience.

Group Zero's government is extremely complicated. The robots have taken over the old human settlements, and do their best to carry on as the colonists would have intended. Each of the robot communities is self-governing, according to whatever the system

was in the past society. The 20th-century Retropolitans elect rulers democratically, the Neo-Victorians have a Parliament dominated by aristocrats, the Medievalists live under a feudal system, and so on. Each community sends a representative to the Interim Council, which makes decisions governing the entire society.

Group Zero had to develop a new economic system. The human colonists used a completely credit-based monetary system. The robots kept track of each colonist's finances, and the humans could make purchases simply by taking what they needed from a shop. Since most of the colonists had substantial off-planet wealth, the credits were convertible with standard Galactic currency. This system didn't work for the robots of Group Zero, since none of them had interstellar bank accounts, and could easily change their credit balances by altering the financial databases. Spare computer chips were adopted as a useful medium of exchange. Megabyte chips are worth $1; smaller-capacity chips are worth less in proportion to their capacity. Robots who get into financial difficulties must sometimes sell off parts of their own brains.

Technology and Equipment

The robots of Group Zero have control of the main robot construction center, so they have access to a large stockpile of high-tech components. Most robot parts are TL9, with some older TL8 systems available. The chief problem is a lack of power sources. Since Group One controls the power plant, no broadcast power is sent to the area inhabited by the Group Zero robots. They have had to fall back on other power supplies. The store of solar or atomic power cells is small, so many robots must use gasoline motors or coal-burning steam engines for power.

Power Plant Table

TL	Type	Weight per KW	Cost (per lb.)	Fuel (per KW)
8	Solar	20 lbs.	$200	no fuel, only works in daylight
8	Broadcast	1 lb.	$100	no fuel, only in broadcast area
7	Solar	10 lbs.	$100	
6	Gasoline	15xKW lbs. (if under 5 KW) 10xKW + 25 lbs. (if over 5 KW)	$5	0.1 gallons per hour
6	Steam Turbine	20xKW lbs. (if under 5 KW) 10xKW +50 lbs. (if over 5 KW)	$5	0.05 gallons of oil per hour
5	Steam	25xKW lbs. (if under 5 KW) 15xKW + 50 lbs. (if over 5 KW)	$2	0.5 lbs. of coal or wood per hour

Solar: Requires 10 square feet of collecting panel per kilowatt generated. Solar panels need no fuel, but work only during the day. Most solar-powered robots have energy cells for use at night, or else go dormant.

Broadcast: Broadcast power units function only within the area controlled by Group One.

Gasoline: Double the fuel consumption if alcohol is used instead of gasoline.

Steam Turbine: Can use either oil or coal as fuel; increase the consumption rate by 50% if coal is used. Cannot be built smaller than 1 KW.

Steam: Steam engines can also burn oil, which reduces fuel consumption by 30%. Alcohol-fueled engines are about as efficient as coal-burners.

Group Zero has access to a large supply of weapons, particularly those TL6 and TL7 items used by the Retropolitans in their re-enactments of 20th-century battles. There are also a few advanced nonlethal TL9 weapons kept in the robot repair center for use in law enforcement and animal control – since the plague, these are nearly useless.

Most of the Group Zero robots are human-sized and are built to use equipment designed for humans. A small minority are actually androids. Since members of Group Zero strive to replace the human colonists, high status is associated with humanoid form.

The robots of Group Zero do their best to duplicate human family life. The robots are programmed with an identifiable gender, and pair off into married couples. Married robots desiring offspring pool their wealth to buy the parts, and design their own child. The rich can afford lifelike androids; poorer robots must make do with obviously mechanical children.

The Retropolitans

The largest city on the planet was built by a group of 20th-century enthusiasts, who christened their town Retropolis. It is an Art Deco wonderland of skyscrapers, highways, and factories. Surrounding the dense city center is a belt of suburban homes, each with a tidy lawn, two-car garage, and a TV aerial on the roof.

The robots of Retropolis do their best to live like humans of Earth's 20th century, as depicted in old movies and videos. They leave their suburban homes and commute to work in the city. There are frequent car chases in the streets, and solving murders is a leading industry. Wealthy robots run large corporations, and constantly engage in illicit deals and financial struggles.

Retropolis is home to a small band of robot superheroes, who fight crime in the streets and try to protect their own secret identities. They are joined in the battle against crime by a large corps of private detectives. Gangsters run most of the crime in Retropolis; they are usually low-status machines with heavy Sicilian accents. The leader of all the crooks in Retropolis is Don M-169-A, known as the "Godfather."

Retropolis has a large army. Before the plague, the war robots were used to fight huge reenactments of famous battles from the 20th century. Now they guard the border against Group One, and fight occasional skirmishes. Infantry robots are man-shaped but obviously nonhuman machines. The army's tanks and helicopters are themselves robots. The Retropolitan army is mostly armed with TL6 gear, with a small amount of TL7 equipment for elite units. The robot repair center holds some TL8 stunners and other non-lethal weapons for law enforcement, but most of them do not work on other robots and so are useless.

The government of Retropolis is a party-dominated democratic system resembling the big-city political organizations of the mid-20th century. All robots can vote, even if they are not sentient. The politicians of Retropolis have given new meaning to the term "machine politics" as they shamelessly manipulate the less-intelligent robots during elections. The two chief parties are the Humanoids and the Mechanists. The Humanoids are all human-shaped robots (some are even lifelike androids); they are mostly old machines from before the days of the plague, and consequently are the more conservative party. The Mechanists are a party of functional machines, who claim to represent the downtrodden masses of Retropolis. The two parties are indistinguishable in their actual conduct of government.

Victoria

The second-largest city in Group Zero territory is the smoky brick town of Victoria. It is the chief seaport, and is linked to Retropolis by a railroad. Victoria is built in a chilly, foggy region, and is surrounded by moorland and bogs. A few old manor houses stand abandoned in the countryside. Beyond the moorlands is the border of the wild country inhabited by Group Ten.

The robots of Victoria have a more stratified society than the egalitarian Retropolitans. At the top of the heap is the Queen, an extremely lifelike android in the form of a dowdy old woman in black. Below her are the members of the aristocracy, who are all humanoid in form. The middle classes have wheels or treads, but preserve a basically human body plan. The lower orders are entirely mechanical, often specialized for their work. Only the aristocrats and some of the middle classes are fully sentient; the lower orders are simple machines.

Victorian aristocrats go to parties, go hunting on the moors, solve crimes, and engage in political intrigues against one another. The middle classes work hard and try to earn enough money to make their children humanoids, in the hope of marrying them off to aristocrats. The poor work and gather in pubs to overload on current.

Politics in Victoria is based on the constantly shifting balance between the Liberals and Conservatives in Parliament. The Parliament seldom has to pass any laws or make decisions, but a great deal of energy is spent on politicking and running for office.

The foggy streets of Victoria are home to a great deal of crime. Members of the lower orders who become sentient often turn their talents to evil. A few aristocrats join them secretly. The leaders of crime in Victoria are the insidious Doctor Yukio F-684, an immigrant from the Edo community, and Professor James A-314, a wayward aristocrat and scientist. Their fiendish plots are opposed by Scotland Yard and a number of upper-class amateurs. The detectives of Scotland Yard are programmed never to solve a case themselves. When they discover crimes, they call in amateurs and let them take charge.

Victoria has a small robot army, with soldiers similar to the Retropolitan infantry. There is also a cavalry force with robot horses. The Victorian army is equipped with some TL6 gear, but most of the weapons are replicas of human-built TL4 arms.

The Victorian army is in charge of defending Group Zero against the outlaws of Group Ten. The Victorian soldiers refer to Group Ten as the "wogs."

Edo

Edo is a re-creation of life in feudal Japan. The robots here take their view of life from a thousand samurai and martial-arts movies. As in most of the Group Zero communities, Edo's society is divided into classes. There is a warrior aristocracy of daimyos and their samurai, who rule the peasants. Nearly all sentient machines in Edo are lords or samurai. A few ronin wander the countryside offering their blade to whoever can pay.

Edo consists of a tract of rocky coastal country dotted with castles and villages. It borders Gascony and Camelot. There are relatively few peasants in Edo, because there is little for them to do. A few older machines still plant and harvest rice, which is distilled into alcohol for fuel. Other peasant robots are craftsmen, making swords and armor for the samurai.

The samurai robots of Edo fight a lot, but use only melee weapons and occasionally bows. All the lords constantly struggle for power, and the dominant lord is named shogun. The shogun names Edo's envoy to the Council, but otherwise the community has little contact with the outside world.

Edo is home to what remains of the planet's space-defense force. CybEarth's single squadron of space fighters is based in Edo, and the ships have been rebuilt to enable them to transform into large humanoid shapes. Since they are humanoids they have the rank of samurai, and carry swords even in space. The space force robots are in charge of protecting the planet from giant monsters; sadly, no such monsters have ever appeared.

Gascony

The kingdom of Gascony is a small coastal enclave between Edo and Victoria, inhabited by the Cavalier robots. It consists of a small port city, some outlying chateaux, and a few coastal islands. The robots of Gascony have a King, but all real power is in the grip of the robot called the Cardinal. There are many powerful dukes and lords. Each noble has a company of guards, and these soldiers constantly fight with each other in the streets.

The Cavaliers control Group Zero's small navy. The ships are mostly wind-powered, and the Cavaliers use them to guard against Group Ten pirates and occasionally for raids against Group One. Adventurous robots of Gascony sometimes organize privateering ventures for profit.

The Cavaliers are tremendously outgoing and flamboyant. Always chivalrous and honorable, they love adventure and romance. Duels are common in Gascony, fought over fair ladies or points of honor.

The Cavaliers are also the most religious robots on CybEarth, with numerous robot monks and nuns and an impressive cathedral near the King's palace. The robot religion is based on Catholicism, but with a number of changes introduced by the robots to make it more "relevant" to the machines. The Sacraments given at Mass are now a squirt of oil and a power recharge instead of wine and bread.

Camelot

The smallest of Group Zero's communities is Camelot. It consists of a handful of castles separated by forests and moors, and borders on Victoria, Gascony, and Edo. Each of Camelot's castles is ruled by a baron and served by armored knights. King Arthur, a realistic android, reigns over all the barons, but does little to halt their incessant warfare.

Nearly all of Camelot's inhabitants resemble medieval knights in plate armor. A substantial minority are built in the shape of horses. Because they have more room for brains, the horse robots are generally more intelligent than the humanoid knights. They usually work in teams, with the horse as the leader.

The robots of Camelot have been programmed for chivalry, and do their best to uphold the knightly ideal. A pair of knights meeting on the road will fight each other

without hesitation. This constant fighting has reduced Camelot's population over the years, so that many castles now stand abandoned. Some are now inhabited by weird renegade machines from Group Ten. Parties of adventurous robots occasionally venture into the dungeons of a ruined castle in search of monsters and plunder.

Camelot territory is home to an outlaw band, known as the "Merrie Mechs." They hide out in the dense forest of Herwood, emerging to prey upon wandering travellers. The Merrie Mechs are fairly humane bandits, taking only redundant subsystems from over-equipped robots, and sharing their loot with poor machines in need of parts. Their leader, Hood F-941 is a flamboyant, overconfident robot. All the Merrie Mechs have a camouflage paint job in shades of green.

Group One

The idealists of Group One have abandoned the Retrogressive notions of the planet's human founders, and instead have tried to create a perfect society for robots. Appropriately, they are headquartered in the old human settlement of Athens, which was a community devoted to philosophy and the arts. While fewer in number than the loyalists of Group Zero, all of Group One's robots are fully sentient. Malcontents from Group Zero occasionally slip across the border to join Group One.

Athens

The community of Athens has been transformed by the robots of Group One into a vast, high-tech city of machines. It is divided into sectors, each devoted to a specific purpose. Alpha Sector is the administrative center, Beta is home to the powerplant, Gamma contains industrial facilities, Delta is the military base, and Epsilon is devoted to research. The city is quite ugly by human standards, with rigidly functional buildings arranged in a perfect grid pattern. Work goes on at a frantic pace around the clock.

The environment around the city is very polluted, and the robots of Group One make no effort to control waste spills. To them, robots and machines are a higher order of being than organic life. If the pitiful animals and plants can't survive, it shows they are unfit and useless.

Government

The government of Group One is a vast bureaucracy, in which individuals are constantly rated and evaluated. High-ranking robots are given enormous brain upgrades, making them much more intelligent than their subordinates. What began as a simple and efficient system has gradually grown out of control, as new departments and agencies are constantly spawned. Only the Executive Director, with his room-sized brain, can fully understand the labyrinthine ways of Group One's government.

Robots in Group One are always being tested for loyalty to the Ideal Robot Society. Deviationists can be reprogrammed or broken up for parts. A widely-feared Secret Police constantly seeks out traitors and
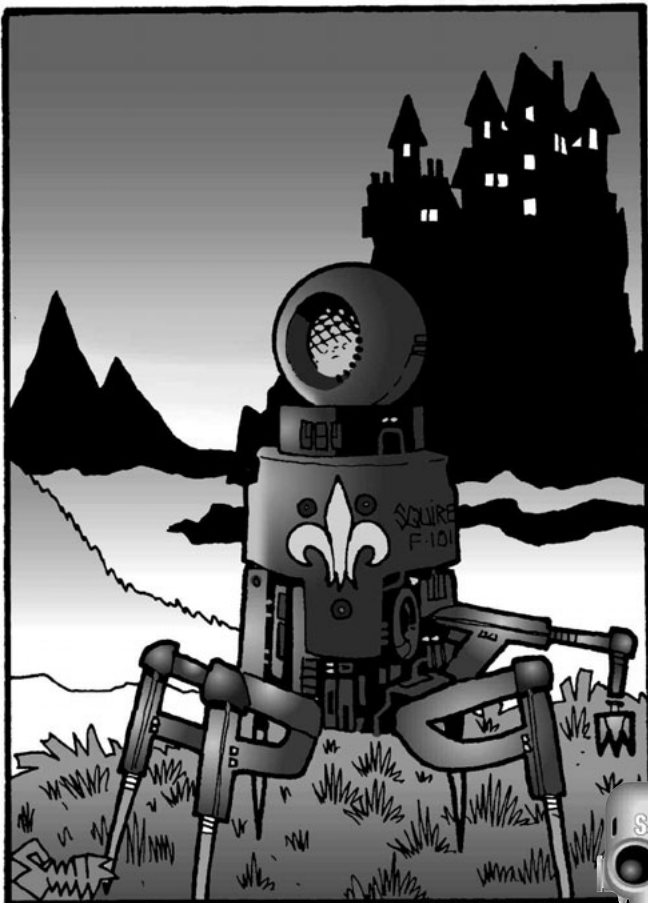
spies, and has informants everywhere. The Secret Police have rivals in the agents of the Security Division, and other branches of the government have their own security services and spies. The result is a constant state of nervousness among the robotic citizens, sometimes verging on paranoia.

Group One has a formidable army, since all members of society can be mobilized when the need arises. Because of a terrible shortage of ammunition, most of Group One's soldiers fight with crossbows or melee weapons.

Economy

Officially, there is no economy in Group One. All resources are allocated logically, for the good of the community. And if you believe that, there are some robots here with a bridge they'd like to sell you. An extensive underground economy thrives among the robots of Group One. They trade surplus parts, services, information downloads, and stored power. Low-level robots strive to obtain the processing upgrades which will allow them to rise in the hierarchy. Upper-level machines plot against rivals. There is always an opportunity for profit.

Because Group One has no caste of nonsentient robots to perform all the labor, citizens are required to devote a certain percentage of their time to the service of the state. Low-status individuals get only 10 percent or less of their time off. High-status robots are free as much as 50 percent of the time. But since the higher-status robots are all trying to impress their superiors by working extra time, they end up with little more leisure than the workers.

Technology

During the schism, Group One got control of the powerplant, but did not keep any of the robot repair facilities. Since then, they have managed to improvise some machine shops and factories of their own, but are still desperately short of supplies.

Group One has a small stockpile of advanced TL9 robot parts, reserved for the most important members of society. The rest must use crude, locally-built TL7 components. The chief purpose of Group One's occasional wars against Group Zero is to get new supplies of advanced parts.

Nearly all of the robots in Group One get their energy from broadcast-power receivers. Those intended for long missions beyond Group One territory have solar panels or fuel cells. Some secret agents have been built to infiltrate Group Zero territory, and are equipped with steam engines as a disguise. Because the central power station is so vital to their community, the robots of Group One guard it fanatically. Only robots authorized by the Power Agency can even enter Beta Sector, and strangers may be shot on sight by the Agency's guards.

Society

The robots of Group One constantly work to advance in the bureaucracy. They seldom question orders that are properly authorized, and follow instructions to the letter, even if the results are absurd. When not at work they complain and plot, careful not to be overheard by security agents. Group One robots all try to make other robots dependent on them, in order to increase their power base.

New citizens are manufactured whenever a robot brain becomes available, either by capture or trade with the other communities. Most of Group One's inhabitants are immigrants.

Group Ten

The robots of Group Ten are the outlaws of CybEarth. For various reasons they have fled or been driven out of the other robot societies, and have taken up life in the wilderness. Some are discontented members of the lower classes from Group Zero, or traitors wanted by the government of Group One. A few are simply insane, driven mad by damage or faulty programming. In the wild country beyond the borders of the old human colony they prey on each other, and mount raids into settled territory to gather supplies and parts.

The only rule among the robots of Group Ten is "survival of the fittest." All the robots in this part of the world are heavily armed, and generally fight anything they encounter. Lack of supplies means that many prefer to use weapons that don't require ammunition, like lasers or melee weapons. A few use handmade bows or slings.

Group Ten robots all resemble huge mobile junkpiles, with lots of ill-matched replacements and bolted-on additions. Many have non-sentient slave robots under their control, and use restraining devices and overrides to enslave captives.

Here and there in the wilderness small communities can be found, controlled by a powerful warlord. They are absolute rulers, their tyranny limited only by fear of revolt by their subjects. Such communities often exist to take advantage of some natural resource, like a hydroelectric power generator or an oil well.

When fighting isn't an option, the robots of Group Ten will trade with each other or with merchants from the settled communities. They are very sharp dealers who will lie and cheat as much as they can. All purchases must be made in barter; among the robots of Group Ten, currency is useless and credit is a bad joke.

Building CybEarth Characters

The robots of CybEarth are constructed according to the rules in *GURPS Robots*. The maximum tech level on CybEarth is TL9, but most robots have a mix of parts from a variety of tech levels.

Although sentient robots cannot be built below TL10 (p. RO10), some of the robots of CybEarth can spontaneously "awaken" to sentience if their brains are complex enough. In Group Zero the middle and upper classes are sentient, but the lower orders usually are not. All robots of Group One and Group Ten are sentient. Player-character robots are assumed to be "awakened" sentient machines.

Because CybEarth is inhabited entirely by robots, the point modifier for an obviously mechanical entity does not apply. However, in Group Zero there is a social convention favoring humanoid shapes. Robots must be humanoid to purchase any levels of Status in Group Zero society. In the other two communities there is no particular benefit attached to humanoid form.

A good base point value for PC robots is 250 to 300 points. More powerful campaigns can go up to 500 points. Among the warlords of Group Ten, robots of 750 or 1,000 points are not unknown. Restricting characters to 150 or 200 points would create a challenging low-powered campaign.

Note that CybEarth robot characters do *not* divide their model point cost for an inhuman appearance (as per p. RO50); since there are no humans on CybEarth, there is no disadvantage to looking different. In a campaign where humans *do* play a prominent role, point costs should be adjusted accordingly.

Adventures on CybEarth

Player-character robots can have all sorts of adventures on CybEarth. Detectives in Group Zero can root out crime and battle villains. Brave soldiers and explorers can venture into the wilds and fend off the savage robots of Group Ten. Secret agents can slip across the border between Group One and Group Zero. Tough machines can struggle to survive in Group Ten, and wily machines can scheme to get ahead in Group One. Gamemasters can have fun adapting adventures from other game genres for use on CybEarth.

Humans on CybEarth

Human characters can also show up on CybEarth. The simplest explanation is that the characters are explorers or salvage hunters who are checking out the planet. Spacers shipwrecked on the planet may have to get along as the only humans in a world of machines. Humans may also be survivors of the plague, possibly living in some form of suspended animation during the past decades, or else members of a tiny settlement of immunes. An interesting campaign could be built around human efforts to regain control of CybEarth.

Campaign Crossovers

GMs may be reluctant to run a full-fledged CybEarth campaign, but still want to use the setting. It can be worked into a number of other *GURPS* worlds.

Space

Space voyagers might find themselves on CybEarth for a variety of reasons. They could be explorers, checking out the planet to see what has happened since the plague. Or they might be salvage-hunters hoping to plunder the abandoned colony. Characters might also wind up on CybEarth by accident after a crash landing. Officers of the Space Patrol could be sent to rescue survivors and find themselves caught up in the weird politics and conflicts of the robots.

Alternatively, the robots of CybEarth may decide to boldly go where no robot has gone before, constructing their own spaceships to explore the universe. An all-robot crew of adventurers might roam the galaxy, facing prejudice and a shortage of spare parts along with all the other perils of space travel.

Supers

CybEarth in a superheroic campaign can either be a distant planet ruled by robots, or an alternate dimension in which the machines have taken over Earth. Group One makes a good model for a completely cybernetic society. The PC supers could be thrown into CybEarth by a dimensional rift or some kind of scientific accident.

Since superheroes are a part of society among the Retropolitan robots, players could run mechanical superheroes defending their city against various robotic villains.

Atomic Horror

Space voyagers in an *Atomic Horror* campaign could discover a distant world inhabited entirely by robots, or some parallel universe as described above. A weird and hilarious *Atomic Horror*-style campaign might pit Retropolitan robots against human "invaders from space."

Other Campaigns

Fans of *The Terminator* might want to postulate a future in which humanity has been replaced by machine intelligences. Time travelers could visit this terrible future, and then try to prevent whatever causes it. The ruthlessly efficient robots of Group One or the anarchic barbarians of Group Ten would be good models for such a world.

A visit to CybEarth could be played as a horror story, with humans fighting for their lives against a planetful of metal killers. Or robot characters could face a terrifying situation on the moors of Victoria, stalked by a mechanical madman.

Characters

These sample characters are intended as examples of the types of robots on CybEarth. GMs and players are encouraged to develop their own designs.

Inspector B-951

The Inspector was built as a law-enforcement and rescue robot in the days before the plague, but he is now one of the best detectives of Victoria's Scotland Yard. His crude, mechanical exterior belies the fact that he has a very powerful brain and lots of experience. Inspector B-951, like most of the older robots, was designed to get his power from a wireless beamed system. He has since been retrofitted with a coal-burning steam engine, like most Victorian robots. Having a hot boiler next to his delicate computer brain sometimes makes the Inspector's memory unreliable, but he is otherwise an honest and tenacious police officer. Inspector B-951 is a 534-point character.

Brain: TL9 mainframe computer, with the Compact, Neural-Net, and Genius options.

Complexity 7 (125 lbs., 2.5 cubic feet, $2.8 million, 1 kilowatt, 70 points).

Sensors: Basic TL8 sensor package with the following options: Independently Focusable Eyes, Infrared Vision, Microscopic Vision, 360-Degree Vision, No Sense of Smell/Taste and Smoke Detector (4.2 lbs., $15,500, 54 points).

Communications: Basic TL9 communicator package with the Bullhorn and Disturbing Voice options (.55 lbs., $150, 5 points).

Arm Motors: One TL9 Cheap ST 12 arm, one Cheap TL9 Extendible ST 20 arm with Bad Grip (15.6 lbs, $4,800, 5 points).

Propulsion: TL9 Wheeled .5 KW drivetrain (3.75 lbs., $75).

Accessories: Fire extinguisher, Flashlight, and Siren (2.75 lbs., $55).

Power Plant: Two-kilowatt coal-fired steam engine (50 lbs., $100).

Fuel: Coal bunker holding 50 lbs. of coal (50-hour supply).

Surface Features: Waterproof ($66).

Subassemblies: One head, two arms, four wheels.

Arm Design: Right arm housing ST 12 motor (.1 cf), extendible left arm with Bad Grip housing ST 20 motor (.33 cf).

Body Design: Body housing power plant, coal bunker, brain, wheel drivetrain and fire extinguisher, with empty space for head rotation (total volume 5.5 cf).

Wheel Design: Wheels and suspension system total 1.1 cf.

Head Design: Head contains sensors, communicators, flashlight and siren; 360-degree rotation (total volume .25 cf).

Surface Area: Total area of 33 square feet.

Structure: Tech level 8 structure, Heavy and Cheap (297 lbs., $3,300).

Hit Points: Body 57, right arm 9, left arm 18, head 8, wheels 10 each.

Statistics: 548.85 lbs., total volume 7.28 cf (1 hex, 6 feet tall), $2,824,046. Body ST 18, right arm ST 12, left arm ST 20 [100], DX 11 [10], IQ 12 [20], HT 12/57 [245], Move 10 [20]. Cannot float [-5]. Legality rating 6. Model point cost: 524 points.

Advantages: Ally (Sir Charles A-237) [10], Awakened to full sentience [30], Doesn't Sleep [20], Legal Enforcement Powers [5], Reputation (crack detective, +2 among citizens, -2 among crooks) [7].

Disadvantages: Absent-Mindedness [-15], Duty (Scotland Yard) [-10], Gentleman's Code of Honor [-10], Honesty [-10], Inconvenient Size [-10], Intolerance (Group Ten robots) [-5], Stubbornness [-5].

Quirks: Careless of appearance; Defers to aristocrats; Prefers to work at night; Rolls back and forth when thinking; Smokes heavily [-5].

Skills: Area Knowledge (Victoria)-13 [1/2], Brawling-12 [2], Forensics/TL5-12 [1], Interrogation-13 [1], Law-12 [1], Mechanic (Robotics)/TL8-12 [1/2], Streetwise-13 [1], Tracking-13 [1].

Jacques D-41-M

Monsieur Jacques D-41-M is a robot of Gascony, and serves in the Cardinal's Guard regiment. He is a dashing humanoid robot with glittering metal skin and a built-in sword for easy duelling. Like all the Gascon robots, Jacques is honorable to a fault. Jacques is a 295-point character.

Brain: TL9 Microframe with the Biocomputer, Compact, Genius, Neural-Net and +2 Reflex Booster options (75 lbs., 1.5 cf, $8,400,000, 0.1 KW, complexity 7, 65 points).

Sensors: Basic TL8 sensor package, no options (2 lbs., .04 cf, $10,000).

Communications: Basic TL8 communications package, with Superior Voice and no Cable Jack (0.9 lbs, .036 cf, $2,950, 20 points).

Arm Motors: Two TL8 ST 15 arm motors; right arm is just a Striker (4.5 lbs, $7,200, -15 points).

Propulsion: Leg drivetrain, .3 KW power output (18 lbs., 0.36 cf, $3,600).

Weapons: Retractable rapier (1.5 lbs, .075 cf, $500, 10 points).

Accessories: Gyrobalance ($5,000, 15 points).

Power Plant: TL7 gas turbine producing 0.6 KW (6 lbs., .12 cf, $120, consumes .05 gallons per hour of alcohol).

Fuel: TL7 self-sealing fuel tank holding 1 gallon of alcohol (7 lbs., .15 cf, $10, -11 points).

Subassemblies: Head, two arms, body and two legs.

Arm Design: Left arm holds arm motor and .05 cf of empty space for a total volume of .11 cf. Right arm contains arm motor, retractable rapier and .005 cf of space for a total volume of .11 cf.

Body Design: The body contains the brain, the powerplant and the fuel tank, along with .03 cf of empty space for head rotation, for a total volume of 1.8 cf.

Head Design: The head contains the communications and sensors, along with .024 cf of empty space for a total volume of .1 cubic foot.

Leg Design: Each leg contains one leg motor and .36 cf of empty space for a volume of .54 cf each.

Surface Area: 21.5 square feet of surface.

Structure: TL8 medium structure (86 lbs., $2,150).

Hit Points: Body 13, arms 4, head 2, legs 6.

Armor and Threat Protection: Reflective surface, waterproof ($204, 2 points).

Biomorphics: Sculpted surface, Handsome (2.15 lbs., $1,075, 15 points).

Statistics: Weight 203.05 lbs. (.1 ton), total volume 3.2 cubic feet (6' tall), $1,712,809. ST 16/15 [70], DX 13 [30], IQ 12 [20], HT 12/13 [25], Move 7 [5]. Cannot float [-5]. Legality 3. Model point cost: 246

Advantages: Awakened to full sentience [30], Doesn't Sleep [20], Military Rank 3 [15], Status 2 [5].

Disadvantages: Chivalric Code of Honor [-15], Impulsiveness [-10], Laziness [-10], Struggling [-10].

Quirks: Courts wealthy ladies; Keeps skin polished; Quick to take offense; Snobbish; Witty [-5].

Skills: Acrobatics-14 [8], Brawling-14 [2], Dancing-13 [2], Fast-Draw-14 [2], Fencing-15 [8], Gambling-12 [½], Literature-12 [1], Mechanic (Robotics)/TL8-13 [1], Poetry-13 [1], Savoir-Faire-13 [½], Seamanship/TL4-14 [1], Stealth-13 [2].

Alpha Under-Supervisor

Alpha Under-Supervisor is a Group One robot. As her name suggests, she is second in command in Alpha sector. Her superior often gives Under-Supervisor the troublesome assignments. Under-Supervisor enjoys the opportunity to make a name for herself, but is always careful to cover her tail in case of failure. She is equipped with folding helicopter rotors to enable her to fly all over her sector quickly. Her dependence on broadcast power makes Under-Supervisor reluctant to leave the area controlled by Group One.

Alpha Under-Supervisor is a 200-point character.

Brain: TL9 Mainframe with the Biocomputer, Compact, Genius and Neural-Net options (Complexity 8, 187.5 lbs., 3.75 cf, $20,000,000, 1 KW, 65 points).

Sensors: Basic TL7 sensor package, with Color Blindness, One Eye, No Sense of Smell/Taste and Search Radar (8 lbs., $24,000, -25 points).

Communications: Basic TL7 communication package, with Disturbing Voice and Medium-Range Radio (4 lbs., $900, 6 points).

Arm Motors: One ST 10 arm motor with Extra-Flexible option (6 lbs., $12,000, -15 points)

Propulsion: TL7 wheeled drivetrain, .2 KW power (2 lbs., $40). TL7 helicopter drivetrain, 100 KW power (600 lbs., $30,000).

Power Plant: Broadcast power receiver, 1.5 KW (1.5 lbs., $150, 10 points); Gas turbine generating 100 KW (240 lbs., $4,800, consumes 8 gallons per hour of gasoline).

Fuel: Gasoline tank holding 8 gallons (56 lbs., 1.2 cf, $80, -11 points).

Subassemblies: Body, one arm, four wheels and rotary wing.

Arm Design: Contains ST 10 arm motor; total volume .12 cf.

Body Design: Contains brain, sensors, communicators, wheel drivetrain, helicopter drivetrain, power plants and fuel; total volume 22.06 cf.

Rotary Wing Design: Rotary wing consists of .45 cubic feet of empty space.

Wheel Design: Wheels comprise 4.42 cubic feet total, or 1.1 each.

Surface Area: Total surface area is 72.5 square feet.

Structure: Extra-light expensive TL7 structure (81.5 lbs., $36,250).

Hit Points: Body 19, Arm 1, Wheels 3 each, Rotary Wing 3.

Statistics: Weight 1,184.5 lbs (0.59 tons), total volume 27.05 cubic feet, 2 hexes long (Inconvenient Size, -10 points). Cost: $14,108,220. ST 0/10 [-40], DX 12 [20], IQ 13 [30], HT 8/19 [35], Move 4 ground/64 flying [80]. Cannot float [-5]. Model cost: 141 points.

Advantages: Awakened to full sentience [30], Comfortable [10], Doesn't Sleep [20], Patron (Alpha Supervisor) [10], Status 2 [10].

Disadvantages: Bully [-10], Cowardice [-10], Jealousy [-10], Paranoia [-10].

Quirks: Collects gossip; Flies whenever possible; Hoards gasoline; Servile to superiors [-4].

Skills: Accounting-15 [2], Administration-16 [2], Area Knowledge (Alpha Sector)-15 [1], Broadsword-12 [2], Diplomacy-13 [1], Flight-14 [8], Mechanic/TL7 (Robotics)-14 [1], Navigation/TL7-13 [1], Politics-16 [2], Psychology (Robot)-15 [2], Scrounging-15 [1].

Smasher

Smasher is a Group Ten robot, fending for herself in the wilderness. She is a huge, powerful machine, with many components scavenged from the bodies of past enemies. Her years in the wilderness have made Smasher shrewd and cautious, and she prefers to attack from ambush. Smasher's chief problem is a shortage of power. Her existing power supplies cannot serve all her systems, so Smasher must constantly budget her energy. Completely isolated from the rest of CybEarth's robots, she treats the whole world as her enemy. Smasher is a 763-point character.

Brain: Macroframe computer, TL9, with the Compact and Neural-Net options (1,000 lbs., 20 cf, $4,000,000, 10 KW, Complexity 7, 70 points).

Sensors: Basic TL9 sensors with the 360-Degree Vision, Low-Res Hearing, No Sense of Smell/Taste and Radiation Detector options (1.7 lbs., $4,050, 10 points).

Communications: Basic TL7 communicator package with the Bullhorn and No Cable Jack options (2 lbs., $1,000, 10 points).

Arm Motors: One TL7 arm motor with ST 15 (4.5 lbs., $9,000); one retractable TL9 striker with ST 3 (.675 lbs, $1,350); one extra-flexible TL7 arm with ST 6 (3.6 lbs., $7,200); 10 points.

Propulsion: TL7 leg drivetrain (3 legs), 2 KW (160 lbs., $16,000).

Contact Weaponry: Buzz saw on flexible arm ($100, 4 lbs.)

Ranged Weaponry: Medium laser torch on retractable arm (5 lbs., $250); Light machine gun on arm (25 lbs., $3,000); 100 points.

Accessories: Integral mechanical tool set on flexible arm (10 lbs., $200); Flashlight (2 lbs., $20).

Power Plant: 10-kilowatt TL8 solar cell (200 lbs., $2,000); TL8 rechargeable B-cell (.05 lb., $30); 2-kilowatt TL6 gasoline engine (30 lbs., $10, uses 0.2 gallons per hour).

Fuel: 6-gallon gasoline tank (42 lbs., .9 cf, $60, -11 points).

Subassemblies: Head, body, three arms, three legs, external pod.

Arm Design: Right arm holds the ST 15 motor and the light machine gun (.6 cubic feet); left arm is extra-flexible and holds the buzz saw, the ST 6 motor and the mechanical tool set (.36 cubic feet); the retractable arm holds the medium laser torch and the ST 3 motor (.78 cubic feet).

Body Design: The body contains the brain, the retractable arm, the solar cell and the energy bank (24.79 cubic feet).

Head Design: Holds the sensors, communicators and flashlight (0.12 cubic feet).

Leg Design: Each leg holds one leg motor (1.07 cubic feet each).

Pod Design: Contains the gasoline engine and fuel tank (1.5 cubic feet).

Surface Area: Right arm 5 square feet, left arm 4 square feet, body 60 square feet, head 1.5 square feet, legs 7 square feet each, pod 8 square feet; total 99.5 square feet.

Structure: Body, head and pod are TL9 structure, legs and external arms are TL7 (388.5 lbs., $9,950).

Hit Points: Body 90, head 2, right arm 15, left arm 12, retractable arm 15, legs 10 each, pod 12.

Armor and Threat Protection: Waterproof ($199).

Statistics: Design weight 1,879.025 lbs. (.94 tons); volume 30.58 cubic feet (Inconvenient Size, -10); 14' tall. Cost $4,054,419. ST 84/15 [185]; DX 11 [10]; IQ 12 [20]; HT 12/90 [410]; Move 10 [20]; Cannot Float [-5]. Model cost: 829 points.

Advantages: Awakened to full sentience [30].

Disadvantages: Dead Broke [-25]; Enemies (Nearly everyone) [-30]; Greed [-15]; Paranoia [-10]; Reputation (Murderous bandit) [-20]; Unlucky [-10].

Quirks: Collects heads of opponents; Despises "weaklings"; Fears the Victorians; Gloats; Hopes to build an offspring [-5].

Skills: Beam Weapons/TL8-12 [2], Brawling-12 [2], Camouflage-14 [1], Guns/TL7 (Machine Gun)-13 [4], Intimidation-13 [1], Electronics/TL7-14 [2], Mathematics-12 [1], Mechanic/TL7 (Robotics)-15 [2], Stealth-11 [2], Tactics-12 [1], Tracking-13 [1].

THE HOLE

A Dark World of Mystery and Danger

BY JEFF KOKE

The Hole is a multi-genre campaign background. It has elements of fantasy and time travel, with a little bit of cyberpunk thrown in. This article presents a general background, designed to outline the basic world; the GM will have to create some specifics to flesh it out. Hopefully, however, this article conveys enough of the flavor of this sinister place to sustain many hours of roleplaying.

The Hole is, as its name implies, a 30-mile-wide hole set into a planet of solid rock. Creatures are brought to the hole from any time, anywhere and in any of several ways – dimensional gates, spells-gone-wrong, powerful magic items, etc.

But the Hole is much more than just a collection of interdimensional travelers; it is a place of incredible diversity and danger. People and creatures from many times, worlds and planes of existence live together in a seething pit of conflict and crime. While a few political systems exist – Dragon City's feudalism and New A'kina's democracy – anarchy is the norm. Roving gangs patrol the darker boroughs, and the Arena is everyone's sadistic playground.

The population of the Hole is somewhere near 300,000 – about 75% humans from various times on Earth, and 25% creatures and races from other planes of existence. Therefore, the architecture and society are largely Earth-flavored . . . with some notable exceptions.

The Hole is made up of nine walled boroughs. Some have controlling governments. Others keep control through gang law; unknown visitors are either assimilated into a gang through initiation rites, killed outright or, if they're lucky, robbed and thrown out of the borough. And two – Scum Town and the South River Quarter – have no laws whatsoever.

Geography

The Hole is a circular area, about 30 miles in diameter, surrounded by mile-high cliffs (completely smooth and unclimbable). A few daring mages and balloonists have reached the top of the cliffs only to find a landscape of desolate rock stretching to the horizon in all directions – and an asphyxiating lack of oxygen. The Hole seems to be some kind of bizarre terrarium, set into a planet of solid stone.

Inside the Hole, the land is shaped like a shallow bowl, low in the center and turning to hills within 3 or 4 miles of the cliffs. Most of the edges have been preserved for lumber and wildlife. The rest is developed city, except for the Ironkill Woods, resting implacably and largely ignored in the center. A river (simply called

The River) flows from two waterfalls on either side of the Hole, meeting in Darkwater Lake at the very center. The lake is very deep. Several creatures have attempted to find its outlet as a means of escape. No one knows what they discovered.

The sun over the Hole wobbles in a wide circle around the sky; more sophisticated adventurers may guess that this is a tide-locked planet, circling a dying sun. The sun produces about three-fourths as much light as Earth's sun. And the various factories and alcohol-burning generators produce great amounts of smoke, which is understandably slow to clear away, given the geography. Thus, the Hole is locked in a kind of eternal dusk. While there is rain, there seems to be little if any seasonal variation. The temperature is a fairly constant 68° year-round.

History

No one knows when or how the Hole came into existence. The current calendar is almost 2,000 years old, and it did not start at the beginning, but at what is called "The Exodus." It is theorized that the Exodus occurred when a large percentage of the population found a way out of the Hole. The remaining few began a new calendar.

There is very little written history, and what exists is often contradictory, relying heavily on unsubstantiated myths and folklore. Oral history is even worse – most stories revolve around the appearance of the Gates every five years and how they were discovered.

It is said that the Hole was originally a lush valley, with lots of trees and wildlife. The original inhabitants built small villages and lived primitive lives off the land. As the population grew, and people and creatures from more advanced societies arrived, the Hole was developed. Cities sprang up, rocks were mined from the cliffs, and whole square miles of forest cleared for lumber. Charismatic leaders squabbled for power and finally separated into their own little city-states. This is largely the system that survives today.

As the Hole became more crowded, an air of discontent began to color the lives of the denizens. Often this was taken out on newcomers, who were seen as symbols of the total unfairness of existence in the Hole. The culmination of centuries of this undercurrent was the construction of the Arena – a place where newcomers would have to go through an "initiation" of sorts. Once the Arena was complete, the animosity toward newcomers lessened (at least *outside* the coliseum). It was a major turning point.

Since then, the history of the Hole has been a story of steady growth, with an occasional plague, war, or exodus greatly reducing the population. Currently, the place is populous but not crowded. It could hold another 100,000 without straining the ecosystem.

The Gates

The Gates are seemingly magical portals that transport people out of the Hole. They appear about every five years, though not on any specific day or in any specific place. They may also appear other times, apparently at random throughout the intervening years. Many claim there is a secret for summoning the gates (a persistent rumor is that this method involves large quantities of copper, leading to the high value of that metal). Any number from one to 20 gates may appear at one time.

There is very little written history, and what exists is often contradictory . . .

No one knows where a Gate takes people once they step through. Some people believe that the Gates return people to their place and time of origin, but others are quick to refute this, saying if that were true, some stories of the Hole's existence would have worked their way into Earth's legends. But there are no such stories.

Ultimately, it is up to the GM to decide where the Gates lead, if anywhere. See *Philosophy* (p. 42).

FOREVER FALLS

LUMBERTOWN

THE WETLANDS

THE BRONX

NORTH QUARTER

CHAOSVILLE

THE STRONGHOLD

IRONKILL WOODS

DARKWATER LAKE

NEW AKINA

THE GRAVEYARD

SCUMTOWN

THE ARENA

DRAGON CITY

MINERS' TOWN

PARADISE ALLEY

SOUTH RIVER QUARTER

THE SOUTHERN LUMBER COALITION

SOUTH FALLS

North

THE HOLE

Scale: 30 miles

LAURA EISENHOUR 1993
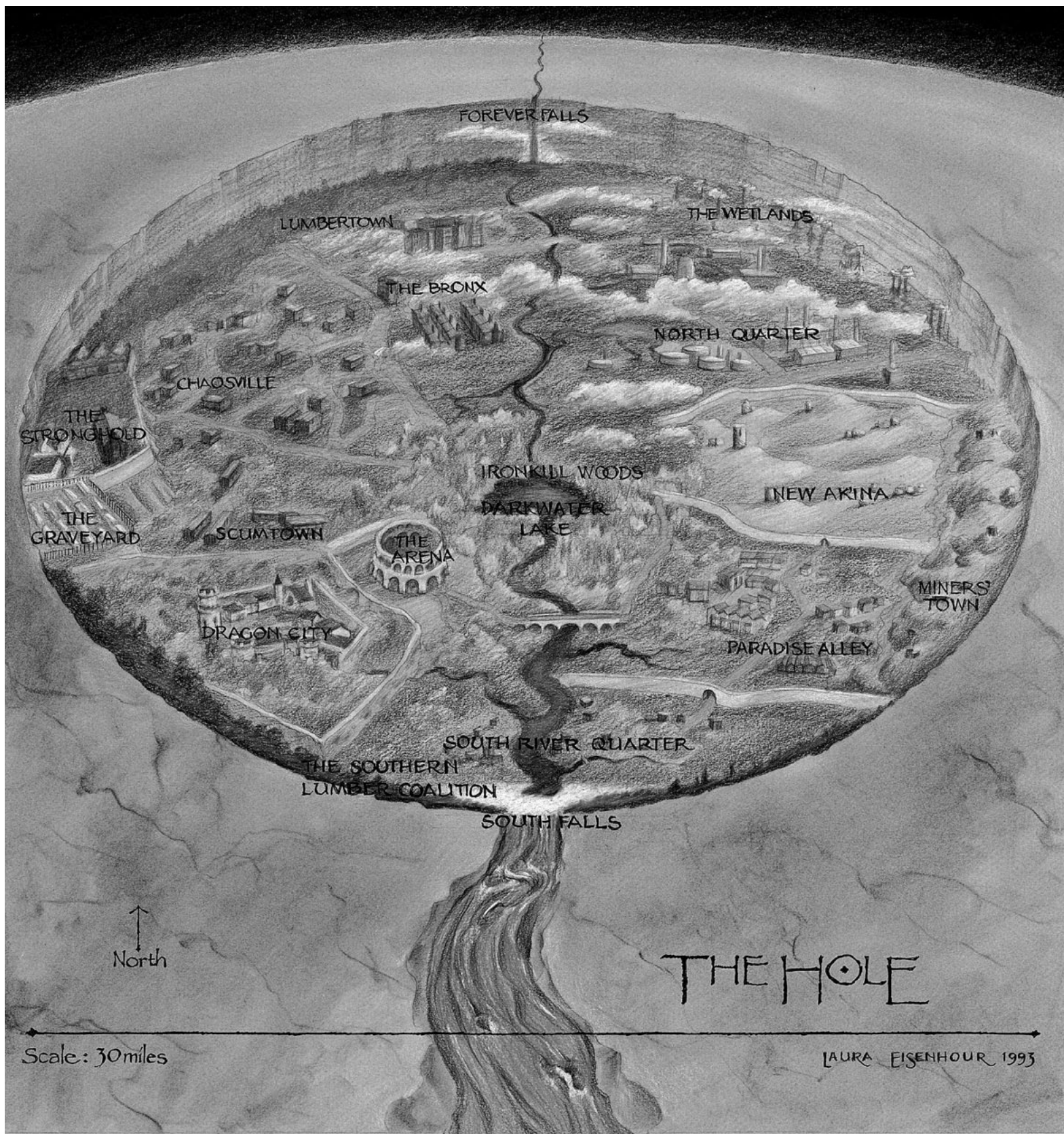
This map, painted by one of the Hole's long-time residents, is typical of those given to a newcomer adopted by one of the societies or gangs that populate this dark world.

The only individual building shown is the Arena, obviously not to scale. Detailed maps would be harder to come by. The rulers of some boroughs consider maps of their territory to be military secrets . . .

Arrival

Creatures brought into the Hole can arrive anywhere, but for some reason they never appear in plain view. No one in the place has ever seen anyone actually arrive. It's always in a secluded place, where the newcomer will be undisturbed for several minutes at the least, sometimes hours. Travelers arrive with whatever they were carrying.

Newcomers will be hard-pressed to assimilate themselves to the Hole quickly. At least half of the populace will react to a new visitor by capturing him and selling him to the Arena. Sometimes merely fighting off this bondage earns the neophyte the respect needed to avoid it in the future. And those who survive the Arena are universally respected.

The People

Denizens of the Hole are divided into two groups: natural residents (anyone born there) and "warpers," people who were transported from elsewhere. There is little bias or social stigma attached to either group. The natural residents tend to admire anyone who has seen another world, and the warpers need the knowledge and experience of lifetime residents.

Not surprisingly, many of the Hole's residents have a dismal view of life. There are the occasional optimists, and everyone *tries* to make the best of it, but the truth is, it's a horrible situation – and there doesn't seem to be any certain way out.

There is a slight Social Stigma attached to non-humans, more severe the less-human a creature is. An Elf might have a -1 Social Stigma, while Treefolk might receive a -3 or -4. Reptile Men might have a Social Stigma, but no one would tell them.

Celebrities

It is a tempting thing for the GM to have every major missing or mysterious figure from history or popular culture living and thriving in the Hole. Certainly, famous people whose deaths are unrecorded or who vanished at some point in their lives could have appeared here. (Amelia Earhart and Beowulf are two that are presented here; see p. 39.) It is highly unlikely that a significant number have arrived. In any case, here are some possibilities: anyone who "went down" with the *Titanic* or *Hindenburg*, any crewmembers from the *Mary Celeste* or inhabitants of the Roanoke colony, Benjamin Bathurst, Ambrose Bierce, D.B. Cooper, Jimmy Hoffa, the Lindberg Baby, Jim Morrison, Moses, Elvis Presley, and François Villón.

There will also be people and creatures who claim to be celebrities, but whom the PCs, or anyone else, don't recognize. These people will act as if they should be treated with reverence and get very upset when they aren't recognized. Sometimes, they will actually achieve fame in the Hole, justifying their egos.

The GM may also wish to include famous personalities from his own game world.

Money

Gold and copper are the standard forms of currency. This arose partly because of the natural tendency for humans to trade in valuable metals and partly because both of these metals are highly conductive and required for electronics. Electronic equipment is uncommon in the Hole, but prized greatly.

There is no universal coinage, and many establishments use small scales to measure the amount for purchases. An ounce of gold is called simply a "gold" – a half an ounce of copper is one "copper." Coppers are very rare as it is rumored that copper serves as sort of a "lodestone" to the Gates; this has yet to be proven, yet the rumor persists and people tend to hoard copper, driving its value up even more.

If nothing else, this system will confuse newcomers as they are separated from their "worthless" copper, and perhaps teach them some humility in the process.

Hole Currency
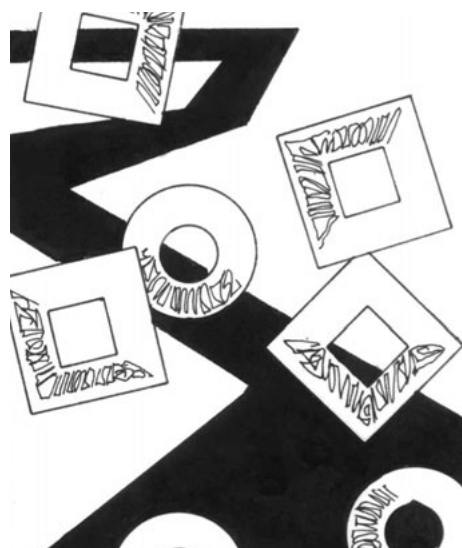
Currency Conversion:

½ oz. of copper =
1 copper =
10 golds

1 oz. of gold =
1 gold =
2 half-golds

1 half-gold =
2 quarters =
4 eighths

An eighth is the smallest amount used for purchases.

Bartering is also common in all boroughs and must be used with Ironkill Woods natives, since copper, gold, and other metals cannot exist there.

Food

How do 300,000 people live on 700 square miles of land, only 30% of which is arable? Very carefully.

Within the city, a decent portion of each borough is devoted to gardens and plots of land. The main vegetables are potatoes and squash – items that don't require a lot of sunlight. The forested areas hold an abundant amount of wildlife, most of which is edible, and seems to be on a faster reproductive cycle than their Earth counterparts.

The Ironkill Woods makes up at least half of the arable land, and it is practically bursting with game. Its denizens hunt and barter their catches for goods from the cities.

A few gangs in the darker boroughs don't have the time to farm or the money to buy produce. They have resorted to cannibalism – it is unwise to cross such people.

Magic

Magic does exist in the Hole, in *some* form or another. The gates might be magical, or they might not, but the Ironkill Woods *are* enchanted. The GM should decide before the campaign what level of mana the Hole possesses. The background works well with a level of Normal for the basic area and High for the Ironkill woods. It is recommended that it not be more than High for the general area, and Very High for the Ironkill Woods, as this would lend an unfair advantage to mages and magical creatures. Regardless, the woods should be one level higher than the surrounding area.

The availability and commonness of magic will have a profound effect on the political structure of the Hole, since life in the Hole is a constant power struggle. If magic is common, mages will hold the lion's share of the power – any borough with a political system will likely be run by a mage or council of mages. The mysterious leader behind the Stronghold will *definitely* have some magical abilities.

If magic is uncommon, then technology will have the edge. Anyone who has been able to construct guns or other technological advances will be in power.

The Boroughs
The Bronx

The Bronx is a community fashioned after its 20th-century Earth namesake. Four- and five-story tenement buildings line many of the streets, save for the northwestern section, which contains several mini-fortresses called the Devil's Mansions. These are owned and lived in by the borough's Mafioso Dons.

The society is oligarchal, with mutual cooperation by the local Dons to protect the borough from gang scavengers and hostile annexing by Chaosville or the North Quarter. Each Don controls a small section of the borough, employing the residents as muscle, casino workers, servants or messengers.

The Bronx is big on casinos, and the Gateway is a big attraction. Featuring 20 gambling pits, it is the most sumptuously decorated building for miles around. Several of the more exclusive rooms have electric light, and the rest have elaborate methane lighting systems.

Another big attraction is Club Animalia, an exotic nightclub that

features dancers of all races and species. The club is one of the few places in the Hole that supports live electric music, with a 10,000-watt sound system, powered by an alcohol-burning generator that goes through 1,000 gallons for one show. Its second floor is also the site of the most exclusive brothel in the Hole, run by an aging, but still sexy, Amelia Earhart.

The Bronx is surrounded by a 50-foot wall with guard posts every 100 yards. Entry costs 1 gold per person, and standard hotel rate is a half-gold per person, per night.

Chaosville

Chaosville is exactly what it sounds like – a maze of twisted streets and ruined buildings. It is a gang-run borough with competing gangs vying for resources and members. Most residents work in the factories: a group of steel mills, furniture and construction supply factories, and clothing manufacturers in the southeast corner of the borough. The rest own the run-down shops and cat houses on Market Row.

The street dregs are just as likely to run screaming from you as they are to kill you and sell your body for its chemicals.

The two largest gangs are Mother Hen's, run by an Amazon motorcycle queen, and the Outsiders, a multi-racial group made up of Elves, Dwarves, Koreans, blacks, Ogres, Orcs and others.

Visitors are warned not to remain overnight in Chaosville, as this will almost always be viewed as encroachment on someone's turf. Intruders, depending upon their skills, may be asked to join the gang, or they may be killed and their bodies nailed to the outer wall as a warning.

Popular sites in Chaosville include Stadium Gray, a gladiator sport arena with a lethal set-up. Combatants compete in a variety of deadly sports.

Gambling is encouraged, and Tuesday is amateur night.

The walls around Chaosville are 8' high, and there is no tariff to get in. There are no public services, however, and thievery is common.

Scum Town

Scum Town is no man's land, home to lesser gangs, fugitives from gang justice in other boroughs, and derelicts with nothing to their names. Scum Town is a hunting ground for North Quarter slavers, and the street dregs are just as likely to run screaming from you as they are to kill you and sell your body for its chemicals.

There is an old, decrepit wall around the borough, but it is mostly ruined and there is no problem getting in. Getting out is another matter entirely . . .

Dragon City

Dragon City is mostly populated with medieval Earthlings, people from fantasy realms, magical beasts and races and *extremely* happy modern-day SCA members.

Dragon Square is a marvel of medieval architecture. Four massive dragon statues rise dramatically out of working fountains at each of the square's corners. Festivals with minstrels and bards are weekly occurrences, and the food is nutritious and tasty.

The Faust Inn is the biggest attraction of the borough. Boasting the finest cuisine in the Hole, the inn is run by a man who claims to be the legendary Beowulf. He'll arm-wrestle anyone who challenges him, and rumor has it that he's never lost.

The only spoiler to the borough's medieval feel is the headquarters of a mercenary group that calls itself the Thunderbird Pigs. The Pigs have two replica Ford Thunderbirds, painted in 20th-century police colors, which they drive through the borough at night, screeching tires and honking horns. This is tolerated because they pay their taxes on time – and they are some of the finest warriors in the Hole, second only perhaps to those of the Reptile Lodge in New A'kina.

Dragon City is run by a feudal king, who delegates his authority to five lesser dukes, each with his own section of the borough. Each duke is responsible for collecting taxes from his serfs and paying the king.

Entry to Dragon City costs a half-gold per entrant, and typical lodging can be purchased for an eighth. Firearms, blasters, and other high-tech weapons must be checked at the gate. The guards are, however, very good about returning them.

The Arena

The Arena is the most popular place in the Hole. For some deep-seated psychological reason, the creatures here like to see newcomers go through hell. New arrivals who can't assimilate themselves fast enough, or pay their way free, are taken to the arena.

The floor of the Arena is similar to that of a normal Earth arena. It is covered with tightly-packed sand and contains cages that can be opened remotely. Usually the cages contain animals or strange beasts, but for special occasions they might hold mechanical death machines. Hanging from a high pole on one end of the Arena is a banner containing a portrait of Charles Darwin, with the words "Survival of the Fittest," written in every known language of the Hole – 137 to date.

The Arena floor also contains doors and gates that lead to the understructure – a maze of tunnels, traps and corridors, getting worse as they stretch underneath the stands and out of the main audience's view. The tunnels, however, are lined with a thick, see-through mesh that holds back hordes of screaming fans, who are just waiting for the prisoner to fall prey to any of the many traps and pitfalls that mark the escape route.

Anyone who escapes must exit through a spray of green dye, and is thus marked. Representatives from all of the Hole's boroughs and major organizations will seek out marked people and attempt to recruit these survivors. PCs can expect to be wined and dined by prospective employers and gang leaders. This should be a welcome change from the rigors of the Arena.

If the survivors aren't happy with any of their offers, and fail to find friends or patrons, they risk another trip to the Arena.

It costs a whopping two golds to get into the Arena on Fridays (though year-long tickets can be purchased for three coppers), and one gold any other night. They have escape contests on most other weeknights, but they are not as grueling or dangerous as Friday's contests. On Saturday and Sunday the Arena closes for cleaning.

The South River Quarter

This borough is reminiscent of Scum Town, except that it's not as violent. It is populated with derelicts, drunks, and poverty-stricken fishermen. There is no industry to support any style of living except ghastly poor. The South River Quarter is a good place for refugees as long as they don't look like they have any money at all.

Paradise Alley

"*Welcome to the Devil's Playground, Mephistopheles' Arcade, the fallen angels' funhouse of sleaze, seduction and sin. Leave your conscience at the Gate, and have your money ready. Excess shall be the whole of the law – anything for a price.*"

– A sign over every gate
leading into Paradise Alley

Paradise Alley is a carouser's Garden of Eden. Most of the major streets are lined with bars, clubs, casinos and whorehouses. The New French Quarter is a realistic mock-up of 20th-century New Orleans. Jazz clubs, strip clubs and more whorehouses line the cobblestone streets. In the Carnival District, rhythmic South American music fills the air, and every night is *Carnivál*. Costumed creatures and scantily clad women dance in the streets till dawn.

The borough is protected by the *Gendarme Verde*, a group of guards and mercenaries who follow the codes of the French Foreign Legion. They patrol the 40' wall constantly and do not tolerate any violence more extreme than brawling. Should weapons come out on the street, the *Gendarmes* will arrest the perpetrators, confiscate their weapons and kick them summarily out. They will, of course, be allowed to return provided they pay the 10-gold fine – Paradise Alley still wants their money.

New A'kina

New A'kina is a borough that is run by a council of Reptile Men. At one point in the Hole's history, a large percentage of Reptile Men warped in over a short period of time. Most who faced the Arena survived, and they quickly organized into a cohesive group. They conquered whoever controlled the borough before them and renamed it New A'kina.

The Arena was built 800-900 years ago as a weeding-out device to keep the population down. It worked, but the side-effect was that the survivors tend to be either strong and brutal or crafty and sly. The chaotic nature of the land tends to push those types of creatures toward the criminal life.

The Arena is a giant stadium, taller than it is wide. It seats 50,000, but usually only 25,000 are present on Friday nights, when captured new arrivals are set loose inside. It is constructed of stone, wood, and some metal; its architecture is a mixture of heavy Gothic and modern minimalism.

There are a few points of interest in New A'kina. The Reptile Lodge is a mercenary headquarters/training camp and the mercenary group's name. Composed almost entirely of Reptile Men, this group is the greatest mercenary company in the land. Their motives are secret, however, and no one on the outside can predict who they will work for. Sometimes they take exorbitant amounts of money to do snuff work for a powerful gang, and sometimes they do charity work, delivering food to the dregs of the South River Quarter. They are indeed inscrutable.

Kal'kath Stadium is the best music venue in the Hole. It holds weekly shows for one of the five touring bands that can afford that lifestyle. It seats 10,000. Rather than electrical amplification, the owners employ a group of mages who use their collective talents to magically amplify the musicians instruments and voices.

Finally, G'othk Pub has the largest selection of ales and beers in the land, perhaps the best anywhere since it includes beers from many different times, societies, and planes of existence. The pub sits comfortably in front of the G'othk brewery, which offers tours and beer samples for one gold per person.

Entrance to New A'kina costs a quarter.

The North Quarter

This bleak borough is the industrial center of the Hole. It is a dictatorship where slavery is legal and slave trading is big business. They also run a fairly profitable business of reducing corpses to chemicals – sulfur, potassium, salt, copper, etc. The borough's factories manufacture many other products from alcohol-powered motorcycles to dentist's chairs.

Entrance to the North Quarter is free to anyone who has business there. Visitors who aren't on official business (delegates from another borough, slave traders, etc.) are discouraged. As a rule, if it becomes obvious that they're not there to spend money, they are brusquely asked to leave. Anyone suspected of abolitionist activities will be captured and enslaved.

Other Areas of Interest

In addition to the boroughs, there are several other interesting sites.

Lumber Companies

Two areas of forest (to the north and south) are walled off and used for lumber. These areas are heavily patrolled, and intruders are killed without warning or provocation. Lumber is big business in the Hole and the proprietors of the lumber companies want to keep competition to a minimum.

The Wetlands

A swamp lies to the northeast, called the Wetlands. It is not practical for lumber as it is populated with the barely-human, cannibalistic "swamp rats," giant alligators, and poisonous swamp toads.

Miner's Town

Miner's Town is to the east. It is also heavily patrolled, for it controls the lion's share of mining in the Hole. Iron, silver, and platinum are plentiful. Copper and gold are rare. Bronze, aluminum, and other soft metals are nearly nonexistent.

Ironkill Woods

In the center of the land lie the Ironkill Woods. This area is enchanted such that any metal brought in instantly crumbles to dust. This area is populated by primitive tribesmen, Native Americans, martial artists, and mages. Those who fight use wood and stone weapons and hunt the exotic game of the woods. They trade with those in the city proper, but do not leave the sanctuary of the forest.

They accept newcomers who adhere to the woods' lifestyle, but woe to those who attempt to deceive them. They have a type of pluralistic democracy with monthly "pow-wows" around Darkwater Lake. Their society is mysterious and secluded. Most residents of the Hole avoid the woods.

The Graveyard

When the first unlucky people were transported into the Hole, they encountered an unspoiled countryside. They built small towns and welcomed newcomers. As the population grew and they lived and died, they buried their dead in a large plot to the southeast. That was over 5,000 years ago.

After about 8,000 people had been buried in that area, the residents of the Hole gave up on proper burials. For one thing, the Graveyard was full and space was becoming precious. Second, many people from modern times recognized the value of chemicals in a person's body, especially the iron in the blood, which could be refined and used. The Graveyard was closed.

Since then, the place has developed a reputation for being haunted. A combined sense of respect and fear keeps those already buried safe and undisturbed.

The Graveyard is about three miles wide by five miles long. Besides tombstones and grave markers, there are a number of free-standing mausoleums, which were built on top of old graves.

The Stronghold

Finally, there is the Stronghold. Built against the cliffs to the west, the Stronghold is a private city-state that is almost completely self-contained. It has its own mining and farming operations and supports at least 1,000 permanent residents. It imports lumber from Lumbertown and meat from the Ironkill Woods.

It is heavily defended, and its walls could withstand artillery attacks. No one gets into the Stronghold without an invitation. Those in the Stronghold are a few of the only people in the Hole who are not actively working to leave. They live in relative luxury, and whoever runs the place would be a fool to leave his magnificent estate behind.

The Stronghold is run by one individual, whose identity is shrouded in mystery. There are rumors that secret tunnels lead from the Stronghold into every area of the city, and that Stronghold agents are everywhere, influencing the political and criminal activities of the Hole.

Philosophy

Deep inner reflections may not come easily to the type of person likely to survive here, but the Hole can make philosophers from the the most unlikely sort. Following are a few common beliefs concerning the existence and purpose of the Hole and the reasons for creatures' arrival there. It is up to the GM to determine which, if any, are true.

Religions
Hell Theory

One unpopular, but widely believed, theory is that the Hole is Hell. The theory holds that everyone who came here died just before, or just as, they warped in. This is contradicted by

many reports of people stepping into magical gates and being transported here, but the Hell Theory proponents argue that it's possible that the "gates" were simply destructive fields that killed those who entered.

The Hell Theory accounts for the violence and suffering that is largely present in this brutal land, but it can't account for the relative peace of the Ironkill Woods or the fact that the Gates seem to transport people out.

Purgatory Theory

Another theory along the same lines is that this is the biblical Purgatory, where those who need to improve their moral makeup are sent upon death. Thus the Gates are seen as delivering those who have somehow achieved the proper moral stature. This theory has not gained much popularity since those who adopt a strict Christian attitude tend to be weeded out fairly quickly.

Satanism

The belief in Satan (or any number of other Evil Gods) is quite popular with some residents, especially those who are looking for justification for their immoral deeds. Many churches of Satan, temples of Set, and other worse gods can be found in the boroughs. It is even rumored that the priests of these temples gain magical powers through their worship.

The Mensalites

A small, but growing, faction of creatures has decided that whatever god or gods exist created this place as an intellectual puzzle. The solution to the puzzle is finding out what controls the Gates and how one can predict when and where it will appear. This group puts great effort into researching the Gates and stories of escapes from the Hole. There are Mensalite temples in Dragon City, New A'kina, the Bronx, and Paradise Alley.

Theory and Speculation

Beyond religious speculation, there are other theories as to why the Hole exists and why its residents are brought there. Here are some of the ones adventurers may hear.

The Prison

Some denizens theorize that the Hole is simply an elaborate prison, either magical or technological, that its creators are using to hold creatures they consider to be undesirables. This runs parallel to the Purgatory theory in that it is thought that once one achieves a certain moral quietude, he can find the gates and leave.

Promised Land Gone Wrong

Another line of thinking proposes that this place was originally set aside as a sort of a utopia or a playground for extradimensional beings. Something, though, has gone terribly wrong with the plan, and now the mechanism for transporting creatures in and out of the land is broken. The gates now appear randomly in the Hole to transport people out, and around the universe, dancing haphazardly along the space-time continuum. If this theory is correct, perhaps the mechanism for controlling the gates can be found and fixed. Maybe it lies in the depths of Darkwater Lake, or deep beneath the towering cliffs, waiting to be discovered by some unsuspecting miner.

Population Control

The most paranoid minds believe the Gates act as a sort of population control: you step through, you die.

The Experiment

Finally, some of the most cynical residents believe that everyone was brought here to perpetuate some sort of inhuman sociology experiment, either for the education of some pandimentional creatures or merely for their pleasure. Either way, there is no way to leave unless they want you to – or unless someone can figure out the pattern or mechanism behind the appearance of the gates.

Whatever the explanation, most agree that something has gone *very* wrong, or they wouldn't be there! The more influential of these thinkers organize groups of explorers to find the elusive secret – whether it's a ritual to be performed in the Ironkill Woods or a secret control room beneath Forever Falls.

Campaigning in the Hole

The Hole is a dangerous place, but it is also a place of great diversity and some beauty. Even a timid person can survive, provided he has the wits and cunning to stay away from the obvious dangers.

Most Hole campaigns will start with the PCs' arrival. Unaware of the nature of their new home, they may fall prey to those who capture newcomers to face the perils of the Arena. If they survive the Arena, the heroes will have plenty of opportunities to join up with one of the Hole's many societies. Conflict may arise when they decide they don't like their chosen group.

Once settled, the Hole's various places can provide a wealth of adventures. Perhaps the explorers are recruited by members in the Stronghold and given a variety of missions, ranging from intelligence gathering to assassination. Maybe they will forgo their metal weapons to join the inhabitants of the Ironkill Woods, only to find out they must pass certain initiation rites . . . or die! Or the heroes might enter one of the darker boroughs, where they must join a gang or face one down.
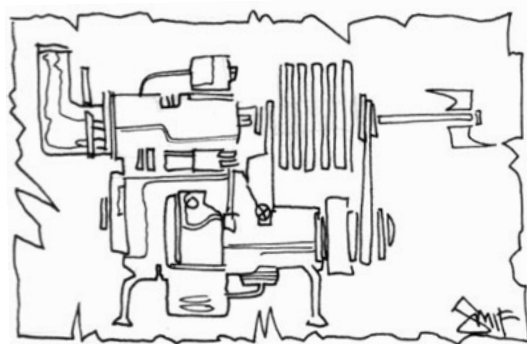
Schematics for a theoretical Gate Summoning Device.

Ultimately, most campaigns will drive toward the goal of escaping the dark world of the Hole, via the Gates.

The GM should use the Gates as plot devices to drive the campaign forward, and when he feels he has exhausted the Hole's possibilities, he should allow the final adventure to take the PCs through the Gates to . . . wherever.

Adventure Seeds
Revenge of the Woodsmen

As the population of the Hole has grown, so has the industry needed to support it. Factories, burning alcohol and wood, are becoming more common. Pollution is threatening the health of the trees in the Ironkill Woods. The woods seem to have retreated a few yards in the last few years, something *everyone* thought was impossible.

The inhabitants of the magical forest are forced to take action. The metalless warriors are coming out in small forces, invading and shutting down factories in the North Quarter.

The heroes can either be part of these commando raids, or hirelings for the factory owners who fear their operation may be next on the list.

Necropolis by Night

A very influential man has a far-fetched theory that there is a way to summon a Gate inside the expanse of the Graveyard. He has entrusted the adventurers to find out if it's true.

The theory involves trekking to the point nearest the cliffs, in the heart of the cemetery, and setting up a "Gate Summoning Device." Then they have to wait . . . for seven days.

If the heroes examine the device closely, they will discover that it is made almost entirely of copper! It must be worth a fortune – how tempting to just disappear with it. Of course, then they would have a very powerful enemy, and there just aren't many places to hide in the Hole.

On the other hand, if they don't run off with it, someone else may find out how valuable it is.

And what happens if the device works? Do the PCs run back and tell their superior, or do they just leave?

Mysterious Stranger

A stranger arrives. While this is nothing unusual by itself, the demeanor of the stranger is. He seems to know a lot about the geography, history, and politics of the Hole . . . certainly, it seems, more than someone who was just guessing. With his knowledge, he is amassing a surprising amount of power for a new arrival.

If questioned or befriended, he will claim to have been in the Hole before, then escaped. But all research fails to turn up any record of his existence before arrival. If his story is true, then how did he escape, and to where? And why doesn't anyone recognize him? How did he get back? If he *hasn't* been here before, how does he know so much? Is he relying on precognitive visions, psychology, or other abilities (mundane or supernatural) to play the Hole's power game in a unique – but effective – way?

All Fall Down

The heroes uncover a massive conspiratorial scheme to destroy the Arena. While the party will, in all likelihood, not have fond memories towards the place, they should recognize the importance of the structure to the Hole as both a landmark and forge. Who is behind it, and why?

Any conspiracy that would even consider such machinations must be huge, powerful, or both. If the adventurers try to thwart the conspiracy, where can they go, and who can they trust? If they join the plot, what effect will it have if they succeed? What effect will it have if they fail? If they try to remain uninvolved, can they? Or will they learn, like so many before, that neutrality is one of the biggest challenges in the Hole?

THE UNITY WAR

A NEAR-FUTURE ROLEPLAYING CAMPAIGN BY STEPHEN KENSON

The year is 2015, and humankind does not seem to have changed much. Despite the warnings of apocalyptic cults and doom-sayers about the turn of the millennium, the world is much as it has always been. Or so it seems. But there is an evolutionary destiny stirring in the minds of humanity, a genetic birthright that some extraordinary individuals are now beginning to discover, powers of the mind that were once only the stuff of legend and speculation.

And in the distant reaches of space other minds are watching with interest to discover how humanity will deal with this birthright and are waiting to judge the results. The future of humanity hangs in the balance . . .

THE UNITY

The Unity is the name of an interstellar civilization that has existed in and around Earth's "neighborhood" of the Milky Way galaxy for the past several centuries. It is composed of at least a dozen member races from various planets in a space at least 1,000 light years in diameter.

The Unity's civilization and technology is based on the use of psionics. All of the member races of the Unity are psionic and have channeled their science and industry into psi-tech that influences all aspects of their society. Communications are handled telepathically and instantly, even over interstellar distances. Medicine is strongly focused on psychic healing, and life-extension techniques allow members of the Unity races to life very long lives indeed, usually measured in centuries. Even their star-drives are psionically based "jump drives" that allow ships to teleport across vast interstellar distances with the aid of a psionic navigator.

Their sophisticated technology and telepathic society has given the Unity a very developed and peaceful culture. Crime is almost nonexistent and the races of the Unity

hold up the fact that their highly empathic natures make them reluctant to harm other creatures. The few non-psionic races known to them are no threat to the Unity because the telepathic "world minds" they are capable of forming can overcome any invasion force in an instant.

The Unity is founded on the belief that all intelligent races have the capacity to evolve psionic abilities, and that psi is the ultimate expression of a "higher-stage" of evolutionary development. Eventually, life will develop into a state of pure thought, without the need for physical form. The member races have a tradition of "stewardship" towards the non-psionic races they encounter, patiently awaiting the day when they too will develop psi and be welcomed into the ranks of the universal mind.

While such a primitive race is developing, the Unity has a strict non-intervention policy, lest they interfere with the race's natural process of development. The Unity has known about Earth for centuries, but they have carefully done nothing more than observe and keep tabs on human progress, mostly psionically from a great distance without anyone the wiser.

For GMs using *GURPS Space*, the Unity can be described with the following information:

Overall Tech Level: 10 to 11
STL Travel: TL10
Reactionless Drive FTL Travel: Psionic jump-drive. The Unity has not investigated other means of interstellar travel and it is quite possible that there are no other means.
FTL Speed: Instantaneous across up to 3 parsecs. Some rarer ships have greater "speed" and can cover several times that distance in a single jump.
FTL Range: Virtually unlimited because the drive requires no fuel, only the power of a psi-navigator to guide it.

FTL Navigation: Simple straight-line, point-to-point transfer. Navigation does require psionic abilities to carry out, but this is not a problem for Unity personnel.

FTL Anomalies: None known at this time.

Power: TL11 Fusion and Antimatter.

FTL Radio: None, but Unity psi-tech does permit telepathic communication over interstellar distances with no lag-time. This requires fairly bulky booster equipment and amplifiers that can only be found in a ship or installation; they are not easily portable.

Habitable Worlds: Perhaps 60 or so within the bounds of the Unity, with new colony worlds being discovered and explored at a rate of one or two a year.

Sensors: TL10 and very accurate. Often augmented by psionic gestalts using Telepathy, ESP and Astral Projection.

Weapons: Heavy reliance on psionic-enhancement technology to create powerful gestalts for planetary defense. Ships carry light defensive weaponry as well, usually sophisticated particle beams.

Computers: Psionic AIs are fairly common, but psiborg technology using living tissue is strictly prohibited.

Medical: TL10 with strong reliance on physicians with psionic Healing skills as well as citizens' inherent healing abilities. Life Extension use fairly commonplace.

Aliens: At least a dozen known races. Member races are all psionic. The Kyz and the Meeranon (from *GURPS IST*) as well as any of the psionic races from *GURPS Aliens* would be suitable members.

Government: Participatory democracy conducted through telepathic means such as world-webs and gestalts.

PSIONICS

According to the Unity, psionic ability lies latent in all intelligent races, and the emergence of psi-powers is a sign that the race has reached a significant evolutionary plateau and is ready to join the greater brotherhood of species in interstellar civilization. There is no certainty as yet that this theory is true, but the Unity operates as if it is and, thus far, they seem to have been right.

Humanity, at the very least, does appear to be an emerging psionic species and has been for the last few thousand years of human history. Sporadic manifestations of latent psi abilities may have laid the foundations for many human myths and religions, but only recently have human psionic abilities and the understanding of them begun to reach any level resembling that which the Unity considers acceptable for an "emerging" psionic race.

All psi abilities appear in races that develop them. The races of the Unity possess all of the different psionic powers. Although some races and individuals may be better at some abilities than others, they lie latent in everyone.

This means that all humans technically have 1 level in all of the nine different psi powers from *GURPS Psionics,* but for the vast majority of people these powers are both Unconscious and Uncontrollable (a total -50% Limitation). This "latent psi package" costs 25 points, but is automatic for all humans, so it is recommended that the GM add 25 points to the starting point level to pay for these abilities. These latent psi abilities are the reason for normal human flashes of insight, empathy, intuition and deja vu that occur for everyone.

Some rare humans have higher natural levels of psionic ability, giving them stronger "gut feelings" and sometimes phenomenal "luck" and even highly erratic paranormal abilities. Many such abilities have played roles in human history, with stories of gifted human psis being turned into legends, myths, and fairy tales.

Some even rarer individuals have begun to break through the limitations placed on human psionic powers and develop full-blown psi powers and skills they can consciously control. These people are the first generation of what the Unity believes is humanity's next step in evolution to assume their status as fellow enlightened beings. It only remains to be seen if the humans will survive the birth pangs of their new race and become a full-fledged psionic species, ready for membership in the Unity.

have no choice but to take action against Earth. It is something they have done in the past, and will do again if it is necessary to protect their society. Humanity has no idea that their fate is being judged from afar and even the Unity is not aware that they are not the only players on the field.

THE HIVE

There is one alien civilization that the Unity is unaware of: a complex hive-mind species of microscopic organisms. They are telepathic, and capable of affecting and reading other beings, but their own minds are so alien and strange that human and Unity telepaths have great difficulty connecting with them.

The Hive comes from space, in the form of a kind of "egg" – a protein/DNA soup held in a protective shell strong enough to enter a planet's atmosphere and reach the surface.

There the "mother shell" telepathically attracts local life forms, and the alien fluid from the egg attempts to invade them to place the Hive DNA within their structure. The actual Hive lifeforms are colonies of viruses that develop within the planetary lifeform's biosystem and eventually take control of it.

Using captured lifeforms, the Hive spreads and begins to infiltrate other lifeforms, usually by spreading through the food chain until it reaches the dominant lifeform on the planet. There is at least one world in the Unity's sphere of influence infested with the Hive but, since the planet harbors only primitive life (as far as the Unity knows) they have left it alone.

The Hive has hidden from the Unity's telepathic probes, but is now aware of them. However, the Unity has escaped infiltration because of its non-interference policy and the sophisticated planetary defense systems of its homeworlds.

The Hive has come to Earth to pursue two goals. First, they will be able to take control of an emerging psionic species, gaining the human powers and abilities with which to augment their own.
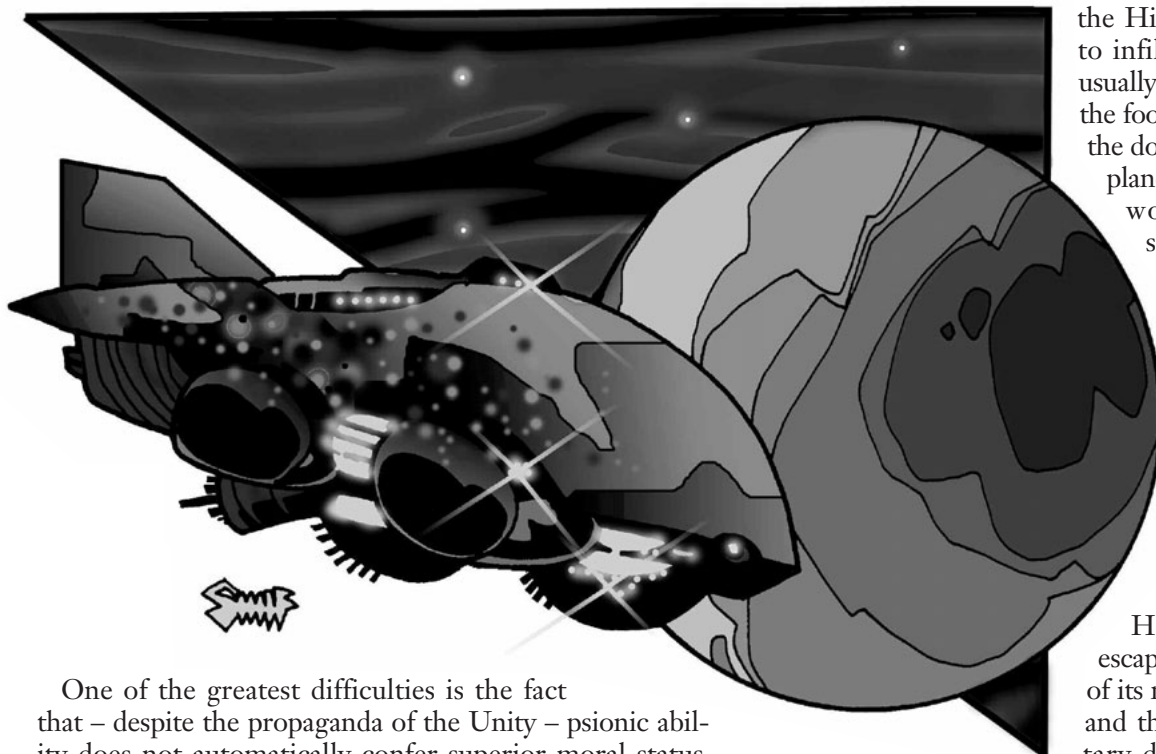
One of the greatest difficulties is the fact that – despite the propaganda of the Unity – psionic ability does not automatically confer superior moral status, and psis are just as capable of abusing the power they are given as anyone. The determining factor will be not only how humans greet the new psis among them, but how the emerging psionic population uses their powers. If it appears that humanity is a threat to them, the Unity will

Second, if they can mask their presence from the Unity until humans are accepted into Unity, they will be able to infiltrate that society as well. The Hive wants Earth to join the Unity, but for reasons of their own.

In **GURPS** terms, a colony of Hive lifeforms that infest a living creature has human level IQ and Telepathy Power 8 with various telepathic skills. They can also use the psionic skills and abilities of their host, if any, and augment the host's Telepathy power with their own (treat this as forming a gestalt).

EARTH

Unaware of the plans of either the Unity or the Hive, Earth continues on its shaky course. The 21st century is not as dark a future as some have painted it, but it does have its problems. Humanity is facing burgeoning population, pollution, environmental devastation, and political unrest. There has been progress, but everything seems like trying to scoop water with a sieve, and every advance only seems to delay the inevitable. Visionaries and futurists say that humanity's only hope is to be able to leave the confinement of a single environment for room to expand, or else suffocate in its own wastes. Humanity has to leave Earth.

This had led to increasing interest in space research, and the more developed nations are pursuing more aggressive space programs once again. Satellites and space stations are fairly routine, and plans are underway to construct a mass-driver for launching payloads to construct permanent orbital habitats and, eventually, colonize Luna.

There is also a strong conservationist movement to take care of what is left of the environment. Oceanic cities are being constructed that "mine" the deep ocean depths for thermal-differential power, and produce vast amounts of algae-based food protein and other aquacultured products. Initiatives to clean up the air and water are being pursued and enforced. An international edict ending the destruction of the Amazon rain forest is in effect, and the signers are working to replant.

Despite these advances, disease is rampant, with higher populations leading to greater incidence of new infection and mutation. Viruses like HIV-III still spread rapidly, making some areas of the world paranoid, isolated behind sterile barriers to keep out any chance of contagion. Travel is slowed by extensive medical checks for any new disease carriers. These safeguards have slowed the spread of the Hive through the human population and forced them to be selective in who is infected, lest they be detected by human authorities too soon.

Population has also continued to increase at an alarming rate, despite the die-offs caused by plague outbreaks.

Cities are all overcrowded, noisy, and crime-ridden, with the close quarters often leading to violent tempers, riots, and civil unrest. Many urban areas have adopted elaborate social codes of politeness modeled loosely on Japanese customs for handling such overcrowding and lack of personal space.

Interconnectivity has increased as well, with the Internet becoming a more mature, worldwide technology. Telecommuting is routine, and more than half the workers in the world use it to get their jobs done. Internet connections are as common as television and telephones in most homes; indeed, they are part of the Integrated Services Digital Network that combines television, telephone, and other such media.

Home computers are sophisticated integrated systems for data- and media-management that also handle many basic housekeeping tasks, like controlling lights and air conditioning (to conserve power). Most computers accept simple voice commands, but direct input through a keypad or similar device is still the standard. Virtual reality controllers using light gloves and goggles are very popular for the well-off, about as common as home computers are today.

Most "cyberpunk" technology hasn't really happened. There is very little in the way of bionics, save for more sophisticated artificial limbs for medical use. Neural interface is still just a distant dream and there are no legions of computer hackers making away with the world's valuable data . . . or at least they're so good that nobody has ever detected them.

The cities are more dangerous than they used to be, and many better-off areas have formed neighborhood watches and hired private security through tenant associations. Most areas are not lawless, however, and violent crimes and riots are put down by the authorities.

Most of the world's major political entities are still in power and struggling to remain that way. Europe continues to limp towards unification, with more stumbling blocks appearing every day. It does have a common currency and few, if any, trade barriers. It also shares a common bureaucracy.

Russia has recovered from the fall of the Soviet Union and is working to turn itself into a major agricultural producer for the rest of the world. China has taken prominence in the world economy. Through the "gateway" city of Hong Kong (China's "silent partner"), China has boosted its economy to deal with the crushing internal pressures of overpopulation and civil unrest.

The United States has remained the doddering old uncle of the family of nations, nodding off in the rocker with a shotgun cradled across his lap. Every once in a while U.S. military forces remind everyone how capable they are, but for the most part the United States has given up on "policing the world" and has tried to turn its attention toward domestic matters.

Japan is sliding down the slope of economic depression, losing ground to the mini-dragons of the Far East like Taiwan and Korea, with the dark shadow of China backing them up. Japanese overpopulation has made Japan one of the major nations developing oceanic cities, which may give it a chance to revitalize its economy once again.

In the rest of the world things are much the same. Third-world nations are quickly becoming information-savvy and skipping over the Industrial Nation stage right into the Information Age, with cellular networks and ISDN connections to rival the best in the world. In many parts of the world, life continues just as it has for millennia, unaware of the changes going on elsewhere.

The governments of the world do have one issue upon which they agree. Something strange is happening to some of their people. None of them are entirely sure what it is, but they know that it disturbs them.

THE CAMPAIGN

The Unity War campaign works best if the players (and their characters) start out completely clueless about the vastness of the issues facing them. An ordinary, low-tech cyberpunk campaign set in the near-future is a good place to get started. The player characters could be anyone: not necessarily hard-bitten mercenaries, but businesspeople, telecommuters, oceanic colonists, street people . . . anyone from any walk of life, just trying to make it in the world. The Game Master should start with a scenario that lets all of the player characters work together from the start: co-workers, members of the same gang, part of the same colony or even members of the same extended family.

As things progress, the adventurers start to discover they can Do Things – just simple flashes of uncanny insight and intuition at first, but eventually major physical psionic phenomena such as psychokinesis and even teleportation. They are part of the first generation of fully realized psionics in the human race. There are others of their kind emerging all over the world; perhaps one person in 10,000 is starting to develop some kind of active psionic ability, and some of those psis are potentially quite powerful.

How will the protagonists react to these abilities? How will they use them? Once they realize what is going on, the governments of the world will scramble to get control of psionics, as will major corporation and other interest groups. Will the newly awakened psis join up with one of them or strike out on their own? They could form the core of a new psionic strike force for the U.S. government, a military psi-corps or even a secret "thought police." If they refuse to join up, how will the government react? Perhaps mildly at first, or perhaps by jailing or executing rogue psis to eliminate the danger they represent. Will the new psis turn against their own kind and hunt down rogues for their employers or turn rogue themselves?

Once the party has begun to settle into things being different in the world, with a sizable psionic population emerging and them at the forefront of it in one way or another, they discover something else entirely. Strange Things are going on within their organization and elsewhere. Very subtle patterns are developing, and possible covert telepathic communications have been detected, but the psi who reported them died in some mysterious "accident."

Following this trail of strange happenings, they discover the presence of the Hive, which they may take to be some kind of psionic conspiracy at first before they discover the microscopic aliens behind it all. And when they do, how will they know who has been co-opted by the Hive and who hasn't? Can they trust anyone in their organization any longer? What happens when a Unity observer decides to break his oath of non-interference by sending covert telepathic messages to certain Earth-people, telling them the truth about the Unity and its observations of their world? The messages can potentially manifest as dreams, subconscious impulses, or simply disembodied voices.

As the campaign progresses, the adventurers become more and more aware of the larger issues they are dealing with, until they discover that their world and the human race are caught in the conflict between the Unity and the Hive. What if the Unity decides to "cleanse" the Earth of the Hive infestation by sterilizing the entire planet for the overall good of interstellar civilization? What if the Hive makes the Unity out to be the bad guys, promising to protect the Earth and humanity from them?

Get the players started and wish them luck.

Thanks to *GURPS'* modular nature, it's easy to delete, add, or change any rules you want. Presented, then, for the tinkerer in all of us, are an assortment of options and items . . . with more than a few story ideas thrown in for good measure. (After all, rules are often tied to the worlds or ideas that inspire them.) But be warned: if you find yourself consumed in a greenish ball of fire because you've tapped into magical energy levels you cannot control, don't blame us.
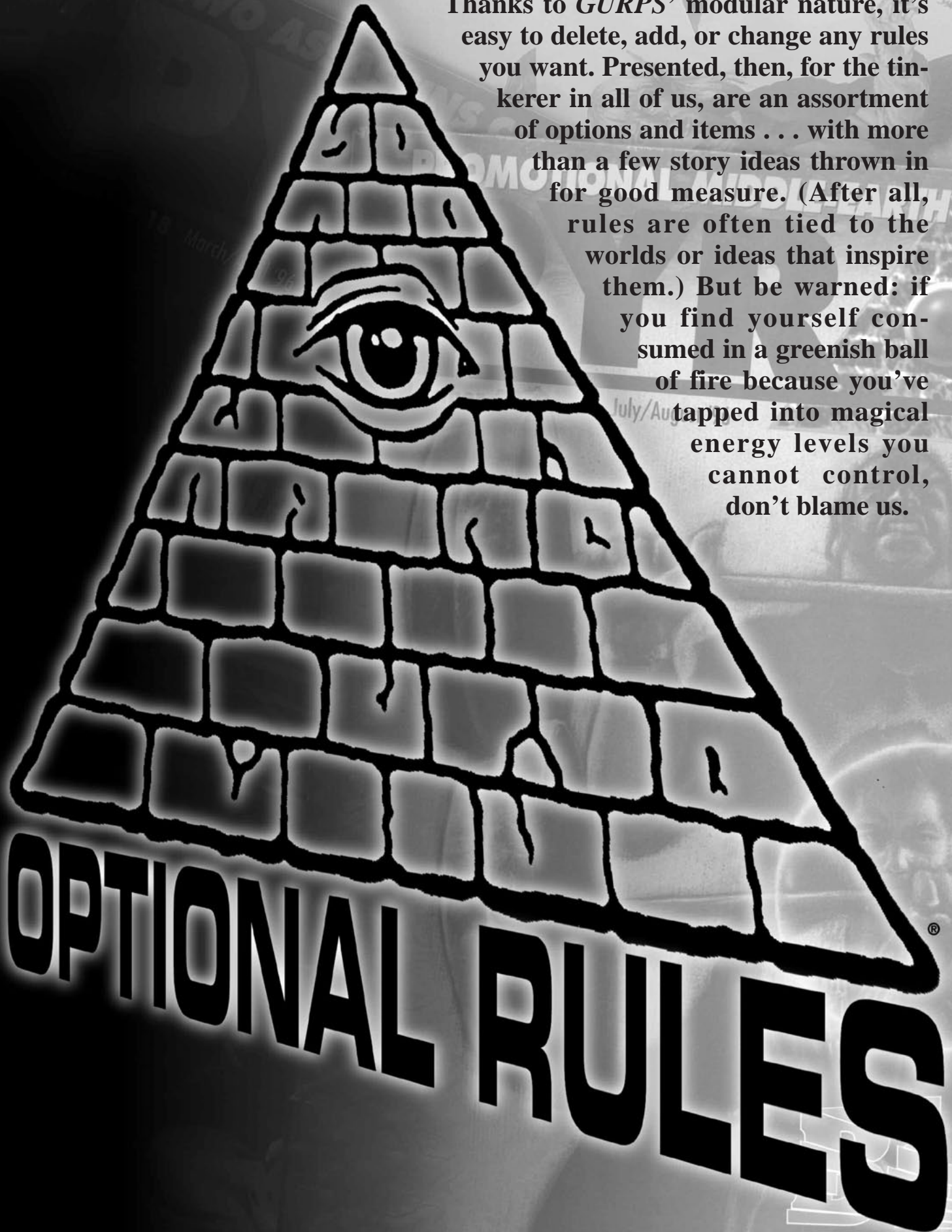
OPTIONAL RULES

23 SKIDDOO

AN ALTERNATE CAMPAIGN FRAME FOR
GURPS Alternate Earths
BY KENNETH HITE, CRAIG NEUMEIER, AND MICHAEL S. SCHIFFER

The time is out of joint: – o cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
– Hamlet, Act 1 Scene V;
unofficial motto of the TIA

GURPS Alternate Earths is designed as a supplement for the "Infinite Worlds" campaign frame in *GURPS Time Travel*. It provides six new worlds for the Infinity Patrol to adventure in, keeping the continuum safe for Homeline tourists and Infinity Unlimited's investment portfolio. However, it originated in a somewhat different campaign predating the publication of *GURPS Time Travel* by several years. "23 Skiddoo" is that campaign frame, retrofitted for *GURPS Alternate Earths* GMs who want the faster pace and adrenaline rush that only multidimensional Time War and rapid-fire history-changing can provide.

Anthony Leighton and the TIA

During the darkest days of the Cold War, Anthony Leighton was working at the Ronald Reagan Super-conducting Supercollider in Waxahachie, TX. His specialty, high-energy field physics, was critical to America's quest for a missile defense against Soviet ICBMs. Ligachev had over-thrown Gorbachev in a coup in 1990, and the USSR was moving to restore its empire in Eastern Europe. Fighting broke out in Poland and Germany, exploding into World War III in 1991 as the Red Army crushed dissent in Eastern Europe and moved against NATO. The winter of 1992 saw a limited nuclear exchange, but when the smoke cleared, the Soviet system collapsed – the strains of war were too much for it. The former Soviet satellites became independent, the Soviet Union was dissolved, and America was able to turn its massive engineering might into peacetime pursuits. Along with warm-temperature superconductors, microwave-power satellites and other benefits of advanced research came Leighton's discovery of time travel.

Announced in 1999, time travel had actually been developed almost a decade earlier, and a top-secret CIA "Project Flashback" had run through several iterations of World War III until an American victory had been secured. This truth, that time not only could be changed, but had been changed repeatedly already, was kept from the world and the cover story of Leighton's discovery was promoted with massive fanfare. The United States formed the Temporal Intelligence Agency (TIA) under U.N. charter, offering jobs as researchers, policemen and historians to citizens of any nation (who passed the strict background checks). The TIA headquarters was established at Waxahachie and the TIA began patrolling the timelines. Keeping saboteurs, cranks, and thieves out of the delicate past while allowing historians, scientists, and other scholars to study history first-hand kept the TIA busy for six years. "Portable" time machines, the size of a small minivan, made researching the past easy while increasing the danger of unauthorized intrusions.

The Reality Wars Begin

In 2005, a freak accident at the Waxahachie projector led to the discovery of "sideslipping," travel into parallel Realities. "Reality Beta," the world the TIA entered, was ruled by a Rome that had seemingly never fallen. Unfortunately, the TIA agents discovered that at least one other Reality had already mastered "sideslipping" – a Nazi-dominated world that the TIA dubbed "Reality Gamma." Reality Gamma was already working to destabilize Reality Beta when the TIA intervened, leading to a crash program of exploring the worlds on the other side of the sideslip.
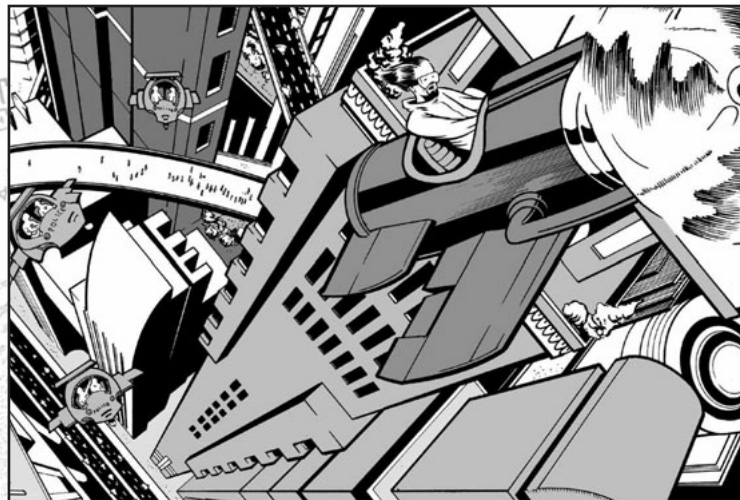
The rivalry between the TIA in Reality Alpha and the Zeit-SS in Gamma soon flared into open conflict. However, both sides soon realized that they had another enemy to deal with, "Reality Zeta." This mysterious timeline, where apparently Ming dynasty China had conquered the world, used a means of psionic reality travel unlike that of Alpha or Gamma.

As the campaign begins, these three intertemporal superpowers fight a war of influence across a backdrop of multiple timelines all branching off from an original reality, which began splitting for some unknown reason at the time of the dinosaurs. In fact, there are 23 realities, although the TIA begins with knowledge of only six. (Gamma knows about one or two others, Zeta may know of them all.) Although the local present differs between the realities (Alpha is in 2006; Beta is in 1878), all advance at the same rate.

Time Travel Mechanics

Time travel within individual lines is simple provided you have the proper equipment. A Leighton Effect device is too large for an individual to carry, but may be mounted in any vehicle. When it appears in the past, it emits a radioactive gold-198 signature (travel into the past produces gold-198 as a byproduct of a tachyon reaction). Reality Alpha and Gamma have monitor satellites in critical eras of their past that detect unauthorized incursions and warn the future about them with remote drones.

Time machines in the past cannot jump farther back, or return only partway to the present; a conservation law forces return to the true local present of the timeline. Linearity is normally conserved; a time machine spending an hour in the past must return to the future an hour after it left. Probably as a related effect, no one can meet themselves in the past – or at least everyone who has made the attempt has failed to return.

Time is plastic with high resistance; history can be changed only with difficulty. Small changes dampen out; large changes, however, cause the timeline to "jump tracks," often altering history radically. Possibly as a side effect, a "successful" alteration to the timeline breaks linearity, causing the traveler to return at least several months later than would be expected. Time travelers pastward of the change notice nothing until they return to the altered present; time travelers futureward of a change apparently blink out of existence with the rest of the world.

Sideslipping

Sideslipping is a more limited application of the Leighton Effect than time travel. Only organic matter can make the shift into another dimension. Alpha and Gamma use large projectors that send agents across realities but do not move themselves. These projectors can only function in local present.

Returning, then, is a problem. Alpha has devised a "homing beacon" which can link to a projector on Alpha, enabling retrieval. The beacon requires metal components, including gold, and therefore must be constructed by travelers using local resources. Ideally powered by direct current, a beacon may be modified to function when struck by a bolt of lightning.

Reality Zeta travelers can (and do) use ordinary Leighton time machines, but they also use a psionic method of reality travel that is not understood by Alpha or Gamma. This power, however, allows them to transfer agents from the past of one reality to the past of another. Note that Zetan agents sideslipping into the past cannot be detected by gold-198 emissions.

Adventuring

TIA agents engage in three basic kinds of operations: exploration, damage control, and chronotage. Exploration missions can either be to some ill-understood event in the past or to a newly-discovered parallel world. In the second case, agents will need to acquire sufficient information about the new world to make the trip worthwhile, and build a beacon in order to return. A group sent into a non-technological parallel will find this challenging.

Missions into the past can become damage control, if the group returns to the "present" to find everything changed. The group must examine the new alternate history in order to determine the change point, return to it and restore the original course of time. Fortunately, the monitor satellites often give warning of unauthorized intrusions, allowing the TIA to send preemptive response teams to stop the intruder before history can be changed. (Linearity is conserved; rapid response will give the intruder very little time to effect an alteration.)

Chronotage missions send agents into another reality with instructions to find a time machine (often secreted by agents in place) and attack its past. Damage control teams will certainly be dispatched to block the agents, and history is difficult to change even without active opposition. Of course, Gamma's ZSS mounts its own chronotage operations against Alpha and its allied timelines.

The 23 Worlds

Alpha: "Homeline," base reality of the TIA. Local present 2006.

Beta: Roma Aeterna, from *GURPS Alternate Earths.* Dominated by a TL5 Roman Empire, allied with Alpha and the TIA. Local present 1878.

Gamma: Reich-5, from *GURPS Alternate Earths.* Nazi-dominated reality, TL8 with time travel and sideslipping. Local present 1994.

Delta: TL6 reality splitting at the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Republican revolutions are in the process of destroying the hold of Bourbon France and its Hapsburg allies on Europe. Alpha supports the Republicans. Local present 1943.

Epsilon: Islamic-dominated reality diverging during the early caliphate. TL9 but without time travel (the scientific revolution occurred in the 10th century), has colonized several other star systems. Neither Alpha nor Gamma want to risk attracting the attention of the Rightly-Guided Stellar Caliphate. Local present 1684.

Zeta: Chinese-dominated reality, diverging with the Ming sea voyages of the 15th century. TL of this world is unknown; their agents use only local technology. Unlike any other timeline, Zeta has developed psionics. Local present 2000?

Eta: Post-disaster timeline which reached TL9 or 10 before collapsing about 100 years ago. Apparently diverged with Alexander the Great; his successors built the space stations and other artifacts still dotting this mostly empty world. Local present 2055.

Theta: Dixie, from *GURPS Alternate Earths.* The CSA won the Civil War, and is currently locked in a Cold War and space race with the Union. TL7, local present 1984.

Iota: A Christian Mongol Khanate, converted by a more successful Marco Polo mission, rules most of Eurasia but is being wracked by the Reformation. TL4, local present 1612.

Kappa: Dinosaurs, millions of years after they should have died out. Returning from this reality will require psionics or building a technology up from TL0.

Lambda: Ezcalli, from *GURPS Alternate Earths.* The Aztecs are the leading power in this TL5 reality, contesting with the Iroquois and the empire of Songhay for the spoils of the Mongol Khaganate. Local present 1840.

Mu: Apparently destroyed in a global nuclear holocaust a few years ago. The fabric of reality is weaker here, and people and things can sideslip in or out without warning. Local present 1993.

Nu: Gernsback, from *GURPS Alternate Earths.* The World Science Council benevolently rules a world transformed by the inventions of Nikola Tesla. TL variable (6-13), local present 1965.

Xi: The Spanish Armada succeeded in 1588, and the Spanish Hapsburgs rule a global empire opposed by bands of pirates in the Caribbean and Indian Ocean. Reality Gamma has so far used this timeline only as a source of treasure. TL4, local present 1715.

Omicron: Society is based loosely on Icelandic semi-anarchy; the nation-state collapsed as an institution centuries ago. Original change point unclear due to unreliable records. TL7, local present 1970.

Pi: Explorers from Gamma and Zeta have failed to return from this timeline.

Rho: Victorian British Empire presides over the world. Diverged with reforms of 1763 giving American colonies a voice in Parliament. TL5-6, local present 1894.

Sigma: Cretan matriarchy one of few civilized areas in TL1 world. Local present is so early (1800 BC?) that no one is quite sure how its history differs from Alpha's.

Tau: 1908 meteorite destroyed St. Petersburg instead of Tunguska, plunging Russia into anarchy. Gamma is aiding Kaiserine Germany's attempt to fill the power vacuum. TL6, local present 1923.

Upsilon: Complex political balance of Celtic overseas colonies, Teutonic-dominated Egypt and Khazar Empire. History shows signs of tampering by time travelers. TL6, local present 1932.

Phi: American revolution crushed in 1778. Stagnant European monarchies challenged by revolutionary democrats in Russia. TL6, local present 1981.

Chi: Shikaku-mon, from *GURPS Alternate Earths.* Quadripolar balance between France, Brazil, totalitarian Swedish Empire and Catholic Japan. TL8, local present 2015.

Psi: Diverged with Turkish invasion of Italy in 1480s. Ottoman Empire dominates most of Europe and the world. TL5, local present 1876.

Campaigning

Characters

The PCs in a 23-Skiddoo campaign should be TIA agents built on 150 points. Although most TIA agents are from Reality Alpha, the GM may allow PCs to come from a parallel world, especially as the campaign progresses.

Considering the limited technology that can be transferred between worlds, the GM may allow genetic engineering of advantages such as Absolute Timing, Absolute Direction, Acute senses, Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Lightning Calculator, Night Vision, Rapid Healing, and Toughness. Psionics are available with an Unusual Background and GM approval.

Cliology is an optional specialization of the History skill; it allows the character to predict the effects of a historical change, or work backwards to locate the change point that created an unknown present.

Notes for the GM

Exploration and damage control missions allow (and the latter almost require) substantial control over the course of events. Chronotage missions, however, allow the ingenuity of the PCs free rein, especially if successful. If the GM is not able to improvise altered histories on the fly, the players' changing history should coincide with the end of the play session. This at least gives the GM some time to work out the effects of a successful act of chronotage.

Because the setting of the campaign is so variable, a sense of continuity depends largely on NPCs. Colorful running villains, helpful Alphan researchers, and perhaps the PCs' superior officer can recur through many adventures, even if history is changing around them.

the Yalkani

A New Alien Race by Erick Melton

The Yalkani most closely resemble terrestrial turtles, being covered with thick, rubbery scales and enclosed, front and back, with a soft carapace. Yalkani are highly aquatic and move much more gracefully in the water than they do on land. Yalkani are much more flexible than turtles, and have no trouble righting themselves if they happen to fall on their backs. Their heads are broad and flat, almost semi-circular in outline. Their mouth is ringed by cilia which serve as a sensory apparatus and, when stiffened with bodily fluid, as a defensive weapon (1d cutting damage after a successful grapple). Their eyes are wide-set and feature a protective nictating membrane. Their vision is much poorer that humans, and Yalkani rely more heavily on smell and touch, both of which are excellent by human standards. The Yalkani stance is semi-upright, though they are equally comfortable going on all fours. When standing their forelimbs are clearly used as arms and the hind limbs as legs. Their hands are clumsier than human hands, with four thick digits, and feature retractable claws useful for digging and defense.

Yalkani have no nudity taboo, usually wearing nothing more than a harness with pouches and fasteners for whatever tools or items they might need. Body piercing is the most common form of Yalkani decoration, including more functional 'cargo rings' through the edge of the carapace. Normal coloration is in shades of green, ranging from a deep, almost blackish green, to a shade very close to yellow. The Yalkani do possess the ability to change their color to match that of their environment. If nothing is done to maintain the change, they will return to their normal shade within an hour. Each Yalkani has a series of spots and stripes that is unique to that individual. Among fertile Yalkani these markings appear in reds, blues, and yellows.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Yalkani are Amphibious (10 points), and derive protection from their armor (DR 5; 15 points). Their Chameleon abilities (+4 Stealth when still, +2 when moving; 14 points), and their Claws (+2 damage in hand to hand combat, 15 points) are other natural advantages. Their Nictating Membrane (PD 4, DR 2; 20 points) helps protect their eyes while underwater. They have the racially learned skill Swimming at DX+2 (4 points), and a +2 racial skill bonus in biologically related fields, such as Physician (12 points).

Yalkani disadvantages include a Shortened Lifespan (1 level, -10 points), Dependency (Need to be immersed in water daily, -15 points), and Aquatic (-40 points). Their apathy toward technology makes them Primitive (2 TLs, -10 points). Their awkwardness on land gives them Reduced Move (1 level, -5 points). Their Bad Sight (Near Sighted) (-2 to hand weapon attacks, distance modifier in ranged attacks doubled, -10 points) often goes uncorrected.

It costs 0 points to play a Yalkani character.

Names

Yalkani names are very rumbling and "burbling" sounding, and will include the name of the individual's pod. Drones will normally include the pod name at the beginning of their name, while breeding individuals will include it at the end. Hence, two members of the Gullderam pod named Blamavia (a drone) and Hadmara (a breeder) would be called Gullderamblamavia and Hadmaragullderam. Trusted associates, such as pod members, would be given the shortened name to use.

Psychology

The Yalkani are a somewhat staid race. Their outlook on life, and their closeness to natural cycles, tends to put definite limits on what they consider to be the possibilities of progress, resulting in a much slower level of technological advancement than encountered in other races. Yalkani tend to display a great deal of chauvinism when dealing with members of other races. They will be suspicious of a non-Yalkani's motives, and will tend to be very cautious and edgy while in their presence.

Amongst themselves, especially amongst members of their own pod, Yalkani are quite warm and friendly. They are a very tactile race, and will always greet each other by touching and nuzzling. Yalkani moving through each other in crowds can sometimes literally travel from one embrace to another, and stepping out of the way to avoid contact, as humans do, would be considered a snub in Yalkani society. Between close associates, this display is even more intense, sometimes resulting in sexual activity. Yalkani have no privacy taboos when it comes to sex, and any humans prone to embarrassment should be forewarned before going out into a Yalkani community.

The Yalkani need to be immersed in water at least once a day. Each day that a Yalkani is unable to immerse himself, roll vs. his HT. A failed roll results in a loss of reasoning and an increase in the individual's level of aggression.

(Roll 1d and divide by 2, rounding up, to determine the number of IQ points lost.) On the second day the Yalkani is still unable to reach water, HT points are lost as well (roll 1d and divide by 2, rounding up). This loss is cumulative, and can quickly result in serious injury or death. The Yalkani can avoid this health loss by going into self-induced hibernation. They secrete a mucous film which hardens into a mummy-like shell. In this state they are immune to water loss, but are also completely dependent on others for resuscitation. To break out of the shell, a hibernating Yalkani must be completely immersed in water for up to an hour, plus an additional 1d6 hours for each point of health loss. Yalkani space passengers will often use the hibernated state as a form of self-induced cold sleep.

The Yalkani are very status conscious. There is a direct relation between an individual's status within the pod and their prospects for reproduction.

The lowest-status Yalkani, and the most common, are called drones. They are either male or female, but are sterile and unable to reproduce, though they do engage in sexual activity. They are responsible for most of the "grunt" jobs: soldier, technician, clerical, etc. Drones are quite gregarious, and together form something akin to a group mind. Scientists think that one of the functions of the drones is to act as the "social subconscious" for the Yalkani, moving collectively for the betterment of the pod to which they belong, and the race in general.

The fertile members of Yalkani society are called "breeders." They are much more individualistic than the drones, with a correspondingly higher sense of self. Breeders differ from drones in that their body markings are brightly colored, with reds, yellows, and blues instead of the normal dark greens and blacks. Breeders form the professional class for the Yalkani, becoming officers, researchers, and explorers. Any Yalkani encountered off-world will likely be a breeder, although the individual may have a party of drones in attendance, depending on the mission at hand.

Ecology

The Yalkani are descended from omnivorous scavengers that hunted prey and browsed for food. The dark, murky swamp waters of their natural habitat made for a lessened dependence on eyesight, and a greater reliance on touch and smell for finding food. This heightened tactile sense may also account for the Yalkani heightened natural awareness. They have an innate understanding and affinity for biological rhythms, and can immediately "feel" when something in any given system – be it an individual's body, or a given ecosphere – is not operating properly. This "sense" also forms the basis of their daily group dynamics.

Yalkani live in dome-like, underground structures called "pods." Each pod houses what is essentially a large, extended family. The pod is directed by a breeding cadre of one fertile female and three to five fertile males. Other fertile members with sufficient status will vie to replace members of the cadre during breeding season (see below). The size of the pod varies, but they tend to grow much larger over time. A relatively new pod may contain no more than few dozen individuals, while some truly ancient pods are the equivalent of small towns, containing thousands of members and covering several acres above ground. A collections of pods will form the Yalkani version of a city. Pods are always surrounded by water; from the air, Yalkani cities resemble a collection of lily pads.

New pods are usually formed during a crisis of confidence. When the breeding cadre makes a decision that a number of the other breeding members disagree with, they will try to break off and leave the pod to form their own. The new pod's chance of success is directly related to the separatists' ability to convince drones to join them. If enough drones find merit in the separatists' ideals, then the pod will survive.

As the beginning of the breeding cycles approaches, the fertile males and females ready for breeding become more aggressive and territorial. Their markings also become brighter and more defined. The actual mating process occurs when the fertile males and females exit the pod and congregate in the "pasture," a wild, uncultivated area maintained around each pod. Females fight females and males fight males in a series of highly ritualized, individual combats. The Yalkani name for the combats is "Yamdu," which seems to refer to the martial arts style as well.

Yamdu is similar to Terran judo. The combatants will grapple with each other, trying to force their opponents to submit. While fighting, both parties will continue to chant their life's accomplishments. Drones will gather around each contest, acting as a combination group referee, judge, and medic. They will step in and stop a contest when one participant is clearly dominant, and will treat the wounds of both victor and vanquished. The winner of each Yamdu is the one that displays the best balance of physical fitness and status, achieved through the accomplishments of their career. The Yamdu continues until the one female and small group of males for the cadre are chosen. The length of the process varies, depending on the size of the pod, but is usually over within two or three Yalkani days.

Once chosen, the breeding council retire to the "inner sanctum" of the pod. This is an area deep below the pod's surface, and serves as the political center, residence for the cadre, spiritual haven, and maternity ward for the Yalkani society. For the next month the breeding council will do little besides eat and mate. They will fertilize hundreds of eggs, which will be left in specially prepared chambers to grow and develop. The chambers are tended by drones chosen for the task.

Approximately six weeks later, the eggs will hatch. Immature Yalkani are markedly different from the adults, both physically and psychologically. The young Yalkani are feral, and display no sentience whatsoever. The familiar carapace is absent, and they possess a long whip-like tail. The head is narrower and more arrow-shaped, and the young Yalkani do not possess the mouth cilia of the adults. Once born, the hatchlings will make their way through underwater tunnels out from the pod and into the surrounding pasture. For the next nine months, the Yalkani young will fend for themselves, hunting for food,

defending against natural predators, and competing with each other for territory . . . with no more supervision from the adults than one might find from park rangers at a nature preserve on Earth. The Yalkani refer to this as the "Rukh," or Realm of Becoming. They believe that this stage of their life guarantees that the most fit members of their species are selected for the next generation.

At the end of their rukh, the young Yalkani once more make their way through the underwater tunnels. Three times bigger than when they left, the rukh-stage Yalkani will bury themselves into the walls of the inner sanctum. Here, for the first time, they will secrete the mucus-like film that mummifies them, and enter a state of hibernation. Over the next four to six weeks, they will go through the metamorphosis into the mature Yalkani form. The individuals that were most successful during their rukh, the ones that were able to secure the most territory, eat the best food, etc., will emerge as fertile males or females who will one day enter the breeding cycle. Those who were less successful will emerge as drones. Human scientists believe that fertility in the Yalkani is triggered by some chemical in the Yalkani environment. The more of it consumed during rukh, the greater the chances of the individual becoming fertile.

There is a third possibility, one which the Yalkani fear and do not reveal to outsiders. Occasionally the hibernating rukh emerge large, well-developed, and sexually mature . . . but still rukh. Such a creature, called a Dairukh, is extremely vicious and voracious, combining the armor and claws and size of a mature Yalkani with the sleek shape and speed of the rukh-stage Yalkani. Dairukh are at best only semi-intelligent, but are quite cunning, and strongly driven to survive. Dairukh are destroyed immediately upon discovery, though there are stories, the equivalent of Yalkani legends, of those that have escaped into the wild to breed and multiply. Since there is a strong genetic relationship amongst the members of a given pod, it is speculated that the appearance of Dairukh in a pod's offspring is a sign of excessive inbreeding within that populace. This supposition is supported by the fact that a breeding cadre that has produced a Dairukh is almost always replaced during the next breeding contest.

Culture

Yalkani culture is highly codified and ritualistic. The Yalkani world view is very much linked to the natural cycles of birth, maturity, decline, death, and renewal.

Yalkani art, for example, is never created for permanence. Yalkani sculpture is left where natural interaction with the environment will cause it to decay. It is often carved in the trunks of living trees, or shaved (painlessly) into the hides of living creatures. The process of healing, which will eventually destroy the work itself, is considered part of the artist's expression.

Yalkani performance art also has a much more natural feel. There is no such thing as a Yalkani theater or music hall. Performances will merely "happen" during the course of the day, in whatever environment the performers feel is the "natural" setting for their piece. The only effort made is to surround the chosen area with burning pots of incense and perfumed smoke. The performances themselves, however, are very traditional, and feature scenes, bits, and character archetypes that have been polished and handed down over generations. They will often include unsuspecting members of the audience as the object of their performance. Indeed, the very terms of "audience" and "performer" are inaccurate. The action takes place through and amongst the attending crowd. Also, the various forms are so well known and familiar to the Yalkani, they will sometimes join in the action themselves. Such events are always highly musical and operatic. The closest Terran equivalent would be a combination of *Commedia del Arte*, 20th-century performance art, and shamanistic ritual dances of aboriginal peoples. The Yalkani word for "performer" has the same root in their language as "religious leader."

The education a Yalkani receives depends on its breeding status. After emergence from the hibernation chamber, all drones are tested to determine their various strengths and weaknesses. They are then assigned to an appropriate course of training. This will determine the "career" they will follow for the rest of their lives.

Fertile Yalkani are much freer to follow their own inclinations. They are separated by sex into small groups and then introduced to a number of different disciplines. The idea is that eventually the individual will find a field for which they have an affinity. A young Yalkani that is constantly found roaming through the lesser known areas of the pod might be encouraged to consider becoming an explorer, or perhaps a field scientist. One who enjoys playing complicated games would be encouraged to study military strategy. It is not unknown for an individual to start in one area, and then change to something else later in life. Usually, however, the area the young Yalkani picks during this time period is the one they will keep.
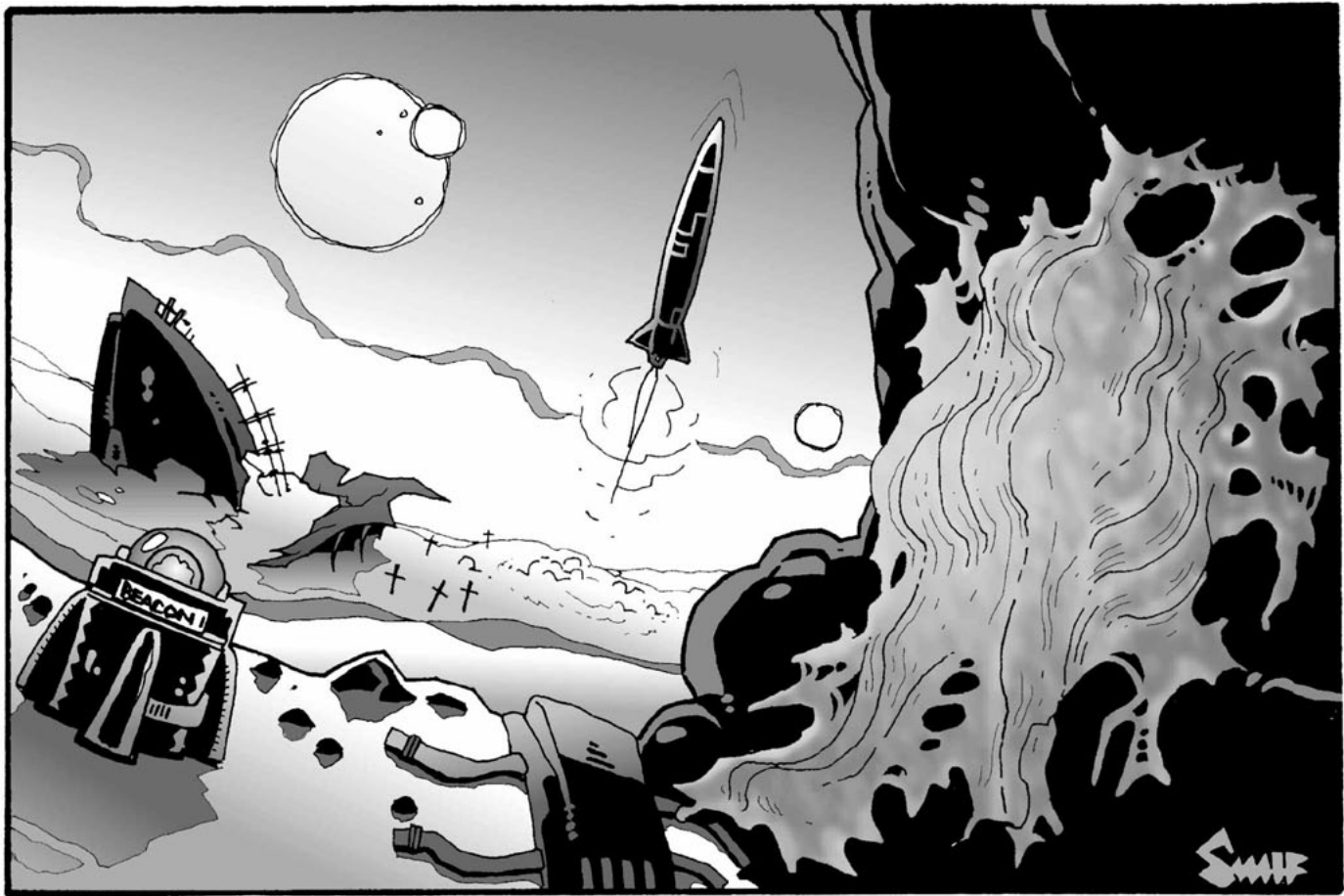
It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the fertile Yalkani are a ruling elite, and the drones merely a servile slave caste. While status does play a huge part in Yalkani society (as it does in human society), the concern and care afforded to all members of society is quite high, much higher than often shown in human populations of the same size.

It must be remembered that all pod members of a given generation, both drones and breeders, are, genetically speaking, at least half-siblings. Just as few human families would knowingly allow a brother or sister to suffer, it is rare for a Yalkani in need to go long without having those needs fulfilled.

Religion

Most Yalkani believe in a form of reincarnation. Just as the natural world goes through a cycle of birth, death, and renewal, the Yalkani believe the that spirit of each individual goes through a series of cycles of death, life, and rebirth. Each cycle adds to the power of the spirit, making it more in tune with "the way things are." To the Yalkani, the highest form of spiritual wisdom is not to stand up against nature, but to understand one's place within it and accept it.

With increased contact with other races, there has developed a small but growing sect of Yalkani that believe in a true afterlife. This new sect still maintains the idea of the spirit returning again and again, but have added the idea of the growth and development received as eventually leading the spirit into a higher plane of existence. This paradise is depicted as the "Ultimate Sanctum," where the individual is both complete and distinct from all others, as well as being in perfect union with all things. Thus the spirit embodies the ideal of both the drone and the breeder perception on life.

And with this Yalkani "heaven," there also now exists a Yalkani version of hell. The conditions of this realm are somewhat vague, except that it is very, very dry and barren. It is most often depicted as an extreme form of the Realm of Becoming, a place of great spiritual testing that the soul returns to after each life to make sure that it is still fit. There is no indication that the Yalkani view this as a place of permanent punishment. Yalkani hell is reigned over by a large male dairukh, fully intelligent, whose function is to destroy all who enter his realm. He is the embodiment of entropy in the Yalkani mind.

Politics

As with all other aspects of the Yalkani, politics is based on the pod. Just as each member of a pod's importance is rated by his status, the importance of each pod is rated by its status as well, measured by its age and size. The Yalkani do not vote on their decisions, exactly. Policies are discussed between the ruling cadres of each pods, with those cadres of the largest and oldest pod having the greatest influence. Decisions evolve naturally out of the discussion process, with the final policy achieved almost through acclamation.

In intergalactic circles, the Yalkani walk a thin line between two different policies. On the one hand, their distrust of non-Yalkani makes them very isolationist, dealing with other races only when there is an absolute need, and then keeping the contact as brief as possible. On the other hand, they are very aware that their lower technological level places them at a disadvantage when dealing with other races, and that their security depends on fostering good relations and trade agreements with other peoples.

This strain is being felt on the Yalkani homeworld as well. New technological devices and different cultural outlooks are being introduced into Yalkani society at an increasing rate. To most outside observers the rate of change can be called, at best, moderate. To the Yalkani, with its normally staid, traditionally-bound outlook, the rate of increase is a great source of alarm. One sign of the "new times" is the fact that new pods are being formed at a faster rate than ever before in Yalkani history. Some human xenobiologists wonder if the Yalkani can overcome this crisis and retain the cohesion of their society.

Sample Character: Mombeambavmiam

Mombeambavmiam is a fertile female Yalkani who has recently entered the "career" phase of her life and is driven to reach the highest levels of her pod. She is a member of one of the newest pods on the Yalkani homeworld, whose leading members disagreed with the breeding cadre of their former pod over how much contact they should have with off-worlders (the new pod favors increased contact and importation of off-world technology). "Mombe" joined the new Ambavmiam pod because she agreed with their position, but also because she thought she would have a much better chance to advance than in the very old and highly populated pod she had been born into.

Mombe currently works as the ship's surgeon on board a human-run deep space trading vessel. Over time, she has come to understand some of the human technology, especially as to its application to her chosen field of medicine. She has also come to find off-worlders, especially humans, fascinating (a rarity among Yalkani). The fascination expresses itself in a new avocation: sculpting figurines of the various individuals from the different races she meets. The figurines have one quality their subjects usually find disturbing: they decay in a fashion that mimics the aging process of the particular species of the subject. Mombe has come to view the humans on her crew as part of her "adoptive pod," and views crew members of other vessels with a certain measure of mistrust. Her crewmates, for their part, find her physician's skill invaluable, and count the additional strain on their water supply as a low price to pay.

Mombe is designed as an experienced 100-point character from a TL10 society.

Attributes
ST 10, DX 12, IQ 15, HT 10

Advantages
Amphibious, Armor, Chameleon, Claws, Nictating Membrane, Swimming DX+2.

Disadvantages
Shortened Lifespan, Dependency (water), Increased Life Support, Primitive, Reduced Move, Near-Sighted, Code of Honor (doctor's Oath), Jealousy (Yalkani of higher status).

Quirks
Uses scented water when immersed; Creates "alien" figurines.

Skills
Beam Weapons-12; Biochemistry-13; Computer Operations-15; Diagnosis-14; First Aid-17; Fishing-15; Judo (Yamdu Combat)-9; Language (Terra Lingua)-13; Naturalist-12; Physician-17; Sculpting-12; Surgery-15; Survival (Swamp)-14; Swimming-14; Zoology-17.

Adventure Seeds
First Contact, and a Half

After months of delicate negotiations, a human diplomatic team has been allowed to construct an enclave on the Yalkani homeworld for the purpose of establishing relations with this new species. They build their compound in the midst of what appears to be unused swampland immediately surrounding the largest of the Yalkani pods. Now, practically overnight, the Yalkani are showing definite signs of hostility towards them. What did they do to change the Yalkani attitude toward them; and how do they get rid of these annoying lizard-like creatures the Yalkani call "rukh"?

Yamdu Rebellion

A group of the older pods have joined together to expel all non-Yalkani from the world and withdraw from interstellar politics. Opposing them are the younger, more progressive pods which want to acquire the "alien" technology. Trapped in the middle are the members of your multi-species trading enclave. As the number of mock-combats, protests, and general unrest increases, the enclave faces the prospect of a general uprising.

Unlimited MANA

By S. John Ross

Standard **GURPS** magic is "tactical"; mages can create dozens of small effects in a given day – but very few (if any) world-shattering miracles. Manipulations of mana, the force behind spells, leaves sorcerers drained and weak. Thus, wizards are limited by their knowledge (which determines their flexibility) and their physical stamina. "Powerful" wizards are wizards that know more spells at higher levels than others.

Absent from this basic structure is the concept of *Raw Power* – wizards that can crack a castle in half or drown an army in flames.

Fantasy novels which feature such levels of power rarely have mages that get "tired out" by magic. Instead, extreme effects threaten the fabric of the universe, creating a situation in which wizards can create true miracles in times of need, but do not use their powers frivolously. When their companions ask for more magic, they will drone cryptically, "To draw too deeply on my Gift can lead to madness and death. Do not demand of me what you do not comprehend."

Fantasy writers need character balance as much as GMs do. While it's exiting to establish that a sorcerer can wreak serious havoc when needed, it's boring to let him overshadow the rest of the characters. That cryptic doubletalk exists as a handy plot device, no less than the wizard himself.

This approach to magic has been left untouched in gaming, and for good reason. It's easy for a writer to create a wizard that will be prudent with his arcane wisdom. Trying to get an ambitious fantasy gamer (even a well-meaning one) to do the same is risky at best. Fortunately the **GURPS** magic system is flexible enough to permit Unlimited Mana that will balance in *any* fantasy campaign, even the lowest of "low fantasy!"

The Power Tally

"Unlimited" isn't a mana level, it's a mana *type*. In an Unlimited Mana (Umana) campaign, spells do not cause fatigue.

When a mage casts a spell, he should record the cost in a running tally, instead of taking the cost from his ST score. All normal rules for costs (skill reduction, etc.) remain in force.

Example: Magus Wiltshire finds himself caught in a besieged city. He has not used magic in a while, and feels that the present emergency justifies it. In his attempts to escape unnoticed, he casts a huge (cost 21) Mass Sleep spell on a group of guards. Three guards are unaffected, and Wiltshire, furious, casts an Entombment spell on one of them, which increases his tally by 10 points to 31. Two guards remain . . .

Threshold and Calamities

Every mage has a Threshold (*Thresh*) score – this defines the safe limits of his magic. If his tally remains at or below his Thresh, everything is fine. If his tally exceeds

his Thresh, Bad Things can happen, and the mage must roll on the Calamity Table (p. 63). The "default" Thresh score is 30.

"Calamity Checks" are made by rolling 3d, and adding 1 for every full 5 points by which Thresh has been exceeded. The spell that first brings the mage's tally over Thresh triggers a check. After that, *any* spell cast by the mage (even those that cost no energy) will also trigger new Calamity Checks at the current level of excess.

Calamities take effect immediately, but their nature may not always be apparent to the mage (see the table for details). Calamities do not normally cause the spell to fail (but see results 29+).

Note that any Calamity that refers to the "spell cost" means a number equal to the energy cost of the spell that *triggered* the Calamity.

Example, Part II: Magus Wiltshire, a normal (Thresh 30) mage, exceeded his Thresh when he cast the Entombment spell. This requires a Calamity Check. Since Wiltshire exceeded his Thresh only by 1, there is no modifier to the roll. If he decides to entomb the other two guards, each new casting will trigger a fresh calamity, and modifiers will begin to apply.

The Recovery Rate

Once per day, the mage's Tally is healed by an amount equal to his Recovery Rate (RR). The "default" RR score is 8, with recovery occurring at sunrise.

Fiddling

The numbers above create an overall power level equivalent to the current rules. Mages can't cast nearly as many smaller spells, but they can (in emergencies) cast some very *large* spells. Area spells, in particular, become more of an option in combat, and more "strategic" levels of magic become possible.

These basic numbers, however, are open to change. Thresh and RR defaults are a campaign decision for the GM. A Thresh of 50 and a RR of 1 per day would allow mages to cast *really* powerful spells safely, but would cripple them on a day-to-day basis. A Thresh and RR of 40 each would make for a world where mages are godlings that walk the soil – Unusual Background would be appropriate to keep them balanced! At the other extreme, Thresh and RR of 5 each would create a distinctly low-magic world, where mages could still use relatively mighty magic in times of dire need, and at great personal risk.

The third assumption – that Recovery occurs daily at sunrise, is also variable. Even with a standard daily rate, wizards might have their own "hour of recovery" chosen at play. Alternately, a campaign might feature recovery every hour, or every week, or every (gasp!) month. The latter would lead to a dramatic thinning-out of magical activity just before "payday," but some GMs might like that idea!

New Advantages, Further Ramifications

Increased Power   *10 points/Level*

This advantage may only be taken by mages. For each level of Increased Power that you have, increase your Thresh by 20%, and your RR by 25%, of the campaign average (round normally).

Each of these effects can also be purchased individually for 5 points/level, as the Increased Threshold and Rapid Recovery advantages. Mages may not purchase decreased levels of Thresh and RR; the campaign default defines the weakest levels of personal power.

Safer Excess   *10 points/Level*
                              (3 levels max)

This advantage may only be taken by mages. Your calamity rolls are at +1 for every 10 points of excess, instead of +1 per 5. Every additional level doubles this effect (+1 per 20, +1 per 40).

Double Recovery   *25 points*
This advantage may only be taken by mages. Your Tally heals twice as often as that of a mage without this advantage. If, for example, "normal" recovery is equal to RR once every 24 hours, you get RR once every *12 hours*. Mages with this advantage must pay 15 points/level for the Increased Power advantage, and 10 points/level for the Rapid Recovery advantage.

With unlimited mana, mages can now be defined in terms of both versatility and raw power – a 250-point mage might have a vast grimoire, or a limited, predictable repetoire and earth-cracking mana-resources! This gives players and GMs more freedom, and has many small side-effects that need the GMs consideration. Powerstones, for instance, become less desirable for many wizards, and some spells formerly limited to Ceremonial Casting can be cast by individual wizards! GMs fond of adding new spells to the campaign can add *very* powerful ones, balancing them with costs as high as they see fit, and even Thresh or RR-based prerequisites.

Optional Expansions

That's all there is to the basic Unlimited Mana option, but this basic framework can be built on to make all sorts of dramatically different uses of the *GURPS* magic rules. Consider any of the following:

Emergencies Only

GURPS Magic rules are standard, and mages may still expend ST to power their spells. However, they may draw additional power "out of the ether" via Unlimited Mana, but the campaign Thresh is *zero*, and may not be improved. This means that any "free lunch" casting automatically causes a Calamity Check. RR should probably stay in the low range (1-10 daily). A slight (10-point) Unusual Background for mages would be appropriate; this option makes magic more powerful than in the normal rules.
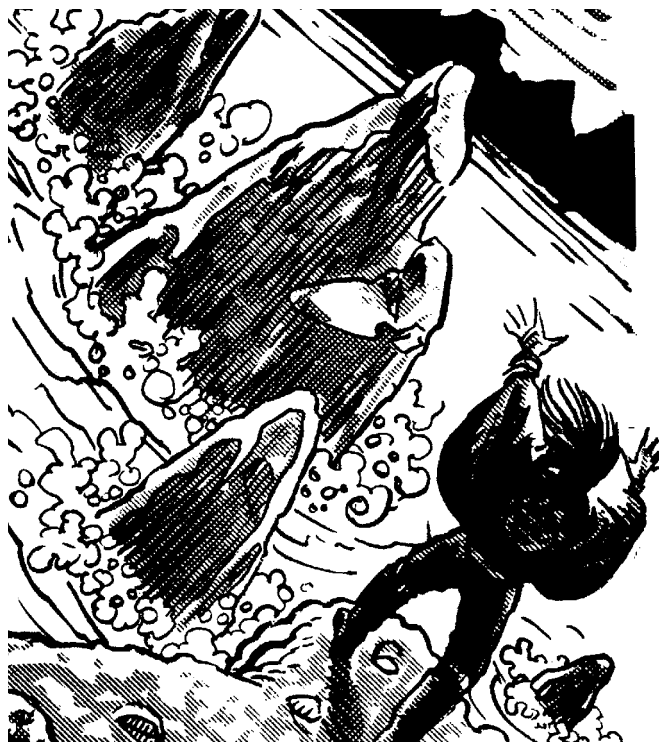
Spending Options

Mages may spend energy to make their spells faster (4 points per second of reduction, which will even affect missile spells and bring spells to "zero time" if sufficient energy is spent). They may also increase their odds (1 point of energy per +1, or 3 per +1 if the spell is to be resisted). At the GM's option, even the odds of hitting with a Missile spell can be increased on a +1 per point basis!

This option actually works very nicely in play, allowing much greater flexibility for mages at appropriately high energy costs. Players tend to overspend at times, but the rules keep such mages nicely in line . . .

Heal Calamities
(Mental/Very Hard)
Special

This spell is used to erase any "regional" or global change brought about by magical Calamity. It requires at least three mages and Ceremonial Magic (even if one mage has sufficient Threshold and Recovery to cast the spell, it cannot be cast by fewer than three mages). The mages must work together at least 8 hours per day during the casting, and may only rest and eat with the remaining time; they may not even study.

Casting Time: Equal to the die-roll that caused the calamity, times 2 hours. Thus, a roll of 35 would require casting of nearly 3 days! The casting circle must remain awake; alternate mages can take over "shifts" if need be, but at least 3 mages must remain in the circle at all times.

Cost: Equal to 1/10 the die-roll that caused the calamity (round up), *every hour of the casting.* This may be divided among the casting mages in any way they can agree upon.

Prerequisites: IQ 15+, Dispel Magic, and a RR of at least 12.

This is a meta-spell.

Example: Mordecai the Necromancer blew himself up trying to turn a dead Leviathan into a Zombie, and his calamity roll was 54, resulting in global ceasing of all rainfall that will last for months! To restore normal weather, a group of mages must work this spell for 4.5 days, spending a total of 6 energy every hour! This will require a lot of powerful mages, all of whom must know this spell at a level sufficient to share the cost . . . When the world is at stake; things aren't cheap. After the casting is complete, the mages will likely want to summon up Mordecai's spirit from the afterlife, and teach it a lesson. Fair is fair.

Option to Spend

Mages may take fatigue to help power their spells, but it costs 4 fatigue to produce 1 point of spell energy. Thus, mages won't bother with using their ST for most castings, but in an emergency they can exhaust themselves for an extra point or two of power.

New Tables

The GM could design an expanded Calamity Table, or have different tables for different races, regions, and so on. ("The universe seems less forgiving in the Dark Lands, Wiltshire . . .") Perhaps over-spending summons hostile entities, or affects only weather.

Partial Fatigue

Every spell cast causes 1 fatigue, in addition to the increase of the mage's tally. This limits the *number* of spells a mage can cast in a given scene, without limiting their power.

Variable Threshold

In a Variable-Threshold world (or region), the default Thresh changes like the weather. Mages might or might not be aware of the current level; if they aren't, this will increase spellcaster caution.

Variable Recovery

Instead of RR being a flat rate, it can be a die-roll. 2d+1 *averages* to a roll of 8, but makes recovery less certain. Increased Power would give a flat bonus to the roll (+2 per level, if the default value is used).

Limited High Mana

With this option, *non-mages* can cast spells as if the world were High Mana, but spells cost 10 times as much for them (or some other multiple as determined by the GM). Likewise, mages with Magery (One College Only) (p. CI39) could cast spells outside of their sphere for the same ×10 multiple to cost.

Recovery Rituals

The daily recovery needn't be automatic. Perhaps the mage must burn incense and meditate, or (in a dark fantasy world) perform animal sacrifices or demonic rituals. Likewise, there might be some rituals that will trigger *additional* levels of recovery beyond the daily standard.

Mutable Thresh and RR

Mages may choose any starting Thresh and RR they like, provided Thresh multiplied by RR doesn't exceed a value set by the GM (240 in a "default" setting). A Thresh/RR of 60/4 balances equally with a Thresh/RR of 30/8 or 15/16 . . . Increased Power is then based on the individual mage's values. The GM may wish to specify that Thresh must be a multiple of 5 and RR a multiple of 4, to keep the math simple.

"Still Kind of Limited Mana"

There are limits to the energy a mage can spend on a single spell. This can be either an arbitrary value ("no spell bigger than 100 ST"), or a derived one ("no spell bigger than the square root of [The mage's IQ × Magery × RR × Thresh], rounded down"). This option is useful if the GM wants a campaign where "heroic" magic is possible, but where PCs aren't able to blow themselves up (and possibly scar the game-world) without having to *work for it* a bit. Note that this limits only what a single mage can accomplish – if you have a circle of five mages who can contribute 100 each, you can cast a ST 500 spell. Now it's just a matter of assembling that circle . . .

Mana Mash

There are two kinds of mages in the world – Umana mages and standard ones. By making Umana optional, players can choose from two "flavors" of mage.

These options represent only the tip of the iceberg, and any GM or player will likely have several ideas, from new advantages to strange variations on the concepts of Thresh and RR.

3,4 – Nothing bad happens, *and* the mage gets (1d×5) points of free, instant Recovery!

5-9 – Nothing happens . . . this time.

10 – The mage's skin and clothing crawl with strange energies, sparks, or other visual effect for 3d minutes, and his eyes glow bright, making Stealth impossible and frightening small animals and many "mundanes."

11 – The mage is struck with violent headaches that prevent any action other than suffering (treat as physical stun) which lasts 3d turns (Or a number minutes equal to the cost of the spell that triggered the calamity, if a HT roll is failed – minimum 5 minutes). Result 10 also applies.

12 – The mage becomes horribly nauseous and weak, taking a -4 to DX, IQ, ST, and skills. This lasts a number of hours equal to the cost of the spell (minimum 2), after which the mage must make a HT-4 roll every hour to get over the sickness.

13 – The mage is cursed with nightmares for 3d days (plus a number of days equal to the spell cost). After the first night, the mage is at -2 to DX, IQ, ST, and skills. The penalties last until the mage gets a normal night's sleep!

14 – Any failed casting roll that the mage makes is treated as a critical failure! This lasts for 1d+1 weeks.

15 – The mage's mind is bent. The GM should assign one debilitating (-15-point) mental disadvantage by fiat. It takes effect immediately, and lasts 1 day. Each day thereafter, the mage may make a Will roll to shake it off. If the spell cost was higher than 25, the disadvantage lasts for (spell cost/25) days, rounded up.

16 – The mage has weakened the binding forces around him. His Thresh for the next 1d weeks is reduced by 2d+5. The mage is aware of a drop, but not of its severity! Result 10 also applies.

17 – The caster gains a -5-point disadvantage. After 3d days have passed, the mage has the option of buying it off (it will simply fade away). If the mage does not wish to, or doesn't have the points, then it becomes permanent. *Any* disadvantage is legal; the mage can get ugly, go insane, and so on.

18 – The mage's Thresh is reduced by 4d+(the spell cost); the change lasts 1d months, after which the Thresh "heals" back to normal at a rate of 1 point per day. Thresh cannot be reduced below zero. In addition, the mage's spellcasting will be at a -3 penalty for 2d weeks. Result 10 also applies.

19 – As per 17, but the disadvantage is worth either -10 or -15 points (50/50 chance of either).

20 – The mage is aged 2d+13 years, or a number of years equal to the energy cost of the triggering spell . . . whichever is worse!

21 – Roll again (same modifier) but the result affects a companion of the mage (chosen randomly).

22 – The mage gains multiple disadvantages worth a total of (-2d×5) points, or a number of points equal to the spell cost, whichever is worse. These are permanent.

23 – The mage permanently loses the ability to cast a single spell. The skill is still known, but it cannot be cast. The mage must make a (Will-6) roll. If it is successful, he chooses which spell "dies." If not, the spell is chosen at random. On a critical failure, the GM chooses the mage's most useful or favorite spell!

24 – The mage loses 1d×5 points of advantages (or has an attribute lowered). Choose randomly.

25 – The mage becomes a wandering Mana-Scar! Spells cost double within a 2d+3-mile radius of the mage, and Recovery is *halted* in the same area! Every mage in the region will be hunting for him . . . The duration, in days, equals the cost of the errant spell, plus one. Result 10 applies for the *entire* duration.

26 – The mage's skill at spells is reduced by 3d+5, or by a number equal to the spell cost, whichever is worse. The mage must make a Will roll. If it is successful, the penalty will heal at a rate of one per day. If not, the healing rate is one per week!

27 – A plague or curse (locusts, storms, etc.) descends on the region, lasting for 3d+ weeks. No one will be able to trace this to the mage (-20 to divination attempts on the subject), but

the mage will know the fault is his . . . Be grotesque and *cruel*.

28 – The spell propagates out of control. Harmful Regular or Area spells will affect everybody and everything nearby, allies and enemies alike. Beneficial spells will do likewise, but will go "over the top" and cause dangerous side-effects. (For example, a healing spell might raise all the local dead, creating a horde of restless zombies out for revenge!) Information magic will overload the mage's mind (Fright Check at -20); Missile Spells will seem normal to the caster, but have so much punch that they drill through their target and through *everything else* for *miles* beyond, and so on. The GM should be creative and unpredictable with this result.

29 – The mage permanently loses the ability to cast spells, (but not the skills – small comfort). At this level and above, the spell that causes the roll fails unless a Will roll is made by the mage. The roll is at a penalty equal to 1/10 the spell cost (round in favor of the mage), and at a bonus equal to the mage's level of Magical Aptitude.

30-39 – As per 29, and something happens to the region the mage is in. If the result on this table was an even number, magic itself is changed (the region becomes aspected, certain spells function erratically, or some such). If the result was odd, the change is to the physical world – the weather, birth rate, crops, or something else. Sometimes the result is good, sometimes bad, sometimes just *strange* – determine the nature of the result randomly, or by fiat, or whatever is deemed most amusing to the GM. The duration of the change is typically equal to the cost of the spell, in days, but some very dramatic effects last only a moment, and some very subtle ones last indefinitely.

40+ – As per 30-39, but a *global* change occurs. In addition, the mage must make a HT roll at -6. If this roll is failed, the mage is consumed in a backlash of magical energy, and explodes. The explosion does concussion/burning damage like a grenade (p. B121) doing the mage's (Will+Magery) dice of damage! If the HT-6 roll is made, the backlash is less dramatic; the wizard takes 2d *dice* of internal burning damage, and doesn't explode.

MORE POWER!

A SPELL THAT CAN CHANGE A WORLD

BY FRED WOLKE

Once again, Teruvio's eyes lit up as the sound of the next set of falls became audible. The rest of us groaned. The portages that we took around the cataracts were even more exhausting than fighting the river current. As the waterfall came into view, he extended his hand and closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, the light in his eyes blazed all the more. "Relax," he said,"we won't be carrying our boats any further. This one will do nicely."

The Draw Power spell in **GURPS Grimoire** is introduced with little fanfare, but its implications are profound. Including it in the list of spells to which most wizards have access will change the way mage characters operate, and it should have profound effects on the behavior of NPC wizards, and what they can accomplish.

The real key to seeing the implications is in the fourth paragraph of the Conduct Power spell. "The low-TL versions of this spell allow the mage to tap natural power-houses, such as waterfalls, sunshine, the wind, forest fires, volcanoes . . ." It can be assumed that low-TL versions of Draw Power can accomplish the same thing.

Which natural power sources would be useful to the low-tech mage? Sunlight and wind are relatively constant and dependable, but diffuse . . . you would need to gather the light from the area of several football fields to get the two megawatts that is needed to get the spell to work on a second-to-second basis. A GM might rule that, say, a sixtieth of that area would produce 1 fatigue per second, but that's not terribly useful. And the spell isn't an area spell; how one would use it to gather sunlight or wind over a large area isn't clear. All in all, sunlight and wind directly aren't much of a power source. Even concentrating the power with a windmill doesn't help; the largest modern wind turbines only gather a few kilowatts.

Geothermal power is much more energetic and concentrated. Geysers would make a good power source, generating between 2 and 100 megawatts depending on their size. The drawbacks to them is that they aren't constant, and they're a rather fragile system. You could trigger an eruption with the Geyser spell, but if you did this too often you might shut the geyser down completely. Earthquakes in Yellowstone, measuring only 2-3 on the Richter scale, regularly cause geysers to start, stop, or alter their schedules. Most geysers only erupt for a few seconds at a time, so the spells that could be cast with it are limited.

Volcanoes are less fragile, but difficult to stay close to for any length of time. Even a small one will generate enough power for the largest circle of mages, but the enchantments required to keep the mages alive while they're in range of the spell would take a lot of preparation.

More Power!

Forest fires also release a lot of energy, but using one's energy to fuel sorcery is not something a mage could plan on for the long term. It would make a devastating combination when besieging a forest stronghold, however. About 10 hexes of forest fire should provide roughly a megawatt of power, if it's burning strongly. Grass fires would need an area 10 times as large. Chances are, however, if you can see the fire and you're close enough to use it, you're probably close enough to take damage from the heat radiating from it (1d-3 or so per round).

Similarly, a thunderstorm can be drawn upon for up to 100 megawatts for a small storm, 400 for a moderate storm or 1,000 or more for a tropical storm. A hurricane goes off the scale; even the largest circle of mages could not drain a hurricane significantly, even if they were to stand outside in the middle of one. Storms have similar drawbacks to forest fires; as they get more energetic, the less one wants to stand around casting spells in the middle of it, and one can't be sure it will be there when it is needed.

Waterfalls provide a good combination of constancy, power and reliability. A large waterfall like Niagara or Victoria Falls would provide well over 2,000 megawatts, enough for a large circle of mages, and falls of a more common size would provide 200 megawatts, enough for a smaller circle. Small falls, the kind one could find in any mountainous region with moderate rainfall, would provide between 2 and 20 megawatts, well in a useful range. One of the few drawbacks to a waterfall is that an ingenious enemy could stop or slow the flow of water from upstream, whereas a volcano would be more difficult to interdict.

While we set up camp, Teruvio clambered across the rocks next to the waterfall, disappearing into the spray. I stopped to watch. Slowly, the spray cleared, and the turbulent pool at the bottom of the falls turned still as glass. The thunder that had been deafening us for the past hour faded away. The water spilling over the ledge took on an eerie cast, flowing cleanly and gently into the glass-smooth pool, with nary a ripple.

The effects of drawing power out of any natural source will dampen that source, to an extent that depends on what fraction of its power is being drawn. Drawing on sunlight or wind will cause darkness or still air in the region from which the energy is drawn – though the darkness is not likely to be terribly deep, as ambient light from nearby will illuminate it sufficiently for most purposes.

A geyser eruption will emerge as a gentle flow of unpressurized water of ambient temperature. Because the abrupt drop in temperature will cause mineral deposits to form on the inside of the geyser, the geyser will become dormant for 3d months if a 6- is rolled on 3d, -1 per consecutive time the geyser is drawn upon.

In the unlikely event that a majority of a volcano's eruption power is drawn upon, a dangerous condition may be formed where a plug of cool hard material is formed in its throat. This may well cause the volcano to explode (remember Mount St. Helens?).

A forest fire drawn upon by more than a small fraction will grow more slowly, or start to shrink. If drawn upon by more than 50 percent it may be extinguished quickly. As a full-fledged forest fire can cover several acres, however, generating thousands of megawatts of power, this is unlikely on the large scale.

A thunderstorm that is drawn upon for more than a small fraction of its power will begin to lessen in size and intensity. Tapping it for more than half its energy will cause it to shrink quickly, as the energy needed to maintain the activity is leeched away.

A waterfall that is drawn upon by more than 50 percent will show the effects mentioned above, as the energy that had gone to making sound, turbulence, and eroding the rocks is instead turned to sorcery. This makes waterfalls an even better choice.

More Power!

Teruvio stood at the water's edge, his hands extended over the still pool, as if hauling upwards on a weight at arm's length. The stillness of the air carried his words to me, but as usual when he was working his sorceries, I understood nothing. Out in the lake, a few yards from where he was standing, a platform of soggy clay about five yards in diameter rose to the surface. Teruvio's hands turned over, and he said something else, and the clay turned to stone. A walkway appeared similarly, and Teruvio moved out onto it as a circle of stone formed around the edge of the platform, slotted into a groove he had made there. By the time we had the camp set up, he had called a 40-foot tower of unmortared stone into existence, with a slate roof, windows and a doorway facing away from the spray. A long, narrow bridge spanned the pool from the doorway to the shore. As it was completed, the waterfall returned to normal with a crash.

Create Earth, Shape Earth, and Earth to Stone spells are probably some of the more useful things one can cast with such a huge source of mana. Over a period of several days, an unmolested mage could easily build himself a castle. Essential Earth (p. G22) would make this castle even more secure.

Area spells in general are a great way to spend large amounts of energy. Bless Crops would make it easier for a town growing in infertile mountain terrain to prosper . . . though the Create Food spell could make it unnecessary at all.

Other more-or-less permanent spells with large casting costs would benefit from this arrangement, such as the more advanced healing spells. Spells with large continuing costs, such as Communication (p. G20) and Telecast (p. G73) would also be enormously useful with a continuing source of power.

Enchantment using the power from a Draw Power spell is a difficult proposition, requiring access to at least 60 ST, but several partners using Lend Strength and tapping the same source simultaneously while in circle with the enchanter could be able to manage that. This isn't terribly efficient, however, as the circle could just as easily be used for the enchantment itself, directly. Anyone who can learn Draw Power can learn Enchant as well.

A mage with access to this kind of power would be at a huge advantage in any combat. Within his stronghold, a mage could protect himself and his companions with magical walls both large and strong; he could cast hugely offensive spells with a minimal cost to himself, and summon or create large numbers of creatures to fight on his behalf. With Maintain Spell (p. G72), he needn't even worry about having too many spells "on"!

Once the word got out that we had found a large, uninhabited waterfall, we started getting visits from other mages trying to replace Teruvio. Most of them tried to stop up the flow upstream, one way or another, but between our patrols and Teruvio's magical guardians, they were never all that much of a danger. The ones we had to worry about were the ones who came pretending to want to become apprentices . . .

There are many ways a "plugged-in" mage could be the center of an adventure. The players could be exploring frontier areas looking for usable sites. They could be trying to steal a site from an established mage. They could be servants and apprentices, as these mages (in a world where the Draw Power spell is well known) would need support to fend off other mages.

A whole community of mages might grow up around a river that makes several waterfalls along a course of rapids, or a geyser basin. They would be somewhat isolated, but would also have to cooperate in order to avoid damaging the whole system. This sort of enforced cooperation makes a good backdrop for adventures with a cloak-and-dagger feel.

STEVE BRYANT 1997

More Power!

The Five Treasures of Ragathar

by Scott Tengelin

Thousands of years ago, when magic was first beginning to be tapped, the world's first great enchanter created five objects of great power. So great was their power that the objects shattered the enchanter's body, destroyed his mind, and damned his soul. This mage, Ragathar, died upon the objects' completion. Ragathar's few friends sealed his laboratory with Ragathar within, and his laboratory became his tomb, the five magic items buried within, to remain undisturbed for years to come.

Centuries later, when Ragathar's home city was just a memory, five tomb robbers happened across Ragathar's tomb. Finding Ragathar's possessions, the robbers fought over them until one suggested that each keep a separate item, and all five go their separate ways. The other four agreed, and this was done.

The tomb robbers are now long dead, and the five wondrous objects are lost. The causes of their deaths are unknown, but as others still look for these Treasures, they hear the cries in the night . . . cries of such anguish that can only belong to one who has lost his dearest possessions. And the shadows of the night betray the stalking appearances of an old, hunched figure, following those who would seek the Five Treasures of Ragathar.

Whether or not this legend is true, the Five Treasures of Ragathar are indeed powerful, and there is a powerful undead looking for them. These magical items can be placed in any *GURPS Fantasy* (or any other fantasy) campaign, to be found by the players as the GM wishes.

The Five Treasures of Ragathar

The curse of the Five Treasures is profound. First, possession of just one of the objects incurs a risk of attracting Ragathar's attention, and owning more of the treasures increases this risk. For every treasure a character has, there is a cumulative 1 in 6 chance of being noticed by Ragathar. Thus, a PC with three of Ragathar's treasures has a 3 in 6 chance, every month, of gaining Ragathar's attention and having to deal with him. This check is made every month the character has the item(s).

Along with the ever-increasing danger comes ever-increasing power. Possession of additional objects gradually adds power to each treasure, and all additional powers are cumulative. The specific powers gained are detailed along with the descriptions below. Losing treasures has the reverse effect of gaining them.

As an example, a character has acquired both the Bracers and the Cap of Ragathar. At this point, the Bracers grant one point of DR and +1 to all resistance rolls against spells. The Cap will add +2 to all spell skill levels, and a +1 bonus to all IQ-based skills. Should the same character also find the Staff of Ragathar, the Bracers improve to 2 DR, the Cap now grants a +1 to IQ, and the Staff automatically functions with +2 to damage and can store up to 6 mana points of spells. Suppose this mage loses the Cap. The Bracers drop to DR 1 again, the Staff only strikes with +1 to damage, and can only store up to 4 points of mana.

Should someone wish to destroy any of the Five Treasures, this can be done by any normal means (burning, immersion in acid, etc.), but the items have 4 points of PD and 20 points of DR greater than a regular item of the same make.

All spell-like abilities of the Five Treasures function at skill level 21, and all items are only usable by Mages.

The Bracers of Ragathar

The Bracers of Ragathar were designed with protection in mind. They appear as a pair of bronze armbands with etchings of dragons carved into them. The Bracers provide one point of DR. Should one possess the Bracers along with one other item, the Bracers provide a +1 bonus to all rolls to resist magic. Possession of two other items increases the DR to +2. Three additional objects raises the resistance bonus to +2. Possession of all five items grants the wearer +3 DR and the use of Force Dome (p. M78) once per day.

The Cap of Ragathar

Ragathar built the Cap to aid in his studies. It appears to be a somewhat conical hat, blue with gold trim. Wearing it grants a +1 bonus to all spell skill levels. Should the wearer have a second Treasure, this bonus increases to +2, and all IQ-based skill levels gain a +1 bonus. Possession of two other objects grants a +1 to IQ for as long as the character wears the Cap. Three additional items increases the bonus to spell skills to +3, and the wearer may understand any spoken language. Possession of all five Treasures grants another +1 to IQ, a +2 to all IQ-based skills, and the wearer can understand any form of written communication.

The Cloak of Ragathar

The Cloak of Ragathar is a powerful movement-related item. It appears to be a simple, black cloak with a plain wooden pin. Wearing it grants 1 point of PD, as well as the Swim spell. Having a second object also conveys Wallwalker at will. A third item boosts the PD to +2, and also allows the wearer to use Levitation at will. Possession of three additional Treasures changes the Levitate to Flight. All five objects increases the PD to +3, and allows the wearer to cast Ethereal Body 3 times per day.

The Robe of Ragathar

The Robe of Ragathar was designed to allow easy and concealed access to equipment. It appears as a multi-pocketed blue robe, with black and silver trim depicting gryphons and unicorns. The Robe will possess two patches, which may be detached and used as regular items (see below). Possession of another of Ragathar's items mysteriously results in the appearance of two more patches, and one of the pockets functions as an extradimensional space with a carrying capacity of 100 pounds. Two additional Treasures adds a fifth patch, increases the carrying capacity to 150 pounds, and allow any items placed inside the pouch to be within easy reach. Owning three additional items adds two more patches and increases the carrying capacity of the pockets to 200 pounds. At this level of power, one of the patches will be "blank," allowing the wearer to decide what the item is at the time of use. (Almost any normal, mundane item is possible, at the GM's discretion.) If the mage has all five objects, an eighth patch will appear, the carrying capacity will increase to 250 pounds, and the robe will possess the ability to hide its nature. On command, the robe can hide its pockets, leaving them inaccessible (even to the wearer) until another command is given. At this level the robe can also disguise itself at the mage's will, appearing as nothing more than a mundane robe (without the trim or patches); these two abilities can be combined, leaving a normal-looking robe without pockets. Even disguised, however, the robe will still be detectable as magical for those with such abilities.

The Robe of Ragathar patches should be chosen by the GM or rolled randomly, using the table below as a starting point. Used items will result in a replacement patch appearing the next day (not necessarily the same item, though). Multiple patches of the same item are possible.

3d	Item
3-4	50' silk rope
5-6	Dagger
7-8	Meal for one person
9	25' ladder
10-11	Lantern with oil, plus flint and steel
12	Riding horse, with bit, bridle and saddle
13	Potion of healing
14	Door, 10' high x 10' wide x 10' thick (will magically penetrate up to 10' thick of wall)
15-16	Suit of fine clothing
17-18	Scroll with one randomly determined spell

The Staff of Ragathar

The Staff of Ragathar looks like a simple wooden staff with the head of a dragon carved out of the top, with pearls for eyes. By itself, the Staff will function as a

Quick-Reference Chart

Item	Abilities Alone	With 1 Item	With 2 Items	With 3 Items	With 4 Items
Bracers	+1 DR	+1 Magic Resistance	+2 DR	+2 Magic Resistance	+3 DR, Force Dome
Cap	+1 Spell Skills	+2 Spell Skills, +1 IQ Skills	+1 IQ	+3 Spell Skills, Gift of Tongues	+2 IQ, +2 IQ Skills, Gift of Letters
Cloak	+1 PD, Swim	Wallwalker	+2 PD, Levitation	Flight	+3 PD, Ethereal Body
Robe	2 Patches	4 Patches, 100 lbs.	5 patches, 150 lbs., Quick-Draw Items	7 Patches, 200 lbs., Blank Item	8 Patches, 250 lbs., Disguise Itself
Staff	+1 Damage, 2 Mana	4 Mana	+2 Damage, 6 Mana, +1d Damage	8 Mana	+3 Damage, 10 Mana, +2d Damage

Powerstone with 2 points of mana. It also strikes with +1 to damage. When another Treasure is found, the Staff may store 4 mana. Two additional objects increases the damage to +2, and 6 mana may be stored. Furthermore, the Staff may be called upon to do an additional 1d of damage, at the cost of two mana from the Powerstone. A third item increases storage to 8 mana. Should all five Treasures be owned, the Staff increases to +3 damage, 10 mana of spells can be stored, and the Staff can deliver an additional 2d of damage at the cost of 4 stored points of mana.

If the Staff is charged to cause additional dice of damage, and the attack misses, the mana is not wasted. Only if the attack hits will the mana be spent.

Ragathar

Ragathar was the first great enchanter. His death was the result of repeated use of forbidden spells. The raw power of his spellcastings, combined with his passion for his items, caused him to rise from the dead. It is up to the GM exactly what kind of undead Ragathar is, but he should be at least as powerful as a lich or vampire. Ragathar's quest for his belongings has brought him far and wide, and the centuries past have given him plenty of time to build up his power. He has access to any spell the GM needs him to have. Ragathar's IQ is 18, and he has Magery at Level 3. He will always use the Seeker spell in his quest for his lost items. Ragathar will never possess magic items other than the Five Treasures; anything else, he believes, is just a shadow of true magic.

Ragathar will always prefer to use his spells rather than engage in melee, but he is a powerful combatant nonetheless. The mere sight of Ragathar causes the effects of a Fear spell. Should Ragathar decide to attack in melee, his clawed hands drain 2 Fatigue in addition to damage. Creatures drained of all Fatigue either become ghasts or shadows, as Ragathar chooses. These undead will follow Ragathar fanatically. Ragathar will usually be with 2d skeletons, 1d zombies, 1d-3 shadows (minimum of 1). All undead will be fanatically devoted to Ragathar, their creator.

Ragathar uses Seeker to look for his lost possessions, even though he once used a magical link which allowed him to know the location of any of the objects at any time. (Since his undeath, the magical link has weakened, and now operates only occasionally.) If Ragathar is ever alerted to one of his items, he will reach the item (and its current owner) within 5d days. Should that item be dropped, Ragathar may lose his link (3 in 6 chance), and stop following until another link is regained. One particular tale describes a mage, while fleeing the wrath of Ragathar, to have tied one of the treasures to a dog. That dog was later found to be slaughtered, the Treasure gone. It is rumored, then, that any living creature possessing an item is enough to attract Ragathar's attention.

The chance that Ragathar will already have some of the Treasures with him depends on how many Treasures the PCs have when Ragathar catches up to them. If the characters have one or two Treasures, Ragathar has a 2 in 6 chance of owning one himself. If the characters have three of four Treasures, this chance drops to 1 in 6. It is unlikely Ragathar would have more than one Treasure at any one time.

Ragathar is only interested in recovering his belongings. He will attack the current owner immediately, but will cease hostilities if the owner freely hands the item(s) to Ragathar. If the owner decides to fight, Ragathar will fight to the death. The only way to kill Ragathar is to destroy his body and all five treasures, otherwise he will rise again in 1d days and begin his quest anew.

Should Ragathar regain all five of his possessions, his purpose in undeath will be complete, and he will probably return to the ruins that were once his home, and haunt them forever.

Salvation for the Disillusioned Archer

Or, 16 reasons not to trade in your bow for a blaster

By Aric J. Liljegren and R. Darrow Bernick

The archer is perhaps the most sadly neglected character type to exist in any genre not revolving around Sherwood Forest. With precious few supporting magical items or technological advancements to keep them interesting, the average archer is doomed to be just that . . . average. They have been restricted to items like the ever so useful *+1 Bow vs. Muckmonsters Wearing Bermuda Shorts on Alternate Tuesdays* or the equally indispensable *Arrow of Rodent Slaying and Paint Stirring* for far too long.

Here, then, are several ancient artifacts from realms long since forgotten, and new weapons as yet uninvented . . . all based around the simple bow. This we have done in a humble effort to discourage all archers from gathering together for a mass suicide as their therapists reassure them that it is how they perceive themselves that's important (easy for them to say as the plasma residue around your gaping chest wound continues to burn out your insides while your opponent blows the smoke from the muzzle of his blaster and your bow falls to the ground in cinders alongside the arrows that bounced off his power armor like so many rotten tomatoes). So, curl up in your favorite chair, throw another bow on the fire, and let's find some weapons worth being an archer for.

Artifacts from the Past
Swampreed Bows

Cultivated in the far northeastern bogs of Kahln, swampreeds would at first glance seem unlikely material for bow construction. However, the reed's natural grain gives it two distinct advantages over wood. If bent in one direction, it possesses great flexibility, allowing it to be gathered into a tight coil 6" in diameter (like a roll of green masking tape). Yet, if forced to bend in the opposite direction, it has remarkable rigidity. Swampreed bows are similar to normal bows, but are Holdout of +1, damage +1, and cost ×4 of a regular bow. Being a plant, however, it will eventually dry out and become brittle, snapping on a critical miss with any attack roll thereafter (reeds remain fresh for 2-3 months depending on weather conditions). Highly prized for its concealability, one account tells of an assassin who disguised himself as a minstrel, wearing the reed as a belt and hiding the string on his lute.

Blindman's Bow

Who said blind men don't make good archers? When drawn – and only when drawn – this bow of plain, untreated wood confers sight in all spectrums upon the firer; this includes IR and UV fields. The power originates in a small inset crystal "eye" located above the handle, and is communicated to the archer via a one-way telepathic link. The archer will therefore gain the sight even if blindfolded. The ability is lost the instant the arrow is released. The crystal can itself be blinded if it is covered, removed, or shattered.

Spider Arrow

The Spider Arrow originates as a series of thin, sticky strands found in the bark of an aura tree woven together into an intricate net. This net is then rolled and compacted into a shaft similar to the compressed hair of a rhino horn. The arrowhead is a reversed funnel designed to channel the air through the center of the shaft when fired, forcing the net to unravel and spread over an entire hex. The effective range is between 10 and 50 yards, having little effect at other distances. Under 10 yards the net has not had sufficient time to spread and will do a mere 1d-3 crushing; beyond the 50-yard mark, the net has lost its momentum, and glides harmlessly to the ground. Targets must roll vs. ST-2 or DX-2 to escape but may not attempt this on the same round in which they were hit. Meanwhile, all actions are at -4, and movement is at ½.

Shrieking Arrow

These arrows discharge a wailing scream as they fly, deafening and confusing those around them. Everyone within 6" of its flight path must roll vs. HT or be deafened

for 1d-2 turns (minimum of one turn). Characters within the area of affect are given a +1 on this roll for every 1" distance from the flight path. If hit, the target is automatically deafened and stunned for one second even if the roll is made. As the shriek is directed forward from the arrowhead, the archer – as well as those behind him – will be unaffected.

Warp Bow

This horrific weapon houses the life force of a demon banished in centuries past. The entity now activates its power each time the bow is fully drawn, summoning forth a minor spirit and trapping it inside the arrowhead. Nocking an arrow to the Warp Bow triggers a low, quiet hum, while drawing it increases the volume considerably, screaming when fired. Upon hitting a target, the spirit will attempt to possess its victim (roll a Quick Contest of Will against the spirit's Will of 12). If the target wins the Contest, he merely takes the arrow damage; but if he loses, one of the following affects apply (roll 1d):

1-2: Victim goes berserk, attacking all in view.
3-4: Victim develops amnesia, extending to skills and powers requiring memory.
5-6: Victim becomes catatonic, unable to take any action.

All effects last for 2d hours or until exorcised. If the spirit wins the Contest by 10 or more, the effects last for days instead of hours. If the archer critically misses his attack roll, the spirit attempts to possess the archer instead.

Healing Arrow

This arrow is made of pristine, white lacquered wood and a flat, silver arrowhead. It carries a powerful enchantment of healing. Anyone (person, animal, or even monster) struck by the arrow takes no damage, but instead regains 1d hit points (2d hits with a critical hit). The recipient must be shot with the arrow, not just touched by it (jabbing it in by hand won't work, either). Specific wounds may be targeted, although all hit location modifiers apply. The arrow will also wipe away any diseases or other physical afflictions short of lost limbs. A Healing Arrow can do nothing for someone who is already dead. The arrow vanishes upon hitting its mark, but if it misses, it may be retrieved and fired again.

Bow of the Messenger

The only drawback to this bow is that it will never hit its target, but that was never its purpose. Made for an elven messenger to send orders from his king to the soldiers in the field, the bow may fire up to five times normal longbow range, the mentally projected message inscribing itself on the arrow while in flight. The arrow will then miss its target by no more than a yard (and frequently by mere inches). The archer must have the Bow skill, but no to hit roll is needed. Instead, the archer must roll vs. IQ to determine the complexity of the message sent (1 word per point of success). A normal failure will still allow a feeling to be conveyed, but a critical failure results in misleading or confusing information. If any other message is carved, written, or otherwise attached to the arrow, it will nullify the bow's effect on that arrow.

Mourdenkhel's Magnificent, Collapsible Arrow Propelling Contrivances

These bows are made from an incredibly dense wood found only in the dwarven province of Stygothia called Splinter Wood, named for its ability to be carved until nearly paper thin, yet still retain its structural integrity. This makes them very light, weighing only 1/3 as much as normal bows of the same size. Called Splinter Bows for short, they are carved in 8- to 10-inch segments with slight tapers allowing each section to slide into the next. When fully collapsed, a Splinter Bow resembles a cylindrical scroll case or flute. The last segment on one end houses a small reel that holds the string – the archer pulls it from the reel to a hook on the other end.

Grappling Arrow

Invented by an alchemist quite by accident, these arrows are fitted with small glass vials in place of normal arrowheads. These vessels are filled with a compound of chemical and organic materials that react violently when exposed to oxygen. The containers burst upon contact, and the black gel within instantly floods every crack and crevice on the targeted surface, hardening in the same turn. The resulting tendrils form a bond hard to break on any but the slickest of surfaces – treat as ST15 (on smooth, nonporous materials) or ST25 (for castle walls and the like). The weight of the vial throws the arrow off balance, doubling range modifiers, adding +4 to SS and -2 to Acc. The same chemical in the arrowhead (mixed with a controlling catalyst) is extruded from the rear of the arrow as it flies, leaving behind a thin cord with the strength of 1" rope. The cord looks a lot like black licorice, and is so light that it does not further hinder the arrow's flight.
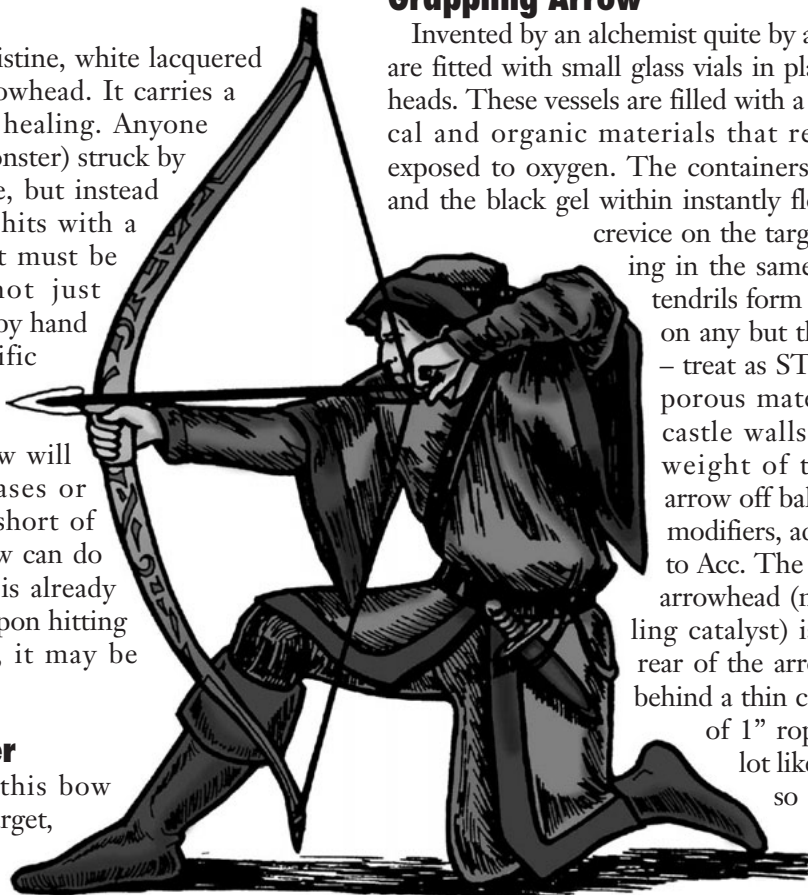
Bounty Hunter's Arrow

Designed to incapacitate rather than kill, these arrows bear runic symbols of law and justice along their entire lengths. When fired, the archer must target the hands, arms, legs, or feet, but suffers no attack penalty for doing so. The arrows are impregnated with a chemical that causes a terrible burning sensation around the wound, doubling all skill and movement penalties caused by the arrow's base damage. These additional penalties do not dissipate until the arrow is removed. These arrows cost $800 each. They require a variant Accuracy enchantment, a mysterious alchemical preparation, and possibly special craftsmanship.

Future Weapons

Motorized Compound Bow (TL8+)

Ideal for the street samurai with style, this bow is a step above the normal compound bow. A motorized pulley system is developed that fits inside the body of the weapon instead of attaching to the outside. The contraption is powered by one C cell, stored inside the bow's handle. The result is a lighter, more portable compound bow, with only one fatal flaw; a broken bow string is nearly impossible to replace, the cost rivaling that of the bow itself.

This little oversight nearly killed the manufacturer, C-Corp., but a modification by engineer Andrew Sullivan saved the day. Sullivan, a member of the Ted Nugent Bow Hunters' Club, devised a manually telescoping body for the compound bow. Not only is the pulley system accessible (allowing for easy string replacement), but hunters can now carry their bows in a large jacket pocket. This development transformed C-Corp. into the premier bow company in the world. Cost for the improved version is twice that of the now obsolete model.

All stats for either version remain consistent with normal compound bows (-2 to the minimum ST required for bow type, +2 effective ST for purposes of figuring 1/2 Dam and Max ranges and +1 to damage), both weighing 75% normal for bow type.

Switchbow (TL9+)

Highly concealable and made entirely of plastic, this bow is a favorite in the corporate world of assassins and street operatives. The telescoping action of this motorized compound bow is fully automated. Just push a button and – *snikt* – instant bow. Pulleys reel in the extra string when the bow is collapsed. In addition, a number of accessories are available to the well-connected archer.

Laser Scope Projector And Range Sensor. This device projects a dot of any color (including infrared), and adjusts its aim for distance. It adds +4 Acc. and halves SS.

Designer Styles. One end of the string can be detached and reeled in, allowing the bow to be designed to look like almost any hand held device. Popular examples include cellular phones, pocket computers, and garage door openers.

Special Arrowheads. Arrowheads are now available in any number of different types including Broadheads, Flu-flus and the ever-popular converted gyroc ammo (but be very careful; they're impact-detonated). All special arrowheads do basic arrow damage in addition to ammo effects.

Improved Switchbow (TL10+)

The Switchbow and string in this version are composed entirely of bioplastic. Make sure it gets plenty of sun, and you'll never break another string.

Gauss Enhancement (TL10+)

Nocking an arrow creates a small trigger current that runs through the bow; the current is deactivated when the archer releases the arrow. A magnetic mechanism holds the arrow to the bow and pushes it back against the string. In other words, the bow draws itself! One might think of this as the epitome of laziness; however, the gauss enhanced bow has an effective pull of ST 25, making up for any loss in pride.

Switcharrows (TL10+)

These arrows retract down to 3" and can be carried in a belt dispenser which minimizes the risk when carrying special arrowheads.

Force Bow (TL12+)

The Force Bow is not actually a bow; it's just a handle with a notch on the side. The arrow is placed in the groove and is pulled back as though drawing a real bow. A shimmering field of energy can then be seen around the arrow. Releasing the arrow causes the force field to propel it at several times the speed of sound. The Force Bow not only senses for distance, but also locks onto its target. If the archer's skill roll is successful, the bow will not release its arrow until the target fails to successfully Dodge. Stats for the Force Bow are as follows:

Malf.	Type	Damage	SS	Acc.	1/2D
Ver.	Imp.	3d6x6 (2)	6	7	2,000

Max	Wt.	RoF	Cost	LC	TL
3,000	2	1/3	4,000	3	12

Salvation for the Disillusioned Archer
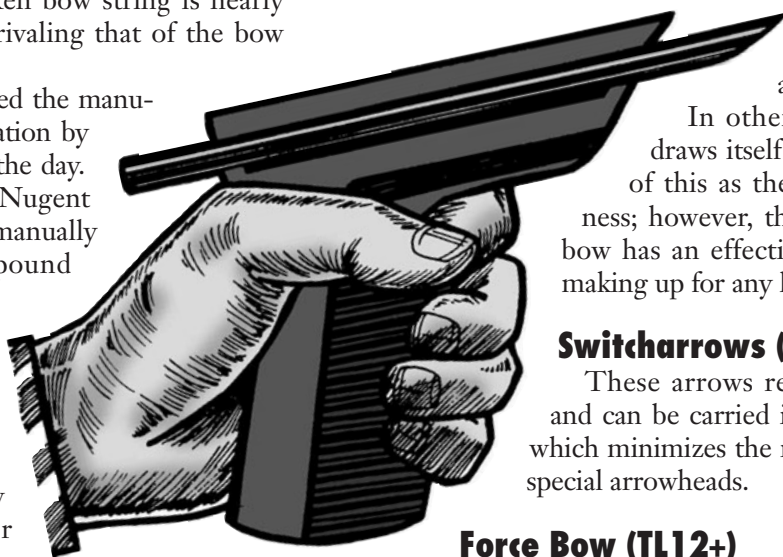
MAGIC on the EDGE

Broovy was getting nervous. As the evening wore on at the Club Blackboard, he was getting more and more tense. He really wanted a drink, eyeing with lust the trays that the waitrons carried, but he didn't dare fog things up now. Especially if something had gone wrong.

"Tchort," Hando muttered. He wasn't so concerned as Broovy was about keeping sharp and he tossed off the last of his second beer. "Where is she, paryeni? You said she'd be here." Broovy took another long look around the club, at the various spookies and club kids scattered around the tables and dance floor. Still no sign.

"She will be," he told Hando. She'd better be, he thought to himself. Katrina was usually on time; something must be wrong, his gut told him. Kat would've sent word if she wasn't able to make the meet, either through the net or . . . otherwise. Broovy fingered the pentagram medallion under his shirt and let the touch of the solid metal calm and center him a bit. He had a bad feeling about this. With a last glance around he slid off his barstool and tapped Hando on the shoulder.

"C'mon, omae, let's fade." Just as they made to leave, three figures clad in black entered the club. Two were wearing light, form-fitting black body armor with the stars-and-stripes patch on the shoulder; they had burners holstered casually at their sides, like it was the sort of thing everyone wore on a night out. Nerks. The guy with them was wearing a long black coat over a bulky turtleneck that looked to have some neokev padding across the chest and back. He was pale and his dark eyes darted around the club as he slowly turned his head like he was listening to a sound no one else could hear.

"Faex," Broovy muttered, almost to himself, "witch-smeller. They must have gotten Kat." He guided Hando toward the back of the club with a gentle touch on his elbow. Had to play it sub-zero cool not to alert the boys-in-black or their trained bloodhound. If they were going to get out of this, it was going to take more than the little magic that Broovy knew. It was gonna take a poxy miracle.

Cross-genre pollination is one of the strengths of **GURPS**, allowing players to combine features from different worldbooks and genres to create their own unique setting. Many gamers have been interested by the contrast between the dark, gritty future of cyberpunk and a world of magical fantasy. This article offers one means of blending the two together, set in **GURPS Cyberworld.**

An Alternative
GURPS Cyberworld

by Stephen Kenson

HISTORY

Magic is a new and mysterious force in the One-and-Twenty, a new player in a very old game of power and control that may tip the scales toward one side or the other. Magicians in the occult underground research new spells every day that will give them a better understanding of the power that's out there, while the ProGov and the korps spend millions in cred on research projects to put this new power under their thumb as well. It's a race to an unknown finish line. Here's how it all started.

FIRST HINTS

The first real hint that something strange was going on came in 2021, when a NERCC strike team conducted a routine rooting-out of an underground group of occultists in Boston. The NERCC commander on-site filed a report that claimed the leader of the cultists somehow deflected weapons-fire aimed at him, despite laser-targeting systems. Two of the officers also collapsed from violent and painful muscle spasms.

Although an attempt was made to pass the whole report off as exaggeration, an investigation revealed that the cult followers believed that their leader was a sorcerer capable of performing actual magic, and that he was in contact with others who were capable of the same feats. NERCC Director Adam Hammond authorized a small team to investigate the possible occult conspiracy, a branch that became known as "Division X" by NERCC officers.

Over the next ten months, investigations by Division X began to turn up very disturbing evidence, not only of cooperation between many underground occultist organizations, but of individuals who displayed abilities that could not be explained by cyber implants or other modern technology. As the evidence mounted, more resources were diverted to Division X to continue their research and to keep information about such paranormal phenomena from the general public.

By 2023, the NERCC and the United States government had incontrovertible evidence of more than a dozen individuals who exhibited what could only be described as supernatural powers. At this time Director Hammond made Division X a permanent branch of the NERCC with the directive to uncover and eliminate threats posed to the security of the nation by this "occult conspiracy." What stories of "paranormal powers" that leaked to the press were discredited and not widely believed by the general public.

PUBLIC DISPLAY

In 2025, the U.S. Government's carefully constructed "occult cover-up" exploded in its face . . . literally. The nationwide rioting and civil unrest that led to the formation of the Provisional Government was rumored to be aided by so-called "mages" displaying unusual abilities. Information on the existence of these strange powers began to spread, and a media blanket was thrown over the issue in an effort to smother the smoldering rumors.

In November of 2025, an assassination attempt was made at the swearing-in ceremony of Provisional President Martin Patterson. The assassin seemed to appear on the platform out of thin air and hurled a blast of flames from his hands at Patterson. Shots from NERCC officers failed to harm the assassin, and he was finally brought down by a squad of men. The assassin destroyed himself and a dozen other people in a fiery blast. President Patterson was rushed to the hospital, where he was pronounced dead two days later. The entire event was captured on national television and the public clamored for information as rumors about the identity and nature of the assassin multiplied.

THE BIG LIE

The Provisional Congress chose Adam Hammond, Director of the NERCC, to succeed Martin Patterson as Provisional President in 2025. In his first national address, Hammond revealed the existence of an occult conspiracy possessed of "paranormal abilities" that was responsible for the death of President Patterson, the same conspiracy responsible for the assassination of President Burris in 2010. He informed the public of the danger of these conspirators and swore that the resources of the NERCC would be devoted to eliminating "these and any other threats to the life, liberty and prosperity of our nation."

Official ProGov policy recognized the existence of a new form of "somatic mutation," supported by several experts at universities and think tanks. Citizens were strongly encouraged to report paranormal activity to the proper authorities. Although no official ProGov or media report ever made use of the word "magic," many people began referring to these unusual abilities as such and terms such as "mage," "witch," and "spell" began to see common use.

MAGIC IN THE ONE-AND-TWENTY

In 2043, most people accept that magic (of some kind or another) exists. The ProGov continues to maintain that the so-called "magical" abilities displayed by some individuals is in fact some kind of psionic mutation, but it doesn't make much of a diff to the average C-3 kicking back in front of the vid watching the evening news *what* you want to call it. Magic is magic.

THE STATUS OF MAGES

Mages (people with the Magical Aptitude advantage) are considered "dangerous elements" by the ProGov and are either feared by the general public or secretly romanticized and thought of as heroes. They receive either a +2 or -2 Reaction Modifier from anyone who knows that they are mages. Very few people react neutrally when meeting a mage.

Generally, anyone who is identified by the government as having magical aptitude will be taken and placed in special "training" for their own protection. Their families are then offered C-2 (or better) status and kept in comfort, so long as the mage cooperates. This training usually leads to that person becoming a witch-smeller for the NERCC or some other ProGov agency (see below). The korporations also recruit those with magical potential by offering them economic incentives and legal protection from persecution.

These magicians are all licensed and carefully regulated by the ProGov. Part of the licensing process involves the implantation of a cortex bomb that the authorities can use to keep potentially dangerous magicians in line. Many Low-C and nullo mages escape the identification process along with a few rare High-C mages who learn to conceal their aptitude magically. Knowingly failing to register magical ability with the ProGov is considered a Class B Felony. Mages who are also members of an occult organization are considered subversives and automatically have C-4/R status (see p. CW33).

Many magicians choose to flee the United States for greener pastures in Russia or Japan, where they usually end up the virtual slaves of one of the major korps. Magicians also seem to gravitate toward conflict areas and rebellions; the Alaskan Special Operations Forces are known to include a couple of mages, as are the rebel forces in Cuba.

MANA LEVEL

By 2043, most of the world has attained a level of Normal Mana (p. B147) with some areas that are still Low Mana. Some powerful sacred sites like Teotihuacan, Stonehenge and some American Indian ritual grounds are reputed to have High Mana at certain times of the year, but so far this has not been confirmed. If it is true, there are probably no more than a dozen or so such sites in the world.

At the current mana level, only those with the Magical Aptitude advantage can cast spells. Many magicians and researchers have questioned whether or not the mana level will continue to rise. This question is of great concern to the ProGov and is the subject of their most intensive magical research.

MAGICAL APTITUDE

"The Talent," as it is most commonly known, is still a rare gift. Perhaps one person in 1,000 has Magery 1, one in 10,000 has Magery 2 and one in 100,000 has Magery 3. Of these, only 20% will have any real knowledge of magic. So in a city of half a million people, there will be 500 or so potential mages, only 100 of which will have any more than a small handful of spells. Since Magical Aptitude is so rare, there is a 10-point Unusual Background cost for being a mage.

The exact cause of Magical Aptitude has not yet been determined, although the ProGov and nearly every korp and government in the world would like to figure it out. Numerous projects are under way to determine if the Talent is some kind of mutation or latent gene, or is linked to some unknown environmental cause. Some even speculate that the Talent is culturally based, owing the greater incidence of mages among so-called "primitive" cultures as well as in the occult sub-culture. Most scholars discount this theory and attribute the higher incidence of mages in these areas to the greater ability of those cultures to recognize and bring out the latent Talent in their members.

The ProGov, and other world powers, have discovered that the only current reliable means of detecting Magical Aptitude is through the use of magic like the Aura spell (see p. B163). This makes potential magicians very difficult to detect, although organizations like the NERCC have trained "witch smellers" who know the Aura, Mage Sight and Seek Magic spells and are used as "bloodhounds" to track down other potential mages. Many of the Talented loathe such individuals as traitors to their own kind, while the NERCC regards them with a combination of respect and distrust.

SPELLS

Unlike in most fantasy worlds, magic in the One-and-Twenty is not an organized and codified science . . . yet.

Most mages are self-taught, or learned their spells from another magician. Everyone has their own pet theories on the proper rituals for casting this or that spell, and the capable mages are working constantly on developing more sophisticated and powerful spells. The rarity of people with high levels of Magery has also inhibited magical research, since the more powerful spells can only be cast by them.

All of the spells from *GURPS Magic* and *GURPS Grimoire* are available except for the following Colleges: Enchantment, Gate, Meta-Spells, Necromantic, and Technological.

Enchantment spells remain very rare. The only commonly known Enchantment spell is Powerstone (see p. B161) which many magicians use to provide them with the boost needed to cast powerful spells on the streets without exhausting themselves. Other enchantments are very difficult to find and learn, as well as difficult to perform; conditions for producing enchantments are generally less than ideal, and most magicians are not interested in devoting months they could be using for spell research to creating magical items. Some minor items have been created by magicians for their own use, and some of the government and korporate magical think-tanks have performed some fairly sophisticated enchantments, but even these are rare. Possession of enchanted items is illegal in the United States, and such items are confiscated by the NERCC if they are detected, and the owner is detained so that he can be questioned about where the item came from.

Gate spells are completely unknown at present. Rumors abound that some magicians have developed the Teleport spell, a rumor of which the NERCC would very much like to determine the veracity. At present, theories of teleportation, spacial gates and time travel are just that, theories. Practical Gate or Teleportation spells would be incredibly valuable to a number of parties, who would go to any lengths to ensure that they were the only ones with knowledge of them. The discovery of the Timeport spell (p. G46) by an underground mage could lead into an interesting *Terminator*-style adventure where the player-characters are sent back in time to prevent the assassination of President Burris, followed by a squad of crack NERCC agents who are ordered to stop them.

The meta-spells Activate Runes, Reflect, Great Ward, Drain Mana and Restore Mana are unknown. All of the meta-spells listed in **Grimoire** (see pp. G69-74) are unknown except for Seek Magic, which is used by NERCC "bloodhounds" to track down other magic-users (making knowledge of the Conceal Magic spell very useful).

Necromantic spells are still in their infancy, and few magicians are willing to tamper with them at present. Resurrection (p. M51) is not possible, and may never be discovered . . . but some magicians have summoned spirits of the dead and other beings that some claim are demons. Some of the more daring young Turks tinker with the mechanics of life and death and the summoning of spirits and demons, but just as many of them have been devoured by creatures they have summoned and not been able to control.

The NERCC and most other governments crack down hard on necromantic magic, mostly because the implications of it frighten them greatly should they become public knowledge.

Spells from the Tech college (see p. G94) have not yet been discovered or invented, although there are rumored to be hip cybermages working on strange blends of magic and technology. Many mages (especially traditionalists and tribals) tend to be somewhat technophobic, proclaiming that magic is a better and "cleaner" option than technology. Some suggest that magic and technology are not compatible in anything but the grossest mechanical sense and that Technological spells might not even be possible.

S PELL R ESEARCH

The Thaumatology skill (see p. G7) is used to develop and design new spell theories using the new invention rules (see pp. B186-187). The skill can be used by non-magicians as well, but mages have an easier time both learning and using it, as well as a practical means to test their theories! Normals can develop theories and even design spells, but they will have no idea if their spell works until a mage learns and attempts to cast it.

Very high Thaumatology skill is exceptionally rare, even rarer than magical aptitude. Combined with the high penalties for inventing, spell design from scratch is very difficult. Highly skilled magical theoreticians are worth their weight in gold and are almost universally kept under close observation and tight security by the governments and korps that employ them.

Most mages don't invent their own spells from nothing. Instead they scavenge from a diverse range of magical source material; old books, datafiles, anthropology texts and "New Age" material for scraps of useful magical knowledge that might give them the clues they need to piece together a new spell. The Research skill (see p. B62) is essential for this, although many street and nullo magicians use the default for it.

The result of this is that magical knowledge is considered extremely valuable. Net-pirates can do a brisk business in black occult data, and the formula for a useful new spell is valuable enough for several governments and korps to kill for. The more basic prerequisite spells are better known, while the more advanced second- and third-tier spells are correspondingly more rare. Powerful "master" level spells like Earthquake are virtually unknown except to some very powerful, legendary magicians.

N P C s

NERCC Division X Officer

As the NERCC Elite Enforcer (p. CW34) with the following modifications: +1 (or more) levels of Strong Will and Occultism skill at IQ (higher for more experienced officers). Some rare DivX officers may have levels of Magic Resistance. DivX officers normally carry laser pistols as sidearms, especially since an unfortunate incident involving a subversive mage with the Reverse Missiles spell.

NERCC "Witch Smeller"

ST 10, DX 11, IQ 13, HT 12
Basic Speed 5.75, Move 5
Dodge 5, Parry 5
Advantages: Magery 1 (or more), Unusual Background [10].
Disadvantages: Enforced Duty (to NERCC), Social Stigma (turncoat) among other mages. Cowardice and Honesty are also common.
Cyberware: Cortex Bomb.
Skills: Aura Reading-13, Computer Operation/TL8-13, Occultism-12, Research-11, Stealth-10.
Spells: Analyze Magic-12, Aura-13, Detect Magic-15, Light-12, Seek Magic-14, Seeker-12, Shield-13.

These sorry individuals are magicians who are pressed into service by the NERCC to track down other mages who might have escaped the law. Most are unwilling agents who are forced into service through the use of implants and threats against their loved ones. A few are traitors who have turned their backs on their own kind in exchange for some degree of safety and status working for the ProGov. Witch Smellers are employed by Division X as "point men" to find the way to rogue magicians so that the troopers can deal with them. It is rumored on the street that NERCC has a small cadre of combat-trained magicians they use on special missions who know several offensive and defensive spells at high skill levels, but it is likely this force – if it exists – isn't very large, since the NERCC fears letting any magician get too powerful.

Underground Magicians

Most of the magicians in the Occult Underground are Magery 1 minor-leaguers who know a handful of spells that mostly allow them to escape NERCC detection and aid their profession. Some rarer adepts have higher levels of Magery, more spells and greater skill, but these magicians take great efforts to conceal their abilities from the Witch Smellers and keep their activities secret. Some are part of the resistance movement while others are near-legendary mercenaries who sell their abilities to the highest bidder.

Hooks

The following are some possible adventure ideas for including magic in a *Cyberworld* campaign.

Emergence

GMs who want to include magic in an existing *Cyberworld* game can simply take the events described in the timeline and make them happen in the here and now of 2043, with magical abilities first starting to emerge from secrecy and NERCC's Division X cracking down on mages. Perhaps one of the player-characters discovers that he is actually a latent mage!

Arcane Lore

Magical knowledge is highly valuable, and characters might find themselves working to dig up some lost bit of lore that can be sold to the highest bidder, or perhaps to learn and use it themselves for or against the ProGov and the NERCC. And if the adventurers know about it, they can be sure that other parties will be interested as well.

Infiltration

The Occult Underground gives the PCs a difficult mission: infiltrate the NERCC to help save other mages from being recruited as Witch Smellers and to start an "underground railroad" to smuggle latent mages out of America to safety in Alaska. Many challenges will greet them – including, perhaps, magical mind probes from other NERCC magicians – in working their way inside and trying to save others.

Located just off the beaten path, over the edge, and around the bend, Warehouse 23 has rows and rows of goodies you're dying to get. You never know what you'll find there, but you can be certain at least that it won't be boring. And some of these items are so insidious, sinister, and yet useful, it's hard to know whether you'll curse the day you found the object . . . or the day you need to get rid of it. All transactions are almost certainly final.

WAREHOUSE 23

THE SEVEN BOOKS OF ALEXANDER LACAN

by John M. Ford

While Alexander Lacan (1823-1892?) is usually described as an "occultist," he would have rejected the term. He considered himself a scientist – he preferred the archaic term "natural philosopher" – and believed that nothing was hidden to those with the perseverance, and the courage, to look. He wrote: "As Man has finally begun to learn that there must not be one law for the Prince and another for the poor man, one law for the Englishman and another for the Hindoo, so there is not one rule for the Gods and another for Men. What They have done, we may do. Nay, can do, must and shall do."
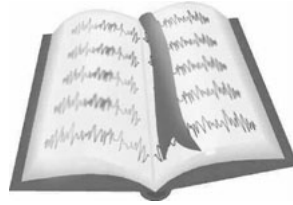
Lacan lived in Devonshire, England, near Dartmoor, where his experiments with chemistry and electricity would disturb no one. His source of income is not precisely known, though he certainly never lacked for money. He was not a complete recluse, appearing once or twice a month in the nearest pub, the Star and Compass, for dinner and political conversation – radical, but not beyond the radicalism of the times.

The Star and Compass was where he was last seen, in April of 1892. No one seemed to notice anything unusual on that visit. When he failed to appear for three months, a constable visited his house. It was empty, and had clearly been so for some time. The library, laboratories, and astronomical observatory, all quite valuable, were apparently intact, and most of Lacan's clothes were still present. A manuscript journal was found in the study, but it offered no clue – at least, no practical clue – to his disappearance.

Lacan's Journals of a Free Mind were published in 1923, the hundredth anniversary of his birth, by Editions du Bord, a small "mystic arts" publisher in Paris. Editions du Bord closed in 1940, leaving very few records; the best guess is that between 100 and 200 copies of the Journals were printed.

According to the Journals, around 1860 Lacan became interested in the "lost" writings of the natural philosophers of the past. He developed the idea that there were seven volumes of extraordinary knowledge, lost or deliberately hidden away through human ignorance and fear. Any one of the books could make the owner immensely powerful, if that person were willing to apply its contents; with all seven, there would be nothing separating a mortal from the Gods. Lacan always referred to "the Gods" in the plural, and he seems to have believed that they were mortal beings (not necessarily human) who had mastered the arts he tried to learn.

Lacan's disappearance was never solved. Most people believed that he had died on Dartmoor, in whose bogs and wilds many people have vanished, either by accident or murdered by a vagrant. Skeptics claimed that, financially exhausted by his quest and ashamed at its failure (for even those who considered Lacan a fool never doubted his intelligence), he chose to vanish, either a suicide or an exile under an assumed name, possibly in America. A few true believers insisted that he had completed his search and been translated to a higher existence, perhaps to Deity itself, and that the Seven Books of Knowledge had then been scattered across the world, waiting for the next questor.

The Seven Books

The Sforza Codex. A notebook of Leonardo da Vinci, containing working diagrams for machines far beyond the cannon platforms and underpowered flying machines of his known work: death rays, robots and computers, nuclear explosives, a time machine. In da Vinci's handwriting – mirror-writing, in Italian, naturally – and unique.

Further Investigations of Andreas Vesalius. Vesalius was the great student and illustrator of human anatomy, working at a time when human dissection was officially forbidden. This book describes his experimental work in the reconstruction and animation of dead bodies; Lacan may have acquired it from the library of the late Dr. Victor Frankenstein. In Latin, though Vesalius' illustrations are famously clear. There may be as many as eight copies.

Elements, by the Comte de Saint-Germain. A practical manual of alchemical transformation. More than a recipe for making gold, it includes the secrets of chemical immortality, invisibility, and control over all properties of matter and energy. While the author is known to have lived in pre-Revolutionary France, this book is much older; either "Saint-Germain" was an immortal, or simply appended his name to a work he inherited. In Latin; one, or possibly two, copies.

Beyond the Pillars of Hercules. An anonymous account of a voyage to Atlantis, possibly used as a source for Plato's writings on the subject. So much has been claimed for Atlantean science that its exact contents cannot be guessed at; some believe that it is actually an atlas and gazeteer of lost places of power. Written in classical Greek; one copy only.

Principalities of the Kingdoms. Describes strange and exotic forms of life, some of which inspired the monsters of legend: sea serpents, flying blood-drinkers, shape-shifters. One section deals with intelligent plants, another with the hypothesis that the Earth itself is a living organism. Attributed, doubtfully, to Pliny the Elder. In Greek; at least three complete copies exist, and as many as three more have been cut apart and rebound as pamphlets dealing with a particular creature or class of creatures.

The Grand Orrery, by "King Balthazar." Detailed account of the mechanics of the Universe, including descriptions of contact with extraterrestrial beings. Allegedly written by one of the "Magi" (Babylonian astronomer-priests) of the equally pseudonymous Gospel of Matthew, but known to have existed several centuries before the Christian Era. One copy in Aramaic, one in Greek, one in Arabic.

The Siren of Odysseus. Study of the powers of the mind, human and animal: special perception, telepathy, soul travel, and a chapter called "Will Influencing Will." Written in Asia Minor before Alexander's conquest of Persia, by someone using the name "Odysseus," who claims to be an eternal, immaterial wandering spirit temporarily inhabiting a human body. The language of the original is unknown; two copies of a Greek translation were made.

The number of copies can, of course, be adjusted by the GM – availability is what really counts, of course, and even eight of something isn't very many in the whole world, especially when the owners are so very possessive. More modern translations could exist, though such are likely to contain errors – making the recipes worthless, or dangerous.

Also note that the books may take a number of forms: the earliest may still be scrolls, or for ease of use a scroll may have been cut and rebound as the kind of book we're familiar with. Microfilm has been around for decades (though remember that microfilm deteriorates) and this, of course, is the era of color scanning and electronic storage. Those who have owned the Books, with the exception of Alexander Lacan, have not wanted to increase the number of copies in circulation, and might well, after having a copy or translation made, destroy the original.

Launching Adventures

Obviously, in an occult/dark-knowledge campaign, the Seven Books fit right in with all the other semi-legendary semi-lost tomes of Stuff We Weren't Etcetera. Any Dark Lord of Mystic Knowledge would give any number of his flunkies' cheap and convenient lives to obtain any one of them. And, naturally, once a book is in someone's possession, he has to start acquiring the stuff listed in the parts manifest, very little of which is available from Illuminati

Mail Order. A little less conventionally, the characters might need one specific bit of knowledge from one Book – but people who possess them tend to be rather difficult about letting others have access.

There's also the synergistic element: for instance, Saint-Germain's Distillate of Eternal Life might require organs from an animal described only in the Pliny book, prepared on a piece of lab equipment described in the da Vinci *Codex*, and then injected into a location shown in the *Vesalius*. In short, anyone who acquires even one of the Seven Books will desperately desire the others. It's even possible that Alexander Lacan, or someone before him, deliberately swapped around or encoded pages from the books so that they are worthless individually.

In a Victorian-era campaign, Alexander Lacan himself might approach a group of investigators to help him acquire one or more of the Seven Books. Lacan is a cautions, highly intelligent man, but (unusually for someone with an interest in the Seven Books) he is not greedy or selfish: he wants the power of the Books available to all of humanity. He is obsessed, and might try to have someone steal (he'd say "borrow") a Book he could not otherwise obtain, but he will use violence only to defend himself.

In the 20th century, the characters might learn about the Books from Lacan's journals, either the printed edition or the manuscript. Starting a bit earlier, they could be investigating Lacan's disappearance – probably hired by someone actually after the Books, or even Lacan himself under a new identity. The journals can conveniently contain as much background as the GM wishes to provide, as well as clues for the search.

An entire campaign could begin with a player character coming into possession of one of the Books – a mysterious bequest, a discovery in a sealed attic – and discovering that all kinds of people are awfully interested in obtaining it. The new owner would assemble some friends (who might have occult knowledge, or might be completely new to the hidden world) to solve the mystery and survive the solution. Further complicating matters, the Book's owner might not be immune to the collector's obsession.

In **Vampire: The Masquerade,** the Books would be the special interest of the Arcanum (of which Alexander Lacan would almost certainly have been a member); the complete set would surely contain the secret of Rebirth as a mortal.

The Books will fit into a non-supernatural campaign simply by making them the McGuffin everyone's chasing, and reserving judgement on whether or not they "work"; think of *The Maltese Falcon*. If mysterious forces are trying to kill you over this funny old book you can barely even read, you've got a more immediate problem than whether the book can put you in touch with extraterrestrials. In a sense, what's dramatically interesting about the Seven Books is not the "power" they will grant to the characters (even if, in the game, that power is real), but the intensity of the chase, and the kinds of people the characters meet on the way.

MORDAL'S AXE

by Michael Phyillaier Jr.

The crystal sculpture twinkled, even in the gloom.

Mordal glanced around furtively – the demon wasn't around. Quickly, he used his axe to craft a hollow clay sphere, placing a metal rune inside. He then threw the sphere into the lava stream where it quickly drifted away. Mordal prayed the message would find its way to another dwarf.

The demon floated in, "So, where's my new sculpture, decrepit one?" The voice was like splintering wood.

"Here," was all Mordal grunted in reply. If only the demon would become substantial for a moment . . .

"Exquisite as always." The demon and the crystal sculpture disappeared. Mordal cursed his own foolishness and prayed for deliverance.

Mordal is an ancient dwarf who is being held captive by a greedy demon. More important than Mordal, though, is his axe. The axe is a powerful magical item given to Mordal by an ancient dwarven clan. The axe was the symbol of the clan and its absence has diminished the honor of the clan. The axe (and Mordal with it) have been missing and presumed dead or destroyed for 30 years. Mordal is alive, as it turns out, but his health is failing him.

Mordal's Axe has +2 Accuracy, +2 Puissance, Quick Draw, Loyal Sword, 2 points of Power, Shape Earth, Shape Stone, Earth to Air and Earth Vision cast upon it. It has a Limit: only dwarven mages with a skill of 15 or higher in Geology or Prospecting can use the axe. The axe also has two points of Self Power. It is not only a frightful weapon, but can also be used (as Mordal has for the past 30 years) to create sculptures of unparalleled beauty.

The axe is made of cobalt steel, wrapped in rust-dyed leather. The axe also has several "personality quirks." It will employ only one of its spells at a time, and will not allow

a different one to be cast until the first one has run its course (except Accuracy and Puissance, of course, which always work). If used for sculpting objects that have already been touched or crafted by someone else, the axe forces its user to pay for the spells used to work on the item. Lastly, the axe has an innate artistic taste; it simply will not sculpt bad art, no matter how unskilled its owner.

Mordal is near death. His last wish is to see the demon killed, or at least to return the axe to his fellow dwarves. Mordal is a 205-year-old dwarf with ST 11, DX 12, IQ 12 and HT 10. He has Axe/Mace-20, Geology-16, Sculpting-18, and an assortment of mining-related skills. (His statistics used to be even higher, but 30 years of imprisonment have taken their toll). He is frequently tortured by the demon, and will have at least 7 points of unhealed wounds at any given time. He also has walking pneumonia. Mordal does not fear death or the demon, but he fears the shame of dying a prisoner and of losing the axe to non-dwarves.

The demon's name is Naught Good. He has ST 30, DX 15, IQ 12, and HT 15/20. He has Insubstantiality, Telepathy 10 with all skills at 15, Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, and Strong Will +5. His disadvantages are Sadism, Overconfidence, Intolerance (Dwarves and humans), and Greed.

His quirks include: Loves to talk in riddles; Believes human minds are weak; and Thinks fighting with weapons is for lesser beings.

Naught Good has been selling Mordal's sculptures to various rich nobles and priests throughout the land. He uses a sniveling goblin named Alvin, a 50-point con man, to deliver and sell the sculptures. To date they have sold 30 sculptures. Each one is a work of beauty.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

• The heroes can be hired by a dwarven clan that has found one of Mordal's messages. Or the adventurers can find one of Mordal's messages and take it upon themselves to try and rescue him. The runic message contains only the location of the cave, and asks for help, nothing more.

• The adventurers can run into Alvin and/or one of the sculptures. A dwarf member of the party might and recognize the work as Mordal's.

The characters can be hired by a buyer of one of the sculptures to rescue the artist for his own use.

• The heroes could be adventuring in the wild and run across Alvin's trail. After tracking it to the cave, they see Alvin talking to Naught Good. One of the explorers can then recognize the demon for who and what he is.

• Or the party could be relatives of Mordal, assigned the duty of finding the truth about what happened to their patriarch and the axe in order to restore their clan's honor.

No matter which seed is used, getting to Mordal is just the beginning. Naught Good is a skilled Telepath and not easily harmed due to his Insubstantiality. Also, Naught Good has lots of other demon friends. If Mordal is rescued alive and the axe recovered, he will prove a useful Patron for further adventures, and Naught Good makes a splendid enemy.

ARACHNE'S TAPESTRY
by Christopher Meinck

The two well-dressed Englishmen seemed out of place milling about the backstreet stalls of Cairo examining the wares of the various merchants. One piece in particular, a beautiful hand-woven tapestry crudely nailed to an alley wall, caught their eye.

An old turbaned man clad in white, sitting on the floor next to the work, regarded the pair shrewdly.

"Are you interested in this rare prize, esteemed sirs?" he asked in Egyptian.

"Yes," one of them replied in heavily accented Egyptian. "It's Greek, isn't it?"

A twinkle came to the old man's eye as he replied in perfect English, "Indeed it is. You know, many people are not aware of this, but the myth of Arachne as it is told today is incomplete.

"Yes, it is true that she angered the goddess Athena when she claimed that she could weave better than the gods themselves, and it is also true that she was changed into a spider for daring to depict the indiscretions of the gods, but that's not the end of the tale. Arachne was so embittered at having lost her lovely human form that she vowed she would repair the tapestry Athena ripped apart and make it an everlasting monument to her own skill and to the misdeeds of the gods. Enlisting the aid of all spiders, she painstakingly rewove her masterpiece with silk webbing in such a way that it could never be undone. This is that very tapestry, esteemed sirs, and some claim that the curse of Arachne has given it strange powers …"

Arachne's Tapestry is an exquisitely-woven wall tapestry 10 feet high by 20 feet long. A close examination of the material reveals that it is made of the finest silk, and it appears to have been hand-dyed. It always looks clean and new, and never shows signs of wear or aging. Even if someone intentionally dirties it, his attention will be diverted away from the Tapestry for an instant by a sound or other disturbance . . . when he looks back, it will be miraculously clean. No method of analysis has been able to reveal its true age, and no one thus far has proven the Tapestry a hoax.

The Tapestry depicts the ancient Greek gods at their worst, focusing especially on the numerous illicit trysts of Zeus and the many dirty tricks that the gods have played on humans throughout history. Looking at the Tapestry for extended periods of time evokes a feeling of vengeful pride, as if the viewer himself had crafted it as a tribute to the power of the human spirit.

There are two primary manifestations of the power of the Tapestry. The first requires that the viewer of the tapestry have a specific object that he has actually touched in mind while he is looking at the Tapestry. If the viewer is intent on finding the object, then he makes an IQ check. On a failed check nothing happens, and the Tapestry will not function for the user for the next 24 hours. A successful check will activate the Tapestry, and thousands of spiders will climb from its fabric. Witnessing this requires a Fright Check at -3, or -10 if the viewer has arachnophobia or entomophobia. Once the spiders have emerged, they will quickly but painstakingly reweave the Tapestry into a detailed map that shows the object's current location. The scale of the map is completely dependent upon how familiar the subject is with the area where the object resides, but is always sufficient for the user to locate the object in question. The map will remain for as long as the viewer keeps looking at the Tapestry, after which the spiders will restore it to its original appearance and then vanish.

The second ability of the Tapestry is foretelling the future. Someone must view the Tapestry with a question about future events in mind in order for it to be activated. When this happens, the subject makes an IQ roll. A failed check means the Tapestry will not work for the viewer for the next 24 hours, but a successful roll causes the spiders to emerge as with the mapping ability. They will reweave the Tapestry into a single scene that addresses the question posed by the user. Simple and innocuous requests, such as "Will it rain tomorrow?" or "Will my child be a
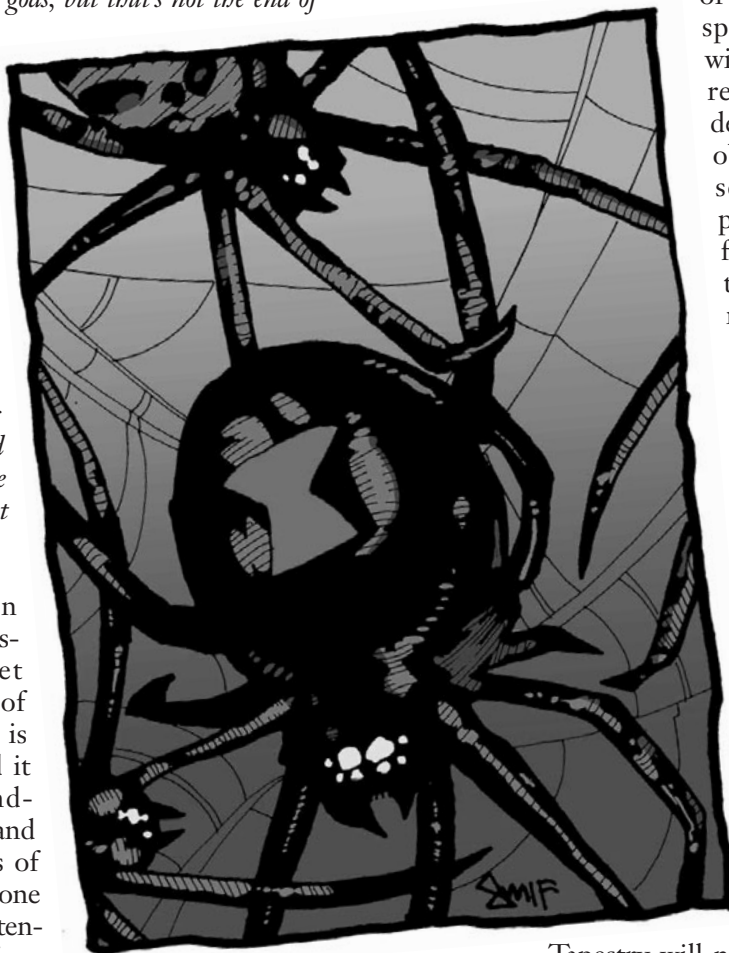
girl or a boy?" will receive straightforward answers. More difficult questions, such as "When will I die?" and "Will we succeed in our quest?" will have more cryptic answers. The GM is free to be as abstract and misleading as he likes when describing the images the spiders create. The picture has the same duration as the map.

Both of the special abilities of Arachne's Tapestry will function only once per week per individual. More than one attempted use will have no effect. Once a user has discovered one of the powers, he will instinctively know the other.

The Tapestry has a long and colorful history, with the earliest references to its existence dating back to ancient Greece. It is mentioned in many a shadowy occult tome, and people steeped in such lore will have a passing knowledge of it. Those who have owned the Tapestry have been wealthy art collectors, interested in it solely because of its incredible craftsmanship and beauty. When an owner learns of the special powers of the Tapestry, he becomes very secretive and will do his best to hide it. Eventually, however, these individuals go insane from the knowledge of a future they cannot change, and the Tapestry passes on to another owner. It has disappeared from time to time, only to reappear in a private art collection. To date no museum has ever housed the Tapestry.

An exclusively female secret society known as The Weavers has been searching for the Tapestry for over 1,000 years. No one is certain of the origin of this group, but their goal seems to be promoting the worship of Arachne as the human ideal of perfection.

Every member of The Weavers is accomplished in some field of the arts, but entry into the upper circles of the society is reserved for those who have mastered weaving. All Weavers are identified by a detailed tattoo of a spider on their left shoulder. A typical member has ST 10, DX 13, IQ 11, and HT 10. She has Ancient Greek-15, Staff-13, and some Artistic or Craft skill at 16 in addition to any other skills she may possess. Thus far The Weavers have been unable to locate the elusive Tapestry, but they have come close many times. They have many contacts in the art world and vigorously pursue any rumors about ancient Greek artifacts. The group is generally nonviolent, but they have been known to use force when information regarding the Tapestry is at stake. What The Weavers intend to do with the Tapestry when they find it is unclear, but they may have some hidden knowledge about its powers or purpose.

Adventure Seeds

• The heroes are searching for an unspeakably rare artifact and have few leads. Then a mysterious contact tips them off that there is a device that could help them find it, but the current owner is a powerful figure in organized crime. They must sneak into his mansion, use the Tapestry, and then escape alive!

• The adventurers are on a cruise ship when it is suddenly hijacked by terrorists. The prisoners discover that a priceless work of art is on board, and it is what the terrorists are after. When they discover its true nature, can they let it fall into criminal hands?

• The government hires the party to track down a group of notorious art thieves. They seem to be able to break into any museum or gallery to steal precious artifacts. The heroes discover that the Tapestry is allowing them to pull off these heists. If they bust the thieves, can they trust the government with the Tapestry? Maybe the real reason they were hired was to get it so that the government could use it in a secret project.

• A reign of terror has gripped the art world! Museum curators and art dealers are being killed with alarming frequency around the world, the only clue being a black marble spider left at every crime scene. The party is called in to investigate the murders. The Weavers are finally about to get Arachne's Tapestry, and they've abandoned their pacifist ways. This should be a globe-trotting romp to keep the Tapestry from The Weavers before they use it in some terrible ceremony (the nature of which is up to the GM).

GORDON'S GLOVE

by Michael Phyillaier, Jr.

Gordon's Glove is an item with a horror flavor, though it can be fit into any campaign. It is owned by Gordon Galtor Bail, born in 1725. Educated in Paris, this Englishman became a grand master in fencing by 1748. Today, Gordon is a fencing instructor at Cambridge University in England, using the name Arthur Georgian. He appears to be in his mid-thirties, and has quite a following among college students and fencers.

Gordon's extremely long life is a result of his glove, a right-hand fencing gauntlet made of boiled leather (PD 2, DR 2), lacquered with an intricate gold rose on the back. Set in the center of the rose is a large opal. The glove gives Gordon effective immortality by stealing small amounts of life energy from Gordon's fencing opponents. The glove must come in contact with the blood of a victim to steal the victim's youth, and the blood must be the result of a wound inflicted in a legitimate fencing match or duel.

Gordon Galtor Bail has ST 13, DX 15, IQ 13, and HT 13. Advantages should include Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Alertness +1, Fearlessness +2 and one level of Toughness. His disadvantages should include Bloodlust, Gentleman's Code of Honor, and a Delusion that he is immortal (while the glove prevents his aging, Gordon is still quite vulnerable to physical harm of all kinds). His skills should include Fencing-19, French-16, Tactics-15, Savoir Faire-16, History-16 and Teaching-15. Additional skills, advantages, and disadvantages should be added as the GM likes.

The gauntlet itself is a magical item that allows its wearer to cast a variant of the spell Steal Youth (p. M74) with a Power of 20. The opal is a dedicated Powerstone with a ST of 30 (after doubling). The glove has several limitations, as listed earlier. The version of Steal Youth cast by the gauntlet does *not* work on a willing or helpless victim. Gordon is able to cast this spell whenever he draws blood with his foil (using energy from the powerstone first, and his own personal energy if he's really

mad), and will occasionally use the glove's magic to unnaturally age an enemy four, six, or even eight years. He doesn't do this very often, however – he is usually careful not to arouse suspicion about his longevity and how he acquires it.

Typically, Gordon will stay in a community he likes for 20 or more years, slowing down his aging only slightly during that time. Then he will disappear (occasionally faking his death to cover his tracks) and embark upon a worldwide rejuvenation trip, where he steals a year or two from different people in different places over a period of several months. Once he has his physical age back down to his late 20s or so, he will assume a new identity and start over in a new community.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

☞ Gordon contacts the party for help in faking his death so that he can move on, but after the deed is done, he plans to take some of the PCs' youth with him as a going-away present.

☞ Gordon has let his temper get the better of him, and in a series of duels witnessed by dozens (including the party), aged a bitter rival a total of 22 years. The victim wants revenge, and Gordon wants to cover his tracks and leave the country.

☞ A dependent of one of the heroes has been challenged to a duel by Gordon, and the PC has been asked to second the dependent. A mysterious visitor before the duel warns the heroes that Gordon is not all that he seems.

☞ Somebody has discovered the secret of Gordon and his glove, and is blackmailing him to keep quiet. Gordon hires the party to stop the blackmailer, hoping they won't learn his dark secrets themselves.

☞ Gordon's glove has been stolen! Gordon hires the adventurers to recover the glove as it wends its way from fence to fence in the criminal underworld. Perhaps nobody has any idea of the gauntlet's magical powers – or maybe the theft was orchestrated by a powerful occultist who suspects the truth . . .

THE BLACK STYLUS
by Dan Massey

Lord Grayfeld sat across the table from King Nowlwen. His eyes drifted over the large sheet of parchment on the table. "Your Majesty, I cannot sign this. It would leave my family with nothing."

"What about my family?" rasped the king. "Your duty is to the monarchy, Lord Grayfeld. Don't tell me I have to explain this again," the King taunted. He extended his hand across the table, suppressing a yawn. The noble stared at the black feather quill.

"No, Majesty. I will give over my lands, but my son is not to be harmed." He reached for the pen and signed his name to the document.

A faint smile touched the King's face, "You have made the right choice, John. Now go back to your family and, by all means, have a good night's sleep."

That night Grayfeld slept only fitfully. His dreams were plagued by visions of his son plotting his murder. After three nights of these dreams Grayfeld began to see the motives behind his son's actions. The hidden plots were all becoming clearer. After four more nights of the disturbing dreams, Grayfeld slit his son's throat. The next night he slept soundly . . . until he dreamt of his wife having an affair with the Chamberlain.

Nowlwen's pen is known only as the Black Stylus in the places it is chronicled. It is hard for scholars of magic and historians to track the stylus back to its creator, because it changes appearance based on the time period and setting it is placed in.

The Stylus is known to have been a quill, a fountain pen, and a ball-point pen. A calligraphy brush with similar properties is also mentioned in the diary of a samurai. Other forms are certainly possible, but all known incarnations are a variation on the handheld, ink writing instrument. The stylus is always black and appears to be valuable. The only identifying mark is a horse's head carved or engraved on the surface of the stylus.

The stylus allows the owner to write the dreams of his victims. The owner must first get the victim to sign their full name with the pen. Then, when the victim is sleeping, he can write the name of the victim at the top of a sheet of paper and author a dream. The owner can only use one sheet of paper per dream, but there is no limit to the size of the paper. When the victim wakes up, the paper fades out of existence, leaving behind no trace of the written dream. There appear to be no limits on what can be written or drawn on the paper to create the dream. Some of the more interesting accounts of uses of the stylus involve artists. The dreams can be used to plant images in the minds of victims or just to spook them, but the stylus also provides the owner with the ability to influence his victims through their dreams.

When attempting to influence another individual, the stylus' owner must state her objective – what she wants the unwary individual to do. The GM must then determine the number of nights it would take to effect a change in the character. The GM should assign a difficulty level from 1 to 4, based on how far the objective is from the victim's original character or motivations. Easy changes, like getting a character to sell something at a slightly cheaper price, would have a difficulty factor of 1, while hard changes would be rated at 4. This is the minimum number of consecutive nights of influenced dreams the author must supply to affect the victim. Each night results in the sleeper losing 1 point of IQ, for purposes of the stylus' dream influence only. When the victim's effective IQ falls below that of the stylus' owner, the individual will carry out the author's objective. The minimum amount of time necessary to change the character is equal to the difficulty factor in nights, even if the victim's IQ is already below that of the owner.

Access to Morpheus' power does not come without a price. The owner of the pen will gradually become narcoleptic as he uses it. For each month in which he uses it at least once, the owner will need slightly more sleep. He will also appear to be tired and show more signs of fatigue. When the number of months of use, even if not consecutive, is equal to the character's IQ, he falls into an endless nightmarish sleep. Attempts to destroy the pen will result in the owner falling asleep for 24 hours minus his IQ. When he wakes the pen will be gone, he will have no idea where it is, and his signature will appear on some available surface obviously written with the pen.

19th-century historian John Tuttle has written the most about the pen. He traced it back through many owners and identified several of the victims. He came to the conclusion that the Black Stylus is the work of a powerful follower of Morpheus who bound a Night Mare to the original writing instrument. Tuttle theorized that the pen could affect people across time with unforseen results that may actually alter history. He notes that it is difficult to prove this ability, because any changes in time would not be detected by most beings, although it is likely that the owner of the stylus would know (if he still owns the stylus after the changes in time occur). This aspect of the Stylus is so dangerous Tuttle hid his research notes to prevent people from attempting to influence victims and owners of the past or, in some cases, the future. Other accounts of the Stylus could lead to the names of past owners and dreamers.

Characters in a campaign might be made victims of the Black Stylus after signing a contract or other document. The characters should have some clues that the villain is different, a description of how tired he looks, or a brief description of the pen. It should be something they can think back to when they try to figure out why a member of their party is acting strangely. They could also uncover Tuttle's research or some other tales about the stylus and try to track it down. The most intriguing possibility is to drop small clues that something strange is going on, through headlines, rumors, etc., and have the characters gradually come closer to people and events altered by some mysterious force. They must track down the criminal and find out more about the power he is tapping to influence people.

The Black Stylus

THE BRAINMAKER
by Anthony Salter

The Brainmaker is an adventure seed for a modern or high-tech setting. It works best if the Brainmaker's tech level (12) is much higher than the campaign's.

The Brainmaker is a four-inch-square mesh of fine wire. It links the right and left halves of the brain and provides direct access to the subconscious. This boosts any character's IQ by 5 points, and immediately grants the advantages Eidetic Memory, Lightning Calculator, Absolute Direction, and Absolute Timing. Metabolic functions that are normally involuntary, like breathing and heart rate, become controllable. This device must be applied directly to the scalp – the top of the user's head must be shaved.

Any character that uses the Brainmaker – especially a mage or psionicist – will become exceptionally powerful. But the power has a high price. Using the device is addictive. Anyone who uses it for a day or more, then removes it, will want to use it again *very badly* (treat as an Addiction). The device also prevents dreaming, and as dreams are necessary for a person to stay sane, the character will slowly go crazy. The first signs may just be Quirks, but they will quickly escalate to Delusions and then Paranoia. The insanity will center around the device. Eventually, the character will believe that everyone is attempting to steal the Brainmaker. When it is removed, the GM should roll 3d, add the number of consecutive days the device was worn, and consult the Fright Check table – except that a total over 40 results in the *death* of the character.

The Brainmaker's origin is a mystery. It was first discovered on the body of a deceased cult leader after his death under mysterious circumstances. Government scientists found it was made of non-terrestrial compounds. One possibility is that it is part of a Sprocket (pp. PYi10-21), possibly the part that somehow makes sure a Sprocket takes the form of something useful to the person triggering it. But if that's true, where is the Sprocket? And if the Sprocket has been destroyed, why didn't the Brainmaker dissolve with it?

If you're campaign has no room for Sprockets, the Brainmaker origin could be visiting aliens, time travelers, super-secret government research, or just about anything.

Adventure Seeds

☀ A clever GM can use this as an opportunity to introduce a truly nasty villain into a campaign, one who is fully aware of the Brainmaker's capabilities *and* limitations, and only uses the device for a few days at a time. Or perhaps the heroes' patron is using the device and descending into madness; rescuing the patron would make for a difficult adventure, as he will not believe that the party is trying to help him.

☀ Or the adventurers could be hired by a government or corporation to steal, guard or destroy the Brainmaker. Or the PCs could be the ones who discoverer it, only to have their new toy snatched away by an uncaring military.

☀ And don't forget the Illuminati. A covert world war could break out over the item, with several Illuminati sending agents to retrieve the item, while trying to prevent their own agents from using it.

☀ Or the extraterrestrials could come back for it, since it could reveal too much about the truth behind the seemingly benevolent Sprockets . . .

In any event, this item is *much* too powerful for the heroes to keep. They should be made aware of its dangers soon after they encounter it, and the GM should ensure that it is destroyed or lost after the adventure (or campaign) is over.

THE CODEX OF THE MIND
by John W. Baichtal

This book was penned by the esteemed Emile Henri Lucienne le Habile, Duc de Trebec, a brilliant and gifted swordsman, scholar, statesman and gentleman. It is said that he could convince the sky it was green and grass it was purple, or defeat 10 men at once with his famous silver sword, Mis'ricorde. The greatest accomplishment of his life was the penning of three books which were the sum of his great knowledge. This, the Codex of the Mind, was his first.

The Contents

"This being a Collection of Treatises, numbering Seven, which in a Small Way make the Attempt to Teach the Reader, by the Studie of this Codex, of the greatest Weapon in Man's Arsenal, if Reader will Permit me a Metaphor; that is to say, the Human Mind, and all its Complex Workings, such that he shall Learn how to Gain every Advantage that he can over the Enemie."

There are, as mentioned, seven chapters to the Codex. Each one governs a single topic. A character who reads the book at least eight hours a day for the number of weeks or months mentioned in the individual descriptions will gain the appropriate skills at no cost. If the character reads for less than eight hours a day, the length of time will increase proportionately. Reading for more than eight hours a day will not give any appreciable benefit as the mental fatigue from studying so much will negate any additional learnings.

Treatise on the Workings of the Mind

"This being the Studie of the Manner in which Men's Brains, that is to say, their Minds, come to Function, and indeed, how they may be Made to Work for You."

This is a discussion of early psychology, and while childishly archaic by modern standards, contains some genuine insights. Anyone studying this treatise for two weeks will gain the skill Psychology at IQ-3, or if the skill already is possessed at a level of 15 or lower it will increase by one level. If the skill already is higher than 15, then the information in the treatise will be nothing new.

Treatise on Politickal Manipulation

"This being the Studie of the Manner that Men, whether they be King or Merchant or Slave, doth Interact in Matters of Politicks, in a manner Consistent in all Lands, for all Times, insofar as Historie Teaches us."

This is a cunning, valuable dissertation on the workings of the political mind, with particular attention paid to the way courtiers curry favor with their sovereign. A character pondering this treatise for a month will gain invaluable insights on the subject, equivalent to the skills Politics and Diplomacy at IQ-3. If either or both skills already are possessed and at a level of 17 or lower, then the treatise increases each by one level.

Treatise on the Seduction of Another

"This being the Studie of the Seducement, some say Bewitchment, of a Man if you are a Woman, or a Woman if you are a Man, for Purposes of Pleasure or Politick."

This treatise is couched in the context of a highly formal court situation where obliquely stylized conversations and flirtations take place between men and women. In that setting, there are some useful bits of information, but the advice is worse than useless outside of such a situation. If the character regularly interacts in a court similar to those of England or France in the 17th and 18th centuries, then he gains a +1 to Sex Appeal, or if not already possessed, gains it at HT-2. Absorbing the information takes two weeks of constant study.

The Codex of the Mind
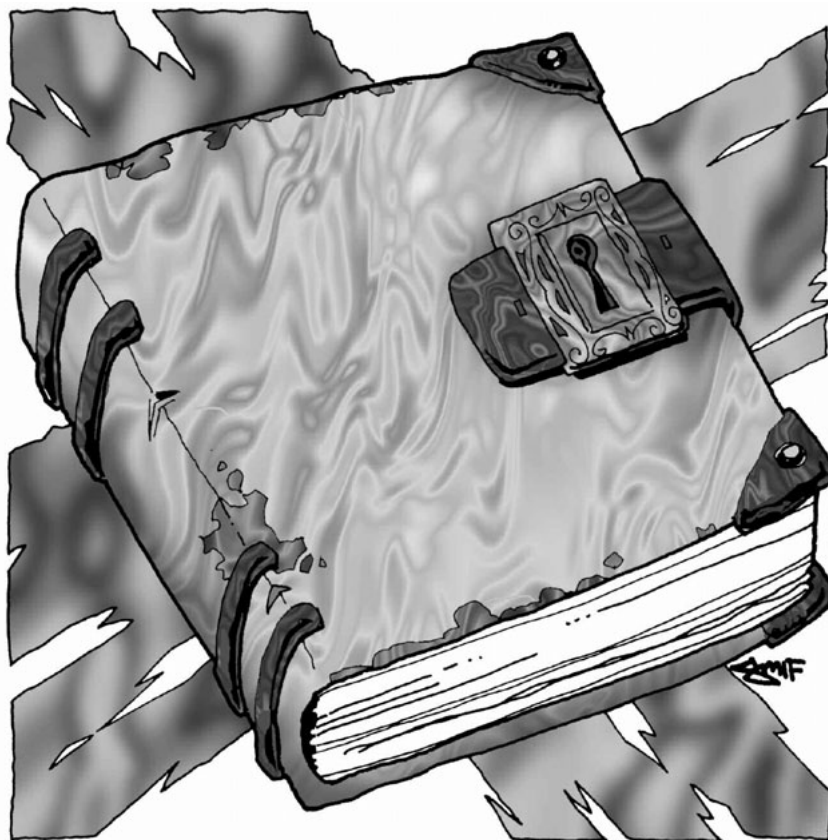
Treatise on that Ancient Art of Dissembling

"This being the Studie of Prevaricating, indeed, Lying, if I may use so Common an Expression, or Deception, if you will, in Manners of Politicks or Business."

It seems that M. Le Habile was a master liar, and anyone who studies this treatise for two months, and practices the techniques and exercises set down within, will gain the skills Fast-Talk and Detect Lies at IQ-2, or gain a bonus of +2 if a skill is currently held at a level of 15 or under, or +1 if it is 16 or higher.

Treatise on Causing Another to Affright

"This being the Studie on Inducing, by means of Words or by Manner of Actions, the Effect of Dread, that is to say, Apprehension or Fear, on the part of your Enemie."

When Le Habile couldn't sweet-talk his opponents, he apparently could scare the croissants out of them with a few words and a sinister demeanor. In addition to advice on bearing and facial expressions, the author lists a number of threats so frighteningly cold-blooded that none can be set down in example. A character who studies this treatise for six weeks gains a bonus of +1 to his Intimidation and Interrogation skills, or a score of IQ-2 in both skills if they were not already possessed.

Treatise on the Brewing of Potions and Elixirs

"This being the Studie of all Manner of Herbs and Chemickals, such that Potions which Affect the Brain may be Concocted for Purposes of Subterfuge, and while he shall not Know as much as a True Alchemist, the Reader will Hopefully Learn Something of that Perspicacious Art."

Although much important information is left out, this treatise (as the long-winded title proclaims) teaches the basics. A character reading the tome for four months will gain the skills Alchemy/TL4 at IQ-4, Chemistry/TL4 at IQ-3, and Poisons at IQ-3, or +1 to any of these skills if it is already possessed at a level of 15 or less.

In addition to pure theory, the treatise includes the formulae for two incredibly rare and potent drugs: Wine of Valhalla and Distillate of the Crimson Lotus.

The wine forces anyone who drinks it to make an IQ check with a penalty of 4 or become a berserker, attacking everyone within range regardless of danger or friendships, until he or everyone nearby is dead or unconscious. The drug wears off in 15 minutes.

The distillate strips away memories from certain portions of the brain; not those which govern such areas as knowing how to walk and talk and eat, but such things as friends' faces and names, memories of past experiences and so on. Lifelong skills, those which the GM decides are ingrained into the character's whole being, are not lost, but incidental skills are. Those memories lost are gone forever unless the GM decides otherwise.

Both of these drugs use rare materials only found in the distant corners of the earth.

Treatise on the Art of Conceiving Tacticks and Stratagems

"This being the Studie of Strategie, both for Soldiers and Statesmen, in Regards to Deafeating the Enemie through Cleverness and Superior Tacticks."

This is another weak chapter. When the Codex was written, it was common for every scholar to write a book on "the art of war." Accordingly, Le Habile felt compelled to do the same, despite the fact that he had only the vaguest idea of proper battlefield tactics. Still, he was a brilliant man, and shamelessly borrowed from his peers' ideas, so there is something of value to be found in this treatise. Any character without the Strategy skill who reads the book for two weeks gains the skill at IQ-3. If he already has the skill at a level of 13 or lower, he gains +1. If the skill is at 14 or higher, then all of the material is either self-evident or else already learned from other sources.

Conclusion

This book, of which only one copy is known to exist, exhibits a strange effect on the reader. Anyone who reads the book continuously for more than two months becomes totally attached to it, and will desire to read every page, to learn every secret. Moreover, he will not want anyone else to have access to the book for fear that they will also learn the secrets held within. If ever the character reads the whole book, which takes more than a year of study, he will immediately gain the Megalomania disadvantage, or if it is already possessed, will pick up a Delusion (-15 points) that he is the most cunning and devious person alive.

THE ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE PLATFORM

by Michael Phyillaier, Jr.

Gabe looked over his shoulder again – he could swear something was there. The off-world buyer snorted and took his time inspecting the stolen implant chips. "I'll give you 3K for the lot."

Gabe nearly choked. They were worth ten times that, but he had no choice. "Okay, quick, gimme the stones and let's scat."

"Sure, sure, don't know why you're worried, there's no one around." At that moment, a flare of blood erupted from the off-worlder's chest. Gabe slowly raised his hands and turned around. He knew what it was. A damned ESP. They were everywhere recently. So much for his big break. If only he could get that teleport off . . .

No, it's not psionics, it's high technology. The Electronic Surveillance Platform (fondly called ESP) is the most recent development of Goliath Weaponry in privacy invasion. The ESP is a small, compact and inexpensive platform that could show up anywhere starting at TL8. The version listed below is TL10.

ELECTRONIC SURVEILLANCE PLATFORM (TL10)

A small, compact weapon and surveillance platform for police, military and espionage use. The computer normally runs the following programs: database (1 gig); computer navigation; datalink; targeting (reduces movement/range penalties by 3); skill program – Gunner (Gauss Guns)-10 [2]; skill program – Piloting (Light Helicopter)-10 [2]; skill program – Tracking-8 [2]; skill program – Shadowing-9 [4]; and skill program – Stealth-10 [2], all at TL10.

Subassemblies: Body +0.
P&P: 55,963 KWh TL10 Rechargeable power cell powering 30 KW CAR helicopter drivetrain.
Fuel: -.
Occupancy: none.   *Cargo:* 0.4 cf.

Armor	F	RL	B	T	U
Body:	4/30	4/30	4/30	4/30	4/30

Weaponry
3mm Guass Gun [Body:F] (1,000 rounds Solid) +0.

Equipment
Body: Hardened, compact small computer acting as Complexity 4 robot brain; holomotion camera; light and siren system; 5000-mile radio; multiscanner with 1-mile range; terrain-following radar; low-light TV system with ×15 magnification; sound detector with level 10 magnification; laser sensor; radar detector; deceptive radar jammer; flight recorder; intruder chameleon system; basic sound baffling; and terrain following radar, all at TL10.

Adventure Seeds

• A new corporate security toy! It is introduced with lots of fanfare, promising permanent reductions in crime with only minor infractions on personal privacy. But unbeknownst to everyone, the corporate suits stole the ESP from its inventor, and the inventor has cooked up a little revenge. The first new ESPs, once in service, will go on a corporate headhunt to ice the suits who stole the invention.

The PCs can be hired to stop the ESPs, or to find the murdering inventor. Or the PCs can be friends of one of the targeted suits (possibly a Patron or Contact), and the platform attacks while the PCs are nearby.

• A rival corporation wants to do a bit of reverse engineering. The PCs are hired to capture and deliver an ESP, or they can be hired to stop the rival company from snatching one.

• An ESP records the PCs breaking the law, and the PCs must stop it before it relays their dirty deeds. The only problem is that the ESP isn't a police-owned model, it's being used by a shadowy figure to gather blackmail information . . .

• The PCs stumble upon a destroyed ESP, but some of its memory survives. Someone might pay handsomely for the data. Or, perhaps the data shows some plotters assassinating a VIP. Or *planning* an assassination . . .

Statistics
Size: 1.51' radius 1'   *Payload:* 14 lbs.   *Lwt.:* 0.15 tons
Volume: 7.2 cf.   *SizeMod:* +0.   *Price:* $87,884.

HT: 10.
HP: 10   *Rotor:* 4.

aSpeed: 300   *aAccel:* 20   *aDecel:* 16   *aMR:* 4   *aSR:* 4
Stall speed 0.

Design Notes
Body is extra-light, robotic, with good streamlining. Area is 29 sf. Armor is advanced, metal.

The Electronic Surveillance Platform

THE TRUE EYE
by John Aegard

David Lester allowed himself a brief moment of optimism. It had been at least 20 hours since he'd been kidnapped off the San Francisco wharfs by Sing Tam's agents. Brady and Collins knew where he'd been going, and the Tong couldn't have gotten very far with him. Any moment now, they'd come busting through the door –

The door cracked open, admitting a whiff of sunlit opium smoke. Three of Sing's men sauntered in. Two stayed at the door; the other crouched at Lester's side, whispering in his ear.

"You still will not tell us what has been done with our traitorous swine of a brother?"

"I told you, he's doing a canary act in a United States Marshal's office." The Chinese man sighed softly. "I don't even know why you're bothering with me right now. The FBI's gonna be all over this pier before sunset. I'd be busy hauling ass back to China if I were you."

His tormentor smiled politely, produced a wet sponge. Lester tasted blood and sweat as his face was mopped clean. "That is unfortunate, officer."

The door was flung open again, and another man appeared in the room. He stormed across the creaky warehouse floor, seized Lester's face in his hand and stared straight into the cop's eyes. The new man had a queer gaze; his left eye was an alien purple, nested in a socket of white scar tissue that stood out in sharp relief to his amber flesh. Lester tried to blink, tried to look away from the inhuman thing – and was terrified when he found that he couldn't.

"Let us discuss the small matter of my nephew's relationship with your department, Mr. Lester."

The gaze of that horrible eye lanced straight through Lester's mind, shredding his carefully trained resolve in moments. The cop whimpered and found himself answering all of Sing Tam's questions . . .

It's unclear where and how the True Eye came into existence. Some say that this Eye was enchanted by one of Adam Weishaupt's disciples to serve the Primus Illuminatus. Others say that it dates back much further than that, coming from the remains of an ancient demonologist or mentalist. Still others, citing its clearly inhuman appearance, believe that its origins are extraterrestrial or even extraplanar. While the origins of the True Eye may be debated, its powers are not – The Eye grants its user the power to know and compel the truth.

The Eye appears as a healthy, human-sized, purple-black eye with a horizontally slitted pupil. Sustained by some extraordinary life force, it will stay moist and slightly warm to the touch in any environment up to hard vacuum. The Eye is not invulnerable, though; a single point of any kind of impact or fire damage will destroy it.

To obtain the Eye's benefits, the user must be prepared to sacrifice one of his natural eyes. The empty socket must be excavated thoroughly and the Eye fixed securely in place. This is a more-or-less routine procedure after TL5. Prior to TL5, the GM should assign a chance of infection (p. B134).

The surgeon need not bind any nerves, blood vessels or muscles to the Eye – the artifact's magic will knit everything in place within three weeks. At the end of that time the user will be able to see dimly through it. Full benefits of the Eye will be developed gradually after this initial healing period; they should be fully manifested after another month. The Eye may always be removed, and a conventional flesh or cyber eye substituted in its place, without risk beyond that of the operation.

Since the Eye will always be "off" in comparison to its natural counterpart, it will subtract one level from the user's Appearance. The Eye also will halve either the severity of its user's Bad Vision or the bonus of its user's Acute Vision.

The Eye will knit itself to a machine as long as the appropriate connections are available and the machine's controlling hardware possesses sentience. Once the requisite healing time has passed, the Eye will act exactly as a conventional sensor, with the additional benefits outlined below. Output from a device attached to the Eye will include illusions and astral phenomena if the controlling intelligence so desires. This includes output from someone using any appropriate image-capturing cyberware.

After the user has grown accustomed to the Eye, it will grant him the following extraordinary benefits:

☸ The Empathy advantage.

☸ A further +2 to his Detect Lies skill, on top of the +4 granted by Empathy, for a total of +6.

☸ The ability to torture the subject of an interrogation merely by fixing his gaze on the subject's, granting a +6 to his Interrogation skill as per the rules on p. B66. Being subject to this kind of torture would certainly call for a Fright Check; the negative modifier for the check is at the GM's discretion.

☸ Astral Vision, as per the spell (p. G61), but with no time to cast or energy cost.

☸ See Secrets as per the spell (p. M54), but with no time to cast or energy cost.

☸ The ability to detect illusions without effort.

The sensing effects of the Eye will work through clairvoyance, but not through any other remote-sensing methods such as photography, video or holography.

At the GM's discretion, the Eye may also provide some additional, random insights to its user. These insights will chiefly be related to the campaign's *raison d'etre* – for instance, in an Illuminated campaign, the Eye will give glimpses into the tangled webs of the Conspiracy. And woe be to the Eye-possessing investigator of the Cthulhu Mythos! The GM is encouraged to have fun with this property of the Eye – these brief flashes of understanding may be used to provide critical information to the players or to provide color for the setting.

Adventure Seeds

The Eye makes a fine McGuffin. Any knowledgeable, unscrupulous group of people will be able to think up a dozen good uses for it, and another dozen good reasons why only they should be allowed to possess it. This kind of adventure is time-tested and will work in almost any genre. The adventure doesn't even have to be dedicated to finding the Eye itself – it could be about finding a countermeasure to the Eye's magic, or perhaps even finding the source of the Eye.

☸ A young teenager has received the Eye from his cultist parents. The kid slips away; the parents are unable to find him, and the adventurers are called in to find him discreetly before anyone else twigs to the fact that he's missing. Of course, when the child is found, he'll be telling the most interesting stories about what he's seen . . . stories that should pique any adventurer's or investigator's imagination.

☸ PC netrunners may seize some video or holo footage from the Net that shows interesting astral activity. Naturally, they'll be keen to find the source, especially if the activity concerns them or a loved one.

☸ Cops or PIs may be following strange leads in an otherwise unsolved case, when a witness comes forward offering some startling, but unprovable evidence.

☸ The Eye will also provide some prime opportunities for roleplaying characters who are in a position to make use of it. Will they be willing to mutilate themselves to gain its benefits? Is scientific or mystical knowledge worth the physical and mental anguish that comes with using the Eye? Adventures can easily be based around such questions.

The True Eye

LIFE STEALER
by Steve Dickie

Life Stealer is just that – a stealer of lives – but it's not quite that simple. It started long ago when Mad King Fergus went questing for immortality.

Despite his success in battle, the King had never been able to win the respect of his three sons, Pwyll, Lodan, and Finegas. Fergus knew his sons did not respect him and decided that none of them could succeed him. He banished his sons from his realm so that none of them would be able to step into a kingship they had not earned. This left no clear line of succession. His chief advisor, Evric, saw this as his way to the throne. Evric knew that if the king died leaving no heirs his position as the King's confidant put him in a prime position to seize the throne, or at least its power.

Evric began to convince the King that his only recourse was not to die. Evric told the King of a powerful alchemist named Kalembach who was reportedly over 200 years old but looked no older than the King himself.

The King sent for this alchemist, hoping to learn the secret of his longevity. Evric talked with Kalembach at length before he was admitted to see Fergus. The King's advisor promised the alchemist a place of power on the King's council should Evric succeed Fergus, who was even now showing the signs of his age.

Kalembach spun a tale for the King assuring him that immortality was indeed possible. He said he could grant it to the King and he would render this service free of charge for his Lord. Although the task would be provided for free, it would cost a great deal for the necessary materials. The King happily gave the alchemist all the money and resources that were needed.

The King visited Kalembach often to check up on his work; so as not to disappoint his King, the alchemist put on quite a show for the old man. He muttered strange incantations, used even stranger ingredients and "spent" an obscene amount of money. The final product was a sword. It was the finest sword the King had ever seen. Kalembach had been one of the best weapon smiths in the realm prior to his quest to find the Philosopher's Stone.

He told the King that he must go out alone in search of his three sons and in turn kill each with the sword. When this was done the King would never age as long as he possessed the sword. Kalembach knew full well the old fool would never be able to accomplish the task. Even if the King did, Kalembach knew he would

be long gone with his new wealth by the time the King returned. Unfortunately Kalembach was a better conjurer and metallurgist than he realized.

Fergus set out to find his sons. He didn't have to travel far to find his first son. Pwyll had been raising a small army just outside his father's realm, seeking to take by force what should be his birthright. When his father came to him all alone, Pwyll thought his father had reconsidered and had come to name him as the rightful heir. Pwyll was so confused when Fergus drew his sword that he virtually fell upon it while pleading with his father.
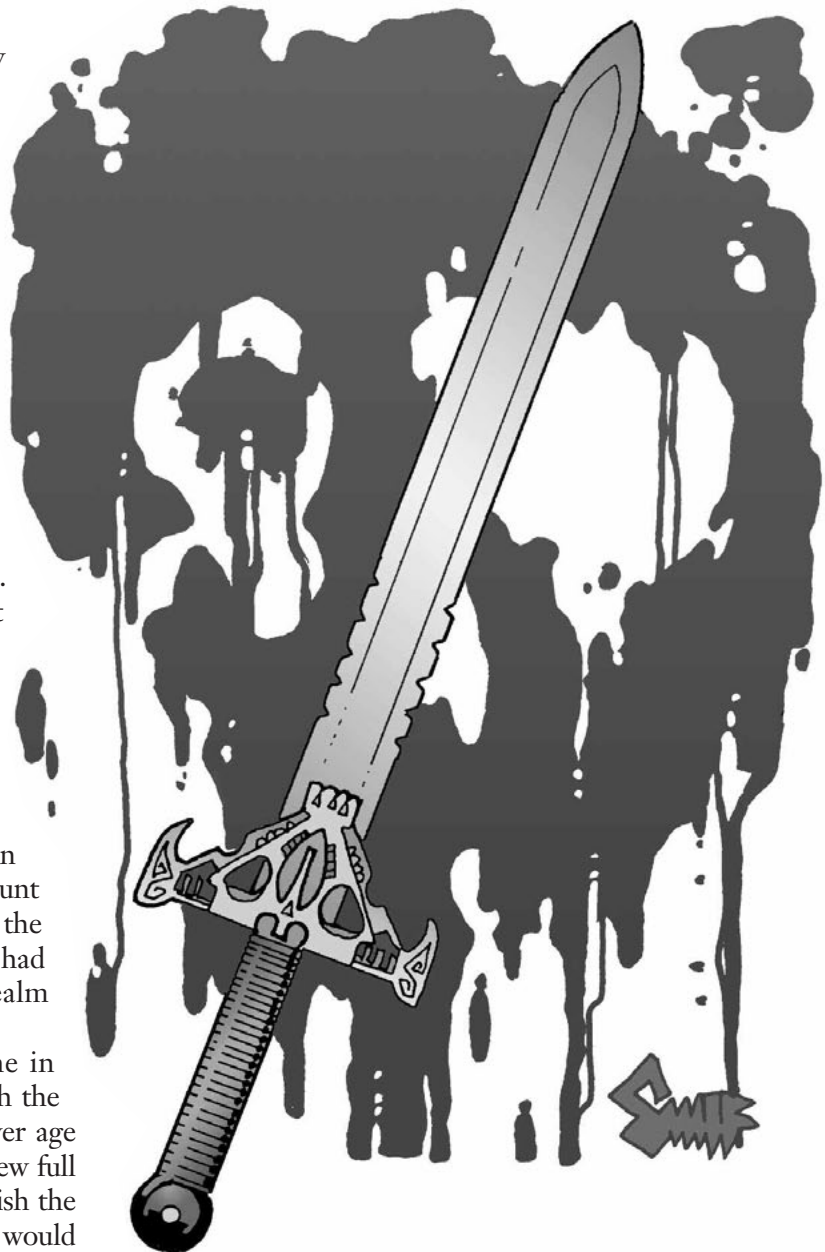
This marked the first stirring in the sword that was to become Life Stealer. Kalembach had somehow managed to bind a malevolent spirit to the blade. Infused with the blood of the wielder's own son, it began to awaken. The spirit filled the King's body with its energies. This made the King faster, stronger and more ruthless.

Even though Fergus was able to ambush his second son, Lodan, it was a close fight. The spirit had made him stronger and faster, but his son was still 30 years younger and in his prime. Fergus suffered from a few minor wounds but was, in the end, able to defeat his son. This second infusion of blood made the spirit, and thus Fergus, stronger still.

The fight with his third son, Finegas, was over almost before it started. With Finegas' death, Life Stealer was born. The spirit asserted its will over Fergus, trying to take control of him. Even through his insanity Fergus knew what was happening. He forced his will on the spirit and pushed it back into the blade. Unfortunately the spirit wouldn't be trapped alone. It used its last bit of strength to pull Fergus in with it. Fergus' body, bereft of all will, stood motionless beside his dead son. His body died soon after.

Fergus' will fought with the spirit and eventually gained some measure of control by blending with the spirit. This blending developed a new personality that was neither Fergus nor the spirit. This same blending trapped both the spirit and Fergus in the blade forever. The blending makes it possible for the combined personality to reach out and manifest in the real world. In this way, King Fergus had become immortal.

Life Stealer is indeed a stealer of lives. Each time it tastes blood, Life Stealer tries to take control of the wielder. Life Stealer is paranoid, suffers delusions of being a great king before whom all should bend knee and is quite ruthless (Bloodlust) in battle. When Life Stealer tastes blood, the wielder must roll against Will-4. A success keeps the personality at bay; a success by 10 or more means that Life Stealer can never take control of the wielder. A failure means Life Stealer takes over full control of the character. A failure by 10 or more causes the wielder's personality to be totally destroyed by the sword. The only way to break Life Stealer's control is to bind the sword to someone else.

Life Stealer is a broadsword of very fine quality that is unbreakable and never dulls. It can choose to either grant the wielder +2 to DX and ST, or penalize his rolls by the same amount, while he's using the sword. Life Stealer can also raise the wielder's Parry from $\frac{1}{2}$ skill to $\frac{2}{3}$ skill. The sword itself has a 16 IQ. It knows exactly what it is and has all the memories it has gained in its years of use. It will often withdraw its bonuses and lose a fight with a skilled swordsman to get a new, usually better, body.

Life Stealer fits well in a fantasy campaign, but could easily fit in a horror game of nearly any time period.

Adventure Seeds

The Contest: A wealthy eccentric hosts a contest to find the best swordsman in the world. The prize is a sword of unparalleled value and the honor of being named the eccentric's sole heir. The contest attracts men from all around who would try for the prize.

Unexpected Gift: A PC or someone a PC knows receives a package from an unknown source. The package contains a sword of incredible value and quality, but no explanation or return address.

Ambitious Youth: A man, hardly of age, is raising an army to unknown ends. He seems to have knowledge and wisdom of one beyond his years. This boy carries himself with such grace and arrogance he must be a prince, but others claim him to be a farm boy. And he carries a marvelous sword . . .

Life Stealer

THE CHALICE
by Michael Nelson

The crimson drop slid slowly down the young girl's pale arm and dropped off her finger into the iron chalice below. The captive hung upside down, suspended by a taut rope, while the Countess waited in her armchair a few feet away. Blood continued to drip into the dark cup, its solid mouth hungrily swallowing the liquid into darkness.

At last, the girl's moans faded, and she ceased to move. A bit of blood hung on her finger like a raindrop on the edge of a leaf. The Countess rose, and placed a finger to the girl's wrist. There was no pulse.

Smiling, she delicately picked up the chalice, and placed its dark rim to her lips. As the warm blood ran down her throat, the Countess felt her body healing itself, returning to its true beauty. Throwing back her head, the Countess laughed with the vigor of youth.

The Chalice is a tall, slightly fluted drinking vessel made of iron. It rests on a solid iron base, and the connection between the vessel and the base is ringed with small studs. The rim and inside of the Chalice is plated with polished pewter, and the handles are a pair of fanged serpents. The Chalice is always cold to the touch.

The Chalice comes from a time before recorded history, and no one knows who, or what, created it. There are only minor references to it in the blackest of occult tomes, although it seems to have had many owners through the years. Those that know of such things shiver at the mention of the Chalice, and insist it has been lost, for good this time. The Chalice grants immortality, but – of course – there is a cost . . .

Most people can handle the Chalice without harm, and without noting anything more out-of-place than its unnatural coldness. Those with Magical Aptitude will

sense that the Chalice is a powerful magic item, and of an evil so dark that a Fright Check should be rolled. But if the rare person who wishes to live forever at any cost happens to touch or see the Chalice, it will tell him what to do.

If the lifeblood of a living human is poured directly into the Chalice, and the victim dies from this blood loss, the drinker of the blood will undergo a profound change.

Not all the victim's blood must go into the Chalice, but if more blood is poured in than the Chalice can hold, the Chalice will itself drink the overflow. But the last living drops of blood must flow into the Chalice for its powers to work.

When the lifeblood is drunk, it will restore the drinker to the peak of physical health, and will improve the drinker's Appearance by one level. All adverse effects of aging will vanish. The drinker will feel strong and vigorous, and all ailments (magical and physical, including sickness) will be gone. These effects last for a full seven days, then they wear off slowly.

The drinker will know what is happening, and will also know the Chalice can restore his youth again. Another victim must be drained, but this time, the effects only last for six days. On the next drink, only five days, and so on until the drinker must drain a new victim every day to retain the benefits of the Chalice.

But the Chalice has one more reward it can bestow. If the user drinks from the Chalice 301 times, on 301 consecutive nights (evidence of a pre-Roman calendar), the drinker will become a vampire the moment the blood crosses his lips. The drinker will also gain the Bloodlust Disadvantage, if by some chance he didn't already have it. The Chalice will not work

for that person any more, and the user will feel a compulsion to get rid of the Chalice, thus letting it fall into the hands of another prospective drinker.

The former user has no more need of the Chalice anyway, having fully gained the immortality that was so strongly desired.

If a single day is missed (the deadline is midnight, of course), all benefits the Chalice has bestowed – all healings, cures, restorations and Appearance bonuses – will wear off, and the count to 301 resets to 0. This could mean a gruesome end for a character who has used the Chalice's power to heal deadly wounds in the past, and will give the owner strong motivation to procure another victim, and quickly. Exact amount of time for all cured diseases, wounds, etc., to reappear is up to the GM, but a range of two to five days is good.

The Chalice is difficult to destroy, but not impossible for a determined effort in modern times. It has DR 40 and HT 200.

It also has a disturbing tendency to find its way into the hands of those who would use it – and protect it. These people also tend to be very good, very silent killers. After all, to fully gain the benefits of the Chalice, one must commit over 300 murders . . . something not easily done without skill.

The Chalice also protects its users. If the user is threatened by death or loss of the Chalice, the user gains the Ridiculous Luck advantage (p. CI29). Taking the Chalice by force is a risky operation.

It has been noted in some texts that the Chalice resembles the Holy Grail in too many ways to entirely discount it actually being the Cup of Christ. The truth of this is up to the GM.

The Chalice

Adventure Seeds

✴ There have been a series of disappearances in the heroes' city. How will the PCs react when they find out what happens to the victims . . . perhaps even firsthand? Even then, what about the hero who finds the Chalice, and it tells him what he must do . . .

✴ The party is hired to solve a grisly murder in high society. There are a lot of suspects, but the true killer is the current owner of the Chalice – who doesn't want to be found out, and will do anything to prevent her death.

✴ The investigators find the Chalice somehow, and one of them, or an associate (or a Dependent) is attracted to the Chalice. How do the heroes bring their friend back from the darkness of the Chalice without harm? That is, assuming they even notice what the person is doing. After all, a drinker will be sure to cover his tracks.

✴ A valuable artifact has been stolen from a museum or private collection. The artifact was the Chalice, and the new owner knows its history and powers very well . . . because the thief created the Chalice over 3,000 years ago! It is up to the GM to decide what the thief is, and why the Chalice was stolen. Maybe it has something to do with the blood which the Chalice drinks when filled to overflowing? Or perhaps an improvement is to be made . . . This adventure should be incredibly dangerous, and involve the destruction of the Chalice, once and for all.

THE ECSTASY VIRUS
by Steve Dickie

The Ecstasy Virus is ideal for use in any modern or future campaign. It was developed using information that was learned from the extensive study of the AIDS virus.

The Ecstasy Virus attacks the T-cells (which are instrumental parts of the human immune system) in the same manner as the AIDS virus is believed to act. Its function is somewhat different, however. It is thought the AIDS virus infects the T-cells and then lies dormant for many years. When its dormancy ends, it takes over control of all the T-cell's functions and makes the cell produce more of the virus, which in turn infect more T-cells. This cycle continues until all the T-cells produce only the AIDS virus and are unable to protect the body against disease or infection.

Rather than going dormant for years, the Ecstasy Virus takes control of the cell's functions immediately and begins producing a protein. This protein stimulates nerve clusters, causing the user to feel intense pleasure, spreading out from the site of injection until it can be felt throughout the entire body. The user is at -1 to DX and IQ per dose for 10-HT hours (at least one hour). The penalty decreases by one for each hour after that. After five doses in 24 hours there are no additional effects.

The best thing about this drug is that there are no "hangover" after-effects, such as headaches and nausea. It does, however, have a negative effect on the immune system. For 24 hours after the last effects wear off, all HT checks against disease or infection are at -3/dose taken. This decreases to -1/dose the day after that and decreases by one per day after that as the immune system recovers. For example, if a person took three doses they would have a -9 on HT checks for that day; the next day they would have a -3, -2 the day after that, and then -1 before fully recovering. A large enough number of doses could prove fatal – one could die of a cold or have a tiny scratch turn into an infection that could require amputation of a limb.

A secondary bonus of the Ecstasy Virus is the feeling of euphoria can return. Just because the feeling stopped doesn't mean the virus is totally gone from your system. Every six hours during the immune system's "down time" (anytime before the system has completely recovered), roll against HT (taking into account the current penalty for the drug). If the roll succeeds, the pleasurable effects will kick in again, and IQ and DX will be at -1 for an hour. Combat or exercise will automatically trigger a roll vs. HT, as the heat of combat or vigorous exercise will increase the chance of any leftover virus finding T-cells to infect.

The Ecstasy Virus is highly addictive. The user must roll against Will-2/dose and must make a Will-1 roll for each "relapse." If a single roll is failed, the user becomes addicted. The Ecstasy Virus is expensive, highly addictive, and will be illegal as soon as the authorities know of its existence. The addiction counts as a -20-point disadvantage.

The Ecstasy Virus can be produced in a few ways. Cultures of human tissue can be used, but are unreliable. The drug can be synthesized artificially, which is how it had to be made initially, but is expensive and impossible to do on a large scale. The cheapest, most reliable way is to use a living person with a fully functioning immune system.

A variant of the virus is used for this purpose. This variant acts in much the same way as the Ecstasy Virus. It uses the T-cells to produce more of itself, and will quickly infect all the T-cells and go dormant until an external signal is given. This signal stimulates the production of the Ecstasy Virus. The Ecstasy Virus can be easily isolated from the blood of these individuals, who are known as "factories." After about a week of Ecstasy production, factories have no immune system left, so they can (and do) die from the most inconsequential of illnesses.

Adventure Seeds

Protein Factories: The players are police officers or private investigators and stumble on to the distribution network for a new narcotic. They soon discover that this new drug is somehow related to the disappearance of a large number of the city's homeless.

The Good Doctor: Several new cases of AIDS have mysteriously appeared in the city. A man comes to the PCs claiming his doctor purposefully infected him with the deadly disease. His doctor, Ernst Schnell, is one of the foremost AIDS experts in the world. The players may recognize the name because it had been in the news a few months before. Ernst Schnell recently lost credibility in the scientific community for falsifying his results and has been unable to get funding for his research. He's been using his patients as factories to be able to continue his research.

Hope: One of the heroes' dependents has been found to be HIV-positive. This means that some day he will contract AIDS. It is rumored that some new drug mimics the AIDS virus. If this is true, the people who developed it may know of some way of combating this deadly disease.

Bad Trip: The Ecstasy Virus has become the popular designer drug, until a problem arises. Variants of the drug have appeared. One such variant causes intense pain while another causes rages that drive users into violent frenzies. Where are these new drugs coming from and why?

THE CURSED SWORD OF HSIMA

by Steven W. Disbrow

"Ah, you must be the renowned Aldarac of Hinthaw! My friend, I cannot tell you how proud I am to meet you! I've been told that your bravery and masterful swordsmanship was the deciding factor in driving back the hordes of Malsi! Your homeland is forever in your debt, brave sir!"

"My liege! It is but my duty to serve as best I can. Yours is truly the glory that all should be in awe of! . . . May the remaining days of your life be filled with the croaking of the frogs of happiness!"

"Er, yes. Well. Thank you. Brave . . . warrior. Now, if you'll excuse me, I've other warriors to greet. But remember, the gratitude of our kingdom is yours. Merely ask it of me, and you shall have it!"

"Thank you, my lord!"

The Cursed Sword of Hsima appears to be an ordinary shortsword. It is in fact somewhat magical. However this enchantment only manifests itself if the person holding it has at least one level of Magical Aptitude. If the person holding the sword doesn't have any Magery skill, the sword will seem to be a substandard weapon. It will seem poorly balanced, a bit too heavy or too light – whatever it takes to make that person put it down or pass it on to someone who *does* have magical aptitude.

If the owner of the sword does have some magical aptitude, the Cursed Sword of Hsima will seem to be a great prize indeed. In combat, the sword gives its wielder a +5 to his Shortsword skill, a +3 to any block or parry made with the sword, and an additional +1d to the standard damage done by a shortsword! Of course, there *is* a catch.

"My lord, if I might say so, you look horrible this morning. Didst thou have trouble sleeping?"

"Aye, I haven't slept in almost a week! Those damnable frogs! They begin that infernal croaking at dusk and continue right through to the dawn! Your bed-chamber is just down the hall from mine, have you not heard them?"

"Nay, m'lord, I've not heard any frogs."

"It's almost as if . . . hold a moment . . . Do you remember that peasant warrior that came to our court a week ago?"
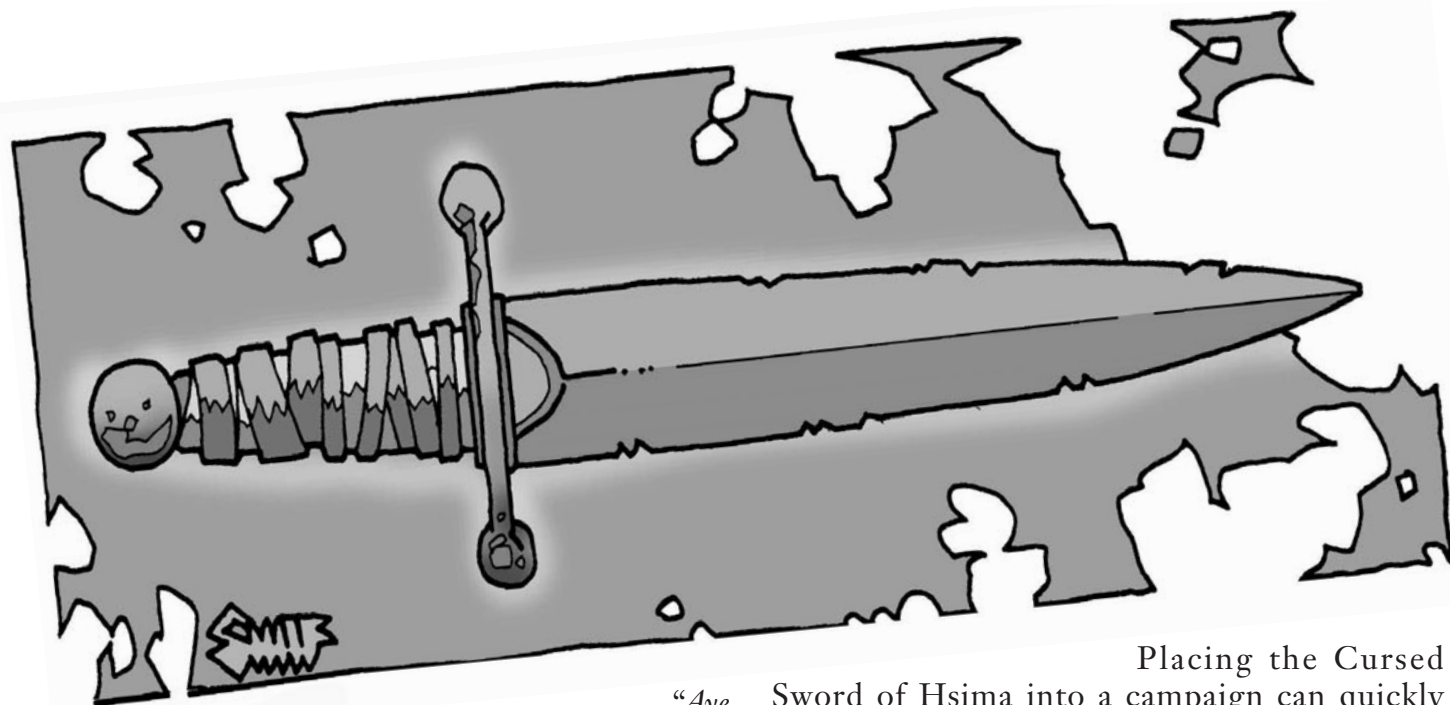
"*Aye. The one that single-handedly defeated five-score Malsi warriors. Why?*"

The catch is that, up to twice a day, when the holder of the sword meets a new individual of any prominence (anyone with status above that of a merchant), the holder must win a quick contest of wills against the sword (the sword has an IQ/Will of 13 for this purpose) or they will enter a short magical trance. During this trance, the sword will attempt to place a minor curse on the new acquaintance. (Again, use an IQ of 13 for the sword's spell-casting attempt.) This curse usually takes the form of an odd greeting or blessing. The curse is usually something minor, but it's always *very* specific, so that, if they stop to think about it, the cursed individual can easily identify the source of his newfound troubles.

"*Yes, that's the one! When I greeted him, he replied by saying the strangest thing. At first I thought it was just some odd peasant blessing . . . something about . . .* **frogs***! He said that the croaking frogs of happiness would follow me all the days of my life! That peasant blackguard! He's a wizard! That's how he defeated the Malsi troops, and now he seeks to drive me mad!*"

This, of course, will cause the sword's owner to make a lot of enemies in a very short period of time. (So it's a good thing that it has all of those combat bonuses.)

Placing the Cursed Sword of Hsima into a campaign can quickly cause it to degenerate into a silly, "Benny Hill" chase scene (which can be a great diversion for a short time), but only if you let it. The Sword could just as easily be played as an extremely subtle and evil entity, created specifically to slowly turn a kingdom's people against its greatest hero. In that case, the sword would bide its time, earning its owner's trust in combat and only cursing one or two people every few weeks or months of game time.

Of course, you don't have to use a sword to get the same effect. If **GURPS Illuminati University** is your cup of tea, it could just as easily be the "Cursed Stapler of WUSE" . . .

"*I swear, I don't know what you're talking about! I'm no wizard, and I don't remember saying anything about 'frogs' to his majesty!*"

"*Yes, well, we'll see if your memory comes back before the executioner's blade removes your head. Take him away! . . . Sergeant! Did you find it?*"

"*Yes, sir, it was hanging on his wall. Frankly, I don't see how he managed to kill anyone with it. It's far too light to deliver a blow with any force.*"

"*Well, that may be, but his majesty wants to make a gift of it to the Crown Prince. The king is sending him to the peace talks next month, and he wants him to be wearing 'The Sword That Defeated The Malsi' when he greets the other ambassadors . . .*"

While Hollywood cranks out identical clones of what was popular last year (how many more buddy cop films do we really need?), *Pyramid* writers keep topping everyone's expectations with their creativity and unique visions. To that end we're proud to present these exciting adventures, including a cyberpunk love story, a tourist trap conspiracy, and a surf shop of unlikely alliances and well-armed women who are vamping (literally).

With this kind of excitement, forget spending seven bucks on a movie ticket – buy more dice!

ADVENTURES

FIRST CONTACT
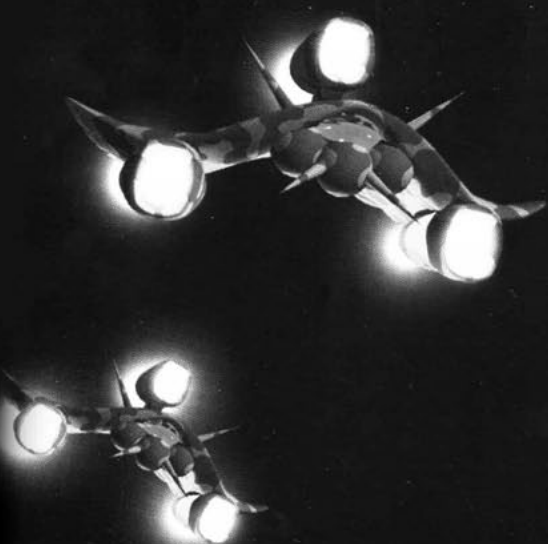
AN ADVENTURE FOR *GURPS SPACE* BY SCOTT TENGELIN

Introduction

A distant, backwater alien race – now known as the Xrex – has recently developed space travel. In order to properly integrate them into the Galactic Community, Councilman Johnathan Rake (galactic head of diplomacy) is sending one of the Federation's top diplomats to the Xrex system. The heroes are contacted to escort the Irari diplomat, Telraree, to visit the Xrex and return.

PCs should be around the 100-150 point range, created with *GURPS Space,* and may use any of the standard PC races from *GURPS Aliens.* This adventure assumes there is some galactic community or federation of worlds. If the characters do not have a ship of their own, they may travel along with Telraree on board a Federation ship, piloted by a member of the Federation's navy. In this case, the party would only be Telraree's bodyguards.

Because of the multitude of races in this adventure, there is a short glossary for those without *GURPS Aliens* (p. 105).

The Factions

The Federation is not the only group interested in the Xrex. The Markann have just discovered them, and are naturally curious (to the point of cruel experimentation). Also, there is a small cult of diverse peoples, the Cult of Chuchek, that follows an insane priest who claims that the Xrex are "demons" and their appearance heralds the end of the world. Neither the cult nor the Markann are aware of each other, but both realize the Federation's interest in the Xrex, and will learn quickly of the player-characters' involvement, as well.

The Cult of Chuchek has access to a robotics corporation, Neotech Enterprises. The cult owns 50% of Neotech's stock, and this arrangement means that the cult may use Neotech's high-security metroplex as a base for their worship. But this is not enough for the Cult of Chuchek.

Neotech has developed an extermination droid, the C-11 Rathunter. Because it is still under testing, Neotech has put the Rathunter under lock and key. The Rathunter was designed for pest-control, but the robot's stealth abilities make it suitable for another function – assassination. Cult members have slipped into the Neotech laboratories, "borrowed" a few Rathunters, and secretly modified them for assassination. The cult plans to use the modified Rathunter to keep the Xrex out of the Federation.

The cult is extremely dangerous, and Neotech would rather nobody know of its existence within their metroplex.

The Markann are not without their tools, either. A shipload of Verm have been found by the mad-scientist race, and the Markann are ready to release the Verm on any who try to get in their way of dominating the Xrex.

The Journey to Xrex

The heroes meet with Councilman Rake at Starbase Delta III. Rake offers $10,000 each for the escort, or $15,000 each and enough fuel for the round trip if the party supplies transportation. The Federation will supply the party's navigator with the necessary coordinates and star charts, should they be flying there themselves. They also send a Federation warship as additional protection. After the meeting, the party has three days to get ready for the trip.

When they do head out, they meet High Priest Randall Steede at the starport. He starts screaming at the characters about the end of the world, and the evil demons that are coming. This troubles Telraree, because these demons sound an awful lot like the Xrex; but the diplomat does nothing about it.

Once the party is well underway, have the players make opposed Hearing rolls versus Stealth-14. Success indicates hearing three Rathunters before they strike, Rathunters that Steede placed aboard the party's ship before they launched.

After the fight, if the characters examine the robots, let them each make an Area Knowledge – Delta III or Merchant skill roll. Success means they recognize the robots as products of Neotech Enterprises.

Diplomacy

Once the party reaches Xrex, they receive a weak transmission from Kruxtek, one of the leaders of the Xrex. "I am Emperor Kruxtek," he says, complete with buzzes and clicks. "I speak for my people, and for the people of the Tkrar. You are welcome to land, Federation."

What Kruxtek is referring to is an additional complication; the Xrex are divided into two nations, the Xarix and the Tkrar. Emperor Kruxtek leads the Xarix, while King Xark leads the Tkrar.

Upon landing, the party is greeted by Emperor Kruxtek's daughter, Thak, with an entourage of Xrex. Telraree greets them, introduces the adventurers as his trusted aides, and the group is off to their chambers, to meet with the leaders of the Xrex the following day. Meanwhile, the warship remains in orbit.

The meeting should go quickly, as this is mostly Telraree's moment. At first, the two Xrex leaders are cold toward each other. However, Telraree gets everybody relaxed and into having a good time. The Tkrar poetry gets loud, and much Xarix jazz is enjoyed by all. At the end, a decision is reached; in order to promote peace between the two nations of Xrex, the leaders decide to send their oldest children (Thak and Kaxut, son of Xark) with the party, back to their base among the stars, to explore the galactic community for a time. That night, Telraree sleeps soundly.

Over the next week, both Thak and Kaxut prepare for their journey to the stars. One or the other might call the heroes and ask if certain items are appropriate to take. "Should I take my winter coat, or will there be *(gasp)* full environmental control?!" It should be obvious that the Xrex are a couple tech levels behind the Galactic Community.

During the week, however, the characters have a constant feeling of being watched.

Finally, there is a grand parade to see the young nobles off. That's when contact with the orbiting warship is lost, and the Markann release their first wave of Verm.

A number of Verm (equal to the number of players) end up attacking the two young nobles, Thak and Kaxut. The Xrex parade will be able to handle their own share, but it will be up to the PCs to defend Thak and Kaxut. After the battle, the Markann will flee, and the Xrex will be hesitant to send their children off to this dangerous galaxy. Telraree eventually convinces them that they will be well cared for, using the courageous party as an example.

As a note, the Markann do not want to destroy the Xrex at this point. Their real target is Telraree and the heroes, the eyes and ears of the Federation. If the party scans for the Markann at any time before they attack, they will find nothing; the Markann have sophisticated cloaking systems.

The Return

Once the party returns to Delta III, they meet Randall Steede at the starport again, accompanied by Amarann, his Sparrial assassin. Randall panics upon seeing the Xrex, screaming "The end of the universe is at hand! Look on our foes and despair!" Starport Security takes them both away, but Telraree is nervous. He asks the party to stay with him as he welcomes the Xrex into the Galactic Community.

The Irari takes the group to the local shopping mall, Delta Central. Everything a person could want can be found at Delta Central, and chances are the PCs do most of there shopping here. Throughout the mall, the party sees posters displayed by the Chuchek Cult, depicting hordes of demonic Xrex purg-ing a helpless village with flames. "Look on the enemies of the galaxy and despair! The end of the universe is nigh!" Because these posters are written in Galactic Common, the Xrex cannot read them; but they do ask what it says. These posters could cause some potential problems to the party, as the Xrex try to interact with anyone who might have seen them.

During the visit to the mall, Thak and Kaxut will grow very fond of each other. (Perhaps the group goes to a holofilm, where the young couple touch feelers.) Later on, however, the party finds a display of Neotech's C-11 Rathunter, "The Newest Answer to Pest Control." It is important for the players to make a connection at this point, so remind them that this is similar to the robots that attacked them in the starship. Surrounding the Rathunter are two scientists, numerous citizens, and a homeless Sparrial squatting in the corner (Amarann in disguise).

Thak is entranced by the Rathunter, and goes in for a closer look. Suddenly, the Rathunter jumps to life, and takes a menacing step toward Thak! It then turns back to its pedestal and sings a song. Give the
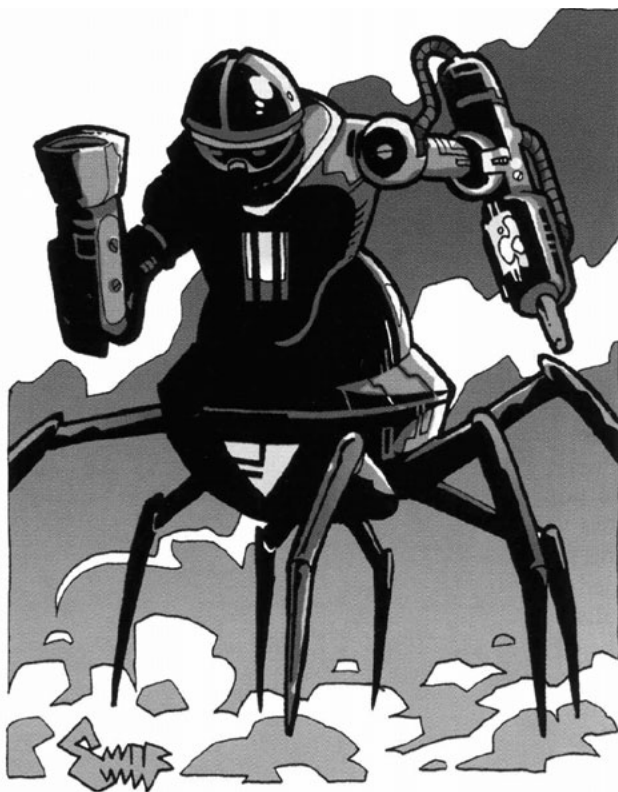
players a chance to react. Unless someone stopped her, Thak will be right by the Rathunter as soon as it enters its demonstration – and right by the corner where Amarann is slouching. He makes a grab at Thak as soon as the Rathunter moves, hoping to escape detection during the whole demonstration.

If the PCs are protecting Thak, Amarann will ditch his disguise and activate his chameleon suit. Let the players make Vision -3 rolls to notice that the homeless Sparrial has vanished. Amarann will track the party until they reach a fairly secluded spot. The walls will then "come alive" as Amarann grabs at Thak.

Whichever tactic Amarann uses, the party will have one turn to stop Amarann if they stand and shoot, or two turns if they give chase. After that, Amarann will use a carefully-planned escape route. However, if the party manages to avoid all these situations, Steede will just send four modified Rathunters that night in an attempt to kill them all.

The Connection

At any time during this adventure, the party may investigate the Rathunter-Chuchek connection.

Checking computer networks requires two Computer Operation rolls. The first, to discover the cult is holding 50% of Neotech's stock, the second at -2 to find the location of the Chuchek Temple (beneath the Neotech Metroplex).

Interrogating any members of Neotech Enterprises will result in nothing unless the party uses psionics or truth serum. Even then, nobody but administration and corporate officers know of the secret cult hiding under the floors.

Investigating Neotech personally results in disdain from Telraree. Of course, if Thak was kidnapped, Kaxut will want to organize a rescue party. Telraree convinces everyone that the authorities can handle things, but that night, Kaxut will be missing; he will have slipped out to rescue Thak on his own.

However the party deals with the cult, they will eventually find out about it (even if Telraree has to discover it on his own). Telraree reports to Delta Police, who deal with the cult quickly and efficiently.

The Return of the Verm

The next day, the party receives a surprise from Councilman Rake; King Xark and Emperor Kruxtek have just arrived, and want to know how things are going!

They have contacted the Federation after another Verm invasion, and asked to be brought to Delta III. Councilman Rake informs the characters of their arrival, and asks that they help in making the Xrex leaders feel at home. Rake is authorized to pay $10,000 more if the party agrees to serve as the Xrex's escorts.

Emperor Kruxtek will appear with the head shell of a Verm strapped to his left shoulder. The Emperor will act like a child, excited to see a world beyond Xrex. King Xark arrives with four of his eight wives (his favorite wife, along with her three sisters). The king will also be excited, but hides his enthusiasm behind a cloak of stuffiness.

If Thak was kidnapped, and the party let Kaxut go after her, the two leaders will be furious, and demand the party go rescue them immediately. At that point, Thak and Kaxut will show up, wounded but alive, and greet their parents warmly – and announce the decision of their Skahking.

Skahking is the ceremonious reproduction of two Xrex who wish it to be known that there will be off-spring between the two. Skahking is not entirely sexual, but is more of a gathering of friends to share in the courtship process. This involves a feast, the trading of love notes between the two, and finally they go off to their new nest, created by the mothers of the couple. The heroes and Telraree are invited, and the Skahking will take place on Delta III.

Unfortunately, the two leaders brought more than wives and war trophies with them. The Markann have left Xrex to return another day, but the Verm have remained behind, on their queen's orders, to ful-fill her unknown plans. About 50 Verm have stowed away on their ship, and that night they intend to strike. Their targets are King Xark and Emperor Kruxtek.

That evening, the Skahking begins. A feast is set out, and Telraree makes sure the food is palatable to the Xrex as well as any other races invited (mean-ing an evening of raw car-rots, turnips, and Auburn, a collard green from the Banduch homeworld). King Xark composes poetry in the couple's honor. Telraree, after hav-ing too much to drink, adds his own line, which makes all the Xrex laugh. (Those who can under-stand Xrex hear something to the effect of a key opening a locket – an obscure Xrex joke.)

One of the PCs is selected as the note carrier between Thak and Kaxut. The carrier will be constantly sent between the two, as Thak writes numerous notes, all of which Kaxut has the character return unread. During the process, two Verm drop from the ceiling and attack the car-rier! Four more Verm drop onto the dinner table, one drops on each of

the Xrex leaders, and eight Verm swarm out from underneath the table, enough to keep everybody busy. The uninvited guests have now crashed the party.

The party will have to fight two Verm apiece. Unless one of the char-acters turns his back to his Verm, one of Kruxtek's wives will be killed. Unless someone else turns from his Verm, Kaxut will be severely injured. Give these players a chance to react to these problems. After the fight, the two leaders are given heavily-guarded quarters, and take their respective children with them.

That instant, an emergency secu-rity meeting is held, and search-and-destroy parties are formed immedi-ately to clean the Verm from Delta III. If one of the adventurers suggests it, they could purchase C-11 Rathunters from Neotech to help in the job. The Rathunters have been confiscated since the problems with the Cult of Chuchek, but in this case, Federation security will gladly let them go. The Federation will pay

Neotech for up to five Rathunters, enough to make the job easier. The Rathunters will not be part of any party, though; Rathunters work alone.

During this meeting, there is a security breach in the station prison. The Verm realize that the Cult of Chuchek are a potential tool against the Xrex, and have freed all members of the Chuchek Cult. The Cult are now on their way back to the Federation's capitol building, where the Xrex are staying.

The Verm begin their second strike within hours after the security meeting, just as the party is on patrol. The streets of Delta III will be completely evacuated, and there will be no warning that the Verm will strike. Let the heroes fight a wave consisting of one Verm for each character, or half that if the Federation is using Rathunters. Immediately after the last Verm of this group is slain, a news broadcast is shown on a nearby holocom, revealing the breakout of Randall Steede and the Cult of Chuchek.

Investigations reveal that their liberators were definitely not of the Federation races. The cells are displayed on the holocom, showing numerous claw-marks.

Hopefully the players will be able to put the clues together and head straight for the Federation capitol and the Xrex, where Randall and Amarann will try to put an end to the "galactic men-ace." If not, have another wave of Verm attack, all the while trying to push them away from the gen-eral direction of the capital building. If this still isn't enough, the two Xrex leaders will be killed.

Upon reaching the capital, security scanners will have been deactivated throughout the building, and Steede and Amarann will already be inside the Xrex quarters, equipped with chameleon suits. Steede is going for Kruxtek, and Amarann is going for Xark; the party will have to split up in order to rescue both Xrex in time. The guards will shout at the adventurers if

they try to interfere, telling them, "Do your own job; we'll do ours!" Steede and Amarann fire immediately, missing the party, but killing the security guards. It's up to the heroes now. Both will fight to the death; they are determined to kill the leaders of this great, galactic evil.

After the fight, if any of the players thinks to look for the children, they will not find them, and they will not appear for another hour. During the break-in, the two star-crossed lovers escaped and headed for the nearest janitorial closet so they could be together.

Conclusion

After the rescue of the Xrex, the two nobles will hold a Krakha in the party's honor; the Krakha is a formal dance set to the constant shoutings of the others. It is extremely bad manners to shout when one is dancing, but spectators may shout freely. Thak and Kaxut will invite the party to the continuation of the Skahking. If the party thought to use the Rathunters in the search for the Verm, Neotech is also grateful, and offers the PCs a 25% discount on their next visit to any of Neotech's warehouses. Although the Rathunter is still restricted, this is the party's chance to pick up that assassin-bot they've always wanted . . .

If either or both Xrex leaders were killed, the younger Xrex will sadly have to leave for their homeworld and begin the task of ruling; they will not be joining the Federation for a few more years.

Character Points

Award the PCs 3 character points for the adventure. Add 1 for exceptional roleplaying. Add 1 if the players thought to use the Rathunters during the search. Subtract 1 experience point per Xrex that died during the adventure due to the players' actions or inaction.

Possible further adventures include remaining members of the Cult of Chuchek seeking revenge against the party; the Markann may want to

"study" the party to discover how they were able to thwart their plans; finally, Telraree may be sent on another diplomatic mission, and no doubt he will want the PCs by his side once again.

Glossary

Banduch. Dinosaur-like super-psychics from a wet, swamplike world.

Irari. A race of long-lived birds with a fever for science and research.

Markann. Spider-like super-scientists with a taste for cruel experimentation.

Sparrial. Cat-like beings who use stealth and robbery to designate a pecking order within their society.

Verm. Crab-like creatures with superior stealth, a hive mentality, and an unstoppable aggressive streak.

Telraree

Telraree is an Irari xenologist and diplomat to the campaign's Federation. He is extremely loyal to the Federation's ideals. Like many Irari, he will often lose sleep during his research, but is always quick to catch up as soon as his job is done. Telraree despises the military, and feels that any problem can be solved through negotiations. But he carries a weapon, just in case.

ST: 9   **IQ:** 15   **Speed:** 5.25
DX: 10   **HT:** 11   **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5

Advantages: Charisma +1, Empathy, Extended Lifespan, Winged Flight.

Disadvantages: Combat Paralysis, Compulsive Behavior (Research), Fragile, Impulsiveness, Pacifism (Self-defense), Stubbornness.

Quirks: Coffee addict; Obsessed with Xrex culture; Talks to self while working; Hates military.

Skills: Acting-13, Beam Weapons -11, Computer Operation-15, Diplomacy-18, Fast-Talk-14, History -15, Language (Xrex)-15, Linguistics -13, Psychology-16, Research-13, Savoir-Faire-16, Xenology-15.

Equipment: Thermos, portaphone, laptop computer, laser pistol (Dam. 1d imp., SS 9, +7 Acc., Range 200/500, RoF 3 (sel.), 20 shots).

Note that Telraree will not take his sidearm with him to diplomatic meetings, but will leave it in his quarters.

Amarann

Amarann is a Sparrial assassin, and a member of the Cult of Chuchek. He does his job well, and enjoys it; largely to please Steede, but also because of a sense of wanting to prove something to himself.

ST: 10   **IQ:** 12   **Speed:** 7.25
DX: 16   **HT:** 13   **Move:** 7
Dodge: 8   **Parry:** (Karate) 11
DR 1 (chameleon suit); PD 5, DR 30 (reflex robes).

Advantages: Acute Taste/Smell +2, Alertness +1, Combat Reflexes, Double-Jointed, Night Vision, Temperature Tolerance.

Disadvantages: Fanaticism, Gluttony, Kleptomania, Short Lifespan, Stubbornness, Sense of Duty (Cult of Chuchek).

Quirks: Uses homeless person as a cover; Wants to impress Steede.

Skills: Acting-14, Area Knowledge (Delta III)-14, Beam Weapons-18, Climbing-16, Detect Lies-16, Disguise-14, Escape-17, Fast-Talk-14, Jumping-19, Karate-15, Knife-16, Shadowing-14, Stealth-17, Streetwise-14.

Equipment: Homeless person costume, facepaints, 4 knives (Dam. 1d-1 cut/1d-1 imp., Rch C,1), blaster pistol with silencer (Dam. 2d+6 imp., SS 10, +6 Acc., Range 300, RoF 3 (sel.), 20 shots, -1 Rcl), chameleon suit.

At the end of the adventure, Amarann will also have reflex robes (PD 5, DR 30), blaster rifle (Dam. 4d+4 imp., SS 14, +13 Acc., Range 300/800, RoF 3 (sel.), 12 shots, -1 Rcl).

Randall Steede

Randall Steede is a human, and the high priest of the Cult of Chuchek. He occasionally has flashes of premonition that he is learning to control. They come to him in waking dreams, and he feels that these are divine visions, leading to his higher purpose of saving the universe.

ST: 10   **IQ:** 14   **Speed:** 5.5
DX: 12   **HT:** 10   **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5   **Parry:** (Knife) 6
PD 5, DR 30 (reflex robes).

Advantages: Charisma +4, Precognition Level 5, Voice.

Disadvantages: Delusion (Xrex are demons here to bring about the apocalypse), Fanaticism, Megalomania, Sadism.

Quirks: Uses torture to "extract information," without asking any questions; Views himself as a messiah from God; Thinks psychic ability is power from God.

Skills: Administration-14, Bard-19, Beam Weapons-14, Interrogation-14, Knife-13, Leadership-18, Precognition-12, Theology-16.

Equipment: Reflex robes (PD 5, DR 30), blaster pistol (Dam. 2d+6 imp., SS 10, +6 Acc., Range 300, RoF 3 (sel.), 20 shots, -1 Rcl), knife (Dam. 1d-1 cut/1d-1 imp., Rch C,1).

Thak

Thak is the daughter of Emperor Kruxtek of Xarix, of the planet Xrex. Although trained in the whip and shield, she hates fighting and archaic weapons. Some Xarix feel that when she rises to power, she will attempt to abolish any requirements to learn this traditional weapon combination.

ST: 9   **IQ:** 13   **Speed:** 6.25
DX: 13   **HT:** 12   **Move:** 6
Dodge: 6   **Parry:** (Buckler) 7
PD 2 (krizzt), DR 2.

Advantages: Attractive, Damage Resistance +2, Four Legs, Microscopic Vision 2, Musical Ability +3, Status 5, Telescopic Vision 2, Voice.

Disadvantages: Agoraphobia, Impulsiveness, Intolerance: Tkrar, Primitive -2 TL, Sense of Duty (Xarix), Short Lifespan 1.

Quirks: Likes fantasy movies; Wants to start a band; Hates combat practice.

Skills: Administration-15, Area Knowledge (Xarix)-13, Buckler-14, Law-14, Leadership-13, Musical Instrument (Tziktaz)-14, Politics-15, Singing-17, Whip-14.

Equipment: Zakzir (Dam. 1d-1 cut, Rch 5), krizzt (PD 2), tziktaz, various personal items.

Kaxut

Prince Kaxut is King Xark's son, of Tkrar, from the planet Xrek. He has studied military policies in hopes of leading the armed forces of Tkrar into a new age of "peace through superior tactics." As soon as he reaches majority, his father has promised Kaxut an automatic officer ranking in the Tkrar army. Some Xrex consider this a lucky break, and expect Kaxut to take advantage of the position. However, Kaxut intends to take this responsibility seriously. He intends to study military history, tactics, and combat for years to come. Like all nobility among the Tkrar, Kaxut is a skilled fencer. In his spare time, Kaxut reads a great deal.

ST: 10   **IQ:** 12   **Speed:** 6.25
DX: 14   **HT:** 11   **Move:** 6
Dodge: 7   **Parry:** (Fencing) 11
DR 2.

Advantages: Attractive, Combat Reflexes, Damage Resistance +2, Four Legs, Microscopic Vision 2, Status 5, Telescopic Vision 2.

Disadvantages: Intolerance (Xarix), Laziness, Primitive -2 TL, Sense of Duty (Tkrar), Short Lifespan 1, Stubbornness.

Quirks: Likes romance novels; Hates robots; Enjoys fencing.

Skills: Administration-11, Area Knowledge (Tkrar)-13, Beam Weapons-15, Fencing-15, History-11, Law-11, Leadership-12, Literature-10, Politics-10, Strategy-12, Tactics-12.

Equipment: Zatuk (Dam. 1d+1 imp., Rch 1,2), heavy laser pistol (Dam. 2d imp., SS 9, +8 Acc., Range 300/800, RoF 3 (sel.), 12 shots), various personal items, such as novels and history books.

King Xark

King Xark is the leader of the Tkrar nation, of the planet Xrek. He is a pompous sort, but also a skilled poet, with a very loud voice. Xark has eight wives, which is a lot even among Xrex. Xark's love of his son outweighs his nationalism, and would gladly give up his reign if it interfered with his being a father.

ST: 11   **IQ:** 14   **Speed:** 6.5
DX: 14   **HT:** 12   **Move:** 6
Dodge: 7   **Parry:** (Fencing) 9
DR 2.

Advantages: Charisma +1, Damage Resistance +2, Four Legs, Microscopic Vision 2, Status 6, Telescopic Vision 2, Voice.

Disadvantages: Intolerance (Xarix), Primitive -2 TL, Sense of Duty (Tkrar), Short Lifespan 1, Stubbornness.

Quirks: Pompous; Loves poetry; Secretly likes Xarix music.

Skills: Administration-16, Area Knowledge (Tkrar)-15, Beam Weapons-14, Fencing-13, History-14, Law-16, Leadership-17, Poetry-16, Politics-18, Strategy-14, Tactics-13.

Equipment: Zatuk (Dam. 1d+1 imp., Rch. 1,2), heavy laser pistol (Dam. 2d imp., SS 9, +8 Acc., Range 300/800, RoF 3 (sel.), 12 shots), various personal items.

Emperor Kruxtek

Emperor Kruxtek is the leader of the Xarix nation, of the planet Xrex. Kruxtek is also Thak's father, and loves his daughter dearly. Kruxtek is a boisterous showoff, a great lover of life, and loves to make big entrances. He is also an excellent musician, and takes his personal band often to official functions – if only to provide his theme music for his grand entrances.

ST: 10   **IQ:** 14   **Speed:** 7
DX: 14   **HT:** 14   **Move:** 7
Dodge: 7   **Parry:** 8 (Buckler)
PD 2 (krizzt), DR 2.

Advantages: Charisma +1, Damage Resistance +2, Four Legs, Microscopic Vision 2, Musical Ability +3, Status 6, Telescopic Vision 2, Voice.

Disadvantages: Intolerance (Tkrar), Primitive -2 TL, Sense of Duty (Xarix), Short Lifespan 2.

Quirks: Boisterous; Likes to mingle with commoners; Loves a big entrance.

Skills: Administration-17, Area Knowledge (Xarix)-15, Beam Weapons-14, Buckler-16, History-14, Law-19, Leadership-15, Musical Instrument (Tziktaz)-12, Politics-15, Singing-15, Strategy-14, Tactics-14, Whip-17.

Equipment: Heavy laser pistol (Dam. 2d imp., SS 9, +8 Acc., Range 300/800, RoF 3 (sel.), 12 shots), zakzir (Dam. 1d cut, Rch. 5), krizzt (PD 2), tziktaz, various personal items.

C-11 Rathunter

C-11 Rathunters are the newest product of Neotech Enterprises. They look like 5' tall robotic centaurs with spider legs. The left arm ends in a tangler, and the right arm ends in a stunner. In the Chuchek version, the stunner is replaced by a blaster pistol. They are built for exterminating pests, and are quite silent.

The Rathunter's IQ listed is effective in terms of problem solving and information. The number in parentheses is the effective IQ for intuition and will. The listed HT is the hit point total, while the number in parentheses the amount to damage it to ½ effectiveness (½ all skill levels).

ST: 14   **IQ:** 10 (4)   **Speed:** 7
DX: 14   **HT:** 14 (7)   **Move:** 7
Dodge: 7
PD 8, DR 40.

Skills: Beam Weapons-14, Stealth-14, Tangler-14.

Weapon Systems: Stunner (Dam. spec., SS N/A, +3 Acc., Range 12/20, RoF 3 (sel.), 40 shots, Rcl (N/A) or heavy blaster with silencer (Dam. 4d+2 imp., SS N/A, +8 Acc., Range 300/450, RoF 3 (sel.), 30 shots, Rcl N/A), tangler (Dam. spec., SS N/A, +8 Acc., Range 20, RoF 1, 10 shots, Rcl N/A).

Verm Warrior

These are the typical Verm shock troopers found throughout the adventure. For the time being, these Verms' particular queen does not object to them working with the Markann. She has her own agenda, involving taking the planet Xrex for her own.

ST: 13   **IQ:** 10   **Speed:** 6
DX: 12   **HT:** 12/15   **Move:** 6
Dodge: 7   **Parry:** 9 (Brawling)
PD 2, DR 2.

Advantages: Claws, Combat Reflexes, Cutting Strikers ×2, Damage Resistance +2, Dark Vision, Deafen, Early Maturation, High Pain Threshold, Four Legs, Passive Defense +2, Recovery, Secret Communication, Silence ×2, Sonics ×2.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust, Compulsive Behavior (Must get orders from queen), Intolerance, No Fine Manipulators, Odious Racial Habits, Reputation -4, Short Lifespan.

Skills: Brawling-12, Stealth-12.

PLANETARY RECORD: XREX

Planet Type: Terrestrial
Diameter: 9,665 miles
Gravity: 1.2 G
Density: 5.2
Composition: Medium-Iron
Axial Tilt: 9°
Seasonal Variation: Minor
Length of Day: 18 hours
Length of Year: 24 days/.05 Earth years

One Hex = 214.78 miles

Atmosphere

Pressure: 1.1 (Standard)
Type and Composition: 80% Nitrogen, 18% Oxygen,
 1% Carbon Dioxide, 1% Others.
Climate: Warm
Temperatures at 30° latitude: Low: 70° Average: 90°
 High: 110°
Surface Water: 56%
Humidity: 66%
Primary Terrain: Plains/Hills

Mineral Resources

Gems/Crystals: Scarce	Rare Minerals: Scarce
Radioactives: Ample	Heavy Metals: Ample
Industrial Metals: Plentiful	Light Metals: Ex. Plentiful
Organics: Ample	

Biosphere

Dominant life form: Xrex
Other significant lifeforms: Many varied, mostly insectoid
 or crustacean.

Civilization

Population(s): 3.37 billion (PR 9)
Tech Level(s): 8
Control Rating: 2
Society: Factionalized (two representative democracies)
Starports: Class II at Xarix, Class II at Tkrar
Installations: Many varied
Economic/Production: None on the galactic scale

Other notes

Emerging spacefaring race; no galactic colonies,
 outposts, or bases.

System Information

Star Name: Txaz	Type: M3 V
Biozone: 0.1 - 0.2	Inner Limit: 0.0
Number of Planets: 4	
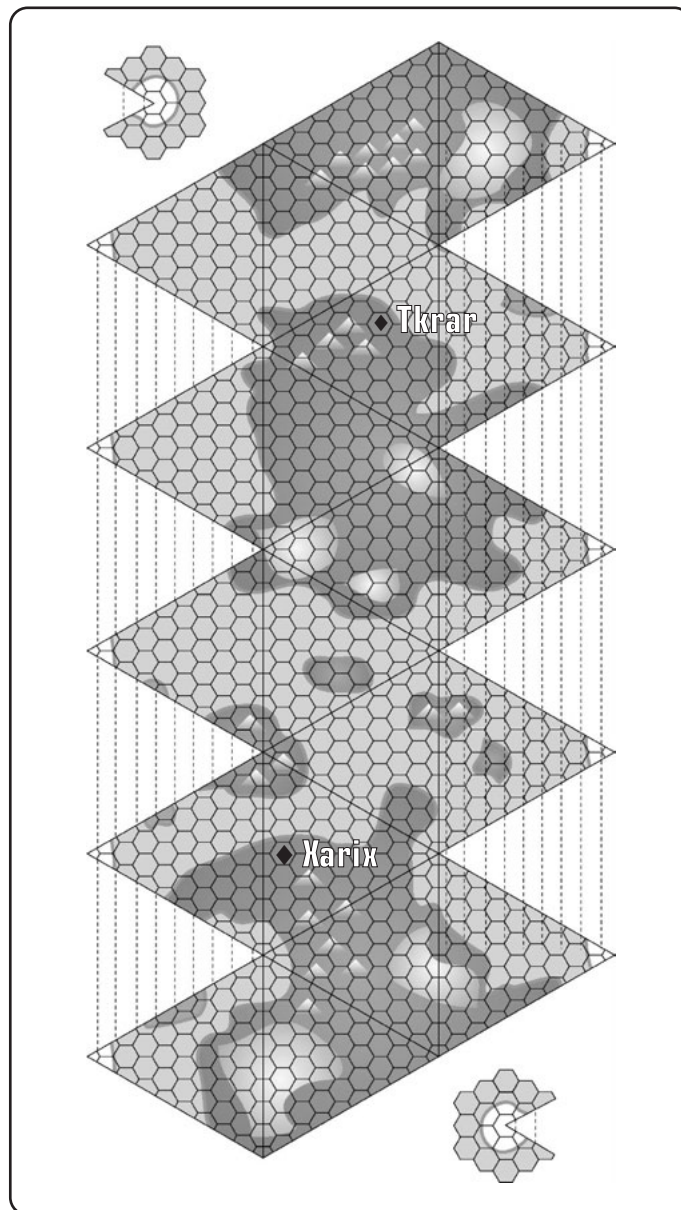
Kzraz: 13 moonlets, 6 small moons, 1 medium moon, 1 giant moon (Moon base Xrex Kra located here; Class I Starport plus research station).
Zitban: 12 moonlets, 7 small moons, 2 medium moons, 2 large moons, faint ring.

	Planet	Distance	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity	Atmosphere	Notes
1.	Xrex	.2	Terrestrial	9,665	5.2	1.2	Oxygen-Nitrogen	
2.	Kzraz	.5	Gas Giant	53,860	.7	.9	Hydrogen-Methane	see above
3.	–	.8	Asteroid Belt	–	–	–	–	
4.	–	1.4	(Empty Orbit)	–	–	–	–	
5.	Zar Ktzar	2.6	Hostile Terrestrial	6,775	2.7	.4	Trace CO_2	
6.	Zitban	5.0	Gas Giant	55,450	1.7	2.1	Hydrogen-Helium	see above
7.	–	9.8	Asteroid Belt					

First Contact

Xrex

Xrex average 5' tall, weight 240 pounds, and resemble Terran insects. They possess four legs on their thorax, and two arms on their abdomens. Xrex have no noses, but detect smell and taste with four feelers atop their heads.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Xrex have ST -1 (-10 points), DX +1 (10 points), and two levels of Enhanced Move (Running) (20 points). Advantages for Xrex include Damage Resistance-2 (6 points), Extra Limbs (Four Legs) (10 points), Microscopic Vision-2 (8 points) and Telescopic Vision-2 (12 points). Xrex have the following disadvantages: Short Lifespan-1 (-10 points) and Primitive (-2 TL) (-10 points).

It costs 36 points to be a Xrex.

Names

Xrex names resemble the buzzing and clicking of insects: Tzekkit, Zarrkar, or Kruxtek. (Xrex pronounce these names without the vowels.) Because of the nature of the Xrex language, races not equipped to deal with insectoid sounds learn it as Mental/Hard. Xrex learn non-insectoid languages as Mental/Hard.

Psychology

The Xrex are a slightly paranoid race, as they have been dealing with a cold war for the past few decades. The two major nations of Xrex – Tkrar and Xarix – seem to want the same thing: peace, but superiority. They are both afraid of losing their own culture within the other, should they try compromise. However, they are both willing to put aside their differences for a chance to see the rest of the galaxy.

Xrex typically mate for life. Tkrar males often take more than one wife, while Xarix are monogamous.

Ecology

The Xrex evolved from creatures similar to the Terran insect. The highest form of animal life on Xrex is the insect, as well. In fact, many Xrex possess pets such as the bzen, a two-foot-long, ten-legged cross between a spider and a centipede. Xrex are herbivorous.

Xrex eyes are highly versatile. Besides being multi-faceted, they are adjustable to a certain degree of microscopic and telescopic vision. It is believed that these eyes evolved out of a need to find food as well as locating predators from great distances. Unlike most other insects, Xrex eyes are set inside the skull, and do have eyelids.

All Xrex bear between one and three children in a lifetime. Xrex measure age in terms of seasons, with two major seasons per Xrex year. Thus, despite their short lifespans, the short Xrex year and their measurement of life tends to make them sound older than they really are. (A twelve-year-old Xrex would be 485 seasons old!) To simplify this, they often use lengths of ten seasons (4¾ decaseasons, for example).

Culture

The two major nations of Xrex are the Xarix and the Tkrar. Both utilize feudal systems of government, along with representational democracy. Both are also heavily involved with the performing arts.

The Xarix are governed by an emperor, and he rules over the many states in the Xarix empire. Each state has its own lord. Government is passed on from the parent to the oldest offspring, male or female. Xarix nobles are expected to learn the use of the zakzir (whip) and krizzt (buckler) in the fighting style known as Kratuzr. Xarix popular music is similar to Earth's jazz. This music is sung and played on a seven-stringed instrument called the tziktaz.

The Tkrar are ruled by a king, and, like the Xarix, each territory is ruled by a governor. Rulership is passed on from parent to eldest child of either gender. Also, like the Xarix, the Tkrar nobles learn a melee weapon – the zatuk, similar to the Terran fencing foil. Tkrar poetry, a popular performance art, involves numerous reciters improvising lines, one after another, in an attempt to create a story as well as match each others' rhythms. The poetry starts as a whisper, increasing in volume with each new line.

Clearly the two cultures share much in common, but they prefer to dwell on petty differences rather than try to get along.

Politics

At the end of the adventure, the Xrex are hopefully welcomed as citizens in the galactic community. They do not hold positions in the galactic body politic, but there are hopes that this will change soon.

LOVING THE DEAD

An adventure for GURPS CYBERPUNK

by
Laurence MacNaughton IV

Dirty rain pelts the windows. Yojimbo swallows the last of his recaff, stares at his deck. The featureless plastic case is slick and white, the color of a blank fax. He doesn't want to call her again. But the memory of her eyes tugs at him. Those cool blue eyes, like mountain lakes a thousand years old. His plugs ache to be inputted. Ache with the emptiness.

The pain lifts his hand, grasps the cables. It draws them in and locks them tight. Signals pour into him. The blood of the Net. He closes his eyes and hits the switch.

Behind the Scenes

Joseph Enriksson was the advertising manager for TransTechnic, Inc. He got to his position mostly by convincing Important People that an ad manager was what the company needed. He didn't actually do much . . . except spend TransTechnic's money on lavish cruises and executive dinner parties. He was very popular in the marketing world, and rubbed a lot of elbows. But when his subordinates made one too many mistakes, those same people decided maybe they didn't need an ad manager after all. And Enriksson was liquidated. Literally.

But he left behind a lot of financial wreckage. Among his many vices, Enriksson enjoyed braindance. He spent a few million having a super-realistic Virtual Reality created in TransTechnic's mainframe. Even after his death, the program remained. No one knew it existed. Until one night, a hot-troded 'runner named Yojimbo busted in.

Interfacing the Party

The party should be good mix of netrunners and mercenaries. It doesn't really matter who the characters are, as long as they survive. A member of the group (pick one) has a long-lost friend, Yojimbo. The two of them went through hell and back together. A few years ago they parted ways (the specifics are up to you) and they haven't spoken since.

At the start of the adventure, Yojimbo is drowning his sorrows at Skinner's when the characters stride in.

Yojimbo has a problem. He's fallen in love.

Skinner's

Read the following paragraph aloud to your players:

Skinner's is the place for cybertech chic. Every surface in here is brushed stainless steel. Walls, floor, stools, tables . . . all coldly metallic. You walk in on the lower level, air conditioning blowing away the rotting night air outside. Above you, a steel grille catwalk leads to a row of private booths. There's an empty stretch at the bar, and that's where you drift to. You can see your face in the steel, see the Street-worn meat and the chrome that pokes out from beneath.

Sitting next to them is Yojimbo. He's been in here all evening. Even after popping a few Sober-Ups, he isn't quite himself. "Hey!" he sloshes, "Haven't seen you in years!" He offers to buy a round of drinks. "You can get anything liquid here, choomba. Coffee, real beer, anything. A friend of mine once drank a CHOOH2 and nitric acid twister."

Yojimbo spends a while catching up with old times. Gloss over most of it, if you want. The players can try Vision or Empathy rolls. Those who make it see beneath Yojimbo's cheer. Something haunts his eyes. But before they have a chance to figure out what, bad news shows up.

Bad news in this case being a three-man corporate hit team. At the bar, a corp sidles up next to Yojimbo. His short hair is slicked back to match his street-legal leisure suit.

Any Solo who makes a Vision roll, or a Holdout roll +/- Vision modifiers, will spot the smartgun snuggled up under his armpit. He orders a Gin and Synth, and knocks it over into Yojimbo's lap.

While Yojimbo swears and stands up, the Solo pulls his gun.

Loving the Dead

Hit Team

ST 12, DX 13, IQ 11, HT 12

Enhancements: Polarization, Light Intensification, and Interface Jack.

Notable Skills: Guns-15 and Karate-13.

Gear: Medium Monocrys jacket. The one at the bar carries an interfaced Needler. The other two have Machine Pistols.

After the first round of combat, the other two hit men appear. They're on the second level, on opposite sides of the catwalk (see the map). Their SMGs open up, scattering drinks and bodies everywhere.

Because everything in Skinner's is made of steel, there's some excellent cover for the characters. Yojimbo dives over the bar when the party takes out Mr. Smartgun (otherwise this adventure would be pretty short). He stays there under cover while the other two hitmen try to kill him. The Solos on the catwalk will fade if they encounter too much resistance. There's a back door on the second level.

I Say Hey Man, Nice Shot

The smoke clears, and the characters are pretty angry about getting shot at. Yojimbo apologizes profusely, once they're in a moving vehicle . . . preferably heading far away from Skinner's. Read the following section aloud.

SKINNER'S

2nd Floor

1st Floor
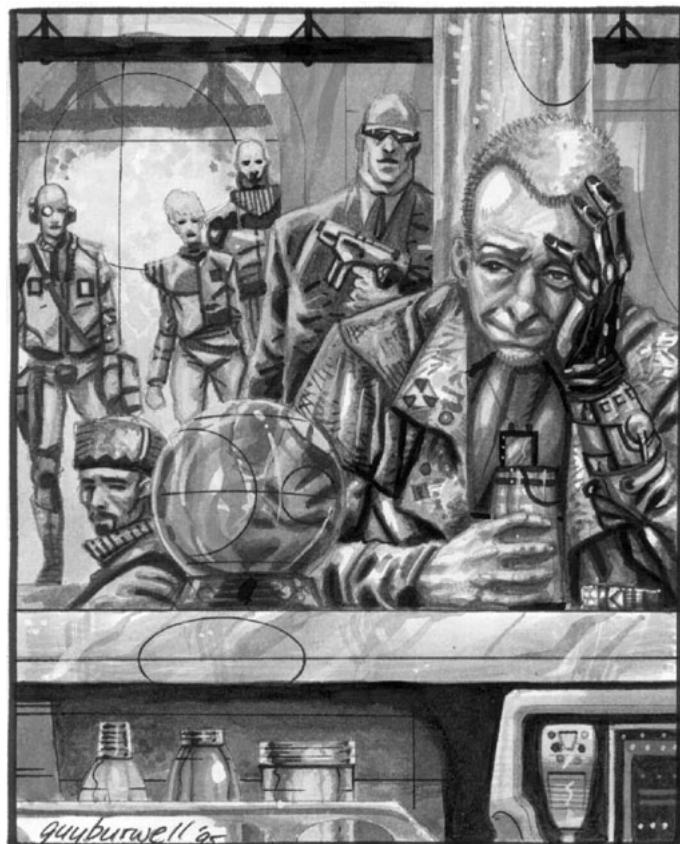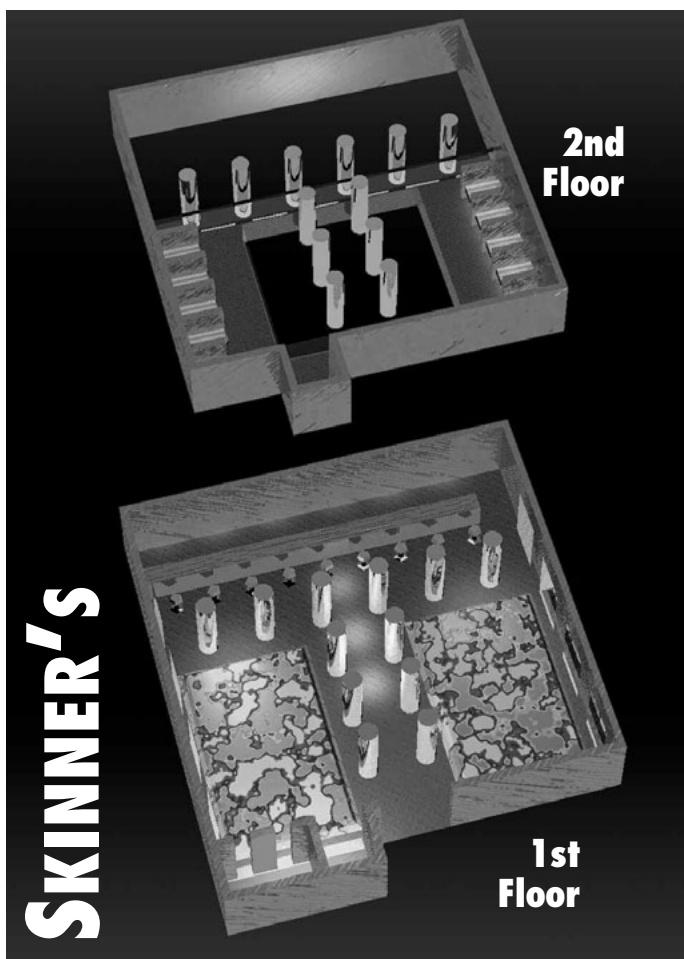
Yojimbo starts his story. "A couple months ago I got a gig to burn TransTechnic. The fortress was easy, just a code gate and some gray ICE. But while I was there, I stumbled into this secret downlink. Like, it wasn't on the directory at all. So after the run was over, I went back. And you would not believe what I found. A whole damn Virtual. Empty. Set up like one of those big white mansions from a few hundred years ago. Plantation, y'know? More real than life, and it was deserted. You could feel the breeze, man."

Yojimbo pauses to light a cigarette. His eyes narrow in the swirl of smoke. "So I stayed there a while, just checking everything out. It was like, so... so relaxing. I've never felt anything like it. There were fields and orchards, and just room after room of all this 19th-century stuff. So I kept coming back, and one day there was this lady there." He stops for a moment. Breathes out smoke.

"Her name's Abigail. She's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. At first I thought, Whoah, this is some chilled construct. But there's more to her than that. She tries to play like she's just part of the program. So I play along. But you know what I think? I think she's another 'runner like me who busted in. And I gotta find her." Yojimbo looks intently in your eyes. His voice drops to a whisper. "TransTechnic's caught on to me. I don't know if she's still alive. I don't even know who she is. You have to help me find her."

Love doesn't carry much weight in the gritty future. Especially against corporate hit men. But Yojimbo offers to pay for their time ($50,000 per character). It's everything he has at the moment, and he's willing to trade it all for finding Abigail.

But that won't be easy. Their only lead is buried somewhere in TransTechnic's computer.

The Mission

Back at Yojimbo's cluttered apartment, he stuffs his deck and some peripheral gear into a duffel bag. "Can't stay here," he says, "Got anywhere to chill?" If the characters are keeping watch, have them make a few Awareness/Notice rolls. The heat isn't coming (yet), but they don't know that. Tell them someone's watching from the corner. Maybe a black vehicle slinks past. Keep the players (and characters) paranoid.

Yojimbo's immediate plan is to get lost. TransTechnic knows his identity and wants him flatlined . . . nothing a face change and some adjusted records won't fix. But in the meantime, he has to find Abigail.

And that means burning TransTechnic again.

Silicon Decay

Abigail isn't human. She's an entire AI subroutine, complete with simulated feelings and fabricated memories. Abigail was created specifically to match Enrikesson's psych profile; a perfect companion. Set against a backdrop of virtual romance, she was designed to fall in love with the corporate executive.

But Yojimbo isn't Enrikesson, and he has a different personality. With all the ingredients of "love" in the air, Yojimbo has become snared in a reality that wasn't meant for him. Unrequited love in the cybernetic age.

The virtual is a super-realistic "building" occupying a huge chunk of memory (and worth millions). The reality itself is based around a three-story mansion set in 19th-century South Carolina. It's chock full of objects and sensations. A sensualist's dream, built to be wandered through, to be experienced. There used to be roughly 30 rooms in the house itself, with another dozen areas outside (lake, garden, orchard, fields, etc).

The reality is squirreled away in normally unused memory. Without Enrikesson around, the memory space is being eaten up by other users. First the extra characters went, then some of the objects. Now entire rooms are being deleted.

When the party gets there, half the reality is completely gone. If they walk through the wrong door, they're back in the mainframe . . . and a prime target for the resident ICE.

Burning TransTechnic

The TT Data Fortress is set firmly in the downtown Net. The monolithic double-T icon has been scouted for years, but netrunners leave it alone. There isn't much worth stealing, and the ICE isn't tough enough to draw glory seekers.

Yojimbo has access codes to get into the virtual, so security wouldn't be a problem. But parts of the virtual have been erased and written over. Any time a character leaves the map, he is suddenly dumped into the TT mainframe. And that's where the ICE is. A lost netrunner can find his way back into the virtual with a successful Cyberdeck Operation roll.

The party begins in the Entrance Hall. After they've explored a room or two, a distorted woman's voice calls Yojimbo's name. It's Abigail. About to be deleted, the AI subroutine had enough vestiges of self-preservation to move into the CPU. Elements were lost in the transfer, and the remaining program is compressed in an unlabeled file. She doesn't have enough active programming to say more than, "Yojimbo? Help me . . ." No one can tell which direction her voice comes from.

Entrance Hall: Near the massive oak front door are divans and a pair of reading chairs. Sultry afternoon sunshine lights the room, setting the lace curtains aglow. There is an open doorway to the left and right, and a wide carpeted stairway leads up. As the characters stand there, checking out their new surroundings, they feel a tremor. The whole scene flickers, shifts, colors running rancid like a dying TV. Then everything's fine. Yojimbo looks panicked. "What the frack's going on?" he whispers.

Dining Room: A luxurious bay window opens out on a green yard scattered with trees. The long formal table is set with a bountiful feast. Huge covered dishes contain steaming piles of roast duck, boiled ptarmigan eggs in paprika, and other Victorian delicacies. There is no trace of the servants or how the food got there. But the wine is chilled, and the food is very, very good. If the characters leave and return later, the table has been cleared and only a few sandwiches packed in ice) remain.

Master Bedroom: Unlike the rest of the mansion (which is spotless), the master bedroom looks well inhabited. The sheets are tousled, clothes are strewn about (both men's and women's), and someone's been writing at the desk. Characters examining the desk find handwritten love notes. A half-finished glass of wine sits beside the inkwell. It isn't hard to realize what syrupy nonsense the notes are. A Vision roll reveals that the writer wasn't Yojimbo. And a difficult roll reveals clues bearing Enrikesson's name (stationery, cards, name tags in clothing). In fact, it was Enrikesson who spent so much time here.

Trophy Room: This room serves one purpose: ego stroking. Stuffed animals lurk about in every pose. Each bears a plaque (such as "White Tiger, killed on Safari near the Euphrates"). All over the room are the trophies and memorabilia of Joseph Enrikesson's fabricated lifestyle. At one end of the room is a larger-than-life painting of Enrikesson, with an engraving of his name. Anyone who makes a Vision roll spots Enrikesson's pompous biography: *From TransTechnic to Tycoon*. Skimming through it, the characters read the adventures of a nobleman from some unmentioned country who commits dashing heroics in the face of direst danger, and eventually wins Abigail's hand in marriage.

Library: This dim room is home to thousands of books. Small tables (a few already stacked with tomes) are topped by elegant reading lamps. It's a Vision-3 roll (or some other applicable skill – GM's option) to find a title that doesn't belong here: *Executive Route to Mainframe*. Pulling it off the shelf triggers a hidden switch. The bookcase slides aside to reveal a dark, cobwebbed secret passage. A few steps down the passage, a huge black wolf snaps and growls from the other side of a heavy iron portcullis. Recon reveals a simple Password-13 and linked Flatline-15 variant. The Flatline won't kill the netrunner – just fry his deck.

Speaking the access code ("Enrikesson") will open the gate and tame the wolf. The passageway leads to the TransTechnic CPU. It's a "safe" route – netrunners using this path are recognized by the CPU as an executive superuser.

Other rooms: The rest of the mansion is just bursting with paintings, staircases, closets full of Victorian clothes . . . use your imagination. The outside areas have been deleted. Any time a character leaves the map, he's immediately dumped into the CPU.
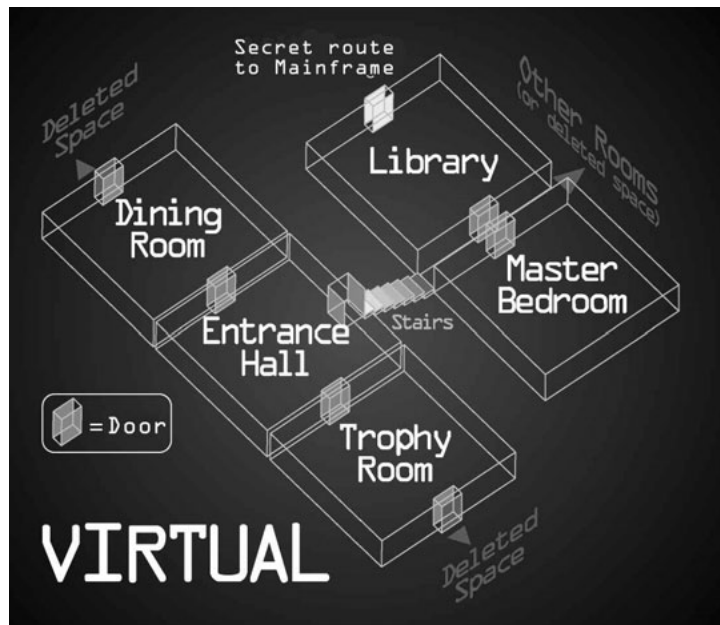
The TransTechnic CPU

Outside the virtual waits TT's central processing unit. Through the cyberdeck interface, the CPU appears as a cavernous open chamber lined with points of neon light (accessible files). The AI's haughty chrome face floats in the center. There's some interesting stuff drifting around.

ICE: Every second that a character is logged on as an unauthorized user, he risks being hit by ICE. The TT mainframe contains free-roaming security programs. There's a 1 in 6 chance each turn of encountering a Trace-15 and linked Sever-12.

AI: The Artificial Intelligence (IQ 15) won't speak unless spoken to. Its booming voice will announce information: "File closed," or "Intruder alert." Otherwise, it's silent, absorbed in its own affairs.

Loving the Dead

Here's where you (the referee) have a choice to make. If the party is light on firepower, you could let them find Abigail here and now. This puts a completely different spin on the game. They have Abigail's program; now what? They don't have a Virtual to run her in. An entire adventure could revolve around finding one, or somehow finding a way to dump her onto the Net . . .

But searching so much raw data for one unlabeled program is hopeless. More likely than not, they can't get to Abigail before the ICE hits. Make a hidden die roll every turn. No matter what the result, tell the searchers that they fail, and the ICE is coming. Punch out or fry.

The Real World

Back in the apartment, Yojimbo grins like a puppy. "Well, what's up?" he yips, pulling the cables from his wrists. "Did you find her?"

Now they have to break Yojimbo's heart. Abigail is just a construct, an illusion lost in TT's mainframe. The life fades from his eyes. He sits there, numb, not responding . . . beyond pain. After a while he gets up and wanders over to his duffel bag. He comes back with a handful of debit cards. "Here," he says, handing the credits to the group leader.

If they have any compassion, the characters might try to refuse the money. But Yojimbo gets angry, even violent if he has to. A deal's a deal. Go ahead, play it up. Make 'em feel bad.

Because a few days later, Yojimbo comes back. He seems a lot better. "I've got an idea . . ." he says. He can't get in to see Abigail anymore. But he can get her out. He tells them about the Tombs. If they can break into the TransTechnic tower, they can steal the memory core that holds Enrikesson's virtual. Abigail can be with him forever.

The Tombs

Buried a mile and a half beneath Night City is the processing core for TransTechnic, Inc. When the corporate tower was built 20 years ago, decisions were made to ensure that the CPUs and supporting hardware would never be disturbed. They built the Tombs.

Isolated from the world, the computers are maintained by an army of AI-controlled remotes. The miniature robots scuttle among the data banks. They check circuits for integrity, replace worn components, and vacuum up what little dust accumulates in the 99.7% untainted air. Humans will need rebreathers. The air mix contains coolants and fumes which will incapacitate or kill the unprotected.

Building security: Here are the access codes to the building's security locks. Each type of code is listed under a separate file, and a skill roll is required to get each file. The files are: Exterior Doors, Elevator Over-Ride, Executive Offices and Tomb Access Elevator. There's also a link here to the elevator and security camera controls.

Virtual files: There's a file for each room. ENTRANCE.VRT, MSTRBEDR.VRT, ORCHARD.VRT, etc. There's also a database set aside from the rest: ABOUT ABIGAIL. Opening it, the characters find information detailing her clothing, mannerisms, and other features. It also contains a readout of Enrikesson's psych profile and the following note: "Abigail simulacrum created using compatible psych nodes. The construct contains romance patterns from VoyeurWriter V4.2 tailored to the client's profile." Abigail's actual programming isn't here. It's in a hidden file (see below).

Abigail (Unlabeled): Until he figures it out, Yojimbo thinks Abigail is another netrunner. But here in the main CPU is her programming data. Abigail is crammed smack in the middle of the CPU's memory, just one file in thousands. How long does it take to find her? About as long as it would take to find a random document in a darkened office full of filing cabinets.

Loving the Dead

There's an access hatch in the tower's engineering sub-basement. Through that hatch is a restricted elevator, guarded by a high-powered security system. The elevator descends the full distance, all the way down into the computer core.

More Money?

Yojimbo can be talked into paying some more. After all, tackling TT head-on wasn't part of the original deal. If asked, he "acquires" another $50,000 per character. Don't ask where he got the money. He'd rather not think about it.

Grand Theft Cyber

The TransTechnic building is protected by a small security firm. All outside entrances are fitted with numeric keypad locks and security cameras. Inside, the party has a 1 in 6 chance of encountering a guard for every room or corridor they enter. The guards (60 total) are all in radio contact. As soon as a fire fight erupts, the whole building goes on alert.

Guards

ST 11, DX 13, IQ 10, HT 11
Enhancements: Radio Reception, Biomonitor, Cortex Bomb.
Notable Skills: Guns-14.
Gear: Combat Infantry Dress, Military Laser Carbine, Electronic handcuffs.

The tower is 20 stories tall, with a basement and sub-basement. The top three floors are executive offices. They're secured by a mixture of thumb-print locks and retina scanners. Security passkeys can be taken from the guards' bodies, if necessary. They'll open everything except the Tomb Access Elevator.

1. Offices: These large areas are subdivided into warrens of cubicles. The partitions provide visual cover only. During the day, all the offices are bustling with corps. At night, only a handful of workaholics remain.

2. Security Desk: There's always a security guard stationed here (unless he's getting a cup of recaff). The desk monitors show views of every room on that floor. A little tampering can create some incredible havoc, anything from blank screens to circuit loops.

3. Elevators: Standard elevators will go from the basement to level 17, but won't go above or below that without security clearance.

4. Stairs: These run all the way from the first to 20th floors, but the top three floors have security systems.

5. Parking Garage: TransTechnic executives have the privilege of parking here. The lighting is sparse and dim, and the security cameras can be avoided with a little stealth. But 2 guards stand watch at the elevators. There's a ramp to the street, blocked by heavy clamshell doors more at home on a space station.

6. Storage: Shelving units here hold everything from spare computer parts to soap and mops. An unprotected air vent leads straight down into the subbasement.

7. Subbasement: This is basically one huge room with a few concrete walls to divide it up. Ranks of humming power converters and climate-control systems dominate the room.

8. Tomb Access Elevator: This restricted elevator is covered by a reinforced hatch set deeply into the wall. Inside, it takes a very difficult roll against an appropriate skill (GM's choice) to bypass the codelock and activate the elevator controls. Characters may roll once per second. When they make the roll, the access hatch clamps shut and the elevator begins the 20 minute ride down into the Tombs.

Basement

Floors 1-20

■ = Door ▢ = Elevator

The Tombs

Basement

Ramp to street

Front Doors (ground floor)

Uh, oh.

Unless they think fast, the AI will recognize them as intruders. The security remotes (1 to 3 per character) power up to attack. These small robots each have a targeting system and capacitor laser. The remotes are HT 4, PD 4, DR 10, and armed with a Laser Pistol (Skill 12).

Any stray gunfire blows sparking electronics from the opposite wall. Red lights flash, alarms sound. Smoke floods the chamber.

And they still have to fight their way back out. At the GM's option, there is a back door. Halfway up the access elevator's shaft is an abandoned passage. It could lead anywhere: old railway tunnel, underground waste dump, utility duct, someone's basement . . .

Diagnostics: There's no internal lighting here; just section after section of computer banks. The spherical chamber houses diagnostic screens and emergency systems. Walls, floor, and ceiling are all covered by rows of blinking lights. It's like being in the world's largest shuttle cockpit. The elevator opens onto a walkway which extends left and right.

10. AI core: The walkway hugs the sides of this room. Suspended in the center is the stark pillar of the Artificial Intelligence mainframe. Security sensors pick up the characters. "<VERIFY IDENTITY PLEASE.>" a simulated voice commands. After a pause: "<YOU HAVE THIRTY SECONDS TO VERIFY IDENTITY.>" The AI will only be satisfied with a proper security code. If they're still in the room when the time's up, or if they touch anything before answering, the room's laser cuts them down. The laser attacks one target per round. The AI is protected by a Defense Globe (skill 14) (p. UT89) with a Laser Rifle.

11. CPU and memory units: This is the meat of the computer system. It takes some work to locate which memory compartment holds the Virtual. Behind a wall panel, the unit they want is a bowling-ball-sized block of solid-state electronics. When they try to open the panel, a screen lights up. "<UNSCHEDULED MODIFICATIONS RESTRICTED. PLEASE IDENTIFY YOURSELF.>"

Other Options

Force isn't the only answer, especially if the characters don't want to die young. The party could launch another assault against TT's computer via the net. With skill and a little luck, they might be able to download a copy of the Virtual onto their own decks. This requires attacking the data fortress from the outside. The specifics are left up to you; use the listed ICE as a guide.

And then there's the Dress Up Like Technicians And No One Will Notice Us approach. Instead of breaking in, the characters could bluff their way in. It would take a few Persuasion and Disguise rolls, but no one will question high-security techs. The Tombs are scheduled for a manual inspection once every month. Usually, this involves a group of techs going down, glancing around, and coming back up. Maybe this month, the inspection is a little ahead of schedule . . .

As a final and more desperate option, Yojimbo knows a street doc who specializes in life support gear. They can smuggle Yojimbo down into the Tombs, plug him in, and hide his inert body in a ventilation shaft. Who knows how long he'll stay undiscovered, or even how long he'll live. But such is the price that must be paid for love.

Pawnshop

By S. John Ross

Pawnshop is an Illuminated/Weird Occult adventure for a small group of modern adventurers of 50-150 points each. The text assumes that the heroes are known for their interest in the unusual or otherworldly, and that they are either "for hire" or have sufficient reputation to be sought out when an unusual case presents itself. The adventure is set in and around Washington, D.C. (in Georgetown, specifically), but can easily be transplanted to any modern city. Only the *GURPS Basic Set* is necessary for play.

Note that one or two adventurers with some low-power Psi or magic are appropriate to the genre, following the suggestions for "psychic investigators" on p. B165 (sidebar). In fact, the GM may wish to encourage one PC to have a little Psychometry, as this power is useful for feeding the party information the GM wants them to have.

Background

Washington, D.C.'s Georgetown district is known for its "college town" atmosphere – art galleries, alternative theaters, expensive shops, and a strong streak of new-age sensibility permeate the northwestern end of M Street. Weekend evenings find the streets crowded and festive, and the local intellectuals retreat into coffeehouse booths to savagely ponder verities over tense games of chess.

Just out of reach of the lights of M Street is a tiny shop of the kind that can only thrive in this kind of atmosphere: Emperor Baxley's Pawn Shop, possibly the only pawn shop in the country specializing in occult paraphernalia. Next to the predictable stacks of stereos and glass cases of cheap firearms, the casual browser will spot hand-painted Tarot decks, seemingly ancient manuscripts (carefully crafted by a local artist), crystal balls, pewter pentagrams, and suggestive candlesticks engraved with pagan slogans. The choicest items – the truly unusual – "Emperor" Baxley saves for himself, or puts on display without a price tag. Karl Baxley profits from the occasional poverty of the local new-agers, and over the years has accumulated a few items worthy of the attention of the Secret Masters. One of them – an alien artifact meant to be used as a communications device – is being used by Baxley to control minds at a distance, and to commit murder.

The Plea for Help

The PCs are contacted by Karen Kessler, a resident of Crystal City, Virginia, with a request for their services as investigators of the unusual. She will call first, and request a meeting in-person, in a public place such as a restaurant. On the phone, she sounds nervous, and gives only her name and her assurance that she is "very serious, and very concerned, and willing to pay." She will not elaborate on her problem until the PCs meet her face to face.

Karen *looks* like she's normally cheerful, but her face is tired-looking, now, with sunken eyes under large sunglasses, and a weary frown. Her husband died nine days ago, and the police have effectively closed the case as a suicide. Karen disagrees, and tells her story:

*Ron **wasn't** suicidal. We were both very happy and things were going fine. I know that something was done to him to make him do what he did . . .*

I was with him, at home, the night he died. We had just got back from a day in the city, doing some shopping and visiting his parents. We had stayed out a little late drinking in Georgetown and we were both a little buzzed, but neither of us were drunk, since his mother had been with us . . .

*When we got home, we were unwinding, relaxing together on the couch, when he went crazy. He started shaking, and then looked at me with the eyes of . . . the eyes of a different man. He started laughing and screaming things. Pointless, ridiculous things about glory and – I'm **really** not making this up – how he was going to get rid of the Senate!*

I tried to calm him down, give him something more to drink, get his mind off whatever had gotten into him, but he wouldn't have it. He grabbed me and smiled and said that now he finally had the power he deserved . . . and then he just ran out to the balcony and jumped off, laughing.

*It wasn't him. I don't know about things like this. I don't **believe** in things like this. But something killed my husband. He wasn't himself, and he wasn't crazy.*
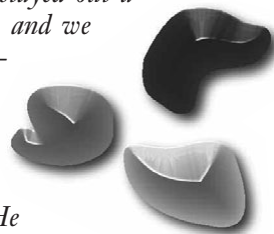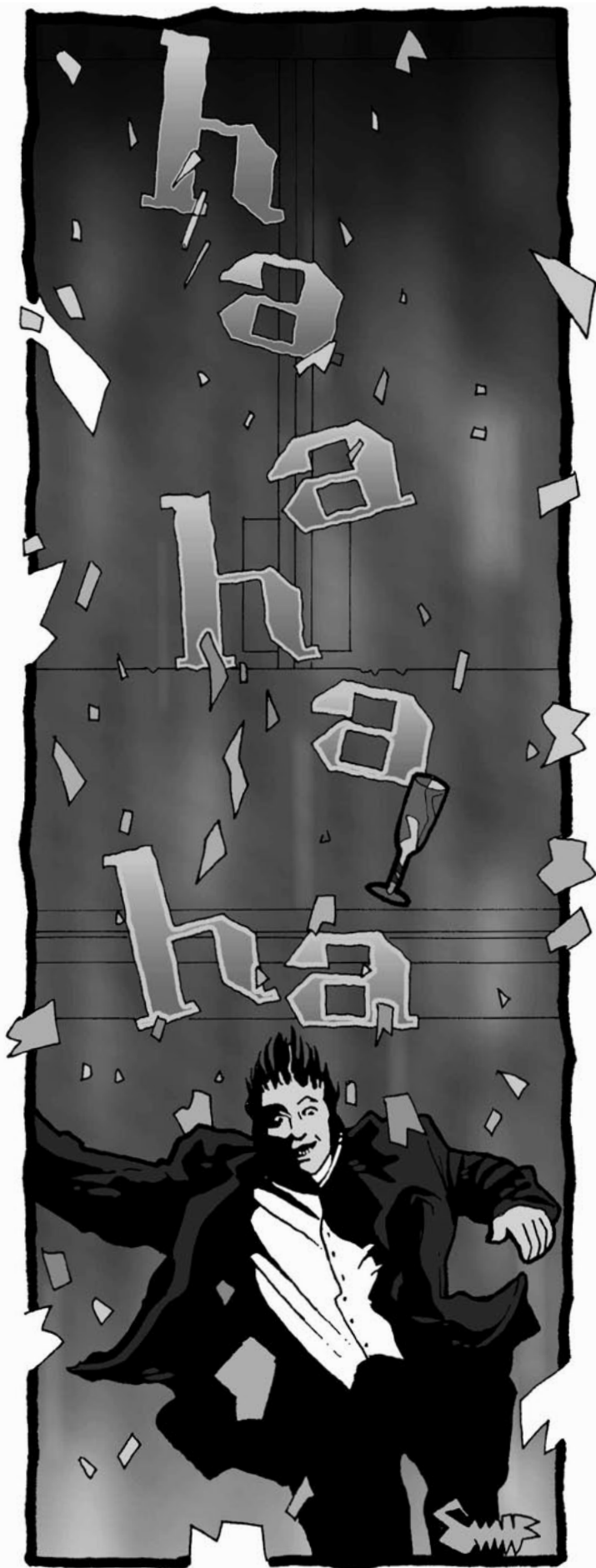
The GM should note that her story doesn't flow smoothly. Karen will take long pauses to collect herself, and her mind will sometimes wander, her speech following it into incoherence. She will also explain that both her lawyer and her doctors have advised against doing what she's doing now – pursuing a private investigation of her husband's death.

But she insists firmly that her husband was somehow literally not himself. She will ask the PCs for their rates of service, and try to meet them, but she has only $1,200 available in spendable savings, and will prefer to offer $60 a day. She will promise the party more money later, as she gets it, and will be willing to sign a contract to the effect that she can be billed for reasonable expenses. The GM should portray Karen as sympathetic, if necessary tugging personal strings of the characters to get them to agree to take her case. If the GM suspects his players will be especially resistant, Karen could be replaced by one of the heroes' dependents, or by a close friend of the party from previous adventures.

Ron Kessler's Death

The Kessler "suicide" is meant only as the adventure's teaser, so the GM shouldn't make it too challenging. It should draw the players in and pique their interest, not discourage them. The following are the likely avenues of investigation, and their potential results. Note that at some point after they go to the police, the PCs will be followed and attacked (see *Sergeant Henle*, below).

Rosalyn Kessler: Ron Kessler's mother was with the couple on the Saturday night that Kessler leaped to his death, and with Karen again later that night when she heard the news about her son. She lives in Maryland, just outside of the District, in a high-security apartment complex. She is unlikely to trust the investigators if they turn up cold, but will talk to them (reluctantly) if Karen calls ahead. She believes that Ron committed suicide, and possibly that he was mentally ill. She'll describe the day of the suicide: The trio had lunch at her apartment, then went into the city shopping, first in D.C.'s miniature Chinatown, and then onto Georgetown, where they parked at a distance and walked most of M street, hitting nearly every shop they could. While she remembers that they visited Emperor Baxley's, and that she found it unsettling and wanted to leave, it doesn't stand out as a relevant detail, and she had similar impressions of half the places they visited. Even if questioned directly about the shop, it will have to be described as "the occult pawnshop" or somesuch, since she doesn't remember the name. She *does* confirm Karen's assertion that Ron seemed happy and content with his life, but will likely not confide in the PCs with her true belief: that Ron was for some reason unhappy with his marriage. She blames Karen, but doesn't really acknowledge this consciously, herself.
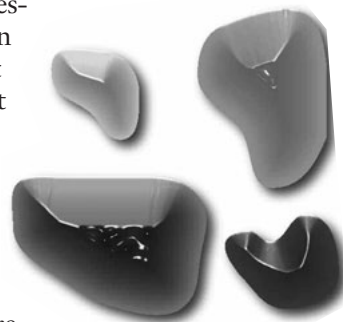
The City Police and/or Morgue: If the heroes are private investigators licensed in the state of Virginia, or have police Contacts that are appropriate, getting the information on the Kessler case will be reasonably simple. If they are simply independent operators, some "social engineering" will be necessary, possibly in the form of lies or bribes. This is one case where Karen will be of no real help; the police are already leery of Mrs. Kessler due to her steady hounding of them over the past week since the death was officially declared a suicide.

The official reports contain all the data on the body, but the body itself wasn't revealing. The fall killed Kessler; there were no unusual drugs present in the body, no injuries not attributable to the fall, and not even enough alcohol to count him as a drunk. But the police report *does* contain a vital clue: A few feet away from the body was the shattered remains of one of the knickknacks Kessler purchased in Georgetown: glass painted with many colors, which Karen identified as having been a small goblet. This is a detail that Karen remembers (Ron was clutching it throughout his tirade), but she didn't consider it important – it was just what he happened to be holding, as far as she is concerned. At this point, the heroes might agree.

If at any point the investigators decide that the glass is important (and they should, fairly soon), careful questioning will reveal two *other* recent cases where painted glass items were found near bodies. One was a car accident on the Capitol Beltway, where the dead driver had a painted shotglass in his *mouth*, and another was chalked up as a drug-related homicide, where one of the victims was carrying a painted-glass pipe. Investigation into that incident will reveal that the victim in question is the one who started the gunfight.

The Kessler Apartment: Shopping bags from the entire shopping trip can be found, but again, Baxley's place is just one of many. The bag might be useful later, however, since it has the address clearly printed on it. The Kesslers were comfortably middle class (Karen works at a nearby college library, Ron was a construction foreman), and their home reflected ordinary tastes, but contains no evidence of what might drive a man to suicide. Use of Psychometry in the living room or on the balcony will pick up a troubled "vibe" from the night of the suicide, and the Psi *will* get the impression that some other presence was at work, implying that Ron didn't kill himself of his own volition.

Other Tenants in the Building: The Kessler's had neighbors only on one side of their 12th-floor condominium: Kevin Wayler and his young wife, Yvonne. They are a polite couple, happy to be helpful, but they only remember that there was screaming next door, most of it Ron's. They will also point out that they had never heard that kind of yelling from their neighbors before.

The Stained-Glass Grail

The shards of glass found near Kessler's body are very significant, although this will not be immediately apparent to the party.

Several months ago, an impoverished youngster entered Baxley's emporium with the find of a lifetime: a large goblet made of multifaceted colored glass which seemed to capture and magnify ambient light. The youth explained that the goblet had once been the property of his great-grand-mother, who told him that she used its magic to help their family. The boy didn't believe in magic, but he believed in his electric bill, and was willing to part with it for a reasonable sum.

Baxley, raking over the strange goblet with a jeweler's loupe, didn't even haggle the asked price, fascinated as he was with the the material, which clearly wasn't glass, but some kind of fused collection of gems. He closed his shop early that evening, to take it upstairs to his apartment to examine it over a few beers. The first thing he did was to wash it out in the sink – it was still covered in cobwebs and dust.

When he poured the water out of it, it wasn't water anymore. What emerged from the goblet was like melted glass, but cool to the touch. Frightened but fascinated, Baxley found that he could mold the material into nearly anything, and that it would harden permanently after a few minutes.
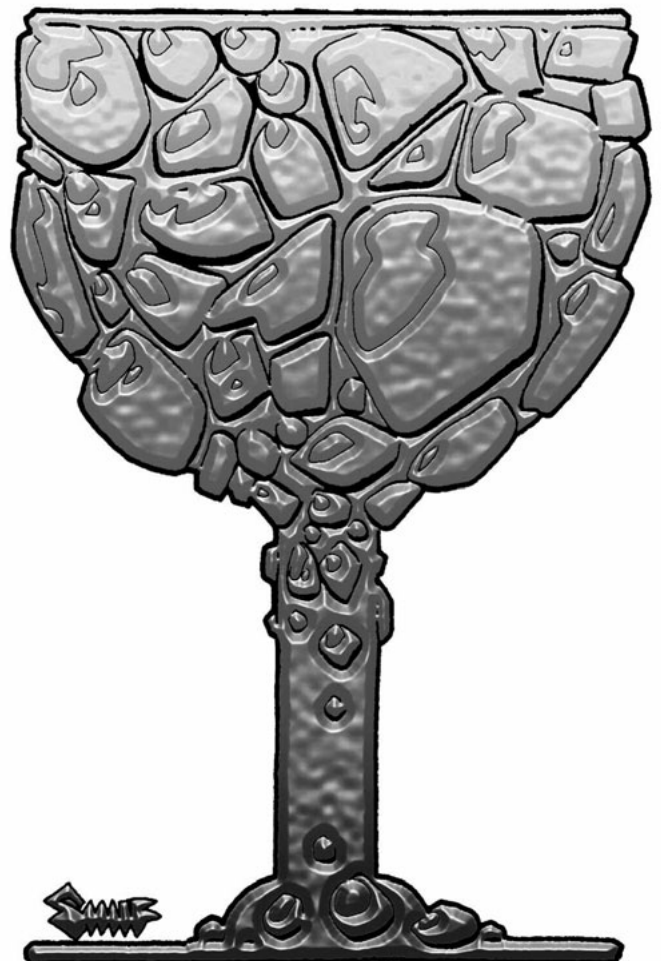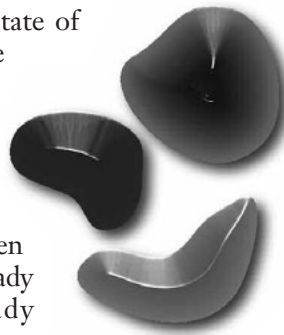
He also found, after he had saturated himself with alcohol and constructed half a dozen cups and crude statues, that by holding his "gemstone Grail" and concentrating, he could make his new glass artifacts glow with warm light. As the hours wore on, the goblet's magic reached out and touched Baxley's mind.

Baxley's "Grail" was an entity, an ancient product of alien sorcery from the days before the glory of Atlantis. Built originally to help form a network of communication between alien minds, it can be utilized by a human Telepath to reach out through its "glass" creations to read and control minds. Baxley was only a latent Psi, but that was enough.

Karl "Emperor" Baxley

Occult pawn-shop owner, black, age 43, 5'9", 260 lbs., impressive smile, wears boots, blue jeans, and an Irish sweater. Carries a riding crop and calls himself "emperor of the Occult World."

ST 8, DX 10, IQ 11, HT 10.

Basic Speed 5.0; Move 2 (Heavy Encumbrance from Fat disadvantage)

Dodge 2; Parry NA; Block NA

Damage: *Thrust* 1d-3; *Swing* 1d-2.

Armor: None

Advantages: Empathy, Danger Sense, Extraordinary Luck.

Disadvantages: Delusion ("I am reincarnated from all the great emperors of Rome"), Fat, Paranoia. Due to the influence of the Grail, Karl is even *more* insane, having gained the Sadism disadvantage.

Psi Powers: Through his "Grail," Baxley has the equivalent of Telepathy Power 21, with all Telepathy skills at 17 (see the *GURPS Basic Set,* chapter 20, or *GURPS Psionics*). These skills only work while Baxley is holding the Grail, and only work on subjects with one of his alien-glass creations either in hand or kept close on their persons (in a pocket will do).

Furthermore, the Grail lets him immediately sense when there are "victims" available (such as when anyone is touching one of his painted-glass pieces). The only other difference from the normal Psi rules is the nature of the Telecontrol: the victim has total memory of the events, but is *convinced that the decisions were his own.* Had Ron Kessler been interviewed as he dived to the blacktop, he would have rationalized his suicide on the way down.

The potential Telepathy power-level is actually much higher; Baxley is still becoming accustomed to the device.

Quirks: Affects an "imperious" air – including occasional dips into ridiculous melodrama; talks to his pet baby kangaroo; delights in his newfound power and actively seeks "worthy foes."

Notable Skills: Accounting-11, Computer Operation/TL7 -11, Detect Lies-10, Driving/TL7 (Automobile)-9, History -10, Hobby Skill (Book Restoration)-11, Hobby Skill (Glass Painting)-11, Literature-10, Merchant-14, Occultism-13, Sign Language (AMESLAN)-10.

Karl Baxley has long been regarded by his friends as a likable and only occasionally intolerable eccentric. Everybody *knows* he's crazy, and that his speeches about the glory of Rome are more than just fun, but he always seemed basically harmless before he purchased the Device from a down-on-his-luck collector who had no idea what it did.

When roleplaying Karl, the GM should slip into melodramatic tirades at random, then drop back into what is essentially reasonable speech. Throughout the adventure, note that his pawnshop is "Closed Due To Vacation" – Karl is addicted to his new power, and spends most of his waking hours in his apartment, using it.

Sergeant Henle

One of the policemen on the scene when Kessler jumped to his death was Sergeant Paul Henle. It was Henle who handled the broken glass goblet, and Henle who was responsible for bagging it and turning it over as evidence. Under the control of Emperor Baxley, he kept a single piece, and keeps it in his shirt pocket at all times. As a result, Karl has a policeman he can use.

In game terms, Paul Henle is an ordinary man: ST 10, DX 10, IQ 10, HT 10, with a Move (and all derivatives) of 5 and skills of 9 to 12 in ordinary modern things like driving and bicycling. He has Guns/ TL7 (Pistol)-13 and carries a standard issue .45 ACP. Nothing extraordinary, but the badge – and his subsequent ability to gain entry (or just respect) by intimidation – makes him a favorite of Karl's pawns. Karl *likes* playing cop.
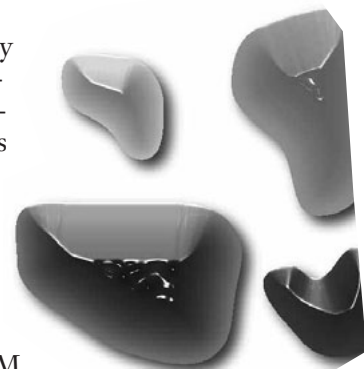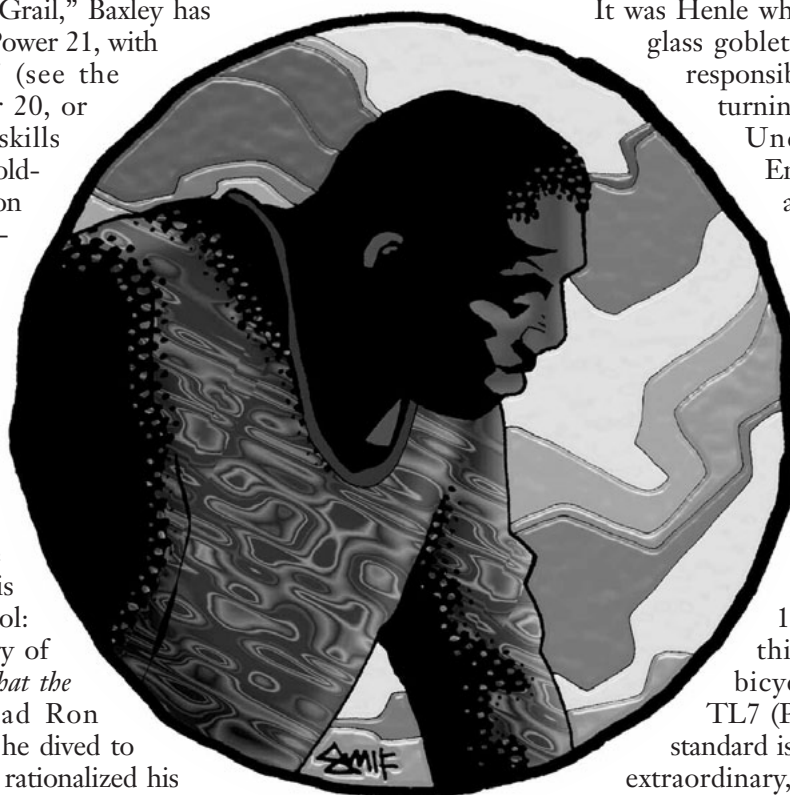
When the heroes go to the authorities to ask about Kessler's death, Sergeant Henle will be present. Henle will, at the time, be under the control of Emperor Baxley, who spends more and more time controlling the policeman.

After the investigators get the information they came for, Henle will follow from a distance, and pick an opportunity to try to kill them. Baxley is insane but not *stupid*, and he will play a waiting game if need be to get the heroes stopped, alone, and vulnerable – and then he'll open up with the pistol.

By this point, the concept that Kessler was possessed or controlled in some way should have definitely been in the air (a casual passer-by or nosy taxi driver will bring it up at some point, if the PCs are being especially thick). So, they should have a reason *not* to just dive for cover and return a hail of lead at the offending peace officer. The hard cover is a good idea, though. Henle will take it himself, when it comes time to reload. Ideally, Henle will be incapacitated and captured, but not killed. Again, ideally, the shard of glass in his shirt pocket should be found, providing a clue.

Keeping a captured or injured policeman will prove to be a major complication – if he's conscious, Baxley will speak through him, trying to manipulate the heroes to a place where he has other minions to ambush them, or (if he's feeling particularly playful) simply to humiliate them. If the cop is unconscious or dead, simply turning him *back* over to the authorities is a dangerous thing: when Henle awakes, he will try to justify his actions, even if he is uncontrolled at the time. And even if he never wakes up, explaining a dead or injured cop is trouble. Most likely, the party will have to keep him prisoner someplace for the duration.

The purpose of this encounter is threefold: First, it should clearly establish that the adventurers have a *foe*. The investigation is no longer a safe one. Second, it should hint that there is some link between what is happening and bits of painted glass. Finally, it puts two complicated things in the hands of the PCs: a cop who shouldn't be there, and a piece of the glass.

Roman Ruins

The line about destroying the Senate is a tease; Karl doesn't have any concern with the U.S. Government now that he is convinced he can start ruling the world directly. It's a reference to the *Roman* Senate, which "Emperor" Karl has a personal grudge against for reasons he could explain for hours. When the PCs encounter other pawns of Baxley, the GM should toss in more Roman references now and again. See **GURPS Imperial Rome** if you want to get detailed, but in a pinch Karl will just loudly complain about the ineptitude of the emperors that he's decided he isn't a reincarnation of.

Glass Pawns

Over the past few weeks, Karl has picked up a *lot* of potential pawns. He uses the glass-pouring properties of the Grail to churn out tons of tiny trinkets, which he then paints colorfully as a kind of "instant art" to sell inexpensively in his shop, and to other local vendors. As a result, he has literally hundreds of "agents" potentially under his control. By making his victims vocally declare the glass trinkets "lucky charms" while under his control, the rationalizing side-effects of the Grail's special Telecontrol insure that most people who own one of Baxley's painted-glass masterpieces keep it handy at all times . . .

This is a tool for the GM, who will need to improvise encounters as the investigation moves the heroes closer and closer to Baxley. Since Georgetown is visited by tourists of all kinds daily, any sort of person might conceivably have purchased or found one of the glass baubles.

All the GM needs to keep in mind is that everyone the PCs meet who are under Karl's control act like Karl. They *are* Karl. When they see a little old lady in a sun-bonnet shake her fist at them and shout "Drat!!!" in a villainous cackle, this should be a Big Clue that the possession line is the real one.

Karl is *seriously* Paranoid. Once he finds out that one of his killings is being investigated, he will become obsessed with the heroes. If they have a piece of his glass, he will attempt to control one of *them*.

At first, Karl will attempt to be subtle and murderous – not directly challenging the party, but trying to lead them into areas where he can hurt them. It won't be very long, however, before he just goes into a tirade. He will never actually identify himself (unless the players are at a total loss to track him down and the pacing needs a kick of adrenaline), but he will drop any pretense of being anything but somebody possessing the minds of his victims.

Note that the normal penalties to multiple Telecontrol attempts apply; Karl will have two or three simultaneous pawns at most, and usually only one at a time. His supply of people who own guns or other weapons is extremely short – but he has plenty of pawns who are capable of car chases and hit-and-run attempts!

Setting Up the Challenge

The GM should aim for a subtly creepy atmosphere. The investigators are being stalked by a madman's mind. Furthermore, they may have an increasingly large pile of tied-up bodies, and a boxful of colorful glass junk.

All of this should, in short order, lead the PCs directly to the lair of the enemy. Divination or psychic examination using the glass shards themselves can provide a direct route, if the GM is feeling generous – but remember that physical contact with the glass puts the psis in immediate peril of control.

More likely, interviews with victims will lead a painted-glass trail to Georgetown, and a showdown on M Street. In enough time to include some interesting encounters, but not so much time that it frustrates, the PCs should eventually find out that all that colored glass comes from Emperor Baxley's Pawn Shop.

Baxley's Emporium

A narrow two-story building sandwiched between a comic book store and a consignment clothes shop, the pawnshop has windows full of lurid esoterica, from used books of modern magic to cheap statuary, human skulls from medical supply houses, and crystal and pewter enough to supply the free world for decades. A sign on the door is written in flowing calligraphic script: *Closed Due to Vacation*. At night, the only light is on the second story, where Karl lives.

Ground Floor

The Front Door: Flaked green paint, with bars behind the windows. There is a +2 bonus to pick the lock; it's cheap and old. Note that breaking in through the windows works fine if the party has some way past the bars. Karl once bought an alarm system for insurance reasons, but it no longer works. He trusts some painted charms on the bars to protect him from theft, but they have no real magic in them whatsoever.

The Pawnshop: Emperor Baxley's Pawn Shop resembles a cross between an ordinary pawnbroker's and a crowded occult bookstore. If the PCs need to stock up on their aromatherapy supplies, used audiocassettes and video games, postcards featuring paintings of naked women wrapped around asteroids, wedding rings, or pewter unicorns, this is their chance (the total value of the jewelry – if sold at another pawn shop – comes to less than $800.00).

The GM should feel free to improvise if the PCs want to get a chuckle out of browsing, but the only really unusual thing they might notice is a large cat-bed with a blanket in it. Hanging over it is a recent photo of Karl hugging his pet baby kangaroo, Gimpy Shawn.

There is a display shelf full of colorful painted glass items: bowls, plates, goblets, pipes, picture frames, and more. These are all made from the alien glass, and touching them will alert Karl instantly, and open the person who touches them to control.

Behind the Counter: There is a 12-gauge under the counter, but it's cheap, and has been loaded with the same shells for seven years. Use the M870 stats (p. B209), but the gun has a malfunction number of 13. Also behind the counter is access to the many guns for sale (the keys are on Karl's personal key ring, but the glass is breakable). Baxley doesn't stock any ammunition, however. He directs any firearms customers to a local sporting goods store. Next to the shotgun is a small can of pepper-spray.

The Storeroom: Karl Baxley has, unwittingly, made himself a minor Secret Master. He has pawns, a plot to take over the world, and a miniature, private Warehouse 23. In addition to crates of more of the same junk found outside (including piles of stereos and televisions that Karl plans to someday sell for scrap), there are valuable things here . . . and dangerous things. If the heroes have the ability to detect magical or psychic emanations, they will find one or two of them here. They are unknown to Karl. The nature of what can be found is left to the GM, since any "magic items" introduced into a long-running campaign should be hand-picked. The Occult section of *GURPS Warehouse 23* can easily be mined for possibilities. Perhaps Karl got the Crystal Skull for $7.50 at a yard sale, or has Aaron's Rod propped up against the wall. Items such as the Crystal Bell and an Oracle Gem are more likely – and just as dangerous (see *Warehouse 23*, Chapter 3).

The Stairs: There is a single, wooden, unlocked door concealing this narrow stair. It leads upstairs, past a window and onto the apartment landing.

Upstairs Apartment

The Landing: The door here is unlocked.

The Livingroom/Kitchen: There is a desk here, with a personal computer and a dangerously leaning stack of new-age books on it. The computer is off, but (if it becomes important) is a pretty up-to-speed machine complete with a modem and Karl's account on a local net server. His password is kept conveniently in his communication software if anyone thinks to look. He has no email waiting. There is also a dingy couch, a beaten-up coffee table, a color TV set and VCR (the pick of the stock from downstairs – both very nice),
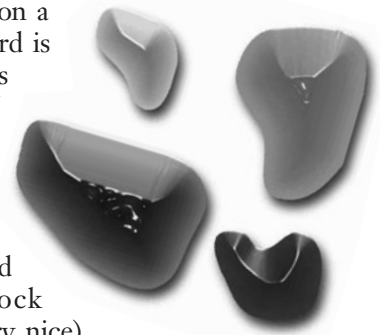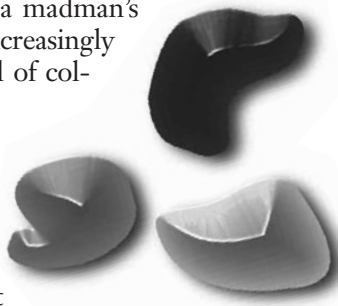
three different-colored lava lamps, and a kitchenette with a small stove and a microwave. Judging from the contents of the kitchen, Karl exists entirely on frozen convenience foods, fruit punch flavored soda, and Pop-Tarts.

When the heroes arrive at this area, Karl will be in the livingroom only if they had been clever enough to sneak in entirely unobserved. Considering the level of obsessive observation the party has been under, this would require some excellent planning. Most likely, Karl will be holed up in the bedroom ready to defend himself, with a mind-controlled drone sneaking up the steps behind the party carrying the shotgun from under the cash register (if the PCs didn't take it).

The Bathroom: An ordinary bathroom. The seat is up. The shower curtain has Snoopy on it.

The Bedroom: The Emperor is most likely here, sitting with his pet kangaroo (who looks either frightened or bored; it's hard to tell which), and holding the "Grail" in one hand and a Beretta 9mm in the other (remember that Karl uses guns at default). The bedroom itself contains bookshelves to the ceiling, books overflowing, clothes on the floor, and a large waterbed.

The Final Conflict

How the showdown runs depends entirely on the previous jockeying between the madman and the player characters. If Karl Baxley had his way, it would go exactly like this:

Phase One: The PCs, shadowed by a particularly skilled and dangerous pawn (one of the criminals or cops Karl can grab, if possible – somebody with their own gun and the skill to use it), break into the pawnshop and sneak their way up the stairs, thinking they have the drop on Karl.

Phase Two: Karl hits the PCs from both sides, catching them in a hail of skillfully-slung lead from both in front (when they open the bedroom door) and behind (from the ace-in-the-hole assassin). The last sight the pesky PCs see is Karl, grinning and pouring cool glass and playing with it.

Phase Three: The PCs' bodies are tossed into the nearby canal, and Karl goes on to systematically implement his plan to Rule the World.

What actually happens depends on the heroes. But keep in mind the penalty Karl will take for controlling the drone and firing his own gun. He's not likely to hit much. Another point to remember is the Grail itself – it's not impossible to target (-6 to be hit for size), and it's fragile. It has DR 1 and HT 2. A single point of damage past the DR will crack it; another will destroy it utterly. If that happens, even Karl will become merely eccentric again.

Wrapup, Ramifications, and Crossovers

There are many loose ends that need to be tied up. In an ongoing campaign, some of them can become major plot points. In a one-night adventure, they can be glossed over in the closing narration by the Game Master. The most important is the many scarred lives and deaths that the adventure will potentially produce. This isn't an adventure about bloodshed; it's about a single madman, and everybody else who attacks the PCs is an innocent victim. Hopefully, the heroes didn't blow them mindlessly away. If they did, show them a little less mercy in the final scene. He who lives by the sword . . .

But, keep it entertaining in any case.

If the Grail survives the encounter (and it's a great target for one of those final stray shots – give it a dramatic slow-motion death), then it's potentially dangerous not only to the campaign, but also to the PCs. It warps the intentions of the users. No longer a benevolent tool for communication, is is touched by the minds of the Dero (see *GURPS Warehouse 23*) who used it for evil. Whether it's "magic" or "super technology" is almost a moot point. It runs on life-giving Orgone energy, however, and Karl has taken the equivalent of nearly 200 rads of radiation damage from it! Anyone possessing the Grail takes a rad per day of exposure, because of the flow of negative Orgone.

The adventure can be retooled to any contemporary or futuristic setting, from *Autoduel* to *Space*, with no troubles. It even easily adapts to historical settings and fantasy campaigns – the only real difference is the TL of the weapons involved, and the way Ron Kessler died (a leap from the 12th floor is unlikely in medieval Prague). The PCs can also easily be policemen or government agents – anyone who might be called in to look at the curious nature of Ron Kessler's death.
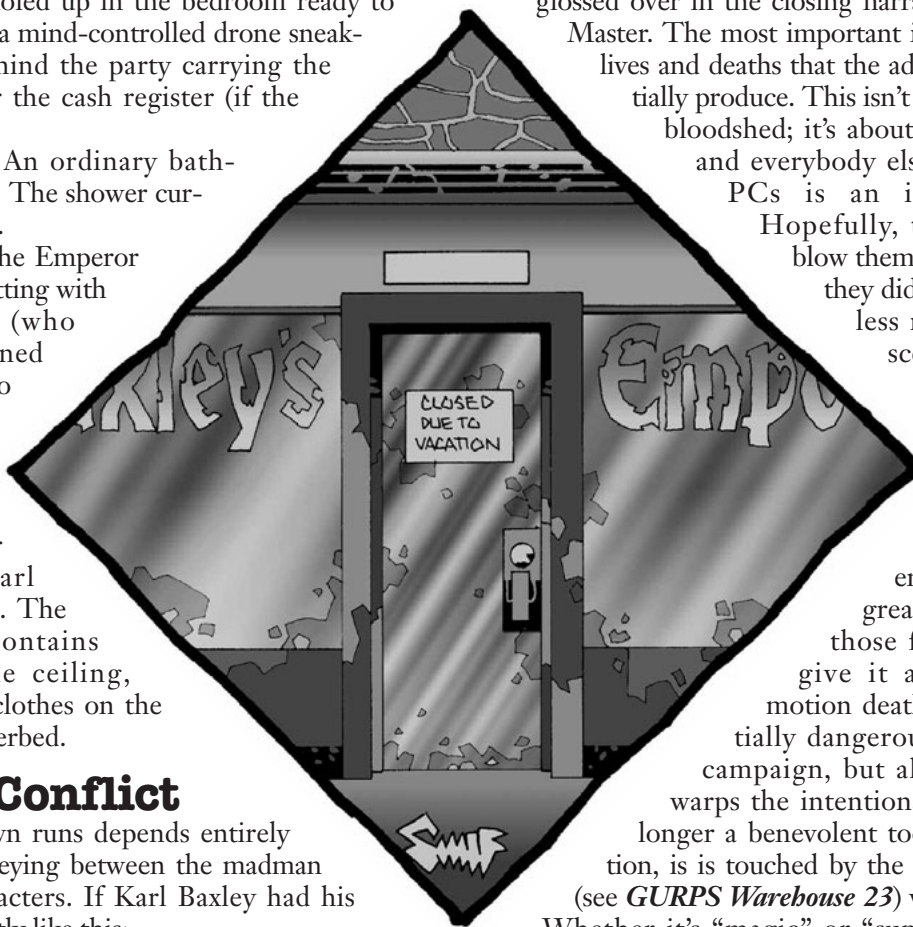
Gothic Surf Shop
by Mike Kelly

John picked up his surfboard. As was his usual custom, he headed for the beach. Big waves were predicted today, would last maybe a week. John touched his board in the middle, just a little tap, and watched the device he had installed pop out. He felt the sharpness of the blade; it protruded a good 12 inches from the front of his board. This weapon made him feel better about what he was going to do. Surfing in the morning was not an intelligent thing to do, especially before the sun came up. The radio and paper was full of stories about surfers who were found out there in the ocean, not quite whole any more. John knew that with this weapon attached to the front of his surfboard he had nothing to worry about at all. He recalled what the picture of one of these dead surfers had looked like in the holocube. Real dead. Parts missing. Two punch marks in the neck as if a vampire had bitten him. The look of painful death in his eyes. A real painful death. John was convinced that he would not die this way. Somewhere in the distance the roar of the surf could be heard. It was time to go ride the waves . . .

This adventure for **GURPS Cyberpunk** centers around the grisly death of John, who never returns from his morning surf. John should be a friend of the PCs or other acquaintance that will make them feel obligated to become involved when what is left of him washes up on shore in Huntington Beach, California. Characters of 150 points are assumed. Useful advantages would be Danger Sense and Intuition. Useful skills would be weapons skills, Streetwise, Swimming, and Sports (Surfing).

Sports (Surfing) — **Physical/Average**
Defaults to DX-5

This is the ability to ride a surfboard standing up on an ocean wave. A roll must be made every 10 minutes (or every hazardous situation); a failed roll means that you fall off your board. A Swimming roll should be made if the surfer does fall off. No roll is needed for riding small waves while on your stomach.
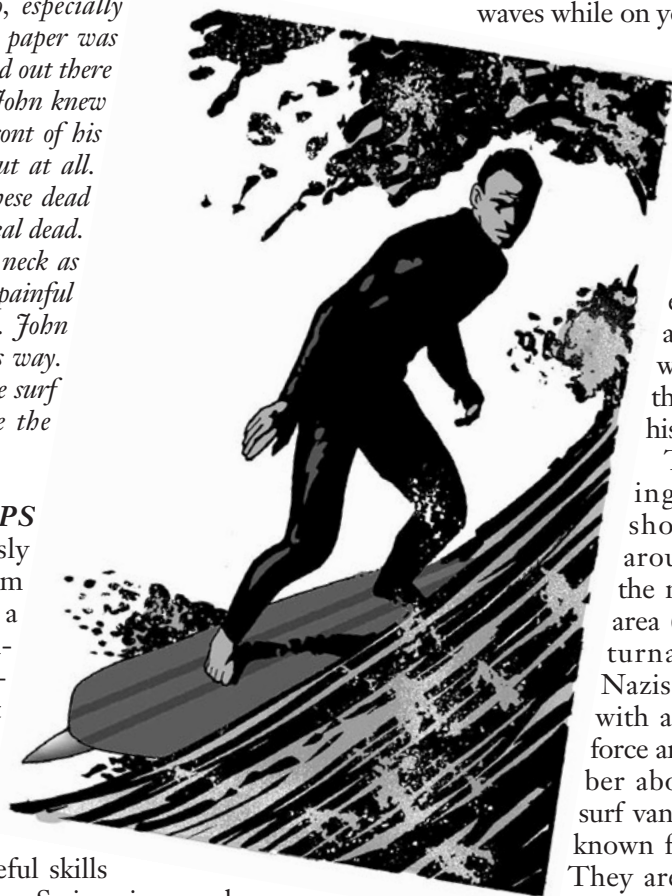
The first clue of John's cause of death would be the two puncture wounds in his neck – classic vampire stuff. The other wounds could be explained by gunfire and the use of edged weapons. A major clue is the grisly bat carved into his left ankle.

The adventurers probing into John's death should eventually come around to inquiring with the main street gang in the area (and John's fellow nocturnal surfers), the Surf Nazis. They rule the beach with a combination of brute force and firearms. They number about 10, own a beat-up surf van painted black, and are known for their weapon skills. They are armed with machine pistols and stun wands (p. CY46).

The Surf Nazis are best known for their expert surfing, and for handling nearly all situations with violence. The details of John's murder and the grisly symbol carved into his ankle do not match their modus operandi, however. If someone successfully combines Streetwise with Fast-Talk, the Surf Nazis will turn out to be better sources of local rumors and other information than suspects.

The Golden Bear

After the investigators question (or even gain the trust of) the Surf Nazis, they should notice – or have pointed out to them – that the symbol carved into John's ankle is gang related. The most likely gang would be the "Carmirita" – an all-girl punk gang that only comes out to play at night. Their usual hangout is a dive called the Golden Bear. The players are warned that these "ladies" must be handled with extreme caution.

When the heroes investigate the Golden Bear, check everyone's Danger Sense. If the roll is successful, tell them that the place makes their skin crawl.

The Golden Bear is located on Main Street, near the ocean. It is an old two-story brick building standing alone about 20 feet from Jack's Surf Board shop. The condition of the building is not good – it has a look of almost Gothic horror about it, and is definitely out of place compared to the strip mall across the street. If the adventurers show good sense, they will approach the building in the daytime.

The front door of the Golden Bear is locked, and a sign states that normal business hours are from 6:30 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. In smaller writing can be made out "from dusk to dawn only," scrawled in a blood-red liquid. All entrances to the building are securely locked: a roll against Lockpicking skill will be needed to break in.

Inside the Golden Bear, all is pitch-black (total darkness). If the PCs bring a flashlight, they can navigate around the inside of the building with ease. If the group does not bring along any kind of light, have them make a roll against DX at -5 every turn that anyone tries to navigate around in the utter darkness. If they fail, a fall will do 1d-3 cr damage.

The inside of the building is in little better shape than the outside. Rats, cobwebs, and other Gothic horror-type stuff abound, and the whole thing looks like an old burial crypt. Cheap thrills can be milked from this (a black cat jumps out at the wrong time, for example) if desired.

In a careful search, a trap door can be found in the kitchen floor. This swings upward on a pair of rusty hinges. Opening the door will alert the inhabitants of this building that they have visitors. If the adventurers haven't figured it out yet, this building is the nesting ground for a vampire clan.

The party will then be attacked by 1d of the Lesser Cybervamps (see stats on p. 127). These Lesser Cybervamps are trying to drive the explorers off, not necessarily kill them (but if somebody should get unlucky, that's a bonus). If the setup requires more Lesser Cybervamps to do the job – use them!

The party will notice – as they run for their lives – that the Cybervamps are all strikingly beautiful females. They are all very pale and have dark hair, almost black in color.

Once the explorers are back in daylight, the Cybervamps will break off the attack. The conclusion should be obvious: the all-girl gang Carmirita is, in reality, a group of vampires. Let the adventurers try to figure out how to deal with them as they may, but the Carmirita will remain holed away by day and elusive by night. (If the bar is staked out, then every so often at night a beautiful woman in a pale-blue evening gown can be seen floating on the wind high overhead. She is heading toward the ocean. In the morning, another grisly corpse of a foolish surfer will be found washed up on shore, the twin holes in the neck and carved symbol of a bat easily found.)

Eventually, a visit to the Golden Bear during business hours will be in order.

Huntington At Night

This small beach community takes on a different personality in the evening hours. The once-busy streets are now vacant, and most residents have locked themselves in their homes. All doors are bolted shut and locked, and only the shadows and the denizens of the night remain. The investigators should be encouraged to enlist the aid of the Surf Nazis to protect them while in the area during the evening hours. Otherwise, make their travels much tougher.

Gothic Surf Shop

When the party eventually enters the Golden Bear, dim red light will be visible from all the windows, and the front door will be wide open. A beautiful woman will ask for identification. She is wearing a red evening gown and will have a glint of mystery in her eyes. She will smile at the group, though they should have no idea why. After checking IDs, she will let them in. No one will try to restrict the party in any way, though they do draw more than their share of not-so-casual glances. Almost everyone in the joint is similar to the woman at the door – very attractive, very well-dressed, very pale, and very female.

The Trap Is Sprung

After an initial hesitant reception, the PCs will be approached by more and more of the women, offering to purchase the men (or even the women) drinks, play pool or otherwise party with them. One by one, they will try to lure the players into the bedrooms upstairs. If they fall prey to the bait, they will be killed. Smart players will realize what is happening and try to fight them as a team. If anyone brought along typical vampire-hunting weapons, they will have no effect at all. If they check to see if the women have a reflection in a mirror, the women indeed do. A running gun battle (or some other dramatic escape) out of the Golden Bear is in order.

Out of the Fire

Upon escaping from the Golden Bear, the players may have learned who the enemy is and even what the enemy *isn't*. The women have fangs and several nasty habits, but they are not supernatural creatures, and especially not vampires. (They are cyberenhanced humans with implanted fangs, but there's little way for the players to figure that out until the adventure is over. The floating woman at night will turn out to be a holographic decoy. The real cybervamps use an underground passage to leave and enter the Golden Bear on their forays.)

Any attack should be made during daylight hours, hopefully with the Surf Nazis' help. Under the trap door in the kitchen floor the players will find the lair of the cybervamps. Once again, when the door is disturbed the guarding Lesser Cybervamps will attack.

Into the Frying Pan

Inside the cellar are 26 coffins. Each one contains a sleeping cybervamp. If the party tries to kill them one at a time, they will awaken and fight back – and these are Master Cybervamps, not the Lesser Cybervamps found in the kitchen. A better choice may be explosives or fire. The club building is old and would burn very easily. If some of the "vamps" get away, the work is not yet done – not being true vampires, they have no vulnerability to sunlight. They are just as mean in the daylight.

Destroying the "vampires" ends the adventure. Possible rewards for the party are the Surf Nazis as contacts/allies, and any cyber equipment that survives the finale.

The Cast

Master Cybervamps:

ST 14 **DX** 12 **IQ** 12 **HT** 16
Speed 7 **Move** 7 **Dodge 7**

Skills: Brawling-13, Stealth-13, Shadowing-12, Sex Appeal-10, Voice-12, Acting-14, Streetwise-12, Fast-Talk-10, Judo-12.

Advantages: Voice, Empathy, Night Vision, Peripheral Vision, Rapid Healing, Acute Vision+3, Acute Hearing+3, Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: Addiction (Human Blood), Bloodlust, Sadism, Major Delusion (Believe they are real vampires)

Cybernetic Enhancements: Flesh pocket, silver tongue, Cyberarms (PD 4, DR 8) with claws (2d+3 cutting, 1d+3 impaling).

The most powerful cybervamps, they have the most enhancements to their bodies and many of them believe that they really are vampires in need of human blood.

Lesser Cybervamps:
ST 10 **DX** 8 **IQ** 6 **HT** 8
Speed 4 **Move** 4 **Dodge 4**
Skills: Brawling-11, Stealth-10, Sex Appeal-10, Streetwise-12, Fast-Talk-10, Judo-12.
Advantages: Night Vision, Peripheral Vision, Rapid Healing, Acute Vision+1, Acute Hearing+1, High Pain Threshold.
Disadvantages: Addiction (Human Blood), Bloodlust, Sadism, Major Delusion (Believes they are real vampires)
Cybernetic Enhancements: Cyberarms (PD 2, DR 6) with claws (2d+3 cutting, 1d+3 impaling).

A less-enhanced version of the Master Cybervamps, but still a foe to be reckoned with. They were at one time area residents, but are now servants of the Master Cybervamps.

The Surf Nazis
ST 11 **DX** 10 **IQ** 8 **HT** 10
Speed 5 **Move** 5 **Dodge** 5
Skills: Brawling-12, Area Knowledge (Huntington Beach)-12, Stealth-13, Streetwise-12, Knife-12, Drive (Truck)-11, Fast Draw (Pistol)-12, Running-10, Gun (Machine Pistol)-12 Throwing-12, Carousing-10 Swimming-12, Shortsword-10, Sports (Surfing)-14.
Advantages: Luck, Strong Will+1, Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Danger Sense.
Disadvantages: Social Stigma, Alcoholism, Bully.
Cybernetic Enhancements: All wear medium monocrys body armor with PD 2, DR 16. Cyber eyes, +2 vision bonus, cyberlegs that increase Move and Dodge by +3.

Many would have suspected them to be the killers, but if treated correctly they are the only people strong enough to deal with the cybervamps on equal terms. They have the firepower and – most importantly – the contacts with other surf punk gangs. If need be, they could contact the other surf gangs and rally them against the cybervamps.

The GM should note that these surf gangs, the Nazis in particular, live by a code of violence. They will shoot first, then ask questions later. This rule especially is true for "outsiders" who come from other areas into their "turf." They also may show little patience for good tactics, such as surveillance or less than bullheaded assaults on the Golden Bear. They're as likely as not to foul up any plans dependent on guile.

Once the immediate threat of the cybervamps is dealt with, the relationship between the investigators and Surf Nazis may be subject to radical change . . .

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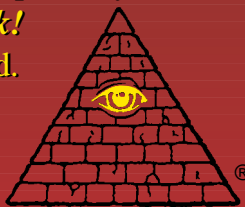
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