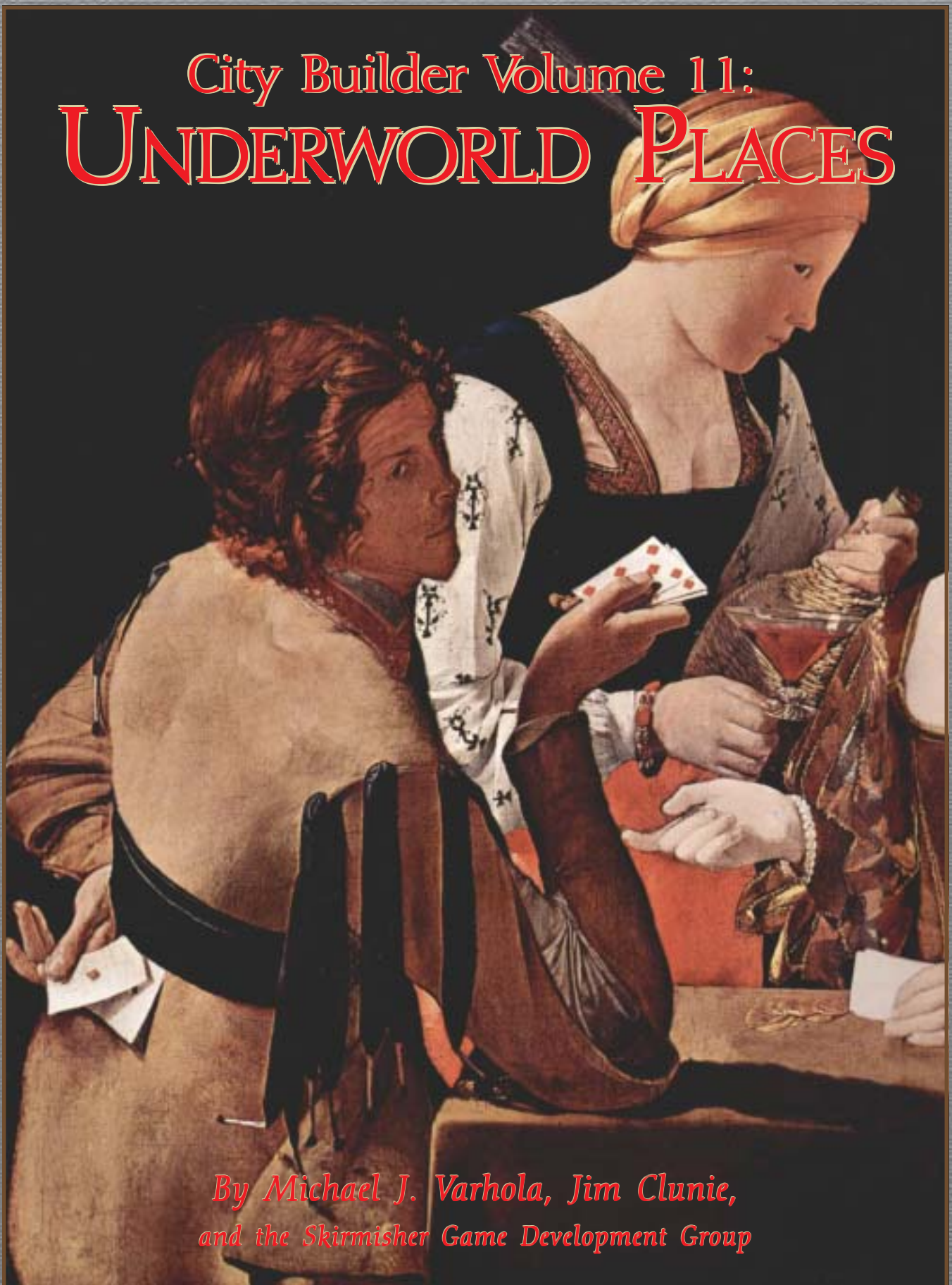
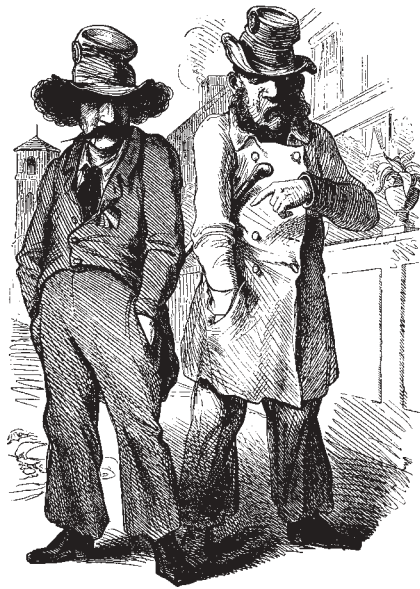


City Builder Volume 11:
UNDERWORLD PLACES



*By Michael J. Varhola, Jim Clunie,
and the Skirmisher Game Development Group*

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Viewing This Book

This book has been designed to be as user-friendly as possible from both the perspectives of printing out for use in hard copy and viewing on a computer screen. It has been laid out like a traditional print book with the idea that each even-numbered page complements the odd-numbered page that it should face (e.g., the illustration of the brothel denizens on page 7 is set up to face and illustrate the Brothel entry on page 6).



With the above in mind, the optimal way to view and enjoy this book would be to print it out and organize it in a binder so that the pages are arranged as described above. This is by no means necessary, however, for using and fully benefiting from *City Builder Volume 11: Underworld Places* and its contents.

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A Street in Old Cairo, Jean-Baptiste-Adolphe Gibert (1803-1889)

Introduction

Underworld places of various sorts cater to the unsavory or illegal needs and desires of a society's members. Adventurers might have any number of reasons for visiting such places, from taking a walk on the wild side to conducting business with the sorts of people who frequent them. Indeed, characters with certain occupations — or inclinations toward criminal or immoral activities — might even spend a significant amount of their non-adventuring time in such places. Roleplaying some of the activities associated with underworld places can contribute to a lively game, add a new dimension to scenarios, and allow for some interesting and lively interactions. Such episodes can also allow characters to utilize skills that they might not routinely have the opportunity to use in the field (e.g., sensing the motives of others, deceiving or intimidating them, or excelling in nefarious contests such as games of chance).

Various kinds of underworld places are likely to be found in communities ranging in size from hamlets to megalopolises; where people congregate in groups of any size, it is likely that some will cater to the illicit needs of the others.

While many underworld places are devoted to activities that are actually illegal, some are venues for practices that are merely considered sleazy or immoral. Some underworld places of these sorts might be suffered to exist only in designated areas or be limited in to whom they can provide their services (e.g., brothels in a particular port city might be prohibited from serving anyone but non-residents).

Underworld places that characters might visit in the course of their inter-adventure activities include brothels, gambling dens, pit-fighting arenas, and thieves' and assassins' guilds, all of which are described in this volume.

Many of the legitimate businesses described elsewhere in the *City Builder* series might also have unlawful underworld counterparts, operate in conjunction with criminal activities, or serve as fronts for them. In societies where intoxicants are prohibited, for example, any existing taverns would necessarily be illicit and secretive. Other underworld institutions might essentially conform to the characteristics of legal counterparts, e.g., fences, a likely destination for characters of a larcenous nature, tend to operate pretty much like Brokerages and Pawnbrokerages, as described in *City Builder Volume 6: Mercantile Places*; criminals sometimes patronize hidden fanes to deities whose teachings favor their activities; particularly well-established power groups of the underworld, such as thieves' guilds, might gather in meeting-places that resemble the legislatures or audience chambers of legitimate government.

Underworld places, by definition, are often run by criminals of various sorts — depending on the enter-

prise in question, these might include thugs, thieves, assassins, pimps, and prostitutes. Characters of any background or vocation, however, might be associated with underworld places of specific types or under particular circumstances (e.g., a scofflaw brewer might be the proprietor of a bootleg tavern, cashiered officers or deserters from the military might serve as enforcers at any such institutions).

Depending on the goods, services, or functions they provide — along with whether those are actually illegal or merely unsavory — underworld places can vary widely in size, construction, and appearance. Many will be established in structures similar to those described under “Buildings” in *City Builder Volume 1: Communities* (e.g., a brothel in a city might operate out of a townhouse, while one in a village might be run out of a wattle-and-daub longhouse).

Furnishings at underworld places will be appropriate to their functions, such as beds or couches in a brothel. Other items might include equipment of the sorts used at the places in question, such as appropriate sorts of weapons or protective gear at a pit-fighting arena, gaming tables in a gambling den, and the like. What such places usually do not include, especially if they are actually illegal in nature, are records or other things that could prove a connection between them and their owners or clients (and, to the extent that such records do exist, they are often to the detriment of those they implicate and are thus likely to be encoded or well hidden).

Security at underworld places, particularly from the legal or moral forces opposed to them, is paramount. The first line of defense at many such locations is that their existence is not obvious or that they are disguised to look like — or make a plausible case in a court to be — something other than what they really are (e.g., to passersby, a particular brothel might look like nothing more than a members-only bathhouse, or its function

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might be quite obvious only to a knowledgeable observer). Fear of incurring the wrath of local organized crime organizations, or of corrupt members of law enforcement agencies who have been subverted and paid to protect them, is another significant safeguard enjoyed by many such places. Other measures are likely to include secret doors, passageways, and chambers; barred windows and reinforced doors; and the presence of armed thugs. Magical safeguards, to the extent that they exist in the milieu in question, will likely be rare at underworld places but might be present if one of the proprietors is a spellcaster of some sort.

Whether the proprietors and personnel associated with various underworld places also dwell in them varies by their type. A brothel might also be home to the prostitutes who work there, for example, but a pit-fighting arena might have no place for accommodations and be completely unoccupied when not in use.

About This Series

This is the eleventh volume in a series of 11 books designed not just to provide Game Masters with concrete information about how to create places essential to their own role-playing campaigns, but also to inspire them to develop ones that are believable, colorful, and exciting for their players' characters to visit.

City Builder Volume 11: Underworld Places examines venues associated with criminals and the seamy underside of society. Places of this sort that adventurers might visit for business or pleasure include Brothels, Gambling Dens, Pit-Fighting Rings, and Thieves' Guilds.

While it is a generic resource not keyed to a particular system of rules, *City Builder Volume 11: Underworld Places* has also been written so as to be fully compatible with the various Skirmisher Publishing LLC d20 publications, including *Experts v.3.5*, *Tests of Skill*, and *Warriors*.

Using This Book

Each section in this book contains a description of the place to which it is devoted. It includes such things as the kinds of communities in which the place might be found, the kinds of leaders, proprietors, and staff associated with it, and the sorts of goods, services, or other things that characters might visit the place to obtain.

Following the description are one or more adventure hooks that are designed to describe interactions beyond the normal operations of the place that might be of interest to player characters.



Brothel

Brothels are places designed to provide prostitutes with places to meet, negotiate with, and engage in sex acts with customers. Such places are also variously known — in some cases somewhat euphemistically — as bordellos, cathouses, bawdyhouses, houses of ill repute, houses of prostitution, knocking shops, pleasure houses, sporting houses, and whorehouses.

Brothels of various sorts have existed around the world — especially in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and South Asia — for much of recorded history and were often associated in these regions with the sacred temple prostitution of love goddesses like Astarte, Ishtar, and Aphrodite. By 594 B.C., licensed secular institutions of this sort had been established in Athens by the statesman Solon with an eye toward creating a source of public revenue and reducing problems caused by sexually unfulfilled transients like sailors. These first official brothels were followed soon after by many others throughout the Greek and Roman societies and even led to the development of special schools that trained prostitutes of various sorts in their trade.

While such places are illegal in many modern societies, brothels will likely be legal throughout much of a typical ancient, medieval, or fantasy game milieu. Even if they are not actually against the law, however, such houses of ill repute will generally be held in very low regard and might be required to operate only in designated areas — often called red-light districts, tolerance zones, or stews — or keep a low profile (or voluntarily deem it is in their best interests to do so). Legal brothels might also be subject to strict regulations that could include heavy taxation and periodic health inspections.

Brothels can take a wide variety of forms and sizes. A great many will be established in existing structures of the sorts typically used by businesses in the campaign setting in question and might conform to the characteristics of the structures described under “Buildings” in *City Builder Volume 1: Communities*.

Many such places will include an area where customers can relax, await their turns with a prostitute, select one or more from those currently available, and perhaps take refreshments, socialize with others, or engage in other activities (e.g., play cards or dice). Beyond this area will typically be rooms used by individual prostitutes — possibly customized according to their particular tastes or specialties — and perhaps other areas designed for groups or any number of special purposes. Other brothels will consist entirely of small

rooms, open to the street or off of interior hallways in buildings. These are usually arranged so that customers can easily view the occupants of each chamber, immediately see which are currently available, and speak or negotiate with them as needed.

Brothels might also be affiliated with other institutions for a variety of reasons — which might include use as cover or complementary functions — and this could ultimately affect the forms they take. Examples include taverns, inns, bathhouses, and temples of sects that practice ritual prostitution.

Proprietors of brothels are generally professional madams — often themselves former or current prostitutes — pimps, thugs, or other criminals, or characters associated with one of the places with which a brothel might be affiliated (e.g., the priestess of a sex cult).

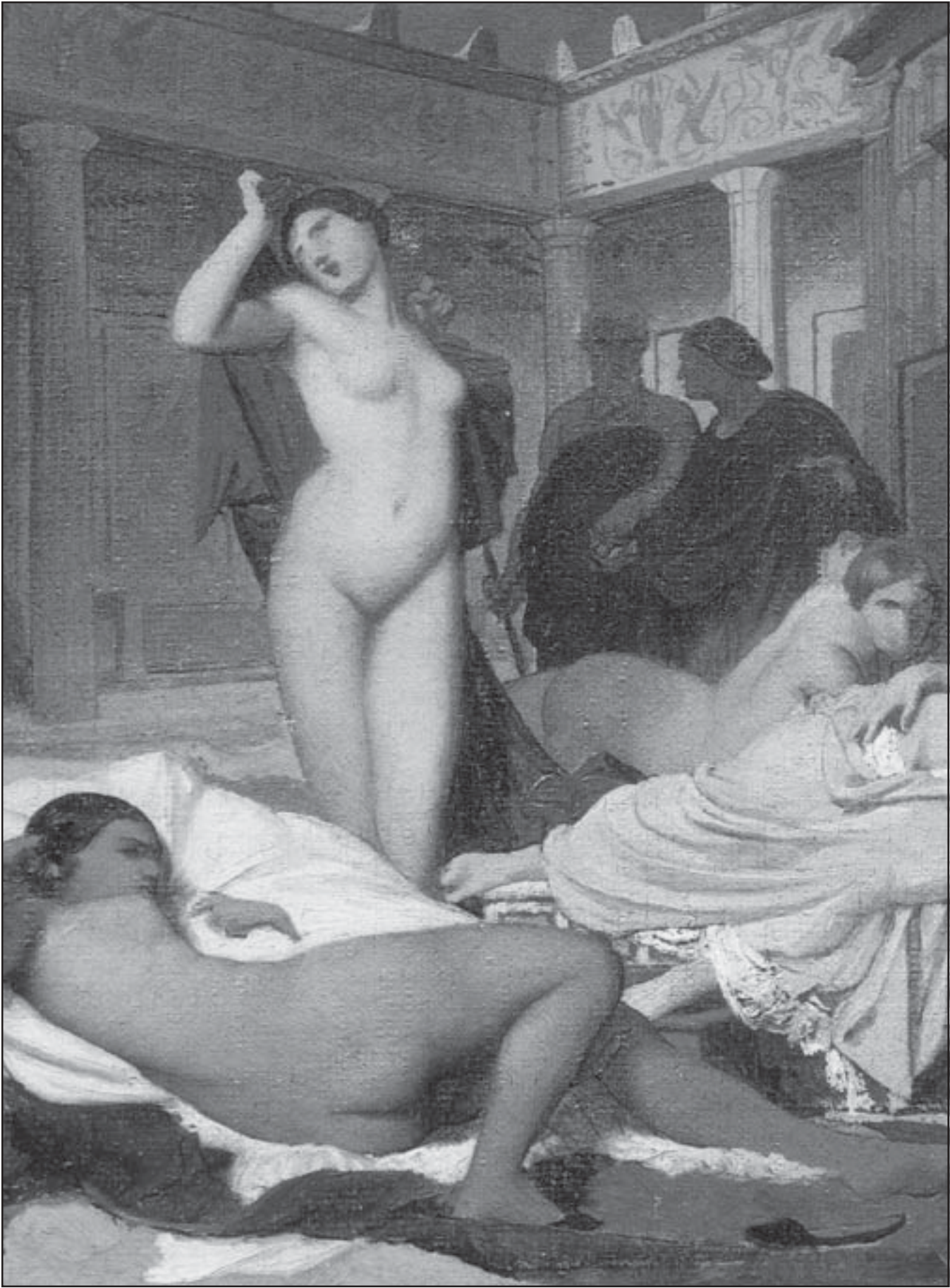
Prostitutes might have one of several relationships with the brothels at which they work. In some, prostitutes are employed by the establishment and are paid a modest salary that is enhanced by bonuses based on their productivity. In others, prostitutes are freelancers who pay a fee to the brothel for the use of its facilities, negotiate on their own with clients, and then keep the entirety of their earnings for themselves. And in many — especially in areas where brothels are illegal and run covertly — prostitutes are simply enslaved and forced to work, receiving little or nothing in return.

Security at brothels is often provided by hoodlums or other sorts of guards. Prostitutes and their panderers also often keep various sorts of weapons close to hand in the event that they are menaced or attacked by clients or refused payment by them.

Adventure Hooks

* A mischievous and greedy but otherwise willing prostitute at a brothel might give a hard-luck story to gullible-looking clients about being forced into selling herself, in hopes they will give her more money. If convincingly told to the wrong character, however, such stories might inadvertently lead to any number of unfortunate consequences (e.g., misguided rescue attempts).

* Enlisting a party of adventurers to protect them in an underworld war with a new criminal organization, the harlots’ guild can provide not only gold but also a good deal of expertise in gathering and passing along information from a surprising range of influential citizens.



Greek Interior [sketch], Jean-Léon Gérôme (1848)

Gambling Den

Gambling dens are places where people can go to play games of chance for money, using a variety of random methods like cards, dice, tiles, coins, wheels, drawing of numbered balls, or betting on public information such as the value of trade in a central market. Different kinds of places primarily dedicated to gambling might be called casinos, gambling parlors, or betting shops, and are sometimes described by the most popular games played in them (e.g., fan-tan houses, card rooms). The operators of the gambling den, known as the “house,” always profit by favorable odds and, particularly if unregulated, may even augment their advantage by various forms of cheating.

Many well-known gambling games have a long history, with dice found in the 5,000-year-old Burnt City site in Iran and numerous civilizations since — most notoriously throughout the Roman Empire — and a keno-style lottery having been established in China in the second century A.D. Famous gambling houses and gambling enclaves include the Long Branch Saloon in Dodge City, Kansas, flashpoint of the Dodge City War in 1883, the Grand Casino of Monte Carlo, and the casino precincts of Las Vegas, Atlantic City, and Macau. In fantasy, Jack Vance’s *Cugel the Clever* plays — and cheats — at many exotic gambling games.

Activities at a gambling den are quite often accompanied by liquor or other intoxicants and the presence of professional companions plying their trade (particularly toward high rollers or those with ample cash). Gaming might also very well be among the side attractions offered at a tavern or brothel, and the line between some such institutions and gambling dens might be very blurry.

A closely associated profession is that of the bookmaker, who makes his living by taking bets at carefully calculated odds on various kinds of contests or on notable events. Such characters frequently employ a complicated array of arrangements for taking and paying out on bets to avoid both arrest and robbery, especially when such activities are prohibited by local law. Any events that attract bets, such as races or gladiatorial fights (q.v.), typically have their entourage of bookmakers to cater to whatever proportion of the spectators are interested in wagering on them.

The activities of gambling dens are often not explicitly restricted by law, and in some instances may even be promoted by the government to raise revenue or to support some side benefit (e.g., improving the breed-

ing of horses as a result of racing). The large profits possible from rigged games or contests, however, almost inevitably attract the attention of organized criminals.

Gambling appeals to many sorts of people — whether because of the excitement of the game itself, the competitive urge to defeat a rival, greed for gain, or some other motivation — and a wide variety of fantasy races and communities might thus have gambling dens. Even a small rural village might have a gaming house, racecourse, or cock-pit, in which case most of the local notables and officials likely are regular patrons. Cities generally house numerous establishments of this sort, typically of different recognized kinds that each cater to a particular class or racial group (e.g., aristocrats, tourists, the middle class, the poor). These typically vary greatly in their social acceptance — and subsequent susceptibility to raids by the law — and favor a single game or restricted range of events corresponding to the available income, morals, and preferences of their typical visitors.

Places where the reach of the law remains loose or ambiguous favor the spread of gambling establishments, whether the poorer and rougher quarters of cities favored by immigrants; frontier regions where government is still in a state of development; or enclaves and small dependent nations which, due to historical peculiarities, combine both variant codes of law and a pressing need for extra income. Proprietors with significant funds might also create gambling dens that reside beyond easy reach of legal authority (e.g., large ships anchored offshore), or even a far-distant place connected by some magical means of transportation or communication that is nonetheless convenient enough for patrons to visit or for them to place bets and collect their winnings.

Gambling dens are often plain, nondescript structures of the sorts described under “Buildings” in *City Builder Volume 1: Communities*, although some might have been built as taverns, halls, or for some other large-scale use (e.g., palaces). Their proprietors tend to transform the appearance of such places using decor that can be applied quickly for great visual effect, such as brightly painted or illuminated pieces (e.g., large but flimsily-built figurines or models of a fanciful or garish nature), mirrors, gilt, crystal, and fine furniture of polished wood and velvet plush. Various devices are typically used to record and possibly display odds offered



The Cardsharps, Caravaggio (c. 1596)

Gambling Den

and bets made, such as chips, tickets, marked tables, or chalkboards. The clatter of dice and chips, calls of obscure gaming terms, and the clamor and shouts of excited patrons also generally fills such establishments and contributes to their unique ambience.

In addition to places always used for gambling, promoters might arrange one-off games of higher stakes and prestige in their homes or other locations, and players and small operators might set up games anywhere, from the streets to wherever they are required to wait around for some unrelated purpose (e.g., while on transport ships, in barracks).

Gambling in the street, however, often suffers from even greater-than-usual legal restrictions, as the authorities often regard it as an especially disruptive and disreputable form of this activity (or because the players of such games are poor, lack influence, and thus make convenient scapegoats for a display of moral indignation). Such games, particularly those played in an ostentatious fashion by strangers, are also sometimes used as ploys to set up passersby to be defrauded or even mugged.

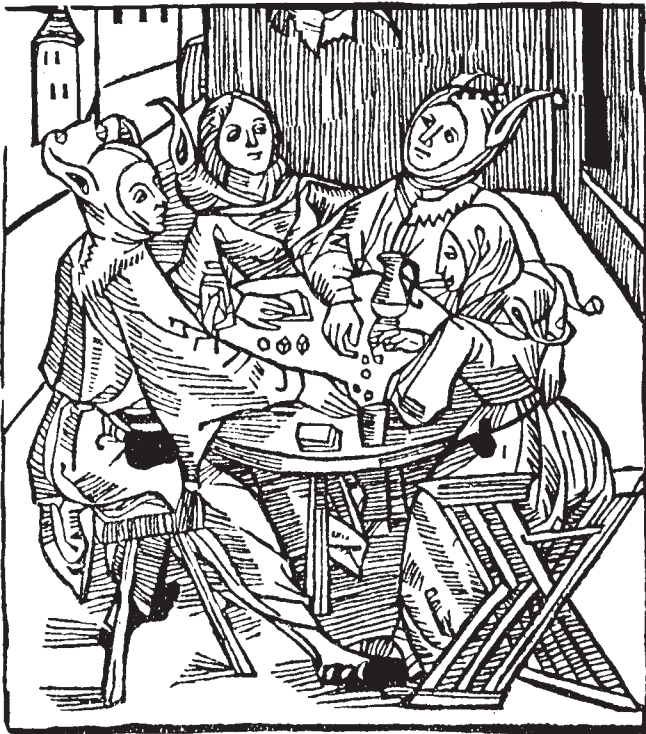
Personnel directly involved in running a gambling den include dealers (who pass out cards, tiles, or dice,

or otherwise operate the devices central to the games and announce their results), croupiers (who handle money and take note of or record bets), runners (who take bets and cash from players at their homes or workplaces to a centrally operated game location), security monitors (who watch the progress of games for cheating and other trouble), floor bosses (who intervene and make rulings in case of disputes), guards, and purveyors of the casino's food, beverages, and associated services (e.g., bartenders and waitresses).

Players themselves are also often essential and willing participants in the gambling den's activities and often take an active role in the conduct of the various games. Possibilities include casting dice, dealing cards, or even buying the position of the bank for a short period — thus enjoying the benefit of the house edge on the game — and such players may be rewarded as high rollers or VIPs with access to exclusive high-stakes tables in separate areas, generous credit, and complimentary gifts of every kind. Most of these individuals are known for a flashy, ostentatious mode of dress that combines the styles typical of high society with a plethora of decorative flourishes and jewelry.

Owners and leading operators of gambling dens often enjoy a high profile — at least within the social circles frequented by rakes, tearaways, and criminals — as flamboyant individuals who handle particularly large sums of cash, who are, by the same token, forceful and proficient enough in violence to keep their wealth from those inclined to seize it.

The need to ensure secure transportation and storage of large amounts of cash winnings makes gambling dens some of the most strongly guarded operations in the criminal world, employing vaults, guards, and security procedures equaling or surpassing the measures used by mercantile places like banks. Tokens such as chips and winning tickets themselves have considerable value, so that gambling dens need strict procedures to control theft of players' items or corruption of low-level employees. Besides robbery and disturbances by unruly patrons, gambling dens face the unique challenge of preventing players from either cheating or winning more consistently than the house anticipates, which they meet by a system of close surveillance backed up by floor bosses and security guards near at hand — belying their often decorative costume and jovially helpful manners — to halt games, void bets, and eject, take into custody, maim, or kill trouble-



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making or suspicious individuals as the situation calls for and allows.

Collecting debts from people who have lost more than they can afford to is often a priority for the proprietors of gambling dens — and, even in cases when gambling itself is legal, such collection activities might be where the activities of such places cross into criminality.

Adventure Hooks

* Player characters who believe themselves to have some skill in gambling — or a foolproof means of cheating — might be interested in joining a high-stakes game or taking a lucrative bet. The group might role-play the incidents of finding and gaining a place in the game;

playing through to its conclusion and either winning or losing, and safely collecting their winnings or avoiding the severe consequences of owing losses that they might be unable to cover.

* A fugitive known for his love of gambling, who the party would very much like to locate (whether to arrest him, protect him from his enemies, or question him about some incident of which he has unique knowledge) might risk playing in public at his favorite gambling den. If the characters can learn these facts, they have the opportunity to find their fugitive there — although they may find it difficult to reach or seize their target in a crowd of people more likely to sympathize with and support their fellow player than a group of outsiders.



Cheater with the Ace of Diamonds, Georges de La Tour (1620-1640)

Pit-Fighting Ring

Pit-fighting rings are underworld places used for all sorts of blood sports, including bare-knuckle fisticuffs, no-holds-barred fights, gladiatorial combats, bear-baiting matches, dogfights, cockfights, and the like. Specific events held at any particular pit-fighting arena will vary from culture-to-culture and be influenced by local tastes and conditions, but the one thing they have in common is that grievous injuries and deaths tend to be typical. Places of this sort appear in a wide variety of books, games, and other media, including the films *Brotherhood of the Wolf*, *Escape from New York*, *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*, and *Unleashed*.

The extent to which pit fights are legal or accepted varies from culture-to-culture and might be dependent on the relative brutality of the events and the level of compassion or enlightenment in the society overall. In cultures where violence is commonplace — especially those dominated by brutish humanoids like Orcs, Goblins, and Gnolls — places of this sort likely will be popular as well. Even in those societies where violence is widely considered reprehensible and blood sports are illegal, however, secretive pit-fighting venues of some sort are likely to exist. Demihumans whose societies traditionally abhor or avoid gratuitous violence, such as Halflings and Gnomes, however, tend to be much less inclined than Humans to be interested in such places.

Pit-fighting rings tend to be considerably smaller and much less elaborate than major public venues where similar but larger events are held, such as coliseums. And, while many such places do indeed consist of a pit inside of which combatants fight and around which spectators view them, any number of alternate forms are also possible. These might include an above-ground area surrounded by a trench, fence, hedge of spears or other means of preventing combatants from leaving, or even structures like large cages. Almost any area, in fact, in which combatants can be confined and yet still be visible to spectators, is suitable.

Other features of a pit-fighting venue might include a staging area where fighters can await their turn in the ring, rudimentary training or practice facilities, and perhaps areas for confining prisoners, animals, or monsters that are to be forced to fight. Such places will also likely include places for spectators to stand or sit around the fighting area. In some cases, there might also be a place nearby for dumping bodies of slain people or animals or some other means for disposing of them.

Pit-fighting arenas that meet these basic requirements might be located either indoors or outdoors and be either permanent in nature or ad hoc (which can allow them to be easily abandoned if a shift of venue is precipitated by a raid from the local authorities or a similar event). Because such places are often illegal, or at least undesirable in many of the communities in which they are located, they are often hidden or situated in isolated areas.

Pit-fighting rings could have several different sorts of proprietors, including anyone from underworld impresarios and promoters who organize covert matches to feudal lords whose domains fall outside the prevailing laws of the overall campaign setting. Such places might also be affiliated with various other sorts of establishments, including taverns and training halls.

Other personnel present at pit-fighting arenas might include bouncers, thugs, or other sorts of muscle, to keep fighters and spectators alike in line and to collect entry fees if these are being charged; bookmakers and their assistants to take, hold, and pay out bets and perhaps post odds or results on a board or some other obvious place; and possibly vendors of various sorts selling food, beverages, or other amenities.

Adventure Hooks

* Characters traveling through a particular area might fall prey to press gangs or other agents of a pit-fighting establishment and be forced to fight various people or monsters for the entertainment of the local inhabitants. Likewise, a party might discover that one or more of their associated animals, possibly even companions or familiars, has been stolen for purposes of being used as a combatant in a pit fight.

* Characters investigating the disappearance of one or more warriors in a port area who were newly arrived or indigent might find evidence of high-stakes pit-fighting meets held within the hold of a large ship. Before the players can infiltrate one of these fights, however, they must somehow find out the ship's movements and when the organizers will stage the next event.

* Down-on-their-luck or tough but inexperienced characters might decide that the way to earn some cash and experience is by participating in unregulated and increasingly dangerous pit-fighting spectacles.



Thieves Guild

Thieves' guilds are organizations that control and monitor various sorts of illegal activity. Such organizations might be true guilds that regulate the activities of dues-paying members and provide them with training and other services in return; convocations of leaders from competing organized crime families that meet periodically in order to keep peace between their various factions; or simply powerful gangs that force lesser criminals to pay a portion of their revenues to avoid violent reprisals. Only rarely, of course — and only then in a society where the guild has an unusually well-accepted role — will a thieves' guild likely be referred to overtly as such.

Real-world examples of thieves' guilds include, to some extent, American organized crime families, Japanese Yakuza clans, and the criminal collegia of the Aventine district of Rome. Some of the most vivid depictions of actual or *de facto* thieves' guilds from fiction include those from the various fantasy novels of Fritz Leiber set in the city of Lankhmar, in the "Gord the Rogue" novels of Gary Gygax, and in the "Godfather" series of novels and films.

While the law-abiding citizens of a traditional medieval, ancient, or fantasy environment tend to look askance at thieves' guilds, they are also often seen as moderating influences that can at least keep crime orderly, reduce the violence associated with it, and perhaps even discourage certain types of especially distasteful crime from being practiced. Criminal activities that such institutions might control — whether through direct management or by enforcing their rule over independent operators — include pick-pocketing, robbery, burglary, extortion, gambling, prostitution, and murder-for-hire.

Many communities of town size or larger will have an organization of this sort in place, and large urban areas might have separate chapters for different neighborhoods or types of activity. Rural and village areas are more likely to have looser sorts of organizations, with local crime being dominated by bandit gangs or families with a criminal bent.

Many thieves' guilds have legitimate fronts that simply look like various sorts of businesses, including guilds of normal trades. The guild is almost always careful to closely guard secrets such as where and when its leaders meet and where it hides its wealth (and guilds that are threatened by an effective system of criminal investigation might not maintain any specific areas for

the guild's activities at all). Even those with legitimate fronts, however, are likely to have progressively well-hidden areas with locations known to commensurately fewer and more senior guild members.

Sorts of furnishings in thieves' guilds are likely to be commensurate with the functions of the areas they are in. Those in more-or-less permanent hidden areas are, however, more likely than usual to be garish, vulgar, or stolen and otherwise to reflect the attitudes and ethos of their denizens.

The provisos given here aside, the facilities of a thieves' guild are likely to serve some of the same functions as at any other guildhouses (as described in *City Builder Volume 4: Professional Places*).

Security measures in a thieves' guild site are likely to be stringent and include such things as hidden passageways and chambers, magical and mechanical traps of all sorts, murder holes and other places from which defenders can sneak-attack intruders, and possibly monsters like guard dogs or poisonous vermin.

The master of a thieves' guild might be a veteran burglar or other kind of specialist criminal, a beggar or other type of rogue affiliated with the local criminal underworld, an experienced assassin or other sort of enforcer, or a prominent and trusted member of society (e.g., a nobleman).

Adventure Hooks

* A power struggle within the local thieves' guild erupts in a widespread wave of violence that includes brawls, street fights, and assassinations. Player character members of the guild must try to survive the chaos, and perhaps even thrive in it, whether it is through choosing sides, trying to remain neutral, or just escaping.

* Organized thieves and criminals have at least a practical interest — and may even be motivated by a strong sense of local patriotism — to help to defend their cities or nations against outside forces that threaten their peace and prosperity. Such situations could affect characters who are guild members or those interested in enlisting the specialized resources of a guild in a covert struggle against a tyrant, foreign enemy, or secret plot.

* Betrayed by their own guild, a party of characters must launch an assault on a guild house and permanently put out of business those who have crossed them.



Thieves' Guild, Geoff Weber (2008)

Thieves Guild

Sidebar: Assassins' and Beggars' Guilds

Underworld elements other than thieves may find it necessary or expedient to organize themselves into guild-like bodies that are either independent of or subordinate to Thieves' Guilds. Assassin and beggars are among the types that might do so.

The sinister individuals in any community inclined toward murdering their fellow citizens might do so for any number of reasons, such as serving the needs of a secret cult or politically subversive organization or fulfilling some twisted personal need. There are yet others, however, who kill primarily for purposes of financial gain, and it is such people who are the members of any sort of Assassins' Guild or sub-guild of killers within a Thieves' Guild that exists.

Where the operations of assassins in a game setting are more-or-less commercial, they will likely follow the wishes of their clients for either a gruesome and spectacularly public killing (e.g., to intimidate or panic surviving citizens) or a secret murder that might appear to be an accident or unexplained disappearance.

Whatever their organizational structure, such organizations are often more secretive than Thieves' Guilds, in that murder-for-hire is generally considered much more serious than crimes like theft. Such groups might also variously make their services exclusively available to one social class or power group, or for anyone — including otherwise respectable private individuals — who pays their fee.

A defacto or actual Assassins' Guild might perform any of several functions. These might include acting as a broker for accepting and allocating contracts to its operatives, which the guild prefers not to have any direct contact with clients so as to decrease the likelihood of a successful investigation and arrest of either party; serving as an underground market for specialized weapons, poisons, disguises, and other equipment; and providing support for the conduct of legwork like background research and surveillance on targets, for which it may even maintain archives, paid experts, or informants of its own.

Beggars and other homeless individuals often seem isolated, bereft of support from society, and

forced to survive entirely through their own efforts (and certainly such an impression contributes to sympathy rather than suspicion from the authorities and general population). Their existence, however, may in fact require at least a rudimentary system for regulating such basic social functions as defining locations where each has the right to beg, sleep, and conduct other activities; discouraging random theft and violence among them; warning of danger; and communicating the understood rules and amenities of their milieu to new arrivals. Such organization may sometimes rise to the level of what might be called a Beggars' Guild.

Factors that lead people to become bums, beggars, hobos, homeless, and the like often prevent them from organizing effectively, of course, but this has been known to happen even in the real world and such groups might certainly be even more prevalent in the game world. Whatever control of a community's beggars exists might be a function subsumed by the Thieves' Guild, a distinct sub-organization of it, or a separate power group altogether.

Because the Thieves' Guild often sees an interest in pressing beggars into service to support its activities — as lookouts, spies, pickpockets, or the cheapest and most expendable of hired attackers, for example — such individuals may support a guild of their own simply to negotiate from a position of some respect and avoid the worst effects of such exploitation.

In addition to having their own variant cants or secret languages, even semi-organized transient beggars might also be inclined to leave markings in the areas through which they pass in order to convey information to others (e.g., indicating that water from a particular stream is either good or bad, that the occupant of a particular home should be avoided).

The leader of organized beggars within a particular area might have the mocking title of Beggar King or something similarly noble or official sounding. This individual of long experience has an extensive knowledge of the community and all that goes on in it, often combined with a particularly callous and brutal penchant for roughing up or killing beggars who flout his dictates.

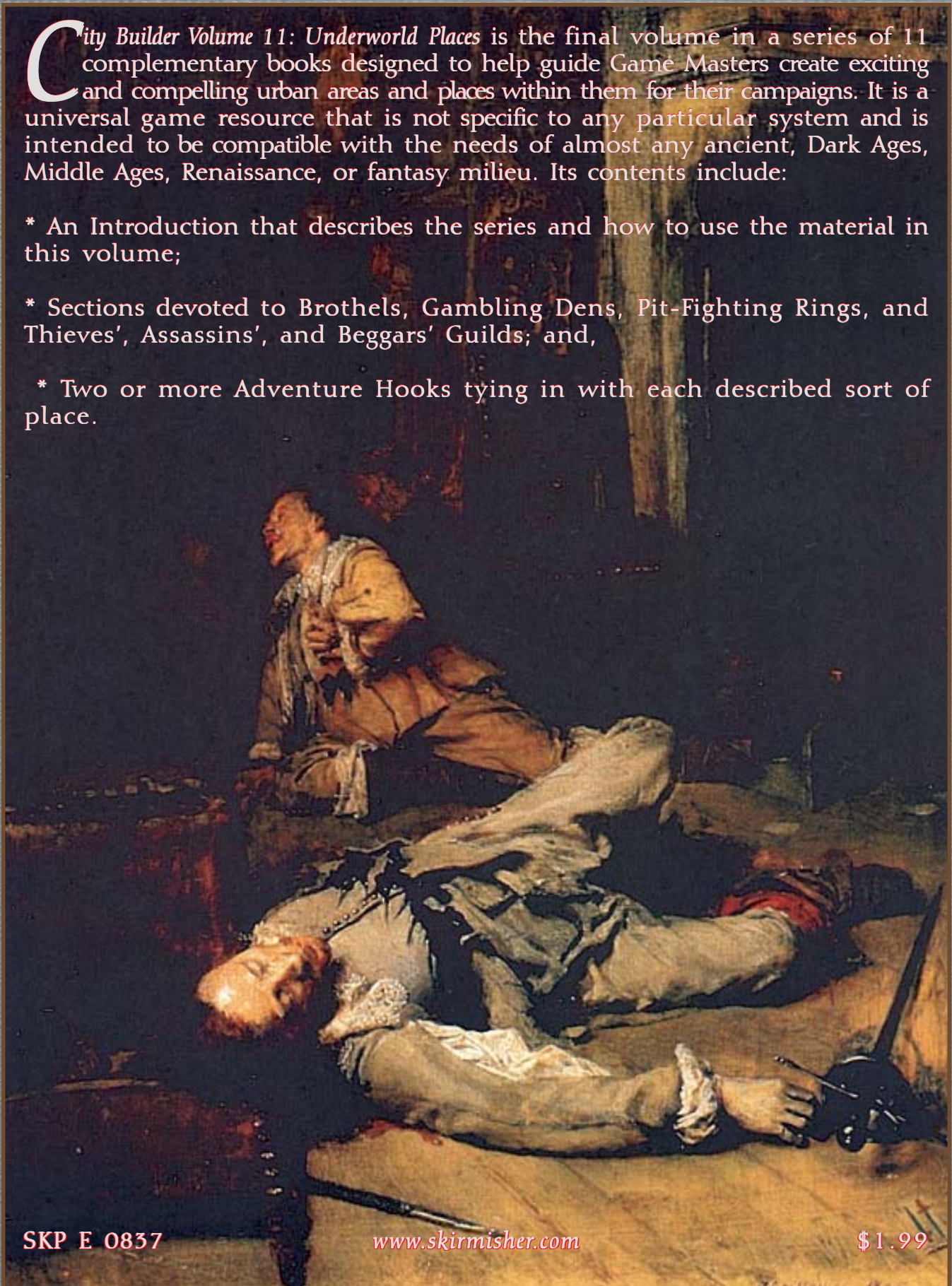


A Street in Algeria, Frederick Arthur Bridgman (1847-1928)



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