PYRAMID

CINEMATIC LOCATIONS

GOING PLACES!
by Matt Riggsby

THE SHADY REST ROADHOUSE
by Loren K. Wiseman

THE IMMENSITY
by J. Edward Tremlett

THE TEMPLE OF SOBEK, THE CROCODILE GOD
by S.E. Mortimer

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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IN THIS ISSUE

When it comes to cinematic locations, this issue of *Pyramid* has enough ideas to pack a passport full of adventure!

Matt Riggsby (author of **GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence** and **GURPS Locations: The Tower of Octavius**) offers two "locations" – complete with full-color maps – that can serve as their own focus or as a means of getting to *other* adventures. By air or by sea, you can't go wrong when you're *Going Places!*

Loren Wiseman **(GURPS Traveller)** takes the gaming classic of the "adventurous tavern" and turns it on its ear; now *it's* the interesting place to visit! Based on a real-world recent-past locale, *The Shady Rest Roadhouse* is sure to be a memorable night out.

Since Egypt is always the source of great cinematic action, S.E. Mortimer takes you on location to *The Temple of Sobek, the Crocodile God*. Whether tracking down ancient secrets or modern-day supplicants worshipping an ancient god, the Temple can serve as an action-packed source of hieroglyphic pyrotechnics.

J. Edward Tremlett offers an "exotic but dangerous" secret base in *The Immensity*. What will adventurers do in exchange for the impossible power this place offers – and what shocking secrets does it conceal?

Alternate Locations provides over a dozen easy ways to transform a mundane location into a memorable one. Pick an option or roll randomly!

Need a headquarters to call home, company offices to steal secrets from, or a building to set a hostage situation in? Then try this issue's insert, *The Office Building,* which offers maps that you can print out and use to quickly create your very own modern multi-story structure.

Pyramid Editor Steven Marsh makes the case that *Locations Are People, Too,* in this month's *Random Thought Table.* Reviewer extraordinaire Matthew Pook suggests some ideal location-centered games in *Recommended Reading.* And, of course, you can locate your monthly dose of humor with *Murphy's Rules,* plus some "odds and ends" that round out the magazine.

FROM THE EDITOR

FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE, VIA ACTION

This issue of *Pyramid* – the one you're holding in your hot little hands (or, more likely, PDF reader) – is set in the action-packed world of modern cinematic adventure. But as we were assembling this issue, we realized something: "Modern-day" is actually an amazing era to set adventures in, since most possibilities are available. Sure, it can cover recent phenomenon such as office buildings and halls of mirrors (which we've got), but it can also include more "pulp" offerings such as road-houses and dirigibles (yes to both!). Action-adventure movies have been set in all of those places.

Or going further backwards, you can even set an adventure in ancient temples (check!), taking a cue from high-octane films such as *Stargate* and *The Fifth Element*. Or you can go future-scientific, with ultra-tech weapons lying in wait in an impossible other-dimensional fortress (it's in here!); then you can replicate modern-versus-future conflicts such as *Predator*.

It seems likely that the wide range of locations in this issue owes to the fact that it's so easy for us, as modern audience members, to envision heroic-action versions of our modern selves just about any other place. Whether it's a millennia-old crocodile-filled labyrinth, a WWI U-boat, or a techno-horror nightmare, we can see ourselves strapping on modern-day weapons and blowing the heck out of anyone who opposes us in those situations – or, at least, struggling to stay alive.
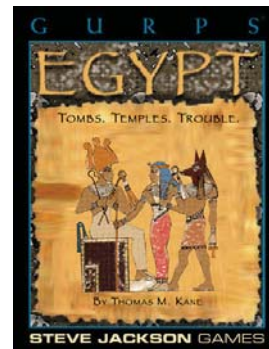
WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

This issue shakes things up a bit and so – as ever – we love to get your feedback! Remember: We only *write* about evil psychics and all-knowing masterminds; we're not actually all-knowing or psychic (or evil!) ourselves. Please feel free to let us know what works and what doesn't. Send feedback and comments to **pyramid@sjgames.com,** or post online on our forums at **forums.sjgames.com.**

*. . . I subscribe to **Pyramid** because you never know what you're gonna get, and you can find fun, cool stuff that can spark off any campaign, anywhere and anywhen.*

– jimminy, on the Steve Jackson Games forums

GOING PLACES!

BY MATT RIGGSBY

Some of the best locations for action take you places themselves. How many movies have had extended fights in and on moving trains or in the rigging of sailing ships? This article presents some other large vehicles that can be used as locations in their own right: a WWI-era submarine and a fast passenger zeppelin.

U-826

This dark, cramped vessel is an unremarkable WWI-era submarine. It is capable of operating without refueling for months at a time as it hunts cargo ships. It returns to port for new torpedoes and fresh food more often than for fuel, but it is crowded and uncomfortable.

The maps on p. 5 show the inside of the U-826; the pressure hull gives it a significantly larger outer surface. The top deck is 66 yards long and nine yards across at its widest extent. The conning tower is a rough oval in the middle of the top deck, about six yards across, three yards tall, and 10 yards front to back. The sub is armed with two deck guns, one in front of the conning tower and the other behind; stats for the Schneider Mle, **GURPS High-Tech,** p. 138, or the RIA M2A1, **GURPS High-Tech,** p. 141, can be used.

The main entrance to the submarine is through the conning tower and into the control room. (Under usual circumstances, the main entrance is the only one, although there are escape hatches over the engine and torpedo compartments.) The passage out is indicated by the gray circle in the center of the bridge, in the center of the submarine; the periscope is located just behind and to starboard. Going aft, one passes through quarters for petty officers (with three layers of bunks on either wall) and the galley (with a pantry on one side and a head on the other) to the engine compartments. Heading forward, one goes through the officers' quarters. The captain's quarters are closest to the control room, and the radio room and a hydrophone listening room are directly across from this. After that is another head, more storage, the main crew quarters (more stacked bunks), and finally the torpedo room. The torpedo room has two forward-pointing torpedo tubes and can carry up to 16 torpedoes. The sub has no dedicated medical facilities, though it has a substantial supply of emergency medical supplies. Black areas on the map are compartments containing fresh water, fuel, or batteries, and are inaccessible.

Typically, only part of the crew is awake and active at any given time; crewmen have two eight-hour shifts on duty and a third off. They cycle through shifts in the bunks in their off hours, since the boat only has enough bunks for about a third of the crew at any one time. Given its limited underwater endurance, the boat itself spends most of the time on the surface, with watchmen posted in the conning tower searching for targets and enemies. When the boat goes into combat, the entire crew goes to work, tending the engines, loading torpedoes, or standing by to do damage control.

The submarine's sensory equipment is quite primitive. Instead of active sonar – not developed until WWI was nearly over – it is equipped with passive hydrophones (**High-Tech,** p. 49). A skilled user can detect the presence and direction of ships and some other objects in the water, but the equipment is very poor at range-finding. Unlike sonar, it also can't detect anything that isn't making noise.

The sub can safely dive up to 50 yards. Beyond that, it must make a roll against HT every turn or take 1d crushing damage, bypassing the boat's DR.

> *Mister, our boys are submarine sailors, not combat marines.*
> *– Lieutenant Andrew Tyler, **U-571***

Variants

Though designed as a warship, this submarine could be adapted to other purposes.

Smuggler: Although it's already well-suited for covert operations, the submarine can be modified for superior underwater performance, letting it remain safely submerged for longer runs through heavily patrolled areas. This variant is stripped of weapons and provided with extra battery power for additional underwater endurance. The cost is the same and the torpedo compartment is filled with batteries, but underwater range increases to 80 miles, cargo capacity increases two tons, and crew drops to 30.

*For WWII-era ships and other vehicles, check out **GURPS WWII: Motor Pool.***

Map of U-826, full-length view (1 hex = 1.5 yards)
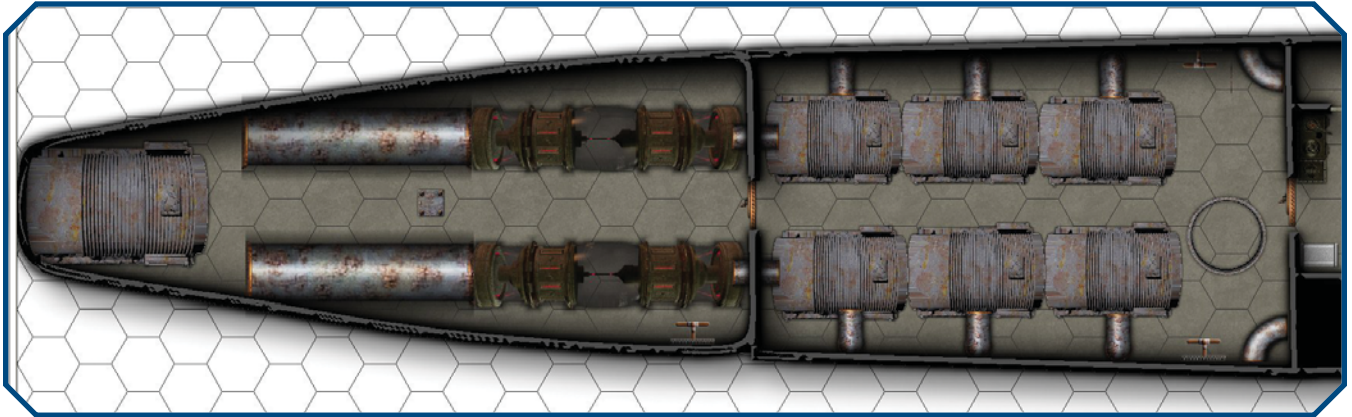
Map of U-826, close-up of fore section

Map of U-826, close-up of mid section
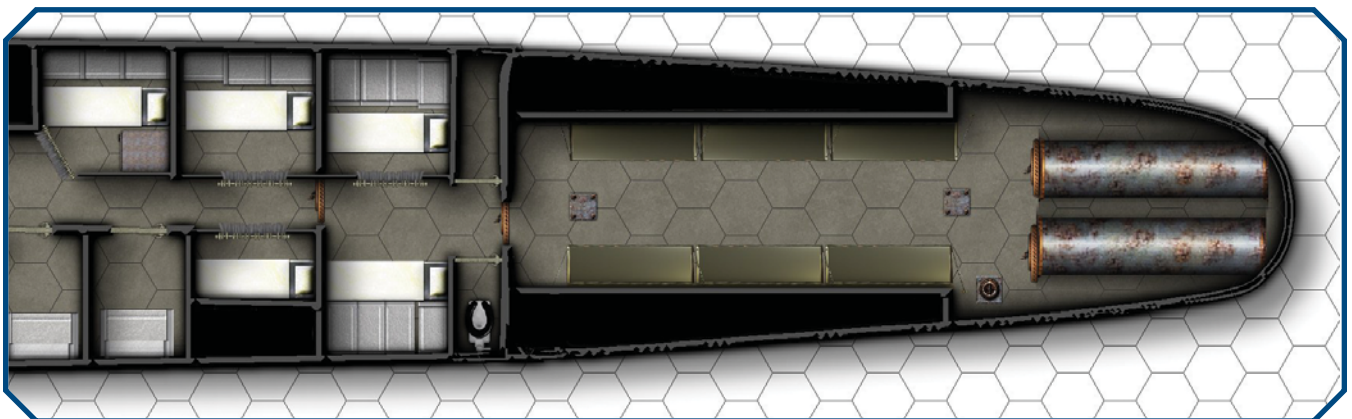
Map of U-826, close-up of aft section

Windows: Although undersea visibility is generally very poor, shallow depths and additional lights can make undersea observation practical. In a scientific version of this submarine, the torpedo tubes are replaced with a cluster of hemispherical windows, each about the size of a ship's porthole, providing a 90-degree arc of vision out of the vessel's nose. With windows, the submarine can only descend to half its usual depth before it has to start making rolls to avoid damage. Reduce cost and crew by one third.

Modern: There have been a lot of improvements in submarine technology since the War to End All Wars. A small but modern attack submarine can use the same deck plans as presented here, but its performance is vastly superior. The engines use stored liquid oxygen along with diesel, increasing underwater endurance from hours to weeks. Improved materials and structural members allow it to dive safely to a depth of 700 yards. More refined and automated controls and mechanisms allow the boat to have a much smaller crew. Consequently, bunks are stacked at most two high and are individual rather than shared among three sailors. About all it gives up are the deck guns, since modern subs have vastly superior torpedoes and don't need a reliable backup weapon with which to finish off wounded targets. In the unlikely event that the sub is called on to use weapons other than torpedoes, the crew could be issued with LAW rockets, SAMs, RPGs, and similar weapons.

But Bath is renowned for shipbuilding, which began here in 1743 when Jonathan Philbrook and his sons built 2 vessels.

– City of Bath (Maine)
*Web site, **cityofbath.com***

THE AIRSHIP *CITY OF BATH*

While the U-boat is a purely military vessel, the *City of Bath* is primarily civilian. It is designed to serve as a light-duty express passenger liner and mail carrier. It can make it from just about anywhere in western Europe to the United States and the Near East (for example, Warsaw or Rome to Boston, or London to New Delhi) in about two days; a trans-Pacific trip (for example, San Francisco to Tokyo) takes closer to three days. For safety's sake a stopover for refueling before the airship has gone more than two-thirds of its maximum range is common practice (contrary winds can cut heavily into its actual range), but a desperate pilot might attempt a trans-Pacific trip in a single go. It can reach an altitude of about 7,000 yards. It has room for 16 passengers, putting it at the very low end of passenger zeppelins (more serious passenger airships carry up to 100). Nonetheless, it is reasonably comfortable, and has a small amount of cargo capacity intended to carry mail.

The lifting body (not pictured in the maps on p. 7) is about 30 yards in diameter and 180 yards long. The gondola is set on the underside of the lifting body, about 45 yards back from the forward end. The fabric-covered envelope consists of a series of large balloons containing hydrogen for lifting or water for ballast. Most of the crew regularly works in the envelope, walking along a central aisle and climbing ladders found between the balloons.

Entrance is by twin gangways at the back of the upper level, which is inside the lifting body's envelope. The single cabins are farthest to the rear. Past the stairs to the lower level flanked by two small staircases going up about three feet to the forward part of the upper level are double cabins, linen storage, and a shower compartment to either side of the central hallway at the rear. Crew quarters and a galley are farther forward.

Passenger areas are tight but comfortable (comparable to a luxury train) with carpets, wood paneling, and lace curtains. Beds may be made up into couches during the day for those who don't wish to spend their time in the lounge. Crew quarters are more Spartan, resembling military quarters. Each crew cabin has two bunks on either side, except for the captain's cabin (which has only one bed).

The lower level hangs down outside the envelope, so unlike the upper level, compartments there can have windows. The rear section is taken up by the passenger lounge. In addition to a compact but well-stocked drinks bar usually manned by the airship's steward, it is kept supplied with current periodicals (while under way, headlines received by wireless are posted there as well), popular tunes for a Victrola, playing cards, and versatile game sets for chess, checkers, backgammon, and so on. Meals may be taken there, though passengers may eat in their rooms instead. One of the few luxuries not available is tobacco. Unlike some larger airships, the lounge is not sealed off from the rest of the airship, so risk of fire requires that passengers refrain from smoking.

Again, the crew area is forward from the passenger area. Going toward the front from the passenger lounge, the radio room is on the left and the captain's cabin on the right. Ahead of them is the control cabin, containing a map table, navigational instruments, controls for the airship's rudders and engines, and a shipboard telephone to communicate orders to the crew in the envelope.

Variants

With a few small variations, this model of airship can be suitable for exploration and warfare.

Carrier: Many airships cruise at or above the stall speeds of contemporary aircraft, making it surprisingly easy to use them as aircraft carriers. A plane is attached to the airship by a gantry, which provides hooks to hold onto the airplane and a gangway or ladder for the pilot to get into the aircraft. Once the airplane's engine has started, the hooks are released and the plane – already at flight speed – may pull away immediately. This airship may carry one or two small planes (treat as the barnstormer biplane on p. B465); each costs $150K and reduces cargo capacity by two tons.

Adventure idea: The heroes are knocked unconscious by goons. They awaken and try to escape the odd "building," only to discover they're four miles high in an airship!
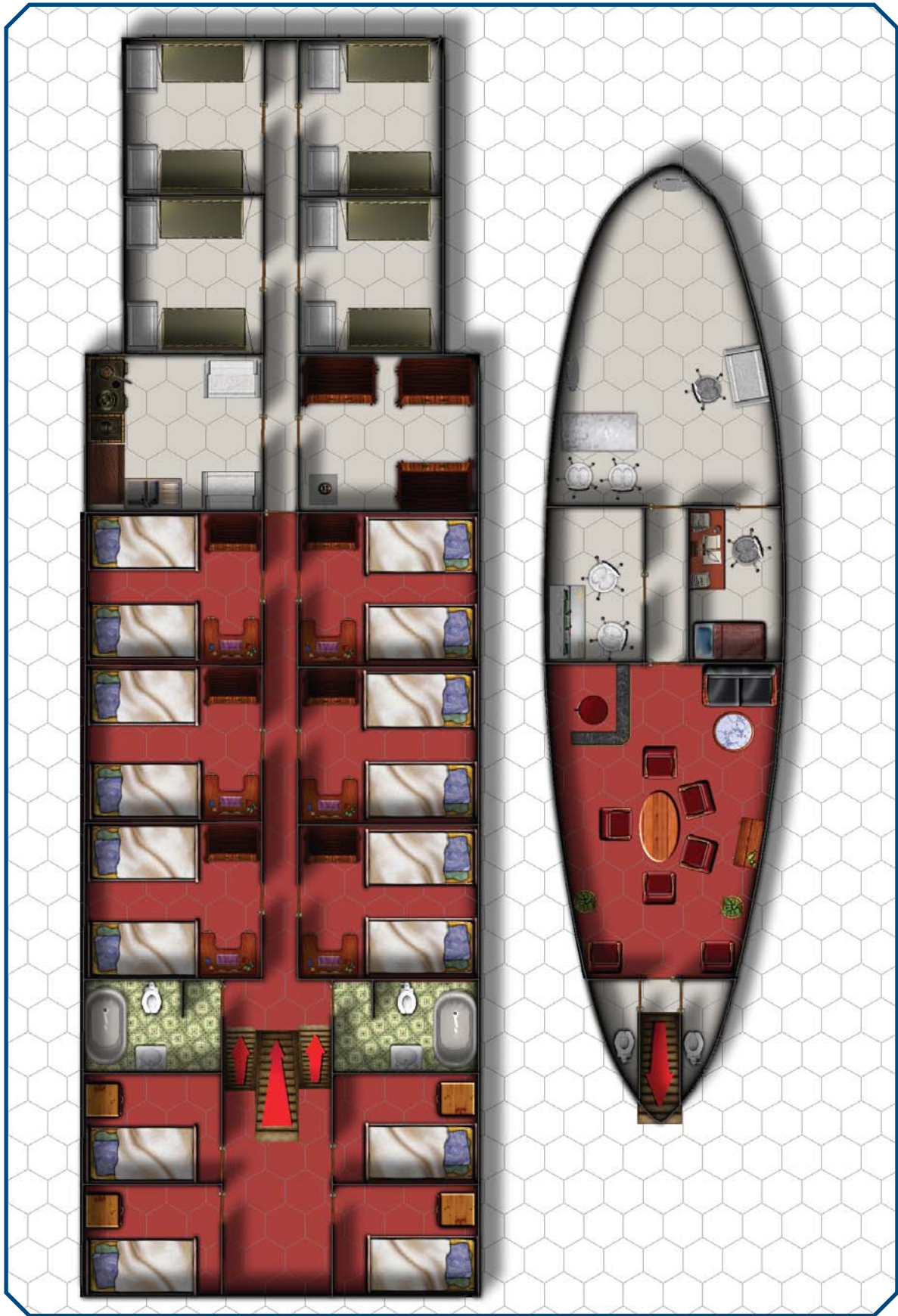
*Map of **City of Bath,** upper and lower levels (1 hex = 1.5 yards)*

VEHICLE STATS

TL	Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Loc.	Stall	Notes
PILOTING/TL (LIGHTER-THAN-AIR)															
6	*City of Bath*	135	-4/3	10	1/38	132	28	+12	10+20A	1	7,000	$22M	S	0	
8	*City of Bath II*	135	-3/3	11	1.5/40	132	28	+12	10+20A	1	15,000	$22M	S	0	
SHIPHANDLING/TL (SUBMARINE)															
6	U-826	400	-3/6	11	0.01/6	2	60	+9	56A	20	25,000	$40M	g2S	–	[1]
8	Small Attack Submarine	400	-2/6	12	1/7	2	60	+9	20A	30	30,000	$100M	g2S	–	[2]

[1]. The performance stats assume the submarine is operating on the surface. If submerged or otherwise working on battery power, it has Move 0.01/2.5 and Range 65.

[2] The performance stats assume the submarine is operating on the surface. If submerged, it has Move 1/10 and Range 7,200.

Armed: In a pinch, the airship could be modified to serve as a bomber. Instead of passengers and their cabins, the crew increases to 20, the passenger section of the upper level is removed, and the lounge is replaced with a bomb bay holding up to four tons of bombs. It also has twin .30 caliber machine guns at either side, plus a small "gunners nest" at the top of the envelope containing the same. The upper guns can move through a complete hemisphere, while the lower guns can move through a quarter of a sphere on their respective sides. Given the obvious restrictions on how far they can elevate or depress, there's a safe zone on either side of the airship from the envelope to about 100 yards away, beyond which at least one gun can reach. This may give attacking daredevils an opening to board the airship in flight, while defending daredevils may climb down the side of the airship to stop them or attack close aircraft with hand weapons. The military version is $50M and may mount airplanes as with the carrier variant.

Modern: While submarine technology has advanced by leaps and bounds over the past several decades, airships have been a bit of a dead end. Still, there are some technical advantages. Modern engines are significantly more powerful and efficient, giving the airship much greater range. The switch from hydrogen to safer helium as a lifting gas requires a larger, heavier envelope for the same lift, but modern materials and semi-rigid rather than rigid designs allow the envelope to be commensurately lighter. A modern passenger airship resembling the *City of Bath* would likely be constructed by an eccentric billionaire or entrepreneur attempting to tap into a high-end tourist market, where the point is the ride rather than the destination, much like modern cruise liners. Routes might include usually inaccessible destinations such as the rain forests of Amazon, the heart of the Sahara, and the poles. The airship would still be luxuriously appointed, though it would probably provide satellite television, phone, and Internet service for everyone rather than just one radio-telegraph for the whole craft. Ironically, while passengers could smoke on a modern version of the *City of Bath* without fear of the vehicle going up in flames, airline regulations would probably prevent them from smoking on grounds of public health.

ADVENTURES

Large vehicles can serve the dual purpose of getting characters to adventures and serving as adventuring platforms themselves. There's enough room in and on both of these vehicles for two-fisted action. The narrow passageways of the submarine make it nearly impossible to do anything but go straight forward or back, though improvised weapons (tools, navigational implements, tins of food) are plentiful. The airship, with less crowding and more space, allows greater freedom of action. In addition to the mapped area, adventurers might make their way into the envelope or even climb out on top of it.

The fact that all of this action is taking place on a moving platform makes it possible for someone involved in it to have a significant impact on the environment. The vehicle's pilot can make sharp turns in an attempt to knock people over, tilting the floors on which they stand. However, a vehicle's size and stability work against the pilot in this case. If a pilot makes a violent maneuver, people standing up in the vehicle must roll against DX plus the vehicle's SR to avoid falling down. Anyone holding on to a post, handhold, or other structural member gets +5 to DX; grabbing something takes a combat action and must be done *before* the maneuver. Of course, the submarine can submerge (washing off anyone on the top deck), and the outside of the airship may be subject to very high winds, requiring DX rolls to retain footing, or even ST rolls just to hang on.

Here are some other possibilities for adventure on or with these vehicles:

Piracy: Both vehicles make interesting pirate vessels. The submarine's main purpose is commerce raiding, so it's a short jump from sinking defenseless freighters to *threatening* to sink them. (See the adventure *Air Devils of the South Seas* in *Pyramid #3/8* for an example). The submarine can't take on significant amounts of cargo, but it could leave a freighter's crew behind on lifeboats and send a prize crew aboard to take it to a suitable port or to meet another freighter (out of sight of the pirated ship's crew to avoid identification) to transfer goods.

An airship is a good antidote to gun-happy heroes. One stray shot can kill everyone aboard – including the heroes!

With its long range, the ability to operate largely unseen, and no incentive to do anything other than pick off lone ships, a pirate sub could have a long career before enough naval power was brought to bear to find and stop it. Justifying airship piracy is a bit harder (it's difficult to hide a floating balloon twice the size of a football field). However, if it's not directly involved in piracy, it could act as a mobile headquarters, coordinating the activities of more nimble aircraft, ground-based raiders, or pirate ships.

Mutiny: Any large vehicle is vulnerable to a mutiny or hijacking. Adventurers could fall on either side of that equation. Without significant room to put prisoners, the submarine presents the potential for a very tense situation, with hijackers/mutineers forced to stay close to the boat's deposed officers.

To the Rescue! Airships and submarines are relatively versatile vehicles, allowing them to participate in unusual rescue operations. Until the invention of helicopters, airships are the only aircraft that can even attempt to hover, giving them a chance of sending down a gondola, or at least a rope, to extract important people stranded on mountains or other rough terrain. Submarines aren't superior rescue vessels at sea, but they *are* better if the rescuer doesn't want it known that help is on the way (for example, to search for a high official returning from a secret overseas conference, whose ship was sunk by a routine enemy patrol). Even if such vessels aren't ideally suited for a rescue, any could face the "only ship in the quadrant" problem: Better rescue vehicles are on the way, but the airship or submarine is much closer to the disaster site, and time is of the essence.

Locked-Room Mystery: A large vehicle is an ideal setting for an Agatha Christie-like murder mystery. The physical environment is very restricted; no one can get on or off without being noticed (or *can they?*), so the list of suspects is short, and there are limited opportunities to hide clues. The murderer can't flee, but the investigators can't summon help until reaching a port, putting the job of finding the murderer entirely in their hands. There's also the advantage of not needing or being able to easily dispose of a murder weapon. Someone shoved out of an airship in flight or a U-boat at sea isn't likely to last very long. The airship is probably better for this sort of adventure than the submarine, since a wartime U-boat is a crowded hive of activity providing no privacy for a murderer and no end of witnesses. However, a less crowded boat (say, a modern sub, or one with a skeleton or prize crew heading to port) could afford some opportunities for secret activities.

Boo! Houses and castles can be haunted. Why not vehicles? Rather than being forced to possess the entire vehicle, a
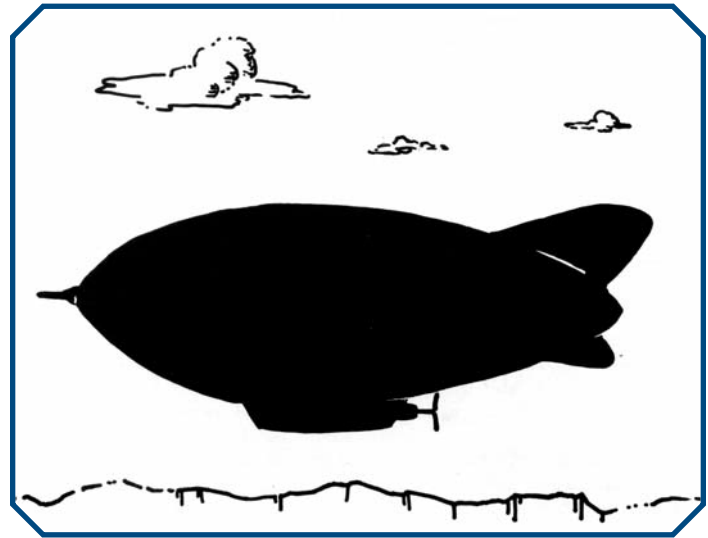
la *My Mother The Car* or *Christine*, a spirit could wander around between compartments, knocking navigational equipment off of a table here, disturbing pitch and yaw there. Dispelling the ghost might require unearthing secrets of the vehicle's past or completing a mission the vehicle was on when the ghost-to-be died.

Home Sweet Home: If airships and submarines are relatively rare, which both of these vehicles are at the time of their introduction, they make an interesting residence. For example, an extremely wealthy industrialist might seal off the front of a submarine, particularly one with the torpedoes replaced by windows, and use it as a personal cabin for a singular yacht, or convert a few staterooms in an airship into a luxury apartment and a few offices. A modern vehicle, where the owner can be as plugged into the world as he wants to be via video and computer links, is particularly well-suited to this approach. This may present adventurers with annoyingly well-rested competition if the owner is a rival who can travel in extreme comfort or a baffling enemy whose base of operations can move.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby has explored the savannas of Africa, the rough-and-tumble Barbary Coast, the ruins of Classical civilization, and the exotic wonders of the subcontinent! He works for an international company that heals the sick using Chinese crystals! He occupies an ancient hidden base with his femme fatale wife, intrepid son, and a pack of loyal dogs!

Existing rules and principles can give us our present location, our bearings, our latitude and longitude. The inn that shelters for the night is not the journey's end. The law, like the traveler, must be ready for the morrow. It must have a principle of growth.

– Benjamin Cardozo

THE SHADY REST ROADHOUSE

BY LOREN K. WISEMAN

The Shady Rest detailed here has nothing to do with the country hotel of the same name in the television series *Petticoat Junction.* This article describes a roadhouse – a rural speakeasy – in southern Illinois that played a major role in a bootleggers gang war in the mid-to-late 1920s. The Shady Rest also served as a headquarters for the Birger bootlegging gang. It has the distinction of being the first spot on American soil to be subjected to aerial bombardment.

WHAT *IS* A ROADHOUSE?

A roadhouse, for the purposes of this article, is a rural tavern that offers other (often illegal) amusements in addition to alcohol. Roadhouses came about as a result of the freedom of travel that the automobile afforded to Americans in the early part of the 20th century, and filled a need for people to get away from the stresses of everyday life. They were especially common in the Midwest and South, usually located at a convenient distance from cities and small towns, hidden away on back roads to prevent interference from law enforcement. During Prohibition (1919-1933), roadhouses provided rural Americans with alcohol as well as gambling, dancing, and prostitution, all of them illegal and/or immoral by the standards of their locale.

THE SHADY REST

The Shady Rest was a large cabin (see map on p. 12) that stood in a grove of trees about 100 yards back from the road connecting the towns of Marion and Harrisburg (see map on p. 11). It was about equally distant from both. It was part of a cluster of buildings in and around the grove that included several sheds and other outbuildings, the cabin itself, and a roadside barbecue stand that served as a lookout station as well as providing hot food. A neighboring farmhouse was a few hundred yards down the road, but otherwise, the grove was relatively remote.

The Shady Rest was one of numerous roadhouses established by the Birger gang as they moved into bootlegging, but it soon became an unofficial headquarters because its isolated location made it secure from both rival gangs and local law enforcement.

Note: This article's reconstruction of the Shady Rest is conjectural in many spots, as only a few photographs and descriptions of the building exist. Some elements in the descriptions and floor plan were extrapolated.

Exterior

The Shady Rest was constructed of foot-thick logs in a rectangular plan about 40' long and 20' wide. The logs were spiked together and chinked with cement or plaster in order to make the building weather-tight. A narrow porch ran completely along the front side, and there were two chimneys, one at each end. A small lean-to extended part of the building to the back. The building was roofed with hexagonal asphalt shingles over planks. A path from a rear door led to the nearby outhouse, and a cellar door gave access to the basement. It was typical of many buildings in southern Illinois for the time, and it would probably have stood for 50 or more years had it not been destroyed during the Birger-Shelton gang war.

The Shady Rest was known to have been used for illegal gambling, including dog and cockfights, so the grounds had many animal pens or cages and at least one large fighting corral. These were erected specially for each contest and stored in one of the sheds at other times. Powered by an electric generator on site and available at the flick of a switch, floodlights could illuminate the approaches at night. Presumably these were installed when Birger converted the Shady Rest for use as his headquarters, as it is doubtful that an ordinary roadhouse would have such a feature.

Interior

Ground Floor: The walls were logs, which may have had the bark stripped off. The windows were double hung. Screens were put up in the summer and replaced with glass panes when the weather turned cool.

The floor was made of smoothed planks laid on floor joists, covered by throw rugs in the bedrooms. Each end of the main room had a fireplace, and small pot-bellied stoves warmed the bedrooms.

Basement: The basement is reinforced with bricks or stonework (whichever was cheapest). The floor is paved with concrete, and wooden supporting pillars hold up the joists for the ground floor. Stone steps go up to the surface of the ground outside, covered by a slanting cellar door. Two planks are kept beside the staircase; they can be laid over the stairs to facilitate rolling beer barrels into the basement. There is also a door at the bottom of the steps, barred from the inside with a thick plank.

Beer barrels are stacked along the basement walls, and shelves storing food and other supplies take up the rest of the basement. A pair of small rooms may have also been in the basement; if so, one would be an ideal armory for the gang.

The Birger gang supplies slot machines to roadhouses, general stores, and diners throughout Williamson and the surrounding counties, and spare machines can be found in the basement.

Details

The interior furnishings of the Shady Rest varied over the years, but a number of details remained consistent. The main room of a roadhouse requires tables and benches or stools for the drinkers, plus a bar with shelves behind it. Kegs of beer are behind the bar, with mugs and assorted glassware on the shelves. A record player or jukebox provides the music for dancing, for which the tables would have been cleared away. The back of the roadhouse had several small rooms for various uses, each containing a bed and a chair or two. Kerosene lamps, wax candles, or – if the on-site generator was running – electric lights gave illumination.

Although it's possible that the Shady Rest offers a roulette or faro table inside, most of the indoor gambling is either card or dice games played at the tables or slot machines along the walls. It could easily contain a pool table.

When used as Birger's headquarters, the Shady Rest holds fewer tables, replaced by folding cots for several of the gang members' use. Traveling rumrunners occasionally use the rooms in the back, sleeping at the Shady Rest during the day in order to make the last leg of their trip to St. Louis during the night.

Food

When used as a roadhouse, most of the food is supplied by the nearby barbecue stand. If Birger is occupying the building,

Illinois
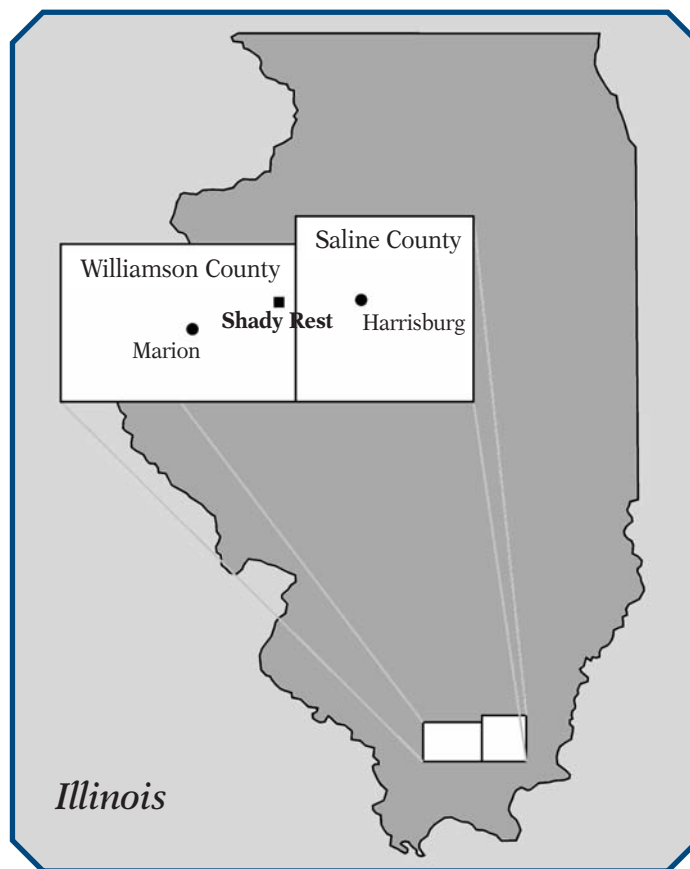
he undoubtedly makes arrangements for more varied fare, but the rest of his other gang doesn't require much in the way of sophisticated foodstuffs.

Birger stockpiles large quantities of canned goods and other supplies in case of a siege by enemy gangs. Birger tells reporters these goods are stacked along the inside walls to provide protection from gunfire, but they are probably there just for show; the logs are able to stop just about anything short of light artillery, and the basement is cooler and more conducive to long-term storage.

Weapons

Charlie Birger keeps a small arsenal inside the Shady Rest. One photograph depicts a roadster with a weapon display on the running board and fenders, which includes:

3 × .45 caliber Thompson submachine guns (with drum magazines).
4 × .45 Colt M1911 automatic pistols.
4 × revolvers of undetermined caliber, probably .38.
2 × double barreled shotguns, probably 12 gauge.
2 × pump shotguns, probably 12 gauge.
2 × lever action carbines, possibly .44 caliber.
2 × bolt action rifles, possibly .30-06 caliber.

"Look, if you're in a do-or-die contest for big stakes, you let the other guy get a head start on you. Take small swigs and hold your breath, huh? Then it looks like you're getting ahead. When you see it's starting to circulate on him, then it's time to bust it down." – Sundog/George Washington Lincoln Brown, Death Hunt

Stairs
Up

Cellar
Door

Spare
Room

Spare
Room

Storage

Basement

Stairs
to
Cellar

Back
Door

Back
Room

FP

Bedroom

Bedroom

FP

Main
Room

Porch

0   5
Scale in feet

First Floor
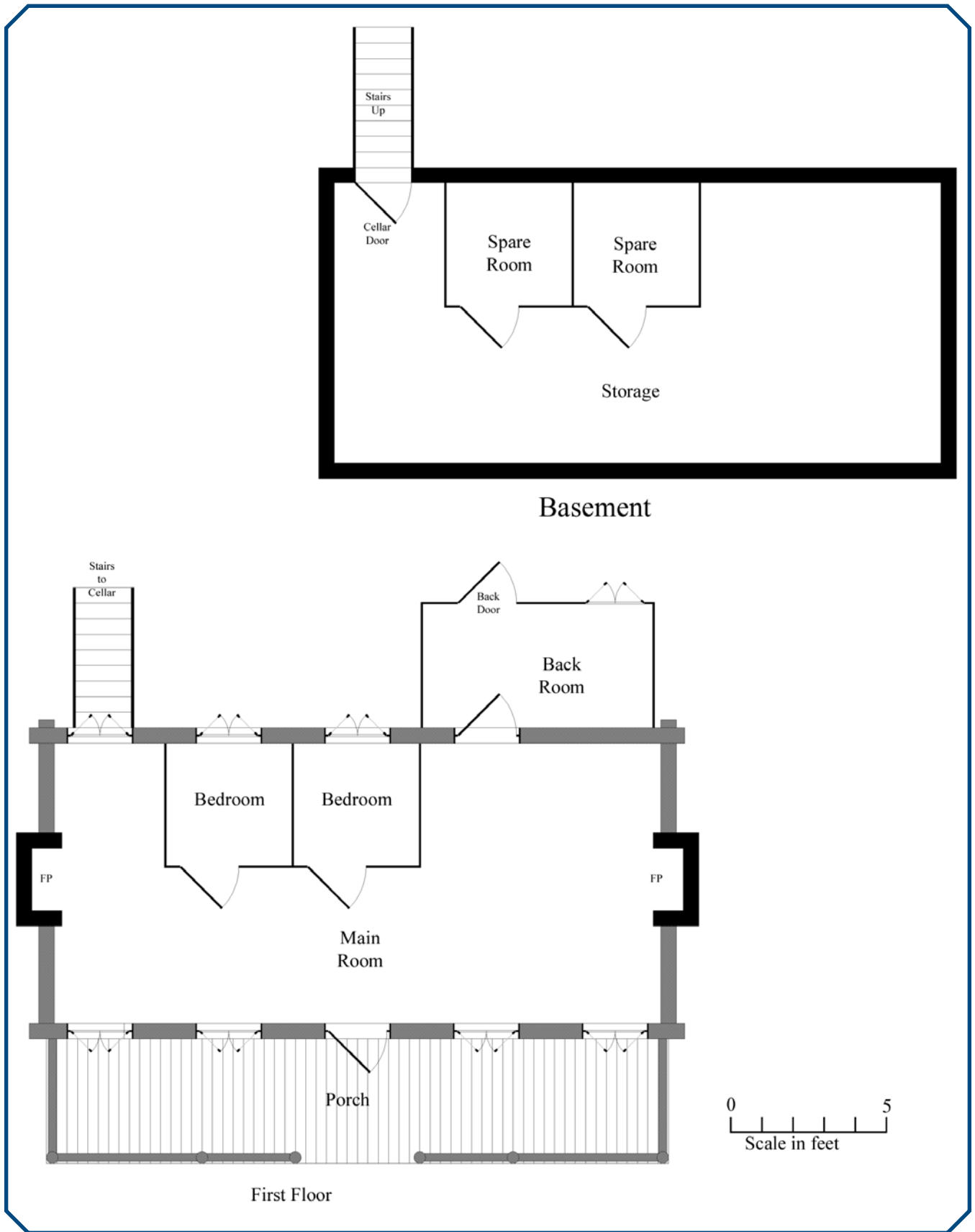
The Shady Rest Roadhouse

This list probably does not represent all the arms available to the Birger gang; it might have been temporarily assembled to impress the photographer and psyche out the opposition. With the exception of the submachine guns, the firearms are typical of the sort that would have been owned by the average farm family in southern Illinois in the early 1900s.

Statistics for these and other period weapons can be found in **GURPS High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1**.

HISTORY OF SHADY REST

Illinois' Williamson county had a long history of violence, starting with a "Hatfields and McCoys"-type family feud in the 1860s, sporadic labor violence from 1900 to the early 1920s, and culminating in a Ku Klux Klan campaign against "sin" (mostly bootleggers and Catholics) in the early 1920s. The Shady Rest was built in 1924 to provide alcohol and entertainment to the farmers, coal miners, and other inhabitants of Williamson and surrounding counties; later, it became the unofficial headquarters of a criminal gang operated by Charles "Charlie" Birger.

Birger claimed to have been born in New York and moved to St. Louis while a child. After serving in the cavalry during the Spanish-American War, Birger drifted around the country before returning to southern Illinois, where he ran saloons and gambling operations, dabbling occasionally in car theft and extortion. He came to the attention of the press in 1923, when he killed three men in two days, but he wasn't convicted because he convinced the court he acted in self-defense. Birger eventually settled his family – his fourth wife and several children from previous marriages – in the town of Harrisburg.

After WWI, each town in southern Illinois had a gang of toughs that operated local criminal activities. Birger organized these disparate groups, provided protection, settled disputes, and fixed territories to prevent unnecessary competition. After Prohibition, the burgeoning trade in illegal liquor offered additional income. The Birger gang furnished bootleg booze, gunmen, and guidance while allowing the locals to remain in business and guaranteeing to squelch competition.

During the KKK's "anti-sin" campaign (1924-1926), Birger and his associates cooperated with a rival gang run by the Shelton brothers from East St. Louis, and both organizations survived the "clean-up," albeit with some losses. By 1926, however, the "heat" was off, and a war of sorts broke out.

The catalyst came when members of the Shelton gang robbed a Harrisburg businessman. Birger considered Harrisburg his home and was determined to protect its citizens from the ravages of outsiders. The Birger gang found and returned the stolen goods. The Sheltons responded by raiding Birger's roadhouses, and the war was on.

The three Shelton brothers (Carl, Earl, and Bernie) came from a southern Illinois farm family that had moved there from Kentucky in the late 1800s. The family farm was not

Cars and Society

The automobile had a major effect on the society and culture of America. The 1920s were an era of unprecedented prosperity over most of the United States, and people began what would later be called "conspicuous consumption." One of the new status symbols many families acquired was an automobile. Although they had been available for decades, it was only after the war that Americans purchased closed cars in increasing numbers. In 1919, closed cars amounted to only 10% of the total number; by 1924, that number had risen to 43%.

The automobile let people escape from their immediate neighborhoods, enabling them to go dancing in the next town, or enjoy liquor, gambling, and prostitution in anonymity at a roadhouse. Increased travel brought the demand for more and better roads, which fueled the demand for more automobiles. Lovers of all ages found an unexpected use for the closed car, and "lovers' lanes" sprang into being all over the country.

The prevalence of automobiles also changed criminal activity across America. Car theft became an increasing problem (obviously), but automobiles also allowed gangs to operate over larger areas, eluding pursuit by jumping across jurisdictions.

very successful, and, in any case, the Shelton brothers seemed to have an aversion to physical labor. By the early 1920s, after a number of small crimes and subsequent terms in the penitentiary, the Sheltons began organizing local saloons and gambling dens in a manner similar to what Birger was doing in Williamson County. As both gangs expanded, conflict was unavoidable.

Violence increased, resulting in a rising death toll, but both sides carefully kept violence directed only at members of the respective gangs – innocent bystanders could count on being fairly safe. Both the Birgers and the Sheltons portrayed themselves as simple country folks who were merely acting in self-defense. The two sides conducted "propaganda" campaigns in the newspapers and used pet district attorneys to accuse each other of (often fabricated) crimes. Birger went out of his way to help out the poorer citizens of Harrisburg and the surrounding area, donating to local churches, giving coal to those without heat, and buying schoolbooks for local children. Birger remains a "Robin Hood"-like folk hero in southern Illinois to this day.

On January 9, 1927, the Shady Rest was bombed and burned to the ground. The bodies of four members of the Birger gang were found in the ruins, but Birger was not among them. The war continued for a few more months, until authorities imprisoned the Sheltons for mail robbery in February 1927 and hanged Charlie Birger for murder in April of 1928. The gangs broke up after that, but bootlegging, gambling, and other illegal activities continued, taken over by other groups.

*If a region is littered with roadhouses, then one amusing plot point might involve the heroes knowing a roadhouse was involved in the plot, but not **which one!** A dozen needless fistfights later . . .*

Combined Arms (Gang) Warfare

The Birger-Shelton War was notable for two features reminiscent of modern combined arms warfare.

Armored Trucks

Both Birger and the Shelton brothers made use of trucks fitted with improvised armor to carry armed men during raids against each other's roadhouses. The Birger gang began the "arms race" when they fitted a truck with a calf-watering trough with firing slits cut into the sides and killed a Shelton sympathizer near Harrisburg. The Sheltons responded with similar raids, and soon upped the ante.

The Airplane

On November 12, 1926, an airplane circled above the woods near the Shady Rest. After a few minutes, three bundles fell from the craft and landed near the cabin. These proved to be crude bombs made of dynamite and bottles of nitroglycerin, which were so poorly made that all three failed to explode.

Although the bombs didn't go off, this was still the first time American soil was subjected to aerial bombardment. Although it is not known with certainty that the Sheltons were responsible – they never claimed responsibility – it's difficult to come up with an alternative. The identity of the pilot and the type of aircraft is not known, but there were hundreds of WWI veteran pilots "barnstorming" across the country at the time, flying surplus USAAF planes. It is not too much of a stretch to conclude that one of these was hired by the Sheltons to destroy their enemy's headquarters.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

Roadhouses like the Shady Rest lend themselves to several types of campaigns.

"Untouchables"

A campaign where the adventurers are law enforcement personnel is simple to administer. The group can portray a special unit of the Bureau of Prohibition (like Eliot Ness' "Untouchables" in Chicago) tasked with breaking up the Birger and Shelton gangs and bringing their members to justice. Alternatively, the PCs might play a special group hired by local citizens to do the same thing. **GURPS Cops** provides plenty of assistance for this sort of campaign.

The heroes could portray a district attorney and a group of investigators working for the Illinois state government, trying to straighten out a snarl of corrupt and incompetent local law enforcement officials.

In all of these campaigns, the Shady Rest is the headquarters of the "bad guys" and should figure prominently.

Pulp

Using information from **GURPS Cliffhangers,** the Shady Rest can figure in pulp/action adventure campaigns set in the "Roaring Twenties." The group could portray private investigators tasked with retrieving a kidnap victim from the clutches of the Birger gang. (For ideas about using **GURPS Action** in a pulp campaign, see Sean Punch's *Pulp Action!* in *Pyramid #3/8*.)

The Shady Rest could be encountered by a group traveling through southern Illinois en route to a major adventure elsewhere, and become sidetracked by a plot involving the gang war.

Time Travel

Temporal voyagers could run afoul of the Birger-Shelton conflict on exploratory missions through time, or temporal police might have to get into the Shady Rest in order to "put right what once went wrong." **GURPS Infinite Worlds** will be valuable to the GM here.

Other Times and Places

During Prohibition, roadhouses were as common in the country as speakeasies were in the urban areas. By changing a few names, the Shady Rest (the Hut, Shangri-La, or whatever name the GM gives it) can be dropped into any 1920s-era campaign.

Roadhouses continued to exist after Prohibition ended, and they often continued to flaunt local morals, if not the laws. They are common throughout the rural Midwest and South even in the present day. In the real world, roadhouses are not as rough and tumble as in the "Roaring Twenties" – county and state police are less corrupt than they were in the 1920s, so modern roadhouses must be more circumspect in conducting gambling and prostitution. Alcohol is illegal in some places, and dog fighting remains popular, although less widespread than it once was. Nowadays, in a cinematic environment, a roadhouse can be as rough-and-tumble as required by the plot (see 1989's *Road House* starring Patrick Swayze as a textbook example).

As another example of modern roadhouses, consider the very real city of Normal, Illinois – home to Illinois State University (and its resultant student population). The city remained dry until the mid-1970s; the county also had blue laws prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages on Sunday. This created a niche for small, rural bars that served alcohol to college students (often underage) and provided other entertainments. Prostitution had vanished by the 1970s, but slot machines and side bets on pool could still be found. Roadhouses from this era would likely have linoleum floors rather than wooden planks, and its logs would have been covered by modern sheet metal siding; other than that, such buildings were very similar to the Shady Rest.

*For another modern location, find your way to **GURPS Locations: Metro of Madness**.*

Prohibition

Prohibition (also known as, the "Great Experiment") originated in the temperance movement of the late 19th century, which attempted to change society for the better by eliminating the problems of alcoholism. They tried to do this by getting rid of alcohol itself from both the retail side (saloons) and the wholesale side (distilleries and breweries). Women were the primary movers behind the temperance movement, exemplified by the Anti-Saloon League and the WCTU (Women's Christian Temperance Union). From the 1880s until about 1912, the temperance movement conducted highly publicized attacks on saloons (led by women such as the hatchet-wielding Carry Nation), chasing out customers and smashing bottles and fixtures. More sedate demonstrations consisted of lines of women marching outside breweries and distilleries, carrying placards with anti-drinking slogans, and interrupting traffic. Such tactics garnered the movement great publicity, but they had little real effect.

Shortly before WWI, there was a change in tactics – the movement began campaigning in support of "dry" (anti-alcohol) candidates, and lobbying federal and local congressmen. With American entry into the war, the drys began to push prohibition as a patriotic measure – drinking caused absenteeism from factories doing vital war work, destroyed families, and diverted grain from the food supply. It was a sacrifice that needed to be made. By 1919, the drys had accumulated enough support to ratify the 18th Amendment and pass the Volstead Act (which took effect on January 16, 1920). The Volstead Act was the supporting legislation for the 18th Amendment, and prohibited the manufacture, distribution, and sale of alcoholic beverages. The Bureau of Prohibition (BP) was created to enforce the new law, but it was undermanned and underfunded from its conception.

Enforcement was spotty from the start, and many saloons simply continued to operate as before. Many stopped supporting Prohibition as the reality of the situation dawned on them – the majority of people thought beer would not be banned, for example – and the Volstead Act was soon widely violated. Enforcement was made more difficult by the language of the law itself: *Possession* of alcohol was not explicitly prohibited, only the manufacture, distribution, and sale. A family could possess a limited amount of wine for sacramental use, and whiskey was allowed for medicinal purposes – which meant that doctors were increasingly pressured to prescribe it for a large number of "ailments." Factories producing alcohol for chemical purposes found it profitable to divert some of their production and ignore the laws requiring their product to be denatured (poisoned) to prevent it from being used as a beverage.

Further, nonalcoholic beer was allowed, but the only way to make nonalcoholic beer was to brew regular beer and remove the alcohol. It was a simple matter to "neglect" to extract the alcohol, so legal breweries would often supply illegal establishments. As time passed, and more agents became available, these sources of supply dwindled (but did not completely disappear – BP agents were as susceptible to bribery as anyone else), and illegal ones flourished.

Organized crime soon took advantage of the opportunities presented by Prohibition. Liquor was compact enough that it was profitable to smuggle it across the border (a process that came to be known as rumrunning). Liquor could also be distilled with a minimal investment in equipment and materials; this process was known as bootlegging, and the product was called "bathtub gin." Because there was seldom time to age the liquor properly and the distillers were seldom very picky about their ingredients, it was usually of poor quality, and fetched a lower price than smuggled liquor. In many rural areas, distilling alcohol to avoid the revenue tax was a long-standing tradition.

Where stills were scarce, it was common to dilute commercial ethanol to the desired proof; add colorings and flavoring to simulate scotch, bourbon, or gin; and (sometimes) pour the results into empty bottles with the requisite labels.

Many homes had a history of winemaking, and grape sales boomed. Winemaking doesn't require much more than a barrel and a cool place to keep it as it fermented.

Beer, however, was not economic to smuggle across borders, and had to be brewed in larger quantities than liquor or wine. It was transported in barrels on large trucks from the brewery to its destination. Such trucks were impossible to conceal, so the required cooperation of local law enforcement officials was obtained by bribery or intimidation. It was easy for rivals to hijack beer trucks, so they were often accompanied by armed guards. (This is the origin of the common joke: "What did you do in the war?" "I was a tail-gunner on a beer truck.").

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About the Author

Loren Wiseman was one of the founding partners of GDW, Inc., and spent more than 20 years there as a game designer, developer, editor, and typesetter. While at GDW, Loren contributed to more than 60 of that company's myriad products. After GDW closed in 1994, Loren freelanced for a while and then came to Steve Jackson Games, where he is the *Traveller* line editor.

Loren is a historian by training and a game designer and developer by avocation. He paints miniature figures for relaxation when not reading or watching DVDs. From time to time, he has been known to actually play tabletop wargames with the figures he has painted.

GURPS

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THE OFFICE BUILDING

In many modern campaigns, there is often a need to have interesting, logical (more or less) office buildings at a moment's notice. Thus, this handout was born.

THE BASICS

The following three pages depict quick-and-dirty blueprints for an office building. They're designed to be printed out and labeled however is desired. Obviously, it's not necessary to determine what every room does ahead of time; it's quite enough to label the most important rooms and figure every-thing else is uninteresting, or else make up what's in there on the fly.

All Plans

Each floor is assumed to have four elevators in the center, at each of the corners of the center square. Obviously, the exact function of these elevators is open for interpretation. One could be an "executive" elevator or a service one. Additionally, it's possible to get by with fewer than four; just assume the unused squares are storage closets, duct work, or the like.

Each plan also includes two restrooms on each floor – directly above and below the center square (between the elevators).

Finally, each plan also has space for stairwells at the out-side corner squares. Not all four stairwells need to exist, but it's important to be consistent about *which* corner contains a stairwell.

Floor Plan 1

This floor is the most "basic" of the three; it's assumed that the outside rooms are all individual offices, and the inside rooms are break areas, conference rooms, etc.

Floor Plan 2

This floor is the "Evil Incorporated" level. Features include a weapon-testing maze, a firing range, and a large undefined area.

Floor Plan 3

This is the "Random Weirdness" level. Features include an undefined octagonal area (a swimming pool? an arena?), two large rooms that would serve well as executive offices, a "cube farm" for folks who don't get the real offices on the first floor plan, and an auditorium/conference room.

HOW TO USE THE OFFICE BUILDING

There are two obvious ways to use this prop for gaming.

The Easy Way

Print out copies of the pages – one page for each floor. You need multiples for the floors you'll be duplicating. (Floor Plan 1 is the obvious choice for repeating on multiple floors.) Modify at least one of the floors to be the "ground floor," and include a way in or out – the best choice might be converting one (or both) of the walls near the octagonal sec-tion on Floor Plan 3 into large openings, and declare that the octagon is an information desk, reception area, or the like. Finally, label points of interest on your maps, and voilà! Instant Office Building!

The Complex Way

If you're feeling adventurous, print out multiple copies, as normal – but either print them on stiffer paper (such as card-stock), or glue them to cardboard. Then cut them along the red line, producing four squares per floor plan. (You'll want to cut along the outside windows, as well, to make them perfectly square.) Now you can mix and match the squares into new configurations. Note that, although designed with modularity, this Office Building "blueprint" does require some creativity and consideration. For example, not all walls may line up quite right; if using the Complex Way, it might be necessary to assume (or draw) walls where the sections meet.

Stairwell
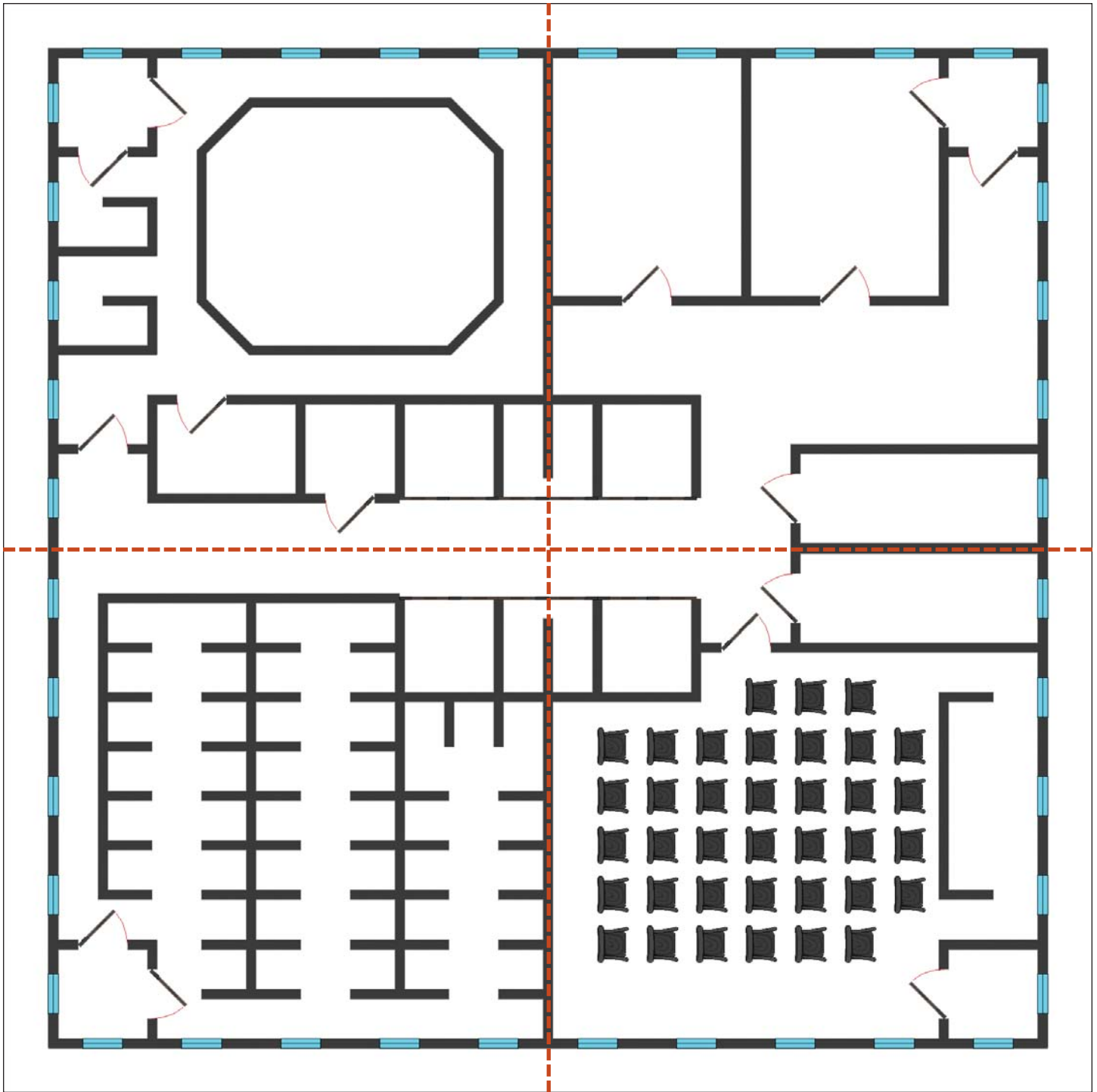Elevator
Restroom
Cut line (in red)
Window
Door
Wall
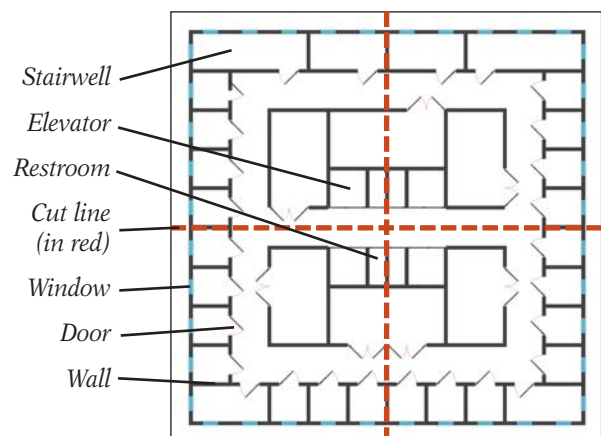
THE OFFICE TOWER: FLOOR PLAN 1 (1" = 14')
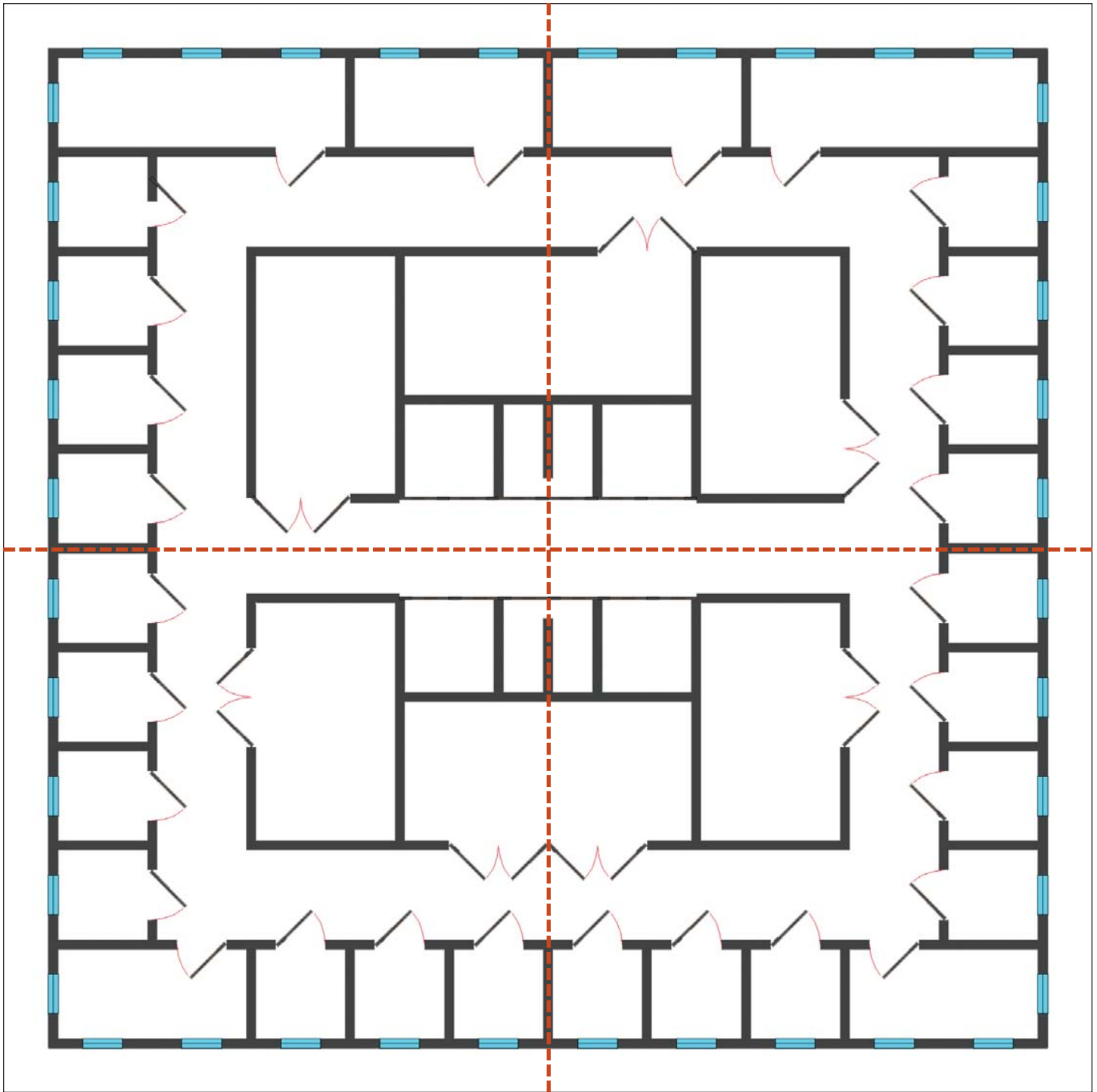
THE OFFICE TOWER: FLOOR PLAN 2 (1" = 14')
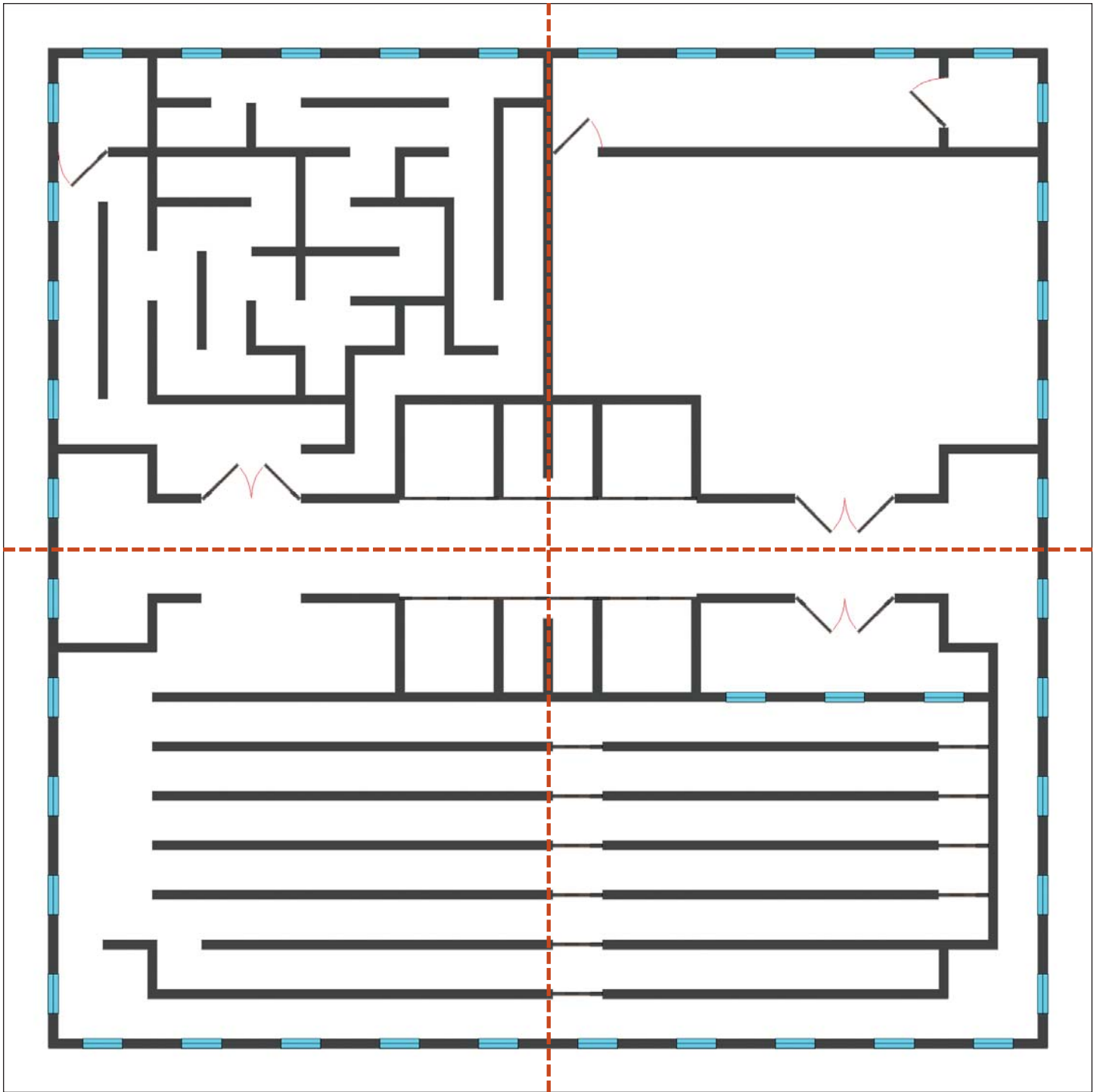
THE OFFICE TOWER: FLOOR PLAN 3 (1" = 14')

THE TEMPLE OF SOBEK, THE CROCODILE GOD

BY S.E. MORTIMER

I am Sobek, who dwelleth amid his terrors.
I am Sobek, and I seize my prey like a ravening beast.
I am the great Fish which is in Kamui.
I am the lord to whom bowings and prostrations are made in Sekhem.
And the Osiris Ani is the lord to whom bowings and prostrations are made in Sekhem.

– The Book of the Dead

The Nile River was the lifeblood of ancient Egypt. It was the principal trade route and the benefactor of many fishermen. It provided resources such as fresh water for washing and drinking, papyrus for making paper, mud for making bricks, and so on. Each year, the river flooded its banks, revitalizing the land and granting bountiful harvests.

In addition, the Nile was full of crocodiles, which could make things difficult for people trying to earn a living on or near the river. Keeping the god Sobek – the crocodile god – pleased ensured that the god's reptilian servants left his human worshippers alone. Furthermore, the god controlled the waters. Pleasing Sobek also meant that the river would continue to bless the land and its people.

In Pliny and Plutarch's writings, the crocodile was seen as a prophet of the annual inundation – the females could anticipate the degree of the coming flood and lay their eggs just above the high-water mark.

Sobek was also considered a fierce hunter and he became the patron of the army. The crocodile's strength and speed was thought to symbolize the power of the Pharaoh; the hieroglyph of a crocodile was even used to represent the word "sovereign" or "ruler."

River towns and cities revered Sobek, but none more so than Arsinoe (which Egyptians called *Shedyet* or *El-Fayoum*); so great was the love of the crocodile god that the Greeks renamed it Crocodilopolis.

THE TEMPLE OF SOBEK

Although the ancient Egyptian deities are no longer worshiped as they were thousands of years ago, it can be useful to understand how they existed back then. Were Sobek to become actively worshipped again, it might be reasonable (and dramatically appropriate) for his followers to revive the old traditions.

Egyptian temple layouts are similar regardless of the gods involved, and the structure was prescribed by Egyptian religious tradition. Visitors to a temple typically approach along a causeway that leads into a large open-air colonnaded courtyard. This is followed by a series of enclosed rooms that gradually diminish in size. Smaller rooms mean more restricted access. The general public is permitted into the courtyard, but only supplicants are permitted to venture into the larger rooms, and officials alone go deeper into the complex.

Columns surround the courtyard, and on its grounds is a large altar or statue of the crocodile god. This leads to the largest enclosed room, which is used to sort out potential supplicants. Only temple officials are permitted to go further inside – to a smaller room that serves as a vestibule to the dimly lit sanctuary beyond. The sanctuary houses the statue of the god where the High Priest performs his sacred rites.

Priests use mummified remains of crocodiles and other animals in their rituals. These remains are stored in deep niches in the inner walls when not in use. Some sites also have catacombs under the building where thousands more mummified animals are entombed.

Some temples keep live crocodiles that live pampered lives. Tame crocodiles dwell in pools where they are hand-fed with honey cakes and choice cuts of meat, and ornamented with gold and jewels. These lucky creatures live in the Sacred Lake – a pool located in the courtyard or just outside and enclosed with a fence or hedge to keep visitors from getting too close.

Justifications to go to the Temple of Sobek in modern campaigns include: religious artifacts (especially biblical ties between Judea and Egypt) and modern-day secrets (there's always turmoil in the Middle East, and no one would suspect hiding current schemes in an ancient temple).

THE CULT OF SOBEK

The bottom of the temple hierarchy is composed of ordinary priests who are called Pure Ones. They perform most of the mundane activities involved with running the temple. Members of the next rank are known as Servants of the Gods. These men are assistants to the next rank – Fathers of the Gods – who make most of the more important decisions. Commanding them all is the High Priest, who is the pharaoh's appointed representative. He performs the most important rituals and acts as chief administrator. All priests take great care to maintain their purity. This involves bathing twice each day and twice each night using water from the Sacred Lake and shaving off all bodily hair once every three days.

Every day, offerings are made to Sobek, represented by a statue of a man with the head of a crocodile. The life-sized statue is located in the temple sanctuary in a shrine called a *naos*. The idol itself is not worshipped; it is used as a means of channeling prayers and offerings to the god, after being first consecrated via a ritual called "Opening the Eyes and Mouth" (see boxed text on p. 23). A larger statue of the god stands out in the courtyard, and it is to this statue that the common people make their offerings.

Morning Service

The daily ritual begins before dawn when temple priests and their servants prepare meals and offerings of flowers, oils, and incense arranged neatly on platters. Next, all implements are cleansed with natron and water from the Sacred Lake, as is each person entering the temple. Here the public can stand and watch the priests make their way slowly and reverently through to the vestibule, where the priests sing hymns, burn incense, chant, and play sistrums. Only the pharaoh or his appointed deputy (usually the High Priest) is permitted to enter the inner sanctuary and "waken" the god.

Awakening the God

The High Priest breaks the seal on the sanctuary door and unties the cord fastening the doorknobs. The double doors are opened and the priest enters slowly, bowing regularly. When in front of the statue, he kisses the ground and begins singing hymns with raised arms. More incense is burned while the statue is washed and dressed in a robe consisting of four layers of cloth of varying length and color (after removing clothing from the previous day). According to some texts, each color served a different purpose: White cloth safeguarded against enemies, blue hid the face of the god, green gave him health, and red protected him. Ideally, the final layer is always placed just as the sun lifts above the horizon. The ritual is completed by anointing the head with oil and applying eye paint. When finished, the priest backs out of the room carrying yesterday's offerings, while bowing and sweeping away footprints. The
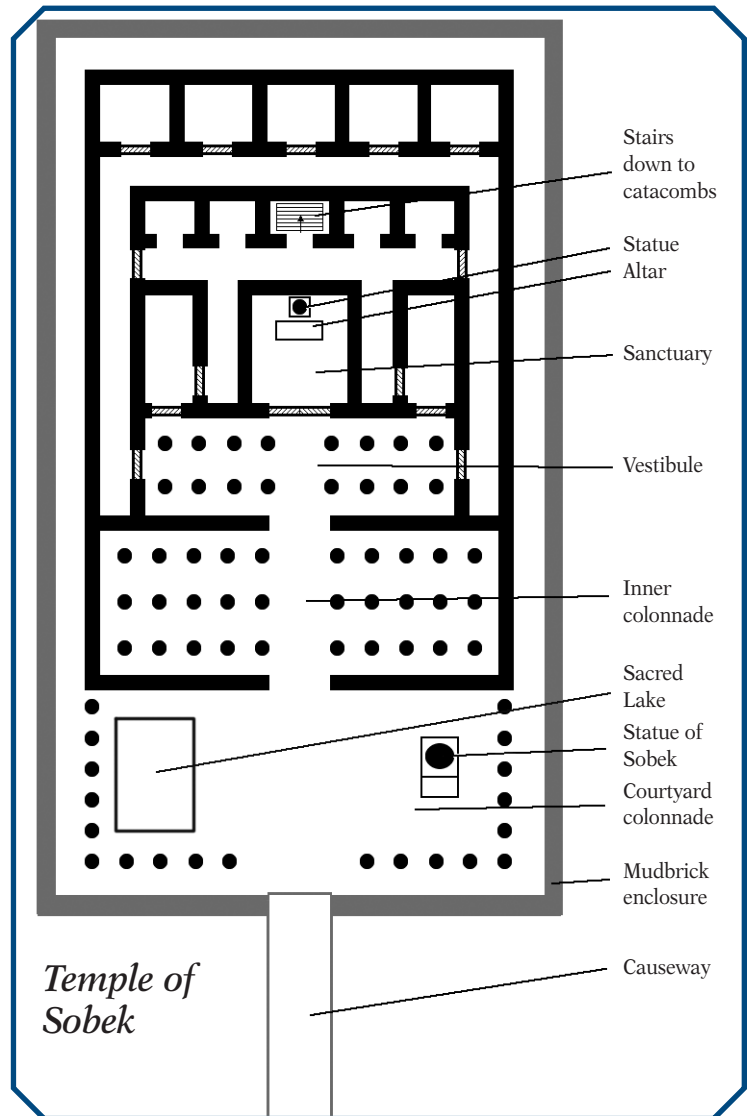
doors are closed and tied with rope, a ball of clay is wrapped around the knot, and a seal is pressed into it to prevent tampering. Every aspect of this ritual – from preparation of the fire before burning the incense, to tying the knot and applying the seal – is described in great detail in a temple manuscript, which is secured in a locked room along with the various ritual implements.

Supplication

Supplicants are screened in the inner colonnade. Some wait quietly for their turn to approach the altar in the courtyard, where an accompanying priest interprets the god's response to their prayers. Some altars are hollow; according to archeologists' theories, a priest could hide inside such an altar before the supplicants entered, which would allow him to pretend to be Sobek and speak directly to the supplicants. Other statues have mechanics for moving the statue's arms or mouth.

Temple of Sobek

Labels: Stairs down to catacombs; Statue; Altar; Sanctuary; Vestibule; Inner colonnade; Sacred Lake; Statue of Sobek; Courtyard colonnade; Mudbrick enclosure; Causeway

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GURPS Egypt offers additional details about the topic country, which could become clues to mysterious treasure or knowledge.

Other supplicants can make an offering at one of the many tiny shrines throughout the complex. Some walls of the temple are specially reserved for people to write their names upon, along with a specific request or a more general note of devotion.

Before anyone can make a devotion, however, he must first be purified. Usually, the person was anointed with oil and cleansed with water from the Sacred Lake.

Unlike many gods, who were called upon to perform miraculous healings, worshipers of Sobek were more likely to ask for strength or protection. A merchant might ask Sobek to guard his caravan during a long trading expedition, or a mother might ask the crocodile god to protect her son serving in the military.

Incubation

Some supplicants are permitted to sleep in the temple in the hope that Sobek will visit them in a dream. This process of "sleeping in" was common in many ancient religions and was called *enkoimesis* or *incubatio* by the Greeks. Supplicants sleep on the floor of the temple; when they awake, they describe their dreams to a priest who would offer an interpretation.

Sobek's Chosen

When anyone, be he Egyptian or foreigner, is known to have been carted off by a crocodile or drowned by the river itself, such a one must by all means be embalmed and tended as fairly as may be and buried in a sacred coffin by the townsmen of the place where he is cast up; nor may his kinfolk or his friends touch him, but his body is deemed something more than human, and is handled and buried by the priests of the Nile themselves.

— Herodotus, II.90

Anyone killed by a crocodile is considered sacred to Sobek, and nobody is permitted to touch the body except for Sobek's priests. The body is treated reverently; it is bathed and anointed, then mummified and buried. Relatives and loved ones take no part in the ritual but can participate in the burial.

Other Rituals

On some days, other rituals are performed. If any live crocodiles are kept in the temple, then the care and feeding of these also have their own rituals. Sometimes people want the priests to prepare and bury a loved one or a family pet. Throughout the year, worshipers celebrate significant religious days with animal sacrifice and a feast. Once each year the statue of Sobek is taken out of his sanctuary and prepared for its annual procession.

Action!

The Temple of Sobek and its associated cult would make an ideal "place of action." The building could be scaled to any size necessary; underneath might lurk a maze of catacombs where mummified crocodiles, priests, and sacrificial victims (usually other animals) are entombed. The temple can form part of a larger complex that includes libraries, hospitals, classrooms, museums, and administration buildings. Entire cities can be constructed around particularly significant temples. Temple guards can protect the area, outfitted in crocodile hide armor (see below) and bearing pole arms and sidearms, such as swords or axes. The priests take on a darker aspect if they sacrifice *people* to their god instead of animals. They might turn to such practices if facing a disaster – perhaps a prolonged drought after the nearby river failed to flood for many years. Finally, the GM can replace the altar in the sanctuary with a hole in the floor, leading to a crocodile-filled pool in the catacombs underneath.

Modern Times

Once Christianity became the official religion of Rome, many of the pagan cults were either subsumed into this new religion – with patron saints replacing pagan gods – or they were driven underground and practiced in secret.

Got a great location, but now you need some protagonists? Find inspiration in the GURPS Action series.

For dramatic purposes, it's best to assume the Cult of Sobek has become one of the latter.

Over the course of nearly two millennia the cult has undergone some changes. Once the temple stood prominent, the center of a large city with its priests being respected citizens. Now temples are constructed in secret, in the darker places of a modern city or in remote locations. Its gates, once open to all comers, are heavily guarded. Now, only the initiated are welcome to make an offering and receive the god's blessing and guidance. Where once the god was satisfied with offerings of fruit, cakes, and scented oil, he now requires the flesh and blood of human sacrifices.

> *There, in every place one crocodile is kept, trained to be tame; they put ornaments of glass and gold on its ears and bracelets on its forefeet, provide for it special food and offerings, and give the creatures the best of treatment while they live; after death the crocodiles are embalmed and buried in sacred coffins.*
>
> *— Herodotus, II.69*

ADVENTURE SEEDS

The Cult of Sobek can be the focus of an adventure in any period from Ancient Egypt through to modern times. In ancient times, Sobek formed part of the religious pantheon and was openly worshipped. Modern adventurers would discover a darker and more secretive cult.

Ancient

Supplicant: The heroes need to make a request of the crocodile god, perhaps to advance a subplot or resolve another adventure. The plea could involve blessing an item (say, by granting it a magical ability), or asking the god to make a prediction or tell the whereabouts of a missing loved one. Wealthier supplicants are expected to make more valuable offerings. The GM should determine how effective the offering is (assuming it's possible to communicate with Sobek at all, of course). Two things need to be taken into account: the wealth of the PC, and the significance of the request. Sobek would be far more receptive to a poor farmer who offered half of his entire harvest than to a wealthy adventurer who offered a similar amount in gold. Rather than providing a fixed price, the GM should encourage the players to have their characters determine their own offering. Imaginative offerings should be rewarded, even if their monetary value is lower.

Annual Festival: Each year the priests of Sobek brush off the dusty trinkets and idols and bring the crocodile god to the people in a procession through the city. This is the largest celebration of the year – pilgrims, merchants, and swindlers come from far and wide to participate in the action.

Eerie Idol: The adventurers have a client whose deceased husband bequeathed some of her jewelry to the local temple of Sobek in his will. She wants one of the pieces back and will pay a price far higher than what it appears to be worth. They discover that the item in question is adorning one of the priests' pet crocodiles – a very large and mean-looking crocodile. Even if they manage to recover the jewelry, once they realize why their client wants the strange-looking item, they may not wish to hand it over.

Rogue: Every year, crocodiles kill a few dozen people living or working near the river. Over the last year or so, this number has increased fourfold! The people are saying that Sobek has abandoned them and are blaming the temple for not keeping him appeased. In order to head off a riot (and to save his skin), the High Priest of Sobek has instituted a new rite – human sacrifice. He tells the people that it is better to satiate Sobek's thirst for human blood in the temple with specially chosen victims than to allow him to choose victims at random in the river. At the same time, his priests identify the real cause of the problem – a particularly large and aggressive rogue crocodile. The heroes are hired to track down and kill the offending creature. They must do it under the cover of darkness and keep their activity secret. They will be killed if there is any hint that they can't keep quiet.

Blasphemy: A crocodile attacks one of the PCs. If any members of the party (including the victim) kill or wound the creature, they are arrested by priests of Sobek and charged with blasphemy. The High Priest will decide on the punishment. A Good reaction roll will result in a quest. A Neutral reaction roll will result in a large fine. A Poor reaction roll will result in significant sacrifice to the crocodile god.

Competition: Some of the other temples in the city are becoming more popular – at the expense of Sobek. This results in lost revenue for the crocodile priests. The High Priest has come up with a direct way to remove the "competition." His acolytes kidnap priests of other religions in the middle of the night (along with any witnesses) and sacrifice them to their god. The adventurers are hired to assist in the kidnapping but are not privy to any details of the scheme, nor will they know of the sacrifices. If they ask questions, a false story will be told to allay suspicion.

Just over 100 Egyptian tombs have been found in a 450-mile-long strip of desert. Most pyramids found in modern times are in poor condition and appear only as piles of rubble.

Egyptian Crocodiles

The Nile crocodile is one of the largest freshwater crocodilians. Mature males can grow up to 20 feet in length but 12-16 feet is more typical. Weight can vary between 500 to over 1,600 lbs. Females of a similar age are typically around 20% smaller. They vary from other crocodiles in that both the mother and father ferociously protect their nest (both eggs and hatchlings), while most other crocodilians lay their eggs and move on.

A crocodile's ability to lie concealed with most of its body underwater, combined with explosive bursts of speed over short distances, makes it a superb ambusher. Crocodiles can work together to catch prey, sometimes herding fish toward a river bank or teaming up to take down prey as large as a rhinoceros. They can eat up to half their body weight in a single feeding. Once a crocodile grabs its prey, it will drag the meal-to-be into deeper water and hold it under until it drowns. They won't eat rotting meat but will scavenge fresh kills. While severe injury is a death sentence to most predators, crocodiles can survive to old age even with a missing leg or a portion of the jaw.

Nile Crocodile

Statistics are for a mature male about 15 feet in length and weighing around 1,000 lbs. Pizard's *Animalia* website can help create crocodiles of different sizes (see link below).

ST: 27	**HP:** 26	**Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12	**Will:** 10	**Move:** 4 (Ground)/7 (Water)
IQ: 3	**Per:** 12	**Weight:** 1,000 lbs.
HT: 12	**FP:** 13	**SM:** +2
Dodge: 10	**Parry:** N/A	**DR:** 3 (2 underbelly)

Bite (14): 4d crushing. Reach C, 1.
Tail (14): 3d+2 crushing. Reach C-3.

Traits: Amphibious; Breath-Holding 4; Cold-Blooded (65° F); Combat Reflexes; Discriminatory Smell; Gluttony (12); Hard to Kill 2; Hard to Subdue 2; Incompetence (Climbing); Low Empathy; Night Vision 5; No Fine Manipulators; Peripheral Vision; Quadruped; Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach); Restricted Diet (Carnivore); Striker (Tail; Crushing; Long +2; Cannot Parry; Weak); Striking ST +6 (Bite only); Wild Animal.

Features: Born Biter 1*; Scales.

Skills: Brawling-14; Intimidation-10; Running (Sprinting)-14†; Stealth-14; Survival ((River/Stream))-12; Swimming-14; Tracking-15.

* *GURPS Martial Arts,* p. 115
† *Optional* specialty (p. B169) that does not apply to paced running.

Modern

Sacrifice: A dependant of one of the heroes disappears while visiting a small town. After investigation, the party discovers that other visitors have also gone missing in the past. The trail leads to a secret temple complex where the missing victims are sacrificed to the crocodile god. The dependant will be sacrificed during the next new moon. A major complication is the discovery that prominent community leaders (such as the mayor and the sheriff) are secret members of the cult.

Zoo Escape: All of the crocodiles in the enclosure of a large metropolitan zoo escaped during the night. Bloody remains belonging to one of the zoo attendants are discovered floating in the pool. Initially, it looks as though he was mauled by a croc, but forensic investigation throws up some inconsistencies. Public panic ensues after the local media gets involved. The next night, the zoo's security guard does not show up for work. In fact, he is a recruit for a new branch of the Cult of Sobek, which is about to be consecrated in an abandoned car assembly plant in the run-down industrial part of town.

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He said he was like a crocodile. You never knew whether he was trying to smile or preparing to swallow you up.

– Winston Churchill

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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THE IMMENSITY

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

No one had seen Count Gerlach von Grabnische in decades. He was meant to have died in Berlin at the end of the last World War – lost in the final advance on Hitler's bunker. But, as with most evil geniuses, his remains were never found.

*So it was with little surprise – but much horror – that he was found to be very much alive and leading a squadron of his dreaded **Totengraben** in a siege on the Louvre. But this time, things were different: His men's strength and stamina were enhanced by strange, quartz-like growths, and they were armed with crystalline "guns" that knocked their victims unconscious with one hit.*

Several civilians and guards were incapacitated before the police could evacuate the museum. By the time they'd gotten them out of the way, the Count had taken what he'd come for – a haunting landscape by Nicholas Roerich – and escaped. Witnesses saw the villains clamber into the crystal pod they'd come in, and then watched it vanish, fading away like a mirage.

It was obvious the Count had acquired some new and impressive technology during his decades-long absence. But as weeks went by, and there were no further attacks, the French authorities began to truly worry. What was planning? What was he waiting for?

So the Directorate called the UN. The UN's Intelligence Taskforce called the Black Box. The Black Box found the experts necessary to figure out where the pod came from, and how to follow it.

When they did, they sent Major Landham and his team of commandos in to deal with Count Grabnische – once and for all.

It's been said that the only differences between the average villain and a true, evil genius are the size of their armies and the magnificence of their secret lair. If so, the hyperdimensional crystalline construct known only as the Immensity will turn any two-bit evildoer with at least a small following into a world-burner almost overnight – and do wonders for deadly dictators as well. It provides vehicles, weapons, and tools for those who find it, along with an (almost) totally secure location and the ability to travel anywhere they'd like – within certain parameters, of course.

The problem is that the Immensity is *alive* – a massive, crystal intelligence that hungers for soul-energy. It allows certain persons, and their lackeys, to use it as a base of operations in the hopes that they will rely on its weapons to bring it the energy it needs. If they fail to please it, then they, too, can serve as food.

And the creature is always hungry.

A provider of weapons that's able to change its interiors and slowly ingest the energies of the unwary, the Immensity makes for the ultimate in "exotic but dangerous" secret bases. It would be a great – and unexpected – twist for two-fisted action heroes to take the fight to the enemy to at the end of a long and baffling adventure, and it could provide a source of weird-science advantages for that enemy to use. It would also be a good object of interest for foreign governments – worried that the "enemy" might get a hold of it – to fight over, or for villains to find and exploit.

This article explores the strange and unique creature, outlines what it has to offer, and provides a rough guide to its interiors. It also warns of the dangers it holds in secret, ways to get to it, and ideas for its use. A brief description of the best human record of the Immensity – written by a madman – is also included.

WITHIN THE DARKNESS, A HIDEOUS LIGHT

There is a space *beneath* space – a no-zone between parallel universes, where the laws of space, time, and matter do not apply.

It is a black and endless void, home only to those unfortunate things that managed to slip outside of their own universe but could not quite make it into another. It is the final resting place of cosmic anomalies, intergalactic travelers, lost planets and civilizations, and long-dead, hubristic space gods who strived too far – yet not far enough. It has no native life forms, no landmarks, and no reliable means of entrance or escape.

Call it the In-Between, for want of a better name.

Deep inside the In-Between lies a true marvel of unknown engineering: a vast spire of quartz-like crystal that shines dimly within the gloom. It is a semi-transparent mountain of rock, floating in the space between spaces. It is slowly and surely growing, as crystals do when fed.

This great and monstrous thing does not grow merely from the accretion of matter, but from feeding upon energy. It consumes the life energy of sentient beings – siphoning the energy into its vast neural network. It slides forth new structures as it feeds, glowing brighter all the time.

What is this gigantic thing that floats between the worlds? Is it a broken ship trying to repair itself? A massive probe from another universe, set to some unfathomable mission beyond human comprehension? A piece of the future, come back in time to haunt humanity for the mistakes of their descendants? A colossal crystal god demanding near-endless sacrifice?

*A multitude of bizarre devices can be found in **GURPS Warehouse 23** and **GURPS MacGuffin Alphabet**.*

The Interdimensional God-Mind

The Immensity is a highly formidable psychic power, though not without certain limitations.

Its intelligence and willpower seem to rival any deity, to the extent that any and all attempts to read its mind ultimately fail. So far as any of its "friends" have known, the crystal palace is nothing more than a high-tech fortress, albeit one that seems quite willing to give up its secrets – one well-timed pictographic sign at a time.

The block works both ways. The Immensity is equally incapable of directly reading mortals' minds, which is why it must place "tests" in their paths and observe their statements and actions. It can, however, understand the language of anyone who sets foot within itself. It can also sense emotions, paying particular attention to those persons overcome by greed, avarice, and desire.

However, while it can't read, it *can* transmit. It can send mental images to those who are in possession of pieces of it, and through those images, try and influence more malleable persons to do its bidding, as well as nudge them toward correctly using its weapons and other tools. It can also take direct control of anyone who has a piece of it within them, though this is quite draining for it.

In spite of its massive hunger, the Immensity is quite sensible when handling its friends. It can subsist off of the life force they siphon away while on raids and missions. When they aren't off gathering food for it, the creature can drain a little energy from them instead – not enough to knock them out, just enough to leave them feeling tired. While it could just "disappear" a random person and drain all his energy at once, it usually refrains from such gluttony; subtly controlling people is more cost effective than a one-time feast.

The Immensity has a massive psychological flaw: Its endless hunger and rabid parsimony leads it to disloyalty. If it starts taking more energy to keep its friends alive than it's getting from them, the Immensity will do everything it can to bring a new clutch of potential friends on board, letting the groups fight over possession of it. It will also consider ending the current arrangement if they start asking too many questions or develop an objection to their actions.

The creature never worries that it's throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Time goes by quickly in the In-Between – one day in the Immensity is 30 on the Earth – and it rarely needs to wait long for a more enterprising, or at least less inquisitive, source of labor to present itself.

Speculation is pointless. The creature will never reveal the truth of its birth or direction. Nor will it speak its name.

Just call it the Immensity.

A Growing Lattice of Friends

The Immensity has been floating within the In-Between for strange and countless eons. It is something of a unique denizen, for it alone has the means for its escape. It has the power to send small pieces of itself outside of the In-Between and into the many universes that border it. There, the shards give up their secrets to easily suggestible minds, bombarding them with visions of the means to contact it.

Once contacted, the Immensity expends a measure of energy to send a "pod" of itself as close to the point of contact as it can. The pod is designed to bring a number of beings back with it, into the In-Between. Travel is near-instantaneous, and its new passengers are teleported into the center of the spire, where they are allowed to explore their new environs.

As they do, they find pictographic signs that speak of the many things this new place has to offer them. They discover that they now have access to energy weapons, body augmentations, medical facilities, and attack craft that can teleport them anywhere they would care to go. Who would say no to all that?

During this period, the Immensity scrutinizes their every word, move, and action. It quickly decides whether they are ruthless (or gullible) enough to do what is necessary to bring it more energy. Those deemed worthy only of ingestion are marooned within the crystalline being, slowly drained of energy after they ingest some of the food it makes available to them. However, those who have the qualities the Immensity desires are led to the central chamber and allowed to make it their new home.

The Geometry of Hunger

The Immensity is a mass of jagged crystal projections some 200 miles tall, and 70 miles across at its widest point. From that wide section, it slowly tapers to a point at its head, perhaps 170 miles up, sharply tapering off to a point 30 miles underneath. It glows from within – dimly pulsing as if to the beat of a massive, alien heart. It has no windows or observation platforms and is entirely self-contained, with a strange ability to create gas, heat, and pressure by slowly cannibalizing itself, so as to keep its occupants alive regardless of their native environment.

Most of the action in the Immensity takes place above the widest point. A series of chambers is nested within a labyrinth of crystalline passages and walkways that spiral both up and sideways. It's easy to become lost, but the Immensity is kind enough to pulse lights along the right path to take persons to their desired destination – usually.

Clues for the Immensity can (and should) be sprinkled months in advance. Long gaps of time are part of its core concept.

The first room new "friends" see is the pod bay, where a number of egg-like pods sit, waiting to be teleported elsewhere. The rounded, oblong pods are 20 feet wide and 15 feet tall, with crystal doors that slide open and shut. The insides of the pods have no controls. As extensions of the body of the Immensity, they teleport to and from it by its will alone. It allows its new "friends" to think they have voice control over the pods, though.

Radiating out from the pod bay are supply rooms and holding cells. The supply rooms contain row after row of the crystal handguns the Immensity allows its friends to use, along with rods and small crystal balls. The balls are voice activated communicators that allow for person-to-person or all-channel audio-visual communications. The rods are psycho-adaptive hand-to-hand weapons that "read" the user's desires and grow blades, blunt surfaces, and extra handles accordingly.

The holding cells are presumably for prisoners. They have sliding doors like the pods, plus some rudimentary furniture and toilet facilities. They also provide "food and drink": clear nutrient slurry that looks awful, tastes wonderful, and provides the Immensity the "in" it needs to siphon energy from its new friends' bodies, if necessary. If a prisoner should die without anyone observing, the body will be sluiced through openings in the floor into the lower labyrinth, and then the crypt.

Spiral passageways lie between supply rooms and holding cells. The journey upward is easy, but if the Immensity doesn't want its friends to go down and see the crypt (which it usually doesn't), it won't. The spirals will turn endlessly and give the illusion of going down without end, even if they've gone no further than one "story."

The trip upward is unobstructed and leads to a labyrinth of rooms and chambers of unknown purpose. Some of these are medical bays, where injured persons can have their wounds sealed with crystal growths, or have lost limbs and organs replaced with similar materials. Some of these are augmentation stations, where bodies can be improved with crystalline armor, spikes, and inbuilt physical and energy weapons. Some are torture chambers, where sinister-looking devices capable of inflicting pain with brute force or surgical precision wait to be used. Many more are empty and closed; they seem to have no purpose, though they glow at odd intervals.

At the end of the labyrinth of rooms lies a central control chamber. The Immensity prepares a massive crystal map of its friends' known universe, with their homeworld in the center, glowing slightly. The map can zoom in and out by command, showing anything they would care to see, down to the movements of people within a building. It can also be used to see what lies within the Immensity and explain what purpose the areas have, though certain omissions will be made as befits the Immensity's plans.

The Immensity will also prevaricate using these maps – showing things that are not there, but that its friends would *want* to be there. If they desire to go to such places, it teleports them somewhere that matches that location, and they may never know they were being fooled. For example, Count Grabnische spent decades in Earth-time exploring what he thought was the hollow world within the Earth, but was, in reality, the interior of another planet.

Around the control chamber are living quarters, which provide furniture (made of crystals of variable molecular density to provide "cushions" and "beds"), toilet facilities, and a font of liquid "food and drink." There are also weird "shower" cubicles that clean bodies by means of sonic vibrations.

Underneath the pod bay is another labyrinth of rooms, which the Immensity is not keen on its friends exploring – at least at first. Nothing here seems made for the use of humanoid life forms: rooms light up and pulse in series, changing their shape and size in an endless, sliding routine. It may remind modern-day observers of a model of a humanoid brain, with nerve cells lighting up one after the other as thoughts and commands are passed down from the brain.

Sometimes these closed chambers fill with crystalline sludge, which is sluiced from room to room. Sometimes it's piped up to the living quarters to become food, and sometimes it's piped elsewhere to be made into other things. And sometimes the sludge has passengers, none of which move.

At the bottom of the lower labyrinth is a crypt, filled with jagged, crystal coffins. Each coffin holds the body of a former friend of the Immensity: beings from a multitude of universes lie drained of energy, slowly being broken down into the nutrients needed for growth. Some of the coffins are mostly empty, except for things the Immensity could not digest or has had no use for yet. There could be any number of technological and xenobiological treasures here, provided the Immensity will let its friends dig for them.

The Bibliothèque Nationale in France may hold a key to contacting the Immensity. With that and the right crystal . . .

WEAPONS AND TOOLS OF THE CRYSTAL GOD

The Immensity has defenses, which it uses to feed on the life of others. The location intends its new friends to use some of these defenses as weapons; others are hidden things – booby traps and other surprises – that the Immensity activates as needed. Both have the end result of feeding the Immensity the energy it desires.

*Tough moral dilemma: The heroes thwart the Immensity, but its previous "friend" sends it on a course to crash into Earth! Now the heroes may need to go aboard an entity that wants to kill them, to save **its** life (and the Earth's).*

The Testament of Henri Lamarche

In 1758, a Parisian noble named Henri Lamarche was remarked to have been behaving "strangely" while at Court, and in the company of his family and friends. The mania took hold of him after a rock-hunting expedition in the Pyrenees, where he found a curious piece of crystal. Being an excellent craftsman, he made this crystal into a necklace. He said that the rock could show him things – filling his mind with visions of a great city that he could one day visit, if only he could find the path there. He also spoke of mind-to-mind conversations he held with a vast, crystalline intellect that bade him seek it out.

His family sought to have him sent to the madhouse, but he vanished before they could. The next time Henri was seen, it was 1776. He was dressed in ragged, filthy clothing, minus his distinctive necklace, and quite insane. Even so, he did not appear to have aged at all in the 18 years since his disappearance. In fact, he claimed to have been gone for only a couple hundred days!

Finally placed in an asylum, he composed a fantastic story about being taken by a large crystal egg to a massive, enclosed city made entirely of crystal. There was no one there but him, but he was tended to by the city itself. All the time he was there, the city spoke to him, through pictures on the walls and in his mind, telling him of great things they might do together.

However, the more it spoke to him, the more he sensed its terrible, awful hunger. He soon got the feeling that it might need him to perform unspeakable acts in order to make it happy. He also felt its growing impatience – sensing that if he did not do as it wished, it would one day kill him.

Faced with such a horrible choice, he found a different way to leave – making a doorway in the air by using the ideas the crystal had given him. That was how he found himself wandering in the streets of Paris near what was once his home, but was now a manse belonging to someone else, as his own family's fortunes had fallen to ruin in his absence.

Henri died penniless and insane in the asylum. *The Testament* was lost in the Revolution, but then found in 1801 and placed in the Bibliothèque Nationale. It contains the entire account of how Henri spent his days in the crystal city, what promises it made to him, and what he managed to find – including the crypt, which was what most likely drove him insane. It is magnificently illustrated in his hand. It contains detailed instructions on how to make the device to call a pod, plus how to use a piece of its crystal to make a door either there or back.

Henri's original device is long since gone, and with it – most likely – the centerpiece of his crystal necklace.

The energy weapons it lets its friends use are actually energy *collectors,* and therefore do not run out of power. In battle, they appear to cause a bolt of white lightning to shoot from the gun to the target, but in reality, the energy is flying from the target to the gun.

The discharge is a portion of the life energy of the victim, being collected by the gun for transport to the Immensity. One successful "hit" drains enough energy to knock the target out for at least an hour, maybe more. (In most game systems, start out with stats for a top-of-the-line stun gun, amplifying stats as needed.)

Once inside the drop pod, the energy is drained from the gun into the pod. Even if the pod or the gun were destroyed before it could return to the Immensity, the energy would just bleed away into the air. Once the pod returns to the Immensity, the crystal monster absorbs it into itself, glowing brighter with each unit of energy ingested.

The guns will not be allowed to function inside the Immensity itself. This is to avoid a miss, which would create a situation where the Immensity fed on *itself* – creating a dangerous feedback loop that might shatter its structure to a varying degree. Its friends are encouraged to use its provided hand-to-hand weapons for internal fights, as these also collect life energy with a successful, crystal-to-skin hit that knocks the victim out. The machines in the torture chamber work along a similar line, though they are designed not to draw out so much energy that the target falls unconscious – there wouldn't be much point in that!

As for its own defenses, the Immensity will not create energy discharges within itself, so it creates physical traps instead: endless and exhausting loops in the labyrinth, trap doors that drop the unwary into sealed rooms, spikes of crystal that shoot from nearby walls and impale their victims, short-ranged sonic vibrations in close spaces that knock people unconscious, and the like. Anyone who dies from such an attack is pumped down into the crypt, where clear coffins await. Its friends cannot command the Immensity to perform these actions as defensive measures. The Immensity does not reveal these as possibilities if it can avoid doing so; it prefers to keep its friends in the dark about how easily it could trap, injure, and kill them.

The augmentations it can give to its friends are painful to install, but very effective. They can take the form of crystal body armor, projecting-spike weapons, and skeletal-muscular enhancements. The pictographs in the surgery chambers don't tend to make clear that the augmentations are not removable without killing the patient, nor do they point out that the Immensity can feed off the augmented persons' energy through the augmentations themselves.

As an odd option (especially in a realistic campaign), the Immensity could be a hoax – a plot by a powerful entity wanting to conduct studies in mass hallucination and "big lie" justification for deadly weapons. Read the Watchmen *graphic novel for inspiration.*

Worse is the food the Immensity provides. It furnishes basic moisture and nutrition, and can be excreted normally, but a small percentage stays in the body, depositing itself in the spinal column. If the Immensity should decide it needs to siphon energy from its friends, it will use this connection to do so. It also can use this connection to take control of its friends, making them perform actions against their will.

FINDING THE CRYSTAL GOD

There are two ways to gain entrance to the Immensity. The first is to contact it, so that it sends one of its teleportation pods. The second is to find one of its many probe pieces (see p. 27) and use it to create a doorway in spacetime. For those not "friends" of the Immensity, the latter may be somewhat safer than the former, as the locale (and its associates) will be taken by surprise – but this method is not without its own travails and dangers.

Both options require one of the small pieces the Immensity sends from the In-Between. They always appear to be small, quartz-like crystal lumps that pulse with a slight glow; they defy traditional methods of rock classification. Gazing intently into these pieces floods the mind with otherworldly visions. Hypergeometrical concepts burst across the mind like opening flowers, along with the promise of what the Immensity can offer and the skills needed to create a device capable of making it easier to travel to it.

Direct Contact

Those who decide to contact the Immensity directly have their work cut out for them. They must create a device around the piece – one that makes it more energy efficient for the ever-frugal Immensity to send a pod. They then place their hands upon it and make plain their desire to visit the magnificent thing they have seen in their visions, at which point the Immensity usually sends a pod.

The device remains on until someone destroys it or takes the Immensity shard out of it; this means the infernal contraption can be reused over and over. Such machines have been found in various places and times throughout human history. They have almost always belonged to ruthless or insane individuals that mysteriously disappeared (at least for a time), returning either with a powerful – almost supernatural – army, or with crazed stories of a great, crystal palace and its many wonders. Sometimes both.

The Doorway to Beyond

The second option is not as clear-cut. Those wishing to create a doorway will have to take what the pieces show and extrapolate outward from it. Persons with knowledge "ahead of their time" – teleportation, non-Euclidean geometry, "weird science" – can, with trial and error, eventually find a way to set the pieces resonating so as to create a sympathetic doorway from Earth to the Immensity. However, this process requires a great deal of energy that will have to be maintained in order to keep the door open, and they may not be able to predict exactly where aboard the Immensity they will be appearing.

Also, the door is very clearly visible on both sides. Thus, if explorers are investigating the ship and away from the gate, current friends of the Immensity may slide through the open doorway and wreck the device on Earth in order to strand the interlopers there on the Immensity. If that happens, the newest visitors will have to create another doorway aboard the vessel, using a piece of the Immensity and an equal source of power. As with the way there, this will require a lot of power, and they may not know where they'll re-enter on Earth.

Worse still, the Immensity will soon realize what they're doing, and may try to stop them, using its body or friends as the means of execution.

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Option: The Portal

A more straightforward way to get characters into the Immensity – and, eventually, the Immensity into characters – is to have a third way in: a portal the Immensity generates to bring new friends on board.

The Immensity does not like to waste energy, but it does see the wisdom in making friends with people who might not be smart enough to figure out how to use the pieces of itself to create a portal. So, instead of biding its time while hoping for someone to learn basic interdimensional teleportation, it will bridge the gap for them – waiting until there are enough people near one of its pieces, and then generating a one-way spacetime portal to itself using that piece as a focus.

There are several problems with this tactic for the Immensity. First, it has no idea whether the people it's offering a way over to will take the invitation, or if they'll even be of any use once they get there. Second, the group might be aware that the Immensity can do this (or hazard a guess), and organize a large, armed group of people to wait near a shard, hoping that the crystal god will open a door and let them in.

And when it does . . .

</div>

USING THE IMMENSITY

The Immensity can be set into play a number of ways, depending on what kind of game the GM is running.

The most obvious use is to have it be the lair of an enemy. The villain drops out of sight for quite a long time, and all his former contacts know was that he was behaving strangely before he vanished. Then he comes back, armed to the teeth – perhaps literally – with the strange weapons and tools the Immensity can provide its friends.

*The secret paranormal-investigation agency called the Black Chamber might want to get a closer look at the Immensity. For details on this organization, see **The Black Chamber: An Agency for Decrypting the End Times** in Pyramid #3/5.*

Maybe it takes a few horribly one-sided fights, a month or two apart from each other, before the heroes do research for anything like this having happened before. Or maybe they search the villain's old lairs and find the transportation device – or what's left of it. They then have the choice of entering the Immensity by the front door, or around the side, and chances are good the Immensity will let them duke it out with their enemies relatively unmolested. Can they get in and out without falling victim to the inhuman persuasion – or deadly traps – of the Immensity, itself?

Another use is to have the Immensity be a treasure to be fought over, or a rogue element to be controlled or somehow destroyed. Rival superpowers realize the thing could provide a massive boost to their arsenal, and they thus send in teams to secure it – or maybe one or more sides will try to destroy it in order to keep it from falling into the "wrong" hands. A dictator could learn of the creature and scour the globe to find pieces of it, so it can claim its riches for his own, evil uses. This could turn into a really hairy situation if there's already a group on board the thing. It could get worse when the Immensity figures out that a group is attempting to *deny* it energy and tries to stop them, delaying them long enough to take them over and use them as pawns of its own.

The heroes could be the ones to discover the creature. Perhaps they come across one of the devices used by some long-lost scientist to make contact, and, finding a doorway to another reality, mount a proper expedition into the unknown. The Immensity will seek out those with usable psychologies, transmitting ideas of what they could do here. But what will they make of the crypt? How long before the expedition realizes their actions are not their own? And how will they get out if it decides to maroon them there?

There's also the possibility that the characters are tyrants or evil geniuses who find the Immensity and decide to use it for their own ends. They might thrill to the possibilities it offers, and gladly turn their henchmen into half-crystal monstrosities with its facilities. How long before they realize their goals have changed against their will? How long before the Immensity decides they're just not being cost effective, and pits them against one another? Can they turn this god-city to their will? Or will they have to flee for their lives while they still can?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He's been the editor of *The Wraith Project* and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.

I don't feel rejected by the sky. I'm a part of it – tiny, to be sure, but everything is tiny compared to that overwhelming immensity.
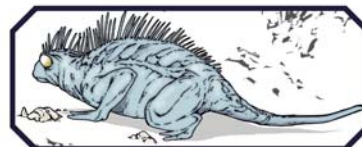
– Carl Sagan

ALTERNATE LOCATIONS

by Steven Marsh

If a campaign runs long enough, then it's possible for a "been-there/done-that" mindset to settle over even the most exotic locales – "Another desperate chase through an airport? <yawn>"

This list, then, gives potential variations to a location. The GM can either pick an intriguing possibility from the list or – if faced with coming up with something interesting on the spot – roll 2d (reading each die individually) to determine what variation exists.

LOCATION VARIATIONS

1-2, 1 – Deathtrap!

This location has cut many corners when it comes to safety; it simply doesn't care about protecting its workers or people. Assume any safety measures are significantly hampered or even removed entirely, if those measures are designed to keep people alive. Safety rails surrounding hazardous vats? Klaxons to warn when something is about to explode? Yellow paint to indicate "oncoming subways"? Nah.

1-2, 2 – Safe Haven!

This facility has placed safety at the top of its priority list. Assume any safety measures are top-of-the-line. Of course, safety protocols can often hamper heroes in action-adventure campaigns . . .

1-2, 3 – Secure

Security was an utmost concern when this place was designed. Assume better-than-average (or even top-of-the-line) security functions, plus more security personnel than expected.

1-2, 4 – Insecure

Whoever designed this place cut corners on security – its security cameras that don't work (or are fake), alarm systems that are antiquated, or locks that are a joke. Such locations can present problems or opportunities for heroes.

1-2, 5 – Compact

Space was at a premium when this location was made, so it is significantly smaller than similar locations – half the size of a comparable place is a good starting point. Thus an airport might be built into a mountain and have a terrifyingly short runway, or a coffee shop might contain only two small tables. Obviously maneuvering will be a problem, if it becomes necessary, and privacy or discretion can be much more challenging.

1-2, 6 – Sprawling

The location had room to grow, and it did! Or maybe it just had larger ambitions in the first place. A sprawling museum might require viewers to walk much more than they're used to, while a dining establishment might be huge even by big-restaurant standards – perhaps multiple stories! This can result in a much larger area than expected for searches, more area for chases, etc.

3-4, 1 – Advanced Tech Level

This place has state-of-the-art technology. In *GURPS* terms, if the society is on the cusp of a new tech level, assume this place is firmly dipping its toes into the new paradigm. Otherwise, it has many items or features that are high-end for that tech level.

3-4, 2 – Reduced Tech Level

This place is behind the times, and it doesn't look like it'll be catching up anytime soon. In *GURPS* terms, if it's possible for the place to be a tech level behind (or even two!), then it is. Otherwise, all its features are woefully antiquated, even if they are *technically* considered part of the proper tech level.

3-4, 3 – "Divergent" Tech Level

If possible, this place has diverged from normal technology for a place of its sort. In cinematic or cross-world campaigns, this can mean actual divergent technology – literal TL(x+y) material, in *GURPS* terms. In a more realistic setting, this option means the location uses an obsolete, depreciated, or underutilized technology. For example, a photo-processing lab might only deal with film in a digital era, or a web-server center runs all its software on OS/2.

3-4, 4 – "Haunted"

For lack of a better word, this location seems to be "haunted" – and the place offers plenty of its own proof.

Steve Jackson Games has published various Floor Plans hex-map sets, complete with details and adventure ideas.

While this may not be literally true (although, in many campaigns, it certainly *may be!*), a large number of people believe it's true. Errant wind produces moans, rodents (?) echo mysterious scritches in the walls, and no matter how much you oil the front door, it still squeeeeaks when it opens.

3-4, 5 – Inviting

This location is the opposite of haunted – it has a warm, cheery, inviting atmosphere. Maybe the windows focus in just the right way to make it warm and bright, yet not hot and blinding. Or maybe the circulation of outside air has enough residue of nearby pine to give it a fresh feeling. Such a place might catch heroes off-guard – "Who would start a firefight in as nice a bistro as this?!" – or it might give them something to protect and foster.

3-4, 6 – The Wrong Calling

This location was originally designed to be something else, but was instead converted to its current usage. It might be a restaurant with a stage (former theater), a mansion turned into a community library, or a multistory "office building" with a fire pole in the center. This can be a fun opportunity to mix-and-match two different locations.

5-6, 1 – Inconvenient

Getting there is half the "fun"! The location is placed such that getting into or out of it is a hardship for its patrons in some way. Thus a grocery store might have a labyrinthine parking lot, or a nightclub might be at the top of a multistory building – with no stairs. In general, such places usually need to have some other compelling reason to draw people in (the grocery store has good prices and interesting selection, the nightclub has an act that everyone wants to see), or else it will be in serious danger of going out of business.

5-6, 2 – Convenient

This place has been designed with user/visitor convenience as an utmost priority. It may well have a drive-thru, even if it seems inappropriate! Convenient places are easy for adventurers to get into and out of quickly – but that often means their quarry can do the same.

5-6, 3 – Incompetent

It may be a restaurant that takes twice as long to deliver a meal as expected, a movie theater with horrid sound and dim projectors, or an automobile-repair place that manages to cause one new problem for each old one it fixes. Whatever the core function of the location is, it doesn't do it right.

Unless there's a compelling reason for it to remain around (say, it's a government building and thus has a monopoly on its function), it's quite probable that such a place will go away in the future.

5-6, 4 – Artistic

This location was designed or decorated by someone with an artistic vision. (Whether that vision is any good is up to the GM.) Thus a mall might have elaborate murals on the floors, ceilings, and unused walls; or a bookstore might be completely designed around an entire *Alice in Wonderland* motif. Such places are often difficult to get a bearing on quickly, which can prove a challenge to heroes. ("Argh! The skyscape murals on the floor make me feel like I'm constantly walking into an open pit!")

5-6, 5 – Opulent

This place has had an extravagant amount of money invested into it – almost entirely for the purposes of a more lavish experience (perhaps stupidly so). Thus large, impractical (and fragile!) statues might adorn the center of the place; or the fixtures might all be trimmed with gold; or everyone wears a spotless suitlike uniform. Of course, "opulence" means different things depending on the location, and there's probably an upper limit. An opulent restaurant would be a sight to be hold, while an opulent donut shop might merely serve all its wares on real china and have a live band playing music . . . and an opulent bus station might merely be one that has soap in the restrooms.

Opulent locations are some of the most "fun" for players (and perhaps their heroes!) to adventure in; little is as satisfying as taking cover from gunshots behind a priceless 16th-century sculpture, or stopping the flow of blood with silk curtains.

More Variations!

Options for more transient variations can be found in this month's *Odds and Ends* feature, *That's Unexpected!* (p. 36)! A quick-and-dirty method to combine the two random tables is to roll d6:

1-2	Pick an option from *Alternate Locations*.
3-4	Pick an option from *That's Unexpected!*
5-6	Pick one option each from both tables.

5-6, 6 – Underfunded

Whatever the task is this place is expected to perform, it has not been given nearly enough money to do so. Unlike the Reduced Tech Level result, previously, this location doesn't necessarily have worse-than-normal technology. Rather, it might have perfectly adequate tech – just not enough of it. Or it's not working right. Or there's not enough trained staff to use it.

But the lack of funding exhibits in other ways, too. Lights flicker or are out entirely, windows are cracked or covered with makeshift repairs, and the wall paint was freshened up last millennium.

When using this option, it's a good idea to figure out why the place is still around. If it's a tax write-off, then no one cares what happens to it. If it's a government building, then obviously the people who could get or maintain funding don't have a lot of power. If it's a commercial location, maybe the owner is siphoning off profits elsewhere – which might reveal an unscrupulous nature.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been contributing to *Pyramid* for almost 10 years. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son Sam.

Random Thought Table

Locations Are People, Too

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

The curator is unaware of the bomb, so he declares his actions first which are to continue blathering away about the safety of his collection. The bomb declares it will explode, what do you declare?

– **DC Heroes Roleplaying Game,** *First Edition (1985)*

The above is, perhaps, one of my favorite quotes from a roleplaying game ever. It stemmed from a somewhat rare system used in the **DC Heroes** game (relied on by a few other games, but not many). It's a GM's description of an encounter where Batman is investigating a museum mystery. In that game, actions are declared in order, from slowest person to fastest; then, when actions resolve, they do so from fastest to slowest. In other words, the person with the best initiative not only knows what everyone else intends to do; he also gets to act before them all, too.

An amusing side effect of this system is that it requires inanimate objects to "declare" their actions, too, so that the players have a chance to react to them. This leads, directly, to the merriment of "The bomb declares it will explode" – a line that was a staple of our gaming group for many, many years.

This quote ties into this issue's location-based theme nicely, since it's a technique I've applied before in games where the location is important. To wit, treat the location as a character.

The Basics

At its most basic level, treating a location like a character means one thing, which ties into the opening quote: Have it act. In each "combat round" (a.k.a. "second," in esoteric **GURPS** terms), make sure to spend some time describing what the location is doing. In other words, give it a chance to "do something interesting" each round, the same way the heroes and NPCs do.

The easiest way to do this is at the same time each round – at the beginning or end, typically. If the location has been established firmly beforehand, these "actions" don't need to be particularly involved. For example, imagine a foot chase in a stadium during a college football game. Each round, simply give some description of something that happens around the heroes:

● "A child screams bloody-murder nearby." [Pausing to look reveals the kid dropped his ice cream.]
● "The ground beneath your feet starts shaking as the crowd noise grows deafening." [The a stadium wave is making its way around the arena.]
● "A chorus of booing echoes in the air." [The referees made a bad call.]
● "A security officer notices your actions and seems like he might be intent on investigating." [A complication, or potential ally?]
● "Hundreds of people start streaming through exits, cluttering all public walkways. [Halftime bathroom breaks!]

And so on.

Obviously the amount of action that can be conveyed is dependent on the assumptions of the game system. For example, if the preceding football actions were used in **GURPS** and the GM wasn't thinking it through, then an awful lot happened in the "real world" in just five seconds!

Depending on the group (and the use of the place), it can be distracting to have an update on the location occur at the same time each round. In that case, for games with initiative-determination methods – especially those involving random elements – simply give the location an "initiative," rolling for it accordingly. Obviously events are transpiring continuously at the place of action, but it can make it feel less monotonous and predictable if the location update happened after the third PC last round, before the first PC this round, and at the end of the round next round. Personally, I've found that the mere act of putting the location on the "list of active participants" for a scene helps to remind me that there is, in fact, a backdrop that is playing an important part of the adventure.

In campaigns with recurring locations, it's helpful to have placards that display the current location, as a reminder.

Of course, if you're not on round-by-round actions, you can still use this technique; just try to make sure the "scene" interjects about as often as an interesting NPC would. For example, let's say you have a carnival midway as the source of a tense (covert) investigation, with the heroes trying to track down a sleeper agent before he activates and goes on a rampage. Simply slip in background details as the mood strikes, or whenever there's a lull in the group's activities. (It's a risky technique to simply start interjecting background details, interrupting conversations or overriding players; although it can be effective – "As you're talking, a fire alarm rings out through the airport!" – for the most part, I don't do it more than once a scene, and usually less than once an adventure.)

Of course, this same advice applies to any item with its own motive or active capabilities, such as – say – a bomb. Have it provide updates as appropriate, give it an initiative if desirable, and have fun!

PLACES (LIKE CHARACTERS) HAVE A PURPOSE

As a more advanced application of the previous idea, keep in mind that just about every location – and certainly just about every manmade one – has a purpose: something it "wants" to do. The most obvious is our quote-inspired bomb: It wants to explode.

An airport primarily wants to get people off and on its planes as orderly and timely as it can.

A factory wants to stamp blocks of ore into widgets.

A dam wants to convert jillions of gallons of water into electricity.

Keeping these wants in mind will help you devise background activities that make sense for the location, since anything that interferes with its purpose will either be a new complication or have been designed to be taken care of (both of which can provide a background element). For example, a dam might have a concrete apron to protect it from wave action; knowing this can provide a background element: "A larger-than-expected wave seems intent on crashing over the top of the dam! *[next round]* The concrete apron on the dam breaks up the large wave, rendering it mostly inert except for a thick mist of water."

Obviously, wants derive from people, which can mean that the "wants" of an area are in conflict. For example, a prison "wants" to keep people locked up, but much of its constituency "wants" to escape; gamblers in a casino "want" to win lots of money, but the casino "wants" to take as much money of theirs as they can. Again, from this conflict can come interesting details to interject:

● "The prisoners realize that something interesting is happening in the hall, and they start clanging on their bars and cots, making as much noise as they can."

● "A stray shot hits a slot machine, which starts spewing quarters. The murmur of a crowd torn between personal fear and greed starts rising."

LET THE HEROES DEFINE THE ENVIRONMENT

As a final advanced technique, don't be afraid to let the heroes (and players) try to "define" their environment, through the use of their own details and interjections. The easiest way is to say "yes" to player requests (or at least, not say "no" immediately), since most of these attempts to build details will come in the form of a question.

For example, let's say the heroes are at a carnival. A player might say, "We have to get rid of this memory card before the bad guys show up any minute! There has to be someone nearby selling or giving out helium balloons, right?" Although the GM didn't have "balloon vendor" on his notes, it's a reasonable expectation to see at a carnival, so he says, "Yes." A few moments later, the heroes have tied the card to a balloon and are letting it go – a brilliant complication for later in the adventure!

As an advanced technique of *this* method, remember that the "wants" of the location can take precedence over the heroes' desires. For example, if the carnival "wants" to rip off as many kids as possible, then the heroes might discover a balloon costs $5, cash only – yikes! Or maybe the heroes want to find a fire alarm at an airport to trigger an escape (reasonable, the GM says), but that conflicts directly with the location's "desire" to transport people as orderly and efficiently as possible. Looks like the players will need to roll well!

If you start thinking of places as being like "people," with their own routines and wants, interjecting them meaningfully into an adventure becomes that much easier. And for those who've ever spent time in a "haunted" house or an automated factory, it shouldn't be much of a stretch at all.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over nine years; during that time he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son Sam!, who is a two-year-old force of nature entirely worthy of his exclamation mark.

Background Checks

Once you start introducing lots of background details and happenings at locations, the PCs will likely start wanting to use those elements for their own ends. For example, a hero might take the coming oversized wave on a dam as an opportunity to warn (or bluff) the bad guys: "Look out behind you!"

By all means – let the players do this!

The whole purpose of a noteworthy location is to provide an interesting break from the "infinite featureless plane" that so many combats seem to take place on. If the heroes want to help the little kid who dropped his ice cream at a stadium, use their intimidation to keep the inmates in check at a prison, or push a bad guy into the widget-maker at the factory, then this should be evidence that the location is successful; none of those actions would be possible were it not for the firmly established sense of place.

ODDS AND ENDS

THAT'S UNEXPECTED!

Alternate Locations (pp. 32-33) provides ideas for GMs looking to make permanent alterations to a place. But often what makes a location memorable or different is a more temporary or transient change. Here, then, are some unexpected (temporary) changes that can be made to a location; pick an interesting possibility or roll 2d (reading each die individually) to determine one. (Naturally, tweak the specifics as necessary.)

1-2, 1: The location is much darker or more dimly lit than expected.

1-2, 2: The location is much sunnier or brighter than expected.

1-2, 3: The location seems lit at random (some sections bright, some too dim, etc.).

1-2, 4: The location has a horrible organic smell – rotting meat, sewage, or the like.

1-2, 5: The location has a horrible industrial smell – new paint, carpet glue, or the like.

1-2, 6: The location is draftier or windier than expected.

3-4, 1: A group of people sympathetic to the locale are there (on a tour, doing a television report, etc.).

3-4, 2: A mob of upset people is at the location (protesting, looting, etc.).

3-4, 3: Security (perhaps additional) or police are at the location.

3-4, 4: The location is being torn apart by one or more entities (people, animals, undead, etc.).

3-4, 5: The location is much hotter than expected (the air conditioning is broken, the ventilation isn't working).

3-4, 6: The location is much colder than expected (the air conditioning is overworking, the insulation has given up).

5-6, 1: Sections of the location are more difficult to access (large crowds, new intrusive security measures, etc.).

5-6, 2: Sections of the location are closed or off-limits (private function, repainting, remodeling, etc.).

5-6, 3: The location was damaged recently (say, by a storm or looting), and hasn't been permanently or fully repaired.

5-6, 4: The location has terrible acoustics, making communication difficult.

5-6, 5: The location (parts or all of it) is soaking wet.

5-6, 6: The location (parts or all of it) is on fire!

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND

On Her Motherly Secret Service

IN D6 ADVENTURE LOCATIONS (West End Games), MOTHERS ARE BETTER DRIVERS THAN GENERIC PEOPLE AND ON PAR WITH SECRET GOVERNMENT AGENTS!
-S. Marsh-

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

The Little Things

It's the little details that make life – and locations – interesting. Here's a short list of items to casually add to a scene. They could mean nothing, or they could provide GMs and players with inspiration for a new adventure.

● A single item of clothing; if the item normally comes in pairs (such as earrings or gloves), only one is present.

● A novel with corners of some of the pages turned down.

● A small notebook of handwritten, unsigned poems.

● A child's toy – or a piece from a toy.

● A short newspaper clipping (a comic, an obituary, a group of classified ads, an advice column, etc.).

● An empty (or mostly empty) wallet.

● A few coins in various denominations.

● A single eating or serving utensil – clean or used – but no signs of what was eaten or served.

● Some broken glass.

● Small, unlabeled computer-data media (such as a DVD or memory card).

RECOMMENDED READING
THERE AND BACK AGAIN AND BLOWING IT UP

BY MATTHEW POOK

This time we're going places. Remember to pack the dynamite. Or get your butler to do it.

This month, we're about "thrilling" locations – literally, in a couple of cases. We need to start somewhere, and that somewhere is at home, or in your hometown. From there, we will visit ever larger and more exotic locales, always keeping an eye on the fun to be had there, whether that's the ever-popular brawls, shootouts, or even blowing things up. And for those so minded, let's not forget the shopping opportunities.

When it comes to keeping it at home, the United States is well served by location books. *Critical Locations* ($19.95, Wizards of the Coast, **wizards.com**) and *D6 Adventure Locations* ($12.95, West End Games, **westendgames.com**) both do places mundane and exotic (mostly mundane), the former is in color and the latter isn't although it provides better adventure seeds. The maps in both books though do feel too regular and too square, those in *Critical Locations* particularly so. Perhaps the most pleasing book with locations, at least from an architectural standpoint, is the *GMs Companion* ($18, Chameleon Eclectic, **rpgnow.com**) for 1992's Miami-based techno-thriller RPG, *Millennium's End* ($25), set in the "near future" of 1999. The maps lack the adventure seeds found in similar books (they are elsewhere in the book), but they are clear and possess an open feel.

If all you want to do is get away from things, then a holiday is in order. If your taste in vacation runs to the high life, then *Thrilling Locations* (Victory Games, Inc., 1985) is the perfect guide. Designed for use with what is still the best espionage RPG published, *James Bond 007: Roleplaying In Her Majesty's Secret Service* (Victory Games, Inc., 1983), the supplement is a guide to some of the world's best and most exotic places to stay, eat, and gamble at, along with the most luxurious means of getting there, all accompanied by advice from the superspy himself. Whether planning to stay at the MGM Grand Hotel, visit the table at the Casino de Monte Carlo, or merely glide across Europe on the Simplon-Orient Express, this is the book you need. The dangers of such travel is not ignored either, whether it involves fighting on the rooftop fight on a train or fleeing in a speedboat through the bayou. The book does show its age – it has a write-up and deck plan for the SST (or Concorde, as it's commonly known). Even if using the supplement for other games, there is no reason that Sheriff J.W. Pepper shouldn't be on the same holiday as the player characters, too.
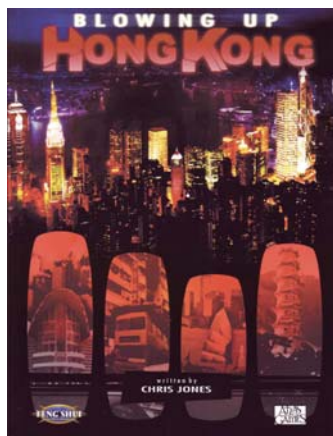
Alternatively, your tastes might run to somewhere smaller, quainter, and off the beaten track. Nowhere caters better to such demands than the Mediterranean island of Al Amarja, its quiet facade hiding surreal undercurrents of chaos, conspiracy, and danger – all detailed in *Over the Edge* ($29.95, Atlas Games, **atlas-games.com**). If you are looking for something specific or esoteric there, *At Your Service* ($19.95) lists some of the island's most interesting places and purveyors of unusual goods and services. Check out Beautiful Day or Hell in a Handbasket for magical ingredients (depending upon the flavor of magic), or go to Giancarlo & Sons for psychic legal services. Just don't visit Pike's Diner for food; they cater only to those who have passed on.

For our second set of "thrilling" locations, we get pulpy. *Thrilling Places* and *Thrilling Hero Adventures* ($26.99 each, **herogames.com**) are both for *Pulp HERO* ($34.99), and they provide excitement with adventurous places and places to adventure around the world. *Thrilling Places* contains genre standbys aplenty, all with adventure seeds.

*The first part of the title of this review is taken from J. R. R. Tolkien's **The Hobbit**. The second part of the title isn't.*

There's the fog-covered K'hull Island (home to unaging giant ape, K'hong) and Pleistocene Plateau – a lost world in Siberia ruled over by fleeing White Russians. There's an ancient Mayan city where worshippers of Camazotz the bat-god still practice their religion, and the Temple of the Dragon – a Chinese martial arts school under the nefarious Doctor Fang Shen's malign influence. *Thrilling Hero Adventures* provides actual adventures in the same vein, letting the heroes visit East Africa to fight "Nazi Death Zombies of the Congo," encounter Nazis again in "Inner-Earth" (along with dinosaurs and serpent-men, naturally), and actually *assist* the search for a Nazi archaeological expedition lost in Iraq in "The Tablets of Destiny" . . . all before returning to Africa and the "Valley of the Spider Queen"! The anthology is not all Nazis, but it gives both thrills and locations.

Blowing things up comes naturally to *Feng Shui: Action Movie Roleplaying* ($35, Atlas Games, **atlas-games.com**) – the RPG of mystical conspiracy and Wuxia martial-arts action – which casts the heroes as warriors in a Secret War to control Feng Shui sites and thus history. Better still, the game comes with three supplements that detail locales and the destructive fun that you can have fun there. The *On Location GM Screen* ($17.95) and *Iron & Silk: The Player's Guide to Improvised Fight Scenes* ($17.95) both do locations. The former covers mundane places such as an airport terminal, a convenience store, and a parking garage. The latter discusses uncommon locales – an ancient sorcerer's shop, floating shantytowns, and space shuttles – alongside the mundane. The game's *real* location book ups the scale to city size. Like any good guide book, *Blowing Up Hong Kong: The Guide to Action & Mysticism in Modern Hong Kong* ($19.95) tells you all that you need to know: its people and customs; the best places to shop, eat, and visit; and how to get around – the basics, essentially, all updated to reflect rule under Communist China.

Of course, it also provides more than the basics. Those needing a Rolls Royce fitted out with the latest luxury and security modifications should go see Arthur C.K. Moore or Tony Leung for the best in customized automobiles or boats for smugglers. Visitors should find time to take in a cup of "Golden Buddha" tea, reputed to be truly life-enhancing. If they're desperate, they can pray at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, where you might just gain the temporary – but extraordinarily effective – guidance from the ghost of Bruce Lee! Such assistance might be useful when the GM consults "Need 27 Kick-Asses to Stage a Brawl?" – just one of the useful lists in the book. Other lists give you unsolved mysteries, the locations of known Netherworld Portals, and "Things to Do in Hong Kong If You're an Anarchist" (which, obviously, also serves as a list of plots to foil, if you're a hero).

Our last location is the whole planet – specifically the world of 1948 after the blowing up has been done, thanks to Harry S Truman. In fairness, he didn't have much choice. When Hitler threatens to unleash Götterdämmerung and you have the Trinity Device, what else do you do but order a B29 to fly into the brain of Jörmungandr – the Midguard Serpent – and destroy it with the fires of the atom? Thus Ragnarok was averted. On the downside, the serpent's body and toxic blood fell to Earth, poisoning everywhere, dividing Europe with the Serpent Curtain, and causing a super tsunami that ravaged the United States as far as the Rockies. Now much of a ravaged Europe and the Near East is held in Stalin's red grip; the British Empire is based in Australia and South Africa under King Henry IX; Japan retained its empire after the Allies were forced to sue for peace; and California is the home of the United States under President Earl Warren. Professor Bernard Childermass builds rockets for the Royal Rocketry Air Force at Woomera; Djehuti-Yamun leads the Children of Set, the most malignant of the newly arisen snake cults; and who knows what loyalties and pay drive Otto Skorzeny's adventures!

This is the setting for *The Day After Ragnarok* ($19.95, Atomic Overmind Press, **atomicovermind.com**), Ken Hite's post-WW2, post-apocalypse, post-Ragnarok setting for the pulpy *Savage Worlds* ($9.99, Pinnacle Entertainment Group, **peginc.com**). *The Day After Ragnarok* describes itself as "SMGs & Sorcery," and it's is easy to run under the system of your choice. In this setting, both magic and psionics are known. Speleo-herpetologists harvest Serpent parts and develop Ophi-Tec – advanced technology such as Marconi Guns, Neural Stimulators, Ophiline (better than gas!), and delta-wing rocket planes. Stalin has his own arcane allies, including engineered man-apes, used to infiltrate British Africa.

Instead of a single Plot Point campaign, Hite offers four outlines that cast the heroes as freelancers, agents for the Crown, or local protectors. Alongside these are the superb Top Five lists, of which "Top Five Places to Stomp Nazis" and "Top Five Secret Bases" are the obvious highlights. Hite's own underlying inclination is toward running this as a Conan 1948 game set in Robert E. Howard's own country of Texas, but the swathes of detail and imagination on show range all over in this fantastic pulp setting.
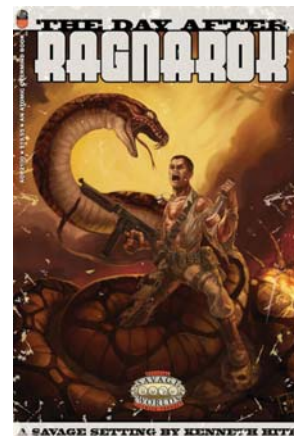
Only Ken Hite's imagination though, could stretch as far as suggesting that Ronald Reagan could star in the 1946 movie, *Conan of Cimmeria*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Pook resides in Birmingham, England, with the requisite pair of black cats and a perky Goth (not obligatory, but fun nonetheless), plus more games than he can eat. A pedant and proofreader by day, a reviewer by night, he has been gaming for nearly 30 years. He has been saying mostly good things about those games for almost 10 of those years now.

HALL OF MIRRORS

Whether chasing a criminal through an abandoned amusement park or stumbling through a megalomaniac's glassy monument to himself, a staple of many adventure tales is the hall of mirrors.

THE SETUP

From a story perspective, the usual goal of a hall of mirrors is to provide a means for the hero(es) and villain to see each other but be unable to interact directly . . . at least, not with much clarity. Unlike skulking through sewers or back alleys, such halls are usually brightly lit and inviting in their own way – until the adversary with the gun can be seen cackling maniacally. Do the heroes risk attacking the person? Do they assume it's a trick of light?

THE MAP

This map is of a potential hall of mirrors. (One hex = 1 yard.) There are two broad ways it can be used.

A Room With Views: The hall exists as an obstacle to get through, from the lower-right corner to the upper-left (or vice versa). Of course, the bad guy can still try to use the confusion to take some potshots at the heroes, but he's generally hoping the hall buys him some time.

It Ends Here! The hall exists as a final obstacle room. In this case, the adversary closes or blocks the exit and uses his superior knowledge of the hall to plot his foes' demise.

Gray lines indicate walls; these cannot be seen through, and are made of the same material as the surrounding walls.

Blue lines are windows. They can be seen through (obviously).

Red lines are mirrors. They can reflect on both sides, but are otherwise opaque viewing through them as per gray-line walls. As arranged in this hall, angled mirrors reflect at a roughly 90-degree turn, although cinematic mirrors are generally able to reflect at seemingly impossible arcs. If the GM has a good idea of where the heroes and villains are in this hall, he should be able to determine if it's remotely possible for the two sides to see each other.

If the windows and mirrors are normal glass, then determined heroes can probably smash or shoot their way through fairly easily – but they may still buy the villain enough time to further his goals. If they are made of bulletproof material, then it's harder for the heroes to simply force their way through. (Information on regular and bullet-resistant glass are on pp. B558-559.)

Note that the hall becomes a real challenge if the adversaries have some means of using the hall offensively – say, by bouncing laser attacks!
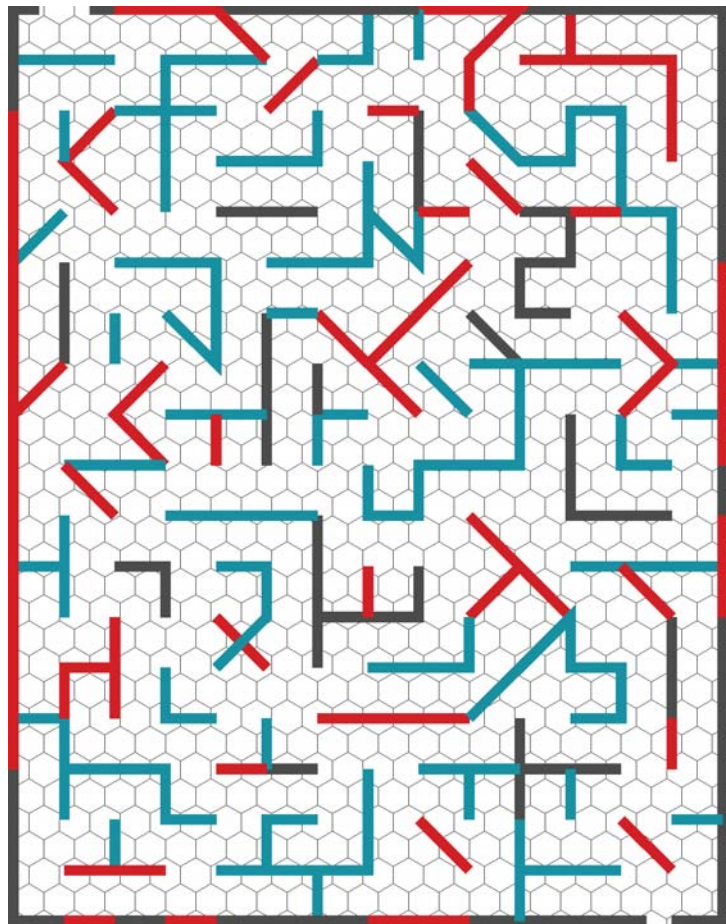
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Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases are available on our website – see above.

GURPS rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book.