

# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/22 August '10

## BANESTORM



### ANSONNE: THE BLACK HEART OF ARATERRE

by Matt Riggsby

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by Phil Masters

**ARVEY: THE CITY OF SILVER HILLS**  
by Paul Stefko

**WHATEVER HAPPENED TO . . . ?**  
by Andy Vetromile

**THE CRYSTAL WILDS**  
by C.J. Miozzi

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*Some adventurers may arrive on Yrth with nothing but the clothes on their backs, but it's possible for whole buildings and small villages to come through.*

– **GURPS Banestorm**

## Article Colors

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

*Pale Blue:* In This Issue

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

*Dark Blue:* **GURPS** Features

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### COVER ART

*Bob Stevlic*

### INTERIOR ART

*Greg Hyland*

*Matt Riggsby*

*Ben Williams*

# IN THIS ISSUE

The world of Yrth is a rich and varied place, with many locations explored by its inhabitants but not so much by outsiders. This issue of *Pyramid* offers possible histories of lesser-known spots – including two cities using the **GURPS City Stats** format – plus plenty of other **Banestorm** goodness.

Matt Riggsby (author of **GURPS Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality**, **GURPS Hot Spot: Renaissance Florence**, and many more) reveals the secrets of a splendid island city in *Ansonne: The Black Heart of Araterre*, about which one observer has said, “The scent of the city’s spices cannot keep pace with the stench of its rot.” It includes a full-page map depicting the city and its surrounding environs.

Phil Masters (co-author of **GURPS Banestorm**) suggests how to create unusual character histories in *Places to Come From: Heroic Origins on Yrth*. Additionally, he presents brief descriptions of two unusual locations that provide ideal heroic backgrounds.

There have been thousands of unsolved disappearances over the centuries. Find out a possible fate for several of the more famous ones in *Whatever Happened To . . . ?* (Hint: They ended up on Yrth.) The article also offers some ideas on how to add noteworthy names to the **Banestorm** setting at the right time.

Near the Bronze Mountains lies *Arvey: The City of Silver Hills*. Though sometimes a place bitterly fought over, this metropolis has still managed to shine. More importantly, the location of the city makes it a perfect starting point for **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**-style adventures. It also includes full **GURPS** character stats for three of the city’s noteworthy names.

The dwarves have a secret place of great beauty and unusual flora and fauna. Explore *The Crystal Wilds* (on Yrth or under the volcano of your choice), and discover what delights it has for the eye and palate. Is it realistic or fantastic? Yes!

In addition to its usual frivolity, *Odds and Ends* features a special bonus this issue: an unlabeled version of the city map from **GURPS Banestorm: Abydos**. Give a copy of this map to players and tempt their heroes into seeking out this strange city.

This issue also has its usual touch of humor with *Murphy’s Rules* and a thought-provoking *Random Thought Table*.

Editor-in-Chief ■ STEVE JACKSON  
Chief Operating Officer ■ PHILIP REED  
Art Director ■ WILL SCHOONOVER  
e23 Manager ■ STEVEN MARSH

**GURPS** Line Editor ■ SEAN PUNCH  
Editorial Assistant ■ JASON “PK” LEVINE  
Production Artist ■ NIKOLA VRTIS  
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Page Design ■ PHIL REED and JUSTIN DE WITT  
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# FROM THE EDITOR

## SETTING THE MOOD

This issue of *Pyramid* feels a bit different from previous fantasy-themed issues we've done. It took me a while to understand why, but I think I'm getting close. This time, we've included a lot more setting material, rather than the usual gear, powers, etc. In many ways this is intentional; a *Banestorm*-themed issue should expand on that setting as much as possible, since – if we tried to work an Ytarrian city into a more generic issue – it might feel out of place. This doesn't mean the material here can't find a home in other campaigns; once the relationships to larger political bodies are transformed, the crystal caves (on pp. 31-34), the two cities (pp. 4-16 and pp. 25-30), and Phil Masters' *Places to Come From* (p. 14) would be fine in just about any fantasy setting.

In comparison, we feel relatively confident in our ability to list (say) new martial arts styles or strange magical items with *Banestorm* ties in future broad-themed issues. It should be

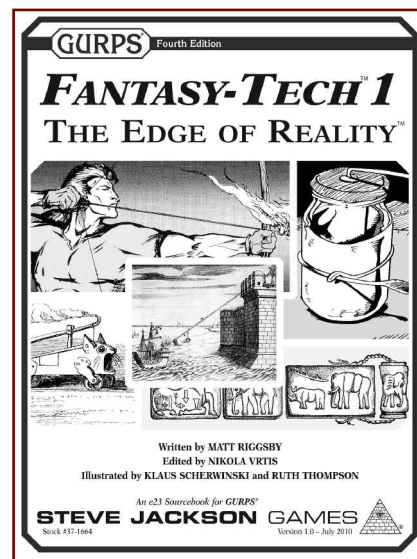
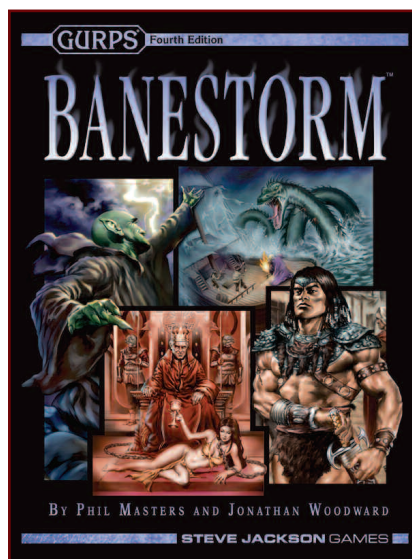
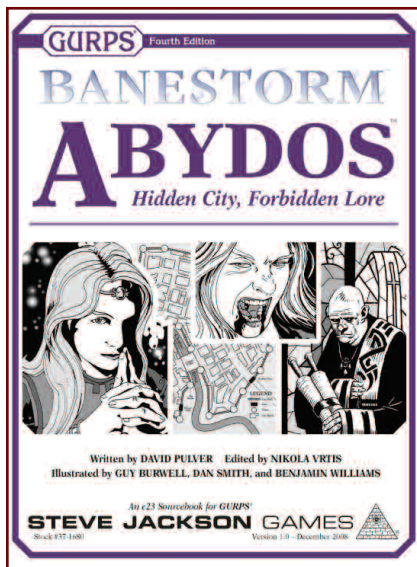
easier to scrub off Ytarrian place names of an ancient magical sword or a new spell than it is to move a whole city.

As ever, we try to maintain a balance between “useful to folks who like the theme” and “usable in lots of different campaigns.” Let us know how we did here!

Which leads us to . . .

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

We love to get your feedback! Please feel free to send any messenger owls to [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or scrawl missives on your apprentice squire and have him stand at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com) – for particularly long messages, simply write the post on multiple squires (and be sure to include “Continued on Next Page” at the bottom). If you're inspired to try to contribute to *Pyramid*, please check out our Writer's Guidelines at [sjgames.com/pyramid/writing.html](http://sjgames.com/pyramid/writing.html) for more information.



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# ANSONNE

## THE BLACK HEART OF ARATERRE

BY MATT RIGGSBY

The most distant outpost of Ytarrian Christendom is the Aralaise archipelago. To many, Araterre is an exotic – even romantic – place. The environment is lush, the land is rich with spices and fruits, and the culture is alive with tales of adventurous sailors and the strange magic of the nearby Ring Islands. With that romance, there's an inevitable bit of danger, which is usually supplied by the city of Ansonne.

As the major city closest to the Ytarrian continent, Ansonne is the gateway between the mainland and the rest of the archipelago. In recent years, that gateway has opened wide enough to let in anyone. Most notably, it has welcomed a growing class of exiles, renegades, and pirates. Decadent and dangerous, Ansonne is a fascinating place to visit . . . if you can survive it.

## GEOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

Although the island Ansonne occupies is a rich one, few locations are suited to large settlements. Fewer still are good ports.

### FLEUROUGE AND ANSONNE'S ENVIRONS

The city of Ansonne lies on the northwest coast of the island of Fleurouge, near the northern end of the Araterre archipelago. Fleurouge is just a bit larger than Jamaica on Earth, over 90 miles across its longest axis and up to 60 at its widest. It and the small islands immediately surrounding it comprise the duchy of Ansonne. Most neighboring islands are to the north and south, with Isle de Nord just out of sight over the northern horizon, Isle Entelle a similar distance to the south, and Bartow Island twice as far to the east. However, there's nothing but water for nearly a thousand miles west and northwest to Alimar and Min.

Fleurouge is fertile but mountainous. Most of the coast is surrounded by reefs and submerged rocks. Even where dangerous obstacles are absent, wide expanses of shallow water make it difficult for full-sized ships to draw close to the shore. Navigable approaches to the island are limited to a few harbors, of which Ansonne occupies the largest. There are three other good harbors on the eastern shore (each occupied by a small town of no more than 5,000 people), and

a number of marginal landing sites, most of which are occupied by fishing villages.

The island's main industry is agriculture, and a great deal of land is taken up by plantations. Most are part of feudal domains or large private holdings administered by local overseers; the owners themselves spend most of their time in Ansonne. The island's steep ground is well-watered by frequent rains. It has also been shaped in many places by terraces cut into the hillsides for rice farming and grape vines. However, many of the steep hills are used for forest and orchard crops: teak and other tropical hardwoods, cashews, mace and nutmeg, cinnamon, and recently vanilla. Fleurouge already grows more than half of Araterre's vanilla, all of which is shipped out through Ansonne, and a number of new plantations should start producing it in the next decade as the secret techniques of cutting and pollinating become more widely known.

### THE CITY ITSELF

Ansonne is built in a rapidly rising valley between two spits of land extending roughly northwest and west into the sea. Since the more southerly spit is shorter and thicker, they have been named the Thumb and the Finger. Rocky shoals project some distance out from the ends of each digit (called, appropriately, the Nails), so a lighthouse has been built on each by the Order of St. Molyneaux, a minor order of Benedictines.

*A map of Araterre (including Ansonne's relationship with it) is on p. 105 of GURPS Banestorm.*



## Ansonne, 2010

**Population:** 40,000 (Search +1)

### *Physical and Magical Environment*

**Terrain:** Island/Beach

**Appearance:** Unattractive (-1)      **Hygiene:** -1

**Normal Mana** (Rare Enchantment)

### *Culture and Economy*

**Language:** Aralaise

**Literacy:** Broken

**TL:** 3

**Wealth:** Comfortable (x2)

**Status:** -2 to 6

### *Political Environment*

**Government:** Dictatorship, Municipality

**CR:** 3 (Corruption -3)

**Military Resources:** \$1.12M

**Defense Bonus:** +7

### *Notes*

Search modifier is +2 for pirates, smugglers, and black marketers, and +3 for spices and exotic woods. Ansonne, like the rest of Araterre, is predominantly TL3, but is TL4 in some areas such as shipbuilding, navigation, and melee weapons.

The lighthouses are equipped with arrays of objects with Continual Light cast on them by resident wizardly monks, and Sound spells are used during fogs. Once past those hazards, Ansonne Bay is broad and surprisingly deep, allowing even the largest ships to put in at the city's extensive wharfs.

The legal limits of Ansonne are a rough triangle with a base defined by a line between the lighthouses and the other two sides by the ridgelines of the Thumb and Finger as they turn into hills and meet about two miles southeast of the base. The ridgeline is enhanced by a low defensive wall protecting the city from overland attack. The wall is too low and too long and the city too sparsely garrisoned to make it a very good defense, but with a lack of landing sites and rough terrain across the island, an overland attack is prohibitively difficult.

Ansonne's 40,000 people are concentrated in the landward third of the triangle, near where the Thumb and Finger meet. Most of the city is built in a narrow crescent-shaped plain along the shore, with an extensive series of docks and warehouses immediately facing the water. Behind them are a mixture of inns, marketplaces, and poorer dwellings. This section of the city is occasionally subject to flooding during very bad storms. The size and richness of buildings (and the wealth and power of their owners) increases the farther uphill one goes. Ansonne's cathedral is about half-way up the slope along the Finger, while the ducal palace is almost at the top of the slope where the Finger and Thumb meet.

## HISTORY

Ansonne is no older than human occupation of Yrth. It grew from an unremarkable town to an important center of commerce, but it may soon prove to be a difficulty in the next major conflict.

### THE EARLY YEARS

Like the rest of the Aralaise archipelago, Fleurouge appears to have been uninhabited until the Banestorm. There are suggestions that elves may have visited, but did not stay. Even when humans did appear on the scene, they rarely approached Fleurouge's rocky coast.

The site of Ansonne was first settled by 1561. It was around that time that the island acquired its name, after a variety of large red flower which still grows in huge numbers in wild areas. During that period, Fleurouge had an unusually high number of Huguenots, so most settlements on the island were predominantly Protestant. Early Ansonne was an exception, even hosting a small settlement of Jesuits. However, all the Banestorm refugees, regardless of their faith, were too focused on survival to carry on the sectarian wars which were wracking their native France, so Catholics and Protestants on Fleurouge lived in a wary peace with one another. Ansonne

grew to be a reasonably prosperous town of about 6,000 people, the largest settlement on the island. Between the sparse population and the rough terrain, it exerted little influence over neighboring towns, but that was soon to change.

### MEGALANS

In 1587, the first Megalan galley put in at Ansonne. Accurately assessing the situation, the Megalans spent the bulk of their effort on building up Catholic Ansonne at the expense of its Protestant neighbors. It didn't reach the violent depths of Earth's sectarian wars, but it did nevertheless result in widespread persecution of the island's Huguenots. The largely Protestant towns on the eastern shore of Fleurouge were put to the torch, ensuring that Ansonne would remain by far the most influential city on the island.

The *ducs* of Ansonne acquired enormous prestige during this period. They went from glorified mayors to rulers of a sizeable territory. By 1594, Ansonne's bishop was recognized by the Curia and in 1603 – as part of the promotion of the Megalan Church over Protestantism – arranged to become the administrators of the city of Ansonne (though not the rulers). Work started on an elaborate cathedral around this time.

*The stat block in the box above uses the GURPS City Stats format. See that supplement for details on searching within a city and information on how City Stats interacts with GURPS Mass Combat.*

However, the structure would not be completed until 1848. When the principality of Araterre was established in 1625, one of its centerpieces was a dynastic marriage between the houses of Ansonne and Sauvons, uniting the new country's most powerful families.

Even after Araterre was opened to trade in the mid-17th century, Megalos remained a key partner. With its relative proximity, Megalos is simply the easiest nation to reach. Nevertheless, superior Aralaise ships constructed in the shipyards of Sauvons and Ansonne also started making the long voyage to Cardiel and al-Haz, carrying sugar and the spices of the islands to satisfy the sophisticated tastes of the more developed nations of the west. However, production of valuable crops was limited by the islands' relatively sparse population.

## BALINESE

That started to change in 1872, when the first Balinese appeared. (In actuality, this wave of Banestorm refugees came from across Indonesia and Southeast Asia, but initially were predominantly Balinese, so the name stuck.) The Balinese were quickly assimilated in the more densely populated south, but they became a large and stable minority on Fleurouge. There was never any serious question of the Balinese being incorporated into the Aralaise feudal system. The confused, disorganized Banestorm refugees were no match for their entrenched and magically assisted forerunners. Still, there were some violent incidents, and a minority of ethnic Balinese around Fleurouge harbor resentments against their overlords.

Still, aside from a few incidents, the Balinese were quickly accepted into the country where they found themselves. The nobles of Fleurouge were in dire need of labor to expand their agricultural operations, and the Balinese, mostly farmers and fishermen already, saw themselves as continuing to fill the roles they had been given in their previous homes, simply in a new location.

One of the chief factors in the peaceful integration of the Balinese is that the Aralaise almost immediately acquired a taste for many aspects of Balinese culture. Balinese craftsmen who made their way to Ansonne set up shop and immediately enchanted the aristocracy with their elaborate, colorful designs. Ansonnese tailors were behind a vogue in the early 20th century for batik fabrics, shadow puppet theater was and is a popular art form, and many buildings dating to that period show a distinct Balinese look. The Balinese influence has faded somewhat over the years, but it is still a distinctive attribute of many aspects of Ansonnese life, from cuisine to clothing to popular entertainment. The Balinese also brought with them sandalwood, cloves, nutmeg, mace, and a few lesser crops that are now major money-makers.

## RECENT ADMINISTRATION

Although Ansonne has never seriously challenged Sauvons as Araterre's first city, it has been losing ground in recent years. The groundwork was laid 22 years ago, when Calvino Montferrat was created bishop of Ansonne. Like his superior, Archbishop Andrew, Calvino is both a Benedictine and devoted

man of religion. However, Bishop Calvino is a fanatic. He believed fervently in the monastic ideal, constant prayer, mortification of the flesh, and the like. No one could doubt his piety, and no literate person could fail to respect his fiery, articulate defense of traditional doctrine. Nevertheless, this frequently put him at odds with the more relaxed practices of most other Aralaise clergy and the earnest but more realistic approach of his superior.

However, despite his skill as a philosopher and pamphleteer, Calvino was never a good administrator, and he became much worse as he got older. Rather than spending his days overseeing the episcopal guard, monitoring tax revenues, and the like, he has turned more and more inward, spending his days reading and writing in a nearly unfurnished cell in the otherwise luxurious rectory attached to the cathedral, seasoned by mortifications and overnight vigils. Even his fellow Benedictines have become alienated by his increasing irascibility and philosophical emphasis on mysticism, and he has been almost completely out of touch with the world outside of the cathedral for the past several years. However, he's in outstanding health despite advancing age, so it seems that the current episcopal administration will continue in that vein for years to come.

Having an inept bishop wouldn't be an insurmountable problem if the city could have a canny, hard-working duc to take up the slack. Unfortunately, what it has is Duc Remis d'Ansonne, brother of the prince in Sauvons. Remis duplicates all of his brother's faults and few if any of his virtues. Aside from a pleasing appearance (*le duc* is, before all else, a snappy dresser), an affable demeanor, and a liberal hand with the purse which could be confused with generosity, the best that can be said for him is that he is seldom needlessly cruel and has no ambition to rise to a higher position which would allow him to do even more damage than he already does. He would not, for example, be interested in an attempt to assassinate his brother and young nephew in order to bring himself to the throne.

Remis was handed the reins of power at the end of a misspent youth, and he has administered the city consistently through a misspent young adulthood up to the edge of what promises to be misspent middle age. The first to recognize the value of the dissipated duc was the Wazifi merchant as-Siyassi, who befriended the duc with a dazzling array of silks, women, sports, and other luxuries. During those early years, Remis followed as-Siyassi's suggestions on pretty much everything, which was far less work than governing himself. Although as-Siyassi has long since departed, Remis found that he enjoyed this style of government so much that he found other favorites for himself, and he happily remains a rubber stamp for other people's ideas.

Although some imagine that the Society of Honorable Seamen (Ansonne's powerful merchants' guild) might have stepped in at this point, that organization was itself quickly corrupted. Among the duc's bought-and-paid-for actions were maneuvers whereby unscrupulous merchants became Society leaders, and any number of dubious captains became members. With a membership which came to contain a substantial number of outright pirates, the Society limited itself to the narrow interests of its more vocal members.

*"Reformed pirate from Ansonne" is a great heroic character concept. Enemies! Intrigue! The call of a scoundrel's life!*

This is where Ansonne finds itself today. Although geography, history, and increasingly liberal trade policies make it an important port, it's a far more dangerous place than it was 20 years ago. Pirates walk the streets as respectable citizens, and

thieves lurk in the shadows with little fear of the authorities. One of the more melodramatic observers of Ansonne's recent history has said that the scent of the city's spices cannot keep pace with the stench of its rot. Unfortunately, he's right.

# GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Ansonne has a complex government which involves a number of venerable institutions and the involvement of the most powerful segments of society: the aristocracy (in the person of le Duc d'Ansonne), the church (in the person of the bishop), and major commercial interests (in the form of a council of merchants). Unfortunately, the incumbents of two of those positions are at best negligent and at worst incompetent, and the remaining leg of government is handicapped by internal conflict and a lack of oversight. As a result, there's a large gap between how the city is supposed to be governed and how it is actually governed.

## GOVERNMENT IN THEORY

Ansonne is the seat of le Duc d'Ansonne. The duc is the supreme judge for the region (that is, Fleurouge and a handful of tiny inhabited islands) and overseer of lesser authorities. He derives the bulk of his revenue from feudal holdings through the region and traditional fees attached to the city and its institutions. He also maintains ships belonging to the Aralaise navy and a detachment of troops, and he has the authority to raise more soldiers as necessary.

Nonetheless, though the city falls under the ultimate authority of the duc and contains the duc's traditional residence (as well as barracks for his men and moorings for the fleet), he does not rule over it directly. There are several layers of authority between him and the people. The duc issues edicts concerning the public peace and regulation of trade, but the work of carrying out most of those edicts lies in the hands of the bishop of Ansonne and the Society of Honorable Seamen. They work within a framework of laws and regulations imposed from above (by the duc and the prince of Araterre; imperial decrees from Megalos can set the tone for edicts from the prince, but rarely have a direct impact on the civic level), collect most of the taxes and duties, and return a share of the proceeds to the ducal government.

The bishop has primary responsibility for keeping the public peace, regulating the city's marketplaces, and collecting most direct taxes. Between those revenues and private donations to the church, the bishop maintains a detachment of his own guards, who function as the primary police force for Ansonne (crimes and unrest outside the city fall under the duc's jurisdiction), and deals with most civic infrastructure and services, including maintaining church buildings and the public spaces around them, handling "family law" (marriages, divorces, determining legitimacy of births, administering wills, etc.), determining the legal status of residents, regulating minor trades to ensure quality materials and workmanship,

and providing charitable aid for the destitute. All told, the episcopal administration probably has the greatest impact on common people's day to day activities.

The full name of the Society of Honorable Seamen is "the Worshipful Society of Honorable Seamen Before the Lords of Ansonne Assembled," but it is typically abbreviated to "the Society." It is a guild composed of the city's resident merchants, responsible for operation and maintenance of Ansonne's port facilities and collecting docking fees and shipping duties. The Society is willing to consider for membership any citizen of Ansonne who owns a seaworthy ship or trades goods outside the city to a value of at least \$40,000 a year. Prospective members are reviewed by a committee and must pay a substantial initiation fee in addition to regular dues and the occasional extraordinary subscription (for example, emergency funds to rebuild a wharf damaged by storms). The members elect a high council of a dozen senior masters, members of the Society for more than 10 years. The council in turn elects a consul to handle executive functions and appoint members to serve on various committees: membership, inspection of imported goods, relations with long-shoremen, mediation of trade disputes, and so on.

Ignoring the vital role of defense in wartime, the role of le duc is mostly oversight and high-level direction. He may ratify or review certain topics (in addition to being a court of appeal for residents of Ansonne, he must approve the Society's high council and consul and approve marriages between humans and non-humans), but the church is largely free to look after the spiritual and physical welfare of its flock, and the merchants must shoulder the difficult responsibility of regulating one another.

## GOVERNMENT IN PRACTICE

In actual practice, the Society of Honorable Seamen rules the city, when they can be bothered . . . which is rarely. The bishop is out of touch and out of his depth in dealing with some of the wickedest men in the world and – at any rate – is more concerned with abstract theological debates than administering weights and measures in the marketplace. The duc would be within his authority to step in and impose his authority, but Remis is working very hard to be part of the problem.

For one thing, Remis does sporadically exercise his authority, but only in response to bribes or the prompting of his favorites. The ducal guard can only be counted on to defend the duc himself, and possibly his friends and the wealthier merchants. The duc, who can theoretically hear judicial appeals from anyone, will only review cases from which he's likely to receive amusement or substantial payment.

*To generate spices of interest to fortune-seekers, see p. 11 of **Dungeon Fantasy 8: Treasure Tables**.*



If he can be convinced that a particular appeal should be heard, he'll most likely hand the task over to one of his favorites, who will bring yet another agenda to the case.

Worse still, in a strategic sense, the duc is empowered to issue letters of marque, which he does with few concerns beyond keeping his debts down. Araterre has long granted letters of marque to private ship captains of known ability to augment the navy in wartime and help keep piracy down in peacetime. However, most of Remis' letters are a legal fig leaf for sophisticated pirate captains who like to style themselves merchants. In the unlikely event they are accused of piracy, holders of Remis' letters claim that their victims were pirates, that they looked like pirates, or that they were in the pay of al-Wazif or some other enemy, and that they (the actual pirates) were within their legal rights to attack their victims and eliminate the threat they appeared to pose. Since Remis is empowered to hear cases involving accusations of piracy, such a defense typically succeeds. Remis is also happy to retroactively declare that captains slain (or sometimes just captured) by his allies and supporters were in fact pirates, absolving the attackers of blame. By tradition, incidentally, holding a letter of marque automatically qualifies one for membership in the Society, so Remis' sale of letters has also serves to pack the Society with men who prey on more conventional merchants.

Moreover, Remis himself isn't always involved in the sale of justice. Although he occasionally enjoys dressing up in nigh-royal finery and issuing grand decrees, the business of government is too great a distraction from his usual pastimes of drinking, gambling, wenching, and hunting. Instead, he hands most of those tasks over to a never-ending succession of favorites and bureaucrats. The current favorite is a woman styling herself "Daniela de la Nuit," a cheerfully self-confessed diabolist and witch. It is widely assumed that she is one of the duc's mistresses, though it certainly hasn't stopped the duc from running through countless other women (which Daniela

doesn't seem to mind, leading some to believe their relationship is of a different nature). While she has taken no formal position in the ducal court, she does prepare proclamations, letters of marque, and other official documents for the duc's signature and seal, which is always forthcoming.

The unenviable task of trying to make sense of the duc's administration-by-whim falls to his chamberlain, Moishe the Tall. Moishe, a member of Ansonne's miniscule Jewish community, has been with Remis for over 10 years, putting his considerable administrative skill to use by similarly preparing official documents for the duc's approval. Though he despairs of Remis' careless approach to his duties and the damage it's doing to Ansonne, Moishe knows better than to try to work against him. He has held his difficult position for so long by keeping the duc solvent and out of legal trouble.

*Daniela is the duc's favorite at court.*

This leaves the Society as the one effective governing body in Ansonne. The Society firmly controls large-scale trade in Ansonne, pulls Remis' strings, and has slightly longer-term interests than the duc (who only cares where his next drink is coming from) and shorter-term interests than the bishop (who is still trying to figure out how many angels can dance on the head of a pin). But even they have far from comprehensive power. When they agree, as they usually can on such matters as maintenance of port facilities and services, they're quite effective. However, the Society's members are intensely competitive with one another; and beyond the basics of ensuring smooth transactions for large quantities of goods, they can come to terms on next to nothing.

## FORCE, CRIME, AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

With such lax administration, a great deal of what goes on in Ansonne involves some combination of brute force, overt or covert criminality, and vigilantism.

### ARMED FORCES

One of the few powers the duc and bishop haven't abandoned or sold to others is the right to maintain troops. Any sailor worth his salt is expected to be able to help defend his ship, and most wealthy individuals retain bodyguards, but only the rulers of the city can maintain large bodies of uniformed men who have pledged long-term loyalty to them.

In peacetime, Ansonne is home to about 300 regular troops. Two thirds of those are in the service of the duc, or at

least nominally under his orders. Most of them are assigned to three naval vessels regular stationed at Ansonne. Most Aralaise professional fighting men, though, are equally at home on land and on the sea, so they can be transferred on and off ships as circumstances dictate. Although the officers and a few of the men own horses, the Aralaise have never gone in for cavalry, and the hilly terrain of Fleurouge is doubly prohibitive to mounted troops.

The duc's men operate as medium infantry, mostly relying on pole arms, but with a good seasoning of bowmen. The duc's troops do not include magicians; if any are needed, they can be considered "civilian contractors," hired from among private citizens or borrowed from the church but not a formal part of the military.

*For another city where the influence of guilds makes for strange politics, see GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence.*

This body of troops is good enough for everyday tasks and lightly patrolling the waters around Ansonne, but hardly enough to defend the city in wartime. Between feudal levies and hiring mercenaries, the duc could bring his fighting force up to a few thousand. However, the new troops would be both less competent and less loyal than the regular soldiers, and after a few months, he'd have to turn to the capital for assistance.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

About 50 troops serve on the duc's personal guard. Their primary task is to protect the duc and his property. They could be ordered to assist the bishop's troops in their law enforcement tasks, but in these sad days, that would most likely happen only in case of riots and other civil unrest. They have dashing blue and red uniforms and count a number of favored duelists (who tend to be hotheads) among their ranks, but Moishe makes sure that they're also reasonably disciplined and loyal soldiers. Like everyone else in Ansonne, they're hardly incorruptible, but they're much harder to influence if it comes to directly endangering le duc.

With the duc's men engaged in dueling, naval patrols, guard duty at the governor's palace, and keeping their uniforms clean, this leaves the bishop's 100 men the closest thing the city has to a police force. No one is surprised that they're not terribly effective. For one thing, they can't be everywhere at once. On average, fewer than half are on duty at any given time, and of those who are, probably half are in or around the cathedral or guarding the bishop, wherever he happens to be. This leaves no more than 25 men (typically in groups of four to six) to patrol a city of 40,000. They do their best to prevent overt lawlessness, but by the time they reach the scene of a crime, it's likely to be long over.

The quality of the troops is also not what it could be. While Moishe has done a good job of balancing loyalty and skill, the bishop's insistence on religious devotion and orthodoxy as a primary qualification has hurt the average quality of his men. The bishop's guard are among the most loyal and least corruptible men in Ansonne, but they're hardly a force to be reckoned with. The guards are competent fighters, but only a few are better than that, and fewer still have the skills to be more than the low-tech equivalent of a beat cop.

Consequently, what justice there is tends to be vigilante justice. The Society guards its own warehouses and will actively pursue thieves, and most neighborhoods tend to stick together, keeping an eye out on strangers to prevent petty crime. Visitors are, naturally, more subject than usual to criminal activity, but there are some counterbalancing factors. Some neighborhoods are simply more vigilant or more adamant than other about protecting themselves, so strangers can sometimes find themselves in places where thieves are either subtle or quickly caught. The upper city, the neighborhood of the cathedral, and most Society warehouse neighborhoods fall into this category. The lower-middle part of the city tends to be the most dangerous. Most criminals also commit crimes of opportunity where they hope to escape unharmed. Since strangers in Ansonne are a varied and wildly unpredictable lot, only the most desperate and foolish will take on new arrivals without observing them

extensively first. No matter what their moral character might be, most thieves are all too aware that the old man with the tattered robe and heavy pouch might be a mad archmage or Sahudese martial arts master.

## DUELING

With a large population of people prone to violence, Ansonne has developed an active dueling culture, which many residents follow as people elsewhere might follow their favorite sports or social goings-on. As in Sauvons, dueling is illegal within the city walls. Anti-dueling ordinances are enforced by the bishop's guard, so particularly impulsive duelists may be able to fight a quick, furious bout before any authorities can arrive to stop them.

More genteel duelists, however, avoid brawling in the street like common thugs and take their affairs to the dueling grounds just outside the city walls, in easy sight but beyond the jurisdiction of the bishop. Indeed, people line the walls to watch duels between particularly famous swordsmen – but only if they can't get a good viewing spot at a safe, respectful distance from the duelists on the ground itself. The duc may put in an appearance, bringing with him a comfortable couch; a small, open tent so that he can watch from the shade; and a good supply of wine, women, and minstrels.

Challenges are almost always delivered in person. Both parties may use whatever melee weapon they prefer. However, anything but a sword is likely to be looked on askance, and pole arms are the subjects of ridicule. There are no formal "seconds," though duelists typically bring along a friend or two as witnesses and to help with wounds. However, duels often start on the signal of a third party, frequently a lady whom one of the duelists hopes to impress. More "recreational" duels are usually to first blood or – for more daring duelists – until one party or the other cannot continue the fight. However, dueling to the death is common in cases where someone is insulted or dishonored.

## ESPIONAGE AND INTRIGUE

Unsurprisingly, Ansonne is a nest of spies. Some might be characterized as "industrial" spies, agents of merchants in al-Haz, Cardiel, and around Araterre itself, searching for intelligence of shipping trends and industrial and agricultural processes. For example, methods for growing vanilla are much sought-after.

Most espionage, though, is military and political. To the Megalans' despair, Remis, in his capacity as the leader of Ansonne's military, is privy to a great deal of intelligence concerning the Aralaise navy. His court leaks like a sieve, and some of the cloud of spies around it pursues Remis and his associates for any details they might drop on deployment, fleet strength, potential actions, and so on.

Remis is also the subject of a more dire plot. Certain Wazifis, foreseeing another war with Megalos, believe that if Remis were prince of Araterre, he could be used as a figurehead in front of a move to make Araterre an independent kingdom. With Megalos deprived of a significant source of naval strength, the Wazifis would be at a distinct advantage in the next conflict.

*Campaign idea: One of the heroes has Destiny ("I will be instrumental in guiding Ansonne to its fate").*

Even if Remis were to throw off the influence of favorites, most observers believe he'd be sufficiently inept that Araterre would become a non-issue.

In addition to international problems, there are local issues as well. The wounds of the past have never completely healed. There are separate underground organizations of

Balinese "nationalists" and Protestants, each plotting the overthrow of the current regime and independence for their group. At the moment, both are little more than secret grumbling societies, but there's always the chance that someone could do something rash.

## DAILY LIFE

If nothing else, civic life in Ansonne is varied and colorful.

### HIGH SOCIETY

Between the archbishop's cathedral and the ducal court, Ansonne is a magnet for the educated and moneyed classes of the northern end of the Aralaise archipelago. These two are centers of overlapping social circles casually referred to as "the vestry" and "the palace."

Vestry society focuses on the church calendar and clergy. Those involved are avid church attendees, participate in or materially support the chapter (a combined lay and ecclesiastical organization that handles the church's finances and "business" operations such as construction and maintenance), promote religious education, and are important players in planning and carrying out civic religious festivities. Vestry society is regarded as very pious and, by those to whom it makes a difference, very dull. However, those who participate have a certain amount of influence, since they're in a preferred position to serve the church on committees and as informal agents.

Palace society is centered on the doings of the duc and his hangers-on. The duc likes to have a lot of friends on hand, so it's relatively easy to get access to him. However, it's both expensive and dangerous, since palace society involves social competition which is cutthroat both figuratively (in rapidly changing fashions in clothing and amusements) and literally (in dueling; see p. 10). There are constant rounds of gambling, masked balls, hunting, chamber concerts, salons for philosophical discussion (or, more often, clever ribaldry), and similar amusements. Because the duc is easily bored, there's also very high turnover. Today's favorite is often tomorrow's outcast.

Because civil and ecclesiastical institutions intertwine, social climbers must have a foot in both worlds. Naturally, this is difficult; a champion drinker will get a cold shoulder at Mass, while a serious Biblical scholar is the butt of cavaliers' jokes. Particularly clever ones form alliances, each using their influence to shield the other in their respective areas.

### LOW SOCIETY

Although the amusements of the poorer people of Ansonne are often what one would expect, they can be surprisingly diverse. The city's restrictions on foreigners, which are lax verging on nonexistent, have made it a refuge for a huge cross-section of the people of Yrth. Assuming one survives long enough, a stroll through the alleys of the lower part of the city

would turn up, in addition to more-or-less Aralaise and Megalan public houses, establishments such as a tavern selling heavy Caithness-style ale, a Wazifi steam bath, a Sahudese herbal pharmacy, or an orcish raw-meat restaurant.

There are no purpose-built theaters in the lower part of the city, but inns often have a small space for performers of all kinds. These are likewise diverse, ranging from solo fiddle or reed instrument players (both are popular among sailors) to sharqi (belly dance) to small plays (mostly ribald comedies and bloody tragedies) to gamelan ensembles.

Another major recreation is gambling. The merchants and pirates of the lower city are, if nothing else, inveterate risk-takers. A vast range of games of chance have been imported, and bets might be placed on just about anything, from public fighting bouts (both formal duels and the "championship" brawls which are another popular tavern entertainment) to the weather. Just about anyone can be found to place a bet on any unsettled question, though retribution for fixing bets and welshing can be swift and terrible.

*Wealthy and poor alike enjoy performances and gambling.*

### LIFE OF THE MIND

For a city with so many merchants and aristocrats, the intellectual life of Ansonne is remarkably underdeveloped. Although small groups of people engage in philosophical debate and pursue literary studies, there are no formal schools (teachers are essentially freelancers working for the wealthy), widely available libraries (libraries are private, restricted to small groups, or both), or societies of magicians, scholars, or other intellectual professionals.

Such learning as there is tends to be very practical or very esoteric. On the practical side, anyone who keeps his eyes and ears open can pick up the rudiments of literacy, mathematics, and navigation. On the esoteric side, the city is home to a number of fugitive and exiled magicians and craftsmen. The city is a good place to look for wizards who have seen too much, and there are rumors of a cabal of underground engineers.

*Determining if Ansonne's fate is a new era of greatness or a final decline can be the source of tension.*

Ansonne has one licensed printing press, and it belongs to the bishop. It is used occasionally to print handbills with baffling spiritual messages and warnings to the citizens of Ansonne to look to their salvation.

The real activity in publishing, though, issues from an unlicensed press. The most widely read publication in Ansonne is *Le Gazette*, a weekly scandal sheet published in secret and distributed through an underground network of dead drops and part-time couriers. *Le Gazette* publishes a mix of “regular” news and useful information (small reports on commodity prices, recent ship arrivals and upcoming departures, tide tables), but most of its pages are filled with a mix of investigative reporting, gossip, and downright satire aimed at the city’s inadequate authorities. *Le Gazette*’s anonymous publisher, who signs his work “Father Confessor,” is believed to be a member of the city’s aristocracy.

## THINGS TO SEE

Ansonne is, sadly, not an attractive city. Despite the city’s wealth, high turnover among the poorer residents and the gold rush-like nature of the expanding spice trade have resulted in cheap, shoddy construction in most of the lower city. Combined with tropical temperatures and humidity, a number of buildings are crumbling or have been patched repeatedly with little regard for aesthetics. The very cultural diversity that makes its street life so vital has also led to some very odd and often clashing architectural juxtaposition. Flowers grow well on Fleurouge and decorate many building fronts, but the riot of color can only cover so much. The most notable features of the lower city are purely utilitarian: the lighthouses (short, thick towers, undistinguished except for the bright lights), the wharfs (a series of docks covering the majority of the sea-front), and the shipyard. The shipyard occupies a section of the southern end of the city’s sea-front. A network of wharfs outlines a large rectangular pool divided into berths where ships are constructed. The shipbuilders are among the city’s most industrious residents, and famously tight-lipped about their techniques.

Farther uphill, the cathedral, made from a charcoal-gray native stone, was built at a time when Gothic architecture and gargoyles were wildly popular. It now looms over its neighborhood like a gloomy skeleton. The ducal palace is slightly better. Though inspired by rococo styles, the style of the building is relatively restrained and the imported, faintly rose-colored marble facing makes it visible without being gaudy. However,

Duc Remis has spent several years extending the core of the palace with garish out-buildings and pleasure gardens.

## FOOD AND FASHION

Aralaise food has acquired a mostly unfair reputation for being frighteningly spicy and exotic. Aralaise chefs simply observe that they’re making the best use of local ingredients, and if you eat barley gruel every day like those gloomy mainlanders, just about anything will seem exotic. Although the food of Ansonne is based distantly on the cuisine of Provence during the Renaissance, it has been altered heavily by the local ingredient supply and the heavy impact of southeast Asian foodways. Staple foods include wheat bread, rice, and noodles of various kinds in about equal proportions. There is little good land for cattle in the islands and sheep are not widely raised, so lamb, mutton, beef, and dairy are relatively expensive; pork, poultry, and fish are far more common. Salads, often involving blanched vegetables and roasted and cooled meats, are a mainstay of the Ansonne diet. Stews, roasts, and heavy sauces, though still prepared, are regarded as old-fashioned or, at times, comfort food. More progressive palates prefer heavily spiced noodle soups and grilled fish and meats with flavorful legume-based pastes; a popular satay-like sauce based on chickpeas shows the influence of al-Wazif and al-Haz. Sugar is in good supply, so spiced nut brittles and sweetened cakes are common, and the duc’s pastry chefs are masters of blown-sugar art.

Clothing likewise retains a vaguely European look heavily layered with south Asian features. The poor tend to wear tight, short-sleeved shirts, loose vests, and voluminous pants (or, for some women, short but baggy skirts) with a sash or belt. Wealthy men wear hose or tight pants, tight tunics (often open at the neck), and two or three layers of loose, thin vests and coats. Despite the climate, wealthy women are given to two or three layers of thin gown over punishingly tight corsets. Dye plants are relatively inexpensive on Fleurouge, so decoration can be both rife and garish: batik, embroidery, appliqué, and other techniques are used on just about every visible bit of cloth. Felt or leather hats are universal; the most common style is broad-brimmed with from one to four points pinned up. Capes are rare and, where worn, lightweight; they’re usually the sign of a duelist. Ankle-high boots are common footwear. Ansonne is enthusiastic about Carnival season, so masks are very common in the weeks leading up to Lent.

# ANSONNE IN THE CAMPAIGN

*An exciting port of call.*

Wealthy, diverse, and chaotic, but not quite chaotic enough to invite serious intervention from outside, Ansonne provides a lot of room for adventure.

## ANSONNE AS DESTINATION

Ansonne is, first and foremost, a trading hub. A great deal of trade to and from Araterre passes through Ansonne. Even vessels bound to and from Sauvons and other points to the southeast put in regularly for supplies. The sea voyage from the mainland is long and difficult, but it’s an excellent port of call for mercantile PCs in search of making their fortune.

*For more guidance on using Destiny in a Banestorm campaign, see p. 15.*

Ansonne is also an excellent place to find unique commodities and information. It's the kind of town where anything can be had for a price, from contraband enchantments to heretical books, although the people purporting to sell them may not be trustworthy. It's also the ideal place to acquire advanced Aralaise technology whose export is discouraged.

Espionage is another good reason to visit Ansonne. Agents could easily be sent from nearby nations to gather information on the ground, obtain unusual items (for example, exotic poisons smuggled in from Bilit Island), counter other agents, or make overtures to influence important people.

Finally, it's a good place to find unique and unusual people. A chieftain's lost daughter from the Nomad Lands? An exile who fled the Megalan court because he knew too much? The man who murdered your father? All could easily be hiding out in the alleyways of Ansonne.

## ANSONNE AS HOME

Ansonne is, obviously, a good base for piratically inclined adventurers. Indeed, it comes close to being Yrth's equivalent of Tortuga or Port Royal. By custom, pirates are expected to make a pretense of being good sailors who only fight in self-defense or in support of their country rather than aggressive sea-thieves. However, as long as they're even slightly circumspect about it, they'll find the city's inns and markets open to them, with no trouble from the authorities.

Of course, ambitious folks might want to *be* those authorities. Being a member of the bishop's guard is very tough, but that could be the basis of a challenging campaign, playing the only honest cops in a corrupt city. Guardsmen can do what they can to keep the streets safe while unraveling complex criminal relationships and identifying the most influential pirates and smugglers. Whether the investigators turn over their information to the appropriate authorities or, not trusting the corrupt regime, take steps themselves, is a question of character.

Those interested in pursuing the martial arts could do worse than stay in Ansonne. The city's violent streets and highly formalized dueling culture provide endless opportunities to get into fights in a variety of settings with a wide range of opponents: formal sword duels, informal tavern contests, street brawls, ambushes by thugs, and so on. Ansonne has a number of formal salons teaching swordplay, but fighters can pick up tips from a variety of veterans through the city.

## ADVENTURES SEEDS

Here are some more specific suggestions for adventures or short-term campaigns.

### Sea Monsters

The one thing everyone in Ansonne agrees on is the importance of the sea. Without it, merchants can't ship, pirates can't raid, producers can't sell, and exiles can't come and hide. And that's why everyone in the city is pitching in together, inefficiently and with much jockeying for influence, to beat back the sudden infestation of large sea serpents now plaguing the waters around Fleurouge. Heroes good at fighting can help kill the monsters, while investigators can try to figure out where they're coming from all of a sudden.

## Masked Marvels

A corrupt city. Swashbuckling action. Mask-wearing. Vigilante justice. Sound familiar? Adventurers can be masked avengers, anonymously righting wrongs and vanishing into the night. They may be completely mundane, in the tradition of Zorro, or they may use magical abilities and enchanted items, both relatively uncommon in Araterre, to become super-heroes.

*There just might be Jesuit assassins hunting pirates sympathetic to the Lutherans.*

## Spy vs. Spy vs. Spy vs. Spy

There are already many several possibilities for espionage in Ansonne. Taken together, they suggest a surprisingly large and possibly incestuous community of spies: Megalan agents have been inserted in Ansonne to ward off Wazifi agents trying to influence the duc, while agents from Cardiel and al-Haz are in place to keep an eye on the situation and report back to their masters. All are keeping their presence a secret from a few special men in the ducal guard who are tasked with counterintelligence; agents from Sauvons are no doubt on hand to keep an eye on the unreliable duc without revealing their presence to the untrustworthy men of the ducal guard. In the meantime, *different* agents from a variety of foreign powers are gathering commercial information (such as the secrets of growing vanilla; aristocratic members of the ducal court are natural targets for their spying), while a *different* set of local agents (ducal, episcopal, and Society) are trying to figure out who they are and stop them. Finally, yet *another* set of Megalan agents are trying to identify pirates while members of the Society are trying to blur the distinction between merchant and pirate as much as possible. Of course, Protestant and Balinese nationalist agents and agents of the Curia – on hand to stamp out Protestantism and Hinduism – may be found around the edges of any intrigue. This leads to a situation where multiple sets of secret agents (any of whom may be PCs) are moving in overlapping circles, trying to find out rather different things. This may be played out as a fiendishly complex chess game (“Is he a Protestant spy working for Wazifi commercial agents, or is he trying to throw us off of the idea that he’s a Jesuit assassin hunting pirates sympathetic to the Lutherans?”) or as a comedy of errors (“I’d arrest him, but I can only do Wazifi assassins. Wazifi spies and Cardiel assassins are out of my jurisdiction, but give me a call if he poisons someone or emigrates!”).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby first encountered Yrth when it was part of the original *GURPS Fantasy*. He has since written a number of articles for *Pyramid* magazine and several *GURPS* books, most recently *GURPS Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality*. He works for a large supplier of advanced medical devices and services. He lives with his wife, son, and several dogs. He falls on the correct, pro-pirate side of the pirate-ninja debate. Ya-harrrr, matey.

# PLACES TO COME FROM

## HEROIC ORIGINS ON YRTH

BY PHIL MASTERS

The heroes of fantasy have to come from somewhere. (Yes, when a daddy brawny-thewed barbarian and a mummy brawny-thewed barbarian like each other very much . . .) This isn't generally a superhero-style "origin story"; fantasy characters don't usually have superpowers as such, so they mostly just have the same sorts of personal histories as a lot of other people in their worlds, except that they personally often somehow come out a little bit *remarkable*.

Sometimes these origins are simple (and none the worse for it): "These stories are set in the world of Nehwon; one of the heroes is a northern barbarian from the barbaric northern bit of Nehwon, and the other is a city rogue from the most important city on Nehwon." However, sometimes origins are designed to have a bit of poetic resonance to mark the hero out as special from the start: "He's not just a northern barbarian, he's a northern barbarian who was *born on a blood-drenched battlefield*." Or they come with a bit of built-in destiny or superiority: "He's the heir of an ancient royal line, exiled for centuries to the wilderness where he and his kin fight monsters." Or they have just enough oddity about them to make the hero interesting and drive the plot: "He's a member of an obscure minor race who live in a bucolic idyll on the edge of the map, largely unknown to everyone else in the setting – and his nephew in the sequel is much the same." Occasionally, the heroes actually come from a different world altogether – often our world – which may give them interesting knowledge/skills/stuff, and certainly gives them an excuse to demand the explanations of the setting that the reader needs. Once in a while, the author firmly refuses to explain the hero's personal history, maybe marking him down as a poster-child for rootless wandering, or just allowing for a few good jokes (his parents ran away from home before he was born, and he's been running away from everything else practically ever since).

The world of Yrth has space for heroes with pretty much this full range of origin types. It has the Nomad Lands producing barbarian warriors, teeming cities such as Megalos or

Tredroy complete with politicians and thieves, Araterre with its schools of refined fencing, and Sahud for those who want to play samurai or ninja. There are odd little communities and people with complicated family histories, a few remote regions and cities barely on the map (such as Bilit Island, the Djinn Lands, or the titular city of necromancers detailed in *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos*), and a multitude of nonhuman races with their own peculiarities. Of course, for those who want to play with a classic "bit," Banestorms still occasionally pick up unfortunate folk from other worlds much like our own.

*There is no meaning to life  
except the meaning man gives his  
life by the unfolding of his powers.*

– Erich Fromm

In addition, it's certainly possible for players to give their adventurers slightly twisted or exotic origins on Yrth. This demands a certain amount of judgment on the part of the GM. Some players who hit on this idea may be hoping to give their characters some kind of advantage, or a weird combination of normally incompatible traits ("He's a dwarven weather-wizard who's been trained as a ninja!"). Fortunately, *GURPS* point-based character creation helps control this a bit – however many inconsistent advantages your character history can justify, you still have to find the points for them – and if the combination gives the adventurer a peculiar synergistic edge, well, that's just about the textbook reason why the Unusual Background advantage exists.

*For information on unusual not-quite-magical equipment and advancements that can form an interesting "hook" for a hero, see *GURPS Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reason* (written by Matt Riggsby, author of this issue's *Ansonne!*).*

## Destinies

A related question to all this involves the Destiny advantage (p. B48) – or, to a slightly lesser extent, the like-named disadvantage (p. B131). Anyone with those, especially at higher point values, are supposed to have significant, complex relationships with fate. Not every GM will want to allow either into a *Banestorm* game, as having to manage and consider a PC's Destiny can be a distraction and can warp the flow of scenarios. For that matter, some campaigns may be specifically about heroes carving out their *own* destinies – or failing to do so. Still, having a Destiny is a very fantasy-heroic element in many ways.

One important thing to remember about a Destiny in game terms is that the player only knows the *size* of the Destiny; the GM determines its actual nature. Players may spend a fair amount of time trying to find out what the GM has decided, but it should still be mysterious (and there's nothing to stop the GM changing his mind mid-campaign). Still, having a Destiny can be an excuse for a slightly unusual and quirkish personal “origin story.” The Destined Ruler of the Land may be the descendent of some ancient

dynasty – or he might be born from among the very lowest of the low; that's a matter of taste and maybe of snobbery about family vs. admiration for personal drive. A player can take a Destiny advantage or disadvantage, *and* specify a complex or odd character background – and then the GM has the fun of weaving them together.

Of course, even if the player puts some flagrant pointers into the story, the GM can choose not to follow the obvious path in deciding on Destiny. Even if you come from an ancient, exiled noble family with a strong claim to the imperial crown (and a 15-point Destiny advantage), you may not find that you ever come near the throne. Instead, you might end up leading the revolution against the current tyrant emperor, only to die heroically on the battlefield or be secretly blackmailed into refraining from going anywhere near the capital after your victory. You'll be remembered as a truly noble, self-denying hero, a founding father of the republic – and only you'll ever know that your motives weren't as pure as the legends say!

Others origins may be honest and relatively harmless as far as game rules, yet still end up producing something too wacky or implausible to fit the mood of the campaign. A halfling samurai with Rapier Wit is all very well, but will probably end up wrecking a dark urban horror-fantasy game – and in those cases, the GM must feel fully entitled just to say “No, start again.”

Still, a slightly off-beat place of origin or upbringing can add some real and interesting originality and depth to a hero, without necessarily warping the rest of the game. The following are a couple of ideas for slightly odd communities, primarily for adventurers to *come from*; PCs who were born in either can be interesting without automatically dominating the game, either in terms of abilities or of plot hooks. The first merely raises the possibility of dark secrets and minor advantages; the second is a little less dark, and produces heroes with a range of features.

### PIRSEFFE ISLAND

The Island of Pirseffe is a northern outlier of the Araterre archipelago, situated a little way northeast of Isle de Nord. It's evidently been occupied since the first days of Aralaise history, and some people think perhaps even longer; the earliest expeditions from Megalos and larger islands back in the 16th century apparently found people quite well settled there. It was absorbed into the new principality and placed within a feudal domain based on Isle de Nord. However, the rulers of the island when the Megalans arrived were quite happy to swear fealty to the noble who'd been placed over them, and the Megalan representatives saw no reason to depose someone

who was offering them no problems. Since then, the island has paid its taxes very regularly and offered no sanctuary to pirates; even the lords who nominally own it barely remember that it exists from year to year. A few natives of the island do show up further afield from time to time, and every so often someone tries to factor Pirseffe into some kind of political scheme – but the islanders and their rulers seem, if anything, to make a point of avoiding attention.

The obvious oddity about Pirseffe is that the “de Pirseffe” family which holds and governs it, with a formal rank just below the nobility (Status 2), usually seems to be led by women; tax agents and bailiffs regularly expect to find themselves talking to the “Dame de Pirseffe” on their occasional visits. A very few outsiders of similar rank have occasionally married into the family, but somehow the marriage contracts always leave the original family in charge – and with a distinctly matriarchal pattern of inheritance. More often, the de Pirseffe children marry other islanders of slightly lesser rank. Even by quasi-medieval standards, these details all give the community something of an inbred image (or, at least, very introverted). The way that the islanders get away with this is a tribute to political skill, but is mostly down to the promptness with which they pay their taxes. Nobody wants to rock the boat.

The truth – and the secret – about Pirseffe is that its “ladies” aren't human, but are actually a family of medusas. This is something of an open secret on the island; everyone knows that their Dames are *special*, but rarely discusses quite *how*, and the word “medusa” itself is downright taboo. Yes, keeping the secret requires a lot of caution and plenty of illusion magic (or, occasionally, just large hats or bulky veils).

*If the GM doesn't want to use the secret of Pirseffe for a PC, it would make a great introductory hook for a group of mystery-solving heroes. It's Ye Olde X-Files!*

The Dames are especially competent spellcasters, and any human resident who leaves the island tends to be subjected to a Geas or Permanent Forgetfulness spell first, even if their devotion to keeping the secret appears to be completely solid. The few outsiders who marry into the de Pirseffe family are carefully vetted first and generally subjected to a lot of magic afterward.

All this would add up to a strange and potentially dangerous but ultimately minor secret – even a tribute to the capacity of different races to live together, if they try hard enough, some might say – except for the fact that the Dames de Pirseffe have been marrying into the island families (and occasionally forming casual liaisons) for centuries. Hence, most people from the island have a “drop of serpent blood” in their veins. Girls born to fathers from the island occasionally prove to be medusas (which is why even islanders permitted to leave are often given a Geas to compel a return). If they’re born *on* the island, they’re either admitted to the family as junior members – given some honor, but perpetually stuck in a minor role unless they’re smart enough to find a niche of some kind – or permitted to leave when they attain adulthood, albeit under magical compulsion themselves. In addition, human islanders are slightly more likely to have Magery than most humans, although they may well not be permitted to study magic, and may have Immunity to Medusa’s Gaze [5], or at least Resistant (+3) [1] or (+8) [2].

The Dames de Pirseffe rule with a careful, light hand, but they know very well that they’re keeping a secret which could get them slaughtered *en masse* if it ever got out; regardless, they see themselves as aristocrats, superior to the majority of other beings by right. They can be terribly ruthless when they perceive a risk, and will use both magic and their gaze weapons on anyone who might threaten them. They have been known to hire assassins to hunt down islanders or others who they suspect might reveal the secret to the world at large; occasionally they sail abroad and do the job themselves. They also keep a few *statues* around their manor house, knowing full well that it unnerves islanders who might have to enter the place.

The human population of the island is just barely large enough to survive through the years without lethal inbreeding effects, but a significant minority have odd physical disadvantages or health problems. They also have a negative Reputation among some other inhabitants of northern Araterre (usually -2 on 10 or less, group size depends on campaign scope) for being secretive, a bit inbred, and sometimes downright creepy.

## THE VILLAGE OF GRUNDEMORGE

Grundemorge was a small village in the Bavarian Alps, with a small community of Benedictine monks nearby, which was swept up more or less intact in the early days of the Banestorm. Doubtless thanks to the principles of sympathy which seemed to govern Banestorms, it was deposited on the southeastern slopes of the Bronze Mountains. This was of

course traumatic for the villagers, but the monks and the village priest managed to steady them, and they adapted well enough to their new situation to survive.

They were especially lucky in that the first nonhumans that they encountered were a small group of local gnomes. At first, the villagers saw them as some kind of fairy spirit, but decided that they weren’t evil; the gnomes, for their part, were cautiously friendly. The two groups formed an amicable relationship, and when the village was subsequently discovered by groups of dwarves out of Zarak, the gnomes were able to act as go-betweens, convincing the dwarves that these humans were harmless while warning the villagers just how powerful the dwarves were. To this day, people from Grundemorge have a positive attitude toward gnomes and a neutral-to-friendly view of dwarves. Some actually have Cultural Familiarity (Zarakun) or speak a little of the dwarf language. Over time, several gnome families settled in the village, often converting to Christianity, out of courtesy as much as anything; gnome as well as human PCs can claim this as their birthplace. Other nonhuman encounters – often with ogres – were less happy, but the village survived.

*That life will never  
come again. It ought  
to be remembered.*

*– Alfred Duggan,  
Lord Geoffrey’s  
Fancy*

The Banestorm hadn’t brought any knights or nobles through with the village, so leadership in those early years was mostly provided by the village priest – and the monks, who took over providing spiritual guidance when the priest eventually died and no one was available to ordain a replacement. In time, some of the peasants sought to join the monks (especially older villagers seeking to find a role for themselves as their strength waned), and the monks permitted this; eventually, a few women even formed a group of nuns. The monks came to act more or less as a sort of council of village elders.

Then, during the 13th century, troops from the expanding Megalan Empire discovered Grundemorge. The villagers were slightly startled but not unhappy to meet other humans, and were certainly not foolish enough to try to resist being absorbed.

*Although most of its technological gear is inappropriate, there is still good advice in GURPS Loadouts: Monster Hunters for those who seek out monsters. In particular, the broad roles it advocates are good for groups.*



The Megalans perceived the place as being owned by its (tiny) monastery, and the newly appointed bishop of Arvey (pp. 25-30) promptly claimed it as a church holding. This doubtless saved Grundemorge from falling into the hands of some aggressive secular lord. In truth, it remained too distant from the centers of power to be seen as much more than a tiny and trivial source of tax revenues. The monks turned out to have developed some slightly odd ideas about religion in their centuries of isolation, but the issue was resolved without any actual fatalities, and their spiritual devotion came to be quite respected.

To this day, the monks of Grundemorge are seen as theologically eccentric (though probably not heretical) throughout western Megalos, and a few devout churchmen occasionally travel to the village to live as near-hermits. All this can justify both positive and negative Reputations in church circles, while warmongering Megalan nobles may suspect heroes from the village of being dwarf-loving traitors to the Empire. In addition, anyone from the village may have grown up talking to hermit-monks or nuns with some interesting knowledge of the wider world.

Two other facts are fairly well known about Grundemorge, at least in nearby areas. First, being isolated from the wider world, the village retains its own distinctive accent, and indeed a dialect with some Germanic words; treat this as a quirk. And second, some villagers are experts in a specialized combat style.

## *Grundemorgen Monster-Slaying*

**3 points**

Although it didn't face large-scale threats in its early years, Grundemorge was occasionally plagued by ogres, and later by gargoyles, which lived among the high peaks of the local mountains. The villagers learned to fight back; they eventually developed their own methods for dealing with such creatures, making the best of the resources available to them. This has developed over the years into a functional martial-arts style, which they still preserve. The style hasn't spread much beyond the village, but stylists do sometimes make a name for themselves in the wider world; very occasionally, adventurers who've heard stories of its secrets make their way up into the mountains to seek instruction. It's described here in the format used in *GURPS Martial Arts*; it's up to the GM to decide whether the cinematic components really are taught by masters in Grundemorge, or they just reflect wild stories.

The style uses relatively cheap weapons that give humans a fighting chance against bigger, stronger monsters. Although it includes full training in the use of the spear, a stylist's primary weapon is always some kind of polearm – usually a type of halberd or glaive, in *GURPS* terms – which can dish out enough damage to bring down big monsters. Spears (preferably long spears) are mostly used by fighters in mixed groups; the spear-men keep the monsters at a distance, while halberdiers kill them. This is actually the style's preferred approach to combat – the big human advantage against ogres and such is the ability to work *cooperatively*, after all. The Teamwork perk is common, although stylists can fight alone if they have to. Other, optional weapon skills cover the sort of “peasant weapons” that stylists may sometimes have to use in emergencies.

*Skills:* Polearm; Spear.

*Techniques:* Close Combat (Polearm); Feint (Polearm); Low Fighting (Spear); Spinning Strike (Polearm); Sweep (Polearm).

*Cinematic Skills:* Immovable Stance; Power Blow.

*Cinematic Techniques:* Flying Lunge (Polearm or Spear); Whirlwind Attack (Polearm).

*Perks:* Grip Mastery (Polearm or Spear); Special Exercises (Striking ST +1); Sure-Footed (Uneven); Teamwork.

### **Optional Traits**

*Attributes:* Improved ST.

*Advantages:* Enhanced Parry (Polearm); Fearlessness; Fit.

*Disadvantages:* Intolerance (Ogres and/or Gargoyles – usually just a quirk!); Quirk (Speaks with a “Germanic” accent and uses some odd dialect words); Reputation (Possibly Unorthodox in Religion).

*Skills:* Axe/Mace; Survival (Mountain); Staff; Two-Handed Axe/Mace; Wrestling.

*Techniques:* Feint (Axe/Mace); Spinning Strike (Two-Handed Axe/Mace); Trip (Wrestling).

*Cinematic Techniques:* Roll with Blow (Wrestling).

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Phil Masters is the co-author of *GURPS Banestorm*, the *Transhuman Space* line editor, and a long-standing *GURPS* writer, being the author or co-author of books from *GURPS Arabian Nights* to *GURPS Thaumatology*. This is his second appearance in the third incarnation of *Pyramid*, although he had a number of articles in previous versions.

*One of the saddest experiences which can come to a human being is to awaken, gray-haired and wrinkled, near the close of an unproductive career, to the fact that all through the years he has been using only a small part of himself.*

– V.W. Burrows

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# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO . . . ?

BY ANDY VETROMILE

*A warm wind swept across the beach, and equally heated water poured into Bailie's boots as he stood and took the seascape in. He heard another slosh past the breakers to him.*

*"Is there no trace of the storm then, sir?"*

*"None, Mr. Harvie."*

*"But it was so powerful," he said, enclosing the coast with a sweep of his arm. "It's . . ." Here he hesitated, but finally forced, ". . . it's changed the very lay of the land. Torn up trees and . . ."*

*"And put new ones in?" Bailie prompted, leaving the other man looking abashed. He shook his head as he surveyed the unfamiliar scenery. Still a beach, still lined with trees, surrounded by fish, but clearly something had happened in the wake of last night's storm. Everyone had been gladdened to see the clouds gather in the face of the ongoing drought, but the relief had been short-lived. The mist moved with terrible speed, almost . . . purpose? No one could even recall the evening having passed before finding themselves on a peaceful but unfamiliar beach.*

*"Where are we, then? Is it possible we were washed farther up the coast?" Harvie was struggling for explanations now.*

*"A whole settlement? I hesitate to think."*

*"What shall we do now?"*

*"What we were planning to do before nature swept over us: continue along the coast in search of the local tribe, and pray for White's speedy return."*

*Mr. Harvie knew this was an indication that preparations should continue, and waded back to the beach toward the village. Roger Bailie watched him go, trotting across the strangely two-hued sand.*

*"Ah, young Virginia," he asked the empty ocean, "to what other strange sights will you bear witness in the New World?"*

As the Banestorm swept across our world (and others), it snatched countless people throughout history. While this populated Yrth with many humans of no repute, it was inevitable that the tempest would also claim those who were changing – or would have changed – the course of our history.

Transportation to their new surroundings has now changed this world as well.

*Whatever Happened To . . . ?* deals with the lives of some people famous for, if nothing else, their mysterious disappearance from Earth. Each has a brief biography that reveals how they might be introduced to the **GURPS Banestorm** setting, describing their lives and activities since they arrived on Yrth. Following each are three sections. *Contemporary* discusses what changes they might bring about in their new habitat; *Legacy* talks about the long-ranging effects their efforts could have after they pass away; and *In the Campaign* suggests adventure seeds or how they might be encountered in a fantasy campaign.

*Obviously, I faced the possibility of not returning when first I considered going. Once faced and settled, there really wasn't any good reason to refer to it.*

– Amelia Earhart

## AMELIA EARHART AND FRED NOONAN

The famed aviatrix disappeared with her navigator, Fred Noonan, while circumnavigating the globe in her plane. Parts of her craft were discovered on an island in the Pacific; the Banestorm sheared off portions of the vehicle, but deposited the two of them in relative safety in Zarak. While the magical appearance of humans on Yrth is usually unworthy of mention,

*The Pulp Action! rules from Pyramid #3/8: Cliffhangers might be useful for generating stats for Amelia Earhart. In particular, the gadgeteer template would be a good basis for a version of her intent on bringing flight to Yrth.*

these two dropped into a mountain tarn in half a flying machine. Those who witnessed the spectacle and dragged the pair out were in awe of them, and among the people of the mountains the two rapidly gained a reputation as beings of the air.

Earhart has little to work with but she's determined to bring flight at least back into her life once more, if not to all of Yrth. Noonan isn't as anxious as she to relive past glories, but he sees the value of staying busy, keeping the respect of the locals, and having goals to work for. She works daily to build gliders, find ever-lighter types of wood, pick the brains of traders and metallurgists about the properties of Yrthian metals, and more, all in an effort to recreate aviation technology. Since she has the rest of her life, she is prepared to rebuild the aerospace industry singlehandedly if need be. She approaches this task with the same characteristic vigor as she pursued a career in flying back on Earth.

## Sorry, Who Are You Again?

Depending on the era(s) whence the PCs hail, some of these folks may not be on their radar, so the sense of dramatic irony is somewhat lessened. Anyone who traveled to Yrth during the Crusades won't know the island of Alcatraz, let alone its inmates, and anyone native to the fantasy world is probably in the same boat. Before deciding to use any of these personas or storylines in his game, the GM should determine if there's anything to be gained by doing so in the absence of historical or even trivial interest, or if he's just being cute for the sake of it.

Since the *players* are aware of historical figures, they can still find emotional connections to them in the game even if those play out in an unspoken fashion during the course of the session. For example, depending on how she's used Amelia Earhart could serve several roles, in any one of which the heroes could find reflections of their own lives. Having lost her beloved ability to fly in this technologically stunted world, Amelia's attempts to regain that glory are anything from tragic (forever doomed to be earthbound) to daring (she had the guts to fly around the world, and now she's trying to recreate the necessary machinery in the face of organized opposition) to inspirational (bereft of aircraft, she instead dabbles in the many forms of flight possible in a magical world to continue living out her dreams).

## Contemporary

A collection of exiles from a number of lands, the thunder-struck hill people did not mistake the newcomers for gods – but they do respect their obvious power. Earhart and Noonan were elevated to a position in the makeshift clan not unlike that of shamans. They were technologically advanced and assisted the group in improvements for their homes and streamlining their movement in the mountains. Gizmos such as zip-lines, pulleys, baskets, and more are liberally scattered throughout the area to make easier work of daily living.

The tribe consists mostly of humans, but there are several elves and dwarves, and a small band of orcs now enjoy protection from within the ranks as well. Though the people stayed

as isolated as they could when the group coalesced – they had no desire to give those who had persecuted them any reason to come looking for them and finish the job – under the aviators' tutelage they have made forays further from tribal lands to get food and supplies. This, combined with Earhart's improved methods of living, has allowed the mountain folk to actually trade with a few villages and settlements at the base of the range. In other words, the hill people have learned to once again hold their heads high.

Though there may not have been any truth to the romanticized rumors about an affair between the missing fliers before they were taken by the storm, that's no longer strictly true on Yrth. Their relationship isn't entirely platonic, but they are lucky enough to have each other, fellow outcasts from Earth, and both consider the companionship at times invaluable.

## Legacy

After the aviators passed away the tribe all but canonized them, and continues trying for ever-greater flights with the hang-gliders and other equipment she pioneered. The once-fearful people now only think of themselves as exiles in the proudest sense: They may have been chased from some of the best cultures on Yrth, but they no longer skulk in shadows in fear of being rediscovered by their oppressors, and woe unto him who thinks he can use a guilt complex to bully something from them. They have every right to live their lives, and are willing to trade or parley with anyone who seeks them out and shows them the proper respect.

## In the Campaign

When the tribe is still forming and Earhart's arrival is yet a novelty, some members see an opportunity to reconnect with their former communities or gain favor with powerful players by betraying their new friends to the local wizards' council. All the "state of the art" technology the fliers brought (pieces of) with them is enough to

earn the pair a long interrogation to see what else they may know or could be cooking up. Alternately a malcontent within the ranks who still fears reconnecting to any kind of authority may just try to sell the newcomers out to other local clans for their talents. With no one else to turn to, the tribe asks the unallied PCs to intercede on their behalf. Depending on when they're hired, the heroes may have to hide the fliers, track the turncoats in hope of convincing them of the value of clan solidarity, or intercept the kidnappers to effect a rescue.

If the adventuring team needs a stealthy way into a fortification, flight may be the answer. A short quest to find the mysterious "Air Hart" of the mountains could yield an ally – one who's been hungering for a little adventure since her arrival.

*An interesting twist on this idea might be a hero with the Delusion that he is one of the folks contained in this article. Since most on Ytaria don't care who new arrivals are, this maxes out at -5 points.*

*Warden: Since I've been warden, a few people have tried to escape. Most of them have been recaptured; those that haven't have been killed or drowned in the bay. No one has ever escaped from Alcatraz. And no one ever will!*

*– Escape from Alcatraz*

Amelia can field four or five trained wingmen (including Noonan) to accompany them, if their cause is just. She may also have access to something the party needs, like rare magical wood from the edge of the treeline that is lighter than air.

## ESCAPEES FROM ALCATRAZ

On the night of June 11, 1962, Frank Morris, John Anglin, and Clarence Anglin crept through the utility tunnels behind the walls of Alcatraz Prison and made their way to the island's shore. There they clambered into a crude raft they had constructed of rubber raincoats and began paddling through the dark toward an opposing coast. Along the way, the men were "saved" by the Banestorm as it swept past their unsteady craft. They found themselves deposited on the outskirts of Tredroy where they were greeted roughly by scoundrels. They had little worth stealing, however, and they were able to prove their value during the ensuing scuffle.

Their attackers sensed they had come across kindred spirits of low moral standards, and after a few drinks it was decided they would be put to work in exchange for some help with a little petty crime. Needless to say they were equal to the task. Frank Morris convinced their "hosts" to take on somewhat larger jobs that he would orchestrate, and the group became more successful. Morris and the Anglins knew there was little honor among thieves and that they would either outgrow this tight circle or fall to arguing over spoils with them.

The trio struck out on their own, and found that the medieval restrictions on legalities in this society gave them a chance at something they had never had much of before: respectability. With Morris coming at things with a clear mind and a clean slate, he was able to walk the fence between crime and law, and found purpose as a master planner. The complex and fabled escape from Alcatraz was just the beginning.

### Contemporary

Yrth has proved to be a new lease on life for the criminal trio. The three continue to work together, though the Anglin brothers, free of the prison and the need for allies, have begun thinking about striking out on their own. (They're not as careful as Morris, so leaving the one person they know from back home, the genius who helped them regain their liberty, seems like a

pretty good idea to them.) While their violent, criminal natures have been an advantage in this harsh new arena, even they have been schooled by the dog-eat-dog world of the guilds.

Frank Morris is the power player. He has a genius IQ and took two years to develop and execute the Alcatraz escape plan. As word of the deed was disseminated on Yrth, he was approached by several interests seeking to employ his services. The first was an orc band that quickly worked out anyone who could get himself out of a massive prison from the inside could easily help them free members of their clan from a jail by working from the outside. Soon he was being consulted as a problem solver, mostly by rabble and criminals but occasionally by nobles seeking solutions to bigger problems.

The Anglins are Frank's muscle. Yrth is their kind of place, where issues of life and death are pretty straightforward, but working with Morris pays well and that keeps them around. As the partnership goes on, they sense the widening gulf: Frank is the breadwinner and gets all the respect, and the two of them are very threatening window dressing. This is the source of a lot of growing tension, and arguments multiply as the Anglins, enjoying some measure of notoriety from proximity to Morris, take on small extracurricular jobs to reassert their independence. The brothers feel their manhood is threatened by their unspoken deference to him, while the "boss" increasingly sees them and their exploits as liabilities. The partnership will end – badly – sooner rather than later.

### Legacy

Two rumors persist about Frank Morris. The first is that he gave birth to one or more sons, to whom he passed on all his secrets and a good deal of training. Every so often Yrth sees another claim of blood ties to the criminal, though from a variety of sources. Kings state one of their inner circle is related, or bankers offer that a member of their staff shares his name, in a bid to keep the curious out of their coffers. The Morris name is akin to a brand name on Earth, signifying quality, and invoking it is to say, "You'd be a fool to attempt entry to the structure in question." Some otherwise unremarkable second-story men get work convincing coworkers their skills come from the great man himself. The Book of Maps (see p. 22) is sometimes coupled with these stories, though if both exist no one has yet found the two together.

*For example, a pilot who admired Earhart and suffered a head trauma during the Banestorm might use the incident to begin life anew; on Yrth, no one knows you're not a hero.*

## The Book of Maps

Reputed to be an innocuous tome, Frank Morris is said to have left behind his life's work: *The Book of Maps*. Within are said to be annotated diagrams of nearly every stronghold in Yrth. It is surely an overstatement, but even those locations not specifically reproduced are thought to have close mirrors in other maps, either in part or whole. If the stories are to be believed, the volume also holds his self-congratulatory life story (the professional part, anyway), ideas about radical thinking when approaching a problem, and thoughts about the progress of construction techniques. This last has made it the target of many "witch

hunts" – folks who don't want the TL growing too fast or going too far hear a rumor of the book and go all out to find and destroy it. Many libraries have been burned to the ground on mere hearsay.

Anyone who finds the book would be in a precarious position, the focus of many irate rulers and wizards, yet able to command their own price. Then again, those who simply claim to have seen it or know of its whereabouts are in the exact same position – a ploy of which Morris himself would be proud.

The second rumor is that Morris had a daughter.

Morris' fate is every bit as mysterious on Yrth as it was coming off Alcatraz Island. Those whose noses he tweaked with his celebrated exploits like to think he finally ended up imprisoned in (or under) some jail even he couldn't crack, while fans of his work tell tales of Morris being locked away in some dank dungeon – quite intentionally – as part of some extended scheme to prolong his life and fame. Most adherents expect one day he'll be found, perhaps by one of his own students, waiting in some cobwebbed corner of subterranea under a spell of suspension, offering Yrth time enough to develop new and more difficult challenges for him to face.

The Anglin brothers lack Frank's style and name recognition, but they nevertheless have a rabid fan base. The two men and their small gang were camping in concealment near a caravan they intended to rob, but orcs emerged from the darkness, raided the same group, and swept the Anglins into the killing zone. Rumors circulate among ardent supporters that the pair joined the orcs or made off with a big score in the confusion, but their demise is well documented. Devotion to them comes from equal parts appreciation of their violent past (always a big seller in the cruder regions of Yrth) and the natural tendency to root for the underdog (ironically the same reason people secretly supported the trio *in toto* in the first place). Bar brawls break out when the age-old Morris-Anglins argument rears up again, but as on Earth Morris' story eclipses those around him.

### *In the Campaign*

If there's an "impossibly" secure location the adventurers want to enter, chances are Frank Morris has either been in it or been consulted about it. They could have a worse tour guide than the famous crook, even if his mapping skills are better than his people skills. His services don't come cheap . . . and if they hire him, his clients should watch their backs. It means Morris has found a way to get paid on the back end, which may in turn involve hanging his employers out to dry.

Nobles looking to expand their power have to do so by going through enemy fortifications, and Morris makes himself

available to instruct aggressors on weaknesses and unexpected avenues of attack. This knowledge can be more trouble than it's worth if someone thinks Frank knows more about their defenses than they're comfortable with. The PCs might have to save him from kidnappers who want to know what he knows.

He has also been called upon to help design secure locations – who better to provide an impregnable fortress than someone who foresees the problems before they arise? He might need a hardy group of guinea pigs willing to be locked in to test it, hunting for holes he overlooked. Once the project is finished, Morris and the party may need to stick together long enough to evade their patron; their boss didn't go to so much trouble to build a redoubtable structure just to have the designer turn around and sell those secrets to the second-highest bidder . . . which Frank would do (secretly).

The heroes may show up while things are coming to a head between Morris and the Anglin brothers. It's possible they're simply caught in the crossfire like anyone else who's around, but if both parties' fates are intermingled for whatever reason (robbing the same tomb, say, or during a "business meeting" with them), they'll be expected to choose sides.

## THE PRINCES IN THE TOWER

Imprisoned by Richard III, their power-hungry uncle, brothers Edward V of England and Richard of Shrewsbury (first Duke of York) were raised in the Tower of London where outsiders seldom saw them. With the death of his father in 1483, Edward was in succession to become king at age 12, but the elder Richard quickly claimed the boys as his wards – and thereby secured for himself the throne. The boys disappeared before the year was out. Denied much of their childhood, it was almost a mercy when the Banestorm descended upon them. Their uncle spent the rest of his life denying to himself what he had witnessed that day in the courtyard and trying to deflect questions about the fates of his nephews.

The boys were among those fortunate enough to find welcoming strangers. A small village took them in, and they were eventually passed on to an orphanage attached to its own farm.

*More advice for importing heroes from history – including character-creation tips – is given in GURPS Infinite Worlds (pp. 198-199).*

## It's All in the Timing

Something else the GM has to consider when employing famous missing persons in a fantasy game is the time-frame. If explorer John Cabot disappears from 1499 and rides the storm to Yrth, chances are he ends up in a parallel 1499. That means in a game set in 2010 he's long dead, and that's no fun. The GM has a few options in this case:

*The Seventh Son of a Seventh Son:* The heroes find themselves dealing with the persona's offspring. This might be a son or it might be a many-times-great grandson, depending on the gulf of time that separates the two sides. The fun here for the GM is to drop hints about the family tree to see how many clues it takes before his group picks up on the link.

*DBA:* If the displaced person made his fortune after the Banestorm, his influence may yet be felt. He may have created a merchant house or similar institution, or given rise to his own cult or even a full-blown religious movement. If he didn't, those around him might have done so on his behalf, or to take advantage of his reputation.

*Past Is Prologue:* Given the fickle nature of time and dimensional travel, magic, and the Banestorm, a person need not arrive at the same point he left. Someone from Earth's past might not arrive on Yrth until a later year. If the GM doesn't mind playing fast and loose with the setting, he can assume the poor fellow was not only thrust onto a new world, but a later era and technological age in its timeline (Yrth may not be overly progressive, but even its TL grows over time). Conversely he may also drag a

modern figure into a campaign set in Yrth's early history. If he doesn't want to get too fancy with knotty time-travel issues, the GM may instead state the person was caught up in the Banestorm and has been a prisoner of it for several decades, in a state of suspended animation, before being released.

*Homefield Advantage:* With so much magic suffusing the area, an enterprising newcomer could use that to preserve himself for many years. He may have access to a darker form of magic that makes this even more feasible. Perhaps he felt cheated, having the rug pulled out from under his old life, and so justifies the extension of his life as he seeks a way to return home and pick up where he left off. At this point he's either a long-lived wizard, many centuries old, or he has lost sight of the better half of himself and been forced into unlife. The players should be properly creeped out by the idea that some missing celebrity from their world exists on this one, but here he's a lich of the first order.

All of this also suggests the more famous the disappearance, the easier it is for the players to suss out whose influence they're feeling decades or even centuries after the figure's death. Lest it hurt the campaign, the GM should resist the temptation of collecting anyone too sensational or well-known. A flashy entertainer or too-recent transplant runs the risk of becoming a distraction for the game group, more the subject of table talk than quality roleplaying.

They learned useful skills, but as they grew, Edward and Richard took on additional responsibilities. By Edward's 16th birthday, he began running day-to-day operations for the townsfolk and clergy who sponsored the institution. Still not content, the two young men went on to open the Great Hall, their own version of a home for storm-tossed orphans. Their new venture was born of their upbringing as leaders and the obligation they felt to give back, and the Hall does not limit itself to the welfare of small children. Anyone caught by the Banestorm is given food, clothing, and shelter until their place in the local community can be established. Even those brought in by tempests and turns of misfortune of the mundane sort may find succor here, though overwhelmingly, the greatest number are victims of the mystic assaults.

### Contemporary

The twins run a haven for storm-stolen victims, and are minor celebrities in their own right. Everyone comes to Yrth with a story to tell, but most of them find they feel far better after talking with the brothers. Edward and Richard were stolen from a royal heritage and never truly allowed to be children, yet they find satisfaction in assisting others in their

position. The hardest of strangers are disarmed and heartened by their story, and few leave without making some small donation to either the orphanage or the Great Hall.

### Legacy

The Great Hall not only remains a going concern, the brothers opened a number of additional outlets before their deaths, and those who took up the torch thereafter have continued to populate Yrth with them. Most have been made aware of the boys' story, and it leaves a sour taste in the mouths of those who hear it when it comes to royalty. Rare is the noble who speaks ill of the Halls and doesn't make generous donations to any branch in his region; failure to do so risks turning the protective citizens against them.

### In the Campaign

If the GM wishes to start his game from the heroes' collective arrival on Yrth, a meeting with the brothers is an ideal avenue toward acclimation. It keeps them off balance ("We're being pacified by teenagers? Who put them in charge?") while allowing a ray of sunlight into this dark episode in their lives ("If these kids can make it here, so can we").

*Even if the heroes are Ytarria natives, they might contact the twins to investigate some troublesome new arrivals.*

The Great Hall can be the springboard for many adventures – and if the GM needs it, it’s a good way to force the issue. Only a cad wouldn’t answer the call when the franchise needs it, and anything that arrives on Yrth might pass through its doors. All manner of quests begin here: reuniting families, rescuing damsels and dudes in distress, and returning lost or stolen property. Some religious orders may become jealous of the “success” of the Great Hall (read: They want supplicants indebted to *them*) and find ways to make their services seem more attractive. If a lost artifact shows up on the property, others will claim it in the name of “safekeeping.”

*In the United States to this day, the expression to “pull a Crater” means to disappear . . . The phrase dates back to a summer’s day in 1930 when Judge Joseph F. Crater hailed a taxi in New York, stepped inside and vanished.*

*– Reader’s Digest,  
Great Mysteries  
of the 20th Century*

## JUDGE CRATER

A lawyer working in New York City, Judge Joseph Crater made plans to see a show on August 6, 1930. After dining with him, friends saw him walk away down the street and into legend. The Banestorm took him as he rounded a corner, and deposited him in the midst of a tribe caught in an ongoing internal dispute concerning a marriage and property rights.

They took him in and helped him acclimate. As he learned about his hosts, Crater also learned about their problem. It was considered not just good fortune but a sign from above that he was not only an outsider with no vested interest in the outcome of their quarrel, he was also a judge by trade. He agreed to arbitrate and – regardless of the outcome – all parties involved were quite pleased with his keen insight and impartial attitude (it didn’t hurt that both sides had low expectations of someone who had spent so little time on Yrth).

The tribe later used Crater as a go-between with another clan, with whom they had long-standing issues. As news spread of his ability to mediate any situation, nobility sought his counsel, merchants asked for his guidance in matters of financial restitution, and farmers allowed him to settle disputes over property lines and water rights.

### Contemporary

Outside Tredroy, Crater is thought to be the foremost authority on matters of law. He has established for himself a business based on arbitration. The surrounding town encourages it, both with popular support and by providing armed guards to enforce the edicts. No one is required to go to Crater for his services, but his office is considered a form of sanctuary: Anyone who enters his rooms may turn over any

disputed properties for safekeeping. This service isn’t used too commonly, but at any given time it’s not unusual to find the vault room contains anything from a land deed to a live cow. These are held in trust until such time as a decision can be made regarding their dispensation, whether by Crater, the proper authority, or an agreed-upon third party (and Crater can help decide on that third party, too – just one example of how convoluted some of the proceedings he deals with can be). The town is not huge so the number of men that can be fielded to protect the grounds isn’t impressive, but few attempt to retrieve property through armed might. Crater’s reputation is held in high esteem, and while even a small group of well-trained soldiers could overcome any resistance there, it sets a precedent and colors the good name of anyone who doesn’t wish to play by what are viewed as rather honest rules.

### Legacy

The arbitration service started by Judge Crater exists into the current day, though with the death of its founder it doesn’t enjoy the same unchallenged character as before. Like any well-established business it has the force of tradition and a dedicated clientele, but small cracks have formed – of late, Crater’s service itself has occasionally found itself forced into mediation. As for Crater the man, his ideas about law are much respected and are the subject of endless debate in judicial circles and legal colleges.

### In the Campaign

PCs most likely meet Judge Crater in his capacity as a moderator. It might be a fun twist for the villains to pursue the party after a raid on their castle, forcing them to take shelter in the judge’s chambers. Then the heroes are in the strange position of having to defend their ownership of something they just took from an orc’s hoard during a routine dungeon crawl. Crater could hire the team as protectors for himself or his vault, or for the caravan that takes a valued item to the winner of an arbitration.

Should he ever have occasion to practice law again – which many members of the legal community would like to see – Crater could be the only hope the heroes or someone dear to them has. Then again, he might be the prosecutor.

### Misery Loves Company

As an aside, Crater had been keeping company with a showgirl named Sally Lou Ritz. She disappeared only a month or two after he did, so the GM may wish to expand on this. Ritz could have been waiting for the judge nearby and gotten caught up in the same Banestorm, or there might be something about the nature of the tempests that respects connections – or has a sense of humor about it.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Vetromile is a freelance writer and editor with an insatiable taste for games. He’s been reviewing them for over 10 years and still can’t wait for the next release. He has also contributed to *Pyramid* and edited several *GURPS* books.



# ARVEY

## THE CITY OF SILVER HILLS

BY PAUL STEFKO

Located 125 miles northeast of New Jerusalem in the foothills of the Bronze Mountains, the Barony of Arvey once marked the western edge of the Empire of Megalos, before the treaty with the Hospitallers and the expansion into Caithness. Today, the City of Silver Hills is a center of trade, gaining much wealth and prestige from its proximity to the dwarves of Zarak.

### THE BARONY

The Barony of Arvey is bordered on the north by the Bronze Mountains and on the south by the Coffinwood, which separates it from New Jerusalem. To the east, the Barony stretches to Corvus in the hills and Tenebrus by the Greywoods north of Craine. To the west, Arvey's control mostly trails off less than a week's ride from the city.

The land consists mostly of rolling hills, growing more rugged the farther north one travels. The southern fields are dominated by wheat, while northern Arvey is roamed by herds of harding and cattle, along with a few prize horses. The western and southern reaches of the barony are home to exotic creatures like antelope and zebra, and the rare lion is captured every generation or so.

Arvey is friendly with Craine, trading livestock, stone, and dwarven goods for foreign treasures. Relations are less warm with New Jerusalem. The Hospitallers, vocal in their distaste for dwarves, see Arvey's friendliness with Zarak to be a sign of moral decay and a danger to Christian security.

As for Zarak, Arvey lies closest to the clanhold of Solginel, but little legitimate trade goes through Solginyarl's domain. Instead, many dwarven merchants travel from Morriel, north of Corvus, to do business in Arvey. The dwarves do a brisk trade in copper as well as low-energy enchanted items.

The current baron, Julian Michel Depaul, spent years in Araterre, where he was known as a braggart and a sword-fighter. He hopes to bring a more modern outlook to his land, and he's pushing the boundaries of custom to accommodate such elements within his domain.

### HISTORY

The founders of Arvey arrived in the late 1180s, the same period of Banestorm activity that deposited the Hospitallers

farther south. The Arvein came mostly from southern and eastern France with a healthy minority of Alsatians. The arrivals were drawn to a set of five large hills surrounding a warm spring, and it was here that they founded the City of Arvey in 1189.

In the beginning, Arvey was built around five coalitions, under the leadership of powerful families: Broussard, Gravois, Weber, Depaul, and Prideaux. None trusted power to their fellows, so these five families formed a joint council to rule over the new city. Each family claimed a hill and built a manor, with a central Council Hall constructed near the spring.

The city's first century saw contact with the Hospitallers to the south and dwarves to the north. Where relations with Zarak were peaceful and profitable, dealings with fellow humans were tense and erupted into violence several times, culminating in the bloody Four Summers War in 1289. The war drew the attention of Megalos, and with the Emperor's help, Arvey drove off the Hospitallers. The price was independence.

Francois Depaul had been elected to lead the Arvein Council in 1287. Rumors of Megalos had been swirling for nearly 20 years, but Depaul was the first to travel east and see the Empire for himself in 1285. He returned with riches and stories of the East. As Council Chair, he called for the families to ally themselves with Megalos and share in its growing wealth and power. He was outvoted, but the idea appealed to some of his contemporaries.

In 1289, the forces of New Jerusalem invaded after months of saber rattling. Francois was responsible for the city's defense, and he did an admirable job. Ultimately, though, the Hospitallers were the superior force. Depaul managed to hold out while he sent emissaries to Megalos, requesting aid. They responded with two Legions, and over the next three years, the combined forces pushed the Hospitallers back and secured peace.

Megalos claimed Arvey and named Francois Depaul its baron. The other families bristled, and two – Broussard and Weber – raised forces against Depaul. With the remaining Megalan troops, Depaul put down the coup, cementing his authority. He dissolved the rebel families, dividing their lands and making lords of his loyalists. Arvey now marked the westernmost border of Megalos, an empire that stretched across half of Ytarria.

*Character idea: The hero is a remnant from a dissolved rebel family; he longs to restore his name and the bloodline.*

This distinction did not last long, however, as in 1350, New Jerusalem was welcomed into the Empire, not as a subject but as a welcome ally in the Crusades against the Muslim hordes. The Arvein were cautious, remembering their neighbor's aggression and boundless zeal. Still, for the next several centuries, the Hospitallers were distracted by wars to the south, and Arvey grew as the commercial heart of the West and the gateway to Zarak.

Arvey suffered for its position, too. After Megalos invaded the Whitehood Mountains in 1585, the dwarves of Solginel launched a series of attacks to avenge their eastern cousins. A harsh winter prevented Arvey from retaliating as mountain passes choked with snow and ice. By spring, tempers had calmed, and the only response was to expel all dwarves and close the borders. Eventually, Arvey renewed relations with Zarak, but from then on, they dealt primarily with the clanhold of Morriel farther east.

Its location on the edge of the empire has meant that Arvey has played host to numerous military actions over the centuries. Arvein forces took part in the defense of Craine during the Bannock War. The barony has served as the staging ground for legions during each of the Megalos-Caithness Wars. Most recently, its forces suffered major defeats in the Frontier Wars. However, since joining the Empire, its location has kept it from taking part in many of Megalos' many campaigns, insulated from war.

## Timeline

- 1187** – The Banestorm brings numbers of French and Alsatians to central Ytarria. The arrivals soon align themselves under strong leaders and form the Five Families.
- 1189** – The families meet at Arvey Spring to settle their differences. Their leaders form a council to resolve disputes and found the city of Arvey as the seat of their new alliance.
- 1207** – First contact with New Jerusalem. Both sides eventually agree to the Coffinwood as a common border and have little further contact for the next 40 years.
- 1236** – Hearing rumors of mountain kingdoms, Arvey sends an expedition north into the Bronze Mountains. The diminished party returns a year later with word of dwarves.
- 1247-1248** – Fearing the influence of heathen dwarves on its neighbor, New Jerusalem invades Arvey. Access to fine Zarakun equipment allows Arvey to fight off the otherwise superior Hospitaller offensive.
- 1269** – First contact with merchants from Megalos traveling north out of Craine.
- 1285** – Francois Depaul embarks on a journey east to investigate the Megalan Empire. He returns with exotic treasures and tales of great sites like the goblin city of Yibyorak.
- 1287** – Francois Depaul assumes leadership of the Arvein Council. He advocates joining Megalos, but is outvoted.
- 1289-1292** – The Four Summers War. New Jerusalem invades, claiming Arvey is sponsoring raiders. Francois Depaul gains

# Arvey, 2010

**Population:** 7,500 (Search 0)

## Physical and Magical Environment

**Terrain:** Plains

**Appearance:** Average

**Hygiene:** -1

**Normal Mana** (Rare Enchantment)

## Culture and Economy

**Language:** English

**Literacy:** Broken

**TL:** 3

**Wealth:** Comfortable (x2)

**Status:** -2 to 3

## Political Environment

**Government:** Semi-Feudal Autocracy

**CR:** 4 (Corruption -1)

**Military Resources:** \$525K

**Defense Bonus:** +6

## Notes

The barony's population is 250,000 (Search +3; *total* military resources \$17.5M). Primary exports include livestock and wheat. Copper and iron are the primary imports. Important figures in the barony are Baron Julian Michel Depaul, Bishop Antoninus, and Guildmaster Marc Prideaux (Mages' Guild).

acclaim leading Arvein forces, but the Hospitallers are better organized and equipped. Arvey survives only with Megalan aid.

- 1292** – The Stillborn Coup. Megalos annexes Arvey and names Francois Depaul Baron. Broussard and Weber raise armies against Depaul. After a few one-sided skirmishes, the rebel families are dissolved and their leaders executed.
- 1402** – The Prideaux family founds a school for young mages. This academy later forms the basis for the Mages' Guild.
- 1468** – A dragon is sighted in the north, over Zarak. The creature is sighted three more times in the next 300 years.
- 1520** – The Academy of Magic burns under mysterious circumstances. Prideaux later rebuilds the school over the ruins.
- 1586** – Solginel launches a series of attacks on Arvey in response to the Megalan invasion of the Whitehood Mountains. Arvey expels all dwarves from its borders, but mounts no counterattack as winter approaches.
- 1603** – Pierre Depaul dies without heir. Louis Montand of the Depaul family arranges tribute to Megalos and moves his personal forces into the city. He is named Baron and assumes the Depaul name and manor.
- 1614** – Arvey reopens its borders with Zarak, trading more heavily with Morriel than their closer neighbors.
- 1754** – The last sighting of the Zarak Wym. On this flight, the dragon passes over the city, visibly wounded, and disappears to the south. The Mages' Guild clashes with opportunists to collect the dragon's spilled blood.

*Adventure idea: The heroes find a 1755 journal claiming to know the truth behind the Zarak Wym's last sighting.*

- 1827** – The First Megalos-Caithness War. A Caithness spy is caught poisoning supplies as the Legions stage in Arvey. He is publicly executed on Hangman's Hill.
- 1932** – Henri Depaul publicly blames the failure of the Second Megalos-Caithness War on Hospitaller apathy. New Jerusalem ignores the attack but cuts down on trade with Arvey.
- 2002** – Gaspard Depaul dies while hunting in the Greywoods; he is without heir. Julian Michel Depaul returns from Araterre to assume the baronial seat. He faces resistance from his nobles, who see him as too foreign, too impulsive, and too modern.

## THE CITY OF SILVER HILLS

The city of Arvey grew from the manors of the Five Families, built on hills surrounding a spring where they reached their peace. These hills, named the Silver Hills by the poet Alaric, came to bear the individual names of each family.

Since much of the city is built on hills, a great number of streets are actually long staircases cut into the earth. It is for the silvery granite of these steps that Alaric so named the hills and the city. The stepped streets have led to novel methods of moving goods through the city. The Mages' Guild rents golems to haul cargo, or wizards can be hired to cast Lighten Burden on porters.

At the center of the city is the natural spring that drew the Five Families here in the first place. The Council Hall they built there still stands, but today, it is used as a theater. The land around the spring is reserved as a public square and market place. The spring is open to all and is purified daily by Guild mages.

### *Depaul Hill*

The Depaul family has ruled Arvey since the city joined Megalos. The city's elite have made their homes on this hill, with elevation indicating status. At the very top sits Depaul Manor, a sprawling estate of marble and manicured lawns. Here, Baron Julian Michel Depaul hears petitions from his nobles, meets with important visitors, and watches his city go about its business.

### **Merchants' Guild**

This columned marble building halfway up Depaul Hill is the center of official commerce in Arvey. Anyone seeking to trade in the city must register with the guild and license space. This can range from a few copper farthings (\$2 or so) for a stall in the square on market day to three gold marks (\$600) a year for a proper shop on Gravois Hill. These fees are in addition to any rent for buildings. Anyone caught conducting business without Guild sanction is subject to fines and/or flogging.

### *Hangman's Hill*

Formerly Broussard Hill, Hangman's Hill is the city's poorest district, for one very good reason. Situated at the top, on the ruins of Broussard Manor, is Arvey Prison. Mostly used for

holding criminals awaiting punishment, the prison is also the site of all public executions. On occasion, the yard has been turned into a makeshift gladiatorial arena, a facility the city otherwise lacks.

Below the prison, the hill is covered with a collection of ramshackle houses rented by poor tradesmen and laborers. Their owners live on Depaul Hill and charge more than the rooms are worth but just less than the tenants can afford. In the end, the poor know they have nowhere else to go, so they pay lest they be forced to move out of the city or up the hill.

### **The Wyrms' Blood**

This inn has a well-earned reputation for raucous brawls and secret deals. It is named for the rust-red tiles of its roof, allegedly stained by the blood of the Zarak Wyrms in 1754. The two-story structure has a half-dozen meager rooms for rent and a small stable around back.

The taproom at the Wyrms' Blood is a favorite haunt of many members of the city's underworld. Thieves, gamblers and con men frequent the inn, not looking for marks but simply enjoying the company of colleagues and friends. The informal fraternity that has grown out of this camaraderie is the closest thing Arvey has to a Thieves' Guild. While crime in the city is not particularly organized, it can wield a surprising amount of influence if anyone threatens business in the city.

### *Knight's Hill*

Originally claimed by the Weber family, Knight's Hill earned its new name after Francois Depaul granted the Weber manor to his lieutenant, Sir Gavin Fournier. Fournier fortified the house, adding stables and barracks for nearly a hundred men-at-arms. He hired his men out as mercenaries, and his company formed the nucleus of the city's modern Armsmen's Guild.

Knight's Hill is home to many of the city's craftsmen, and the few dwarves that reside permanently in Arvey make their homes here. As such, this section of the city resembles more than any other the mountains of Zarak. Few buildings on Knight's Hill extend more than a story above ground, instead delving into the hill itself. In some places, the basements and cellars have grown together, forming underground avenues. Above ground, the steps of the streets are shallower to accommodate shorter dwarven legs.

### **Ironworkers' Guild**

This guild controls the production of iron and steel, representing blacksmiths, weapon smiths, and others who work with the metals. It is one of the most powerful guilds in the city, with strong relationships with the Armsmen's Guild and the itinerant dwarven merchant companies. Its deceptively small Guildhall is festooned with chimneys, hinting at the levels of underground forges hidden below.

Unbeknownst to most, including Guild leadership, several Ironworkers maintain a secret workshop just blocks from the Guildhall, beneath the blacksmith shop owned by Gerald Cross. Here, a half-dozen men conduct experiments and construct devices that some would consider dangerous or even heretical.

*See p. 17 for another reference to Arvey, and how it intersects with the village of Grundemorge.*

Literal underground engineers (*GURPS Banestorm*, p. 30), this circle of visionaries pushes the limits of Ytarrian knowledge. They are reaching out as well, making contact with representatives of King Morkagast of Morriel and sending him samples of their work through dwarven smugglers. So far, they haven't drawn the attention of the Ministry of Serendipity, and Cross is working hard to see that they don't.

### Gravois Hill

While the Merchants' Guild is housed on Depaul Hill, most of the city's shops are found here. Gravois Hill is clean and orderly, but not as grand as Depaul nor as wondrous as Prideaux. Residents of Gravois Hill pride themselves on their work ethic and their ability to spot a deal. The hill is also home to many of the city's best restaurants.

### The Cathedral of St. Gerard

Named for the patron saint of Arvey, the Cathedral of St. Gerard is modest by Megalan standards, but it still stands as one of the finest structures in the city. Its bells can be heard throughout the city, and it can hold nearly 300 people for Mass.

The current Bishop of Arvey is Antoninus, a relatively young bishop and Arvey native appointed just four years ago upon the death of the long-serving Bishop Honorius. So far, Antoninus has focused on good works, raising funds for a hospital at the base of Hangman's Hill.

### Prideaux Hill

The first head of the Prideaux family discovered his gift for magic soon after arriving on Yrth. The family forms the core of the magical community in Arvey. In 1402, the family founded the Arvey Academy of Magic, and the current Mages' Guild grew from the school's graduates. Today, the former Prideaux Manor serves as Guildhall, and much of the business of Prideaux Hill revolves around wizardly and scholarly pursuits. You'll find alchemists, dealers in exotic plants, book-binders, and brokers of minor magic items.

### Arvey Academy of Magic

Adjacent to the Mages' Guildhall stand a trio of towers and a two-story building surrounded by a sturdy wall. The Arvey Academy of Magic exists to train members of the Guild and to provide space for members' personal research. Guild dues can be deferred in exchange for lecturing, and the students perform apprentice duties for any Guild members teaching or working at the campus.

The main cross-shaped building at the center of campus houses the student dormitories (boys to the east, girls to the west), offices for the headmaster and his staff, and kitchens. The three towers contain classrooms and labs for magical or

## What Every Arvein Knows

Everyone living in the city of Arvey is likely to know the following things. The GM may require an Area Knowledge roll to recall specific details.

*Accession Day.* Held every year on April 23, this holiday marks the day that Louis Montand was named Baron of Arvey, and celebrates the city's history as a whole. A parade is held in which children progress from the spring up Depaul Hill past the estates of the wealthy, who throw them trinkets and candies.

*St. Gerard.* Gerard Depaul was made the patron saint of Arvey after his death in 1565. Gerard had traveled south with 1,500 men to battle the Wazifi invaders in Craine. He was killed, his body burned by a Wazifi war mage, and his ashes returned to Arvey in a cask of oil. The cask stands in the audience hall at Depaul Manor.

*Choice Dwarvish.* Most Arvein children can curse in Dwarvish by the age of 8, and many adults can name their favorite Dwarven dishes, which are often long and storied in their original tongue.

alchemical research. Two clay golems are available in each building for heavy lifting and restraining intruders or unruly students (as Clay Golem template on p. 59 of *GURPS Magic*, with Forced Entry-12, Lifting-15, and Wrestling-12).

The current academy stands on the site of an earlier school that burned down in 1520. The Guild and the Prideaux family have never revealed what exactly caused the blaze, but tales speak of purple flames, smoke that moaned, and haunted dreams for months after.

Mana in the area carries an interesting taint to this day. Magical disasters, while still draining, are dulled on the campus, but when they do occur, they draw the attention of powerful and mischievous spirits. No one has been able to capture such an entity or gather much meaningful information about them through mundane or magical senses.

Whenever a critical failure is rolled while casting a spell on Academy grounds, make a second roll with the same modifiers. On anything but a critical failure, the caster loses twice the FP the spell would have cost normally, but there is no other effect. On a critical failure, roll on the *Spirit-Oriented Magic Table* on p. 260 of *GURPS Thaumatology*.

## IMPORTANT FIGURES

Here are some of the more interesting people that adventurers might cross paths with in the City of Silver Hills.

### Baron Julian Michel Depaul

169 points

Julian Michel Depaul was born in Arvey in 1977. When he was four, his mother took him with her on a tour of Araterre, where they had family. A series of events, including the outbreak of the Third Megalos-Caithness War (which staged partially in Arvey), led to them remaining in Araterre for nearly three years.

*Adventure proto-idea: Check out any of the bad results of the Spell-Oriented Magic Table from p. 260 of GURPS Thaumatology (especially results 13-15 and 18), then work backward from there. What could have happened at the Arvey Academy of Magic to cause such an effect?*

Julian remembered his childhood in Araterre fondly, and he returned there at the age of 15 to study at the University of Sauvons. His studies were secondary, though, to his interest in fencing. He took part in several duels, although never to the death. He was known to take offense easily and to defend his honor at the slightest provocation. Word of his exploits carried back to his homeland and became the topic of some gossip among the nobles in Arvey.

While at Sauvons, Julian also became interested in the advanced technologies of the islands, particularly those of shipbuilding and navigation. He lamented in letters home that Arvey was landlocked and unable to benefit from the methods he observed among the shipbuilders.

Sadly, Julian's time in Araterre was cut short in 2002 by the death of his older brother Gaspard in a hunting accident. He returned to Arvey and assumed his title, but so far he has made little impact on his barony. His lords view him as an unruly youth with a short temper and head full of foreign dreams. He is struggling to prove his devotion to his homeland, which he genuinely loves and hopes to see resume its lost prestige.

Julian Depaul cuts a graceful figure, tall and dark, often dressing in outfits cut in the style of Araterre but made from the native fabrics of Arvey. In public, he carries a fine rapier at his side, which he believes makes him look fearsome, although the foreign weapon is underestimated by the Arvein. He is attractive and very personable, enjoying conversation with his courtiers.

**ST** 10 [0]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 11 [10].  
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [5]; Per 12 [0];  
FP 11 [0].  
Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 9 (Cloak); Dodge  
9; Parry 9 (Rapier).  
Height 5'8"; 155 lbs.

### Social Background

*TL:* 3 [0].  
*CF:* Christian [0].  
*Languages:* English (Native) [0]; Aralaise (Native) [6].

### Advantages

Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Charisma 1 [5]; Fashion Sense [5]; Fit [5]; Independent Income 3 [3]; Smooth Operator 1 [15]; Status 3 [10]\*; Wealth (Very Wealthy) [30].

### Disadvantages

Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10]; Impulsiveness (9) [-15]; Reputation -2 (Undisciplined firebrand; All the time; Western Megalan nobles) [-3]; Sense of Duty (Arvein) [-10].

*Quirks:* Rests his hand on his weapon to look intimidating. [-1]

### Skills

Acting (A) IQ [1]-12†; Administration (A) IQ [2]-12; Area Knowledge (Arvey) (E) IQ [1]-12; Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Carousing (E) HT+1 [1]-12†; Cloak (A) DX [2]-12; Current Affairs/TL3 (Arvey) (E) IQ [1]-12; Current Affairs/TL3 (Politics) (E) IQ [1]-12; Dancing (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Detect Lies (H) Per-1

[1]-11†; Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [1]-11†; Expert Skill (Natural Philosophy) (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Fast-Draw (Sword) (E) DX [1]-12; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [1]-12†; Heraldry (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; History (Arvey) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Law (Megalan) (H) IQ-1 [2]-11; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [1]-13‡‡; Literature (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Philosophy (Stoicism) (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Poetry (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Politics (A) IQ [1]-12†; Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [1]-13‡‡; Rapier (A) DX [2]-12; Riding (Horse) (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ+1 [1]-13‡; Sex Appeal (Human) (A) HT+1 [1]-12‡§.

*Techniques:* Feint (H) Rapier+2 [3]-14.

\* One level free from Wealth.

† Includes +1 from Smooth Operator.

‡ Includes +1 from Charisma.

§ Includes +1 from Appearance.

## Gerald Cross, Underground Engineer

177 points

Gerald Cross dreams of a better world. It all unfurls behind his eyes: a world where miracles are not the province of an elite selected by the vagaries of birth (either political or magical) but available to anyone with the means and the ambition to produce them. Unfortunately, he knows just how many would see those dreams burned out of him. He is ever vigilant against his many enemies.

Publicly, Cross is a member of the Ironworkers' Guild, a blacksmith of little importance. He owns his own shop a few blocks from the Guildhall and does a modest business. Secretly, Gerald leads a circle of Underground Engineers who meet beneath his shop to work on their inventions and discuss new theories. Cross knows that his vision is the greatest of any of his fellows; the Dream is a gift from God, and he plans to do whatever it takes to see it realized.

The truth is, no matter how brilliant he may be, Cross is not healthy. If he isn't working on a new invention, he is constantly looking over his shoulder. He is also a physical coward, preferring traps and ambushes to any direct confrontation. On the occasions when he leaves Arvey, he travels with a flintlock musket of his own design and the tools to keep it in perfect repair.

Gerald Cross is a tall, keen-eyed man in his early 30s with unkempt brown hair and a weak chin. He dresses in the leather apron of the blacksmith, and his hands are stained black from his work. He has persistent bags beneath his eyes from lack of sleep.

**ST** 12 [20]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].  
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 14 [5]; Per 14 [5]; FP 11 [0].  
Basic Speed 5.00 [-5]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Axe/Mace).  
Height 5'11"; Weight 195 lbs.

### Social Background

*TL:* 5 [10].  
*CF:* Christian [0].  
*Languages:* English (Native) [0]; Dwarvish (Accented/None) [2].

*Adventure idea: Needing underground tech to accomplish a goal, the heroes seek Gerald Cross – who thinks they are spies.*

## Advantages

Artificer 2 [20]; Eidetic Memory [5]; Gadgeteer [25]; Signature Gear (Portable armoury kit, Flintlock musket) [2]; Status 1 [5]; Versatile [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10].

*Perks:* Equipment Bond (Portable Armoury Kit); Good with craftsmen; Weapon Bond (Flintlock Musket) [3].

## Disadvantages

Cowardice (15) [-5]; Curious (12) [-5]; Paranoia [-10]; Secret (Underground engineer; Imprisonment or Exile) [-20]; Workaholic [-5].

*Quirks:* Delusion (Believes his gift of invention is divinely inspired); Doodles ideas for inventions; Refers to his inventions as "the children of Dream." [-3]

## Skills

Armoury/TL5 (Small Arms) (A) IQ+2 [2]-15\*; Axe/Mace (A) DX [2]-10; Chemistry/TL5 (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Engineer/TL5 (Small Arms) (H) IQ+2 [4]-15\*; Engineer/TL5 (Clockwork) (H) IQ+2 [4]-15\*; Engineer/TL5 (Electrical) (H) IQ+2 [4]-15\*; Engineer/TL5 (Steam Power Plants) (H) IQ+2 [4]-15\*; Explosives/TL5 (Demolition) (A) IQ [2]-13; Fast-Talk (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Guns/TL5 (Musket) (E) DX [1]-10; Machinist/TL5 (A) IQ+2 [2]-15\*; Mathematics/TL5 (Applied) (H) IQ-2 [1]-11; Mechanic/TL5 (Clockwork) (A) IQ+2 [2]-15\*; Mechanic/TL5 (Steam Power Plant) (A) IQ+2 [2]-15\*; Metallurgy/TL5 (H) IQ-1 [2]-12; Physics/TL5 (VH) IQ-2 [2]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-14; Smith/TL5 (Iron) (A) IQ+2 [2]-15\*; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Teaching (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Traps/TL5 (A) IQ-1 [1]-12.

\* Includes +2 from Artificer.

## Kasoyarl, Dwarven Smuggler

140 points

Like all surface dwarves, Kasoyarl is an exile from Zarak. Unlike most, he doesn't care at all. He loves the surface; there's so many marks up there. Kasoyarl is a born merchant, living for the deal. While he appreciates wealth as much as any dwarf, he cares so much more about beating the other guy.

It's this desire to get one over that led Kasoyarl to smuggling. His company, Kasoyarl's Folk, travels back and forth from Zarak, carrying legal goods to Morriel and contraband to Solginel. He makes a tidy profit transporting clockwork to Solginel, where the king's anti-technology position makes even innocuous toys illegal.

Kasoyarl is an average-looking dwarf with a smooth, deep voice and clear brown eyes. He wears his hair long and braided but trims his beard short and neat. He typically dresses in colorful trousers and vests with many pockets.

**ST** 12 [0]\*; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [0]\*.

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 39 lbs.\*; HP 12 [0]; Will 14 [5]; Per 13 [0]; FP 14 [0]\*.

Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 4 [0]\*; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Axe/Mace).

Height 4'4"; Weight 130 lbs.

## Social Background

*TL:* 3 [0].

*CF:* Christian [1]; Zarakun [0].

*Languages:* English (Native/Accented) [5]; Dwarvish (Native) [0].

## Advantages

Business Acumen 2 [20]; Dwarf [35]; Night Vision 2 [2]; Sensitive [5]; Voice [10].

## Disadvantages

Compulsive Haggling (12) [-5]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5]; Selfish (12) [-5]; Social Stigma (Disowned) [-10].

*Quirks:* Prefers human beverages to dwarven ones. [-1]

## Skills

Accounting (H) IQ+2 [4]-15†; Acting (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Administration (A) IQ+2 [2]-15†; Area Knowledge (City of Arvey) (E) IQ [1]-13; Area Knowledge (Zarak) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Armoury/TL3 (Melee Weapons) (A) IQ [1]-13‡; Axe/Mace (A) DX [0]-10\*; Carousing (E) HT [1]-11; Connoisseur (Weapons) (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Current Affairs/TL3 (Arvey) (E) IQ [1]-13; Current Affairs/TL3 (Zarak) (E) IQ [1]-13; Detect Lies (H) Per [2]-13§; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [1]-14¶; Finance (H) IQ+1 [2]-14†; Market Analysis (H) IQ [1]-13‡; Merchant (A) IQ+2 [0]-15\*‡; Propaganda/TL3 (A) IQ+2 [2]-15†; Smuggling (A) IQ [2]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-12; Wrestling (A) DX [2]-10.

\* Includes traits from Dwarf.

† Includes +2 from Business Acumen.

‡ Includes +1 from Artificer (from Dwarf).

§ Includes +1 from Sensitive.

¶ Includes +2 from Voice.

## ADVENTURE SEEDS

*All that Glitters (GURPS Dungeon Fantasy):* Several years ago, a group of Arvein explorers made a fantastic discovery in a secluded valley in southern Zarak: a dragon hoard, seemingly abandoned, possibly that of the Zarak Wyrms. The team has been secretly removing the treasure one small trip at a time to avoid the attention of the dwarves and any other dragons in the area. Unfortunately, the cave system housing the hoard has recently become infested by an aggressive colony of insect men, and the explorers need armed assistance if they are going to make their next haul.

*Double Cross (GURPS Mysteries):* The heroes discover a dwarven craftsman of their acquaintance murdered in his shop. Hidden near the body, but undisturbed by his killer, is a small vial filled with an unknown fluid. The dwarf's records indicate he dealt with Kasoyarl's Folk to smuggle goods back into Zarak, but that he hadn't worked with them in months. Soon, the PCs are being shadowed not only by dwarven smugglers but by a mysterious wizard as well. Where did the victim get the vial? What's inside? And how will the PCs sort their way out?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Stefko lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which once sat, like Arvey, on the frontier of a growing nation. It's also pretty hilly. Paul sometimes wishes there were dwarves nearby to trade with. Instead, he spends his days writing speculative fiction, thinking about games, and trying to figure out how to make money off either of those. He lives with his wife, Jamie, both in service to their cat.

# THE CRYSTAL WILDS

BY C.J. MIOZZI

The word “wilderness” may evoke images of lush forests, winding brooks, and tall grasses, but the Crystal Wilds offer a twist to the backwoods that adventurers so often frequent. Buried deep underground within a colossal cave system, the Crystal Wilds are an otherworldly reflection of their surface kin.

Instead of bushes and tufts of grass, jagged crystals grow from the rock while pale moss carpets the ground. Instead of forests of trees, towering crystals stretch toward the ceiling like slanted obelisks. Pathways snake over, under, and around sharp crystals that glint like thousands of daggers; a river cascades through it all, its burbles echoing against the cave walls. Insects creep through the moss, crystal-winged moths flutter through the stale air, and mushrooms that give off a haunting blue glow bathe the Wilds in perpetual twilight.

## HISTORY

Though the true history of the Crystal Wilds is unknown – and its creation beyond the understanding of most of Yrth’s denizens – the speculation of Ytarrian scholars who have acquired modern ideas from Earth may not be far from the truth.

This history began with the collision of tectonic plates. An oceanic plate rammed into the northern shore of Ytarria and was forced to sink underneath the thicker continental plate into the planet’s mantle. This sinking plate melted into magma that erupted in a chain of volcanoes stretching from east to west across northern Ytarria, forming the Whitehood Mountains.

Five thousand feet beneath those mountains, a thick layer of limestone was gradually chiseled into an expansive cave system. As groundwater seeped down through the layers of rock, natural acids within the water dissolved the limestone, creating holes and tunnels that grew hundreds of feet high and miles long.

The mineral-rich groundwater flooded the caves and, warmed by the magma pockets deep below, provided an ideal environment for the crystallization of gypsum. Over the course of half a million years, gypsum crystals, submerged in the warm water, grew to incredible sizes, until a catastrophic volcanic eruption cracked open fissures that drained the cave. The crystals stopped growing, and the groundwater that previously flooded the cave flowed down to the fissures, slowly carving itself a path until it became an underground river.

Initially a death trap due to its scalding temperature and suffocating humidity, the cave grew more habitable as the magma cooled. Over time, life found its way through the cracks and down into the cave, where it adapted to this new environment, resulting in a unique biota. The erosion of gypsum crystals offered a mineral-rich setting, which, mixed with the surface soil and sediment brought in from the river, allowed life to slowly blossom.

Plankton was the first form of life to flourish in the Crystal Wilds, forming the bottom of the food chain. Insects followed, adapting to the darkness, then fungus. Without any wind to disperse their spores, mushrooms became bioluminescent in order to attract the attention of the near-blind insects that could ingest, transport, and deposit the spores. The introduction of this dim light allowed moss to grow, spreading along the river shores and eventually deeper into the caves thanks to the extreme moisture.

*Crystals grew inside rock like arithmetic flowers. They lengthened and spread, added plane to plane in an awed and perfect obedience to an absolute geometry that even stones – maybe only the stones – understood.*

– Annie Dillard

Constant warm temperatures with no winter season allowed life to thrive all year round for eons. This unique ecosystem continued to evolve in isolation until a dwarven mining team of Thulin’s Folk accidentally dug its way into the western end of the Crystal Wilds while following a rich silver vein. Astounded by the sheer size of the cave system and the crystals therein, the dwarves dispatched an expedition team to map out the Wilds.

*A real crystal given to the players can be an interesting prop to introduce the heroes to this locale.*

Of course, the dwarves did not wait for the results before proceeding with mining operations. As they harvested the crystals, the dwarves assembled stone bridges and walkways to more easily navigate the alien jungle and wheel out ore.

Discovery of this seemingly endless supply of a material the dwarves have innumerable uses for meant a tremendous boon to their economy. Dwarves prefer to use the alabaster form of gypsum as a substitute for wood as a building material, since it doesn't rot. Gypsum is also used to create plaster, and – when sliced thin – it can form window panes. Many alcoholic beverages are brewed with gypsum powder, which is even employed for medicinal purposes.

## FEATURES

The cave system of the Crystal Wilds extends for almost 400 miles, running east-west beneath the Whitehood Mountains. Its largest chamber measures four miles in length, 700 feet in height, and 1,500 feet in width. The air is hot and thick with humidity, and explorers are subject to heat dangers. (For rules on remaining within the Wilds for extended periods, see *Heat* on p. B434; treat the environment as 100°F.) Dowsing oneself in the cool stream waters for one minute every 20 minutes will keep an explorer safe. Creatures native to the Crystal Wilds are treated as having the Temperature Tolerance advantage and are immune to the heat hazards.

A trek through the Crystal Wilds is equivalent to a hike across Very Bad terrain (see p. B351). Traveling the dwarven walkways is treated as Average terrain; however, these walkways only extend for one mile into the Wilds. Further, the cave system is not one level surface. Although it proceeds in a fairly linear manner from east to west, there are several vertical levels formed either by converging horizontal crystals or simply undulations within the cave ceiling, which – if viewed in cross-section – would appear as platforms and pockets. While traveling the Wilds requires frequent climbs and the odd jump, GMs should only call for Climbing and Jumping rolls during combat, chase scenes, or other instances when the party is under pressure.

The underground river originates from the westernmost part of the Crystal Wilds as a great waterfall that gushes down blocks of gypsum. Because it runs from one end of the Wilds to the other, following the river is the best way to avoid becoming lost. Smaller waterfalls contribute to the river here and here, and it ends in a fissure where it gets sucked deeper down into the unknown. More of a stream in most places, it grows in places up to 100 feet in width and eight feet in depth. Though its waters are relatively calm, rapids and cascades make travel by raft even more hazardous than trekking on foot.

### Acid Dangers

Isolated pools of warm, stagnant water have become acidic due to the gases escaping from the magma below. Because these waters are only mildly acidic, follow the **GURPS** rules (p. B428) with the following modifications:

Being splashed with the acidic water deals 1 point of damage after 15 minutes. On first contact, there is no evidence that the water is acidic; however, after 10 minutes, the victim experiences discomfort. If the acid is washed off with fresh water before 15 minutes, the victim takes no damage.

Acidic water splashed into a victim's eyes causes moderate pain (p. B428) until washed out; if this is not done within two minutes, the victim also takes 1 point of damage and acquires Bad Sight (both nearsighted *and* farsighted) until healed. Nictitating Membrane prevents *all* these effects. If immersed in acid, the victim immediately experiences discomfort and takes 1 point of damage every 30 seconds. If he swallows the acidic water, he takes 1d damage at a rate of 1 HP per 15 minutes.

This acid is too weak to cause significant damage to most items.

A related danger comes in the form of caustic geysers. Water that seeps down toward the magma is rendered acidic by escaping volcanic gases and boils until it erupts into the Crystal Wilds as small geysers. Thankfully, it is rare for a spelunker to be affected by a caustic geyser. For every week spent in the Crystal Wilds, an explorer may be witness to up to half a dozen eruptions (1d per week). Getting caught by a small geyser's acidic mist is similar to being sprayed by weak acid (see above), while getting caught in a caustic geyser's full blast should be treated as the rules for strong acid (p. B428).

*The world is so full of care  
and sorrow that it is a gracious  
debt we owe to one another  
to discover the bright crystals  
of delight hidden in somber  
circumstances and irksome  
tasks.*

– Helen Keller

### Flora and Fauna

The various insect species that inhabit the Crystal Wilds exhibit a reduction in pigmentation, smaller eyes, and longer antennae than their aboveground counterparts. Adapted to the dim lighting, these insects can visually distinguish little more than light from dark, but their other heightened senses allow them to function normally.

Though these insects are mostly harmless, explorers new to the Wilds are often frightened by their sheer size. Some species

*For an unusual – perhaps even tongue-in-cheek – possibility, the subterranean exit of the Cave tavern (from GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 10: Taverns) might connect in some fashion to the Crystal Wilds. Once the heroes are done exploring the impossible wonders of nature, they can return for a drink!*



## Fungus Fun

Though a variety of white fungi grows in the Wilds, the most prominent are the bioluminescent mushrooms that emit a ghostly blue glow. These mushrooms, which the dwarves have dubbed “glowshrooms,” can easily grow over two feet in height, weighing up to 50 lbs. If a mushroom is torn from the ground, it will continue to glow for one hour; and it sheds light according to its size.

Mushrooms at least one foot in height shed light in a two-yard radius and reduce the darkness penalty from -10 (total darkness) to -5; mushrooms at least six inches in height radiate light in a one-yard radius with the same darkness penalty reduction; smaller mushrooms do not shed enough light to illuminate much more than their immediate surroundings.

Glowshrooms are a mildly poisonous hallucinogen – they act as appetite enhancers to encourage further ingestion (and hence dispersal) of their spores, with the side effect of inducing delirium. One hour after ingesting a glowshroom, the person must roll vs. Will or be afflicted by paranoid delusions. On a success, the mushroom picker suffers no ill effects, but must still roll another check every hour until he either fails, or until 48 hours have passed and

his body is detoxified of the glowshroom poison. Ingesting only a portion of glowshroom grants a bonus to the Will roll, depending on the amount eaten (+1 for most of a glowshroom, +3 for half, +6 for a quarter, and +12 for a taste). On a failure, the eater still experiences paranoid delusions for a duration proportional to the amount consumed (minimum one hour).

Even if someone limits himself to small bites of glowshroom, the hallucinogenic results *will* eventually take effect. Anyone consuming glowshrooms for multiple days in a row resists the effects at a cumulative -1 per day past the first. This penalty only goes away after the subject avoids eating glowshrooms for twice as long (in days) as he has been consuming them.

*Example:* An adventurer eats a quarter of a ‘shroom once a day, every day. The first time, he resists the effects with Will+6 (see above). The second day, he resists with Will+5. By the end of the week, it’s Will-1. At this point, if he wants to purge this penalty, he has to go two weeks without consuming glowshrooms.

are suspected of being venomous, though there is no evidence of this, as most insects scurry away if approached.

Most notable are the moths, who have startled more than one dwarven miner with their one-foot wingspan. The moths use their translucent wings and white body to camouflage against large gypsum crystals and suddenly flutter into the air when someone walks by.

In campaigns where the fauna pose a danger to the heroes, giant spiders (see *GURPS Banestorm* pp. 220-221) may inhabit the Wilds, and the moths may be predatory (treat them as striges; see p. B461).

Clumps of moss cushion the ground and fallen crystal obelisks, offering an easier walking surface than the slick crystals. The moss is a pale yellow when viewed under torchlight, but it appears black with just a hint of purple under the blue light of the glowing mushrooms.

### Crystals

The Wilds’ titular crystals are of the selenite variety of gypsum and grow in two main shapes: columnar slabs and blocky clusters. The obelisk-like slabs can grow over 30 feet in length and almost 10 feet in diameter, weighing up to 50 tons. Smaller variations of these slabs may be found, especially in the smaller cave chambers, resembling glinting sword-blades.

The blocky clusters are like vicious thorn bushes, and they are easily capable of slicing skin. Falling on them from a height results in *cutting* damage instead of crushing!

Initially colorless and translucent, most of the crystals are now white and opaque due to the change in climate induced by

the drainage of the cave and exposure to air. However, the opaque layer can be chiseled away to reveal a clear interior. The crystals are soft enough to be scratched by a fingernail. Although they are white, their lustrous surfaces reflect the blue light of the glowshrooms, giving the illusion that they shed their own light.

Most of the larger crystals grow upward from the ground or downward from the ceiling, either vertically or at an angle; however, some extend horizontally from the sides of the cave walls. Some horizontal crystals crisscross to form canopies, adding even more vertical levels to the Wilds. Since dwarves flushed the cave, many of the horizontal beams – which tend to be coated with moss and mushrooms – have snapped from the wall under their own weight and fallen; they have formed precarious bridges across the river, not unlike toppled logs.

Walking on the crystal obelisks is treacherous, as the dampness of the caves makes them slippery. Balancing on a crystal requires a successful Acrobatics or DX roll, with difficulty determined by how steep or thin the crystal is.

## ADVENTURES IN THE CRYSTAL WILDS

The Crystal Wilds and its alien “wilderness” are suitable for a number of adventures. For campaigns not set in *GURPS Banestorm*’s world of Yrth, the Crystal Wilds could remain geologically plausible by being placed beneath any volcanic mountain chain that runs roughly parallel to, and in relatively close proximity of, a coastline. The dwarves of Thulin’s

*As an entirely natural phenomenon with possibly magical implications, the Crystal Wilds can serve as a focal point for either a realistic or high-fantasy adventure (see p. 35-36 for more ideas on mixing campaign expectations).*

Folk could be substituted for any race that has reason to dig tunnels or mines – they needn't even live underground. For instance, the Crystal Wilds may have been discovered by a remote mining colony on the fringes of civilization, populated by no more than a few dozen workers and their families.

### *The Dwarven Mecca*

Not all the dwarves agree that the Crystal Wilds should be treated as a newfound resource; a few radicals believe its unique biota and environment must be preserved – even revered, claiming it to be the perfect wilderness. More traditionally minded dwarves refer to these radicals by the derogatory term “dwelves” for their elven way of thinking.

A schism is created among the worshippers of the Eternal – some believe the Crystal Wilds to be a gift that should be harvested, while the dwelves are adamant about protecting it as a holy site. Some Muslim dwarves even believe the Wilds should be the new Mecca.

The radicals have taken to hiding in the Crystal Wilds, where they live off the land and stage guerilla raids on the mining camps, sabotaging and stealing equipment. In their attempts to thwart the miners, the dwelves have become increasingly violent; this is due to the glowshroom toxins to which they've been slowly succumbing. Unfortunately, the leader of the radicals is experiencing paranoid delusions that are leading him to take increasingly extreme measures; however, his clear-headed (for now) right-hand dwarf may be swayed by diplomacy into striking a bargain about the extent to which the Crystal Wilds will be mined.

Players may find their adventurers on either side of the conflict, as hired mercenaries or believers in the cause. If working for the “dwelves,” the PCs may have been smuggled into the xenophobic dwarf society in a desperate effort to enlist help. If working against the radicals, the Thulin's Folk dwarves may have grudgingly hired the PCs because they needed people who didn't follow “traditional dwarf thinking” to track down the guerillas.

For campaigns not using *GURPS Banestorm's* Yrth setting, the activists could be members of another race, such as subterranean elves. Instead of Islam and worship of the Eternal, this quest could involve a struggle between followers of a deity of civilization and industry and the followers of a deity of nature and earth.

### *100 Leagues Under the Mountains*

An explorer navigating the Crystal Wilds can easily become lost, wounded, or incapacitated. A dwarven expedition team sent to map out the extent of the Crystal Wilds has not returned. The PCs are hired to find the missing team – or, they may even be members of the team, lost in the Wilds, with their fellow expedition members scattered or dead.

After taking a tumble down a crystal rock slide, the team couldn't climb back up the way it came. Seeking an alternate route back, the team had no choice but to delve deeper into the Wilds until it became lost. When they ran out of rations, the explorers resorted to eating glowshrooms, which rendered them delirious. The cartographer was the first to go mad and run off on his own.

The heroes must chase down and even battle the paranoid survivors and return them safely. If the adventurers are part of

the original team, then they must also fight off their own delirium (or figure out other sources of food).

If they are not dwarves, they may have been hired because they are trusted Northmen, or due to their skill or reputation as trackers or explorers.

### *Gypsum Rush*

Word of the bounty of the Crystal Wilds has spread throughout Ytarria, and Megalos has set its eye on it as a valuable resource. The Megalans intend to use the gypsum to fertilize and condition their soils for far more fruitful harvests. Wishing to claim its bounty, Megalan miners tunneled their way toward the cave system; after a year of digging day and night, they created an alternate entrance.

Not content with simply claiming the Crystal Wilds, Megalos intends to use the cave system as a foothold for a surreptitious invasion of the territory of Thulin's Folk. Having learned during their failed assault in 1585 that a direct takeover of the dwarven hold beneath the Whitehood Mountains is not feasible, Megalos instead sends in small raiding parties that consist of miners and squads of soldiers who will ruthlessly kill any resistance they encounter.

The heroes are hired to track the soldiers back to their foothold, drive off the Megalan miners, and cave-in their tunnel.

For campaign settings other than Yrth, Megalos and Thulin's Folk could be substituted for rival nations of any race. The roles could even be reversed: the Crystal Wilds may be held by evil orcs, while a nation desperate for resources has discovered an alternate entrance into the Wilds and its soldiers quaver in their boots as they guard the miners, hoping an orc patrol doesn't happen by.

*All the means of action – the  
shapeless masses – the materials  
– lie everywhere about us.  
What we need is the celestial  
fire to change the flint into the  
transparent crystal, bright and  
clear. That fire is genius.*

*– Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow*

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Based in his hometown of Montreal, Canada, C.J. Miozzi is a geologist and published writer with a passion for art, fiction, and gaming. He is designer, layout editor, and supervising editor, and has over a decade of Game Mastering experience he wishes he could put on his résumé.

# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

## A WORLD OF MAGIC, A WORLD OF FEAR . . .

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

I remember the first time I read *GURPS Banestorm*, the part that first made an impression was the last chapter, *Campaigns on Yrth*. This isn't too surprising, since the "how the heck do I use this?!" section is one of the first I read anytime I encounter new gaming material. That chapter's often the most direct way to peer into the mind of the creator(s), which gives you the appropriate lens to view the rest of the supplement. For most settings, these sections have a flavor along the line of, "Survival on Fluffonia is a bleak and bitter affair, and heroes who cannot master its plush-based magic are doomed to die in its bright pink fields."

As *Campaigns on Yrth* makes clear, the *Banestorm* setting is well-suited for a number of campaign types – really, just about as many as are possible on our own celestial ball of mud we call "Earth." High fantasy? Dark fantasy? Comic fantasy? Sure!

Given the diversity of different regions of Yrth, it's possible to combine campaign types. This might either result in a melding of outlooks (an otherwise high-fantasy campaign with certain active ill-minded organizations with a dark-fantasy flavor) or a more patchwork affair. Similarly, given the influence of magic and mystery in the setting, it's possible to devise a framework that's just about as unusual as you'd like – and your players are willing to put up with.

Here, then, are some ideas for mixing and matching different campaign flavors on Yrth. These ideas can be used as the framework for a campaign, or the means of changing up an otherwise established campaign for a bit.

### JUST DO IT!

Probably the easiest way to alter campaign assumptions is to simply begin the adventure with the new form. If a previously

serious campaign opens with the heroes discovering that the slightly askew noble with whom they're associated has made it a month-long quest to find the best pie in all the lands . . . well, they should be clued in that this won't be a deathly grave adventure. Similarly, if – in an otherwise epic campaign – the heroes awaken after being approached by a stranger, only to find themselves stripped of gear and trapped in Abydos, the city of necromancers . . . well, they'll probably get the idea that this adventure is more of a "sword and sorcery" tale.

### HITHER, YON, BACK

Another easy method to cross campaign presumptions is to give the heroes a reason to travel to various locations in the world. After all, as *Campaigns on Yrth* notes, different parts of the setting are suitable for different tones and focuses. If the players know from the beginning that they're expecting to go from city to city, they should be able to accept that the tone of individual adventures will be fairly different.

On the more mundane side, heroes could have just about any justification to travel from place to place; many governmental agencies, guilds, and religious or magical orders would have good cause. If they are all agents of some high-level hush-hush organization – say, agents of the Ministry of Serendipity (or even higher-up members of a conspiracy Behind It All; see *GURPS Banestorm*, p. 89) – then they should have ample reason to roam the lands in search of different-flavored adventure. Plots involving gunpowder, too-cool explosives, and impossible innovations should be able to encompass just about everything from a gritty "Guy Fawkes Night"-style conspiracy to an epically magical "let's blow up a portal to another world!" and anything in between.

*To adapt the old Scottish melody: You take the high fantasy and I'll take the low fantasy, and I'll get to Yttria before you . . .*

On the more magical or technological side, maybe the heroes have some kind of enchanted or higher-tech ship – perhaps keyed only to them – that allows the group to travel faster than conventional methods. (The “cool device that takes us to new adventures” is a central tenant of the sci-fi genre – *Quantum Leap*, *Sliders*, *Doctor Who*, and the like – but it works perfectly well for the fantasy genre, too.) This method can potentially sidestep one of the biggest obstacles to having a globe-setting fantasy adventure; it’s hard to feel like the world is open to new adventure each week when you need to spend a month on horseback going from area to area. The limitations of the transport should be considered carefully to make sure the heroes can get to where the GM wants them to be able to quickly, without (say) providing a way to escape, short-circuit adventures, or the like. For fantasy campaigns, a large, impossibly fast sailing ship is a great way to use this technique; they need to be docked somewhere, and it’s unlikely the heroes can make use of it much once it’s in port, so – once they get to a place of adventure – they need to leave their cool transport aside.

## THE CAMPAIGN WITHIN

As a final option, perhaps the flavor of the campaign stems not from the campaign world, but from the heroes themselves. Very often, the various adventure options discussed in *GURPS Fantasy* and *GURPS Banestorm* come not from within the world but from its heroes. As a real-world example, New York City is a very different place if you’re a multibillionaire corporate mastermind than if you’re a down-on-his-luck homeless person. So, if you want to create a gaming series where the players get to experience different types of campaign frameworks, all you need to do is ensure their *heroes* constantly change.

Let’s make up a really unobvious example. The heroes have been blessed (or cursed, depending on the worldview) by some mystical affliction that causes them to physically and mentally morph from season to season (see *Disadvantageous Divergences*, below, for some tips). So, for example, in the spring they may be

mighty epic-style heroes; in the fall they may be scrawny everymen, and in the summer and winter they are more traditional mid-powered characters.

In *GURPS* terms, the heroes for such a campaign might be built as follows:

Season	Point Total	Season	Point Total
Winter	250 points	Summer	250 points
Spring	400 points	Fall	125 points

It’s up to the GM to decide if the winter and summer heroes use the same 250-point write-ups or different ones. (It might be interesting if, say, the spring heroes were more magically oriented and the fall versions martially inclined.) The GM must also determine how the degradation between seasons takes place. (If the group likes bookkeeping, perhaps the adventurer loses or gains one-fifth of the difference in character points over the course of five days before the new season. Thus a hero going from winter to spring would be at 250/280/310/340/370/400 points in the days leading up to the new season, while one going from summer to fall would degrade from 250/225/200/175/150/125 points.)

With this idea, the heroes are the same people – they’re just weaker or stronger, depending on the time of year. The players should be encouraged to adapt to the campaign view that their new point total encourages. Their 125-point versions would probably feel as if they were in a low-fantasy setting, trying to play it safe and pull off minor missions (or even just struggle to stay alive!); their spring counterparts should feel the pull of epic adventure. Although the heroes are their own impetus for the campaign’s flavor, crossovers between the heroes’ various forms can also enforce the changing genre types. For example, a minor magical adversary during the high-fantasy spring season can be the sinister “wizard in the tower” sorcery aspect that forms the basis for sword-and-sorcery adventures.

(And, no, we’re not going to get into here what happens if the heroes cross the equator . . .)

## Disadvantageous Divergences

Note that the total points possible from disadvantages probably change as well; it’s entirely reasonable for the winter hero to have 100 points in disadvantages compared to his fall version’s 25 points. However, care should be taken to ensure that the disadvantages represent a continuity between the forms or have some plausible explanation for appearing in one version but not another. It would be unusual if one form suddenly had (say) the Berserk or Alcoholism disadvantages if there’s no hint of that the rest of the year. A player could mitigate this by including an equivalent 1-point quirk (“Likes to drink a lot” or “Likes to start fights”) in a lower-point version of the adventurer.

Also note that it’s not required that stronger or weaker versions of disadvantages are limited to stronger or weaker forms. If a spring hero has Alcoholism that his fall form does not, then that’s simply his “epic flaw” when he’s buffed up; conversely, if Alcoholism is only a failing of his frail fall form . . . well, the weaknesses of the flesh are difficult to ignore in the autumn.

Moreover, social disadvantages (and advantages) need to be considered carefully. It probably doesn’t make much sense for a mighty enemy of the 400-point hero to suddenly disappear the rest of the year, but an Ally of the 125-point fall hero might be a Dependent during the spring – his friend is as powerful as ever, but his comparative weakness makes him a liability!

## FANTASTIC LIVES

The nice thing about fantasy is that the players are often forgiving of outlandish campaign premises. Even in a more realistic setting like *Yrth*, they’ll often come along for the ride. If the heroes know to expect the unexpected from the beginning, then it’s possible for one campaign to enjoy a huge number of possibilities.

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to role-playing game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards.

# ODDS AND ENDS

## FIVE MEMORABLE BANESTORM TRANSPLANTS

*Whatever Happened To . . . ?* (pp. 19-24) presents a number of real-life personalities to introduce to the *Banestorm* setting. Here are some other possibilities for interesting folks to bring to Yrth.

- A group of individuals from late Georgian London. Oh, and they're all goblins. Moreover their world's unusual ideals of social advancement and personal fortitude seem to have transplanted over with them. (See *GURPS Goblins* for more details.)

- A wizard who claims to have been plucked from an *alternate* version of Yrth – one that seems to be 10 years in the future! Is he merely a delusional “mundane” resident of Ytarria

(perhaps using some divination magic and/or lucky guesses to present a plausible version of the future)? Or is there something to his claims?

- One or more corpses of *biological* zombies – perhaps from one of the Gotha parallels (see *GURPS Infinite Worlds* and *More Hell Parallels* from *Pyramid* #3/20: *Infinite Worlds*). As the infection spreads, this could present a real conundrum for many Ytarrian residents: “Why aren't our necromantic spells working? *Why aren't they working?!*”

- An entire burrow of (more or less) mundane bunnies, who struggle to make their way in this strange new world; see *GURPS Bunnies & Burrows* for more info. (As a slightly less ludicrous twist, perhaps the human heroes are magically transformed into rabbits and find themselves in such a Banestorm-transplanted burrow. “The good news is we found some new allies who came from our time! The bad news is they're shorter than you might expect . . .”

- Someone who claims to have previously possessed a copy of a book entitled *GURPS Banestorm*, and who seems to have access to a lot more information than he should have about the world . . .

## MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



Got a *Murphy's Rule* of your own? Send it to [murphy@wotgames.com](mailto:murphy@wotgames.com)

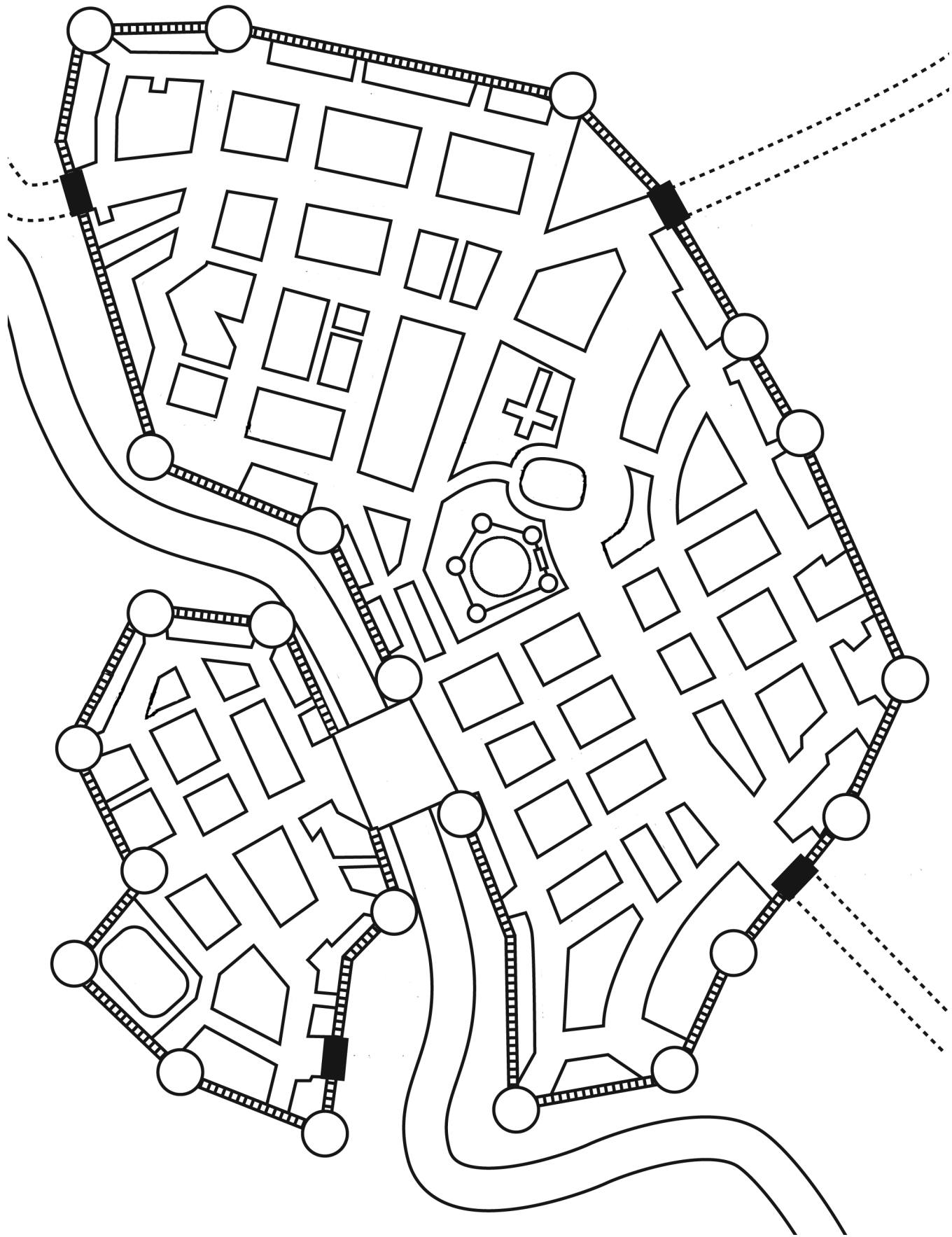
## Abydos Player's Map

*GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* includes an attractive map of the titular City of Shadows, but it's intended for the GM only. (There isn't anything *incredibly* secret on there, but it takes some of the mystery away to say, “Hey! Let's go see the Bloodless Arena and find out what that's about!”) For GMs who like to maintain some mystery for the players, the player's version of this map on pp. 38-39 should serve as a useful handout.

There are two forms of the map presented. One is a plain “nuts and bolts” black-and-white version (cheap to print!), and the other is a color version that might make a neater prop for a harried GM to print out. You can also generate a “real” crumpled map by printing the black-and-white version on parchment paper; then crumpling and tearing the map as appropriate.

It's up to the GM to determine how the map ends up in the heroes' hands. Although it's a risky job, spies do sometimes attempt to learn more about Abydos; the adventurers could acquire the map from one of them. Or maybe the heroes are working within the city of necromancers, and have acquired the map from one of the shadowy figures who call Abydos home. (In this case, one or more items of interest might be marked as well – although whether those markings are *true* is up to the GM . . .)





## ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: [info@sjgames.com](mailto:info@sjgames.com). Resources include:

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*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.

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