PYRAMID

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STEAMPUNK

ORDER OF PRECEDENCE
by William H. Stoddard

NECROMENSCHEN
by Sean Punch

THE CLANKERS
by David L. Pulver

THE MOHOCKS
by J. Edward Tremlett

ACROSS AFRICA WITH IRON AND STEAM
by Matt Riggsby

A WHISPER IN THE SKY
by Michele Armellini

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Purple: Systemless Features
Green: Distinguished Columnists

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In This Issue

There was a time when a full boiler and fresh blueprint were instruments enough to change the world. That time is now, and the era is steampunk. Welcome, good fellow, to tomorrow!

From the pen of William H. Stoddard – the gentleman scientist behind both ***GURPS Steampunk*** and ***GURPS Social Engineering*** – comes the *Order of Precedence.* This transfixing treatise reveals that, in Victorian England, different social spheres can feel like strange worlds. Discover how the guidelines from ***Social Engineering*** can add greater authenticity to the interpersonal relations of your realistic or cinematic Victorian campaigns.

All aboard the great Trans-Kenya railway; it's time to make your fortune *Across Africa With Iron and Steam.* Written by Matt Riggsby (author of ***GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence***), this alternate-history campaign locale is suitable for many steampunk campaigns looking to add a bold new realm rooted in reality. It offers tips on travel, details on dangers, and pointers on politics. It includes a map and ***GURPS*** vehicle stats for a personal airship.

What do you get when you cross zombies with weird science? *Necromenshen!* ***GURPS*** Line Editor Sean Punch melds the science of steampunk with the zeitgeist of zombies. It describes the undead creations with ghoulish detail and plenty of ***GURPS*** stats.

Victorian London is being terrorized by mechanical machinations, so the Metropolitan Police Department fights back with *The Clankers.* This month's Eidetic Memory offering from ***GURPS Basic Set*** co-author David L. Pulver is an adventure outline, complete with ***GURPS*** vehicle and weapon stats for the cogwork creations.

Learn the hard way that not all steampunk innovations are noisy, with *A Whisper in the Sky.* ***GURPS WWII: Their Finest Hour*** author Michele Armellini soars with ***GURPS*** rules and stats for fantastic gliding vessels.

An infamous Edwardian gang is revitalized in Victorian London. Discover the motives, history, and key players of *The Mohocks* – a systemless social swarm suitable for any steam-powered setting.

Enjoy a spot of tea with *Pyramid* Editor Steven Marsh's *Random Thought Table,* the wind-up whimsy of *Murphy's Rules,* and other *Odds and Ends.* Catch the fresh-polished brass just right and you'll agree: The future is brighter than ever!

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From the Editor

Gearing Up

One aspect I love about the steampunk aesthetic is an underlying optimism: It takes a historical era where everything seemed possible – a time where it appeared as if gentlemen scientists and elbow grease could change the world – and allows the impossible to happen.

I also love steampunk because it provides the thematic mirror to another personal favorite: turn-of-the-century Lovecraftian horror. If steampunk is a natural positive reflection of "humanity is capable of anything" leading up to the Great War, Lovecraftian horror is the post-War pessimistic reflection on the exact same ideal: "humanity is capable of anything."

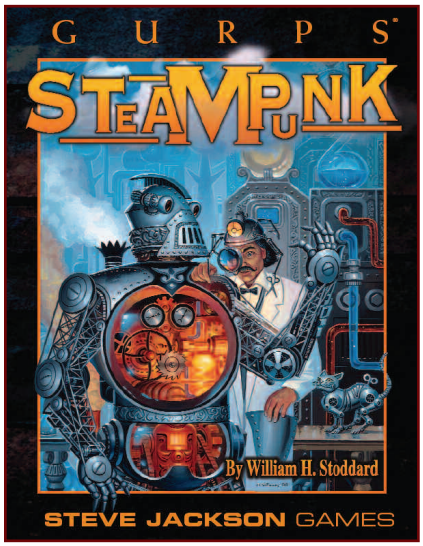
Regardless of where your historical gaming takes you, hopefully you'll find something in this issue – there's quite the spectrum to choose from, including new tech of all stripes, social ramifications, and a campaign setting. Embrace the future!

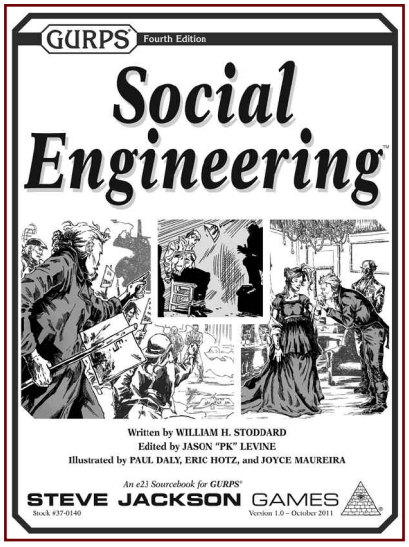
Steam Effort

On another note, one thing I love about *Pyramid* is its speed and focus. It was natural to invite William H. Stoddard – author of ***GURPS Steampunk*** – to participate, but it wasn't until we started brainstorming ideas that I realized how exciting I found the thought of support for the recently released ***GURPS Social Engineering*** (also from the Stoddardian pen). I feel the power and flexibility of ***Social Engineering*** really shine through in *Order of Precedence* (pp. 4-9), and it's a great introduction into what Victorian England was like.

Write Here, Write Now

Was our past look at the future what you expected today? Are our gears clogged up with sand? Let us know what you thought about this issue, by sending private feedback via pneumatic tube at **pyramid@sjgames.com,** or posting a circular of your ideas for public veneration at **forums.sjgames.com.**





Order of Precedence

by William H. Stoddard

Victorian Britain, the classic steampunk setting, felt the strain of conflicting values and colliding institutions. The Industrial Revolution, built on steam power, created new wealth that supported new forms of social mobility. But the old social hierarchies survived and adapted. Adventurers in the Age of Steam need to find their way through a maze of class distinctions.

GURPS Social Engineering offers tools for mapping out this maze – new rules for defining social advantages and disadvantages, and how they fit together, in more detail. Victorian social distinctions offer a perfect example of how to use ***GURPS Social Engineering*** to build a campaign world and create characters for it.

> *"It is in bad taste" is the most formidable word an Englishman can pronounce.*
>
> *– Ralph Waldo Emerson*

What Kind of Society?

Great Britain is a society with a hybrid government. Functionally, it's a representative democracy: Parliament holds supreme authority, established in the English Civil War in 1649 with the execution of Charles I, and confirmed in 1660 with the restoration of his son Charles II. But the Restoration led to the reestablishment of the earlier feudal organization, with a monarch, a House of Lords in Parliament alongside the House of Commons, and a landed aristocracy and gentry. From 1837 to 1901, the monarch was Victoria; the reign of Edward VII, her son and successor, was largely similar.

Until the Reform Act of 1832, Parliament was an essentially oligarchic regime; many members were elected in "rotten boroughs" with under 100 voting residents, whose votes could easily be bought by the wealthy. The Reform Act did away with nearly all of them, and allowed anyone who owned land worth $1,100 or more to vote. The Second Reform Act, in 1867, extended the vote to all householders.

Great Britain in this era is CR2. Taxes are light, going mainly to support a small army and the world's largest navy. There are few restrictions on trade and industry. However, Ireland, despite having its own representatives in Parliament, is actually subjugated, under the control of a Protestant oligarchy that maintains CR4 for the general population. The remnants of Irish customs and institutions are clan/tribal, with significant religious influence from the Roman Catholic Church.

Social Classes

The traditional British class system – and the one that's still officially recognized – is based on *ascribed* Status: Your place in society mainly reflects your birth. Bonuses to Status from Rank or Wealth don't actually raise your Status; rather, they reduce the cost of your (unchanged) total Status. British ascribed Status covers the full allowed range, as shown below.

Status	*Examples*
8	Empress (Victoria, after 1876, when the British Raj is instituted) or Emperor
7	Queen (before 1876), Prince Consort, Prince of Wales, other royal family
6	Duke, marquess, archbishop
5	Earl, viscount
4	Baron, baronet, bishop
3	Knight, Member of Parliament
2	Gentleman
1	Prosperous yeoman
0	Yeoman
-1	Husbandman (tenant farmer) or tradesman
-2	Cottager (farmhand), laborer, or pauper

Status 3 and above is accompanied by equal Courtesy Rank. For Status 4 and above, this Courtesy Rank is hereditary. Titles from baron up to duke grant a seat in the House of Lords; holders of these seats make up the *peerage*. Baronets are not part of the peerage. However, a knight or baronet (amounting to a hereditary knight) often holds a position of real political power in a country government, as a magistrate, sheriff, or the like; treat this as actual Political Rank 3-4. Gentlemen without knighthoods often use the title of esquire.

Baronets, knights, and gentlemen make up the *gentry*. They are expected to have enough money (or property) to live on the interest (or rents) without working. Being "in trade" is contemptible, by definition. Serving as an army or navy officer doesn't count; neither do the learned professions – the clergy, law, and medicine – as they require a university education, and thus the wealth to support a young man who doesn't work.

Gentry are technically commoners (not members of the peerage), but the mass of the common people are not gentry – they need to work for a living, or to live on charity. British society draws subtle distinctions about this. For example, a physician is a gentleman, and learns his profession at a university; meanwhile, a surgeon is a tradesman, because he works with his hands, and learns his profession by apprenticeship – surgeons are not called *doctor* and have less prestige than physicians. (Apothecaries, who sell drugs and may prescribe them, are lower still.) The distinction even applies in sports: A *gentleman cricketer* is an amateur, but a *player* receives a salary.

Status at this level is always partly *achieved* through wealth, ownership of land, and having servants (see *Above and Below Stairs,* below). But the growth of trade – especially shipping and finance – opened new paths to wealth, and the Age of Steam added industrial enterprise. This sort of Status is mostly *imputed* from Wealth and Rank, in the style of classless meritocracies. A merchant or industrialist is treated like a yeoman, and a successful one (Wealthy or better) like a prosperous yeoman. However, the really successful ones are coming to expect to be treated as gentlemen – and their daughters may marry into the older gentry or even the peerage.

Meanwhile, people born into the gentry may be left too poor to afford its way of life, through debts (particularly gambling debts), bad investments, or divided inheritances in large families. Anyone who isn't at least Wealthy can't make enough from Independent Income to support a Status 2 lifestyle (cost of living of $3,000/month versus income of $2,000/month, based on 20% of Comfortable Wealth of $10,000). Men in this situation may turn to military service, as "gentleman rankers," or search for heiresses to marry. Women become "decayed gentlewomen," doing their best to keep up appearances with a small house and a maidservant; or they look for positions as companions to wealthy and respectable ladies, or as governesses.

Above and Below Stairs

Having servants is a mark of respectability. The cost of living for Status 1 includes the wages and keep of a maidservant or a stable boy. Status 2 is enough to support a manservant such as a groom or valet, often along with one or more maidservants. Status 3 or higher includes multiple servants with their own internal organization and community. As in the classic British television series, such households are divided into "upstairs" (the master and mistress and their family), and "downstairs" (the servants).

Position among servants can be treated as a form of Rank, though with a very low cost. Using the rules for variant costs of Rank from ***GURPS Social Engineering,*** Servant Rank costs 1 point/level for titles, 1 point/level for chain of command, and -1 point/level for lacking dominance or uniqueness – a total of 1 point/level, with up to four levels. Servants of royalty have a higher cost: 1 point/level for titles and 1 point/level for chain of command, a total of 2 points/level, with up to eight levels.

The hierarchy of service looks like this:

Rank	*Positions*
4	Butler
3	Housekeeper
2	Cook, lady's maids, valets
1	Chambermaids, footmen, groom, head nurse, parlormaids, under cook
0	Housemaid, nurse, scullery maid, stable boy

Governesses aren't officially servants, being required to come from the gentry; their function is to teach the older daughters while the older sons are away at school. However, they're not members of the family or considered their equals. A governess who treats the servants as her inferiors is likely to be snubbed until she learns her place.

In the Edwardian era, a wealthy household may have an automobile as well as a carriage. This usually means having a chauffeur to drive it. Chauffeurs are also Servant Rank 1.

Rank and Organizations

Religious, military, and political organizations provide their own levels of Rank and Status to their members.

The Church

England has an established church, the Church of England, of which Victoria (and later Edward VII) is the head. (Other beliefs are legally tolerated, under the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1829, but may carry some stigma; see *Outsiders,* pp. 7-8.) As a result, the Church of England can grant Religious Rank costing 5 points/level. The hierarchy of the Church is as follows.

Rank	*Positions*
7	Archbishops of Canterbury and York
5	Diocesan bishops
4	Suffragan (assistant) bishops, archdeacons, rural deans
3	Parish priests/vicars
2	Curates (assistant priests), deacons
1	Lay subdeacons
0	Sextons, other minor offices

It is part of English hypocrisy – or English reserve – that, whilst we are fluent enough in grumbling about small inconveniences, we insist on making light of any great difficulties or griefs that may beset us.

– Sir Max Beerbohm

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York are jointly the primates of the Church of England, though the Archbishop of Canterbury is senior. In addition to their authority over their own archdioceses, they jointly exercise certain powers nationwide. There are no other archbishops in the church (and thus no Rank 6 clergymen). Under the Bishopric of Manchester Act of 1847, 26 bishops and archbishops sit in the House of Lords and have the Status that goes with doing so: The two archbishops are Status 6; the Bishops of Durham, London, and Winchester (who are automatically admitted) are Status 5; and the 21 longest-serving bishops from other dioceses are Status 4.

Scotland has its own church, the Church of Scotland, which is Presbyterian – that is, governed not by a hierarchy of bishops, but by councils of elders and ministers. Ministers (with Religious Rank 3) act as moderators for parish councils; moderators of larger councils hold Religious Rank 4 (for presbyteries), 5 (for synods), or 6 (for the national council), but only during their term of service, though former moderators hold equivalent Courtesy Rank. Ireland and Wales are officially under the Church of England. However, 75% of the Irish belong to the Catholic Church, which has its own hierarchy, while in Wales, the majority are Dissenters, often Methodists. Dissenting churches have varying forms of organization; the GM may want to reduce the cost of Religious Rank for their clergy, based on how widely they are respected, similarly to Reputation.

The maxim of the British people is "Business as usual."
– Sir Winston Churchill

The Navy

Britain's navy is traditionally called the Senior Service, and grants Military Rank. However, the legalities are complex: Sea officers (lieutenant and above) serve the navy as a whole, warrant officers (mainly technical specialists) are attached to specific ships, and petty officers serve at the pleasure of their ship's commander. Below all of them are seamen. The ranks are as follows.

Rank	*Positions*
8	Admiral
7	Vice admiral, rear admiral
6	Post-captain (in command of a large warship)
5	Commander (of a smaller warship), master and commander
4	Lieutenant in command (of a small warship)
3	Lieutenant, warrant officer
2	Midshipman, warrant officer, petty officer
1	Able seaman
0	Ordinary seaman, landsman

A "master" was technically a specialist in navigation and shiphandling, and counted as a warrant officer; however, he could be given command of a ship other than a warship, and would then be called "master and commander." A commodore was not actually a distinct rank but a post-captain who was temporarily assigned the duties of a rear admiral – Military Rank 6 plus Courtesy Rank 1. During major wars, a senior admiral might be appointed to the higher rank of "admiral of the fleet"; this is also treated as Military Rank 8.

The Army

The army had a somewhat similar system, with the same three categories of officers. Army ranks are as follows.

Rank	*Positions*
8	General
7	Lieutenant general, major general, brigadier
6	Colonel
5	Lieutenant colonel, major
4	Captain, lieutenant/first lieutenant
3	Sublieutenant/ensign/cornet/second lieutenant, warrant officer
2	Warrant officer, sergeant-major, sergeant
1	Corporal, lance corporal
0	Private soldier

The lowest rank of commissioned officers had a confusing variety of titles. Cornet was a cavalry rank, and ensign, an infantry rank. Separate names for the different arms were abandoned during the Victorian era, and the other two names were alternately favored at different times. During major wars the rank of "field marshal" might be established, above general; this is also treated as Military Rank 8.

Law Enforcement

Since 1829, law enforcement in Greater London has been the responsibility of the Metropolitan Police (called "Scotland Yard" from the address of their first headquarters – it moved to a larger building, New Scotland Yard, in 1890). The force grew steadily from an original 1,000 men to over 10,000; it is a powerful organization, and the first big-city police department in the English-speaking world. The original City of London has a separate and much smaller force, formed in 1838 by the merger of the City Day Police and Night Watch.

Ranks in the Metropolitan Police are as follows.

Rank	*Positions*
6	Commissioner
5	Assistant commissioner
4	Superintendent
3	Chief inspector, inspector
2	Sergeant
0	Constable

Government Positions

Other governmental functions and offices fall under Administrative Rank. In 1855, after the administrative chaos of the Crimean War, the government adopted a uniform civil service system, modeled on the East India Company's organization, which itself was based on the Chinese imperial examination system. The civil service is extraordinarily small, with about 20,000 employees in 1830 (the French government has nearly a million). Administrative Ranks 1-6 are appointive positions, gained through competitive examinations and performance reviews.

John Company

The British East India Company – nicknamed "John Company," or in India "Company Bahadur" (*bahadur* means "hero" or "important person") – was charted in 1600 by Elizabeth I to trade with India. From the beginning, the Indian kingdom of Bihar exported saltpeter; it produced 70% of the world's supply. After 1660, it began dealing in tea, introduced to Britain by Charles II's Portuguese queen, and after 1773 in opium, resold at Calcutta to be smuggled into China.

Trade created a need for military protection, and protection led to conquest. By 1858, the Company governed most of India. In an alternate history, it might have avoided or survived the Indian Mutiny and remained in power longer; it had its defenders, including the philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill, who argued for the superiority of expert company administrators to parliamentary appointees who might change with each new election.

During the early Victorian era, the Company can grant Company Rank. Using the rules from ***Social Engineering*** (p. 14), this includes ranks and titles (1 point/level), a formal chain of command (1 point/level), average resources (1 point/level), unique (0 points/level), and political dominance in India (0 points/level). It is not seen as legitimate – that is, as serving society – either in India, where its power is often resented; or in Britain, where it's treated as a commercial enterprise (hired by Parliament to govern India, but also subject to close Parliamentary regulation). Company Rank thus costs 3 points/level.

The best measure of the Company's size is its military forces; on the eve of the Mutiny, it had 40,000 British soldiers commanding nearly eight times as many Indian soldiers. The civilian administration was comparatively small, with only about 1,000 British officials responsible for governing 300 million people, and remained small under direct Parliamentary control. Each district had a tax collector (who headed its local government), a magistrate, and various lesser officers. The Company didn't separate civil and military functions as stringently as the British government; the same man might perform both roles at different times.

About one-third of India remains outside of direct British control, divided into over 500 "princely states." Their rulers have an amazing variety of titles, which neither form a clear system of precedence such as the peerage nor reflect how much actual power they have. The English word "prince" treats them all as Status 6, lower than the Status 7 ruler of a fully independent state; for many of them, this includes one or more levels of Honorary Title. Actual Status is reflected in such customs as gun salutes: the 10 rulers who received 21- or 19-gun salutes are Status 6, the hundred-odd who receive lesser salutes are Status 5, and "princes" not entitled to salutes are Status 4.

In an alternate solar system with a habitable Mars or Venus, a multiplanet British Empire might develop similar systems for Martian or Venerean "allies." The scientific elite of a steampunk empire might find Mill's arguments for the superior rationality of corporate administration persuasive.

The majority party in Parliament selects Members of Parliament to serve as ministers, heading government departments; the Prime Minister is Administrative Rank 8, and other ministers are Administrative Rank 7. This gives the Prime Minister Status 6 and other ministers Status 5, thanks to Status bonuses from Rank. Former ministers retain Honorary Title (a courtesy equivalent of Status), treated as a perk.

Outsiders

Other factors of one's birth and upbringing besides class could affect a person's place in society.

Religion

Religious discrimination has greatly decreased in Victorian society. Acceptance of members of religious minorities as Members of Parliament was regarded as a key marker of social acceptance. Daniel O'Connell's election in County Clare led to the Catholic Relief Act of 1829, which had widespread public support in England; Lionel de Rothschild and David Salomons were seated after the Oaths Bill of 1858 made it possible for Jews to serve; Charles Bradlaugh, a secularist, gained membership in 1888 through a new Oaths Act that allowed a nonreligious affirmation. By the end of the century, members of these groups can be considered Second-Class Citizens: They aren't excluded from the legal rights of citizenship, but may face unfavorable reactions.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity apart from religion is less often a source of bias, though the Chauvinistic quirk is commonplace. Writers such as Gobineau and Chamberlain began advocating racist ideologies in the second half of the century, sometimes supported by appeals to Darwin's theory of evolution as a basis for considering some human populations "primitive" and others "advanced." Peoples brought into the Empire by conquest – such as the Irish, the Indians, and the Australian aborigines – are likely to be treated as Minority Groups, especially if they didn't adopt British customs, as were readily identifiable groups in England such as the Chinese of Limehouse or the Romany.

Sex

Women are definitely Second-Class Citizens – but that's a substantial improvement from their earlier position. A series of Married Women's Property Acts, from 1870 through 1893, gave wives the right to own property in their own name, to file lawsuits, and more generally to have legal identities separate from those of their husbands. Before this, their position was closer to that of Valuable Property. The later part of the century saw the founding of women's colleges associated with Oxford and Cambridge – starting with Girton College at Cambridge in 1869 and Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford in 1878 – though their students can't take university degrees.

Sexuality

Homosexual men don't have anything as mild as a Social Stigma; they have a Secret whose revelation can lead to imprisonment or exile, as happened to Oscar Wilde. A homosexual man who has served his sentence has a Criminal Record and may well have been Disowned. The pressures on lesbians are less severe, but they face utter rejection if they aren't discreet.

Heterosexual women who are publicly known to be "unchaste" face similar penalties. Men face lesser penalties, though they may have to answer to an angry husband or father; however, part of the Code of Honor (Gentleman's) is to not expose their mistresses to public scandal – if necessary, a gentleman is expected to lie outright.

The Benefits of Class

Victorian England is an ideal setting for applying the rules on the benefits of Status. ***GURPS Social Engineering*** discusses these on p. 59. Some are particularly applicable.

Leadership Bonuses

In an emergency, a person with positive Status can roll versus Leadership to take charge. Status gives a bonus to the Leadership roll. Having a gentleman, or a member of the royal family, take command can turn a disorganized crowd into an organized group. Note that Status doesn't give bonuses to rolls to lead effectively!

Securing Assistance

A person with high Status can treat authorities or specialists at a scene as if they were Usually Reliable Contacts. Status 1-2 works with people with effective skill 12; Status 3-4 with effective skill 15; Status 5-6 with effective skill 18; and Status 7-8 with effective skill 21. For each +3 to effective skill of the person approached, drop reliability by one step.

Supporting a Cause or Enterprise

A venture, either profit or nonprofit, that has a high-Status spokesman is regarded more favorably. Divide the difference between the spokesman's Status and the target audience's average Status by 2 (rounding down); the result acts as a bonus to Propaganda skill for a publicity campaign.

Who You Know

England is a country of private, voluntary associations of all sorts. (The same is true of the United States, as de Tocqueville discussed in *Democracy in America*.) The middle classes and the respectable working classes have fraternal societies, which perform social-welfare functions such as finding jobs for the unemployed, paying the expenses of the sick, and burying the dead. Gentlemen have clubs. Scholars have learned societies, ranging from the Royal Society of London to the Society for Psychical Research. With legal toleration of non-Anglican churches, an increasing part of religious life is based on voluntary association. More informally, one of the main marks of Status is being able to gain an invitation to a dinner party or weekend visit held by someone of high Status.

Both formal societies and informal social circles have gatekeepers – people whose opinion of applicants matters. This is assumed (and has no cost) for the person of highest Status in a group. If the Prince of Wales proposes someone to his club as a member, no one is likely to disagree! For anyone else, it is a perk: Social Arbiter.

A visitor who has the chance to observe a social milieu for eight hours can attempt to identify someone in it who's a gatekeeper, either for that circle or for a more exclusive circle that overlaps with it. This requires a Per-based roll against Diplomacy, or for some groups against an alternate skill – for example, Politics, Savoir-Faire (High Society), or Streetwise. A successful roll identifies someone suitable; a failed roll provides no information; a critical failure picks out a pretentious nobody whose good opinion is actually a black mark.

Making a good impression on a gatekeeper normally involves a general reaction roll. It can also be accomplished with a suitable Influence roll; Savoir-Faire (High Society) and Streetwise are commonly used for this. There are various ways to improve the odds of success. A person who's good at reading people can use Body Language as a complementary skill (+2 to the primary skill roll for a critical success, +1 for a success, -1 for a failure, -2 for a critical failure). A person with Empathy (or Sensitive) can use IQ (or IQ-3). A con artist or manipulator can attempt to gain specious acceptance: Winning a Quick Contest of Fast-Talk vs. IQ gives +3 to the primary skill; a tie or failure results in an automatic failure, and the target's reaction is Very Bad, not just Bad.

In many circles, worthy achievements can enhance the chance of being accepted. This can usually be represented as a bonus from Reputation. The GM should award adventurers suitable Reputations based on their publicly known deeds. Such Reputations may open the door to raising a person's Status – which is both a suitable reward in a steampunk or historical Victorian campaign, and a means to larger adventures.

Climbing and Falling

Looking back at the Victorian and Edwardian eras can give the impression that these social advantages and disadvantages were a solid structure. In a sense, they were: Most of the social distinctions people recognized at the start were the same as those they recognized at the end – and traces of many of them still survive a century later. However, individual people in Victorian society didn't always stay in the same position. Rising and falling in society is one of the great themes of Victorian fiction. Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion,* written in 1912, dramatizes the process (and the musical *My Fair Lady* romanticizes it even more). Indeed, millions of Victorian and Edwardian men and women taught themselves the accents and manners of their social "betters."

One of the common paths to upward mobility was increased wealth. The expansion of international trade brought additional profits not only to the British East India Company (see *John Company,* p. 7), but to many independent merchants. The Industrial Revolution created entire new industries and

occupations. Entrepreneurs might become prosperous or even wealthy by putting their work and their savings into a new factory. The same factory would create jobs for working men and women – often hard and poorly paid work, and sometimes dangerous, but it gave them choices other than being a tenant farmer, farmhand, or domestic servant. A few of them went on to become factory owners in their own right. (A successful roll vs. Finance can represent setting up a successful business; a critical success can indicate that a fortune was made from such a venture.)

The presence of these newly wealthy men challenged the social standing of the older wealthy classes, the aristocracy and gentry. The result was conflict between ascribed and achieved Status (in American terms, "new money" and "old money"). The established upper classes embraced the idea that there was more to respectability than money. Respectable people had to have *inherited* money; being "in trade" wasn't respectable. Similarly, newly bought expensive goods were less creditable than inherited expensive goods; "the sort of people who buy their silver" was a common insult. Being Wealthy granted imputed Status – but those who spent like gentlemen without having the manners of gentlemen had Odious Personal Habit (Above His Station), giving -1 to reaction rolls per level of Status gained through spending.

The easiest way to learn to be a gentleman or lady was to be brought up as one. However, it was possible to *learn* the right sort of behavior . . . and many people did, from formal instruction or from manuals of etiquette. This amounts to being trained in Savoir-Faire (High Society). Anyone with Status 0 or better can imitate the behavior of a higher Status with rolls against this skill; someone who starts out with negative Status is at -2 to imitate positive Status. It may also be necessary to learn an upper-class accent; faking an accent requires Native comprehension of English and rolls against Mimicry+2, Acting, or Linguistics. Finally, dressing appropriately is required, which takes a roll against Disguise+4 to look right (+1 with Fashion Sense). Those who can't simply buy garments can get help from a Contact, find a rental source with an Area Knowledge roll, buy them inexpensively with a Scrounging roll, or make or alter them with a Sewing roll (-1 per level of added Status for alterations).

Another option for women to get into the aristocracy is by marrying upward. The wealth of a woman's parents could be a big help in this; an impoverished aristocrat might find it possible to accept a wife with no pedigree but a substantial dowry. If she had taught herself respectable manners, the barriers were lower; even daughters of American millionaires might gain titles from their husbands. It wasn't so easy for a young woman who had only looks and manners, though literary characters from Thackeray's Becky Sharp (in *Vanity Fair*) to Shaw's Liza Doolittle carried it off. Other such women settled for less formal alliances and became known as "adventuresses," such as Doyle's Irene Adler, whose career in opera took her from New Jersey to being the mistress of the heir to the Bohemian throne.

Those who were raised in upper-class households, but didn't inherit enough money to support an upper class lifestyle, had a difficult time. If they tried to live the way they were brought up, but among poor people, they were likely to be resented for it. The skill of Savoir-Faire (High Society) can be used to fit in among people of lower Status – but at -2 to skill if a person with Status above 0 tries to make a good impression with people with negative Status. Savoir-Faire (Military) can take its place for a "gentleman ranker" – an upper-class person serving as an enlisted man.

Both the struggle to climb and the fear of falling can provide the driving force for steampunk campaigns. In a steampunk world, inventors and industrialists may become a new social elite – or struggle to overthrow the older elites. A future Britain might have a House of Lords with real power controlled by eminent scientists with life peerages.

About the Author

William H. Stoddard is a professional copy editor, specializing in scientific and scholarly books in fields ranging from aerospace technology to archaeology. Fortunately, he likes reading nonfiction; his research library is threatening to take over his apartment, and he regularly visits the nearest university library for supplemental reading. His other pleasures include cooking, reading science fiction and alternate history, and running and playing in roleplaying games; he has been doing the latter since 1975, when he first encountered ***Dungeons & Dragons***. His previous work for Steve Jackson Games includes writing the latest editions of ***GURPS Supers*** and ***GURPS Low-Tech***, as well as composing *Pyramid* articles on such subjects as formal dances and sexual situations in roleplaying games. He lives in San Diego with his cohabitant Carol, two cats, two computers, and far too many books!

The British Empire is Etheria's greatest power. Administered from London, it encompasses dominions, colonies, and protectorates on every continent – and since 1884, Cytherea on South Polar Venus and Erebus on Mercury, with scientific missions going to Mars, but no territorial claims there.

– GURPS Steampunk

Across Africa With Iron and Steam

Or, the Great Trans-Kenya Railway, Hurrah!

by Matt Riggsby

In the 19th and early 20th century, the final frontier wasn't space – of which telescopes could make perfectly good observations – but Africa. Though the process was still incomplete, exploration in the 1880s gave way to land grabs, with international conniving to draw lines on the map and bold efforts on the ground to turn those theoretical spheres of influence into real domains. In this campaign setting at the dawn of the 20th century, adventurers can do their bit for king and country far from the technological centers of Europe and America in one of the few remaining uncivilized spots on the globe. This article presents an alternate history for colonial Africa and suggestions on how to fit it into steampunk campaigns.

Victorian and Edwardian East Africa

At the end of the 19th century, the British Empire directed some of its considerable resources toward developing territories in east Africa. The loftier motivation was to stamp out the slave trade rampant in those parts – a goal that enjoyed the active support of most civilized nations by that time (including all the European powers). The less altruistic goal was to establish an unbroken line of communication between the strategically important colonies in Egypt and South Africa.

In the 1890s, Britain had nominal authority over parts of east-central Africa, and a growing German influence was threatening what little they had. Lake Victoria had to be secured and the East Africans incorporated into the Empire, but British diplomats and military advisors could only do so much without a permanent presence and infrastructure. Advocates for development persuaded the Foreign Office to undertake the construction of a Kenya and Uganda railway, linking Mombasa with Lake Victoria.

By 1903, things were going swimmingly. The line from Mombasa to Port Florence opened for service. Branch lines were planned to expand communication from the railway's main trunk through the countryside. Colonization to take advantage of Africa's seemingly inexhaustible soil was proceeding rapidly and a tourist trade pursuing big game was developing.

However, storm clouds appeared on the horizon the next year with the publication of British diplomat Roger Casement's report concerning the treatment of natives in the Belgian Congo. Belgium's King Leopold II – effectively the sole owner of the entire Congo – allowed his agents to kill and maim millions in pursuit of profits from trade in rubber, ivory, and other exports.

Europe was outraged. However, Leopold launched a skillfully managed disinformation campaign, producing missionaries and others who testified to his civilized treatment of the natives and framing the criticism as a plot by Britain and Germany to rob Belgium of one of its few overseas possessions.

In an attempt to discredit his critics, his spies also obtained and distributed a set of Casement's private diaries, which detailed his homosexual activities in explicit detail. Though Leopold's campaign was only moderately successful outside of Belgium, he retained popular support in his own country.

The year is now 1907. Seeing that Belgian reforms are not forthcoming, Germany is preparing military bases to annex and reform the Congo, making Britain nervous. In an absurd, deadly parody of tic-tac-toe, the Germans threaten to finish an east-to-west line across Africa before the British can build one north-to-south. Or, as the undersecretary for the colonies has warned, "from Luanda on the Atlantic to Dar Es Salaam on the Indian Ocean, an iron curtain will descend across the continent." With a German bar dividing the land, they could support a new Boer uprising and effectively control the southern half of Africa, which would in turn threaten shipping between Britain and its vital possessions in India in the event of a general European war . . .

In the heart of Africa . . .

Kenya

Kenya lies near the center of east Africa, right on the equator. The climate is hot (obviously) and fairly dry, although not desert-like, and the eastern highlands are more comfortably cool. The land rises from low plains by the sea punctuated by occasional hills to a highland plateau in the central and eastern portion of the country. The highlands are split by the Great Rift Valley, which runs north-to-south through western Kenya. Though mostly still grassland, there are many stands of trees and small forests, with more swamps and woodlands closer to Lake Victoria.

Kenya also has excellent farmland. The highlands in particular have some of the best land in the world, although most requires considerable irrigation. Enterprising colonists are experimenting with small-scale pumping operations, and larger water-control districts are being planned. Mechanized farming may be introduced, but it is unlikely to be successful until supplies of water and fuel can be regularized and a sufficiency of steam engineers become resident.

Kenyans

Like the land itself, the people of Kenya have yet to be changed much by colonization. Indeed, many Kenyans have never seen a white person or even an Indian peddler. However, minor resistance movements have already cropped up along the railway's path, and more may be on the way as incoming settlers demand more farmland and are willing to push out the current occupants to get it.

The native people tend to fall into two categories. The first is farmers living in small villages. They are divided into many ethnic groups, but the most numerous are the Kikuyu, whose core territory is around Mount Kenya. The second (less numerous but more noticeable) category are nomadic herdsmen. Among those, visitors are most likely to meet the Maasai, who – with their spears and red blankets – have become iconic of Kenya as a whole. The Maasai are no more hostile or warlike than any other tribe, but they believe that cattle were a gift from the gods specifically to them. Consequently, they maintain all cattle ultimately belong to the Maasai, and raiding other societies and stealing their cattle is perfectly justified.

The Kenyans and their Ugandan neighbors almost all follow native religions, although a number of Muslim settlements are near the coast, and a significant Muslim presence is around the Ugandan court. However, with increased contact with Europeans, Christian missionaries are starting to make inroads.

The Railway

The trans-Kenya railway, stretching northwest across the country, is the backbone of the East African Protectorate. With it, troops and officials can reach distant posts and stay in touch with the imperial government, and large quantities of goods can be shipped and traded with the rest of the world. Without it, East Africa would once again be a remote backwater.

The railway operates at a loss, supported by government loans and investment. However, transport prices are kept artificially low to encourage trade and development. "Down" traffic (that is, exports) is mostly grains, vegetable fibers, and other commercial crops (the East African coffee industry is in its infancy). "Up" traffic carries manufactured goods and other imports; alcohol is remarkably inexpensive.

Trains from Mombasa to Port Florence and vice versa leave about every other day and are scheduled to take two or three days. Unfortunately, unpredictable delays for minor line repairs, particularly difficult loading and unloading, and other problems large and small are frequent. The lightweight, borderline-obsolete engines are underpowered and overworked (the locomotive stats on p. B464 can suffice). Imported relatively cheaply from India, they are kept running by constant maintenance and patchwork repairs. Conditions in first-class compartments aren't luxurious, but they can be reasonably comfortable. Cheaper compartments are progressively more crowded, although they rarely require sardine-like crowding because of the still relatively low level of passenger traffic.

Despite its problems, the railway remains the sole reliable modern means of moving a significant number of people and quantities of goods across Kenya. Airships and land dreadnaughts might be shipped in by wealthy individuals, but they lack facilities for repair and even basic maintenance and refueling. Most traffic away from the railroad by necessity depends on camels or human bearers.

Nairobi

The town of Nairobi is purely a creation of the railway. Until recently, it was little more than an advanced base for its construction and administration. The bulk of the city consists of railway installations (switching yards, workshops, warehouses) and makeshift homes for railway workers. The director of the railway lives in a relatively luxurious three-room corrugated iron house, although given the African propensity for building compounds with several small buildings rather than large single buildings, that's more comfortable than it sounds.

However, after a plague and massive fire a few years ago, the city has been largely rebuilt. Now, there are growing facilities not just for official administration and the railroad, but for visiting big-game hunters. Still, it lacks both physical beauty and first-class accommodations and entertainments.

The land on which the city sits is completely flat, and drainage is poor. Nairobi's one saving grace is that it is at a high enough altitude that it is too cool for most mosquitoes. Malaria, therefore, is quite rare.

Asians

After native labor proved unsuitable (the Kenyans have so far shown only moderate interest in foreign money and none in wage labor), railroad workers were shipped in from India. So many Indians have been brought in that they outnumber Europeans in Kenya by five to one.

Indians are considered an important factor in the "civilizing" of East Africa. Many choose to remain after their railroad contracts are up and become traveling merchants. Working routes insufficiently profitable to attract Europeans, the Indians trade small quantities of imports (manufactured household goods, cloth, etc.) for similarly small quantities of agricultural produce. Each merchant does very little business, but thousands of them have the aggregate effect of opening large areas of the country to foreign trade and connecting countless villages to the British imperial economy.

One peculiar influence of India on East Africa is that rupees are the official currency of the territory. The majority of laborers in Kenya want money they can send back to their families or return with it themselves once they've made their fortune, so it simply makes sense to use Indian currency in this British outpost in Africa.

Neighbors

British East Africa is surrounded by other colonies – some friendly, some less so.

German East Africa

Between Mozambique (officially Portuguese but heavily influenced by Britain) and Kenya lies German East Africa. It includes the southern half of Lake Victoria, giving the Germans a point of entry to the Nile river system. Like the British, the Germans undertook a railway as a means of cementing control over their territory. However, they provided far less financing, so the main line from Dar Es Salaam to Lake Tanganyika won't open for years.

Until recently, the Germans have used brutal tactics to force Africans to grow crops, notably cotton, for export. This has led to a series of uprisings, which were put down at great cost. However, the government in Berlin has recently appointed a reform-minded new governor to clean house.

Following the British model, the Germans issued a "rupee" currency in its African colonies closely resembling the Indian rupee. The two currencies circulate across borders at approximately the same value.

Congo

Since 1885, the "Congo Free State" has been anything but free. Through a series of clever diplomatic tricks, Leopold managed to obtain the Congo not as a colony or protectorate of any nation, but effectively as his own personal property. He could do so because Congo was so unproductive that no other nation wanted it. Consequently, Leopold had to take extraordinary measures to turn a profit from it. His agents were permitted to use any means – up to and including torture, dismemberment, and mass murder – to clear land, obtain slaves, and extract valuable ivory and rubber.

In 1907, Leopold is in a sudden financial crisis. Global demand for rubber boomed in the 1890s with the development of inflatable rubber tires and rubber wire insulation. However, prices have been falling sharply as new rubber plantations have come on line in Asia and Latin America. Leopold hasn't yet been forced to relinquish the Congo, but he's also unlikely to be able to afford a fight for it.

The Congo shares borders with British and German East Africa, though it lies beyond the current reach of the railroads.

All Creatures Great and Small

One of Kenya's important selling points (to wealthy Britons, anyway) is big-game hunting: elephants, lions, giraffes, rhinos, and the world's largest wildebeest migration, annually between German East Africa into western Kenya. In addition to recreational hunting, someone could get a job as a hunter in Africa. To reduce the need to carry provisions and keep up the supply of fresh food, expeditions and construction crews employ professional hunters to bring in meat. People with good tracking and weapon skills can easily be drawn into adventures by signing on to such expeditions, or can even hunt as their "day job" between exploits!

The abundance of large animals has a downside, though. As the railway pushed its way deeper into wild territory, predators became a significant problem. A pair of lions is believed to have killed over 130 people during the years of heaviest work across Kenya and into Uganda. Most of the victims were Indian and native workers at the literal edge of civilization, but not all, nor were they necessarily people foolish enough to wander off alone into the wilderness. Charles Ryall – superintendent of the railway police – was killed in 1900 in his first-class railway car by a notorious lion, ironically while Ryall was hoping to hunt the beast. Furthermore, since the countryside away from the rail line is still largely untouched, other dangerous predators are still out there.

However, Africa's greatest natural threats are microscopic. Though lions are lethal enough, the continent acquired a well-deserved reputation as a "white man's grave" for tropical diseases. The threat of malaria was only abated when quinine came into common use in the middle of the 19th century. It was *known* well before then, but not widely accepted as an anti-malarial. Sleeping sickness is another significant problem, particularly around Lake Victoria, though it is more a threat to populations of introduced animals than human habitation.

However, if the German line reaches one of the larger tributaries to Lake Tanganyika, a few motor launches could provide transport down-river to the lake, then up-river into the lake's tributaries on the Congo side, giving the Germans access to the Congo from the east.

South Africa

South Africa is still a precarious place for the British. In the Second Boer War, starting in 1899, they established more direct control over what had previously been a semi-independent territory. This war involved a guerilla campaign by Boers countered by a scorched earth campaign and the establishment of massive prison camps by the British.

The Boers have been thoroughly beaten, but the scars of the conflict are fresh. With sufficient support from Teutonic allies, a new campaign might start. A German fleet could also return veteran Boer exiles who could act as scouts and guerilla troops, or even serve as the core of new regular forces.

As if that weren't bad enough, an increasingly strident Indian labor movement could easily make common cause with the Afrikaners. Disillusioned with the treatment of Indians in South Africa despite their support of the British during the recent war, a young lawyer named Mohandas Gandhi has been urging Indians to simply ignore British authority, which could conceivably cripple the South African economy. Moreover, he appears to have broader anti-colonial aspirations, which could spread a strike of both native African labor and Indian middle management through Africa, also causing problems for the Nairobi administration.

Uganda/Kitara

Beyond Lake Victoria lies the territory of Uganda. Though under nominal British control ("Uganda" is a form of the name of the kingdom that occupies the southern half of the protectorate), it is still a largely disorganized collection of kingdoms and chiefdoms of varying sizes. Unexplored corners remain. The British hope that the railway will help bring the territory under more direct control.

Rumors abound of the lost kingdom of Kitara, somewhere in western Uganda or eastern Congo. Kitara has been variously described as the source of the legend of Prester John, a long-lost remnant of an advanced civilization, the domain of either an immortal white sorceress or son of a mortal king and the King of the Dead's daughter, and the hiding place of vast quantities of gold and jewels.

Where the Lies Are

The broad outlines of the alternate history presented here are more or less true, or at least near-miss possibilities. The railway from Mombasa to Lake Victoria – built mostly by Indian labor – was enormously expensive but a remarkable logistical feat on the part of the East African Protectorate and was planned partly as a defense against German ambitions. Nairobi was a creation of the railway, and lions were a serious threat that even professional hunters couldn't completely abate.

Leopold's murder and mutilation of an estimated half of the Congolese was the first great atrocity of the 20th century (or perhaps, since it had started in the 1890s, the last great atrocity of the 19th), but it wasn't a cause for war. Without support in Belgium, Leopold gave up the Congo in 1908 and died the next year. Roger Casement's Congo report was instrumental in rousing international opinion. However, his sexual orientation wasn't exposed until the British prepared to execute him for treason in 1916, a consequence of his conspiring with Germany in support of the IRA's Easter Uprising. Ironically, by that time he was *Sir* Roger Casement, and since he was ultimately unsuccessful in obtaining German arms, he had advised his comrades not to follow through with the planned revolt.

These are important formative years for Ghandi. He developed his deeply humanitarian stance over time. Initially, he was simply an advocate for the rights of Indians in South Africa. He never made common cause with native Africans, a fact that has since attracted some criticism.

Kitara is a real legendary kingdom (that is, the legends are real) that overlapped Uganda. If it ever existed, it fell to Sudanese invaders around the Renaissance. It undoubtedly never had the kinds of wonders attributed to it here. However, African explorers did occasionally produce rumors of all kinds of unlikely places.

Campaigns

So far, this has been history, or at least alternate history, suitable for almost any late- or close post-Victorian setting. To be *steampunk*, there must be a consideration of technology and themes, as well as some attention to how events and institutions fit into the individual campaign.

Timing

The state of affairs described here is for the year 1907. That's a bit later than most steampunk settings, which are largely Victorian. This is because of the many useful historical associations: Leopold's atrocities in the Congo provide a clear moral enemy to mobilize against, while the Germans constitute a rival that isn't so evil. The Boers have only just been put down so that they can constitute a potential threat. Ghandi is only just becoming politically engaged and influential.

However, aspects can be easily adjusted to fit an earlier year. Although names of individuals may have to change, many of the same powers can be kept in place. Sticking to our historical calendar, a significant European presence in most of Africa is unlikely before the 1850s when malaria was finally conquered. However, a small tweak to medical history could push that date up to a century earlier. The Belgians were a notable power in the Congo by the 1870s and were killing people *en masse* within two decades, so atrocities could come to light any time during that period.

The Germans established their colony in modern Tanzania in the 1880s as part of a joint arrangement with the British to remove the Sultan of Zanzibar, so a rivalry could be in place at least that early. The expansion of British influence in South Africa could lead to conflicts with neighboring Boers as far back as Napoleon, so a *potential* Boer War rather than *another* Boer War could be a possibility for most of the 19th century.

In a more variant history or completely different setting, the GM can select peoples as appropriate to fill in various slots: a leading colonial and industrial power to stand in for the British, another major colonial power to stand in for the Germans, a third colonial power bent on exploiting their colonies for maximum benefit to stand in for the Belgians, at least one nearby partly developed colony to stand in for India, and some natives or other colonists to stand in for the Boers.

Laying Down The Law

Theoretically, British East Africa is CR3. That's effective in Mombasa, Nairobi, and other major settlements and their immediate surroundings, but the government can only exercise sporadic control over much of the countryside. Europeans in tribal areas such as Uganda and the more remote parts of Kenya enjoy a certain legal immunity, being technically subject to British rather than native jurisdiction, but local politics may render that moot.

Themes

Obviously, British East Africa can be used as a spot for *Boys' Own*-style adventure, hunting big game and fighting German land ironclads on the African savannah. However, deeper themes can develop here.

Imperialism

The whole point of the railroad is to extend European power and institutions onto the African scene. Those people supporting the imperial expansion may be British who believe in a civilizing mission, natives who see general prosperity or a peaceful settling of unending local squabbles, or anyone who can make a fast rupee on the whole business. Opponents include those natives who prefer to govern their own affairs, Europeans who agree that the natives should be left to do so, and those who believe that, even if the West does have a moral right to govern less-developed peoples, the enterprise is far too expensive to be worth it. Activities may include intervention in military conflicts (on either the side of colonialists or rebellious natives), investigating crimes and adjudicating disputes between natives on behalf of the Protectorate, or simply starting up new businesses.

The existence of conflicting colonial powers can complicate the picture by causing disaccord between distant capitals in ways that might make little sense locally. In addition to "spy vs. spy" adventures, attempts to cooperate across East Africa (scientific projects, business ventures such as shipping companies or telegraph systems, or responses to broad-based revolts) might be confounded by orders from Berlin and London.

Primitivism vs. Industrialization

The colonists filtering into British East Africa are from the most technologically advanced civilization the world has yet produced. Meanwhile, many natives are only a few steps away from hunting and gathering. Contact between them will change both. Explorers may want to uplift the natives, but their technological superiority can corrupt them; as Francis Ford Coppola said about making *Apocalypse Now,* "We had too much money, too much equipment, and little by little, we went insane." Natives may want to take on the products of an industrial civilization but lose their own identities in the process. Railroad engineers, extending lines across the countryside, are at the coal face of civilization, creating a tangible physical connection to the technological world.

Outcasts and Outsiders

Though there's remarkable opportunity for adventure and riches, Kenya is also dangerous, hot, and a long way from the comforts of civilization. Though some colonists are perfectly sound Englishmen out doing their bit for king and country, many may be in Kenya because they have nowhere else to go. They may reject or have been rejected by their conformist society, and have social, ideological, or personal issues that make them difficult to deal with. There are still rigid class distinctions in some places; in more "civilized" areas, Europeans receive preferential treatment to Indians, and Indians to Africans. Nevertheless, those distinctions can break down on the frontiers, and for those who have suffered a crushing scandal, Kenya may be an alternative to suicide.

Wonders of the Modern Age, or Not

Whatever counts as cutting edge technology in the campaign, Kenya doesn't have it. Developing British East Africa does not yet produce enough income to justify the cost of fleets of land ironclads, banks of difference engines, or other steampunk wonders. Such items also require high-grade tools, ready access to quality parts, and trained technicians. In the colonies, the more expensive and mechanized an item, the more difficult to obtain it is, and the harder to repair should it break down. However, locally produced goods are very cheap.

Common Goods

Land and basic necessities are sufficiently inexpensive, and the acknowledgement of the primitiveness of colonial life sufficiently recognized, that residents with Status 0 or better may pay a Cost of Living for one level of Status less without penalty. Mass-produced TL5 items are generally available at their listed price, as are TL6/TL5+1 (depending on the campaign) hunting weapons. People can obtain TL5+1 gear with some difficulty and additional expense. Most such items are available for a 25% increase in price. Huge items (vehicles, very large difference engines, and anything else that weighs more than 2,000 lbs. or costs more than $10,000) may also take at least a month to get, since they typically must be specially shipped from elsewhere.

Vehicles

If powered ground vehicles are in use in the campaign beyond the railways, those found in Kenya probably won't employ wheeled drivetrains. Given the lack of roads, they need to use tracks or legs. They'll be more like the land ironclad and steam horse from ***GURPS Steampunk*** and the steam elephant from ***GURPS Steam-Tech.***

If there are airships, large ones are usually found in conjunction with a naval force which can provide logistical support. A typical one might use the stats for the blimp on p. B465, but include a few automatic weapons (for example, something very like a Maxim Mk 1 using .303 ammunition, mounted in a cupola on either side of the gondola; see ***GURPS High-Tech*** p. 130).

Kenya may also see "personal" airships (see below). These have a ceiling of a few hundred feet, a gondola big enough for two or three people, and a battery-powered engine providing a few hours of slow flight.

Computing and Non-Humans

Expensive, delicate, and ill-suited to the rigors of the African climate, mechanical computing devices are not widespread in Kenya. Perhaps as importantly, they're not as useful in Kenya as they might be in London. Most of the work to be done requires brute force, data input is unreliable, and any really difficult problems can probably be shipped off to more advanced centers in Capetown, Mumbai, or Cairo. Automata face similar issues.

However, if they exist in the campaign, easy-to-maintain biological creations such as anthropomorphized animals described in ***GURPS Steampunk*** or domesticated intelligent non-human beings from ***GURPS Steam-Tech*** are natural choices to fill in a role similar to Indian laborers on the railways. Though they're more expensive than human laborers (at least initially) and are unlikely to fill the Indians' economic role as small merchants, they don't require skilled maintenance and generally have an advantage in strength and provoke fewer qualms about humane treatment. Such creatures also complicate the period's racial views and hierarchies; native agitators might be able to make common cause with oppressed constructs. The triceratops cavalry from ***GURPS Steam-Tech*** and similar domesticated dinosaurs from ***GURPS Big Lizzie*** might also fare well in Kenya. The Great Rift Valley, which has in recent years provided a wealth of hominid fossils, might be a source of *living* fossils.

Adventure Seeds

Here are some possibilities for adventures and mini-campaigns set in British East Africa.

The Great African War

When the Great War came to southern Africa, it was far more mobile than in Europe, and guerrilla tactics served the outnumbered Germans well. There simply wasn't enough troop strength to fortify vast frontiers. A military campaign there at any time, then, would be one of maneuver rather than attrition, and a small group of skilled, dedicated fighters could make a real difference in outcomes. The most valuable and vulnerable target in British East Africa is the railway, which can be disrupted by small groups of aggressors with a little dynamite. Ambitious raiders will attempt to blow up strategic but easily patrolled trestles or destroy tracks just as trains approach. Defenders must patrol broad areas, enlist native aid, and lay their own hidden counterattacks.

Le Voyage dans la Lune

Mount Kenya lies almost exactly on the equator. The combination of a high altitude, an equatorial position, and at least theoretical British control may lead mad British or allied scientists to try to make Kenya the jumping-off point for extra-planetary adventures. Adventurers may be the aforementioned scientists trying to construct an iron-girder beanstalk, a launching pad for monstrously sized Congreve rockets, or a huge gun capable of firing a capsule into orbit. Alternatively, they might be a scientist's agents, trying to get a spur of the central railway built toward Mount Kenya or bring in parts by native bearers and beasts of burden. Or they could be agents of any number of governments and rival scientists, trying to keep it from happening.

The Road to Kitara

The African interior is an ideal spot to find hidden pockets of civilization, and the mad archeologists and rogue explorers of a steampunk campaign are just the right people to make the connection between the remains of the fallen cities like Great Zimbabwe and rumors of Kitara. Can they gather funding and the right people for the expedition? Can they navigate the imperial bureaucracy to gain permission? And what happens if they find it? Certainly, sheer anthropological interest would make the successful explorers the toast of Europe, to say nothing of the potential to exploit mysterious technologies. But a long-lost civilization might want to *stay* lost, and be willing to take any steps necessary to stay continue way.

About the Author

Unlike many Westerners taking on the subject of African exploration, Matt Riggsby is not a Scottish doctor with inclinations towards ethnography and death by malaria. He does, though, have Scottish ancestry, an anthropological academic background, and a job with a corporation producing medical devices. Other members of his expedition include the mysterious white queen he is married to, a son who would rush ahead and scout no matter how many times he was told not to, and a pack of dogs who would be no good at all as bearers.

Personal Airship Table

TL	Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Loc.	Stall
PILOTING/TL (LIGHTER-THAN-AIR)														
5+1	Personal airship	64	-4/3	10	1/6	2.2	0.2	+7	2	1	100	$25,000	S	0


Lake Victoria
Uganda Protectorate
Port Florence
German East Africa
Nairobi
Mount Kilimanjaro
Mount Kenya
British East Africa
Equator
Mombasa
N

Map of Kenya

Necromenschen

by Sean Punch

When a steampunk villain decides to make – literally *make* – friends, the usual results are either clanking mechanical men or animated constructs stitched together from pieces nicked from corpses, Frankenstein style. Less common but not unknown are modified beasts and wholly synthetic life. Methods like these typically yield superhuman beings that are prone to berserk rage, turning on their master, and similar psychological flaws. Most such creations aren't well-suited to rapid mass-production, either.

However, the *strategic* mastermind wouldn't trust his ascent to power to minions that take forever to build and couldn't be trusted not to blow a gasket, go mad, or disappear on a personal quest for the meaning of life. His calculations might show that a legion of reliable, easily replaced automatons could accomplish everything that a handful of high-risk supermen could. His mind may turn to zombies.

The catch is that the typical zombie is an uneasy fit to steampunk aesthetics. Fantasy undead depend on necromantic mumbo-jumbo that's at odds with the genre's love of Science! The B-movie ghoul is a disaster scenario, Nature gone wrong, or Apocalypse incarnate, not a slave – it *starts out* savage and uncontrollable. While drugged victims of Voodoo *might* work, no self-respecting Victorian madman would privilege tribal juju imported from the colonies over civilized technology, and no power-hungry schemer would waste time creating slow, stupid human servitors when he could hire them for a few quid at any tavern.

Fortunately, these problems are easily overcome. Whatever his bent, the mad-science mastermind never seems to lack access to cadavers – that's where he gets spare parts for constructs and horrid extracts for synthetic life, after all. The challenge is in getting the corpses walking around without hoodoo. And *that* is mostly a matter of picking the right power supply.

Start With a Corpse

However a steampunk zombie, or *Necromensch,* operates, the baseline is the same: a corpse, mostly intact, up and walking around. The following template describes such an entity without making assumptions about where its energy comes from. It doesn't work that well on its own, and needs one of the lenses under *Animation!* (below) – or something similar – to set it in motion.

Necromensch

-185 points

A baseline *Necromensch* is markedly stronger and tougher than a living man; doesn't breathe, bleed, or feel pain; and is immune to disease, poison, and distraction. It's also a hideous, stinking corpse with a dull mind and no self-motivation, capable only of those physical tasks ingrained during life. It never heals – although its creator can sew it back together – and returns to death at -HP, as it has no biological or psychological impetus to survive. By default, it must get its energy somewhere, and eats (albeit unwholesome crud that's 1/3 as costly as rations for living minions), requires about eight hours of inactivity daily, and possesses FP; it *isn't* tireless and inexorable. It also suffers in the extremes of temperature, with sufficient FP loss causing it to shut down and HP losses representing bits rotting or shattering.

These traits are cumulative with the subject's attributes and secondary characteristics, physical advantages and disadvantages, and DX-based skills in life. He loses his mental advantages and disadvantages, and IQ-, Will-, and Per-based skills. Where traits in life conflict with the *Necromensch* template, the latter prevails.

Attribute Modifiers: ST+3 [30]; IQ-2 [-40].
Secondary Characteristic Modifiers: HP+2 [4].
Advantages: Doesn't Breathe [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Indomitable [15]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, Unliving) [25]; Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [2]; Single-Minded [5]; Unfazeable [15].
Disadvantages: Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [-25]; Automaton [-85]; Bad Smell [-10]; Cannot Learn [-30]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Fragile (Unnatural) [-50]; No Sense of Smell/Taste [-5]; Reprogrammable [-10]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Unhealing (Total) [-30]; Wealth (Dead Broke) [-25].
Quirks: Sexless. [-1]
Features: Body doesn't "age," but wears out with effects similar to aging; No mental skills.

> *. . . then it had dissolved into a nightmare city filled with gas and the walking dead.*
>
> *– Cherie Priest,* ***Boneshaker***

Animation!

What gets the *Necromensch* moving, and where does its energy come from? There are endless possibilities, but here are three lenses that especially suit steampunk inventors. Choose one per type of *Necromenschen.* All traits here are cumulative with those on the baseline template.

Antithanatic Fluid

-77 points

Some *Necromenschen* are injected with an amazing serum daily. This infusion revives the mind enough to obey orders (though not truly think), and contains sufficient energy (often from chemicals or radium) for 16 hours of operation. Once a corpse is revived with this "antithanatic" and subjected to the stress of reanimation, however, it decays quickly if it misses its shot. A further downside is that piercing injuries cause it to leak vital fluid, with effects identical to bleeding.

Advantages: Doesn't Eat or Drink [20].
Disadvantages: Dependency (Antithanatic Injections; Rare; Daily) [-90]; No Injury Tolerance (No Blood) [-5]; No Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [-2].

Mechanical Metabolism

-31 points

Other *Necromenschen* have miniature coal-fired power plants built in! These generate energy that's converted into life force, firing up the brain and keeping the body moving. Such entities are effectively machines made of meat; they require stoking after every four hours of operation, air to support combustion, and weekly maintenance, but can run for as long as they're stoked. The engine is noisy, and any benefits that may obtain from the heat cooking and preserving tissue are lost to the stench of burning and broiling. They don't have and can't lose FP, but *can* attempt extra effort – read Will rolls as HT rolls and FP costs as HT losses, and repair lost HT as described under *Maintenance* (p. B485).

Advantages: Doesn't Sleep [20]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10].
Disadvantages: Increased Consumption 1 [-10]; Maintenance (1 person; Weekly) [-5]; No Doesn't Breathe [-20]; No Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [-2]; Noisy 2 [-4]; Restricted Diet (Coal; Common) [-20].
Features: Extra effort costs HT; Neither has nor can spend FP.

Mysterious Fields

+1 point

Rarest are *Necromenschen* that don't seem to run on anything at all – no moldy meat, weird fluids, or fuel, just energy collected from a strange etheric field. These are among the scariest of such entities, as they can't be defeated by cutting supply lines and waiting. They *don't* require air, provisions, or rest. However, the antennae used to pick up field emissions require monthly realignment, and isolating such a *Necromensch* from this field (say, with superscience shielding) means that it quickly uses up its reserves and falls to bits. These creatures use the same rules for extra effort as mechanical models.

Advantages: Doesn't Eat or Drink [10]; Doesn't Sleep [20].
Disadvantages: Dependency (Etheric Energy; Very Common; Constantly) [-25]; Maintenance (1 person; Monthly) [-2]; No Reduced Consumption 2 (Cast-Iron Stomach, -50%) [-2].
Features: Extra effort costs HT; Neither has nor can spend FP.

Improving on Nature

Between their strength, reduced vulnerability to bullets and bayonets, imperviousness to pain and poison gas, retention of combat skills learned in life (often Guns and Saber), and unwavering loyalty, *Necromenschen* make wonderful grunt soldiers. Gone are field kitchens and hospitals, replaced by a satchel full of serum or at worst a cartload of coal accompanied by a few technicians who need not concern themselves with their patients' pain and suffering. Still, the true steampunk villain *will* tinker. Below are some examples of possible improvements that might be added to any kind of *Necromensch*.

Any trait that brute-force TL(5+1) surgery could produce is also possible: Claws or Spines in the form of spikes anchored in bone; internal spaces that count as Payload (up to five levels), useful for bombs that the hollowed-out zombie can be ordered to trigger under specific circumstances; or even disadvantages such as One Arm or One Eye, if the creator desires this for some reason (typically to reduce the difficulty, time, and expense of production by not bothering to restore all body parts).

Imprinted

+30 points

While no *Necromensch* is vulnerable to fear or being talked out of its mission, rivals might figure out a way to seize control of using weird science – and there are tales from the Orient of men who can cloud minds. It's possible to grant complete immunity to this sort of thing via suitable brain surgery. This ensures that the creator and only the creator can cause the *Necromensch* to deviate from its current task.

Advantages: Immunity (All mind control) [30].

Steeled

+20 points

A dead man won't complain or experience ill effects from having his bones replaced with metal to improve durability. The net effect is that the injury needed to cripple *limbs* and *extremities* is doubled (the amount usually required for dismemberment); crippling is at worst lasting; and dismemberment is impossible. Ribcage and cranium reinforcement mean that skull and vitals hits score no bonus injury. This option is *internal;* treat bolted-on plates as ordinary armor. It's most common for mechanical *Necromenschen*.

Advantages: Injury Tolerance (No Brain, No Vitals, Unbreakable Bones) [20].

Well-Preserved

+25 points/level

Meticulous mortician work can render a walking corpse less prone to rot and stench, and more capable of withstanding the elements (the embalming agent acting as antifreeze *and* preventing decay). At the first level, the creature still *looks* foul and dead – it simply doesn't stink or have a monstrous voice. This usually suffices for *Necromenschen* built as cloaked-and-armored bodyguards capable of passing as menacingly dressed humans. At the second level (the maximum), the cadaver is presentable in normal clothing, a bit like dear old Aunty Prudence at her funeral visitation. This trait is most common among *Necromenschen* animated by an antithanatic.

Advantages: Level 1 gives No Bad Smell [10], No Disturbing Voice [10], and Temperature Tolerance 5 [5]. Level 2 adds No Appearance (Monstrous; Universal, +25%) [25].

Necromenschen in the Campaign

The obvious use for zombies in steampunk closely resembles the role of zombies in fantasy: They're minions of a megalomaniac who dabbles in the forbidden and doesn't want living, complaining slaves who require food and housing, much less servants who expect to be paid. As most of them are monstrous by nature, they're unlikely to be found anywhere public. Their lot is that of guarding secret laboratories, waylaying coaches on remote roads, and dragging corpses through sewers. The GM might require heroes who believe they're dealing with ordinary thugs to make a Fright Check if, after a battle, they take a sniff or peel off a mask and find a rotting corpse – and the -3 for grisly mutilations should *definitely* apply! See *Fright Checks* (pp. B360-361).

The infectious zombie plagues of horror don't align well with steampunk traditions – that's why infected ghouls don't appear as an example – but zombie *outbreaks* still fit. The GM might have *Necromenschen* without a master boil out of a graveyard as a direct consequence of mad science gone awry (perhaps a critically failed Prototype roll). The rotting army of a recently defeated villain may even start attacking random townsfolk as a consequence of a twisted standing order ("If I do not show up to inject you daily, and you start to feel the pain, then go forth and savage the living.").

An interesting variant on the previous idea is the *Necromenschen* horde with a master that isn't its creator. Perhaps a mad scientist created vast reserves of antithanatic, which leaked or spilled into a cemetery (or a Thames suitably stocked with murder victims). In itself, this would simply create a bunch of mindless zombies that don't do much of anything. However, an unethical surgeon or a particularly savvy crime lord might smell opportunity and put the undead to work.

Nothing says that *Necromenschen* must be the result of rare, secretive experiments, though. Some views of steampunk feature European empires locked in total war, hurling all manner of new inventions into battle. If that's the case, then dead soldiers might be raised to fight again as a matter of course, giving rise to a political or religious cause – or just an expected battlefield hazard – rather than a mystery or an unexpected horror.

About the Author

Sean "Dr. Kromm" Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the ***GURPS*** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every ***GURPS*** product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of ***GURPS*** *Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition* with David Pulver. Since then, he has created ***GURPS Powers*** (with Phil Masters), ***GURPS Martial Arts*** (with Peter Dell'Orto), and the ***GURPS Action, GURPS Dungeon Fantasy,*** and ***GURPS Power-Ups*** series . . . and the list keeps growing. Sean has been a gamer since 1979. His non-gaming interests include cinema, cooking, and wine. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife, Bonnie. They have two cats, Banshee and Zephyra, and a noisy parrot, Circe.

"Can I Make Them?"

Necromenschen work better as the slaves of sinister NPC villains than as the puppets of heroic PCs. Still, players might attempt to raise their own – and even if they don't, the GM may want to assign sufficient Wealth and skill to someone who does. Here are some quick-and-dirty rules for this.

Steampunk reanimators use *Gadgeteering* (pp. B475-477), with a few tweaks. Required skills are Surgery and Weird Science. Add Alchemy, Bioengineering, or Pharmacy (GM's choice) for antithanatic fluid; Engineer (Robotics) for coal-fired mechanical designs; or whatever Engineer specialty addresses etherics for field-powered *Necromenschen.* For Steeled or Well-Preserved, tack on Metallurgy or Professional Skill (Mortician), respectively. All skills must be TL(5+1). Concept and Prototype rolls use the *lowest* applicable skill.

A walking corpse is no Simple invention by dint of being animate – but in the realm of created minions, it seems fair to reserve Amazing for new life. This puts *Necromenschen* at Average to Complex, but as these are broad categories, the GM may wish to account for variations in point value. Sum the point cost of template, lens, and options, add 400, and multiply the result by $1,000 to get base facilities cost. Ignore TL increments; zombies are *weird,* not high-tech.

Consult the table below to find skill modifier from facilities cost. If the value falls between two lines, use the *lower.* While a suitable existing setup divides facilities cost by 10 as always, this has no effect on the cost used to determine the complexity modifier.

Base Cost	*Modifier*
$100,000	-2
$175,000	-3
$250,000	-4
$320,000	-5
$385,000	-6

All *other* modifiers to Concept and Prototype rolls apply. Likewise, each roll has its usual time requirement; treat a complexity modifier of -2 or -3 as Average (Prototype roll requires 2d days) and anything worse as Complex (Prototype roll requires 1d months). The cost of each run at a prototype is 5% of base facilities cost. Once production begins, the cost per zombie is 0.5% of base facilities cost, while reanimation time is an hour per $100 of unit cost. None of these costs are reduced for existing facilities, either.

Example: A *Necromensch* (-185 points) powered by etheric fields (+1 point) and made Steeled (+20 points) is worth -164 points. Added to 400, that's 236, making base cost $236,000. This gives -3 for complexity. Each Prototype roll costs $11,800 and takes 2d days. Each zombie after that costs $1,180 (about a month's pay for a soldier!) and takes 11.8 hours of work.

Eidetic Memory

The Clankers

by David L. Pulver

"The Clankers" is a ***GURPS Fourth Edition*** revision of a Victorian-era steampunk/mecha adventure concept I ran some years ago. Details of character and NPC statistics have been left flexible, but it's intended for two to five adventurers with 100-200 points.

In this age of invention, the science of arms has made great progress.

– Thomas P. Kettell

The Clankers

The place is London, England, in a world not quite our own. The year is 1888. The history has deviated only in that certain exceptional Victorian-era engineers have built TL(5+1) to TL(5+3) inventions. Some have served society or been harnessed for the defense of the realm, but too often, the power of science has been misused by criminal geniuses for sinister aims. To combat this, the Scotland Yard – London's Metropolitan Police – created a new weapon in the fight against crime: the clankers.

"Clanker" is the nickname for the Armstrong-Mitchell steam-powered giant walkers operated by the newly formed Special Mechanical Division (SMD) of the Metropolitan Police. Each "steam detective" in the SMD is assigned a clanker. The SMD was formed in 1887 to combat the growing threat of so-called mechanical crime within Greater London, such as the legion of clockwork rats that recently burglarized jewelers' shops last Christmas. The SMD is led by a Chief Inspector, who could be a PC or NPC. He reports to the present head of the Metropolitan Police, General Sir Charles Warren, who would be eager for some good news after his inability to apprehend Jack the Ripper.

A typical SMD detachment consists of a party-sized group of steam detectives led by an inspector; they hold the formal ranks of sergeant or police constable. The detectives are supported by civilian mechanics recruited from the clanker's manufacturer Armstrong-Mitchell. Not everyone can master the skills and balance needed to properly operate a humanoid walking machine, so untraditional special constables may also be recruited.

Simon Sterling, the Clankers, and the Mole

Before or near the beginning of the adventure, PCs should notice the newspaper articles on p. 24 in the Times of London or a similar paper.

The story is true. Thames Mechanical Ironworks factory has invested thousands of pounds in its mole machine, and now their only hope is a foreign military sale. Recently, they have made contact with one Colonel Popov, a military attaché for Imperial Russia. He has made an appointment to visit the Mechanical Ironworks to see if this supposed wonder-weapon lives up to its billing.

However, the Russian Army is not the only group interested in the mole machine. Up-and-coming London criminal mastermind Simon Sterling (see p. 21) has read articles on the machine and wants one himself. He plans to steal it and use it to commit the crime of the century! Sterling's informants learned when Popov was to visit the Thames Ironworks and worked that into his master plan. Unfortunately, he didn't count on two things: the power of organized labor, and the involvement of the Special Mechanical Division.

Timeline

The timeline outlines a sequence of events for an adventure featuring the SMD. The GM should adjust it for dramatic effect based on the heroes' actions.

8:30 a.m. – Two Russian officers hail a cab to take them from their embassy to the Thames Ironworks to see a demonstration of the mole machine. Unknown to them, the Simon Sterling gang has replaced the cab driver. They are lured into a back alley, murdered, and stripped; their bodies are tossed in the Thames. Sterling and his henchman put on the Russian uniforms and make their way to the Ironworks.

9:00 a.m. – The Russians are late at the Ironworks, and owner Mr. Higgins begins to fret. In the confusion, a disgruntled worker learns of the visit and sends word to the Fabian United Socialist Society that foreign dignitaries will be visiting soon. Time for a protest demonstration!

9:50 a.m. – A small crowd of Fabian United Socialist Society members march up to the gates of the Thames Mechanical Ironworks and begin a noisy protest. The nervous factory manager telephones the police commissioner. He informs them that they expect Russian dignitaries are expected to visit the factory to examine the mole machine. The Russians are late, so there is still time to avoid an embarrassing international incident if the commissioner orders the police to disperse the mob.

10:10 a.m. – Before the police appear, the Russians (really the Sterling gang) arrive late and are barred by angry demonstrators. Unwilling to cause a scene and blow their cover, Sterling is bemused to accept assistance from a newly arrived mounted police squad who help force their way in. One protestor is injured, the demonstrators turn ugly, and the police retreat into the compound. A few Fleet Street journalists may also arrive.

10:15 a.m. – Once inside the facility, Simon Sterling finds his plans to steal the mole machine temporarily stymied. Not only are there plenty of Bobbies (cops) about, but the company's workers, distracted by the protests, have not fully fueled either of the two mole machines or charged their oxygen tanks.

10:25 a.m. – The SMD (the PCs) are alerted that there is a possible riot situation and international incident at Thames Mechanical Ironworks. The PCs can be briefed on the situation and decide whether to wait and see or to respond. Just as their briefing ends, a non-SMD constable mentions everyone is having a busy day: A report has just arrived that two male bodies, throats cut, were found under a bridge in the Thames. They were naked with no identification. A new ripper? (These were the Russian officers.) Unless the PCs get suspicious, it will take the police at least a day to identify them, since the Russians have not been reported missing by their embassy.

10:30 a.m. – Outside the gates, the protest turns nasty. Radical workers have brought up at least two 15'-tall steam-stevedores (see pp. 23-24) from the docks, and they have frightened off the mounted police's horses! These giants are now beating on the gates with iron bars and may soon break in. If the PCs have not yet arrived, the outnumbered police send a runner to call for the Special Mechanical Division to sort things out. Inside the compound, Sterling is getting nervous as the crew nearly finishes fueling one of the mole machines. At this point, the heroes' unit in the SMD should have been dispatched. It will take about 10 minutes to go from Scotland Yard's garages to the Ironworks.

10:45 a.m. – The heroes should be at the factory.

Dramatis Persona

Simon Sterling: A tough east-end gangster who affects an upper-class manner and normally carries a silver-tipped cane. In his youth he did a stint in the theatre, and he retains some acting skills. He has a love for mechanical gadgetry and a desire to pull off the heist of the century. He is now masquerading as Colonel Popov. He speaks broken Russian, a legacy of a connection with smugglers in Sevastopol. No real Russian speaker would be fooled, so he mostly sticks to speaking English with a passable fake accent.

Harvey Logan: One of the Sterling gang, silent and blond, with one eye . . . and not very bright. He carries a revolver, which he is a terrible shot with. He's also a skilled brawler and dynamiter, with a love of gambling. Though posing as a Russian Army captain, he hasn't said a word as he only speaks English, nodding or grunting when Higgins or other engineers talk to him.

Hugo Higgins: The harried manager of the Ironworks, he is out of his depth and struggling for air. Higgins thinks of the mole machine sale as a lifeline; he may be reduced to a stuttering wreck if he finds it's all a trick of Sterling.

William Shaw: Leader of the trade unionist faction among the demonstrators, he is a committed socialist but a realist. He'll settle for Higgins to commit to keeping the factory open if he sells the mole machines, or perhaps set up a fund for distressed workers, rather than taking the money and closing shop.

John Corby: Leader of the anarchists among the socialist protestors and one of the men in the steam-stevedores, he's armed with a crowbar. He wants to teach a lesson to capitalist war mongers, and wouldn't mind beating up a few Bobbies if they get in the way. He may calm down if Shaw is allowed to get what he wants.

Detective Sergeant Cartwright: The Metropolitan Police officer on the scene, he is a man with gift for stating obvious facts. He has no imagination at all.

Complications, Expected and Otherwise

The investigators will be faced by two situations: the known problem of the now-mechanized riot and (unknown to them) the soon-to-occur burglary of the mole machine.

A constable on the scene can offer a briefing:

"Here's where it's at, sirs. There's a noisy crowd of socialists, trade unionists, and anarchists waving signs and carrying on in front of the Ironworks. We sent the riot squad to sort them out, but some hard-line anarchists from the docks have appeared with bloody huge steam-stevedores! We need the clankers to arrest those troublemakers and disperse the mobs.

Also, the Ironworks manager, Mr. Hugo Higgins, has some Russians in the building. A Colonel Popov from the Russian Imperial Army along with his two aides, have shown up to consider buying his mole machine for the Tsar's army. The socialists and anarchists seem to have found out and aren't happy about that, either – afraid they'll be used to smash through worker barricades in foreign parts or some such anarchist nonsense! The Russians got lost in traffic or something, arrived hours late and in the middle of the mob and got them all riled up. Who knows what will happen? We don't need an international incident, that's certain. See what you can do!"

Inside the locomotive assembly building within the Ironworks a half-dozen engineers and owner Higgins have gotten one mole machine ready; the other is still not fueled. But the SMD clankers will panic Sterling and convince him to make his move. Depending on the heroes' actions, they could be outdoors dealing with protestors or in the building when Sterling acts. If the latter, there is a chance anyone who either speaks Russian or succeeds with a Linguistics skill roll will notice something wrong about his accent. Similarly, a Savoir-Faire (Military) roll will show his uniform and that of his aide are bit sloppy for an officer of his rank. These may provide the heroes with warning. If they fail to realize that something odd is going on or are stuck outside the fence, the first sign that something has wrong will be high-pitched grind of the mole machine's drill biting into the building's floor followed by a dozen screaming company employees stumbling and rushing out the building's side doors.

The Thames Ironworks

A London industrial complex south of the river Thames, the factory covers two acres of ground, with a big locomotive assembly building (LAB) next to a muddy open space and a pair of smaller work sheds, some coal bunkers, and a few docks. A 10' high wrought-iron fence surrounds the plant on the side away from the river, with a gate and small guardhouse. Just outside the gate are a few corrugated tool sheds. The gate is shut with two frightened watchmen and a few policemen facing a large crowd of several dozen sign waving, slogan-chanting protestors. Inside the LAB are the mole machines, Higgins, six engineers and mechanics, and the faux-Russian Sterling gang.

The Demonstrators

The first task is to disperse the illegal demonstration. How to do this is up the SMD; this is a roleplaying issue. The main threats are the steam-stevedores (powered exoskeletons similar to the clankers but without armor). These are best handled by wrestling them down! If officers use excessive violence and someone is killed or maimed, they will be in trouble, but if they do nothing, they will also be in trouble. The GM can track the aggression of the crowd each round, scaling it up or down (debate/insults/thrown eggs and vegetables/vandalism/attacks on the police) based on the heroes' actions and roleplaying.

What's Happening Inside

If the investigators are not distracted by the demonstrators, some of them may wish to go inside the assembly building to check on Mr. Higgins, the Russians, and the mole machines. If they speak to the constables or the watchmen, they will learn the Russians arrived late and took everyone by surprise; the PCs can get basic descriptions of them. If the heroes do not do this, or are taken in by the gang's disguises, here is what will happen.

Inside the Ironworks LAB, the disguised Sterling and his henchman Logan have listened to the sales pitch from the company's representatives and their demonstrations of how to use the controls and are now studying the prototypes #1 and #2 to decide how best to steal them. Mole Machine #1 has its engine covers open and is only half-fueled with coal but #2 is ready to go. Sterling as "Colonel Popov" insists on stepping into the cockpit of the working tank and testing the engine.

At that point, Logan produces a concealed revolver, covers Higgins and company, and startles everyone by saying in English: "Enough with the sales pitch, mates. We like it; we'll take it!" Sterling then activates the drill. Logan checks Mole Machine #1, determines it doesn't have enough fuel but decides to make sure there is no pursuit: He pulls out a small clockwork time bomb containing a few pounds of dynamite (6d×3 damage) and inserts it inside the hatch, setting it for a 30-second fuse. This will destroy the machine unless PCs with appropriate skills can arrive in time to disarm it.

As Higgins and the company executives react in shock, Logan points his gun and says, "Start running!" As they scamper for the doors, Sterling guns the engine, Logan clambers into the hatch, and Mole Machine #2 begins boring its way through the floor.

Professor McEwan detailed his first glimpses of the exotic land many miles beneath us. His discovery marks the first successful burrowing venture into our planet's crust, though many are now speculating that Professor Perry, the American designer of the iron mole drill, who vanished during his own expedition three years ago, may be alive somewhere in this underground realm.

– Robert Appleton, ***The Mysterious Lady Law***

The noise will be louder than any racket the demonstrators or the heroes' clankers might be making: a horrible vibrating screech like the mother of all pneumatic drills! The very building shakes. This should alert any officers who are still outside that something is wrong, as should the sight of several Ironworks personnel rushing out the LAB building's side door waving their hands and shouting something that sounds like "bomb!"

If the PCs arrive in time then the GM can stage a fight between the clankers and the mole machine. If they arrive too late, Mole Machine #2 will have left a gaping tunnel four yards wide bored in the floor (from which pneumatic drill-like noises still emanate), and the air will be filled with rock dust (from the drilling). If the bomb hasn't gone off yet, Mole Machine #1 is still there. If the bomb is disarmed, the machine could be used in pursuit, although some of its engine covers are off (leaving unarmored areas exposed at -4 to hit), and it has only half normal range.

Following the mole machine through the tunnel with clankers can be attempted but is foolhardy. The tunnel is unstable and will collapse behind the mole machine within a few minutes. A successful roll against Architecture, Masonry or Engineering (Mining) skill reveals this threat; otherwise pursuers take 6d×3 crushing damage and are buried requiring hours to dig out (or intervention from Mole Machine #1, if intact).

Lanyan ducked out of the way as the firing continued. Static discharges ricocheted like lightning in a bottle. This pitched battle was the compies' last stand. The military robots advanced with the sheer weight of numbers. Lanyan froze a clanker in front of him, then kicked the energy weapon out of its metal hands. Even he hadn't expected so much resistance.

– Kevin J. Anderson, ***Of Fire and Night***

What If They Failed?

If they failed to stop the theft of the Mole Machine #2, it is the SMD's duty to track it down! One scientific method is to use the vibrations it makes as it burrows through the earth. The nearest experts are at the Royal School of Mines in London (in South Kensington), where researchers are calibrating new semi-portable seismographs for use overseas. If approached, chief geologist Dr. John Milne and his assistants are busy and have no time to watch news about burglaries or machines! They have detected unusual seismic disturbances – unforeseen and seemingly impossible given London's geology. Of course, this is the mole machine. The investigators may be able to persuade the scientists to assist them in erecting multiple seismographs to discover the villain's target . . . the Bank of England! If so, they could intercept them if they were able to prevent the other mole machine from being destroyed, or prepare an ambush at the bank.

The Bank of England

The central bank of the British Empire is located on Threadneedle Street in the City of London financial district. It sprawls over more than three acres, and its vaults house the gold that backs the currency. The bank is protected at night by a military detachment called the Bank Guard. However, a few squad of soldiers with rifles standing outside are simply bypassed by the mole machine tunneling up from below! The two-man crew cannot extract the entire gold supply, but can easily remove two *tons* of gold and escape.

Inventions

For stats for the following inventions, see p. 24.

Armstrong-Mitchell "Clanker"

The Armstrong-Mitchell Armored Anthropomorphic Steam Ambulator (to give it its full name) is latest invention from Armstrong-Whitworth's military locomotive works. A clanker is a 15'-tall iron giant with big feet, clumsy arms, and large smoke stack extending from its rear torso. It is driven by a single pilot using a complex set of levers and pedals. The machine is entered via a ladder that extends up to a rear-mounted hatch in the upper torso. The driver peers out a narrow quartz vision slit but may also observe behind and around himself using a ring of periscopes. The clanker is stabilized by a powerful gyroscope and impelled by a clattering 60-horsepower sextuple-expansion steam engine. A prototype mechanical stoking device feeds powdered coal from the backpack-mounted bunker and removes the need for a manual stoker. Enough coal is carried to power it for two hours of continuous operation. It is protected by 1/4" of compound iron and steel plate.

It takes the engine one minute to start up, so when operating on patrol, it is usually left running. To facilitate operations, 24 police coaling stations have been stationed at strategic locations around London, manned by rather grimy constables who would prefer to be doing something else. Refueling takes five minutes of shoveling.

The clanker has no built-in armament but officers typically carry 10'-long truncheons or the newly designed 37mm Armstrong-Bulldog revolver (with five shots in a cylinder; see p. 24). To prevent damage to the public, explosive ammunition has not been authorized.

Steam-Stevedores

These are essentially lighter, open-cockpit clankers.

Ground Vehicle Table

TL	Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ	dDR	Range	Cost	Loc.
DRIVING/TL(5+3) (CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT)													
(5+3)	Mole Machine	157	-3/5	10	1/5*	32	2	+4	2+4S	20	80	$500,000	A6W
DRIVING/TL(5+2) (MECHA)													
(5+2)	Clanker	100	0/1	12	5/5	8	0.2	+2	1	20	80	$50,000	2A2LOt
(5+2)	Steam-Stevedore	85	0/1	11	5/5	5	0.2	+2	1	10	80	$20,000	2A2LOt

* Move 1 while burrowing underground.

Weapon Statistics

TL	Weapon	Damage	Acc	Range	Weight	RoF	Shots	ST	Bulk	Rcl	Cost	LC
GUNS (PISTOL)												
(5+1)	Armstrong-Bulldog, 37mmR	9d pi++	2	100/500	50/5	1	5(3i)	40	-4	4	$4,000	2

The Mole Machine

The mole machine is a manned 32-ton high-speed tunnel-boring machine capable of digging through even the hardest rock. It consists of a giant drill mounted in an articulated arm atop a monster six-wheeled armored chassis. A small cab is inside the chassis is accessed by a rear hatch. It has room for two operators plus four passengers and/or up to two tons of cargo. Electrical battery-operated search lights provide some degree of vision. The machine's cabin is sealed with a 24-man-hour oxygen supply in high-pressure steel tanks. The drill can also be used as a weapon: use Driving (Heavy Equipment)-4 to aim it. It inflicts 12d(2) impaling damage. Damage is considered corrosive if the object being drilled is pinned against a solid, unresisting surface.

About the Columnist

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid SF fan, he began roleplaying in junior high with the newly released ***Basic Dungeons & Dragons.*** Upon graduating from university, he decided to become a game designer. Since then, David has written over 70 roleplaying game books, and he has worked as a staff writer, editor, and line developer for Steve Jackson Games and Guardians of Order. He is best known for creating ***Transhuman Space,*** co-authoring the ***Big Eyes, Small Mouth*** anime RPG, and writing countless ***GURPS*** books, including the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition,* ***GURPS Ultra-Tech,*** and the ***GURPS Spaceships*** series.

Handouts

Copy this page and cut out the articles below to give to the players at the start of the adventure.

Boring Machine Marketed to Foreign Powers

London, 15 September

Mr. Hugo Higgins' company Thames Mechanical Ironworks Ltd. is now seeking a military buyer for their subterranean boring engine. This steam-powered "Mole Machine," brainchild of the late Professor Hopwood, was developed to assist in the Anglo-French Submarine Railway Company's proposed excavation of the Channel Tunnel. With the cancellation of this plan over fears that it would leave our nation open to potential mischief by the French, Thames Ironworks have been left with two unsold prototypes, debt of over £50,000 and a disgruntled workforce owed some months back-pay and facing redundancy. Last-ditch attempts to sell the machines to La Société internationale du Canal interocéanique for the Panama project lost to a French bid.

With no civilian sales, Mr. Higgins now offers the Mole Machines, upgraded with appliqué armor, to military customers. Their potential for novel underground vertical envelopment tactics that bypass enemy fortifications were demonstrated to the Corps of Royal Engineers but so far has failed to attract interest from Her Majesty's Government. Sources close to Mr. Higgins have informed us that foreign military sales to the Empires of Brazil, Japan, or Russia are now being actively pursued.

To the Editor of the Times

Sir, We who were familiar with the workers at Thames Mechanical Ironworks know they toiled not just for their daily bread but also to forge a mechanical marvel whose excavation could join together the Continent and England and so facilitate peace and the free of movement of international labor. To read that this great dream is dead and our comrades at the Ironworks could lose their livelihoods is an injury. It becomes an insult where principals are sacrificed on the altar of Mars, and these labors' fruit is sold as a weapon of aggression to reactionary foreign governments. This is truly outrageous and all true socialists in London shall not stand idly by.

Sincerely, A Working Man of the Fabian United Socialist Society

A Whisper in the Sky

by Michele Armellini

Gliders, sailplanes, they're wonderful flying machines. It's the closest you can come to being a bird.

– Neil Armstrong

It is a rare steampunk setting the one that doesn't feature dirigibles: lighter-than-air ships that move under their own power. Although most historical zeppelins used internal-combustion engines for propulsion, Henri Giffard demonstrated in 1852 that steam could be used to power a dirigible. Though not a common application in our history, steam-propelled airships are feasible.

Faster, Nimbler . . . Heavier Than Air

Airships look impressive hovering in the sky, especially if they're gigantic (as they are wont to be in a steampunk world). They can be a nifty environment for combat and chase scenes inside them – or on top of them! They may also be the protagonists of large battles, somewhat resembling naval engagements: long-range gunnery duels among behemoths floating in the air.

Nevertheless, Luke Skywalker flew an X-wing fighter for a reason: It may be nice to lead a fleet from a command bridge of a giant vessel, but it's a lot more dramatic (and *fun*) to zip around in a smaller, faster, nimbler flying vehicle, strafing and bombing that giant vessel.

Can the open-minded, lavishly funded, and slightly crazy scientists at the cutting edge of Victorian steampunk research construct a fighter – that is, a small, fast, maneuverable heavier-than-air vehicle? If the hallmark of such a setting is that the motive power has to be a steam engine, then the answer is "probably not." As early as 1874, Félix du Temple built a compact single-seat airplane propelled by an exceptionally light steam engine – what we would call a "flash boiler." However, the du Temple monoplane never took off under its own power.

Sir Hiram Maxim – the inventor of the Maxim automatic machine gun (see ***GURPS High-Tech,*** p. 129) – had some qualified early success with a steam-powered winged aircraft he built, before abandoning the attempt in 1894. However, even if he had continued, the result would have been a huge biplane, maybe nearly as clumsy as a zeppelin. His prototype weighed 8,000 lbs., had a 110' wingspan, and sported two 17' propellers. That was unavoidable, given the weight of a steam engine of that era, plus the boiler, the tank, and crewmen.

The Solution: Unpowered Flight

Naturally, Victorian pioneers were trying for powered flight. Their idea of machines had to do with locomotives. Besides, being familiar with aerostatic balloons at the winds' mercy, they believed thrust was needed in order to maneuver their air vehicle.

Here is where the intrepid thinkers of a steampunk setting may deviate, probably building upon the work of Sir George Cayley and Otto Lilienthal. Both built functional, manned, controllable heavier-than-air winged vehicles – yet these were *unpowered* aircraft. Cayley's flying boat had to be towed, like a kite. Lilienthal's contraptions were more or less early hang-gliders (and dangerous; he died in an accident in 1896). In short, they were sailplanes. Steampunk adventurers might find such aircraft interesting and useful, even if they lack steam engines.

In fact, it's easy to posit elements of a steampunk setting where soaring gliders are a common sight . . .

The Steampunk Gliders

*Bruce caressed the handles, smoothly aligning his **Silent Hawk** with the enormous zeppelin below; he had used the sparse clouds to cover his approach. The top of the cigar-shaped airship was flat and could be accessed by the crew. He hoped Guendalyne had succeeded in bribing the current shift; they would need them not only to keep quiet about his intrusion, but also to push the glider to a dive takeoff. Preparing for the first landing in history over a dirigible, Bruce prayed that his recent improvement – the aerobrake – would stop his craft before he ran out of zeppelin. If all went according to plan, Lord Harken's scheme would be thwarted, he and Guendalyne would marry, and their elopement would be the scandal of the century.*

The first such aircraft were the weird experiments of unconventional researchers. Many of these were similar to powered aircraft prototypes, but without an engine: biplanes with cloth-covered wings and a lightweight wooden structure, supporting an open seat for the pilot. Many had complicated moving control surfaces, and all featured a forest of struts and tie rods. They got airborne in several ways: towed by a locomotive, launched by a steam machine along an inclined rail, or simply pushed off a hill (or a cliff, for the true do-or-die steampunk scientist).

Lots of them failed, but others managed takeoffs and landings. Innovators accumulated a wealth of experience, and the researchers confirmed that a glider could do what birds could when they did not want to flap their wings: ride the wind.

Once the most lethal flaws were ironed out, gliders became a fad – and an expensive (though still hazardous) toy for young aristocrats. Piloting them is now a flashy, new, and technological sport, like riding a steam tricycle or powerboat. The gliders are so fashionable that to date, the experiments with steam-powered heavier-than-air craft have only produced dead ends or at most white elephants. When you are very wealthy, you use a private airship to make a status statement, to travel in comfort, and to entertain guests aboard . . . but you pilot a glider to show off your personal skill and bravery.

Practical uses for gliders have been harder to come by. Even if – unlike balloons – they could be steered, they are still dependent on weather conditions. They usually can't provide reliable service. However, the same had been true of the zeppelins at their beginnings. Gliders thus found their first employment in areas at the edge of civilization, where telegraph lines have not been laid everywhere and airship service was still rare. Given the prevailing weather conditions, the first standing mail service using gliders has been set up in the Crown Colonies of Australia.

Another endeavor in which gliders turn out to be useful is exploration. The effort to chart the interior of Africa is not over yet, and while an airship always is the workhorse of those expeditions, gliders serve in auxiliary duties, as outriders, and liaison.

The Armies Catch Wind

A flight stunt involving the elopement of a glider designer and a young noblewoman (and the resultant uproar) had an unforeseen consequence: the military developed an interest in these machines. Until then, they had been satisfied racing toward ever-larger dirigibles; the gliders had suddenly proven themselves not only feasible, but also fast and agile. On top of that, they were expendable (unlike the massive airships), and harder to notice. It helped that, even without actual combat, the *Silent Hawk* had definitely taken the zeppelin by surprise.

The British Army is already employing towed gliders carrying observers over military trains that travel through insecure territory; high above the flatbed railcar carrying the windlass and cable, the vantage point they provide has preempted many ambushes. Furthermore, most armies are rumored to be experimenting with *untethered* gliders. Newspaper articles hint at potential uses, breakthrough innovations, and secret training grounds, while embassy attachés and double agents strive to gather actual intelligence.

Infantry From the Sky

Dawn. Oberst Schmidt looked down. The ground was dotted with wrecks: Prussian steam landcruisers and clockwork warwalkers. The fortress artillery of the sprawling enemy compound dominated the area and had repulsed the frontal assault. But Schmidt's move would be something new. As his pilot banked, he saw sentries running in alarm on the ramparts. They had anti-airship guns there, and they were trying to traverse them against his glider flotilla. Schmidt smiled; those big guns were too slow, sledgehammers trying to hit a wasp swarm.

In this steampunk world, military gliders may soon prove useful in the same role in which they were used in our history, decades after the Victorian Age. They can carry assault troops for surgical strikes against key objectives, bypassing land obstacles and defenses. There have been reports of Japanese navy airships with several gliders hanging below their gondolas; they are carried on racks called "trapezes." Zeppelins serve as mother ships, giving the unpowered aircraft the altitude and starting point for fast surprise raids that the dirigibles themselves cannot carry out.

In addition, the U.S. Army is rumored to have designed a sailplane large enough to carry the last word in heavy infantry: machine-gunners in steam-powered armored battlesuits. A few of these can deal with lots of conventional infantry. If landed behind enemy lines thanks to a glider, they could easily defeat rear-area troops and behead a divisional command center or railhead staging area.

The British are said to prefer another approach: small two-person hang-gliders that can somehow be used at night. They would maximize surprise and deploy elite units to carry out commando operations, or infiltration and espionage.

Air Combat

A Russian theorist has just published a book about air combat. Previous wisdom acknowledged that airships can engage each other on even terms with heavy artillery installed in belly turrets hanging from their gondolas. However, the Russian general surmises that those guns would be no defense against sailplanes armed with machine guns diving from above and aiming at the zeppelins' gigantic weakness: the gas bags.

At a maximum, failure at Pegasus Bridge might have meant failure for the invasion as a whole, with consequences for world history too staggering to contemplate.

– Stephen E. Ambrose

He argues the only reasonable defense against that gambit would be friendly glider interceptors charged with defending their mother-ship dirigible.

Naturally, once a glider has lost altitude and speed in air combat, it would need a long time to exploit rising hot air to soar and engage again. Even so, a game of sudden, deadly ambushes from above is possible. Such fighting would more resemble a hawk's dive onto an unsuspecting sparrow than dogs circling each other. The sparrow might be an airship, or another glider. However, once that silent, deadly dive is over, the hawk would find it hard to try again.

Shooting Stars

What the Russian theorist doesn't know is that some armies are working in secret research centers toward the possibility of repeated attacks in a short period. The solution would also make the glider combat aircraft much more lethal all around: temporary power.

Steam engines – with their continual power generation – are basically unsuitable for winged aircraft. Still, power needn't be available at all times. A glider that could rely on some thrust for special occasions could use it to get out of emergencies, regain altitude quickly, or zoom against a target.

Top-secret experiments have been made with flywheels storing energy, connected with airscrew propellers. To date, these have been unsatisfactory. However, a revolutionary alternative is actually as ancient as medieval Chinese warfare: solid-propellant rockets. Booster rockets can be ignited when needed, providing immediate acceleration. With a number of these rockets installed under the wings, gliders might achieve "impossible" performance. A secret desert air base in Nevada is trying this method; test pilots call their new aircraft "Shooting Stars" – true in more than one sense.

In theory, such a temporarily powered aircraft could fight enemy dirigibles from a strictly defensive stance. It could scramble on alarm from ground bases under its own power, climbing to engage enemy bomber airships.

The Gliding Cape

Action-oriented adventurers should see the hypothetical utility in a portable, concealable glider. Sure, it's cinematic, but no more so than much of a steampunk world . . .

The gadget resembles a very bulky cape or mantle, with thick seams going down from the wearer's shoulders. It features a body harness and handles on the front edges. When correctly operated, the handles activate the ribs hidden in the seams, snapping them open behind the wearer's shoulders. The ribs also telescope out, tenting the fabric. The cape thus becomes a sort of small steerable parachute, resembling a single wing, which the wearer can control by moving his arms.

It's impossible to take off with it, but it can save the hero if he jumps from a New York skyscraper or the Eiffel Tower.

Once he's landed, the user needs 2d seconds to take it off and bundle it up so that he can carry it under one arm, or a full minute to prepare it to be worn again as a cape. If he tries to walk away without doing either, he will drag a long "tail" on the ground, thus suffering -1 to DX and Move (and the cape might get caught on something).

This can be treated as a vehicle (see p. 29), or as the Flight advantage with a Gadget Limitation.

Flight

see p. B56

Gliding Cape: Flight (Breakable, HP 11, DR 2, SM 0, -45%; Can Be Stolen, Must be forcefully removed, -10%; Controlled Gliding, -45%; No Signature, +20%; Nuisance Effect, Cumbersome after landing (see text), -5%; Winged, -25%) [8]. *8 points.*

No Signature reflects the fact that, as long as this is worn as a cape, opponents may not realize the user can fly away! The cape is obvious *while in use,* of course.

GLIDING

Rules for powered flight, and some directions for gliding flight, can be found under *Controlled Gliding* (p. B56) and *Flying Combat* (p. B398). In addition to the rules for *Basic Vehicle Combat* (pp. B467-470), the following optional rules can provide additional flavor, and complexity, to steampunk aircraft.

Glide Ratio

A key optional statistic for sailplanes is the glide ratio. This is the ratio of forward movement to downward movement (or loss of altitude), when maintaining constant speed, in calm air. For instance, someone with the Gliding advantage (p. B56) has an average glide ratio of 10, since his Basic Move in flight is 10 and – in order to maintain that speed – he has to lose 1 yard of altitude per turn.

Modern sailplanes have a glide ratio ranging from 30 to 50, or even 70 for high-performance models. They are carefully streamlined, have extremely long wings, and are built with advanced, lightweight materials; this figure was lower (around 25) for gliders of the 1930s. With no streamlining and the looks of an early airplane, a steampunk vehicle will probably have an average glide ratio of 15.

Piloting a Steampunk Glider

Steampunk inventions are more dangerous than mass-produced vehicles out of real life, and gliders are no exception. The skill used is Piloting (Glider) for true aircraft and for the gliding cape, if it's treated as a vehicle. If the latter is a gadget providing the Flight advantage (see above), the user can use Aerobatics (see p. B174).

Taking Off

A glider takeoff requires a regular skill roll (see p. B214) when carried out normally, such as being towed by something powered (in all likelihood, a ground vehicle). If launched by a steam catapult, a control roll (as per p. B466) is required; the same applies if dropped from a mother-ship trapeze or pushed off a cliff, but with a -2 penalty. Not achieving a speed above stall speed in the first turn after takeoff automatically means an uncontrollable dive. See p. B469 to pull out of that!

Trading Altitude for Speed

Without an engine and if winds play no part, the only way for an aircraft to gain speed is to dive. As mentioned on pp. B56 and B468, an aircraft may accelerate up to 10 yards per second in this way, while losing 10 yards of altitude. The GM should keep track not only of the increase in speed, but also of the actual horizontal movement (on a map, if needed). For instance, if the glider has a speed of 50 yards per second (100 mph) and the pilot wants to accelerate, maximum acceleration could be achieved by losing 10 yards of height per second. At the end of the first second, the actual forward movement would be 40 yards (50 - 10: the aircraft has 50 yards per second of airspeed, but each yard of height lost means one yard less of horizontal movement); the next second would begin with an air speed of 60.

A continued dive can bring the aircraft beyond its safe top speed. Steampunk gliders aren't sturdy machines, and they are not expected to fly fast. The GM should assume that an unpowered steampunk aircraft exceeding 130 mph is "pushing the envelope" (see p. B395). Such a vehicle going over 200 mph has probably reached terminal velocity. A roll against its HT will be needed every second; on a failure, the thing simply breaks apart.

A dive over 45° also counts as "pushing the envelope."

Finding the Wave

A glider pilot may look for rising air that will allow him to gain altitude. He can roll against IQ or Meteorology to find any (if it's there to be found), as per p. B56. Optionally, he can roll against Piloting (Glider), or against Area Knowledge, provided that he has Piloting.

Riding the Wave

Air that goes up will cause a glider to ascend. The most common wave the sailplanes can ride is a "thermal" – a mass of air (often created by the sun heating the ground) that is rising because it's warm. Typical steampunk gliders may gain one to three yards of altitude per second while flying in a thermal, depending on weather conditions and aircraft design. They will normally fly in circles, spiraling up. Once the pilot thinks he's gained enough altitude, he can glide along his intended course, looking for another thermal as he goes.

Thermals can also be found on cloudy days. Cities are warmer than the countryside, lands being ploughed beat moorlands, and jungles are better than forests. Steampunk cities burn tons of coal and their buildings are poorly insulated; in the winter, they are very good at pushing gliders up! A steampunk steel mill will provide a hefty thermal at all times.

Air may go up for other reasons. Cliffs or ridges in windy areas can provide a steady updraft, up to twice their height. (For heroes in gliding capes, the same applies to lines of tall buildings hit by winds.) Mountain ranges offer "wave lift" that can launch an engineless aircraft into the stratosphere!

Landing and Slipping

The rules provided by the ***Basic Set*** cover landings (pp. B214 and B466). However, early steampunk gliders are not equipped with modern control surfaces, such as flaps (or "aerobrakes"). Additionally, they can't use a reduction in engine power to help land – since they have none! There is the ground effect pushing their wings up, too. Thus, it's hard for them to go down quickly and touch the ground. More than one inventor found that the trees at the end of the landing strip were too close. . .

Up!

Here are some examples of glider flight.

Flight

Bruce takes off with his *Silent Hawk*. His faithful butler drives the towing machine; Bruce rolls against his Piloting skill. Once he's dropped the tow cable, the GM assesses that he's flying at 50 yards of height and 50 mph (25 yards per second, above stall speed). Bruce is on his turf and needs no roll to know that he can spiral over the farms on a sunny day like this. Conditions are perfect and his sailplane is well-built, so he soars three yards per second. In 10 minutes, he reaches 1,850 yards.

The GM now requires the player to roll to see if the ship has lost speed; this is a routine roll. However, it fails, and the GM decides the speed is now 20 yards per second, close to stall speed. Since Bruce has no navigation instruments whatsoever, the GM requires another roll for the pilot to realize that, based solely his senses: a Per-based Piloting roll. The player succeeds, and decides he wants to gain speed. So Bruce glides; his sailplane's glide ratio is 20 – it will lose at a minimum one yard of altitude per turn while gliding at this speed. This means an acceleration of one yard per second; in 10 turns, Bruce loses 10 yards of altitude but he's now moving at 30 yards per second. Time to soar more, or to glide along, and look for another thermal. The pilot decides to glide. In 20 turns, the sailplane has reached a speed of 50 yards per second, so it's nearly too fast for its structural strength. To decelerate, Bruce only has to fly level; that way, his speed will decrease by one yard per second.

Dive Takeoff

A "Whispering Wind" transport glider takes off from an airship's trapeze for a training flight. The Japanese dirigible's top speed is 29 yards per second, and there is no wind. The initial speed of the *3 Shiki* is 29, well above stall speed. But a dive takeoff is a difficult maneuver, which requires a roll against Piloting with a -2 penalty. It is a failure by 4, more than the glider's stability rating! The aircraft immediately falls into an uncontrollable dive. The pilot rolls again, this time with a -5 penalty, and fails again; it's now a deadly tailspin. A pity they didn't give him a parachute.

Hang-Glider Landing

Two British commandos are landing with their hang-glider. Once they are 3' above the ground, the GM requires a Per-based roll against Piloting because the soldiers want to touch down only when they are very close to stall speed. The pilot succeeds, and they land at nine yards per second. The ground is slightly muddy, so the GM requires a DX roll (for both characters) in addition to the Piloting roll for landing! They succeed. In the first turn on the ground, they run, while they stall the wing; in the second turn, they come to a safe standstill.

The solution is to take an aerodynamically inefficient position, with the aircraft's nose not pointing straight ahead. This is called a "slip" and it can quickly decrease the aircraft's altitude, because of the increased drag. Needless to say, it's a difficult maneuver with these steampunk machines, requiring a control roll at -2, *in addition* to the standard roll for landing.

The Wondrous Flying Machines

Here are some sample steampunk aircraft, either unpowered or with temporary power only. See pp. B462-463 for an explanation of the statistics. The prices are all out of scale with a Victorian-era economy. This is because the *Silent Hawk* is unique, the military vehicles are secret prototypes, and the gliding cape is cinematic!

Silent Hawk

This sports sailplane is a one-off design. It's a no-frills vehicle, with nothing more than two open seats for the pilot and one passenger. However, its performance is exceptionally good, with a high glide ratio. Indeed, it features several advanced design elements, and it's easier to handle than most steampunk gliders. It comes with skids for landing. Its normal takeoff procedure involves a steam locomotive on a small-gauge rail towing it on a wheeled trolley (that remains on the ground). Its landing run is just 85 yards.

P-3 Shooting Star

This glider is an airship killer (P is for "Pursuit"). It's manned by two crewmen. The pilot sits behind and above the gunner; both seats are open. The pilot has TL5 navigation instruments.

The gunner sits forward in the nose. He fires a Gatling .45-70 multi-barrelled mechanical machine gun that comes with 400 rounds (see ***GURPS High-Tech,*** p. 128); half of the rounds are incendiary. After firing 40 rounds, the gunner must replace the magazine. What makes this triplane exceptional is that its thick wings host no less than 24 solid-fuel rockets, each providing 500 lbs. of thrust. They can only be fired in pairs, burning for 10 seconds, and can't be stopped before that time has expired. A clockwork safety mechanism prevents the pilot from igniting more rockets simultaneously, but tests are being carried out as to the best takeoff method. One of the experiments is igniting the first four rockets together. This rocket-assisted takeoff run is 335 yards long. The P-3 can land in 250 yards.

The *Shooting Star* is still very much an experimental craft, and very accident-prone; rockets spitting flames and sparks don't go well with fabric-covered wings and tails. However, it is easier to handle when the pilot has the rockets' thrust available.

3 Shiki Guraida

This is a glider for airborne infantry, who call it *Kaze-No-Sasayaki* ("Whispering Wind"). It seats two crewmen and 10 infantrymen in a cramped open cabin. It comes with navigation instruments. It has a wheeled landing gear instead of skids, and it uses both wheel brakes and aerodynamic brakes, managing to land in 120 yards. Tests are underway with a drogue parachute to further reduce this run. Little is known about it outside Japan; foreign analysts think it will only take off from racks under airships.

Commando Mk I

The stealth insertion vehicle of the Royal Commandos is a two-person hang-glider. Very small, with a low stall speed, it can land in a city street, but it's difficult to handle and its safe top speed is also low. Ideal for small-sized raids by highly trained personnel, and often considered disposable. It has navigation instruments, but if it really can be used in darkness, that remains unexplained to date.

Gliding Cape

This entry is for the GM who likes the concept but doesn't want to deal with it as an advantage. In calm air, the user can land just by running straight for two turns, or for just one turn if he's willing to "push the envelope" (see p. B395).

About the Author

Michele Armellini lives in Udine, Italy, with his very understanding wife, Silvia. As a WWII wargamer, he always loved glider airborne operations, and as a fan of Verne and Wells, he has now managed to move them to the Victorian Age. He makes a living out of foreign languages, but he loves dabbling with and studying the obscure and the uncanny – and trying to convert them into game mechanics! Apart from material he published in Italian, he has written for *Pyramid,* and he is the author of ***GURPS WWII: Grim Legions.*** He is the author or co-author (with Hans-Christian Vortisch) of several e23 products, including ***GURPS WWII: Their Finest Hour, GURPS WWII: Doomed White Eagle,*** and ***GURPS WWII: Michael's Army.***

With many thanks to the Hellions.

Gliding Machine Table

TL	*Vehicle*	*ST/HP*	*Hnd/SR*	*HT*	*Move*	*LWt.*	*Load*	*SM*	*Occ.*	*DR*	*Range*	*Cost*	*Loc.*	*Stall*	*Glide*	*Notes*
5+1	*Silent Hawk*	40†	+1/3	9f	0/55	0.7	0.2	+3	1+1	2	–	$19K	O2RWi	18	20	
5+1	P-3	49†	-1/3	10fx	0/65	1.4	0.5	+3	2	2	–	$56K	O2RWi	26	10	[1]
5+1	3 Shiki	58†	0/3	11f	0/60	2.7	1.2	+4	2+10	2	–	$23K	O2WWi	19	10	
5+1	Commando Mk I	27†	-1/1	9f	0/20	0.35	0.2	+2	1+1	2	–	$6K	EWi	8	7	
5+1	Gliding Cape	11†	-1/1	9f	0/20	0.11	0.1	0	1	2	–	$2K	EWi	7	10	

Notes

[1] These are the stats for the P-3 *Shooting Star* in unpowered flight. When two rockets are ignited, the aircraft has: ST/HP 49, Hnd/SR +1/3, and Move 3/65. When four rockets are ignited: ST/HP 49, Hnd/SR +1/3, and Move 5/65.

The Mohocks

A Deadly Steampunk Techno-Aesthete Gang

by J. Edward Tremlett

We heard them before we saw them. There was a terrible hue and cry, and then a dozen young men came burling right at us around the corner, knives and cudgels raised high. They wore their hair straight up on their heads like the Indians of the Americas, and had their faces painted in such a way that it was dashed difficult to make one out from the other.

Before I could draw my pistol, the bounders were upon me, trying to hack at my face and hands. I got a shot off, eventually, but it went wild. All the same, they were content to merely knock me down, and then continue on their way. But my poor friend A. tried to run and they took his nose and every finger on his hand – this even after he offered his watch and purse!

They say these are the lost children of this new technological age. I say to h– with it if it creates this kind of lawlessness. Where are the police in our hour of need, other than to blame it all on the speaking mutophone?

– Lord Mockton, after being set upon by a Mohock Gang (1882)

We will scower the Town,
Knock the Constable down,
Put the Watch and the Beadle to flight:
We'll force all we meet
To kneel down at our Feet,
And own this great Prince of the Night
Then a Mohock, a Mohock I'll be,
No Laws shall restrain
Our Libertine Reign,
We'll riot, drink on, and be free.

– John Gay, "The Mohocks" (1712)

It's said that the sleep of reason produces monsters, but sometimes the monsters come when that divine faculty is wide-awake as well.

Stumbling from a well-meaning artistic movement, and fattened on sour dreams and London's violent past, the street gang called the Mohocks has been let loose to rage through Victorian London. Embracing the new technological age to come, this vicious slice-gang sees itself as the preparers of the way – bringing terror to the masses so that they might find their appropriate places when the machine future arrives.

Their methods are shocking and violent, their leader is furtive and mysterious, and their philosophy is strangely enticing to Aesthetes looking for purpose and thrills. But be warned: Once one dons war paint and takes up the automatic knife, leaving the gang alive is no longer an option. The victimizers can become victims, too – especially when the Emperor has your name.

Here, then, is the strange and twisted history of the Mohocks, along with their ways, tactics, and means of creation. Also included are contemporary gangs to battle or avoid, a treatise on what's known about their Emperor, and many ideas for using them in a ***GURPS Steampunk*** game.

London's Burning

England's Restoration period was both the best and worst of times. It was finally free of the Puritans, but also an underpoliced age, where going out at night was quite a dangerous undertaking. "Street clubs" saw to their neighbors' nocturnal well-being, but such groups' existence led to the creation of less wholesome endeavors.

Eventually, violent, armed, and drunken gangs of well-to-do thugs – "rakes" – would rage through the nights. These monsters, well above the law, caused fires and property damage, and loved to terrorize innocents out after hours. The Watch was unable to do anything about this – indeed, its members were frequent targets of these brutes.

Perhaps the most infamous gang was the Mohocks, named after the "cannibal" tribe of American Indians. They met in taverns, become outrageously inebriated, and raced into the streets in frightful, violent abandon. They took their blades to passersby, subjecting them to depraved, painful "games" that left their victims bleeding, burned, disfigured, indecently assaulted – sometimes dead. Occasionally, they were content to make victims "dance" by slashing at their legs, or roll them down hills in barrels. They also slashed nostrils and cheeks, lopped off hands and noses, tore out eyes, and set them alight.

The threat posed by the Mohocks caused the Crown to issue £100 bounty against them in 1712. Despite this, many people insisted they were nothing more than a scare story. Even after the reward was posted, not a single Mohock was captured by the watch. Even their infamous "Emperor," readily identifiable by the Turkish crescent cut into his forehead, seemingly escaped both detection and justice.

Some accounts have the Mohocks slowly vanishing after the bounty, while others say they were active until the death of George I, in 1727. The Mohocks' demise heralded the formation of other, even less salubrious clubs, but, thankfully, these kept most of their depravities behind closed doors. Societal change, and the formation of "proper" police organizations, eventually put paid to the specter of armed, outlaw gangs raging in England's streets – for a time, at least.

Face the New Religion

Decades went by, and society changed all the more. The American Colonies rebelled, kings gave way to a queen, and a techno-industrial revolution turned the nation into an industrial powerhouse. The new sciences and their amazing inventions provided more leisure for higher classes; effective tools for certain, upscale professions; and greater opportunities to see and study the world. They also created more toil and drudgery for those at the bottom of society's ladder, not to mention more turmoil at the ragged edges of the empire.

There were many responses to this lopsided state of affairs. The Aesthetic Movement promoted "art for art's sake," eschewing the idea that art had to serve some higher purpose, and seeking to divorce it from the heavy-handed didacticism that upheld the status quo. The Aesthetes argued that pleasure alone was sufficient to justify the existence of any artistic endeavor.

A few took the idea further: If art need not be shackled to traditional morality, then why not completely unshackle it by creating a *new* morality? Why not create a new society, governed by new rules and mores, and use art to promote its formation? Paintings could show images of the coming world; literature could reveal its inner workings; and song, dance, and theater could broadcast its promise to the masses.

Such notions found purchase, and before long, many "Dream Academies" flourished in London, each one competing with its fellows for adherents. Most of these utopian idealists went nowhere fast, given the competition between Academies, the iron walls of Victorian social order, and the loony nature of these promised utopias. Sometimes they "graduated" an artist into the world, but the rest of the time, they achieved little more than creating an admiration society.

At least one of the Dream Academies churned out something more concrete, however nightmarish. The group of Aesthetes formed around a single man, whose dark charisma and presence proved a deadly combination. Slowly, in the backrooms of the tavern where his Dream Academy met, a new credo began to form around this man, an inspired and muscular reaction to the insidious notion that all men were equal, or at least deserving of equality of station.

The new, technological world to come would work only if the workers stayed as they were, and their leaders faltered not. Those of lower station should be treated like slaves, while the highest names in the land should be willing to fight and die for their places. Only the strong and daring could hope to be kings of this new frontier, but getting there would take goading from fearless forerunners, and vigilance against any notions of egalitarianism.

Oh, He's a Devilish Fellow

The Emperor of the Mohocks is an enigma, as befits any shadowy leader of a large and dangerous gang. But this one's mysteries go further than most.

All he would say of his past was that he was quietly expelled from Sandhurst, and was being well-paid by his family to stay away from them and their estate. It seemed his ideas proved unpopular with instructors, but became enticing to many of his fellow cadets. Indeed, whispers circulated about an attempted takeover of that prestigious military academy, though the facts in the case were vigorously suppressed.

Where, then, did the Devil enter into things? Some whispers involved mention of black magic and diabolism. There was also word of a ghost-raising that went horribly wrong, or perhaps hideously *right*. An overnight change in demeanor heralded the takeover attempt, they said; it was as if he were an entirely new man.

Legends of his supernatural ability were rife within the group. Kings told their Tribesmen that he could hear anything said – or even *thought* – about him, and be there within moments. He was said to step through walls, walk up into the air as though on an invisible staircase, and slice a man's face clean off with a languid wave of his hand. He was also said to be a prodigy of the new electro-ethereal sciences, and possibly a master mesmerist – perhaps explaining some of his exploits.

Another oddity: When the original Mohocks vanished, their Emperor was occasionally seen at the infamous Hell Fire Club. While these improper establishments had more to do with obscene behavior than occultism, some said that the revels above masked dark doings below. But what could be the connection between a vanished man from the early 18th century and his would-be successor from the late 19th?

One of the more historically minded members of the group recalled the horror caused by the Mohocks of more than a century and a half ago. The others decided it was as worthy a legacy to take over as any. To seal the pact, their leader took an automatic knife from his pocket, and carved a Turkish crescent into his own forehead, grinning as the blood ran down his face.

He declared himself their Emperor. No one dared challenge him. Henceforth, he has needed no other name.

Not only do most people accept violence if it is perpetuated by legitimate authority, they also regard violence against certain kinds of people as inherently legitimate, no matter who commits it.

– Edgar Z. Friedenberg

Run Though the Empty Stone

The Mohock code was simple: the strongest must rule through fancy, force, and fear. Those who would call themselves Mohocks were expected to be outrageous in dress, quick to act, and ready to terrorize the gray and faceless masses without mercy. The poor must be stamped down lest they rise up, the rich must be made to defend their station and honor, and those between those two poles should be challenged, to see whether they deserved to rise, or should only sink.

As part of their identity, the Mohocks adopted special "war paint" to disguise their features, and began to wear their hair long, so as to grease it up into Mohawk-style hairdos when about their bloody business. Automatic folding knives were the weapon of choice – mostly the superior and stylish Chatellerault brand – with members allowed recourse to any form of weaponry, so long as it incorporated new technology within it. They were not permitted to speak of their membership to anyone outside their Tribe, nor be drunk or under the influence of drugs while in war paint.

Unlike their Restoration-era forebears, the new Mohocks were not into robbing or indecent assaults. Why should they take money when they had enough of their own, and why take liberties when they could simply buy them? They wanted *fear*, which money could not completely buy, and only directed action, and its omnipresent threat, could truly cause.

To that end, the Mohocks organized "challenges" for unwitting contestants. The most common one was the "Blood Run," which was conducted down busy thoroughfares late at night. The object was to race down the street, slicing and slashing as many pedestrians as possible until they either ran out of road, or the police arrived. (Those who were nicked by the police were "seen to" by the Emperor, who would either help them escape, or quickly dispatch them to stop them from talking.)

Any of their victims who stood up for themselves, or bravely put themselves between the Mohocks and someone defenseless, might be toyed with a bit, but eventually let off with little more than a token cutting: They had "passed" the test. But those who screamed, ran, or threw others between themselves and the Tribe were fair game for any mutilations the members saw fit to perform. The Mohocks took care to collect the pieces and parts they "stole" from their victims as proof of their deeds. They would recount the events before their fellows at the end of each evening's revels, as they caught their breath in the darkest corners of London.

Then they'd dance and sing, and clean off the blood and the grime. The "trophies" would be divided between themselves, their Kings, and the Emperor. Then they'd swear to each other to never speak of these things again, until next they met, and go home not Mohocks, but men.

The Mohocks were led by their shadowy Emperor, who always appeared before the gang at the revels' end. He appointed "Kings," who best personified the Mohock code, to oversee each "Tribe" of the group. Should a King die, the Emperor would choose another. Should any King break the code, the Emperor would decide his fate, just as he was always eerily present when a King had to discipline a lesser Tribesman.

A King could be challenged at any time, by any Mohock within his Tribe, on any point in the code. In a strange reversal of social rules, a failed challenger was allowed to return to the ranks without penalty – provided he survived. However, a deposed leader was subject to the "mercy" of the new leader, who often had none to give.

Membership in the Mohocks was for life; the only way out was death, or infirmity, which often begat death. Those who wanted to escape the gang's clutches needed to break all ties and run far from London. But even those who vanished into thin air spent the rest of their lives looking over their shoulders, half-expecting the Emperor to be there.

Sometimes he was.

A Better Way to Spend the Night

The Mohocks could serve in a campaign as London street villains, or the occasional nocturnal hazard. If the heroes want to venture out after nightfall, they'll have to take care lest they turn the wrong corner and blunder into a Blood Run.

The good news is that, if they fight back, they might escape with merely some bumps and cuts. The bad news is that, if they were on their way to a delicate operation, or a seriously strenuous encounter, being pummeled by punks before arriving may put a serious crimp in their plans.

The villainous group won't be caught dead working for someone else; they have their own ethos, and aren't about to be paid money for someone else's. Nonetheless, they might be used by a Professor Moriarty type as foils or misdirection. Incriminating clues could point to the gang, inviting an investigation that proves time-consuming and dangerous, and ultimately leads only to the gang. Of course, when the Mohocks learn they've been set up, the Emperor will order all Tribes to pay back the blackguard who besmirched their "good" name.

There are other campaign options.

Kings of the New Frontier

The PCs are all Aesthetes who've fallen in with the dreaded Mohocks. By day, they go about their normal upper-class business, but by night, they go off to their meeting place, grease up their hair, paint their faces, and sally forth to bring fear to the masses. It's not all fun and games, however: Tribal politics are vicious, the police are getting close, there's been a time or two that they've been half-recognized by their own friends and peers (now missing fingers), and their families are starting to ask disconcerting questions.

In truth, the violence is starting to get tiring, and the brave new world the Emperor promised looks less appealing each day. Yet, there's no way out except the grave, which may come faster than expected if the police finally realize what they've been up to. How long can the PCs maintain their violent pernoctations? Can they pool their resources and escape the gang and its spooky, omnipresent Emperor?

Technogangwar

It was inevitable that the Mohocks would run smack-dab into some competing gang, and now it's happened. One of the other Dream Academies has churned out an aggressive group of Aesthetes, eager to either replace the gang for its perceived failings, or enforce a different future upon London. Whatever its credo or cause, the gang is numerous, well-armed, technologically savvy, and quite violent.

Other Dreamers

The Mohocks are far from the only Victorian street gang that spun out of the Dream Academies, or came up alongside them.

Les Amis Électriques

Sometimes progress creates its own monsters. The fad of being revitalized through the careful application of electric shocks upon the body led some to believe that the "beneficial" practice should be shared with everyone – whether they wanted it or not. A technologically minded Dream Academy of "New Men" developed metal-tipped canes with electric batteries in them, which produced a mild but sharp shock when pressed against flesh. Now, dressed in androgynous clothing and girlish makeup, the Aesthetes walk the streets "electrifying" those who looked run-down, beat, or in need of a thrill. Some people actually liked the treatment and would wait out at night, hoping their electric friends would come by for a visit.

The East-End Equalizers

A radical offshoot of the Fabian Society, the Equalizers are the act to their talk. Where the socialists slowly worked towards a more equal society, this gang decided it was time to make it equal, preferably through direct and brutal action. They gave away their possessions, and devoted themselves to taking from the well-to-do and giving that money to groups that helped the less fortunate. Wearing tight-fitting but small wolf facemasks to disguise their identities, they brake into genteel homes, garrote the affluent as they left their clubs and theaters, and organize schemes to bilk the wealthy and fatuous. At some point, they've lost sight of their socialist goals and started to keep the money, but also kept the wolf masks.

Death Heads

This group, mostly comprised of failed stage magicians, specializes in a peculiar kind of theft. They employ street urchins to follow the well-to-do home, and scream that they'd seen a ghastly, ghostly face in the window. Then, late at night, the 'Eds quietly break in, and employ magic lanterns, "ectoplasm," and other tricks of fraudulent mediums to convince their victims their house was haunted. Once the victims fled, they'd have their army of urchins come in to steal everything they owned, and be gone before they calmed down. When "working," the gang wears top hats, white scarves, and skull masks or fright makeup to conceal their identities, as well as blend into their phantasmagoria.

Wild Riders

The subway trains can be dangerous places, filled with con men and pickpockets. One gang in particular makes riding the rails a truly frightening proposition. The bloody, soot-besmirched Wild Riders specializes in a very complicated and dangerous kind of robbery: They hide down the line, leap fearlessly onto a train as it passes, smash into a carriage, and demand the passengers' valuables. They dress like pirates, brandish pistols and cutlasses, and sometimes light bombs that they threatened to let explode if their demands were not met. Once they have what they want, or are successfully fought off by outraged subway patrons, they leap out the way they'd come and run off to their secret hideout, deep within the bowels of London's underworld. Several extensive searches have been made of the lines, but neither the mass of the Wild Riders nor their lair have ever found.

An outrageous ambition of doing all possible hurt to their fellow-creatures is the great cement of their assembly, and the only qualification required in the members.
– Richard Steele, "The Spectator," ***Readings in English Prose of the Eighteenth Century***

The PCs could be Mohocks trying to defend their turf and honor, or members of the competing gang, eager to take it. They could also be members of an entirely different gang (perhaps one from *Other Dreamers,* p. 33) that's trying to make an alliance, play both sides against each other, or just stay out of it. Or they could be members of the police, having to deal with the spectacle of well-armed, upper-class monsters intent on carving up the city like a Christmas goose. Whichever way, there will be blood.

The Electric Gun Caper

Who has stolen Professor Wellkettle's designs for the electric pistol? Who has taken the parts needed to manufacture them from several engineering firms throughout London? Who has taken a small factory hostage and turned it into a combination sweatshop and social Darwinist laboratory? Who is creating the weapons for tomorrow's army, today?

The Mohocks, of course. At long last, the Emperor's true plan takes shape: not merely to herald the new, more brutal and honest world he spoke of, but to spark the revolution that will bring it about. With electric pistols in hand, his gangs go from frightening toffs and running down fleeing peelers to taking on the entirety of the police force, armies, Parliament – even the Crown.

The PCs could be Mohocks, now about to take the last and greatest steps toward the dream they've been speaking of all these bloody and knock-turned years. Or they could be agents of the law, consulting detectives, Victorian adventurers, scientists, and other law-abiding citizens who have stumbled upon the plot, and are now well-poised to try and stop it, or at least warn London that traitors lie within the city's stone bosom. But can they take on both the bloodthirsty gang *and* its mysterious Emperor, who may have both science and sorcery on his side?

And Then There Were None

It's New York City in 1890, and a man lies dead on the floor of his luxurious apartment. Peter Barnstubble, aged 30, a recent émigré from London, England, was found in his stately Manhattan residence, his throat slit from ear to ear. His door was locked, and there was no sign of entry or exit, other than that of the housekeeper who found him, at least a day after his demise. The murder weapon was doubtlessly sharp, but is nowhere to be found.

The look on Peter's face is terrible: pure shock and horror, far beyond what one might expect from such a horrible manner of death. In a last gesture, he wrote on the ground in his own blood a word. EMPEROR.

Investigations show Mr. Barnstubble came to America in 1889. Further investigations show that his name is a fraud. He's actually Roger Peterson, scion of the Petersons of Essex, who vanished from his home in London six months before arriving in NYC with a fake identity and a lot of money in hand. His family's been searching for him frantically, worried for him. It seems they had good reason.

The PCs are investigators who have been hired by the Peterson family to look into the matter. Their investigations eventually lead to the Mohocks, with whom young Roger had a brief but violent flirtation in late 1888. He got in, and decided he wanted out, but could only do so by completely vanishing. But how was he tracked across the Atlantic, and who killed him in the locked room? Was it the mysterious Emperor, using his strange powers, or someone or something else?

Finding the answers will prove dangerous, to say the least. The Mohocks do not appreciate outsiders prying into their affairs, and when the investigators find themselves looking into the Emperor, they can be assured he will return the favor.

GURPS Steampunk

Mohocks can be created using by adapting the Aesthete template from ***GURPS Steampunk*** (pp. 31-32) to ***GURPS*** *Fourth Edition.* Five more points should be given to such vigorous pursuits as Axe/Mace, Knife, Rapier, or Shortsword. If the campaign has hand-held energy weapons, the Beam Weapons skill can be included with that group, given the gang's zealous acceptance of the new. Their Chatellerault can be treated as normal knives.

About the Author

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

Random Thought Table

The Right Tech From Finish to Start

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

One of the joys of parenthood is getting to revisit ancient brainteasers and puzzles. (This is the pleasant flipside that offsets the agony one endures when, say, one's five-year-old is given a "365 Knock-Knock Jokes" calendar for Christmas.)

There's an old riddle with infinite variations that goes something like this:

Q: How many apples can you put in an empty 10'-cube box?
A: Just one . . . then it's not empty anymore!

I was reminded of this riddle when I tried wrapping my mind around how much "steampunk" it takes to turn a historical Victorian campaign into a steampunk one. I took my conclusive cue from that classic riddle and decided that once you start adding anything, it's no longer a pure historical campaign.

From a certain point of view, that's a fairly uncontroversial opinion. After all, even a low-powered magical fantasy setting is going to be different from a straight historical medieval Europe campaign. However, making that realization can go a long way toward figuring out what kind of steampunk campaign you want to create.

Most of the time, steampunk additions are directed from the point of view of the gear. However, an equally valid possibility is to think of the desired outcome, and work backward toward the technology that would enable that to be possible. (Eagle-eyed readers may recognize this as a continuation of roleplaying research begun in *Pyramid #3/37: Tech and Toys II*.)

When using this method, think about how you'd like to shake up a standard Victorian setting from the norm, then come up with a technological justification. Once you do that, it's often possible to work backward *again* from that idea, and figure out where else that idea gets you.

Here are a couple of broad ideas – with specific implications – to get you started.

Scope

A common "otherworldly" desire when crafting a steampunk game is to expand the Victorian-era scope beyond the confines of the British Empire – or, perhaps, to expand the British Empire itself. Perhaps the most striking example is starting with the concept, "What if the Victorians were able to visit other *worlds*?"

My earliest exposure to this idea was in the ***Space: 1889*** computer game – which I believe was my first introduction to steampunk ever – although the game that made a bigger impression on me was ***Ultima: Worlds of Adventure 2 – Martian Dreams*** (despite having a title that can't fit through doorways). In both, humanity has made contact with other worlds . . . although the methods of doing so in each are different.

In the ***Space: 1889*** setting, Thomas Edison invented a means of propelling vessels through the ether in space, resulting in (more or less) conventional steampunk spacecraft. ***Ultima: Worlds of Adventure 2 – Martian Dreams*** relied on a space cannon model, meaning that trips to other worlds are one-way unless the traveler can figure out a way home from the destination.

In Cannon, In Canon

So, in this hypothetical case, we start with a base desire – "it'd be neat to expand the scope of the steampunk world to include other planets" – and try to narrow that down a bit. Given the scope of interplanetary travel, do you want the same technology to be applicable in a shrunk-down fashion to Earth-bound travel? In other words, if it takes a week to get to Luna or Mars, does that mean it should take a half-hour to get from London to Sydney? There's no right or wrong answer, but the possibilities result in two different campaigns.

If the only means of interplanetary travel is via space cannons, then it's probably not scalable to Earth-based destinations. (It's tricky to fire a cannon only a little bit.) Likewise, since we can safely presume that such trips are one-way, a cannon is required at the destination to get home. That would mean the first few months/years were probably spent shooting the parts for the return cannon on the moon (or Mars, etc.).

However, once our hypothetical cannon travel circuit is complete, the scope of the world can be expanded to include the destination. And that can lead to interesting possibilities. For example, in our world, the trip from London to Sydney was a month flight in 1919. However, if the canon trip to the moon takes a week, as does the return trip, then you might have the odd circumstance where it's twice as fast to be canon-shot to Australia (via the moon) than to travel using the fastest conventional means! This doesn't really upset our premise of wanting to limit Earth-bound travel times – the fringe case of transporting three people in a tin can for two weeks at hideous expense doesn't upset the fact that 99.9999% of travelers going halfway around the globe are going to use more rational methods – but by thinking through the corner cases of our hypothetical, we can come up with a cool bit of flavor for our world. The "Lunar Loon" two-week global express is now open for business!

"Elementary," Said He

Some readers may wonder how we can know that the introduction of certain technologies will have the desired outcomes. The answer is obvious: Because we say so!

Really, you – as the GM – can say something like, "In this world, the invention of reliable, affordable tunneling technology led to underground factories, which means this steampunk world is significantly less sooty than the real Industrial Revolution." How did that happen? Because you said so! If the players are going to accept clockwork manservants with AIs beyond what we can do *today,* they'll probably go along with whatever harebrained scheme you come up with. (And if not . . . well, they can certainly suggest their own alternatives or take up the GMing reins themselves for a bit!)

Besides, who's to say that there aren't intervening steps that make everything fall into place nicely? It's not inaccurate to say that the invention of the automobile led to catastrophic decay in major American cities, but that statement leaves out a lot of intermittent bits about how A got to B.

Social

Another way one might want to tweak a "classical" historical Victorian setting is adjusting social views to something slightly more amenable to a modern audience. For example, the gaming group might enjoy a steampunk era that files down the overt sexism of Victorian society. Again, starting with the goal and working backward to the tech can help shape the world.

She's the One With the Angry-Looking Robot

In our sexism example, one possible avenue would be to concoct a technological scenario that required the influx of women into the workforce. Something similar happened during World War II, where women were required to work factories for the war effort. While this didn't lead to immediate enlightenment, it sowed the seeds for the idea that women in the workforce might not be the end of the world.

However, from my point of view, a more interesting angle might be to come up with a way that elevates the status of women in society by giving them a separate niche (since coming up with a justification for why you'd need to suddenly double the potential workforce leads me to envisioning the Great War a half-century early, and that makes me a sad panda).

So, if I were trying to come up with a technological justification for my goal, I might start with the idea of, "What could women do that men couldn't?" Which leads me to . . .

Steam-powered exoskeletons. Long a dream of scientists, the reality emerged in prototypes from laboratories just a few years ago. Unfortunately, owing to the mechanical marvels required, only the most slender, lightest, yet tallest bodies are able to physically fit inside these devices and control all their aspects. While some men were suitable (and many children), the most ready supply of available pilots under 100 lbs. and over 5'4" came from the ranks of women. The English translation of *On the Suitability of Fairer Pilots* (as accurate as many other Victorian scientific publications) provided the intellectual justification, while the victory of the Sisters of Steam over the male-led Clockwork Cavalry at the end of the American Civil War cemented the idea of female mechanical-martial superiority in global culture.

With this idea, female steam-mecha pilots have developed an authority and appeal akin to test pilots from the 1950s and astronauts from the 1960s: a big deal. From there, it requires just a bit of hand-waving to say that Western women have achieved whatever level of social independence we desire in the campaign. Sure, technology is likely to improve enough at some point that men will be able to fit into the cockpit more reliably, but even then, women will have had a however-many-year head start. Will it be enough to retain the rights they've won?

Once more, starting at our end point (women have more rights) and working backward (gal-powered gizmos), we've gotten to an interesting place that helps define our world. Most steam-mecha pilots are going to be rail-thin women, and – akin to jockeys and wrestlers – there may well be a spate of unhealthy eating and dressing habits for prospective pilots to get down to the desired weight. If women start developing a reputation of being naturally better at handling mechanical wonders – in the same way that women were traditionally viewed as better typists before the rise of the personal computer – then they may be able to parlay this position into other new and interesting possibilities. There may well be a race to be the first man on the moon . . . but the women might've beaten 'em by a decade before then!

By starting with the desired deviation from a traditional Victorian world and working backward, you can come up with the tech that can make that possible . . . which can then, in turn, serve as a jumping point for all manner of new ideas. Behold the glorious tomorrow – then figure out how to get there!

About the Editor

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

Odds and Ends

Hopes to Fears

As an epic campaign idea, have a single campaign that evolves from a steampunk world to a Lovecraftian one. Start in one year (say, 1870) and have one adventure every game year or two until a suitably climactic/cataclysmic Depression-era finale. The heroes can remain the same from adventure to adventure (perhaps with a boost in bonus character points to reflect downtime experience).

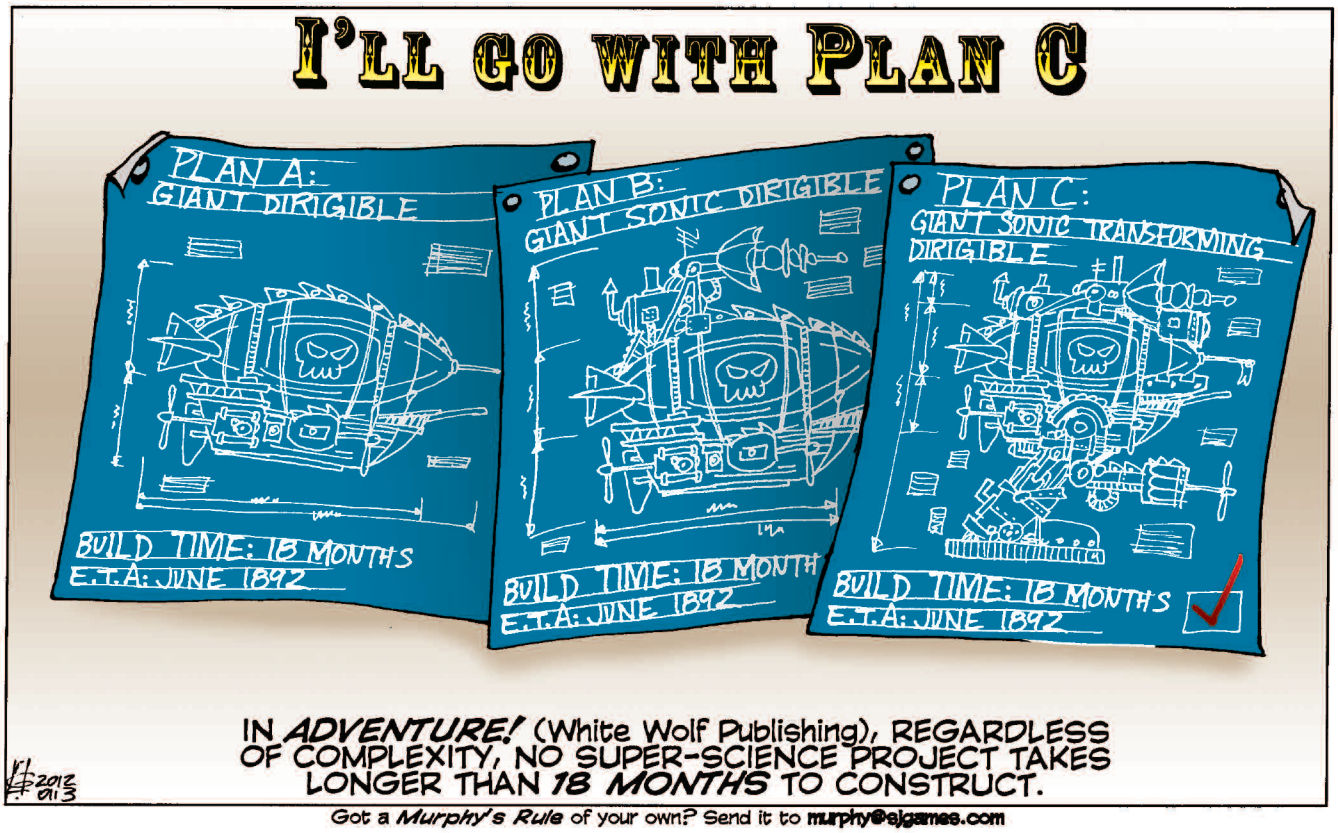
Alternatively (or in addition), the campaign may continue past Lovecraftian horror into 1950s-style space-opera optimism again. The pendulum swings . . .

Gauges and rivets, copper tubing and glass
Lend a steampunk creation a real touch of class.
Gears are appropriate to introduce
If they look like they have a legitimate use.

– Professor Elemental and Mr B, the Gentleman Rhymer, "Just Glue Some Gears On It (And Call It Steampunk)"

Murphy's Rules

by Greg Hyland



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

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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.