

PYRAMID[®]

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URBAN FANTASY II

SAFE AS HOUSES

by Christopher R. Rice

TRAITS FOR TOWN
by Sean Punch

CITY BOTCHES
by Phil Masters

BELIAL'S BASTARDS

by David L. Pulver

HUNTING THE CABAL
by W.A. Frick

THE WRAITH OF PRECINCT 13
by J. Edward Tremlett

FESTIVALS OF THE UNKNOWN
by Jessica Wolfman

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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IN THIS ISSUE

The streets have a magic and life of their own . . . as the heroes might learn, if they're nosy or unlucky. This issue revisits the intersection of urban roads and fantasy lanes, with incredible results.

When you're running from things that go bump in the night, you want to go somewhere that's *Safe as Houses*. Learn **GURPS** mechanics for what makes a structure easier to defend from paranormal threats, plus relevant traits for monsters. **GURPS Horror** (p. 77) told you what a Bad Place is; this feature tells you how it gets that way – and how to cleanse it.

Towns aren't just for selling your loot! Sean Punch, mayor for life of the **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy** line, expands the possibilities of that series with *Traits for Town*. This indispensable guide tells adventurers what works (and how!) in urban environments.

A love of motorcycles can band folks together from all walks of life . . . or unlife! In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of **GURPS Technomancer** – delves into the history and members of *Belial's Bastards*, a monstrous motorcycle club that controls a little U.S. town in any urban-fantastic game.

It's bad when random supernatural entities threaten the sanctity of human dwellings. When they come together for a purpose, it's time to go *Hunting the Cabal*. Find out how you can combine **GURPS Cabal** with **GURPS Monster Hunters** to take your urban-fantasy campaign to a new level. You'll get tips for designing a "conspiracy of monsters" and how to include it into campaigns, a new lens, tips for using templates, suggestions for tweaking the Ritual Path Magic system to make it "Hermetically sealed," and more.

When a bad cop gets even worse, he becomes *The Wraith of Precinct 13*. This threat has systemless details on background and motivation, plus **GURPS** stats for what might be the revenge-filled revenant . . . perhaps one of many!

Stir up urban encounters with *Festivals of the Unknown*. This set of tables helps you decide on the who, how, and why of holidays for any game's setting.

Spells that go wrong within municipal limits are *City Botches*. Phil Masters – archmage of **GURPS Thaumatology** – examines the variety of urban-specific disasters that can occur with the **GURPS** spell-failure table.

Random Thought Table reveals a secret that's staring you in the face, while Odds and Ends seems oddly familiar (at least, it will eventually) and features a Murphy's Rules that's as magical as a punch in the jaw. Get ready for a night on the town; it could be the time of your life!

Article Colors

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

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

Green: Columnist

Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features

Purple: Systemless Features

COVER ART

Rogério Vilela

INTERIOR ART

Greg Hyland

Editor-in-Chief ■ STEVE JACKSON
e23 Manager ■ STEVEN MARSH
GURPS Line Editor ■ SEAN PUNCH
Assistant **GURPS** Line Editor ■
JASON "PK" LEVINE

Art Director ■ SAMUEL MITSCHKE
Assistant Art Director ■
BRIDGET WESTERMAN
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Chief Operating Officer ■ PHILIP REED
Marketing Director ■ LEONARD BALSERA
Director of Sales ■ ROSS JEPSON
Page Design ■ PHIL REED and
JUSTIN DE WITT

FROM THE EDITOR

THE CITY NEVER SLEEPS

Once you view urban environments as aboveground dungeons, the world is never the same. And if they're teeming with magic or fantastic elements . . . well, it's like the perfect melding of danger and 24-hour pizza.

This is our second issue focusing on the magic of cities (and vice versa). We look at some secrets hiding in plain sight (pp. 35-36) and other secrets that could hide more firmly in the shadows. *Pyramid* prides itself on providing both ready-to-use campaign-building material and bits that can be added to your own campaigns. This issue is no exception, with an assortment of material that should find homes in many thau-maturgic towns.

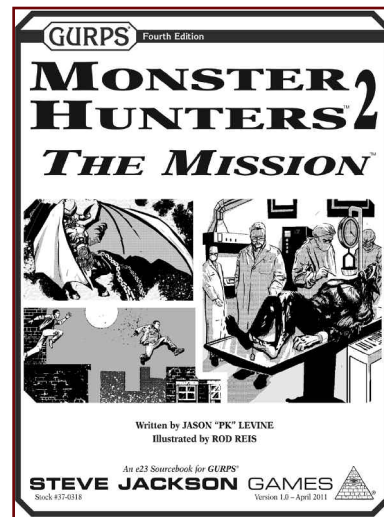
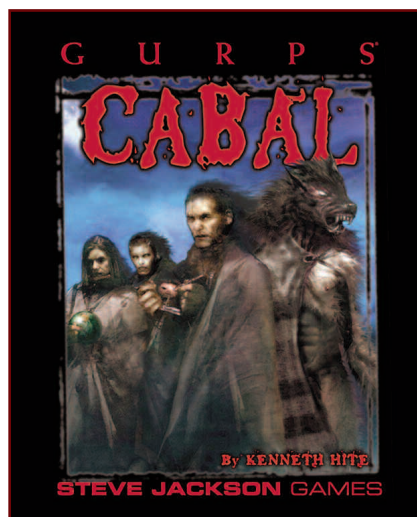
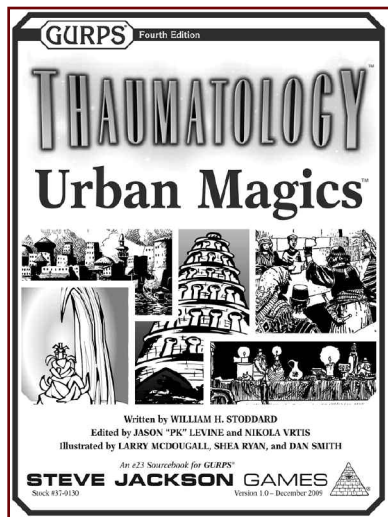
WE BUILT THIS CITY ON ORCS AND TROLLS?

One challenge we have when we make this kind of issue is trying to figure out exactly *how* you're using these articles.

That's where you come in. Every issue we encourage you to write to us (privately or publicly), to let us know how we're doing. As we zero in on our fifth year of this volume of *Pyramid* (has it been almost five years already?!), long-time readers are aware that we've made a number of adjustments over the years; we've added more of some kinds of articles, gotten rid of some feature types, and tried to make this the mag *you* want. As the old headline said in the first volume of *Pyramid*, "We're reading your mail." Just like urban developers (see what we did there?), it's an ongoing process, but it's one we're committed to – just like we hope you'll continue to let us know what's working for you and what isn't.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Speaking of writing to us, how much fun was this trip to the city? Was it a magical time or a miscast spell? Let us know privately at pyramid@sjgames.com, or join the magi at forums.sjgames.com. (And if you participate in – or *start!* – any conversations about *Pyramid* on any other online venues, let us know! Our all-seeing eye can't be *everywhere* . . .)



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SAFE AS HOUSES

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

Supernatural monsters come in all shapes and forms, their mythology varying so much that finding a common thread seems impossible. Even so, one universal theme resounds through multiple traditions, myths, and stories: the safety of a home. Currently made popular by literature like Jim Butcher's *The Dresden Files*, Fred Saberhagen's *The Dracula Sequence*, or Patricia Briggs' *Mercedes Thompson* series, the concept has

been around for a *long* time. In your home, you're safe from the *brujo* with the evil eye. In your home, the vampire cannot enter. In your home, your soul is safe from the clutches of the Devil. Unless you invite them in . . .

These observations and optional mechanics for the safety of places require familiarity with **GURPS Horror**, and familiarity with **GURPS Thaumatology** is recommended.

THRESHOLDS

The idea that the supernatural cannot cross the threshold of a home stretches back into antiquity. In game terms, the easiest existing mechanic is Divine Curse (Cannot enter dwelling for first time unless invited), for -10 points. However, in settings where *all* supernatural beings are affected (including humans with paranormal abilities, like witches), it's probably easier to define it as a feature, "Affected by Thresholds."

WHAT IS A THRESHOLD?

Thresholds are defined as a metaphysical energy that collects around structures that are of particular importance to sapient beings (e.g., humans). This energy forms an invisible

protective barrier that supernatural creatures or powers have a hard time penetrating. This is why vampires must be invited in, why sinful or immortal acts must be committed before a demon can possess a house's occupant, and so on.

Note that only a home's *rightful* occupant, his guest, or someone who has a deep emotional bond with the dwelling can offer an invitation. Once the invitation is given, *all* residents are affected equally. This means it's possible for an adulterous father to create an "opening" in his home's Threshold, allowing a demonic entity to possess his child. Fortunately, an invitation may be *revoked* at any time, by saying it loud enough to be heard by the invited being; this may only be done by someone who could offer it in the first place!

Threshold Examples

| Typical Threshold Rating | Strength | Rarity | Example |
|-----------------------------|-------------|---------------|--|
| N/A | – | Common | Most businesses, hotels, and places that are open to the public. |
| 0 or less | Nonexistent | Very Rare | Blasphemed ground, a haunted house that contains its own <i>genius loci</i> , or a devil's gate (or similar dimensional "weak" area). |
| 3-6 | Faint | Rare | Typical haunted house, spooky place, or "unquiet" cemetery (see p. 9). |
| 7-9 | Weak | Very Uncommon | Typical temporary residence, "murder" house, or site of suburban decay. |
| 10-12 | Average | Common | Typical of most homes with people living in them. |
| 13-15 | Robust | Very Uncommon | Typical of houses that have passed through a few generations of a particular family, a "new" church or other house of worship, or the home an occupant built himself and has lived in for <i>years</i> . |
| 16-19 | High | Rare | Typical of houses built by hand and passed down through several generations of a particular family, or a church or other house of worship that has been used for generations. |
| 20 or higher | Very High | Very Rare | Typical of houses built by hand and passed down through many generations of loving, caring family members, or cathedrals or other places of worship that have been used for hundreds of years. |

When an invitation is revoked, the affected supernatural being must make a roll against the Threshold immediately, with the usual results (see pp. 6-7).

Thresholds have a rating of 0 or less (practically nonexistent) to 20+ (near impregnable). Dwellings with Threshold Ratings (TRs) of 6 or less are “damaged,” and are well on their way to becoming “haunted houses” (see *Madness in the Floorboards*, p. 9). Most public places don’t have a Threshold Rating at *all* – while they don’t protect their occupants, they also *don’t* ever become a supernatural sinkhole, attracting things that go bump in the night.

*Never open the door to a lesser
evil, for other and greater ones
invariably slink in after it.*

– Baltasar Gracián, *The Art
of Worldly Wisdom*

DETERMINING A THRESHOLD’S STRENGTH

To determine a residence’s TR, start with a base Threshold of 10 and then apply the permanent modifiers below. (Alternatively, roll 3d and *justify* the result using the modifiers.) Temporary modifiers alter a dwelling’s TR for all purposes, but only while applicable.

Permanent Modifiers

- Dwelling has been used to perform religious rites to malevolent entities: -1 to -10*
- Dwelling is the location of premeditated murder or torture: -3†‡
- Dwelling is the location of violent death (e.g., homicide or suicide): -2†‡
- Dwelling has been the site of repeated evil or selfish uses of paranormal powers (but *not* to protect the dwelling): -1
- Dwelling is abandoned, dilapidated, or otherwise rundown: -1
- Dwelling is an apartment or other “shared” residence: -1
- Dwelling is being used in a manner other than a home: -1
- Dwelling is the location of repeated violence or abuse: -1†‡
- Occupant(s) views the dwelling as a temporary residence or “a place to stay”: -1
- Family cemetery or chapel on the property of the dwelling: +1 if hallowed ground; +0 if unhallowed; -2 if blasphemed/profaned
- Dwelling is an apartment or other “shared” residence, but all occupants share some form of emotional connection (family members, long-time friends, lovers, etc.): +0
- Dwelling has been occupied by inhabitant(s) for less than a year: +0
- Occupant views the dwelling as his rightful home: +0
- Dwelling was passed down through generations to current inhabitant: varies§

- Dwelling is in good repair: +1¶
- Dwelling is the location of several joyous occasions or events (e.g., a wedding, the birth of a child, or a signing of a peace treaty): +1
- Occupant has traits pertaining to his home (Higher Purpose, Odious Personal Habit (Territorial), and so on): +1
- Dwelling has been occupied by inhabitant(s) for 1-5 years: +1†
- Dwelling has been occupied by inhabitant(s) for 10-20 years: +2†
- Dwelling has been occupied by inhabitant(s) for 20+ years: +3†
- Dwelling’s inhabitant(s) are devoutly religious (have character traits relating to their faith): varies, usually +1 to +3
- Dwelling has been used to perform religious rites to benevolent entities: +1 to +5*

* These modifiers are mutually exclusive.

† Use only the *worst* negative modifier and *best* positive one. For example, it would be tragic if a suicide took place in the same building as a serial murderer’s torture-house, but wouldn’t reduce the Threshold any further than the numerous premeditated murders did.

‡ Increase this by -1 if committed by an inhabitant on a *co-inhabitant*. Increase it by a further -1 if done on a *large* scale (e.g., mass murder).

§ Use the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) and look up the number of successive generations that have occupied their family home in the *Linear Measurement* column, reading yards as generations, and use the corresponding size modifier as a bonus to the dwelling’s Threshold Rating.

¶ At the GM’s option, this bonus can equal the dwelling’s quality modifier, if better than +1. This can be increased another +1 if the occupants or their family built the house.

Temporary Modifiers

- Dwelling is damaged: -2 per full multiple of HP lost
- Dwelling has been violated (it was robbed or broken into, police have searched it, etc.) within the last week: -1 per violation
- Dwelling’s inhabitant(s) have been the victim(s) of violence inside the residence within the last week: -1*
- Dwelling has been “blessed” by someone with Blessed, Clerical Investment, True Faith, or other similar religious traits within the last week: +1†
- Dwelling’s owner has willingly allowed an evil supernatural creature into his residence within the last week: -1 to -10‡
- During a special time, season, or date: varies§

* Increase this by -1 if committed by an inhabitant on a *co-inhabitant*. Increase it by a further -1 if done on a *large* scale (e.g., mass murder).

† This bonus can be even *higher* if the person is “blocking” a supernatural being from trying to enter a dwelling. For example, a priest with Clerical Investment, standing in the doorway of a home and commanding a vampire to leave, would temporarily give +2 to the dwelling’s Threshold Rating – but would be first in line if the creature *did* get in!

‡ This can range from -1 (for a “run-of-the-mill” vampire) to -10 (for a demon lord) and is entirely at the GM’s discretion.

§ The GM must decide exactly what times, seasons, or dates work for his campaign. For example, since midnight is the “witching hour,” Thresholds might be at a penalty against magical attacks during that time. Likewise, the first rays of dawn – a time of new beginnings and victory over darkness – might give Thresholds a bonus against supernatural creatures.

WHAT DOES A THRESHOLD PROTECT?

Threshold energy is strongest in physical barriers (such as walls, floors, ceilings, roofs, and so on), but also manifests around portals (windows, doors, chimneys, etc.). This means that most Thresholds do not extend further than the walls of the dwelling they are bound to.

A powerful enough Threshold (a final TR of 15 or higher) *also* protects the property around it, and any substructures attached to it (such as porches or balconies). Treat any substructures and property (including any buildings on the property) as if they had a Threshold equal to the main dwelling's rating *minus* five. Family chapels, cemeteries, and the like are treated as having the main dwelling's *full* rating if they are hallowed, -5 if they are unhallowed, and -10 if they are blasphemed or profaned. This means a powerful enough Threshold *can* keep unwanted supernatural creatures off the property, much like holy ground (see below).

Threshold energy has difficulty collecting around impermanent or movable structures (like tents or RVs). When calculating such a structure's Threshold Rating, include an additional -5. Don't count this penalty when determining the effects of a damaged Threshold (see p. 9). Theoretically mobile structures that haven't moved, however, are not subject to this penalty.

This assumes all external parts of the house are protected equally; in some campaigns, this might not be true. The spooky basement and creepy attic are staples of horror fiction, while windows and (closet or open) doors can be "gateways" for some beings. For such games, the GM can treat any basement or attic as having a lower Threshold than the rest of the dwelling. The dwelling's Threshold Rating minus two is fair for spooky areas, but the GM could assign as much as -5 for extreme locations, such as murder-site basements or attic-prisons. A particularly detailed GM could even assign individual rooms their own variable rating. This would work best in games revolving around haunted houses or similar locations.

For further information on haunted houses, see *Madness in the Floorboards* (p. 9).

HOW DOES A THRESHOLD PROTECT?

Threshold energy protects the occupants of its dwelling in the following ways.

- A Threshold's main benefit is its ability to keep out unwanted supernatural creatures. Whenever *any* creature with the feature "Affected by Thresholds" tries to enter a dwelling that has an active Threshold, it must make a Quick Contest of (ST + Will) / 2 vs. effective TR. Success allows entry, but the creature suffers an Affliction (p. B428) based on his margin of success: Agony for a margin of 0-1, Terrible Pain for a margin of 2-3, Severe Pain for a margin of 4-5, Moderate Pain for a margin of 6-7, or Topsy for a margin of 8-9, or none for a margin of 10+. If a creature fails by 3 or more, it's Nauseated for minutes equal to (Threshold Rating - HT; minimum of one minute) and cannot enter. Failure by 10 or more means the creature cannot *ever* enter that particular dwelling as long as it remains inhabited by the current inhabitants; the being must leave immediately. This restriction disappears if the entity gets voluntarily invited in.

- The protection extends to a supernatural creature's paranormal powers or abilities. Use the rules for magic, below.

- The Threshold affects certain forms of magic when cast against a dwelling's inhabitants, but only within the bounds of the Threshold. Whenever someone uses magic against those protected by a Threshold, he must make a Quick Contest of Will + Magery (or other applicable Talent) vs. its effective TR. Success means the spell functions normally; success by 10+ means the mage ignores the Threshold for 24 hours when casting spells. Failure on this roll means the caster suffers a penalty equal to the margin of his failure on all rolls pertaining to casting that spell; failure by 10 or more effectively nullifies the spell *and* means the caster cannot try to cast magic against that particular Threshold for (1d + margin of failure) hours.

Natural Places and Houses of Worship

The rules here assume Threshold energy only forms around dwellings the inhabitants consider "home." However, church and cemeteries were traditionally considered "holy ground" and thus inviolate to many supernatural beings. To represent this, treat churches and other places of worship as if they were dwellings, with clergy being their "occupants," even if they don't *live* there. Parishioners are treated as guests, unless they volunteer there frequently. Parsonages and rectories are usually treated as part of the church proper for the purposes of their Threshold Rating, but *can* have their own ratings at the GM's discretion.

Optionally, some natural places might have a Threshold without any (current and/or sapient) occupants, for whatever reason the GM likes. The GM picks the "heart" of a particular natural place and gives it a rating of 15 or more, while treating the surrounding area as if it were a

connected property (above). This could be generalized further, so that a specific *environment* has its own Threshold; e.g., rivers and other flowing bodies of water could prevent supernatural creatures from crossing them. The GM should restrict this to a few types of creature (e.g., vampires or ghosts) or add caveats (e.g., vampires cannot *physically* cross running water, but they can be carried over in a boat or other vehicle).

Even more radically, the GM could assume that certain *times* (day, night, dawn to dusk, etc.) have Thresholds. In such situations, the GM may decide a supernatural creature's lair is exempt from this and allow it to move freely – while inside. For example, the day could have a natural Threshold Rating of 20! None but the most powerful creatures of the night could be active during the day, with most being forced to stay wherever they were when the sun rose.

This protection only works for hostile magic cast *into* the dwelling or against it. This protects against all types of magic in the campaign setting. It might protect against other similar powers like psionics, chi abilities, etc.; this is completely at the GM's option.

Mages can use Threshold energy as a "matrix" within which they can cast their *own* magic (usually protective or defensive spells), to enhance the dwelling the Threshold surrounds. The exact effect of this depends on the type of magic. The GM can freely disallow *any* spell he feels inappropriate. For instance, a GM might allow a mage to cast the Armor spell (p. B253) on his cottage. The caster treats his effective skill with the spell as (skill + Threshold Rating) / 2 *and* treats the energy cost as if his skill were *five* levels higher than it actually is.

The GM should feel free to vary exact effects from creature to creature. An *excellent* example is in the movie *Let the Right One In*. In it, a young girl (a vampire) strikes up a friendship with a neighbor boy. After she reveals her nature, he seeks to test the theory by getting her to enter his apartment without actually inviting her. While she's hesitant to do so at first, she eventually shows him what happens to vampires who enter without permission: she begins to bleed from her ears, nose, eyes, and mouth! The GM doesn't have to have such dramatic examples, but variance between different supernatural creatures will definitely flesh out the setting.

A GM who feels that PCs are relying on their Threshold too much should either put them in situations where they *can't* rely on it, or work around the rules. For instance, the GM could have the monsters go on the defensive, forcing the PCs to come to *them*. An especially literal GM could even allow monsters to circumvent the need for an invitation by exploiting loopholes. In such games, PCs should never have welcome mats, meet the eyes of strangers, or actually invite anyone into their home but their closest allies . . .

Alternatively, he could let them rely on it as much as they like . . . Since the monsters *know* their limitations, they will attempt to get around them. In the recent 2011 remake of *Fright Night*, the film's antagonist vampire gets around being invited in by blowing up the house instead!

GET DRAC TO WHERE YOU ONCE BELONGED!

In some cultures, placing specific items (called *apotropes*) along the outside of a house, typically on doorways or windows, keeps evil at bay. In game terms, such items might modify a dwelling's Threshold Rating. To prevent knick-knack abuse, only the *largest* bonus works at any one time – though bonuses against specific supernatural intruders might stack with "general" bonuses to the Threshold Rating!

The following are some of the most common apotropes.

Bells (TL0)

Bells, like wind chimes (see below), can ward off spirits. When hung, they provide +1 to a dwelling's Threshold Rating against spirits or evil supernatural creatures that can hear them. As recently as the fourth century, church bells were also believed to repel all manner of faerie creatures.

Bells are usually made of metal (typically an alloy of bronze and tin), but can also be made of wood or glass. Statistics

assume a metal bell; glass versions are available at triple cost, weigh half as much, and are Brittle (p. B136), but are *twice* as effective (they can be heard at twice the distance and give +2 to the Threshold Rating). Wooden versions weigh half, cost half as much, and cannot be tuned.

Price, weight, and audibility range varies with each bell (see *GURPS Low-Tech*, p. 49, for more information on bells of different sizes). A 1"-tall bronze bell costs \$2, has an audibility range of four yards, and negligible weight. A 18"-tall bronze church bell costs \$2,500, has an audibility range of 64 yards, and weighs 113 lbs.! Before TL1, only untuned bells can be made. At TL1, quadruple the cost for a *tuned* bell; at TL2, double it.

*He hesitated on the threshold,
smiled at me, and said, "By your
invitation." Then he stepped inside
my house.*

*"That threshold thing really
works?" I asked.*

*His smile widened again,
this time I saw a glint of white.*

"Not after you've invited me in."

– Patricia Briggs, Blood Bound

Horseshoes (TL3)

A horseshoe hung over a doorway gives +1 to a dwelling's Threshold Rating against faeries and their ilk. This bonus may extend to witches and other "evil" magic workers at the GM's option. Horseshoes also grant +1 to *the building's* resistance rolls vs. accidental hazards (lightning strikes, falling trees, etc.) Bent iron nails hammered into the doorways, or railroad spikes placed over the doorjamb, function similarly but do not grant a bonus against accidental hazards.

Nails cost \$0.05 and weigh 0.02 lb. each, but at least 0.25 lb. of them are required to be effective. A horseshoe costs \$12.50 and weighs 1 lb.

Mirrors (TL3)

When placed on a doorjamb or in a doorway, a mirror can ward away curses, ghosts, and similar evil. This assumes a small handheld model, or a "witch ball" – a reflective sphere like a Christmas ornament, hung in windows or on gates. Each such mirror that's attached (up to two) provides +1 to the dwelling's Threshold Rating vs. harmful magic, spirits, and other supernatural creatures affected by reflective surfaces. More mirrors can serve as backups if others are broken . . . Optionally, for geomantic traditions such as *feng shui*, a single *bagua* mirror, hung above the doorway, "harmonizes" Threshold energy (+1).

Mirrors are Brittle (p. B136) and break if they take even a single HP of damage. At TL5 or higher, divide cost by three and weight becomes negligible. At TL7 or higher, non-Brittle, high-impact plastic mirrors become available. \$15, 1 lb.

Plants (TLO)

Many plants are attributed special powers or abilities. For example, garlic bulbs are supposed to drive away vampires. *Asafetida*, rosemary, or sage – when burned, planted, or dried and hung in doorways – are said to keep evil spirits and illness at bay. Fresh moly sprigs purportedly protect against all magic. Mistletoe was said to protect against supernatural beings that preyed specifically on men (e.g., succubi). A rowan branch wound with a red thread was supposed to protect against witches and demons. Most famously, a pumpkin, turnip, or beet carved with a frightening face (that is, a jack-o-lantern) was said to keep the dead at bay on Samhain.

Some plants might require a blessing or other outside influence to work. For instance, *palaspas* are decorative palm fronds sold on Palm Sunday in the Philippines. Blessed by a Catholic priest, they are said to ward off evil.

At least 1 lb. of the plant is required. This gives +1 to the Threshold Rating versus the supernatural creatures it's effective against. Price varies; for instance, garlic is \$0.50 per bulb (most wreathes have approximately 12 bulbs). Local plants can be found in the wild with three hours of searching and a successful Biology (Botany), Herb Lore, Naturalist, or Poisons roll. The GM might allow larger amounts of a plant to grant a larger bonus.

a similar manner but protects against “bad dreams.” A similar device of Arabic origin is a *hamsa*, which is a palm-shaped and has an eye in the middle. An even more ancient talisman is that of the Greek *gorgoneion*, a depiction of Medusa often found on doorways.

Some talismans might be painted on a structure. Examples include a pentangle (which provides protection from hostile magic) and the Chinese “door gods” (pictures of the Generals Qin Shubao and Yuchi Jingde, who served the second Tang Emperor of China and were said to chase away evil spirits).

Assume that a prominently displayed talisman provides +1 to the dwelling's Threshold Rating. This bonus is *doubled* if the occupants of the dwelling have an appropriate religious advantage, such as Blessed, Clerical Investment, or True Faith. The GM might wish to make this bonus *specific* to creatures affected by that particular religion. For instance, a *dyybuk* might be affected by a *mezuzah* or Star of David, but *not* a Catholic crucifix or Shinto *ofuda*.

Small paper and other similar “disposable” symbols cost \$2 and weight 0.1 lbs, but large ones cost \$20 and weigh 1 lbs. Large religious symbols cost \$50 and weigh 1 lb. Smaller handheld talismans cost \$5 and have a negligible weight. Carvings and statues cost whatever materials are used to create them. Weight depends on the material and size of the talisman; these are generally nonportable.

The Good, the Bad, and the Weird

The basic rules assume that Thresholds protect against the supernatural of all kind. But what about “good” vampires or “bad” angels? What about the eldritch entities of the Cthulhu mythos? The easiest method is to simply leave it as it is. If it's hostile and supernatural (and has the “Affected by Threshold” feature), then a Threshold might be able to stop it. Alternately, the GM could assign a different Threshold Rating against specific types of creatures. For example, a home might have a Threshold Rating of 15 vs. beings from Hell but a 5 against those aligned with Heaven.

Wind Chimes (TLO)

Constructed from tubes, rods, or similar objects suspended on a length of wire or string, chimes are said to ward off evil. They can be made of metal, wood, or glass. When hung where a breeze will strike them, they provide +1 to a dwelling's Threshold Rating against spirits or evil supernatural creatures that can hear them (up to two yards away). Multiple wind chimes do not stack, but *do* increase the range at which

they can be heard. Their Threshold bonus also extends to the dwelling's property (if applicable, p. 6).

Price and weight varies. A typical wooden wind chime might cost \$20 and weigh 1 lb. Metal wind chimes are double cost, weigh the same, but are more durable (DR 4). Glass wind chimes, like Japanese *fūrin*, cost five times as much, are half the weight, and Brittle (p. B136), but can be heard at twice the distance and give +2 to the Threshold Rating).

Salt (TLO)

Salt is a universal paranormal “purifier.” Lines of salt around all doors, windows, chimneys, etc. change a dwelling's Threshold Rating by +1 as long as the lines remain unbroken. Traditions vary as to how thick the line must be, but a fingernail's width is a common “measurement.” In some customs, ash, brick dust, and other esoteric powders serve the same purpose as salt and have identical statistics. \$4 per pound of edible salt (enough for about a three-yard line). At TL 4 or less this cost is doubled, and at TL 7 or higher, the cost is halved.

Talismans (TLO)

Various talisman are thought to ward against all manner of supernatural creatures. Common “talismans” were carvings or statues that were said to frighten off supernatural forces. Examples include foo dogs, foo lions, gargoyles, hunky punks, and sacred geometric or figure carvings. While most talismans are religious in nature, this's not always the case.

An example is the Turkish *nazar* (typically made of colored glass), which is used to ward off the evil eye and bad luck. A Native American device, the dreamcatcher, works in

Decorated Apotropes

All of the above assumes that non-perishable items are “plainly decorated.” The GM may allow quality (p. B345) to affect the bonus granted to the Threshold, but require that the cost modifier also affect the *weight* of the object. So a Good-quality crucifix might give +2 to a Threshold's rating, but would cost \$250 and weigh 5 lbs!

The GM may permit decorated items (see *GURPS Low-Tech*, pp. 37-39) to provide a similar bonus. Treat each +1 reaction bonus as +1 to the Threshold Rating. This bonus might be restricted to items that have been decorated “appropriately.” For instance, silver, obsidian, hematite, and chalcidony were thought to ward off evil spirits and bad luck.

Paranormal Presence

Powerful supernatural creatures might bolster a dwelling's Threshold (+1 to +3 or more) simply by *being* there. The GM

will have to decide exactly how this works in his campaign, but guardian angels, household gods, and the like are especially common in fiction. The GM could require the PCs purchase these beings as Allies (p. B36) or Patrons (p. B72).

I don't like the dark here, it keeps eating my pencils.

– Paul, in *Darkness*

MADNESS IN THE FLOORBOARDS

What happens when a Threshold is *damaged* (a rating of 6 or less)? A place that was once a refuge becomes a threat. A place that once had happy memories suddenly becomes a reminder of past sorrows. A place that once offered shelter from the elements becomes a prison. Maybe *nothing* terrible happened in a given location; it was always “bad.”

In short, *you get a haunted house.*

Whenever an occupied dwelling's Threshold Rating permanently falls below 6 (not from temporary modifiers, see p. 5), strange things begin to happen. First, the Threshold's protection dissipates. The once beneficial energy begins to collapse in on itself. This “folding” effect acts as a beacon to supernatural beings (*especially* intangible monsters like ghosts or demons), who flock to it like moths to a flame. To simulate the odd effects such a place has on the average human, treat this as a penalty to certain rolls: rolls to resist supernatural abilities, Fright Checks, self-control rolls, rolls to resist Corruption (*Horror*, p. 146), etc.

This penalty is equal to -1 for a TR of 5 or 6, -2 for a TR of 3 or 4, -3 for a TR of 1 or 2, -4 for a TR of -1 or 0, and so on, with no cap! Dwellings with negative TRs tend to unhinge their occupants.

Furthermore, most dwellings with a damaged Threshold are also *Bad Places* (*Horror*, p. 77). To determine if a dwelling with a damaged Threshold becomes a Bad Place, use the following table.

Bad-Place Conversion Table

| Roll* | Result |
|---------------|--|
| 5 or less | Increase the Threshold Rating by 1 as souls move on, dark energies dissipate, etc. |
| 6-15 | Nothing happens. |
| 16 or higher† | Dwelling becomes a Bad Place. |

* The GM should roll on this table once per century for Threshold Ratings of 6, once per decade for ratings of 4 or 5, once per year for ratings of 2 or 3, and once per *month* for 1 or less.

† On a natural roll of 18, the dwelling *also* becomes self-aware. Sometimes a Threshold is so damaged that the very *house* comes alive, given “birth” by the fractured energy. These malevolent spirits are best represented by the *genius loci* template (see *Horror*, p. 79).

THIS HOUSE IS CLEAN

A dwelling with a damaged Threshold can be a dangerous place. To make it safe again, the Threshold must be “cleansed.” This usually involves a religious ritual or magical spell to “cast out” the evil there. A default ritual to cleanse a Threshold takes (20 - TR) × 15 minutes.

Cleansing requires a Quick Contest of Exorcism vs. (20 - TR). If the exorcist wins, increase TR by *half* the margin of victory (round down), minimum 1; this cannot raise the Threshold Rating above 10. If his roll was also a critical success, increase TR by the full margin of victory (minimum 2, no maximum) instead, *and* all supernatural beings in the dwelling must roll against the new Threshold Rating as if their invitation had been revoked. If he fails the roll *or* ties *or* loses the Contest, he may try again in a week, but at a cumulative -1. Critical failure reduces the TR by 1, requires an immediate roll on the *Bad-Place Conversion Table* (above),

and everyone within suffers the effects of the *Fright Check Table* (p. B360) – roll 3d+(10-TR)!

If the TR is raised to 7+, the Threshold is no longer damaged. If the location was a Bad Place, it becomes normal again.

During the ritual, all supernatural beings in the dwelling can sense what's happening and may harry, attack, or otherwise hamper the person performing the cleansing! If he's stopped before the ritual is complete, he must make a Will roll (or Exorcism, if higher). Success means he can continue. Failure means he must start over again. Critical failure means he must wait a week as if he failed (see above).

When trying to cleanse a dwelling that has become sentient (see *Bad-Place Conversion Table*, above), use the normal rules for Exorcism (p. B193), but the spirit gets a bonus to all Will rolls to resist, equal to (10 - TR). Once the spirit is gone, the exorcist may then attempt to restore the damaged Threshold (as above), with +2 to his skill.

EXISTING DISADVANTAGES

The following disadvantages pertain to Thresholds.

Dread

see pp. B133-132

Use Dread (Threshold Energy) for someone who cannot come near a dwelling protected by a Threshold.

*As our bodies may sicken,
so do our houses sicken. And what
of madness? If mad people live within,
doesn't this creep into the rooms . . .
and walls and corridors? The very
boards? Don't we sometimes sense
that madness reaching out to us?
Isn't that a large part of what we
mean when we say . . . a place is
unquiet, festered up with spirits?
We say haunted . . . but we mean
the house has gone insane.*

– Dr. Joyce Reardon, in
Stephen King's Rose Red

Supernatural Features

see p. B157

The following is a new option for this disadvantage.

Portents/Omens/Signs: Your mere presence causes the world around you to “wobble,” creating noticeable fluctuations in reality that can be used to detect you! This disadvantage is usually possessed by supernatural creatures (or *maybe* very powerful humans, like Merlin or Baba Yaga). The level depends on how subtle the effect is:

Trivial: Only someone who knows what to look for would notice it; e.g., you cause mushrooms to spring up in or around where you live. Anyone aware of this effect has +1 to notice it and associate it with you. *-1 point.*

Minor: A subtle effect; e.g., you bring a slight chill with you wherever you live or visit. Anyone making the connection reacts to you at -1 and has +1 to deduce your secret. *-5 points.*

Moderate: A more noticeable effect; e.g., many ghosts (especially *genius loci*) cause flickering lights or brownouts, along with sudden static on radios and TVs. As above, but -2 to reactions and +2 to deductions. *-10 points.*

Severe: A truly obvious effect; e.g., you may cause lightning storms, crop failures, pestilence, or drought wherever

you live or visit. As above, but -4 to reactions and +4 to deductions. *-20 points.*

Susceptible

see p. B158

The Susceptible disadvantage can be used to represent a creature or race's acute weakness to a particular apotrope. The GM can also use this trait for paranormal sensitivities, exchanging HT for Will rolls. For instance, if all vampires must make a roll vs. Will or suffer 1d HP per minute they're in sunlight, a vampire with Susceptible 3 (Sunlight) must make the same roll, but at -3!

Further, a new variation of this disadvantage is available: Susceptible (Rare). This is a disadvantage worth -1 point per level *per* -2 on HT or Will rolls.

Being Susceptible to Threshold energy is considered an Occasional condition in most campaigns and Rare in others. The GM might consider traits such as Divine Curse (Cannot enter dwelling for first time unless invited) [-10] as 10 equivalent levels of Susceptible (Threshold Energy). This might make it impossible for such creatures to enter a home uninvited.

Weakness

see p. B161

Some creatures might be so vulnerable to Threshold energy that they actually take *damage* if they come in contact with it. Treat Threshold energy as an Occasional weakness in most campaigns and Rare in others. Many creatures with this disadvantage also have one of the following new special modifiers.

New Special Enhancement

Quickened: Each level of this trait halves the intervals between when you take damage. For example, Weakness (Sunlight; 1d/minute), modified with a level of this trait, means a character takes 1d HP of damage every 30 seconds, not every minute. It's otherwise identical to the Reduced Time enhancement (p. B107). *+20%/level.*

New Special Limitation

Resistible: You can resist the effects of your weakness! Whenever exposed to your weakness, roll against HT or Will (chosen when you take this limitation). Success means you take *no* damage, while failure results in normal damage. You can also add +1 to the roll, but this increases this limitation by -10% per +1, with a maximum bonus of +5. *-50%.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice lives in a home his family has owned for three generations – so . . . no vampires allowed. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he dreams of being able to write full-time, or at least eke out a living doing it. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group; Christian Gelacio and Troy Loy for their unique viewpoints; Antoni Ten Monros; Beth “Archangel” McCoy, the “Sith Editrix”; Douglas Cole; Emily “Bruno” Smirle; and Matt Riggsby, for being most excellent sounding boards.

TRAITS FOR TOWN

BY SEAN PUNCH

For many gamers, “urban fantasy” evokes wonders hidden beneath the surface of a superficially realistic world, hinting at fairy tales unfolding behind the wainscot. *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy*, by stark contrast, is *in your face* – it’s all about hacking and slashing through dungeons, monster-infested mountain ranges, and haunted forests. Reconciling these styles is made even more difficult by the fact that *Dungeon Fantasy* simplifies all social traits to Wealth, which exists solely to help fence stolen goods (well, *loot*) while visiting town . . . which itself is little more than a place to sell booty, buy gear, and hear rumors of even richer treasures that you’ll need more and better gear to obtain.

In a campaign with more going on in town, the GM may wish to let PCs purchase a greater range of social traits. After all, how can one have a princess to rescue from orcs, or a high priest to collect donations at the temple, without some way of explaining what the titles mean? And many a delver would like to know how to join the Town Watch or the King’s men, who apparently run town with an iron fist (or at least a couple of iron swords). When urban fantasy runs into the dungeon kind, heroes need to know where they stand. Striking a balance between civilized parts and the dungeon calls for a little rethinking, though.

First, some quick-and-dirty definitions:

Academy, brotherhood, clan, guild, order, and related terms describe “professional” organizations for delvers. Most artificers, assassins, elementalists, innkeepers, thieves, and wizards belong to guilds; barbarians, ninja, and shamans are organized along clan lines; bards, clerics, druids, holy warriors, and martial artists are invested in orders; demonologists, mentalists, necromancers, and often scouts have (secret) brotherhoods; scholars, and bookish clerics and wizards, form academies; and knights, swashbucklers, and otherwise-unaffiliated assassins, barbarians, martial artists, and scouts end up in a “Mercenaries’ Guild.” The salient feature is access to profession-specific training and gear.

Town means a population center, from the customary out-sized fantasy village (the sort with pubs and shops, like a lot of historical market towns) on up to a stinking metropolis (similar to Ankh-Morpork or Lankhmar) – what matters most is that it supports a Town Watch. Delvers of every stripe can find their organizations there, but this doesn’t imply *distinct* facilities. A single “Magic Shoppe” may cater to demonologists, elementalists, necromancers, scholars, and wizards alike; a temple could be consecrated to not one god but an entire pantheon, and welcome most clerics and holy warriors; and “headquarters” for

barbarians, druids, and scouts might be a Gypsy-like camp in the old oak grove. Each town is unique, with a name of the GM’s choosing. Most contain members of many races but are dominated by a single race. A town collects enough taxes to reward adventurers who solve local problems, such as base-ment cults and alligator-infested sewers.

Kingdom refers to a land in which all the towns are ruled by the same sovereign – by default, the King – who is served by a formidable force of ex-delvers and professional troubleshooters known colloquially as “the King’s men” (who make Town Watches look namby-pamby). Most kingdoms are dominated by one race, although the racial mix in individual towns often diverges (more elves near forests, more dwarves near mountains, etc.). A kingdom is home to many brotherhoods, guilds, and orders that keep “national” records on who holds what rank and is a member in good standing. It is crisscrossed by trade routes sufficiently robust to keep prices stable, and collects enough taxes to offer lucrative rewards to heroes who rescue princesses, defeat zombie legions, and end evil wizards’ dreams of conquest.

Claim to Hospitality

see p. B41

As explained on p. 16 of *Dungeon Fantasy 11*, this advantage allows the adventurer to roll 14 or less to locate members of his group while in town. Success lets him stay with his colleague for up to a week, saving the \$150 cost of living (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 4). Roll again weekly. Critical failure means the *hero* must provide aid, paying a professional colleague’s cost of living for the week as well as his own. The delver may also ask for small favors – being hidden while hunted, a short-term loan of up to \$100, etc. – but this calls for a reaction roll at +3, scoring at least a Good reaction. Refusing to reciprocate, causing property damage, or defaulting on loans can cost the adventurer his advantage.

This normally benefits one delver. However, a reaction of “Good” or better – this time *without* the +3 – extends the hospitality to one associate in the same or a similar profession. This means a fellow wizard, or maybe a scholar or an elemental, for a wizard; another cleric, or a holy warrior of the same faith, for a cleric; and so on.

Claim to Hospitality costs 1 point for a single inn, safe house, temple, etc. in one particular town; 5 points for an entire clan, guild, order, etc. that has tendrils in every town in one kingdom; or 10 points for hospitality that spans kingdoms (e.g., “thieves’ guilds the world over”).

Legal Enforcement Powers

see p. B65

Two levels of “police powers” exist in *Dungeon Fantasy*:

Town Watchman: You’re authorized to search and arrest lawbreakers in one specific town. This doesn’t grant the right to commit crimes! It mostly means that you have a job that pays your \$150/week living expenses – no dice rolls required – as long as you forgo crafting and other “town” activities that the GM feels would be full-time work. However, you can replace bumming, busking, and haranguing (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 4) with shaking down crooks for fines; use the same rules, but roll against the *highest* of Fast-Talk, Intimidation, Streetwise, or a suitable weapon skill, treating the other skills as complementary. You may carry arms and armor appropriate to Status 2 (p. 14) in service to the town. Finally, when the town has a quest to offer (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 4), you hear about it automatically. *5 points.*

King’s Man: You enjoy the above powers in all the towns of an entire kingdom! You can also requisition food and fodder when travelling in the realm, even when en route to private dungeon raids; thus, you can reduce the cost of rations to just what you need for the dungeon (though you must still carry the weight of the free supplies). See also *Travel* (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 5). You may carry arms and armor befitting Status 2 anywhere in the kingdom when you’re on duty. If the kingdom has a quest to offer, you learn of it automatically. Lastly, you get a snazzy surcoat (\$350, 0.5 lb.) that’s blue with silver fleurs-de-lis, red with golden lions rampant, etc. *15 points.*

You cannot have Legal Enforcement Powers *and* Social Stigma (Criminal Record). If you acquire the latter, you lose the former.

Criminal Record?

As *Scum and Villainy* (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 4) notes, somebody who plays free and easy with the law can end up branded a criminal. The GM decides when this becomes permanent, but “three strikes” works well: It’s temporary the first two times, the -2 applying only on *that* visit to town, but becomes permanent the third time, as Social Stigma (Criminal Record). After that point, spellcasters will be able to detect this status through spells like Aura, and a visible brand, tattoo, magical mark, or similar will warn everyone else. Members of the offender’s clan, guild, etc. will catch wind of his misdeeds (or of his clumsiness at getting caught, if a thief) and become hesitant to deal with him. While there won’t be a dossier in a file cabinet in most fantasy settings, he *will* acquire a record in every way that matters.

Legal Immunity

see p. B65

Two levels of immunity exist in *Dungeon Fantasy*, too:

Local Bigwig: For whatever reason – you’re the mayor’s brother, you saved the burg from orcs, you’re a scion of the founding family, etc. (explain it!) – you enjoy immunity in one specific town. Critical failure while shopping or selling on the black market there is treated as mere failure; failure at shoplifting, cheating, or pickpocketing results in no consequences worse than “no material gain”; and sauntering around

over-armed for your Status (pp. 13-14) leads to nothing worse than being escorted home to put away the hardware. Getting caught at these crimes, or even betraying a local quest sponsor, won’t trigger the effects of *Scum and Villainy* (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 4). You still can’t debase coin safely. *5 points.*

Royal Favor: You enjoy the above privileges in all the towns of a kingdom, and may treat even critical failure at debasing coin as mere failure. Explain why this is: You saved the King’s life, you’re a super-secret agent whose *job* is testing the law (complete with a Royal Writ making you the covert-ops equivalent of a King’s man), etc. *15 points.*

Those with Legal Immunity can’t also have Social Stigma (Criminal Record). The 5-point version goes away if that Stigma is somehow acquired, while the 15-point version grants immunity to acquiring it!

Rank

see p. B29

You hold a privileged position within your guild, order, etc. Each profession has its own variety of Rank, which the GM should rename for flavor; wizards are conservative, and might go with “Wizardly Rank,” but barbarians may literally have a pole with clan totems carved on it, making “Pole Length” entirely sensible (to them). In formal groups, this accompanies a public title. In clans, it’s like Status (pp. 13-14) relevant only to kinfolk. In secret scout societies, sinister underground necromancer cults, and so on, it’s about being recognized on sight. Whatever it’s called, it costs the usual 5 points/level.

When dealing with that group, add Rank to skill rolls to engage them as a sponsor for a quest (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 4), to reaction rolls for *Negotiation* (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 10), and to skill rolls for any ensuing deal-making.

Also increase effective Wealth by steps equal to Rank when fencing loot of interest to that group (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, pp. 14-15). Finally, subtract 10% per level from the training expenses for acquiring that profession’s abilities (*Dungeon Fantasy 3*, p. 43 and *Dungeon Fantasy 11*, p. 8); 5% per level from the cost of anything the GM deems to be professional goods (see *Professional Discounts*, p. 13); and 5% per level from the pay rate of hirelings the GM agrees match the hirer’s profession under *Niche Substitution* (*Dungeon Fantasy 15*, p. 5). The maximum discount is 80% off.

Example: A Poor thief with Guild Rank 5 would enjoy +5 to convince Guild scum not to rob his group, or to persuade the Guild to back a mission; fence goods to thieves as if Very Wealthy; pay 50% tuition for training at thief power-ups; buy thieves’ tools at 25% off; and retain cutpurses and burglars (and possibly agents and treasure-hunters) for 25% less.

Reputation

see p. B26

Reputation enhances all reaction rolls – for *Negotiation* (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 10), selling loot (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, pp. 14-15), all the purposes described in *Dungeon Fantasy 10* (learning information, stopping brawls, and so on), and Claim to Hospitality (p. 11). It doesn’t influence the reaction rolls noted for conjured or summoned creatures in *Dungeon Fantasy 5* or *9*.

Professional Discounts

Literate delvers can claim their Rank (p. 12) discount on manuals (*Dungeon Fantasy 4*, pp. 13-14) for skills on their templates. If a skill requires tools, those get the discount, too. The guild or clan might sell *entire loadouts* from *Dungeon Fantasy 13* at this discount – but only as sets, without substitutions. In addition:

Artificers: Chemicals, magic potions, special-order gadgets and adventure-wear (e.g., *Dungeon Fantasy 4*, p. 12); anything with “alchemy” or “alchemist’s” in its name.

*Assassins**: Blowpipes (and darts), crossbows (and bolts), garrotes, knives, poisons, traps.

Barbarians: Two-handed melee weapons that require ST 12+, partial armor (*Dungeon Fantasy 13*, p. 8), any weapon or armor for a SM +1 user.

Bards†: Manuals (all kinds!), maps, musical instruments.

Clerics†: Healer’s kits, holy symbols and holy symbol weapons (*Dungeon Fantasy 7*, p. 33), holy water (“stacks” with the basic -50%); any special gear pertinent to their order (*Dungeon Fantasy 7*, p. 34).

Demonologists†: Anything with “demon” or “demon’s” in its name; knives and swords matching the summoner’s Slayer Training (*Dungeon Fantasy 9*, p. 7).

Druids†: Camouflage (*Dungeon Fantasy 13*, p. 25), healer’s kits, natural preparations (*Dungeon Fantasy 1*, p. 28 and *Dungeon Fantasy 8*, pp. 36-37).

Elementalists†: Anything clearly linked to the elements (e.g., alchemist’s matches for fire, true water potions for water); gems.

Holy Warriors: Holy symbols and holy symbol weapons, holy water, garlic, wolfsbane, silver weapons. Treat *unholy* warriors as assassins.

*Innkeepers**: Beverages, rations, spices, cookware (*Dungeon Fantasy 8*, p. 14), wagons (*Dungeon Fantasy 13*, p. 5); anything (drink, food, shelter) ordered at an inn (*Dungeon Fantasy 10*), for himself or anybody he favors.

Knights: Axes, broadswords, flails, lances, maces, polearms, and spears; crossbows, bolts, and quivers; shields and metal armor. For samurai-themed knights,

replace this with katanas, spears, bows, etc. Either can get cut-rate cavalry horses or warhorses (*Dungeon Fantasy 13*, p. 5).

Martial Artists: Brass knuckles and similar fist weapons; kusaris, nunchaku, quarterstaves, sais, shuriken, tonfas; other “martial arts” weapons the GM deems fitting (e.g., *Dungeon Fantasy 12*, p. 14);

Mentalists: Psi-related gear (*Dungeon Fantasy 14*, pp. 23-27); any item bought specially to replace a current power item with a higher-capacity one; anything intended as a new Psychic Replica (*Dungeon Fantasy 14*, p. 14).

Necromancers†: Knives or swords matching the summoner’s Slayer Training; poisons.

Ninja: Covert ops and security gear (*Dungeon Fantasy 1*, p. 25), poisons, non-artifact-grade ninja gear (*Dungeon Fantasy 12*, pp. 12-17).

Scholars: Manuals (all kinds!), maps, scholarly gear (*Dungeon Fantasy 4*, p. 12), scrolls, writing equipment (ink, paper, etc.).

Scouts: Bows (and arrows and quivers), camouflage, camping and survival gear (*Dungeon Fantasy 1*, p. 23), maps, telescopes.

Shamans†: Healer’s kits, natural preparations, anything intended as a new Spirit Weapon (*Dungeon Fantasy 9*, p. 5).

Swashbucklers: Bucklers, cloaks, knives, one-handed swords.

*Thieves**: Camouflage, covert ops and security gear, ladders, ropes, thieves’ mail.

Wizards†: Magic potions, mass-produced magic items from p. 30 of *Dungeon Fantasy 1* (only!).

* For these professions, purchases on the black market (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 4) use the *better* of 10% off or Rank discount.

† Spellcasters get their discount on scrolls and spellbooks for their profession (*Dungeon Fantasy 4*, pp. 13-16), any item bought specially to replace a current power item with a higher-capacity one (maximum one item per visit to town), and power-item recharges.

Base point cost is unchanged. In one town (a small class), the cost multiplier is 1/3; in an entire kingdom (a large class), it’s 1/2; and for everyone you meet, pay full cost. The third and broadest level is identical to the Hero power-up on p. 16 of *Dungeon Fantasy 11*.

Status

see p. B28

Fancy titles are especially tricky to justify for errant delvers. In *Dungeon Fantasy*, the most practical benefits have to do with bearing arms and armor on urban adventures – and the fact that “blood will tell.” Cost is 5 points/level, as usual.

Status 0: Delvers cannot fall below this level – although those with clan Rank rarely rise above it, dancing to a different drum as they do. Adventurers may be seen as smelly, ragged

menaces to society, but they possess the abilities of potential heroes and thus the physical or magical capacity to escape or strike back if oppressed (this is true even for 125-pointers created using *Dungeon Fantasy 15*). They cannot run around town *armed*, though – permitted weapons there are daggers, small and large knives, and quarterstaves. Armor is allowed, but metal armor hints that the wearer is looking for trouble, and is also off-limits. Those who break the law by carrying heavier weapons or armor are subject to *Scum and Villainy* (*Dungeon Fantasy 2*, p. 4).

Status 1: A gentleman of sorts, somebody at this stratum may legally traipse around town with one or two long knives, rapiers, sabers, shortswords, or smallswords hanging off his belt. He can wear metal armor in town, but no heavier than DR 4 mail – and if he goes that far, he’ll be mocked unless there’s a war going on (-2 to all reaction rolls).

Who Gets What?

From a character-improvement perspective, not all social traits make equally sensible “power-ups” for all adventurers. Anybody might be able to call upon friends or extended family (Claim to Hospitality), advance in his vocation (Rank), or inspire admiration for his adventures (Reputation). However, the GM may opt to restrict other advantages as follows:

Legal Enforcement Powers: Knights, martial artists, swashbucklers, and even barbarians are often hired as enforcers at either level. Assassins and thieves can possess either level, too – but that puts them in the pay of the law, disqualifying them for Rank. Few scouts will sit around town, and the GM may rule that they can only be King’s men (“Rangers”). Clerics and holy warriors rarely possess this trait outside of a theocracy; however, clergy of city gods (*Dungeon Fantasy 7*, pp. 11-12) are sometimes Town Watch.

Legal Immunity: Almost everybody can have either level – including assassins, demonologists, necromancers, and thieves, who often work hard to acquire it! However, barbarians, druids, and shamans are tied to communities, and lack the social connections to move beyond the 5-point version. Conversely, scouts (who avoid towns) and ninja (who glide between towns like the wind) can have only the 15-point version, which makes them royal spies.

Status: Successful artificers and innkeepers can achieve up to Status 1. Gentlemanly bards and swashbucklers might have up to Status 2. In most fantasy societies, some combination of clerics (or even druids or shamans, where they’re the prevailing holy folk), demonologists, elementalists, holy warriors, knights, mentalists, necromancers, scholars, and wizards are the “ruling classes,” and can boast any Status, while the others on that list are “trusted advisors” at best, limited to Status 2. This detail is up to the GM, and varies by kingdom. Other professions reject froufrou Status in favor of Rank.

Tenure: Artificers, clerics, demonologists, elementalists, mentalists, necromancers, scholars, and wizards often belong to academies. Some game worlds have academies for bards and druids, too – GM’s decision.

A Monster’s Life for Me

Most fantasy societies are racist (or to be precise, “speciesist”). Status 1+ is off-limits for the races listed in *A Monster’s Life* (*Dungeon Fantasy 3*, p. 11): coleopterans, corpse-eaters, gargoyles, goblin-kin, half-ogres, minotaurs, ogres, reptilians, and trolls. The same goes for 15-point Legal Enforcement Powers or Legal Immunity, or any Reputation broader than “in one town” – a town might appreciate a monster’s qualities, but a kingdom won’t. The GM can make exceptions for coleopterans in the Hive Lands, goblin-kin in the Orc Khanate, etc.

Status 2: This level befits a genuine knight. *All* weapons and armor are fine, even in town – but mockery (-2 to all reactions) will ensue for going beyond a gentleman’s arms and armor in peacetime. The GM may specify that some magic items require a “knightly” user and only work for people with Status 2+. At this level, ignore the \$150/week to live in one specific town.

Status 3-5: These levels suit nobility. Treat them as Status 2 for bearing arms – but there’s no danger of mockery, even when visiting the pub in plate armor with a halberd in hand. At Status 3+, ignore the \$150/week to live in town while you’re in any town

in a given kingdom. Being of truly noble blood has two further benefits. First, potent artifacts that call for a “noble” user will function for you. Second, “blood will tell”; *in any town in your kingdom*, add Status-2 as a bonus in all Quick Contests against living people who are physically in your presence; e.g., a thief who attempts to pick the pocket of a Status 5 duke must beat the duke’s Vision+3 with Pickpocket, while an evil wizard would find his Charm spell resisted by the duke’s Will+3. There’s no effect in wilderness, dungeons, or faraway barbarian lands; against undead, demons, inanimate traps, and similar threats that aren’t truly alive; or on uncontested rolls.

Status 6-8: These levels indicate royalty. Treat them as Status 3-5 for bearing arms and ignoring living costs. Status 6+ also lets you wield relics that demand a “princely” user, while Status 7+ lets you use ones that require a “kingly” wielder. And “blood will tell” (as above) *anywhere in your kingdom*, even outside of town. Add Status/2, rounded down, as a bonus in all Quick Contests against living people in your presence there. Thus, a Status 6-7 prince or king has +3 to beat others in his lands – in town or not – and a Status 8 emperor gets +4. This *still* doesn’t matter in faraway barbarian lands, though, or against ancient undead, falling rocks, or other impersonal dangers.

Status in *Dungeon Fantasy* isn’t boosted by Rank or Wealth, doesn’t guarantee fancy duds or digs, and doesn’t use the standard rules for cost of living – in fact, ignore *Cost of Living* (pp. B265-266). Your holdings aren’t liquid assets, and while they pay whatever costs your station might demand, they don’t give you cash in excess of that. If you’re set on being rich, then buy Wealth, too.

Tenure

see p. B93

Spellcasters and sages can belong to obscure academies instead of or as well as their usual guilds. The upshot is a place to stay in the town where the institution is based (yet another way to avoid the \$150/week cost of living, equivalent to a 1-point Claim to Hospitality) *and* the benefit of the doubt. Such people are expected to be little wonky, and until they actually commit a crime involving demons, poison, or the Dark Ritual of Calling and Binding the Squid-Lord, they can learn about and work with such matters freely, up to and including filling their cellar with zombies. In effect, this is 5-point Legal Immunity in one town, specifically for the purpose of occult machinations.

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. . . and the list keeps growing. He lives in Montréal, Québec with his wife.

EIDETIC MEMORY

BELIAL'S BASTARDS

BY DAVID L. PULVER

Motorcycles and outlaw bikers have long been a staple of urban-fantasy literature, whether they're a mechanical Wild Hunt, a motorized werewolf pack, elf punk bikers, or modernized knights or valkyries who traded in their horses for Harleys. Belial's Bastards is one such organization, a fictional supernatural motorcycle club inspired by the history of real-world outlaw bikers and by movies and television dramas like the recent *Sons of Anarchy* cable series.

The club's background assumes a modern-day urban-fantasy setting with a wide variety of supernatural beings, including elves (or other faerie folk), vampires, and lycanthropes, either existing in secret or recently revealed to the world. The location of the town they're set in has been left vague, and its name could easily be changed to any other location in the United States. With a few minor alterations, the club could also be based in a different country.

Belial's Bastards aren't very nice people, but they could have worse enemies. The club could take the role of a campaign's villains, allies, or an organization the PCs could join.

The winged Death Head is the Hells Angels' proud emblem: an angry-looking skull with a helmet and feathers streaming behind him. It's frightening – as it's meant to be . . .

– William Marsden and Julian Sher,
Angels of Death

HISTORY OF THE MC

Belial's Bastards are an outlaw motorcycle club (MC) that was founded by two World War II vets: the American necromancer Israel Sawyer and Welsh vampire Owen Madoc. Both were avid motorcyclists.

Madoc was a Mosquito night fighter pilot in the Royal Air Force whose habit of only flying at night – coupled with

perfect night vision – served him well in the skies over Europe. (He was not the only vampire night fighter pilot; in fact, he even met another, the *nosferatu* ace Reinhold von Richter – the legendary “Black Bat of Berlin” – in an epic midnight duel). Although peerless in the night skies, Madoc was nearly undone when a family of lethally mischievous gremlins infested his squadron's air base (at RAF Wrexham), causing several fatal crashes, which he escaped by turning into mist. However, similar problems had recently afflicted a U.S. Army Air Force unit, and the Yanks generously dispatched a troubleshooter to provide assistance.

This was Staff Sergeant Israel Sawyer, a roguish Ozarks hexworker whose spirit-binding talents had been pressed into service by desperate Army brass. He roared up to the base riding a customized Harley-Davidson WLA. Perched behind him on the saddle was another “asset” he had found – Morwenna Jones, a Woman's Auxiliary Air Force mechanic barely out of her teens, who was also a local witch with a trace of faerie blood. Recognizing each other as fellow supernaturals, the trio together made short work of the gremlin problem. Afterward, they discovered a shared interest in fast motorcycles, hard liquor, black magic, and each other. Madoc got a bit too enthusiastic, and Morwenna died of blood loss, but came back as a vampire three days later.

A few years after the war's end, Morwenna and Madoc decided they had no interest in spending their eternity in dreary postwar Britain. In 1959, they shipped themselves over the pond to America, eventually tracking down Sawyer. He was living at Jerusalem Mills, a small mountain town where he owned a junkyard and garage (the Jerusalem Salvage Lot), and honed his necromantic skills while working as an enforcer for local crooks. The business soon became a nexus for local supernatural beings with a shared interest in mechanical mayhem. Thanks to zombie labor, it was rather profitable. Over the next decade, the trio became involved in the nascent outlaw motorcycle culture of the 1960s, but for obvious reasons, they found themselves a poor fit for existing chapters. In 1965, they founded their own motorcycle club, which Sawyer named Belial's Bastards.

It soon earned a reputation for brutal violence, Satanic orgies fuelled by massive drug use, and wild midnight runs in which the club's ranks were often swelled by skeletal undead bikers that Sawyer's growing magic had animated from dead friends or foes.

Like several other outlaw bikers, the club drifted into a variety of criminal activities, chiefly drugs, gun running, and local racketeering. They also took contract work as enforcers and hitmen for more ambitious supernatural beings. The motorcycle club fought pitched battles with rival mundane groups, but they had few challenges until the rise of a rival supernatural biker club, the Rabid Mongrels. The werewolves met the Bastards in the "Battle of Wolf Lake" in 1984, which killed several members on both sides. During the 1990s, further violence followed after a Mexican vampire club, the Cloud Serpents, moved into the area.

Then their fortunes changed. Morwenna received word from relatives in Wales that the truce between the Unseelie and Seelie courts was braking down, and war seemed imminent. Due to Morwenna's faerie connections, the Bastards found a lucrative sideline of running guns into faerieland, a tricky process involving a number of magical gates and dangerous cycle runs escorting vanloads of guns and ammo through the extradimensional borderlands to faerie strongholds like Caer Cidi or Tir Na Nog. Payment (faerie gold being what it is) was taken in magic items, elixirs, and powerstones, which the Bastards kept or resold to wealthy clients.

PATCH

The club member's patch is a bat-winged skull impaled by an ornate knife along with the legend *Belial's Bastards MC* and below it *Jerusalem Mills Originals*. Members (patchholders) wear the patch on their colors (denim vests) and also tattooed on their backs. A few daughter chapters of the club have been founded by members who have moved away; these have the local chapter name below it. Prospective members just have a temporary patch that says "Prospect."

Full-member patches are enchanted to provide its wearer with DR 4 vs. piercing (any type) of damage only; this is cumulative with any armor. Daughter chapters may or may not have enchanted patches.

The ink used in patchholder tattoos is an exchanged faerie compound; the skull and knife are both magical.

The Knife: This aspect is useful if members are imprisoned, etc., and need a surprise weapon. By spending 2 energy (FP, etc.) and a one second Concentrate and then Ready maneuver, the member can reach behind his back and pull out the knife. It is a very fine quality large knife. It will remain for one minute (but can be maintained by spending a further 1 energy per minute). If broken, it can still be summoned again.

The Skull: If a club member dies (with his body mostly intact), this tattoo will animate him two seconds later as a zombie programmed to obey the orders of members (in order of seniority). The GM may decide that significant damage to the back of the torso will destroy the tattoo first, preventing reanimation.

ORGANIZATION

Belial's Bastards is not a huge motorcycle club, but despite being some 45 years old in 2013, it is remarkably stable, largely because its original founders are functionally immortal. Madoc and his "old lady," Morwenna, stay young in body due to their vampirism. Israel Sawyer, despite having no wish to become undead, sustains his life by necromantically draining captive enemies or unwary lovers of their youth on a regular basis. Also, while Sawyer never married, a few decades worth of girlfriends and one-night stands have produced multiple offspring, some of whom are in the MC.

The club has a formal hierarchy identical to that of mundane motorcycle gangs. Like these, the group also functions as a somewhat dysfunctional extended family.

It has a dozen active "patched" members plus several more retired members and wannabee prospects. Patched members attend and vote in club meetings and, if a position is open, can serve on the club's executive. All members must contribute at least \$100 a month as club dues. Except in lean months, patchholders receive a cut of the club's profits from its various enterprises. Typical profits are about 3d-5 × \$500 per month.

The club holds regular meetings that all patchholders must attend. The Bastards are theoretically a democracy – every patched member gets a vote on significant issues. In practice, the officers are sufficiently respected or feared that what they say goes, and will serve until they opt to retire.

The club has a number of bylaws common to most MCs. All patchholders in good standing must own and be able to ride a motorcycle. All must be supernatural beings or mages. Due some prejudices of its founders, the club bylaws don't allow demons, angels, ghosts, or weres ("beasts") to be patchholders.

Leaving the club is discouraged. Anyone doing so with the club's permission will have their memory magically erased. Anyone running will be hunted down and killed.

As in most MCs, newbies are called "prospects," prospective members of the club who have yet to earn their patch. In the Bastards, most are members of the town's occult or biker community, or individuals with family or friendship ties to existing members. Due to the club's otherworld connections, they also include occasional visitors from faerieland connected to Morwenna's elven kindred. A prospects' job is to hang around and follow orders. They have no voting rights, and do not attend meetings. After a few years of faithful service, they may be patched in.

Tribes of men, including motorcycle clubs, do their best to become totally self-reliant. They have their own rules. They enforce those rules with their own punishments. They require members to make contributions on emotional, physical, and financial levels.

*– Dr. Stephen "Skinz" Kinzey, "Foreword," **The One Percenter Encyclopedia***

Prospects who are humans can expect to be either turned into vampires or, if they have the necessary ability, taught magic.

The club's executives are its officers, elected by democratic vote of the members whenever an existing officer can't carry out his job (due to death, injury, imprisonment, etc.). Unlike more mundane outlaw MCs, the club has few members in prison, as biker mages and vampires have sufficient resources to make jailbreaks relatively easy – although some are presently rotting in more exotic durance vile (Hell, faerieland, etc.). There are four officers (president, vice president, secretary-treasurer and sergeant at arms).

President: Israel Sawyer has been prez for most of the club's history. In 1988-1990, an offended demon lord imprisoned him in Hell, and Madoc took over. In 1991, Sawyer escaped and has held it ever since. He likes to drop hints about retiring – mostly to keep his sons and grandsons some reason to think they might become his heir if they stay loyal – but he doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

Vice President: The second in command is Owen Madoc. He has little interest in being president, but is a trusty right-hand man.

Treasurer and Secretary: These two positions are managed by Morwenna. She handles the club's finances, collects dues, and manages the Bastard's network of illegal activities. She also keeps the club's archives, history and records (which are kept very secure and written in Court Elvish).

Sergeant at Arms: The club's enforcer, bouncer, and tactical officer. The current Sergeant at Arms is Ian Stark, one of Sawyer's children.

KEY MEMBERS

Many members of Belial's Bastards are quite noteworthy.

Israel Sawyer

Age 92; looks 43. Descended from a family of Ozark mountain witches, Sawyer is a charming killer with a passion for big motorcycles, good mechanical skills, and a smattering of occult power. He honed his skills in the U.S. Army, where he spent some time in the "secret war" (the supernatural conflict beneath the surface of World War II). Unlike many of his fellows who ended up in the OSS or other special agencies, he got out to feather his own nest.

Despite being a natural leader and a fearless fighter, his essential lack of imagination and laziness has meant he's never really amounted to much more than a street thug. He is nevertheless a tough, ruthless guy.

Sawyer is a magical dabbler who knows spells from several colleges of magic, including mind-related, Technological, Animal, and Body Control. He is most talented in necromancy, where several decades of practice eventually taught him ways to prolong his own life. He has a large collection of magic items, many of faerie manufacture.

Owen Madoc

Age 94, looks 27. The black sheep son of a well-off Welsh railway engineer, Madoc drifted through a variety of jobs and criminal escapades linked only by his love of motorcycles

Club Activities

- Hanging out at their clubhouse or at Twisted Sisters (their strip club).
- Protecting a number of business ventures in and around Jerusalem Mills that the club owns a part-interest in by eliminating or intimidating any competition.
- Policing the supernatural community in Jerusalem Mills and the surrounding rural county. In particular, this involves intimidating or eliminating any vampire slayers, witch hunters, or rival supernaturals that refuse to acknowledge their hegemony.
- Feuding with the Rabid Mongrels, the werewolf biker gang based in the next town who also have interests in the county.
- Regular runs to nearby cities for (mundane) outlaw motorcycle events, and planning and executing more dangerous ventures, such as shipping goods into or out of faerieland.
- Interfering in local politics by way of magic, blackmail, intimidation and occasional murder to ensure that the mayor, town council and local sheriff are "cooperative."
- Trying to fend off any challenges from out-of-town law enforcement. Although the gang is usually tricky and powerful enough to evade (for example) an ordinary state or Federal-level RICO investigation, they may encounter trouble if they run into individual agents or agencies experienced at targeting monsters or supernatural criminals.

and loose women. He joined the Royal Air Force just before World War II, discovering a talent for flying. Posted to Egypt, a spate of unauthorized tomb robbing led to him freeing an ancient vampire who turned him. That vampire's unfamiliarity with modern weapons soon got her killed, but Owen survived.

Once WWII broke out, his vampiric charms finagled a transfer to a night fighter squadron in foggy England, which helped keep him out of the sun as well as deflecting attention from his unnatural condition until the end of the war, when his life changed after meeting Sawyer and Morwenna. He is less ambitious or mercenary than his beloved wife and his best friend, preferring to enjoy simple pleasures: fresh blood, a good fight and a shag afterward, and a fast vehicle. In addition to a collection of classic and modern motorcycles, he owns a small private plane that Morwenna keeps running.

Morwenna Madoc

Age 87; looks 20. This small, dark-haired woman with a faint Welsh accent looks like a geeky college sophomore. Actually, she is a vampire, technomancer, and the fierce matriarch of the MC. A born mechanic with a head for figures, she is equally at home tinkering with engines, balancing a ledger, or weaving intricate tech magic; her Essential Fuel and Rebuild spells are greatly prized by the MC. She has also created a few permanently animated machines, including her personal motorcycle.

Morwenna's grandmother was a faerie in a Cymric branch of the Seelie Court. She thus has some faerie blood and distant relatives in their otherworld, which have helped her gain arcane knowledge of the extradimensional paths and gates to reach it. A human vampire who specializes in the magic of iron and machines would normally be shunned by elves and their kin, even with her faerie blood, but due to their desperate struggle with the Unseelie court, the guns Belial's Bastards provide have secured her welcome.

Ian Stark

Age 30. Sawyer's son by Sally Stark, one of his many Old Ladies, he is a lean man with a shaved head and an impressive collection of piercings. He is an indifferent mage, mostly knowing a few tricks and combat spells, but is a nasty hand-to-hand fighter, keen strategist, and motivated moneymaker. He served in the U.S. Army during the Iraq War, but was dishonorably discharged for drug use. He gets along well with Morwenna, but harbors some resentment for his "Old Man" Israel. His main motivation is money, and he believes that he can turn the MC into a powerful criminal enterprise.

Sean Brennan

Unknown age. A solid and reliable member with a touch of chivalry, he moved to Jerusalem Mills from Boston in 1992 after some unpleasantness with monster hunters back east. He is a headless horseman – a Dulachan – whose "horse" is a ghostly motorcycle named Paladin. He usually wears a closed-face helmet to disguise his missing head. He has several enemies, but also useful East Coast connections (including Irish fey).

*A fog-covered campground, bodies
laing around, the campfire almost out,
a few people walking around in a daze,
and the sound of snoring. It was like
a movie, but were living it instead
of just watching it.*

– Richard Hayes,
Outlaw Biker

Callon Rhys

Age unknown, but looks 20ish. A patched member, Rhys is very handsome, with long waist-length white hair, jade eyes, and pointed ears normally hidden behind a bandanna. He is an elf, an exiled from faerieland due to an unsettling interest in black magic and firearms. He has a cold, logical personality and is an accomplished biker and shooter. He dresses in blood-red leathers, and rides a Vincent Blackshadow cycle.

Drano, Mozzie, and Austin

Three recent, young prospects who serve as muscle and, if necessary, cannon fodder, they all in their early 20s. Drano is a budding alchemist. Mozzie expresses hopes of becoming a vampire, but he has a secret – during a recent bar fight he was bitten by a werewolf; now he turns during the full moon. He doesn't want to tell any other club members for fear they'll kick him out. Austin is an apprentice necromancer, studying under Sawyer. He also nurses a hopeless crush on Morwenna.

Poppy Sherman

Age 22, but perpetually 18. A club associate, this pretty young vampire is a former prostitute turned four years ago against her will. She works in the Twisted Sisters strip club the MC took over. She is grateful to them for freeing her from her

former master's bondage. A bit of a drama queen, she is always getting into trouble.

Dingo Thorsen

Age 33. Owner of Twisted Sisters, the local strip club, Thorsen is a sleazebag and amateur porn director. Nonetheless, he is a decent businessman and a good DJ in demand at club parties.

Madison Drake

Age 40. The local district attorney arrived 10 years ago to clean up the town. She failed. Now Drake takes a regular pay-off from the MC to look the other way.

ASSETS

The Bastards go through boom and bust cycles, but the MC often has a million dollars or so in cash or easily convertible assets (drugs, gold and jewels, magic items, unicorn horns, guns, alchemical elixirs, etc.) at any one time. It has about \$10 million in property and club-owned equipment and vehicles (cycles, vans, and pickup trucks). Sawyer also owns a light airplane kept in a hangar at the town's local airstrip. Most of the club officers have a few hundred thousand dollars each worth of cash, property, or gold squirreled away in various hiding places. The Club's headquarters – Jerusalem Mills Salvage Lot – is a well-protected compound with high walls, magical wards (such as Scryguard spells), and a local guard force of a half-dozen armed skeletons. The basement of the club contains a magical laboratory used by Sawyer and Morwenna.

At minimum, each MC member has a motorcycle (usually a big Harley), a handgun or three, a few melee weapons, and their colors. Most also own a car; a shotgun, machine pistol, or submachine gun; and have their own houses or apartments in town. The club sometimes has a few heavier weapons due to arms deals, but usually avoids keeping them on premises due to the rare but possible risk of a federal government raid.

In addition to the salvage lot, their faerie arms smuggling, and their drug business, the club have part ownerships or protection schemes that give them a share in several Jerusalem Mills businesses. These include a strip club, a pawnshop, a marijuana grow-op, a meth factory, a porn studio, bar, a chop shop, a block of slum tenements, a head shop, a fortune teller, an occult bookstore, a fish-and-chip shop, a mail-order gun store, and the town's garbage collection franchise. Many of these businesses also employ individual club members or prospects, or their family, on a part-time basis.

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.

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HUNTING THE CABAL

BY W.A. FRICK

What's worse for an urban-fantasy campaign than blood-thirsty monsters? *Organized* bloodthirsty monsters – with friends, contacts, safe-houses, and support networks. They are not only a coherent, recurring threat to champions, but one that can learn and *adapt* to their methods and tactics. The secret sect of vampiric Templars, the gang of skin-changers whose infiltration plots the hunters keep uncovering, the lodge of warlocks and their demonic servitors – and *masters*.

But what if *all kinds* of monsters conspired together? What if there was a secret society, an occult Cabal older than history, that counted among its number every description of freak and horror that has stalked the nightmares of

humanity (and some that defy description) – witches, psychics, spirits from Beyond and Below, monsters both human and inhuman . . .

Now you can introduce the ultimate “conspiracy of monsters” in the *GURPS* meta-verse to the world of *GURPS Monster Hunters* or any other urban secret-magic setting. Featuring notes for using Cabalists as villains, contacts, or even *champions*, as well as a discussion of the Cabal's coveted Hermetic Magic as it relates to the Ritual Path Magic system, the material here combines the templates and options from the *Monster Hunters* line with obscure esoterica from *GURPS Thaumatology* and occult heresies from *GURPS Cabal*.

THE CABAL

Since its dawning, human civilization has cast a shadow, a lingering darkness beneath its passage through the ages, inhabited by those it most fears and scorns: witches and monsters, lurking natives of the night, along with those chased from “civil society” for their differences and predilections. But there, in the darkness, in the wilds and ruins forgotten and avoided by decent folk, these creatures and outcasts met . . . and found a common purpose.

The long and winding history of the Cabal is not only too voluminous to recount, but told differently, contended, and contested by virtually everyone who even knows that such a group exists. Most versions agree that *They* are the Truth behind the rumors and superstitions of the occult and paranormal, the uber-Secret Society behind such groups as the Medici Circle, the Rosicrucians, the Golden Dawn, and the Thule Gesellschaft. *They* offer refuge to those hunted by the forces of human intolerance, whether Inquisition, Pogrom, or witch-hunt du jour. *They* have kept alight the flame of Hermetic Magic (pp. 26-27), the true and powerful secrets of Reality, through the Dark Ages of imposed ignorance. *They*, through mutual interest and agreement, conspire to keep the secrets of the supernatural from the unawakened masses.

NATURE OF THE BEAST

The Cabal is many things to many people (and things), but most roles and stereotypes can be boiled down to a few broad categories. The group may show up in any of these forms, or possibly each in turn.

Den of Monsters

From the outside, most who know of the Cabal see it first and foremost as a collection of the most frightful and horrifying creatures imaginable. It *is* this (and worse), and many campaigns will never look past this aspect – the Cabal will exist as a loose, shadowy association of villains, perhaps a common thread in various supernatural occurrences (though this may shade into a *Grand Conspiracy*, below), or perhaps a coincidental and effete “gentle-monster's club,” to which several adversaries of the champions happen to belong. Supernatural PCs may even be former (or *current*) members – possibly drummed out when they took up hunting their own kind, but just as likely maintaining “friends in the fold,” if not attending lodge meetings themselves (fez optional).

Grand Conspiracy

The next logical step beyond “club of monsters” is, of course, “conspiracy of monsters.” What else would monsters do in their secret meetings, besides conspire against humanity? Whether foiling the machinations of mid-level Cabalists, or unraveling the ages-long schemes of the Grand Masters, many monster hunters are apt to encounter the Cabal first (possibly *only*) as a conspiracy. What makes it “grand” (apart from the aforementioned Grand Masters, and their general grandiosity) is up to the GM: Does it control, or conspire to control, the world's governments? Financial markets? The Church? New Age book stores? Does it plan to bring about the Apocalypse? (Hey, who *doesn't* these days?) All of the above?

Whatever the case, it's apt to be a powerful enemy, with vast natural *and* supernatural resources to throw at pesky champions who thwart scheme after carefully laid scheme.

Mutual Protection Society

If one thinks to ask them, many Cabalists will insist that the Cabal is primarily a mutual protection society, a sort of handshake-fellowship of freaks and monsters, all looking out for each other in a hostile world – a world that has shown them, time and again through the ages, that it would like nothing better than to tie them to a stake and burn them alive. Every Cabalist-in-good-standing has two *ultors* (“avengers”), who will aid him if attacked or persecuted for his nature – or punish his murderers, if need be. They also have two *passers* (“sparrows”) to whom he is *ultor*, who he must aid or avenge as needed. (See *Ultors and Passers in Play*, p. 24, for more.) And all are sworn to maintain the Secret of the supernatural, a goal they have in common with monster hunters.

This aspect has upsides and downsides for champions who might tangle with the Cabal. On the one hand, they're not likely to meet any resistance, and may even receive unexpected *aid*, when trying to conceal evidence of the supernatural. On the other, if they start killing Cabalists indiscriminately, the organization is designed to have a hydra-like response – each one slain brings two more to your doorstep, who may be very different kinds of threats than the one you just disposed of. Incautious hunters may quickly find that the degrees separating a Middle-Circle vampire crime lord from an Inner-Circle arch-magus are alarmingly few.

Occult Initiatory Order

Behind all these other masks and illusions (each with its own reality, of course), the True Inner Heart of the Cabal is the Secret of Hermetic Magic (pp. 26-27) – or at least, so say the Hermetic Adepts of the Order, before being shouted down by a chorus of indignant psis, vampires, and werewolves. Contentious though the claim may be, the truth remains that Hermetic Magic is one of the Cabal's greatest assets and most jealously guarded secrets. Virtually all of the Grand Masters, and most the Inner Circle in general, have studied it in depth. It is said to be the one and only key to crossing the Abyss into Atziluth, the City of Pyramids, Divine Seat of Transcendental Illumination.

Of course, all this will be of little interest to any but the most spiritually minded champions or campaigns. The upshot for most monster hunters is that the Cabal has access to Big Magic, further cementing its position as a formidable foe to those who would cross its members, and a powerful ally to those who curry their fickle favor.

Squabbling Rabble

In spite of anything and everything else it may be, the Cabal is an organization of many disparate philosophies, individuals, and *things*. No two Grand Masters can agree on much of *anything*, beyond the cornerstone of Don't Give Away the Secret, and while various Cabalists may conspire together, the Order as a whole is anything but unified. For every world-girding scheme one Cabalist may be hatching, another is planning a devastating betrayal or counter-plot that will knock the legs out from under it. Monster hunters may find that their greatest ally against the Cabal is the Cabal –

particularly if they can convince one faction that another is acting imprudently and risks giving the whole game away.

It's in this form that the Cabal is most dynamic and nuanced; it can plausibly and simultaneously serve as sketchy contact, deadly enemy, and *somewhat*-trustworthy ally. If the PCs navigate its hoary halls and twisting politics with caution, diplomacy, and dash of respect, they can find that the Cabal isn't simply a conspiracy, den, *or* rabble of monsters, but in its way, a civilized society . . . of monsters.

Miss Winston, everybody has a secret face!

– Dr. Philip K. Decker, *Nightbreed*

CABALISTIC TIES

Whatever form the Cabal may take in a campaign, it's up to the GM whether the PCs pay (or receive) points for their relationship with it. Several of the templates and motivational lenses in *GURPS Monster Hunters 1: Champions* feature Contacts, Enemies, or even Patrons that could easily include Cabalists. Indeed, *individual* Cabalists, or at most a limited subgroup (e.g., “Cabalists in the Bay Area,” or “magically inclined Cabal lodges of New England”), are what PCs are most likely to have some kind of specific relationship with. Contact Group (The Cabal) – or even Enemy (The Cabal) – is just too big, nebulous, and downright fractious to take as a single trait.

As Contacts

If treated as an ambivalent force in the campaign (as opposed to pure Bad Guy), the Cabal can provide supernaturally inclined PCs with a host of possible Contacts, from circles of ceremonial magicians to werewolf park rangers and mummy antiquarians. Cabalists could plausibly know virtually *anything* about the supernatural world – depending, of course, on the Cabalist in question.

Some such Contacts may be on the seedy side, one step away from needing slaying themselves; others are as on the up-and-up as any occult lodge that's part of a vast supernatural conspiracy can be. All will have a few important things in common with the champions, primarily that they're interested in stopping any kind of supernatural threat that might blow the Secret of their existence. Problems may arise when the champions find that Cabalists are often less worried about *protecting the innocent* than about maintaining the Secret – at any cost.

As Enemies

Depending on how big and powerful the Cabal is (see *Defining the Cabal* in *Cabal*, p. 80), it may be hard to throw a vial of holy water in the supernatural world without hitting a skulking Outer-Circle Cabalist or minion. Or, they may be a lean organization, keeping their profile low and covering their tracks, pulling strings from behind the scenes for several adventures before their subtle and insidious influence is discovered.

Either way, chances are good that if the champions end up with any significant portion of the Cabal as their enemy, it's been through a string of repeated conflicts. By the time such a small group of outsiders, even self-proclaimed "monster hunters," reaches the attention of the Inner Circle, it's because they've crossed some powerful interests. Thus, the PCs get no points for acquiring such an enemy during the course of their adventures; this is a campaign development. Nevertheless, Cabal-themed opponents may quickly take over the "Monster of the Week."

Moreover, once such a group is targeted by one Grand Master, the others naturally take notice, deploy agents to assess the situation, and if the targets seem worth further attention, swoop in to offer sanctuary . . . for a price.

As Patrons or (Erstwhile) Allies

There are many Cabalists with great wealth and greater schemes, and a team of highly competent individuals who can

be relied on to deal with supernatural threats is a natural asset to invest in. Champions may not even know that they're working for a Cabalist, at least not to begin with . . . just another wealthy, eccentric philanthropist who knows about the supernatural – a *lot* about the supernatural, as it happens – and seems to have a vested interest in meddling in the affairs of wizards and monsters. The fact that he never comes out of his fortress-like, old-world mansion by day just seems like another of his odd quirks . . . at first . . .

However, hunters may decide to *seek out* a powerful Cabalist for patronage, or at least assistance, in fighting a mutual enemy or other supernatural threat – quite possibly another Cabalist. This may in fact be the *safest* way to fight the Cabal; getting some sort of backing or "permission" to take down a member reduces the likelihood that his ultors come looking for payback.

Of course, it's always possible that supernatural PCs may want to *join* the club . . .

Illumination

By some definitions, all monster hunters are "Illuminated." Whether born into the secret world or shocked into awareness by some pivotal event (becoming a vampire, undergoing occult Initiation, etc.), they know about the Truth behind the thick curtain of official denial and sleepy rationalization that conceals the supernatural from the unawakened masses. They may not *intuitively* sense when something is Weird with a capital W, but they know it's always a possibility.

Cabalists are yet another step "in" on the whole thing, being members of an ancient occult conspiracy. As they become initiated into the deeper mysteries of the Order, they undoubtedly experience various mystical awakenings, enlightening experiences, and gateless gates.

It's entirely up to the GM when and if any of this qualifies someone for the Illuminated advantage (p. B60). It may seem problematic for an investigation-based campaign – the ability to unerringly identify *any* Illuminated character on sight, and make generous default rolls to pick out Illuminated clues – but it needn't be. If all PCs and most important NPCs are Illuminated, identifying a fellow Illuminatus simply marks him as "a possible player" in the Conspiracy (and if you've spotted him, chances are good he's spotted you). Knowing which clues are relevant to the Conspiracy keeps the hunters from chasing down nonconspiratorial dead ends and red herrings. (*Conspiratorial* dead ends and red herrings – often planted by cunning conspirators to throw investigators off the trail – are another matter.)

Neither of these effects profoundly short circuits the *Investigation* rules (*GURPS Monster Hunters 2: The Mission*, pp. 5-11). At best, they allow investigators to make deduction rolls when their awareness provides a new clue. ("The mayor's aid is an Illuminati agent" *might* count as a clue, but really gives away little, other than that the Conspiracy reaches into local politics – likely to no one's great surprise.) The GM *might* allow **Illuminated** to sub-in for **Intuition** when making *Lucky Guesses* about the

Conspiracy, or overlooking Conspiracy-related clues (see *Monster Hunters 2*, p. 6).

Some campaigns may have the advantage as a feature (often balanced by Weirdness Magnet; see below). All PCs, and most *important* NPCs, are Illuminated, meaning basically that they're "in" on the Secret of the supernatural. Illumination can also be a goal, particularly for junior-hunter-to-champion games that begin with a cast of inexperienced PCs (see *GURPS Monster Hunters 4: Sidekicks* for tips). While many or all of them may have dabbled in the occult or been touched by the paranormal, they haven't *fully accepted* the Truth – they lack an Illuminating experience, something to pry open their Third Eye, tune in their Pineal Gland, and awaken their intuitive understanding. Either way, you can't just hit the occult book shops, drop a couple tabs of orange sunshine, and sit in on a meditation circle, then shell out 15 character points and buy Illumination . . . you have to *See the Fnords*. And the GM determines if that happens.

Of course, many campaigns, like the default *Monster Hunters* frame, will simply *ignore* Illumination – there's no such threshold or distinction, just the people who don't know the Truth, and the people (and things) who do.

High Weirdness

Being an Illuminatus means that *all other* Illuminati (and "Illuminated Beings") can identify you, just as easily as you can spot them. This tends to invite High Weirdness into the life of any Illuminated character, with or without his leave . . . and conveniently, Weirdness Magnet is priced exactly negative to Illuminated. In most cases, Illuminated will either be a campaign feature, an award by the GM based on in-game events, or not available at all. In the former cases, Weirdness Magnet is a natural companion-trait, and a reasonable balance for the "free" 15 points. Note that this *removes* Weirdness Magnet from the PCs' disadvantage choices.

As Members

A mixed lodge of Outer- and Middle-Circle Cabalists will likely consist of a motley assortment of mages, monsters, mystics, occult scholars, psis, perhaps the odd runaway Promethean experiment . . . in short, it will look an awful lot like a team of monster hunters. Their goals and M.O. will similarly line up with those of typical champions: investigate bizarre and paranormal occurrences, find the source of said occurrences, and if need be, put a stop to it – all while maintaining the Secret of the supernatural from the unawakened masses.

In many ways, this is as natural a fit for a Cabal-**Monster Hunters** crossover as pitting the champions *against* the Order. They'll likely face fellow Cabalists as adversaries just as often as a group of outsiders would, as well as dealing with all of the same kinds of things that other hunters face. Whether they begin the campaign as members, or encounter the Cabal in the course of their investigations – possibly facing them as enemies, before coming to an understanding – and join for reasons of their own, their membership can only benefit their pursuit of the Mission.

Provided, of course, that they don't succumb to the temptation that seduces so many, and turn from *fighting the good fight to consolidating power* . . . and *become* the Enemy.

CABALISTIC FRAMES

Depending on the forms and roles the Cabal takes in a **Monster Hunters** game, there are several campaign types (see **Monster Hunters 1**, pp. 5-6) that work well. Many will resemble the *Shadow Wars* frame, with the PCs participating – willingly or otherwise – in the maneuvering of various occult factions, both *inside* and *outside* the Cabal. See *Some Rival Societies* (**Cabal**, pp. 22-23) for some possible outside groups, and *Some (In)Famous Lodges* (**Cabal**, pp. 28-29) for a few insiders.

The Hunters Hunted

Probably the most obvious campaign type or development is the team of champions who, in the course of their regular investigations, stumbles in the dark into the nest of vipers. If they haven't faced an organized "conspiracy of monsters" before, it may be new territory for the hunters to find themselves not only outnumbered, but outmaneuvered, and quite possibly outgunned (or at least out-magicked) by the Enemy – *fleeing* the monsters, rather than chasing them.

Such a game could take the form of a long-term war against the Conspiracy – with the champions decidedly playing the underdogs. Alternatively, it could flow into a situation where the PCs gain the sponsorship of *another* Cabalistic faction (likely rivals to those who originally targeted them), pulling them into the Order's shadowy politics.

Politics as Usual

Whether the champions are dues-paying members of the Order, or opposing its schemes from the outside, the night-to-night plotting and politicking of various Cabalists can easily fill the team's date book. This will likely make for a fairly typical *Shadow Wars* campaign, as the hunters navigate the treacherous factions and rivalries of the secret world. However, it could turn into a quest (see below), if the team is drawn into one of the Cabal's perennial pursuits. Or, the group might become

supernatural troubleshooters (see below), if they're careful to avoid throwing in their lot with any *particular* faction (and canny enough to avoid the consequences of turning down "offers they can't refuse," made by Order elders who don't like such loose cannons rocking the boat).

*What is the Cabal up to now –
and how will the hunters get drawn in?*

The Quest

A number of *Great Quests* and other "lofty" pursuits (see **Cabal**, pp. 17-19) are common among members of the Cabal – searching for the Holy Grail, the Philosopher's Stone, etc. – and a party of monster hunters may become involved in any of them, whether as members or rivals (or both). Such a quest may constitute an individual adventure, a lengthy plot arc, or an entire campaign. It could resemble a *Research Grant* (funded by a well-to-do Patron to find the Legendary Chalice of MacGuffin), *Road Trip* (globe-trotting from Mayan Ruins to the Holy Land to the Rennes-le-Chateau to follow-up leads), or *Shadow War* (competing with Cabalistic and other factions who have the same goal) – or all at once.

Supernatural Troubleshooters

Monster hunters *hunt monsters* – it's what they do. A team of Middle-Circle Cabalists – whether a local lodge situated near a supernatural hot spot, or a team of continent-hopping troubleshooters – can make for a meat-and-potatoes **Monster Hunters** game. They could be *Extermination for Sale* (and/or on a continuous *Road Trip*), working for the highest (Cabalist) bidder to solve supernatural problems. They might be *Local Guardians*, perched at the Mouth of Hell to see that nothing *too* horrible crawls or skitters out (or at least, that it joins the Order, so they can keep closer tabs on it). They might be agents of a wealthy Grand Master, working as a *Strike Team* (or on a *Research Grant*), to further their patron's interests in the *Shadow Wars*.

Unmasking the Truth

Quite against type for both the Cabal *and* garden-variety monster hunters, who generally want to *conceal* the Truth about the supernatural, the PCs could be trying to *expose* the Cabal and all of its grasping tendrils. This necessarily means revealing the existence of the supernatural to the World at Large – not a small task, particularly since it's the one thing that all Cabalists can agree on: Keep the Secret! Thus, such a campaign is one of the few circumstances that is likely to mobilize the *entire* Cabal against a team of hunters.

In this campaign frame, keeping the Secret obviously isn't a concern – but that *doesn't* mean that the champions can rely on reinforcements from the SWAT Team or National Guard! Even assuming that those organizations *aren't* under Cabalistic control, chances are good that any attempt to recruit them will be ignored, *at best* – and at worst, it will land the hunters in the psych ward, where the Cabal can keep a closer eye on them. *Time for your meds* . . .

CABALISTIC HUNTERS

Using *Monster Hunters* templates to make Cabalistic characters is a natural fit. The following sections provide nuance and adjustments for creating “champions” (or villains) of the Cabal.

CABALISTIC MOTIVATIONS

While the forces that drive one to *join* the “Grand Conspiracy of Monsters” are as varied as those that compel monster *hunters*, the motivational lenses from *Monster Hunters 1* tend not to fit for most Cabalists. Instead, use the following lens, and see below for customization notes.

New Motivational Lens: Cabalist

15 points

You are a member of the Cabal – you’ve been accepted and initiated, selected your ultors and passers (below), and taken your oaths of secrecy. As a result, you’re *in*. You have access to the Cabal’s secret knowledge, and can present yourself to a local lodge when traveling and (hopefully) be received with at least passing hospitality. See *Illumination* (p. 22) for other potential ramifications of Initiation into the Order.

Advantages: Claim to Hospitality (Cabalistic Lodges) [5] and Security Clearance (Cabalistic Secrets) [5]. • 30 points chosen from among Ally (Cabalistic) [Varies], Contact (Cabalistic) [Varies], Contact Group (Cabalistic) [Varies], Patron (Cabalistic) [Varies], or template traits or customization suggestions (see below).

Ultors and Passers in Play

As mentioned under *Mutual Protection Society* (p. 21), all Cabalists have two *ultors* looking after them, and two *passers* for whom they look after. (See *Ultors and Passers*, *Cabal*, p. 25.) In practice, this is generally a wash for PC Cabalists . . . two Allies who you can only really count on in limited situations (often *after* your death), and an identical Duty to two others. If a player wishes (and the GM allows), a Cabalist character can pay points for more formidable and/or reliable ultors – Allies, or even a Patron – or designate a sidekick as one of his passers (no additional game effect). It may be tempting for a party of Cabalist PCs to go “round-robin,” designating each other as ultors and passers so that they only have to look out for teammates, but this means that no *outside* help can be counted upon if the group ever bites off more than it can chew.

Know Thy Enemy: The Cabal

Whether hunting Cabalists, or conspiring with them, monster hunters will find that certain skills are indispensable in ascertaining the ins-and-outs of the Cabal and its members: Hidden Lore (The Cabal) (A) IQ [2]; History (Esoteric) (H) IQ-1 [2]; Occultism (A) IQ [2]; Savoir-Faire (Magical) (E) IQ+1 [2]; Thaumatology (VH) IQ-2 [2]; and any skills relevant to the particular Cabalist(s) in question – who could be faeries, “rogue” witches, vampires, etc.

Disadvantages: Secret (Member of the Cabal – if you blatantly give away the Cabal’s Secret, such as their existence, or any of the secrets of Hermetic Magic, you’re a marked man; Possible Death) [-30].

Skills: Hidden Lore (The Cabal) (A) IQ [2] and Savoir-Faire (Magical) (E) IQ [1]. • Choose one skill from *Know Thy Enemy: The Cabal* (above).

Customization Notes

Accursed: Whether by birth or calamitous event, you’re a *freak*. You might be a vampire, embraced unwillingly into the dark folds of undeath; or a psi whose powers caused you to be ostracized. Either way, you probably joined the Cabal for its “mutual protection society” (p. 21) aspect, though it may have come to mean much more to you since then.

Ancient: You (or your “family” – whether that’s a sorcerously gifted human lineage, a vampiric bloodline, etc.) have been in the Cabal for centuries. Even if you haven’t been initiated into the Inner Circle yet, you’re as close to blood aristocracy as the Cabal has. You often tend to cling to the Old Ways – whatever those may have been in your day – and look down your nose on the whelps who play petty games in the night without properly honoring their Elders. You likely have a Patron, in the form of a powerful family or elder within the Cabal, or possibly some sort of Social Regard that applies to fellow Cabalists.

Expatriate/Fallen: You used to belong to some *other* supernatural faction – perhaps you’re an outcast angel who defied Heaven, or were on the losing side of a power-struggle in the *Pavane des Vampires* (*Cabal*, p. 23) – and joined the Cabal when something happened to expel you from that group. You may well have Enemies from your former life, as few such societies suffer turncoats gladly, but may also have the inside scoop on them (in the form of Hidden Lore, etc.).

Seeker: It was your curiosity that got you into this mess. You couldn’t help but seek out the occult, the Weird, the *other-than-normal* . . . and that brought you to the doorstep of the Conspiracy. Being the curious type, you decided that – rather than start a radio show or blog to “expose” Them – you’d poke around inside a little, see what *other* secrets they kept . . . and *ohh*, the wonderful secrets you’ve found . . .

KINDS OF CABALISTS

Most of the *supernatural* templates from *Champions* are suitable for Cabalist characters – primarily the inhuman, psi, sage, and witch. Other characters *could* fit (see *Other Templates*, p. 25), but in general, the Cabal only accepts those who are “more” (or less, depending on your point of view) than “merely human.”

Inhuman

Probably the most common type of Cabalist – not specifically *vampires* or *werewolves*, but inhumans in general, make up a plurality within the Cabal.

Unlike their dyed-in-the-wool champion counterparts, they're *not* generally seen as traitors by their fellows. Unless they *specifically* crossed their kin in joining the Cabal (e.g., an expatriate of some *other* monstrous society), trade their negative Reputation for another -5-point template disadvantage. Inhumans are also not especially likely to feel guilty or apologetic about their nature and appetites . . .

Psi

A sizable minority within the Order, psis make up some of the Cabal's more powerful factions and (in)famous luminaries – the Insidious Doctor Fang (*Cabal*, p. 35), the Clear Thought Society (*Cabal*, p. 49), and even defectors from the GKMR (*Cabal*, p. 23). Although the larger factions of mages and monsters sometimes try to look down on them (even freaks have cliques!), there's no question that psis belong in the Cabal.

Sage

Many who come to the Cabal come in search of *that which is hidden* – the occult. Although a large portion of these seekers delve more deeply into the secrets of Hermetic Magic, becoming witches, some prefer to tread the surface waters and expand their breadth of knowledge (Lore!) rather than their mystical practice. While true Hermetic Adepts may be the masters of magic, occult sages are apt to know more about *why* and *how* the supernatural nuts-and-bolts of the cosmos mesh and operate. And knowledge, they say, is the *ultimate* power.

Witch

Among *human* Cabalists, “witch” (known variously as adept, mage, sorcerer, warlock – every individual has his own preferred nomenclature) is probably the most common vocation. Within more magically inclined lodges and associations, there's sometimes a hazy distinction between the witch and the sage. Witches, of course, are the full occult adepts, masters of the secrets of Hermetic Magic (pp. 26-27).

Other Templates

Although few “normal humans” are ever accepted into the ranks of the Cabal, monster hunters can hardly be called *normal*. The GM may decide to allow other templates in a Cabalistic party, generally individuals who have shown themselves to be too useful to leave outside the fold. (Keep your enemies closer, after all . . .) *Commandos* aren't “supernatural” as such, but can be *very* useful. *Crusaders* might be heretics and dissenters from their religious groups, or “dark/rogue” mystics.

“Promethean Life” is a concept familiar to virtually all Cabalists, and *experiments* might find acceptance under those auspices. *Sleuths* and *techies* might have stumbled across the Conspiracy in their research, and shown themselves to be crafty and intelligent enough to make the cut. *Warriors* might be esoteric martial-arts masters, every bit as mystically inclined as Hermetic magi.

Sidekicks

If Cabalist PCs have “sidekicks” (read: minions) – whether allies or other PCs – they're as apt to be outsiders as they are fellow (likely Outer-Circle) Cabalists. Particularly useful or loyal allies may be sponsored for membership in the Order, but sometimes it's better to have some friends on the *outside*. And, particularly in the case of the “mundane” templates – *brothers, fixers, geeks, gunmen, muscle, scouts*, and *whitecoats* – many simply aren't Cabal material. *Gifted, magicians*, and *occultists* are probably new initiates, still muddling their way through the Order's Outer Circle, or uninitiated petitioners, trying to prove their worth and dedication.

. . . as Cabalists

Players wishing to mix things up a little – play a vampire fixer, or geek-turned-witch, instead of the standard champion archetypes – can hardly do better than using the sidekick templates and champion-upgrade lenses (*Monster Hunters 4*, pp. 20-22) as written. Adding any of the lenses *other* than Enhanced turns a mundane sidekick into a supernatural Cabalist, while Enhanced allows upgrading a gifted, magician, or occultist into a wicked 400-point version.

Monstrous Power-Ups

Sages and witches have *Thaumatology* (and Hermetic Magic, pp. 26-27), psis have *GURPS Psionic Powers* . . . even commandos, techies, and warriors have crunch-books of their own (*GURPS Gun Fu*, *GURPS High Tech*, *GURPS Martial Arts*). And now, inhumans have the award-winning new edition of *GURPS Horror*, providing detailed discussions of monsters of every description – and the folklore behind them – from basic “consensus” models to rare and exotic varieties. Although not necessarily designed as a shopping list of PC abilities, the templates, lenses, and new traits found in that tome can give inhuman PCs something to salivate over. The GM may even choose to waive some of the advice from *Why Aren't I This Tough?* (*GURPS Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy*, p. 3), and allow inhuman PCs to draw ideas from abilities possessed by their more monstrous kin.

Reaching back to Ancient Egypt, there's been a single cabal of powerful individuals directing the course of human history. But the common man prefers to believe they don't exist, which aids their success.

– *The Question*, in *Justice League* #3.6

HERMETIC MAGIC

The original Hermetic Magic system for *Cabal* (pp. 55-78) was based on core *GURPS* magic (pp. B234-253, and *GURPS Magic*). It used various *magical modifiers* to allow Hermetically trained magi (those who had the Thaumatology skill) to reap large casting-skill bonuses for the use of various ritual accoutrements and other mystically significant materials, as corresponded to the type (College) of magic being attempted. These bonuses would help the magician overcome the penalty for the setting's low mana level (see p. B235), giving Hermetic (Cabalist) magicians a distinct advantage over those without the knowledge of such correspondences – that is, those who lacked the Thaumatology skill, which was known exclusively to the Cabal.

This presents a few problems for a Cabal-based *Monster Hunters* game – the most obvious being that *Ritual Path Magic* (*Monster Hunters 1*, pp. 32-39) replaces core *GURPS* magic. However, Ritual Path Magic is quite suitable for Hermetic Magic – arguably *more* suitable than core *GURPS* magic – so it's easy to just say that Cabalists use Ritual Path Magic instead.

The other problem is that, in the setting to which they are native, the Cabal has a monopoly on Hermetic Magic – which is distinct from lesser (“low”) magics, both in the skills required to use it, and the overall power available to practitioners. There are a number of ways to handle this, depending on the results the GM wants – just *how* powerful is Hermetic Magic in comparison to “low”/other magic? How *complex* of a system is the group willing to use? Depending on the answers, the GM may implement one or more of the following.

*It has been our experience
that many individuals who seek
admission into a Hermetic Order
have no idea what Hermeticism is.*

*– Chic Cicero and
Sandra Tabatha Cicero,
The Essential
Golden Dawn*

MAGICAL MODIFIERS

The most straightforward way (though perhaps not the *simplest*) to distinguish Hermetic magicians is to allow them exclusive access to *Astrological Modifiers* (*Thaumatology*, pp. 83-85; see also *Hermetic Astrology*, pp. 248-252) and other *Magical Laws* (*Thaumatology*, pp. 86-89; see also Appendix A, pp. 242-255). Once the ritual effect(s) has been defined, and the relevant Path(s) determined, the caster can make use of appropriate items or correspondences to gain bonuses to *all* rolls involved in the spell, including energy-gathering and casting. See *Thaumatomological Detail* (*Monster Hunters 1*, p. 33) for more details.

The ability to stack up bonuses to compensate for hurried or repeated attempts at *Gathering Ambient Energy* (*Monster Hunters 1*, p. 36) is a considerable edge in itself, but it brings up the question – why can't other magicians use the same modifiers? In the Cabal's native setting, this was because of their exclusive access to the Thaumatology skill . . . which is the *core* skill in Ritual Path Magic. However, it's easy enough to simply designate another skill, Ritual Magic (Hermetic), to do the same duty – an IQ/VH skill that represents a Hermetic magician's exclusive understanding of the laws of magic. In this case, having that skill at IQ or better is *required* to be able to make use of magical modifiers.

Of course, the GM can always allow *other* magical traditions to have similar skills (Ritual Magic specialized for their *own* tradition), granting access to *some* magical modifiers – often the Laws of Sympathy, Names, and Contagion, as well as *Sacrifice Bonuses* and *Significant Dates* (*Thaumatology*, pp. 243-247). It's suggested, however, that at least *Hermetic Astrology* remain exclusive to Hermetic magicians.

ROLLING FOR DECANS

As much flavor as magical modifiers can add, waiting for a player to pore over astrological tables and decanic descriptions in the back of *Thaumatology*, trying to calculate his bonuses on the spell he's about to cast, might not sound like fun to every group. But there is another way! Assuming that the magician has access to “a suitable variety of magical impedimenta,” have him roll against Ritual Magic (Hermetic) to find the total modifier – usually *half* his margin of success (round up), but the full margin if the GM rules that he has access to exceptionally good resonances or equipment for the spell in question.

This is best used to replace only *astrological* modifiers; other modifiers tend to be simple enough to figure out – either you have the guy's blood or you don't. Figure modifiers from other magical laws separately (possibly allowing non-Hermetic magicians to use them), and then apply the bonus from this roll *instead* of normal astrological bonuses.

THAUMATOLOGICAL TRADE SECRETS

If the boon of magical modifiers isn't enough – particularly if the GM rules that *all* skilled ritual magicians have access to certain modifiers – Hermetic magicians can be made the sole keepers of full Ritual Path Magic, with other magicians relegated to a more scattered and compartmentalized body of occult lore.

For Hermetic magicians, nothing changes – they learn the Sefirotic Paths (*Monster Hunters 1*, pp. 32-33), and use Ritual Path Magic as presented, though they must still learn Ritual Magic (Hermetic) to make use of magical modifiers. *Non-Hermetic* magicians must *replace* the Sefirotic Paths with appropriate Paths and Books from *Thaumatology* (pp. 140-165) . . . all are still (IQ/VH), and all have the same limitations to skill level, etc. apply, so the points come out the same.

The upshot of this is that *only* Hermetic magicians can pull improvised effects out of the air with full Ritual Path Magic; lesser magicians use the same rules for *casting* (enacting the ritual, gathering energy, and channeling the effect), but are limited to the specific rituals that belong to their learned Paths and Books.

Another way to make a similar distinction is to say that *any* magician who belongs to a formal (or *Illuminated* – see p. 22) Occult Initiatory Order uses Ritual Path Magic, while uninitiated dabblers and eclectic occultists use Path/Book magic. Hermetic Magic then becomes “first among equals,” with whatever other traditions the GM allows to use Ritual Path Magic able to compete with them on more-or-less even footing.

In a campaign where all PC magicians use one kind of magic or the other – i.e. either *all* or *none* of them have access to full Ritual Path Magic – there’s no need to make any further distinction . . . the *other* kind of magic, the kind that the champions *don’t* use, is simply the province of NPCs. If the party is mixed, e.g. a Hermetic magus using Ritual Path Magic alongside a neo-pagan witch using Path/Book magic, some distinction should probably be made at the character-point level . . . perhaps the *Cabalist* motivational lens (p. 24), or *Illuminated* (p. 22).

RITUAL PREPARATIONS

Magicians (*any* magicians, Hermetic and otherwise) who take time to draw a magic circle, inscribe appropriate runes and sigils, perform a banishing ritual, invoke auspicious spirits, etc., can be allowed to net further bonuses to spell-casting. The relevant skills are Ritual Magic and Symbol Drawing, both specialized by the caster’s magical tradition (Hermetic, Neo-Pagan, Voodoo, etc.); each can be attempted once per casting, requiring at least five minutes per attempt. For an adept, each success yields +1 to all energy-gathering and casting rolls for his *next* spell-casting (+2 for critical success, -1 for failure, -2 for critical failure); see also *Non-Adepts and Hermetic Magic* (below).

Spending at least an hour (instead of five minutes) nets a +5 to the preparation skill roll, and permits the magician to maintain an “open ritual space.” For as long as he doesn’t fail a *casting* roll, critically fail *any* roll, nor do anything *other* than cast spells (or prepare for the next spell, rest quietly between spells, etc.), he continues to get the bonuses for successful preparation skills, without having to reroll them. Spending an *entire day* (12+ hours) doing ritual prep (allowing rolls against *both* skills) nets an additional +1 to the *casting roll* per skill – so +2 per normal success on the prep rolls. It also allows maintaining an

open ritual space for as long as the magician doesn’t leave the premises, nor *critically* fail any spell-related roll.

TRADITIONAL TRAPPINGS

Using *Traditional Trappings* (*Monster Hunters 1*, p. 34) in a casting can get the magician a discount to energy cost – and most magical modifiers come from traditional trappings of one kind or another. If allowing magical modifiers, the GM can use the total bonus to set the energy discount for traditional trapping, e.g. -5% to final cost per +1, up to a maximum discount of -25% – or possibly -30%, -50%, or more, if the GM wishes to encourage the use of elaborate ritual settings and occult paraphernalia.

Non-Adepts and Hermetic Magic

Some of the things that grant bonuses in this article are *required* for non-adept casters – see *Non-Adepts and Magic* (*Monster Hunters 1*, p. 36). This *does not* mean that such magicians can’t benefit! For example, a non-adept lacking consecrated space may make a Thaumatology roll to reduce the penalty to -1, and then could succeed at follow-up Ritual Magic and Symbol Drawing rolls for another +2 (net +1 to skill) – or *more* with a critical success or two! From an outsider’s perspective, the whole process would just seem like a single circle-drawing and invocation ritual taking 11 total minutes.

Further, the requirements for a connection to the subject are the *minimum* for a non-adept to avoid penalties; once those are met (such as a single object to establish the Law of Sympathy or Contagion), any additional modifiers count for bonuses as normal. At the GM’s discretion, non-adepts with access to true Hermetic teachings can claim Hermetic astrology bonuses as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brother Lex (known aliases include W.A. Frick, Dr. Pietro Pentavius, and the Countess Erszebet von Maldov) is a mendicant friar of the Order of St. Harvey, an anascetic sect of Orthodox Discordians who follow the Malaclyptic Rule (“We Discordians Must Stick Apart!”). When not enrapt in ecstatic trances or exotic meditations, he enjoys arguing on the Internet, reading about serial killers, and playing elaborate “cat-and-mouse” games with his actual cat, Vinny (who usually wins, being a cat and all). Also, he plays a lot of *GURPS* with the other ward patients.

The Hermetic view of ritual is that we are in this world not to abstain from form, but to use it for a higher end.

– Lyam Thomas Christopher, *Kabbalah, Magic and the Great Work of Self-Transformation*

THE WRAITH OF PRECINCT 13

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Police Lieutenant Frank Alvarez ran for his life.

His heart – made flaccid by too many desk shifts and donuts – was leaping out of his chest. He was white-faced and terrified, and he wasn't sure how much of the wetness on his cheeks was his tears or his partner's blood.

*If he could get to the street, he'd be safe. Down in the basement garage, where the deal had gone bad, no one could see him or save him. No one could step in and call the police against the **thing** that had walked into their "understanding" with the Russians.*

The armored thing with the black and hateful face . . .

*The shotgun blast doesn't quite tear his knees and feet apart, but it's enough to drop him. He falls facedown onto the ramp, screaming and crying, trying to crawl away. The **thump thump thump** of heavy, armored boots approaches him, and there's the sound of a shotgun being hoisted.*

He turns to look at his killer, as the thing takes off its heavy gloves. For a moment, he thinks he knows him, somehow.

"Hello, Frankie," the ghost wrapped in SWAT armor says, his voice a wet and rotten thing. "I told you buying from the Organization was a bad idea."

Alvarez has enough time to say the thing's name, but then its bony palm is on his forehead, and the cold, searing pain that touch brings becomes his entire world.

This is a warning: Do not get involved with shady police business in this city.

If you look too closely at what's really going on, you might want to investigate. If you investigate, you may be in the wrong place at the wrong time. At times like that, when the moon hangs dark in the sky, something else is out there, walking the city streets and dealing out black and harsh justice from beyond the grave.

The problem is, it's not a nice guy, and it doesn't like witnesses – not at all.

Created by an unknown hand, a vengeful, undead creature stalks the city. In life, it was a police officer who worked both sides of the law, and lost someone precious because of it. In death, it seeks revenge for this loss on old friends and foes, but also innocent bystanders, victims, and anyone who looks into the hideous mystery its actions have created.

It is the Wraith of the 13th Precinct, and to see its black-boned face is to be marked for death. Here is its story, habits, and possible uses, along with **GURPS** stats as an example of how it could be created. The undead beast could be inserted into any urban fantasy campaign as a spooky adversary, used

as evil background noise in a big-city occult setting, or pitted against monster hunters in search of truly dangerous prey.

*A well-aimed shot from
a black-gloved hand, and
the tall man fell to the ground
with a bleeding shoulder,
while he screamed in pain.*

– Tom Johnson, *Guns of
the Black Ghost*

THE STORY IS

Detective Jack "Hack" Czarny was a tough but decent guy, as anyone at the 13th Precinct will happily tell you. An eight-year veteran, he had a decent arrest record, a good eye for finding reliable witnesses, and a way of getting to the meat of any crime scene in a few careful glances. He probably would have made lieutenant in a couple years if he'd been just a little luckier – or if his wife had been, anyway.

Detective Janice Davis Czarny was everything her husband wasn't. She was meticulous where he was quick, careful instead of cocksure, and a little too nice for her own good. But theirs was a love of opposites, and it worked well enough as long as they didn't talk about work at home, or ask about each others' cases on the job.

Then came the day that Janice's meticulousness accidentally got her in the middle of something that Jack was investigating, and the people who were feeling the heat decided to send a warning. His wife's shattered body was left as a gruesome reminder to not mess with a certain branch of foreign, organized crime, and Jack was left a broken man.

Czarny left the force shortly after the funeral. As far as anyone knows, he lives well outside of the city, in his parents' old home. He doesn't answer phone calls, letters, or email, and his colleagues have taken the hint.

Not that there's a lot of them left alive.

BUT THE TRUTH IS

Detective Jack “Hack” Czarny was as crooked as the city’s nights are long and dark. He was in the employ of a certain “foreign-business interest,” which used him to put away their own rivals, and get their soldiers out of trouble, or face down in a ditch. He forced people to say what he wanted, and planted evidence. He could figure out crime scenes so quickly because he was present when a lot of them went down.

He *did* love his wife, but that didn’t stop him from altering her evidence, or planting fake information for her to find. The way he saw it, he was looking out for her well-being. All he had to do was follow orders, and make sure his do-gooder wife stayed in the dark, and then they could soon retire on all his quiet money.

Unfortunately, not talking about work to each other bore bitter fruit. She was about to blow open one of his colleagues’ side projects – and rather than tell Jack, that detective told the man they both worked for. Drastic steps were taken, and Janice wound up dead. Jack – being no dummy – realized *exactly* what had happened.

He couldn’t go public with what he knew, and he couldn’t turn on his fellows. So he took a large payout as compensation, swore to keep quiet, and left the city.

*There are evil spirits
in human form that tread
on this earth.*

– Ian Nottingham,
in *Witchblade*
(TV series)

THIS IS WHERE IT GETS BAD

The problem is – no one *ever* gets out clean from that kind of a situation. Jack knew it was only a matter of time before the “businessmen” decided enough time had gone by, and that they could make him disappear without bringing too much attention. So, he sat in his empty nest, waiting for death. The combination of grief, fear, self-recrimination, and hate turned him into a dark and broken mockery of a man.

When the strange person appeared in his home – a truly weird-looking individual who knew Jack’s whole story – and promised him protection, Jack didn’t tell him to leave. Instead, he listened, and as the strange person explained what he could help Jack do – and *become* – he saw this as the answer to the question he’d been asking since the funeral: How *could* he get revenge?

Janice loved her graduation ring from the Academy, and always wore it proudly. The strange person needed it, along

with a bevy of other dark and unwholesome things, for a ritual that harshly excised whatever humanity Jack had left.

By its climax, the silver ring had turned black, and the gemstone had cracked and gone sour. Jack put it on his smallest finger, smiled the smile of a man who has learned to love Hell, and fell down dead.

A day and a night later, when he got back up again, not even his smile was recognizable.

THIS IS WHERE WE ARE NOW

That night was two years ago. Since then, Jack has been a busy wraith.

He killed the colleague who ratted out his wife – shooting him repeatedly, and then draining his life. Then he killed the men who actually killed her, the mob boss who ordered her dead, and *his* boss’ entire stateside family. Only then did he come after that last, doomed man, toying with him for days before finally consenting to let him just die.

After that, he settled into the pattern that has become part of the city’s legend. Every new moon, he emerges from his wife’s grave, and seeks out some half-remembered piece of his old life. He learns where these people are now, follows them as they go about their secret patterns, and then discovers the best time to get at them. Then he collects his guns and a battered, old set of SWAT armor from where he hides them (an empty coffin in a mausoleum). He sets up an ambush, and kills the old friend or foe and everyone with them – guilty, innocent, or too nosy for their own good.

If possible, he saves the primary targets for last, stealing their health to repair any damage he’s suffered. Their bodies have the life sucked out by way of the face, leaving the mark of a dark, bony hand on their withered features.

The police, bless their hearts, have been doing their best to keep a lid on the whole thing. Dead gangsters and thugs are chalked up to gang violence – as are any innocent bystanders – and tossed in the “unsolved” drawer as soon as possible. The more sensationalistic papers were initially pressured to avoid running stories about the “Black Hand Murders,” but after a few reporters wound up dead, the pressure wasn’t needed.

In the absence of official action, there are only stories – and fear.

THIS IS WHERE YOU COME IN

Jack Czarny can be dropped into just about any big city setting and let loose. He could be a direct threat to the characters or their families, a matter their leaders want dealt with, or just another dark and nasty supernatural obstacle in a city full of them.

For PCs who are in law enforcement, dealing with supernatural elements within the city, the wraith could be a dirty secret they’re trying to suppress, or something horrible they’ve just found out about. Maybe the remnants of the 13th Precinct need help protecting themselves, or maybe the protagonists – stymied by layers of mob-friendly interference – are letting the wraith do their work *for* them, and trying to keep collateral damage at a minimum.

If the PCs are themselves predatory creatures, having a ghostly serial killer on the loose may bring heat down on their own kind, leading them to try and stop this Black Hand Killer. Necromantic or ghostly beings could possibly enter an alliance. Ethically questionable mages could try and bring him under their control.

For monster hunters, this could be a true challenge. Can they find out who this vengeful ghost is, and set a trap for him? Can they best him in combat, or learn his one sure weakness – the ring – and destroy it? Will they have to make friends with unsavory characters, or will they be able to serve justice by solving the wraith's last few cases for him?

Angry Wraith Cop

One hideous beast, Jack's blue-grey skin is translucent, revealing grey veins and black bones underneath. When he's angry or ethereal his skin goes transparent, and the bones glow with a black, evil light. His eyes are empty pits, devoid of emotion, and his voice is cold and rotten.

Jack "Hack" Czarny

455 points

ST 17 [70]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 17 [70].

Damage 1d+2/3d-1; BL 58 lbs.; HP 22 [10]; Will 13 [0]; Per 15 [10]; FP 18 [3].

Basic Speed 7.25 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 10. 6'1"; 160 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Doesn't Breathe [20]; DR 4 [20]; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards [30]; Injury Tolerance (No Blood, No Brains, No Vitals, Unliving) [35]; Magery 3 [35]; Night Vision 9 [9]; Supernatural Durability (Spells, Magic Weapons) [150]; Temperature Tolerance 10 [10]; Unaging [15]; Unfazeable [15].

Disadvantages

Appearance (Horrific) [-24]; Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Callous [-5]; Dependency (Wife's ring; Constantly) [-150]; Disturbing Voice [-10]; Social Stigma (Dead) [-20]; Supernatural Features (No Body Heat, Pallor) [-15]; Trade-mark (Handprint on forehead) [-10]; Unhealing (Can heal with Steal Health) [-20].

Quirks: Loves killing; Obsessed with wife's grave; Sexless. [-3]

Skills

Criminology (A) IQ+2 [8]-15; Forced Entry (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Guns (Pistol) (E) DX+3 [8]-15; Guns (Shotgun) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Interrogation (A) IQ+2 [8]-15; Intimidation (A) Will+2 [8]-15; Law (Criminal) (H) IQ [4]-13; Search (A) Per [2]-15; Stealth (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Streetwise (A) IQ+2 [8]-15.

Spells*

Deathtouch (H) IQ+7 [20]-20; Steal Health (H) IQ+7 [20]-20; Ethereal Body (H) IQ+7 [20]-20.

Equipment

Auto pistol, .44M (p. B278), pump shotgun, 12G (p. B279), SWAT armor (assault vest, arm and leg riot gear, riot helmet) (*GURPS High Tech*, pp. 66-70), wife's ring (wraith item; DR 1, HP 4).

* All spells include +3 from Magery.

How You Find a Wraith

Witnesses might see him rising from his wife's grave, and find out her story. Someone might realize that most of the dead police officers worked at the 13th Precinct at some point within the last 10 years. A rare living witness might talk to the police or mental health workers before Czarny comes back to finish the job. Forensic examination might discover his fingerprints at a crime scene.

Most of the crooked scum at the 13th Precinct are dead, and the rest are nervous, have left the force, or have since transferred. Most of those who left the police have left the city, too. The others live in fear, and could be persuaded to talk.

The precinct's leadership refuses to speculate as to who was targeting their officers, or why. Unofficially, they might note that a lot of cases involved the Russian mob. For their part, the mob thinks there's a vigilante, but refuses to believe it's a dead one. They have, however, stopped working with cops out of that precinct.

Jack's paychecks had been sent electronically to an account that, it turns out, hasn't been touched in two years. Jack's parents' house has had its utilities shut off due to lack of payment. Anyone going in finds a filthy warren, full of animal corpses, putrid waste, and less identifiable things.

The being that made Jack a wraith is long gone, but he left a note on the living room wall, scrawled in the crushed juice of a thousand insects: *THIS IS BUT THE FIRST OF MANY.*

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.

FESTIVALS OF THE UNKNOWN

BY JESSICA WOLFMAN

One aspect of creating realistic and interesting backgrounds for a world is its cultures' use of holidays. Holidays are a good way to show what a society, race, or religion sees as significant. These tables provide a quick method for the GM to design holidays. The table helps determine not only the reason for the day but also holiday traditions, which can be turned into potential hooks or opportunities for roleplaying. Arriving during a celebration can be an unexpected twist for the adventurers as they enter a new town or country (or planet, or dimension).

PURPOSE

Determining the purpose is the first step. Although there are many different reasons to have a holiday, they tend to fall into a few specific categories. Roll or pick from the following table. Roll 1d, 1d.

- 1, 1-2 – The holiday is the observation of a repetitive, *natural* event: an equinox or solstice, the end of the winter rains, the start of the new year, when the World Tree blooms, etc.
- 1, 2-4 – The holiday marks the time of planting or harvesting.
- 1, 5-6 – The holiday is a celebration of love, marriage, or fertility.
- 2, 1-2 – The holiday is a re-enactment of an important historical event, such as a famous battle or escape from a disaster.
- 2, 3-4 – The holiday is intended to appease, honor, frighten, or bring forth a specific kind of supernatural being, such as gods, demons, the dead, saints, or ancestor spirits.
- 2, 5-6 – The holiday marks the birth (or other form of arrival to the world) of a famous or holy person.
- 3, 1-2 – The holiday marks the death (or ascension or disappearance) of a famous or holy person.
- 3, 3-4 – The holiday is an observation of a religious revelation or miracle.
- 3, 5-6 – The holiday is a symbolic cleansing of sins, ignorance, sorrow, etc., or represents the symbolic renewal of purity or innocence.
- 4, 1-2 – The holiday is a celebration of independence, emancipation, armistice, or victory.
- 4, 3-4 – This holiday was declared holy (or unholy) by a god or other supernatural entity.
- 4, 5-6 – This holiday is a commemoration or observation of an important event. Roll 1d: 1-3 – a mundane event (the coronation of the king, the end of a war, the date a notable law was made, etc.); 4-6 – a supernatural event (the appearance of a god's avatar, the closing of the Gate to Hell, the slaying of the dragon that had devastated the kingdom, etc.).

- 5, 1-2 – The holiday honors a particular group of people (parents, soldiers, laborers, elves, etc.).
- 5, 3-4 – The holiday commemorates the founding of a country, organization, religion, etc.
- 5, 5-6 – The holiday is a day of penance or mourning.
- 6, 1-2 – The holiday is a festival of lights (to bring back the sun/goodness or to banish the dark/evil).
- 6, 3-4 – The holiday denotes a change in lifestyle, such as coming of age.
- 6, 5-6 – The holiday is used to demonstrate pride in something.

TRADITIONS

Holidays tend to have associated traditions: people put up decorations, buy gifts and candies, spend days cooking, wear a specific color, put on parades, dress up in costumes, camp out at stores for the sales, and more. For many, these traditions are the entire point of the holiday; *not* taking part is seen as strange, sad, or even blasphemous.

The GM may roll or pick as many times as he likes on the following table, although one to three events is usually enough. Roll 1d, 1d. Reroll results that contradict a previously chosen tradition.

- 1, 1 – The holiday is marked by revels, feasts, singing, dancing, games, and overindulgence. Parades, marches, pageants, or mock battles are held. Events that are normally banned – such as gambling, stage plays, or public drunkenness – may be allowed openly.
- 1, 2 – Roles are reversed. Members of the lowest classes are treated as nobility and vice versa, men and women take on the other's roles, etc.
- 1, 3 – People wear specific types of outfits, such as masks, full costumes, special jewelry, formal or traditional clothing, body or face paint, or nothing at all. People may also dress up their animals.
- 1, 4 – Light is important. Candles of a specific type, number, or color may be burned, perhaps over a period of days; people may decorate their houses with lights or wear them on their clothing; or torches (or sparklers or light sticks) may be carried, often in procession.
- 1, 5 – Bonfires are lit, so that something can be burned (perhaps in effigy), people can dance around them, or objects can be placed inside for purification.

- 1, 6 – Items such as paper boats or candles are floated down a river or out to sea; kites or balloons are allowed to drift in the winds or flying animals are released to fly away; items such as statuettes are buried in the earth; or spells, prayers, or wishes are written down and burned.
- 2, 1 – A person is nominated or randomly chosen as the lord of misrule, the fool, the king or queen of the holiday, and so on, and his word is law.
- 2, 2 – Houses, altars, trees, statues, and the like are decorated with garlands, lights, flowers, flags, or other ornaments. Banners, statues, or oversized holy symbols are erected outside of homes, in the center of town, or are carried in procession.
- 2, 3 – All holiday-related activities are held in a particular place: at the standing stones, in the town square, at a temple or sacred area, or any other place that holds significant meaning to the origin of the holiday.
- 2, 4 – Certain traditional foods or treats are made for eating or display, or particular types of food are required for eating or are proscribed during the holiday.
- 2, 5 – People fast during the holidays (either just during daylight hours or through the entire holiday). The fast is possibly preceded or followed by a feast.
- 2, 6 – People seek to begin new romances or improve upon existing relationships. Marriages may be arranged or performed on the holiday.

What are they celebrating?!

- 3, 1 – There is an exchange of symbolic tokens, trinkets, or major gifts. People may be expected to give gifts to everyone they are close to or see on a regular basis. Alternatively, only certain people, such as children or lovers, are expected to take part in the exchange.
- 3, 2 – Stores put on major sales, perhaps for stretching for weeks prior to the holiday, or special market days or fairs are held. Conversely, many or all stores or businesses may be required to be closed during the holiday, or just close due to tradition.
- 3, 3 – Family reunions are traditionally held during the holiday.
- 3, 4 – People visit grave sites, clean family tombs, or engage in ancestor worship, even if the holiday is not otherwise focused on such things.
- 3, 5 – Traditional games, races, or sporting events are held; traditional plays and stories are performed and told; or traditional dances (such as maypole or morris dances) are put on.
- 3, 6 – Fireworks or other forms of pyrotechnics are shot off, or noisemakers are used.
- 4, 1 – People – possibly everyone, possibly just certain types such as priests, civic leaders, or youths – perform special rituals, read aloud from important historic or religious texts, or perform other actions, usually to audiences.
- 4, 2 – Sacrifices or offerings are made of food, money, animals, people, effigies, or tokens. A specific thing may be sacrificed (perhaps having been specifically made or set aside for such an event), or it may be common (or required) for everyone to contribute something.
- 4, 3 – It is required or suggested that people give up or abstain from something for the holiday, or for a period of time (usually up 2d weeks) prior to or following the holiday.

- 4, 4 – People are supposed to spend the time in prayer, meditation, contemplation, or silence throughout the holiday.
- 4, 5 – A particular group is honored, blessed, or thanked, even if it isn't the main focus of the holiday. This might be a particular group of people (such as children, the elderly, expectant mothers), type of animal (particularly a type of domestic animal), crops, or a god or supernatural being.
- 4, 6 – Temples are closed; no religious services or rituals are held.
- 5, 1 – People engage in symbolic or ritualized bathing. Alternatively, certain items (such as doorways, clothing, or even the entire household) are symbolically or actually cleansed or purified.
- 5, 2 – People hunt for an animal or mythical creature (literally or figuratively); sometimes a person dresses up as the animal while others symbolically hunt him.
- 5, 3 – Objects (often candy or toys) are hidden so others, especially children, can find them.
- 5, 4 – People go house to house begging for treats or money, singing, carrying a symbol, giving presents to the residents, or putting decorations (or playing tricks) on the houses.
- 5, 5 – A particular animal, plant, or other such thing is associated with the holiday, and may form a mascot. Alternatively, a particular color(s) is associated with the holiday, and most people decorate with or wear that color.
- 5, 6 – It's believed that children born or conceived on the holiday are blessed (or cursed) and will have good (or bad) luck in life. Conversely, dying on that day might be considered to be good (or bad) for the dead person's spirit.
- 6, 1 – It's believed that a supernatural being or person, ancestor spirits, or holy person comes around that day to give treats or presents, punish or kidnap bad children, steal animals, grant blessings, dine with the family, etc. Often treats or entire meals are left out for the being.
- 6, 2 – It's believed that doors open up to Hell, the afterlife, Faerie, or other such dimensions, and creatures can enter the real world through them – or normal people can fall through to the other dimension and possibly get stuck (especially if they go to a place they shouldn't go on that day, such as crossroads, a cemetery, or even outside).
- 6, 3 – If a particular event occurs (or fails to occur) on the holiday, such as a star falling, a particular animal appearing, or the ice breaking on the lake, then good (or bad) luck will prevail until next year.
- 6, 4 – People plant trees or release animals into the wild.
- 6, 5 – On this holiday, people are initiated into the priesthood or into particular trades, organizations, or secret societies.
- 6, 6 – Divinations are performed, and omens are read.

LENGTH

Roll 2d on the following table to determine how long the holiday lasts.

| <i>Roll</i> | <i>Length</i> |
|-------------|---|
| 2 | 1d-1 (minimum 1) weeks |
| 3-4 | 1d days |
| 5-11 | 1 day* |
| 11-12 | Part of the day, such as during daylight hours only, or only after moonrise.† |

* Roll 1d: On a roll of 6, the holiday is also celebrated the eve before or the morning after.

† Roll again to determine how many days the holiday spans, rerolling results of 11-12.

FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE

In general, most holidays occur annually, but that's not always the case. Roll 2d to determine how often the holiday occurs.

| Roll | Frequency |
|------|--|
| 2 | Held on 2d nonconsecutive days each year |
| 3 | Monthly |
| 4-5 | Seasonally |
| 6-11 | Annually |
| 12 | Occurs once every 2d years |

TIME HELD

Most holidays suggest an appropriate time in which they happen – harvest-based holidays are usually held in the autumn; festivals of light are celebrated in the darkest times of the year, and so on. For other holidays, roll 1d.

| Roll | Time |
|------|---|
| 1 | On, or just before or after, a particular phase of the moon (such as the third full moon of the year) |
| 2 | In spring* |
| 3 | In summer* |
| 4 | In autumn* |
| 5 | In fall* |
| 6 | Movable holiday† |

* If desired, roll 1d: 1-2 – early in the season; 3-4 – in the middle of the season; 5-6 – late in the season.

† The event takes place up to 1d days before or after another holiday, significant periodic event, or other specified time period (such as on the nearest weekend at a particular time of one month, or two days after the last of the ice melts).

IMPORTANCE

Not all holidays are created equal. People will usually treat the day that marks the ascension of the First Empress into divinity as being more important than the day that marks the annual Return of the Migrating Geese. If desired, roll 1d to determine how important a particular holiday happens to be.

| Roll | Importance |
|------|--|
| 1 | Minor importance – it's on the calendar, but otherwise, most people don't care much about it. |
| 2-3 | Moderate importance – people will engage in at least a minor ritual or two (such as buying greeting cards or wearing the appropriate color). |
| 4-5 | Very important – people usually go all-out for it, and it's common to have the day off. |
| 6 | The holiday is extremely important – people spend a long time planning for it, little or no work is expected to be done, and not celebrating it is seen as truly bizarre.* |

* Roll 1d: On a roll of 5-6, the holiday is also celebrated the day (or more) before or after.

PARTICIPANTS

Not everyone celebrates each holiday. If the holiday itself doesn't suggest its focus group, then the GM may roll 2d on the following table.

- 2-3** – Only members of a particular group, such as adherents to a particular religion or ethnicity, celebrate the holiday. It's considered weird or taboo for non-members to join in.
- 4-6** – Originally, only members of a particular group celebrated the holiday, but it has since leaked out into the general population. Typically, it's still far more important for the original celebrants than it is for the rest of the people. The original celebrants may welcome newcomers to the holiday, or resent the way it's being treated by others.
- 7-11** – Everyone celebrates the holiday. If it was originally only for one group, that's been forgotten through the ages, or the holiday has commercialized for the general population. In certain settings, the celebrations may be mandatory.
- 12** – The holiday has been banned or fallen out of favor. Those who celebrate it must do so in secret or suffer social or even legal consequences.

LOCATION

Not every holiday is celebrated everywhere. A holiday that is endemic throughout one area might be nearly unknown anywhere else. The GM may roll 1d to determine over how large an area the holiday is observed.

| Roll | Location |
|------|---|
| 1 | Local (single town or city) |
| 2 | Regional (county, very small country, one state or a tri-state area, small colony) |
| 3-4 | Country-wide (several very small countries, throughout an entire religion, by an entire race on a multi-race world) |
| 5-6 | Worldwide (although it may be celebrated on different dates or for different reasons in different countries) |

In low- or high-tech campaigns, these results should be altered to reflect the scope of the setting. "Local" in a wide-reaching space-faring game may just mean on one planet or by one species, "country-wide" might mean in one solar system or throughout one species' territory, and "worldwide" might mean "throughout the known universe." Likewise, in a low-tech world that lacks useful long-range communication and travel, then "worldwide" may simply mean one country, its colonies, and any closely allied nations.

GENERAL MOOD

If the purpose of a particular holiday doesn't suggest the associated mood, the GM may roll 1d on the following table.

| Roll | Mood |
|------|---|
| 1 | The holiday is generally somber. |
| 2 | The holiday is marked by a decadent, partying mood. |
| 3-4 | People are supposed to be charitable or thankful on this holiday. |
| 5 | The holiday is generally joyful. |
| 6 | No particular mood is associated with the holiday. |

SAMPLE HOLIDAYS

These events show the versatility of the tables, as well as provide ready-made examples that can be adapted to the GM's favorite setting.

Viyir's Feast

This feast, held in the late spring each year, was declared by the god Viyir (a god of fertility, bounty, and forethought) to be a time of feasting and happiness. People clear out the rest of the preserved foods that had been laid in for winter and get ready for the new foods of summer and autumn by thoroughly cleaning the pantry.

Often called "the feast of leftovers," Viyir's Feast is usually served potluck, with entire communities providing bits of food and helping the cooks. People give thanks and small gifts (*not* of food, but often of new cooking implements) to the cooks. While not a particularly important holiday in the religion, it's a rather popular one, and is celebrated everywhere Viyir is worshipped. People go all-out for the holiday in rural areas and closely knit communities; in more urban areas, it's mostly an excuse to have a big family meal. While the holiday lasts for only one day, the day after is usually reserved for digestion and cleaning up.

Delivery

Centuries ago, followers of the dog-headed demigoddess Scha were persecuted by members of the dominant religion, which worshipped the agricultural god Dreyestus. One particular count hated the Schaites but could not ban them according to the laws of the larger kingdom. Instead, since autumn was a holy time for Dreyestus, the Count declared that no good Dreyestian could do business with a Schaite during that time – and since most Schaites were craftsmen, it meant they would quickly run out of food and either starve or leave.

The Schaite's prayers for aid became more and more desperate as hunger set in. Then, on a moonlit night, packs of spectral dogs suddenly appeared on the streets. Some frightened and bit any Dreyestian they came across, while others left parcels of meat and bread on the doorsteps of the faithful. Finally, they converged on the count's manor, savaged him and his family, and chased them out of the country, never to return.

The anniversary of the event, held on the second new moon in autumn, is a major holiday among the Schaites. Dogs are allowed to run around unleashed; it's a bad omen if one dies or fails to return home. Children go door to door, bringing treats (usually sausages) to the residents or putting dog-shaped figurines on the front steps. Some people put on dog masks and frighten or even attack Dreyestians, although in recent times, this is frowned upon. Few people outside the county are aware of the holiday, and it is only celebrated by the Schaites.

Sunday

The planet Da'thy is part of a trinary star system. Once every five years, the huge, red main star and the two minor, faint blue stars align in a mythically and culturally significant way. The planet's natives – the graceful, eight-limbed stick-insectoid Thyne, who are normally sedate and urbane – celebrate by throwing a world-wide, three-day party.

Months are spent in preparation. Carnivals are set up and parades march across entire continents, gaining and losing

participants as they go. Athletic troupes put on exotic costumes and perform death-defying feats of acrobatics. Awards are given to the best troupes, as well as to musicians, singers, holoartists, and others. Huge flocks of *tlikkeen* with brilliant colored carapaces are released on noon of the second day so their crystalline feathers spread rainbows everywhere. Decadence is *the* byword. Anyone on-planet not celebrating Sunday without a very good reason is universally considered to be a ghastly antisocial killjoy and is mocked incessantly until the next holiday – and more than one *war* has been put on hold for it.

Steadfast

The strangely shaped ships appeared in the sky one day and disgorged huge beings whose true forms were hidden by bulky, asymmetrical mechanized suits. Armed with powerful blasters and nigh-impervious to most bullets, the aliens lay waste to the cities. People fled the targeted sites, but many were captured by the aliens and taken back to the ships for unknown reasons. After a few weeks, the ships vanished as suddenly as they came, but many of the aliens remained and turned the smoking ruins of the cities into their nests, from which they only occasionally ventured. Most of the humans who survived fled to the country, gathering in small, out-of-the-way towns and villages.

The observance called Steadfast seemed to spontaneously arise among the survivors. Once each season, people in each town will gather in underground areas, where the giant aliens can't enter and can't easily destroy. They take the time to remind themselves of the need to stick together, as the aliens can't be destroyed by a single human, and the survival of humanity is dependent on cooperation. People also take the time to acknowledge each others' deeds, to remember those who died in the continual fight, and to appreciate those who are still alive. Steadfast is a quiet holiday spent in reflection and mourning, although toward the end of the day, people will join in quiet games, storytelling, and sing-alongs.

*Use these ideas to create holy days for the gods of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 7: Clerics**, commemorations for the nonhumans of **GURPS Banestorm**, or festivities for the alternate timelines of **GURPS Infinite Worlds**.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Over 20 years ago, Jessica Wolfman wandered, lost and alone, into a multiverse-spanning portal cleverly disguised as a convention gaming demo. She quickly decided not to escape, and instead settled down, befriended the natives, and has spent her time there wisely by studying them. This is her first attempt at documenting their peculiar and alien societies.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

AS I ALWAYS SUSPECTED . . . GNOMES BENEATH THE HOOD!

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Take a look at the paragraph of the lower-right corner of this page. I have absolutely no clue what those words are – as I type this paragraph, I haven’t written them yet – but I can already tell you a secret about that block of text. In fact, check out the lower-right corner paragraph of every page in this issue; that same secret is hiding in plain sight, one which I bet most of you have never consciously detected.

To wit: The final paragraph on every page ends on a complete sentence.

This isn’t an accident. It’s a careful design decision, so you’re never reading along and then discover you need to turn the page as you’re in the middle of a thought: “The heroes pull back the mask to reveal the murderer as . . .” (Or, even worse, hyphenated in the middle of a word: “The strange man has a tambo- . . . urine in his backpack.”) It’s a subtle effect, but it’s one that we know subconsciously increases the enjoyment of what we produce. It’s also nontrivial; our production gurus – let’s call her “Nikki” – work hard to make this happen as often as possible. Sure, it’s not backbreaking, but it takes effort, training, and checklists . . . and it’s part of the invisible “magic” that goes into creating a published work to our standards.

*Alan: How to play the flute.
Well here we are. You blow
there and you move your
fingers up and down here.*

Noel: Great, great, Alan.

*– Monty Python’s
Flying Circus #28*

For most of us, I suspect urban environments contain a certain amount of “magic” that goes on behind the scenes; I don’t know beans about how the fire department works, outside of a vague understanding that I should give them a call when I’m having a particular Really Bad Day. Reseating a toilet in my house a month ago also made me realize I also don’t know how a town’s plumbing works. (“There’s a hole right in the floor that sucks water into oblivion? How is this possible?!”) This is true regardless of the era; your typical vaguely medieval farmer probably knows as much about how the blacksmith transforms molten rock into swords as the blacksmith understands the nuances of the agricultural pursuit.

Here, then are ways to look at the world slightly askew, to envision the possibility of magic hiding in plain sight.

SCALE IS EVERYTHING

There’s a tendency to look at the world and say, “Okay, let’s turn it magic!” Thus, flying carpets replace cars, or there are zappy-wands instead of guns. However, it can be more interesting and fruitful to change the perspective or scale of what we’re tweaking when we add magic.

For example, zooming in, let’s say that we declare “fire” to be a magical source. Normally, we think of it as an *effect* of magic or a natural phenomenon, but taking it as the foundational magical underpinning for the world leads to some odd – and interesting – new ideas for gaming. As some random examples:

- Fires become more difficult or impossible to start in low-mana areas, or become more uncontrollable or spontaneous in high-mana places.
- Internal combustion engines might look different (smaller, larger, or stranger, depending on what is needed to make fire possible).
- If fuel also needs to be magical, then fire is probably about as dangerous as (say) dynamite or gunpowder (both of which can be deadly, but tend to be stable enough to handle under most circumstances); as long as you don’t provide a supply of enchanted fuel, fire is tamable.

- A mage might smoke cigarettes to recharge.
- If “fire” extends to the metabolic processes that transform calories into energy, then we *all* become magical; a no-mana zone might mean you starve to death with a full belly!

Similar possibilities from zooming in on hyper-specific magical inspiration include water (fluid dynamics is a magical force), any of the simple machines (“anything with a lever is *magic!*”), or metallurgy (which might mean “blacksmith” and “mage” are synonymous).

We can apply the same effect by zooming out. There might be a fundamental magical force behind the weather (“meteorologist equals sorcerer”), conception/pregnancy (forget charting your cycle – go with divination), or even sapience (where exile to a no-mana zone is the equivalent of a lobotomy). By stepping back from the usual human-level replacements for magic, we might stumble onto a lot of interesting possibilities to make our urban environments truly fantastic.

PAPER, PLASTIC, OR MAGIC?

When we bought our house a few years ago, we started fully appreciating the number of choices for *everything*. Just as one example: selecting a lawnmower. We could go with gas-powered, electric (rechargeable battery or plug-in-a-wall varieties), manual push mowers, and maybe even a goat. None of these options were obviously superior – gas-powered were affordable but stinky and noisy, rechargeable electric was costly up front but quiet, goats are cute but they’re also goats, etc. For many aspects of urban life, there are choices for practically everything: gas or electric heating; owning a car or not; tap water, well water, or home-filtration; etc.

It’s entirely possible that “magic” can fit into any of these choices, as just another possibility for urban-dwellers to puzzle out. Maybe a homebuilder has a choice between “standard gravity-fed sewage removal” and “poo-devouring water elementals.” And magic doesn’t even need to be the *best* choice! Maybe there’s a prestige associated with non-magical means, or maybe mana flare-ups are common enough that any home who goes the water-elemental route courts disaster, but this is why they are cheaper and thus commonplace.

To add a true fantastic appeal to any urban environment, see how you can make magic *and* nonmagical means of accomplishing tasks enticing. The results might surprise you!

THE MYSTICAL SOCIAL ARTS

At one late-night gab session among friends on the topic of the best science-fiction films of the 1990s, I enthusiastically listed *The Game* and *The Truman Show* as top contenders. Amid protestations that they weren’t “science fiction,” I argued they were; it’s just that the “science” being exploited in each were the social sciences. When we think of

inserting magic into a setting, we normally think of it as an enhancer or replacement for harder sciences – fireballs instead of mundane weapons, light spells instead of candles or electricity, etc. However, the *social* sciences are also fertile grounds for possibilities.

For example, what if the act of ruling is a fundamentally magical force? The stuffy ritualistic bureaucracy that takes place within “city councils” is actually necessary to provide the binding force of law – Robert’s Rules of Order might be all that keeps the darkness at bay! Or perhaps there is no concept of “law” that isn’t codified by magic; in such a setting, contracts might be vastly more powerful, because a fundamental force of the universe ensures their completion or metes out immediate justice. Maybe a magical force unifies familial lines; blood truly *is* thicker than water, because it provides immediate bonuses or abilities that are unavailable for outsiders. (For one implementation of this idea, seek out the TSR *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* campaign setting *Birthright*.)

This fits well with the initial ideas we explored: If we don’t know how an aspect of urban life is fulfilled, it might as well be magic. Most of us aren’t lawyers, bureaucrats, or civil engineers, and we have only a vague understanding of what they do, so it’s relatively easy to start with “they’re an unknown element in the city” and add “. . . that is fundamentally magic.”

Given how many professions there are that take years to master, it’s not surprising that most pursuits have elements that seem as if they’re magic to outsiders. Why not take that fundamental uncertainty about what’s really going on beneath the hood, and see about adding some magic? Your city just might thank you.

Po-TAY-To, Po-TAH-To . . .

One theme in some settings (such as White Wolf’s *Mage: The Awakening* setting) is that what we think of as “technology” is actually “magic” by a different name. The example that particular game uses is how modern society would view a strange man in a robe and wizard’s hat waving a wand over a pregnant woman’s abdomen and declaring the baby is healthy, versus a medical doctor in a lab coat doing the same thing with an ultrasound wand.

The intersection of magic and technology is its own kettle of fish (see *GURPS Thaumatology: Urban Magics* for some ideas). However, some questions to consider:

- Is magic separate from technology, or is it its own thing?
- Can magic and technology coexist, or is there a conflict between the two? (The classic interactive-fiction game *Spellbreaker* required the hero to destroy the Age of Magic and – in so doing – usher in the Age of Science.)
- Is knowledge of magic inherently contradictory to magic, such that it’s impossible to be a master of both?

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

THE CITIES OF THE BEAST

This adventure-series outline is appropriate for any campaign featuring urban fantasy. It's especially suitable for campaigns that have globetrotting heroes or reasons to travel from city to city. Its key encounters are simple enough that the series can be slipped into an ongoing campaign.

The heroes encounter an unusual, monstrous beast in a hazardous, contained, reasonably nondescript situation (in the sewers, in an abandoned library, or something similar). It presents itself as a dangerous enough threat, and it doesn't respond to quick attempts at dispelling or calming it. Presumably the heroes kill it; if so, it dissolves shortly after the battle, with little evidence of its existence. (Preferably, evidence of the battle lies around – damaged surroundings, shell casings if appropriate, etc.)

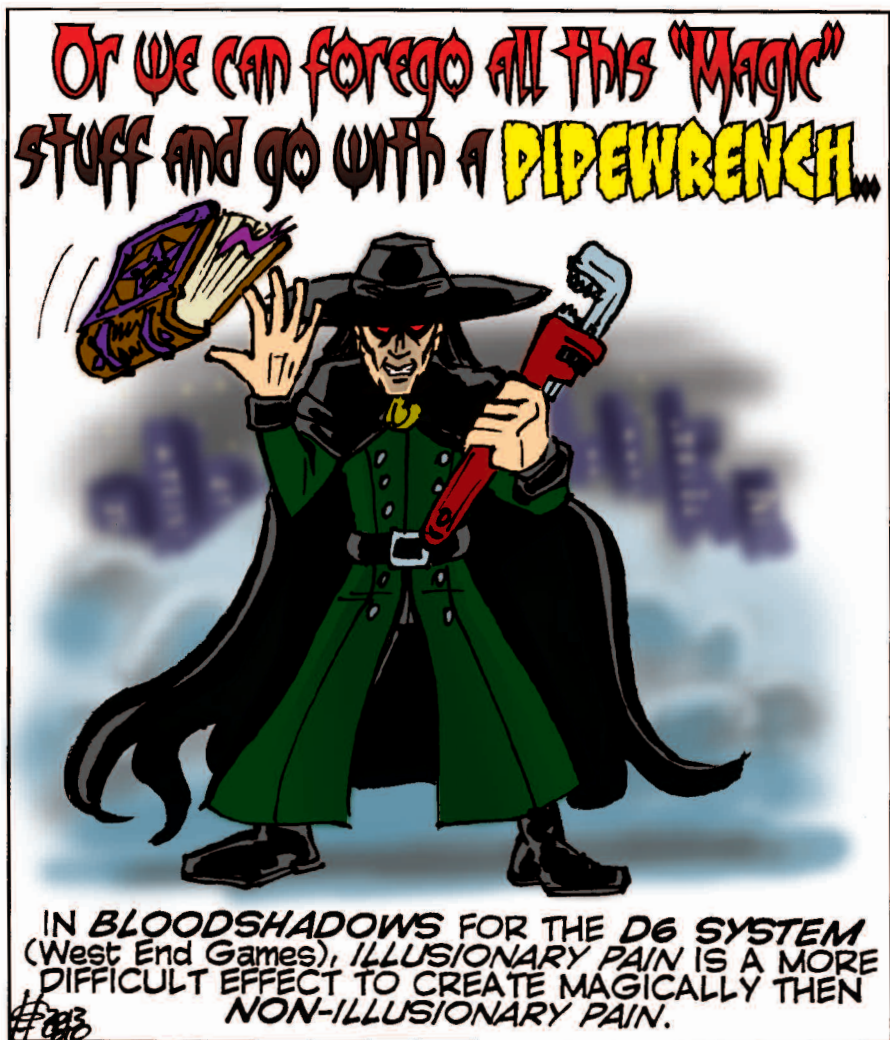
In another city, the heroes meet what seems to be the same creature, *in the same situation* – the subway/abandoned library/etc. look identical. In fact, any cosmetic (or not-so-cosmetic) damage to the previous environment is also present, as are any environmental changes effected by the heroes; it is as if the encounter takes place in the same spot. Heroes who can replay the second attack – mentally, magically, or the like – will see that the monster's attack was initiated in the same way: It originated from the same spot, its initial attacks were the same (if possible), etc. Any actions the heroes take – including different attacks, etc. – causes the situation to deviate from the starting point. At the end of the encounter, the creature disappears, as before.

As the heroes travel from city to city, the situation will play out identically: same locale, same monster, etc.

The heroes can use the fact that the locale will carry over to their advantage as they seek a resolution. For example, if they set up a trap *immediately after* defeating the monster in this city locale, then the same trap exists when they encounter the monster in the *next* city

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



IN BLOODSHADOWS FOR THE D6 SYSTEM (West End Games), ILLUSIONARY PAIN IS A MORE DIFFICULT EFFECT TO CREATE MAGICALLY THEN NON-ILLUSIONARY PAIN.

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

locale. Once the beast is caught, the heroes can use longer-term efforts to negotiate/dispel/understand it; this will be successful, and they will not encounter the situation again.

What is actually going on is up to the GM. Some possibilities include residual guilt following the heroes, a spirit of malevolence tied to an item carried, or some element connected to a larger plot.

APPENDIX Z

CITY BOTCHES

BY PHIL MASTERS

The standard *GURPS Critical Spell Failure Table* (p. B236) provides a range of interesting results for magical foul-ups, but using variant tables for this purpose can add more flavor for specific settings and styles of magic. *GURPS Thaumatology* (pp. 256-260) provides a selection of such tables; here's another one, suitable for use with "city magics," including some of the arts described in *GURPS Thaumatology: Urban Magics* and the magic worked by the clerics of "city gods" as described in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 7: Clerics*.

In all cases, "the city" means the urban location where the spell was cast, or with which the caster is most closely associated – whatever seems most appropriate to the GM. For this and other purposes, "city" can mean a town or a large village, but nothing smaller – at minimum, it must be a community with its own shops, places of worship, etc. The boundaries of the city are its walls if it has some and they are in a functional state of repair; otherwise, use whatever political boundaries the local inhabitants would recognize.

- 3 – Spell fails entirely. The caster takes 2 HP of injury, and suffers a very visible scar that functions as Unnatural Features 3 until it heals, which takes one month.
- 4 – Spell fails entirely. The caster is incapable of casting any magic within the boundaries of the city for the next 24 hours.
- 5 – Spell fails entirely. Any man-made structures (buildings, vehicles, etc.) within 10 yards take 1d damage (DR doesn't protect), which will be quite visible – chips, dents, etc. suddenly appear, fragments fall off, and so on.
- 6 – Spell is cast on a random nearby friend (or on the caster himself if no friends are around), if it does physical damage. Otherwise, it's cast on a random nearby foe, but if it's harmful, the victim automatically makes any HT or Will rolls required to resist it, and is filled with hatred for the caster.
- 7 – Spell fails entirely. The caster is filled with the sense that buildings and man-made structures *hate* him, suffering the equivalent of Claustrophobia (p. B149) with a self-control roll of 9 when inside man-made structures. This continues for 2d days.
- 8 – Spell fails entirely. The caster suffers from Phantom Voices (p. B148) at the -10-point level for the next 24 hours.
- 9 – Spell fails entirely. The caster finds himself strangely disconnected from the city for the next 3d days, suffering -4 to Architecture, Area Knowledge, Hidden Lore, and Current Affairs skills relating to it, and to Administration, Carousing, Politics, Public Speaking, Savoir-Faire, Shadowing, Stealth, and Streetwise when within its boundaries.
- 10 – The spell produces nothing but a lot of noise, much like an excited crowd, making verbal communication impossible for

the caster and anyone within 10 yards of him. This lasts for 2d seconds.

- 11 – The spell produces nothing but a foul stench, as if from an overflowing sewer, lasting for a few seconds.
- 12 – The spell produces only a weak and useless shadow of the intended effect, and a few seconds of flickering shadows and muttered voices.
- 13 – Spell fails entirely. The caster suffers from demophobia (p. B149) with a self-control roll of 9 for the next 2d days.
- 14 – Spell fails entirely. The caster and everyone within 10 yards of him at the moment of casting suffers from Phantom Voices (p. B148) at the -10 point level for the next 1d hours.
- 15 – Spell fails entirely. The caster suffers -4 to all reaction rolls for all encounters within the boundaries of the city for the next 3d days.
- 16 – Spell fails entirely. For the next 2d weeks, any time that the caster goes out in public in the city, he must roll against IQ-2 once per hour or become separated from any friends and embarrassingly lost in the streets and crowds.
- 17 – Spell fails entirely, and the caster comes to the attention of the patron deity or "genius loci" of the city. Make a reaction roll with no modifiers. If the result is "Good," the caster will be assigned some task or mission that benefits the city, with some support from the being's worshipers or followers. If it's "Neutral," the same applies, but with no or minimal aid or support. If it's "Bad," the being attacks the caster, though probably indirectly, using subtle powers or social influence.
- 18 – Spell fails entirely, and the caster attracts the attention of a malevolent supernatural being that represents the dark side of the city, or that seeks its destruction. This might be a demon worshiped by the city's darkest cults, an evil spirit that possesses and inspires backstreet serial killers, the patron god of a hostile nation, some other deity directly opposed to the patron god of the city, an elemental that enjoys causing natural disasters, or (in a modern conspiracy/paranoia/urban legends sort of game) a gigantic sewer-dwelling albino alligator with uncanny cunning. This entity may attack the caster immediately, or may hold back and make life hell for him and his friends and family over a period of time, depending on its exact nature.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Phil Masters is a long-time *GURPS* writer, responsible for *GURPS Thaumatology* among other projects, and is the *Transhuman Space* line editor. His forthcoming *Discworld Roleplaying Game, Second Edition*, is eagerly anticipated. He lives in a small town in the U.K.

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