COPS AND LAWYERS

CONTENTS

ARTICLE COLORS

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue
Brown: In Every Issue
Green: Columnist
Dark Blue: GURPS Features
Purple: Systemless Features

COVER ART
Alex Fernandez

INTERIOR ART
Brandon Moore

IN THIS ISSUE

The rise of codified laws and a way to keep social order marks one of the earliest achievements of civilization, and the existence of both continues to loom large to this day. In this *Pyramid,* we look at cops and lawyers, with an eye toward developments past and present.

When your modern-day action gets too big to handle, you may find yourself dealing with *Mass Combat in the City.* David L. Pulver – author of **GURPS Mass Combat** – provides **Mass Combat** stats for a complete police force as well as various groups they may face, from news teams to biker gangs to terrorists.

Augment your superhero campaign with realism by deciding which powers are *Above the Law.* Prolific *Pyramid* contributor Christopher R. Rice offers insight into tracking legal infractions and using the **GURPS** Legality Class framework to classify various powers.

Those amid **GURPS Banestorm** or **GURPS Infinite Worlds** parallels could benefit from knowing about the intersection of *Sultans, Shurta, and the Courts.* The judicial system of classical Islam can provide interesting challenges for medieval Middle Eastern heroes. Learn about the three types of courts, including roleplaying tips for using each one in adventures.

In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver salutes the United States Coast Guard with a look at the *Marine Protector and Dolphin.* These two key vehicles – one a boat and the other a helicopter – come to life with **GURPS** vehicle stats and adventure ideas.

What do you with superpowered villains who could never be held in a normal prison? You send them to a *Mega-Max!* This private-industry super-prison has three locations around the globe . . . and even more secrets! Learn about the history, important leaders and prisoners, layouts, and more in this system-neutral jail system.

Mortal judges and juries aren't the only way to decide a case. Some societies offer *Judicium Dei.* Peruse this systemless overview of various trials by ordeal and by combat, including what they would be like realistically or with fantastic elements added and how to use them in different time periods.

Wrap up your time here with a Random Thought Table that considers how to make convicting a bad guy you've already caught a satisfying experience, then buckle in with Matt Riggsby for another peek into the forthcoming **Car Wars** future history with this month's installment of Short Bursts. With this month's *Pyramid,* the forces of law and order have never been so accessible!

FROM THE EDITOR

GAMING WITH THE FORCES OF LAW AND ORDER

The heroes in many campaigns have an interesting intersection with the forces of "law and order" – the police officers entrusted to act as a first line in keeping peace and the legal system that needs to untangle situations (often a mess by the time the PCs get done with it) and put the bad guy behind bars permanently.

Although many gaming groups treat these concerns as tangential to what the heroes are interested in, there's still plenty of good dramatic potential to be found by incorporating them into your campaign. Local police can be a powerful ally, with access to resources and information that can be beyond the reach of many adventurers . . . in addition to access and legal authority to use remarkable equipment within city boundaries. Legal maneuverings can serve as the coda for many adventures (see pp. 35-36), as well as a rich environment for stories or subplots.
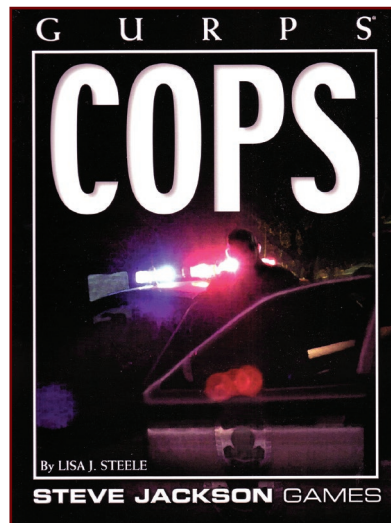
In addition, legal considerations can offer a powerful framework for stories themselves, providing boundaries for heroes to come up against or challenges to overcome (see pp. 9-13 for one good examination).

On the other side, the police and judicial system can be challenging adversaries, either as the outcome of a misunderstanding, a result of isolated or systemic corruption, or because the heroes themselves are acting outside the law. Heist films often revolve around protagonists trying to stay one step ahead of police, while anyone in an appropriate era might find themselves engaging in trial by combat (pp. 32-34).

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Last month's *Pyramid* was an experiment with a highly specific topic. This month's topic is more general, covering two broad yet related topics while also reaching a bit across genres and timeframes.

So, what did you think about this month's wider net? Did you find two related topics interesting? If so, do you have any great ideas for a couple of topics we could run in the same issue? (Can we even *get* enough articles about peanut butter and jelly?!) Do you like the idea, but wish something had been done a bit differently here? Please tell us your thoughts! Our super-surveillance genies read everything sent privately to **pyramid@sjgames.com**, and there is a larger discussion about each *Pyramid* issue every month on the public at **forums.sjgames.com**.

Mass Combat in the City

by David L. Pulver

In the event of serious civil unrest, major terrorist incidents, a natural disaster followed by looting, or apocalyptic scenarios, local police could find themselves engaging in mass combat situations. Against ordinary criminals, violent people, or protesters, the authorities typically have both numerical and firepower advantage, with their main limitation being the need to avoid escalating the situation and causing excessive civilian casualties. However, on occasion, even police SWAT teams may find themselves outmatched, e.g., against invading aliens or paratroops, giant-monster attacks, or robot or zombie uprisings, with a thin blue line holding on until Army or National Guard arrive.

This article provides generic *GURPS Mass Combat* statistics for contemporary U.S. police, rioter, terrorist, and criminal elements for urban warfare situations. Although the focus is on the United States, statistics for a few extreme groups are also included, who might show up in a post-apocalyptic or conspiracy scenario. Most of the statistics can broadly be used for non-U.S. police forces, but organizational details will vary – for instance, some nations have separate para-military riot police, or restrict firearms to ordinary patrol officers; in others, cops carry submachine guns on patrol . . .

New Feature

The equipment quality and troop quality ratings for police reflect their utility as *combat troops* rather than as police. Most U.S. police are well-equipped and trained for law enforcement, but their doctrine, gear, and training aren't optimized for military engagements. The relatively low quality ratings assigned to them reflect this distinction!

However, this results in police costing a lot less than they should. Since police are expensively trained and equipped *as police*, they have a new feature called Law Enforcement Officer (LEO).

Law Enforcement Officer (LEO)

Varies

This feature can be added to any element with the Recon or C3I classes. It represents training and equipment optimized for law-enforcement operations rather than combat operations.

Modifier	Cost to Raise	Cost to Maintain
LEO	+100%	+100%

Note that it is possible to have police forces who lack the LEO element. This could apply to militarized elements (e.g., full-time SWAT who don't do *any* policing) or to police who have lost touch with their community or simply use strong-arm tactics.

LEO is mostly an accounting figure to ensure police are not unusually cheap, but it has a game effect in a *Mass Combat* situation: During Reconnaissance Operations that take place within its force's jurisdiction, the element gains the Recon class even if it doesn't have it, or if it already has the Recon class, its TS counts double for the purpose of determining Recon superiority.

Police-Force Sizes

Police departments come in all sizes: in the United States, ranging from the more than 34,000 full-time officers serving New York City to the single officer who patrols Gaines Township, Michigan. However, major incidents may see police drawn from all across the region! In big cities, the typical number of police officers per 10,000 residents varies from a low of 10 to a high of 61 (Washington, D.C.) averaging about 20 per 10,000. Almost all U.S. law enforcement agencies now have Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) or equivalent tactical units, but typically no more than 1-5% of a police force are SWAT units or vehicles. A U.S.-average police budget for the force is about $130,000 times the number of officers in the department.

After the 1997 North Hollywood shootout (when police were outgunned by bank robbers) and again in the post-9/11 era, many departments upgraded their equipment. "War on terror" preparedness federal subsidies from Homeland Security transferred over $40 billion to allow local agencies to buy gear from private contractors specializing in para-military equipment. Extra gear was provided by the Defense Logistics Agency's (DLA) 1033 Program, which transferred $1 billion or so worth of Pentagon matériel. As a result, many SWAT units have armored vehicles, robots, sophisticated body armor, and other military-style items. The amount of paramilitary gear on display during the riots in Ferguson in 2015 was seen as symptom of excessive militarization of the police, and have led to new guidelines aimed at reducing or eliminating the most over-the-top equipment, such as tracked APCs. Even so, there's plenty of gear still around!

For more details on police forces, see *GURPS Cops* and *GURPS SWAT.*

ON THE FORCE

These are some of typical elements that police forces might send out to deal with crisis situations. The cost to raise for vehicles and helicopters can be assumed to take into account subsidies and transferred surplus equipment.

Police Car (TL8)

Motor Recon

Most North American law enforcement are deployed in motor vehicle patrols. This represents a single police car, well-outfitted with communication gear and other patrol equipment. The car is driven by one or two officers armed with police-issue handguns, batons, and ballistic vests, plus shotguns, semi-automatic carbines, and/or assault rifles in the trunk. In tactical situations, the officers may dismount and use the car as partial cover.

TS: 40. *WT:* 1.
Classes: Cv, F, Rec. *Mobility:* Motor.
Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.
Features: LEO.
Cost: $50K to raise; $5K to maintain.

> *Yes, police! There's a savage fox in the National History Museum! Officer Hopps is down! Please hurry!*
> *– Bellwether, in **Zootopia***

Riot Police (TL8)

Heavy Infantry

This represents a squad of officers issued with riot helmets with plastic face shields, riot shields, and batons, plus specialized crowd-dispersal weapons such as pepper spray, tear gas, stun grenades, rubber bullets, and Long Range Acoustic Devices. Some countries use specialized units of riot police, but in the United States, these are ordinary dismounted officers issued riot-control gear. At present, U.S. riot police rarely use water cannons.

TS: 10. *WT:* 1.
Classes: –. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Very Fine equipment; Average troops.
Features: LEO.
Cost: $160K to raise; $28K to maintain.

Dismounted Police Officers (TL8)

Riflemen

This represents a half dozen or so officers or sheriff's deputies, operating on foot. They are in ballistic vests, with shotguns or assault carbines removed from their cars or station. This can also represent a part-time SWAT team from a small police department.

TS: 160. *WT:* 1.
Classes: F, Rec. *Mobility:* Foot.

Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.
Features: LEO.
Cost: $120K to raise; $24K to maintain.

Motorcycle Police (TL8)

Motor Recon

This is a highway patrol officer on a police motorcycle armed with a handgun.

TS: 30. *WT:* 1.
Classes: Cv, F, Rec. *Mobility:* Motor.
Quality: Poor equipment; Average troops.
Features: LEO.
Cost: $43.75K to raise; $4.375K to maintain.

Mounted Police (TL8)

Mounted Rifles

This is a half dozen or so police officers on horseback. A dwindling number of big city and some rural departments maintain equestrian units for ceremonial and crowd-control purposes and occasional patrol of parks or wilderness areas. In the United States, they're usually known as a mounted patrol or mounted enforcement unit. They are classed as "Poor" equipment as they're only armed with pistols (rather than rifles).

TS: 60. *WT:* 2.
Classes: Cv, F, Rec. *Mobility:* Mtd.
Quality: Poor equipment; Average troops.
Features: LEO.
Cost: $75K to raise; $15K to maintain.

Police Van (TL8)

Light Truck

This is an unarmored police van, SUV, or paddy wagon, along with one or two officers. It has police communication equipment and a few long guns for the crew. It is often used to transport a SWAT team element or police command post.

TS: 40. *WT:* 2.
Classes: Cv, T1. *Mobility:* Motor.
Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.
Features: LEO.
Cost: $50K to raise; $5K to maintain.

SWAT Team (TL8)

Riflemen

This represents five to 10 police officers with special weapons and tactics training, including assaulters, snipers, team leader, and negotiator. The assaulters are equipped with assault carbines or submachine guns, breeching gear, and stun grenades, and are protected by helmets and tactical body armor. The sniper team (also used for reconnaissance) have sniper rifles with telescopic or thermal imaging scopes.

TS: 160. *WT:* 1.
Classes: F, Rec. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.
Features: Night.
Cost: $252K to raise; $37.2K to maintain.

Elite SWAT Team (TL8)

Riflemen

This represents a highly trained and superbly equipped tactical team who are practiced in a variety of special operations procedures and often use helicopters, night vision gear, and other specialized equipment. This includes full-time teams from big-city departments (such as LAPD SWAT or Washington ERT), as well as state or federal government teams such as the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team. Equipment is similar to the standard SWAT team (if somewhat better quality), but training is superior.

TS: 320. *WT:* 1.
Classes: F, Rec. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Good equipment; Good troops.
Features: Airborne; Night.
Cost: $174K to raise; $25.2K to maintain.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Team (TL8)

Combat Engineers

Equipped with heavy armor, explosive-sniffing dogs, and a bomb-disposal robot, the unit can also be pressed into service for other combat-engineering options, such as taking out barricaded suspects. They are classed as Inferior troops with Basic gear as the primary focus is noncombat; combat operations (e.g., using a robot to breech a barrier and deliver a bomb against a target) are usually of an improvised nature.

TS: 80. *WT:* 1.
Classes: Eng, F. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Basic equipment; Inferior troops.
Features: LEO.
Cost: $90K to raise; $18K to maintain.

> *Policemen are soldiers who act alone; soldiers are policemen who act in unison.*
>
> *– Herbert Spencer*

Armored Deployment Vehicle (TL8)

Combat Engineering Vehicle (CEV)

A few well-equipped police departments have one or two highly specialized armored deployment vehicles. These are mobile siege engines equipped with assault ramps, hydraulic breeching ramps, and grapple claws. they are armored to withstand armor piercing rifle fire. An example is the six-ton tracked Rook Critical Incident Vehicle.

TS: 300. *WT:* 4.
Classes: Arm, Eng. *Mobility:* Mech.
Quality: Good equipment; Average troops.
Features: None.
Cost: $225K to raise; $11.25K to maintain.

Police Command Post (TL8)

Command Post

A command post packed with communication gear for use by the incident commander on scene (usually a police captain) and any support staff.

TS: (300). *WT:* 1.
Classes: C3I. *Mobility:* 0.
Quality: Good equipment; Average troops.
Features: LEO.
Cost: $225K to raise; $60K to maintain.

Armored Rescue Vehicle (TL8)

APC

SWAT often rolls into action in SUVs or police vans, but many better-equipped teams deploy in military-style APCs. A typical design is the Lenco BearCat, an eight-ton, four-wheeled APC with two-person crew, 10 passengers, a 1/2" thick bulletproof steel hull, gun ports, and sirens, lights, battering rams, various sensors and communication gear. The older Cadillac Gage V-150 is also popular as are surplus military Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles. (See *Pyramid #3/53: Action,* pp. 16-19, for more details on the Cadillac Gage, including **GURPS** vehicle stats.)

TS: 300. *WT:* 4.
Classes: Arm, Cv, F, T1. *Mobility:* Mech.
Quality: Good equipment; Average troops.
Features: Night.
Cost: $340K to raise; $17K to maintain.

Police Helicopter (TL8)

Utility Aircraft

This is a typical police helicopter, usually with a four-person crew, e.g., an AStar B-2 or Bell Jet 206, or a Coast Guard MH-65 Dolphin (see pp. 23-24). The crews or helicopter itself have night vision gear and searchlights. The helicopter lacks built-in weapons but can deploy a couple of riflemen or snipers capable of firing out the open door.

TS: (100). *WT:* 8.
Classes: Air, T1. *Mobility:* SA.
Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.
Features: LEO; Night.
Cost: $1.65M to raise; 66K to maintain.

OPPOSING CIVILIAN FORCES

The usual mass combat opponents for police are detailed below. Numbers may range from a single element to a few hundred elements! Except in a total breakdown of order, it's unlikely that more than one or two categories will be encountered in a single situation.

Rioting Mob (TL8)

Stone Age Warriors

This is an ad-hoc group of civilian rioters, looters, or protesters-turned-violent. They aren't organized or disciplined, and will likely break and run if faced with serious opposition or properly applied riot-control measures.

The majority of the mob have no more than fists, bricks, rocks, bottles, or improvised clubs acquired at the scene. Mixed in with the mob, perhaps equal to half its number, are various innocents or peaceful protesters caught up in the situation. As such, this make identifying real rioters harder, confusing decision makers and thus affecting law enforcement's C3I capabilities.

TS: 0.25. *WT:* 1.
Classes: Rec. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Poor equipment; Inferior troops.
Features: Impetuous; Neutralize C3I.
Cost: $12.5K to raise; $2.5K to maintain.

Organized Protesters (TL8)

Light Infantry

This is a well-organized group of "direct action" protesters or anarchists who have taken time to equip themselves and develop tactics. They often have face masks with improvised gas masks, and heavy clothing. They may have some clubs or bricks, but their usual weapons are thrown incendiaries such as fireworks or Molotov cocktails. They have leaders, decent communications thanks to cell phones, and some logistic support (e.g., designated aid stations, support personnel with water bottles and food, etc.).

TS: 0.5. *WT:* 1.
Classes: Rec. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Poor equipment; Inferior troops.
Features: None.
Cost: $20K to raise; $8K to maintain.

Street Gang (TL8)

Riflemen

This element is a crew of urban criminals, such as members of an organized street gang. They're usually more interested in fighting rival gangs than the police, but represent a sizable armed force that could be involved in major unrest. Notorious gangs with thousands of members in major cities still active in 2016 include MS-13 (or Mara Salvatrucha), the Latin Kings, the Crips, the Bloods, the Trinitarios, and 18th Street. Although classed as riflemen, their Poor equipment reflects a typical armament of semi-automatic pistols, with only a few long guns or light automatic weapons. Body armor is rare. Tactics are usually hit and run attacks, but they often deploy from cars or trucks.

TS: 40. *WT:* 1.
Classes: F, Rec. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Poor equipment; Inferior troops.
Features: Impetuous.
Cost: $15K to raise; $3K to maintain.

Outlaw Bikers (TL8)

Motor Recon

Members of an outlaw motorcycle club who are involved in criminal activity (drugs, gun running, etc.). This represents a single or a couple of motorcycles and riders or a single automobile. Characteristic weapons are brass knuckles, lead pipes, chains, and steel-toed boots, plus a handgun. Mass police vs. motorcycle outlaw action has been rare since the 1960s, but they might come out given the right provocations.

TS: 10. *WT:* 1.
Classes: Cv, F, Rec. *Mobility:* Motor.
Quality: Poor equipment; Inferior troops.
Features: Impetuous.
Cost: $6.25K to raise; $0.625K to maintain.

> *Chicago has over 13,000 police officers; that is roughly 60 per square mile, and there are two precincts in a four-block radius of the diner. My guess is just a matter of time before a cop would walk in.*
>
> *– Dr. Spencer Reid,*
> *in* **Criminal Minds** *#12.1*

Friendly News Team (TL8)

Command Post

This represents sympathetic reporters or bloggers who have escaped the press pool and gotten close to the action, determined to ensure media oversight. Although theoretically not working for one side or the other (hence the Disloyal feature), their C3I and Neutralize Recon capabilities represents the ability of forces opposing the police to gain intelligence on police movements by monitoring civilian news broadcasts and the constraining effect that media coverage may have on the authorities' use of force.

TS: (50). *WT:* 1.
Classes: C3I. *Mobility:* 0.
Quality: Poor equipment; Inferior troops.
Features: Disloyal; Neutralize Recon.
Cost: $50K to raise; $10K to maintain.

Civilian Truck (TL8)

Light Truck

An old civilian pickup truck or SUV, plus one to two crew with handguns or long guns.

TS: 20. *WT:* 2.
Classes: Cv, T1. *Mobility:* Motor.
Quality: Basic equipment; Inferior troops.
Features: None.
Cost: $12.5K to raise; $1.25K to maintain.

Battle Truck (TL8)

Heavy Truck

A heavy-duty truck fitted with improvised armor. Notable examples are the "narco tank" up-armored trucks used by Mexican cartels for drug transport and gang fights, with heavy cabin armor, gun ports, and even gadgets to dump nails and oil.

TS: 40. *WT:* 4.
Classes: T3. *Mobility:* Motor.
Quality: Good equipment; Inferior troops.
Features: None.
Cost: $45K to raise; $2.25K to maintain.

Gunmen (TL8)

Riflemen

This element represents several well-equipped, motivated, and decently trained shooters with paramilitary gear and semi-automatic assault weapons, often with a degree of organization, discipline or military-style training. They could be well-drilled crooks equipped for a bank robbery or armored car heist, members of an anti-government militia, or a drug-cartel hit team. Other non-criminal possibilities include "warrior society" groups, rural posses, border security vigilantes, or ad-hoc urban neighborhood protection groups (e.g., the groups organized by Korean ex-Marines to defend shops in the LA Riots). It could even represent just one or two well-armed shooters: the North Hollywood bank robbers between them had one semi-automatic high-power rifle, three full-auto assault rifles, 3,300 rounds of ammo, and heavy body armor vests augmented by trauma plates and home-made armor to protect their limbs!

TS: 160. *WT:* 1.
Classes: F, Rec. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Basic equipment; Average troops.
Features: None.
Cost: $60K to raise; $12K to maintain.

Terrorist Bombers (TL8)

Combat Engineers

This represents several members of a terrorist cell with the capability to construct vehicle, car, or truck bombs; place improvised explosive devices (IED); and recruit and equip individual suicide bombers. Their ability to neutralize C3I represents paralysis of decision makers through threats to civilians and dominating media rather than a direct attack on leadership assets. Their primary goal is inflicting a series of bombing attacks, but they are willing to commit suicide (usually with explosives) rather than be taken alive.

TS: 200. *WT:* 1.
Classes: Eng, F. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Poor equipment; Good troops.
Features: Fanatic; Neutralize C3I.
Cost: $80K to raise; $15K to maintain.

Terrorist Shooters (TL8)

Riflemen

This is a small team of terrorists who prefer direct action – or a single, cinematically capable, deranged sniper or spree shooter. The shooters are well-equipped with assault weapons, pistols, or shotguns, plentiful ammo, and possibly a few grenades, improvised explosive devices, or suicide belts. They are intent on causing mass casualties in a particular area (school, place of work, parade, etc.) and then being killed by police or committing suicide to avoid capture. They'll often barricade themselves in a building, sometimes with hostages, so the siege rules may be appropriate.

TS: 240. *WT:* 1.
Classes: F, Rec. *Mobility:* Foot.
Quality: Basic equipment; Good troops.
Features: Fanatic.
Cost: $75K to raise; $15K to maintain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author who has written numerous roleplaying game supplements. For more details, see this month's Eidetic Memory, pp. 22-24.

ABOVE THE LAW

by Christopher R. Rice

A common theme in many modern comics and graphic novels is "If you have superhuman abilities, does that make you above the law?" In some ways, having inhuman abilities *does* make it difficult for the legal system to deal with such powered individuals. After all, if someone can lift a bus over his head or is immune to gunfire, how can he ever be arrested? Moreover, how can anyone ever force them to accept any sentence that might be prescribed? This article seeks to offer solutions for the GM running contemporary superhero-themed games, which can also be used for campaigns with magic, cybernetics, or any other paranormal or superhuman capabilities. Also included are new rules for law enforcement on a campaign-wide scale.

THE LAW OF THE LAND

The *Basic Set* (pp. B506-B508) talks briefly about the law, criminality, and legal punishment, but doesn't give many specifics. *GURPS* uses two different scores to determine how the law is enforced. The *Control Rating* (pp. B506-507) measures the general regulation exercised by a government, while the *Legality Class* (p. B507) determines how illegal a given piece of gear is.

GAMEMASTERING THE LAW

GURPS Horror, p. 106, introduces the concept of "austerity" for describing how "real" a setting will be. The GM may use this as a guideline for how the campaign world reacts to player characters performing illegal actions. For example, if Doug the Digger brains Merlin the Malefactor and kills him, then:

- In a *very austere* game, the law is clear that deaths must be investigated, and police have options like fiber matching, fingerprint databases, DNA typing, and any non-mundane investigatory powers that are legal in their district. If caught, Doug will enter the justice system, likely being indicted and tried. If convicted, execution or prison awaits.
- In a *moderately austere* game, he is merely "on the lam." He'll be unable to cross the path of the law again, but he can go "underground" in the same city without the police finding him.
- In a *lenient* (low to no austerity) game, he's home free, provided there are no eyewitnesses. Police routinely side with vigilantes, covering up clues when the victim is a known criminal or supervillain.

This approach uses the GM's judgment to adjudicate how the law might react to a given player character's actions.

Remember that austerity interacts with the setting! For example, a samurai in the Sengoku period could murder peasants with little or no legal repercussions. Registered superheroes might have similar Legal Immunity (p. B65) for property damage (or even deaths!) that happens while they're performing their duties. The GM could allow those with a certain level of Status or Social Regard to be treated as if they were functioning in a campaign with a lower austerity level. In such cases, every 10 points of Status or Social Regard make the austerity level one level more favorable for that character in his society.

> ## WITH GREAT POWER . . .
>
> Just as people with medical training are expected to help those in need or those with military or police training are expected to help in dangerous circumstances, so might the super-powered be called to help others. If registration is required (p. 11), then those who are registered may be called upon to use their abilities for good. If such "community service" is *required,* it's a Duty (pp. B133-B134), possibly with Involuntary in authoritarian settings.
>
> In the comics, this often goes a step further. Those with powers are deputized or work for government-sanctioned organizations (e.g., the Avengers). Game-mechanically, this can take the form of Legal Enforcement Powers and Legal Immunity of any level, possibly with "Informal, -50%" (*GURPS Supers,* p. 33). This may co-exist with even Involuntary Duties!

THE HEAT IS ON

Those looking for a more mechanical approach may use the following abstract system to determine what penalties their actions have attracted. Whenever a player character (or important NPC) performs an illegal act, he gains Misconduct Points (MP). Alternatively, points are accrued or lost on a per-*group* basis.

0 MP – *Lawful Actions.* The action is legal in most societies, but some tightly controlled groups might restrict or license it. *Examples:* Travel within the society's bounds; access to "everyday" information or libraries; growing produce for personal use. *Note:* Violating restrictions on a legal-but-lightly controlled action inflicts a mere 1 MP; e.g., leaving a legally registered car parked in the fire lane; having chickens in an urban residential area; routinely violating the condominium association's rules; returning library books late or losing them.

1-3 MP – *Restricted Actions.* The action is licensed, requires registration, or has conditions attached to it in most societies. *Examples:* Self-defense (proportional response); manufacture or selling of LC3 items; growing produce to sell to others.

4-6 MP – *Illegal, Misdemeanor.* The action is illegal, but in a limited or minor way. *Examples:* Attacking someone non-fatally; theft of inexpensive items; accidentally killing someone; gambling; vandalism; arson; fraud.

6-10 MP – *Illegal, Felony.* The action is highly illegal. *Examples:* Murder (premeditated or otherwise), theft or embezzlement; rape/sexual assault; robbery; producing, using, and/or selling of LC2 items (especially recreational drugs).

11+ or more MP – *Illegal, Capital Crime.* The action is heinous. *Examples:* Genocide; serial or mass murder; treason.

The GM can adjust the values depending on the circumstances. For example, if someone killed three people in cold blood, the GM might decide that's worth 10 MP, *plus* another 12 MP for the other two deaths.

A character gains -1 to reaction rolls from ordinary law-abiding citizens, civil authorities, and most NPCs for every 5 MP (or fraction thereof) that person has. Roll on the *Reaction Table* (p. B560) every game session. On a Poor reaction, the character is detained and questioned for his alleged actions. On a Very Bad or worse reaction, he's arrested and charged with a crime. (Alternatively, see **GURPS Social Engineering,** p. 74.)

What incentive do Probes have to cooperate, to turn themselves in?

– Myke Cole,
Control Point

Those who can stay out of trouble lose 1 MP per week. This rate is doubled if they also "lay low" *or* leave town. If they do all three, then the rate is tripled instead! Losing MP can be adjusted depending on the austerity of the campaign (p. 9). Those default values assume a moderately austere campaign (p. 9). In very austere campaigns, MP are lost at a rate of one per month; in lenient campaigns, the rate is one per day! In high austerity campaigns, the GM might require a roll against Law, Streetwise, or another appropriate skill to lose MP in the first place.

Alternatively, players can shed MP *instantly* by trading them in for permanent disadvantages, at a rate of 2 MP per -1 in disadvantages. This trade-off allows for long-term problems with the law in exchange for removing the short-term issues. The GM can explain this however he likes: lost paperwork, "bigger fish to fry," and so on.

Superhuman Powers and the Law

The section on *Spell Legality* (p. B507) in the **Basic Set** gives a few guidelines for how magic might interact with the law. But what about supernatural or superhuman abilities? The GM is free to decide how such powers might be treated ad hoc, but here are some suggestions for how different types of power could interact with the current legal system.

The GM can use the abbreviated guidelines from *Superhuman Power Legality* (p. 11) to jump-start a campaign, but he should also consider the following.

Afflictions and Bindings

An unmodified Affliction (pp. B35-B36) is the equivalent of a stun gun or TASER in most cases (PLC4). Similarly, a Binding (p. B40) that *only* restrains the target and cannot damage him are the equivalent of handcuffs or manacles (PLC4). Afflictions that incapacitate a subject, but are otherwise non-lethal (e.g., a paralyzing attack or one that causes terrible pain) are PLC3, while those that *can* be lethal (e.g., an attack that causes a coma or heart attack or Binding with the Suffocating enhancement) are PLC2.

Afflictions that enhance a subject (e.g., those with Advantage or Negated Disadvantage) or cause pleasurable incapacitation (e.g., those with the Drunk modifier) may be restricted in other ways. For example, Affliction with Ecstasy is a replacement for just about any recreational drug on the planet and causes no side effects **. . .**

Attacks and Psychokinesis

Being able to shoot bursts of energy from your eyes, move things with the mind, or raise the ambient temperature are common power tropes. If the ability is no more damaging than a powerful handgun (up to about 4d), it's PLC3; anything up to 8d is PLC2. More powerful attacks are likely to be heavily restricted (PLC1 or lower). Supers with abilities that can kill multiple targets over a wide area are likely to be pushed toward the military or be constantly monitored for the rest of their lives (PLC2 or PLC1).

Abilities that allow control over the environment are similarly dealt with. For example, those who can quickly heat or cool an area may make a small fortune as personal space heaters or ambulatory air conditioning (PLC4). At the extreme end, they may be required to be as knowledgeable (and licensed) as mundane HVAC technicians (PLC3).

Those who can manipulate the weather or seas have the capacity to inflict massive property damage and/or loss of life and are likely to be closely monitored (PLC2 or PLC1).

Concealment and Obfuscation

Advantages like Chameleon (p. B41), Invisibility (p. B63), Obscure (p. B72), and Silence (p. B85) can cause the user to disappear or become hard to perceive. Potentially, these could be used for illegal acts. Thus, merely having such abilities might require stringent licensing (PLC2 or PLC3). Those with such powers might have to prove that they do not have "criminal intent." A legal hurdle or barrier to entry such as this one is often put in place for legally gray areas such as the possession of lockpicking equipment in some states.

Distinctions between "partial" concealment and "full" concealment also may be made. Those with the former may be merely required to be licensed (PLC3), while those with the latter may be monitored by ankle bracelet (PLC2). In more authoritarians settings, they may be pressured to join the military, police, or similar organization.

Creation, Destruction, and Transmutation

With the potential to collapse an economy or cause a severe economic shock, those with the ability to destroy, create, or transmute valuable substances would be tightly regulated (at least PLC2). They'd likely be forbidden from operating things like pawnshops, cash-for-gold stores, and similar businesses. Those with the ability to destroy or transmute dangerous or noxious substances (e.g., "destroying" pollution) might be able to freely use their gift (PLC4). No one likes pollution! Correspondingly, those who create dangerous or noxious substances (e.g., creating VX nerve gas) are likely to be held in indefinite confinement (PLC0). In most cases, the GM should use the guidelines for Legality Class to determine what PLC a given instance of Create might have.

Defensive Measures

Among the many defensive traits, Damage Resistance (p. B46) is the go-to-advantage for determining how much physical punishment someone can take. DR up to 5 can be found in nature (e.g., rhinos have DR 5 thanks to their thick hides). Up to twice that is possible in archaic armor, while modern tactical vests (anything up to NIJ4 Level IV4 armor) can go up to DR 35. DR higher than that is usually due to armor plating on a vehicle or building. A good guideline when using real-world sources is that DR 70 is approximately 1" of RHA steel. Thus, a super with DR 1,650 is roughly equivalent to the hull of an M1A1 Abrams MBT! Price the PLC of such traits accordingly. For example, DR equivalent to a tactical vest would be PLC3, while DR equivalent to a tank would be PLC1. For a discussion of determining even higher levels of defensive traits, see *Invincibility and Immunity* (p. 12).

The GM may wish to use the *Reaction Penalty* (p. B286) rules for wearing armor to decide how most people react to visible defensive traits. He could rule this is a 0-point feature for his campaign, though Low or No Signature (p. B106) could reduce or cancel these penalties. Optionally, he could figure the penalty first and then apply a -5% Nuisance Effect per -1 in reaction penalties.

SUPERHUMAN POWER LEGALITY

In campaigns where superhuman powers exist and are regulated by legislation, all such abilities might possess a Legality Class of their own – Powers Legality Class (PLC). For abilities that have no obvious analogue to gear (e.g., Mind Reading), the GM will have to use his own judgment. For example, being able to read someone's mind is *similar* to using surveillance on another target and could be treated as an audio or video bug (LC3). If it were more invasive (e.g., Mind Probe), then the LC might be one or two lower. Abilities that cannot be detected by mundane senses are one LC less – even if they can be detected by other abilities.

LC4 – *Open.* The power either cannot harm others (e.g., Healing), does no lasting damage – physical or mental – of any kind (e.g., unmodified Affliction), is mildly defensive (no more than half the DR of whatever passes for concealable armor in the campaign), or otherwise cannot be used offensively (e.g., 360° Vision).

LC3 – *Licensed.* The power harms others (dice of damage equivalent to limited muscled-powered weaponry or handguns in the campaign, e.g., 4d), causes nasty afflictions (e.g., Terrible Pain or Daze), is defensive (up to the DR of concealable armor), can be used for slow transportation (e.g., Flight up to Move 40), or can be used to survey a target without them knowing (e.g., Clairsentience or Invisibility).

LC2 – *Restricted.* The power can cause massive harm (up to 8d), cause dangerous afflictions (e.g., Agony or Unconsciousness), are highly defensive (DR starting at 35 or Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction)), can be used for fast transportation (e.g., Flight *starting* at Move 40), or can be used to read a target's mind (e.g., Mind Reading).

LC1 – *Military-Use Only.* The power can easily kill or massively harm a large number of targets (any number of dice for Innate Attack possibly with Area Effect), cause killing afflictions (e.g., Coma or Heart Attack), are tactically defensive (DR starting at 120 or Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction) 4 or higher), can be used for instantaneous transportation (e.g., Warp), or can be used to interrogate or control another (e.g., Mind Probe or Mind Control).

LC0 – *Banned.* The power can easily kill *and* massively harm a huge number of targets at once (Innate Attack *starting* at 30d with Area Effect), are strategically defensive (DR starting at 500 or Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction) 10 or higher), can be used for dimensional or temporal transportation (e.g., Jumper (Time) or Jumper (World)), or can be used to wholly control another (e.g., Possession).

LC0 is a morally gray area – putting a sentient being in permanent confinement just for existing is as totalitarian and autocratic as it gets . . . but having someone walking around with the power to spontaneously explode in nuclear fire isn't likely to be a popular policy either. Each campaign world will have their own answer to this question, depending on genre and what the players are willing to tolerate – or eager to explore in an game setting!

INVINCIBILITY AND IMMUNITY

For the GM who's pondering how invincible is invincible when determining PLC for defensive measures (p. 11), the following suggestions may be useful.

GURPS is built in such a way that traits with "infinite" effects cost infinite points – that is, there is no fair way to price them. The supers' genre relies pretty heavily on some instances of infinite effects and this doesn't play well with *GURPS* proper. That doesn't mean it's not *possible* to create such traits. If the GM is willing to fudge the lines a little, recreating Superman's invulnerability is as easy making a few assumptions and doing math. First, take the largest number of dice of damage that can be expected to be dealt in a given setting and multiply that by 6; *Benchmarking Attacks and Defenses* (*GURPS Powers,* p. 117) is exceedingly useful here. Next, use the rules for extended levels of Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction) (*Powers,* p. 118) to determine a value that reduces that damage to 1 point of injury. Optionally, add "Cosmic, Rounds down" (+50%) to Injury Tolerance to ignore that. Finally, just note it as a new trait.

For example, in most typical TL8 settings, a 12.5 kiloton nuclear device is the largest source of damage anyone will face outside of superpowers (or superscience). Since it does a 6d×10,000 crushing explosive attack with a linked 6d×6,500 burning explosive attack (with radiation and surge effects), this translates to 594,000 damage ($6 \times 6 \times 10,000 = 360,000 + 6 \times 6 \times 6,500 = 234,000$, or 594,000). This would require 37 levels of Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction), which would give an injury divisor of 700,000 and cost 925 points. The nuke would thus only inflict 1 point no matter the roll. For those who don't want to take even that much damage add "Cosmic, Rounds down" (+50%) for a total of 1,388 points. The GM may wish to round to the nearest multiple of 5 for easy bookkeeping. Thus, "invincibility" might be listed as "Invulnerability [1,400]." The GM could even create "levels" for his campaign.

Narrowing down an immunity to a specific form of damage is trickier. Perform the steps as above, but at the end, add the Limited modifier (p. B47) so that it only protects against that one thing. For example, if a player wanted his character to be "immune to fire," first decide how much damage the hottest fire could do (about 9d+2 burning damage for a blast furnace – *much* hotter than magma). Since $9 \times 6 + 2 = 56$, he'd need Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction / 70) [275] and would add "Limited, Heat/Fire" (-40%) and "Cosmic, Rounds down" (+50%) for a final cost of 303 points.

Other traits may be necessary to fully protect a subject. For example, being immune to fire and heat also requires Immunity to Heat Exhaustion [10], Filter Lungs [5], *and* Temperature Tolerance (Heat) 411 [411]. The first removes the FP loss for *Intense Heat* (p. B434), the second protects against smoke inhalation, and the latter protects against the damage aspect of *Intense Heat* (the level assumes the hottest blast furnace in a TL8 setting). The GM could then price "Immunity to Heat/Fire" as 730 points.

Extrasensory Perception

Extrasensory perception of any kind violates so many privacy laws that it could set back most courts for *decades*. In general, divinatory abilities fall into one of three categories: *Scrying* abilities are those that allow someone to scan the present (e.g., Clairsentience or Detect); *divination* abilities are those that allow the user to see the future (e.g., Precognition); *retrocognitive* abilities permit the person to gather facts about a subject from his past (e.g., Psychometry). At bare *minimum,* all such abilities are PLC3, with Divination powers likely having the same restrictions as temporal transportation (see p. 13).

Enhanced Mental and Physical Acuity

For those that possess incredible ST, determine the maximum amount of damage they could do and refer to *Attacks and Psychokinesis* (p. 10). For most cases, those with superhuman attribute levels are not as restricted as those with other powers – it's an intrinsic trait. It's not against the law to be better than someone else. Alternatively, those with superhuman attributes may be forbidden from sports and other competitions or have their own leagues (e.g., superhuman boxing for "bricks").

Those who possess the ability to move quickly might be subject to motor vehicle laws. Ground Move scores of 15 or less (the speed limit on most unmarked roads) require no license. While Move scores up to 135 require licensing and are PLC3, anything higher is restricted by the law (PLC2).

Enhanced Senses

Danger Sense (p. B47), Dark Vision (p. B47), Microscopic Vision (p. B68), the various Discriminatory senses, and similar traits are likely to be PLC4. The exception to this are traits like Penetrating Vision (p. B74) and Scanning Sense (p. B81) which should follow the guidelines for scrying abilities under *Extrasensory Perception* (above).

Traits modified with the Hypersensory modifier (*GURPS Supers,* p. 108) fall under whatever the base trait is but have a PLC of one *higher* (e.g., Psychometry with Hypersensory would be PLC4).

Gadgeteers and Gizmos

Fictional geniuses are often capable of creating shrink rays and heat beams in just a few minutes working their labs. Those with any sort of high-TL equipment are under the same requirements as those with powers; thus, an ultra-tech laser rifle doing 8d of damage is restricted like a PLC2 power.

Gadgeteers might be capable of radically altering the technological landscape in just a few decades if left unchecked. Such rapid advancement of technology may be restricted just like any other superpowers. Such powers are likely PLC4 or PLC3, but may be PLC2 or less depending on what technology is being advanced.

Healing, Immortality, and Regeneration

Being able to heal the injuries or illnesses of another is the very definition of a superpower that cannot harm in any way. Supers with such powers may be highly sought after by the public and more likely to protect their identities than any other superhuman. Some campaigns may require them to get a license just like a medical doctor (PLC3).

Self-healers (e.g., those with Regeneration, Regrowth, Resistant, etc.) would be PLC4 in most cases – the person must be injured for the powers to work in the first place. The exception to this are those with Supernatural Durability (p. B150) or Unkillable (p. B95), as those traits present a special problem of their own. Subjects who cannot be incapacitated (or killed) are in the same boat as those with oodles of defensive abilities (p. 11). Those with such capabilities are might have to be registered (PLC3) at the very least.

Those with Unaging are equally likely to be greeted with suspicion or reverence by the population. In most cases, they'd not be under any specific requirements from the government (except for the risk of being kidnapped and prodded by those trying to discover the secrets of eternal life . . .).

Mental Communication, Mind Reading, and Mental Control

Those who can communicate with others through understood mundane methods (radio, ladar, etc.) are PLC4. Abilities that rely on telepathy or weird science have PLC3 (or less), since they cannot be easily regulated!

Anyone who can read minds will be regarded with suspicion and trusted by no one. Few people want others digging into their thoughts. Mind readers are a minimum of PLC3. Those who can mentally *control* another (e.g., Mind Control or Possession) are PLC1 and likely PLC0 in many modern societies.

Phasing

Supers with the ability to become insubstantial, phase, or otherwise ignore solid matter are PLC4 if they can only affect uncommon building materials (e.g., ice or flesh). Those that can affect common building materials (e.g., glass or stone) are PLC3. Those that can affect any solid matter are PLC2.

Shapeshifting and Self-Transformation

Being able to change sexes (e.g., Hermaphromorph) is unlikely to be legislated except in the most stringently puritanical societies. The ability to alter one's own appearance at will on a skin-deep level (e.g., Elastic Skin) is PLC3, while those who can change themselves on a genetic level are PLC2.

Those with the ability to shift themselves into a single form (e.g., Alternate Form) are PLC4 as long as that form is not overtly dangerous (e.g., a bear) or hazardous (e.g., a being of living flame). In such cases, those with dangerous or hazardous forms are PLC3 or worse.

Transportation

Supers with the ability to fly or instantly move themselves from one place to another (such as with teleportation) may find themselves under the purview of the U.S. Department of Transportation or similar agency. Because of how broad the U.S. Commerce Clause is (United States Constitution, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 3), supers may be required to get a license (PLC3), be banned from using their abilities except in specific circumstances or places (PLC2), or be monitored constantly (PLC1). Those with the ability to teleport may be forced to join the military or government so their powers can be used for the benefit of the nation.

Anyone with the ability to move through *time* or *dimensions* may be outright banned (PLC0) from using their abilities or, like those with the capability to teleport, forced to become a government agent (PLC1). Some settings may even *euthanize* supers with such powers for being too dangerous to control!

POWERS REGISTRATION

In campaigns that have officially acknowledged superhuman abilities the GM can require that each affected person has a trait that represents the fact that he's been properly registered, but only *if* registration is mandatory (or strongly encouraged). Such registration likely contains the same information that most DMVs keep on file (name, address, type of power, etc.). In most campaigns, this is merely a perk – the same cost to be licensed in a field that requires it (*GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks,* p. 18). If certain powers are rarer (or viewed as – or *are* – more dangerous) then having a properly registered power costs more points. If the GM also charges points for a power's rarity, use the higher cost *plus* 1/5 the cost of Unusual Background (Registered Powers). For those with PLC4 powers (p. 11), this trait is a 0-point feature. For those with PLC3 powers, this trait costs 1 point per ability. Those with PLC2 powers pay 5 points per ability. Those with PLC1 powers pay 35 points *per* such ability, while those with LC0 powers are either outright forbidden or charged *100 points* per ability.

In all cases, treat five or more such different abilities as if it were five abilities for the purposes of this trait. For example, if a super had three PLC3 powers and three PLC2 powers, he'd pay an Unusual Background worth 17 points (5 + 5 + 5 + 1 + 1 + 0), not 18 points.

If having powers requires registration, *not* being registered is a Secret. Having an unregistered PLC4 power is a quirk. An unregistered PLC3 power is a 5-point Secret. For a PLC2 power, it's a 10-point secret. A PLC1 power is a 20-point secret, and a PLC0 power is a 30-point secret.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SULTANS, SHURTA, AND THE COURTS

BY JON BLACK

For campaigns ranging from *Arabian Nights* high fantasy to historical palace intrigue or crusades, the legal systems of the classical Islamic world offer a wealth of roleplaying opportunities. This piece provides a roleplaying-friendly summary of the region's jurisprudence and legal practices from the period of 632 to 1800. It emphasizes information useful for the GM and players, including game mechanics and roleplaying opportunities. It's insightful for campaigns that use **GURPS Arabian Nights, GURPS Banestorm, GURPS Crusades,** and certain parallel Earths of **GURPS Infinite Worlds.** While not required, the **GURPS Social Engineering** series offers tools and ideas that can expand information provided here.

Two caveats are useful. First, given the chronologic and geographic scope of classical Islam, exceptions exist to any information provided. This article offers a composite picture appropriate to most places at most times. Second, this piece does not treat or comment upon practices currently referred to as *sharia,* which can differ markedly from historical antecedent.

BALANCE OF POWER, SCALES OF JUSTICE

It is often said the classical Islamic world made no functional distinction between religious and secular authority. A more accurate characterization is that they were locked in an ambivalent yet codependent relationship. Broadly speaking, secular leaders appointed religious leaders but were dependent upon those religious leaders for legitimacy. Each was beholden to the other, resulting in ongoing suspicion and intrigue. For campaigns set in the classical Islamic world or similar environment, it is helpful for the GM to determine beforehand where this balance stands currently.

This tension strongly impacts legal systems. As the era progresses, three different legal systems develop: maẓālim, shurta, and sharia, which approximate civil, criminal, and religious courts. In reality, jurisdictions are often ambiguous, overlapping, and subject to manipulation. Their relative strength ebb and flow across time and geography.

Each system is summarized below, beginning with a general overview. Salient aspects are highlighted, including chronology, typical cases, presiding officials, and particularly useful **GURPS** attributes and skills. Descriptions conclude with courtroom procedures and roleplaying opportunities.

GLOSSARY

classical Islamic world: Muslim-majority polities, here covering the period 632–1800.

dhimmi *(also People of the Book)*: followers of religions deemed valid but incomplete, always including Christians, Jews, and Sabians. At times, can include Zoroastrians and faiths indigenous to India.

diyya: Financial compensation for victims of crimes (or their relatives).

fiqh: The legal writings and opinions of qadi and ulema.

hudud: Crimes with mandatory sentences (as opposed to tazir), especially in religious law.

maẓālim: Secular court presided over by a high-ranking official.

muham: Professional legal advocate equivalent to a lawyer.

pagan: Anachronistic but convenient term used here for non-dhimmi non-Muslims.

qadi: Judge, especially one of religious law presiding over sharia courts.

qanun: Law made by secular authorities. From the Latin "canon."

qisas: Legal principal of equal restitution (an eye for an eye).

sahib al-shurta: Judge presiding over shurta trials.

sharia: Literally "path." Islamic religious law, derived from the Quran and other sources. In the classical Islamic world, applicable only to Muslims.

shurta: Literally "police." Also refers to criminal law within qanun and to police courts hearing criminal cases.

tazir: Crimes with judicial discretion in sentencing.

ulema: Scholar of sharia (may or may not be a qadi).

Sharia (and Other Religious Courts)

Religious courts are the earliest judicial bodies of the classical Islamic world. Each recognized religion (Muslims and dhimmis) has its own courts where believers are tried according to the tradition's religious laws. (To the classical Islamic mind, the idea of applying sharia to non-Muslims would be nonsensical.) The following information pertains to sharia but can model dhimmi courts as well.

Dates From: About 632 (strength is generally inverse to that of secular authority).

Typical Jurisdiction: Commercial disputes, divorce, family law, inheritance and probate, religious infractions, small claims, violent crime (uncommonly).

Presiding Official: Qadi. Variants: *qazi* (Indian).

Governing Skill: Law (Islamic).

Useful Traits: Reputation (Pious), Theology (Islamic).

Legal Code

Sharia is the legal code derived from Islam's foundational sources but is *not* identical to the sources themselves. Theology (Islamic) is helpful but insufficient for navigating sharia courts; see *Law (Islamic),* below. For greater detail on sharia as a body of law, see *The Five-Minute Qadi,* pp. 18-19.

Law (Islamic)

see p. B204

Default: IQ-6 or Theology (Islamic)-4.
Prerequisite: Theology (Islamic).

This represents understanding of how law and legal decisions derive from Islam's foundational sources. It conveys knowledge of major qadis and their rulings. It reflects the ability to debate interpretation of implementation of sharia and imparts familiarity with courtroom procedure and etiquette.

Training in either Sunni or Shia law must be specified, defaulting to each other at -4. Apply penalties of -1 to -3 for differing polities or religious traditions *within* Sunni or Shia.

This specialty can be used to model other religiously based legal codes.

Initiating Proceedings

Cases are brought by the plaintiff and accepted at the qadi's discretion. Qadis attempt mediation before disputes go to trial. (Settling out of court is considered in community interest and allows qadis greater flexibility than trials.)

Procedure

Mosques, palaces, and the qadi's house are common locations for sharia trials. Proceedings are supposed to be public. In cities, courts typically meet twice weekly. Rural courts are likely to convene as necessary.

Producing and questioning witnesses is the plaintiff's responsibility, but the qadi can chose to question them directly. There is no cross-examination, so defense strategy focuses on discrediting witnesses by impugning their character, credibility, or observation of the alleged crime (or encouraging them not to testify).

Two situations bring dhimmi into sharia courts. First, dhimmis can be witnesses. Second, in some times and places, cases pitting a Muslim against a non-Muslim are tried in sharia courts (with obvious potential for bias).

Reaching Verdicts

Plaintiffs win by producing a certain number of witnesses of good character affirming the defendant's guilt. The number of required witnesses varies by crime. Specific numbers can be researched or set by GM fiat.

Traditionally, required numbers presume witnesses are Muslim males. Testimony from Muslim females or dhimmi males carry less weight. The GM can count such individuals as a half-witness toward the required total. Testimony from a female dhimmi, if allowed, counts as a quarter-witness. Gaming groups preferring a more equitable, contemporary flavor can, of course, ignore these ratios.

Witnesses are not required to swear to testimony (enabling false testimony is considered a lesser evil than profaning the Quran through perjury). When a witness volunteers to do so, it carries greater impact. The GM may give such sworn testimony double normal weight. Such oaths also positively impact perceptions of witness credibility and character.

This is an age when most people take faith seriously. If someone attempts to perjure under oath, the GM can require a Will roll to commit the damnable act. If successful, disadvantages like Guilt Complex and Manic-Depressive may apply (supernatural or magical campaigns may bring other consequences).

Compared to maẓālim and shurta judges, qadis are skeptical of testimony gained through torture or coercion. Even if allowed, it carries less weight. The GM should halve the value of such testimony. (Coerced testimony is, obviously, incompatible with voluntarily sworn testimony.)

Material evidence can be introduced into sharia trials but has minimal impact. There are no standards for scrutinizing or weighting such evidence. A GM *might* allow evidence to count for a maximum of one witness.

Witness	Value Toward Requirement
Muslim Male	1
Dhimmi Male	1/2
Muslim Female	1/2
Dhimmi Female	1/4
Material Evidence	1 (Maximum)

Testimony	Modifier to Value
Volunteered Under Oath	x2
Coerced	x1/2

Verdict and Sentencing

The qadi issues verdicts. Rarely, multiple qadis adjudicate a case. Theoretically, decisions are final. Verdicts cannot be overturned by another qadi but can be superseded by a maẓālim court.

The principles guiding sentencing are diyya (compensating victims) and qisas (punishing offenders with harm equal to what was inflicted). Sentences may utilize either or both.

Sharia rarely utilizes imprisonment. Typical penalties include corporal (and capital) punishment, exile, fines, and maiming (like amputation or branding). Crimes are divided into hudud (carrying mandatory sentencing) and tazir (with discretionary sentencing). In practice, even with hudud offenses, qadis have some leeway to consider circumstances.

Roleplaying

Unless the GM decides otherwise, if the required number of witnesses are provided, the plaintiff wins the case. Protagonist efforts likely to focus on validating or discrediting witnesses (depending on their position) and advocating advantageous interpretations of sharia.

Resolve questions about witness credibility or character with a Reaction roll. On a result of Neutral or better, the qadi accepts the witness. This is not a contested roll. Treat disclosures undermining the witness as penalties to the reaction roll.

Advocating a particular interpretation of sharia requires Law (Islamic); see p. 16. This roll may be contested. Particularly good (or bad) Public Speaking rolls might modify the Law roll. The GM may also assign a modifier if the qadi is predisposed for or against the interpretation.

> *As Islamic law is in principle sacred law, there was no theoretical room for man-made law, hence the exceptionally peculiar nature of the qanun.*
>
> – Haim Gerber, **Islamic Law and Culture, 1600-1840**

Beyond Sharia: Secular Courts

Publicly, sharia is considered the judicial ideal throughout classical Islam. Tacitly, however, limitations are acknowledged. Sharia evolves only gradually. As the classical Islamic world grows in size and complexity, increasingly tenuous deductions and logical gymnastics are often required to resolve cases through sharia. Even where cases seem straightforward, qadis will seldom convict without the required number of witnesses.

Maẓālim and shurta courts develop to fill these niches. Because they are supposed to take sharia into account, calling them secular courts is technically a misnomer, but a useful shorthand. Losers in sharia trails can appeal to maẓālim courts. These courts can also hear cases and redress grievances not addressed by sharia. Shurta courts allow law enforcement to deal effectively with criminal cases.

Shurta

Shurta courts grow from classical Islam's police forces. Recognizing sharia's challenges in criminal trials, police are empowered to try such cases. Many shurta characteristics are more familiar to contemporary readers than sharia or maẓālim. But its sometimes cavalier attitude toward coerced testimony and concentration of investigation, judgment, and punishment in a single authority bring potential for abuse.

Dates From: About 650, peaks in influence around the 10th century, declines around 13th century.

Jurisdiction: Criminal law (assault, murder and other violent crimes; sedition; theft; treason).

Presiding Official: Sahib al-shurta (general). Variations: *hakim*, *ma'una* (Fatimid Egypt), *ma'awun* (literally "helper"), *shihna* (Syria).

Governing Skill: Law (Criminal).

Useful Traits: Ally, Contact, or Favor (Police), Reputation (Law abiding).

Legal Code

Qanun (secular law) related to criminal cases.

Initiating Proceedings

Initiated either by police or a party to the dispute. In the latter case, the court must agree to prosecute.

Courtroom Procedure

Unlike sharia, shurta readily admits material evidence and testimony from witnesses of dubious character.

Proceedings include pretrial disclosure and evidentiary processes featuring investigation by law enforcement and questioning of witnesses. Questioning *might* take the form of Interrogation, and shurta courts commonly have the fewest restrictions on coercion or torture.

Across time and place, there is little consistency in judicial forms. At one end of the spectrum, shurta trials are rigorous proceedings with articulated charges, active opportunity for the accused to refute or disprove charges, and a verdicts rendered in judicial format. At the other, they are perfunctory administrative sessions with predetermined verdicts.

Reaching Verdicts

Guilt or innocence is based upon preponderance of evidence. Lack of consistent guidelines makes weighing evidence and testimony the judge's prerogative. Judges may be partial to evidence or testimony from other shurta agents.

Verdict and Sentencing

The judge is responsible for rulings and has wide discretion in sentencing. In principle, verdicts or sentences violating sharia are forbidden. This is never clearly defined. In practice, the judge's latitude is determined by the current balance between secular and religious authority. Shurta is more focused on punishment than compensating victims.

Roleplaying

Protagonist efforts are likely focused outside the courtroom on building a strong case.

Resolve the case as a Quick Contest of Influence rolls between plaintiff and defendant. The GM should assign a modifier to each roll based on strength of evidence and testimony. A +5/-5 is appropriate for a very strong/weak case. For a weak circumstantial case, use +1/-1. If the truth appears unambiguous, the GM may simply declare a verdict.

Maẓālim

Maẓālim courts are presided over by high-ranking secular officials. A vehicle for promoting common good, state stability, and social justice (ideally, at least), maẓālim courts address situations or developments for which sharia doesn't offer a clear solution. Because they can supersede sharia verdicts, they function as appellate courts.

Important people with many demands upon them, maẓālim judges typically only hear cases with social or political significance or involving important or well-connected individuals.

Dates From: 634. Power ebbs and flows (it is especially strong under the Abbasids).

Jurisdiction: Any. Commonly includes appellate cases, cases against government officials, high-value commercial law or property crimes, and violent crime between different religions or ethnic groups.

Presiding Official: Rulers (caliph, imam, or sultan) or officials like *walis* (governors) and *viziers* (ministers of state).

Governing Skill: Law (Political Region).

Useful Traits: Status, Patron or Favor (presiding official), Savoir-Faire.

Legal Code

Theoretically, maẓālim courts enforce qanun while considering sharia. In reality, both are often subordinate to the presiding official's personal opinions and attitudes.

Initiating Proceedings

Cases are initiated by parties to the dispute. Officials must agree to hear them.

Courtroom Procedure

Of the court systems examined, maẓālim are the least consistent. Officials run trials as they see fit with minimum consideration for precedence or regulation.

Reaching Verdicts

Presiding officials may consult others (including qadis and sahibs al-shurta) but are solely responsible for verdicts. Officials set their own criteria for proving guilt or innocence (and need not share them with parties to the dispute). Verdicts can be capricious or based on the presiding official's political or personal interests.

Verdict and Sentencing

Officials have freedom in sentencing (prudent ones avoid punishments offending key allies or public opinion). Like shurta, maẓālim sentences are more likely to focus on punishing offenders than compensating victims.

Roleplaying

For adventurers, the biggest challenge of a maẓālim case may be getting it heard. Many (though not all) officials take offense at overt bribes. Subtler incentives are more likely to work.

Getting a case heard requires a Very Good or better reaction roll (or by fiat if the adventure hinges on success). The GM may wish to deviate from the standard formula for Status as a reaction modifier (p. B29) and use the actual level instead of relative status (Status 4 gives +4, Status -1 gives -1, etc.).

The case's potential impact on the realm and official's personal feelings may also modify the roll.

The GM has a blank slate in designing and running maẓālim trials. Historically, classical Islam lacked concepts of trial by combat and trial by ordeal, but the flavor is appropriate for *Arabian Nights* fantasy. Maẓālim trials, where officials can do anything they want, are the most plausible place to insert such elements.

Given the variability of maẓālim trials, gaining advance knowledge of how the presiding official intends to run the trial (and what will influence him) is a valuable advantage.

Maẓālim trials are frequently the focus of political intrigue and public spectacle. In addition to presenting a strong case, PCs will want to build a relationship with (or at least impress) the presiding official and those who influence him.

> *He stage a trial? The Qadi realized that something was terribly wrong.*
>
> *– Suada,*
> ***The Qadi al-Fadil:***
> ***The Eminent Judge***

THE FIVE-MINUTE QADI

Of classical Islam's legal systems, sharia is likely the most esoteric to contemporary gamers. People spend a lifetime mastering Islamic law. Fortunately, grasping a few key concepts allows the GM to bring it sufficiently to life in a gaming context.

Sources

Sharia is the body of law and legal practice derived from Islam's foundational sources (and other practices), not those sources themselves. Over time, a definitive order of precedence emerges for sources. In reaching verdicts, the qadi begins with the preeminent source. If it does not provide clear guidance, he examines the second ranked source, and so on. In descending order of importance, the sources are:

Quran: For nearly every Muslim of classical Islam, the Quran is literally the word of God, recounted to Mohammed by the archangel Gabriel. The Quran's text is standardized by 656 and accepted by both Shias and Sunnis.

Sunnah: Traditions, customs, and sayings of Mohammed, as recorded by his companions. A single tradition, custom, or saying is called a *hadith*. Many are common to all Muslims. Some are accepted only by Sunnis or Shias or even by smaller groups within them. Each hadith's chain of transmission has, theoretically, been investigated to ensure veracity. This process is largely complete by the 10th century.

Fiqh: Legal writings and opinions of ulema (scholars of Islamic law) may be consulted as precedent. Generally, qadis only consult fiqh from the same religious tradition.

Ancillary Sources: Where Quran, Sunnah, and fiqh don't provide guidance, things become complicated. As that point, the qadi has multiple tools available but no clear order of precedence. *Ijma* (consensus) seeks input from other qadis. *Qiyas* (analogy) derives decisions from cases with similar aspects. Local custom, public interest, and individual reasoning are also valid ancillary sources.

Roleplaying

Debating how to interpret and apply religious law is part of many sharia trials. This is a Law (Islamic) roll (contested if the qadi is initially opposed to the interpretation or if the opposing party pushes a contrary one). Bonuses might be provided by successful Research or Theology (Islamic) rolls to locate strong support for the preferred interpretation.

Everything in Its Place

Sharia in classical Islam seeks to encourage proper behavior as well as punish transgressions. Facilitating this, Islamic law divides all actions into five categories.

Fard: Obligatory actions.
Mustahab: Meritorious or virtuous actions that are recommended.
Halal (or *Mubah*): Permissible but neutral actions, neither meritorious nor disreputable.
Makruh: Practices which are disreputable but not forbidden.
Haram: Explicitly forbidden actions.

The classification of some actions is consistent throughout classical Islam. Many others, ranging from polygamy and slavery to consumption of alcohol and depiction of the human form, vary or are contested.

Roleplaying

How a qadi categorizes an action has significant ramifications for sharia trials. Protagonists may find themselves debating the qadi (or looking for appropriate textual sources) to predispose him to their position. Consider the same mechanics as in *Sources* (pp. 18-19).

Meet the Judges

The judges of each system are very different. The history and likely backgrounds of each is discussed below. Because stats will vary based upon a campaign's point value, genre, and flavor, standardized templates are not included. Instead, descriptions provide minimum requirements (in **GURPS** character stats) and suggest plausible traits and skills.

Qadi and Ulema

The role of the qadis evolves more dramatically than their secular counterparts. At first, qadis are appointed by the caliph or another qadi. They must be free Muslims of good character. In **GURPS** terms, IQ 10+ and no social or mental disadvantages conflicting with "of good character" (or with the ability to conceal them) meet this description. This approach often persists in frontier areas or where secular rulers seek to prevent strong religious establishments from rivaling them.

There is no good evidence for female qadis (unlike ulemas). The GM should disregard this if it doesn't fit his campaign or preferences.

Most areas quickly develop institutions providing formal training and certification of qadis. Some, like Morocco's Qarawiyyn and Egypt's Al-Azhar, become the world's earliest universities. Formally trained qadis should have at least IQ 11, Law (Islamic) at IQ+1, Theology (Islamic) at IQ, and literacy. Status 1+ is not required but almost universal. High-ranking qadis, erudite legal scholars, and archetypical wise men may be much more formidable.

Common advantages for any qadi include Charisma, Clerical Investment, Eidetic Memory or Photographic Memory, Empathy or Sensitive, Religious Rank, Reputation, and Tenure. Depending on the campaign, Blessed, Magery, Power Investiture, or True Faith may be appropriate. Useful skills include Acting, Area Knowledge, Body Language, Current Affairs, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Psychology, and Religious Ritual (Islamic).

Formally trained qadis likely possess Administration, History, Public Speaking, and Research. Those taking full advantage of institutions such as Qarawiyyn and Al-Azhar may possess any artistic, scientific, or social science skill known to classical Islam. Guidelines for formally trained qadis can also be used to build ulemas.

Qadis are forbidden to receive money or gifts from parties to a dispute. It is frowned upon, though not prohibited, for them to engage in trade or commerce. Despite such safeguards, complaints occur. Corrupt or incompetent qadis are removable only by a higher-ranking qadi or ruler. Petitioners believing a qadi has wronged them may seek redress through maẓālim courts.

221B Abu-Bakr Street

The classical Islamic world's intellectual achievements were impressive for its day. For a cinematic treatment of classical Islamic science that facilitates traditional police procedurals, detective stories, and courtroom dramas, consider the Anachronistic Skill perk (**GURPS Low Tech**, p. 9) allowing people to take an anachronistic skill like Criminology or Forensics. Other perk-appropriate skills in this setting include Physician, Physics, and Sociology (although, after Ibn Khaldun, Sociology isn't all that cinematic).

Sahib al-Shurta

Shurta court judges come from police or military forces. At minimum, the sahib al-shurta should have IQ 10+, Status 0+, Duty (Shurta), Legal Enforcement Powers (10 or 15 points), Rank 2+ (Police or Military), and Law (Criminal) at IQ-2.

Plausible advantages include Acute Senses, Legal Immunity, and extra Will. Cinematic or fantasy sahib al-shurta may be Indomitable, Single-Minded, or Unfazeable. Common skills include Acting, Administration, Area Knowledge, Body Language, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Interrogation, Law (Islamic or political region), Observation, Psychology, and Streetwise. If the GM permits, Criminology and Forensics are also applicable (see *221B Abu-Bakr Street*, above).

Sahib al-shurta likely have advantages or skills relevant to police or military experience. Backgrounds typically correspond to detectives or officers, not beat cops or enlisted men.

Maẓālim Officials

Unlike their sharia and shurta counterparts, officials presiding over maẓālim trials have many other duties. As such, they may or may not be optimized for the courtroom. Minimum requirements are IQ 10+, Administrative Rank 5+ *or* Status 5+ (frequently both), and Law (political region) at IQ-2.

These officials are formidable individuals who might possess any allowed advantage or skill. Particularly plausible traits include Charisma, Cultural Adaptability, Eidetic Memory or Photographic Memory, Empathy or Sensitive, Indomitable, Languages, Legal Enforcement Powers, Legal Immunity, Reputation (positive, negative, or both), Sense of Duty (caliph or people), Social Regard, Tenure (rulers only), and Wealth (any). In supernatural campaigns, rulers may possess Blessed, Magery, Power Investiture, or True Faith.

Common skills include Accounting, Acting, Administration, Area Knowledge, Body Language, Connoisseur (any), Current Affairs (Business, People, or Politics), Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Economics, Geography, History, Law (Islamic), Literature, Merchant, Philosophy, Poetry, Politics, Public Speaking, Psychology, Religious Ritual, and Savoir-Faire, and Theology (definitely Islamic, possibly others).

Walis and rulers may have attributes and skills appropriate to a military background.

WHERE ARE THE LAWYERS?

Present at certain times and places, professional legal advocates never take firm hold in classical Islam. Generally, the more sophisticated and affluent the area, the more likely that muhams (lawyers) exist. In traditional areas, the idea of third-party representation in court is often suspect. Note that ulema is sometimes translated as "lawyer," but their abstract role doesn't fit the term's modern connotations.

A muham's functions are equivalent to a modern lawyer's. They use legal knowledge to assist clients in navigating the judicial process, advocate on their behalf in court, and assist in preparing legal documents. Muhams appear in all three court systems (though the idiosyncrasies of maẓālim courts mean they may not be useful).

Most muhams are formally trained. At minimum, they should have IQ 11+, Status 1+, literacy, and one or more Law specialties at IQ+. Good muhams have a much higher Law skill and Acting, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Psychology, and Public Speaking. Charisma is a common advantage. Stereotypical disadvantages that modern people associate with lawyers haven't really changed since ancient times.

END OF THE AGE

Around 1800, classical Islam's traditional legal systems crumble. The demise results from two antithetical but connected trends. First is the increasing influence of European legal ideas, either voluntarily through reformers or involuntarily through colonization. Second is the emergence of reactionary groups like the Wahhabis, opposing European influence and confident they understand the Quran without requiring a millennium of legal scholarship.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

Caliph's Investigation Service (CIS): A serial killer is loose in Baghdad. Six suspects are detained: a wealthy merchant, a well-regarded physician, a prominent dhimmi, a scholar reputedly skilled in alchemy and astrology, a common criminal, and (gasp!) a young noblewoman. The situation is potentially explosive. Harun al-Rashid has assembled a special team of shurta agents and other experts to gather evidence and ensure the guilty party is identified and convicted.

Inherit the Djinn: As one of his three wishes, a local wizard forces his comely genie to wed him. She's filed for divorce in the sharia court (the wish didn't say anything about staying married). The wizard and his high-priced muham argue that, as non-humans, sharia doesn't apply to genies. If the heroes help her win, they'll gain a potent Ally (and maybe a wish).

Law and Injustice: The caliph is weak and old. His grand vizier, chief qadi, and police chief jockey for position, using the courts they control as weapons. The justice system has broken down, and unrest grows. The PCs, mid-level functionaries from all three systems, must find a way to restore justice while keeping their heads.

Secret History: Someone is killing Al-Azhar's best legal students. The victims were all studying an ancient, half-forgotten fiqh ruling. The investigators (possibly fellow students who may be next on the list) must discover who's doing the killing, what they're trying to conceal, and whether the cobra venom used in each murder is significant.

The Lost Hadith: The party's Patron (or a beloved NPC) is charged with heresy by an Enemy. Unfortunately, it looks like he's guilty. The heroes hear rumors of an obscure hadith that might clear their associate. The catch? It's known only to an old ulema in faraway mountains. They must survive their journey to the ulema, learn about the hadith and its chain of transmission, then return and convince the qadi of its validity.

The Seven Tests: The party is involved in a maẓālim trial adjudicated by an eccentric caliph with a twisted sense of humor. To prove their case, they must pass the caliph's "Seven Tests." Characters will need everything at their disposal to pass them. Learning what they are in advance would help.

To Kill a Nightingale: A beggar stands accused of killing an influential local. Even before the "questioning" starts, the shurta act as if he's guilty. The whole thing smells of a frame-up. The PCs (idealistic young muhams, friends of the accused, or citizens trying to do the right thing) must clear the beggar and, if possible, find the real culprit.

RESOURCES

Burton, Sir Richard. *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (public domain, 1885). The standard edition of this collection of traditional tales; other editions and translations are available. Excellent flavor for classical Islamic fantasy. Two tales are noteworthy: "The Hunchback's Tale" is a darkly comic murder mystery and shurta courtroom drama. "The Three Apples" is a murder mystery providing great inspiration for a quirky maẓālim trial.

Clark, Malcom. *Islam for Dummies* (For Dummies, 2003). A good general primer but, admittedly, of limited value for classical Islamic law and courts.

Esposito, John (editor). *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2003). A broad but not deep overview. Notable primarily for the searchable abridged version online.
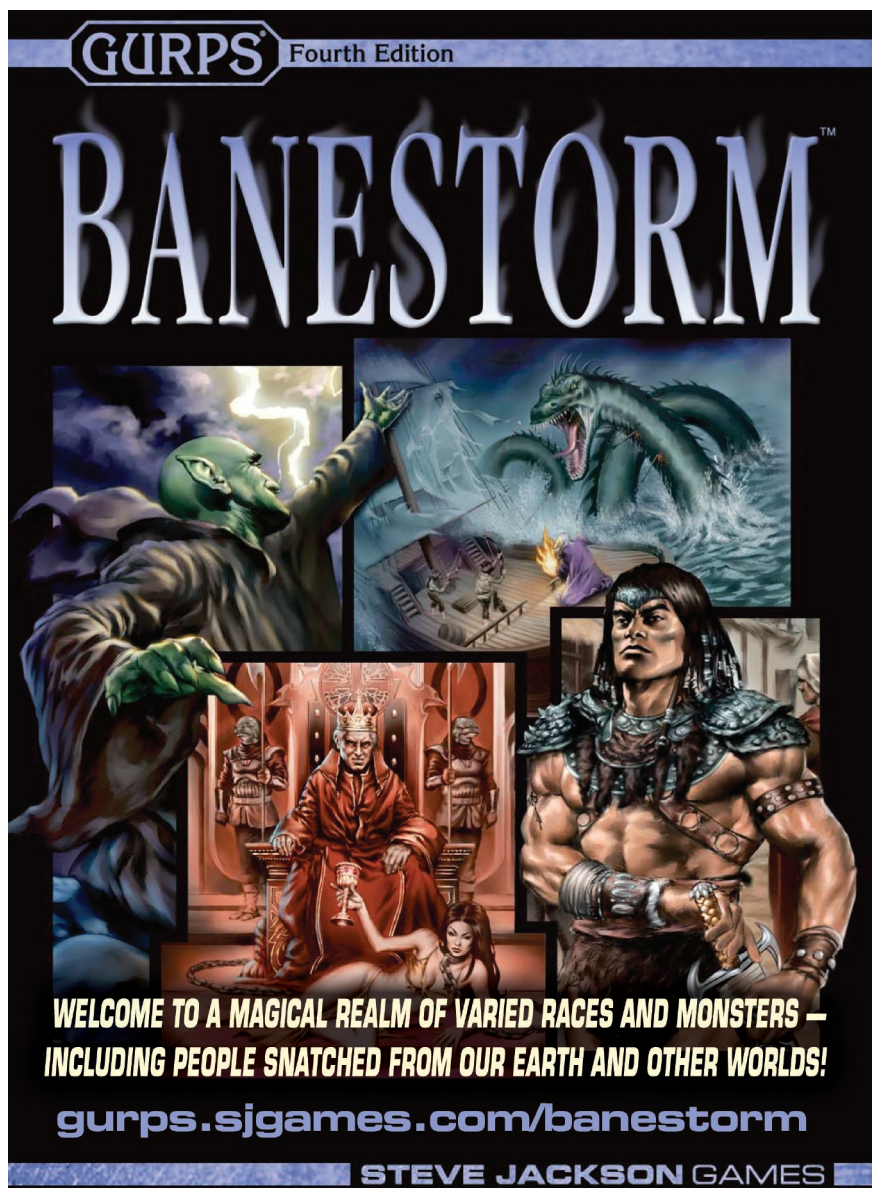
Khadduri, Majid and Liebesny, Herbert. *Law in the Middle East: Origin and Development of Islamic Law* (The Lawbook Exchange, 2008). One of the most readable examinations of law in the classical Islamic world. Available as an eBook.

Vikor, Knut. *Between God and the Sultan: A History of Islamic Law* (Oxford University Press, 2005). A great examination of classical Islamic law, especially good regarding the impact of tension between secular and religious authority. Inexpensive used copies are available.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Long before he tuned in, turned on, dropped out, and become a music journalist, Jon Black was a Middle Eastern Studies wonk. Conducting graduate studies at the American University in Cairo, he lived and worked extensively in the region. As recently as 2010, he was in Sudan handling communications and media for elections monitors from an American non-governmental organization. Jon has been playing role-playing games for more than 30 years and *GURPS* for more than 20 years.

GURPS Fourth Edition

BANESTORM

WELCOME TO A MAGICAL REALM OF VARIED RACES AND MONSTERS — INCLUDING PEOPLE SNATCHED FROM OUR EARTH AND OTHER WORLDS!

gurps.sjgames.com/banestorm

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

EIDETIC MEMORY

MARINE PROTECTOR AND DOLPHIN

BY DAVID L. PULVER

The United States Coast Guard (USCG) is a branch of the United States Armed Forces. It traces its origin to the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, and is the United States' oldest continuous seagoing force. It is unique in being both a military and emergency-response service with law-enforcement, military, and life-saving duties. It functions under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, but it can be transferred to Department of the Navy by presidential order or in time of war. To carry out its mission, the U.S. Coast Guard operates hundreds of ships, boats, and aircraft. This article describes two of its most important vehicles: the Marine Protector cutter and MH-65 Dolphin helicopter.

MARINE PROTECTOR-CLASS PATROL BOAT (TL8)

The USCG operates a sizable fleet of small boats and larger Coast Guard cutters. A "cutter" originally meant a small sailing ship, but the Coast Guard defines it as a USCG vessel with a permanent crew, onboard accommodations, and length of at least 65'. The most numerous of these vessels are the 87' *Marine Protector*-class armed patrol boats.

Between 1998 and 2009 some 73 Marine Protector cutters were constructed, all at Bollinger Shipyards of Lockport, Louisiana, using a licensed version of the Damen Stan 2600 patrol boat (built in the Netherlands and first used by the Hong Kong police). Individual vessels are named after sea creatures (birds or swimmers). Some examples include *Barracuda* (first of the class), *Cormorant, Halibut, Flying Fish, Manta, Osprey, Pelican, Sea Horse,* and *Swordfish*. Four other Marine Protector vessels were also built by Bollinger for other national fleets (two for Malta and two for Yemen).

The cutter's missions are law enforcement, search and rescue, and coastal defense. Marine Protectors are optimized for Homeland Security protection of coastal regions, ports, and inlets. They are commonly used for drug interdiction and patrol operations.

The cutter is 87' long and 19' wide. It can operate in conditions up to Sea State 5 (rough seas with 13' waves). The boat is powered by two 1,500 horsepower turbocharged diesel engines driving a pair of propellers, with a top speed of 25 knots (29 mph). The 2,800-gallon fuel tank provides enough fuel for three days of normal operation (but burns 165 gallons/hour at top speed).

The cutters carry a crew of 10: a commanding officer, executive officer, cook, four engineer/technicians, and three deck crew (for gunner, boarding, and rescue operations), plus one spare passenger berth.

The Marine Protector is arranged with a main deck (in the superstructure) and a below-deck space (in the body). The main deck contains the pilothouse, office, and a small four person cabin. Below decks is the engine room, fuel tanks, mess and galley, and (in the forward space) two small two-person cabins and one small three-person cabin.

The bridge, called a pilothouse, can be crewed by two people, with stations for helmsman and commanding officer/navigator. It has a precision navigation suite with electronic chart display system and GPS (+4 Navigation), depth sounder, an autopilot, and console to operate an AN/SPS-73 surface search radar (range 50 miles) and multiple radios (three 300-mile range radios, satellite phone, and a high frequency radio). Its large windows provides 360° visibility. The ship is also equipped with loudspeaker and foghorn. The ship's office has two safes for classified material and a personal computer (C4) that can access Homeland Security and USCG databases, along with extensive technical specifications for common civilian vessels.

The cutter's armament is mounted externally on deck and is suitable for low-intensity threats such as drug smugglers or terrorist boats: two .50 caliber Browning heavy machine guns each in a stabilized external mount on the forward hull. They are operated by a deck gunner. (Use .50 HMG statistics on p. B281, or .50 M2HB in *GURPS High-Tech,* p. 137.)

Despite its small size, crew comfort in the Marine Protectors was a higher priority than in older generations of cutters.

Each of the small cabins has a sink, intercom phone, and beds. There are two lavatories and two showers, with facilities for male and female crew. The mess seats nine people and has a TV, stereo, and VCR; the small galley can prepare basic meals. The crew spaces and engine room also have a fire main, water pumps, and multiple fire extinguishers (extinguish fire on 10 or less). There's also an arms locker for small arms (typically M870P 12-gauge shotguns, M16A2 rifles, or M4 carbines). The ship's stores have five days of supplies.

The cutter can also carry a single auxiliary 17.7' rigid hulled, waterjet-powered inflatable boat (RHIB) on its stern (20 knot/23 mph speed with six crew). It has a recovery system that can launch and retrieve it even in rough seas.

Variants

Four Marine Protectors – *Sea Dragon, Sea Devil, Sea Dog,* and *Sea Fox* – were funded by the U.S. Navy. Although operated by the USCG, they have the special duty of coastal security at the U.S. Navy's two ballistic missile submarine bases at Kings Bay, Georgia; and Kitsap, Washington. They were built with extra firepower: a remote-controlled stabilized mount for a third .50 HMG, run from the pilothouse (add "t" to the locations in the stats on p. 24).

EUROCOPTER MH-65D DOLPHIN (TL8)

The U.S. Coast Guard operates approximately 200 aircraft, primarily for maritime patrols. Half of these are Dolphin helicopters, which are classed as "short range recovery" aircraft. Their most important mission is marine search and rescue – both at sea and during natural disasters such as hurricanes – but they're also employed for a variety of operations: interdiction of drug smuggling and human trafficking, marine environmental protection, air defense, counter terrorism, and even arctic resupply and ice breaking (scouting ahead of polar icebreaker vessels to search for thin ice and navigable channels). Most of the Dolphins are based ashore, but some are embarked on the largest Coast Guard cutters and icebreakers (the Marine Protector is too small for a helicopter).

The Dolphin is a version of the French-designed Aerospatiale (now Eurocopter) SA366 G Dauphin. The Dolphin was first acquired (as the HH-65A) in 1984, and the fleet has been progressively updated with various electronic and engine upgrades as the HH-65B and HH-65C. As of 2016, nearly all helicopters in existing Coast Guard service had been modified to the latest MH-65D standard, with a further upgrade (the MH-65E, with some improvements in the avionics) planned for 2017.

The MH-65D is a conventional helicopter with four-blade main rotor, a quiet ducted fan tail rotor, and a retractable tricycle undercarriage. The helicopter is 38' long (with a 39' rotor diameter) and largely built out of composite materials – as a result it's been nicknamed Tupperwolf and Plastic Puppy. It is powered by twin Turbomecca Arriel turboshaft engines with 696 kW

power, giving it a top speed of 190 mph and ceiling of 18,000'. It carries 1,977 lbs. of fuel for a four hour flight endurance. The cockpit has three seats for pilot, a co-pilot, and flight engineer/hoist operator, with room for another crew member and up to six passengers in the rear cabin.

The MH-65 has a modernized suite of computerized flight controls. The pilot and co-pilot use can fly or navigate the aircraft, using multifunction display terminals to operate a sophisticated inertial navigation system and GPS (+5 Navigation) and four radios (300-mile range). This is linked to an advanced four-axis autopilot that can allow the crew to lock the aircraft into a stable hovering position 15 yards above a selected object (+2 to piloting-related rolls) in any kind of weather conditions, which can allow the crew to leave the controls untended while they assist with rescue work or perform other activities.

TACTICAL DOLPHINS

Although most Dolphins are unarmed, some are fitted for more dangerous missions.

HITRON Operations

U.S. Coast Guard aircraft traditionally did not carry weapons. However, Coast Guard cutters were having difficulty catching "go-fast" cigarette boats being used to smuggle drugs. In 1998, the Coast Guard began experimenting with armed light helicopters. In 2000, the service formed HITRON (Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron), based at Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Florida. It has proven successful, stopping boats carrying over $2 billion worth of drugs. Post-9/11 their operations were further extended to coastal counter-terrorist patrols. At present, HITRON exclusively uses the Dolphin for armed operations.

When engaging smugglers, the usual procedure is to fire warning shots with a 7.62mm or .50 rifle sniper rifle or machine gun, and if the boat fails to stop, to disable the engine using precise shooting. Attacks on personnel are permitted if the criminals return fire. When engaging terrorists, the rules of engagement are loosened to allow deadly force.

Coast Guard Air Defense Facility

Another tactical role for armed MH-65 Dolphins was initiated in 2006. The Coast Guard Air Defense Facility in Washington, D.C consists of MH-65D Dolphin helicopters deployed from the Atlantic City Coast Guard Air Station. Instead of their usual rescue mission, they're under tactical control of NORAD and assigned to prevent small general aviation aircraft from violating the 30-nautical-mile "Special Flight Rules Area" around the capital. Due to the Coast Guard's special legal position as both a law enforcement and a military force, they're uniquely legally qualified and trained to transition between playing aerial traffic cop (safely warning off civilian pilots that got lost or confused and strayed into the area, which happens two to 12 times a month) and emergency counter-terrorist force. Helicopters are used for this mission, as most civilian aircraft fly sufficiently low and slow that they're difficult targets for fast-moving fixed wing aircraft.

Coast Guard Vehicles

SHIPHANDLING (SHIP)/TL8

TL	Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Loc.	Draft
8	Marine Protector	97	-1/5	12	1/14	91	2	+7	10+1A	8	1,036	$6.8M*	GS2X	5.6′

   * $3.5M when ordered in 1998.

PILOT (HELICOPTER)/TL8

TL	Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt.	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Loc.	Stall
8	MH-65D Dolphin	70	+1/4	12f	5/93	4.74	1.18	+4	3+6	4	410	$9M	GH3Wr	0

The cockpit instruments are compatible with night vision gear, which is often worn; ongoing upgrades are adding thermal imaging sensors (Infravision) and a HUD (+1 to Piloting).

The flight engineer provides emergency mechanical support, assists with rescue or tactical operations, and operates the helicopter's rescue hoist, mounted by the starboard door, which can lift up to 600 lbs. An optional cargo sling can carry 2,000 lbs.

The final crew person is usually an emergency medical technician (EMT)-qualified rescue swimmer, but Dolphins engaged in tactical operations may carry one to two enlisted aviation gunners. Dolphins operating in search-and-rescue role don't carry arms, but some squadrons (see *Tactical Dolphins*, p. 23), and helicopters aboard larger cutters, have crews trained as aerial gunners. Safety slings and harnesses allow one or two people to lean out the helicopter door and fire sniper rifles or automatic weapons. The typical weaponry is either an FN M240 7.62-mm belt-fed machine gun (see **High-Tech,** p. 134, in FN-Mag description, or use the 7.62mm LMG on p. B281), an M107 .50-caliber anti-material rifle (see **High-Tech,** p. 118, in Barrett M82 description), or a telescopic-scope equipped 5.56mm M16 assault rifle or 7.62mm M14 battle rifle.

ADVENTURE SEEDS

The Marine Protector and Dolphin are "first responder" assets adventurers who encounter trouble off U.S. coastal waters might encounter. In a fast-developing special ops scenario on the American coast (such as a terrorist incident on a freighter) where's there's no time to bring in full-scale military assets, a single Marine Protector or MH-65 may be the first ship or aircraft that the PCs can call upon for assistance. These two vehicles are also the most likely opposition that protagonists engaged in illegal or suspicious activities off the American seaboard (e.g., smuggling or nosing around ballistic-missile submarine bases) may need to evade! Anyone flying light aircraft (or flying supers) in the restricted Washington, D.C. area may be challenged by the MH-65s of the Coast Guard Air Defense Facility. And if the characters are in an aircraft or boat that crashes or runs into trouble in U.S. waters, a Marine Protector or MH-65 may be the vehicle that saves them.

Here are three other possible scenarios involving the two vehicles.

Sea Monsters: In recent weeks, a number of small ships and boats have been discovered drifting derelict at sea off a segment of the U.S. coast, their occupants vanished. The ravings of a lone survivor suggest something well beyond criminals or bad weather. A commanding officer at the local Coast Guard station has heard of the monster hunters, and she asks that the PCs go aboard a Marine Protector (replacing the normal deck crew) to engage in a hunt for what may be a real-life sea monster. Adding to the complication are some folks who claim they saw mysterious lights in the sky – perhaps a meteor – a few weeks before the disappearances happened. Could it be connected?

Polar Peril: One mission for the MH-65 Dolphin is transporting supplies and medical evacuation to scientific outposts in the far north that are isolated by bad weather. Unfortunately, one helicopter fails to return after a supply mission; its last transmissions suggest something extraordinary was going on at the station, something far more sinister than climate-change research or polar-bear migrations. The station is also near an area of the arctic that Russian ships and submarines and Canadian ships have been operating in, due to some suspected underwater gas fields.

The Last Cutter: In an **GURPS After the End** campaign, wanderers may stumble on the last surviving Marine Protector vessel (its crew killed by a biological attack, fallout, zombies, etc.) in an isolated cove or abandoned port. If they can deal with any dangers lurking aboard and can figure out how to fuel and run it, they'll have a vessel that is the perfect size for a party of adventurers. However, getting the parts – or finding someone with the skills – to do this could easily require several more adventures.

> *The Marine Protector and Dolphin are "first responder" assets.*

ABOUT THE COLUMNIST

David L. Pulver is a Canadian freelance author. An avid science-fiction 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 roleplaying game, and writing countless **GURPS** books, including the **GURPS Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition,* **GURPS Ultra-Tech,** and the **GURPS Spaceships** series.

**Do you hate zombies?
You should!**

This fast-paced Kickstarter favorite, created by BoardGameGeek, boasts an exciting 10-minute experience for 2-12 players. In this treacherous party game, two teams fight for survival: zombies and the remaining humans who hate them.

Like and follow us on Facebook at
facebook.com/sjgames

Follow
@sjgames
on Twitter

Find other gamers at
gamerfinder.sjgames.com

ihatezombies.sjgames.com

Mega-Max!

by J. Edward Tremlett

One of the drawbacks of being a superhero is knowing that, once you've captured the Plutonium Skull, there's a good chance that he won't serve his 50-to-life sentence for melting half of Omaha before he breaks out. Even the best, most secure federal prison is ill-equipped to deal with someone who can shoot atomic blasts from his hands, eyes, and navel. Nonetheless, given that even the most murderous and overpowered of villains have rights, and deserve not only their day in court, but a chance to rehabilitate and reenter society, what can the heroes do?

Luckily, there is a solution, thanks to the private prison industry. International Incarceration Incorporated has no less than three specially designed facilities – known as Mega-Maxes – that take in villains that even a Supermax cannot handle: ones too cunning, powerful, or hazardous to realistically house with normal prisoners.

If the inmate is just a costume and a gizmo, has a low-level power that can be easily negated or nullified, or isn't the sharpest knife in the crook drawer, the standard system can keep them. For all others, there's Mega-Max.

But is the private solution really the best one? Apart from concerns about prisoner rights, abuses of power, and cost over care, III has a strange and secretive history. There are dark secrets hiding inside their corporate structure, and not every prisoner who goes in is fully accounted for.

This article details the history, current operations, and controversies of the Mega-Maxes and their parent company. It tells of their directors and wardens, the three known – and one unknown – Mega-Max facilities, and their most infamous inmates. It also tells the truth about what's really going on, and fun things to do in or around the super-prisons.

History

The first Mega-Max was built in 1999 by Marlin G. Skeevers, CEO of Incarceration Incorporated – *the* premier name in private prison solutions.

Founded in 1995, II was a latecomer to the booming prison business. It quickly zoomed past its competition by severely underbidding to get contracts, gambling that initial losses could be recouped later by slowly raising rates, and tacking on extra charges later. Skeevers's business model was proven correct, and, by 1998, II had at least one private prison in every state where the practice wasn't banned.

Bolstered by these successes – and a 600% profit increase – he set his lobbyists to get those laws changed. He also had

a mind to tap into an as-yet unexploited market: the private incarceration of so-called supervillains, which many prisons were leery of handling for obvious reasons. After developing the Mega-Max concept, the corporation lobbied to win an exclusive federal deal.

The idea was resisted at first, as the Feds already had Superprison 1. However, after a fortuitously timed escape by a very powerful supervillain showed how poorly the current situation worked, II's proposal was taken quite seriously. Skeevers was already very prepared to show proof of concept, as he'd been quietly modifying II's latest prison, just northwest of Winnemucca, Nevada.

> *Every prison that men build*
> *Is built with bricks of shame,*
> *And bound with bars lest Christ should see*
> *How men their brothers maim.*
>
> *– Oscar Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"*

The Muck

Within six months, Mega-Max 1 was ready to show off. A month after that, the federal government allowed states to remand the custody of convicted supervillains to Incarceration Incorporated. The prison corporation also provided exclusive contract services to jails housing such persons until their trial, and their high-tech prisoner transports – "Trouble Trailers" – soon became part of the penal landscape.

After five years of arguably exemplary services, substantial profits, and no escapes, Skeevers decided to expand. He convinced II's board to create a new, more secure facility to handle the most dangerous and hazardous prisoners – preferably *way* out of the way. He also looked toward Europe, where governments were still housing superpowered inmates in supposedly more secure facilities within ordinary prisons, with predictably bad results.

Abyss and Abbey

After some massive glad-handing, Incarceration Incorporated became the proud owners of Baker Island – an atoll less than a square mile in diameter, roughly halfway between Hawaii and Australia. Construction on Mega-Max 2 began in 2005, and was completed two years later. The worst and deadliest inmates from the Winnemucca facility were transported to the Abyss, and locked away in individually tailored isolation units.

Breaking the foreign market was tougher, due to the dim view most European nations take on private incarceration. Skeevers persevered, however, and made a historic deal with the United Kingdom: in exchange for letting II build a Mega-Max in the north of England, and take in inmates from the rest of Europe and Russia, they agreed to massive reductions in costs per UK prisoner. Other nations would cover both their own prisoners' costs and a substantial portion of their host's.

In 2009, II became International Incarceration Incorporated, and work began on the Kirkcambeck facility, in Cumbria. Unfortunately, III had to rely on substandard local help as part of the deal. As a result, the Abbey took two years to complete due to construction problems, and was riddled with staffing issues from the start.

Mistakes Were Made

A year and a half after the Abbey went online, a riot turned into a massive breakout. The authorities managed to contain the resulting mess, but the Kirkcambeck Massacre of 2013 soon became a rallying point for those opposed to privately run prisons – especially ones for supervillains. Worse, the incident caused some nations previously willing to entertain allowing III into their countries to reverse course. Losing Russia was very galling to Skeevers.

In 2015, one of the Abyss' inmates died during what was described as an escape attempt, but was never satisfactorily explained. A former employee of the Abyss went public to say it was no accident, and claimed to have seen numerous human rights abuses at the facility. He also spoke of a fourth, secret facility where experiments were carried out on inmates. However, when it was learned the employee was fired for drinking on the job, his testimony was largely ignored.

All the same, the damage was gone. To this date, no less than three Congressional hearings have been called to investigate conditions at III's facilities, as well as reports of inmates mysteriously breaking out of their Trouble Trailers during or after trial. These predictably turned into partisan shouting matches that went nowhere, but there's a chance the issue might come back with a vengeance during the next election cycle.

STRUCTURE

International Incarceration Incorporated is headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland – close enough to Washington, D.C., to have access to its people, while still far enough away to not have to deal with the traffic. Its gleaming, neo-futurist, 10-story building rises like a glass-and-steel horn where I-295 becomes Russell St., just southwest of Oriole Park. Skeevers likes to sit in his office, up on the top floor, and use the latest in surveillance equipment to watch the ball games, all by himself.

The Chiefs

Marlin G. Skeevers, 52, is the CEO and undisputed leader of the company. He's balding, tall, and beefy, with deep blue eyes that are quite unnerving. He started his career as a bull in Attica, and worked his way up to assistant warden. He might have eventually been appointed to the top job, but decided he would rather run the whole show from *outside* the government than be held subject to the whims of whoever was in office. Plus, there was a lot more money to be made in going private.

III's chief operational officer is Kenneth K. Kracower: a rail-thin and ambitious tyrant, 46 years old. Unlike his boss, he has a purely corporate background, though he likes to joke he was often arrested for beating down people in boardrooms.

Milton O. Wilson is the chief financial officer. He's 54 and short, with long black hair kept in an unflattering ponytail, tiny glasses, and a small mouth. He keeps track of every penny III makes, both on and off the books

The Board

III's board is composed of 12 people: the chairman, nine inside directors, and three outside directors.

Chairman Thomas E. Quentin is 53, of medium height and build, and a study in subtlety. He's quite aware that he really runs the company, but doesn't care to bring it up during meetings. He just makes carefully pointed suggestions, here and there, about how a board member thought a certain course of action might be best, or not, and lets Skeevers and Kracower fill in the blanks.

The inside directors are a combination of upper-level manager (all of whom report directly to either Kracower or Milton) and principal shareholders. The managers are essentially toadies for their bosses, and the shareholders want their stock values to enjoy as steady an increase as possible. Quentin happily pits them against each other while deciding what he's going to "suggest" at the next big meeting.

The three outside directors are of more interest to Quentin, given who they are and what they bring to the mix.

Bill J. Preston, 65, was the warden of Superprison 1 – America's longest-lasting Federal prison for supervillains. He was there for 40 years, and oversaw its long-overdue attempts to modernize. He was in charge the night Multisaurex broke loose, and chose to shoulder the blame. After his resignation he was approached by Skeevers to provide insight and knowledge.

Sir, within the last hour, there has been a massive infraction on Supermax M.S. One. It's a takeover.

– Scott Langral, in **Lockout**

Ursula O. Metropolis (also known as Jennie H. Middlevale), 86, was once the Street Queen. She controlled much of the postwar organized crime in Chicago through smarts, cunning, and sheer terror, along with the ability to appear totally anonymous. Incarcerated at Superprison 1 until 2000, she later admitted to having snuck out "hundreds" of times. Skeevers sought her expertise in designing their new prisons, as she was so good at determining the their weaknesses.

Gary "Good" Bye, 69, was Master Illusion: a little-known, somewhat esoteric hero during the 1960s and early 1970s. Calling him a superhero who doubled as an escape artist is selling him criminally short, as he was, and still is, the world's foremost expert on all aspects of traps – design, detection, and escape. His quest for "The Lock in the Key" saw him hang up the costume in 1976 and disappear. But when Skeevers was looking for help creating incarceration solutions for the first Mega-Max, there was Gary, waiting.

ABANDON ALL HOPE

Supervillains are like any other citizen in that their rights are, or at least should be, guaranteed. Innocent until proven guilty, they have a right to a fair trial, with an attorney. They have the right to be treated humanely before, during, and after that trial. They have the right to be treated fairly while in prison, and, once their sentence is up, they have the right to reenter society.

In theory, III's Mega-Maxes are like any other prison in that they must recognize and respect these rights. In practice, like so many other prisons, corners get cut and lines get crossed – it's the nature of the beast. But when the prison has to make a profit, things get even more complicated.

Prisoners whose powers can be blocked with special drugs get dosed first thing every day – jabbed right in the neck as they leave their cell. Those who *can't* be blocked, or are too powerful to take the chance, are just locked up in the Hazardous section. If they crack up in the can, well, too bad.

Mega-Max mental health care is lousy at best. The company employs therapists willing to work on the cheap, who analyze and diagnose from the comfort of a studio on the other end of their patients' room cameras. The physical health care is just below standard, with prisoners' well-being often going ignored for a long time. As for the food, it's barely nutritious slop.

The guards are mendacious and mercenary, and almost always on the take. They're not above doling out "extra justice" on behalf of other inmates or the victims' families by bribing lifers to maim or kill their fellows, or arranging accidents, poisonings, and the like. They also arrange lethal "malfunctions" in the Hazardous cells.

Inspectors from the Federal Bureau of Prisons make regular visits, as well as surprise inspections. Oddly enough, conditions improve dramatically just before they arrive. It's almost as if III knew they were coming, somehow.

FACILITIES

The three Mega-Maxes are located in fairly remote places, both to reduce the chances of successful escape, and to minimize civilian collateral damage in case one occurs. They are built from prefabricated materials, assembled in curving sections that spiral inwards. The more dangerous the inmates, the closer to the center of the spiral they are jailed, until one reaches the most deadly group at the center. In the event of a breakout, and subsequent lockdown, the villains have to fight their way through every locked door in the place to get out.

III sends its Trouble Trailers out to collect arrested supervillains deemed worthy of a stretch in a Mega-Max if convicted. During the trial, their experts determine the best incarceration solution, and provide details to the nearest facility, so more permanent containment can be assembled, and/or the right chemical cocktail given. If the villain is successfully convicted, they drive their new inmate to his new home; if the villain gets off scot free, III keeps the info on file in case it becomes relevant later – which it usually does.

Basic Model

The model facility has three different zones, each housed in a separate spiral, each catering to a different kind of inmate.

The Standard zone has inmates whose powers can be chemically nullified, as well as nonpowered criminal masterminds too dangerous for a standard prison. Most inmates have varying degrees of freedom – they can leave their cells to eat in a common area, exercise, visit the library, shower, etc. The further into the spiral, the more rights and allowances are curtailed, until the center, where the worst of the lot are kept in 23-hour confinement in Supermax-style conditions.

The second zone is Hazardous, filled with people whose powers cannot be turned off – merely compensated for with technology – or whose body chemistry is extremely toxic, requiring special facilities. These inmates are confined to their specially made cells at all times, and have their meals and any reading material slid into their doors. They don't even leave in medical emergencies – the doctors come to them.

The third zone is Disturbed, housing villains who are "standard" in power, but whose mental illnesses make them too risky to keep in the Standard zone. Some of them are allowed to leave their cells and mingle under highly monitored conditions, while others are kept locked down continuously. High powered or highly toxic prisoners who *also* happen to be mentally ill are housed in the Hazardous section, instead, but receive therapy via closed-circuit television.

Mega-Max 1 – The Muck (Winnemucca, Nevada)

The flagship facility currently houses 250 inmates, with space for another 100. It employs 60 guards and 80 support staff.

The chief warden is Ramon H. Valdez, 40, a former Marine who ran three military prisons in his time. He has a reputation for being firm but fair, but that's only to his employees. Inmates are expected to be obedient and quiet, and heaven help anyone who attracts his attention.

From the air, the facility looks like three spirals arranged in a triangular pattern. Their entrances meet in the middle, at the central administration building. Each spiral is surrounded by twin fences, with an active "death zone" between the two; the entire facility is surrounded by a similar pair of fences. Entrance points are coded to the guards' optical scans, fingerprints, and DNA.

Interesting Inmates

Ned Nemesis, 47: America's most dangerous criminal mastermind. Currently serving several life sentences for schemes so complex and convoluted he's the only one who fully understands them. He spends most days in the library, quietly reading the papers, and chuckling darkly every so often. *(Standard.)*

Dee Note, 50: Infamous semiotic terrorist, whose mind-bending "art" can kill entire cities. Her last stunt involved tagging Pittsburgh with an alien language that turned commuters into cannibals. Her psychiatrists always say she's making progress, right until they go home and kill themselves. *(Disturbed.)*

Twistergirl (Billie Joe McDonald), 28: Can generate long-lasting, independent, miniature tornadoes from her hands. Currently serving 80 years for knocking over banks in southern Indiana, Billie Joe is kept in a cell whose atmospheric conditions negate her powers. She's undergoing treatment for meth withdrawal, and claims to have been born again. *(Hazardous.)*

Mega-Max 2 – The Abyss (Baker Island)

The most remote Mega-Max, the Baker Island facility holds 60 entities – all classified as Hazardous, some also Disturbed – with room for another 40. III transports Trouble Trailers to Hawaii, and then loads them on a specially designed ship to take them to the island. The ship – jokingly called the Loathe Boat – also brings in food, supplies, and staff both new and returning.

The facility is partially submerged off the east side of the island – a two-story spiral with a control facility and dock built into the north part. A small village for the 40 guards and 50 staff lies on the east coast, complete with a company store, movie theater, nondenominational chapel, and café.

The warden is Phyllis V. Rocksteader, 38. She is a mousy chemical engineer who designed the power-negating drug compounds Mega-Maxes use. She has no background in prison administration or law enforcement, but Rocksteader confidently proclaims she needs neither to "lock up the crazy and dangerous." She generally views her duties as akin to watching lab mice, and has her assistant warden, Edward I. Chase, handle the logistics. He does it gladly, hoping to eventually catch her in a big mistake so he can take the reins.

Staff morale is consistently poor, and not just because of boredom, the remoteness of the job, or the danger level of the inmates. Everyone – *especially* the inmates – knows the complex is wired to a small nuclear device, set to go off in case of mass breakout. So while all employees sign up for two year tours, few complete it. Some even crack up, complaining of bad dreams that lead to self-harm.

The Missing Mega-Max

The disgruntled former employee was telling the truth. There *is* another Mega-Max, but very few know of its existence, even within III. This is due to the especially dangerous nature of its inmates, as well as certain other considerations.

Mega-Max Zero, commissioned in 2010, was built into a specially converted, aging cargo ship. The only mobile facility, it makes a near-constant run between New York City and Portsmouth, England, supposedly taking inmates from the Muck to the Abbey. But far below decks, 50 special inmates are locked down in specially designed isolation chambers, with about 100 staff overseeing their stay.

The main reason for the secrecy is how menacing these "inmates" are. They're mostly creatures too dangerous for even the Abyss: grossly overpowered villains, genuine monsters, or things that can only be called "weird menaces." There's no attempt at rehabilitation, no chance of release, nothing – III dumps them here, and pretends they never saw them.

The warden of the Null is none other than Outside Director Gary "Good" Bye – the former Mister Illusion, somehow capable of simultaneously being in Baltimore and the Atlantic. He runs the ship like a series of conundrums, with carefully worded orders and schedules like logic puzzles. Those who can't hack the mental exercise don't last long, but no one's sure where they go – no one seems to leave Bye's infamous exit interviews.

Interesting Inmates

The Crawler, 3: The freakish, massive creation of Dr. Worldburner, the beast is best described as a trilobite the size of a panel van. It feeds on the pollution in the air and constantly excretes radioactive gases. Worldburner was going to breed these by the thousands to kill the world, but was thankfully stopped. The Crawler sits here to be studied and contained.

The Shape (real age unknown): A strange invader from another world, the being is an airborne, intelligent xeno-infection that turns its victims into copies of itself – able to switch back from alien to human form in seconds. The Shape afflicts entire crowds within minutes, but, luckily, its ship crashed in a remote area of Norway. The authorities burned the infection down to one, last survivor. The six year old sits in her cell, smiling evilly, and occasionally showing the guards what she *really* looks like.

Sir Real (Charles P. Pendleton), 37: Disgruntled mail clerk turned walking chaos engine. An employee of the dead letter office in Atlanta, Georgia, he learned some great and esoteric secret in those stagnant envelopes, and was transformed into a reality-warping caricature of a man. Authorities think he *may* have creatively obliterated three cities, 10 towns, and around 150,000 people from reality before he was caught, but they're not sure. The cell Master Illusion put him in rotates him through a half-dozen dimensions a second, keeping him perpetually off-balance and unable to use his terrible powers.

What's Really Going On

There's a lot of messed-up things going on in International Incarceration Incorporated, from the top down.

Kracower has his hands in several piles of revenue, and he is making money from a lot of dirty deals. Wilson knows what he's up to, but covers for him in exchange for a little off the top. Meanwhile, Skeevers knows something is going on, but doesn't say anything for now, thinking he can handle it.

One of Kracower's nastier deals is with various red market interests who study how superpowers work. He knows a number of people who want to study their powers up close and personal, with no concern for the subject's welfare or life expectancy. He also knows some other folks who just want to harvest their parts.

Such persons of interest are "escaped" from their Trouble Trailer, either during their trial or just after, on the way to a Mega-Max. They're snatched up by a mercenary outfit, taken to New York City or Portsmouth, and put on the Null with other transported inmates. At some point, they're moved below decks, and then the fun begins.

Then there's Master Illusion and his strange obsession. Back in the 1970s, he went looking for the truth that lay behind the twin traps of life and reality. Saying he solved them is wrong – they solved *him*, and now he pays fealty to the omnipresent, pan-dimensional entity that lurks behind their facade.

But it's not enough to merely know; he must also show and tell. For that, he needs to feed its hunger with special beings – the kind III sends to the Null for "experiments." So he earmarks some of them for sacrifice, hoping that "The Lock in the Key" will one day open itself up, and with it, the world.

Interesting Inmates

The Wonder (real age unknown): A being of almost-mythological power levels, so fast, strong, smart, and invulnerable that it took *three* teams of A-list superheroes to bring him down. Supposedly he can be banished by speaking his true name, but no one knows what it is. He's being kept in a magical coma until then. *(Hazardous.)*

Multisaurex (Dr. Lacey T. Thompkins), 42: A large, raggedy, and wide-eyed woman capable of turning herself into any creature from the Jurassic to Cretaceous periods. The ability is due an accident she suffered while researching prehistoric DNA, and she has no control over it whatsoever. A steady drip of Rocksteader's drugs has kept the transformation from happening, but it's also destroyed her mind. *(Hazardous – Disturbed.)*

Toxidemalion (Milton B. Flurb), 29: A well-meaning goober who wanted to be a circus clown, a fateful plunge into an illegal hazardous waste dump turned him poisonous, polymorphic, and insane. Now he's a clown-shoggoth who gives people leukemia, mercury poisoning, and Day-Glo skin tumors from 50′ away. He sits at the center of the bottom spiral, in a form-fitting lonsdaleite ball rigged to explode the nuke if even a molecule of his odious body wiggles out of it. *(Hazardous – Disturbed.)*

Mega-Max 3 – The Abbey (Kirkcambeck, England)

A physical near-clone of the flagship prison, the Abbey squats in a low-lying valley north of the ruins of Kirkcambeck. The depressed village has never gotten over the consequences of the 2013 breakout, and hardly anyone lives there anymore.

The facility is currently full up at 350 inmates, from a stunning variety of countries. However, it only has 50 guards to look after them all, and only 60 support staff to help them in this task. Double shifts have become common, and people are getting careless. Some say it's only a matter of time before another breakout occurs.

> *What do I care about the law? Haven't I got the power?*
> *– Cornelius Vanderbilt*

The warden is Thomas Y. Caulder, 57, who was one of the assistant wardens of Strangeways, in Manchester. When the now-infamous riots resulted in that prison's partial destruction in 1990, he was blamed and spent the next few years defending his controversial actions. Following the sacking of the previous warden of the Abbey, after 2013, Skeevers hired Caulder to take charge. He has been doing the best he can with little support, but that doesn't seem to count much these days.

Interesting Inmates

Espada de Sangre (Hector J. Rojas), 37: A gruesome Spanish contract killer who can animate his own blood outside of his body. He uses it to form body armor and bladed weapons, hence his colorful name. Currently serving a life sentence for attempting to kill the president of France, he will not give up his employer, saying he will eventually fulfill the contract. He's on special drugs that dull his ability – on a good day he can cough up blood on command, but that's it. *(Standard.)*

The Professor (real name and age unknown): A wily rogue claiming to be a time-traveling inventor. A person of interest in several kidnappings, he was found in possession of numerous archaeological treasures thought lost centuries ago. He claims he stole them, and, as for the missing children, he took them on his "adventures," only to strand them in the past to cover his escape. Such a tale would normally land one in an asylum, but he's been able to escape normal facilities by cobbling together devices from seemingly nothing. The authorities have yet to discover his time machine, which he claims is disguised. *(Disturbed.)*

Handhammer (Gunther C. Gustavsson), 45: German muscleman who can punch through 6″ armor plate. He used his abilities as hired muscle for other, more intelligent criminals, but was busted during a poorly planned diamond heist.

Currently serving a life sentence for his crimes, he is suspected of several murders where the victims were left as literal smears. His cell has ultra-hard walls, and yet he still leaves knuckle-imprints every so often. *(Hazardous.)*

USES AND SEEDS

As written, the Mega-Maxes provide a crucial bit of background to any superhero campaign. The legal issues can appear in the papers, and possibly form part of a campaign's moral and ethical dimensions. Breakouts can be cause for titanic team-ups, or panic as a dangerous adversary gets out, revenge on his mind.

They also answer "what do we do with Plutonium Skull?" A Trouble Trailer can contain his bad, bony self before and during his trial, unless he "escapes" during the proceedings. Once he's locked up in a Mega-Max, the heroes can visit to try and get information, or cut a deal.

Many other stories could be told, depending on how far from the standard hero script the GM wants to go.

Orange Is the New Evil: The PCs are supervillains who've been sentenced to the Standard zone in a Mega-Max. Some need to take blocker drugs, some don't, but they'll need all their skills to navigate the dangerous environment of "prisneyland." Join a gang or remain independent? Make alliances and deals, or break them? Go straight or get tough?

Mega-Breakout: A bent guard is willing to engineer a breakout, courtesy of the hazardous psycho at the center of the PCs' Standard spiral. The monster's been weaned off his blockers and is a day or two from busting loose, theoretically letting everyone else out on the way. But can they trust the guard? Can they trust the psycho? *Can they trust each other?*

*Mega-Break-**In**:* Ned Nemesis needs to get out of jail – *now*. The PCs are high-tech mercenaries who've been hired to make that happen. Their job is to infiltrate the Mega-Max, find out all they can, and then arrange for his exit. Breaking into the most high-tech, secure prison in North America will be difficult, but it'll pay really well. Plus, if anyone dies, the survivors split his share of the fee.

The Abyss Also Gazes: The PCs are guards in the Abyss. Their normal routine is one of drudgery and sheer terror, coupled with the boredom of the island, fear of the nuke, and the desire to go home and spend their paychecks – provided they don't lose it all to the overpriced company store. That and, the longer people are here, the weirder their dreams get. It's like something is invading their sleep and demanding they speak his name to wake him up, but when *they* wake up, the name is gone. Is it the Wonder, infesting their minds, or something else entirely?

Infiltrating III: The PCs are investigating the irregular goings-on behind the veneer of the company's fine PR. They have either gotten jobs in the company, or are on surveillance duty. It doesn't t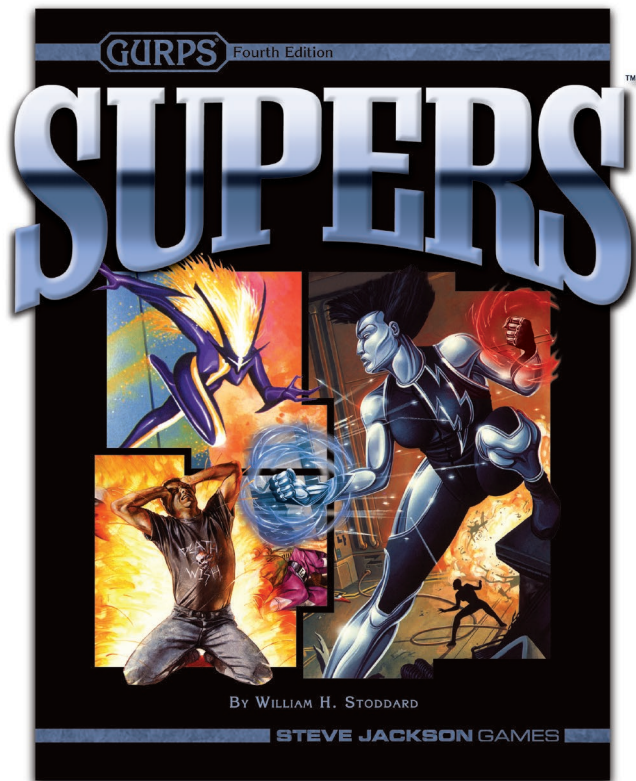ake too long to realize all the chief officers have secrets, the chairman is bent, and the three outside directors have clashing agendas. Will they find out what's really going on before someone takes an unhealthy interest?

Have You Seen This Villain? The heroes put Satyricon behind bars, but then he escaped from a Trouble Trailer awaiting trial. Unsatisfied with III's pat answer, they're looking for him. Before long, they realize he was busted out and taken elsewhere, and the trail leads to a certain dock, where a certain cargo ship berths at when in New York City. If they get to the ship, and learn about the Null, what will they find? Will they survive it?

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 the author of the fictional blog *SPYGOD's Tales* (**spygod-tales.blogspot.com**) and writes for Op-Ed News. He currently lives in Lansing, Michigan, with two cats and a mountain of Lego bricks.

JUDICIUM DEI

by Nathan M.M. Meluvor

In modern times, we tend to associate a trial with a formal meeting before jury or judge, it being the form of legal inquiries to which most of us are accustomed. However, historically, evidence, juries, and judges have not been the only means of determining someone's guilt or innocence. In medieval times (and up until the 19th century in the case of England), trials often took a variety of forms which were to be determined by Judicium Dei, or judgment by God. The two most well-known forms of Judicium Dei are trial by ordeal and trial by combat. In both, the central principle was that God, if he knew the accused to be innocent, would intervene in their fate.

TRIAL BY ORDEAL

Trial by ordeal is a common concept throughout the world. It was a very early form of trial; Hammurabi's second law allows a man to answer any accusation by a form of water ordeal rather than face judgment. In many societies (including that of Ur), the effect was animistic or magical, but a form relying on the mercy of God was common throughout medieval Europe.

Ordeals could take a variety of forms. Two of the most common varieties were the ordeal by fire and the ordeal by water.

Ordeal by fire involved the accused walking a certain distance either over a red-hot surface (such as heated plowshares) or while carrying a red-hot iron. Determination of guilt depended on culture. Some required that the accused be unharmed, while others simply that they succeeded. In some, the wounds were bandaged and then examined after a set period of time; those that had begun to heal were deemed innocent, and those whose wounds festered were judged guilty.

Ordeal by water took two forms: boiling water and cold. The former was much like ordeal by fire; the accused would retrieve a stone from a boiling cauldron of water or oil. The latter had a few forms. In Hammurabi's code, the accused needed to jump into the river. If he survived, he was deemed innocent. This practice, wherein the accused needed only survive being placed in water, persisted into medieval times. In harsher forms, however, the accused was bound to a millstone, and was deemed innocent only if he did not sink. Later, during the witch-hunts, this practice was reversed; those who were accused would be bound in the fetal position, and considered guilty if they floated, and innocent if they sank.

Other ordeals exist throughout the world, including ordeal by poison (guilt determined by whether or not the poison killed the accused) and ordeal by Eucharist (it was assumed that anyone who swore a false oath then ate the host would die within the year). As another example, there was a form of trial by ordeal in medieval Europe known as cruentation, whereby it was believed that a murder victim's corpse would bleed or otherwise change in the presence of the murderer. The accused would be made to lay his hands on the corpse of the body and if it spontaneously changed or bled, he would be deemed guilty. Some societies invented less damaging forms; Charlemagne instituted the ordeal of the cross to discourage judicial duels, wherein the accuser and the accused would both attempt to keep their arms parallel to the ground, the last to give up being deemed correct.

For further discussion of various forms of trials by ordeal, including *GURPS* game mechanics, in medieval England, see *GURPS Middle Ages 1,* p. 12.

TRIAL BY COMBAT

Trial by combat is the more well-known form of Judicium Dei, especially due to its use in George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, despite it being a less common form of trial than trial by ordeal. Trial by combat is closely related to the practice of dueling, and originated in civil rather than criminal cases. Any legally sanctioned duel can be considered a trial by combat – the Scandinavian practice of holmgang is a particularly good example, wherein an insult could be legally responded to with a challenge to a duel, which the insulter was required to attend.

Trial by combat took a variety of forms in both civil and criminal cases, and were usually informed by the dueling customs of the time. In early Germanic law, weapons were to be chosen by each fighter, and a variety of weapons were available. In some medieval civil cases, particular weapons were prescribed. The Italian codes allowed the defendant the choice of equal weapons.

Who would actually fight the duel also varied. In some societies, a party (or the clergy on the person's behalf) could name a champion to fight in the participant's stead; this was especially common in cases involving minors, women, or the infirm. In criminal cases, the state or clergy would name a champion, often chosen from among prison populations.

Trial by combat in criminal cases was usually fought to death or disablement. If either party cried "craven," that person would be declared the loser, but also labeled an outlaw, being stripped of all rights and legal protections, a fate often considered worse than death. In civil cases, while duels certainly were often fought to the death, other victory conditions (such as first blood) were stipulated. In some Italian courts, a defendant who succeed merely in parrying all of his opponent's blows until sundown was considered victorious.

For another look at trial by combat in Norman England, see *GURPS Middle Ages 1,* p. 91.

Trials in the Real World

In a realistic campaign (that is to say, one where supernatural forces don't influence the outcome of the trial), the actual trial can be very easy to model, and may be as simple as a series of rolls. In such cases it is likely that the GM will want to focus less on the trial itself, and more on the circumstances surrounding the trial.

Trial by combat is especially simple to emulate; standard combat rules are sufficient for this. The level of detail being used determines how invested the campaign as a whole is in combat. For more detailed games, **GURPS Martial Arts** is an invaluable tool.

The trial might be made more challenging than a normal combat. Perhaps the arena has hazards, like dangerous traps or animals, or perhaps the combat takes place in zero gravity. This can be an interesting way to make an otherwise unfair fight more balanced, putting the more experienced fighter off balance. For some example ways to mix up the playing field or end conditions, see *Instant Tournaments* and *Appendix Z: The Crumbling Ground* in *Pyramid #3/14: Martial Arts*. For an overview of how various hazards can affect fighting conditions, see **How to Be a GURPS GM,** pp. 29-30.

A trial by combat scenario has opportunities for characters outside of combat as well. A more social campaign could have an entire arc surrounding the finding of a champion to take the place of the accused. A scenario involving more underhanded participants might focus on attempting to fix a judicial combat (poisoning one fighter's weapons is a classic example). Trial by combat involving inexperienced fighters is a possibility, and can be a change of pace in an otherwise low-key campaign. A campaign that normally concerns the affairs of a group of out-of-shape entrepreneurs or guild members could have those same individuals find themselves bodily defending their lives.

Trial by ordeal will depend both on the ordeal involved and, more importantly, what is necessary to determine guilt. Many ordeals are actually impossible to for anyone to overcome in a realistic setting, such as being unharmed in a ordeal of fire or floating while attached to a millstone in an ordeal by water. In such a scenario, the conclusion of the trial itself is foregone and can simply be described by the GM. Actions on the part of the PCs will involve events surrounding the trial (such as trying to find an alternative, forcing such a trial to happen, or escaping the scenario entirely), rather than having agency in the trial itself. In the same way, other trials, such as trial by Eucharist will have a foregone conclusion of innocence.

Other trials allow for participants to have some agency. Ordeals that are determined by whether someone begins to heal from the test could be determined randomly, but the GM might permit the person to roll one or more health-related rolls to influence the result. An unscrupulous and stealthy individual might try to affect the result further, either sabotaging the healing or secretly administering medical care.

Ordeals that center around whether someone completes a task allow for even more player agency: health-related rolls to carry hot irons, willpower-related rolls to endure extreme pain, or even skill rolls to fake the task altogether (perhaps palming poisons for a neutral substitute or the like).

Trials Amid the Fantastic

The concept of Judicium Dei changes drastically in a setting wherein a god or gods actually do intervene on the behalf of the innocent. Of course, a GM could rule that trials always gives the appropriate verdict, with miracles happening and swords being guided. If this is the case, adventurers must be more skilled at avoiding the attention of the law, or more careful not to violate it. Campaigns involving illicit activity will generally focus far more on the police side of a criminal investigation, as once one has been detained, the determination of guilt is easy, infallible, and likely inexpensive. However, the existence of supernatural intervention need not imply infallibility or even a lack of excitement; there are several options to enliven the play experience with the will of divinity involved.

One option is for divine intervention to help, but be fallible. This can come across in a variety of formats – bonuses to skill in combat or health rolls, a small or even moderate amount of damage reduction, or the benefit of some kind of luck for the duration of the trial. This option gives innocent people an advantage in a trial, without the mental safety of certainty. It is limited in that it can only apply to trial by combat and ordeals wherein immunity to harm is not the standard of survival.

Belief in the System

An important consideration for a GM in a scenario involving a Judicium Dei in a realistic campaign is whether the heroes believe that supernatural forces will intervene in the trial. If they (admittedly incorrectly) have faith that such forces will, they will behave differently than more skeptical folks.

Skeptics will recognize that ordeals are often impossible and are likely to act accordingly; pushing enemies into certain ordeals and avoiding them for themselves. Similarly, they might view trials that involve skill or tolerance (such as some ordeals by fire or trial by combat) as being preferable to trial by judge or jury if both are available. A particularly talented, and skeptical, swordsman is more likely to commit a crime if he has the option of trial by combat. These becomes even more the case when champions are allowed; someone with particularly deep pockets may have relatively little regard for the law altogether (historically, paying a champion was illegal, but also clearly attested). It is also notable that trial by combat need not have any belief in the supernatural to be societally accepted; although it was usually a form of Judicium Dei in European history, dueling as a way to settle grievances in civil cases was often not tied to the will of God.

Believers, conversely, will act almost oppositely. They will likely see the outcome of any given case as certain, and therefore push for Judicium Dei over any other option if they believe the accused is innocent, or away from it if guilty. A trial that doesn't go as expected despite evidence might be damaging to someone's faith, and could become a story arc in itself.

Polytheism provides some interesting options. One option for trial by combat is for the gods to be divided on the question of who is innocent, and to provide different help to each side, as they do in the siege of Troy in the *Iliad*. Different people can make arguments to various gods in an attempt to solicit their aid. This works especially well for the trial by combat of groups (Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" is a good example).

Another option is to actually hold a trial by jury with the gods acting as the jurors. While this, of course, decreases the omniscience of the gods (or perhaps just increases their caprice), it has the advantage of being compatible with those sorts of ordeals which require the accused to receive no harm, not sink in water, or other miraculous intervention. It also allows a GM who is excited to run a trial in game to do so even in a society which embraces Judicium Dei. In order to preserve the societal idea thereof in the game, the GM may wish to wipe the memories of all the characters involved in that trial.

Another option is to limit the purview of Judicium Dei to certain types of trials. A GM who doesn't want to make trial by ordeal the sole form of trial in his campaign could limit it to only murder or other specific crimes. It could also be restricted by the scope of the crime. For example, trial by combat for a crime against the state or church might be divinely guided, but a legal judicial duel for determining a civil case might not, especially if the civil offense was not against the teachings of the god in question.

A GM could make Judicium Dei infallible generally, but manipulatable through specific tampering. This is especially possible if it is not actually a god ordaining the outcome; while Judicium Dei is the European term for this sort of trial, other cultures have also had trials by ordeal, where the supposed effect was magical rather than divine. If this is the case, it's possible that a sufficiently skilled mage could interfere with the proceeding.

More obscure forms of trial by ordeal are also possible in a fantastic campaign. The aforementioned ordeal of the Eucharist is an example; in a campaign with supernatural elements, the GM could in fact give a character a severe disadvantage after swearing a false oath – terminally ill is the historical example, but cursed, unlucky, or the like would also be appropriate. A GM could in fact give the disadvantage secretly, in a campaign where the players do not know that such trials are actually divinely enforced.

SUGGESTED READING

Bartlett, Robert. *Trial by Fire and Water* (Clarendon Press, 1986).

King, L.W. (translator). "Hammurabi's Code of Laws," *The Avalon Project*, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, **avalon.law.yale.edu/ancient/hamframe.asp.**

Halsall, Paul (editor). "Ordeal by Boiling Water, 12th or 13th Century," *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, Fordham University, **legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/water-ordeal.html.**

> *I demand a trial by combat!*
>
> *– George R.R. Martin,*
> ***A Game of Thrones***

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nathan Meluvor is a philosophy grad student with degrees in liberal arts and linguistics, and altogether too little ability in confining himself to one subject. He has lived in a variety of far too small, yet remarkably affordable apartments, with his endlessly patient wife, where he tends to spend his time neglecting schoolwork in lieu of researching his campaigns.

Random Thought Table

When the Bad Guy Threatens to Wiggle off the Hook

by Steven Marsh, *Pyramid* Editor

I'm a huge fan of police and legal procedurals. If you've ever browsed the DVD section of retail shops and wondered, "I wonder who the heck is the target audience for the unending sets of *C.S.I., Law & Order,* and *Boston Legal,*" that'd be me. (Tangentially, our household also has a complete set of *Murder, She Wrote,* but we file that with our sci-fi/fantasy collection because clearly Jessica Fletcher is the archangel of death.)

However, one plot element that pops up all too often on these shows is where a sleazy defendant uses the legal process to his own advantage, making the whole episode a furious wheel-spinning mired in mud. The bad guy has the "Ha-ha I'm so smug" smirk in the courtroom and on the witness stand; even the catharsis of him getting his comeuppance isn't particularly satisfying, since it just affirms a conclusion that was obvious from the opening scene.

Still, there *is* ripe roleplaying potential here, especially if you don't go to the well too often. The trick is to make sure that it's not a zero-sum game; "heroes secure legal conviction of a bad guy they already caught" isn't as interesting as "heroes succeed at a legal conviction *and,* in the process, do Something Interesting and Useful."

Here, then, are some ideas for how this legal trope can be applied in various law-and-order campaigns.

The Plot Thickens

If "known bad guy is ultimately convicted after trying to dodge charges for an hour" is one of my least-favorite plots, perhaps my *most* favorite is "known bad guy is convicted, but only after it's revealed that there's more to the story." The reason for this is that then it's not a zero-sum game; the story is making forward progress, rather than just confirming a victory the heroes already had.

Some ideas to implement this include:

● The plot that the heroes thwarted is part of a larger plot, which the heroes need to uncover during the trial and by using the legal system. ("His plan to steal 8,000 gallons of diesel fuel was thwarted, but apparently someone else pulled a similar heist in Nearbyville; if he's not behind it, we need to figure out who's pulling the strings, and *why* they need that much fuel . . .") This may lead to an interesting dilemma where the heroes must work with the accused – perhaps even offering a plea bargain – to get more information on the grander scheme.

● The bad guy did exactly what he was accused of, but his *motivations* are murky enough that the trial uncovers Something Interesting. ("He was programmed by a secret government intelligence agency?!")

● The bad guy did most of what he was accused of, but his scheme intersects strangely with another plan, which the heroes have to uncover. This can be especially satisfying to learn about, because it's easy to determine the defendant probably isn't lying when confronted with a disputed fact that doesn't appreciably affect his overall chances or punishment.

A Note on Time

Although this article assumes a modern-day outlook, almost everything here can be used in alternate timeframes. Bad guys have used various court systems to escape justice about as long as there have been courts: in medieval tribunals, Wild West frontiers, bronze-age courts, and the like.

It's also reasonable to assume that there will still be injustices in futuristic eras. It's practically built into near-future dystopian settings, but even more near-ideal intergalactic science-fiction campaigns should have room to maneuver nefariously in its justice system. Maybe robo-jurors can be tampered with, or psionic abilities can adjust testimonies or judicial rulings. (For more on futuristic investigations and evidence gathering, check out *Transhuman Space: Transhuman Mysteries.*)

("You're still getting life in prison whether there were five bodies in your dungeon or six, so why are you only confessing to five? *How did the sixth body get there?!*")

Behind the Jury

One of the most successful "solo" adventures I ever ran was a trial, where the hero playing a lawyer had to serve as the defense of a larger issue in the campaign universe.

What made it particularly interesting is that there were *three* participants: the player, me as the GM, and a third player – who wasn't otherwise part of the campaign – who served as the "jury." My reasoning was that I had a fair bit to keep track of as the GM, and I didn't want to have to keep tabs on how persuasive the PC was being as a lawyer while accounting for how the jury was reacting.

Afterward, I learned that the "jury" player had actually made up 13 simple jury profiles ("single mother," "retired construction worker," "business owner," etc.). Then that person used a simple tally system for pros and cons during the testimony, based on whether a specific point or topic was likely to sway that particular juror. It was a brilliant idea, but it was only possible because that was the only "bookkeeping" the jury player had to do.

Of course, I suspect one reason this adventure is remembered fondly by all who participated is because the player's character ultimately prevailed in court . . .

The *Subplot* Thickens?!

Alternatively, the heroes may be fighting to maintain their victory during a trial, but there are behind-the-scenes elements that make the trial more interesting.

● After a number of surprising rulings in favor of the oily defendant, the heroes realize that the judge is biased in favor of the bad guy. This may be due to nefarious reasons (bribery, power) or more-understandable ones ("They've kidnapped Judge Holbrook's husband until the trial ends; we have to investigate and rescue him before it's too late for justice!").

● The trial serves to shine a spotlight on the heroes' methods, especially if they've acted in ways that are outside the rules or laws. ("You barged in on my client without a warrant, and then immediately engaged him in combat without so much as a warning, correct?")

● Instead, the trial shines a spotlight on the methods of the heroes' allies or associates. For example, if the heroes have routinely relied on police to clean up after they save the day, perhaps corrupt or incompetent officers' sloppy methods endanger the case; the heroes need to thread the needle of not upsetting their crime-fighting partners, while attempting to rid the police force of its unsavory elements.

● Perhaps one of the heroes – if he has legal training – might be asked to serve as the prosecution or assistant council. (This isn't particularly realistic due to the conflict of interest, but players are often willing to forgive such technicalities if it means they get to have the Spotlight of Awesome on their characters for part of an adventure.)

Bwah-hah-hahhhh . . .

Perhaps the only thing more infuriating than having a trial where the heroes need to keep someone behind bars who they already dealt with is a trial where the bad guy manages to get away with it, owing to a technicality or jury decision (a.k.a. GM fiat). Unless the players really dig futility – which some game groups no doubt do! – such a plot thread should be handled quickly and efficiently. It would work to have it be as a minor (if annoying) part of downtime, a 10-minute cut between scenes of a larger adventure, or happening off-screen entirely.

This can be effective if the bad guy gets away with faking his way to innocence in the court of law, only to be thwarted on his next plan . . . with fatal results. Sure, he escaped justice, but no one escapes the grim reaper. (Of course, this assumes it's the kind of campaign where people can't fake death or return from the grave. Even so, death is usually a bit more serious of a setback than being behind bars in many fictional universes.)

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.

In most law courts a man is assumed guilty until he is proven influential.

– Laurence J. Peter

Short Bursts
A Word From Our Sponsor
by Matt Riggsby

The next edition of **Car Wars** is coming! To help prepare, **Pyramid** proudly presents this vignette, spotlighting one aspect of its bold new world. Visit **carwars.sjgames.com** to keep abreast of the latest developments!

❋ ❋ ❋

[Attractive young people toying disconsolately with drab food cubes in home setting.]

Tired of the same old myco meal?

[Attractive young people smiling and entering restaurant to zydeco music.]

It's time to head south, for Scat Cat Louisiana Catfish! Get all your southern favorites, hot, fast, and delicious.

[Camera pans past plates of food.]

Order a six-piece fritters, regular size K-Krunchers, and the Cat Captain's secret recipe sweet tea for just nine ration points! Try original,

[Snippet of salsa music.]

Cubano with black beans,

[Snippet of bhangra.]

or for a limited time our new Desi Delight!

[Cartoon cat in naval uniform with exaggerated southern accent.]

Scat Cat Louisiana Catfish: let the cat get your tongue!

[Camera pans over T-Dome from high angle; horn fanfare.]

Monday Night AADA Autoduelling, live from the Boston T-Dome!

[Camera pans past polished duelling vehicles.]

Newcomers Lon Pettis and Erin al-Baz in their first T-Dome competition. Panshin and Charles in a rematch against Garcia and Hashimoto. And then the feud that's been shaping up all season:

[Rapid edits of Toombs, Schmidt, and Commandant and Tombstone vehicles in action. Music with heavy beat.]

It's Schmidt versus Tombs. Can the Commandant put Ibrahim Toombs in the cooler, or will Ruth Schmidt get her name on the Tombstone? Undercard starts at 6:30, main event begins at 8:00.

[Different voice, speaking rapidly.]

Live match subject to blackout and public information regulation in some markets.

[Panning across aisles of shelving; thick New England accent.]

Duellists! Truckers! Come on down for the best gear at the best prices in the tri-state area!

[Industrial cylinders of assorted sizes.]

Solid fuel boosters for every rocketry need? We've got 'em!

[Large-caliber shells and open cases of linked bullets. Ticker of bore diameters across bottom of screen.]

Sabot rounds for every popular caliber? We've got 'em!

[Rows of electronics cases linked to HUDs and holo displays. Brand names logos blot out the hardware display.]

Targeting computers from Blackrock, Fu Zu, and Combine? We've got 'em!

[Busy garage with multiple duelling vehicles in various states of repair.]

Professional installation available! Don't fab your own; get the best!

[Still image of a small man standing by a large armored vehicle.]

And this Sunday, meet two-time AADA New England regional champion Tran Ang and the Tran Van. Plus target shooting and games for the kids.

[Aerial shot of large one-story building and parking lot.]

Come see us in Pelham, just five minutes from the Merrimack Customs Plaza! Uncle Al's New England Armory, serving all your autoduelling needs.

About the Author

Matt Riggsby has written over 120 articles and supplements for Steve Jackson Games.

T-DOME GRUDGE MATCH!
TOOMBS vs SCHMIDT
Monday Night! Undercard at 6:30, Main Event at 8!