

# PYRAMID<sup>®</sup>



Issue 3/116 June '18

## Locations

### **AL PHASMAQ**

Christopher R. Rice & J. Edward Tremlett

### **FILM HOUSE**

David L. Pulver

### **THE PHAROS LIGHTHOUSE**

Carolyn & Steve Stein

### **CROATOAN POINT**

Christopher R. Rice & J. Edward Tremlett

# **STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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Every adventure begins and ends somewhere, and most adventures have interesting locales in between! Following in the tradition of the *GURPS Locations* series, this issue of *Pyramid* presents to you an assortment of interesting, ready-to-use places.

Whatever trading business you have, you're sure to turn a profit in *Al-Phasmaq, the City of Ships*. This fantasy seaside location boasts a colorful past and a bright present. But will a secret cult succeed in awakening a hidden evil? Perhaps some enterprising heroes can investigate and find out! This setting – from *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* co-author Christopher R. Rice and frequent *Pyramid* contributor J. Edward Tremlett – includes descriptions of prominent locations, *GURPS* stats for important people, and a sketch of the area.

The local university thought it had the perfect place for its Film Studies department, but the ghostly residents have other ideas . . . and they involve *The Haunting of Film House*. In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Banestorm: Abydos* – reveals the tragic history of this 1920s mansion, the spirits of those who've died here, and recent events. It provides enough details that it can be an amazing set piece for earlier 20th-century eras, including *GURPS Cliffhangers* or *GURPS Atomic Horror*. Although this location assumes you have *GURPS Monster Hunters*, you can use *GURPS Horror* to populate the location to your own needs. The horrific meets the academic, in a place that's cinematic in more ways than one.

*Croatoan Point* is a space station with a dangerous secret. Once a mining outpost, it's now a restocking, refueling, and refreshment stop for those continuing to the edges of known space. Learn about who (or what) else has visited this rough-and-tumble place, and what those outsiders plan to do now that they are here. This location also includes a *GURPS* racial template for a new non-human species.

If you're sightseeing in the past – or perhaps on a parallel Earth – consider visiting *The Pharos Lighthouse*. Get an overview of the history and key features of one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World; gain inspiration from the trove of ideas for using this Alexandrian landmark in fantasy, historical, and modern campaigns; and revel in the speculative map.

This month's Random Thought Table wraps up the issue with tips for turning generic places into something worth writing home about. Regardless of whether you're in the past, present, or future, this month's *Pyramid* provides amazing resources for postcard-worthy adventures.

## 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

"Purgatory Cliff" by William Trost Richards. From Bequest of Susan Dwight Bliss, 1966, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, [metmuseum.org](http://metmuseum.org).

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# FROM THE EDITOR

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!

It's a running joke in Hollywood that certain movies and television shows are just variations of "[X] someplace else." So *Star Trek* is "Wagon Train in space," *Under Siege 2: Dark Territory* is "Speed on a train," or *White House Down* is "Die Hard in the White House."

And it's usually snorted derisively – "Oh, there's no creativity anymore" – but, to me, the mere fact that changing a location can completely change a story is *awesome*. I mean, who *wouldn't* want to encounter "Die Hard in a haunted mansion" (pp. 16-26)? Or "Casablanca in a space tavern" (pp. 28-33)?

[SPOILER ALERT] You can't actually do any of those movie-inspired location crossovers with this issue alone. But you at least have the location . . . and that's the heavy lifting.

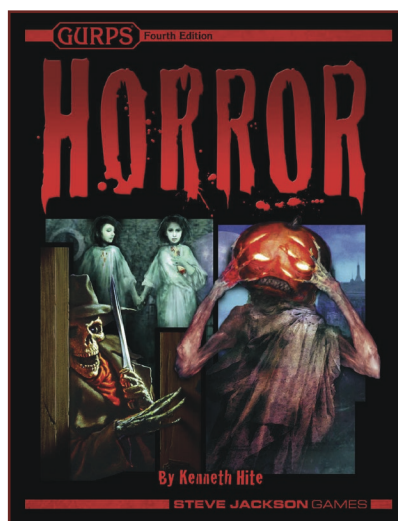
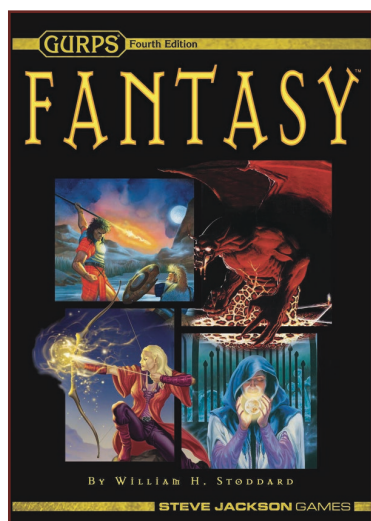
If you haven't given serious thought to adding and modifying locations for your campaign, maybe you should! It's a great way to add a lot of flavor and interest to a game. The existing *GURPS* library has a number of examples, of course (all handily listed under the *Locations* prefix, not to mention *GURPS Places of Mystery*), and this issue is packed with a few other possibilities.

One nice thing about any of these places is that you're not beholden to their premise. A spooky mansion built in the 1920s can be used as a contemporary locale in a cliffhangers campaign, a 1930s horror setting, a 1960s detective caper, or a modern-day *GURPS Monster Hunters* hunt. A "fantasy island" might be the locale of a virtual-reality construct in a science-fiction setting. A map of an ancient lighthouse might be cribbed for just about any setting ever. (Seriously – come up with a setting where you *can't* use an ancient lighthouse. *Atomic Horror, Martial Arts, Bunnies & Burrows* . . . you're envisioning the climax for all of those right now, right?)

So have fun moving your adventure into exciting new realms. And don't worry about trashing the place; that's what they're there for!

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW!

We tried to span the gamut of past, present, and future, while (hopefully) being useful to lots of different campaigns. Sooo . . . how'd we do? Are these great places to visit? Is there something you wish we'd done differently? Let us know, privately via [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or publicly on the place to be, the message boards at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



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# AL-PHASMAQ, THE CITY OF SHIPS

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE  
AND J. EDWARD TREMLETT

*. . . May the fates spare us, for our gods will not. For we have lost the fear of our forefathers. And now [blurred spot] our homeland has come to destroy . . .*

*– A fragment of text found in the old city*

Behold Al-Phasmaq – the City of Ships! Famed for its seafaring craft and massive wharfs, it has become *the* trade destination of the Great Sea’s southern edge. Merchants from across the waters and all points on the land visit the Bay of the Crab to buy and sell, and its neighbors pay very well for its excellent ships.

Surely, Al-Phasmaq should be a happy and prosperous place. Sadly, only one of those things is true, for this kingdom has been built upon a lie. Its history is not what its people claim it to be, its patron deity is a clever invention, and its

priests conceal a terrible secret – one they are willing to kill to protect.

The truth lurks under the bay – seducing the venal and broken, and destroying the unwary. One day that truth may doom Al-Phasmaq, as it did the city upon which it was built. Can the riddle of this city be solved in time to prevent a second cataclysm, or should it be left well enough alone?

This article provides a campaign framework for a low tech level (TL3 or TL4) fantasy setting. The material is generic enough to work for most games, but it does have some **GURPS** stats. It includes the history (true and false) of the city, key locations, and people to be found there. It also speaks of the threat posed to the city by the Sleeper below, and it gives ideas for using the location in various campaigns.

## THE CITY OF SHIPS

A city of thousands with secrets in the very mortar and foundations, Al-Phasmaq has a long and colorful history that is riddled with long-lost knowledge and a darker threat so close by it is rarely noticed.

### HISTORY OF THE CITY

A thousand years ago, at the seeming height of the mighty Zerabite Empire, its leaders sent a war expedition across the Great Sea. As the soldiers established an outpost, their stonemasons toiled to make the outer wall – one of the 10 wonders of that age. But no sooner was that feat completed than they learned their home had fallen to its many foes.

Abandoned by their homeland and surrounded by potential enemies, the people of the colony began to panic. But their war leader quashed that fear with a speech – sadly lost to the ages – that solidified their resolve to start anew. So did that man become a king, an outpost become a city, and frightened refugees become a mighty army once again.

The first century was perilous, and they fought many battles with their new neighbors. Only the strength of their ships, the strategy of their king, and the blessings of their god saw them through. After they repelled no less than five invasions in a single decade, even their worst rivals saw the wisdom in becoming allies, and their weaker neighbors become vassals.

So began the fabled first age of the city. The citizens constructed a great and amazing metropolis, based on the grander, more martial aspects of Zerabite culture. They built ships for themselves and their allies, and invited everyone near them to trade. In time, the people of the city truly began to prosper, and all seemed well for the fledgling kingdom.

Then came near-total disaster. A massive tidal wave swamped the city and its immediate neighbors, sparing only those on the other side of the outer wall. Horrified by the devastation, the surviving royals chose to abandon the city, and wandered the lands beyond in a daze lasting generations.

The city was said to be cursed thereafter, and became filled with scavenging outcasts.

A hundred years later, a newly crowned king commanded descendants of the city's former citizens to return from exile. Sadly, a century away had taken its toll: numerous aftershocks had caused more flooding, and the fires that followed ensured that the old city was completely lost, and its history with it.

The new king declared it a sign from their god that a new direction was needed. No longer would they be warlike, but welcoming – seeking communion instead of conquest. But should enemies approach, they would be ready.

A new city was then built on the ruins of the old, and the king called it Al-Phasmaq: The Thing Reclaimed from the Waters. In time, the new paradigm bore fruit, as trade won more allies than war ever had. The Great Market was reestablished as soon as possible. Two hundred years later, the Great Staircase was created to improve transit to and from the city.

The last 500 years have seen both tragedy and triumph. Al-Phasmaq has endured flood and fire, earthquake and plague. It has warded off numerous invasions – none of which made it any further than the city's seaside gates or the Watchpoint overlooking the Great Market. When war is not looming, peace brings prosperity, for the city's trade generates a great deal of tariffs, and its ships are quite in demand.

## POINTS AND PERSONS OF INTEREST

A city over 1,000 years old has countless attractions and curiosities. Some are the sorts of things everyone knows about, some are known but a few, and a few are known to no one at all – no one living, at any rate.

For a sketched map of Al-Phasmaq, see p. 14.

### Sea Walls

The “claws” and outer edges of the “arms” of the Bay of the Crab are well-fortified against would-be invaders: spiked and bladed to prevent landings, and constantly guarded. Inside them are the city's famous merchant docks – a frenzied hive of activity, with ships docking, unloading, and departing at all hours.

At night, only soldiers on watch are allowed out. Ten patrol each claw, with another 90 in the barracks. They're armed with flaming arrows, and ready to engage in fighting (with their famous “crab swords”; see *City Guard*, p. 6) if those should fail.

All visitors are forbidden to fully enter the water for “safety reasons,” the soldiers explain (not knowing any better themselves). Those wishing to sneak about can hide behind unpacked boxes, or creep along the spikes and blades, but swimming is *not* a good idea.

### People

Directing maritime traffic within the sea walls falls to the Docking Guild: naval veterans too old for active duty. They guide ships in and out, collect the docking fee, and ensure no one causes problems. They are entitled to carry weapons, and most still excel at the use of two short swords.

The Docking Guildmaster is Izem El-Malan.

### Secrets

Mute testament to the lies of the official history, the sea walls were built upon the ruined edges of the original city – a large island, connected by a land bridge that terminated where the royal palace is now. Of that ancient glory, a deep, water-filled crater is all that remains. Countless artifacts of the old city lie in the crumbled ruins there, waiting to be found. There are also large holes leading to undersea caverns – the lair of the Ul-Ramal (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10), usually happy to prey only on larger sea life.

### Izem El-Malan, the Docking Guildmaster

A long-bearded, 50-something fellow whose jolly girth belies considerable speed and strength. He's participated in two minor sea battles and the last serious war the city engaged in, and jokes that his current job is even more dangerous. He knows what happened to the last guildmaster – eaten by the Ul-Ramal after trying to take sea treasure. He's not about to make that same mistake.

**ST 12; DX 12; IQ 12; HT 12.**

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 14; Will 12; Per 12; FP 12. Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 10; Parry 11 (Shortsword).

SM 0; 5'7"; 300 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Combat Reflexes; Mariner 2 (*GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents*, p. 13); Secret (Knows about the Ul-Ramal); Very Fat.

**Skills:** Administration-12; Boating (Unpowered)-14; Freight Handling-14; Knife-12; Knot-Tying-14; Seamanship-14; Shortsword-14; Swimming-12; Weather Sense-13.

### Naval Docks and Shipyards

Between the back end of the “arms” of the Claws is a floating network of docks – home to Al-Phasmaq's navy and shipyards. Sailors are in motion at all hours, ensuring all craft are ready to go at a moment's notice.

There are generally between one and three ships under construction or repair. Most of the new ones are medium-sized triremes or smaller penteconters, made on commission.

## BUILT TO LAST

One of the great engineering marvels of the last age, the Old Wall was the first structure built by the city's founders. Constructed from large, smooth blocks of local granite mined from a quarry 10 miles away, it stands over 50' tall for most of its length, and is just over 20' wide. It was clearly never intended to have an opening, which is why the Grand Staircase was later constructed.

While all can agree it's at least 1,000 years old, no one is quite sure how long it took to build. Estimates range from 10 to 50 years, depending on how many workers were involved, and whether or not magic was a factor in its construction. The wall is mostly smooth, adorned only with the symbol of the ancient city: an eight-pointed star within a circle, with a smaller circle in the center of the star. It is believed to stand for the eight towers of the old temple, said to have been laid out like such a star.

They only make larger, war-worthy penteconters and triremes for themselves. (For stats for ships, see **GURPS Low-Tech Companion 2: Weapons and Warriors**, pp. 38-39.)

## People

The Shipwrights' Guild (lead by Munatas Ul-Gallaf) builds ships according to ancient, time-tested standards. Each family specializes in one portion of the job – the secrets passed down through the generations – and is forbidden to share knowledge. Romance between shipwright families is therefore forbidden, leading to many tragic songs.

## Secrets

Far below the floating docks lie the ruins of the original city, the Ul-Ramal (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10) that live there, and their colossal, somnolent master. A network of sea caverns leads from there to the surface, and various parts in and outside of Al-Phasmaq. Only the royal family, portions of the priesthood, and a few confidants know this truth, and they are willing to kill to keep the secret.

## Munatas Ul-Gallaf, the Master Shipbuilder

The Shipwrights' Guild leader is technically the king, who blesses each new boat. However, most of the job's daily minutiae is overseen by the reedy but venerable Munatas Ul-Gallaf. He is the patriarch of the crafters of the bows. The king has entrusted him in the matter of the Ul-Ramal, and instructed him to quash all talk of creatures below the water.

**ST** 8; **DX** 10; **IQ** 13; **HT** 12.

Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 10; Will 13; Per 13; FP 12.

Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

SM 0; 6'; 120 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Artificer 1; Disturbing Voice; Gifted Artist 2; Secret (Knows about the Ul-Ramal); Skinny.

## CITY GUARD

Members of the City Guard use broadswords, shields, and a "crab sword": a polearm capable of tangling a target's clothing, hooking limbs, or – for the skilled and/or lucky – hooking around the neck. Use the statistics for the *sodegarami* (**GURPS Martial Arts**, p. 230), but add a special attack: targeting the neck allows a guard to initiate a grapple and then choke (p. B370) the target at a reach equal to the weapon.

**ST** 12; **DX** 12; **IQ** 10; **HT** 11.

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 34 lbs.; HP 12; Will 10; Per 11; FP 11.

Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5; Dodge 9; Parry 10 (Broadsword); Block 11 (Shield).

SM 0; 5'8"-6'4"; 150-180 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Combat Reflexes; Duty (To the Guard and King; 9 or less); Exotic Weapon Training ("Crab Sword"); Lifting ST 1.

**Skills:** Brawling-13; Broadsword-12; Shield-14; Soldier-10; Staff-14; Swimming-11; Wrestling-12.

**Skills:** Administration-14; Carpentry-16; Engineer (Sailing Ships)-16; Fast-Talk-12.

## Fishers' Markets

The sea walls' inner "arms" are the realm of local fishers and seaweed farmers, who tie down their ships, market their wares, and make their rude homes there. Ancient law forbids the casting of nets inside the bay, as this disrupts ship traffic. Thus, every morning Al-Phasmaq sees a massive exodus of small, one- or two-person boats, headed out beyond the claws. Most return by mid-afternoon to hawk their wares from their stands, or take them through the city along Main Avenue (p. 8) to the Great Market (pp. 11-12). Some customers are foreign visitors who arrive by ship, but most visitors to the markets come through the seaside gates (see *The Barracks*, p. 7) from within the city proper.

## People

Independent businesspeople, the fishers generally look after themselves. Disputes are handled quietly to avoid attention from the City Guard. Anyone stupid enough to swim – or unlucky enough to capsize – is treated like a pariah until they leave the area.

The community "leader" is Badis "The Fishers King" Al-Hammour, who does his best to end disputes before the Guard are called.

## Secrets

The real reason the fishers cannot cast inside the walls is the same that no one is allowed to swim: the Ul-Ramal (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10) might give chase. The fishers have all heard tales of something lurking down there, but they assume it's merely a nest of sea serpents.

One who knows more than he should is Saden (p. 7) – a "fisherman" who purposely trawls for treasures.

## Badis Al-Hammour, the Fishers King

A 50-ish man with large eyes and a well-groomed beard, he has final say in all disputes *before* the soldiers arrive, and will happily hand over those who keep arguing. Born in the sea-wall arms, he jokes that he'll die there, too – especially on days when his joints are aching.

**ST** 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 12; **HT** 12.

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 13; Per 14; FP 12.

Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Knife).

SM 0; 5'4"; 140 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Charisma 1; Chronic Pain (Mild; 2 hours; 12 or less); Mariner 3 (**GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents**, p. 13); Outdoorsman 1.

**Skills:** Boating (Unpowered)-14; Detect Lies-12; Diplomacy-15; Fishing-16; Freight Handling-14; Knife-12; Knot-Tying-14; Seamanship-15; Swimming-12; Weather Sense-14.

## Saden

A “fisher” who secretly trawls the floor on his way in and out. Over the years, this long-fingered rascal has dragged up numerous artifacts, which he quietly sells to interested parties (such as the head cultist of the old city, Udad El-Hadiqa, p. 11). Deals take place out on his boat; those who can’t meet his price, or seem untrustworthy, are given poisoned water and slid overboard.

**ST** 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 11; **HT** 11.

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 14; Per 14; FP 11. Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Knife). SM 0; 5’4”; 130 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Greed (12); Luck; Secret (Knows about the Ul-Ramal).

**Skills:** Boating (Unpowered)-12; Fishing-14; Knife-10; Knot-Tying-12; Merchant-12; Seamanship-12; Swimming-11; Weather Sense-10.

## The Barracks

The most imposing structure in Al-Phasmaq, the barracks are a 40’-tall, 50’-wide barrier built on the shore. The structure closes off the curve of the Old Wall (see *Built to Last*, p. 5). All 8,000 members of the city’s armed forces live and train within it, with the notable exception of the palace guard.

Anyone wishing to enter the barracks does so by scaling one of many sturdy climbing ropes, dangling from human-sized holes in the gateways’ roofs. These ropes are pulled up during an invasion, and the holes used to pour noxious, caustic substances on the enemy.

Once atop the barracks, covered stairwells lead down into a labyrinth of sleeping quarters, meeting halls, training facilities, kitchens, armories, and storerooms – all, connected by passages, stairs, and the occasional ladder. It’s easy for *anyone* to get lost, but thankfully, the bottom floor is tiled with large, heavy plates of cast iron, providing some directional reference.

Three seaside gates break the length of the barracks wall – tall and wide gateways with strong, battle-worthy doors. The central, largest one is only opened for ceremonial reasons, like when the king sends off a new ship. The two slightly smaller, less ornate ones near each “arm” remain open from first light to full dark. People enter the gates on foot, though pulling carts or using pack animals to haul goods to and from ships. The guards check each load at their discretion, especially if a tax collector’s watching.

Past each of the gates sits a tax office, where all goods coming in are subject to a nominal fee. All who pass are given a once-over by the ever-vigilant City Guard, looking for known criminals, tax cheats, and other persons of interest. They have full authority to detain and question anyone, so long as they can justify their zeal to their unamused superior.

## People

The Captain of the Guard, Yattuy, has been at his job for the better part of 20 years. He knows his job so well and is respected so much by his people that the entire guard functions as a well-oiled machine. Another person near the barracks is the chief tax assessor, Tazrit El-Dhahab (p. 8).

## Secrets

Tazrit’s symbol of office – a family heirloom, apparently – is a curious thing: a small, white disc with a squiggly, eight-pointed star, somewhat akin to the symbol of the old city. So far as he knows, it’s always been the sign of those who collect taxes, and he won’t listen to tales otherwise.

He has no idea of its deeper meaning, much less that the barracks’ iron ground plates are stamped with the same symbol. Laid down centuries ago by the priests of Benoth, they keep the Ul-Ramal (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10) from coming up into the city between the wharfs and the Old Wall.

At night, Tazrit dreams of cyclopean palaces beneath the waves, filled with stacks upon stacks of coin – endless into the gloom. Sometimes he catches sight of what’s counting them, and wakes up in a cold sweat.

## MIGHTY BENOTH, GOD OF THE SAILORS

The patron deity of Al-Phasmaq, Benoth is depicted as a sharp-eyed, stout-chested fellow with a well-groomed beard. He carries a crab sword (see *City Guard*, p. 6) and a compass, and has his eyes fixed on the horizon – perhaps for new shores. Like most sailors, he’s highly superstitious, especially about magic (except for his own), and hates pirates. He’s also happy to take sacrifices of grog and old fish.

Unfortunately, Benoth does not exist – he was created by those who reclaimed the city after it was destroyed. That said, *something* is answering prayers for good catches and maritime safety. It might be a since-forgotten sea deity, helpful spirit, or some other strange ethereal being of the GM’s choosing. It is not, however, anywhere as powerful as the Sleeper (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10)

## Yattuy, Captain of the Guard

Yattuy is a hulking giant, easily twice the size of most men and as fast as a man half his size. He’s usually on the barracks’ roof, watching as Al-Phasmaq goes about its day. If Yattuy has to come down the stairs, someone’s in serious trouble. He is quite skilled with a crab sword (see *City Guard*, p. 6) and can easily overpower most men, given his size and strength.

**ST** 16; **DX** 13; **IQ** 12; **HT** 13.

Damage 1d+1/2d+2; BL 65 lbs.; HP 16; Will 14; Per 14; FP 13. Basic Speed 7.00; Basic Move 7; Dodge 11; Parry 11 (Broadsword)/12 (Staff); Block 11 (Shield). SM 0; 6’11”; 300 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Bad Temper (12); Combat Reflexes; Duty (To the Guard and King; 9 or less); Exotic Weapon Training (“Crab Sword”); Fit; High Pain Threshold; Horrible Hangovers; Lifting ST 2; Rapid Healing.

**Skills:** Brawling-16; Broadsword-14; Carousing-13; Intimidation-16; Leadership-12; Lifting-12; Shield-14; Soldier-12; Staff-16; Swimming-13; Wrestling-16.

## Tazrit El-Dhabab, the Chief Tax Assessor

Tazrit is a well-dressed, leering beanpole with a very tall hat and a love of the finer sex, and quite corrupt for a bureaucrat, exacting his own tax on those who can afford it. He's so smooth in manner that his "clients" rarely object to his fleecing – at the moment, anyway. Below all of this lies a madness that has yet to fully claim him as he hears the whispers of the Sleeper (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10).

**ST 10; DX 10; IQ 12; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 12; Per 12; FP 10.

Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

SM 0; 5'9"; 137 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Blessed (The Sleeper); Greed (15); Lecherousness (12); Odious Personal Habit (Leering Mannerisms); Skinny; Smooth Operator 3; Voice.

**Skills:** Administration-14; Body Language-14; Detect Lies-13; Fast-Talk-17; Merchant-14.

## GOODS AND SERVICES

Between the long-established businesses inside the city, the cosmopolitan Great Market, and the traders along the Old Wall and in Legtown, adventurers should find any mundane items or amenities they desire. Clothes and tailoring, repairs and smithing, potions and healing, food and drink, beds and safety – almost anything is available . . . and negotiable.

One important exception is weaponry. The blacksmiths will happily repair damaged armor and swords, but are forbidden from selling new items, by order of the Guard. Anyone seeking such things will either have to chance smugglers in the Great Market, or seek out Legtown's rogue armorer.

Magic items are another sticky point. The city god Benoth forbids anyone but his priests from performing miracles within the city walls. That prohibition extends to the sale or use of all but healing magic and simple, non-damaging cantrips. As with arms and armor, unscrupulous market vendors and Legtown are the best places to find such things.

## Main Avenue

Past the seaside gates (see *The Barracks*, p. 7) lies Main Avenue: a wide thoroughfare following the Old Wall's inner length from gateway to gateway, and cut in half by the Grand Staircase. All goods coming in from the sea are paraded down it, and either taken to some place within the city, or up the Staircase to the Great Market.

The wall side is home only to simple or temporary structures. On any given day, the entire way is filled by the makeshift stalls of unimpressive merchants, the pots and fires of food vendors, the stands of street entertainers, and the meager blankets of beggars and pilgrims. There is no licensing of these enterprises, so each morning sees a rush over the Grand Staircase to get the best spots.

Conversely, the inner side is home to Al-Phasmaq's many proper and venerable merchants. The line of simple one or two-story buildings runs from each gate to Staircase on either side. Alleys and roads between create a warren of two- or

three-story buildings, leading up to the royal complex; see Dawn Side (below) and Dusk Side (p. 9) for the specific characteristics of these areas.

## Dawn Side

The western curve of Al-Phasmaq is the first part to awaken, and first to begin closing down as the shadow of the Old Wall (see *Built to Last*, p. 5) creeps across it. The stew pots of the itinerant food stalls – cooked all night, then brought in at dawn – are ready for breakfast as soon as the city begins to stir. The line of stores opens not long before the first few loads come through the western seaside gate, cries for customers filling the air with a din.

## People

The Dawn Side's stores are home to several notables. The nimble fingers of Tedus the Barber provide dental care, minor surgery, and the best shave in town for reasonable prices, along with a great deal of salacious gossip. Amaynu the Shoemaker can repair or make to suit any style or size of footwear, though his wife, Tintlelli, is the one who really does the work. Itri the Brightsmith is a widow whose silverwork is quite exquisite.

Past the front line, in the maze of streets beyond, lay such establishments as The White Serpent, a tavern of some repute, though the food's not the equal of the ale; the home of Gwasila El-Majal, who has two floors of barely furnished rooms to let at high but negotiable prices; and the villa of Munatas Ul-Gallaf, head of the Shipwrights' Guild, who lives with his two wives, 10 sons, and eight daughters in a four-story home behind tall walls, and has no idea of the sinister proclivities of his youngest son, Anir Ul-Gallaf (see below).

## Secrets

The High Priest of Benoth has a very loyal inner retinue that knows a great deal about the threat below Al-Phasmaq. When they're not wandering about in their sea-blue robes and blessing the faithful with sacred compasses, they slip into civilian clothing and skulk about, listening for those who may know too much. Such persons are marked, followed, and may be brought in for questioning. Those who do never come back.

The royal gardener, Udad El-Hadiqa (p. 11), may be the head cultist, but he has a handy lieutenant in Anir Ul-Gallaf, demented oldest son of the Shipwrights' Guild's leader. The glittery-eyed fellow – who learned the wrong lessons about the creatures – represents him among the lost souls of Legtown outside of official rituals. He spreads the word, tends to matters of secrecy and discipline, and calls the faithful to unholy glory.

## Itri the Brightsmith

Itri is one of the few people who knows the secret of the ancient symbol. After losing her husband to one of the Ul-Ramal (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10), she's been quietly employed by the priests to make protective sigils for them.



She knows nothing of the Sleeper, however – the priests have only told her of the monsters.

**ST 8; DX 11; IQ 11; HT 10.**

Damage 1d-3/1d-2; BL 13 lbs.; HP 8; Will 13; Per 11; FP 10.  
Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.  
SM 0; 4'11"; 90 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Gifted Artist 3; High Manual Dexterity 2; Secret (Ul-Ramal); Social Regard 1 (Venerated).

**Skills:** Housekeeping-12; Jeweler-16; Merchant-12; Smith (Copper)-12.

## Dusk Side

If the Dawn Side wakes Al-Phasmaq, the Dusk Side lulls it to sleep. As night creeps across the city, the taverns and places of pleasure come to life – promising everything, delivering only what can be afforded. Meanwhile, the street performers collaborate to put on a show that must be seen to be believed.

## People

The front row of shops include Sifax the Importer, who scours the lands near and far to bring precious and amazing wares back to sell – including a number of things best not considered; Ajeddig the Herbalist, who has a garrulous complement for every customer, and a tincture for every conceivable ill; and Salom the Scribe, whose manuscripts are hand-copied rather quickly by his many children.

Beyond the front line are The Aerie, where well-to-do citizens gather on a third-floor terrace to drink and discuss business by moonlight; the home and office of Yuffayur Al-Kitab, official historian to the king, who knows more secrets than he feels comfortable sharing with anyone (unless commanded, or suitably bribed); and the stately home of Tazrit El-Dhahab (p. 8), Chief Tax Assessor, whose neighbors are tired of hearing him cry out from his nightmares.

## Yuffayur Al-Kitab

Yuffayur knows too much. He knows the secret of the Ul-Ramal and their master (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10) and what happened to the original inhabitants of the city. His office is messily kept and smells of smoke from his hookah, but hides one of the finest collections on the city of Al-Phasmaq in the world. Yuffayur is both a hunchback and a dwarf, but his bent and broken stature hides a keen mind and sharp wit. Given a “discretionary” fund by the king, he’s hired adventurers to deal with problems and is the go-to fixer for all things Sleeper-related.

**ST 10; DX 11; IQ 15; HT 13.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 16; Per 17; FP 13.  
Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 9.  
SM -1; 4'2"; 60 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Appearance (Ugly); Bad Back (Mild); Dwarfism; Hunchback; Luck; Patron (King Usem the Third; 9 or less); Quirk (Likes his hookah); Secret (Knows of the Sleeper);

**Skills:** Diplomacy-15; Hidden Lore (Al-Phasmaq)-16; History (Al-Phasmaq)-15; Occultism-14; Teaching-14; Writing-14; additional skills as the GM decides (magical spells, for instance).

## Royal Palace

A beautiful example of Al-Phasmaq’s original style of architecture (or so locals claim), the palace is a gleaming, well-maintained work of art. It is home to the royals, as well as the 200-strong Royal Guard, a small army of servants and tradespeople, and a menagerie of beautiful creatures from all corners of the Great Sea.

The tallest of its six towers has a view that rivals that of Watchpoint, and is constantly flying the royal colors – a motley crafted from the noble houses who have married into the royal line. Its lush gardens are a rich tapestry of horticulture, with flowers brought from every trading partner, all overseen by the kindly gardener, Udad El-Hadiqa (p. 11). Its beds are fed by a cunningly crafted trick fountain situated atop the wellspring of the city’s fresh water supply.

The rectangular wall that surrounds the palace goes from just beyond the main gateway from the sea to a few hundred yards from the inner base of the Grand Staircase. It’s almost as tall as the Old Wall (see *Built to Last*, p. 5), though nowhere near as thick. It has two very heavily guarded entrances – the seaside, ceremonial one, and the main one facing the Grand Staircase. Past that entrance lies the Grand Avenue, a magnificently tiled road leading to the Grand Staircase, lined by the embassies of foreign powers and trading partners.

## People

The members of the royal family take great care to appear kindly, hospitable, and merciful, but can also be terrifying, demanding, and ruthless. One could say that about *any* royal family, but the double-act is especially necessary within Al-Phasmaq. The royals are all too aware of the dangers beneath their feet, and managing these has required the need for merciless secrecy.

King Usem the Third is in his 50s, and he has grown both stout and sour after the tragic drowning of his first wife, Queen Takama. He leaves most official diplomacy to Queen Lunja, whose seeming youth hides a keen and cunning intellect well beyond her 35 years. Her 15-year-old son, Prince Izil, is technically the overseer of the Army, but he has yet to fight a single major battle. His half-brother, Azrur, son of Takama, is in charge of the navy, and he has seen off a few would-be invaders in his 27 years.

Usem’s queens have produced several princesses. The two oldest, Illi and Tagafayt, have been married to the King of Uzzar and eldest Prince of Laat, respectively. The remaining two, Tamenzut and Tamazzalt, are 17-year-old identical twins and have a great deal of fun pretending to be one another – especially when the envoys of stately suitors appear.

There’s also Tzila El-Benoth (pp. 10-11), the high priest of the city’s god, Benoth the Sailor (p. 7).

## Secrets

The royal palace is awash with dark mysteries, some of which are in direct competition with one another. For example, while Tzila is working against the Cult of the Old City, the gardener, Udad El-Hadiqa (p. 11), is the head cultist. Udad often sneaks out through a secret tunnel in the dungeons leading to the sea caves – there to take audience with the Ul-Ramal, sing to the Sleeper with his insane brethren, and conduct periodic searches for the object that keeps their master in endless slumber. (See *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10, for more.)

The dungeon holds two other secrets, both rather noisy. The first is Prince Anamar, first-born son of Usem and Takama, who saw an Ul-Ramal at sea and went incurably insane. Now he gibbers and howls in a special room that muffles his cries; the priests can do nothing for him.

The other secret is a matter of unquiet history, as the current royal family is *not* descended from the original one. Normally this would not be a problem, except that the ghosts of the old city began haunting them within the last few generations – demanding recognition and offering dire warnings to leave before history repeats itself. Unmoved by both pronouncements, Usem’s grandfather ordered their bones placed into an ensorcelled chamber. Tzila keeps the enchantments fresh, but anyone who wanders too close will hear their tale of woe, and learn more than they should.

### *Tzila El-Benoth*

Tzila is the one who directs and enforces the rules of worship from a gorgeous chapel, nestled within the royal garden.

She is attended by numerous priests, who enjoy the freedom of the complex, and an inner retinue that attends her every move. She tends to stay in the chapel – seeking communion with Benoth during the day, and attending to secret (occasionally murderous) deeds at night.

**ST 10; DX 10; IQ 14; HT 12.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 14; Per 14; FP 12.  
Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 9; Parry 8 (Knife).  
SM 0; 5’5”; 110 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Charisma 2; Clerical Investment; Combat Reflexes; Duty (To the Church; 12 or less); Extreme Fanaticism (Keep the Ul-Ramal and their master from the surface world); Magery 1; Religious Rank 4 (Head of the Church of Benoth the Sailor); True Faith.

**Skills:** Diplomacy-14; Hidden Lore (Al-Phasmaq)-14; Knife-11; Leadership-15; Meditation-12; Public Speaking-16; Religious Ritual-16; Teaching-14; Thaumatology-12; Theology-16; additional skills as the GM decides.

## THE THING THAT SLEEPS

The true story of Al-Phasmaq has its genesis far away – in a blasted, now-nameless land far beyond the Great Sea. Over 1,000 years ago, a great flotilla escaped that doomed place, fleeing the prophesied hunger of strange and ravenous gods. As they fled, they used their magic to place their previous lives within a small, crystal talisman, shaped like their ziggurats of old – becoming less themselves each day. These newly minted Zerabites – austere nonbelievers – found a great island, just offshore, and began to build a life upon it.

Before long they had created what is now the Old Wall, emblazoning upon it an unconscious warning of the doom they had escaped. They then sealed the crystal ziggurat within it, not exactly understanding *why*, but somehow knowing it must stay forever hidden.

Generations passed, and the city became a center of trade. After a time, the Zerabites grew envious of their neighbors and their gods, and wondered why they could not have ones of their own. When “because” was no longer a sufficient answer, the royal family relented, allowing worship.

Overjoyed, the people celebrated for an entire year. They feasted and fasted, danced and sang. At some point during that time, the citizens decided to show fealty to all gods by taking the crystal ziggurat from the Old Wall and placing it upon the island’s highest temple. But the next day, as the morning light struck it, some great *thing* rose out of the waters – hungry for the long-denied morsels of Its meal.

Those who saw it either died or went mad; only those fortunate enough to have been on the other side of the Old Wall escaped. Three generations later, their descendants finally returned and found nothing like what they had been told. Perhaps their grandfathers’ tales had been

lies! There was no island here – only great outcroppings, like the claws of a crab.

Laughing at what now seemed like silly children’s stories, they decided their ancestors had merely fled a great tidal wave. The descendants began to rebuild atop what little was left. So rose Al-Phasmaq, its architects unaware that between the Claws, in a deep hole in the sea, slept the truly titanic thing that destroyed the old city: a nameless god from an older land, whose worshippers were created merely to feed it.

Its caustic, gelatinous bulk lies within a large system of caves, both dry and submerged. It is ever-attended to by its “children,” the Ul-Ramal – creatures borne of its dreams that act as guardians, food, and extensions of its will. Ever-shifting expressions of its alien hunger, they have no real shape. To see them is to go mad, become their slave, or die of fright; to touch their gelid form is to be burned by the same corrosive slop their master is made of. (See *Dungeon Fantasy*, p. 12, for suggested stats.)

These horrors slide to the surface, luring lost and broken humans into the caves to do what they cannot – swim within the Sleeper. Doing so means being painfully dissolved by its flesh, but these cultists gladly die in the hopes of finding the thing that causes their god to sleep. Somewhere within its jellylike form is a small crystal ziggurat, accidentally ingested by the Sleeper as it devoured its prophesied prey all those centuries ago. If it could be found and removed, the Sleeper would awaken and feast once more.

This is why the Priesthood of Benoth works to find all traces of the old city and kill those who would seek its treasure and secrets. The cult is a dangerous nuisance – one that loses members as a matter of course. But if someone actually went down there in search of treasure, and found that object, the city would be forfeit.

**Spells:** Air Jet-13; Apportation-13; Aura-13; Banish-16; Clouds-13; Continual Light-13; Counterspell-13; Create Air-13; Create Water-13; Current-13; Detect Magic-13; Dispel Magic-14; Freeze-13; Ignite Fire-13; Lend Energy-13; Lend Vitality-13; Light-13; Major Healing-12; Minor Healing-13; Predict Weather-13; Purify Air-13; Purify Water-13; Rain-13; Seek Water-13; Sense Foes-13; Shape Air-13; Shape Water-13; Tide-13; Water Jet-13; Waves-13; Wind-13; Windstorm-13; other spells as the GM deems appropriate.

## *Udad El-Hadiqa, the Royal Gardener*

Beneath the kindly exterior of Udad the Royal Gardener is Udad the Cultist. Udad's parents were the leaders of the Cult of the Old City, as were theirs before them. Udad's parents were ingested by an Ul-Ramal, but he was spared. Looking into its decaying-rainbow eyes strengthened his devotion to the cult and gave him a "gift" – a vision of Al-Phasmaq, ruled from beneath the waves.

**ST 10; DX 10; IQ 14; HT 14.**

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 16; Per 14; FP 14.

Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8.

SM 0; 5'7"; 130 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Callous; Charisma 2; Empathy; Extreme Fanaticism (The Sleeper); Honest Face; Pitiably; Smooth Operator 3; Social Stigma 1 (Venerated).

**Skills:** Diplomacy-18; Gardening-16; Hidden Lore (Al-Phasmaq)-14; Public Speaking-19; other skills as the GM deems appropriate.

**Notes:** This assumes that Udad has no magical ability, which may not work for all campaigns. If he does, give him *Magery 3* and a skill list similar to *Tzila's* (see above).

## *Watchpoint and the Grand Staircase*

At the very top of the Old Wall (see *Built to Last*, p. 5) squats a tall, brilliant archway – one large enough to allow several highly packed caravans to travel through at once. Atop that archway, on either side, are two imposing watchtowers, staffed by keen-eyed soldiers who gaze far out in all directions. Next to them lie barracks, housing 100 soldiers on each side, all ready to fan out into archery ranks.

This is Watchpoint, the guard station that straddles the Grand Staircase, which allows transit over the unbroken expanse of the Old Wall. Based on one engineering marvel on top of another, the Staircase – which has both ramps and stairs – is not only wide enough to allow several lanes of caravan travel, but long enough to provide a gentle slope.

The far side terminates in the Great Market, while the other comes down close to the end of the Grand Avenue. The bases on both ends are well-guarded, but the soldiers tend not to hassle those upon it, as they've already been checked and taxed. Instead, they wait for a fight, and scatter the legion of beggars that mysteriously appear not long after sunrise.

### **People**

Wiwurgh Al-Dire is the Lieutenant of the Guard in peace and war, and the one who calls to shut the gates. Those who cause a mobilization for no reason quickly find themselves stripped of rank, and he's served for many years without

embarrassing himself. He hopes to one day replace Yattuy when *he* finally makes too great a mistake to ignore.

### **Secrets**

The beggars of Al-Phasmaq make their home *under* the Grand Staircase itself. A hidden passage along its eastern side ends in a maze of corridors, leading to a sanctuary whose mysterious Abbess of the Under-Sanctuary welcomes all.

The sanctuary once held an object of some considerable potency, in the days of the old city. The magic in those walls was so powerful it kept even gods from seeing into it, thus keeping it safe. But then its foolish and forgetful inhabitants abandoned all caution and removed the object, and thus fell the old city. But the magic still remains – healing the afflicted, dispelling curses, restoring the minds of the broken and the mad, and retarding the aging process to a near-crawl.

Very few know that the Abbess is actually Queen Takama, long thought lost at sea. She became curious as to what the dungeon's ghosts were saying, thereby learning of the horror she had married into. Distraught, she threw herself off the Old Wall, but was taken here by kindly beggars, and nursed back to health and sanity by the previous Abbess. That ancient woman died not long thereafter, and Takama has been safeguarding the sanctuary's many secrets ever since.

## *The Great Market*

For many, the true attraction of Al-Phasmaq is the Great Market: a sprawling riot of stalls, stands, and wandering merchants from anywhere and everywhere. It sits just outside the Old Wall, between the Grand Staircase and the land-side gate, bounded within the well-built wall made from permanent stores and shops. This colorful chaos is overseen by the City Guard – ever on the lookout for beggars and thieves.

From dawn to dusk, the cries of merchants make for a bewildering cacophony. Everything anyone could ever want is here: the glittering wares of the florid, brightly dressed gem merchants of Kalar-Mal, who can tell a story about each stone on the table; the pale, long-eared rug-weavers of Laa, whose silken goods are surprisingly light and strong; the luscious fruits of Al-Qoos, said to bring sweet dreams if eaten at night just before moonrise; and the orange-clad goldsmiths of Uzzar, whose work is so legendary that even gods take human form to buy the goods.

The main gate sits at the land-side of the Great Market – a passage even more well-guarded than the palace itself. The guards are much more strict here, and the tax collectors more likely to find additional charges. The Legtown workers must reenter each day and display their employers' seal or brand to pass untaxed. The way is shut from dusk to dawn.

### **People**

Known for his considerable girth and offerings, Yittir the Spice Merchant is one of the lucky few afforded a permanent building. Boasting product from all over the Great Sea, and all the way inland to fabled Dornal-Xan, he and his equally plump daughters do a brisk trade. It's whispered he stocks a special mixture (courtesy of the Fish-Men of Ynath) that allows air-breathers to survive underwater for hours per dose, but he doesn't advertise that for obvious reasons.

## CAMPAIGNS IN THE CITY OF SHIPS

Al-Phasmaq can be dropped into most TL1-4 fantasy campaigns with few adjustments, if any. It could work well in campaigns that take place on historical Earth with a few name changes. A GM who wished to include it in a modern campaign could add it *Brigadoon*-style; this is especially appropriate for campaigns featuring widespread-but-secret supernatural forces such as the ones presented in *GURPS Monster Hunters*.

### Banestorm

Having the entire city of Al-Phasmaq be the victim of a banestorm would allow the GM to use this article with minimum effort and present a reason why adventurers might want to go there *now*. Incorporating it into Yrth proper is also an option (e.g., somewhere along the coast of the Erythraean Sea near the Fence of God and the Djinn Lands). Al-Phasmaq works quite well within the cosmological makeup of *GURPS Banestorm*, given that clerics in that setting use Magery and not Power Investiture.

### Dungeon Fantasy

Having Al-Phasmaq act as “town” is certainly an option, but it’s not using the creepy nature of the city to its full potential. The Sleeper Itself is an Elder Thing so powerful that its dreams (nightmares?) cause reality to bend, creating Ul-Ramal (use the statistics for mindwarper, *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, p. 25, but add Amphibious and water Move equal to ground Move). Its eldritch energies have soaked into the very blood and bone of the Phasmaqian people, and disturbing numbers of mentalists, dark ones, and elder-spawn are present in the populous. The laws against magic items and armaments (see *Good and Services*, p. 8) should be ignored when using this article as they contradict some of *Dungeon Fantasy’s* core precepts.

The GMs may want to consider having *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Settings: Caverntown* as a nearby location, given its own problem with Elder Things, or using Al-Phasmaq as a springboard to run *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Adventure 1: Mirror of the Fire Demon*. However the GM decides to incorporate it, Al-Phasmaq is big enough to provide interesting challenges and adventures to delvers without ever leaving the city in the first place.

One of the most welcome sights of the whole market, Jabir the Juice Seller wanders with a massive urn of cool, sweet licorice juice on his back. For a few coins – or maybe free, if you seem like you’re literally dying – he will happily give a clean brass cup of the refreshing stuff. A few more coins provides any information he’s heard about nearly anything or anyone, as everyone gossips with or around him. He doesn’t know much about ancient history, secret cults, or monsters under the sea or sand, but he can point the adventurers in the right direction to people who might know more.

### Secrets

The proprietor of the Grand Market’s longest-lasting restaurant, Ziri Ul-Laati, serves spicy fish stew on flat, spongy, sour bread. He also maintains a secret passage to Legtown through the back of his restaurant, and for a steep fee, he’ll happily get people in and out. It’s usually just day workers banned by the guard, but if it turns out to be more criminal than that, he doesn’t care.

## Legtown

This part of town is the sordid outcropping of Al-Phasmaq, where the thousands who cannot live inside go at the day’s end. It’s a mismatched agglomeration of tents, lean-tos, and rude shacks of mud brick and salvaged junk – all arranged in thick, uneven lines radiating out from the Old Wall (see *Built to Last*, p. 5). Conditions are filthy and harsh, and disease and starvation are rampant.

The people here (known as “Leggers”) are day laborers, lining up at the front gate each morning before dawn. Most are porters, employed to carry goods around the city, and branded (or having a seal) to avoid entrance fees. The less fortunate must pay to set up along the inside of the Old Wall, or else stay outside to tend to travelers or to other citizens of Legtown.

Still others turn to crime, out of desperation or the kind of cruelty bred under such sorry conditions. There’s also a thriving underground market, where goods and services illegal within Al-Phasmaq (such as magic and weapons) can be found. But those who enter Legtown to seek such things must be wary – many touts are merely luring the foolish to be robbed or worse.

### People

Large, one-eyed, and tough enough to take swords through the lung, Takfarinas of Kemmal (p. 13) was a mercenary before he bottomed out here. People call him the King of Legtown, as he’s the only one everyone obeys. His decisions have nothing to do with justice – just how he’s feeling that day. But if Al-Phasmaq’s attacked by land, everyone in Legtown grabs weapons and rallies behind him, as he’s the only one who can turn a poor, starving mob into an army with a

few shouted commands.

Nimo the Magnificent was a court magician once. He can’t quite remember where, anymore – in fact, he can’t really remember much of anything. He woke up in a garbage pile here more than 10 years ago, with a hideous dent on the left side of his skull. Since then, he’s been Legtown’s unofficial wizard, providing spells of health and healing, and ensorcelling potions and scrolls for a small fee. He can’t always cast correctly, and sometimes you don’t quite get what you pay for, but as he likes to say, “You can’t always get what you ask for, but you *will* get just what you need.”

### Secrets

They say everyone outside the Old Wall has a story they’d rather not tell. Sometimes it’s what they did to wind up there, sometimes it’s what they do to survive, and sometimes it’s something truly nasty or weird, or at least highly illegal.

One such story of the illegal involves Takfarinas’ friend Idder – sometimes known as the Rogue Armorer.

He was also a mercenary, until he lost his legs fighting sand worms in the deep desert. Now he has a small gang of orphans in his shack, all tending a makeshift forge and waiting for certain supplies so he can ply his trade. He has a wide selection of rudely crafted but effective weapons and armor, which he sells at exorbitant prices. The money goes to feeding the people in his "Leg," who are his eyes and ears.

A less pleasant secret is the number of cultists who live outside Al-Phasmaq. On certain nights, they slink out into the wastes beyond, seeking the tunnels the Ul-Ramal (see *The Thing That Sleeps*, p. 10) use to slide out of the ground. Then they clamber into the bowels of the earth, heading for the sea caves beneath the city and a rendezvous with Udad El-Hadiqa (p. 11).

One day, the cultists will watch as the city falls once more. They have great plans to remake it in their demented image.

### *Takfarinas of Kemmal, the King of Legtown*

Takfarinas (or just "Tak") is your average Kemmalite – dark skinned, bright blue eyes, and black hair. Tak may not look it, but he's one of the most dangerous fighters in the city. Despite resisting it at first, he takes his role as "king" very seriously. While he prefers to let the City Guard settle most disputes, anything involving children or the elderly Leggers will earn a visit from him. Sometimes he talks, sometimes he roughs up the one who has earned his ire, sometimes he just dumps the body into the harbor to feed the crabs. This has led to Legtown having a fairly low rate of violent crime for a neighborhood of its size. Tak wields twin thrusting broadswords ("Mother" and "Father") that are rumored to bear enchantment. Despite having a single eye, *nothing* escapes Tak's notice.

**ST 14; DX 14; IQ 12; HT 14.**

Damage 1d+2/3d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 16; Will 16; Per 16; FP 14.

Basic Speed 8.00; Basic Move 8; Dodge 12; Parry 17 (Broadsword).

SM 0; 6': 150 lbs.

**Advantages/Disadvantages:** Ambidexterity; Charisma 1; Code of Honor (Soldier's); Combat Reflexes; Distinctive Feature (One Eye); Enhanced Parry 3 (Broadsword); Extra Attack 1; Fit; High Pain Threshold; Rapid Healing; Sense of Duty (Children, the elderly, and "Leggers"); Striking ST 4; Vow (Keeps word once given); Vow (Stays bought); Weapon Master (Broadsword).

**Skills:** Acrobatics-16; Body Language-15; Brawling-16; Broadsword-20; Carousing-14; Climbing-16; Detect Lies-16; Diplomacy-12; Dual-Weapon Attack (Broadsword)-20; Escape-14; First Aid-14; Forced Entry-14; Intimidation-18; Observation-20; Running-16; Savior-Faire (Mafia)-14; Shadowing-14; Search-16; Soldier-14; Stealth-18; Streetwise-14; Traps-14; Urban Survival-16.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

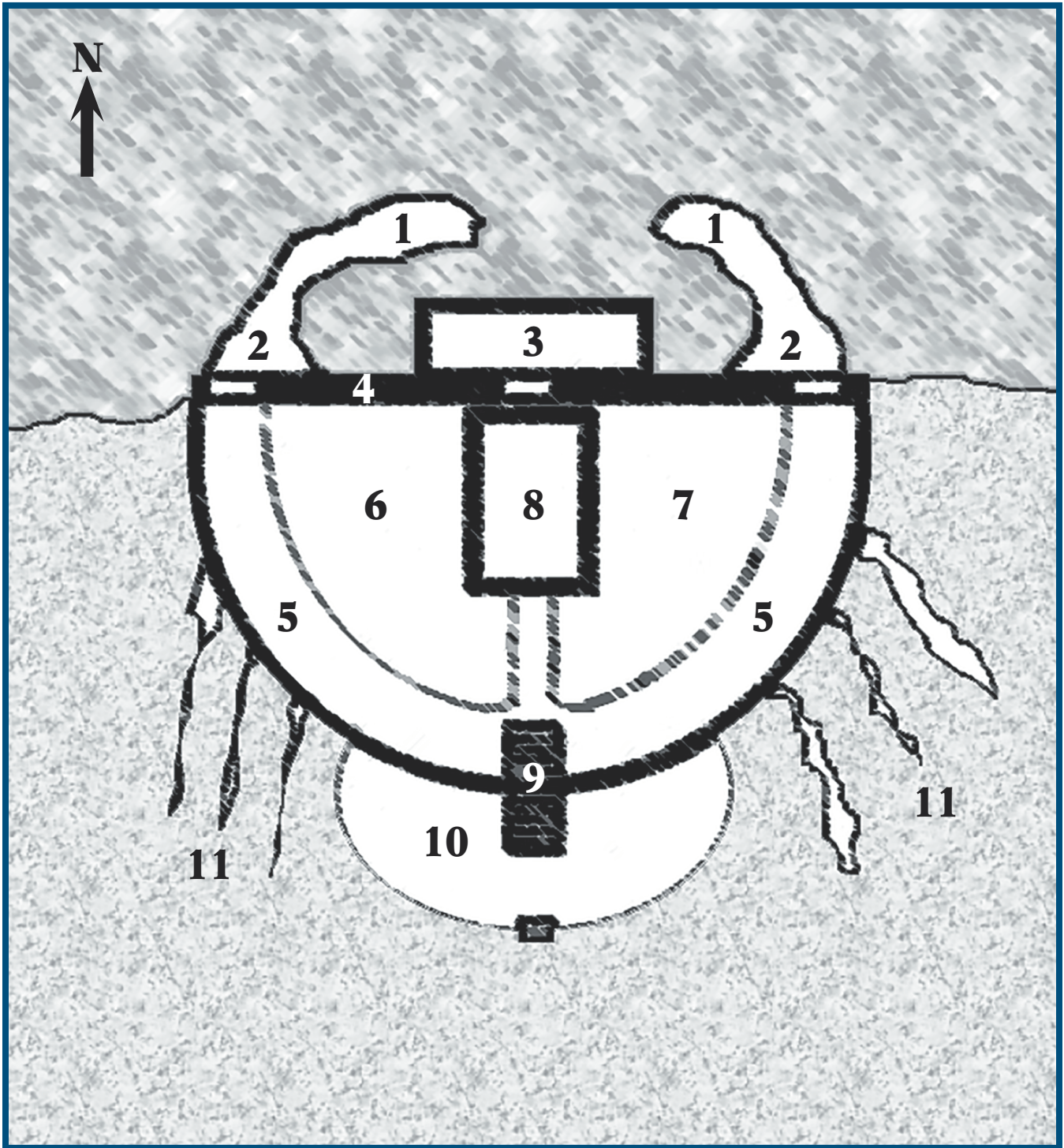
Christopher R. Rice dares to awaken the Sleeper. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's spinning words and whimsy into gold. Of course, if he's not writing about **GURPS**, he's blogging about it. Visit his site "Ravens N' Pennies" ([www.ravensnpennies.com](http://www.ravensnpennies.com)) for more **GURPS** goodies. He's the co-author of **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic** and **Dungeon Fantasy Traps**. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group (the Headhunters) and Beth "Archangel" McCoy, the "Sith Editrix," for being most excellent sounding boards.

J. Edward Tremlett, a.k.a. "the Lurker in Lansing," 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. He is a frequent contributor to *Pyramid*, was the editor of *The Wrath Project*, and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh*, *Worlds of Cthulhu*, and the anthology *Ride the Star Wind*. He's the author of the fiction blog *SPYGOD's Tales* ([spygod-tales.blogspot.com](http://spygod-tales.blogspot.com)), and lives in Lansing with two cats and enough Lego bricks to make a Great Old One. Maybe he already has.

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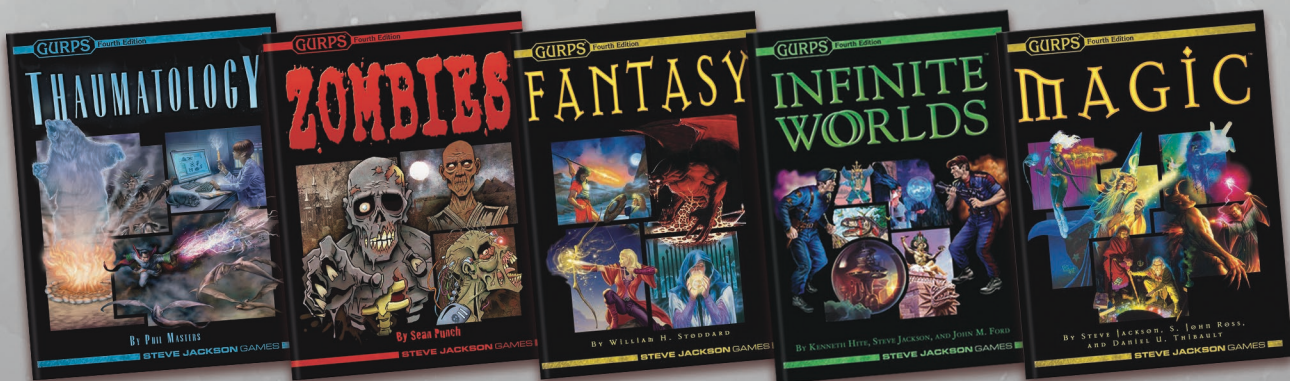
## MAP OF AL-PHASMAQ

Map not to scale.

### Key

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Claws and Sea Wall.                   | 7. Dusk Side.                            |
| 2. Arms, Sea Wall, and Fishers' Markets. | 8. Royal Palace.                         |
| 3. Naval Docks and Shipyard.             | 9. Watchpoint and the Grand Staircase.   |
| 4. The Barracks and Seaside Gates.       | 10. The Great Market and Land-Side Gate. |
| 5. Main Avenue.                          | 11. Legtown.                             |
| 6. Dawn Side.                            |  |

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# EIDETIC MEMORY

## THE HAUNTING OF FILM HOUSE

BY DAVID L. PULVER

Film House is a historic mansion that, almost a century ago, belonged to a film producer during the end of the silent-film era (the late 1920s). The tragic death of film star Jasmine Kale in the mansion and the obsessive actions of the mansion's owner in preserving her memory have created a powerful haunting that still lingers today. After decades of neglect, Film House has recently been purchased by a nearby university. The Film Studies department sees it as the new home for its program. The ghost may have other ideas . . .

Film House is suitable for a *GURPS Monster Hunters* or *GURPS Horror* investigation. References to *Monster Hunters* are provided, or the GM can use *GURPS Horror* to modify the denizens for other supernatural paradigms.

In addition, the house's lengthy past is described in sufficient detail that the GM wishing to attenuate the house's history can set games during other eras, e.g., the *GURPS Cliffhangers* era (1920s-1930s) or *GURPS Atomic Horror* period (post-war to 1950s).

### Location

Film House is assumed to be located on the fringe of a medium-sized university campus, which, perhaps, it pre-dates. The gradual expansion of the university over the years eventually made them neighbors, and in the present, it is "on campus." The house's origin as a Hollywood mogul's home suggests it might be located in Los Angeles county but this is not required; many Hollywood figures had multiple homes. To keep things flexible, "the University" and its town aren't named and details of the area around the house are kept vague. With minor changes, the story could also be set outside of the United States, adjusting the back story to fit that nation's silent-film era.

### FILM HOUSE IN DOCUMENTS

These (fictitious) newspaper articles and book excerpts give the GM a sense of key events in Film House's history and insight into the motivations of the living and the dead. Documents may be discovered by investigators researching the location, or represent information known to Film House

students or local historians or occultists that the PCs may encounter in an investigation.

It's up to the GM how accessible they are. The research might require digging through old newspaper morgues or public-library microfiches and successful Research rolls, or just checking links on Wikipedia or talking to the right NPCs. In a campaign set in the past, of course, more recent documents will be unavailable.

The entries are in chronological order. In a modern-day campaign, it may be a good idea to make the final news story ("*Haunted*" House Sold to University, p. 18) the first one that the party discovers.

### Lavish Party at Producer's Home

Film mogul and eligible bachelor Lawrence Hilbert hosted another lavish gathering at his new mansion, Film House, celebrating the premiere of his new movie *White Cat* (directed by Rudolph Steyer) with a private screening attended by a constellation of Hollywood notables . . . Seen on Hilbert's arm was *White Cat's* lovely co-star Jasmine Kale, whose delicious comedic role as ingénue Felina Fey charmed audiences . . .

– A newspaper society page, 1926

### A Starlet's Obituary

Actress Jasmine Kale (born Hedwig Bretschneider, 1905, in Frankfurt, Germany) suddenly passed away on April 30, 1927, at the home of Hollywood producer Lawrence Hilbert. Miss Kale came to America following an early career as a dancer and extra in European films. A glittering star whose light dimmed too soon, Jasmine Kale shone in a half-dozen films, many produced by Hilbert, including *Catch the Last Caboose* (1925) and *White Cat* (1926). Miss Kale is survived by her parents, Hilda and Klaus . . .

– Newspaper obituary, 1927

### Starlet's Death a Suicide

Details have emerged regarding last week's untimely death of troubled Hollywood starlet Jasmine Kale, 22, who took her life while a guest at the home of Hollywood mogul Lawrence Hilbert, a frequent companion and patron of the actress.



Sources tell us Mr. Hilbert was out on business when Kale called upon him at his mansion Film House in the early evening. She was received by his butler, who suggested she await his arrival. An hour later, Hilbert arrived by motor car in the company of another young actress, Kathy May Cooper, apparently to discuss a part in his next movie, when he learned of Kale's presence. After sending Kathy Cooper home in a cab, Mr. Hilbert was informed by his butler that Miss Kale had in fact arrived a hour before, soaked by a sudden downpour, and had been offered the use of the upstairs bathroom to freshen up. Upon knocking on the bathroom door repeatedly and receiving no answer, Hilbert and his manservant forced it open, only to discover Miss Kale floating in the bath, an apparent suicide. A doctor was summoned and pronounced her dead shortly thereafter. Alcohol was reportedly present, taken from Mr. Hilbert's liquor cabinet.

Gossip and speculation over a possible love triangle involving Miss Kale, Miss Cooper, and Mr. Hilbert has been endemic. This columnist, however, has heard another story: Miss Kale's fears that, as a star of the silent cinema, she was coming under increasing studio pressure to re-shoot her new movie, *The Last House*, as a talkie. Burdened with a strong Germanic accent and a charming lisp, Miss Kale was apparently struggling with a voice coach. Rumors that her voice would be over-dubbed or she would be replaced outright, perhaps by flavor-of-the-moment Kathy May, had been flying about the movie's set, and the intense pressure may have gotten to her. In fact, one anonymous source told this reporter Miss Kale had left a final message written by a bloody finger on the bathroom mirror, the plaintive words, "You Stole My Voice."

A spokesman for Mr. Hilbert's office refused comment except for this statement: "We admired Ms. Kale with all our heart, and nothing could ever replace her." With the loss of its leading lady, the fate of the unfinished film *The Last House* remains unknown.

– *Syndicated Hollywood gossip column run in several tabloids, 1927*

## Obituary for Lawrence Hilbert

Born in 1874 in San Francisco to a family who had made its fortune building railways, Lawrence Hilbert financed and produced several well-regarded silent movies, notably *Catch the Last Caboose* and *White Cat*. His last work, which he wrote and directed, was the unfinished futuristic fable *The Last House*. A bachelor, Mr. Hilbert was romantically and professionally linked in later life to late Hollywood starlet Jasmine Kale (d. 1927), whom he often described as his personal muse. He is survived by a sister, Eleanor Hilbert.

– *Newspaper obituary, 1929*

## Second Suicide at "Film House"

The coroner's office today ruled the death of Lawrence Hilbert, 55, in his mansion to be self-inflicted, the result of a single .38-caliber gunshot wound to the head. Mr. Hilbert's butler, George Lincoln, was also injured in the leg, the result of his heroic efforts to wrestle the gun away. He is expected to recover fully. Also deceased was Mr. Hilbert's dog Fritz, apparently the first victim of the producer's self-destructive impulse.

Acquaintances of Mr. Hilbert say he had been increasingly haunted by guilt after Miss Jasmine Kale's passing two years ago, and had even consulted a spiritualist. Following her untimely death, Mr. Hilbert obsessively redecorated his home as a shrine to her memory, but was unable to recover from the melancholy of her sudden passing.

– *Newspaper article, 1929*

## From Chapter 6 of *American Poltergeists*

Film House is another site with Hollywood connections that has been linked to both ghostly apparitions and reputed poltergeist phenomena over the years . . . After the suicides of Jasmine Kale and Lawrence Hilbert, the estate went to Hilbert's sister Eleanor. She found the atmosphere of Film House oppressive and morbid, and ordered workmen to remove the Jasmine Kale artifacts and redecorate the house for use by renters. Weird thumping noises, mysteriously running water, visions, and other poltergeist-like activity frightened the workers; after a statue of Kale in the lobby came off its base and crushed handyman Ricardo Gutierrez as he was trying to remove it, Hilbert made the decision to sell the property.

Film House was on the market for several years; real estate prices were poor during the Depression era. In 1937, it was sold to the Lodges, a wealthy couple with a young daughter, Annie. A hardheaded businessman at Boeing, Frank must have laughed at rumors of hauntings when he bought the place. Film House initially behaved itself, but as Annie grew older, there was renewed poltergeist activity: thumping beds, taps turning on by themselves, flying bedclothes, breaking glasses and crockery, and so on.

Annie's 12th birthday party was to feature clowns and cartoons in the house's cinema, and a giant layer cake. But plates and crockery broke, the house's cinema inexplicably showed an old silent movie instead of the children's cartoon reel Lodge had arranged, and the pile of presents were ripped open by an unseen force.

## A QUIET PERIOD (1950s-1970s)

Film House was only periodically tenanted from World War II until the late 1960s. It was briefly the home of an investment banker whose wife started hearing voices whispering of betrayals and infidelities, and a barking dog only she could see. Eventually, she attacked her husband with an ice pick and was institutionalized. A number of occult investigators or spiritualists may have dared it during that time (if the GM wants to set a campaign in that era).

In the 1960s, it was owned by a shady businessman with mob connections, who turned it into a cheap rooming house and porn cinema. This offended the ghost of Jasmine Kale, who took control of the film projector during a midnight showing, triggering a panic that cost another life and added a further ghost to the hotel (see *Midnight Riot Closes Porn Theater*, p. 18).

When Annie tried to blow out her candles, she somehow blew half the cake off, splattering one of the clowns in the face. The cook cried, the kids laughed, and the clown (whose name was Pete Seymour) was sent to the upstairs bathroom to fix his makeup. Witnesses heard a shriek, running footsteps, and then a scream and thud. Lodge ran to check on Seymour, and found he had fallen down the stairs and cracked his skull . . . his face had a look of terror on it. Later that night, while the police were being called, Mrs. Lodge went to the bathroom and thought she saw a strange woman's face in the mirror . . .

Lodge called in a priest and then a spiritualist, who told him the place was haunted and he needed to appease the spirits by restoring the house to its previous state, using the Hollywood kitsch in the basement. The problems stopped, but he soon moved his family out, leaving the house. No renter stayed for long. Some complained of odd sounds or visions, running water, even barking; others heard eerie laughter . . . perhaps a clown?

– Wilbert Percy, *American Poltergeists*, 1973

### *Midnight Riot Closes Porn Theater*

Two men are injured and one dead after a panic at the Film House Cinema on Saturday. The tiny theater near the University campus has been notorious for midnight showings of pornographic movies under the guise of imported art films. Last night, just after midnight, one such screening ended in a panicked exodus of two dozen moviegoers, whose cries awakened derelicts and residents at a nearby flophouse.

One witness told this reporter: "I saw these guys running and stumbling out of the theater, some with flies unzipped, looking like they seen a ghost – faces white as sheets!" Police and ambulances were called after two men were found trampled and injured. One patron, Joseph Kozlowski, 62, suffered a fatal heart attack.

Sources at the coroner's office theorize that the mass hysteria was caused by a drunk projectionist who loaded an old art film at the wrong speed, resulting in rapid flickering and psychedelic light-show effects that induced epileptic seizures and panic-inducing hallucinations among a susceptible crowd high on drugs and besotted with alcohol. Film House is now closed pending a city investigation into alleged zoning and fire-code violations, and facing possible lawsuits. Its owner, businessman Vince Lombardo, had no comment.

– Local news story, 1973

### *"Haunted" House Sold to University*

The restoration of Film House, a century-old local landmark that has stood vacant for many years and has a colorful reputation, has been completed by the University.

"We are jubilant at being able to at last move the Department of Film Studies into this historic property," said Professor Neil Thorndike, head of the funding committee. Situated conveniently on the edge of the expanding University campus, Film House provides much-needed space for the Film Studies department, previously relegated to a crowded annex in the Media Arts Building.

Film House, a neo-Georgian mansion built in 1917, was once the home of Hollywood mogul Lawrence Hilbert, and included a small theater and film library among its lavish rooms. In its heyday in the silent film era, Film House played

host to glittering parties of Hollywood celebrities, among them Hilbert's muse, actress Jasmine Kale, who tragically took her own life during a visit there, and whose ghost some say still haunts the premises.

Other deaths over the years and a catalog of strange noises, cold spots, and apparitions contributed to the house's legend as it deteriorated from its former glory, even being used as a flophouse and pornographic theater in the 1970s.

After it was shut down by the city, Film House stood vacant for many years, but its reputation as a haunted house remained, sadly leading to tragedy. In 1990, a freshman named Owen Hall, 18, entered the derelict house to spend the night as part of a fraternity hazing; he was later found dead on the second floor from a .38 gunshot wound, but no weapon or bullet was ever recovered and no suspect was caught. Police opined he was shot by drug addicts in the old house. An effort by community groups to condemn the property was opposed by the city's Historical Society and the University. The latter acquired Film House in 2016 and began a lengthy process of renovation. The move by the Film Studies department into Film House is expected to be complete in time for classes to begin next semester.

– Local news story, 2018

*When we tell a story in cinema  
we should resort to dialogue  
only when it's impossible to do  
otherwise.*

– Alfred Hitchcock

## **FILM HOUSE TODAY**

The Film Studies program is concerned with film history and critical theory rather than actual moviemaking; many students from other programs also take some of its courses as electives. The department also teaches interdisciplinary courses in historical film conservation and archiving.

Its new home, Film House, was purchased a few years ago. A lengthy renovation process had been underway over the summer months, restoring some of the original furnishings (discovered in storage). The renovation went slowly due to electrical faults and minor accidents; the building is still somewhat dilapidated.

Among the small faculty and student body, initial enthusiasm for a building of their own (rather than being tucked into the back of another department) is now tempered by a feeling of unease. There have been bad dreams, depression, substance abuse, and a psychic tendency toward morbidity. More students are doing essays and professors assigning class work on themes of murder, suicide, and the silent-film era . . . perhaps the House is building up its etheric energy, or waiting for the right victims.

Assume PCs learn of potential hauntings a few months into the term, after a series of minor supernatural events has begun to escalate, leading open-minded faculty or students with the right connections to contact monster hunters.

Alternatively, PCs might see news reports of Film House's recent sale and past history, and involve themselves.

## Faculty and Staff

During normal classroom hours expect 70-120 students and four to six faculty and staff in Film House.

*Professor Neil Thorndike* (age 67): Department head. A former '60s hippy who turned to academia, he wrote his thesis on "Marxist themes in early 20th-century horror cinema." He is an atheist and thinks belief in the supernatural, whether ghosts or gods, is the sign of intellectual vapidness, drugs, or mental illness. After recent sightings out of the corner of his eye while working late, he is discretely increasing his intake of pot, feeling weed will restore his reality. He staked a lot of academic and departmental prestige and budget in advocating for the purchase of Film House, and is desperate that nothing go wrong (like students dying mysteriously, or, worse, suing the department). He is possibly desperate enough to hire outside help to "get to the bottom of the trouble, whatever it is, and lay it to rest, quietly." He likes to think he's still cool. He says "dialectic" a lot and wears a beret.

*Professor Maria Hernandez* (age 40): Currently scheming to replace "that fossil Thorndike" as department chair and bring the department up to date, with a proper focus on relevant films about the problems facing women and minorities today instead of that avant-garde horror garbage and communist propaganda he is on. She suspects he is doing drugs again. Thorndike was behind the move to Film House, and she'd like to see it blow up in his face. She has heard rumors about hauntings but not seen any. She might encourage investigators if she felt they would make a mess of things and the blowback would lead to Thorndike being sacked and replaced with someone progressive, like her.

*Assistant Professor Alex Coleman* (age 29): The youngest professor. He has a love of old silent films, and he is trying to organize the Jasmine Kale memorabilia in the basement. His specialty is film restoration, and he is most likely to get himself, unwitting students, or any PCs involved in a showing of the haunted film canisters. He feels ghosts are just bad vibes. He's encouraged students to research Film House's history as part of his classes. He has no tenure, so he avoids the war between Thorndike and Hernandez by sucking up to both.

*Department Secretary Ruth Cavendish* (age 63): She is an immense woman who prefers flower-patterned dresses, with tiny spectacles perched on her long nose, and gray hair. She knows everyone and can tell you where to find people. Her breath usually reeks of alcohol (and she has bottles of gin in a locked filing cabinet). Her once-sunny personality has degraded to faked heartiness after various scary encounters (Pete the Clown, Fritz) at the house, which she won't talk about. Short-tempered in the morning as she nurses a hangover. In the afternoon, she is friendly. In the evening, she is increasingly jittery and eager to leave Film House, eyes darting nervously toward the large clock.

*Department Technician Roy Jones* (age 29): He is struggling to fix frequent and puzzling electrical failures that have occurred, and the very intermittent Wi-Fi. Several students have also claimed cell phones and tablets haven't gotten proper reception inside the house.

*Teaching Assistant Kathy Grande* (grad student, age 22): Kathy seems to have narrowly escaped injury in a couple of inexplicable events. There was a power failure in a late-night class. One of her friends was "freaked out" and injured in a bathroom incident. Kathy is interested in film from an activist perspective, and she promotes social causes (particularly LGBT+ rights). She works closely with Hernandez. She is also the TA for the Queering Cthulhu course. Kathy has little money and really needs her teaching job.

*Teaching Assistant Yolanda Jakande* (grad student, age 22): A friend of Kathy's, busily working on her thesis on early silent films while acting as an assistant to Alex Coleman. Her arm is in a sling as a result of a frightening experience last week when she slipped on a puddle of water in the washroom, water she could swear looked that blood! She was with Kathy at the time.

*Security Guard Bill Griffon* (age 61): "Old Bill" is a fixture on campus, and recently assigned to keep an eye on this building at night. He is part of a two-person team who look after this part of campus from an Administration Building office just over a block away. He believes in good and evil, and he has had a sense since the University moved to Film House that there is something "evil" or "wrong" lurking there. He is most likely to believe students who report supernatural happenings and talk to a minister or seek help from PCs to who have a Christian religious background (clerics, holy warriors, etc.).

## Scheduling

Present-day investigations of Film House are complicated because it's in active use. Due to overcrowding and the lack of alternative facilities, even if someone is killed in the building, there will be pressure to reopen the classrooms as soon as any police or occupation and safety investigation has gathered evidence (within a matter of days). Naturally, the authorities will give little credence to supernatural explanations.

The schedule (p. 20) is intended to give a general idea of what times Film House is busy (when ghosts mostly stay hidden) or nearly empty (manifestations are likely).

## THE GHOSTS OF FILM HOUSE

The ghosts follow the *Monster Hunters* standard rules for such beings (see *GURPS Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy*, pp. 4-6). However, the combination of Jasmine's ghost and the shrine that Hilbert created inadvertently generated an "etheric web" trap around the house. Nearly anyone who dies within Film House is caught in the web and permanently joins the house as a spirit. The house itself serves as the anchor to these spirits. So if anyone dies within Film House from any violence, including as a result of the haunts, their spirits are trapped. It's up to the GM whether they become ghosts (likely if they had reason to come back) or simple apparitions (their last moments replaying periodically).

### Jasmine Kale

Kale is the central ghost of Film House. Discovered in Europe, Kale's acting skill and vivacious beauty made her a star, helped by her close relationship with producer Lawrence Hilbert. Then everything came crashing down. In the late 1920s, the silent films were replaced with the new "talkies."

The executives were thinking of having her latest movie, *The Last House*, dubbed as a talkie, but Kale's voice did not match her physical talent; she had a strong German accent and a bit of a stutter. She struggled with a voice coach, and overheard rumors that she was to be replaced, or her voice dubbed over, perhaps by dulcet-toned starlet Kathy May Cooper, who the studio was now promoting.

Kale decided to visit Lawrence in person to plead her case. It was an unexpectedly rainy night, and her motor car's convertible top was broken. When she arrived, she was drenched. George (the butler at Film House) let her in but advised her that Hilbert was out on business; he was expected to return later that evening. Seeing her water-soaked state, he said she could freshen up in the house's upstairs bathroom, so that she did not resemble a drowned rat. She ran

a bath, but also found the liquor cabinet, making herself a stiff drink. Then others. As she came out of the bath and changed into a borrowed robe, she must have heard the sounds of a car outside, for the window was found partially open. Lawrence Hilbert was there with actress Kathy May!

They were talking, and then Hilbert embraced her. Jasmine pulled the curtains shut. Her world was over. She had been replaced not just as an actress, but in Lawrence's affections as well. A wave of jealousy and despair hit her. She removed a shaving razor from the bathroom cabinet, and slit her wrists. As the blood slowly dripped she used the blood to write "You stole my voice," on the bathroom mirror. Then she used the razor to slice out her throat. She died in the bath, unable to scream, as the blood darkened the bathwater.

However, she didn't stay dead . . .

Her grudge caused her to return as a vengeful spirit. She began tormenting Lawrence Hilbert. He turned the mansion into a shrine to her, but that just helped strengthen and focus her power. Now she is motivated by jealousy and pride – she desires to be worshiped.

She "sleeps" much of the time, but she is growing slowly in anger as she observes lectures and movies being shown that aren't about her by the professors and students now working in the house. She will gradually increase her attacks and manifestations . . . and with every death, her army of ghosts grows.

When she manifests fully in this world, Kale's ghost appears as a pretty, young, translucent woman in a soaked bathrobe, with long pale hair and wicked slash marks on her throat and wrists. She is either a monochrome black-and-white image, or sometimes, when very angry, a photographic negative. She has a slight glow about her. Sometimes she holds a straight razor or a glass of whiskey. Occasionally she may produce the glass of whiskey, hand it to someone, then draw the razor from her robe and manifest physically, but she rarely does so.

## ACADEMIC CALENDAR

The University is also closed for statutory holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving). "Quiet" and "Dead" are primetime for the various ghosts to manifest.

Between 12:00 and 1:00 p.m. and from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m., treat "Busy" periods as "Quiet" and "Quiet" periods as "Dead" as people leave Film House in search of lunch or dinner. Between 10:30 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. Monday through Thursday, and on the weekends (from 10:30 p.m. on Friday to 8:00 a.m. on Monday), Film House is "Closed."

*Busy* means plenty of students and faculty about. Half of the classrooms, labs, screening rooms, and offices will be occupied at any particular moment. Every three hours or so when classes change, large groups of students crowd the halls.

*Quiet* means one-sixth of the classrooms and offices are occupied by students and professors in classes or by grad students working late.

*Dead* means no classrooms or screening rooms are occupied. Offices may have an occasional professor or grad student working late grading papers, doing research, dozing off, or working on a film project. One of the security guards may be checking the house.

*Closed* means that Film House's doors are locked. The only persons normally authorized are campus security, but the faculty or custodial staff can sign in and get the door unlocked for any half-decent excuse ("forgot my car keys" or "have to pick up some research materials" or "work assignment to fix the bathroom tap"). Ghost-busters hired by the faculty can likely be passed off as custodial staff.

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.</i>	<i>Weekdays, 6:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.</i>
August 28 to September 6	Busy: student registration	Quiet
September 7 to December 2	Busy: regular classes	Quiet: evening classes
December 3-19	Busy: exams	Dead
December 20-24	Quiet: graduate work	Dead
December 25 to January 1	Dead: winter break	Closed: winter break
January 2-14	Quiet: graduate work	Dead
January 15 to March 9	Busy: regular classes	Quiet: evening classes
March 10-18	Quiet: spring break	Dead
March 19 to April 30	Busy: regular classes	Quiet: evening classes
May 1-14	Busy: exams	Dead
May 15 to June 24	Quiet: graduate work	Dead
June 25 to August 10	Quiet: summer classes	Dead
August 11-27	Closed: summer break	Closed: summer break

Kale sometimes appears in different forms resembling figures from her movies: a nurse, a medieval noblewoman, a rifle-toting Klondike adventuress in a parka, a flapper, a faceless woman in futuristic garb.

She is IQ 12 but has Will 17, FP 40, and high self-awareness. She has the ghostly abilities Communication, Materialization, Poltergeist, and limited Terror, and can open etheric windows (p. 22). The initial center of Kale's haunting is the upper bathroom (now a washroom) where she killed herself, but she can also manifest elsewhere in the house.

If anyone she is haunting is in Film House's cinema, she can use her Terror ability on everyone there (but only there) by manipulating the projectors to show scenes from the original silent cut of *The Last House*, a phantasmagoric unfinished movie filled with disturbing perspective shifts. Her character, the aviatrix-outfitted Eve, "the Last Woman," and her lover "The Engineer," flee through the halls of a decayed Victorian mansion "at the end of time," caught up in a war between hammer-wielding, animal-masked "devolutionaries" and the Engineer's rebel neo-golems, faceless ballet dancers with wind-up keys emerging from their backs . . . In a kaleidoscopic finale, the Engineer, the last man, sacrifices his life so Eve can escape from the mansion's rooftop in his balloon; drifting in the sky under a giant moon, we see her peeling off her own face, revealing she is really a neo-golem, too. The ghost movie runs at 3x times normal speed with no title cards.

Kale's grudge can be *mitigated* by displaying deference to her by maintaining various symbols of her life, showing her films at the cinema, studying her in courses, etc. However, she also tends to strike out against: (a) anyone bothering the other ghosts, her prey; (b) anyone who disturbs the memorabilia that honors her; (c) anyone named Kathy; and (d) anyone she catches alone at night, but especially pretty women . . .

## Lawrence Hilbert

The house's initial owner, the producer Lawrence Hilbert, who shot himself. The scandal around Kale's suicide scuttled the planned reshoots; *The Last House* was never finished. Hilbert was devastated. His muse was gone; he retired as producer.

In his last year of his life, his guilt turned Film House into a morbid shrine to Kale, filling it with memorabilia, photos, and even statues from the actress' brief career. He bought remaining copies and original prints of her films, and watched them obsessively. He suffered nightmares of Kale as a spectral figure, accusing him of betrayal. Sometimes, he told friends, he felt she was hovering over his bed . . .

A housekeeper dusting a portrait of Kale saw a line of blood along its throat. Hilbert went white and struck her for "telling lies" and had her fired. It was difficult to retain good help; Hilbert alternated between drink, obsession, and terror. His diminished circle of friends reported that he turned to spiritualism. It was not enough for his tortured, guilt-ridden psyche. Two years after Kale's suicide, a shadow of his former self, he took his own life. His butler, George, tried to stop him, and Hilbert fired his gun, shooting George in the leg. Then he shot himself.

His ghost has IQ 13, low self-awareness, and the Possession, Communication, and Materialization abilities.

## JASMINE'S FILMS

Kale had significant roles in six silent movies (mostly forgotten today):

*Catch the Last Caboose* (1924), a war movie, as nurse Frost.  
*Lioness of Brittany* (1925) as medieval privateer Jeanne de Clisson.\*

*Transoxiana* (1926) as Saray, princess of Moghulistan.\*  
*White Cat* (1926), a bedroom farce, as bicycle-riding ingénue Felicia Fey.

*The Daughter of the Snows* (1927), an adventure picture in the Yukon, as Frona Welse.

*The Last House* (1928, unreleased) as Eve, the Last Woman.\*

\* Believed lost. May be discovered in the archives . . .

It appears as a handsome middle-aged man with a large mustache and graying hair, in a smoking jacket and silk pants, with a tormented expression; he can be recognized from his portrait in Professor Hernandez's office (p. 24). He has a .38 revolver in a pocket. He will first point it at his head, and if ignored, blow his brains out and vanish.

Should anyone try to talk to him, he'll mistake them for his butler George, who tried to stop him, point his gun at that person, and speak, saying "Stay back, George! It was my mistake that killed Jaz! It's time for me to join her, and you can't stop me! I'll kill you first!" Hilbert then materializes for a moment, and fires a single, very solid shot. The producer has Guns (Pistol)-13, and he aims for a leg or arm. The gun can kill; the bullet vanishes after piercing its target (but injury is real). He then turns the gun on himself.

## Pete the Clown

An IQ 13 ghost with low self-awareness and the Terror and Materialization abilities. Pete Seymour, a clown hired for the Lodges' birthday party (see p. 17), fell down the stairs of the servant's quarters after being terrorized by Jasmine and running from the bathroom. His ghost tries to frighten anyone alone on the stairs by materializing and screaming!

## Fritz the Dog

Hilbert's dog, shot by his master before he killed himself, now an IQ 5 ghost with low self-awareness and the Communication ability, obsessively seeking his master to find out what he did wrong. The dog doesn't realize he's dead and cannot visibly materialize (if somehow seen, he's a dachshund). His invisible barking, or a faint sense of your hand being licked, can certainly spook or startle. He also may warn of other, nastier spooks, barking a bit before they show up. On rainy nights, he sometimes leaves visible paw prints.

## Ricardo Gutierrez, the Handyman

A young man in paint-spattered overalls, with a sideways-twisted neck, Gutierrez has IQ 10 with Materialization, Poltergeist, and low self-awareness. He tends to appear suddenly and startle people. He is confused and doesn't realize he's dead.

He wanders about the house invisibly at night, replacing good light bulbs with dead ones, painting (leaving smears of wet paint, perhaps actually ectoplasm), or messing with fuses and wiring.

## Owen Hall

When Hall materializes, he looks like a young man in a University jacket, holding a flashlight and appearing puzzled. Soon after he appears, a red stain suddenly spreads on his chest, and the ghost vanishes. An IQ 10 ghost with no self-awareness and the Materialization ability.

## Joe Kozlowski

The “Dirty Old Man” is an IQ 9 ghost with low self-awareness. Rarely visible, but if so, a blurry apparition of a fat, 60-ish man in a cheap suit with pants unzipped. He haunts the cinema and tends to appear in seats beside or behind people in the second-from-back row at night screenings (e.g., evening classes), preceded by sounds of heavy breathing, often whenever any pretty women are shown on screen. Sometimes, he simply manifest as the sound of heavy breathing (a Fright Check when someone turns to see no one there).

## ETHERIC WINDOWS

Etheric windows are places where past and future are linked, where beings from one era can glimpse another. Film House is pierced with several of these windows linking two eras, the psychic energy gnawing holes in the fabric of time itself . . .

Film House can open spectral visions of the past (or perhaps the future!) of particular rooms. If the adventure is set in 2018, the investigators may suddenly see the room blurring into an image of Film House as it was in the 1930s (or, maybe, if the adventure is set in that era, they may see the 2018 “future” of the university!). Apparitions seen through etheric windows are not actually ghosts, but rather “memories” of the house.

A window might spontaneously open only during quiet or dead periods when the building is largely unoccupied and a person is alone, daydreaming, half-asleep, dozing off, etc. Someone with the Channeling advantage will always glimpse an etheric window when they first enter a room; after that, it requires deliberate effort (e.g., entering a trance).

The window is usually visible for 1d seconds, sometimes only out of the corner of the eye. Its sudden appearance (if not expected) may trigger a Fright Check.

Any of the ghosts may spend 2 FP to open a window in a room where they are present. (Jasmine Kale’s ghost can open windows for 1 FP.) A window can normally be opened by a ghost only once per day.

## FILM HOUSE

This is a two-story stone and brick townhouse built in the Georgian style (designed by architect Adrian Fogg), its sides partly covered with ivy. It sits on a quiet street just off campus. There’s a small parking lot next to it (usually with several

faculty cars) and a sign “Film House: Faculty of Arts” and a date stone (1917).

The walls are 6” stone. The interior walls are 3” wood. Doors are 1” wood except for the 2”-thick front doors and 1/4” mild steel rear door. Contemporary rooms all have smoke detectors and electric lighting. Fire extinguishers are in every room. Doors have standard good-quality locks (DR 6, HP 3) but only outer doors and faculty offices after hours are routinely locked. The rear fire escape can be opened from inside even if locked.

The original house had an attached two-car garage, since torn down and the area turned into the parking lot.

For more information on the haunts, see *The Ghosts of Film House*, pp. 19-22. For a map of the house, see p. 26.

## 1. Front Door and Reception Foyer

A flight of stairs (along with a newly added wheelchair ramp) runs up to double doors. These open into a reception hall with a teak-wood-paneled interior, sweeping staircase, and ornamental columns.

*Etheric Window:* During *rainy nights* at 8:32 p.m., an apparition of a distraught young woman (Jasmine Kale) in a rain-soaked 1920s-flapper dress (hat, etc.) may briefly enter for a moment, be met by a uniformed butler, and be ushered in.

## 2. Department Office

Off to one side of the foyer is a glass-fronted enclosure housing the department offices. This is the domain of Ms. Cavendish (p. 19), the department secretary and a likely first point of contact. Her office is furnished with two desks with computers, a printer, a photocopier, and five file cabinets containing departmental paperwork (and her booze stash). A table holds a wilted potted plant; plants must be replaced regularly as they seem to die off every few months. An old mechanical clock on the wall ticks loudly. The office also has a set of 10 mailboxes for professors and teaching assistants, for departmental paperwork; students may also use them to drop off completed assignments for those professors that are still old-fashioned enough to dislike electronic submissions.

At busy times (see *Academic Schedule*, p. 20), Ms. Cavendish is on the telephone or her computer, or assisting someone with an administrative issue. There may be up to three students and/or professors here using the copying machine, picking up mail, or asking Ms. Cavendish for help. At quiet times, there’s a 50% chance Ms. Cavendish is working alone; otherwise, she is elsewhere in the building or on break.

*Etheric Window:* The area is now an elegant dining room, with an impressive crystal chandelier and an 18-place table adorned with candles. Signed pictures of Hollywood stars adorn the walls, presided over by a huge black-and-white photograph of young film star Jasmine Kale, shivering delicately in a fur parka, on location during her Alaskan movie *The Daughter of the Snows*.

### 3. Lecture Hall/Cinema

This large, curved room is a small movie cinema, with tiered seating and a curtained movie screen covering most of one wall. The department still uses it as a screening room for movies and as a lecture hall for big first-year intro courses. Offset on one side is a small stage, presently holding an A/V cart with sound system (it once held a grand piano to accompany silent films). There are 40 seats in five rows. A narrow, winding staircase in the back offers access to the balcony. See also *10. Projection Booth*, below.

*Etheric Window (after 1974)*: The cinema is now run-down and ratty, filled with men with long hair and sideburns, in raincoats and overcoats, a pornographic feature playing.

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Joe Kozlowski.

### 4. Department Chair's Office

This is Professor Thorndike's lair. The room has a desk piled high with papers and a laptop. Numerous framed diplomas are on the walls. Messy stacks of books are piled on the floor and bookshelves. It reeks of pot smoke. A fireplace in one corner has a gilt-edged vintage picture above it: a print of a light-haired beauty with bobbed hair, in a 1920s flapper outfit, riding a bicycle, waving happily (this is Jasmine Kale again, from *White Cat*). Thorndike knows the print was found in the archives.

*Etheric Window*: This was originally the smoking room, richly furnished with thick Persian rugs, side tables holding ash trays, cushy armchairs, neatly filled bookcases, and a fireplace. A small dog bowl and blanket lie in one corner.

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Fritz the Dog.

### 5. Teaching Assistants' and Professor Coleman's Offices

The two cramped but cozy offices are filled with books, computer desks, and stacks of paper, toys, and movie posters. One is home to the two graduate students, Kat and Yolanda, who work as teaching assistants; the other, to Assistant Professor Coleman. Each is present a third of the time during busy periods (if absent, they are tutoring or lecturing) and half the time during quiet periods. Coleman's office desk often contains objects he or his students have salvaged from the archives: rusty old silent film cans, movie props, etc., which he enjoys speculating on with visitors.

*Etheric Window*: The butler's parlor and attached larder contained a workspace lined with shelves, holding various kitchen and household supplies, and the butler's cramped one-room apartment with bed and wardrobe.

### 6. Snack Area

The former kitchen has had its appliances removed and replaced with a row of vending machines offering potato chips, snacks, and soft drinks. One of the machines is usually "out of order." Students can rest on wooden benches. A wilted plant hides in one corner beneath a window. A long bulletin board runs along one wall, covered with notices and fliers promoting assorted campus activities and local

attractions, plus ads from students for subletting, tutoring, textbooks, etc.

*Etheric Window*: A spacious kitchen, equipped with work tables, sinks, and all modern conveniences of the 1930s.

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Fritz the Dog, Ricardo Gutierrez.

### 7. Stairs and Closet

A narrow stairwell runs up to the second floor and down to the basement. In the present time, a wheelchair lift has been installed next to it. Under the stairs is a tiny room. It is a supply closet, which holds a vacuum cleaner, cleaning supplies, and paint. The closet was originally used by the chambermaid to freshen up. It contained a small dressing table, clothing racks for the maid's uniform, and a tiny cot.

### 8. Fire Door

Next to the stairwell is Film House's rear entrance (used as a fire escape). Originally, it was the servants' and tradesmen's entrance.

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Fritz the Dog, Ricardo Gutierrez.

### 9. Upper Gallery Landing

The stairs and wheelchair lift from the first-floor main hall terminate in an upper foyer, which is still richly decorated with wood and brass. A life-size bronze statue of a young woman dressed as a Eurasian steppe princess (Jasmine Kale as Saray) still stands here.

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Jasmine Kale, Pete the Clown (where he died).

### 10. Projection Booth

This long, narrow area is the upper balcony of the theater, with three different movie projectors, used to show a variety of film formats. A few wooden folding chairs are set up between the projectors.

*Etheric Window*: The cinema is showing a black-and-white silent movie (often one of Jasmine Kale's), visible to anyone in either the main area or the upper section. A ghostly pianist accompanies on the grand piano, while an audience in elegant 1920s-evening dress rises to applaud. The cinema differs in that the seats are fine leather, and the room has pseudo-Egyptian decorations and lush velvet curtains.

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Jasmine Kale.

### 11-12. Seminar Rooms A and B

The two guest bedrooms have been converted to seminar rooms. Each room has a central table surrounded by 18-20 chairs, a lecture desk, and whiteboards lining the walls. A portable audio-visual cart with a projector and sound system, and a pull-down projection screen, complete the furnishings.

In busy periods, the seminar rooms are occupied by 3d+8 students and either a professor or teaching assistant. In quiet periods, one of the seminar rooms is occupied by a small group discussion (during the day) or a class (in the evening). They are otherwise empty.

### 13. Seminar Room C

This room today is furnished just like the other seminar rooms (11-12. *Seminar Rooms A and B*, p. 23), but it was originally the master bedroom. Its etheric resonance is stronger because Hilbert killed himself here.

*Etheric Window*: A lushly appointed bedroom with a four-poster bed, plush armchairs, small glass-topped tables, elegant reading lamps, shelves of classical and avant-garde literature and philosophy, a well-stocked liquor cabinet, and a walk-in closet. Sometimes it appears decorated with movie posters and movie props from Hilbert's or Kale's films.

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Lawrence Hilbert (usually only late at night), Owen Hall. Sometimes they interact, as Lawrence shot Owen.

- Flooding of the toilet with bloody water in the fifth stall (possibly causing someone to slip).

- A cold spot and the mirrors and window steaming up.

- Sounds of running water (or the taps in the sink running with blood).

*Etheric Window #1*: An elegant bathroom facility with a sink, mirror, claw-footed bathtub, cabinets, table, and water closet.

*Etheric Window #2*: Looking out the window, instead of what one might expect, the viewer witnesses a rainy-night street scene; a horse drawn coal-carriage goes by. Then an old motor car (1927 Stutz limousine) pulls up and a man (perhaps recognizable) and younger woman (not Kale, but 1930s film star Kathy May Cooper, the "other woman"), both elegantly dressed in 1920s styles, get out. The scene fades to the present day and time.

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Jasmine Kale, Pete the Clown.

## FILM STUDIES COURSE LIST

These are a few of the offerings. Aside from the first three, what is actually taught is based on the whims of the professors.

FS 101: Introduction to Film Studies

FS 221: American Film to 1945

FS 222: American Film 1945-1960

FS 227: Cinematography and Music in the Silent Film Era

FS 231: Gender, Identity, and Film

FS 232: Narrative Structures in Film and Digital Writing

FS 233: Semiotics of Genre Cinema

FS 234: Race and Gender Constructs in American Screenwriting

FS 236: Marxist Narratives in Early Horror Films

FS 242: Asian Horror Cinema

FS 288: Fundamentals of Film and Video Editing

FS 301: Experimental Stalinist Cinema

FS 306: Queering Cthulhu: Altered Geometries in the Lovecraftian Short Film

FS 318: White Zombie: Afro-Caribbean Cultural Appropriation on Screen

FS 378: Innovation and Sexuality in Pre-Code Hollywood (1927-1929)

FS 402: Film Writing and Production Lab

FS 406: Insurgent Videos: Deconstructing Militant Narratives

FS 412: Film Conservation and Archivist Lab

FS 500: Individual Study Project

FS 502: Advanced Topics in Film Criticism

### 14. Main Washroom

The elegant bathroom was gutted by renovations and is now a unisex washroom facility, with a row of sinks, a long mirror, and six toilet stalls with full doors.

A small window looks out onto the car park. The blinds covering it are usually shut.

Manifestations that often occur here:

- The phrase "You Stole My Voice" appearing on the mirror, written in blood.

### 15. Professor Hernandez's Office

The corridor outside the office has a bulletin board covered with announcements and posters for various university events, social justice marches, etc. The office is neat and tidy. Professor Hernandez is present a third of the time during busy periods (if absent, she is lecturing) and half the time during quiet periods, sometimes with a grad student seeking assistance with papers or mentoring. A portrait of the house's founder, Lawrence Hilbert, hangs over some filing cabinets.

*Etheric Window*: This was Hilbert's office and library. The room features a large oak desk, wood paneling, an old-fashioned telephone, four filing cabinets, a couple of chairs, and a large grandfather clock. Pictures and busts of Jasmine adorn the walls and cabinets.

### 16. Basement Stairwell

### 17. Storage Room (Root Cellar)

This room is filled with items and furniture left over from the restoration effort. A Scrounging roll might turn up just about anything movie related . . .

*Etheric Window*: This was the root cellar. The shelves are stocked with vegetables, preserves, canned goods, laundry and household supplies (starch, candles, cooking oil, etc.). There is also a bowl and some cans of dog food. Visitors may see a dachshund curled up here (Fritz, banished here by Hilbert while he was alive after barking incessantly due to Kale's spirit . . .)

*Sometimes Haunted By*: Fritz the Dog.

### 18. Utilities Room

This room is usually locked. It holds the electrical fuse boxes, an oil furnace, and a hot-water boiler. Up until the 1940s, it contained a coal furnace, with a bunker where the oil storage tank is now.



Cardboard boxes in a filing cabinet in the corner contain spare light bulbs. The investigators may have to go down here in the dark and make Electrician rolls to restore the power if it cuts out.

*Sometimes Haunted By:* Ricardo Gutierrez.

## 19. Film Archives

A large, cool (well-insulated) basement room filled with shelves and boxes of old film cans in various formats (8mm, 16mm, etc.), and VHS or Betamax tapes of obscure films, TV programs, and so on.

These were moved here from the Film Studies department's previous rooms in another campus building. Many are obsolete (replaced by DVD/Blu-Ray), but others are rare classics. Professor Coleman is trying to organize it as part of his film restoration classes, which means that in the evenings, a few students may be in the lonely basement sorting through it for extra credit . . .

Buried in the archives are boxes that belonged to prior owners of the house. Contents include obscure 1970s porn movies (many now considered "art"), and black-and-white films left behind by the original owner, Lawrence Hilbert. Other finds are audio/visual and lighting equipment, some of it antique, such as a 1950s-era film projector and sound system (used in the 1960s and 70s "porn cinema" era), and an old hand-cranked projector from the silent-film era. Use Scrounging skill to find what you seek.

This has always been a film archive. It held Lawrence Hilbert's collection of rough cuts from his Jasmine Kale films, short children's presentations from when the Lodges owned it, and various porn and experimental movies from the 1970s. Some of these are still present! One rusty film can holds a trial dubbing track Jasmine Kale recorded for the never-completed talkie version of *The Last House* (see p. 21); Jasmine's German accent and lisp occasionally pop up, so it was rejected by the studio, but her voice acting is good as she conveys Eve's confused terror. One way to placate her troubled spirit may be to dig through the junk, find her lost movies, and use the film restoration lab's equipment to finish the movie, and play that in the cinema on the old hand-cranked projector to an appreciative audience. Of course, if the audience doesn't applaud . . .

*Sometimes Haunted By:* Lawrence Hilbert.

## 20. Film Restoration Lab

This cluttered basement room is full of tables, workbenches, and banks of monitors and audio/visual equipment used by film-preservation and archiving students. During busy times, Professor Coleman or his teaching assistant and four to nine students are working here. At quiet times, one or two students are working late on individual archival projects. The lab work involves inspecting, cleaning, repairing, and reformatting various video and motion-picture film formats.

Old stock is manually and painstakingly cleaned of dirt and dust, tears are spliced with tape or special glue, individual frames are carefully scanned to create high-quality digital files, and then the movie is digitally restored frame by frame. Some films that require further photochemical treatments are instead cleaned and then sent off to the Chemistry department. The back of the room is filled with shelves of film cans and DVDs.

Professor Coleman believes his is the most important work, and is fond of statistics like "90% of all American silent films from before 1929 were lost . . ."

*Etheric Window:* No editing machines or tables are here. Instead, the wine cellar that used to occupy this room appears: horizontal racks holding 1,000 wine bottles, mainly California, French, and Italian vintages, along with glassware.

*Sometimes Haunted by:* Fritz the Dog, Jasmine Kale.

## 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 RPG, and writing countless *GURPS* books, including the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*, *GURPS Ultra-Tech*, and the *GURPS Spaceships* series.

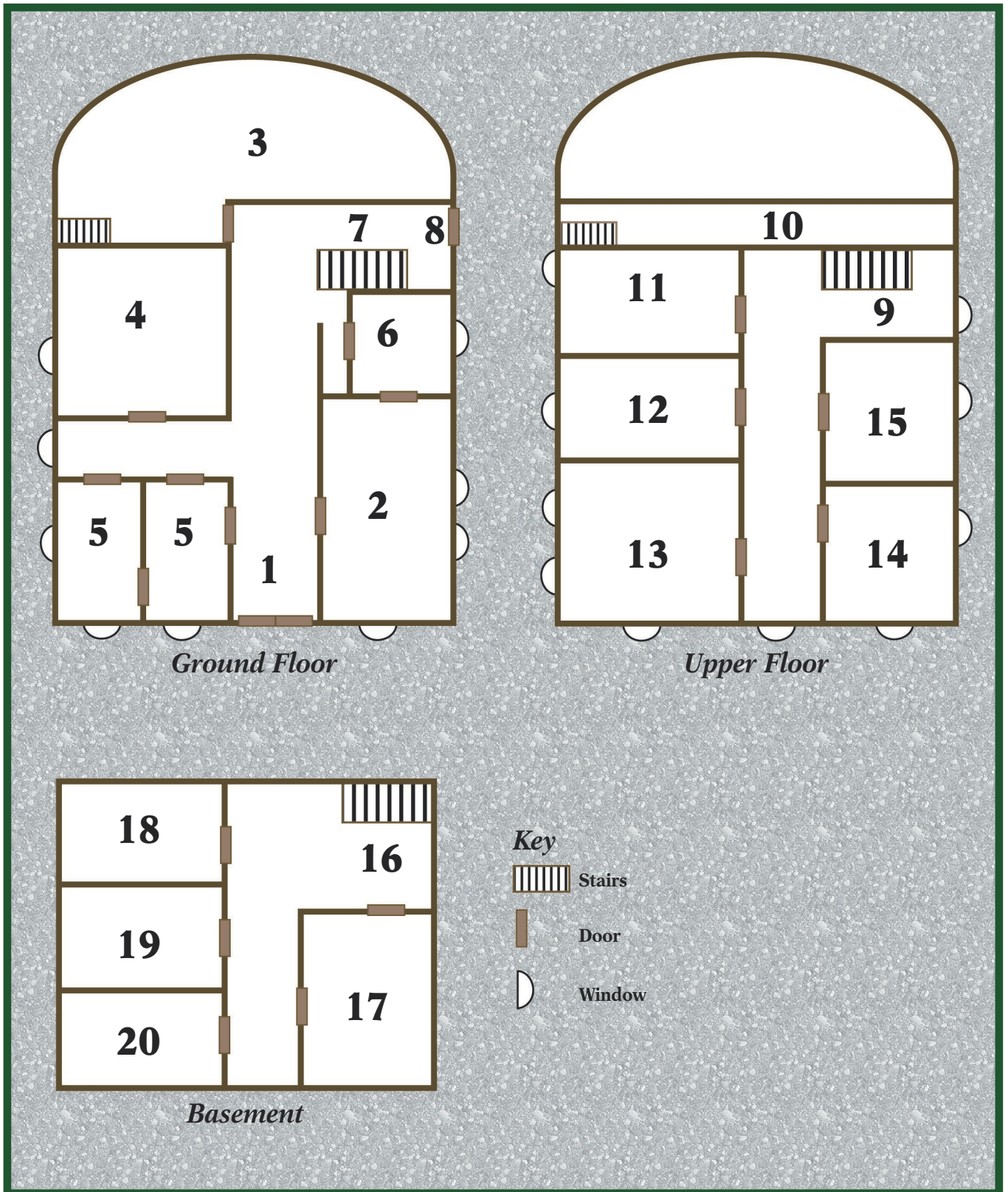


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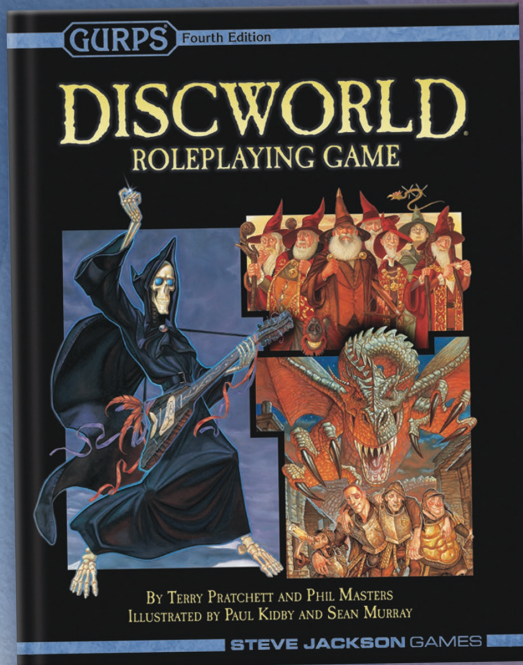
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## MAP OF FILM HOUSE

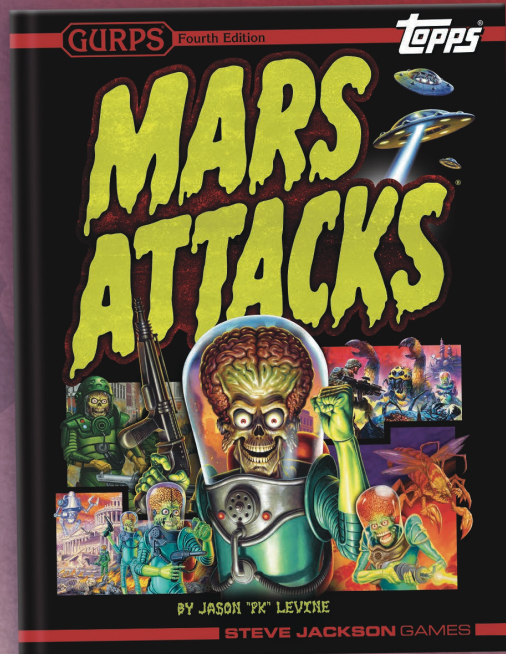
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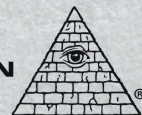
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# CROATOAN POINT

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE  
AND J. EDWARD TREMLETT

The last vestige of (mostly) human civilization before the long haul between Halcyon-4 and Zandran Minor, Croatoan Point is the final repair stop for many a star freighter.

Built above a long-abandoned mine, on an asteroid close to the galaxy's edge, the sprawling spaceport is rightly famous for its anything-goes atmosphere. Having a last, pre-voyage drink at Flannan's is a ritual for many, and wearing a T-shirt autographed by the owner is a distinct bragging point. The station is also filled with all manner of crooks, renegades, and opportunists, making it an excellent place to acquire items and services of varying degrees of illegality.

As spacers say, "If it happened on Croatoan Point, we don't talk about it."

But there is another secret, hidden far below the deckplates – down in the old, mostly depressurized caverns of the abandoned mine. The real reason it was sealed up is not content to wait, down in the dark, but has already sent emissaries up into the light. Now that they're here, they seek to infiltrate, observe, and eventually conquer our galaxy from within.

An unwitting accomplice to intergalactic invasion, Croatoan Point offers a fun but creepy location for futuristic campaigns. This article provides the history of the place, including what's known about the mine it was built upon, and the frightening truth. It gives a thumbnail of the location, NPCs of note, and the services they could offer. The hideous, trans-dimensional arakorax are also detailed, as well as ideas for using the asteroid in a game.

## DIGGING IN THE DIRT

The future home of the Cyclops-45 Mining Outpost was discovered by remote probes over 200 years ago. An asteroid floating in interstellar space, just outside the Halcyon-4 system, it was a lifeless, rocky cigar not even a third of a mile in diameter. The probe wouldn't have even noticed it, except that it registered high in valuable minerals.

As Halcyon-4 was near the southeastern corner of the galaxy's Outer Arm, it would be just under 100 years before the Anijikuni Conglomerate could lay claim and send pre-fabricated, self-assembling Cyclops mining units. They touched down 10 years later and began initial shaft-boring and reinforcement. Five years after that, the first group of miners made landfall and began the slow and careful process of low-g vacuum mining.

The various ores were scattered throughout the asteroid, so extracting them took much more than simply going from vein to vein. In spite of that, Cyclops-45 soon proved to be one of Anijikuni's more cost-effective ventures. That sadly changed

just over 30 years ago, when a mining disaster claimed the lives of all 300 miners and supervisors.

Anijikuni was quick to quash details of what actually happened, but the end result of the accident was that a once-profitable asteroid was now just another rock in space. The mines were sealed, the habitats were shut down, and Cyclops-45 was decommissioned.

## *And the House Is Crumbling*

For 10 years, the asteroid was off limits, guarded by Anijikuni's drones until the conglomerate's other ventures caused its stocks to tumble. In the ensuing buyout frenzy, their holdings and divisions were haphazardly separated; Cyclops-45 wound up in the hands of Cal-Corp, which held the near-monopoly on refueling depots in that sector. The mining modules were converted into fuel storage, and numerous extra docking areas were constructed to accommodate expected traffic to Zandran Minor – a system proving to be well worth the year-long trip time.

Renamed by the first franchise owner's brother-in-law (who'd won a rather odd bar bet), Croatoan Point came online – serving fuel, refreshments, and rest facilities to flights bound for Zandran. In time, return traffic started trickling back, and things became quite profitable. However, those who struck out also began to congregate there, as they'd spent all they had and had nowhere left to go.

The next franchise owner decided to deal with Croatoan Point's poor and homeless by bringing in private security. To this day, Bulwark's armored guards (known as "Bulls") stomp the halls, moving panhandlers and drunks along and occasionally stopping real crime. The new owner also converted portions of the habitat areas into various businesses, and secured permission to make the station a deregulated trade zone – creating the station's current anything-goes, wild-frontier atmosphere.

One of the more successful businesspeople was Horatio D. Flannan – would-be galactic impresario. He bought the decrepit bar at the station's center and turned it into Flannan's 36-Hour Stopover, "home of the Gonk." No one really wanted to know what went into his signature drink, but its purchase (following a signed release form) entitled anyone who actually finished to a signed T-shirt, their picture on the wall, and a free trip to the station's auto-doc if needed.

The scheme worked. Within five years, Flannan bought the whole asteroid. He retained Bulwark's services, but asked them to go easy on customers. He also made an effort to run out some of the more predatory operations, though he soon saw the wisdom of picking his battles.

## But the Stairways Stand

It's currently estimated that Flannan's 36-Hour Stopover Hyper-Karaoke BBQ Burger Bar lures as many sentient beings to Croatoan Point as Zandran Minor itself. The docks are constantly hopping with inbound and outbound traffic. Additionally, the businesses – legal, quasi-legal, and otherwise – and other odd attractions bring in all kinds of docking fees.

At any given time, the asteroid's habitable areas are a study in controlled chaos. A steady stream of pedestrian traffic is met by buskers and beggars, eager to greet newcomers with an opportunity or sad story. Signs along every hallway advertise available services, along with people paid to add a more personable sales pitch.

Aboard Croatoan Point, almost *anything* is allowed. Having a Gonk at Flannan's is just the tip of the iceberg: mind-shifting substances from across the galaxy are for sale, along with objects, mechanisms, and procedures that are quasi-legal at best. Customers must take care, though – all sales are final, and while little is prohibited, nothing is guaranteed.

Many visiting ships are freighters, either making or ending the Zandran Minor run. Military patrol vessels put in an occasional appearance, and are a particular boon as they bring a *lot* of people through. That said, most traffic comes from colonists – large groups and small – who are either heading out to seek their fortune, or coming back in defeat.

Such returning colonists are quite a problem. It's *also* estimated that, along with the 3,000 or so people currently working on the asteroid, an additional 1,000 to 2,000 are stranded there. Some live aboard ship in the so-called Trawler Park, while others bed down in the outermost habitat areas – risking being robbed in their sleep unless they can pay a Sleep House for the privilege of bedding down (somewhat) safely.

These transients lead a sad and stifled existence, generally panhandling for money they'll have to spend that very day. Some are fortunate enough to find actual work, which might be enough to fix their ship or get a ticket home. Others turn to various forms of crime, risking a run-in with the Bulls, or more established criminals who don't like "amateurs."

Dealing with excess people is putting a strain on station personnel, causing some to be a little "off." They still do their work, and haven't broken any rules, but they seem less talkative and more furtive – replete with odd mannerisms, nonsensical words, and a weird hunger for meat. So far, the counselors have chalked it up to Hoek's Syndrome, but some feel there's something else at work.

There is *another*, more troubling situation: a spate of disappearances, slowly increasing over time. It's almost always among the transients, and there are never any witnesses, so Bulwark's chalked it up to criminals chucking them out an airlock. That said, the captain of the security force is starting to wonder if there's more to this, but lacks the personnel and expertise to deal with it.

## THE LAYOUT

The Cyclops-45 mine's above-ground presence consisted of five three-floor rings, arranged in the standard "plus" pattern. The central ring was command and administration, and the top and bottom were habitats. The ones to the sides were

work areas, with mining happening on the left and refining on the right. The main landing pad was beside the refining ring – allowing for easy loading of minerals – with smaller landing areas beside each habitat area for personnel transport.

Below the surface, the mine branched out. A central shaft went down 200 yards, with several shafts radiating away from the habitat ring to avoid collapse. By the time Cyclops-45 was abandoned, the first 50 yards of shafts had been made habitable and were used as additional work and control areas. When it was decommissioned, the central shaft was sealed below the habitable areas with 100 yards of slagged ore – impassable without extensive laser drilling.

After Cal-Corp took control, the surface mining and refining areas were converted into fuel storage and dispensing. Many more landing pads were installed around the "plus" to accommodate both fueling and simple landing, along with better docking ramps. Over time, several control areas in the central ring's first two floors were emptied for commercial development, and the first floor of each habitat ring was turned into lodging areas.

At the beginning of Flannan's reign, the center area of the central ring's second floor was taken over by his bar. A semi-permanent docking area (the Trawler Park) has sprouted up outside of the left side landing pads, connected by a long docking ramp known as the Gutter. The habitable areas of the mines have also been opened up for less-expensive business and lodging space, and many of the stranded reside there.

## THE POWERS THAT BE

Flannan is unquestionably in charge, but he stays in charge by acting as go-between for the people that really run Croatoan Point. On one hand, there's law and order (or at least order) provided by the station's 200 Bulwark Security officers. They take their cues from Captain K. Karman Tujena, a truly dispassionate man known to arrest the victims of a crime for making a scene, rather than chase down the actual perpetrators. So long as things stay neat and tidy, the "Bulls" don't really care what happens.

On the other hand, there's crime, overseen by a creepy-but-charismatic fellow known as Lord Skin. He came to Croatoan Point at the time of the first franchise, slowly building an empire. Now he's just a fact of life, with his fingers in every business – including Cal-Corp, which is why neither Flannan nor Tujena can dislodge him. He loves inviting the two men to dinner in his stately abode, where he holds court on philosophy, economics, and ancient tanning practices of old Earth.

## Amenities

Travelers have many hospitality options, depending on their budget. At one end of the scale is Marjoe's, offering luxury suites and a zero-g pool. At the other are various bed-and-breakfasts and boardinghouses, some more safe than others. Those with only a little money go to the Sleep Houses, where transients are packed in like sardines and watched by "guards."

Food also runs from high to low. Marjoe's signature restaurant, Akton's, is quite adequate (but expressly forbidden from outshining Flannan's), and a few of the major food chains have outposts there. Corridor carts offer "street food," and vending machines dispense anything from auto-prepared food to nutrient tubes.

Emergency services are decent, depending on your credit. The base's auto-doc can handle anything not requiring extremely complicated surgery. Those who can only pay in cash can avail themselves of the clinics, though some are fronts for rogue doctors and gene-boosters.

## WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

In the wake of the Cyclops-45 disaster, Anijikuni refused to state exactly what transpired. The casualties' families attempted to bring a lawsuit – one that lasted past the conglomerate's collapse – but Cal-Corp offered a substantial settlement to drop the matter. Some, however, have continued to press the issue, believing this more than just an "unfortunate incident."

They're quite right: The use of untested technology brought the legendary and hideous arakorax (below) back into this dimension. They have secured a spidery new foothold under Cyclops-45 and are spreading back out into the galaxy, one victim at a time.

### Whatever Fear Invents

Radical physicist Dr. Llewellyn I. Till insisted that his prototype transphasic drill was ready for immediate use. His theories "proved" the possibility of selectively editing the individual molecular cohesion of solid objects – turning a rock stratum semi-solid, so someone could simply reach in to grab more-desirable minerals. Such a feat wouldn't work for most mining operations, due to gravity and overall mine stability, but seemed tailor-made for zero-g work.

In spite of Anijikuni's mining division's scientists' opinion that this was a serious mistake, Dr. Till got permission to try it on Cyclops-45. He and his assistants brought in his equipment, built the drill *in situ*, and assembled all miners for the device's first official use.

None of them survived. From what little Anijikuni could determine, the drill reacted badly with something within the asteroid's makeup. They never figured out what – all they knew was that, after 10 seconds of weird noises, culminating in three seconds of screaming, the device failed and everyone disappeared. Remote-operated doc-bots found no trace of human life – just empty suits, floating in zero gravity along with their tools.

The conglomerate locked the situation down with something approaching righteous fury. The survivors (who'd been in the station) were interrogated, mindwiped, and put to new work in remote areas of Anijikuni's corporate structure. The drill was sent to R&D for "tests" that may or may not have been carried out. The mine was sealed, and the asteroid placed under drone guard until the company's collapse and breakup.

Meanwhile, down in the sealed tunnels, the monsters came out to play.

## Darkness Creeps In

Saying the arakorax – the dark reavers of galactic legend – had been gone for a long time is something of an understatement. It had been millions of years since they blighted the stars with their presence, going from world to world to devour other species and ingest their advantages. However, the last time they came upon a world, they literally bit off more than they could chew.

The people of Jerobyn were, as far as the arakorax were concerned, an unremarkable lot – fit only for a meal between major conquests. But as the dark reavers closed in on Jerobyn, those brave and cunning people chose to take their killers with them. As one, they consumed a substance designed to play havoc with the special senses their destroyers used to leap

across the stars. In doing so, they bound the whole of the arakorax to their world, and condemned them of an eternity of being trapped – just outside the universe they sought to devour.

As the ages rolled past, Jerobyn's system was destroyed by a stellar explosion. A large chunk of the planet eventually settled between Halcyon-4 and Zandran Minor – there to

*And there is nothing  
I can do when I realize  
with fright  
that the Spiderman  
is having me for dinner  
tonight.*

– *The Cure, "Lullaby"*

sit until human probes found it of interest. Then came the robots, the habitats, and finally living beings, eager to harvest the riches of a long-destroyed planet.

The transphasic drill was the key to the arakorax's prison – changing the density of the world just enough to let a single colony free. They feasted upon the humans they found, learning of where and when they were, and how they came to be free. But their queen wisely ruled for them to be cautious. So they waited to see what their discoverers would do.

Fortunately for the universe, Anijikuni chose to cut its losses and send no more victims to feed the aliens' hunger for knowledge. So the colony entered a state of hibernation, to wait for more humans to arrive. Once new visitors showed up, the arakorax slipped up above the seal – kidnapping humans for food and information, and to make slaves of a few.

Down in the shadows, the arakorax bide their time. A sizable number of their slaves and facestealers now walk above – lurking in key positions in the station and making their way to nearby worlds. Only when they are certain this new era can pose no serious threat will they at last reveal themselves, and stride among the stars as giants once more.

## THE ARAKORAX

The arakorax are not the first alien life the human race has encountered – but they *are* the first interdimensional alien race they've encountered. They are also quite possibly the most proud, ravenous, exploitative, and cruel.

The arakorax homeworld orbited a binary star, which would get too close and wipe out most life on the planet's surface once a decade. The distant ancestors of the arakorax (a small multi-limbed creature resembling Terran arthropods) survived by going underground for the duration of this event.

Eventually, one of the stars grew unstable – collapsing in on itself to become a black hole, and slowly devouring its twin. The scouring and renewal of the arakorax planet continued, until finally the cycle of destruction bathed the system with black-hole radiation.

The proto-arakorax survived underground, evolving into tough, dangerous predators with the unique ability to phase shift their cells out of three-dimensional space. In addition to making themselves the unquestioned masters of their strange homeworld, it also gave them the ability to manipulate both space and time by *removing* themselves from it.

They learned that the more of their number cooperated, the farther they could travel. Shifting out of phase with reality, the arakorax clung to one another like ants creating a “raft” during a flood, and fled their homeworld for greener (or at least not charred and blackened) pastures.

During this Great Migration, the arakorax began sending out scouts to look for a suitable homeworld. After encountering various other forms of life, they realized they possessed qualities far superior to other beings. Their physical capabilities, vaster intelligence, and ability to phase shift gave them an edge unlike any other.

So emboldened, the arakorax sent out huge numbers of scouts who would then report back to the main “fleet” (really, just a large number of arakorax banded together in zero gravity). Once they found a prime target, the predatory aliens would divest the area of its natural resources, and either enslave or destroy any sapient (IQ 6+) being.

They did this for *millions* of years, until they utterly vanished, leaving behind no traces of their existence thanks to their bio-organic technology. Most think the so-called Dark Reavers nothing more than fairy tales, but those spacefaring races who were enslaved (or survived a direct assault on their homeworlds only by fleeing) speak of the arakorax in hushed whispers or dismissive rhetoric.

*Croatoan Point is an unwitting accomplice to intergalactic invasion.*

## *Arakorax Society and Culture*

Arakorax society is similar to that of social insects (e.g., bees or ants), but far more intelligent. They have female queens, male general-consorts, male soldiers, and female drones (plus male or genderless engineers and facestealers). Queens and general-consorts mate, but other specifics of reproduction are unclear.

Because their native environment was harsh enough to wipe out multiple arakorax colonies, survivors developed a mechanism wherein they could shed their current biology for another by eating special organs within the body of the arakorax they wished to become. This induced hormonal changes, causing their physiology to shift. This means that a drone could become a general-consort or a queen if she could capture and consume one. (Later, the arakorax engineers figured out how to extend this ability to “become what you consume” to other species when they created facestealers, who can take on the appearance of other races; see p. 32).

Each colony includes a senior queen, several junior queens, multiple general-consorts, and *thousands* of drones and soldiers. Their stratified power structure and the semi-telepathic abilities of the queens and general-consorts allow the arakorax leaders to send commands and control subordinates with a thought. This in turn leads to a race that works together in a terrifyingly inhuman manner. In most things, a colony is of one mind.

This doesn’t mean arakorax culture doesn’t exist. In fact, they have a highly developed society rich with tradition, cultural heroes, and so on. The problem is that their mindset tends to warp such things. To put it mildly, their culture is the only culture worth preserving. All other beings are worthy only of serving, being incorporated into themselves (if the victims possess useful or unique biological traits), or being cattle.

Being surrounded by the vast blackness of space humbles most creatures – reminding them how truly big the universe is. For the arakorax, it merely serves as a reminder of how much they have yet to conquer.

## *Arakorax Biology*

Arakorax body structure is similar to that of terrestrial spiders, with segmented bodies, jointed limbs, and chitin exoskeletons. Unlike spiders, they also possess an endoskeleton.

They possess six legs and four arms. The lower pair of arms is often used as simply another pair of legs, but can be used as a second set of manipulators (reducing their Move normally for a being with a semi-upright posture; see p. B153).

Their head blends features of arachnid heads and humanoid skulls, with the skull (and brain) recessing into their cephalothorax. The arakorax brain is prodigiously large – with 12 distinct regions (similar in structure to human cerebral hemispheres), multiple connectors, and a dense neurological structure. Unlike humans, they possess at least two dozen senses other than the typical five, allowing them to accurately sense time and space, receive communications from their queens, and so on.

## *Arakorax Personality*

The arakorax mindset is one of conquest and domination. This is also directed at their fellow arakorax, as even a lowly drone can become a queen if she is lucky or strong enough to catch and eat one of her superiors. Most of the time, members of an arakorax colony are content with their place.

Arakorax may be exceptionally intelligent . . . but they don’t understand (nor have) human emotions. This sometimes causes them to underestimate other races or beings simply because they are not arakorax.

Arakorax drones tend to go about the work of the nest and ship, help with moving the ship through space, and ignore most other things unless the nest itself is in trouble. Soldiers participate in blood sport when not attacking other nests or species. While general-consorts tend to do the same thing, they consider themselves above mere grunts. Arakorax engineers are fascinated by other species (especially their “dead” technology) and are constantly trying to outdo one another intellectually. The arakorax queens vie with each other for position, with junior queens in a hive only becoming the senior queen by killing the previous one and all of her junior sisters.

## ARAKORAX RACIAL TEMPLATE (357 POINTS)

This template represents a typical arakorax general-consort; add one of the listed lenses to get other varieties. Of particular note is the facestealer – an arakorax that can go deep cover among other races and is fairly new to the race. Facestealers have the ability to literally steal the minds and bodies of their subjects, but must consume a significant portion of them first. Facestealers were engineered long after the period when the arakorax were imprisoned (p. 30) and for some reason (a quirk of their biology) have been able to slip into the real world with ease. There are no fewer than 100 facestealers active on Croatoan Point as they go about the business of their queens – the most notable one being the “late” Natalie Marden, former assistant to Dr. Till.

The Granted by modifier is from **GURPS Power-Ups 8: Limitations**, p. 14 and the Requires Concentrate modifier is from **Power-Ups 8**, p. 17.

**Attribute Modifiers:** ST+4 [40]; DX+1 [20]; IQ+1 [20]; HT+1 [10].

**Advantages:** 360° Vision [25]; 3D Spatial Sense (Cosmic, Extends to 4-Dimensional Space, +50%) [15]; Binding 10 (Only damaged by corrosion or cutting attacks, +20%; Sticky, +20%) [28]; Chronolocation [5]; Claws (Sharp) [5]; Clinging [20]; Control Space 1 (Granted by\* 5 or more other arakorax, -20%; Must touch at least one arakorax in granting group, -45%; Requires Concentrate, -15%)\* [6]; Control Time 1 (Granted by 5 or more other arakorax, -20%; Must touch at least one arakorax in granting group, -45%; Requires Concentrate, -15%)\* [6]; Damage Resistance 4 [20]; Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Storage, ×100, -30%) [14]; Extra Arms 2 (Foot Manipulators, -30%) [14]; Extra Legs (Eight Legs) [15]; Hyperspectral Vision (Extended, High-Band, +30%; Extended, Low-Band, +30%) [40]; Injury Tolerance (No Neck) [5]; Pressure Support 1 [5]; Radiation Tolerance 5 [10]; Sealed [15]; Silence 2 [10]; Super Jump 1 [10]; Teeth (Fangs) [2]; Temperature Tolerance 43 [43]; Vacuum Support [5]; Warp 1 (Granted by 5 or more other arakorax, -20%; Must touch at least one arakorax in granting group, -45%; Requires Concentrate, -15%)\* [20].

**Perks:** Camouflage (Shadows)† [1]; Gestalt Power‡ [1]; Sanitized Metabolism [1].

**Disadvantages:** Appearance (Horrific) [-24]; Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Intolerance (Non-Arakorax) [-10]; Low Empathy [-20]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Semi-Upright [-5].

**Features:** The arakorax possess a variant TL11 that uses “biotech” instead of “hard tech.” Add the High TL advantage to this template in levels equal to (11 - campaign TL).

\* The arakorax must have the listed number of *other* members of their race present and be touching at least one of them to use the ability.

† +1 to Camouflage or Stealth rolls vs. Vision in areas with shadows (anything with a Vision penalty greater than -4).

‡ Removes the need to make rolls to link up using the rules for *Combining Powers* (**GURPS Powers**, p. 170).

### Lenses

**Drone** (-54 points): Reduce DX and IQ by 1 each, for -40 points. Reduce Binding to level 5 for -14 points.

**Engineer** (+40 points): Increase IQ by 2, for 40 points.

**Facestealer** (+135 points): Replace Low Empathy with Callous, for 15 points. Add Craftiness 6 (see **GURPS Power-Ups 3: Talents**, p. 9) [30], Mimicry (Voice Library, +50%) [15], Mind Probe (Invasive, +75%; Memory Bank, +100%) [55], and Morph (Cosmetic, -50%; Need Sample, Must consume at least 10% of the subject, -30%) [20].

**Queen** (+328 points): Increase IQ by 3, for 60 points. Remove the limitations from Control Space, Control Time, and Warp, for 128 points. Add Enhanced Time Sense [45], Mind Control (Only other arakorax, -25%) [38], and Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Video, +40%) [57].

**Soldier** (+103 points): Increase ST and HP by 6, for 72 points. Increase Claws (Sharp) to Claws (Long Talons), for 6 points. Increase DR to 11, for 35 points. Add Berserk (12) [-10].

### Arakorax Technology

When they fled their homeworld, the arakorax brought with them a myriad number of the local species. Using their ability to manipulate time, they literally *evolved* their technology. What should have taken millions of years took decades as arakorax engineers created spaceships, computers, armor, weapons, etc. from living beings. Their biotech (which they call *kor-valing* “technology of the people”) is unique in the galaxy. Most other races have folk memories about “dark ones” who possess such technology, and shying away from it.

Of particular note is their ability to communicate across light-years via a *nezz* – a device that uses the brain tissue of a dead queen fused into the body of a large moss-like structure that the engineers harvested from a swamp planet. The moss is

made of multiple interlocking silica-based strands that somehow convert brain signals into images and sound. They rely on a variation of this technology to record and imprint data using vat-grown brain cells attached to the moss-like *nezz*.

Their spaceships are also rather strange in that they possess no engines or navigational equipment! All of their ships move thanks to the efforts of thousands of drones guided by one or more queens bending space around the ship. Their weapons use an adapted insect capable of releasing pyrophoric gas hot enough to create plasma. Even the armor (which they call *tur-ess*) that their soldiers and general-consorts wear is a form of limpet that permanently molds to their exoskeleton via micro-tendrils, augmenting their speed, reflexes, and strength considerably.



## STORY SEEDS

Between its frontier atmosphere and anything-goes business model, Croatoan Point presents numerous possibilities for the GM. Space-trucking PCs could stop for fuel and a snooze (and a Gonk, of course), only to find a unique opportunity, someone in need of help, or a dangerous mystery – maybe all three at once. Or they might have to buy contraband or engage a dodgy service that’s only available there. It’s also possible their plans to settle on Zandran Minor went badly awry, and they’re having to stay longer than they’d like.

### *A Little Help From My Friends*

- Fol Tarkus was an up-and-coming politician on his home world, but had to leg it after a nasty scandal five years back. Since then, he’s been living in Blake’s bed-and-breakfast under an assumed name, plotting his return – preferably with toughs and techies who can assist in clearing his name. Their first job? Unfreezing his substantial accounts.

- The Ebon Bauble was the fastest ship *once*. But now she’s sitting in the Trawler Park – somewhat busted after being jumped by rival “entrepreneurs” on her way back from a “business deal.” She needs a new engine, new weapons, and . . . *ahem*, a new crew. Captain Jake Potoo’s on the lookout for new talent. Savvy?

- Meet Viktor Broad – displaced worker. In reality, he’s Ronald Młynarczyk, a private investigator hired by the families of those lost in the Cyclops-45 disaster who *didn’t* take Cal-Corp’s buyout. He’s been down in the mine areas for months, searching for answers. So far, he has one lead: one of Doctor Till’s supposedly *also*-dead research assistants, Natalie Marden, has been seen at Croatoan Point. If he can find her (maybe with PC help), he might find answers.

### *Do You Hear Me? Do You Care?*

Missing persons is something Bulwark Security isn’t keen to get involved with. It’s a big station, and little people get “disappeared” all the time – usually through an airlock. The “Bulls” also have to be careful about coming too close to Lord Skin’s “business dealings.”

However, recent vanishings include actual station personnel, as opposed to just transients, tourists, and scum. So Captain Tujena has sent for the PCs – either private investigators or senior Bulwark officers – and given them full authority to find answers. They probably won’t like what they uncover.

### *Something in Me*

The station’s counselors are right to be concerned about the staff’s mental state. Several workers have been kidnapped by the arakorax, implanted with neural biotechnology, and sent back to do their bidding. A spider now squats between the hemispheres of their brain, purling their nerves into a web of control. Such compromised beings act as go-betweens for the facestealers, and may be called upon to commit acts of sabotage.

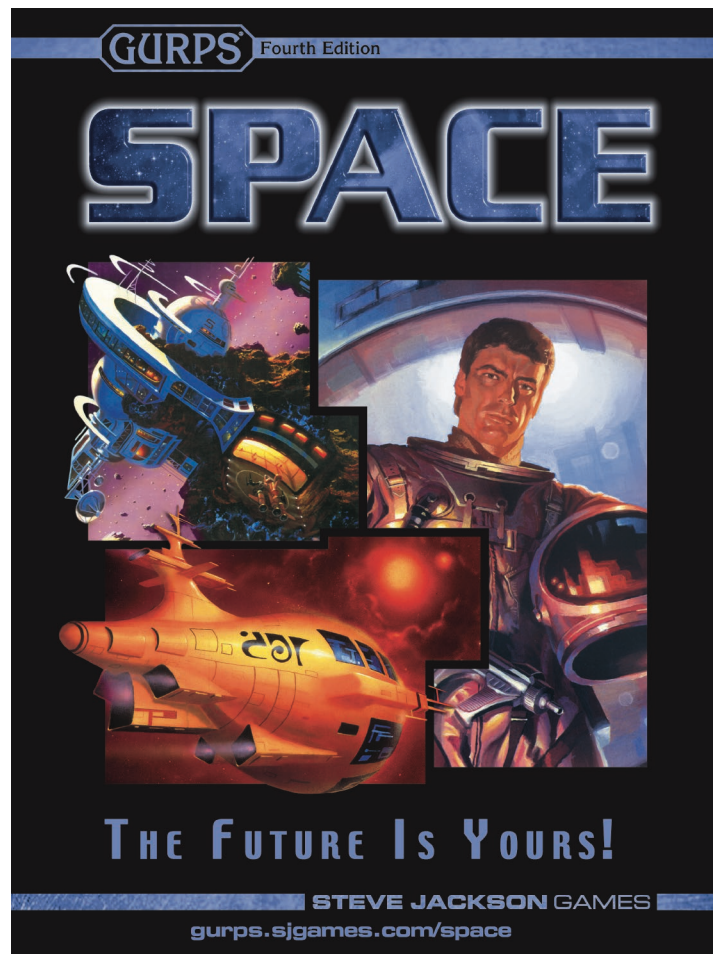
The PCs might be station workers, noticing the odd behavior of their colleagues. But they might also have been kidnapped, converted, and have no idea what’s

happened to them. As they go about their business, they find they suffer alien thoughts and strange impulses, and eventually surrender control to the voice in their head – unless they can find a cure.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Christopher R. Rice is not a facestealer. Promise. From Portsmouth, Virginia, he’s spinning words and whimsy into gold. Of course, if he’s not writing about *GURPS*, he’s blogging about it. Visit his site “Ravens N’ Pennies” ([www.ravenspennies.com](http://www.ravenspennies.com)) for more *GURPS* goodies. He’s the co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* and *Dungeon Fantasy Traps*. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group (the Headhunters); Beth “Archangel” McCoy, the “Sith Editrix”; and TBA, for being most excellent sounding boards.

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# THE PHAROS LIGHTHOUSE

BY CAROLYN AND STEVE STEIN

The Pharos Lighthouse was the world's first lighthouse. For centuries, it guided seafarers to Alexandria, Egypt's principal Mediterranean port. Future lighthouses followed its design, and "pharos" entered many languages as the word for lighthouse. (The term for the study of lighthouses is "pharology.") Even after it fell into disrepair, the Pharos Lighthouse remained the symbol of Alexandria, appearing on coins, seals, and artwork. Although it's appeared briefly in both *GURPS Egypt*, pp. 62-63, and *GURPS Places of Mystery*, p. 118 – and those supplements can provide additional historical or paranormal context – it's a fascinating locale that warrants shedding a bit more *light* on the subject.

Founded by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. during his conquest of Egypt, Alexandria became one of the most sophisticated and cosmopolitan cities in the ancient Mediterranean region. Scientists and merchants flocked to this center of commerce and knowledge. Its two harbors catered to ships of all sizes, and its magnificent lighthouse – one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – was the first thing new arrivals to the city gaped at in amazement.

From fabulous temples and its famous museum to Alexander's tomb and a host of entertainments, Alexandria offered much to enchant and awe visitors, but it was the lighthouse that embodied the city's glamour and grandeur. Much as moderns bring back postcards from visits to Paris, ancient travelers brought home small paintings of the Pharos Lighthouse as souvenirs of their visit to the magnificent city.

## ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT

Alexandria flourished as one of the eastern Mediterranean Sea's principal ports, exporting grain, papyrus, and other goods, including spices from India. Famed for its museum and library, centers of research and learning, Alexandria attracted and funded many of the ancient world's leading scientists. The city's rapid growth necessitated a host of improvements to its port facilities, the most visible of which was its lighthouse.

In addition to being a scientific center of learning, Alexandria controlled trade into and out of Egypt. During the Ptolemaic Dynasty (305 to 30 B.C.), trade was strictly regulated. Egypt's rulers purchased many newly arrived goods at prices they dictated, which they resold or processed into new items at state-controlled factories. When the crown did not buy imported goods outright, it still took a cut of everything sold.

Few natural landmarks mark Egypt's north coast, making navigation treacherous – a problem compounded by a lack of natural harbors and by rocky, shallow waters. The founders of Egypt's Ptolemaic dynasty built the Pharos Lighthouse to guide seafarers to Alexandria. Over 350' tall, travelers could see the lighthouse as far away as 35 miles out to sea. More than a navigational aid, the lighthouse offered a grand statement boasting of Alexandria's wealth and its citizens' scientific and technological acumen. Built on a tall granite foundation on the eastern tip of Pharos, a small, rocky island, builders protected the island from erosion with a sea wall and connected it to the mainland with a causeway (the Heptastadion) three-quarters of a mile long. The causeway also divided Alexandria's harbor into two separate harbors (East and West). The harbors were connected to the Nile with a canal.

## HISTORY OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

Construction of the lighthouse began during the reign of Ptolemy I Soter (reigned 306-282 B.C.), Alexander's general who founded the Ptolemaic Dynasty, which ruled Egypt until the death of Cleopatra VII and Rome's conquest of Egypt (30 B.C.). Completed during the reign of Ptolemy's son, Ptolemy II Philadelphus (reigned 285-246 B.C.), the Pharos Lighthouse became a symbol of the city and remained in service throughout the Ptolemaic and Roman eras.

The Pharos Lighthouse cost 800 silver talents to build – almost double the cost of Athens' Parthenon (estimated at 450 to 500 talents). A single silver talent would be worth about \$13,000 in modern U.S. dollars. Thus, the lighthouse cost quite a bit of treasure, giving Egyptians and Greeks ample reason to protect their investment.

Sadly, this magnificent edifice was damaged in a civil war between dynastic rivals Ptolemy XIII and Cleopatra VII. Assisted by Julius Caesar, Cleopatra was victorious and afterward repaired the lighthouse. Sometime after the Muslim conquest of Egypt in 642 A.D., a domed mosque replaced the statue of a Greek god at the top of Pharos.

Three successive earthquakes in 956, 1303, and 1323 A.D. damaged Pharos and wrecked its upper tiers, which people later scavenged for building materials. Famed traveler Ibn Battuta (1304-1369 A.D.) described the lighthouse as seriously damaged when he visited in 1326, and so wrecked when he returned in 1349 that it was impossible to enter. A major quake in 1375 toppled its remnants into the sea.

In 1480, Egypt's Mameluke ruler, Sultan Al-Ashraf Qaitbay, built the fortress of Qaitbay on the site; the new structure remains to this day.

In 1968, a UNESCO expedition located remnants of the lighthouse underwater. In 1994, a team of French underwater archaeologists located its foundation. The Egyptian government plans to turn the site into an underwater museum. Others have suggested rebuilding the lighthouse as part of a massive modernization of the harbor. Currently, the Egyptian government allows scuba divers to explore the ruins for a \$150 fee per day. In addition to the lighthouse's ruins, divers can examine fragments of statues, pottery, and other antiquities.

*Description of it falls short,  
the eyes fail to comprehend it,  
and words are inadequate,  
so vast is the spectacle.*

– Ibn Jubayr

## PHYSICAL DETAILS OF THE LIGHTHOUSE

Built of white limestone to reflect the sunlight, the three-tiered lighthouse stood at least 350' tall, topped by a 22' statue of Poseidon or Zeus at its peak. At the time it was built, the only artificial structures of greater height were the pyramids at Giza.

The square first tier was the largest. It rested on a high, square, granite foundation about 98' on each side. About 200' tall, its numerous rooms and floors received ample sunlight from large windows. A large statue of a triton stood triumphant at each of its four corners. The lowest floor mostly likely had a shrine to the patron god in it, along with a basin of water, and was lined with columns. Other floors had sleeping quarters, offices, and meeting rooms separated by wooden panels. A central circular staircase connected it to the next tier.

The narrower, octagonal second tier was about 100' tall. This section likely had observation rooms. A circular stairway passed through its center and led to the third tier, a circular tower about 50' high. The tower contained bronze mirrors to reflect sunlight during the day and brazier fire at night. A wide ramp led to the main entrance, which was well above ground level, possibly at the base of the second tier.

For diagrams of the Lighthouse, see p. 37.

Several ancient sources report that "Sostratus" dedicated the lighthouse "to the savior gods on behalf of all who sail the sea." The identities of both Sostratus and the "savior gods" remain uncertain. Sostratus may have been the lighthouse's architect, its primary fundraiser, a high official in Ptolemy's government, or some combination of these. Similarly, the savior gods have been identified with Ptolemy and his queen Berenice, Castor and Pollux (the patron gods of navigation), Zeus, Poseidon, and Proteus, an early sea god – often called "the old man of the sea" – whom Greeks believed was born

and resided on Pharos. Or perhaps the inscription refers to all the gods associated with the sea and navigation.

## ADVENTURE SEEDS

Ruled successively by Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks, and the British before Egypt achieved independence after World War II, Alexandria offers adventure opportunities across 2,300 years of history. Whether in use or in ruins, a structure as vast as the Pharos can hide a host of secrets. Uncertainties about its exact dimensions and interior configuration, as well as the legends about its destruction, allow customization to suit particular campaigns and adventures.

*Sabotage:* In later centuries, several Arab authors claimed the lighthouse was actually destroyed by a Byzantine saboteur who falsely converted to Islam and ingratiated himself with the Sultan. The saboteur convinced the Sultan to let him excavate along the lighthouse's foundation, promising to find an ancient treasure buried by the Ptolemies. Instead, the excavations toppled the lighthouse and the saboteur escaped on a waiting ship. Adventurers could be hired to find or stop the saboteur. Or perhaps the saboteur hires them to help him excavate.

*Treasure:* Maybe a fortune in gold and jewels is hidden there, which the adventurers must recover. If the campaign is set in the past, they must do so without damaging the lighthouse. If the scenario is set in the present, they must do so without disrupting archaeological excavations or calling attention to themselves. Perhaps an ancient periplus (navigation manual) fell into their hands and offers clues to treasures or other secrets related to the lighthouse. In the modern era, any treasure found would need to be reported – or smuggled out of Egypt in violation of antiquities laws.

*Espionage:* Adventurers could be tasked with spying – either studying the lighthouse itself or observing something or someone from the lighthouse.

*Smuggling:* Someone working in a lighthouse could facilitate (or hinder) smuggling. The Ptolemies established high customs duties, and Alexandria's later rulers continued to tax arriving ships and their cargoes. No one likes to pay taxes.

*Body Snatching:* Ptolemy I executed one of history's most famous body snatches, absconding with Alexander the Great's corpse, which he entombed in an elaborate mausoleum in Alexandria. In 868, Venetian traders absconded with remnants of the body of St. Mark (who founded the Coptic Church in Alexandria in 49 A.D.). After unearthing the holy relics, they smuggled them past Muslim customs inspectors in a shipment of pork and brought them to Venice, where most of them remain in St. Mark's Basilica (St. Mark's skull was returned to Alexandria in 1968). Adventurers could be involved with – or perpetrate – either of these famous heists. Or maybe there are other famous bodies to steal and smuggle, perhaps using hidden tunnels under the lighthouse.

*Evil Man Was Not Meant To Know:* A great evil lives beneath the lighthouse's foundation. Anyone who encounters it goes mad. If set in the past, the adventurers have been hired to determine what devilry is interfering with the laborers working on the lighthouse. If set in the modern era, something in the remnants of the lighthouse is driving the archaeologists working there insane. Or perhaps something else has gone wrong with the modern excavations.

*Tourism:* Visiting all of the Wonders of the World became popular during the Roman Empire. Adventurers could be tourists themselves, or guards or guides for a group visiting one or several of the Wonders: the Great Pyramid of Giza, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the Pharos Lighthouse. Adventurers could be required to bring back proof in the form of small paintings from each of the sites.

*Pirates:* A staple of maritime adventures, pirates posed a constant threat to Mediterranean commerce despite regular efforts to suppress them. While they attacked ships at sea, they more commonly raided coastal settlements. Sometimes they awaited their prey at secluded spots along the seacoast, since most ancient ships followed the coast from port to port, stopping, as needed to rest and take on provisions and fresh water.

*Other Lighthouses:* Lighthouses around the Mediterranean Sea were modeled on Pharos, including the lighthouse of Ostia, Rome's port. While not as grand in style, they, too, could house mysteries and secrets that make them good settings for adventure. In the modern era, many lighthouses are in isolated places, making them ideal candidates for villainous lairs, hiding places, and more.

*Archaeology:* Archaeologists and pharologists continue to work the site, both on land and underwater. These digs offer numerous adventure opportunities, ranging from guarding or stealing artifacts to the mysterious nature of the artifacts themselves.

*Gods:* In Greek legend, Pharos Island is the birthplace and home of Proteus, a shape-changing god of the sea who could figure in adventures as antagonist or patron and either help or hinder investigations.

*Modern Adventures:* Modern plans for Pharos, whether as an underwater museum or a rebuilt lighthouse, offer many opportunities for adventure, including archaeological exploration – both underwater and on land. Adventurers could be hired to stop terrorists or radical religious people of any sort bent on the destruction of the ancient pagan monument.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Long-time gamers, Steve and Carolyn have played **GURPS** since the release of the Third Edition in 1988. Carolyn is a freelance writer. Steve is a professor of military and maritime history at the University of Memphis, and has published three books, most recently *The Sea in World History: Exploration, Travel, and Trade* (ABC-CLIO, 2017). He also teaches strategy for the Naval War College.

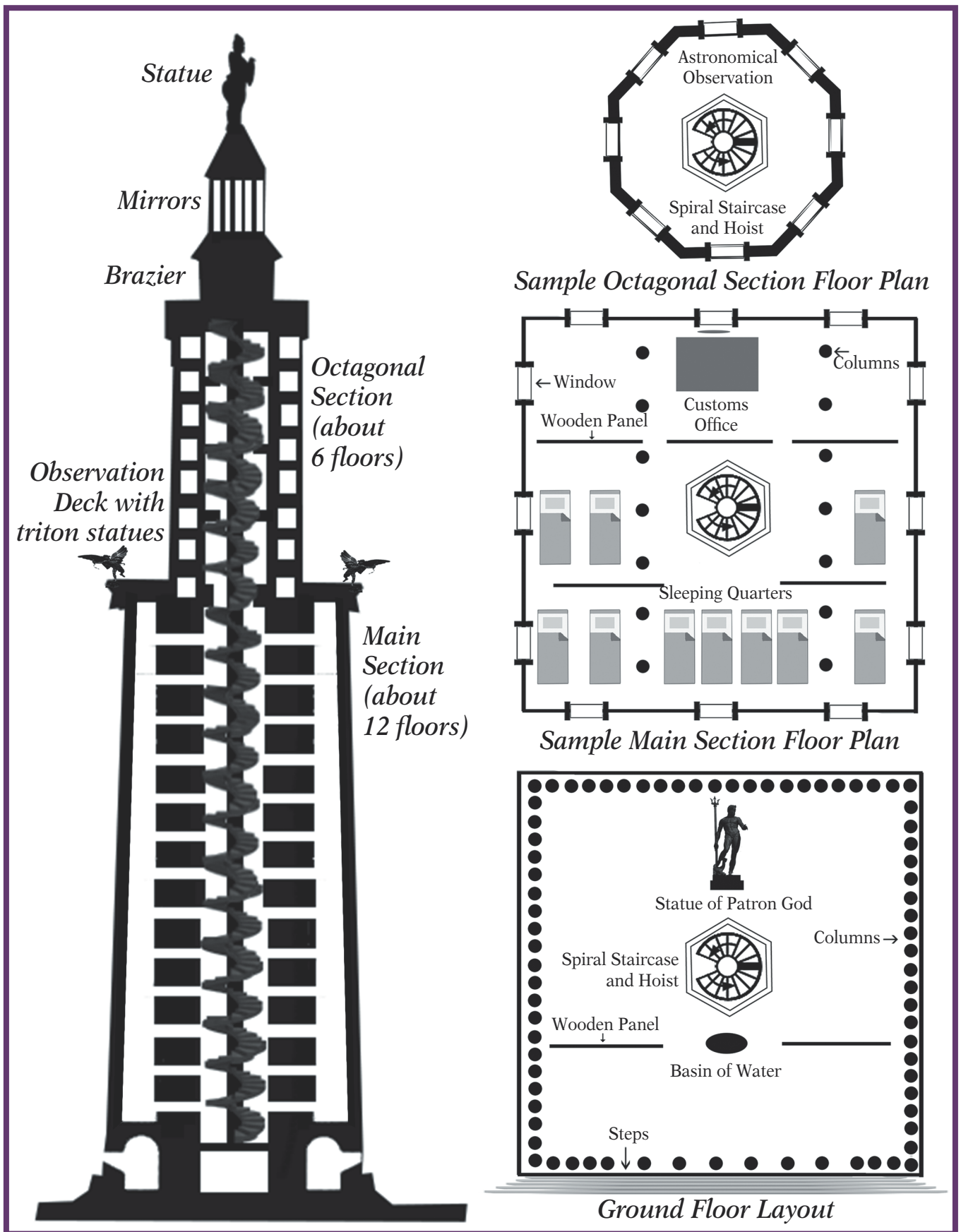
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## DIAGRAMS OF THE PHAROS LIGHTHOUSE

On the left is a cutaway view; scale is 1" = 42.5'. On the right is a series of possible floor plans for different levels; scale is 1" = 16.3'.

# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

## THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE FUNKY

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

I've never understood the attraction some people have to vehicles. Whenever people say something like, "I drive a cherry-red 2015 Esperanto Muskrat with the Sports-Moon package and V8 aqueduct stealth-scent upgrade," my reply is usually along the lines of, "Oh, that sounds nice. I drive a 2005 . . . '06, I think? It's a sedan. I can't remember the model. Wait, sedans are the ones with *four* doors, right?"

However, I *do* have a similar appreciation toward buildings. Sure, I'm not going to own too many buildings in my life, but I – like most folks – am *in* lots of buildings throughout the week, and I usually pick up on the nuances of a structure. The makeup of the ceiling. The variations of temperature between sections. How logical their in/out doors are. (True fact: The devil himself devised glass doors with handles on both sides that give no indication what way they open.)

While vehicles for me easily blend into the background of my life provided they fulfill their function – getting me from point A to point B – buildings often have aspects that are harder to overlook. It's those noteworthy aspects that can make stock locales more interesting – and help you get more mileage out of generic places.

### YOU HAD ONE JOB . . .

All locations have a primary purpose for existing. A firehouse is meant to house firefighters and their equipment; a warehouse's reason for being is to receive, process, and ship out product; game stores exist to suck the money out of my wallet if I walk within 30 feet of one; etc.

But even though most buildings have a reason for existing, nearly all of them fail in that primary function in some fashion. Maybe the firehouse's incline to get out of the parking lot is a bit too steep, causing fire trucks to lose precious time as they scurry to whichever home tried to dry off its cutlery in the microwave. Perhaps the front of the warehouse is prone to flooding when it rains too much. Or maybe the game store has sufficient space, but it's a deep, narrow store, having a thin outward-facing presence that makes it more difficult to attract

new customers who might somehow break the curse and free me from my spendthrift ways.

For locations that are meant to be background color, these negative aspects shouldn't be deal-breaking problems. Obviously, most structures perform their primary functions just fine! But just about every locale has some quirk that makes at least some of its occupants less-than-thrilled at what the structure is doing.

Of course, buildings often have conflicting needs. Most office buildings have a difficult time achieving and maintaining a temperature that makes its occupants happy, but that's partly because humans tend to have a 20° variation in what temperature they consider ideal, so one employee's "a tad too hot" is another's "*need . . . more . . . sweaters.*" That incline the fire station needs to navigate may be necessary to direct water off the streets; if it *wasn't* that way, then there'd be risk of flooding or trucks needing to navigate slick, wet roads in a time of crisis. Similarly, if the warehouse *weren't* prone to flooding, then there might be a difficult "lip" of concrete to navigate when maneuvering trucks, pallet jacks, or forklifts. This isn't to say that *everything* that's wrong with a location has a logical reason for being that way, but it's often a better way to add believable *and* interesting characteristics.

So, if you're looking to include some easy color in a location, think about what the locale's primary function is, think of a way it falls short in that primary mission, and then – if possible – understand *why* it has that flaw.

### YOU'VE GOT TO TRY THIS GARAGE DOOR!

In the same way that most locations don't perfectly fulfill their primary function, most setting spots are exemplary in some fashion at doing what they do. Again, this doesn't need to be a show-stopping advantage; it's just something that's noteworthy and kind of cool compared to others of its ilk . . . to use *GURPS* parlance, it's a nice perk.

Maybe the building's elevator was recently upgraded, so it's particularly fast or quiet. Perhaps the vending machines are always well-stocked and interestingly varied. Or one room in the building that needs to be quiet – a meeting room, the master bedroom, etc. – is particularly soundproof.

Again, these good aspects may have drawbacks of their own. (Good vending machines means less productivity because people mill about, soundproof rooms encourage murderous middle-managers, etc.) But they're still noteworthy and add character to an otherwise drab setting.

### *Turtles All the Way Down*

For an often-used location, it's entirely possible to apply this technique to the constituent parts of the locale. For example, if you have a mansion that the heroes visit frequently, then you may come up with quirks, perks, and features of each room they're likely to visit: The toilet in the bathroom takes too long to flush, but the old wood of the house masks any odors, and the panes in the outside window are slightly askew; the parlor is a smidgen too long and narrow, but the acoustics are quite pleasing, and there's a large burn in a corner of the carpet where someone dropped a cigar years ago; etc.

## PUTTING THE “LOCO” IN “LOCATIONS”

Just about every building has something odd about it that defies characterization. Perhaps a quintessential example is from the classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. In that movie, the protagonist Bailey family lives in the Old Granville House. It's a quirky home that makes its quiriness known by having a loose knob at the bottom of the stairwell banister, such that whenever George Bailey goes down the stairs, he takes the knob with him. It's a minor point that has no effect on the action, except as a symbolic reminder that things in George's life aren't perfect.

So, as a final way to include some character in our locations, think of one or two odd features to add flavor to an otherwise stock locale. Maybe the building has an unusual paint job that was applied at the height of 1980s “make it all neon and pastel” fashion, and it's never been repainted. Perhaps a prominent stairway in a main area goes up to a blank wall, the result of a planned add-on that never happened or a room consolidation that would have rendered that entrance awkward. Or maybe there's a stubborn web of cracks in a settling ceiling that defies repair and bears an uncanny resemblance to the cover artwork for Joy Division's *Unknown Pleasures*.

## PUT IT ALL TOGETHER . . .

Now, why are we doing all this, again?

Well, in many campaigns, the heroes visit lots of places. In fact, they often visit many of the same kinds of places. Even if it's kind of humdrum for the heroes to be before a duke or earl to receive a mission, it shouldn't be boring to the players. By coming up with some memorable features, you help your locations come alive, differentiate otherwise identical

locations from each other, and provide attentive heroes with aspects of their environment they might be able to use to their advantage. By limiting this differentiation to just a few aspects per locale, you keep your workload easier compared to needing to devise a complete history and backstory for each spot the PCs set foot in.

So, as a thought experiment, let's say you're in a research-heavy setting and need to devise three libraries the heroes are likely to go to in their travels. Here are some possibilities that should (hopefully) help them come alive.

### Springville Public Library

A large suburban library in a medium-sized city.

*Quirk:* Notoriously sensitive theft-prevention alarm, often going off for no reason.

*Perk:* Wi-Fi signal is particularly strong, allowing for reception up to 15' away from the building.

*Feature:* Odd arrangement of two side rooms at the front of the library (one on each side of the main building) gives the entire structure a rather phallic look when viewed from overhead.

### City Circle Library

A medium-sized library in the heart of downtown.

*Quirk:* Electronic database is notoriously incorrect; card catalogs are still present, and are the best way to find information on books pre-1980.

*Perk:* The librarians don't discard most books, so many old and “outdated” tomes can still be found.

*Feature:* The building is a converted firehouse from the 1920s. You can still see where the fire pole would have been. There's no elevator.

### Washington Delaware Library

Large library in a city on the decline.

*Quirk:* This building is cramming too many books into too small a space. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves make accessing books on the top shelf next-to-impossible without a stool or ladder.

*Perk:* The head librarian (Natasha Li) has a photographic memory and has been at this branch since 1960; asking her if she remembers seeing a book is often faster than using any other organizational method.

*Feature:* This “building” is actually two tiny buildings that were connected to each other via an add-on in the 1950s. The two sub-buildings have a distinctive feel, and the two “floors” of each building don't quite mesh up, so the elevator has buttons marked 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B.

Coming up with each of those took just a few minutes, and I like to think it created some fairly vivid locations with minimal work. With this technique and a few notes, you can make the heroes' world come alive. Remember the old adage: Location is everything!

## 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 almost 20 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana.

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