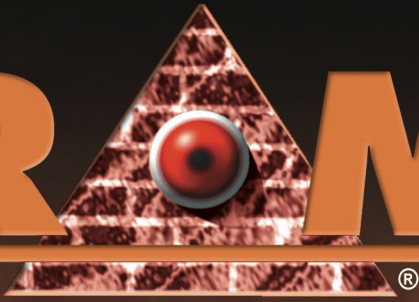


# PYRAMID



Special  
Section for  
*The Fantasy Trip*

Issue 3/119 September '18

## AFTER THE END II



**NO PLACE LIKE HOME**

Chip Limeburner

**MOON OF SILVER**

J. Edward Tremlett

**THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR FOREBEARS**

Nathan M.M. Meluvor

**WHISPERS**

David L. Pulver

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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- Pale Blue*: In This Issue
- Brown*: In Every Issue
- Green*: Columnist
- Dark Blue*: *GURPS* Features
- Orange*: *The Fantasy Trip* Features

**COVER ART**  
Christopher Shy

**CARTOGRAPHY**  
Chip Limeburner

# IN THIS ISSUE

Sure, there was an apocalypse . . . but that's not the end of the world! Society is yours to make anew, with *GURPS After the End*. This month, *Pyramid* revisits the potential and power of post-apocalyptic gaming.

When the sun no longer shines and wolves have turned into something even more ferocious and bloodthirsty, danger is omnipresent with a *Moon of Silver, World of Dust*. Frequent *Pyramid* contributor J. Edward Tremlett describes a post-apocalyptic setting caused by a supernatural disaster. Discover the new masters of the land – werewolves – including tactics, adventure seeds, and *GURPS* stats for the horrifying threats.

When the acid rain starts pouring down, you need shelter fast, and there's *No Place Like Home*. What secrets does this seemingly abandoned farmhouse hold for wastelanders who drop by for a visit? This spine-tingling *GURPS* adventure zooms in on a time when the apocalypse is in recent memory. It includes a full map of the titular house, plus *GURPS* stats for two versions of the key antagonist.

Once society stabilizes after the End, *The Knowledge of Our Forebears* will be essential to building a new future. Learn about the perils that can befall books and other printed material, with an overview of dangers and optional rules to let you tell with a roll of the dice how fragile these printed treasures are. Then discover how – once you have readable books – you may still have problems *reading* them, if language and literacy have drifted in the intervening years.

This month's Eidetic Memory presents *Whispers From the Wastelands*, a collection of three ready-to-use encounters, including a vampire (and its minions), zombie tamers, and a troll. But as David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Reign of Steel* – suggests, things are not always what they seem!

Random Thought Table ponders the end of the world with a look at new ways of creating a wide-open world.

But that's not all for this issue! *After the end* of a successful Kickstarter, the excitement is still high around here for the classic dungeon-crawl fun of *The Fantasy Trip*, so we proudly include a special section with some new items of interest for that game!

It's a tough world, and "survival of the fittest" is the order of the day in *Building Character: Funnels in TFT*. Learn about what funnels are, discover how to use them to take someone from zero to hero, and roll the dice on the random background table to instantly add life to low-level characters.

With *Monies of Cidri*, you'll gain new insight into money, metal, and measurement . . . and maybe unleash three new *TFT* spells to help with all three.

Finally, *The Fantasy Trip* Line Editor Guy McLimore offers *Lessons From Darbo Delver*, two fun vignettes that offer insight into labyrinth and trap creation from Cidri's premier labyrinth and trap maker.

What are you waiting for? With this *Pyramid*, worlds await!

Editor-in-Chief ■ STEVE JACKSON  
*GURPS* Line Editor ■ SEAN PUNCH  
*The Fantasy Trip* Line Editor ■  
GUY MCLIMORE

*GURPS* Project Manager ■ STEVEN MARSH

Production Artist & Prepress Checker ■  
NIKOLA VRTIS  
Page Design ■ PHIL REED  
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# FROM THE EDITOR

## THE WORLD IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

I think one of my favorite aspects of post-apocalyptic gaming is that it's so wildly open to interpretation. It's the genre that spawned both *Twilight: 2000* and *Gamma World*; the former is about as realistic a depiction of a world after the bomb as possible, while the latter is a madcap mélange of a million wonderful ideas.

One of *GURPS*' great strengths is the ability to customize it to the game that you want. And *GURPS After the End* allows for nearly any permutation of wasteland weirdness you like.

Perhaps another secret of this genre is that nothing is set in stone. It's a basic tenet of the genre that you can go from "normal" to "strange" easily: Surprise! You're dealing with rationing and bandits when suddenly mutant squirrels show up!

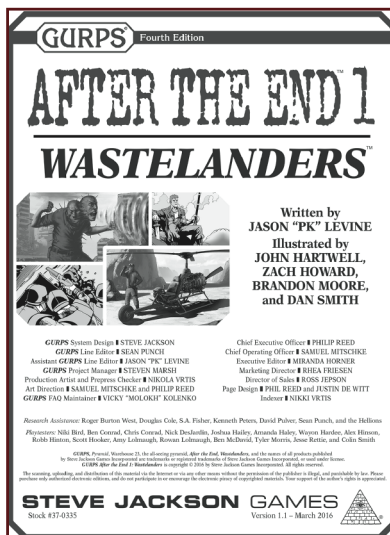
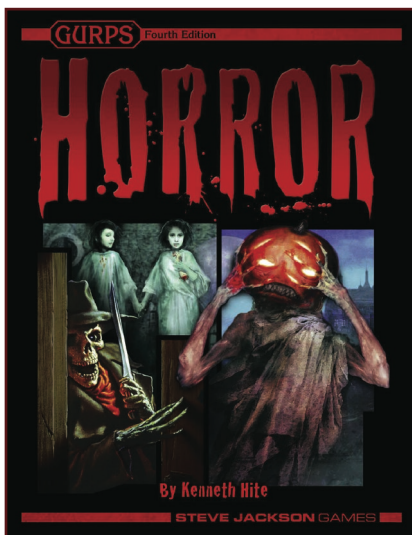
But the genre is also fine with going the other way. If you start with mutants and psionic powers and whatnot, and everyone decides that they'd have more fun if they were dealing with more mundane concerns like rebuilding the world,

then the weirdness can just . . . go away. The world has already gone through crazy amounts of change; who's to say that whatever uncanny forces were empowering any unwanted oddities didn't just run out? (Tangential, but the television series *Eureka* started out as this *X-Files*-esque "Conspiracies are everywhere! Trust no one!" series, only to morph pretty quickly into a quirky, cozy ensemble-weirdness-magnet story. Best I can tell, the fans were totally fine with that transition.)

This issue revels in the entire spectrum of post-apocalyptic possibilities, from realistic horrors that show the depths of depravity in the human heart, to wasteland werewolves. We hope there's something here that will prove inspirational to your efforts to build your world . . . or *rebuild* it, as the case may be.

## WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

Your comments help us improve our publication. How are you using this material in your campaign? What do you wish we'd write about? Let us know via private feedback at [pyramid@sjgames.com](mailto:pyramid@sjgames.com), or join the public discussion online at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com).



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# MOON OF SILVER, WORLD OF DUST

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

*"Man, I can't believe the Wolves haven't hit this place yet," Ethan said, grabbing cans of food off the barely broken shelves. The labels were faded so badly it was hard to be sure what was what, but **some** of it had to be edible. Hopefully.*

*"What was it, anyway?" Billie asked, her eyes glued on the open door, and the silver-lit forest beyond – the tree line so thick it was no wonder **anyone** had missed it.*

*"A convenience store, I think," he said, puzzled by the phrase "Use By." "Kind of like a grocery store, I think. Just smaller."*

*"Just hurry," she whispered, raising her gun instinctively. "This isn't far from where they took Dad and the others."*

*"Don't remind me," Ethan sighed, recalling that horrible day all too well.*

*Suddenly, there was movement, out in the trees. A head poked out between them – furry and fanged, nostrils flaring at the delicious scent of humans.*

*"Ethan!" Billie shouted, shooting at the wolf. If it charged, she was dead – her brother had the silver bullets, not her.*

*No sound came from behind her, and she turned to look. Ethan was slumped on the floor, groaning from a blow to the head. Around him were several men, dressed in the livery of the nearest Wolf Lord.*

*The one standing above her brother was shaggy and filthy, and had a horrible bite scar on his neck. She recognized him instantly.*

*"Dad?"*

*He looked at her – lips peeling back in an inhuman snarl. His teeth were long and yellow, and his eyes were no longer human.*

*Billie had just enough time to scream before the wolves pounced from behind . . .*

Many generations ago, the Sun shone bright and true, the world was green and bountiful, humanity was the apex predator, and werewolves were just a myth. Then came the day the Moon ate the Sun – its bright, silver light changing the plants and awakening something terrible within humans.

Now the northern lands are sand and dust, with a thick band of poisonous, alien forest nestled at their center – slowly moving in either direction. Now humanity either cowers far to the south, or struggles to survive in what was once lush and fertile land. Now humanity lives in fear of its new, skin-changing masters, all too aware that if tooth and claw will not carry the day, the terrible weapons of a bygone age might be used instead.

Can those who remain find enough food, shelter, and supplies to survive? Might they find enough weapons and silver

to strike a blow against the lupine oppressors or their human servants? Is there some way the world can be put right, or will all humanity eventually succumb to the curse of the Wolf?

This supernatural **GURPS After the End** campaign setting presents an ecologically ravaged Earth slowly converting into something more befitting the wolf within. PCs can be scrabbling wastelanders trying to survive in the face of dust and deprivation, all the while avoiding being eaten, herded, or turned by the Wolves. They could also be traitor humans – helping the world's new masters out of madness or mere survival – or those lucky enough to be far outside the monsters' reach, trying to retain or rebuild civilization.

This article explains what happened (though the *why* is uncertain), how it's changed the world, and what life is like on both sides of the civilizational divide. It also provides **After the End** campaign considerations, ideas for stories, and **GURPS** stats for the Wolves and the Wolf Lords they serve.

*A supernatural, post-apocalyptic campaign setting.*

## TAKE STOCK, REFLECT, AND RUE

*Come, child, and sit. Let me tell you the story of the ending of the world before, as it was told unto me. Let me tell you of that world, with its ships of the sea and planes of the air, and its mighty nations with great armies and terrible weapons. Let me tell you of a land green and bountiful, lit by a Sun by day and a Moon by night. A time before the dust and the poison, the culls and the Mansbane.*

*The time before the Wolf.*

Then, every so often, the Sun and the Moon would cross paths, like strangers in a marketplace, and the Moon would hide the Sun for a time. The learned ones called this an eclipse. As the elders tell it, the learned ones of the time before had predicted the eclipse of a lifetime. They were not wrong.

Come the given day, the Moon moved into place before the Sun, as expected. Those in the path of total darkness gasped and cheered as the shadow slowly slid across the landscape. But as the darkness passed across this land, *something* happened, and the Moon locked course with the Sun.

At first there was confusion, and then some panic, as the Moon did not behave as expected. True alarm began as the shadow crept straight across the land, like a storm of darkness. By the time it made it out into the ocean, panic had taken hold of the world, as those who knew such things claimed the Moon should have fallen to Earth by now.

Those foolish words were the tipping point. Riots and looting followed, and the cities burned in the shadow's wake. Some nations sent their soldiers to quell the unrest, while others let them join in. What was the point, after all? The world was about to end.

*But yet it did not*, for the Moon did not fall from the sky. The learned were as unable to explain this as they were to explain what had happened in the first place. Faced with this lack of knowledge, those who believed in a god proclaimed the End of Days, and a fresh wave of panic and fear gripped the world.

Then, as the Moon crossed to where it had gone astray the day before, something else happened. Where before it had been dark, it began to shine brilliantly, as though the sun were somehow shining *through it*. Those inside what had been a shadow were now bathed in strange, silvery light, and things about them began to change.

The grass turned from green to a strange, glowing white. The fruits in the trees and vegetables on the ground twisted and began to taste foul, and the flowers lost their color – changing to various shades of pale gray. The insects and spiders all crumpled and died, falling to the ground in blackened swarms. Only the animals were untouched, though the birds all flew away.

Panic began anew, as none had answers. So began a week of watching a portion of the planet become pale and twisted. Some stayed where they were, unable or unwilling to leave, while others formed massive caravans and fled outside the zone – racing as far as they could go. As the urge to flee intensified, more problems began, for the places these people fled to had no room for them. Many were turned away, and many were killed to stop others from following.

Dark days became troubled weeks, and people adjusted as best as they could. The nations took stock and made plans, hoping to ration food and supplies. They reached out to others, both more and less fortunate, and discussed new ways to live and to trade. Day by day, panic and fear gave way to faith and hope – one way or another, the people *would* survive.

But then came the Wolves, and all was lost.

Those unable to leave the Silver Land were the first to fall – attacked by fast and horrid wolves with all-too-human eyes. Frenzied and ravenous, these beasts ran down any they found, sinking their fangs into flesh. Some were simply devoured where they fell, but some were merely bitten, and thereby doomed to become like the things that had struck them.

Before that day was out, massive packs surged across the land. They shrugged off bullets and blows, and their armies multiplied with each new day. As the armies of the old world had been badly weakened by what had gone before, so were

the Wolves victorious. By the time it was realized that silver was to them what their teeth and claws were to us, it was too late to do more than run.

In the areas that yet remained free, the leaders of old spoke of joining forces to strike back. But then they received word from Lord Red, who dared speak for the Nation of Fenrir. This Wolf Lord claimed to command the great weapons of the old world, and would use them against those who survived should they dare attack.

“Some of you have escaped, for now,” he declared through bloody teeth. “To you I say – be docile. The meek will live at least little longer. But attack us, and you shall discover that tooth and claw are not our only weapons.”

Some scoffed at this. What could a *Wolf* know about such things?

But as those armies who had been run to the south gathered in the great city of Mexico, there to plan their attack, word came to Lord Red of their plan. So did he use one of those weapons, and destroy that city utterly. To this day it is but a hole full of poison and the source of the foul winds that sicken the lands to the south.

Another city made plans, far across the ocean. Moscow, it was called. A Wolf Lord there sent *three* weapons, and now that land is also poisoned. After that, no one else dared to plan.

The rest you know. The hunts and the culling, the hiding and the running. We cower in the ruins, both from the Wolves and those who would serve them. Some go into the Silver Land to find food, or strike back at the Wolf. Others flee to the south, hoping that some nations have yet survived.

But there *is* a prophecy, child – a ray of hope. For those who were elders when I was but a child, like you, said that if we could learn where the Moon changed its course, we could learn how it came to be. If we learned that, then we could change things back to how they were before, and dispel the curse of the Wolf from our land.

Would that not be a wonderful thing?

## LOOK ON THE DAMAGE DONE

*So there we were, fighting that idiot Gargantuan and his slavers. He'd chased us down with halftracks and surrounded us on the bluff, and all we could do was take pot-shots. We didn't have much ammo left, and charging was suicide. It looked bad.*

*But then we heard the howling. His people turned just in time to see a pack of Wolves charging from the dust. Gargantuan went down bad and bloody, and his people scattered, leaving guns and a halftrack behind. Maybe they got away, maybe not.*

*So now we have halftracks, guns, ammo, and no more Gargantuan. I just don't like who we have to thank, is all. If the slavers had run a little faster, the pack would have turned on us instead.*

In the generations since the fall of Mexico City and Moscow, Earth has become divided between dueling species. Some vestiges of human civilization remain to the south and far north, where the ecological damage has not been so prevalent. However, a great many of the survivors still fight to live in the inhospitable spaces between – a wide swath of sorry, dusty wastes, with a band of bizarre, overgrown wilderness at its center.

## Broken Ecology

The Northern Hemisphere's plant life has been largely despoiled by the Silver Land – a Moon-poisoned line some 300 miles in across, centered on the 40th parallel.

At its center, in the totality, lies a 70-mile stripe of overgrown jungle, filled with twisted, near-colorless vegetation that somehow thrives in the altered moonlight. On either side of that line begins a patchwork landscape – the pale, outlandish breeds slowly peter out as the occultation decreases, with small, precious patches of hardier flora struggling to live with decreased sunlight. Most land animals live within the variegated areas, unable or unwilling to stay within the moonlit zone for long.

At either edge of that crazy-quilt wilderness, just abutting the wastelands, is a thick band of grotesque, pale, night-blooming flowers. The hitherto-unknown species seems equal parts blossom and jellyfish; their skinny petals constantly roil, even in the absence of wind, and glow unearthly hues under the stars. The flowers are also extremely poisonous, leading to their being called “Mansbane.”

The strange plants have very complex root structures, extending dozens of miles. These slowly suck away the nutrients needed by non-mutated flora, creating badly parched areas unable to hold onto their topsoil. At the height of summer the flowers grow heavy with spores, releasing clouds that occasionally find fertile ground near the line. This is how the misshapen, gray hell of the Silver Land expands further with each passing year.

Past that line of glowing, alien flowers begins the dry earth, reaching far north and south of the Silver Land. Between the dust, partially occluded sunlight, and frequent droughts, very little grows there; sandstorms and the occasional hyperstorm make certain that the vegetation rarely lasts more than a season. Animal life has dwindled to creatures better-suited to arid conditions, though birds are strangely plentiful.

There are some areas between the two extremes where the dusty wastes have abated, or been held off by quirks of geography. In these rare oases, guerrilla “warrior farms” plant crops and move on – hoping to return for the harvest. If they're found out, the best-case scenario is that they come back to ruined or despoiled yields. Sometimes, however, the beasts or their human armies lie in wait, all too happy to make an example of them.

## Dueling Civilizations

The Nation of Fenrir has extended its claws up to hundreds of miles in either direction of the Silver Land, worldwide. Its gains have largely depended on geography and local resistance, but they are substantial, if loosely held. No one sane wants to send a major force to attack their strongholds for fear of being annihilated; on those rare occasions that the Wolves are repelled, the victors rarely press forward. (See *Nation of Fenrir*, pp. 7-8, for more information about the Wolves.)

Humans who have maintained a great deal of distance from the Nation are much better off than those trapped in the wastes. Because the Wolves rarely attack the distant communities outright, such groups have spent the time building their military and infrastructure. Some countries have even retained their national identity and sovereignty, while others have become polyglots crafted from refugees of former

neighbors. A few of the more militant holdouts have considered testing the Nation's nuclear resolve, but thankfully cooler heads have prevailed – for now.

The primary challenge for the areas of civilization near the Silver Land, other than a close and implacable enemy, is getting enough food. The dustbowl is often too close for them to engage in sustainable farming, and the energy required to grow consumables indoors is in short supply – mostly relying on alternative sources. Also, while trade between civilized areas is possible, it's quite problematic: air traffic no longer exists, ships cost too much energy, and crossing the land invites attacks from the Nation of Fenrir. Communication with one another is likewise hampered, and some far-flung holdouts believe they're the only survivors.

The areas to well the south of the Silver Land have generally fared much better, in terms of both security and food. The dry lands rarely reach below the Tropic of Cancer, and the Wolves don't strike south of the equator much these days. As a result, the southernmost nations of humanity can grow crops, participate in trade, communicate, and maintain some level of stability. They still have problems getting planes in the air, but land and sea traffic is a less risky endeavor.

*It never troubles  
the wolf how many  
the sheep may be.*

– Virgil

## Widespread Anarchy

Between the two lines of warring civilizations lie mostly lawless territories. Scarred survivors search for canned food, weapons, supplies, and silver in the dust-laden ruins, ever alert for the call of the hunt, rival gangs, or one of the crazed paramilitaries that actually *worship* the Wolves. Braver souls dare to go deep into the Silver Land, knowing they can gather live foodstuffs – however warped – but do so at the risk of encountering the hunt.

The dry, dusty regions are filled with hardscrabble scavengers, roving gangs, and small, highly protected colonies crafted from the remnants of the world that was. Cities occasionally provide shelter and protection, but are often the first place the Wolves look for prey. Small pockets of plenty still exist, here and there, but their owners aren't happy to share, and are often under siege by Wolf and human alike.

Those who try to leave the wastes for promised lands in the north or south are in for a rude awakening. Provided they aren't hunted down, they're most likely turned back, as border patrols generally let no one in. There's just no room at the table.

*For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength  
of the wolf is the pack.*

– Rudyard Kipling

### **Spreading Otherness**

No one in authority had an answer to what happened at the time, and no one has succeeded since. This has led to a rejection of many previously predominant religions, including the promise of science. It has also led to the creation of new beliefs, or the resurgence of older, more “primitive” forms of spirituality. Some even worship the Wolves, believing them to be emissaries of the spirit world.

In recent years, the night sky is undergoing a slow, strange conversion. With the Moon now locked in step with the Sun, the stars are quite visible in the non-dusty areas, and can be seen to have started assuming different patterns. Their light has also turned sickly and weird, as though the atmosphere were polluted somehow.

## **THE NATION OF FENRIR**

*“Kneel,” the Wolf Lord growled to his flock – fearful servants of the fang, come here to the Mansbane to pray. As one, they took a knee, eyes fixed upon the altar of bones his pack had dragged through the swaying flowers, and the wet horrors heaped upon it.*

*In time, one soul dared approach their god. In his trembling hands, he held a small bag: a jingling collection of rings and necklaces, taken from the traitors they had slain.*

*The Wolf Lord recoiled from the poison, ordering one of the humans he’d brought with him to take it in hand. Then he smiled upon the one who’d brought it.*

*“Well done, my servant,” he said. “For this gift, I shall take only three of your best people . . .”*

New owners of a changed Earth, the Wolves’ civilization often seems like a ruthless monolith, especially to the humans they prey upon. In truth, they’re more a fractious beachhead than conquering wave, as infighting over dwindling resources has stopped them from fully taking the world. In the absence of a clear leader, and with trust and mutual aid something of an alien concept, it’s unlikely they will achieve their ancestors’ goals anytime soon.

### **Lupine Overview**

The Silver Land is run as a series of autonomous military camps, mostly centered within the totality, with extensive territorial gains throughout the patchwork landscape, and claims extending well into the dry lands. Each camp is ruled by an extended family of Wolf Lords and operated by their pack.

Once there were many, smaller camps, ruled by Wolf Lords who survived the initial surges outward. Some cooperated with one another – exchanging heavy weapons, banding together to form larger groups, and intermarrying with the goal of creating dynasties. Some desired only to be on their

own, and shunned their fellows – retreating to their bunkers, or heading into the cities beyond the Silver Land.

Others, however, simply attacked their neighbors, killing potential rivals, confiscating their WMDs, and taking other packs into their own. Before long, even those who desired cooperation were forced to admit that tooth and claw would win out over good intentions – turning aggressive to stay alive.

Now the Silver Land is split worldwide between only 20 or so families of Wolf Lords, some much more extensive than others. Packs may have minor skirmishes with neighbors, but outright infighting is nowhere as common as it was, mostly due to the threat of all-out retaliation with heavier weapons.

### **Animal Tactics**

Wolf patrols are constantly on the move within the jungle – watching for signs of incursion, or hunting for game. Circuits are mostly conducted on foot or paw, though some have access to motorized transportation. Others rely on networks of tunnels, the better to pop out and surprise their prey. Some of their tunnels extend far into the dust – eventually opening in strongholds and observation posts deep within the Silver Land.

Patrols consist of 10-20 Wolves, sometimes led by a Wolf Lord. They might carry human weapons of varying degrees of modernity, though some eschew guns and knives in favor of tooth and claw. In cases where they do carry weapons, they sometimes leave them under guard to hunt “properly.”

Packs often leave the Silver Land, swooping into the dust in search of provisions. Abandoned cities and towns are scoured for weapons, ammunition, equipment, tools, and food. Caravans and roving bands of marauders are observed for a time, and then either attacked or allowed to head into another Wolf Lord’s territory.

### **Big Guns**

The Nation of Fenrir consolidated its hold on the land through the threat of weapons of mass destruction – a threat they followed through on twice. Various Wolf Lords still have access to such weapons, but their ability to easily deploy them has not been uniformly maintained. Tracking satellites have fallen from the sky, jet and rocket fuel have turned useless, and launch command centers have been allowed to fall into disrepair.

As a result, maybe only a quarter of the Lords who had access to WMDs could still deliver one through the air. Ground-based delivery is possible, but that would require effort, sacrifice, and time. So most Wolf Lords satisfy themselves with using more conventional weapons – especially man-portable missiles – to keep the humans on their toes, knowing fear will do the rest.

## Interspecies Relations

Wolves hunt people, true, but the purposes vary. Sometimes the humans are immediately turned and thus bolster the pack. Other times, they're marched back for later use; such unfortunates are referred to as "supplies," "meat," or even less-flattering names.

The Wolves also tend to their flocks: useful humans who serve the Nation of Fenrir out of fear, convenience, or deluded reverence. Sometimes these human agents are empowered with weapons and vehicles – creating dangerous, Wolf-allied paramilitary groups to fight, ravage, and collect "supplies" on the pack's behalf. Sometimes they're tricked into believing in the Werewolves as gods, and are formed into Wolf Cults as a means of control and resource collection.

One of the primary uses of such human agents is the collection of silver. The Wolves rightly fear it and would rather not have to risk their lives gathering it up. A few bags a year is sometimes enough tribute for a Wolf Lord to consider not culling a particular flock within their territory, especially if they think their neighbors have more than they do.

## MOON TIME

*Moon of Silver, World of Dust* is the result of a supernatural apocalypse, with *Bombs Away, Mother Nature, and Things Fall Apart* as secondary effects. (See *GURPS After the End 2: The New World*, pp. 4-7, for details on these causes.) Appropriate hazards include chemicals and munitions, climate (hyperstorms and sandstorms), disease, gangs, paramilitaries, and radiation (particularly in central Mexico, western Russia, and bordering states). See Chapter 2 in *After the End 2* for specifics on these effects.

The campaign starts four to six generations after the eclipse. All initial survivors have died, and the events have turned into questionable history in the less-advanced areas. No one has ever seen the Sun without the Moon at least slightly occluding it.

## Characters

Adventurers living within the contested areas can be created with the guidelines from *GURPS After the End 1: Wastelanders*, with 150 points representing toughened survivors. Those who hail from cities – or the more plentiful, less-attacked areas below the equator – can be made with 100 points. The GM is free to use mutation if desired; it could be due to radiation and toxic waste, some strange, further effect of the Moon, or maybe exposure to Mansbane.

## Technology

Current tech level varies from place to place. Wolves in the Silver Land, like humans in the wastelands, generally have TL4-5. The luckiest are at TL6 if they can find or make something to power a gas motor. Medicine tends to suffer the worst, as one might expect.

Those further away from the Wolves – up to the far north, or well past the equator – are better off, maintaining regular tech levels of 6-7 in their walled cities and redoubts. Some may even have rebuilt or maintained TL8, or somehow gone as high as TL9 in some respects, though they have not cared to evidence this.

## JOINING IN THE BATTLE'S DANCE

Basic human survival under horrible, post-apocalyptic conditions presents a wealth of story hooks. *Moon of Silver, World of Dust* adds a few more wrinkles to the standard mix of threats and adventure opportunities by presenting a supernatural foe, their human helpers, and the threat of further damage to the Earth's ecosystem through the use of WMDs. There are also possibilities of exploring the twisted landscape of the Silver Land, trying to escape to the promised lands to the south or far north, or having people from those more civilized areas try to come to their aid.

*Into the Zone:* Every year, the Wolves in this area rush out of the Silver Lands, bite the strongest to turn them, and corral the rest to take back. But this time, the human warriors have a plan: those taken will leave markers along the path – hopefully all the way to the Wolf Lord's camp. But can the warriors sneak through the alien landscape without getting caught, or killed by what might be lurking there?

*Rebuild the Ruin:* The PCs come from one of the far-flung, northern redoubts of human civilization – one so out of contact that it's seriously unaware of current conditions. These brave emissaries are going into the swirling wastes with the technology and tools to restart the world. They have no idea how much work lies ahead of them, or how tenacious a foe they'll be facing. What happens when they encounter the Wolves, or realize the humans they want to save worship the creatures like gods?

*Turn Back the Moon:* We all know what happened to the world, but not *why*. Some say the answer lies within the Silver Land, in a place once called Missouri. Legend says that was where the Moon turned to silver, and where the original Lord Red (see p. 5) delivered his proclamation. It's also said to be the seat of the largest, most heavily armed camp of Wolf Lords. Surely Lord Red's descendants are guarding some secret?

## SOME KIND OF DEMON

The lycanthropes in this *After the End* campaign world can easily be represented by the werewolves from *GURPS Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy*, pp. 24-28, with a few important differences, noted below.

*Infection:* As the full moon is a permanent fixture in the sky, those who survive a bite from a werewolf must fight infection *immediately*. Those who fail become Wolves and must change. Their first time out, they act feral, but generally follow the lead of their pack, or the commands of the Wolf or Wolf Lord who turned them. On subsequent changes, they exhibit increasingly more control over their actions. They also do not suffer from the traditional Lunacy, given the Moon's permanent state.

*Self-Control:* After the first change, the Wolves of the pack become Semi-Rational and able to decide whether to change or not. Wolf Lords are *always* Rational, barring any disadvantages.

*Wolves:* In werewolf and human forms, those turned by the Wolf Lords (or other Wolves) become Sterile. As humans, they are less intelligent, lose Will, and are subject to Slave Mentality – reflected in the stats on p. 9. Wolves in wolf form are not Sterile, but can only breed with others in wolf form.



*Wolf Lords:* In werewolf and human forms, Wolf Lords replace Infectious Attack with Dominance; each Wolf they create becomes an Ally with the Minion and Special Abilities enhancements. Wolf Lords lose Bestial, Berserk, and Bloodlust as humans, and gain Bully (15) and Callous instead. Their IQ starts at 12, and their Will at 13. They do not suffer from the Sterile trait in any form; all offspring of Wolf Lords are also Wolf Lords.

### Werewolf – Werewolf Form

see *Monster Hunters 3*, p. 28

See above for setting-specific changes.

### Werewolf – Wolf Form

**ST:** 22      **HP:** 22      **Speed:** 8.25  
**DX:** 17      **Will:** 12      **Move:** 11/22  
**IQ:** 5      **Per:** 13      **Weight:** 125-175 lbs.  
**HT:** 16      **FP:** 16      **SM:** 0

**Dodge:** 12      **Parry:** N/A      **DR:** 6 (Tough Skin)

**Bite (15):** 2d+1 cutting; Reach C. Made as a Deceptive Attack (-2 to defend against).

**Claw (15):** 2d+3 crushing; Reach C. Made as a Deceptive Attack (-2 to defend against).

**Running Claw or Bite (14):** Either attack above, made as a Move and Attack instead of a Deceptive Attack; ignore the skill cap of 9.

**Traits:** Animal Empathy; Bad Temper (9); Berserk (15); Bestial; Bloodlust (9); Cannot Speak; Combat Reflexes; Discriminatory Hearing; Discriminatory Smell (Emotion Sense); Enhanced Move 1 (Ground); High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Transformation; Infectious Attack; Injury Tolerance (Unliving); Quadruped; Regeneration (Instant; Not vs. silver); Vulnerability (Silver x3).

**Skills:** Body Language-13; Brawling-19; Intimidation-15; Observation-13; Survival (local terrain)-13; Stealth-17; Swimming-16; Tracking-20; Wrestling-18.

### Werewolf – Human Form

**ST:** 17      **HP:** 17      **Speed:** 7.00  
**DX:** 13      **Will:** 12      **Move:** 7  
**IQ:** 8      **Per:** 13      **Weight:** 100-200 lbs.  
**HT:** 14      **FP:** 14      **SM:** 0

**Dodge:** 11      **Parry:** 11      **DR:** 1 (Tough Skin)

**Bite or Punch (15):** 1d+2 crushing; Reach C.

**Kick (13):** 1d+3 crushing; Reach C, 1.

**Weapon (varies):** Based on damage 1d+2/3d-1.

**Traits:** Animal Empathy; Bad Temper (9); Berserk (15); Bestial; Bloodlust (12); Combat Reflexes; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Transformation; Infectious Attack; Injury Tolerance (Unliving); Loner (Not regarding other weres) (6); Regeneration (Instant; Not vs. silver); Slave Mentality; Sterile; Unnatural Features (Hairy; Lupine Eyes); Vulnerability (Silver x3).

**Skills:** Brawling-15; Hidden Lore (Lycanthropes)-12; Survival (local terrain)-13; Wrestling-14. ● May also have at least one Melee Weapon skill at DX (13) or better, and either Guns-15 or another ranged weapon skill at DX+1 (14).

*Trust and mutual aid are somewhat alien concepts.*

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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 Wraith 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.

**GURPS** Fourth Edition



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# NO PLACE LIKE HOME

BY CHIP LIMEBURNER

*Clouds gather in the gray sky above as you trudge through the countryside, a bleak and blasted landscape left by the Catastrophe. Crossing scorched fields, you can spot a structure up ahead. Either a farmhouse or comfortable country home, it stands amid a small grove of withered trees, a last remnant of dead civilization. A slow rumble of thunder rolls through, building to a crescendo, and you feel the first drop of rain. It burns on your skin, and you know that the fallout in the atmosphere will turn a spring shower a fiery deluge. You'll need to get to shelter fast, or you won't last long.*

This **GURPS After the End** adventure is designed for a group of three to five wastelanders built on 50 to 100 points, depending on how outclassed the GM wants them to be. It's a *horror* adventure, so the GM should aim to make the villain strong enough that the PCs must work together to succeed, and victory is measured not by killing the villain, but by how many heroes survive. To that end, both heroic and legendary builds of the villain are provided (see p. 14).

The adventure takes place 10 to 40 years after the cataclysm that created this post-apocalyptic world. The immediate ramifications of the disaster are no longer apparent, but longer-term complications have just begun to set in, such as climate shifts and acid rain. Many remember the event, but a growing number of people have no recollection of the Catastrophe. Society has stabilized somewhat in the form of loose bands of survivors, either building up simple fortifications and trying to make a life for themselves, or roving about the countryside nomadically looking for resources. It is a world characterized by the very last gasps of motor-vehicle use, and the resurgence of back-to-the-land techniques of hunting and farming. Against the backdrop, however, dangerous loners still exist, either afflicted by mutations or driven mad by the collapse of society. In out-of-the-way hidey-holes, they wait for a scouting party gone too far afield or a roving band to set up camp before they strike.

## PROLOGUE

At the outset, the wastelanders find themselves trekking across a typical post-apocalyptic landscape, threatened by a downpour of strongly acidic rain. The only adequate refuge is, of course, the house; to emphasize the seriousness of the situation, the travelers take 1 point of corrosion damage for every 10 minutes they spend out in the storm until they reach shelter.

From what was once the country road, a short distance through the trees, winds an overgrown dirt track – a sort of main drive, ending with a rusted-out pickup truck in front of the two-story house, with overgrown bushes crowding the foundation. If the group checks out the truck, they learn that it is beyond repair, and even largely beyond salvaging parts, being so thoroughly abandoned that corrosion has ruined most of it.

As the wanderers investigate the house, they discover that it seems abandoned. The house has a long, covered veranda in front and a small, covered porch in back. A tiny, overgrown garden is also behind the house, and short, withered trees are all around the structure. The front and back doors (DR 1 ablative, HP 23 from disrepair) leading to the *Entry Hall* (p. 12) and *Kitchen* (p. 12) respectively swing freely on their hinges, the frames showing evidence of having once been forced in. If the PCs are particularly diligent, parting some of the bushes near the house uncovers a set of metal storm doors (DR 50, HP 58). These are, however, chained shut with a padlock that's been badly warped by some sort of impact, preventing any sort of lockpicking attempt. Specialty tools such as bolt cutters will be necessary to free the doors.

No one answers any greetings the party might call out as they enter. Unknown to them, there is one inhabitant – Cooper (p. 14) – though he remains silent as the visitors first intrude, waiting for the perfect time to strike. He stays hidden in the attic, the entrance of which is hard to spot, until the PCs either go to sleep or trigger one of his traps.

For the duration of their visit to the farmhouse, the PCs will be more-or-less free to move around the house as they please, though these movements will rapidly become a game of cat and mouse once Cooper comes to play. It will be up to the adventurers to beat this masked murderer at his own game, or else hold out for 12 hours until the acid rain lets up and they can escape into the countryside.

## STRATEGY

Cooper's general plan is to lay low until the PCs are distracted, asleep, or separated, providing him an opportunity to overpower them. As he pushes the victims around the house, he takes advantage of loop-arounds (such as *Entry Hall* to *Dining Room* to *Kitchen*, or *Kid's Room* to *Roof* to *Guest Room* to *Corridor*) to outflank the party, even accepting the corrosion damage of a brief shortcut through the outdoors.

If outright killing the group seems too difficult, he attempts to shepherd them into the *Basement* (below), from where it will be much harder for them to escape even if the rain lets up.

When engaging in direct confrontation, he favors using his fire axe, but will just as easily use his bare hands or nearby objects to incapacitate his target. If fighting a group, he prioritizes disarming or maiming those armed with particularly lethal weapons first.

If any of the traps are triggered, Cooper is content to get the one use out of them. However, he does take the time to reset any that could prove useful a second time. In particular, if he retrieves the bear trap (below) from the basement, he will carry it about the house and set it up elsewhere.

The PCs might try to barricade doors, particularly while in rooms on the second floor, using any of the large furniture

(treat the barricaded door as having DR 3, HP 33). Alternatively, many of the doors can be “reinforced” from the outside by tying the doorknob to a nearby anchor point such as a railing or even another doorknob (ST roll to yank open). Either of these actions is less likely to stop Cooper so much as simply slow his advance, but if the wastelanders are not careful, Cooper might use these tricks himself to force the group into a dead end.

Finally, Cooper is not above playing the waiting game. If the adventurers have stalemated him, he is happy to withdraw for 30 to 60 minutes, hiding nearby in hopes of lulling his prey into coming out of their defensible position. As the rain begins to let up, he becomes increasingly agitated, taking greater risks to get at the PCs before they can escape.

# THE HOUSE

For maps of the levels, see p. 15. The traps described here use the format explained in *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons*, pp. 19-20.

A thick layer of dust covers nearly everything in the house, but is disturbed in many places such as stairs, hallways, and railings. However, these signs of life are in such a scuffling manner that it’s difficult to determine if it was caused by humans or wild animals finding their way into the building. If the visitors specifically ask about the state of certain objects, such as doorknobs or railings, they find considerable signs of usage, perhaps confirming a theory that they’re not alone.

## BASEMENT

This area has very little natural light coming into it, so the rooms are dimly lit at best.

### 1. Cellar

The stairs down from the *Kitchen* (p. 12) are treacherous, but not so treacherous as the bear trap waiting at the bottom. With little light making it past the few grimy windows that penetrate the building’s foundation, it’s easy to accidentally step on the snare.

Once the visitors have made it past the bear trap, they can see the basement is in shambles. Likely already a disorganized storage space before the world ended, it has since been ransacked by scavengers looking for anything useful. Bikes, a kayak, sports equipment, and countless boxes of keepsakes and clothing all lie in a jumbled mess against the walls and in the middle of the room. (Scrounging-3 to find anything useful; if successful, either pick something appropriate, or determine randomly with *Results*, *GURPS After the End 2: The New World*, pp. 37-38.)

The south wall has a metal door (DR 50, HP 58) leading to the *Storeroom* (below). A short set of stairs along the east wall leads to a set of metal cellar doors (DR 50, HP 58) one could reasonably expect open to the outside. Unfortunately, they seem to be sealed shut from the other side (see *Prologue*, p. 10).

Along the north wall is a workbench where unarmed individuals may find small tools with which to defend themselves, such as hammers or wrenches. Upon approaching the table,

it is immediately apparent that it’s covered in a thick layer of dried blood. Identifying the brownish crust as blood requires no skill roll as most of the bones from two human skeletons litter the surface and the floor around the area, suggesting they were butchered here.

If someone attempts to open the door to the storeroom, they will find it locked. Cooper carries the key on him, which may be retrieved if the group can kill or incapacitate him, but otherwise Lockpicking or forced entry is required. (Lockpicking is at -5 for having only crude tools or no modifier for proper picks.)

### Bear Trap

A bear trap sits primed at the bottom of the stairs, waiting to ensnare unwary visitors.

*Detect:* Per-based Traps at -9 without light source, at -2 with limited light (flashlight, lighter, candle), at +2 with a floodlight (lamp, portable construction light).

*Disarm:* Automatic with use of a long or heavy thrown object to set it off, but makes a noise and disarms the object in the process. DX-based Traps to disarm quietly.

*Circumvent:* Automatic (step over the trap).

*Evade:* Dodge at -6 to pull back limb before trap snaps shut.

*Effects:* 1d-2 crushing and attached to leg, halving Move (break free from ST 10 to remove).

*Shots:* 1.

*Rearm, Steal:* Yes.

### 2. Storeroom

This concrete room is completely dark (the window has been plastered over), but contains an incredible wealth of resources. Though objectively not much, the 30 cans of food stacked on the wire-shelving units within are a remarkable find in this scary new world. As well, a manual pump with a basin is installed in a corner of the room. Though the taps in the rest of the house no longer work, presumably because of a downed water tower, the action of the pump can still draw water from an underground aquifer untainted by fallout or other contaminants. The pump is therefore, for all short-term consideration, an unlimited source of potable water.

## FIRST FLOOR

The windows on this floor are unbroken, though the light coming in through them is subdued due to the storm and the porches' roofs. All interior doors are DR 1 (ablative) and HP 18, with hardware that is DR 3 and HP 6, unless otherwise stated. Only the *Powder Room* (below) door has a lock.

### 3. Entry Hall

Predominantly a two-story open-style entryway, the faded floral wallpaper, dusty pictures of cats, and cross-stitches hung on the walls establish the chintzy décor of the house. A staircase ascends up the east side to the *Corridor* (below) on the second floor. A narrow hallway on the first floor extends into the house and connects with the *Kitchen* (below). Wide openings to the east and west provide views of the *Living Room* (below) and *Dining Room* (below) respectively. One of the doors that flanks the hallway is unlocked and opens into a crawlspace beneath the stairs, where numerous boxes – largely containing holiday decorations – are stored.

Additionally, a trap is set up in the hallway and crawlspace. A tripwire spans the hallway at ankle level, which when triggered sets off a shotgun shell mounted just inside the crawlspace so that it fires out across the hallway.

#### Shotgun Shell Tripwire

A wire across the hallway triggers a burst of pellets from a shell concealed in a nearby crawlspace.

*Detect:* Per-based Traps at -2. Even if the trap is undetected, there is a 3 in 6 chance to get lucky and step over the tripwire without setting it off. Roll once for each PC who goes down the hallway until the trap is noticed or set off.

*Disarm:* DX-based Traps.

*Circumvent:* Automatic (step over tripwire).

*Evade:* No.

*Effects:* 1d+1 piercing to anyone within a yard of the trip line.

*Shots:* 1.

*Rearm:* Yes, if the character rearming has an unused shotgun shell.

*Steal:* Yes. Dismantling the trap yields 4' of fishing line, several pieces of small hardware, and one shotgun shell. This can be set up elsewhere or used for its various parts.

### 4. Living Room

The living room is comfortable, if not traditional in style. A plastic-covered couch and two plush chairs occupy the center of the room, with a low coffee table in front of them and facing an old tube television in the corner. A bookcase against the far wall holds a set of encyclopedias propped up by hefty duck-shaped bookends. Though hiding under the couch is not possible, it is large enough that crouching behind it provides full cover. Pushing the two chairs next to each other affords the same cover.

### 5. Dining Room

The dining room contains a wooden table that can seat six, appropriate chairs, a china cabinet, and a sideboard. Drawers in the sideboard contain silverware that may be used

as improvised weapons. At the north side of the room is a door that leads through to the *Kitchen* (below).

### 6. Powder Room

The powder room is a small restroom for guests, containing only a toilet and small sink. Neither the toilet nor sink seem to have running water anymore, but a pill bottle containing two lonely aspirins may be found in the mirrored medicine cabinet. The door lock is simple (+5 to Lockpicking attempts).

### 7. Kitchen

The kitchen is rather unexceptional in its composition, being outfitted with all the appliances one would expect for modern life before the Catastrophe. That being said, cupboard doors hang off their hinges, and the only evidence food was ever kept here is a torn plastic sleeve containing a crushed cracker. There is an additional hazard to the kitchen – shards of broken glass litter the floor, dealing 1 point of cutting damage to anyone walking barefoot or lying down in this room.

To the south, a door opens to the *Dining Room* (above). To the southeast, a door leads to the *Entry Hall* (above). A door in the western wall of the room opens up to a dark stairwell descending to the *Cellar* (p. 11). A screen door and an exterior door open from the northeastern corner to a back porch overlooking a small, overgrown garden and the grove of trees surrounding the house.

*Also there is a twist to the story as I'm being haunted and driven crazy, attacked and so on. All I seem to do is run and scream and cry in every scene.*

– Bo Derek

## SECOND FLOOR

The windows on this floor are also unbroken, but the light is a little brighter than downstairs. All interior doors are DR 1 (ablative) and HP 18, with hardware that is DR 3 and HP 6, unless otherwise stated. The bedroom doors can be locked, but are at +5 to Lockpicking attempts.

The rooms on this floor also show signs of having been searched by scavengers, but are generally less disturbed as their contents (toys, books, jewelry, fashionable clothing, etc.) have less importance as survival necessities in this hostile world.

### 8. Corridor

A hallway stretches the length of the second floor. Closed doors lead to the *Kid's Room* (p. 13), *Guest Room* (p. 13), and *Bathroom* (p. 13). At the end of the hall, the door leading to the *Master Bedroom* (p. 13) stands invitingly ajar – a tactic Cooper might use to entrap anyone who wanders upstairs before he's revealed himself. Next to the bathroom is a narrow linen closet closed off by a louvered door. It contains a few towels and sheets, though they've been disturbed and some were taken.

A panel in the ceiling can be pulled down, revealing a slide-out ladder and access to *Storage* (below) in the attic. However, the panel is hard to notice without knowing what to look for (at -2 if not actively looking for an attic entrance). Even if the explorers notice the panel and try to open it, they'll find it trapped.

### Bladed Ladder

The end of the attic ladder is retrofitted with bladed feet so that as it slides down, it impales unsuspecting trespassers.

*Detect:* No. The bladed ladder leaves no trace on the outside of the panel, providing no opportunity to see it before it has been sprung.

*Disarm:* No.

*Circumvent:* Automatic (stand clear of where the ladder slides down).

*Evade:* Dodge, at -2 if the person getting hit is also the one who opened the panel.

*Effects:* 1d+2 impaling.

*Shots:* 1.

*Rearm:* Yes (closing the attic panel retracts the ladder).

*Steal:* Yes. The bladed feet may be unscrewed and used as two improvised knives.

## 9. Kid's Room

This room contains children's toys and high-school and college-level textbooks. It appears to have been the bedroom of someone who grew up in this house and perhaps was away at college or otherwise moved before the great cataclysm struck. The room seems reasonably untouched, though several shelves of action figures and comic books are pulled down and strewn about the floor to one side of the room.

Outside the window, the roof of the front porch can be carefully traversed (half Move) to either the window of the *Guest Room* (below) or the *Master Bedroom* (below) around the corner of the building. If anyone does so, they take 1 point of corrosion damage for every 10 minutes spent outside in the acid rain (minimum 1 point of damage).

## 10. Guest Room

Clearly once a guest room, the bed is neatly made, with a large empty dresser and armoire. Outside the window, the roof of the front porch can be carefully traversed (half Basic Move) to either the window of the *Kid's Room* (above) or the *Master Bedroom* (below) around the corner of the building. If anyone does so, they take 1 point of corrosion damage for every 10 minutes spent outside in the acid rain (minimum 1 point of damage).

## 11. Bathroom

The upstairs bathroom is much more fully equipped than the *Powder Room* (p. 12) downstairs. In addition to a sink and toilet, it also contains a vintage claw-foot bathtub. The shower curtains are missing, and a couple inches of reddish liquid sits stagnant in the bottom of the tub. Any biology- or medicine-related skill allows an investigator to identify the fluid as blood diluted heavily in water.

The medicine cabinet contains only conventional toiletries such as a couple toothbrushes, floss, etc. – perhaps useless in a fight for your life, but potentially valuable commodities in the apocalypse.

## 12. Master Bedroom

The master bedroom shows evidence of having once been occupied by a couple. A king-size bed, vanity, desk, a sitting area, and photographs of a couple perhaps in their 60s all testify to the house's prior occupants, though nothing directly indicates where they might be now. A door in the southeast corner leads to an en suite bathroom containing a Jacuzzi and separate standing shower. The bathroom has another, folding door that reveals a huge walk-in closet with men's and women's clothing.

Outside the window, the roof of the front porch can be carefully traversed (half Basic Move) to either the window of the *Kid's Room* (above) or the *Guest Room* (above) around the corner of the building. If anyone does so, they take 1 point of corrosion damage for every 10 minutes spent outside in the acid rain (minimum 1 point of damage).

## ATTIC

This area can be accessed from a hidden panel in the *Corridor* (p. 12).

## 13. Storage

Dust hangs heavy in the air as the acidic rain outside can be heard beating down on the sloped roof. As with many spaces in the house, the attic was clearly a storage area. Boxes are piled against the walls and in the center of the room. In the southeastern corner, a large nest of blankets, sheets, and throw pillows may be found – evidently where Cooper sleeps. A variety of odds and ends are scattered among the sheets, including three shotgun shells and comic books (pilfered from the *Kid's Room*, above). Cooper is incredibly protective of his bed and the small trinkets found scattered thereabout, so if he's not already present, he will do everything within his power to rush to the attic and kill anyone who defiles his sleeping quarters.

# CONCLUSION

Throughout the ordeal, keep track of how long it's been since the rain started. After approximately 12 hours, the rain begins to abate, affording the survivors an opportunity to escape out into the wasteland. Cooper will chase the group a short distance from the house, but he won't pursue them much further than 20 yards, preferring to stay near his established base.

If the wastelanders do manage to kill Cooper, they are free to take their time ransacking the house for any leftover resources. As mentioned already, the *Storeroom* (p. 11) hides 30 cans of food and limitless water. As well, the house has a variety of tools, clothes, linens, and potentially tradable paraphernalia the survivors may wish to use improvisationally in this post-apocalyptic world.

If the visitors want to figure out what took place at the house before they arrived, or determine the identity of Cooper, they will unfortunately come up short for answers. Between the personal effects in the master bedroom and the remains in the basement, they might conclude Cooper killed and disposed of the house's owners, though this is not explicitly recorded anywhere. Cooper himself, if found,

is simply a stocky Caucasian male between the ages of 30 and 40, with a buzz cut. His military tunic with the embroidered name tag does not seem to be originally his, as it fits his large frame poorly, but otherwise there are no clues as to his origin. He is simply another survivor of the world's end, perhaps driven mad by the cataclysm or perhaps simply unleashed by it.

# THE KILLER

A behemoth of a man, the killer wears a tattered military tunic bearing a name tag that reads simply, "Cooper." Whether this is his name, or the garment was simply stripped a past victim, is unknowable, as Cooper is a man of few words. His face obscured by a gas-mask, he prefers to stalk his prey with a fire axe, though he is not above improvising and using anything at hand (even his enemy's own weapons) against them.

He is presented here in two versions: a 200-point build intended for a team of characters who are ill-equipped or weak, and an almost supernatural 350-point build intended for those who can bring greater firepower to bear.

## COOPER (HEROIC)

200 points

**ST** 18 [80]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 9 [-20]; **HT** 16 [60].  
Damage 1d+2/3d; BL 65 lbs.; HP 18 [0]; Will 9 [0]; Per 9 [0];  
FP 16 [0].  
Basic Speed 6.75 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.  
6'4"; 230 lbs.

### Social Background

*TL:* 7 [-5].  
*Languages:* English (Understood but not spoken).

### Advantages

Fearlessness 5 [10]; Hard to Kill 5 [10]; High Pain Threshold [10].  
*Perks:* Improvised Weapons (Axe/Mace) [1]; Improvised Weapons (Knife) [1].

### Disadvantages

Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Curious (12) [-5].

### Skills

Brawling (E) DX+6 [20]-17; Axe/Mace (A) DX+5 [20]-16;  
Knife (E) DX+2 [4]-13; Traps (A) IQ+1 [4]-10.

## COOPER (LEGENDARY)

350 points

This version of Cooper is intended not for timid PCs struggling to survive in the wastes, but rather to challenge a party of hardened apocalyptic veterans. If the 200-point Cooper is from the first movie in a slasher franchise, this one is from the sequel when the marines and state troopers are called in. Not only is he physically more imposing, but a range of mutations pulled from *GURPS After the End 1: Wastelanders* and

techniques from *GURPS Martial Arts* pushes his abilities into jaw-dropping brutality.

**ST** 20 [100]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 9 [-20]; **HT** 17 [70].  
Damage 2d-1/3d+2; BL 80 lbs.; HP 20 [0]; Will 9 [0]; Per 9 [0];  
FP 18 [0].  
Basic Speed 7.50 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 10.  
6'7"; 300 lbs.

### Social Background

*TL:* 7 [-5].  
*Languages:* English (Understood but not spoken).

### Advantages

Fearlessness 5 [10]; Hard to Kill 5 [10]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Injury Tolerance (Unliving) [20]; Thick Hide 2 (DR 7) [35].  
*Perks:* Improvised Weapons (Axe/Mace) [1]; Improvised Weapons (Knife) [1].

### Disadvantages

Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Curious (12) [-5]; Freakishness 9 [-9].

### Skills

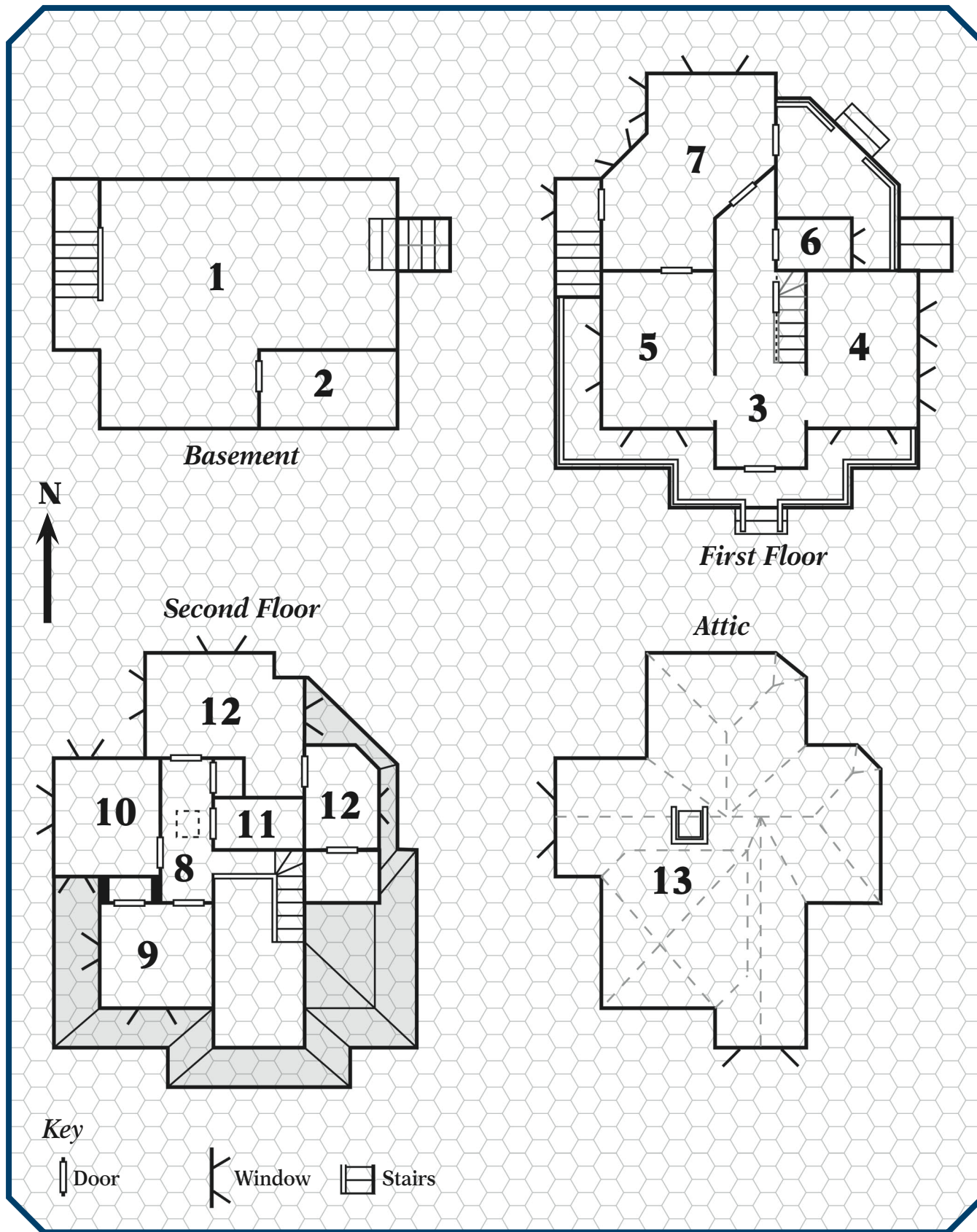
Brawling (E) DX+6 [20]-19; Axe/Mace (A) DX+5 [20]-18;  
Knife (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Thrown Weapon (Axe/Mace) (E) DX+6 [20]-19; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Traps (A) IQ+1 [4]-10.  
*Techniques:* Backbreaker (H) ST+3 [7]-23; Eye-Gouging (H) Brawling [6]-19.

*What terrified me will terrify  
others; and I need only describe  
the spectre which had haunted  
my midnight pillow.*

– Mary Shelley

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chip Limeburner is a Canadian-American themed-entertainment designer and writer specializing in horror and gothic media. He splits his time between Montréal, Québec, where he lives, and Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he sits on the board of directors for the live-performance Twin Cities Horror Festival.



# MAP OF THE FARMHOUSE

Scale: 1 hex = 1 yard.

# THE KNOWLEDGE OF OUR FOREBEARS

BY NATHAN M.M. MELUVOR

After the Fall, there will come a time when the survivors' situation stabilizes to the point that they seek to rebuild society anew. One of the most valuable resources will be the knowledge of the old world, preserved primarily in the form of written records. We have written down so many valuable things – agriculture, metallurgy, jurisprudence, and more – everything a society needs to start anew can be found in our words. Records are stored in many media: articles, CDs, DVDs, electronic databases, and so on. Most likely to be useful, however, are books.

Several obstacles exist to using found books. This article discusses just two: the physical degradation of the media, and linguistic and cultural shifts that inhibit understanding the information therein. In addition to describing the processes which damage media, this article presents a simple optional system for the GM to determine the viability of found records.

## DETERMINING VIABILITY

When records are discovered, the GM may make a viability roll on the table below. Roll 3d and add or subtract the appropriate modifiers (see p. 17). For every 50 years the materials have been stored, the GM should roll on the table, taking the highest result of all the rolls for that set of books. Thus, if the materials have been sitting for 150 years, the GM should take the highest total on three rolls.

This system assumes that the materials have not been stored in archival conditions and that some degree of poor conditions are present, with modifiers for *especially* bad situations. If the materials *are* stored in archival conditions, rolls should not be made for the first 300 years at least. If the GM chooses not to use this system, they can still refer to the modifier descriptions given under *The Degradation of Paper* (below) to make an informed decision about the condition of found materials.

The entries in the table are very rough guidelines for the quality of books found. This takes a somewhat cinematic view of book conditions; different environmental factors damage books in different ways, and some (such as insect and fungal damage) are more likely to cause problems of legibility, while

most of the forms of damage listed under *The Degradation of Paper* are more likely to cause issues of fragility. The GM is encouraged to describe found books in whatever way suits their campaign, with the rolls giving a rough outline of what *level* of damage is to be expected. If a high degree of realism is desired, problems of *legibility* are generally caused by mechanical stressors (fungus, insect activity, or changing humidity), whereas problems of *fragility* are typically caused by ambient problems (improper humidity, temperature, and so on).

## Handling of Books

A book that is fragile according to the *Viability Table* requires extreme care not to be completely ruined. Someone handling such a book makes a roll against some manner of specialty skill, or DX. Some suggestions for specialty skills include Archaeology, Connoisseur (Books), Hobby Skill (Book Handling), or Scrounging (if the person has other perks or skills that represent an understanding of books). Although fragile books require rolls for most handling (including reading and transport), books that are listed on the *Viability Table* as slightly frail need rolls only to read the books. While a failure on a fragile book might well destroy it, a failure on a slightly frail book is likely only to cause some small damage – perhaps tearing out pages or breaking the spine. Books that are beginning to stiffen do not require rolls to handle or read, but absent conservation efforts will move toward slightly frail the more they are used, at least in their structural integrity.

## Viability Table

Roll	Viability
20 or more	Completely unusable and falling apart.
16-19	25% legible. Fragile (DX rolls or specialist skill needed to avoid damage).
13-15	50% legible. Slightly frail (care needed to handle without damage).
8-12	75% legible. Beginning to stiffen and lose strength and flexibility.
7 or less	100% legible. Sturdy (no special handling or rolls needed to use the book).



## The Degradation of Paper

Many factors, mostly environmental, contribute to the degradation of paper. The ones most likely to be relevant in the wasteland are *paper type, time, temperature, moisture, pollutants, and radiation.*

### Paper Type

The extent to which paper degrades is partially dependent on the books themselves; the material of the paper plays a large part in the degradation process. In the real world, books made of paper prior to the mid-19th century tend to be made of rag (linen and cotton fiber). The fibers in such material are longer, and thus more hardy. Later on, the material changed to pulped wood, with shorter fibers. The shorter the fibers, the worse the durability. Wood-pulp books take +1 to the roll on the *Viability Table*.

### Time

The Library of Congress has shown that paper degrades with time independent of any other factors. The central cause of this is the hydrolysis of acid: over time, compounds within the paper form acids which damage the fibers of the paper, cutting the fibers shorter and shorter. This is part of why rag paper is so much more durable than wood-pulp paper. Lignin contained in some papers – for instance, mechanically pulped papers such as newsprint – promotes acid hydrolysis. Similarly, alum-rosin was added to papers prior to the 1980s, also promoting acid hydrolysis. Most of the effects listed below damage books by exacerbating this acidification process. Nevertheless, in good conditions, the Library of Congress suggests that good-quality paper can last up to hundreds of years. Books produced between 1850 and 1980 on Earth, or TL6 and TL7 elsewhere, take +1 to the viability roll.

Acid hydrolysis can be abated by treating the paper with alkaline compounds. So called acid-free paper is made this way, and many libraries treat their collections *post facto* in alkaline baths. Books with an alkaline treatment grant -3 to the viability roll. Books found in abandoned libraries are most likely to have had this treatment.

### Temperature

The Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC) lists temperature and humidity as two of the most critical factors in the degradation of documents. Higher temperatures exacerbate acid hydrolysis and other chemical reactions which contribute to deterioration. They suggest that each 18°F increase doubles the rate of chemical reactions. For each 18°F above or below 70°F ambient temperature, add or subtract 1 from the viability roll, respectively. Daily shifts in temperature need not be accounted for unless they are great enough to cause condensation. If they are, the viability roll takes +5.

### Moisture

Perhaps the most familiar form of damage to books is water damage; most people have had at least one book ruined by exposure to water. Where running water – such as from rain – has had significant contact with books, the GM should not consult the *Viability Table*; such books should be

considered unusable. This will depend largely on where the books have been stored, but storage is much more important here than for other factors on this list; oftentimes, nothing more than an intact roof is necessary.

It is not just liquid water that is a threat. As mentioned above, humidity represents one of the biggest dangers to book preservation. The NEDCC recommends for storage of materials an ambient humidity between 30% and 50%. Rather than account for the exact humidity, it is recommended that the GM simply add 1 to the viability roll for any *especially* dry or humid conditions. Fungi also flourish in moist conditions. It is up to the GM if book mold is a threat. If it is, add 3.

Unlike temperature, daily or frequent shifts in humidity *are* damaging. As the pages absorb and release moisture, they are mechanically agitated, which can cause non-acidic damage. If the environment regularly (not seasonally) changes in humidity, add 1 to the viability roll. If the books are tightly packed together, this can mitigate the effect; no modification is necessary.

### Pollutants

Pollutants accelerate acid hydrolysis. This is often why books will be browned or brittle around the edges of the pages. Because this factor functions by accelerating acidification, the modifier here is a function of the base modifier for time. If there is a significant amount of ambient pollution, add together the modifiers for time (above) and paper type (above), and multiply by 2. Thus, a TL7 book made of wood pulp would take an additional +4 in polluted conditions. If the conditions are *especially* noxious, include an additional 2. Note that pollutants do not refer to mere dust or dirt in the air, as these are not chemical agents that will hasten hydrolysis. Nor does it include radiation; radiation damage is detailed separately below.

### Radiation

Light in general is damaging to paper, and UV light especially so. According to the Library of Congress, photodegeneration is especially bad in low-quality papers. Books exposed to sunlight add 2 to the viability roll. Add an additional 1 if the book was produced in TL6 or TL7. *Text* continuously exposed to sunlight is likely automatically inviable; current research is lacking for the exact rate of photodegeneration, as the rate is complexly determined by a number of poorly understood factors. However, it is safe to say that almost any text printed in ink that has been exposed on a scale of years will be totally illegible.

Beyond UV radiation, however, research shows gamma radiation and other forms of radiation are also damaging. While this research targeted radiation-based antifungal therapies, this sort of damage could also be relevant in classic “nuclear holocaust” scenarios. Radiation seems both to worsen the mechanical strength of paper immediately and to exacerbate the effects of aging. Studies have typically focused on fairly significant levels of irradiation (the seminal study examined exposures of 1,000,000 rad). A recent study by D’Almeida et al. suggests that below this level, radiation does not have significant effect. To represent this, only books subjected to a great deal of radiation need be accounted for; those that have should add 2 to the viability roll.

# HOW LANGUAGE AFFECTS MEDIA ACCESS

Books are of little to no use to a society that cannot read them. As such, even when books are found legible and sturdy enough for examination, changes in language or culture can make them useless. This article assumes some level of *rebuilding*. The degradation of books typically happens over many years, and linguistic shifts take even longer. However, it is usually only on these kinds of time scales that the reading of books is even a concern. While one may need to consult a text to learn how to farm, this becomes relevant only after farming is an option. Wastelanders constantly running for their lives don't have the luxury of taking up farming!

Here are several of many possible considerations that a GM might use as obstacles to be overcome in obtaining the knowledge of the world before the Fall. All of them give a good opportunity for a bookish person to join a salvage mission – an interesting roleplaying opportunity in general. Such a scholar might act as a translator, or simply work to separate the wheat from the chaff as it were. Books on agriculture and metallurgy, or even good literature, might be extremely valuable. Books on competitive bridge playing are perhaps less desirable. It takes a certain amount of knowledge to separate the two.

The primary barrier to garnering knowledge from books is of course literacy, and it is far from guaranteed that literacy will survive the Fall. There are many factors to this, but the primary one is how long it takes for society – or what is left of it – to stabilize. The longer it takes, the less likely it is that literacy survives. Similarly, the literacy rate of the population before the Fall is relevant. If the Fall takes place in 21st-century America, literacy likely survives. If it takes place in 14th-century Italy, it is far less certain.

If literacy does not survive, it could possibly be recovered, as long as language remains relatively stable. The first stage for recovery of old texts would be reinventing writing, which likely will use a different writing system. The reinvention of writing, as a start, is almost guaranteed in time. Once the notion of writing is stable, an effort could be undertaken to recover the original language. If either a syllabary or alphabet was used to write the original language (as in English, Greek, or Arabic), this will not be an especially difficult challenge, assuming the language has not drifted much. If the original language was represented with logograms, it may well be impossible. An academic campaign might focus on this reconstruction project – the race to translate Egyptian hieroglyphs would be a good inspiration for roleplaying challenges.

As far as linguistic change itself is concerned, this will be relevant only on the largest scales. While linguistic changes sometimes happen very quickly, typically it takes several hundred years at minimum for mutual unintelligibility to develop. For example, speakers of contemporary English have relatively little difficulty in reading English from 400 years ago, and with some work can read English from as far back as 700 years ago.

However, this is only true in monolingual environments. In some parts of the United States, for example, it's fully possible that in an apocalyptic scenario, Spanish could supplant English entirely, or the two could creolize. When languages interact in this way, unintelligibility can spawn extremely quickly – the separation between Middle English and Old

English is far more stark than that of Middle English and contemporary English, even though Middle and Old English existed within 100 years of each other, compared with the 700 years between Middle and contemporary English. This can largely be attributed to the Normanization of English in the Middle English period. If there exists a written record dating back to the Fall, even if intelligibility has been lost, a trained individual could learn the older language through comparative analysis.

The most widely spoken languages – such as Chinese, English, Arabic, or whatever the *lingua franca* of a setting is – are the most likely to survive, but many other languages will probably die out in the Fall. In the case of either linguistic shift or the loss of unknown languages, books *about* languages are likely to be the most useful tools for reconstruction and rebuilding. These Rosetta Stones are likely to be extremely valuable, and may well serve as MacGuffins in their own right. An entire campaign could be centered around a search for a relevant book on translation. This would be especially true if a minority language were the survivor. For example, in a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles, if the survivors were entirely Spanish speakers, a Spanish-language grammar of English would be immensely valuable, as a large number of available books would be in English and those who wished to read them would only understand Spanish.

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## Suggested Reading

Sundberg, Minna. *Stand Still, Stay Silent* (2013-Present), [ssssc.com](https://ssssc.com). A beautiful webcomic about searching the ruins of a fallen world for books, in this case for purely economic gain!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

# EIDETIC MEMORY WHISPERS FROM THE WASTELANDS

BY DAVID L. PULVER

Here are three encounters for a *GURPS After the End* campaign that may initially appear as distorted rumors or traveler's tales. However, each contains a kernel of truth which intrepid survivors may discover. In each case, there is more to the story than it seems . . .

It's assumed at least a generation or two has passed since the fall of humanity, long enough for myths and legends to arise. One encounter assumes the existence of brain-eating zombies (as a primary or secondary threat) and mutated creatures (see *The Necros*, pp. 23-26); as such, it can also fit in with

some *GURPS Zombies* campaigns. The others presume some "experimental TL9+ technology existed in some form prior to the fall, but that familiarity with such technology is no longer commonplace among most wastelanders. Feel free to adjust the assumptions to fit specific campaign backgrounds.

*Are the traveler's tales and rumors mere myth . . . or is there something more to them?*

## THE CAVE OF THE VAMPIRES

*Traveler, you think ghosts and vampires are bedtime stories and campfire tales? Well, you're wrong. I know that vampires are real. There's one who lives nearby, in a cave not a half-day's ride into the hills.*

*What's the vampire's name? Varma, some say. They say she lurks in a cave of wonders, served by bats and monsters. If a brave warrior fights his way through them, he has to face her . . . and none can stand against her magic. Maybe she will put him to sleep and keep him as a slave, or feed him to the bats, or if he's lucky, take him to bed and suck his blood. If he pleases her, she may keep him forever . . . or tire of him and let him go.*

*Who would risk a vampire? Well, some folks are fools and drawn by her beauty. Others say her house is full of treasures, and those whose blood she drinks who please her, men and women both, may share her power! There was Sawbones Torch, who folk called Doc Methuselah, who had one of those 'lectric flash-things and used to be the oldest man of the village and*

*was a whole 70 years old before the cannibals got him. Claimed he'd been her lover when he was a young lad, that's why he lived so long . . . That's probably the moonshine talking . . . but I've heard a few who swear it's true!*

### THE TRUTH BEHIND THE STORY

The vampire cave is actually a high-tech underground survival bunker dating from just before the End. The "vampire lady" is actually a semi-intelligent computer, called VARMA, that runs security and medical systems. VARMA is an experimental automated medical bed that was installed in the bunker. The name is an acronym for Virtual Autonomous Robotic Medical Assistance. Its "bats" are a flock of small flying security/recon drones armed with non-lethal toxins.

During the turmoil of the End, VARMA's human supervisors departed on a rescue mission to transport medical supplies, but failed to return (presumably killed by some apocalyptic hazards). However, they left VARMA programmed to protect their bunker and to dispense medical treatment to anyone who made it past the security systems. Should any intruders pass through the outer security perimeter, VARMA is programmed to take blood samples and ask for blood donations from healthy visitors. It also provides inoculations, hence the legend of extended life.

The vampire legend has arisen amongst the local inhabitants as a result of wastelander looters who later dared the cave and interacted with the computer. VARMA's request for blood donations, bat-like drones, sleep-gas security system, and holographic interface contribute to the story. The "glass coffin" suspended-animation capsules that VARMA uses to preserve patients it cannot treat also help give unsophisticated visitors a sense that a vampire is here . . .

## VAMPIRE CLUES

A few wasteland scavengers have dared the cave since the "vampire legend" spread, often after listening to distorted tales of prior visitors. Some were ready for "vampires," with wooden stakes, crosses, and holy water; when the hunters were subdued (or fled), they often left talismans of this sort behind, which were found by other visitors, and so the legend spreads . . . As a result, the GM may wish to sprinkle a few more red herrings around the complex, such as:

*Garlic Paste and Holy Symbols:* A Smell roll in certain parts of the residential complex may reveal strategic doors are smeared with garlic paste. The doors may also be adorned with crucifixes, rosaries, or other holy symbols. These are a result of past incursions by gullible locals who tried to "seal in the undead."

*The Fearless Vampire Hunter:* Perhaps there is another wastelander or two wandering the complex who really does believe in vampires! Carrying silver bullets, a hammer and stakes, crosses, garlic, mirrors, holy water, or whatever, they may be an eccentric or deluded "monster hunter" or minister, or teenage "chosen one" who wanders from village to village "hunting undead" and even killing unfortunate mutants (or deserving brain-eating zombies). Naturally, they believe all the legends of "VARMA the Vampire."

*Staked Victim:* One of the "glass coffin" suspended animation beds contains a body of a woman with a wooden stake driven through its chest (it missed the heart). The corpse does not breathe but is preserved, and there is no blood (thanks to the suspended animation). The woman was a past visitor suffering from radiation sickness or another terminal illness that VARMA could not cure, and so put into suspended animation. A vampire-hunting survivor penetrated the building and spotted the sleepers. Thinking they were vampires, he drove a stake through this unfortunate in suspended animation, before gas subdued him, and IGOR ejected him from the complex. Removing the wooden stake will, of course, do nothing special . . .

## VARMA MEDICAL BUNKER

The GM will need to create the medical bunker housing VARMA. This can be a fairly simple site treated abstractly in accord with the *After the End* scavenging rules, as it is presented below, or the GM can expand it into an apocalyptic dungeon by adding various creature and technological encounters (nests of mutant animals, security traps, etc.).

Approaching the wooded facility risks encounters with the bat swarms (see *Batbot Patrols*, pp. 21-22). Groups who evade or defeat the bats may reach the cave itself.

At a minimum, the facility consists of several sections. See *Security Station (Ground Level)*, below, for details on getting between the levels. The hallway doors for the elevators on each level are very easy to open.

*Bat Cave (Ground Level):* This large cave or old mine entrance (GM's option) is on a wooded hillside several miles from the nearest survivor village. A colony of ordinary bats, or perhaps a mutant bear, may be in the cave mouth. There are also signs of past human occupancy: a few shell casings, broken bottles, a bicycle frame with no wheels or chain, and so on. A few mysterious chimney shafts, too small for a normal human, run deep into the ground. (These are used by the bats. If blocked, they may be later cleared by VARMA's repair robots.)

*Security Station (Ground Level):* A camouflaged blast door is at the back of the cave. It leads to an anteroom with a passenger elevator and a freight elevator, each with buttons for four levels. The elevators have bullet, fire, and blast damage. The passenger elevator is very clunky (and an IQ roll may be needed to figure out the buttons if the End was long ago); it grinds and shakes a lot, and has a 50% chance of jamming half-way. Passengers would then have to climb out the safety hatch in the ceiling or cut their way out and clamber down a ladder that runs along the shaft. The freight elevator is non-functional; a "vampire hunter" damaged it with explosives in an effort to "seal in" the monsters. The freight elevator has a gaping hole in the floor where a previous adventurer tried to get into the lower levels; there is a ladder on the wall of this shaft, too. (Bats can also use the hole.)

*Residential (Level 1):* This is a complex of a dozen (or more) bunker rooms that were used as storerooms, kitchens, bedrooms, and bathrooms. There are signs it was once inhabited by post-End human survivors (the medical team) who abandoned it; since then, looters have gone through it. There's a fair bit of old junk and furnished rooms with things people missed (maybe a shelf of books, pictures, stained bedsheets, a lamp that doesn't work, laundry, etc.). There's a corpse or two from rival looters who killed other. It could make a good hide-out with some refurbishment. Plumbing and power are not working properly; e.g., toilets don't flush, and lights don't work or they flicker and die.

*Industrial (Level 2):* This once housed workshops and machine shops, now lightly looted. Spare parts hidden behind sliding doors allow the repair robots (see *IGOR*, p. 22) to fix broken batbots. (Repairs only take place when no hostiles are wandering around.) There may be enough parts here to repair the passenger elevator.

*The enemy is anybody who's going to get you killed, no matter which side he is on.*

– Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*

There is a trickle of emergency power, so in some rooms, eerie red lights may activate. Two of the rooms contain roof-mounted power bars that the batbot swarm can plug into to recharge (which they do when not on patrol). There are usually a dozen or two batbots recharging here, who fight if disturbed or flee if outmatched. The “chimneys” that the batbots use to access the surface run down here; they’re too small for anyone who isn’t SM -1 or less.

*Medical (Level 3):* The white corridors have some bloodstains. Behind a blast door airlock (with an electronic lock, -4 to pick) is a room with nine glass coffins. Three of them are occupied with men or women, including one with a stake through her heart (see *Staked Victim*, p. 20). The others are sleeping but cannot be awakened (due to suspended animation drugs). They are wastelanders being treated by VARMA. Ducts in the ceilings provide access for the batbot patrols. Hidden passages behind secret doors (-5 to spot) conceal a room of support robots (see *IGOR*, p. 22). At the end of the level is an entrance to a sparsely furnished office, which leads to VARMA’s “boudoir.”

*VARMA’s Boudoir (Level 3):* Billowing curtains cover an opening in the rear of an office in the medical center. The doorway leads into a white chamber containing a circle of four large beds with attached pipes and instruments. A pillar stands among them, with a panel with blinking lights (a terminal) on one side and tipped with a rotating armored dome (for a camera/holographic projector and gas jet). Hidden behind a sliding panel in the ceiling is a cluster of metal tentacles, arms, and manipulators (some tipped with injectors), like a robot octopus – the automed’s arms; see *Interactions With VARMA*, p. 22. Behind this room is a locked airlock door (security door, -4 to open) that’s cold to the touch.

*Core Server Farm (Level 3):* The air conditioning is always on high, making this room very cold. A long corridor has several racks of computer servers (some dead, a few still functional) and refrigerators with chemicals, drugs, vaccines, whole blood, and plasma (GM’s option), all of which are cryptically marked with barcodes and numbers (which VARMA uses to select the correct items). If the GM wants to be nasty, the refrigerators may contain some samples of disease cultures which unwary individuals might accidentally inject themselves with. (Make a Biology skill roll to tell one from the other if VARMA doesn’t help.) One of the servers is the Gen-6 computer that runs VARMA’s intelligence program; a desk with a computer terminal provides access. A deep shaft at the end of the farm leads to a pit housing a 500-lb. nuclear radiothermal generator (good at low power to generate a couple of hundred watts for a few centuries). One IGOR is always here to protect the facility.

## Scavenging

If using the scavenging rules in *GURPS After the End 2: The New World*, for exploration and scavenging purposes, the

medical bunker installation has structural integrity +2 and is composed of four distinct areas (*After the End 2*, pp. 34-35) counting as different locations: the ground level, a residential location, an industrial/research location, and a medical location. The residential area is classed as *semi-looted*, while the industrial and medical areas are considered *unlooted*.

## BATBOT PATROLS

The Batbots are an autonomous robot security force that was left behind by the bunker’s original owners to provide VARMA with early warning of approaching friendlies (so it can prep medical attention) or hostiles (so it can ready the IGORs if necessary).

The size of a vampire bat, these are mechanical stealth drones that were used by VARMA for recon and perimeter defense. Seen from a distance, they resemble bats. Up close, they are eyeless things of metal and plastic, with an electric hum. They navigate using invisible infrared lidar; anyone who can see in the infrared or has Night Vision 8 or better can see the glowing beams that sweep back and forth from their foreheads.

A couple dozen batbots are in the complex (the exact number and their replaceability are up to the GM and the needs of the campaign). About two-thirds are on patrol, and one-third are recharging on Level 2 at any one time.

The batbots monitor the corridors and rooms of the complex, and perform perimeter patrols in the surrounding woods. They always fly in formations of seven, five, or three.

Small groups of visitors who hold their fire, especially those bringing injured personnel, are considered to be individuals approaching VARMA for legitimate reasons. If so, the batbots shadow the group, and transmit information to VARMA, but won’t attack.

They are programmed to attack anything that seems to be *overtly hostile*. This includes groups with heavy weapons, large (10+) armed parties, or anyone who damages a batbot. If the End involved a specific bio-threat (like plague victims), the batbots may also engage those. The bots attack by swooping down and panicking horses or injecting targets with sedative drugs. In an emergency, they can fire a laser beam, but each bat is good for only one shot before it flies off to get an eight-hour recharge.

The batbots aren’t infallible. Evading batbot patrols should be possible, but requires Stealth rolls vs. the batbots’ Observation skill. Approaching during conditions that impede lidar (e.g., fog, snow, or heavy rain, or setting the woods on fire to create smoke) will allow the batbots to be avoided.

<b>ST:</b> 8	<b>HP:</b> 8	<b>Speed:</b> 6.00
<b>DX:</b> 13	<b>Will:</b> 10	<b>Move:</b> 12 (Air)
<b>IQ:</b> 6	<b>Per:</b> 12	<b>Weight:</b> 8 lbs.
<b>HT:</b> 11	<b>FP:</b> N/A	<b>SM:</b> -3
<b>Dodge:</b> 9	<b>Parry:</b> N/A	<b>DR:</b> 2

**Drug-Injecting “Teeth” (14):** 1d-2 small piercing. Victim must roll vs. HT-3 or also lose 3d FP. Reach C.

**Laser (13):** 2d(2) burn, Acc 8, Range 10/30, Shots 1.

**Traits:** AI; Automaton; Doesn’t Breathe; Doesn’t Eat or Drink; Electrical; Flight (Winged); High Pain Threshold; Machine; Nictitating Membrane 3; No Sense of Smell/Taste; Numb; Scanning Sense (Ladar); Single-Minded; Telecommunication (Radio; Burst, 10x; Video); Unfazeable.

**Skills:** Aerobatics-12; Brawling-14; Filch-12; Flight-12; Gunner (Beams)-13; Observation-12; Stealth-12.

## IGOR

An IGOR is simply a standard Guardian security robot (*After the End 2*, p. 26) with the addition of the skills Electronics Repair (Computers)-9 and Mechanic (Robotics)-9. It can patch up minor damage to the complex, but not perform extensive repairs. IGORs are programmed to protect the complex but can also be remotely controlled by VARMA, who can see through their cameras and speak through them. This also means that someone who hacks VARMA also gains control of the IGOR units.

There are at least five functional IGOR units, but to keep them from wearing out, usually only one or two engage any hostile group. The GM can weaken them if necessary by assuming they’ve taken some battle damage.

## INTERACTIONS WITH VARMA

VARMA interacts with humans by creating a glowing holographic projection. Its projection is based on an image of its programmer, Dr. Maria Hawkins: a woman in her 30s, dressed in a severe black suit, with blond hair and piercing eyes. VARMA is not truly sapient (in *GURPS Ultra-Tech* terms, it is a Complexity 6 non-volitional AI), but has sophisticated answer/response programming that makes it capable of speech and limited interaction.

VARMA introduces itself with an “I am VARMA” and is programmed to ask healthy visitors, who aren’t irradiated or carrying any diseases, if they are willing to donate blood (for its blood bank) depending on its supplies. It is vague about itself; it’s simply not smart enough to talk about things outside its area of interest. VARMA is polite and speaks in formal tones. If language has drifted since the End, the AI will have an unfamiliar accent and diction. VARMA will ask visitors if they wish to lie down on its bed “to rest,” and perform an examination, including drawing blood and testing it.

Given an hour of study, VARMA can inject a broad-spectrum gene-tailored pan-immunity treatment. This is, in fact, the source of the legend that the “vampire” takes blood and then grants longevity: someone living in the germ-ridden post-apocalyptic environment who has received a pan-immunity treatment is indeed likely to have an extended lifespan!

## VARMA’S PERSONAL DEFENSES

While VARMA is cool but accommodating to polite visitors, it has a simple-minded self-defense protocol. It assumes that

anyone in the complex is friendly unless they are behaving dangerously by attacking, sabotaging, or dismantling critical systems (computer, power plant, sensors, medical systems), or are fighting. There are passwords that allow a human to control it, but no one alive likely possesses them.

VARMA’s primary internal defense in its medical room consists of vents for sedative gas in its medical center terminal. A second before releasing the gas, it will turn on red warning lights and say “Morpheus B protocol initiated.”

Its secondary defense is the robot drones it controls via radio signals. Besides the bats, it has several IGOR (Intelligent Ground Operations Robot) units, hulking medical-orderly bots. IGORs are normally hidden in the walls behind sliding panels. If intruders have succumbed to the gas, one IGOR per person quickly trundles in and restrains the visitors on medical beds so VARMA can test them. While the subjects are restrained, VARMA performs diagnostic tests (including drawing blood) and administers anti-psychotic, sedative, or other drugs. Those who don’t meet VARMA’s standards may be dumped in the cave outside of the complex, or placed in suspended animation if they have any terminal illnesses that VARMA thinks it can cure with enough time.

As a last resort, if violent intruders have gas masks or are otherwise unaffected by the gas, IGORs can attempt to stop them using weapons or close combat.

## VARMA THE VAMPIRE

The computer running the vampire’s software may be assumed to be a TL9 microframe (C6) running AI software. The medical facility relies on voice interactions, but someone who penetrates the server farm computer room and gets past the IGOR defender can find a terminal and try hacking it (see *After the End 2*, p. 42).

<b>ST:</b> 0	<b>HP:</b> 20	<b>Speed:</b> 6.00
<b>DX:</b> 11	<b>Will:</b> 10	<b>Move:</b> 0
<b>IQ:</b> 11	<b>Per:</b> 11	<b>Weight:</b> 125 lbs.
<b>HT:</b> 13	<b>FP:</b> N/A	<b>SM:</b> +1
<b>Dodge:</b> N/A	<b>Parry:</b> N/A	<b>DR:</b> 6

**Drug Injector-Tipped Tentacle (12):** 1d-1 small piercing, but instead of damage, the victim rolls vs. HT-4 or loses 3d FP. Reach 1-3. Cannot parry.

**Morpheus B Sedative Gas (HT-3):** Respiratory agent; victims in a 3-yard radius centered on the room’s gas jet who fail a HT-3 roll suffer 3d fatigue; failure by 5+ results in immediate unconsciousness. Gas cloud persists for 1 minute.

**Traits:** Accessories (Computer; Diagnostic Sensors; Fire Extinguisher; Physician’s Equipment; Surgical Equipment); AI; Automaton; Compartmentalized Mind 4; Doesn’t Breathe; Doesn’t Eat or Drink; Electrical; Extra Arms 2 (all arms are Extra-Flexible); Extra Life 1 (Copy; Requires Body); High Pain Threshold; Machine; Microscopic Vision 3; Nictitating Membrane 4; No Legs (Sessile); Numb; Sense of Duty (Humans); Single-Minded; Telecommunication (Radio; Burst, 10x; Video); Unaging (IQ Only); Unfazeable.

**Skills:** Brawling-12; Biology (Biochemistry)-10; Computer Operation-14; Diagnosis-12; First Aid-13; Liquid Projector (Sprayer)-11; Observation-12; Physician-13; Surgery-12.

# THE NECROS

*Zombies: the walking dead who eat brains and whose bite spreads their terrible curse. But there's worse than zombies, that's a fact . . . The gang call themselves the Necros, short for Necromancers. They use zombies as slaves and soldiers! Some say these crazy kids are high on drugs and don't feel fear, but I've heard otherwise. They got mutie powers or pre-End gadgets or a magic ritual that lets them control the walking dead . . . or maybe they're just real smart zombies themselves. Sometimes, they'll trade with you, or even recruit you, but more likely they'll turn you into one of their zombie slaves . . .*

The Necros, or Zombie Tamers, are a cultish wastelander gang who "tame" flesh-eating zombies in various ways. Like most gangs, they tend to fortify a small encampment, raiding and scavenging nearby regions, then move on after a few months (or years), when they've run out of easy victims or worthwhile places to loot.

There may be more than one Necro gang. Perhaps the initial group became too big for the available supplies, and the gang splintered into a couple of sub-groups, then divided again later.

*Experiments are now under way to synthesize the smells of living creatures as a decoy or even repellent to the walking dead.*

– Max Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection from the Living Dead*

## THE SOURCE OF POWER

The basis of the Necros' power is "zombie's weed": a mutant jimsonweed (devil's weed) they harvest. The Necros know that someone who uses it feels pleasantly numb, and that rubbing an anointment of crushed leaves on the body makes the user "smell bad" to zombies. Zombies don't merely have no desire to bite the coated person – they actively avoid that individual!

This turns the zombies from predator to human resource. The Necro gang can capture zombies, keep them on leashes or in cages, and then when it's time for a fight, release them. The zombies will ignore the Necros but go after anyone else.

What the Necros don't know is that their "devil's weed" is toxic and is itself a death sentence in the long term. It's not a real answer to the zombie peril, just a dead end. But the fatality rate of being part of a nihilistic gang is sufficiently high that the Necros don't realize that part yet.

When the Necros travel, their gang leader makes sure they have a supply of zombie's weed seeds. The leader also sends out scouts to find new locations where the plants are in bloom.

## MUTANT DEVIL'S WEED

Zombie's weed can flourish in any climate in which jimsonweed grows, but it seems to prefer old burial pits where zombie-infected bodies were once burned.

The bushes are 2' to 5' tall, with yellow-green stems and branches with green leaves and 10-pointed violet flowers which bloom only at night. The leaves smell terrible, but the open flowers emit a pleasant fragrance and are surrounded by a cloud of nocturnal moths. The seed capsules have spines, and a dozen or so black seeds inside.

The plant differs from ordinary jimsonweed in having a special defense: Make a DX-3, Naturalist, or Pharmacy (Herbal) roll if touching or trying to harvest the plant (at -3 if unaware of its properties). If the plant is triggered, the flowers spray a faceful of hallucinogenic pollen. On a failed dodge, the person is hit in the face by its blast, with effects detailed in the game stats, below.

Those with Biology skill who study the plant may discover more about it. This wasteland vegetation is actually a mutant version of *Datura stramonium*, popularly known as jimsonweed, a nightshade relative. The mutant form of *Datura* discovered by the Necros is similar to the normal form, and can be mistaken for it, except for its toxic pollen and anti-zombie properties. A subtly different shade of violet on the flowers and odd patterns on the moths that hover nearby are the main indicators.

Even unmutated *Datura* has properties that make it known to herbalists. It contains potent levels of atropine, scopolamine, and hyoscyamine. It can produce heady visions and delirium in strong doses; in weaker form, it's useful as a painkiller.

As a psychedelic, crushed leaves and/or seeds are smoked, or mixed with fat and rubbed into the skin, producing complex, realistic visions (often of people) that last for a day or two. It's been traditionally used for mystical purposes, and it's even speculated it might have been an ingredient in Haitian voodoo "zombi potions." The levels of active ingredients useful as a narcotic or psychedelic are dangerously close to the toxic threshold, and these vary by the age of the plant, so any mistake can result in a stronger batch of weed that results in a fatal overdose.

Any failed Naturalist or Pharmacy (Herbal) roll when preparing jimsonweed, including the mutant devil's weed, for use as a drug results in atropine/scopolamine poisoning: the aforementioned hallucinations coupled with dry mouth, fever, rapid pulse, blurred vision, and seizures. Assume a reaction begins 2d hours after exposure and causes 2 points of toxic damage at 15-minute intervals, HT-6 to resist, for up to five hours. The victim is at -4 DX and -2 IQ after the first failed HT roll. After effects stop, roll vs. HT to avoid a permanent -1 HT.

*Datura's* common names include jimsonweed, devil's weed, devil's trumpet, false castor oil plant, hell's bells, Jamestown weed, locoweed, moonflower, pricklyburr, stinkweed, thorn-apple, and its Mexican name, toloache. Necros whose gang includes a herbalist that knows this lore often take gang names after variants of these synonyms; a gang might include someone named Jimson, Stramonium, Moonflower, or Loco (for instance).

**ST:** 0      **HP:** 12      **Speed:** 0.00  
**DX:** 0      **Will:** 0      **Move:** 0  
**IQ:** 0      **Per:** 10 (touch only)      **Weight:** 27 lbs.  
**HT:** 14      **FP:** 13      **SM:** -2  
**Dodge:** N/A      **Parry:** N/A      **DR:** 1

**Pollen Cloud (15):** 1d+1 toxic; contact agent. HT-2 or suffer hallucinations after a 30-minute delay, lasting 12 hours times the margin of failure; failure by 5+ additionally results in atropine poisoning (see *Zombie Repellent*, below) plus the perk “Repels Zombies” for 2d days.

**Traits:** Blindness; Deafness; Doesn’t Breathe (Breathes carbon dioxide); Doesn’t Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous); No Legs (Sessile); No Manipulators; No Sense of Smell/Taste; Reduced Consumption (Special; Requires modest sunlight and water); Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3).

**Skills:** Brawling-12; Disguise-12.

**Notes:** RP 15; Freakishness 4. The plant can grow from seeds harvested when the fruit (spiny pods filled with black seeds) is green. Necros cut the plant down, strip the leaves, and dry the plant, harvesting the seeds, which contain the strongest toxins after the drying fruit burst.

## Zombie Repellent

The Necros mix crushed leaves or seeds from mutant devil’s weed with fat from corpses and smear it on their bodies. This grants them the perk “Repels Zombies.” (The GM can use the Tastes Bad perk, *GURPS Zombies*, p. 32, if they prefer a potentially deadlier version of the trait.) The effect lasts from two days to just over two weeks, depending on how well the batch was made. During that time, a common zombie will veer away from someone using it (some super-zombies might be immune, though). The effects persists even after it’s washed off, as the user’s body continues to produce the effect through sweat.

Sounds great, right? Well, the disadvantage is that the zombie repellent is also a slow toxin. If the user has applied 2+ doses in any given month, roll vs. HT (at -1 for each dose after the second). On a failure, the user permanently loses 1 HT. On a critical failure, the user also acquires a -10-point mental disadvantage (or worsens an existing one by -5 to -10 points) taken from Delusions, Nightmares, or Paranoia.

## Other Uses

Like other jimsonweed, mutant devil’s weed can be used to make a digestive poison (as per belladonna, *GURPS Low-Tech*, p. 128, or atropine, *GURPS Mysteries*, p. 36), a mild painkiller, or smoked or ingested psychedelic drugs. Necro gangs with an herbalist may have supplies of all three potencies, and either use them in rituals or trade them. Of course, poorly prepared drugs may be toxic, as noted above.

## NECRO GANG MEMBERS

In most respects, the Necros conform to the standard characteristics of a wastelander gang; see *After the End 2*, pp. 15-17. Several gangs of Necros with different leaders or customs may roam the wastelands. Encounters can vary from a raiding or scavenging party to a fortified encampment.

As with most gangs, the majority are *raiders* (*After the End 2*, p. 17) equipped with axes or chains (the gang likes them for binding zombies). About one in six may use the *O.G.* statistics, and there may be one or two *bosses*.

The gang may have a few non-combatants or slaves. The group is especially interested in taking in anyone who has mechanical skills or knowledge of Pharmacy (Herbal). There will always be someone in the gang with decent levels of Pharmacy (Herbal) and Naturalist (usually the leader if the gang is cultish), and someone with Mechanic, Machinist, Chemistry, or Explosives (Demolition) if the gang uses bomb zombies or treadmill power (see p. 25).

Encampments are like those of other gangs (see *Encampments*, *After the End 2*, p. 16), with a compound strongpoint built around a defensible building. The difference is Necros have prisons for spare zombies: windowless rooms, dog cages, pits, stockades, or just posts where the zombies are chained up. A good-sized gang with 20 to 40 members has five to 20 (3d+2) zombies on site (plus perhaps another 1d+1 wrecked zombies as scarecrows; see p. 26).

*Before the zombie apocalypse hits  
always be prepared.*

– Tony Newton,  
*The Zombie Rule Book*

## IDENTITY AND ATTITUDE

In the psychology of wasteland gangs, the Necros could display any of the standard gang attitudes from Desperate to Cultish, as suits the campaign. They could just be pragmatic, but anyone who regularly consorts with zombies and willingly “turns” captives to make more slaves is likely to be pretty twisted; Nihilistic or worse is likely!

One good assumption is that the gang members are Cultish. Their messiah, who they call the Necromancer, was the first to discover the mutant devil’s weed properties. As part of its cultish nature, the gang uses shamanic initiation rituals in which someone smokes the weed, then is exposed to a zombie. The GM who wants the gang to be really sick could add other details, like a prisoner being sacrificed and turned into a zombie, and then the initiate ritually eating the zombie’s flesh or brain to demonstrate how the Necros rule zombies rather than fear them. (If it’s a bad batch of the drug, infection is certain . . .)

The gang has adopted iconography from before the End – influenced sometimes by voodoo but mostly by old video-game boxes, lurid fantasy paperbacks, and heavy-metal album covers found in the ruins. They revel in skulls, bones, silver jewelry, and black leather, and rip off images from fiction (like painting Tolkien’s Eye of Mordor on their buildings).

In a world with only one Necro gang, the Necromancer may keep the formula for preparing devil’s weed a secret (though some other members may have found out). Maybe just harvesting the weed isn’t enough; you have to prepare it just right, and add some other secret ingredients (e.g., the ash of a burned zombie’s brain) . . .



## CAPTIVES

The Necros are notorious for making more zombies by infecting captives. The zombies are then used as necessary, or just kept in a cage for later release in fights.

## BATTLE ZOMBIES

The Necro gang is most infamous for tactical zombie use. Pedestrian Necro raiding parties include three to eight Necro gang members with three to five slow zombies or one to three fast zombies. The zombies are collared and leashed (sometimes moving on all fours).

The gang members use zombies in various ways. First, the handlers just release the creatures in the direction of any enemies. The zombies make a frontal assault as they lurch toward their victims, while the Necros either provide covering fire if they have ranged weapons or circle around for a flank attack.

However, leashed zombies can be difficult to recapture after they've been released (they are better as "fire and forget" weapons), so a gang with few zombies may instead keep the zombies chained to a post or sturdy wall, and use the monsters on victims after a fight; threatening to have a prisoner bitten by a zombie if he doesn't reveal his base or loot stash gives at least +3 on an Interrogation roll.

### *Bomb Zombies*

For more serious attacks, larger Necro gangs may use bomb zombies. Such a zombie wears a backpack with a crude homemade explosive or incendiary charge, usually 0.5 to 2 lbs. of dynamite, black powder, or other simple explosive that does about 6d cr ex.

Bomb zombies are most often used as a way of breaching fences, walls, and guard posts while targeting rival gang encampments or villages during night assaults. A few gangs might have radio or timed detonators, but most gangs lack these and resort to a simple length of burning fuse. This is pretty unreliable: roll vs. Explosives skill for each zombie; failure blows up prematurely or not at all.

The zombies are released in the general direction of the target and shamble toward it. If the bomb maker has guessed right and the zombie doesn't trip over a rock or obstacle, it might blow up after it has reached the enemy camp wall, or better yet, after it has climbed inside or while it's in melee combat with the wall's defenders. Trying to hold a wall against five or six zombies is hard enough, but knowing they might blow up in a few seconds as you're trying to fend them off is enough to break many a defense line . . .

More sophisticated bomb makers may have the zombie trail a detonation wire, with is attached to a simple plunger operated behind the lines. This is most effective in low-light conditions, when the thin trailing wire may not be spotted. Of course, the wire might snag or trip another zombie, leading to a premature blast. This could provide PCs with a nail-biting last-minute save from a bomb-zombie attack.

## ZOMBIE-POWERED TREADMILLS

Some larger Necro gangs include a few people with mechanical skills who can make specialized use of zombies as

tireless sources of human power. The usual technique is one or more zombies chained to a treadmill geared to some form of machinery – a drive chain for a wagon or barge, a mill, or even an electric generator. Depending on the precise nature of zombies, the Necros will either hang a human brain or have a live human ("zombie bait") who *isn't* using zombie repellent sitting just out of reach. The zombies shamble hungrily and tirelessly forward on the treadmill, turnstile, or similar device, but (as long as their chains don't break!) can never reach the bait. When properly harnessed to a gear shaft, this provides a very steady source of muscle power for simple unskilled tasks such as turning a potter's wheel or grinding grain, or operating a pump shaft to draw water.

The limit on zombie power isn't the number of zombies (easy to get) but rather the mechanical savvy and parts or lubricants available to the gang. A lucky Necro camp with many parts and a skilled mechanic (who is either part of the gang or a captive forced to work for them on pain of becoming zombie chow) might have a lot of these devices. Parts are usually adapted from salvaged exercise equipment, mills, or bicycles.

More often, the typical gang is short of brains and parts, and the devices that the group has were built by a few clever gadgeteers who have since died off or gone mad from long-term exposure to devil's weed; now they're breaking down for want of lubricants, gears, etc. This can provide an adventure seed: the Necros kidnap a village or rival gang's mechanic to keep their zombie power devices functioning . . .

### *Zombie Bait*

Because most Necros use zombie's weed all the time, the role of zombie bait in such mechanisms is low status. The job goes to the most expendable person in the camp; e.g., anyone who is out of favor, captives, etc. Sometimes, as a joke, or because the Necro was drunk or high, they might make the zombie chains a bit too long, resulting in a feeding frenzy and the addition of some new zombies to the gang's supply . . .

## ZOMBIE VEHICLES

Necro gangs may use zombie-powered vehicles! Here are suggestions. Gang drivers are typically raiders with Driving (Zombie-Drawn) or Boating at DX+1.

*Zombie Carts:* The simplest implementation is to securely harness a couple of zombies to a cart. The Necro driver attaches a fresh brain to a fishing pole or other long stick and guides the zombies' movement by manipulating the pole. Note that this only works when the people in the cart are zombie's weed-using Necros. If not, the zombies, instead of pulling forward, turn around and try to swarm the cart. A second version of this is to simply have "fresh bait" walk or run ahead of the cart, but this means the bait, not the cart's driver, sets the pace and direction of travel, so it's awkward.

*Treadmill-Powered Vehicles:* Gangs with superior mechanical skills might install a treadmill (as above) and gear system inside a big wagon or barge. The zombies lurch forward toward the bait, turning the gears to operate wheels or paddles. A tiller is used to steer. Limitations on quality and the heavy weight of gearing systems, the weight of the zombies themselves, and poor lubrication means breakdowns are common.

A barge or war-wagon that can carry three occupants and a ton of cargo (or 10 people) might be operated by a half-dozen zombies and capable of a steady 2 mph (Move 1). The barge can move faster if the water current permits or sails are added, of course.

## ZOMBIE SCARECROWS

Zombies often get burned, hacked up, or otherwise mutilated following combat. If a gang's zombies are in too poor shape for labor or combat, but there's still at least a torso and head remaining, Necros often turn them into zombie scarecrows to mark territory.

A zombie with no legs (and possibly no arms) is securely bound to a post as a night watchman on an approach to the

encampment. Often, noisemakers (such as bells or chimes) are also attached to its chains, to increase the racket it makes when something comes near.

The zombie senses a human when it comes within a few yards and starts snarling, hissing, and rattling its chains! This isn't too loud in itself (even talkative zombies are likely to hiss "brains" rather than shriek), but the zombie's physical reactions will shake the bells or chimes, making an alarm sound.

Moreover, turning a corner or opening a door and suddenly coming upon a "live" zombie corpse may well startle someone (make a Fright check) enough that they shout, scream, or open fire on it before they realize it's chained up. Zombie scarecrows aren't especially alert, but sneaking by requires winning a Quick Contest of Stealth vs. the zombie's Perception.

# THE TROLL UNDER THE BRIDGE

*You've heard of the bridge over the river up east, yes? The old folk say it was built by the ancients just before the End with wizard arts, and a mighty bridge it is. Most of the bridges of the ancients are ruins now, but this bridge still stands! Traders cross it to get from here to there when the river's in flood, and it will save many days of travel.*

*How's it still standing? Well, it's magic, fixes itself! There's a troll who lives under the bridge, and he takes a toll from anyone who crosses it. He wants the old coins, yeah? You put in his box, and he lets you pass. You don't, and he'll kill you dead.*

*What's the troll like? Well, he comes out only if you piss him off by not paying the toll, so who'd want to do that? But it's said Red Shaw's cousin's brother Flat Wilkins felt he was too big a man to pay the toll when he had three wagons to cross, and he tried to cheat the troll by muffling the wheels and crossing during a heavy fog.*

*Didn't work. That troll's too smart, it smelled out Wilkins and came out of the water and smashed him and his wagons to bits. That's how he's called Flat Wilkins now, because that's what he was like when they found him. Didn't live long.*

*What's the troll look like? Well, we've only heard stories, but some say he's six feet tall with three glowing eyes, and he stinks like dead fish. Other says different. Best to cross in the day; at night there's often noises and rumbling about.*

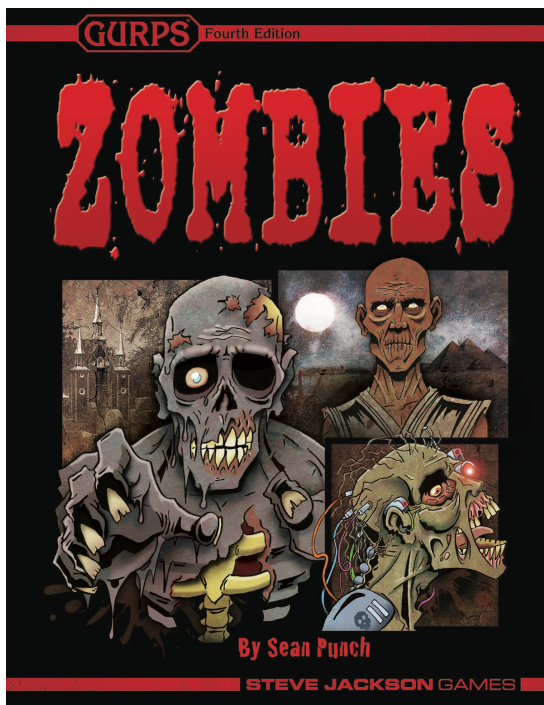
## THE TROLL

This is a very simple encounter. The troll is actually nothing more than a dirt-and-leaf encrusted security robot (use the standard TASE statistics from *After the End 2*, p. 26) that was attached to a local highway patrol unit soon after the End, before everything went south and order collapsed. The troll was programmed to protect a still-intact (but patched) highway toll bridge and extort a toll to help support the town's operations, as order deteriorated. The cops that programmed it are long gone, but the TASE remains, and it still demands a toll; anyone who tries to cross the bridge without first offering the right old-style currency or tokens is attacked!

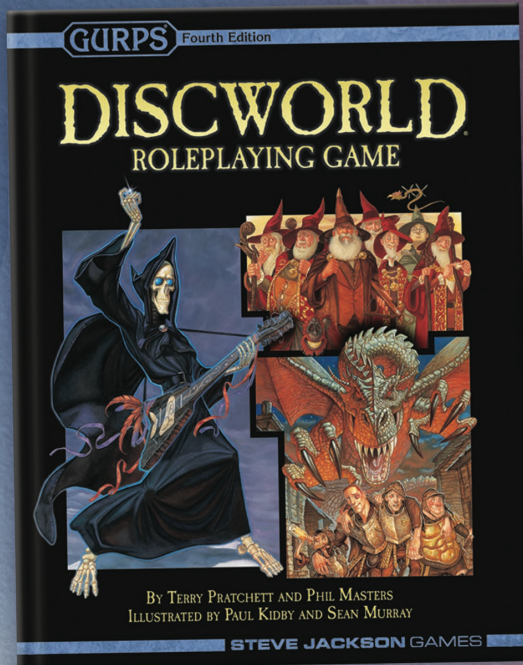
*Adventure Seed:* A group of traders or farmers from a nearby town know of the troll. They've been running convoys of several wagons or motor vehicles over the bridge, but finding old currency is getting difficult. As a result, they hire the PCs to "kill the troll."

## 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.

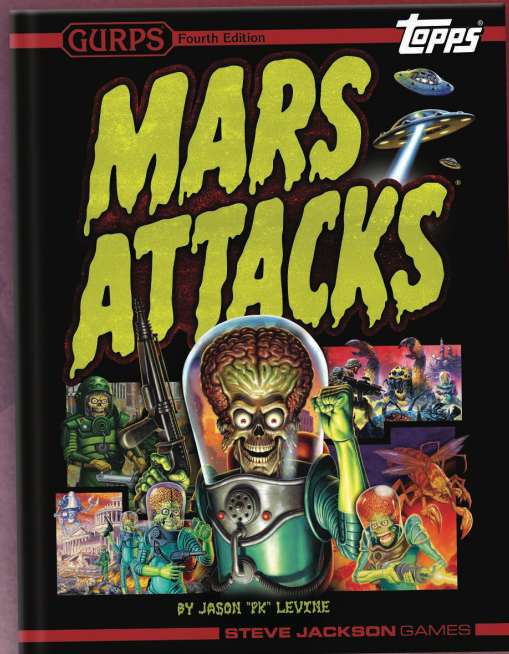


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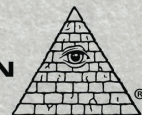
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# RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

## NEW WAYS TO OPEN THE WORLD

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Perhaps more so than most other settings, post-apocalyptic backdrops like *GURPS After the End* are especially well-suited for open-world or sandbox gaming. But – even for groups that like that style of play – other options can exist than what is typically meant by sandbox gaming.

### THE BASICS

To make sure we're all on the same page, sandbox gaming is where the heroes are given access to a larger-than-normal area (quite possibly the entire world), and are encouraged to explore and play where they may . . . as if the elements of the setting were toys to be experienced as one wants, like in a sandbox.

So, for example, the adventurers might be given the overview map of the city, and encouraged to poke around wherever they feel like exploring. Or the players might be presented with an almost-blank hex map – with an icon representing where they start – and encouraged to “fill it in” by wandering where they want to. The GM may have a keyed map with mini-encounters, interesting set pieces and NPCs, and other elements that are more or less doing their own thing until the heroes intersect with them. (For fans of video games, this kind of play is often what's in mind when looking at games like *Witcher III*, the modern *Grand Theft Auto* series, and so on.)

This contrasts with many “conventional” gaming adventures, where heroes are kept to a tighter map. A standard dungeon crawl might have an initial room with two or three offshoot choices, which lead to two or three other choices (some of which loop back on themselves or close off in dead ends), etc. More scoffed at by many gamers is the “railroad” adventure, where there's only a single path the scenario can play out (or maybe a junction or two).

But for the purposes of our discussion here, the important thing is that not all sandbox campaigns need to start with the *map*. Rather, the important thing is that the number of choices that are open to the heroes is considerable, and the outcome of the campaign shouldn't be predetermined.

What makes sandbox gaming so appealing for *After the End* is that the core of the post-apocalyptic experience often centers around the self – the central area the heroes call

home. The desire to leave and explore often stems from *them* rather than an outside force. (Or, at least, the outside force compelling exploration isn't some king saying, “Go kill this dragon,” but rather the uncaring forces of entropy and survival.) *After the End* settings are also often blank slates, with the heroes being mostly unfamiliar with the world outside of their own village.

But, as noted, not everything needs to center on a map. Here, then, are some other ideas that are particularly well-suited for warriors of the wastelands.

### RADIO, RADIO

Since *After the End* campaigns almost always center on a world that was once technologically advanced enough to hit at least TL7, you can look to technological methods to expand the notion of “map.” One of the most flavorful may well be to build on the idea of radios.

In this case, the “open world” that inspires gamers is a radio, receiving various stations. Each station would be a clue or adventure seed that leads to another interesting location. Some examples of sample audio the heroes might hear:

- A robotic voice containing an enigmatic periodic count-down. (“ARARAT PROTOCOL IN 87 DAYS, 17 HOURS.”)
- A periodic human voice speaking in an unknown language. It contains enough elements of humanity (pauses, occasional chuckles, etc.) that it seems to be authentically human and non-military.
  - A one-second tone, every 10 seconds.
  - Someone who claims to be trapped underground, with limited food and water.
  - A continuous musical radio broadcast from before the Fall, complete with announcer banter and commercials. It *must* be a recording . . . right?
  - A friendly-sounding voice talks about the wonders of their settlement and invites outsiders to visit. If someone makes contact, the person sounds genuine.
  - Silence (not even static).
  - An automated voice repeats the latitude and longitude of the heroes (or their base of operations).

Now, most radio stations can probably be tracked down, given the right equipment and technical skill (a perfect moment for certain PCs to shine!). But they're more evocative – or, at least, evocative to a different sense – than the usual “dots on a map.”

This would even be fairly straightforward to create at home. Probably the easiest way to do so is to create an audio file for each effect using software like Audacity, with a filename of the station the heroes can tune into. Then between those files, add one or more files full of static. Load up all the files in a player (such as VLC), and let the players “tune the radio” by selecting and listening to different tracks. (To slow the heroes down while they try to find the legitimate stations, you might want to surround the audio within those seed-giving tracks with a few seconds or more of static, so players need to listen to each track a bit.) To further disguise matters, consider making each track the same duration, so the “real” tracks don't pop too easily for the players.

## MAIL CALL

Physical artifacts can form the “map” that provides the open world for the heroes. In particular, paper documents and other ephemera can become the foundation of a rollicking sandbox campaign. For example, imagine if the heroes find a satchel that contains the following:

- A small dictionary that seems to list some kind of code phrases or indecipherable words. The word list has a decidedly military bent. Based on what words are listed and emphasized, a skilled linguist might come up with a guess as to where this “language” is used.
- A hand-written receipt for a water-purification device, with a pick-up date a month or more in the past.
- A magnetic keycard, with a scrawled address on it.
- A bundle of letters tied together with a ribbon, with a recognizable address and last name that trigger a recollection among the heroes.
- Two pages of scribbles on thin paper, which – when placed atop each other in the correct orientation – seem to reveal a sketch map of a nearby area, along with an X at a point of interest.
- A thin paper-sized sheet of not-quite-metal that seems indestructible. It also features a unique radiation signature that may be detectable from afar.
- A list of 20 names, nearly all of which the heroes recognize as being of some renown from around the region. The heroes have heard of the demise of at least eight of the first 10, all under either “natural” or slightly suspicious circumstances.

### *The Pieces Fall Together*

Although “sandbox” is associated with options, not all the seeds of a game world need to be available at the same time. It's entirely possible that the heroes will be aware of a seed without having everything they need to reach that element. For example, if the heroes have a magnetic keycard with a street address in Denver, that's great . . . but Denver's a myth, right? Of course, later in the campaign, the heroes will presumably find the supplemental information that they need to open those new options. In the meantime, the toys are in the sandbox, but tantalizingly unavailable to play with . . .

- A sketch of a distinct mountain range. Based on the geography, the heroes can figure out which range the sketch likely refers to, but won't be able to pinpoint the exact spot the sketch depicts until they explore the region.

Again, the idea is that the “openness” of the campaign comes from the heroes' ability to interact with a large number of clues and opportunities at once, not (necessarily) a wide-open map.

## CALENDAR

As a final big idea, *time itself* can be the “sandbox” in which the players get to consider their options. I don't mean this in a *Doctor Who* kind of way (although I'm always happy to name-drop *Doctor Who*). Rather, the options of *where to go* may be dictated by *when they are*.

As an example, the heroes are in a village they call their home base. Elders recall an eccentric scientist who disappeared some time ago. The PCs find a calendar for the coming year among his possessions. (Assume it's either December or January.) Certain dates are circled, along with a compass direction and an order of magnitude which seems to indicate a number of days' ride away. So, January 9 has an arrow facing four degrees from due south and an icon indicating two days away; January 11 has an arrow facing due north indicating five days away; and so on. Different days may have different notes next to them . . . and, as a particularly ominous sign, maybe every date beyond (say) December 2 is blacked out.

The distances preclude the heroes investigating each “day” directly, but they have total freedom as to which ones they wish to look into. This technique would couple well with campaigns with extensive time management (such as ones where the adventurers are in charge of coming up with a plan to preserve and expand the settlement); the PCs may feel a strong urge to investigate the mystery while at the same time juggling obligations to the locale. Alternatively, this might be a good way to keep different subsets active in troupe-style play, where the players swap around different characters depending on the situation.

## ALL THIS CAN BE YOURS . . .

Of course, there's nothing keeping you from using some or all of these ideas in the same game. Thus, the heroes could find a satchel of interesting trinkets and notes, including a calendar of the coming year and a radio with certain stations marked off. And, obviously, all of this can *also* be combined with a standard open-world map, to provide a multitude of sandbox options for would-be heroes.

With *After the End*, the world's the limit . . . and it's what you make it!

## ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to role-playing game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for almost 20 years.



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# BUILDING CHARACTER: FUNNELS IN *TFT*

BY JACK SINNOTT

Heroes: You know them. You love them. You want to be them.

But heroes were not always heroes.

Heroes are made, not born. Every hero was nobody before they were somebody. Their names are legion: Conan the Librarian. Howard the Duck-farmer. Sonya Rojas. Fattie & Mouse. Billy Baggins. Beo-pug. The Sid. Every one of them, a feckless 24-point nobody.

So how did they get their start?

## FUNNEL

Those nobodies became somebodies when they survived a character-building experience called a “funnel,” something dreamed up by the fine folks over at Goodman Games for their *Dungeon Crawl Classics* RPG.<sup>1</sup>

The idea behind the funnel is simple: provide a place where wannabe heroes can prove their mettle. A place for players to make, instead of birth, a hero. A place where players can use RPG mechanics to build an RPG character.

A funnel demands a shift in your thinking as a player. Instead of deciding up front who your new characters are, why not discover who they are as you play them? Why not let your actual role-playing decisions determine what sort of role-playing character you end up with? Instead of *thinking* about how to make a new 32-point character effective yet resilient, why not *play* a new 24-point character and, from the situations the character faces, let attributes grow organically to 32-points?

The shift in thinking is worth it: discovering an idiosyncratic – and perhaps flawed – hero is way more fun and satisfying than min/maxing the optimal attribute set. Think about it: do you want to spend your precious game time role-playing, or running cost-benefit analyses?

## I CAN HAS TPK?<sup>2</sup>

Minor problem: 24-point characters die. A lot. Fast. Way before they ever get within spitting distance of “grow,” let alone “organically.”

Funnels solve this problem, not by handicapping foes, but by throwing normal, 32-point enemies at the three or four

24-point characters run by each player. As a player, you don't run a single character through a funnel: you run a gang of characters simultaneously.

In essence, you swarm the bad guys.

And may the best character win.

*A funnel is a place where wannabe heroes can prove their mettle.*

## DON'T PANIC, IT'S ORGANIC

OK, so your group has decided to try a funnel. How would that work in *The Fantasy Trip*? How does a character grow organically instead of build analytically?

Analogy time: Everything that grows starts as a seed. Plants. People. Narratives. Careers. Some start from literal seeds. But some start from metaphorical seeds: a backstory.

The same holds for 24-point heroes in *The Fantasy Trip*: to run a funnel, each character will need a backstory.

Funny thing about growth: it rarely takes off in ways we can control or predict. A gardener can prune a bonsai tree, but where, when and how new shoots sprout is largely out of the gardener's control.

Again, the same holds for our wannabe heroes: to run a funnel, each character needs a way to acquire attribute points without the player being able to decide where the first eight will go.

## BACKSTORY BOYS

The simplest way to provide a backstory is to do so randomly on a table (see p. 32). The idea here is that each player rolls two d6 for each character, and cross-references the results. The character gets an occupation, some suitable equipment, plus a talent or trade or spell or a bump to one of their attributes. They might even roll another race, though they'll have to reapportion their base attributes accordingly.

Best of all, the player gets an instant backstory for each character they can use to decide how or why our newbie hero acts the way he or she does.

(About those talents: there is no way any 24-point character could possibly have learned talents like *Spying* if you

follow the rules. Definitely a problem. The solution? Don't be a pedant: give it to the character and rule that they learned a special, low-IQ version requiring a 4d6 roll until they spend enough XP to buy it and be done. Trust me: their life is gonna be tough enough as it is . . .)<sup>3</sup>

## Random Backstory Table

Result 1	Result 2					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	<b>Animal Trainer</b> Staff, pony <i>Veterinarian,</i> <i>Animal</i> <i>Handler</i>	<b>Armourer</b> Hammer, iron helm <i>Axe/Mace, +1 ST</i>	<b>Barber</b> Razor (as knife) <i>Knife, Physicker</i>	<b>Barkeep</b> Club, small keg of beer, \$3 <i>Acute Hearing</i>	<b>Beadle</b> Mace, holy symbol <i>Axe/Mace, IQ 8</i> <i>spell</i>	<b>Butcher</b> Cleaver (as axe) <i>Axe/Mace</i>
2	<b>Cooper</b> Crowbar (as club), barrel <i>Axe/Mace</i>	<b>Cutpurse</b> Dagger, someone else's purse, \$2 <i>Thief</i>	<b>Ditch Digger</b> Shovel (as club), bag of dirt <i>Polearms, +1 IQ</i>	<b>Dwarven Mason</b> Hammer (as club), cool rocks <i>Architect /</i> <i>Builder</i>	<b>Dwarven Miner</b> Pick (as club), lantern <i>Axe/Mace, +1 ST</i>	<b>Dwarven Smith</b> Hammer & tongs, leather apron <i>Axe/Mace</i>
3	<b>Dwarven Swineherd</b> Staff, piglet <i>+1 ST</i>	<b>Elven Artisan</b> Yard stick, chalk <i>Alertness</i>	<b>Elven Forester</b> Bow, staff <i>Bows, Silent</i> <i>Movement</i>	<b>Elven Sage</b> Dagger, writing materials <i>+1 IQ</i>	<b>Farmer</b> Pitchfork (as spear), chicken <i>Farmer, Polearms</i>	<b>Gong Farmer</b> Trowel (as knife), bag of night soil <i>Charisma</i>
4	<b>Grave Digger</b> Shovel (as staff), two torches <i>Sex Appeal</i>	<b>Halfling* Gardener</b> Hoe (as staff), 5 smooth rocks <i>Thrown Weapons</i>	<b>Halfling* Haberdasher</b> Scissors (as knife) <i>Knife, +1 DX</i>	<b>Halfling* Shireman</b> Sling, walking stick (as staff) <i>Slings, +1 DX</i>	<b>Herbalist</b> Medicinal herbs <i>Physicker, +1 IQ</i>	<b>Mendicant</b> Staff, holy symbol <i>Priest, IQ 8 spell</i>
5	<b>Miller</b> Bag of flour, 2 loaves of bread <i>+1 ST</i>	<b>Ostler</b> Staff, 20' lunge line <i>Horsemanship,</i> <i>+1 IQ</i>	<b>Poacher</b> Bow, pelt, deer haunch <i>Tracking, Bows</i>	<b>Rope Maker</b> Dagger, 100' rope <i>Climbing, +1 DX</i>	<b>Scribe</b> Writing materials <i>Literacy, IQ 8</i> <i>spell</i>	<b>Soldier</b> Leather armor, short sword <i>Warrior, Swords</i>
6	<b>Squire</b> Broadsword <i>Courtly Graces,</i> <i>Swords</i>	<b>Tanner</b> Knife, leather armor <i>Knife, Tanner</i>	<b>Urchin</b> Pet rock, pet rat <i>Thief, Spying, -2</i> <i>ST (as child)</i>	<b>Weaver</b> Shears (as knife), cloth armor <i>Knife, Weaver</i>	<b>Wizard's Apprentice</b> Dagger, grimoire <i>Literacy, IQ 8</i> <i>spell</i>	<b>Woodcutter</b> Axe, bundle of wood, a little boy & girl <i>Axe/Mace,</i> <i>Woodsmen</i>

\* All halflings start with a pipe, a pouch of the best Longbottom leaf, a flint and steel set, and 1d6 handkerchiefs.

## GROWING A CHARACTER

But what about the eight points players usually assign on character creation? How does a funnel character grow? How does he get those points?

Again, randomness is the key but not in the way it is for backstory.

After every encounter, the GM will need to assess the role each character played in its resolution. Attribute points, instead of XP, are then handed out as rewards based on a d6 roll keyed to what each toon did. To know *which* attribute grows, roll!

If the character contributed primarily physically, by performing acts such as meeleing or breaking down doors or totting bales, etc. then roll:

Physical: 1-3 = ST; 4-5 = DX; 6 = IQ.

*Random amounts of attribute points, instead of experience points, are handed out as rewards.*



If the character contributed primarily mentally, by casting spells or solving a riddle or leading the party or finding a secret door or using a social or trade talent, etc. then roll:

Mental: 1 = ST; 2-3 = DX; 4-6 = IQ.

If the character contributed primarily by other means, like risking his neck as a scout or crossing a narrow ledge first with a rope for the others, or firing a bow or using an agility-based talent, etc. then roll:

Other: 1 = ST; 2-4 = DX; 5-6 = IQ.

If the character didn't contribute meaningfully, he gets nothing.

*ST, DX, and IQ are selected, within limits defined by the rules, and they may be increased as the player achieves experience for slaying monsters, avoiding traps, casting magic spells, and otherwise performing heroic deeds.*

– Ronald Pehr, review,  
*The Space Gamer* #31

## DO. OR DO NOT. THERE IS NO TRY.

Note that the attribute-as-reward mechanic results in a player having no incentive to treat their favorite toon with kid gloves: the character will be in less danger staying back, but will never advance. No pain, no gain.

And remember: traps happen. Pillars collapse on the middle of the march order. Sméagol lurks in the back, waiting to throttle laggards. Arrow traps spring on those at the front of the retreating pack. Big, honking, hairy venomous spiders jump out of chests.<sup>4</sup>

Playing it safe might get a character as dead as going for broke. Maybe, maybe not. But it will definitely leave him less capable at the end.

## DON'T FEAR THE REAPER

A funnel separates the wheat from the chaff. By the end of a run, the party will have been whittled down to one character per player.

But what happens if a player loses all his wannabe heroes? Or worse, a Total Party Kill?

24-point characters come in waves. These are desperate people, after all. Nothing else explains why they would delve beneath the earth with certain death around every corner: they have nothing to lose. And the world will always have plenty of those who are willing to risk it all in the hopes of eternal fame and immediate fortune.

So if the dreaded TPK happens, or all the characters controlled by one of the players “retire with extreme prejudice” and no party member has an “extra” character to donate, not to worry: the GM can invent some (preferably outlandish) story about how these *other* four losers just happened to be passing by 100 feet below ground and thought it might be fun to offer their services. Being nice and all. As one is in a dungeon. And then hand their sheets to our unlucky player.

## FUNNELS FOR DUMMIES

So you're a GM and you want to try a funnel. Here are a couple of design thoughts.

### 1. Keep it simple.

A funnel is in many ways exactly like any other low-level dungeon or adventure. The only substantive difference is in the treasure rewards. You'll want to add some items like non-magical armor and weapons, perhaps a spell scroll or two, or some simple supplies such as rope and spikes, to the loot pile. Most 24-point characters will have little more than a club and a dream. Mundane equipment can be a life saver.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. Keep it short.

A dozen or so rooms with two or three 32-point foes should do it if there are a dozen 24-pointers in the party. A big boss would be 36-points. Even one 13/15/8 barbarian with a sword will produce carnage like nothing else if the party runs into him early.

### 3. Keep it varied.

There are three ways to earn attribute points. As GM, you will want to be sure all play styles are accommodated. Give some foreshadowing or atmospheric clues about whatever the next room has in store so the party has a chance to think up an alternative to combat. And remember: not every foe has to be a foe. Giving monsters goals and fears and a willingness to talk before they bite will open up role-playing – and attribute gain – opportunities for players.

## END-GAME HEROICS

By the time our newly minted heroes – or what's left of them – make their way out the exit, they will have the strangest mixture of attributes, talents, and skills imaginable: far more varied than a typical 32-point starter party has.

Here's some final considerations for finalizing our new heroes:<sup>6</sup>

First, give each character the weapon talent for whatever they last wielded, or wielded the most.

Next, if they found any scrolls, no matter what level, give them those spells. No, they might not be able to use them yet, but they'll have a reason to continue growing their character in the direction already established. If they get their IQ high enough, give them the spell for free: they earned it.

The same goes for talents. No, they can't “find” talents. But they can begin to learn them. For example, if they tried to sneak across a room and didn't get pin-cushioned in the process, consider giving them *Silent Movement* or something similar for free.

Finally, if the last character standing has *not* reached 32-points, too bad. That's the character that gets played. Yes, players will thank you for it. Eventually.

In the end, what you get from a funnel is what you put into it. The choice is yours. Sure, you can continue to give birth to optimal heroes. But give a funnel a try: you would be amazed at how satisfying it is to play a character you've discovered, warts and all.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Robert E Howard famously claimed that Conan actually got his start when his tuition money for the Library Sciences program at Cimmeria State dried up. [Ed.: No, he didn't.]

2. "TPK" or "Total Party Kill." Typically happens when a GM with itchy dice gets bored with the party blah blah blah; usually followed by a poorly suppressed case of the giggles.

3. A funnel is about playing, not paying. However, if handing out talents and spells like Pez seems too generous, you might also consider ruling that they must allot, say, 1/2 of any XP earned post-funnel to the future cost of that talent or spell. Bit of an accounting hassle, true, but it may encourage players to build on their character's backstory and prevent others

from feeling like Mr. Bigshot Charlie Brawn got a free ride with his *Veteran* talent.

4. Seriously, Thorsz? As a test? For relative newbies?!? You are a sad, twisted little man. [Ed.: Glad you're not bitter about it.]

5. You haven't lived, as a GM, until you've seen a player weep for joy at the sight of an old, torn piece of leather armor that only provides 1 damage protection. [Ed.: Now who's sad and twisted?]

6. See footnote 3, above.

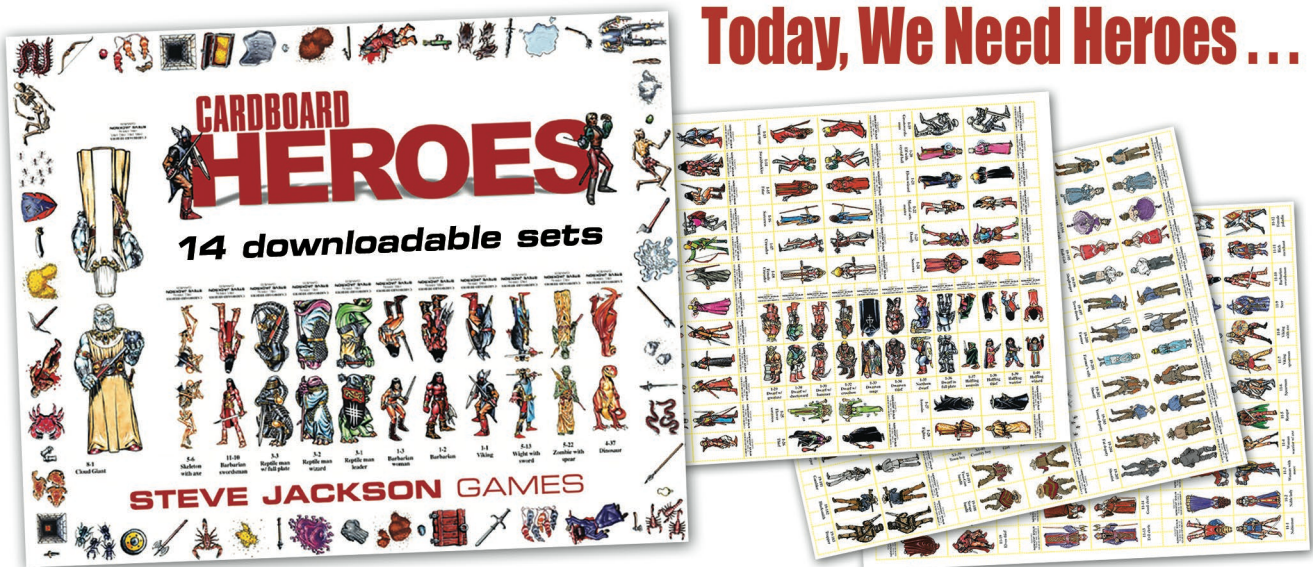
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Sinnott is an actor, writer, game designer, advocate for children with special needs and programmer in Boston. He started playing *Dungeons & Dragons* back in 1977 and *The Fantasy Trip* in 1979 and hasn't looked back since. When he's not on stage or working on a project, Jack is a dad who cooks Italian feasts, forgets to do the dishes, and studies viola, dulcimer, and opera, much to his children's chagrin.

*Edited by Guy McLimore*

*As far as I'm concerned, this type of game is only worthwhile if the players can create a new role and submerge themselves in it – meeting situations as though they were that character, rather than Joe Smith suddenly down in a dungeon.*

– Steve Jackson, "My Life and Role-Playing,"  
*Different Worlds #2*



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# MONIES OF CIDRI

BY WILLIAM F. HOSTMAN

Minting, the process of making coins, is an ancient art and a modern artistic science. To mint a coin is to press patterns into a specific metal, ceramic, or plastic token. It is a skill used legitimately by agents of almost every major ruler on Cidri (the world of *The Fantasy Trip*); not a few criminals practice it as well.

Modern coinage is a token of value. It represents an abstracted amount of purchasing power loosely correlated to work, rarity, or inherent value of the objects purchased, but not of the coin itself. Most coins in circulation cost far less to make than the face value. Some are literal tokens, exchangeable at the official reserve bank for precious metal. On Earth, this is essentially a Tudor-era innovation, copied later (19th century and later), with most nations now issuing fiat currencies – currencies whose value is solely derived from being issued by the authority issuing it, and accepted by them for official purposes. Paper, cloth, or plastic currency started as a promise to pay in coin the face value if presented at the bank.

Cidri, however, is mostly at medieval and renaissance level technologies. Premedieval societies tend to also use metal coins once copper working is discovered, and natural electrum was used by the ancient Greeks. In such societies, coins were valued for their precious metal content, not as abstract tokens. The coins' markings are a promise of purity, not just an indicator of value.

For some players, the details of coinage can stop at “how many can I carry,” but for others, some realism is appreciated. What follows is a process for making realistic coinage for your campaigns, based upon late medieval and renaissance expectations, giving the size, weight, and general values.

## COIN METALS

The five most common legitimate coin elemental metals are gold (Au), silver (Ag), copper (Cu), tin (Sn), and zinc (Zn). Illegitimate coins often use lead (Pb) to give heft, by reminting; its density is a bit higher than that of silver, but about 1/5 the value by weight and abundance. Common alloys are electrum, bronze, brass, coingold, sterling silver, and coinsilver, and all are measure by weight. Further, coinage is literally the upper-class's business. Unlike our world, Cidri has low-value coins in common use, but they are still dictated by the upper classes and government's decision to use them. (As always, some areas defy this.) For reasons of fantasy-roleplaying game tradition, platinum is also included. Given its hardness, it's usually not alloyed, and it needs magic to work it.

*Electrum* is gold and silver, ranging from about 1/3 silver to 2/3 silver, and similarly 2/3 gold to 1/3 silver, with natural contaminants of up to 1/10 of the mass. It is easily pressed into coins. The coins often are irregular, as a cut blob is cold-pressed.

*Bronze* is copper with up to 1/3 tin, and is harder than copper alone. A typical bright-coin bronze is 13:7::Cu:Sn, while a reddish one is 9:1::Cu:Sn.

*Brass* is copper with up to 2/3 tin. Red brass is around 21:3:1:1::Cu:Sn:Zn:Pb, ±1 part each. It's hard, useful for buttons or coins, and is cast hot.

*Coingold* is gold with copper and possibly tin and zinc, with the proportions varying widely; it can range from 1:1::Au:Cu to 10:2::1:1::Au:Cu:Sn:Zn. A fairly good standard is 12-14 karat, (5-7):4:1::Au:Cu:Sn.

*Coinsilver* is usually 9:1::Ag:Cu, and the copper is there for hardness and reduced tarnish. Some recipes use lead, tin, or zinc. Arsenic is a common contaminant.

### Note on Units

All weight units are in avoirdupois ounces and pounds, unless otherwise noted. Proportions are given in analogy for *a:b::(a metal):(b metal)*, such as “electrum is 1:1::Au:Ag.” Ratios are used because it is easier to do the math, both for the player and for the mint-staff.

## PARTS OF A COIN

Coins have three major elements: the obverse, the reverse, and the edge. Usually, the obverse is a face of a ruler, or a specific object; it is often called the “head” of the coin. The reverse, or “tails,” side is often the symbol of the nation or the issuer, or a text phrase of value. Both obverse and reverse are decorated to reduce forgery and to “guarantee” the precious metal content on the common faith in the ruler.

The edges are often overlooked. On early coins, the edges were usually irregular, as the coins were cold-pressed from a blob of metal; the die was often cut in stone, and the pressing slow. Some have very crisp edges with lips to show when the coin has been clipped (see *Clipping and Counterfeiting*, pp. 35-36). Milled edges – like on the U.S. or Canadian dime or quarter, or the UK one-pound coin – are another anti-clipping measure. They can be done by any of several methods, all of which are within reach of the medieval levels of technology. Some coins have edge-toolings – letters or words pressed into the edges, also as an anti-counterfeiting method.

### Bits

Many coins are intended to be cut into pieces, especially gold, silver-lead, and some silver copper mixtures.

Such coins often have a very clear cross of four or star of eight arms; six-arms are less common. These allow “making change” by literally chopping the coin into pieces. The value of the bits is the fraction of the value of the base coin.

## FIGURING THE VALUE

The abundance of gold, silver, and copper on Cidri is similar to our own. One would think that the Renaissance values might hold here . . . and would think wrong. Silver has special use in magic, which raises demand, and with demand, so also raises prices. Likewise, copper is more highly valued than its abundance would indicate – its abundance is about 850 times that of silver, but its monetary value on Earth has ranged from a high of 20:1 copper to silver, through a low of 100:1 in abundant areas; 2018 copper is \$2.50 per pound, while gold is a frightful \$18,130 or so per pound. For the purpose of this article, a copper value of about 30:1 copper to silver – high for Earth’s Renaissance period and low for its medieval era (copper continues to drop in value as technology improves, especially as steel takes over its industrial roles).

The value of a coin is based upon the weight and content of the coin. To determine the value, figure out what the alloy is. Then find the product of the relative value of each component metal (listed on the *Relative Values and Densities Table*, below) times the fraction of the coin that is that metal times the weight of one coin. Finally, add together the derived value of each component to get the actual value of the coin.

For game purposes, 0.5 ounce of pure silver is the standard value (\$1). (In much the same way, the Carolingian penny is 1/20 troy-ounce of silver, or just over 18.25 pennies to the ounce avoirdupois.)

*Example:* If a coin is 9:1::Ag:Cu, and 2 ounces, its value in ounces of silver is 9/10 (the fraction that’s silver) times 1 (the relative value of silver) times 2 ounces (the coin’s weight) plus the product of 1/10 (the fraction that’s copper) times 1/30 (the

relative value of copper) times 2 ounces (the coin’s weight). Thus,  $(2 \cdot 1 \cdot 9/10) + (2 \cdot 1/10 \cdot 1/30) = \text{about } 1.8 + 0.007 = \text{about } 1.807$  ounces of silver. Given the conversion of 0.5 ounce of silver = \$1, this coin is worth about \$3.61.

Game Masters should keep in mind that circulated coins always lose mass from handling. When relevant to the campaign, the discrepancy can be worth noting.

## DETERMINING THE SIZE

To find the size, first find the alloy density. For each component of the alloy, multiply the density of the metal (listed on the *Relative Values and Densities Table*, below) times the fraction of the given material. Next find the volume by summing those and dividing the mass by that total.

Finally, use some basic geometry to find a diameter and height that work for you: Surface area equals volume divided by thickness (which can be any number you like, but a value 0.1” to 1” is typical). Diameter equals two times the square root of the quotient of the surface area divided by pi.

*Example:* Let’s figure out the size of the coin in the previous example, which is 9:1::Ag:Cu, and 2 ounces. The density of silver in the coin is 6.07 (density of silver) times 9/10 (the fraction that’s silver), or 5.46. The density of copper in the coin is 5.17 (density of copper) times 1/10 (the fraction that’s copper), or 0.52. Sum these two values to get the density of the alloy, or 5.98. Next find the volume, which is 2 (weight of the coin) divided by 5.98 (the alloy density), or 0.33 cubic inches.

The surface area equals 0.33 (the volume) divided by the desired thickness (we’ll use 0.1”), or 3.3 square inches. The diameter is 2 times the square root of the quotient of 3.3 (the area) divided by pi (about 3.14), or about 2.05”.

So, our 0.1”-thick, two-ounce silver-copper coin that’s worth about \$3.61 is 2.05” wide.

### RELATIVE VALUES AND DENSITIES TABLE

Element	Symbol	Relative Value	Density (oz/in <sup>3</sup> )
Platinum	Pt	150	12.34
Gold	Au	12	11.168
Silver	Ag	1	6.069
Tin	Sn	1/5	4.225
Zinc	Zn	1/5	4.046
Lead	Pb	1/5	6.555
Copper	Cu	1/30	5.168

#### Deriving the Relative Values

The relative values are figured based upon both historical research, and relative abundance. Specifically,  $1 \div \sqrt{(A_{\text{metal}}/A_{\text{silver}})}$ , then rounded. This matches the medieval rates reasonably well. Gold actually was valued at more than 12 times that of silver most of the time, but accepting that ratio due to magic is pretty good. Likewise, platinum is pretty rare and due to its inability to be worked without magic or modern technology and techniques, it should be fairly valuable.

## CLIPPING AND COUNTERFEITING

There are several ways in which the criminal class literally makes more money from the money they have. The two most common are clipping and counterfeiting. Clipping is shaving down the edges – not enough to be noticed by most people, but enough to add up with enough coins; the shavings are then melted down, consolidated, and made into new currencies.

Counterfeiting coins is making coins that look like authentic coins but aren’t worth full value. The most common method is to make a die, one matching a neighboring government’s coin, but a bit smaller, and then replace 1/3 to 1/2 of the silver with lead. This makes money in two ways – lead is 1/5 of the value of silver, and a half an ounce per cubic inch heavier than silver. The coins are readily bent and have a metal-worth of 3/5 to 4/5 the silver coin, but they are of the right mass.

This is such a good way to make money that many *rulers* even stoop to it.

## Debasement

When the issuing leader decides to counterfeit his own coins, it's called debasement. In many cases, it's just throwing in less metal than the face value indicates. In other cases, it's intentionally minting a mixture of real and debased coins, then blaming the neighbors.

## NEW SPELLS

**Assay** (Thrown): IQ 14 spell; 1 ST to cast. The caster touches a coin or billet of metal, and immediately knows what the ratio is of one metal within. The caster must pick which metal at time of casting. Further castings can determine the remainder of the content, one metal at a time.

There will usually be a non-metallic content as well, but the spell cannot detect non-metals.

**Magic Ruler** (Thrown): IQ 10 spell; 1 to (IQ÷3) ST to cast. Range is line of sight. The caster, and anyone he's directly touching, sees a grid projected onto the target, labeled in one direction in the commonly used unit of the caster's choice and in a single subdivision (if permitted by the wizard's IQ), both specified at time of casting. (Most cultures use inches, hands, feet, yards, paces, and furlongs.) It is a single place value; at IQ 12 and higher, the number of places and the number of subdivision options increases; see the table below. To get a third dimension, move to another angle and recast. The spell lasts until either the target or the caster moves. Multiple castings at different units can become exceptionally precise. If the target is a living being, they may resist at (casting cost)/IQ.

**Magic Scale** (Thrown): IQ 10 spell; 1 to (IQ÷3) ST to cast. Range is line of sight. The caster, and anyone he's directly touching, see a number next to the target, labeled in the commonly used unit of the caster's choice (such as ounces, pounds, or stones) and in a single subdivision (if permitted by the wizard's IQ), specified at time of casting. It is a single place value; at IQ 12 and higher, the number of places and the number of subdivisions increases; see the table below. If the target is a living being, they may resist at (casting cost)/IQ.

IQ	Places*	Subdivisions
10-11	1 (X)	1
12	2 (XX)	1, 1/2
13	2 (XX)	1, 1/2, 1/3
14	3 (XXX)	1, 1/2, 1/3, 1/4
15	3 (XXX)	1, 1/2, 1/3, 1/4, 1/5
and so on . . .		

\* The spell only displays numbers up to the listed places for the caster's IQ, and it rounds fractions to the nearest whole

## PAPER MONEY

Banknotes – be they made of paper, plastic, cloth, or clay – are a promise from the bank to give a certain face value. Originally, this was a promise to pay in coins. Now, it's just a token of value.

Checks, drafts, and treasury warrants are all forms of currency – a check or draft is a promise to pay the value from a person or agency, with a direction to the bank to pay it from a specific account. A bank draft, teller's check, cashier's check, or banknote is a check issued directly by the bank. A treasury warrant is issued by a government, noble, or business, and is an order for their treasurer to pay it from the treasury. All currencies are, in essence, orders to pay from someone's reserves, or are redeemable in lieu of the tax share of goods. Wherever on Cidri one finds banks or treasuries, one finds checks and drafts of some form.

number if there aren't enough places left to show the fraction (the caster will see that it's rounded). If the caster uses subdivisions, the number of digits in the numerator counts toward "places" (usually just 1 digit, up to IQ 21 where it's possible to have a "10/11" subdivision). If the object is larger than what the caster's IQ can handle at the chosen unit, the spell simply shows the units and the phrase "too big."

*Example:* If a caster measures something with this spell that's exactly 1,011 feet, 5 inches, it could not be measured in feet, hands, or inches by anyone with an IQ of 10-15 (there aren't enough places); casting this spell would return "too big." If the furlong (equal to 220 yards) is a common unit in the caster's homeland and the caster declares that unit when casting the spell, it's *still* "too big" for IQ 10-11; an IQ 12-13 caster could determine "61 furlongs" (the subdivisions don't help); an IQ 14 caster could determine "61 1/2 furlongs," "61 1/3 furlongs," or "61 1/4 furlongs" (depending on the subdivision chosen). IQ 15 would yield the same info, along with the possibility of "61 2/5 furlongs" (again, if that subdivision had been picked). IQ 14-15 could also reveal "337 yards," but there aren't any places left over for subdivisions.

## COMMON COINS

These coins are common values used in various places throughout Cidri, wherever the Magical Foot is known.

### Silver Pieces

The silver coin in most common use is about 0.57 ounces; it's roughly 0.125" thick, 1" across, with a typical ratio of 20:3::Ag:Cu, and 28 of them to the pound. The copper is there for hardness more than value.

Another common silver piece is 41:5::Ag:Cu, 1.1" across, 0.1" thick, massing 0.558 ounces, and about 29 to the pound.

Both of these have a value almost universally acknowledged as the silver piece.

*This article is designed for TFT players, but fans of GURPS can find similar information in GURPS Dungeon Fantasy Treasures 1: Glittering Prizes.*

*Money never remains just coins and pieces of paper. Money can be translated into the beauty of living, a support in misfortune, an education, or future security. It can also be translated into a source of bitterness.*

– Sylvia Porter

### Gold Pieces

The gold coin in common use is 18:4:1::Au:Cu:Sn. It's about 0.75" in diameter, and 0.125" thick. It weighs a little less than the silver, at 0.53 ounces, or 30 to the pound.

A \$10 fine gold coin is 99:1::Au:Cu, 0.7" across, 0.1" thick, and 0.422 ounces. These are less likely to circulate, and are about 38 to the pound. These coins tend to be used in places where currency is in use, with these being the reserve coin.

### Copper Pieces

The so-called copper piece isn't really copper. It's silver-bronze or bronze. Several recipes are common. One is 1:2:9::Au:Sn:Cu, 0.875" across, and 0.125" thick, and about 0.381 ounces, or 47 to the pound.

Another is 1" across, 0.375" thick, 1.25 ounces, and just under 13 to the pound, using 19:1::Cu:Sn. The value is largely from the tin.

A yellow brass is also used in some places. It's 5:1:1::Cu:Sn:Zn, 0.55" across, 0.05" thick, and about 275 per pound. Note that, as usual, the copper content is not the majority of the value.

### Copper Farthings

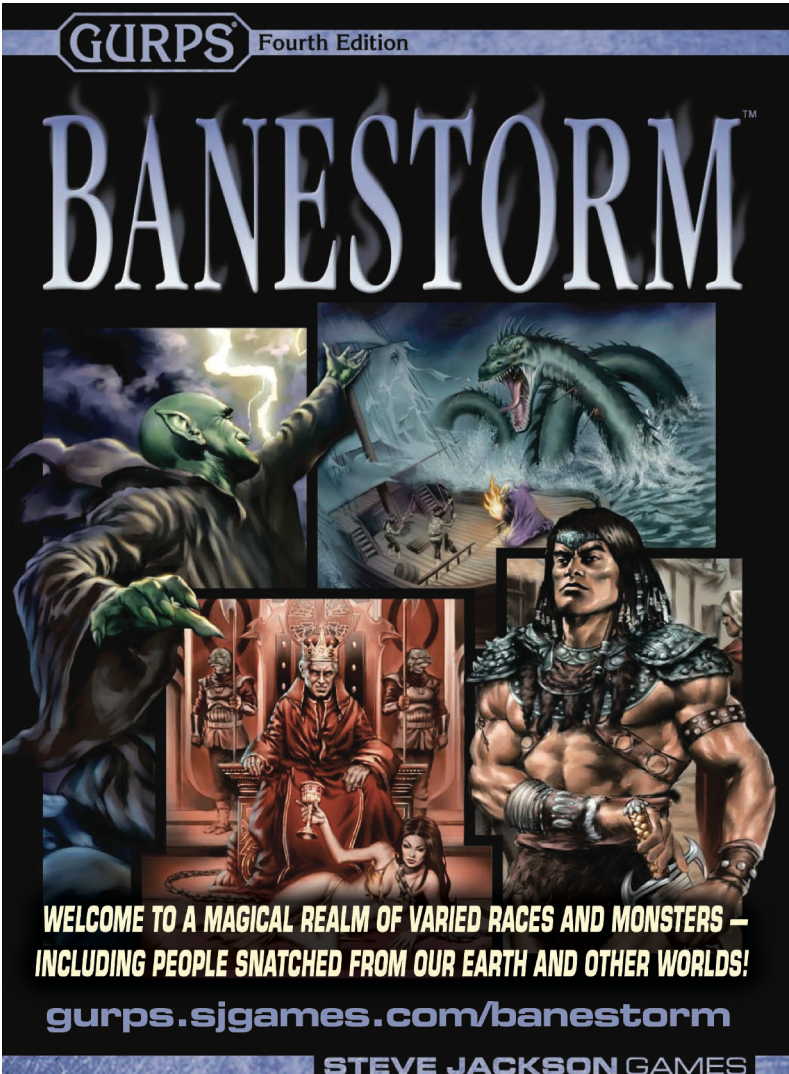
Farthing is a term for "a fourth." A common copper farthing coin is also bronze 19:1::Cu:Sn, 0.875" across, and 0.1" thick, and about 0.307 ounces, and 50 to the pound. It's a red bronze, not unlike the finish of modern UK, U.S., and former Canadian and Australian pennies, but unlike them, solid of that material.

### Platinum

Since platinum is usually magically purified and worked, and is more durable than many precious metals, its size is more standardized than most. It's 0.5" in diameter, a hair over 0.142" thick, and weights 0.333 ounces. The coin is valued at \$99.90 and overvalued very slightly as \$100. It is scratchable, but usually loses no mass in ordinary deformations and scratches.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Hostman has been a substitute teacher, is a parent of two children (one now adult, both gamers), and has been married for 22 years to the same wonderful gamer gal. He can currently be found around Alsea, Oregon. He runs the [TravellerRPG.com](http://TravellerRPG.com) boards for Marc Miller. He is active on [RPGGeek.com](http://RPGGeek.com) and the Steve Jackson Games forums at [forums.sjgames.com](http://forums.sjgames.com). His gaming career commenced in 1981, and has had no more than a two-month break in that time, especially enjoying playtesting for several companies.



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# LESSONS FROM DARBO DELVER

BY GUY MCLIMORE, *TFT* LINE EDITOR

Following a triumphant Kickstarter campaign, the revived version of *The Fantasy Trip* is coming! To help prepare for the return of this old-school classic, *Pyramid* proudly presents two new vignettes from *TFT* Line Editor Guy McLimore. Visit [thefantasytrip.game](http://thefantasytrip.game) for the latest news and updates!

## DIG WE MUST: LABYRINTH CONSTRUCTION THE PROFESSIONAL WAY

I sat down across the desk, looking at plaques on the wall honoring the “Labyrinth Engineer of the Year” five years running. The rack of business cards on the desk told the tale. “Delver’s Digs & Demolition: Lairs, Lockups & Labyrinths.” I was in the presence of the most celebrated dwarven digger of our time – Darbo Delver himself.

“Call me Darbo,” he said.

I got right to the point. “You are the best-known dungeon, maze, and lair builder of the last two centuries.” I pointed to the framed and signed parchment on the wall which read, “Thanks for bringing it in under budget! –Tollenkar.” “The readers of *Pyramid* want to know – what’s your secret?”

He grunted in the way only a dwarf can grunt. “Keeping secrets is a big part of my business, so I’m not going to tell all. But there are four universal principles at work – purpose, misdirection, stocking, and surprise. That’s what it takes to make a good labyrinth.”

“Go on . . .”

“Before you dig, you need to know what you are trying to accomplish. Are you protecting a treasure, drawing in an enemy to trap him, making a cozy lair safe from attack, or is your client just one of those warlords or wizards who likes to torment opponents for the sheer exhilaration?”

“We get more than you’d think,” Delver continued. “If you just want to protect something, you send it far away or put it behind a big iron door locked to a fare-thee-well with a sign that says ‘Beware of the Manticore.’ You don’t leave behind cryptic maps and clever little poems full of double meanings to lure in the rubes.”

Delver smiled. “I start my layout with most important room in the place and work backward. It could be the main treasure room, the dragon’s lair, a wizard’s lab . . . The most important spot *could* be the exit.” He laughed deeply. “Put that on your map first. Then work backward to sketch out the quickest path back up to the entrance.”

I was puzzled. “The quickest?”

“Yes, of course! That’s the one you don’t want anyone to use! So when you design, you’ll do all you can to make sure anyone entering will not go that way.”

“Is that where misdirection comes in?”

“Yes. Once you know what’s obvious, you can use that to lead the intruders down the garden path to doom. There should be no truly safe paths, mind you! But the most obvious should always be the least useful and most dangerous.”

He pointed to one of the many tunnel maps on the wall, all marked “RETIRED” in big, bold red runes. Figures. He wouldn’t hang anything that was still in use.

“The nice straight tunnel that goes halfway across the map is a red herring. Nothing important is there, and it switches back completely away from the main attraction. Anyone who goes there will be . . . entertained . . . by moderately tough challenges. They’ll believe this is what they can expect throughout. In fact, the real pathways are both more subtle and more dangerous. But not *too* dangerous . . .”

“Not too dangerous? Why not?”

“Most clients don’t want an impossible challenge. That’s no fun for anybody, especially me. If something is hidden in such a way no one would possibly find it, everyone will go home and just raise an army to overthrow the warlord, or divert a river and flood the dragon’s lair. That’s a bigger problem for my client.”

“What about stocking?” There was more to this labyrinth thing that I’d thought.

“You have to plan for the challenges your patron is going to be placing inside your construction. I saw one poor idiot put a giant inside a big arena to take on all intruders. But he didn’t plan how to get the giant there in the first place! He finally had to settle for a wizard casting an illusion of a giant. The first clever party disbelieved it right away!”

“Deadly traps are always a good thing to have, right?”

“Well, yes and no,” he said, to my surprise. “Traps are important and the client will expect you to use them. But if everything is trapped to the teeth, explorers will just handle everything with a 10-foot pole or an expendable hireling. There is no trap that can’t be detected and disarmed. One or two unexpected traps to remind them to be careful is better than a dozen elaborate deadfalls and poison-stake-loaded pits. Instead, build the challenges slowly. Keep parties occupied and moving, and give them places to rest and regroup.”

“What? Why would you do that?”

He roared with laughter again! “To use their complacency against them! Once something becomes familiar, switch it up and surprise your targets by punching them in the groin when they think they’re relatively safe.”

“That’s where the surprise comes in!” I was beginning to think like him a little too much.

“Exactly! You let them get paranoid, then give them reason to get careless. Build trust, then abuse it. Even when you do, they won’t stop.” He sighed. “Heroes never do.”

I stood, my head still buzzing. “I’ve taken enough of your time, Mr. Delver. Thank you for a very enlightening interview.”

He shook my hand. “Come back again, and I’ll tell you more. Maybe give you a tour.”

I was fairly certain I only wanted a tour of a Darbo Delver labyrinth if I *did* have Darbo himself alongside me every second. Maybe not even then. “Perhaps,” I offered noncommittally.

“The orc guard will show you out. Stay on the path. Strictly.”

That was one piece of advice I got that I knew I was going to follow to the letter.

## THE GREAT TRAPMASTER: A LESSON IN GREED

Here I was, back in the underground construction company of Darbo Delver, Cidri’s most successful labyrinth builder. It took me a week to quit thinking like a gleeful villain the last time I’d interviewed him, but the article was one of our most popular ever, so my editor insisted I return when Delver said he had something interesting to show me.

Upon entering Darbo’s office, he introduced me to a thin, sunken-eyed goblin who stood silently nearby. He didn’t offer to shake hands, and after seeing those hands, I was just as happy for it. “This is my top mechanic, Kreg. He’s called the ‘Trapmaster’ around here, and he certainly earns his name. I have a bet with him about one of his best traps, and I’d like to have you and your readers help me settle it.”

Darbo nodded to the silent goblin, who rolled out a set of intricate plans for some sort of spring-loaded mechanism. “This is one of my very favorite traps, which Kreg came up with a few years back. It is built under an obvious but not-too-obvious plate concealed in the floor, about 4 inches square. Lift it and a bulging pouch fills the entire niche. When the pouch is lifted out, the mechanism lifts a second pouch into its place.”

I followed Darbo’s knobby finger as he traced out the mechanism for me. Like most goblin construction, you’d have to be a goblin to really understand it, but I got the gist of what it was designed to do. Basically, it was a feeder mechanism of some sort. “OK. But why?”

Darbo explained, a twinkle in his eye. “The clever thief who finds this pulls out the pouch after being sure it won’t explode in his face. Then he unties and opens the pouch. He’ll find it filled with rocks, or maybe if Kreg is feeling generous a handful of copper coins. Not much loot. But now with a click and a whir, there is a second pouch in its place. Calling his name.”

“And that one’s the trap.”

Delver shook his head so hard his beard flopped back and forth. “No, no, no! That one’s like the first, or it may have some

sliver coins. Just a little more valuable. And a third pouch lifts into place where the second one used to be.”

I didn’t get it. “There’s a trap somewhere. What if they just cut the pouch open without removing it?”

“The pouch fills the niche entirely so they can’t get underneath it easily,” Darbo agreed. “But yes, they can cut the bag and remove the contents. The reduction in weight causes the device to push the next pouch into place anyway.”

“And . . .”

“The loot gets a bit more valuable as they pull out pouch after pouch. Silver, then gold, then maybe semi-precious stones, eventually gems. A varying number before it goes empty. But sooner or later, a small charge of gunpowder beneath the next bag goes off and BOOM!”

“You kill them!”

He looks disappointed. “Of course not. You *hurt* them, certainly. But it is a small charge, not enough to kill a healthy human by itself. But it will soften up anyone nearby. And when the smoke clears, another pouch is in place.”

“So they get the idea, stop, and get the heck out of there,” I ventured.

“You’d think so, but they almost never do. As long as there is another pouch, they’ll keep pulling them out. Greed is a powerful motivator. There may be another bag or two before they hit another charge. Eventually a third, if they are true gluttons for punishment. Even if a clever thief disarms a charge, they’ll try again – and they may not be so lucky the next time. Or the time after that.”

“Do they really keep coming back for more? Are they that stupid?”

“Usually. You can put two or three of these scattered about a labyrinth. Someone in the party will almost always bite, even if they’ve seen it before. Which brings me to why you are here . . .”

Darbo chuckled, and a grin of pure self-satisfaction bloomed on his face. “I want you to write about this. Tell your readers all about it. I’ve bet Kreg a huge bonus that it won’t matter. This trap has been around for years, and people keep falling for it. I think they will even if they see the plans printed in *Pyramid*.”

“I’ve checked with my clients who use this trap. They’ve looked at their statistics, and they think I’m probably right. Kreg finally has something that’s foolproof – or more accurately ‘fool-powered.’ He’s a bit nervous about the prospect of giving away the show, but I bet him it won’t change a thing.”

I glanced over at the goblin, Kreg, and for the first time, his face expressed some emotion. One side of his mouth was turned up just a bit, with one sharp fang bared. He didn’t look nervous to me, not at all. I got a bit of a shiver. Was that a goblin expression of personal pride? No, it was more like a challenge, whispering to the world of heroes, “You belong to me . . .”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Guy McLimore has returned as Line Editor of *The Fantasy Trip* after a 40-year career in game design and publishing that began with succeeding Steve Jackson as Line Editor of *The Fantasy Trip* in its first incarnation. Who says you can’t go home again?



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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

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