


PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/121 November '18

TRAVELS AND TRIBULATIONS

MAGNIFICENT MENAGERIE

Christopher R. Rice

THE KLINIK NOVA

David L. Pulver

THE DEPARTMENT

Phil Masters

HAVE GAME, WILL TRAVEL

Jason Brick

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Stock #37-2721



CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR 3

THE DEPARTMENT OF UNCONVENTIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL RESOLUTIONS 4
by Phil Masters

MERLIN'S MAGNIFICENT MENAGERIE . . . 11
by Christopher R. Rice

EIDETIC MEMORY:

THE KLINIK NOVA 16
by David L. Pulver

FLOOR PLAN OF KLINIK NOVA

GM VERSION 25

WALK-THROUGH VERSION 26

BLUEPRINT VERSION 27

HAVE GAME, WILL TRAVEL 29
by Jason Brick

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE:

KNICKKNACKS AND NOTIONS 34
by Steven Marsh, Pyramid Editor

ABOUT GURPS 36

ARTICLE COLORS

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

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

COVER ART
Abnar Ajmal

CARTOGRAPHY
Nikola Vrtis

IN THIS ISSUE

When you break it down, adventure gaming is generally about going to interesting places and dealing with problems both along the way and at your destination. This month in *Pyramid*, we look at the world through the eye of travelers, explorers, and those who encounter and resolve interesting situations.

Highly competent, highly dramatic Victorian-era heroes most certainly should inquire herein about *The Department of Unconventional Philosophical Resolutions*. Phil Masters – author of the recently released *GURPS Steampunk 2: Steam and Shellfire* – reveals the secrets of this British organization designed to deal with scientific situations that are a little *too* cutting edge. Find out what it takes to be an agent of the Department in terms of *GURPS Action* templates, what equipment agents typically have, ideas for campaigns, and information on how the setting for the Department fits into *GURPS Infinite Worlds*.

In the *GURPS Technomancer* setting, one of the big changes magic brought to Earth (known as Merlin to denizens of *Infinite Worlds*) was the creation and mutation of strange, dangerous creatures . . . including six new members of what may be puckishly thought of as *Merlin's Magnificent Menagerie*. Christopher R. Rice – co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* – presents you with manticores, lizards, storm scorpions, and more, suitable for a *Technomancer* game or (of course) waiting to make their way into *your* world. Each critter comes with complete *GURPS* stats.

The fate of your country is at stake, and your agency needs you to travel to *The Klinik Nova*, a medical facility in Switzerland. There, you must resolve the situation with the vicious heir to a mob before he can take over as its leader. In this month's Eidetic Memory, David L. Pulver – author of *GURPS Ultra-Tech* – offers a modern-day adventure outline that's perfect for *GURPS Action* or other high-octane games, and can even be translated to *Technomancer*. The outline includes a background, a timeline, room descriptions for the clinic, *GURPS* stats for key individuals, and a map of the building plus two handout versions that reflect variants the heroes might access depending on how they decide to accomplish their mission.

Going to a destination isn't just a means to an end; it can serve as the springboard for memorable adventure itself, provided your motto is *Have Game, Will Travel*. Long-time *Pyramid* contributor Jason Brick looks at how you can add realistic location details, travel challenges, and flavorful roleplaying opportunities for would-be tourists to your game.

This month's Random Thought Table expands on the notion of travel, with a few more ways to add to the allure of visiting new places.

Places to go, people to see, things to do . . . it's practically a hero's creed all by itself – and it's what's in store with this month's *Pyramid*!

Editor-in-Chief ■ STEVE JACKSON
GURPS Line Editor ■ SEAN PUNCH
GURPS Project Manager ■ STEVEN MARSH
Managing Editor ■ MIRANDA HORNER

Production Artist & Prepress Checker ■
NIKOLA VRTIS
Page Design ■ PHIL REED &
JUSTIN DE WITT

Chief Executive Officer ■ PHILIP REED
Chief Creative Officer ■ SAM MITSCHKE
Chief Operating Officer ■ SUSAN BUENO
Director of Sales ■ ROSS JEPSON

FROM THE EDITOR

STAMP YOUR OWN PASSPORT TO ADVENTURE

I was once stranded in Atlanta's airport overnight, as a result of an overbooked plane and no prospects for additional flights until the morning. I had no place to stay and was frugal (broke?) enough that I didn't want to try to get a hotel, so I just stayed at the airport. It was a surreal experience, this gargantuan structure, which had previously been a cacophonous hub of activity, now nearly silent by the dearth of people. Sleep deprivation probably contributed to this eeriness, and my mind filled with possibilities for gaming potential. (Several years later, I even turned some of the experience into the airport section of *D6 Adventure Locations*.)

My experience wasn't unique. I've read countless stories of being trapped at airports; some folks have even done amusing videos while there, the iPhone era allowing for on-the-fly filmmaking. In fact, I mention it to spark memories about aspects of your own travels that might prove sources of inspiration for adventures and character backgrounds. My philosophy in my gaming writing has been to encourage thinking

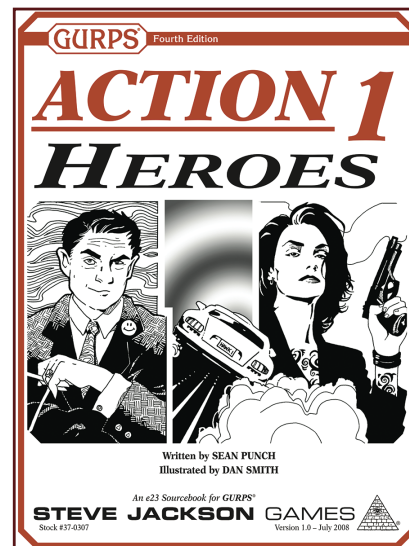
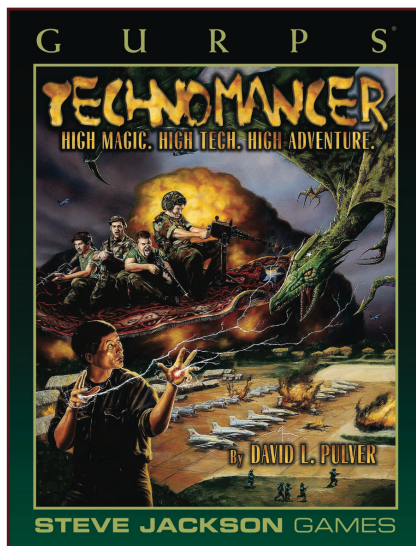
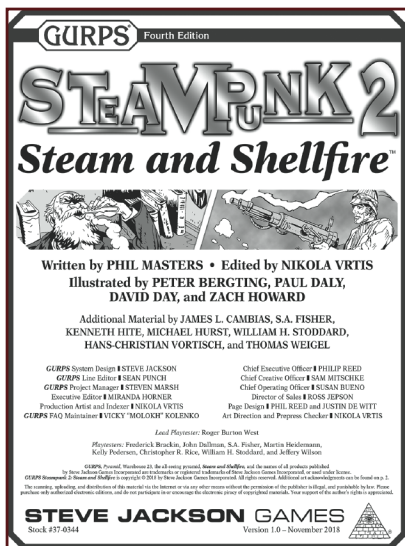
about things in new ways and hopefully to give you the tools you need to make your own gaming as awesome as possible.

This issue is devoted to looking at strange places with the eyes of a tourist. The James Bond or Indiana Jones films aren't exciting because they could take place in any abandoned warehouse; they're exciting because they go places we never can, meet people we never will, and do things we never dare.

They say that the very act of *anticipating* a vacation is often more enjoyable than the act of actually *being* on a vacation. Our heroic lives revolve around the notion of going to another world; don't sell the trip short. Enjoy the ride. But don't forget to watch out for the giant mutated lizards or criminal gang leaders on the way.

WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

We know you have your choice of gaming products, and we thank you for flying Air *Pyramid*. How well did this in-flight magazine work for you? We always like to hear from those who've traveled with us. Share your thoughts publicly at forums.sjgames.com, or privately via pyramid@sjgames.com.



Pyramid, *GURPS*, Warehouse 23, the pyramid logo, and the names of all products published by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated are trademarks or registered trademarks of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated, or used under license. *Pyramid* is copyright © 2018 by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated. All rights reserved.

Submission of your photos, letters, humor, captions, and marginalia constitutes permission to Steve Jackson Games Incorporated to use them in all media. All such submissions become the property of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated and will not be returned.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this material via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the authors' rights is appreciated.

THE DEPARTMENT OF UNCONVENTIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL RESOLUTIONS

BY PHIL MASTERS

GURPS Action campaigns don't have to be set in the present day, as past *Pyramid* articles such as *Pulp Action!* (in *Pyramid* #3/8: *Cliffhangers*) and *Extended Action!* (in *Pyramid* #3/53: *Action*) show. In addition to those possibilities, a steampunk version of the 19th century makes a good setting for such games; Victorian-era fiction has its share of very competent, firearm-wielding, highly *dramatic* heroes, and steampunk adds the possibilities of weird-and-wonderful gadgets and a fast-and-loose approach to real history, without sweating the details. This article describes a fictional organization which can act as an employer or Patron for PCs in such a game, providing a framework and justification – the *Department of Unconventional Philosophical Resolutions*, the only department of the British Home Office to have originated as a platoon of the British Army's Royal Engineers.

The inspirations for all this are many and varied, and include *The Avengers* (the classic 1960s TV series, not the superhero comics or movies), such proto-steampunk movies as *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* and *The Great Race*, the webcomic *Skin Horse*, and pretty much everything in the bibliography/filmography of *GURPS Steampunk 1: Settings and Style*.

THE SETTING

The world in which the Department operates is defined more by *style* than by the logic of alternate history (though if you do want to set things within the *GURPS Infinite Worlds* framework, see *The Setting in the Infinite Worlds*, p. 5). Essentially, it's a quasi-steampunk version of the mid- or late-Victorian era, as seen in the sorts of Hollywood movies and TV shows that don't worry too much about historical accuracy,

but do like the look of period technology. For this reason, it may be best to be evasive about the exact date, so the game can feature (or exclude) whatever technology, international politics, and fashions make for the best look and the maximum excitement.

The Department is specifically British, and the assumption here is that campaigns will be based in the United Kingdom, although trips to foreign parts are certainly possible – either to defend all regions of the Empire against threats from unconventional philosophy, or more secretly, to investigate and maybe neutralize problems originating abroad. Although this implies that the PCs will be patriotic Britons who see the Empire as something to be defended, a degree of steampunk cynicism and moral ambiguity is perfectly possible; not everyone who works for the Department does so 100% willingly, and some antagonists who are specifically hostile to Britain may turn out to have somewhat sympathetic motives and plausible reasons for what they do. And while Departmental agents generally try to do the Right Thing, they may occasionally be obliged to employ dubious tactics for the greater good – or at least, what they are told is the greater good . . .

*An organization for
steampunk-Gothic-
action campaigns.*

The Darkest Department

In fact, while the primary elements of a game using the Department are *Action*-style dramatic adventuring and steampunk visuals and technology, a third element can be introduced from time to time – a distinctly darker, very *Gothic* sensibility. Although PCs, as Departmental agents, see themselves as defending the world against crazy or misguided eccentrics and their peculiar ideas and inventions, the fact is that those ideas and inventions *work*, which should worry thoughtful heroes. When the light of reason is shone into dark corners, it

can lead to some unpleasant discoveries. Furthermore, some of the people exploiting mad science should by rights be pillars of society, and it should occur to the PCs that if they fail too often – indeed, if they fail even *once* on some matters – it would be bad news for the whole world. Not only can the darker products of unconventional philosophy call for the occasional *Fright Check* (pp. B360-361), but some things that PCs encounter should trigger *Fright Checks From Social Disorder* (*Steampunk 1*, pp. 40-43), complete with results from the *Shocking Revelations Table*.

THE SETTING IN THE INFINITE WORLDS

As an optional possibility . . . When Infinity Unlimited discovered the timeline where the Department exists, they initially saw it as a fairly close parallel, with a present in the mid-19th century and a certain amount of eccentric technology that was inevitably described as “steampunk.” Researchers eventually pinned down a divergence date – 1771, when Nicolas-Joseph Cugnot’s experimental steam wagon performed surprisingly well (evidently not suffering the first automobile accident that *may* have happened on Homeline). The French National Arsenal continued to dabble with steam, and after the French Revolution, the technophile Napoleon took this further. Steam tractors pulled artillery to Waterloo, while other experiments such as Fulton’s submarine (see *GURPS Vehicles: Steampunk Conveyances*, p. 10) also saw action.

Although this made no significant difference to the Napoleonic Wars – early steam wasn’t *that* useful, and the British turned out to know more about steam engineering than the French – it set the tone for the new century. Radical experimental technology was pursued with ever-more-enthusiastic interest, and eccentric natural philosophers could often find backers. Political and military history, however, mostly followed the Homeline pattern, although Infinity historians mutter that many nations are becoming caricatures of themselves – the officious British, megalomaniac Prussians, ramshackle Austro-Hungarian Empire, disintegrating Russia, and freebooting U.S.A.

Initially, Infinity agents suggested that this timeline should be put in the “Britannica” category (*GURPS Infinite Worlds*, p. 116); although the British Empire doesn’t actually rule the world, it’s close to the height of its Victorian glory, and its government and their scholars seem to have a good handle on the new weird technology, which can only serve to cement British power. However, further study has called some of this initial thinking into question. Although the 1771 date is the point of *provable* divergence, there is evidence in the timeline’s historical texts of “weird science” influence on much earlier events, while a lot of the steampunk tech depends on divergent physical laws or even something close to magic. This now looks like more of a far parallel with significant inertia; nor does British dominance look quite so secure, given what local mad science might accomplish. A Patrol supervisor argued effectively that code-naming the setting

after the best-known period proto-SF author was most appropriate, making this timeline Verne-1.

Infinity treads carefully here, with no tourism and only carefully controlled research permitted; the Patrol doesn’t want either a mad scientist or the Department getting wind of The Secret. (Some researchers grumble about the timeline’s closed status, but the words “mad science” make Patrol officers think “better safe than sorry.”) Fortunately, the Nazis of Reich-5 don’t seem to have stumbled across the place yet (and if they do, the Patrol will likely respond with a lot of force – a Nazi alliance with the local Prussian government would be no joke), while Cabal activities on the timeline *seem* to be limited and localized.

VERNE-1, 1868

Current Affairs

The complex balance of international intrigues and treaties between the rival nations of Victorian Europe and the rising power of the United States is prone to disruption by all manner of mad science and accelerated technologies.

Divergence Point

1771; Cugnot’s steam wagon works well enough to spark interest in radical technologies and super-weapons.

Major Civilizations

Western (multipolar), Orthodox (empire), Islamic (multipolar), Chinese (empire).

Great Powers

British Empire (representative democracy, CR3), French Empire (representative democracy, CR3), Prussia (dictatorship, CR4), Austro-Hungarian Empire (dictatorship, CR3), U.S.A. (representative democracy, CR2).

Worldline Data

TL: 5+2 (with a *lot* of peripheral superscience)

Mana Level: low

Quantum: 4

Infinity Class: Z4

Centrum Zone: Inaccessible

THE HISTORY AND FUNCTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT

“Unconventional philosophy” (or as some people insist on calling it, “mad science”) has its roots in the early days of modern science, or perhaps much further back than that, in medieval or ancient alchemy or even some kinds of “magic.” It achieved a modern form with the coming of the Industrial Revolution. When the sanest scientists and inventors were rewriting everything that people thought that they knew about the age of the Earth, creating gigantic iron devices that could carry folk hundreds of miles in a day, floating over the highest mountains in balloons, hurling lightning around living rooms as a party trick, and transforming the industry of nations, it was sometimes hard to say what was actually *mad*. Some scholars believe that matters crossed some kind of line when a researcher used electricity to reanimate dead flesh; others pin blame on some dubious American radical, flying kites in thunderstorms; others again say that an Italian watchmaker who built a self-willed automaton set a thoroughly bad example. Perhaps Franz Anton Mesmer warped the minds of his scientific audiences with his mental powers, or too many fashionable thinkers had too much fun inhaling ether for amusement.

In any case, sometime early in the 19th century, it became increasingly obvious to the higher ranks of the British Army that all this newfangled technology was producing far too many super-weapons, which could sometimes be inconvenient when trying to fight wars in the traditional fashion. So the problem was passed to the people who were supposed to handle grubby technical matters – the Royal Engineers. They in turn formed a new unit, the Miscellaneous Tactics Platoon, to investigate new problems and come up with countermeasures as necessary.

The Platoon achieved a number of successes, or at least offered plausible suggestions for dealing with reported foreign weapons (sometimes summarized as “stand back and watch them blow themselves up”). As time passed, it became increasingly clear that many of their assignments were not actually military in nature. Mad scientists and inventors were distressingly unwilling to limit themselves to selling new weapons to national armed forces. When a panicking local constable, say, sent to London for advice on stopping a monster that was rampaging around some rural district, and the army was called in, the army naturally sent in their specialists. This worked, but sometimes took a little while to organize. Moreover, the recently founded civilian police forces (such as the Metropolitan Police, in London) were *supposed* to reduce the need to call in the army to deal with matters of law and order. Hence, after some muttering in the halls of the establishment, the Home Office – the component of the government formally concerned with law enforcement – undertook to develop its own methods for dealing with such problems.

After various civil servants had passed the problem to each other like a hot potato for a few weeks, it was acknowledged that there was one group of people who actually knew something about the matter. The Home Office soon requested that members of the Miscellaneous Tactics Platoon be seconded to the civil authority, to advise. After a further period of prevarication, it was quietly admitted that the new *Department of Unconventional Philosophical Resolutions* now consisted

largely of seconded advisors and former Royal Engineers officers who had walked into civil service posts that nobody else wanted. Various duties that the army really didn’t want were formally transferred over. No longer bound by military convention or by much civil-service oversight, the Department settled down to recruiting the best people for their new job – which, as they had by now developed a fine tradition of desperate improvisation, sometimes meant some rather strange choices.

Traditions and Tactics

All that was some years ago now, in which time the Miscellaneous Tactics Platoon has shrunk back to a small advisory unit dealing purely with military issues (and often calling on the Department, informally, for intelligence – the two bodies retain a good relationship). The Department has become a rather independent-minded element of the Home Office, although it still recruits a fair number of ex-military personnel and functions almost as an intelligence agency at times. Its tasks are only loosely defined, partly because “unconventional philosophy” so often defies restrictive analysis and definition, and partly because this enables other government departments to offload a wide range of problems in its direction.

The Department is, of course, based in London, in what has uncharitably been described as a warren of basements off Whitehall. The headquarters houses both a huge collection of well-indexed files and records on all aspects of unconventional philosophy, and a couple of small workshops – to the annoyance of neighboring departments, who consider that those grubby craftsmen lower the tone. However, the Department is deaf to those complaints, because it has a third element: its teams of investigators and specialists whose job is to go out and *solve* problems, and who often need practical support, sometimes in a considerable hurry.

DEPARTMENTAL DUTIES

Although the Department has its full share of supervisors, paper-pushers, and backroom mechanics, its important component, and the one that will appear in the foreground in games, consists of the people responsible for identifying, assessing, and eliminating problems. These individuals are organized into teams of three to 10 members. Specifics vary, especially as some teams are highly specialized to deal with unique issues – the sorts of problems that crop up in particular places (such as university towns), the acquisition of information from important foreign sources and its subsequent analysis, or liaison with other official bodies such as the Royal Navy or the Metropolitan Police.

A typical field team consists of a supervisor (who is usually also responsible for direct dealings with other authorities, and who may well be chosen for personal charm, not to mention the right old-school tie), and individuals competent in combat, “investigation” (often clandestine), technical analysis, and *ad hoc* problem solving. Teams are *not* military units, despite the number of ex-military agents the Department employs, but do operate under a degree of semi-formal discipline. The Department has a formal rank structure, though rank titles aren’t often used in public, and mostly boil down to “supervisor” and “agent.”

The work of field agents from the Department of Unconventional Philosophical Resolutions is serious and dangerous enough to require a combination of discipline and dedication.

The Department has established smaller local offices in other British cities and in various provinces of the Empire. It is spread very thin outside of the country, requiring agents to be sent from other offices (even, occasionally, from London) to deal with problems. In fact, local offices exist largely to provide regional support for active investigation teams sent from London. The branch locations generally have small but competent contingents of mechanics and engineers, and a small fleet of vehicles (steam cars, boats, personal airships, etc.), but relatively little combat strength or forensic resources of their own. Still, wiser agents from London usually consult branch office staff for specifically local knowledge, and some prove seriously capable when called upon.

Field agents are *not* military or police, and don't claim to be; they are more like an intelligence agency with what would in other worlds be called a "security" function. Nonetheless, their work is serious and dangerous enough to require a combination of discipline and dedication – in notably varying proportions.

DEPARTMENT CHARACTERS

The Department deals with open-ended and sometimes world-threatening problems while operating under legal restrictions and with a finite budget. Hence, its better agents and supervisors tend to be pragmatic in their approach. This definitely extends to the process of recruiting those agents.

While its history gives it a strong inclination to recruit ex-military or ex-police personnel (who hopefully combine useful training with discipline and dedication to the Crown), the Department also needs other skills. For example, its technical specialists can come from anywhere that provides broad, deep, appropriate training, including academia, commercial engineering, and even private scholarship. The problem is that most people with the intelligence and ingenuity to make useful technical or philosophical agents could find financially rewarding or intellectually satisfying work elsewhere, with considerably lower risk and lighter supervision. This means that a number of people working for the Department are there because they have difficulty getting along with others, or because they are obsessively fascinated by unconventional philosophy. In other words, they are borderline mad scientists themselves. Those who are somewhat less erratic may have found it impossible to progress as they deserve elsewhere in society because they are members of minority ethnic groups, or women – though this doesn't preclude them from *also* being scientifically eccentric.

Worse – in the opinion of some senior supervisors in the Department, if not in terms of the damage they may cause – some field agents are recruited from the lower and even

the criminal classes. The fact is, field operations often have to resolve problems quickly or conduct clandestine investigations, and in Victorian London, the people who are often best at this sort of thing may be found in the criminal underworld. Of course, the Department can't employ *active* criminals, but it is perfectly willing to recruit unwilling individuals by offering them the choice of a job or a prison term. Strangely enough, these aren't people who would usually be considered suitable for a civil-service career.

Character Creation

The assumed default Department campaign is definitely *action*, so characters should be created accordingly; 250 points is a reasonable place to start. Players can use some of the templates from **GURPS Action 1: Heroes** and **GURPS Action 3: Furious Fists**, but treat them more as guidelines than as requirements, adapting them freely to fit the campaign's tech level and general peculiarities.

In the Department's world, electronic technology exists, but is mostly rare and often experimental, and unlikely to be used for security. Thus, skills related to that field can always be deleted from templates and replaced with something more appropriate. Likewise, the few computers to be found are weird mechanical devices, so only the most sophisticated technologist characters have computer skills, and even they are more likely to have Mechanic (Mechanical Computers) than Computer Operation or Computer Programming. One point in Electronics Operation (Comm) is moderately commonplace, though, representing training in electrical telegraphy using Morse code.

In any case, most Department agents add the *security* lens, but feel free to swap in skills from the *criminal* lens for recruits from the underworld, the *law enforcement* lens for ex-coppers, or the *military* lens for former soldiers.

The following templates work more or less well for this setting.

Assassin: The Department doesn't normally employ full-time killers, but it does have a few excellent marksmen on the force – mostly ex-military, but some are former big-game hunters with colonial backgrounds. This reflects the usual reason for sending these people out on missions: To hunt and kill monsters and abominations of science.

Cleaner: This type isn't usually found in the Department, but there may be one or two people employed to remove all evidence of the most sanity-destroying and horrible forms of unconventional philosophy. The general public *really doesn't* need to know some things. A few levels of Fearlessness and some peculiar specialties of the Hazardous Materials skill may thus be required.

Demolition Man: As with the assassin, any explosives experts (typically ex-army) employed by the Department are likely to be sent out to remove the most extreme classes of threat – or to tidy up after explosive-loving unconventional philosophers.

Face Man: This is the most common agent type found leading teams. Such supervisors are typically recruited directly from good universities or from other civil-service departments. They receive some training and field experience before being put in charge of assignments. Even so, the charming ex-public-school fellow who does the talking may well be a few years younger than the grizzled ex-soldiers and shady thugs behind him. Raised Status (and enough Wealth to support it) are near-necessities here.

Hacker and Wire Rat: These templates definitely suit Department agents, but need a lot of tweaking to be entirely suitable as steampunk heroes. Primarily, either template can be used as the basis for a “field philosopher” agent – someone sent into the fray to assess and explain the activities of unconventional philosophers, and when necessary improvise countermeasures. These people teeter on the brink of mad science themselves (and may even suffer from the Delusion that “there’s no such thing as truly mad science”), but the Department exists to control and when necessary eliminate unconventional philosophy, not to propagate it. Thus, any who tip over the edge themselves may be pensioned off to a quiet sanitarium somewhere (and then watched for the rest of their lives). While Curious is practically a mandatory disadvantage here, those who act on it too enthusiastically may end up repeatedly dogpiled by their teammates – especially if the philosopher combines it with Overconfidence. To match the style of the setting’s tech and the Department’s approach, replace the “H4xx0r” or “Solder and Duct Tape” limitations on Gadgeteer with “Master/Mistress of the Rapid Repair” (below), replace the specialist Talents on the templates with Artificer or other advantages of your choice, and revise the skill list to suit a different sort of character – Mechanic is more appropriate than Electronics Operation/Repair, and most field philosophers have and use a whole array of theoretical science skills (definitely including Weird Science), mostly to assess problems for their team.

Master/Mistress of the Rapid Repair

This is a -50% Accessibility limitation for Quick Gadgeteer (p. B57), akin to “H4xx0r” and “Solder and Duct Tape” (*Action 1*, pp. 18-19), but lower tech. You have a superlative talent for repairing or modifying mechanical devices and contraptions. You don’t invent from scratch, but you can make such things work despite any damage they have taken and your own previous unfamiliarity with their internal workings. Such repairs normally take 10 minutes and a roll against an appropriate Mechanic skill; fixing something that’s completely crushed or mangled, or using wildly inappropriate components, may take an hour. On a critical success, you come away from the job with a *complete* understanding of the functions of the device; you can replicate it using appropriate parts, and are free to spend one or two bonus character points on a relevant Engineer skill with no further training.

Actually, Wildcard skills (p. 9) are especially appropriate for these agents; feel free to divert points from the templates’ Talents and skills.

Infiltrator: This is the class of agent most often recruited from the underworld, of course. Hence, they are likely to have appropriate disadvantages such as low Status or a Social Stigma (possibilities including but not limited to Criminal Record). Electronics Operation (Security) is entirely optional in this mostly pre-electrical setting; feel free to shift the points to another primary skill or to Observation.

Investigator: A useful type to have along on many missions, and almost always ex-police. Forensics in these games should be much like what Sherlock Holmes does in the original stories – brilliant innovative science, rather than established routines. As Departmental investigators are usually pursuing mad scientists, they may well acquire some scientific skills, including Weird Science, less to use actively than to understand what they’re dealing with.

Medic: Steampunk medicine at TL(5+2) isn’t as . . . dubious . . . as real-world Victorian medicine – it should be as useful in game terms as the real-world TL7 version – so a team may benefit from the presence of a professional emergency surgeon. However, the medic’s most entertaining function may be as the purveyor of low-key mad science in medical form, tolerated by the Department because it keeps agents alive. Hypnotism and even Brainwashing skills may be available and even expected. The player and GM should discuss what they anticipate happening with this character, exactly which skills will be useful, and how much gruesomeness the game will stand. Then again, a medic character *could* be played as stolidly straightforward as Dr. Watson to Sherlock Holmes.

Shooter: This is, of course, the ideal template for a reliable ex-soldier recruited to give a Department investigative team a backbone of straightforward combat ability. Even so, the Department doesn’t expect its teams to go around shooting up respectable neighborhoods; subtlety is usually considered preferable. Hence, this template should be available, but teams don’t *have* to feature shooters.

Wheel Man: This character type should be extended a little for Department games. The setting certainly feature cars – usually steam cars – so the ability to drive them recklessly is often useful. Nonetheless, fast car chases aren’t likely to be quite as common as in modern action movies. Department operations often stumble onto a *terrifying* assortment of vehicles, on land, sea, and air – and the Department itself operates small airships and fast launches. (Basically, pretty much anything in *GURPS Vehicles: Steampunk Conveyances* might show up.) So a character built on this template needs to be very versatile; buy multiple vehicle skills of all sorts, or better yet, a Wildcard skill (p. 9) representing extreme versatility.

Big Guy: The most generally appropriate template from *Action 3* in Department games, the big guy can represent a burly ex-soldier or former street heavy who has been recruited because sometimes even Department teams need the ability to punch people and break things – or maybe to shift rubble or quiet unruly opponents with a glare. (Yes, Intimidation is a good secondary skill choice.) Other types from the same supplement *might* appear, but in a quasi-Victorian steampunk setting, a “combat specialist” is usually either a gunman or a big bruiser.

Wildcard Skills

Wildcard skills are highly appropriate for games in this setting, reflecting the freewheeling weirdness of a world of Gothic steampunk high action. In each case, the details should be adjusted to fit the tech level and style of play; skills should also ideally be named to fit the Victorian mood. Examples might include *Practical Science!*, akin to *Science!* but replacing abstract Astronomy and Mathematics with enough Engineer and Mechanic to cover tinkering with all manner of scientific devices; *Cat Burglar!* and *Sociability!*, which are just *Infiltrator!* and *Face Man!* from p. 23 of **Action 1**, renamed; and *Vehicles!*, which is basically *Wheel Man!* from the same source, but expanded a little to cover control of some slightly larger crewed vehicles, which balances out because vehicles in general are slightly less common and more cumbersome in the setting than in modern-day **Action** games.

Equipment

The Department tries to give its agents the equipment they need for their job, subject to the constraints of a government budget and with the caveat that they should *try* to do less damage than the things they are endeavoring to stop. In addition, many agents have a certain amount of equipment which is their personal property; many are quite attached to some specific weapon or tool. Hence, this being a cinematic sort of setting, Gizmos (p. B57) and Signature Gear (p. B85) are both highly appropriate.

Most equipment should be drawn from **GURPS Steampunk 2: Steam and Shellfire**, with additional weapons coming from **GURPS High-Tech: Adventure Guns**. The main **GURPS High-Tech** volume and both volumes of **GURPS High-Tech: Pulp Guns** can also be useful here. The setting is TL(5+2), and historical TL5 equipment is widely available, along with pretty much anything from the early years of historical TL6, with the GM's consent. It's best to be flexible; in a steampunk-action setting, the first concern is that equipment should be *cool*. For example, the suggested standard sidearm for Department agents is the Webley-Fosbery Automatic, mostly because it's an *automatic revolver*, and never mind that it was quite rare and only appeared in 1901 (also, ignore its reliability issues). Firearms combat specialists might alternatively favor the LeMat revolver (usually with solid slugs or weird specialist ammunition in the shotgun barrel) or the clockwork carbine. Low-ST technician agents might choose the "Sticherin" pistol. Any agent may have a deringer as a backup gun for emergencies. Showy agents, especially social-interaction specialists, may well carry a number of concealed devices; if nothing else, a swordstick or cane rifle can be very comforting when negotiations go wrong.

DEPARTMENT GAMES

As should be quite clear by now, the Department of Unconventional Philosophical Resolutions was created as a framework for games of Gothic steampunk action. Agents, who can have a wide range of backgrounds, receive loosely defined missions which are initially mostly investigative, but which tend to lead to confrontations with monsters, super-weapon-wielding lunatics, and dashed foreigners who want either

to harm the Empire or to appropriate the creations of unconventional philosophy for very dubious and unwise purposes. Agents can wield a variety of weapons and equipment, some of it quite *eccentric* in its own right, but will often be thrown back on their own resources.

It's also entirely possible that agents who don't happen to believe in "the Empire, right or wrong" will nonetheless be asked to risk their neck for it. Some opponents will have admirable goals, or at least understandable motives, which can lead to interesting problems of conscience. But there's no need to overdo this, because mad science is generally prone to blowing things up on an excessive scale, however plausible the motives behind it. Compounding this problem, agents may be instructed to *recover* the products of mad science intact, or examine them in detail – so that the Empire's own engineers can recreate and exploit this wonderful, unwise technology. Curious field philosophers may applaud this idea, but most agents are likely to wonder whether their superiors ought really to have control of such twisted secrets.

All of which said, it wouldn't be impossible to run games in which the Department is the antagonist, or at least an obstruction. Idealistic scientists looking to change the world and improve humanity's lot might find themselves opposed by faintly sinister and dangerously competent agents of the state, who seem intent on destroying anything that might rock the boat too much and co-opting everything else for the Empire and its armed forces.

Because action (or rather, **Action**) is part of the point here, **GURPS Action 2: Exploits** should be a standard reference for the GM; it's not hard to filter everything there through a Victorian steampunk lens. Department games are actually akin to "War Against Terror" campaigns (**Action 2**, p. 44), except that the terror in this

case isn't political terrorism (usually – though the historical Victorian period actually had occasional "anarchist outrages," which could be made much worse by mad science). Rather, it's the terror of very unconventional philosophies and the Gothic worldview – and that is even harder to defeat forever than mere bad politics. Hence, some investigations and dramatic end-of-scene reveals can trigger standard Fright Checks or Fright Checks from social disorder, adding an extra layer of weirdness to the action. Basic Abstract Difficulty (**Action 2**, p. 4) can *definitely* apply to these; in fact, it might be doubled or even tripled for major reveals, as the Gothic awfulness of their foes presses down on the agents.

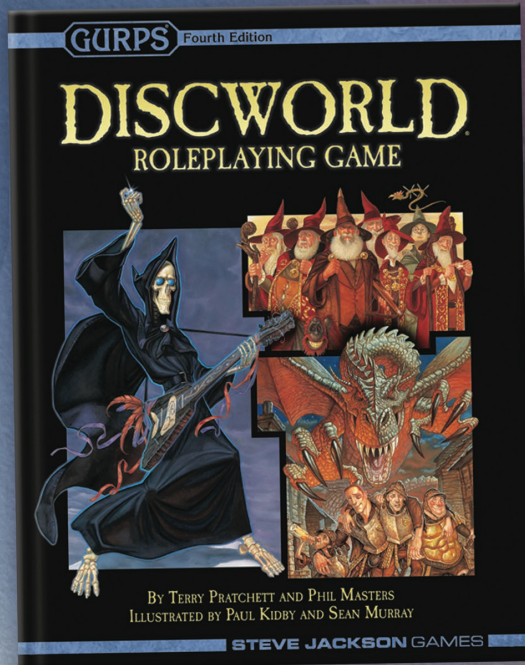
This is not to say that Department agents aren't brave and heroic, of course. They regularly gaze into the abyss, but they keep on fighting. Usually. They just have to hope that the steampunk science they wield is enough to defeat the steampunk horrors they face . . .

Agents may have eccentric equipment, or they might rely on their own resources.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

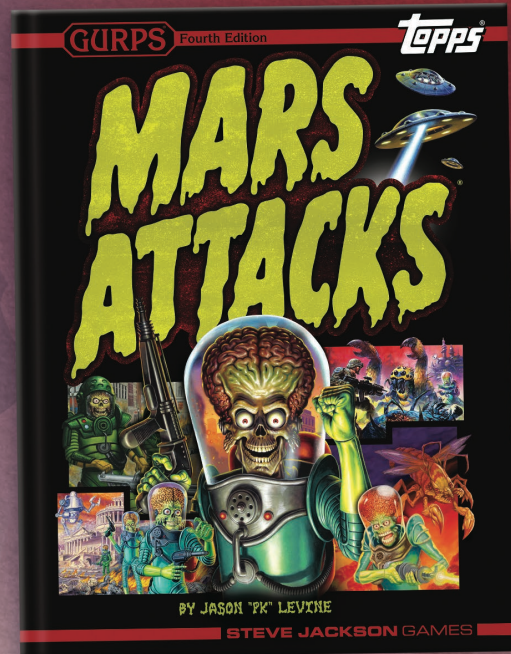
Phil Masters is a **GURPS** writer of long standing whose biggest recent work would be the **Discworld Roleplaying Game**. He is also responsible for the new **GURPS Steampunk** series on Warehouse 23, some vignettes in which feature agents of the Department.

Expand Your Adventure!



Where the world
is round, but
also flat!

Journey through
the mind of
Terry Pratchett . . .



Will you save the
Earth? Or – will
you conquer it?

Play as either Martians
or humans! Wield
futuristic weapons and
tech! Fly spaceships!

Find these at your friendly local game store today!
Or order at warehouse23.com.

DISCWORLD and TERRY PRATCHETT are registered trade marks of Dunmanifestin Limited. All registered and unregistered trade marks including character and place names are used under licence. © Dunmanifestin Limited/Narrativia Limited/Paul Kidby.

Mars Attacks is © The Topps Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Mars Attacks and Topps are registered trademarks of The Topps Company, Inc. Mars Attacks and Topps related logos, characters, names are the intellectual property of The Topps Company Inc. and used herein under license with Steve Jackson Games Incorporated.

GURPS, Discworld Roleplaying Game, Pyramid, Warehouse 23, the pyramid logo, and the names of all products published by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated are trademarks or registered trademarks of Steve Jackson Games Incorporated, or used under license. Discworld Roleplaying Game is copyright © 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2015 by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated. GURPS Mars Attacks is copyright © 2015 by Steve Jackson Games Incorporated. All rights reserved.

STEVE
JACKSON
GAMES



🐦 @ f | sjgames.com
#PlaySJGames

MERLIN'S MAGNIFICENT MENAGERIE

BY CHRISTOPHER R. RICE

"Ava Merlin – real last name?" said Chuck Jones, the too-polished TV host of *Morning Magic*. His handshake was as grabby as the "friendly" hug she'd avoided backstage.

Ava had heard that line since grade school. "Far as I know," she replied automatically, pulling her hand back the moment his grasp loosened.

"They say you've seen every weird, strange, and magical creepy-crawly out there." Chuck's voice and visage were magically enhanced. It drew her attention, even though she didn't want to look at him. Talk about creepy.

"Not yet. But I'm trying. My new book, *Shadowwalker: Following Trinity's Shadow*, is due out next week, and I'm hoping it's popular enough to fund my next expedition into the Arctic." Funding was why she was even sitting here, despite hating daytime TV talk shows. Her agent had talked her into it. Her agent got a cut and didn't have to deal with Chuck holding her hand too long.

"Great, great. I heard you brought us a treat! Some kind of lizard from New Mexico? With eyebeams? Never can tell what comes out of the Land of Enchantment these days!" He grinned at the audience, who laughed even though he wasn't funny. Maybe there was a prompter somewhere.

Ava gritted her teeth behind a fake smile and reached for the carrier beside her chair. "Well, it's descended from whiptail lizards that were modified by Trinity, anyway. If everyone will put on their protective goggles –"

"What, even me, Avie?" Chuck asked, as he leaned forward to put a hand on her knee, ostensibly to get a better look at the "lizard's" carrier.

She didn't even hesitate. "Up to you."

"Oh, I'm sure I'll be fine. It's just a lizard!"

GURPS Technomancer is one of the more fascinating settings written for *GURPS*. It invokes a classic fiction and gaming trope: Magic makes a comeback. What *Technomancer* does differently is combine magic with another, more technological force (radiation), which sets it apart from more common takes on the idea.

This article explores one aspect of *Technomancer*: The rise of magical or magically mutated beings, providing *GURPS*

Fourth Edition statistics and in-setting lore for new creatures found in the campaign world.

These creatures come from all over the world and could be found just about anywhere the GM desires. In a *GURPS Infinite Worlds* campaign, assume they are in all of the various Merlin worldlines (*Infinite Worlds*, p. 134).

For an entire issue devoted to the Merlin campaign setting, see *Pyramid* #3/115: *Technomancer*.

LAZARD

I once blinded a morning TV show host with an agitated lizard (it wasn't permanent, luckily for him). Granted, I did shake the mirrored box it was in, but only a little. Chuck's attitude did the rest. He probably shouldn't have tried to check if it was a boy lizard or a girl lizard, not that he'd know how to tell. Lazards were named by my son, Cole, and the moniker stuck. I keep a few with me in a cage. They make excellent bug zappers and can be very affectionate. They aren't deadly – not really – but a frightened lizard can severely injure the unwary. They do shoot magical laser beams from their tail, after all.

– Ava Merlin, *Shadowwalker: Following Trinity's Shadow*

Lazards outwardly resemble large whiptail lizards (they're the size of a small dog). Their scales are an iridescent white, and their eyes glow like miniature suns. When frightened, these Hellstorm survivors shoot beams of coherent light out of their . . . tail. They do this with a whipping motion of the tail, which gathers both oz particles and photons from the environment and directs them toward a target at blinding speeds. While not deadly, lazards can cause a lot of property damage and accidents – especially in sunny locales like the Manabelt.

Fashionable mages have taken to using them as familiars, and Manadynamics is close to a breakthrough for a faster method of recharging Powerstones using the biomechanics of the lizard's tail-strike ability.

ST: 6 **HP:** 6 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 6
IQ: 3 **Per:** 10 **Weight:** 15 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** -6
Dodge: 10 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 1

Bite (12): 1d-4 cutting. Reach C.

No Pew (12): If looking at the lizard, the target must roll vs. HT at -3 or be blinded for seconds equal to margin of failure. Protected Vision aids this roll normally, and sunglasses (or similar dark eyewear) provide +1 or +2 to the resistance roll. Acc 5, Range 10/20.

Pew (12): 1 point burning surge. This requires the lizard to roll vs. HT; failure means the attack costs 1 FP to use. Acc 5, Range 10/20.

Pew Pew Pew (12): Treat as Pew, but add up +3 to RoF. This attack requires 1 FP per +1 to RoF, up to +3 FP for +3 to RoF. Rcl 1.

Traits: Acute Taste and Smell 2; Acute Vision 4; Chameleon 2; Cold-Blooded (50°); Combat Reflexes; Cowardice (12); Damage Resistance 20 (Absorption, Heals FP; Limited, Light-based attacks); Discriminatory Smell; Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground Speed 9; Costs Fatigue, 2 FP); Quadruped; Silence 1; Terrain Adaptation (Desert); Ultravision; Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-12; Innate Attack (Beam)-12; Stealth-12 (13 vs. Hearing if moving, 14 if motionless).

Notes: Can be trained up to IQ 5 by handlers willing to accept burns and possible bites from irritable creatures.

LEUCROCOTTA

Horrible creatures. Leucrocotta have a lot in common with the wendigo up north, using voice and sound mimicry to ambush their prey. Unlike wendigo, they don't kill just to eat. They like stalking their prey for days before killing it. They get some sort of terrible satisfaction out of it. Avoid them when possible and call for the Hellhounds – I suggest Eric Keele. He's fantastic at what he does and charges reasonable rates.

– Ava Merlin, **Shadowwalker:
Following Trinity's Shadow**

Leucrocotta are named after the mythical creatures of India and Ethiopia, and described by Pliny in *Natural History*. It's anyone's guess as to whether they're the result of thaumatogenetic tinkering gone awry or awakened from a long slumber by the surge of magical energy. These canid monsters look like a cross between a wolf and a hyena the size of a pony. Though more blunt-muzzled, they have "alligator" jaws – once they bite down on something, their jaws can't be pried open by normal means. After a leucrocotta gets a "lock-jaw" grip on its victim's body or limb, it shakes its target repeatedly and rolls on the ground, much like an alligator's attack.

Leucrocotta are easily as intelligent as the average human, can mimic the voices of others (or *any* sound they've heard at least once), and can track supernatural "scents" for miles.

What's worse, they are often mages in their own right (typically with illusion and sound-manipulation magic), making them even more dangerous.

Originally appearing only in Western Africa and India, leucrocotta packs can be found worldwide, thanks to them being imported for study (and escaping), stowing away aboard ships, magical teleportation mishaps, and so on.

ST: 16 **HP:** 16 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 11 **Move:** 9
IQ: 10 **Per:** 14 **Weight:** 500 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** +1

Dodge: 10 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 3 (Tough Skin)

Bite (14): 1d+2 cutting. Any hit counts as a grapple, even if it doesn't penetrate DR. This allows the leucrocotta to *worry* – roll damage each turn as a free action. Reach C.

Lock-Jaw: After a leucrocotta has successfully bitten a target, it can opt to lock its jaw. This is a free action, but the leucrocotta cannot stop grappling its target until the limb is either crippled or dismembered. Doing this increases bite damage to 2d+1 cutting.

Traits: Combat Reflexes; Detect (Supernatural Beings and Phenomena; Long-Range 1; Smell-Based); Discriminatory Smell; Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 18); Mimicry (Voice Library; see notes); Night Vision 9; Penetrating Voice; Quadruped; Sadism (12); Silence 4; Social Stigma (Monster); Striking ST 2 (Bite Only); Temperature Tolerance 4 (3° to 106°).

Skills: Brawling-14; Stealth-16 (20 vs. Hearing if moving, 24 if motionless); Tracking-18; Wrestling-14.

Notes: Leucrocotta mages rule their packs and have +2 to IQ, Leadership-14, Tactics-14, 1d/3 levels of Magery (round down, minimum Magery 0), and 3d+4 spells. They specialize in spells that fool others through illusion or guile. The Voice Library enhancement on Mimicry lets leucrocotta "replay" any sound or voice they've ever heard, with perfect accuracy.

MANTICORE

*Because hey, let's just see what we can cook up in the lab that's similar to what we find in mythology. Manticores have become some of the most preeminent killers for hire. And, you know, serial murderers like to serial murder. Remember those odd rooftop killings in Chicago in 2009? They thought it was a dragon or some other flying predator, but could never prove it. Turns it out **was** a flying predator: one of the CIA's pet manticores. Oh, they never admitted it, but that's what it was. Damn thing finally lost its mind and started "hunting" on its own.*

– Ava Merlin, **Shadowwalker:
Following Trinity's Shadow**

The mythological manticore has a lion's body, a bat's wings, a scorpion's tail, and the face of a human. In the early 1990s, the Iranians recreated the man-eating monster from Persian myth as an alternative to military dragons (**Technomancer**, pp. 57-59). While their lethality and mobility cannot be denied, manticores are *extremely* sadistic, and delight in causing pain to the enemy. This resulted in a loss of combat efficiency so bad that the lab eventually destroyed hundreds of eggs in an attempt to hide what they'd designed.

However, between the CIA appropriating a few dozen eggs, scientists who hated to lose all their work, and perhaps the efforts of the prototype manticores themselves, manticores continue to exist.

CIA-raised manticores are used for covert assassinations, hostile extractions, and as interrogators. Wild ones are just wandering menaces, though their populations are limited by the female's tendency to devour males after mating. The mother lays eggs, guards her nest, and regurgitates food for her hatchlings for a few months, but once she abandons her children, their first independent meals are usually their weakest siblings. Males who discover young manticores are as likely to torture them to death as to adopt one for a while. Or, if they find a newly abandoned nest, both.

The manticores' armored tail ends in a *cluster* of barbs; it can both sting like a scorpion and fling tiny hooks! These barbs are extremely dense, capable of penetrating armor. They also possess bulbous, venom-filled ends that pump poison into the target with muscular action, akin to a bee's stingers. Worse, the barbs regrow with unnatural speed.

Their lion's claws are as damaging as one might expect, and manticores have fangs that continually regrow like a shark's. Surprisingly, their wings are *only* for flight; they're too fragile to be used to buffet opponents, and are kept tightly furled during ground combat.

ST: 20 **HP:** 20 **Speed:** 7.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 12 **Move:** 11 (Ground)/18 (Air)
IQ: 10 **Per:** 13 **Weight:** 600 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** 12 **SM:** +1

Dodge: 12/13* **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 4

Bite (15): 1d impaling. Reach C.

Claws (15): 2d cutting. Reach C, 1.

Flung Barbs (18): 1d+1(5) impaling + follow-up as per Tail Sting (below). Acc 6, Range 50/100, RoF 7, Rcl 1.

Grapple (15): No damage, but on further turns can squeeze (*Choke or Strangle*, p. B370) at ST 22. Treat this as a two-handed grapple.

Pounce (19): Treat as a slam (p. B371), but add an extra yard of reach and make a roll against Jumping; failure means the manticores ends up prone in the target's hex.

Tail Sting (15): Margin of success determines how many spikes hit the target – one per point by which the attack roll succeeds, up to seven! Damage is 1d+1(5) impaling + linked 1d-1 corrosion + follow-up 1d-1 toxic (HT-5 to resist; 10 cycles; 1 second per cycle). At 1/3 HP, the target suffers -3 to HT rolls until all HP lost to the venom's toxic and corrosive effects is healed. Additionally, make a HT roll every turn the subject takes damage, at -1 per 2 points of combined corrosion and toxic damage. Failure means the target suffers from agony (p. B428) for (HT - 20) minutes, minimum 1 minute; failure by 5 or more means the target suffers a heart attack (p. B429) instead! Reach C, 1.

Traits: Appearance (Horrific); Combat Reflexes; Danger Sense; Dark Vision; Discriminatory Smell (Emotion Sense); Disturbing Voice; Enhanced Dodge 1-2*; Extra Attack 1; Fur; Long-Range Smell 1†; Penetrating Voice; Quadruped‡; Regeneration (Regular); Restricted Diet (Fresh Meat); Sadism (6); Silence 2; Social Stigma (Monster);

Temperature Tolerance 6; Unfazeable; Weak Bite; Weak Tail Strike¶.

Skills: Brawling-15; Flight-11; Innate Attack (Projectile)-18; Intimidation-14; Jumping-15; Stealth-14 (16 vs. Hearing if moving, 18 if motionless); Survival (Mountain)-13; Tracking-17; Wrestling-15.

Notes: For ease of game play, sting and barb damage both use *Modifying Dice + Adds* (p. B269) for damage. The manticores effectively has an unlimited number of tail spikes; if a hard number is needed, assume it can regenerate up to 70 spikes in an hour (it saves the last seven so it can continue to sting targets). Extracting a manticores' venom takes a roll against Poisons, at -1 per dose after the first. Success gives one dose of venom per five tail spikes drained. This assumes an unconscious or cooperative manticores; double this amount for a dead one or if you've dismembered the tail stinger. Venom retails for \$20,000 (or more) per dose. CIA manticores use these stats along with an appropriate **GURPS Action** template; see the special forces and spook templates on pp. 89-91 of *Technomancer* for ideas. Wild manticores likely have a higher Survival skill, but may not understand languages.

* Use the higher value only when the manticores is airborne.

† Allows the manticores to use *Long-Distance Modifiers* (p. B241) for Smell rolls.

‡ Omits No Fine Manipulators, despite the claws; manticores paws are very human-like.

¶ As per Weak Bite (p. B161), but for their tail.

The ravenent is intelligent and possesses all of the skills and spells it had in life.

RAVENENT

There's a woman in the Nevada desert who calls herself "La Croix," who claims to have been in existence for over 200 years. Given the kind of things she told me, and how she helped me save Cole's life, I'd have to agree. La Croix asked me for nothing, but made me promise to pass a message on to someone. It's in this book. The right person will find it when they need to. Damn precognitive undead bird people.

– Ava Merlin, *Shadowwalker: Following Trinity's Shadow*

Sometimes when a mage dies in the wild, the spirit possesses the carrion birds feeding on the corpse, creating a terrible form of undead to plague the living. This "ravenent" (a portmanteau of "raven" and "revenant") is intelligent and possesses all of the skills and spells it had in life, as well as many new ones. If a ravenent was murdered (or left to die), the first thing it does is attack those it feels were responsible. This compulsion drives it mad if left unfulfilled. This is an Obsession (p. B146) and a Higher Purpose (p. B59). Ravenents who fail to satisfy the Obsession quickly replace those traits with Bad Temper (p. B124), Berserk (p. B124), and possibly other disadvantages

Ravenents tend to stay away from big cities and other crowded places, preferring small towns or rural areas. Thanks to their link with carrion birds, they are highly aware of local comings and goings, and can sometimes be bargained with for their knowledge. Once they've satisfied their Obsession, most ravenents just want to be left alone, though some mages and naturalists have formed lasting relationships with certain ones. The FBI even has a ravenent special agent ("Mrs. Blackfeather"), who works in the human-trafficking unit.

Ravenents appear either in humanoid form (which is literally composed of birds under a cloak or tattered clothing) or as a hive-mind flock of ravens, crows, or vultures. If they have illusion spells, they might appear entirely human – or could present themselves as a *gigantic* bird.

ST: 14 **HP:** 14 **Speed:** 7.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 14 **Move:** 7 (Ground)/14 (Air)
IQ: 14 **Per:** 14 **Weight:** 150 lbs.
HT: 14 **FP:** 14 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 11 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 1

Peck (12): 1d crushing. Reach C.

Traits: Acute Vision 4; Animal Empathy (Specialized, Birds); Callous; Combat Reflexes; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Enhanced Move 0.5 (Air Speed 21); Flight (Temporary Disadvantage, No Fine Manipulators; Winged); Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Injury Tolerance (Diffuse; Body of Carrion Birds; Flying Swarm; Reflexive; Scatter; Selectivity)*; Magery 2; Magery +1 (One College Only, Animal); Medium; Regeneration (Regular; Matter Absorption†); Silence 2; Social Stigma (Dead); Speak with Animals (Specialized, Birds); Supernatural Durability (Necronium weapons or ammunition); Unaging.

Skills: Aerobatics-14; Brawling-12; Flight-14; Observation-20; Stealth-12 (14 vs. Hearing if moving, 16 if motionless).

Spells: Whatever spells it knew in life plus Beast Link-15, Beast Possession-15, Beast-Rouser-15, Beast-Soother-15, Beast Summoning-15, Bird Control-15, Death Vision-15, Master-15, Repel Birds-15, Rider Within-15, Sense Spirit-15, and Summon Spirit-15. Knowledge spells are very common.

Notes: Sterile. Murdered ravenents have Obsession (Find my killer(s)) with *no* self-control roll, along with Higher Purpose (Find my killer(s)). If they cannot satisfy this compulsion, they go insane and acquire Bad Temper (6) and Berserk (6).

* In addition to the usual benefits of Injury Tolerance (Diffuse), a ravenent can attack as a swarm (p. B461) of carrion birds, flying at Air Move 14/21 and doing 1d impaling damage; this has HP equal to the ravenent's. The ravenent can also take a Concentrate maneuver and scatter its consciousness over the swarm's bodies. In such a state, the swarm's members can instantly communicate with one another over a radius of up to half a mile. While scattered, only area-effect, cone, or explosion attacks can injure the being. It can turn this trait off to become solid – or resume it – as a free action.

† The ravenent can "absorb" a carrion bird that weighs up to 1/50 of its body weight (so typically 3 lbs.) into its "soul matrix," making it part of its body. Doing so "kills" the bird but instantly restores HP equal to the target bird's and increases

the ravenent's Regeneration to the next-highest level (e.g., from Regular to Fast) for the next hour.

STORM SCORPION

Yes. They will rock you like a hurricane. You will regret them doing that. Storm scorpions are just weird. It's like God got bored, decided to come up with the oddest things He could think of, and put them in His Cosmic Blender. Entire platoons of Hellhounds are assigned to do nothing but kill storm scorpion nests before they get too numerous. Problem is, they're becoming more common – especially after the Hoover Dam incident. I was there for that. I really wish I hadn't been. It was like a tidal wave of scorpions – but in the air, after they had sucked all the juice out of the generators.

– Ava Merlin, *Shadowwalker: Following Trinity's Shadow*

Found in the heart of Trinity's Shadow, storm scorpions are descendants of bark scorpions who survived the Hellstorm's onslaught and became something else. Storm scorpions are the size of large dogs, their translucent shells coruscating with electrical energy. They breed like crazy and grow extremely quickly – especially in areas with electrical grids. They get their name not just from their weather magic but also because they consume electricity.

Once fully grown, storm scorpions begin to cause all kinds of problems. While they're bad for smaller wildlife, their worst ability lets them alter the weather. They do this unconsciously, through electrical discharges and innate weather magic. After a storm scorpion consumes enough electricity (sucking the juice out of a house outlet before it trips trip the breaker or the outlet blows), it uses that energy to manipulate mana and create a thunderstorm up to 266 yards in radius, centered on it. This causes +1d-1 to -1d-1 on rolls that could be helped or hindered by the sudden storm. The more scorpions in the area, the bigger the storm! For every *three* additional scorpions in the area, add another 266 yards to the radius and 1d-1 to rolls.

ST: 12 **HP:** 14 **Speed:** 6.00
DX: 12 **Will:** 10 **Move:** 6
IQ: 4 **Per:** 11 **Weight:** 125 lbs.
HT: 13 **FP:** 13 **SM:** 0
Dodge: 10 **Parry:** 11 **DR:** 14

Lightning Aura: 1d+2(5) burning + roll vs. HT, at -1 per 2 points of penetrating damage, or be stunned (roll vs. HT at same penalty every turn to recover). The aura harms anyone who comes in contact with the scorpion in close combat or via a metal weapon. It treats any conductive (e.g., metal) armor as DR 1, regardless of actual DR.

Lightning Burst: As Lightning Aura (above), but affects everything within four yards of the scorpion. Can be used up to three times per day. Outside during a thunderstorm or in a high-mana zone, the scorpion can use this attack as often as it likes! Multiple storm scorpions working together within one yard of each other can increase damage by +2 per scorpion after the first, to a maximum of 4d+1.

Pinch (14): 1d cutting + Lightning Aura (above). Any hit counts as a grapple, even if it doesn't penetrate DR. This allows the scorpion to *clench* – roll damage each turn as a free action. The scorpion has two pincers strong enough to clench targets. Reach C, 1.

Tail Sting (14): 1d+1 impaling + Lightning Aura (above) + follow-up 1d-1 burning surge (18 ten-second cycles). The follow-up does *not* reduce DR. Once the subject is reduced to 2/3 HP by this damage, they acquire the Numb (p. B146) disadvantage. At 1/2 HP, they become unable to move as all their voluntary muscles lock up (treat this as paralysis, p. B428)! The scorpion can attack a specific body part such as a hand or arm, in which case the affected limb is immediately paralyzed. Reach C-2.

Traits: 360° Vision; Clinging (Move 3); Cold-Blooded (65°); Combat Reflexes; Control Thunderstorms 3 (Accessibility, Only after consuming at least 3d damage of electricity or electrical attacks, or in a high-mana area; Emanation; Independent; Mana-Sensitive; Natural Phenomena; Reduced Range, ×1/2; Reflexive); Damage Resistance 36 (Absorption, Heals HP or FP; Cosmic, Extended to internal damage; Limited, Electricity-based attacks); Extra Legs (Eight Legs); Horizontal; Hyperspectral Vision; Immunity to Electrical Conduction; Immunity to Noxious Electrical Effects; Invisibility (Fringe); No Fine Manipulators; Noisy 1; Social Stigma (Monster); Striking ST 2 (Stinger Only); Super Jump 3 (7-yard jump; Temporary Disadvantage, Noisy 3); Supernatural Features (EVP, micro-EMP bursts, and similar electrical phenomena); Terrain Adaptation (Desert and Weather*); Uncontrollable Appetite (12) (Electricity); Vibration Sense (Air); Wild Animal.

Skills: Brawling-14; Jumping-14; Stealth-16 (14 vs. Hearing, 10 if using Super Jump); Survival (Desert)-12; Weather Sense-14; Wrestling-14.

Notes: Storm-scorpion carapaces are biological superconductors, highly prized by manufacturers and research firms. An intact scorpion can sell for as much as \$10,000 (*tripled* if you can catch it alive – make sure your pickup is insulated against electrical surges!). Making armor out of it adds +9 CF per +1 DR (+3 DR vs. electrical attacks), and it provides up to +6 DR for +54 CF; it makes an excellent Kevlar vest insert!

* Removes any penalties for fighting, running, etc. in dangerous weather.

WECHUGE

Another one of those weird things: Was it caused by Trinity or do we now notice it because of Trinity?

Wechuge are zombies. With ice. Kill it with fire. No songs. See what I did there? Pop culture aside, don't let them touch you and definitely don't let them bite you. If they do, see a med-mage pronto – or you know, die, come back, and then go eat your friends. Your choice.

– Ava Merlin, *Shadowwalker: Following Trinity's Shadow*

Wechuge (pronounced “way-choo-gay”) are the frozen corpses of those who died in the wilderness in winter. Said to be possessed by malevolent spirits of the cold, wechuge are part zombie, part cannibal, and part ice spirit. Their faces and bodies are concealed by accumulated ice and snow, making them look like grim snow-people. Their bite has the chill of winter, and their claws are supernaturally sharp ice that carries that same chill. Despite their appearance, they have an animal cunning and are surprisingly agile. They make no

sound, except a low gurgling when close to a target. In ice and snow (or when utterly still), they are near impossible to see or hear.

ST: 13	HP: 13	Speed: 5.50
DX: 11	Will: 12	Move: 5
IQ: 6	Per: 10	Weight: 150 lbs.
HT: 11	FP: N/A	SM: 0
Dodge: 9	Parry: 10	DR: 3* (Tough Skin)

Bite (12): 1d cutting + follow-up 1d-1 fatigue. Treat this fatigue as due to being in a cold environment (*Cold*, p. B430). If the target is reduced to 1/2 FP by the follow-up attack, they suffer from moderate pain (-2 to all DX, IQ, skill, and self-control rolls); if reduced to 1/3 FP, they are paralyzed instead. If the attack struck a limb, the *limb* is paralyzed! Reach C.

Grapple (12): No damage, but on further turns can squeeze (*Choke or Strangle*, p. B370) at ST 14.

Ice Claw (12): 1d-1 cutting + follow-up 1d-3 fatigue. Effects of the follow-up are the same as for Bite (above). Treat as a weapon, not as a body part. Reach C, 1.

Traits: 360° Vision (Panoptic 2); Appearance (Monstrous); Chameleon 2 (Ice/Snow); Combat Reflexes; Dark Vision; Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Metabolic Hazards; Indomitable; Infectious Attack (Accessibility, Fatal attacks by bite only); Injury Tolerance (No Blood; No Vitals; Unliving); No Sense of Smell/Taste; Silence 2; Social Stigma (Monster); Terrain Adaptation (Ice/Snow); Uncontrollable Appetite (12) (Flesh); Unfazeable; Unhealing (Partial); Vulnerability (Fire ×2).

Skills: Brawling-12; Stealth-12 (14 vs. Hearing, 16 if motionless; 14 vs. Vision against a snowy backdrop, 16 if motionless); Wrestling-12.

Notes: Neither has nor uses FP. Sterile.

* This DR is semi-ablative and reduced by 1 per 10 points of damage inflicted, to a minimum of DR 1 (the leathery hide hidden under the ice and snow).

In the first story, Wechuge is described as a bad man who “stayed by himself and followed people's tracks.”

– Robin Ridington,
Little Bit Know Something

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher R. Rice has his own menagerie at home (well, cats, but they count). From Portsmouth, Virginia, he's spinning words and whimsy into gold. He's the co-author of *GURPS Dungeon Fantasy 19: Incantation Magic* and *Dungeon Fantasy Traps*. Of course, if he's not writing material for *GURPS*, he's blogging about it. Visit his site “Ravens N' Pennies” (www.ravenspennies.com) for more *GURPS* goodies. He wishes to thank L.A., his own personal muse, as well as the rest of his gaming group (the Headhunters); Beth “Archangel” McCoy, the “Sith Editrix”; and Joshua Burton, for being most excellent sounding boards.

EIDETIC MEMORY

THE KLINIK NOVA

BY DAVID L. PULVER

This episodic adventure for *GURPS Action* involves an attempt to disrupt the operations of a powerful Russian organized-crime family. It is best suited to a “Task Force” or “Brotherhood in Blue” campaign. The default assumption is that the PCs are elite operators associated with a Western law-enforcement organization with international scope (such as the FBI or DEA, or their foreign equivalents). They could also be “deniable” mercenary contractors hired by such an agency, or international vigilantes working to take down organized crime through covert ops.

Every king needs an heir.

– Klaus Mikaelson,
in *The Originals* #1.1

MISSION BRIEFING

The team is called together and the agents are given their missing briefing by their superiors (the GM can simply read this to the players or sum up the information using data sheets). Along with the information, the team is shown photos of a muscular blond Russian man in his 30s, in an expensive suit, who is identified as Viktor Burayev, and of another handsome blond Russian man in his late 20s, also wearing an expensive suit – and with a slight resemblance to Viktor – who is identified as Alexander Burayev.

Oleg Zharov, age 66, is the powerful and ruthless head of the Zharov Brotherhood, a major player in the Russian mafia. Their activities include drug smuggling, cybercrime, and human trafficking. They recently opened a new heroin pipeline from Afghanistan to Europe and America. Under Zharov’s deputy, Viktor Burayev, they are also preparing a new expansion into our country. But they are very paranoid about their security, and so far only small fry in the organization have been arrested.

However, events within the Zharov Brotherhood may provide us with an opening to crack the organization. Oleg Zharov made the mistake of shaking down a Russian oligarch closely connected to Vladimir Putin. A reliable source in Russia tells us that Russian Federal Security Bureau agents are going to arrest Zharov on various extortion and tax-evasion charges to teach him a lesson about who is boss in Russia. Sounds good, right? Nope. The same source says the new acting head of the Zharov Brotherhood will be his son-in-law, Viktor Burayev. And he’s going to be even worse.

A ruthless thug who previously ran the human-trafficking arm of the business, Viktor Burayev, age 30, is very bad news. Two years ago, Burayev further cemented his status as heir apparent to the organization by marrying old Oleg’s daughter, Nectaria. This was apparently not a love match, but a union arranged to consolidate her father’s power base in the organization. Apparently, Burayev is also smart enough to avoid antagonizing the Kremlin.

We do not look forward to young Viktor coming to power. It’s clear that the imminent arrest of current head Oleg Zharov would simply replace one bad actor with an even worse one who is better connected with the Kremlin.

We can’t stop the Russians from arresting Zharov, but we have another option: to *manage* the succession in a way that will turn it to our advantage. This requires us to take out Viktor Burayev at the same time the Russians are taking out the boss. That will allow another candidate to step into the role. Fortunately, there is one who is more acceptable to us: Viktor’s cousin, Alexander Burayev.

Alexander is mostly involved in the cybercrime and black-market enterprises rather than drugs and human trafficking. He is said to oppose Viktor Burayev’s plans for a massive expansion of the latter into the West. We have indications he wishes to make the Zharov organization “legit” as an ultimate goal. Alexander also hates Viktor for personal reasons: He was a rival for the affection of Nectaria Zharova before her father insisted she marry Viktor. Rumor has it they were in love. If something happened to Viktor, we have indications that Alexander would arrange to marry the widowed Nectaria and use this prestige to take over the organization. We believe he would be a significant improvement over Viktor.

To set this up, we have a narrow window of opportunity. As soon as Oleg Zharov is arrested, the organization's security will tighten around Viktor as he becomes the new acting boss. Our objective is to remove Viktor Burayev before he has time to turtle up, and ensure he is not around to take over after his father-in-law is arrested.

We have one break here. Our sources in the FSB and Zharov family tell us that Burayev is not presently in Russia, where he would be difficult to reach, but is instead entering Switzerland. Under cover of a ski trip, his wife Nectaria has been undergoing treatment at an exclusive private fertility clinic, the Klinik Nova in Switzerland. Viktor and a small team of bodyguards (likely less than a half-dozen) are with her. Apparently, Viktor does not want people to know about his wife's treatment, perhaps to protect her from rivals, and has kept this trip very low key, with few bodyguards and a small entourage. That may be our chance to nab him.

Although there is an extradition treaty with Switzerland, the Swiss authorities are often reluctant to honor extradition requests. Due to the narrow time window, there's no chance of them doing so between when the Russians move on the old boss, Oleg, and when Burayev learns he's taking over the family. When that happens, we believe he'll certainly leave Switzerland to return to consolidate his position, sick wife or not, and the security around him will be impenetrable. We have to get to him now.

Your mission is simple. Go to Switzerland, infiltrate the clinic, and perform a clandestine rendition of Viktor Burayev. Grab him; bag him. We have a safe house in Switzerland where he can be taken and smuggled out of the country. We want him alive to stand trial. (*If this is a black-ops mission, rather than, say, FBI, it's possible the briefer will say: "Unofficially, we want him out of the way. But if you do tag him, make sure it's neat."*) We're operating without the sanction of Swiss authorities; this is a clandestine operation in foreign territory. While the clinic is relatively isolated, avoid civilian casualties, especially of Swiss nationals, other European nationals, and Swiss law enforcement, and clean up all evidence . . .

It is particularly vital no harm comes to his wife, Nectaria. Not only is she not involved in criminal activities (as far as we know), but the plan for getting our guy Alexander – "the good cousin" – into power requires she support and/or marry him. The last thing we want is a screw-up where we have a *second* Russian mob boss swearing vengeance because we killed his old flame . . .

STARTING OUT

The GM should set things up so that the PCs have to strike while the mobsters are at the clinic. The intelligence received from their agency's source in the Russian Federal Security Bureau (FSB) says that boss Oleg Zharov will be arrested at a particular time (say, two days from whenever the party arrive in Switzerland); they must act before then.

The operatives should get anywhere from several hours while en route (in a cinematic campaign) to several days to plan the mission and gather intelligence. Either way, the PCs may want to do some preparation and scouting. **GURPS Action 2: Exploits** suggests ways characters can prep for a mission; much will depend on their skills and style, and what sort of agency, if any, they work for.

The PCs may want to scout the clinic prior to going in (see p. 26 for a walk-through map), or attempt to hack into patient and medical files, access city-planning records to gather information on floor plans (and get access to the blueprint on p. 27), or make contact with the clinic's employees. If successful, the GM should allow the operatives to gain information on the Klinik Nova's layout, staff, and other details as covered here (save for the dispositions of the Russian mobsters). The agents might then want to directly storm the clinic by day or night, or take a more subtle approach of infiltrating as prospective VIP patients, contract cleaning staff, or employees.

What they can't do is just wait for Viktor and company to leave the clinic. While some of the Russian mobsters may come and go occasionally, he's staying with his wife, and she's going to be undergoing procedures for several days, during which time (if the PCs do nothing) the arrest of Oleg Zharov will go down, and he'll be alerted . . .

End Game

Getting out is as important as getting in, especially since a noisy firefight will alert local police. If the operatives escape the area under hot pursuit, the city police will become involved. In game terms, this means that unless the team takes precautions (changes cars, etc.), the GM can set up one or two high-speed urban combats between the party and the local police department . . .

The GM should decide whether the PCs are responsible for handling the arrangements for setting up a safe house, hiding and interrogating the prisoner, and, if necessary, smuggling him out of the country (e.g., in the trunk of a car, or drugged inside a cargo container).

For a less complex scenario, there may be a second team of officials or operatives that the agents just need to meet up with to transfer the prisoner (say, in a van or helicopter on the outskirts of Zürich), and the other group will handle the rest.

If the operatives escape, or lie low in town, the Zharov Brotherhood and Swiss authorities will both take steps to discover the perpetrators, their success depending on the precautions taken by the team.

THE KLINIK NOVA BUILDING

Klinik Nova (founded in 1983) is a private fertility clinic devoted to providing discreet treatment to VIP clients. It occupies a one-story building on a quiet, tree-lined street in a suburb near Zürich. There's a parking garage across the road.

The clinic offers a variety of fertility procedures for men and women, including in-vitro fertilization treatments (IVF). For such procedures, fees charged start at 50,000 euros. Procedures typically take two weeks of consultations and fertility-drug treatments; the final three or four days are usually spent at the clinic itself, in "first-class accommodations, including a meditation garden and dining facility."

The clinic has a high reputation and there is a two-month waiting list for actual treatments, but prospective patients can visit for consultations with an easily obtainable appointment.

Not Public Information: The treatment that Nectaria is undergoing is intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI). This is a treatment for male infertility that involves taking sperm from the male donor (in this case, Viktor) and harvesting a healthy egg from the prospective mother (Nectaria).

The doctors inject a sperm directly into the egg as per a traditional IVF treatment, ensuring fertilization. The fertilized egg is then surgically re-implanted into the original mother, to induce a normal pregnancy. Besides Viktor and Nectaria, a few other VIP patients are having procedures or staying overnight: A wealthy middle-aged German couple is also undergoing an ICSI, while a famous British actress is here for a checkup following an earlier IVF procedure.

Security

Visits are by appointment only. Beyond the main foyer, only clinic staff, patients, and their associates (e.g., family, personal assistants, bodyguards) are permitted entrance. Patients are all given temporary ID badges. Because of the wealthy clientele and a desire to keep out the paparazzi, routine security is fairly tight.

Windows do not open and are protected by laser-beam sensors. If tripped, the alarm is silent and alerts the Operations Center.

Parking Lot: The lot across the street contains 13 cars used by staff and patients, with a high percentage of expensive vehicles (BMW's, luxury SUVs, etc.) used by the VIP patients and well-off doctors; at least one mobster (p. 21) is in a car here. There are also two Russian mob vehicles in the parking lot: a red luxury car (Viktor's BMW) and a black SUV (for the mob heavies). The hospital has a private ambulance that it uses to pick up patients (sometimes meeting wealthy patients at the airport). There is a 50% chance that the ambulance will be out somewhere in the city or neighboring region.

Security Robots

The Klinik Nova recently took delivery of two new Optronics Industries security robots, which they are testing for mobile night security. The clinic's literature does not advertise this. The Optronics Braunbar VI Security Rover (p. 22) is a highly sophisticated (for today's world) semi-autonomous wheeled robot, designed to patrol the hallways and rooms at night looking for unauthorized intruders. While not "artificially intelligent" by any means, these robots can identify intruders – people not wearing the infrared-coded security ID badges – taking a photograph and alerting Operations. They beam the video of any action (monitored using a built-in camera) to Operations while ordering the intruder to remain motionless ("Do not move!" in various European languages). If the intruder fails to obey within one second, or attacks the bot, the Rover engages them with an electric stunner (or a shotgun, if the stunner doesn't stop the target). It will hear and home in on any disturbance, such as gunfire.

Encounters in the Building

The Klinik room descriptions (below) suggest which staff and visitors are in which rooms, and when. "Day" times can

be used if the agents visit the clinic during normal operating hours. "Night" times assumes the PCs make their move after hours, when most staff have gone home and a reduced medical staff is on hand to look after those patients staying over.

People in the clinic respond to noise or trouble logically. Clinic staff will go to see what's happening and prioritize helping patients and their own safety. Viktor will assume any commotion is a hit against him, and his Russian mobsters will react aggressively to defend themselves and protect their boss and his wife. Patients may panic!

In addition to the encounters in the room descriptions, the GM can roll random encounters whenever agents hang about in one place for an extended period (a few minutes by day; every 30 minutes by night). Assume a 2-in-6 chance of an encounter. Roll 1d for the encounter's nature, at +2 after visiting hours.

1d	Encounter
1	Visitor (e.g., Russian mobster) wandering around (e.g., to get a drink)
2	Patient out for a walk
3-5	Doctor or nurse
6+	Security robot

Anyone without a visitor's or staff badge will be suspect. An employee has an IQ-2 roll to notice and challenge a stranger, with or without a badge. A successful use of Fast-Talk might convince a non-guard the person belongs here. A security robot (see above) will *always* challenge someone without a badge, but will not recognize strangers.

FLOOR PLAN KEY

The map on p. 25 shows the Klinik Nova floor plan. Most corridors and rooms have fire extinguishers. After hours, doors are locked with basic TL8 electronic locks. Stats for generic clinic employees, patients, and mobsters can be found on pp. 20-23.

1. *Entrance:* The glass doors of the front entrance open into a waiting room.

2. *Waiting Room:* This room has six easy chairs, refreshments, a wall-mounted patient-brochure display, racks of magazines, and a feature wall with pictures of happy families and cute babies. During the day, three mob bodyguards (Popov, Sokolov, and Volkov) are lounging in the reception room, playing cards, loosely watching the front door, and ready to act as reinforcements. Every half hour, they check in by cell phone with Boris Dragonov (p. 21) and any extra minions outside in the parking lot.

3. *Reception:* On the opposite side of the waiting room is a curving front desk with a station for the receptionist. Behind it are desks for working administrators (who are usually busy on phones). By day, receptionist Luna Vasella occupies the desk, nervously eying the mobsters.

Heredity is what a man believes in until his son begins to behave like a delinquent.

– *Presbyterian Life*

4. *Operations Center*: This place has a desk with two computer terminals, a few monitors (showing information about the status of alarms and displaying various camera feeds), two office chairs, and shelves of equipment. The security computers monitor all alarms and robots, and can control one robot remotely. By day, Adolf Kramer is on duty here, with mobster Boris Dragonov keeping an eye on him. At night, Max Galt is working overtime, monitoring the security bots.

5. *Director's Office*: This room is used in the daytime for meeting clients, arranging treatments, and general paperwork. By day, Dr. Erich Bernhard is working in his office and smoking heavily, upset at the devil's bargain with the mob. An impressive teak desk, computer terminal, and two comfortable office chairs furnish the room, along with a Félix Vallotton woodcut and a framed photograph of his wife and son. After hours, there is a 1-in-6 chance that an executive or secretary is working late here; otherwise, the room is locked and deserted. There's a safe that holds 20,000 euros cash.

6. *Server Room*: This contains a microframe computer for patient data processing and financial records. There's also a row of backup hard drives, a laser printer, a scanner, and a photocopy machine. Hardcopy backups are kept in the records room (p. 20). By day, administrative assistant Lindsay Vogel is organizing files here.

7. *Cafeteria*: The nice buffet-style cafeteria has a few tables, each with four dining chairs, for use by visitors and staff. A row of upscale vending machines provides portable snacks. Around mealtimes, two to 12 staff or patients (GM's option) may be grabbing a bite from the buffet.

8. *Kitchen*: A kitchen for preparing hospital food for patients who are spending a day or two in recovery, as well as snacks for visitors and staff. During the day, the clinic's chef (Zara Castelli) and her staff are preparing, serving, or cleaning up after meals.

9. *Pantry*: Contains shelves, refrigerators, and a freezer stocked with quality foodstuffs.

10. *Zen Garden*: An indoor rock garden under a skylight. It is designed for patient relaxation while contemplating the mystery of life and/or recovering from procedures. A good place to stage a firefight, with rocks for cover and a small reflecting pool. At night, if Nectaria is sleeping off the operation, Viktor, Dragonov, and a couple of his bodyguard goons are here, shooting the breeze (see the timeline, pp. 23-24).

11. *Washroom*: A unisex restroom for use by patients and visitors. It has a tiled floor, four stalls, and three sinks. There's a 1-in-6 chance someone is using it; roll an encounter (p. 18, but reroll the "security robot" result). Locked stalls are a good place to hide bodies.

12. *Executive Conference Room*: The attractively furnished room has a conference table with computer terminals that slide out from underneath. There are eight seats, a coffee machine, and abstract art on the walls. It's also used as a staff break room. Along one side behind sliding panels is a small bar with a well-stocked liquor cabinet, usually reserved for entertaining major guests.

13, 14. *Consultation Rooms*: These rooms are devoted to meeting with prospective clients or donors and educating (or selling) them on the various procedures offered at the clinic. They're furnished with comfortable armchairs, a table, racks of literature, and a big-screen TV (for audio-visual presentations).

15. *Psychologist's Office*: Fertility treatments, pregnancy issues, and egg or sperm donations often involve significant mental stress. The Klinik Nova provides an onsite psychologist. There is a couch, comfy armchair, desk, and chair, and a potted philodendron. By day, psychologist Karla Madsen is in her office, brooding over the file from her interview with Nectaria Burayeva (which suggests she's being coerced by her husband); at night, she is absent and the office is locked.

16. *Family Room*: A private waiting room for families to use while their loved ones are undergoing procedures. It features comfy armchairs and couches, soothing music, relaxing decor, and a coffee and drink vending machine. By day, if Nectaria is undergoing surgery, Viktor and bodyguard Ivan Chernakov are here.

17, 18. *Examination Rooms*: These are typical "doctor's offices," each with a paper-covered examination table, a couple of hard chairs, shelves of medical journals, basic diagnostic instruments, and a sink. By day in room 17, Lara Grant, visibly pregnant, is being examined by Dr. Caspari, who will soon take her to the medical imaging room.

19. *Fire Escape*: A side fire door, locked to prevent entry but easily opened from the inside. Opening the door will sound an alarm. A TV camera monitors the area and feeds the footage to the Operations Center. If any suspicious persons are noted, a silent alarm sounds, and a robot or security guard will be dispatched.

20. *Robot Garage*: The two Optronics Braunbar VI security robots are stored here during the day, as are a half-dozen ordinary floor-cleaner robots. During the night, the security robots patrol or are directed to trouble from the Operations Center, while the vacuum robots clean the halls and common rooms. The garage also contains spare parts and electronics tool kits, which could be useful for those wishing to work on the bots or other electronics. By day, Max Galt is tinkering with the robots.

21. *Medical Imaging Room*: This room contains a bed, a fetal ultrasound machine (for taking sonograms), and a control console.

22. *IVF Laboratory*: The heart of the clinic. On the right side is a sink and a two-unit incubator for human embryos. In the center of the room is an incubator for premature or newborn infants, providing controlled temperature, oxygen, and humidity levels; it's fitted with armholes that allow touching the infant without breaking the seal. On the left wall is a workspace with a variety of lab equipment including a microscope, centrifuge, digital dry bath (used to heat blocks of test tubes containing cell samples), glassware, and a slide dryer (a desktop device for drying out sample slides). By day, Dr. Bronstein is working in the lab. At night, Dr. Helgard may be working late.

23. *Andrology Lab*: This is designed for collecting and testing sperm samples. It contains a double sink, dry bath, incubator, centrifuge, slide dryer, and shelves of glassware (test tubes, etc.). On one side is a refrigerator with several hundred sperm samples, among them Viktor's.

24. *Cryogenics Room*: Opposite the IVF lab, this chilly room contains a trio of embryo storage units and a heavy-duty refrigeration-control system. By day, medical technician Zund is working here.

25. *Nurses' Station*: Used by the duty nurses and for performing simple medical tasks, such as drawing blood.

This contains two cabinets of basic medical supplies (bandages, IV fluids, etc.) and four desks with consoles for remote monitoring of patients who are in the recovery rooms. A wheelchair and four folding stretchers are stacked in one corner. By day, Head Nurse Radmeyer is on duty (she has Unfazeable). Night Nurse Keel is at the nurses' station in the evenings.

26. *Surgical Suite*: This large room is dominated by an operating table and has high-powered lights overhead. An anesthesia cart is near the operating table. Shelves, tables, and carts hold surgical instruments, diagnostic equipment, and other medical supplies. There is a sink on one side of the room. The surgical suite is used for removing or implanting eggs, and for the occasional C-section delivery. During the day, Dr. Helgard may be preparing to extract eggs from someone, assisted by Nurse Giger and medical technician Herzig. Depending on where on the adventure timeline (pp. 23-24) the group is, this person could be Nectaria.

27. *Medical Gases Room*: Holds cylinders of oxygen and nitrous oxide. Big multilingual (German, French, English) signs read "Danger: Flammable Gas" and "Absolutely No Smoking." There are four cylinders, each with DR 20, HP 10, HT 10, and Fragile (Explosive).

28 to 30. *Recovery Rooms*: Each has a comfortable bed, a pair of chairs, a small table, an IV stand, and an intercom for summoning a nurse, along with pictures and soothing decor. Each room also contains a very small bathroom with shower. At night, after her operation, Nectaria may be resting or reading in room 30, with her bodyguard Ivan Chernakov hanging about outside. Also at night, Lara Grant will be in room 28 and Sonya Obermayer and her husband Erwin in room 29.

31. *Records Room*: A library-like room full of shelves, with a few stools. The largest section (four shelves) holds backups of patient charts and records. A smaller section contains backups of administrative information on the clinic's operation. There is also a shelf containing technical manuals for the clinic's medical equipment and electronics.

32. *Staff Locker Room*: 16 lockers (mostly containing changes of clothes and spare lab coats), a privacy curtain, and behind it, a shower and a sink. Busy at the start and end of the day, with at least two to four nurses or doctors usually present; otherwise, it's deserted.

33. *Janitor's Closet*: Contains cleaning supplies (jugs of bleach, industrial cleanser, floor cleaner, etc.), mops, towels, etc. Useful for cleaning up evidence!

34. *Storage Room*: Contains racks of clean medical scrubs and lab coats, and shelves of spare glassware, towels, toilet paper, patient robes, and other general-purpose supplies. Useful for quick disguises!

35. *Soiled Utility Room and Dishwashing Area*: Area for soiled laundry, used laboratory glassware, etc., along with an industrial dishwashing machine. Soiled laundry is generally stored and taken offsite by contractors every two days – a possible infiltration route.

36. *Hazardous Materials Storage*: A secure storage area with multilingual biohazard warnings, with bins for medical waste (everything from blood-stained towels and bandages to non-viable cell samples). Once a week, it is collected and sent to an offsite disposal facility.

NPC CAST

Here is a summary of who's who.

Viktor Burayev (Age 32)

The ruthless underboss (titled *Avtoritet*, or Brigadier) of the Zharov Brotherhood and designated heir apparent to that organization. After growing up in the "garage valley" slums of Moscow, Viktor is a professional mobster whose ruthless street-fighting instincts and business sense helped him work his way up from street dealer, car thief, and enforcer to underboss in the dog-eat-dog world of the Bratva, the Russian organized crime families. Now a senior figure in the Zharov family, Viktor has almost everything he wants: wealth, power (with more to come), men who fear and obey him, and a beautiful wife who is the boss' daughter. What he doesn't have, however, is a child. Viktor Burayev's attempts to conceive a child with his wife, Nectaria, have repeatedly failed. Some very discreet testing revealed the problem was Viktor's low sperm count. He took this badly, as a threat to his masculinity; if it came out, he feared it would make him a joke and weaken his claim to the succession.

Desiring a son to prove his manhood, Viktor decided to turn to a discreet fertility clinic – and as secrecy was paramount, he picked one that was far from Russia. Nectaria already liked to go skiing in Switzerland, so a fertility clinic there that catered to VIPs was selected. He found Klinik Nova, selected partly because its director had financial woes (gambling debts at a mob-connected casino) that would ensure leverage. Viktor arranged to buy up his debts, making clear that – while he and Nectaria were visiting – the clinic would be *especially* discreet. Victor also used the leverage to ensure the director would not object to the presence of his armed bodyguards during his wife's stay for treatment.

Viktor and Nectaria (with a few loyal henchmen) quietly visited the clinic a few times in prior months during ski trips, for testing, consultation, and collection of Viktor's sperm samples. Now they're in the final stages of the fertility-treatment procedure.

Children sweeten labours, but they make misfortunes more bitter; they increase the cares of life, but they mitigate the remembrances of death.

– Francis Bacon

ST 12; DX 13; IQ 12; HT 11.

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12; Will 12; Per 13; FP 13.
Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 10; Parry 11.
SM 0; 5'10"; 200 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Callous; Combat Reflexes; Greed (12); Obsession (12) (Prove his manliness by siring an heir); Sense of Duty (Family); Wealth (Filthy Rich).

Languages: Russian (Native); English (Accented); German (Accented); Turkish (Broken).

Skills: Brawling-14; Current Affairs (Business)-14; Detect Lies-13; Driving (Automobile)-12; Guns (Pistol)-13; Holdout-12; Intimidation-15; Karate-14; Knife-13; Merchant-13; Savoir-Faire (Mafia)-12; Search-12.

Equipment: 9mm auto pistol; cell phone (styled); concealable Kevlar vest (DR 8); expensive suit; small knife; sunglasses.

Nectaria Burayeva (Age 23)

Nectaria is the eldest daughter of mob boss Oleg Zharov by his second (Greek) wife, Anastasia. As a "Russian mafia princess," she was the target of a number of suitors. Her marriage to Viktor Burayev was set up to solidify Burayev's support of her father rather than a love match. She appreciates that Viktor cares for her like a prized possession and treats her to fine things. She does not really like him – preferring his more sensitive cousin, Alexander, her childhood friend – but she was afraid to defy her father. While she is resigned to bearing Viktor's children, she is privately bitter about having to undergo an invasive and uncomfortable fertility treatment when Viktor has the fertility issue! Her hobbies include fast cars, skiing, and Russian literature.

As a twist, the GM may wish to empower Nectaria further by making her the secret source of various leaks and intelligence that led to the mission. In this case, she's actively scheming to get rid of Viktor and marry Alexander.

ST 9; DX 11; IQ 12; HT 13.

Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9; Will 12; Per 12; FP 13.
Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9; Parry 8.
SM 0; 5'7"; 128 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Appearance (Beautiful); Reputation +3 (Among Mafia family and associates); Status 2; Wealth (Very Wealthy).

Languages: Russian (Native); English (Accented); Greek (Native); Italian (Broken).

Skills: Diplomacy-13; Driving (Automobile)-11; Literature-13; Riding (Horse)-11; Savoir-Faire (High Society)-14; Savoir-Faire (Mafia)-12; Sex Appeal-13; Skiing-13.

Equipment: Diamond wedding ring (worth \$20,000); expensive clothes; icon; smartphone.

Boris Dragonov (Age 30)

Viktor's tough ex-military bodyguard, lean and deadly. Never smiles.

ST 12; DX 13; IQ 11; HT 11.

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12; Will 11; Per 13; FP 11.
Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 10; Parry 11.
SM 0; 6'; 175 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Callous; Combat Reflexes; Duty (The mob); No Sense of Humor; Sense of Duty (Viktor).

Languages: Russian (Native); English (Accented); German (Accented).

Skills: Armoury (Small Arms)-12; Driving (Automobile)-12; Electronics Operation (Communications)-11; Explosives (Demolition)-12; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-14; Garrote-13; Guns (Pistol)-14; Guns (Rifle)-14; Holdout-12; Interrogation-12; Intimidation-13; Karate-14; Knife-13; Search-12; Soldier-12; Streetwise-12; Swimming-11.

Equipment: .40 auto pistol; concealable Kevlar vest (DR 8); fancy gold wristwatch (\$2,500); large knife (fine quality); satellite phone; smartphone. Keeps a 7.62mm semi-auto carbine in the trunk of the bodyguards' SUV.

Ivan Chernakov (Age 27)

Viktor's personal chauffeur and other bodyguard, a retired racecar driver who is now an experienced mob wheelman. Secretly in love with Nectaria, and will do stupid things to protect her or spirit her to safety.

ST 11; DX 14; IQ 10; HT 12.

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 12; Per 12; FP 12.
Basic Speed 6.50; Basic Move 6; Dodge 10; Parry 11.
SM 0; 5'11"; 160 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Combat Reflexes; Sense of Duty (Nectaria).

Languages: Russian (Native); English (Accented); German (Broken).

Skills: Brawling-14; Carousing-13; Computer Operation-12; Driving(Automobile)-15;FirstAid-12;Guns(Pistol)-14;Holdout-11; Intimidation-11; Judo-12; Savoir-Faire (Mafia)-12; Savoir-Faire (Servant)-11; Search-12; Smuggling-12; Streetwise-12.

Equipment: 9mm auto pistol; keys to Viktor's luxury BMW; leather jacket; satellite phone.

Mob Bodyguards

A squad of "mook" bodyguards, at least four and perhaps more (balance the numbers with the PCs' team), who answer to Boris Dragonov. Three are hanging about in the reception area. At least one bodyguard is in the SUV, ready for evacuation. The SUV may optionally contain some heavier weapons (e.g., 9mm submachine guns).

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

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10.
Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9.
SM 0; 5'8"-6'1"; 155-175 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Bully (12); Duty (The mob); Greed (12).

Languages: Russian (Native); English (Broken); German or French (Broken).

Skills: Brawling-12; Driving (Automobile)-10; Guns (Pistol)-12; Guns (SMG)-11; Intimidation-11; Savoir-Faire (Mafia)-10; Streetwise-11.

Equipment: The bodyguards in the waiting area each have a 9mm auto pistol (in a shoulder holster) and a cell phone. Those outside in the SUV also have golf bags containing a compact 9mm SMG and a compact 12G pump shotgun; if time permits, the mooks will remove and use the weapons if running to reinforce the clinic and/or protect the vehicles.

Optronics Braunbar VI Security Rover

As part of its cutting-edge image, the clinic is protected by security robots. The robots are autonomous but receive orders and updates from the computer network. They can also display audiovisual feeds to the Operations Center. They use a visible green laser beam to scan the infrared-coded security ID badges of patients, staff, and authorized visitors. For additional details on their behavior, see p. 18.

ST: 25 **HP:** 25 **Speed:** 5.00
DX: 8 **Will:** 6 **Move:** 5/10
IQ: 6 **Per:** 12 **Weight:** 250 lbs.
HT: 12 **FP:** N/A **SM:** 0

Dodge: 8 **Parry:** N/A **DR:** 10

Gun (9): See below.

Traits: Accessories (Computer; Bullhorn; Spotlight); AI; Automaton; Doesn't Breathe; Electrical; Indomitable; Machine; No Legs (Wheeled); No Manipulators; No Sense of Smell/Taste; Scanning Sense (Ladar); Telecommunication (Radio); Weapon Mount 2; Unfazeable.

Skills: Guns (Pistol)-9; Guns (Shotgun)-9.

Notes: Armed with an auto shotgun (p. B279) and an electric stunner (**GURPS Action 1**, p. 32).

Generic Clinic Employees

Notable staff include:

Dr. Erich Bernhard: The administrator who is in charge of the clinic at the time the PCs arrive. Fussy, prone to panic, and already regretting his bargain with the Russian mob.

Ms. Luna Vasella: The front-desk receptionist at the clinic is annoyed at having to fend off crude advances from some of the mobsters. Has Appearance (Beautiful).

Dr. Konrad Helgard: The fertility specialist in charge of treating Nectaria. Has Physician (Fertility)-16. He did not appreciate Viktor's "if anything happens to my wife, you also will need a good doctor" comment.

Nurse Trudie Radmeyer: The head nurse on duty during the day, she is calm and confident. Has Unfazeable.

Max Galt: The IT specialist in charge of the clinic's robots and computer network, on loan from Optronics. Brash and overconfident. Has Computer Programming-14. Galt is worried about the recent disappearance of a coworker at Optronics, Eric Nash.

Adolf Kramer: Two security guards are at the clinic; assume Adolf is the one on duty when the PCs show up. Nervous and wary around the mobsters. In the event of a problem more severe than an unruly patient or paparazzi, he will order staff and patients to retreat to and lock rooms (or evacuate, if the problem is a fire or similar threat rather than intruders), send the robots to handle trouble, and call police. Has Guns (Pistol)-12, Judo-12, and Shortsword-12; carries pepper spray and a baton.

Other employees are mostly white-coated doctors, nurses, medical technicians, or support personnel. They are unlikely to be violent if confronted by intruders, and will surrender if faced by armed foes, though they will alert security or try to escape if the agents let them. Additional staff that can be fleshed out as needed include psychologist Karla Madsen,

administrative assistant Lindsay Vogel, three staff doctors (reproductive endocrinologists and surgeons – Dr. Bronstein, Dr. Caspari, and Dr. Hess), three medical technicians (Herzig, Schmid, and Zund), three registered nurses or orderlies (Giger, Keel, and Wolf), and the clinic's private chef (Zara Castelli). There are also regular food-service and cleaning personnel, but the team will likely not encounter any of them. Only one-third of the less-important staff will be present at night.

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

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 12; Per 12; FP 11.

Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.

SM 0; 5'-6"; 125-175 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Pacifism (Reluctant Killer).

• *Either* Code Honor (Hippocratic Oath) *or* Sense of Duty (Patients).

Languages: English (Accented); German, French, *or* Italian (Native *or* Accented).

Skills: First Aid-12. • Any *three* of Administration-12; Computer Operation-14; Diagnosis-14; Electronics Operation (Medical)-13; Pharmacy (Synthetic)-13; Physician-14; *or* Surgery-13.

Equipment: Cell phone; lab coat, scrubs, *or* uniform.

Generic Patients

Mrs. Sonya Obermayer and her husband, Erwin: Multi-millionaire Frankfurt pharmaceutical executive, age 40, and husband (a banking tycoon, age 52); she is here for a fertility treatment. Will bribe to bribe their way out of trouble (offering upward of 100,000 euros). Erwin is nervous and highly strung; Sonya is as cold as ice.

Ms. Jane Smith (alias of Lara Grant): A notable patient at the clinic, the breakout star of last fall's hit BBC drama, *No Sheet Sherlock*. Secretly undergoing treatment here to avoid the paparazzi, but recognizable from TV, magazine covers, etc. on any Current Affairs roll. Funny and sarcastic; has Acting-15. Will probably assume anything happening is about her. Grant is here for an ultrasound to check on her developing fetus. If being caught between mobsters and the PCs at the wrong moment leads to premature labor *or* a risk of miscarriage . . .

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

Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10; Will 12; Per 12; FP 11.

Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.

SM 0; 5'-6"; 125-175 lbs.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Status 2; Wealth. • Add Appearance (Beautiful) for Lara.

Languages: English *or* German (Native).

Skills: See above for notable skills.

Equipment: Cell phone; fashionable clothes.

Off-Screen Characters

These folks aren't in Switzerland but are significant.

Oleg Zharov: The Old Man, currently visiting the organization's subsidiary. About to be arrested by the FSB, sparking a mob-succession crisis.

Alexander Burayev: The rival of Viktor and an informer. Supposedly in Moscow supervising the organization's cyber-crime activities. Viktor will send men to kill him after he learns of Oleg's arrest.

Pavel Ruskov: A corrupt Russian FSB officer on the task force targeting the Zharov family. He sometimes sells or trades information to foreign agencies, due to a gambling problem. He's the source of the leak regarding Oleg's imminent arrest.

TIMELINE AT THE CLINIC

The agency the PCs are with was tipped off by an informer, and developed the intelligence to set up the agents' mission and get them into place.

If the team plans a long infiltration rather than a brief snatch-and-grab, the GM should decide exactly what stage Viktor and Nectaria's fertility procedure is at, to determine where Nectaria and Viktor will be. The simplest option is to assume it took some time to set up the mission and develop the intelligence, and a narrow window of opportunity occurs between stage 2 and 3 of the treatment while Viktor and Nectaria are at the clinic.

Here's a possible timeline of what will go down if the PCs don't intervene:

1. *Ovary stimulation.* While ostensibly on a two-week ski vacation, Nectaria took a fertility drug prescribed by the clinic to stimulate development of multiple mature eggs for fertilization (instead of the usual one egg). She also took a synthetic hormone to avoid releasing the eggs early. While taking these medications, Nectaria and her loyal bodyguard slipped away and visited the clinic every two to three days for blood hormone and ultrasound measurements to determine when the egg sacs (follicles) were ready. She then received a "trigger shot" injection to mature the eggs; 36 hours later, the eggs were ready for retrieval. The GM may wish to assume that the agents' mission is set up and they travel to Switzerland while this is going on.

2. *Gathering the eggs.* Nectaria checked into the clinic early in the day, this time accompanied by husband Viktor and a full entourage of bodyguards. Since Nectaria is going into surgery, a somewhat paranoid Viktor is staying with her at the clinic, along with several bodyguards. Half of them wait outside the clinic at a nearby hotel, reinforcements in case of trouble; the others ("relatives") accompany her.

In the surgical suite, Nectaria undergoes the final tests and is given an anesthetic, while Viktor and Nectaria's bodyguard Chernakov wait in the family room. The procedure takes an hour or so. The doctor inserts an ultrasound probe to examine Nectaria's ovaries and identify the follicles (egg sacs). A thin needle is inserted to remove eight to 15 eggs.

Afterward, Nectaria recovers from the anesthetic, but experiences some cramping. The Klinik Nova prefers to keep patients overnight while they recover and await the next stage in the procedure. So Nectaria rests in her room, spends some time in the Zen garden with Viktor, eats a light meal at the cafeteria, and then retires to her room to read and get some sleep.

When a restless Viktor is not spending time with Nectaria, he makes a bit of a nuisance of himself by badgering the clinic's staff, and then heads to the Zen garden with some underlings (including Dragonov) to discuss his next criminal operation: his plan to convince Oleg (whom he doesn't know is going down) that it's a good time to

open a new Afghan heroin pipeline to whatever country the PCs' agency is from. He and his associates chatter away in Russian, play cards, smoke heavily (ignoring the *No Smoking* signs), and glare at other patients and staff to keep them out of the Zen garden. On occasion, still nervous about his wife, Viktor sends one of his men to her room to confer with her bodyguard and check on her to see if she needs anything (eventually learning she's asleep). Late at night, he retires to his wife's room and goes to sleep next to her, with some bodyguards outside.

3. *Fertilization.* While Nectaria is resting and Viktor is pacing, scheming, and smoking, the chief embryologist, Dr. Helgard, is in the IVF lab, working late under orders from the director to get things done and have this Russian mobster and his wife out of their clinic! He examines the removed eggs, combines them with Viktor's sperm, and incubates them overnight. In this case, where the problem is poor sperm quality from the male, he uses intracytoplasmic sperm injection, in which a single sperm is injected directly into each mature egg.

4. *Developing the embryos.* It takes three days after the egg removal for the eggs to grow into viable embryos. The clinic's embryologist selects the most viable to implant three to five days after the egg retrieval. Extra embryos are frozen for later attempts.

ALTERNATE KLINIKS: TECHNOMANCER

The Klinik Nova can be used in other *GURPS* settings, such as *GURPS Technomancer*. The GM may draw upon *El Paso Vice* (see *Pyramid* #3/115: *Technomancer*) for inspiration in running *GURPS Action/Technomancer* magical cop adventures.

In the *Technomancer* setting, Viktor may have more complex plans for his wife's fertility than just arranging a pregnancy. With the Russian mob having a smaller number of mages than rivals in the American Mafia and Mexican drug cartels, he might plan to give his family a future edge by arranging for his unborn child to have magical gifts. If so, the Klinik Nova can be a rare European clinic (maybe one secretly owned by Leviathan Genetics) that specializes in magical manipulation of fertility using spells like Accelerate Pregnancy, Analyze Genetics, Ease Labor, Remove Fetus, Manipulate DNA, Transfer Pregnancy, and most controversially, Spellgraft. Maybe Viktor has arranged for a "fairy godmother" intervention and is paying the Klinik's mages to cast a number of useful Spellgrafts on his child.

The GM will have to consider how magic changes things. The Klinik may have hired a mage to provide certain protections, and perhaps has replaced its robots with golems. The Russian mobsters likely aren't powerful mages themselves (although one or two could be ex-Soviet military veterans with experience in that area), but Viktor and his henchmen will certainly own a variety of tactical talismans and enhanced weapons (e.g., guns enchanted with Hail of Lead or Magic Bullet) and defenses. They may also have various useful elixirs on them.

Viktor and Nectaria had originally considered returning to a hotel to wait while the eggs developed. However, Viktor decided that they will remain in the clinic – he is paranoid that someone might sabotage the eggs or go after Nectaria if he leaves. Before the embryo is implanted (if the operatives haven't taken action yet), word of the arrest of his father-in-law Oleg reaches Viktor.

Concerned about securing his position and protecting Nectaria, Viktor won't rush back immediately, in case the FSB try to arrest him as well. Instead, he goes on high alert. He bullies the administrator into allowing him to extend his and his wife's stay while they wait for the embryos to be prepared, and he turtles up in the clinic. He works the phones to establish his position, make sure the FSB aren't after him as well, and summon an entourage of extra bodyguards (a dozen additional mob enforcers). The extra men arrive in 24 hours in three rented cars. Victor also sends orders to place a hit on his hated rival, Alexander.

5. *Planting the embryos.* If nothing has gone down with the PCs (or other intruders; see below), two of the embryos are ready three days after their removal. The doctor has Nectaria return to the surgical suite, where in a simple procedure without need for anesthesia, the embryos are planted in her uterus via a catheter. No surgery is required, though she experiences some mild cramping. After a short rest, she is ready to leave.

Meanwhile, Victor's reinforcements will have arrived. Now sure he has political cover and allies lined up back in Russia, he leaves the clinic in four-car convoy, heads to the airport, and flies back to Moscow. If the operatives haven't acted, it will be too late: Viktor's hit will go down on Alexander, and he'll be secure in his position as the new boss.

Assuming she's safe and well, Nectaria travels back with Viktor. If the party hasn't interrupted the procedure, she has a pair of embryos implanted in her uterus, which may grow into one or two babies; a pregnancy test in two weeks determines success.

EPILOGUE

The GM should award bonus character points for completing the primary mission objectives: capture Viktor (ideally alive); avoid civilian casualties; avoid harming Nectaria; get out before any police arrive. If successful, the GM may wish to have a payoff in future adventures when interrogation of Viktor leads to further action against the Zharov Brotherhood and reports of infighting in the mob. After a suitable interval, the PCs may learn of Alexander and Nectaria's marriage, Alexander's ascension as boss, and, as a *quid pro quo*, a winding down of his operations in their country. Or, perhaps, their agency may find itself drawn into further covert operations to assist his faction against rival groups . . . It's up to the GM whether Alexander may himself have been the source of the leaks and intel that led to Viktor's downfall, or whether he was, as the PCs were told, merely a lesser evil.

If the operatives don't act quickly, the world will become an even more dangerous place.

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.

GURPS

Fourth Edition



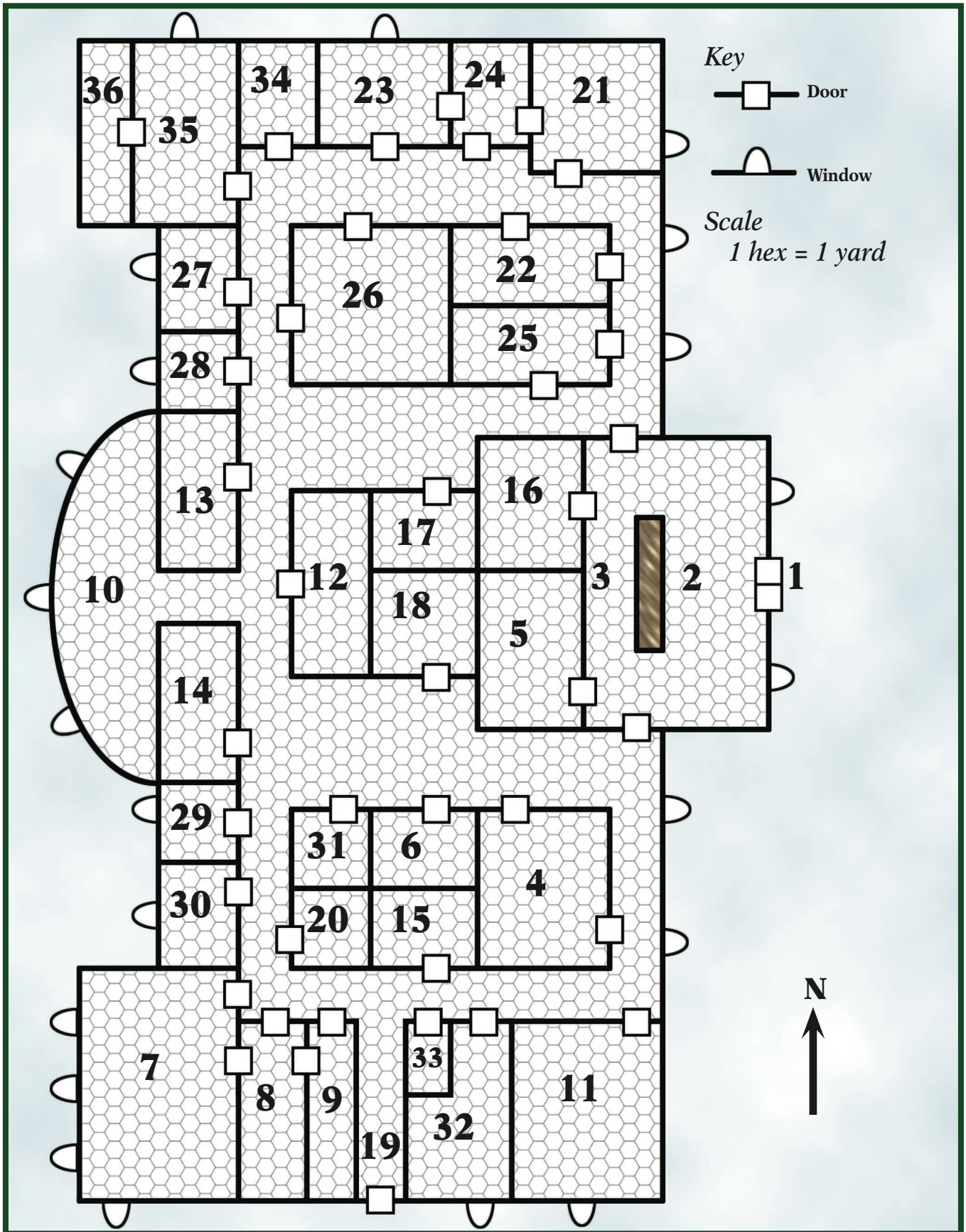
TECHNOMANCER™

HIGH MAGIC. HIGH TECH. HIGH ADVENTURE.

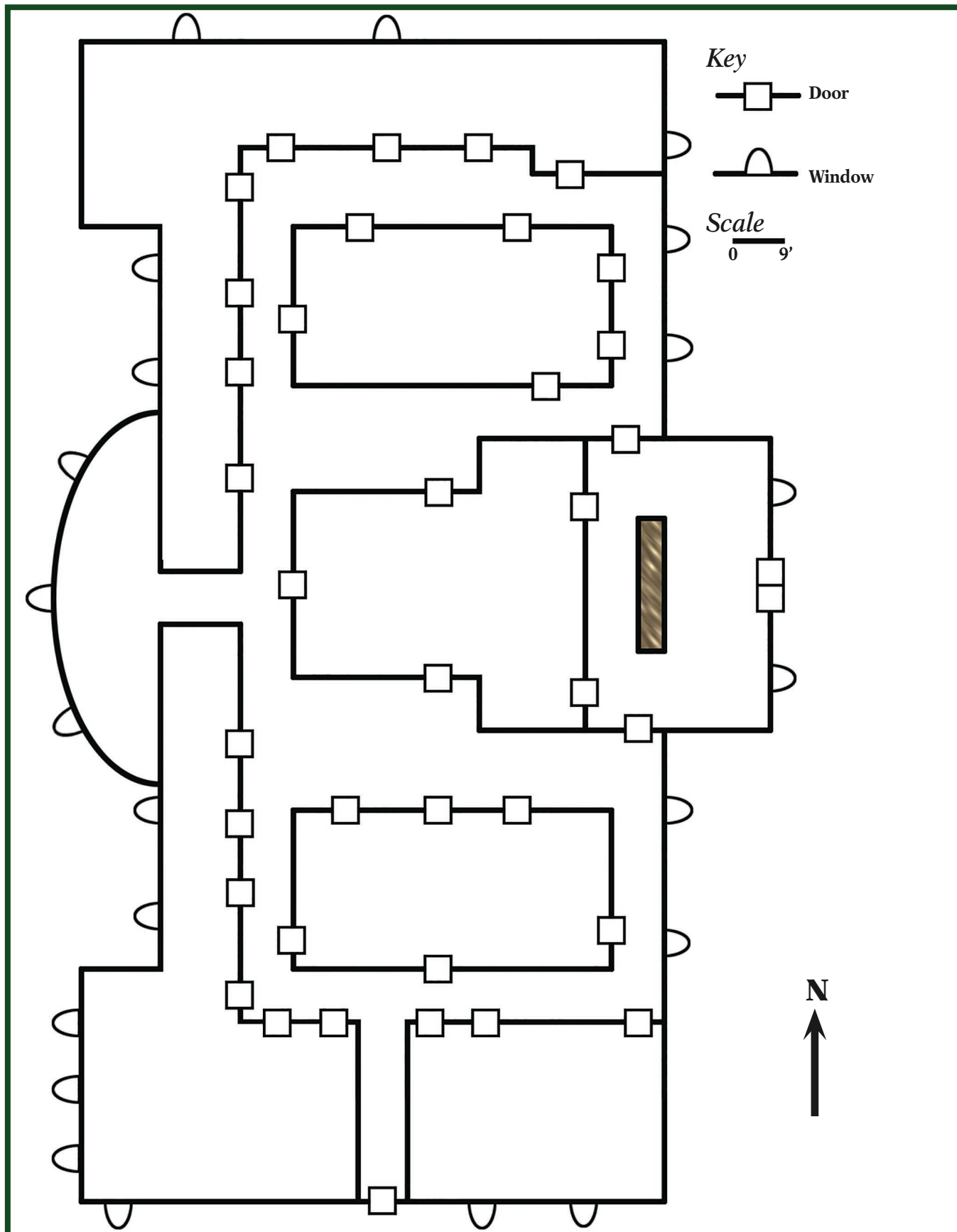
**Available in print from
Amazon.com,
BarnesAndNoble.com,
and other retailers!**

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

gurps.sjgames.com/books/technomancer

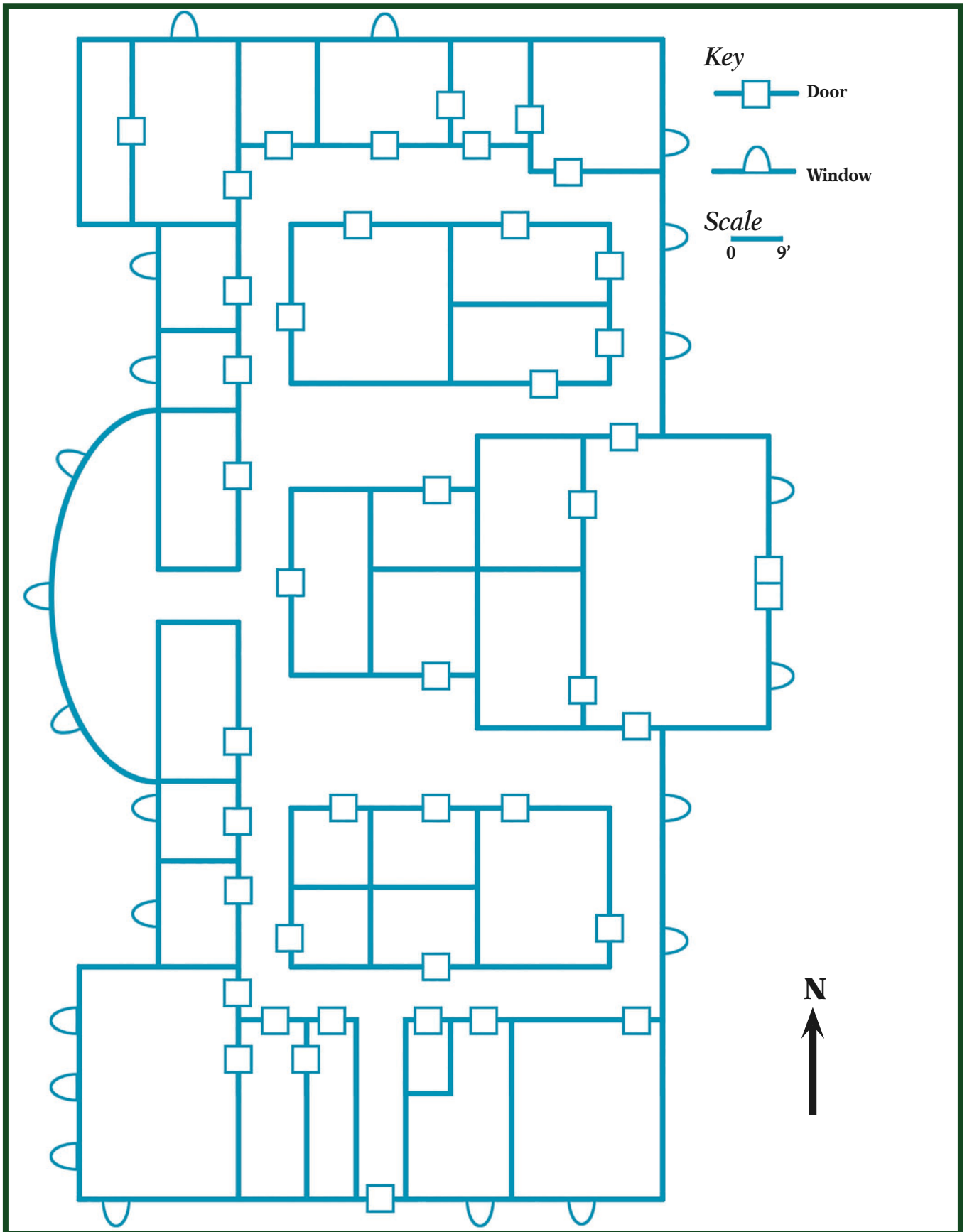


FLOOR PLAN OF KLINIK NOVA, GM VERSION



FLOOR PLAN OF KLINIK NOVA, WALK-THROUGH VERSION

This map represents what agents might see by walking the building's perimeter and the internal halls.

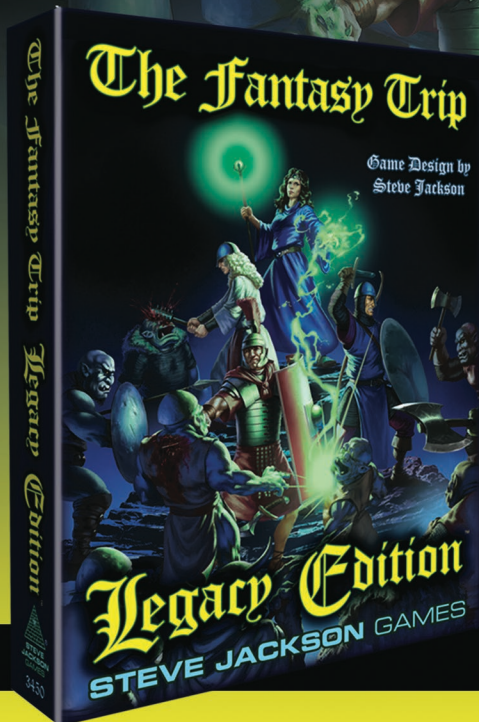


FLOOR PLAN OF KLINIK NOVA, BLUEPRINT VERSION

Agents might use their own methods to obtain a version of the map from city-planning records.



The Fantasy Trip™ Legacy Edition



The return of the classic roleplaying game!



thefantasytrip.com | | #PlaySJGames

HAVE GAME, WILL TRAVEL

BY JASON BRICK

In the real world, tourists go from place to place, bedding down where they can. They experience the local population, visit sites of interest, and generally have adventures they couldn't had they simply stayed at home.

In roleplaying games, adventurers do pretty much the same thing. Sure, they kill more things and gather more loot than your average modern tourist. They're also a lot more likely to save the world along the way. But those are just details.

The point is, travel is an integral part of most campaigns. Yet games often gloss over many of the parts of real-life travel that make it so interesting and memorable. At too many tables, Centauri V feels a lot like Betelgeuse II, there's little difference between the Green Dragon in Kingsport and the Purple Unicorn in Star City, and New Orleans is indistinguishable from Cairo.

But if we take a minute to look at some of the *reasons* why real-world travel is a real-life adventure (using examples drawn from the author's experience), we can inject some of that excitement and color into our adventurers' travels.

THE ALLURE OF ETHNIC FOOD

Ask any friend who travels frequently, and they'll tell you all about the food they ate in all the places they visited. Even traveling domestically, most folks have a town or two where they want to visit a restaurant more than they want to visit the people they know there.

It's true that constantly focusing on the smells and tastes of every meal doesn't make for a great game. Nor does keeping records of every food cart, pub, bistro, and eatery in every town your party visits. But if you zoom in on a few of the best opportunities for introducing local flavor into the game, you can accomplish a lot.

- In campaigns with recurring locations, NPCs and adventurers could have favorite restaurants in every port of call. This can be especially fun if there's some incongruity. The party's half-orc might just have a moderate addiction to the dandelion salad at the elven food stall in Farhaven, so long as nobody is watching. A virulently racist mercenary space marine might make an exception for the aliens running that little bar on Missionary Station.

- Fantasy and science-fiction games offer especially rich opportunities to introduce truly bizarre ethnic food. Think about the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "A Matter of Honor," where Riker has to eat dinner with a Klingon crew.

Now, turn the weirdness up to 11 and remember you're not limited by a special-effects budget. How vivid and memorable can you make that state dinner?

- Food allergies are varied and unpredictable among different members of the same species, as are simple tastes in food. Who knows what might happen when species vary widely, or among people with different superpowers?

- On the flip side of that coin, what if some ethnic foods replicated the recipes for potions in a fantasy campaign? That goblin kidney stew might be a potent antibiotic in a world without modern medicine. In a science-fiction campaign, an odd-tasting dumpling might brew nanotech or biotech solutions that off-world scientists are hunting for.

- Drinking and eating contests appear to be universal across Terran cultures. How wild and adventuresome might they become once humans get off-world? Or between cybernetically enhanced characters, or those with superpowers?

Also keep in mind the customs and settings in which different cultures experience their food. Some make better backdrops for encounters than others. The local tavern is a classic, but overused to say the least. In the real world, do an online image search for Singapore or Malay food courts, floating restaurants in Bangkok, and "weird Japanese restaurants" for inspirations to suit many campaigns. Then set your imagination free to think of what might happen in zero gravity, or in howdahs on the backs of mammoth alien beasts, or in wildly different dimensions.

Adventure Seeds

Food references in a game are usually best left to local color, character development, and easy ways to differentiate between otherwise similar locations. But once in a while, your adventurers' eateries can become plots unto themselves.

A Spicy Side Quest. A favorite restaurateur can no longer serve her signature dish because a supplier hasn't delivered the necessary ingredients. Investigation uncovers something or someone is blockading or sabotaging the route by which those ingredients reach the city. The adventurers go to clear the matter up, which could be a simple one-stop mission or the entry point to an entire story arc.

Smugglers' Blues. Whether they're hired to smuggle it, find it in a dragon's hoard, or stumble onto it in a train car they just hijacked, the adventurers discover they are in possession of a valuable load of spice or ingredients bound for a nearby town.

It turns out the ingredient in question is *sentient* and willing to bargain for its life.

A Lovely Tea Party. What people eat, their rulers tax. Adventurers in a city where a new “(insert beloved delicacy here) tax” is introduced must at the very least navigate the resulting riots and response. Or maybe it’s their entry into a campaign about rebellions against a powerful, oppressive empire.

“THAI HOT”

We all know that Thai food is among the spiciest in the world. Most of us also know somebody who’s a little bit macho about the level of spice they can handle in the food they eat. Many of us have heard that person tell a story about how they went into a Thai restaurant and asked for their food to be “Thai hot.” Some of those stories end hilariously, others with some reasonably well-earned braggadocio.

But *all* of them point out a quirk of culture and cuisine we don’t see in most games – but should. What species is notorious for eating the hottest food in your world? Which has the grossest food (to outsiders)? What ethnic food in any campaign of any genre has features that could turn it into a dare or a slang term? If your game world doesn’t have a couple, it’s time to invent some.

THE AGONY OF THE FEET

Humorist Erma Bombeck wrote a book entitled *When You Look Like Your Passport Photo, It’s Time to Go Home*. It’s a pithy line, and points to an important truth of even the most enjoyable travel: It’s *exhausting* and full of hassles, small and large.

Most such hassles have no place in a roleplaying game, just as most of them never enter the stories you tell your friends and family when you get home. Nobody wants to roleplay spending half an hour waiting in line at customs while fretting about a connecting flight.

Other hassles, though, you recount to everybody who’s willing to listen. *That* kind of difficulty can make a real impact in your games, if only to differentiate Point A from Point B in ways your players will remember throughout and even after the campaign.

But what’s the difference?

Bad travel hassles – the ones you don’t want to include in your game – are those where the PCs lack agency. It’s waiting in line at customs, or a flight delay, or not getting into a place because your papers weren’t in order. These are boring and frustrating, and do nothing but delay and prevent entry into the interesting and fun parts of travel.

You can still account for these by quickly tracking the time and resources they consume, especially if a meaningful skill roll could make things quicker and/or cheaper. It’s also good to use them to frame color commentary or local details, or even to do some foreshadowing. For example, in real-world Indonesia, those waiting in line at customs spend that time staring at huge posters warning that drug smuggling carries the death penalty. How might something similar up the stakes and perceived risk in your next game?

The key to using bad travel hassles is to make the hassles themselves quick in game time. Four hours waiting for a new flight should take only a few seconds, even if the reasons for that delay turn out to be a key part of the campaign. Use it as seasoning, not as the main course.

Good travel hassles, by contrast, can be scenes unto themselves. Sitting around and having bags searched is boring, but a search combining real-time Holdout checks for having hidden contraband plus a Fast-Talk roll to distract the searchers can be a real nail-biter.

The difference between those two scenarios is *agency* and *consequences*. The players making skill rolls during the search made that scene more engaging than if they stood idly by watching. And the risks of hidden contraband made the results of those rolls matter.

Lost luggage is another good illustration of the difference between these two handlings of a common travel hassle. If the adventurers arrive on site and the GM simply says, “Your luggage doesn’t arrive,” that’s realistic but boring. The adventurers did nothing to deserve or affect the fate of their bags. At best, you’ve introduced frustration with no real benefit. At worst, you’ve deprived the protagonists of resources and equipment they were invested in.

But what if the luggage is impounded, and the PCs know where to get it? Or if an adventurer fails an Observation roll and accidentally grabs a drug dealer’s bag? What if the person responsible for their baggage arrives with a story of having been robbed and an idea of who robbed them? Now, we’re dealing with things the party can do something about, and with consequences leading to challenge, mystery, and adventure.

Better yet, imagine a scenario where the heroes have something precious in a bag. The bad guys have agents at the baggage claim to steal the bag before the PCs can get it. *And* the luggage in question is a nondescript roller bag identical to 20 others coming onto the carousel. Of course, the bad guys have people from the destination city on site, who haven’t had to go through airport security. *That’s* a luggage situation worthy of an adventure!

This One Time . . .

Experienced travelers are already thinking of stories from their own journeys where hassles could be spun into “interesting times” for player characters in any genre. For those who haven’t traveled as much, here are a few examples of hassles from the real world that can be altered or expanded into big trouble.

- Open any given copy of a *Lonely Planet* guide and you will find an entry about a common local scam. The book for Beijing describes pirate-cab scouts who come into the airport and lead tourists to rides costing three times the going rate. The one for Puerto Vallarta warns against predatory timeshare salespeople. The Bangkok book mentions cabbies in league with unscrupulous tailors. Having predictable town scams for different locations in your campaign adds color to the adventurers’ first visits, then a sense of familiarity and growing competence as the campaign continues.

- The logistics of landing in a new country or jurisdiction in the modern world can include needing local currency, bank cards not working, requiring a new cell phone or SIM, checking in with the authorities, and a host of similar small problems. Most of these fall under “bad hassles,” but sometimes you can create challenge and adventure in these interstitial moments. It’s no fun to roleplay the process of getting new phones when you land in Kolkata, but the extra challenge of the hour between landing and restoring full communications can be a window for serious trouble.

- The “white guy tax” is a real phenomenon in the real world. Most people in developing nations accurately regard Europeans as fabulously wealthy by local standards. They frequently boost prices, or at least become less willing to negotiate downward, when doing business with Anglos. Adventurers in most fantasy campaigns are rich beyond a commoner’s dreams of avarice, and would almost certainly fall victim to such a thing. In modern and sci-fi campaigns, what races or nationalities might suffer that kind of treatment? And would supers pay extra when buying from normals?

- Differences in customs can make for different, dangerous, or otherwise interesting situations. In Southeast Asia, people don’t hesitate to touch, or even pick up, strangers’ children. Westerners traveling in such a place can be shocked if they’re not expecting it. Playing with different expectations and cultural assumptions, especially if it comes with some kind of Area Knowledge or similar roll to remember the custom, can create memorable scenes or lead to solid adventures.

- The relationship between law enforcement and the population varies widely by region. Attempting to bribe a traffic cop in Bozeman, Montana will land you in jail. *Not* attempting to bribe a traffic cop in Guatemala City will land you in jail. If you’re lucky. Not knowing the rules could mean the difference between success and failure on a mission, or simply lead to hilarious embarrassment that the characters suffer momentarily and the *players* laugh about years later.

- Literacy is a larger issue than people who haven’t traveled in Asia or Russia appreciate. When going to a country with a different language but the same alphabet, one can phonetically sound out locations and get a clue about orientation. But when the signage is in Kanji, or Cyrillic, or Antarean, or Atlantean, or the Deep Speech, it’s more disorienting than can be described. This is an excellent way to reward players who invest points in languages, or to firmly establish that the adventurers “aren’t in Kansas anymore.”

Adventure Seeds

Sometimes, the hassles of travel are simply a brief episode of tension while the heroes proceed toward the plot. Other times, they provide information useful in the core adventure. And still other times, you can make them the beginning of an entire adventure in its own right . . .

Battle Royale. The PCs find themselves in a crowded market square or street when a riot between three sides breaks out. The adventurers fight their way out of the initial scrum to find the entire city locked down by local authorities. As they move through the secured city, they find themselves courted,

bribed, or threatened to join the fight by members of each of the three factions.

Funny Money. While the adventurers are changing money aboard a new space station, the clerk on the other side of the hardened glass blanches. She rushes into the back room. Moments later, armed police arrive and inform them the money they brought is counterfeit, printed by an unsanctioned rebel government, or otherwise illegal. It will take *much* more than an explanation to get them out of the trouble they’ve found themselves in.

Just a Game. Alert scammers approach the adventurers and offer to play a game from the PCs’ culture of origin. In *this* country or spaceport, that game somehow resembles behavior that’s a cultural offense so strong it puts the scammers in a position to blackmail the heroes.

A FRIEND IN NEED

One potential issue with having players roll for the results of simple hassles is you can accidentally end up derailing the adventure because they roll poorly on a critical juncture early on. This absolutely true travel tale from the author’s life illustrates a way to turn that risk into a memorable and fun scene before continuing with the adventure as planned.

A close friend was entering the United States and gave the wrong answer to the customs agent at the border. (She failed her Administration roll.)

The agent looked her in the eyes and said, “Ma’am, if you tell me that, I will have to deny you entry today.”

The friend panicked and repeated her story. (She failed her IQ roll.) The agent repeated, “Ma’am. If you tell me that’s why you’re visiting the United States today, I have to deny you entry.”

While the rest of the group watched in horror and tried to figure out what to do next, the friend and the agent went through several additional rounds of this conversation. At last the agent said, in slow and precise words, “Ma’am. I’ve heard you and listened to you. I need you to listen to me very carefully now . . . *if you tell me* that’s why you’re coming to the USA today, I have to deny you entry.”

The friend (finally succeeding at her “get a clue” check) said, “Oh. No. That’s not why I’m traveling today.” She then gave the right answer, and her passport was stamped without another word spoken.

HURRY UP AND WAIT

Barring superscience or magical teleportation, travel in most genres requires downtime. That means a lot of waiting around, whether it happens on foot, sitting in a starship, waiting for papers to clear, or riding on the back of an Iruvian gigantosloth. That’s a reality of real-life and in-game travel, but playing out the experience in real time isn’t reasonable or fun.

The easy way out is to do an Indiana Jones cut whenever the adventurers have hours, days, or months of uneventful journey. Bonus points for actually singing the song together while tracing the route on the campaign map.

But there are other methods that can add weight, consequence, or meaning to those long hours between departure and arrival.

Building Relationships

One reason why the companions we travel with become such close friends is that we spend hours in close proximity with little better to do than talk with one another. Incorporating this into play can deepen a campaign in many directions. You can steal ideas for this from a variety of other games, or use a variation on the following structure.

For any journey of over a day, go around the table once and have each player share a personal detail about their character, or some knowledge about the game world their character might know that the others don't. The GM in turn shares information about an NPC, or the means of conveyance, or the area being traveled *through*.

Crank this up a notch by also having each player character do something about their relationship with another PC on the journey. This could be as deep as playing out a short argument between rivals or a flirtation between potential lovers, or as simple as a statement of intent.

Rest and Recuperation

In games where instantaneous healing isn't available, the time to get to Point B can be vital for the adventurers to recover from everything that happened at Point A. Travel on a military vessel or starship might give the PCs access to a full suite of medical supplies, allowing for judicious use of Surgery and Physician skills to accelerate healing. At the other end of the spectrum, a desperate First Aid roll in the shelter of a fallen tree as the team collapses for some hard-won rest might be the best care available.

Either way, it's possible to use downtime and wound recovery as a ticking time bomb. Will the heroes be in fighting shape

when they reach their destination? Or will wounds slow them down until they are caught from behind, or arrive too late?

If the heroes use the same mode of conveyance most of the time, the team medic might want to invest in abilities that allow for better healing with the tools on hand.

Getting Things Done

Downtime projects have become a popular aspect of many game systems, including **GURPS** (see, for example, *Improvement Through Study*, p. B292, and *Long Tasks*, p. B499). Many modern humans use a version of this concept when they drag their laptops, knitting, or a novel onto a plane. How many people reading this article have prepped for an upcoming role-playing game while waiting at the airport or sitting on a bus?

At its simplest, this is a matter of counting the days or hours involved in a trip, then using an appropriate skill as many times as is appropriate. Some examples (including suggested **GURPS** skills) include:

- Making daily Animal Handling rolls to train an animal that has come along for the journey.
- Using Armoury skill to repair, improve, or create weapons and armor, or Engineer to craft various gadgets.
- Making use of an applicable Artist skill to beautify the ship, truck, or starship the travelers are aboard.
- Brainwashing a prisoner, which is an efficient – if morally questionable – use of time on long journeys.
- Applying Administration, Cryptography, Intelligence Analysis, or any number of other skills toward making sense of a bundle of previously indecipherable clues.
- Assuming access to a large enough body of reference material, Research could be a vital part of knowing what to do once the adventurers get where they're going.

If we have to explain to the reader how the Games skill might be used on a long journey, it's likely that person is reading the wrong magazine!

NOTES FROM ON LOCATION

If you read the author's bio, you'll see that travel and tabletop gaming are two of three favorite hobbies. They inform one another. The author's gaming hobby makes travel more entertaining, and that travel leads to more interesting games. Below are a few locations in the real world that inspired great games. Run an image search for each, read the notes below, and let your imagination run with that ball.

Batu Caves, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This temple within a cave in the middle of a major city is flooded by nearly a million visitors during an annual religious festival.

Portage Valley, Alaska, USA. A supply bottleneck between open ocean and inland settlements, it inspired an entire campaign about a war against weather and armies to keep supply lines running.

Gated resort, Guangzhou, China. A 24-hour layover in this city led to a carefully curated tour of the area paid for

by the national government. How could such political/cultural theater be inserted into the adventurers' experience?

Bus stop in Berlin, Germany. A casual conversation with a fellow commuter revealed this person was a retired intelligence officer on vacation to his old haunts. He then offered a personalized tour of the city, including the things only an old spook would know.

Pacaya Mountain, Antigua, Guatemala. Climbing the sides of this cinder-cone volcano under armed guard was normal for the trip. Running back down the sides at breakneck speeds when the volcano coughed up plumes of poisonous gas was not.

Waitomo Caves, Waitomo, New Zealand. "Black water rafting" is riding a raft on rough river waters *in a cave*, often in total darkness. Equal parts *Indiana Jones* and *The River Wild*, this experience inspired a host of chase scenes, each more harrowing than the last.

As with healing (p. 32), the GM can use this concept for more than just exploring the PCs' hobbies. Mission success can hinge in part on performance of these downtime projects. This adds a level of tension to an otherwise slack scene, while simultaneously rewarding players for choosing non-combat skills.

Adventure Seeds

The thing about downtime is that it's unoccupied by adventure. That doesn't mean you can't occasionally punctuate it with peril. "Random encounters" often eat up game time with no real benefit, but you can put obstacles in the party's path which both challenge the characters *and* add plot-related developments and information for their benefit. See *It's an Encounter!* in *Pyramid* #3/118: *Dungeon Trips* for other ideas on things that can happen on the way to Point B.

Reverse Die Hard. The vehicle the adventurers are riding to their destination goes off course. It might have been hijacked or commandeered, or the crew may have new orders from a legitimate authority. To complete their mission, the PCs must gain control and get it back on course. In most cases, their weapons will be stored out of reach. They'll need to be creative until they can take down at least one armed opponent. Afterward, dealing with the legal and/or criminal consequences of their deeds can add a new layer of complexity and action to the next phases of the adventure and campaign.

Uh . . . Guys? Guys! This seed works well with downtime game mechanics. One of the player characters makes a discovery during their downtime task. Research might discover something important, or tinkering on a project may reveal details about materials or the fundamentals of science. This discovery introduces some kind of immediate peril. Once that peril is resolved, the breakthrough also has lasting impact on the story overall. Exactly what – and how the PCs react – is up to the gaming group.

HOW TO TRAVEL LIKE A GAMER

Whether it's a drive to Thanksgiving dinner across town, a road trip half a country away, or an expedition to a nation you've never before visited, all of your personal travel can deliver inspiration for your characters, campaigns, and encounters – *if* you travel like a gamer. What follows are the 10 most important tips, tricks, and techniques to maximize the impact of your personal journeys at the gaming table.

Take Too Many Photos. Your phone is right there in your hand. Use it to document the heck out of everything you do; you can always delete the bad shots. Later, bring the images up on your phone or computer (or home projector, if you're feeling fancy) when the party enters locations based on where you've been. Bonus points for using image-editing software to make the photos more closely match the adventure.

Bring a Notebook. Whichever kind you're likely to carry and use. Sketch, write, and tap your pencil whenever inspiration strikes you on your journey. It's weird, but for most people, inspiration strikes more often when they're carrying something in which to write that inspiration down.

Note Your Loadout. Pay attention to what you pack for a lengthy journey, for short expeditions in the city, and for simply going out to dinner or a market. Think about that in terms of what your character might pack on an adventure, or to create challenges for adventurers away from home.

Use Your Downtime. Gather as many colorful details as you can. There's a problem with games where individual towns, countries, space stations, and even planets feel the same during play. Remembering what you noticed can help you give just a detail or three to keep different locations, well, different.

Always Do the Thing. You did not go all that way *not* to hug the tacky tourist mascot, take the trip to the volcano, or dance in the festival. You *cannot* do those things at home. Each and every one of them can inspire something you bring back to your gaming table. So do the thing – whatever it is.

Note Entrances and Exits. Do this for every building you enter, every room you sit down in, and every country you visit. These are the transition points where drama happens, and paying attention to them helps you understand two things. First, they'll aid you in creating compelling action scenes where structure and space matter. Second, you'll begin to notice how different cultures impact the flow, design, and appearance of these spaces.

Find the Guns. Almost every location in the modern world includes people with guns. Those that don't will have people you're used to seeing armed who are noticeable for their *lack* of armament. Firearms indicate power structures, points of conflict, and other key elements of culture. If you see the guns, you'll see a part of reality that adventurers pay attention to, and you'll notice the aspects of your destination most likely to inspire and inform scenarios.

Close Your Eyes, Then Open Them. Take some notes on, or a photo of, the first thing you notice. Use that experience when you describe scenes and locations at the table. That thing that first caught your eye will be the most likely thing to catch the imaginations of your gaming mates.

Observe the Three Things Rule. For each location or experience, play a game where you must describe it using only three short details. That's about how many details most gamers will hear before they zone out, so figure out how to express as much as possible with those three individual bits of information.

Read Travelogues. You can't travel everywhere interesting in the world, but reading and watching guidebooks and travelogues can bring inspiration as fast as you can digest it. Especially recommended are anything by Bill Bryson or Anthony Bourdain, the *Lonely Planet* series of guidebooks, and all *National Geographic* titles. While you're at it, swing by the tourism office of each city you visit and pick up every piece of paper they're willing to give you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jason Brick authors the bestselling *Random Encounters* series and has written for multiple game lines. He's bereft to see *Pyramid* go, but looks forward to seeing what Steve Jackson Games does next. When not gaming, he travels, practices martial arts, and spoils his family. He lives in Oregon. Drop him a line at brickcommajason@gmail.com.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

KNICKKNACKS AND NOTIONS

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

As *Have Game, Will Travel* (p. 29) makes clear, the adventure potential of travel itself is often underutilized in gaming. That article does a great job of looking at things from the point of view of making the most of your journeys. Yet there are some aspects of travel that arise before even getting there. Here, then, are a few “random thoughts” related to travel . . . especially to things that can happen before you set foot out the door.

WHERE TO?

When you think about it, the characters gamers design just about always have more depth than the players include in the stats and descriptions. Players create characters on an ad-hoc basis, figuring out details as needed (or that would sound interesting!) and adding them to game sessions. If those characters were real people, they would live in a “linear” fashion (like we all do), experiencing even those aspects of their lives the players elide or leave for “fill in the blank” sessions. Thus, even if you (the player) have never thought of the answer to various questions, that hero probably has opinions or ideas on:

- Whether or not they like mushrooms.
- What their earliest childhood memory is.
- Which of their muscles get surprisingly tight or tense.
- What strange, not-too-useful trick they have that few other people have.
- Whether they prefer to sleep on their back, side, or stomach.

I was going to mention “what their childhood pet was,” but then I realized that’d probably seem like *Pyramid* was an elaborate phishing scheme for fictitious characters.

One of those aspects that typically isn’t filled in when designing or playing a character is where that person would like to go . . . like, for fun. I’m guessing many – if not most – people have an idea of the travel destinations they’d really like to visit.

(If anyone ever perfects that teleporter to London, please let me know!) It seems likely that PCs have similar hopes and dreams, beyond any specifically goal-oriented “I want to go to the Pit of Ultimate Despair to develop my fighting prowess and avenge my father.”

To that end, consider having each player secretly come up with a “top 10” list of where their hero might like to go. Destinations can be:

- Specific locales, big or small, in the in-game universe (the Louvre in Paris; the Shire; Metropolis; Mount Suribachi on Iwo To, formerly Iwo Jima and the site of the famous WWII flag-raising photo; and the like).
- Specific locales unknown to the player and/or the hero (“the highest point on this continent,” “that one island I saw on Facebook that has thousands of bunnies”).
- General or possibly unknown locales (“I want to spend a week at a beautiful ski resort somewhere, not worrying about anything,” “I want to travel into space somehow”).
- Perhaps impossible or unknowable locales (“I wonder if there’s beer on the sun . . .”).

Once this list exists for each hero, it can be an invaluable tool for the GM and the group:

- The GM can compare lists and see if there are any obvious points of overlap. If half the group always wanted to visit Easter Island, then it’d be crazy *not* to work that into an adventure at some point!
- Items from these lists can be used as subplot threads, offering the heroes opportunities they can follow up on.
- Presuming the lists aren’t group knowledge – which I don’t think they should be – they can be a means for the PCs to learn about each other, in ways the disclosing heroes may not be aware of. For example, if one hero is attempting to chat up another and makes whatever social skill roll the GM deems appropriate, the second hero might reveal an item from their list during the course of that casual conversation.

(The GM may ask players to order their lists by “order of secrecy,” if appropriate.) Of course, NPCs might use these methods to get the same info out of the heroes!

Act Now!

An aspect of travel that isn’t often discussed is the fact that many “destinations” are limited-time offers. We tend to think of vacations as “I want to visit Ireland,” but it’s often more like “I want to go to Gen Con.” The former is open in its timetable; the latter is only a narrow opportunity each year.

Other destinations might be limited because they’re disappearing or their time is limited. “I want to watch the once-in-a-century solar eclipse” provides a definite timetable, as might “I want to visit the Amazon rainforest” or “I want to visit the polar icecaps” if the world changes enough to make that impossible.

If a campaign is going to run long enough, the GM might want to provide a calendar of interesting events or places for the coming year: natural or celestial occurrences, big conventions, interesting art exhibits, seasonal specialties, and so on. Such a list wouldn’t be exhaustive, obviously; in a large-enough area, there are no doubt countless festivals, celebrations, and scheduled incidents occurring. But providing a list of significant ones will enable heroes (and their players) to express their preferences, in the same way that a wide-open map inspires the heroes to go explore. (This is basically a more-fun, presumably less-mutant-iguana variant of using the calendar as the campaign’s “map,” as discussed in *Pyramid* #3/119: *After the End II*.)

GETTING ANYWHERE AFTER YOU GET THERE IS HALF THE FUN

As a final random thought regarding travel, I wanted to point out that many destinations have some kind of quirk regarding their road or transportation situations. Elements that are looked upon as some kind of almost-forgettable background aspect by locals can be wildly perplexing to visitors. Off the top of my head, some quirks of cities I’ve lived in or frequently visited have included:

- The roundabout (traffic circle) capital of the United States, with more roundabouts than any other U.S. city.
- A town built on granite, which causes rain to fail to drain in a most-spectacular fashion.
- A city with gargantuan untended potholes that citizens are expected simply to navigate around while driving at 70 miles per hour.
- A city with an eight-lane road that citizens (including children) are expected to navigate to get to the library.
- A city with 71 streets that bear some variation of the name “peachtree.”

Obviously, some of those are more distinctive than others, but that’s part of the point. Some places have *really strange* local situations, while others have merely odd ones.

This doesn’t include unusual methods of travel that may be legal and profitable within the city (but inconvenient for adventurers): modern-day horse-drawn carriages, two-person duck boats in canals, rider-pedaled “beverage bars on wheels” downtown, and so on. (And those are all in my nearby urban center!) Again, things that locals take for granted would certainly be a great way to add travel flavor to the game; as an example, the yellow school buses that are seemingly omnipresent in the United States are an item of fascination for some in the United Kingdom. Likewise, these odd modes of transportation can serve as plot points or adventure hooks. Who *wouldn’t* want a climactic canal chase and battle that involves duck boats?

So if you’re looking to add some odd flair to your locations, either research what local travel conditions are like (asking a native can be a big help), or make up something equally interesting for your own fictional settings.

With these few tricks, knickknacks, and notions in your backpack of ideas, you’re sure to expand the potential for fun and adventure for everyone at the gaming table.

WHERE TO GO WHEN YOU DON’T KNOW ANYTHING

In many fictional universes, the adventurers ought to know more about the in-game world than the players actually do. It’s their world! (Heroes in a DC Universe game would have heard of Coast City even if the players haven’t, in the same way you’re likely to have heard of Orlando even though it’s only the 72nd-largest city in the United States.) So it can be difficult for players to come up with destinations, even if it’s likely the *heroes* would have not trouble.

Ideally, in such a setting, the players all have access to the same source material the GM does, to help “fill in the blanks” of that knowledge. But not every gamer has the time or resources to buy and read everything, nor is that appropriate to every campaign.

In this case, the player may come up with specific but unknown-to-the-player locales (“the coolest industrial museum in the nation”), and rely on the GM to fill in the details (“Ahh, that would be the Fleftling Museum in Atraboxtra”).

Alternately, the GM might create a list of (say) 100 possible “cool to visit” locations for the group – names and brief descriptions – and let stumped players pick their 10 favorites from there.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for almost 20 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son.

ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. We can be reached by email: info@sjgames.com. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. *GURPS* continues to grow – see what’s new at gurps.sjgames.com.

Warehouse 23. Our online store offers *GURPS* print items, plus PDFs of our books, supplements, adventures, play aids, and support . . . including exclusive material available only on Warehouse 23! Just head over to warehouse23.com.

Internet. To discuss *GURPS* with our staff and your fellow gamers, visit our forums at forums.sjgames.com. You can also join us at [facebook.com/sjgames](https://www.facebook.com/sjgames) or twitter.com/sjgames. Share your brief campaign teasers with #GURPSHook on Twitter. Or explore that hashtag for

ideas to add to your own game! The *Pyramid* web page is pyramid.sjgames.com.

Store Finder (storefinder.sjgames.com): Discover nearby places to buy *GURPS* items and other Steve Jackson Games products. Local shops are great places to play our games and meet fellow gamers!

Bibliographies. Bibliographies are a great resource for finding more of what you love! We’ve added them to many *GURPS* book web pages with links to help you find the next perfect element for your game.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Errata pages for *GURPS* releases are available at sjgames.com/errata/gurps.

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.

STUCK FOR AN ADVENTURE? NO PROBLEM.

**Warehouse 23 sells high-quality
game adventures and supplements
in print and PDF formats.**

- Free downloadable adventures for *GURPS* and *In Nomine*!
- Fun gaming accessories – shot glasses, shirts, specialty six-siders, and more!
- PDFs from Atlas Games, Amarillo Design Bureau, Goodman Games, and many others – plus gems from the up-and-comers.
- Original material for *Transhuman Space* and new *GURPS* supplements from Kenneth Hite, Phil Masters, David Pulver, Sean Punch, and William Stoddard!
- Fully searchable files of *GURPS Fourth Edition* supplements.
- Digital editions of out-of-print classics, from *Orcslayer* and the complete run of *ADQ* to *GURPS China* and *GURPS Ice Age*.
- Buy board games and roleplaying PDFs in the same order! Download digital purchases again whenever you need to.



STEVE JACKSON GAMES
warehouse23.com