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CRIME AND GRIME

THE JUSTICIAR

by Sean Punch

DOMINION
by Kyla Ward

HOLY DIRTY MONEY
by J. Edward Tremlett

CRUEL AND UNUSUAL
by Steven Marsh

ON DE MEDICI'S SECRET SERVICE
by Matt Riggsby

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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Article Colors

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

Pale Blue: In This Issue

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

Dark Blue: **GURPS** Features

Purple: Other Features

Green: Recommended Reading

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IN THIS ISSUE

This month's theme is "Crime and Grime," where we talk about fantasy/historical folks who live a life of crime and those who live to stop them.

The agents of order are no longer abstract, impersonal forces in **GURPS *Dungeon Fantasy!*** **GURPS** line editor and **Dungeon Fantasy** mastermind Sean Punch presents *The Justiciar*: a template for those who wish to enforce The Law.

For anyone looking for a career on the edge of the law, Matt Riggsby, author of **GURPS *Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence***, discusses the *amici degli amici*, or friends of friends, who are *On de Medici's Secret Service*. To aid these would-be agents in patrolling and investigating their domain, a full-color map of Florence, Italy during the Renaissance is included.

Those who claim to support the ultimate law are sometimes guilty of the ultimate crimes. Learn more about a real-world type of crime and the near-extinct mindset that permitted it to exist, in J. Edward Tremlett's *Holy Dirty Money*.

In Kyla Ward's *Dominion*, the land has been brought together under the rule of a single king. In this strange new era, the kingdom needs a few brave souls to act as agents of law – a kind of medieval "FBI." This systemless setting can be overlaid on many other worlds, and it contains an explanation of the legal system and the powers it bestows to catch lawbreakers.

No matter where you are, someone's going to do something that catches the law's attention. Rather than simply killing off PC criminals, GMs can turn the punishment into something *Cruel and Unusual*, a generic table of 18 sentences that all serve as the beginning of an adventure, not the end.

In *Random Thought Table*, the editor offers a brief examination of how magic might affect the dispensing of justice.

When the PCs decide to improve their fortunes through random pickpocketing or burglary, GMs can *Deal the Loot* with a set of generic cards that add randomness and complications to ill-gained wealth.

Odds and Ends offers some humor with *Murphy's Rules*, as well lots of ideas on taboos, customs, magic, and laws. Discover which games offer even more insights on crime and mysteries in bygone ages with *Recommend Reading* from Matthew Pook and Andy Vetromile.

Finally, the *Last Word* is delivered by Simon Washbourne, author of the **Medieval Mysteries RPG**. What is the last word on crime and grime, and why can it be expensive to annoy a medieval coroner?

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FROM THE EDITOR

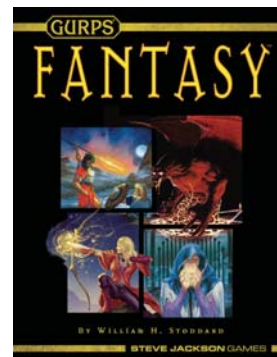
ONE GOLD PIECE, TWO SIDES

In assembling this issue, I had one of those realizations that seems obvious in hindsight, but still took me by surprise. This issue's theme – “Crime and Grime” – has to deal with criminals and those who try to deal with them, in a fantasy/medieval context. But the interesting part is that both sides of the equation are eminently gamable and have a rich context within the RPG world. Thieves (and thieves' guilds, pick-pocketing, etc.) were there almost at the primordial ooze of gaming, as were paladins – and by extension templars, fighter/sheriffs, “city watches,” and peacekeeping nobles. This is somewhat unusual; it's not like (say) playing dungeon-dwelling monsters has ever caught on with the same vigor as those who hunt such creatures. The possibility of supervillainous roleplaying games pale in comparison to their heroic costume-clad counterparts.

But there's an appeal both in fighting the good fight in the name of the law, and taking to the shadows, living off scraps and wits. This issue explores both halves, with some insight

into crime and criminals, plus the forces that seek to wipe them out. Even better, both halves are useful in the same campaign. After all, a description of a secret organization that fights criminals is useful as backbone for an adventuring group *or* as an enemy force that smart PC thieves need to outwit and avoid. The ability of articles to pull double-duty is an interesting technique, and it's one I hope to repeat in the future. (And yes, this is a hint for would-be writers.)

Speaking of which . . .



WRITE HERE, WRITE NOW

We love to get your feedback! Please feel free to send letters and comments to pyramid@sjgames.com, or post online on our forums at forums.sjgames.com. We always like to know what we're done right, where we've gone wrong, and what we ought to do in the future. And if you'd like to take a crack at contributing to *Pyramid*, please check out our Writer's Guidelines at sjgames.com/pyramid/writing.html for more information!

I was only skimming the [Pyramid #3/7] PDF to get a general idea of what was covered in this issue, and the opening vignette sucked me in until I'd read most of the article before I came up for air. Articles of this high quality are one of the reasons I've subscribed to all three incarnations of Pyramid.

– Cap'n Q, on the Steve Jackson Games forums

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THE JUSTICIAR

BY SEAN PUNCH

GURPS Dungeon Fantasy is all about killing and taking. Civilization exists mainly to give the heroes somewhere to sell loot and buy gear. The Law – such as it is – consists of the Town Watch (who descend upon unlucky black-marketeers) and the King's men (who collect taxes, seize stolen goods, and punish debasers of coin).

As explained on p. 30 of **Dungeon Fantasy 2: Dungeons**, the Town Watch and the King's men are abstract, impersonal forces. Nevertheless, they somehow manage to keep well-armed, spell-slinging dungeon-crawlers in line, and even discipline them. This suggests that The Law has its own champions, the equal of any delver.

Enter the justiciar. These men of justice are tough enough to challenge even hardened adventurers. More interestingly, they could *be* adventurers!

JUSTICIAR

250 points

You're a champion of The Law. Whomever you serve – Lord Mayor, the King, or the Faerie Court – you're on "detached duty." You venture into dungeons alongside delvers, retrieve property stolen by monsters, and discourage your allies from committing crimes against civilized folk. You're as high-minded as the holy warrior, but you enforce mortal law, not divine commandments. Since you judge motives, not methods, and aren't above "sneaky" tactics, you're a natural foil for the thief but not *automatically* his foe.

Attributes: ST 12 [20]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 14 [80]; HT 12 [20].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 15 [5]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [-5]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Higher Purpose (Justice Will Be Served)[†] [5] and Intuition [15]. • A further 35 points chosen from among ST +1 to +3 [10/level], DX +1 [20], IQ +1 [20], HT +1 to +3 [10/level], Will +1 to +6 [5/level], Per +1 to +5 [5/level], Basic Move +1 to +3 [5/level], Acute Senses (any) [2/level], Danger Sense [15], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Fearlessness [2/level] or Unfazeable [15], Honest Face [1], Luck [15] or Extraordinary Luck [30], Magic Resistance [2/level], Mind Shield [4/level], Night Vision 1-9 [1/level], Penetrating Voice [1], Peripheral Vision [15], Resistant to Poison (+3) [5], Signature Gear [Varies], Smooth Operator 1 or 2 [15 or 30], or Weapon Bond [1].

Disadvantages: Honesty (12) [-10] and Intolerance (Scum who aren't as law-abiding as me in civilized regions)

[-5]. • Another -10 points chosen from among Code of Honor (Gentleman's or Soldier's) [-10], Curious [-5*], Obsession (Tracking down *specific* criminal or stolen goods) [-5*], Sense of Duty (Adventuring companions) [-5] or (Nation) [-10], Truthfulness [-5*], or worsen Honesty from (12) [-10] to (9) [-15] for -5 points or to (6) [-20] for -10 points. • A further -20 points chosen from the previous list or Bad Temper [-10*], Bully [-10*], Callous [-5] or Selfless [-5*], Loner [-5*], No Sense of Humor [-10], Odious Personal Habits (Arrogant, judgmental, etc.) [-5], Overconfidence [-5*], Overweight [-1] or Fat [-3], or Stubbornness [-5].

Primary Skills: Interrogation, Shadowing, and Traps, all (A) IQ [2]-14. • Observation, Search, and Tracking, all (A) Per [2]-15. • One of Bolas, Lasso, or Whip, all (A) DX+1 [4]-14; or Net (H) DX [4]-13. • One of Crossbow (E) DX+2 [4]-15; Bow or Throwing, both (A) DX+1 [4]-14; or Sling (H) DX [4]-13. • One of these three packages of melee skills:

1. One of Axe/Mace, Broadsword, or Shortsword, all (A) DX+3 [12]-16, and Shield (E) DX+3 [8]-16.
2. One of Rapier, Saber, or Smallsword, all (A) DX+3 [12]-16; one of Shield (Buckler) (E) DX+3 [8]-16, or Cloak or Main-Gauche, both (A) DX+2 [8]-15.
3. One of Polearm, Spear, or Staff, all (A) DX+5 [20]-18.

Secondary Skills: Brawling and Forced Entry, both (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Stealth (A) DX [2]-13; and Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-14. • Three of Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ [1]-14; Heraldry, Public Speaking, or Streetwise, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Diplomacy (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1]-13; or Detect Lies (H) Per-2 [1]-13.

Background Skills: Seven of Fast-Draw (any), Knife, or Knot-Tying, all (E) DX [1]-13; Climbing or Riding (Horse), both (A) DX-1 [1]-12; First Aid or Gesture, both (E) IQ [1]-14; Acting, Connoisseur (any), Disguise, Holdout, Lockpicking, or Occultism, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Diagnosis, Poisons, or Tactics, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Thaumatology (VH) IQ-3 [1]-11; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-15; Body Language, Lip Reading, or Urban Survival, all (A) Per-1 [1]-14; 1 point to raise a 1-point secondary or background skill by a level; or 1 point to buy an extra secondary skill.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

[†] Gives +1 to any roll made to find bandits, thieving monsters, etc.; subdue, capture, or punish them; and recover stolen goods. Applies only when pursuing *proven* criminals (e.g., there's a warrant or a bounty) – "All kobolds are thieves!" isn't good enough.

Learn about politics and justice in Western 17th-century cities in GURPS Swashbucklers.

Legal WHAT?

Despite being a law-enforcer – often in the service of a city or even the King – the justiciar lacks Legal Enforcement Powers. That's because this advantage doesn't suit the simplistic view of society prevalent in the fantasy games of which *Dungeon Fantasy* is a pastiche. Of course, the same thinking excludes the Duty disadvantage, so it's a wash. If the GM would prefer greater social complexity in his campaign, then he should assume that PCs built with the justiciar template possess *both* traits . . . which conveniently cancel out as a zero-cost feature.

Customization Notes

The justiciar must first decide whether he operates primarily in the dungeon or around town. The former means being a better delver, but a party that seeks urban adventures – or the patronage of powerful townsfolk – may recruit someone with the latter inclination. Next, the justiciar should choose a particular quarry: enemies of the state, rogue wizards, thieving orcs, urban scum, etc. These decisions lead to a few common archetypes:

King's Man: You're an agent of the King's court, delivering high justice at sword's point. Allot some advantage points to Eidetic Memory (for royal decrees and, oh, laws), Signature Gear (for *nice* weapons), Smooth Operator, and/or high IQ. Fitting disadvantages are one or more of Code of Honor (Gentleman's), Sense of Duty (Nation), relentless Honesty, and an arrogant Odious Personal Habit. Most courtiers select Rapier, Saber, or Smallsword as their primary melee skill, and Diplomacy, Heraldry, and Savoir-Faire as their social skills. Background skills inevitably include Riding, but rarely much knowledge of how to operate in the wilds (Climbing, Hiking, etc.) or slums (Scrounging or Urban Survival).

Mage-Hunter: You bring magic-wielding criminals to justice: high priests of sinister cults, liches, necromancers, wizardly thieves, etc. You'll *need* – not merely want – some of Fearlessness, Magic Resistance, Mind Shield, and improved Will . . . maybe all four. The motivation to pursue this risky calling might come from Obsession, Overconfidence, and/or Stubbornness. Since your quarry's spells aren't quite as potent from afar, choose the longest-ranged weapon skills: Bolas and Crossbow from a distance, Polearm, Spear, or Staff for melee. As for your other training, Occultism and Thaumatology are essential in order to know your (very dangerous) enemy.

Retriever: You go into dungeons to reclaim stolen goods, kidnapped princesses, and so on – and occasionally to deliver death sentences to the criminal monsters and bandits who dwell there. Useful advantages are Danger Sense, Fearlessness, Luck, Night Vision, and extra ST and HT. Disadvantages tend to be things like Curious, Obsession, and Overconfidence. A Sense of Duty to adventuring companions is also likely for one who travels with other dungeon-crawlers. Invest in a hard-hit-

ting melee skill like Axe/Mace, Broadsword, or Polearm. Whatever social skills you take, make sure that Intimidation is among them. Retrievers also need key delving skills like Climbing, Gesture, Hiking, and Lockpicking.

Watchman: You're a special agent of the Town Watch. Classic detective advantages include Acute Senses, Danger Sense, Night Vision, Peripheral Vision, and more Per – and for a point, Penetrating Voice is great for those “Hands up!” moments. Code of Honor (Soldier's) is suitable for Watchmen; sleuths are famously Curious; and Bully and No Sense of Humor fit authoritarians. Fantasy gumshoes get as much use out of Detect Lies, Public Speaking, and Streetwise as do high-tech cops, while weapons run toward Polearm, Shortsword, or Spear. Assassins are common in the city, making Diagnosis and Poisons valuable investigative skills. “Undercover” men might want Acting, Disguise, Fast-Draw, Holdout, and Knife.

Justiciar Power-Ups

In the spirit of *Dungeon Fantasy 3*, justiciars can spend earned points on any ability from their template plus some extras. They may exceed normal Perception limits, buying up to Per 25 (*before* racial modifiers). They may improve Higher Purpose as if it came in levels; Higher Purpose 3 [15], the maximum, gives a +3 bonus. And they may purchase Weapon Master (Entangling Weapons) [30]; when entangling, read the +1 or +2 per die damage bonus as +1 or +2 to the justiciar's ST and -1 or -2 to the victim's escape rolls. Additional options: Combat Reflexes [15], Ridiculous Luck [60], and Silence 1 or 2 [5 or 10].

*I have always believed
that to have true justice
we must have equal
harassment under the law.*

– Peter Krassner

Making the Justiciar Useful

Above-average Per, Per-based skills, and combat abilities ensure that the justiciar will rarely be left twiddling his thumbs. He'll shine whenever reconnaissance, searching, and tracking matter. He might even outshine scouts and thieves, so the GM should be careful to present some challenges that require those other adventurers' unique abilities (archery and dungeon Parkour, respectively). To test the *justiciar's* special gifts, include monsters that must be followed to some lair, secret door, trap, or treasure – or captured alive and made to talk about such a thing – rather than simply killed.

In some societies, a prisoner might have to rely on friends and family for food and water.

New Wildcard Skill: Justiciar!

In a campaign that uses wildcard skills, the justiciar may learn the following:

Justiciar! (IQ). Replaces Interrogation, Shadowing, Streetwise, and Traps. Make a DX-based roll for Stealth – or for Bolas, Knot-Tying, Lasso, Net, Whip, or Wrestling to capture someone *by surprise* (never in a melee). Make a Per-based roll for Body Language, Detect Lies, Observation, Search, or Tracking.

The best material rewards for the justiciar are fine or magical versions of live-capture weapons: bolas, lariats, nets, whips, and even such exotica as *crossbow-launched* bolas and nets. Enchanted or upgraded non-weapon items in this vein

also work: miraculous binding rope or shackles, giant-strength leg-hold traps, improved sleeping-gas potions, etc. Finally, the superiors of a justiciar who brings a criminal to justice *and* forgoes his share of the loot might issue him expensive special-order gear (see *Dungeon Fantasy 1*, pp. 25-26 and *Dungeon Fantasy 4*, p. 12) equivalent in value to what his pals ended up taking home.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean “Dr. Kromm” Punch set out to become a particle physicist in 1985, ended up the **GURPS** Line Editor in 1995, and has engineered rules for almost every **GURPS** product since. He developed, edited, or wrote dozens of **GURPS** *Third Edition* projects between 1995 and 2002. In 2004, he produced the **GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition** with David Pulver. Since then, he has created **GURPS Powers** (with Phil Masters), **GURPS Martial Arts** (with Peter Dell’Orto), and the **GURPS Action**, **GURPS Dungeon Fantasy**, and **GURPS Power-Ups** series . . . and the list keeps growing.

For we both alike know that into the discussion of human affairs the question of justice enters only where the pressure of necessity is equal, and that the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they must.

– *Thucydides*

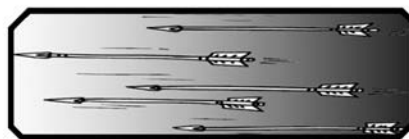
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ON DE MEDICI'S SECRET SERVICE

BY MATT RIGGSBY

Firenze (the native name for Florence, Italy) has no formal espionage network and no formal intelligence agency during the Renaissance. The city does have a great many men of skill and discretion, who travel frequently, are interested in affairs of the world, and love their country. They are the FBI, the CIA, and a political dirty tricks squad rolled into one – and in secret affairs, they are a force to be reckoned with.

THE ORGANIZATION (OR LACK THEREOF)

As with many other aspects of Medician Firenze, serious covert activity is handled not by a formal government council, whose membership and records might be compromised, but rather by skilled and trusted individuals, coordinated by the reigning Medici and his closest advisors. When agents refer to themselves and their “organization” at all, which is rarely, it is as *amici degli amici*, or friends of friends.

Typically, agents are approached by a handler, who is likely be an acquaintance or distant relative. The prospective agent will have been thoroughly vetted to determine his abilities and trustworthiness long before he has even the slightest idea he’s being considered. Despite existing in a class-conscious era, the amici are an egalitarian organization, recruiting members from all classes and as many women as men.

When approaching the new agent, the handler appeals in equal parts to the recruit’s patriotism (“You’re helping your country!”) and greed (“Your country will help you . . .”). If the recruit seems amenable, the handler starts showing him the ropes. He takes the recruit around on routine tasks: delivering messages, engaging in cursory surveillance, and picking up unusual supplies. The recruit soon finds himself doing such little jobs on his own, graduating to larger tasks as necessary.

The contact also introduces the new agent to a small group of fellow agents and associates; cells of as many players as a

GM has convenient are typical. The recruit may get to know one or two alternate handlers, who manage other cells of their own but stand by to take over should something untoward happen.

Just as there are no formal ranks or members, there’s no official pay. However, friends take care of their friends. Assistance can be slow in coming and follow a roundabout route in order to maintain secrecy. For example, instead of finding a sack of coins under his pillow, an agent may unexpectedly find his debts reduced or acquire a lucrative new customer for his family business. Nonetheless, an active member of the amici can count on at least \$1,000 a month, which is not bad for part-time work.

What You Need to Know

This article describes a made-up intelligence network used by the city of Firenze (Florence) during the Renaissance. **GURPS Hot Spots: Renaissance Florence** presents social and political background for the city in detail, but if you don’t own it, here’s a sketch: The Italian peninsula is divided among competing city-states (leading cities include Genoa, Venezia, Firenze, Roma and the Papal States, and Napoli), with the growing powers of western Europe (Spain, France, and the Holy Roman Empire) hovering around the edges. This competition is expressed through small wars and complex diplomacy, creating rapidly shifting alliances to maintain a balance of power. Firenze is ruled unofficially by the Medici, a dynasty of wealthy bankers who coordinate alliances and trade favors instead of taking formal office. They exercise immense power over the city, but they have to maintain their popularity at home and diplomatic stability abroad.

RESOURCES

Although the basis of the amici is its agents, they’re backed up by some of the finest equipment and support personnel money can buy.

GURPS Banestorm: Abydos describes a necropolis with some unusual punishments, including being turned into a zombie.

Training

The Medici use men who are already capable, though additional training is not out of the question. If, for example, an agent otherwise perfectly suited to a mission keeping an eye on a Turkish emissary doesn't speak Turkish, he may find a Turkish servant recommended to him by an acquaintance.

Most agents are already competent swordsmen. If they aren't, they'll soon be taught to be by one of the many fencing masters resident in the city. Most agents are at some point introduced to Maestro Giuliano Belragazzo, one of many useful men excluded from the history books, to learn the amici's special fighting style, *il lavoro veloce* (see p. 9).

For increased security, codes are often employed. Each handler has his own of greater or lesser complexity, which his agents are taught. Though they tend to be fanciful rather than objectively difficult to crack, they are sufficiently diverse that anyone intercepting communications between agents is going to have his hands full figuring them out. Passages from Classical literature and Biblical allusions are often used for passwords and indicators of preset messages. Likewise, the amici are endlessly fond of obscure symbols.

Example: An upper-class agent learns that he may soon need to steal the correspondence of a particular troubling figure in town, assassinate him, or take no action; he is told that red indicates death, yellow is theft, and white is inactivity. Eventually, a painting that he doesn't remember commissioning is delivered to his house, and the painter delivering it draws his attention to a particularly well-rendered figure in the background. The figure is holding flowers which are, as necessary, red, yellow, or white.

Technical Assistance

Just as the finest architects of the age worked on fortifications as much as they did on cathedrals and villas, some

Il Ramo de Q

The workshops of the amici's technical section may be the source of all kinds of clockpunk and alchemical wonders, or even cutting-edge TL5 equipment appearing in experimental form far in advance of its actual date of introduction. Possible gadgets might include:

Clockwork automata (for example, wind-up "robots" capable of carrying a small payload up a wall and into a window, or simply timed fuses for bombs or flares).

Improved optics (for example, binoculars).

Improved poisons and drugs (for example, fast-acting knockout drops or gases).

Pneumatic weapons.

Rocket weapons (for example, a TL(4+1) gyrojet).

Signal flares.

Stun grenades.

of the city's finest craftsmen may produce clever contraptions to aid the amici. Agents needing material assistance rather than training are introduced to Maestro Pietro Casalegno. Casalegno is connected to a number of alchemists, engineers, clockmakers, and goldsmiths, who produce remarkable items to assist agents in their missions.

Concealed weapons are something close to standard issue. Sword-canes are common, as are knives hidden in a disturbing array of forms: boot heels, belt buckles, boat oars, corset stays, ornaments on furniture and picture frames, detachable bits of sculpture, musical instruments, astronomical instruments, the spines of books, and the handles of any item from mirrors to paint brushes. Amici-supplied knives, all expertly made, may be treated as daggers with a Holdout bonus of at least +2 and easily up to +5. Since they aren't terribly dangerous themselves, they are often envenomed.

Though crossbows are on their way out as battlefield weapons, they're still used for covert operations. A typical version is a pistol crossbow kit. The bow, string, and a multi-piece stock are made to be broken down into innocuous and easily concealed parts. The parts can be incorporated into luggage, toolboxes, portable furniture, or even clothing, providing a Holdout modifier of +0 (instead of the pistol crossbow's usual -4), and they can be assembled in five minutes.

Not all technological developments are related to weapons and armor. Hidden equipment of all kinds is available, such as lockpicks, fire-starters, and climbing equipment (for example, extremely strong cords made from exotic silk sewn into a sash or the lining of a doublet).

The alchemists are masters of invisible writing. They have formulated a number of disappearing inks and developers. They've also been trying out new means of detecting invisible writing by opponents, the better to find hidden messages.

The Medici alchemists have been experimenting with methods of rapidly copying documents. Agents can take a prepared sheet of paper from a sealed tube, press it against a written page where it picks up faint chemical traces of the ink, and return it to the alchemist for further treatment to bring out an impression of the writing. It works fairly well, but the preparations are expensive (\$400 per page, if one were to have to pay for it) and must be kept in well-sealed tubes (a quarter pound each) until use.

MISSIONS

The purpose of the amici is to investigate and, if necessary, eliminate threats against the peace and stability of Medici-ruled Firenze. This often involves actions against major criminals (street crime is beneath their notice, but they might handle burglars who are unusually successful, serial killers, large-scale smugglers, and notable con men), foreign enemies, and native rebels. Tasks frequently shade into purely partisan political espionage and operations against families and alliances that might challenge the current regime.

Modern distinctions between foreign and domestic operations are of no concern. The amici are used internally as secret police and externally as spies. Some may find themselves involved in one kind of work more than another, but

GURPS Alphabet Arcane offers some exotic items that might be found in cities, particularly ones on trade routes.

only because of their particular abilities and association. For example, a member of a politically troublesome family in Firenze would most likely provide intelligence on his local relatives, while someone with a villa and business interests in Rome would spend a lot of time snooping around the Papal Curia.

The amici do a great deal of information-gathering, usually directed against enemies, but also against apparent neutrals and even allies to keep tabs on which way they might be leaning and to head off potential betrayals. There are enough garden-variety informers around to pick up everyday information about regular comings and goings that agents can focus on riskier information-gathering. Notably, they may be used to tail subjects of investigation if they attend late-night meetings (following someone through empty streets at night unnoticed is much harder than through crowded streets during the day) and getting their hands on private papers. This may involve daring breaking-and-entering raids, but the amici generally prefer to insert agents into a subject's home or office under a legitimate cover (for example, as a party guest, servant, or business client) and using stealth and cunning to get the desired information.

The more subtle operations of the amici might be called social sabotage. They work to break up potential conspiracies and turn criminal allies against one another. If they find evidence of a conspiracy, they have many means to create tensions between the members. For example, they may forge and quietly reveal correspondence between one conspirator and an enemy of his fellows, or arrange for the conspiracy's enemy to suddenly (and suspiciously) start granting favors to one of the conspirators. Even more subtly, they may target the conspirators' subordinates, who do most of the legwork in any criminal activity, in their own arguments (for example, putting a pretty girl between two ambitious young blades and having her provoke them into a duel). As tensions rise, it becomes much easier to peel off disgruntled enemies and collect evidence against the most dangerous members for trial.

Finally, the amici are used to take action against criminals and political opponents who are essentially untouchable. Foreign diplomats typically have legal immunity but can be dangerous spymasters, while clergy and favored lay clients of powerful men of the Church are subject to canon rather than civil law, putting them beyond the reach of Florentine civil justice. It falls to the amici to see to it that they are punished, or at least stopped, without making it appear any official action has been taken. Diplomats may be goaded into duels (with the unexpectedly expert opponent vanishing in the duel's aftermath) or die quietly of what seems to be natural causes, and priests may be revealed to be in league with Saracens, devil-worshippers, or Protestants.

To preserve secrecy, agents are generally discouraged from interacting outside of missions. The fewer chances outsiders have to connect members of a cell, the better. They are likewise instructed not to try to *avoid* other agents if they happen to be thrown together through normal business or social activity. Fortunately, it's seasonally acceptable to wear masks, so agents can sometimes work semi-openly without revealing their identities.

Of course, the work is not without risk. Theft and assassination are always dangerous. Likewise, since visible members

New Martial-Arts Style

Amici who need better fighting skills typically learn *il lavoro veloce* from Firenze's master of the style.

Il Lavoro Veloce

5 points

Il lavoro veloce ("quick work"), arguably a style for assassination rather than fighting, takes Italian School fencing to its brutally logical conclusion. It emphasizes speed to operate in a crowded environment. The fighter is trained to closely approach unsuspecting targets, produce his weapon before the target can react, strike with lethal effect, and be on his way quickly. The final test in Belragazzo's studio, it is said, is Belragazzo dropping a florin to the floor. The student must draw, strike a dummy in the neck or heart, and sheathe before the coin hits the ground. Though knives are featured, ubiquitous fencing weapons are necessarily part of the training.

Skills: Fast-Draw (Knife); Knife; Rapier; Wrestling.

Techniques: Choke Hold; any Targeted Attack to the neck or vitals with a knife or rapier.

Perks: Grip Mastery (Knife or Rapier); Quick-Sheathe (Knife).

Optional Traits

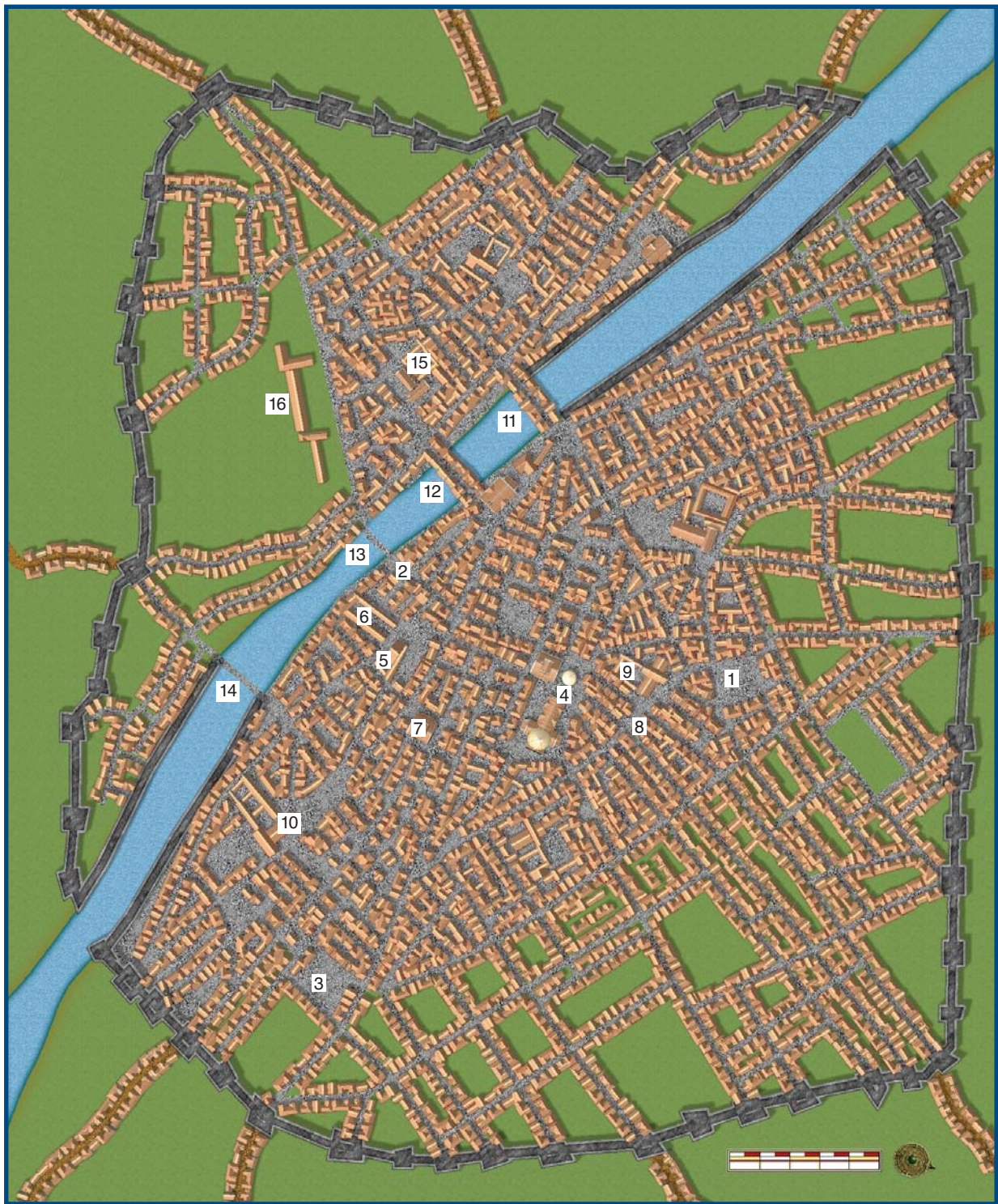
Skills: Holdout; Shadowing; Stealth.

and hangers-on of the Medici's circle make *terrible* covert agents, deniability must be maintained at all costs. It is also generally understood that secrecy is paramount and that agents, if they are exposed, are on their own. Agents who appear inclined to discuss their activities become high-priority targets themselves.

There is also a certain moral risk in being a member of the amici. Subjects of the network's operation are frequently chosen for political reasons, which means that enemies, even the worst wrongdoers, can be officially converted to friends for political reasons. For example, agents who have been setting up the fall of a bishop responsible for selling young virgins into the slave trade for months may be called off at the last minute if the bishop changes his political affiliations and becomes useful to the current regime rather than a rival. They may even be required to fend off the rivals of some very bad people, such as professional assassins, ruthless mercenaries, and brutal noblemen with barbaric but effective armies, because they're useful to the current regime. While corruption among agents is not tolerated, their own leadership could safely be regarded as inherently corrupt.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby is trained in anthropology and archaeology and, like the rest of his generation, has a job in computers. He works for an international medical technology company and lives with his lovely and talented wife, above-average child, and a pack of dogs. He is unique among game writers in that he owns no cats.



Map of Renaissance Firenze

Scale: 1" = 400 yards

- 1. Mercato Centrale
- 2. Mercato Nuovo
- 3. Mercato San Ambrogio
- 4. Il Duomo
- 5. Palazzo della Signoria

- 6. Palazzo Uffizi
- 7. Bargello
- 8. Palazzo Medici
- 9. San Lorenzo
- 10. Santa Croce
- 11. Ponte alla Carrara

- 12. Ponte Santa Trinita
- 13. Ponte Vecchio
- 14. Ponte alle Grazie
- 15. San Spirito
- 16. Palazzo Pitti

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HOLY DIRTY MONEY

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

In a time when the Canon Law of the Church ultimately trumped all forms of secular jurisprudence, there was one holy crime that proved difficult to stamp out. Named after Simon Magus – a magician who reputedly offered the Apostles money for their “gift” – simony was the performance of official spiritual duties for a direct fee. It covered the taking of money for sanctifying grace, but also applied to selling holy goods and offices and any other service the Church could provide.

Given the nature of the Church at that time and the general ignorance of the population, simony – like other forms of low-level corruption – was widespread and almost untraceable, making it a difficult practice to curtail. Medieval charlatans in need of a good racket should take note of this most abominable crime, as should GMs in search of criminals, local color, and possible plots. To that end, this article presents a brief overview of the practice, what one could do with it, and how it might be dealt with under Canon law. There is also a discussion concerning how supernatural powers might fit with the crime, as well as campaign ideas based around simony.

THE NATURE OF THE CRIME

It is difficult to overexaggerate the power of the medieval Church. The average medieval Christian – both pious and superstitious – may have relied on the authorities to protect his life, but he was far more concerned about his spiritual welfare. The Church provided grace throughout life, and the disposition of the soul after death. While the worst the state could do was get you killed, the Church could excommunicate you, guaranteeing an eternity of suffering. People lived and died by the word of the Church. They would gladly give what they had to secure its good graces and, through those graces, salvation.

However, while the Church was powerful, it was also rife with corruption and corrupt people. All tithes led to Rome, and it was not at all difficult to siphon off monies into one’s pockets and not record their having been received; it was as easy as taking “alms” and pocketing the proceeds. It was also not difficult for a charlatan to join minor orders, so that he might receive the protection of Canon law, which was separate from and superior to secular authority – and far more lenient. Furthermore, while there is some controversy as to how rotten

the culture was as a whole, there is no denying that there were some rather venal goings-on behind the scenes.

There was also the ignorance of the church-going population to consider. Largely illiterate, woefully uninformed, and deathly worried about their souls, the common people were easily fooled by seemingly pious scam artists. They would gladly seek out someone claiming to be a pardoner to buy an “official” indulgence, even if they didn’t know what an official indulgence might look like. If they wanted to avoid heavy penances for their sins, they would gladly pay a fee to have them lightened. If the plague was at their door, they would gladly buy “holy” items to keep it at bay. If on pilgrimage, they’d listen to just about anyone who could quote Latin and claim to be able to show the way – for a little monetary aid, supposedly for the nearest abbey.

In short, simony was a perfect crime, aimed at a perfect audience in a perfect time. Given human nature it is little wonder that it was so widespread. The real wonder is how the Church managed to finally stamp it out.

FORMS OF FALSE GRACE

The ways to employ simony to enrich oneself are as limitless as the imagination, but it pays to start out on the right foot.

First, one must either be in the service of the Church, or appear to be. Being a full member of the priesthood required a life-long commitment to a busy schedule and a restrictive code of behavior, which might cramp the style of some. A person could instead easily secure minor orders, provided he had the time to make the minor commitment – and indeed many con men did, if only to be a part of the Church and therefore held to Canon law. Given the ignorance of the population it wasn’t hard to merely disguise oneself as a traveling monk or pardoner: proper attire, a tonsured head, and the ability to quote Latin was all the convincing that some marks needed.

Once one fits – or looks – the part, it’s simply a question of asking the right people for favors in exchange for performing your duties in an official but inappropriate manner. Prescribing light penance for heavy sins in exchange for some consideration is the most common form of simony.

In some societies, an accuser who cannot prove his case winds up being the one punished, because he wasted the court’s time.

There are countless others, limited only by what the penitent might ask for, and what the provider may require.

Those favors could be monetary, but not always: physical property, land, or rights to sources of money (such as household purses or inheritances) also qualified. The penitent could praise the pardoner in high or low places, and speak favorably on his behalf in order to secure him some favor. There could be other, less savory services or “gifts” offered by penitent.

Two other notable cons, and their drawbacks, are as follows.

Relics-R-Us: The trade in supposedly holy relics was one of the great start-up scams of medieval times. Anyone could claim that any item was actually holy, and sell them to travelers, penitents, churches, or other holy institutions. A finger bone could have come from a saint, a splinter could have come from the True Cross, dirt could be from the holy city of Jerusalem, and a mere mustard seed could have been the mustard seed Jesus spoke of. The superstitious and naïve would willingly buy such items, and even those who should have known better would sometimes fork over good money for bad garbage. But woe unto the seller of such things who forgets to whom he sold the one-and-only shinbone of St. Stephen last year, and comes back with yet another.

Pardons for Pay: Pardoners were the pope’s hand in action; assigned to certain areas, they were tasked with dispensing indulgences and collecting money for charity. They could take a certain percentage in order to support themselves, but all too often they pocketed most or all of the money. There were any number of traveling “pardoners” who impersonated the office and sold fraudulent indulgences to the unwary. Of course, they had to be careful not to run into the official pardoner of the area, lest they be denounced as a fraud. Even then, they might be able to cut a deal.

TO ROOT OUT EVIL

Simony became a major problem for the Church between the ninth and 10th centuries, prompting reformist Pope Gregory VII to deal with it harshly. He declared it an excommunication-worthy offense in 1075, and sent legates from the Cluniac Order to enforce it. They met with much resistance, as Gregory’s proclamation – coupled with his calls for compulsory celibacy among the clergy – was almost universally unpopular. However, in spite of his later tragedies, and his death in exile, Gregory’s cause was eventually borne out, and instances of simony were greatly decreased.

The chief problem with detecting the crime, as previously mentioned, was that it was hard to determine what was given freely as alms, and what was actually *paid* for. Those trying to root out internal corruption often encountered a wall of silence; those who were also on the take would go to great lengths to protect others, knowing that if one of them talked, they might all be caught. So the only sure ways to catch those practicing simony in the act was to either set up a sting opera-

*But, sirs, one word forgot I in my
tale
I’ve relics in my pouch that cannot
fail
As good as England ever saw, I
hope,
Which I got by the kindness of the
Pope.
If gifts your change of heart and
mind reveal,
You’ll get my absolution while you
kneel.
Come forth, and kneel down here
before, anon,
And humbly you’ll receive my full
pardon*

– Geoffrey Chaucer,
“The Pardoner’s Tale”

tion, or find the rare citizen willing to go against the priest and confess that they’d aided and abetted.

Fortunately for those who were caught, Canon law tended to be a little more lenient than the secular law at the time, and torture was not considered a valuable means of extracting information (unless they thought you were a witch, too). Indeed, when faced with a Church trial, the burden of proof was on the accuser, and cross-examination might rattle what seemed an otherwise-airtight conviction for the crime.

Those found guilty of simony prior to Gregory VII’s edict of excommunication would be tasked with penance, the harshness of which should have mirrored the severity of their deeds. Fasting, prayer, and – ironically – the giving of alms were the most likely solutions for first-time offenders or those who were only mildly in error. Pilgrimages or other major signs of repentance would be given to those who had truly been up to no good, along with flogging and other mortifications of the flesh.

If all else failed, the guilty might be “abandoned,” which meant they were stripped of Church protection and handed over to secular authorities to torture, try, and punish. Worse punishments were to be locked in a cell on Church grounds for the rest of one’s life, or to be excommunicated, which – prior to Gregory VII’s edict – was the absolute last step in a (hopefully) long chain of repentance and relapse.

Some public places in cities to go for information: a tavern, a fortune-teller, a guildhall, a school, or the marketplace (where announcements might be posted or made at certain times). And there’s always the possibility of a chance encounter on the street!

The Power of Faith and Evil

Whether legitimate and proper absolution actually does one's soul any good is up to the GM to decide for their particular game world and its metaphysical constraints. However, the notion of selling holy items that may not be holy at all, and possibly even evil, opens up an interesting box in a campaign where such items may have a practical use. If holy items are to be used in the dangerous work of dispelling creatures of evil or keeping them away from certain areas, then simony isn't just an amusing-yet-illegal profession, but a legitimate danger.

The obvious set-up would have some avaricious Church member – real or fake – peddling fraudulent “relics”; “holy” oil, water, and rosaries; crucifixes “blessed” by the pope; and the like. Hopefully, the characters have some way of detecting that the fellow's wares have no

power before they buy them, or they may find themselves in a bad spot when they try to use the items.

The possibility also exists of the “other side” engaging in simony for reasons other than mere monetary gain. If a demon in the form of a venal priest takes a confession whose penance is tainted by money, would it not stand to reason that the confessor's soul is now doubly damned? If that demon sold “holy” relics to penitents and those in need of God's protection, wouldn't it be terrible if the items were cursed, or did the opposite of what they promised?

Such demons could be unmasked by their inability to attend services – unless they've also compromised the sanctity of the Church! – but the damage they could do before being caught is truly hideous.

CAREERS IN SIMONY

The following are some ideas on how to create a campaign around this widespread scam. A character could embrace or oppose simony, either as a part-time quest or a full-time crusade. Here are some other, more nuanced options.

The Long Game: Why not buy your own church? A number of small-time crooks – that would be the PCs – take lesser orders in a crooked parish to be shielded by Canon law. They then decide to get themselves a piece of the action inside the sanctuary, too. Before long, they're battling priests and others to get their hands on alms and tithes, as well as other forms of repayment. They're creating competition the more established fellows do not want, and making enemies with powerful patrons. Can they find a balance between what they want and what they can have, or will they find out how nasty some crooked priests can get when there's money involved?

The Righteous Sting: The heroes are Papal legates from a lesser-known order, sent to uncover simony on behalf of the Vatican. Their job is to infiltrate an order suspected of practicing it quite heavily and so carefully that their superiors are unable to catch them. The investigators are to pose as naïve, young things, uncertain of themselves and open to certain suggestions. They have one year to ingratiate themselves into the renegade order and come away with proof of innocence or guilt. They have been counseled not to lie any more than needed, and to keep track of all monies they “earn” through the sin, so that a reckoning might be done and due penance taken for this most important task. Will they succeed in uncovering the darkness inside the order? Will they fall victim to its lures?

The Wandering Beast: Enterprising con men set up a situation where a “monster” crashes into a small and remote village, kills a few animals, and scares the shepherds. A “holy man” then wanders into the town and – hearing their tales of woe – offers the villagers wards and relics for sale, all guaranteed to make the creature flee their town. A midnight showdown with the monster ends in apparent victory, the holy man takes his pick of whatever's offered, and then the act travels to the next small town. It's usually a great scheme, but what if they

encounter a genuine holy man or monster hunter? What if there's already a *real* monster in the area?

*Failure seems to be regarded
as the one unpardonable crime,
success as the all-redeeming
virtue, the acquisition of
wealth as the single worthy
aim of life. The hair-raising
revelations of skullduggery and
grand-scale thievery merely
incite others to surpass by yet
bolder outrages and more
corrupt combinations.*

– Charles Frances Adams

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

By day an unassuming bookstore clerk, J. Edward Tremlett takes his ancient keyboard from its hiding place and unfurls his words upon the world. His bizarre lifestyle has taken him to such exotic locales as South Korea and Dubai, UAE. He's been the editor of *The Wraith Project* and has seen print in *The End Is Nigh* and *Worlds of Cthulhu*. He's also part of the *Echoes of Terror* anthology. Currently, he writes for Op-Ed News, and lives in Lansing, Michigan, with his wife and three cats.

DEAL THE LOOT

When it comes to random loot – whether acquired by pickpocketing, robbing shops, or killing random monsters – many RPGs have a hard time finding a compromise between fast, flavorless “roll a few dice to see what they find” and “detailed roleplaying, one-player sessions.”

The Loot Cards are an attempt to provide a flavorful middle ground. They are extremely generic in nature, but can be used by the player(s) and GM to generate fast-paced, interesting looting scenarios quickly.

MAKING THE LOOT DECK

Print pp. 17-21 on cardstock, making sure that your machine is set to print in black and white (sometimes called “grayscale”). Cut out the cards. For durability, or if you can only print on paper, slip each card into a trading-card sleeve. The GM can print additional cards if need be, although that will affect the core mechanic. Semi-blank, picture-only cards are provided on p. 16 for GMs who want to customize their decks.

ANATOMY OF A CARD

There are three different aspects of the numbered “loot” cards.

Picture: Each card has a picture on it that lets you determine how good (or lousy) the loot is. More coins means it's worth more.

Plus Number: A number with a plus (+) sign below it.

Times Number: A number with a multiplication (×) sign below it.

In addition, some cards are marked “Complication.” These follow different rules.

Designer's Note

The numbers for each card were generated by adding or multiplying the results of 2d. For example, the 6(+)/8(×) card got those numbers by assuming the results of two dice were a 4 and 2; $4 + 2 = 6$, and $4 \times 2 = 8$. Likewise the 10(+)/24(×) card got its results from $6 + 4$ and 6×4 . This isn't important to know to use the cards, but it can be useful if trying to expand or modify the idea.

USING THE CARDS

At its most basic, using the Loot Deck simply relies on drawing a card from the deck and figuring out what it means. There are three ways to interpret a Loot card.

Pictures: The fastest way is to look at the picture and use it to decide how much the loot is worth. There are five “levels” of loot.

Plus: The potential range of these cards is 2-12, with an average of 7.

Times: The potential range of these cards is 1-36, with an average of 12.25. This method has a much greater variance than the plus method.

The GM determines ahead of time whether he's using the “plus” numbers on the cards or the “times” numbers. He also figures out what the “base” value of the potential loot the person can find (along with its unit of measure – copper, gold, dollars, etc.). Having decided these, he has a player draw a card and multiplies the base value he chose by the number of the card that matches the system he picked (+ or ×).

Example 1: The PC is pickpocketing. The GM thinks there isn't a lot of variance in the kind of loot that could be found, so he's going to use the “plus” numbers. He decides the base value is 2 copper. The player draws the 6(+)/8(×) card, so he finds 12 (6×2) copper; the 8(×) is ignored.

Example 2: The PC is robbing a merchant. The GM chooses to use the “times” numbers because a wide range exists in what the thief likely to find. The GM selects a base value of 20 gold. The player draws the 11(+)/30(×) card, so his character acquires loot worth 600 gold. The 11(+) is ignored.

BEYOND THE BASICS

If this is all there was to the Loot Cards, then they'd be no better than using dice. But there are two aspects that inject a lot of flavor into this system.

Complications

The various Complication cards interject some randomness into the process. By design, they are fairly “bland,” providing only the barest of inspiration for the GM for what might have gone wrong. If the GM can't think of a way to get a Complication to work, he should simply ignore it and have the player draw again.

Stacking the Deck – GM Style

The Loot Deck is designed to be small and fast-paced enough to allow the GM to add or subtract cards at a whim, depending on the situation. For example, the GM could decide that there is only “good” loot in the warehouse the heroes are robbing, thus he removes all the half- and one-coin cards from the deck; the worst card is now a 7(+)/10(×) – nice! Alternatively, the GM decides there is no “middle ground” in the city; they're either rich or poor. He filters out all the one-stack cards and has the player choose from the remaining.

Stacking the Deck – Player Style

For even more flavor – and where the Loot Deck shines – the players are encouraged to work with the GM to come up with systems that let them stack the deck in *their* favor. The GM and player should brainstorm together to determine a system that lets him add to or subtract from the deck.

Stacking Examples

By using different mechanics for different situations, you can get a lot of mileage out of one deck, and even the same event that can be encountered dozens of times – such as a thief’s pickpocket ability – can be made fresh time and again.

Example 1: The thief wants to use his pickpocketing skills, but he also wants to use his people-spotting skills to weed out the less-than-promising pidgeons. The GM lets him use an observational skill as a complementary one to his pickpocketing one. If he’s successful, the GM will cull out the half-coin cards.

Example 2: Later on, the thief wants to rob a warehouse, but he wants to improve his odds of getting good loot. The GM decides that each point by which the player beats the roll needed to rob the warehouse lets him draw a card from the deck (minimum one card); the player then gets to pick the card he wants from among those!

Example 3: The thief wants to swindle a wicked landlord out of some money. After a brief-but-interesting roleplaying encounter, the GM has the player roll against an observational skill. The player gets a critical success, so the GM hands over all the cards he culled when creating the deck for this scenario; the player now knows he *cannot* draw those cards. (On a less successful result, the player might have only gotten to see some of those cards.) When the time comes for him to actually steal the money, the GM has him make an appropriate skill roll. However, because of the entertaining roleplaying earlier, the GM decides that the player can have one free redraw; the player draws a Complication, so he eagerly uses his redraw in the hopes of getting something better.

Example 4: A group of **GURPS** characters are looting the den of a monster they dispatched. One of the players asks if his PC can use his Luck advantage to improve the loot they find. The GM agrees, and lets that player draw three cards and choose the *best* one.



COMPLICATION



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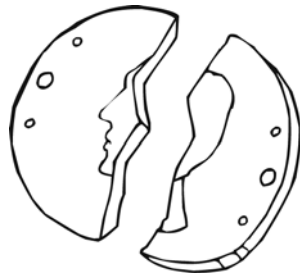
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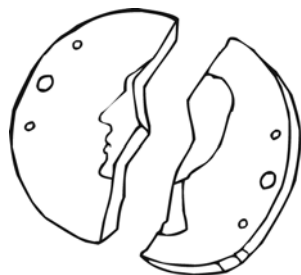
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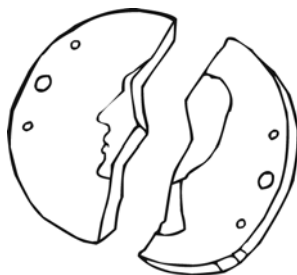
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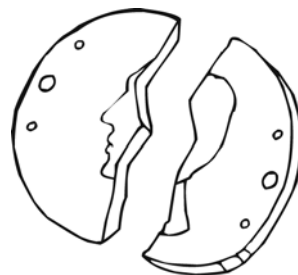
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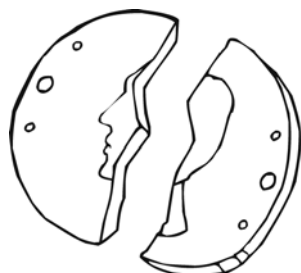
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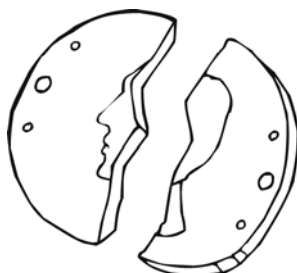
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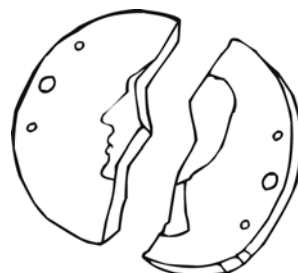
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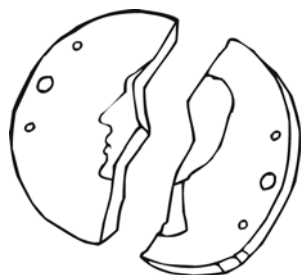
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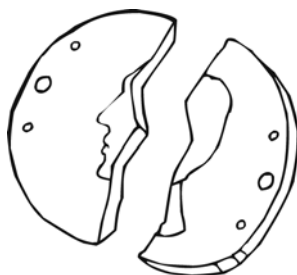
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12
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×
36

COMPLICATION

You find a trap.



COMPLICATION

Someone discovers your plan before you can move on it.



COMPLICATION

A person is guarding the loot.



COMPLICATION

A creature (animal, monster, etc.) is guarding the loot.



COMPLICATION

You're discovered as you're about to take the loot.



COMPLICATION

As you get near the loot, an alarm sounds.



COMPLICATION

There's an alarm on the loot.



COMPLICATION

There's nothing here, and it looks like there never was.



COMPLICATION

The loot has been moved to another location.



DOMINION

BY KYLA WARD

"You were chosen," the king's advisor began, "because of your knowledge and devotion to this kingdom. You have explored its reaches, killed its monsters, and won its treasures. Some call you heroes!" The advisor chuckled humorlessly, then his eyes darted around the empty antechamber, as if searching for spies in his inner sanctum.

His voice lowered as he spoke again. "Of course, the real power has always rested in the king, who shares it with his nobles in return for their loyalty. But the nobles cannot be given power unchecked, and some matters fall to the larger concern of the kingdom. In addition, the Free Cities and established religions complicate matters, and there are tracts of unsettled wilderness that create places where no one holds the king's authority." He handed us each an armband and gold disc – trivial tokens that bestowed so much more – before he continued. "Until now."

The day has come when the unthinkable happened: One unified law has been declared throughout the kingdom. With this radical change comes the need for investigators and enforcers – a new kind of hero in a newly changed realm.

BACKGROUND

"One land, one law!" was the catch-cry of the reformers, and what was once but a scholar's dream has come to pass. All the various obligations, expectations, and traditions that organize a society have been codified. This revised legal code – dubbed "the King's Law" – now extends from border to border, binding his subjects both great and small. In this new Dominion, the strongest tensions lie between the landed nobility and the developing professional elite, between the tenets of chivalry and the realities of daily life, and between the ever-changing will of the people and the king himself.

Negotiating these tensions are the royal magistrates and sheriffs. These intrepid souls, often appointed on the basis of martial or scholarly merit, are responsible for enforcing the King's Law wherever they may be. Some occupy permanent posts in the Free Cities. More travel the land, operating as a forum for the resolution of disputes and a visible reminder of royal authority, more pervasive than even the army. Consisting of a magistrate, a small fighting force, and their support staff, these traveling "Courts of Law" (as distinct from the Court of the King) conduct the tasks of investigation, trial, judgment, and sometimes execution.

This campaign is designed to fit within any existing game world that has a Middle Ages/Renaissance feel. Existing royalty, nobility, and cities can easily be assigned the powers and

positions herein. It can be appended to an existing campaign when the PCs' deeds are rewarded by appointment to the magistracy. (Of course, a kingdom-wide legal revolution might need to occur in-game first.) The heroes' duties can either be incorporated into their normal adventuring activity or taken up full time. Alternatively, the legal system and politics described herein can simply be used as background, providing adventurers with some unusual challenges.

Magistrates

A magistrate should have whatever skills and knowledge equate to education, literacy, and legal training, if such is available. If magic exists, then the ability to cast the basic divination spells is a prime necessity. Mages, priests, and bardic types are suitable, though appointing a "cleric" (in the original sense of the word) has implications that are discussed herein. A monk is an appropriate option for an Asian-themed realm. There can be multiple magistrates attached to the same traveling Court of Law (commonly known as a "Court").

Sheriffs

Sheriff duties are primarily physical, and all fighter, ranger, or other martial types are suitable.

Others

Other character options include specialist trackers/investigators, religious advisors or truthsayers, and scribes/translators. Those whose skills lie in less legal areas present some interesting opportunities. The character may have received the king's clemency, or he has a secret that will cause him and his friends no end of trouble.

FACTIONS

Only a strong king with considerable wealth and power could bring about so monumental a change in the face of the many obstacles to universal Law. Perhaps the current king or his father won a civil war or resisted an invasion, leaving him with the acclaim of the population and a standing army. Perhaps he is a consummate politician and weakened his opponents among the nobility through guile while taking advantage of the opportunities created by the Free Cities.

The imposition of the King's Law affects the different orders of society in different ways.

A very populous city can rarely, if ever, be well governed. – Aristotle

The Nobility

The King's Law reduces the power of any individual nobleman. Even in his own domain, he can no longer discipline the peasants or take measures to defend them without at least pretending to follow the official line. Many nobles object to the Law purely on this principle. In fact, the Law enshrines many of the traditional rights of the nobility and offers them some guarantees against the King's own exercise of power. For instance, it is still the case that only a noble may own land, and this land passes to his appointed heir. In addition, any charges of treason must now be made in a public hearing and evidence given to support it.

The greatest friction occurs when the Law impinges upon a noble's sense of honor. Brought up to adhere to a chivalric code, the idea that they should have to justify their actions in a Court of Law or that some low-born scholar should usurp their prerogative of dispensing justice can be well nigh unthinkable.

The Peasantry

Universal law would seem an obvious improvement of the peasant's lot. In the old days, many nobles considered the peasantry as part and parcel with the land they owned. When their liege had this attitude, the peasants who farmed his domain could not leave it, and he could take their entire harvest as "tax" if he wanted. The Law theoretically intervenes between noble and tenant, and royal tax collectors set a kind of limit.

However, the application of the Law depends upon a magistrate hearing about a situation. If the peasants cannot move freely, how is this to happen? Even should a Court happen by, what about when it departs? As well as such practicalities, a reverence for their liege ingrained over generations means many peasants would not even consider taking up their new rights. "Many," however, is not all, and with the example of the Free Cities, some village elders have already prevented summary executions and obtained rulings concerning the ownership of goods and chattels.

The Free Cities

As far as the Free Cities are concerned, the only problem is the Law doesn't go far enough. Although they own no land, the residents of cities accrue goods and chattels on a scale undreamed of by the peasantry (and many nobles). They seek education and self-determination, organizing themselves into associations and guilds for this purpose.

The land each Free City occupies belongs to the King, but each implicitly represents a loss to some noble's estate. Many cities were originally villages that won royal recognition for services during wartime or were taken away as punishment. Friction between cities and surrounding gentry is common and can get nasty. A noble can place tolls on the roadways and waterways. He can leach away food supplies as taxes. Landowners downstream can claim that the cities pollute the water, thus infringing their rights of vert and venison, and

Noblesse Oblige

Most chivalric codes include the following tenets. The potential clashes with the King's Law are many.

- Always be ready to defend your family and those that look to you for protection.
- Never attack an enemy unaware or by stealth. (Strictly speaking, this applies only to other nobles.)
- Never lie, and never break your pledged word.
- Never abandon a friend, an ally, or a noble cause.
- Be generous and grant largesse as you may.
- In all things, be polite and courteous.
- Never accept a slight or insult.
- At all times and places, be the champion of the right and good against injustice and evil.

demand compensation. In return, the city can play havoc with a noble's supply of manufactured goods and the sale of produce. The services of skilled tradespeople become mighty hard to obtain as guilds close ranks. A Free City can offer sanctuary to peasants wishing to change their lot; it might even send agitators out among the villages.

The Religious

Some churches see the King's Law as a challenge to the truly universal Law of their god or pantheon. Again, this is objection based more on principle than fact, as prevailing religious beliefs have certainly entered into the Law's composition. Still, priests of an individual deity may find specific points unacceptable, and their influence should not be overlooked. Then there is the question of to what extent the Law has jurisdiction over the priests themselves. A temple can defend its traditional autonomy as fiercely as any noble.

If a priest is appointed to the magistracy, this is a public statement that Church and State are in perfect agreement on all the points above. The normal stresses on such a magistrate are doubled.

The Army

Magistrates have no authority over the King's armed forces. The Law may seem all-embracing, but the army has its own hierarchy and means of application, overseen by the Office of Security.

If truly powerful mages exist in the kingdom, it is likely they fall into this category by default.

Taxation

In the Dominion, the concept of tax is still very much tied to land and the ownership of land. An individual's tax debt is payable to the authorities in his place of residence.

How quickly justice is served depends on how often "courts" are held. The lord of an estate might listen to grievances and determine punishments two or three times a year, while the king's men might only come through the region once a year.

In the case of traveling merchants and wandering adventurers, this is a question with no easy answer. However, the potential wealth involved means that sooner or later, someone will test it in a Court.

Tax collectors, like magistrates, are servants of the crown; in remote areas, the same person may hold both offices. They are sometimes recruited from among the younger children of the nobility. The tax collector assigned to an area assesses its wealth each year, and calculates a rough 25% of the land's expected production as tax. Once aware of his tax liability, the landowner taxes his tenants in order to raise the funds with as little strain on himself as possible. He is entitled to take a further 25% as his personal income. The tax burden of the peasantry is therefore a theoretical 50% of their annual production.

The tax is payable by New Year's Day. It is collected from the residence of the landowner by the tax collector with an escort of royal soldiers. On occasion, nobles deliver their taxes personally when they attend festivities at the Court of the King.

In the case of the cities, the same principle applies, with the city council acting as landowner. Unfortunately, the parallel doesn't quite hold. First, the city council members are leaders among equals. Second, the old ways of measuring wealth are becoming increasingly inadequate to assess shares in businesses and speculative investment in ships' cargoes. Annual taxes in the cities are more like 10% of what is really being earned. City councils take a further 10-20% of the income of their citizens, but they call them "rates" and use them to raise public buildings, keep lamps alight in the docks, and pave the roads leading to marketplaces.

Religious bodies are currently free of tax obligations. They may impose their own fees upon their members (who must pay these in addition to taxes demanded by the crown).

*The people should fight for
the law as for their city wall.
– Heraclitus of Ephesus*

THE LAW

The King's Law is a patchwork, combining traditional rights with responses to recent events and the king's desire to centralize control. It is a work in progress. Already, interested groups have formed in the Court of the King, hoping to achieve desired changes. Responsibility for this process lies with the Office of Law, a dignity now joining the Offices of Taxation, Heraldry, and Security.

The Master of Law appoints magistrates and receives each magistrate's annual report. From these reports as well as debates and petitions that occur before the king, the Master of

Law makes decisions that change the Law, which are then made official by a royal proclamation. Royal proclamations of new laws are distributed to all magistrates as rapidly as possible. The Office of Law also has influence over what punishments are appropriate to what crimes.

The nature of punishment and who enacts it is an especially sensitive area. For the same reason some nobles insist on escorting their taxes themselves, some will not contemplate the idea of another authority hanging their peasants. Such matters are currently decided at the discretion of the individual magistrate, who has some latitude to impose unusual punishments, bearing in mind that this may set a precedent. Regardless, imprisonment for a set term is not an idea with much currency; prisoners have to be accommodated and fed.

Crimes are divided into three categories: crimes against the people, crimes against the land, and crimes against the crown. Additionally, there are some situations that don't fall into one of these categories.

Crimes Against the People

These crimes are against commoners, whether peasants or city dwellers. For the most part they are committed by other commoners.

Arson: From time immemorial, the willful setting of fires has exacted the harshest penalty – burning alive. Even a noble could find himself in trouble with this one.

Debt: When a debt can be proved but not paid, the debtor's property is confiscated and the debtor flogged and/or banished from that village or city. Those to whom debts are due seldom find this satisfactory, and there is currently much support for the idea of debt slavery, where the debtor must work off his debt in the service of the owed.

Nobles don't have debts; they have accounts (although not paying eventually is dishonorable). Naturally, many people in the Free Cities have a problem with this loophole.

Murder: For one commoner to kill another is generally a hanging offense. Circumstances such as self-defense apply. One option is a fine payable to the victim's family, estimated as the value of the victim's labor. When nobles kill nobles, it is usually a case of either treason or dueling. When commoners kill nobles, torture and the wholesale burning of villages used to be the punishment. Under the King's Law, a trial is now called for, though hanging will almost certainly be the result.

Mutilation: This can sometimes be tried as a crime. A payment based on the victim's nominal value may be sought. The mutilation must have been deliberate and cost the victim his livelihood.

Theft/Fraud: Thefts under the value of 20 coins incur repayment of the value of the goods if the goods themselves cannot be recovered. (See *Comparative Values* on p. 25 for some suggestions.) Flogging may be instead of or in addition to this. Thefts over that value generally incur hanging. Fraud may be treated as theft, though in some situations (such as a mountebank pretending to be a doctor), the offenders may have their entire property confiscated and be banished from that village or city. Nobles don't steal or defraud unless – again – in the case of treason.

GURPS Tredroy explores a complete city that will add spice to any fantasy campaign.

Comparative Values

Use this scale to determine exact values appropriate to the game system and setting. The values can be used to determine monetary restitution and fines.

Sheep/Pig – 2 coins.
Cow – 10 coins.
Silver goblet – 20 coins.
Deer or other prime game animal – 20-30 coins (nominal value).
Wagon, log cabin – 50 coins.
Fashionable suit of clothes – 50 coins.
Horse – 60-90 coins, depending on training, stamina and appearance.

Gold ring – 100 coins.
Suit of full plate – 100 coins.
Fellable timber – 100-200 coins for the usual barge or wagonload.
Fully trained war horse from good stock – 200 coins.
Farmhouse – 200 coins.
Carriage and team – 300 coins.
Gold ring with gem – 300 coins.
Large wooden and brick house, river barge – 400 coins.
Annual production of a village – 500 coins.
Annual production of a noble's estate – 3,000 coins.
Annual production of a wealthy noble's estate – 5,000 coins.

Crimes Against the Land

These are crimes that can be committed against nobles, again generally by commoners.

Disobedience: This is a convenient catch-all, hearkening back to the days when peasants were “owned.” Failing to show respect, concealing income, damaging property, etc. may incur fines, flogging, or hanging – and that's if the matter is brought before a magistrate. It is generally accepted that this applies to acts committed in a noble's own domain, rather than, say, on the streets of a Free City. Nevertheless, of all the laws currently requiring clarification, this is top of the list.

Tax Evasion: In the case of taxes paid to the landowner, this covers both failure to pay assessed taxes and attempts to reduce assessment by hiding crops and animals, or falsely claiming crippled family members. The penalty is usually a fine of 10% of the amount owed on top of the due tax, often leading to debt (discussed previously).

Vert and Venison: This is an ancient right converted into a law that theoretically conserves the natural resources of an area. A landowner owns all products of his land whether or not these are currently being exploited. Thus if prospectors were to discover a gold mine, all gold from it would belong to the landowner and not them. For peasants, this means no killing wild animals (venison) or felling timber (vert) without their lord's permission, upon pain of fines and flogging. For nobles, it means making sure hunting parties do not spill over into somebody else's forest; multi-generational feuds have started that way.

Crimes Against the Crown

These are the biggest crimes. No one gets away with these.

Interfering with a Court of Law: This is a new law, enforceable by direct royal action that can involve armed troops and a fine of up to 500 coins. Interference may include withholding assistance and concealing accused criminals. It might possibly include attempts to bribe, but any such case has yet to come out.

Interfering with a Royal Messenger: The ability of the king to govern depends upon the speedy and reliable conduct of messages from place to place. Anyone who intentionally delays a royal messenger by commandeering horses set aside for their use, refusing them assistance, or in any other nonfatal way is fined 500 coins. Killing a messenger counts as treason. If the “royal messengers” are magical in nature, the same basic provisions apply.

Tax Evasion: This covers both a noble's refusal to pay assessed tax and deliberate attempts to mislead the tax collector as to the number of villages on an estate. Nobles are fined in the same manner as commoners, with an additional 10% on top of the assessment.

Treason: This covers any attempt whatsoever to undermine the authority of the crown. Traditionally, this includes armed insurrection; attempted assassination; and killing magistrates, tax collectors, and messengers. However, it can be stretched in a number of directions, including giving the king bad advice. Stealing taxes definitely counts. Penalties include confiscation of land, banishment from the kingdom, and death. Nobles are beheaded; any treacherous commoner is likely to be tortured.

Inheritance

The King's Law honors primogeniture, with land and title going to the firstborn son (or daughter in the absence of sons). This can be contested. If the obvious heir can be demonstrated treacherous, insane, or terminally dishonorable, a more suitable relative may receive the inheritance. If there is no suitable heir, the inheritance reverts to the Crown. Such matters are always settled at the King's Court.

Peasants generally have little to leave their descendants, although houses and families are assumed to go together. At present, inheritances consisting of business interests and property such as factories and shops are untrodden ground. If a dispute was brought before a magistrate, it would be dealt with under an existing category such as Theft or Debt.

When a community lacks the resources to enforce punishments, becoming an outlaw is a simple process – a person runs away. However, an outlaw's family and/or associates may suffer punishments instead.

A man cannot govern a nation if he cannot govern a city; he cannot govern a city if he cannot govern a family; he cannot govern a family unless he can govern himself; and he cannot govern himself unless his passions are subject to reason.

– Hugo Grotius

Treasure Troves

This is a matter potentially close to the hearts of many adventurers. In the past, there have been times when the treasure found on a noble's land has been claimed as a form of vert and venison. However, this has usually applied to cases when the discoverer was a (slow-moving) peasant. Once or twice, a king has claimed such winnings on the grounds of it actually belonging to his ancestors and therefore being a kind of inheritance. Until this is specifically legislated for, it rests in the same gray area as an adventurer's tax assessment.

Dueling

This is the sacred right of the nobility to murder each other without the winner suffering any spoil-sport penalty. Only nobles may duel, and the proper forms of a challenge and at least one witness per combatant must be observed. These days, duels are not supposed to be to the death. This doesn't stop "accidents."

Forbidden Magic

Where magic exists (or is suspected to exist!), it will be legislated. However, even in a kingdom where magi are among the King's advisors and hold places in the magistracy, certain types of magic may well be outlawed. Necromancy and demonology are prime contenders. The ability to identify and counter such magic would then be necessary for a Court.

In other cases, the illegal application of magic may be considered a different crime, such as theft/fraud, murder, and – above all – arson.

The King's Clemency

The decision of the king can set aside any judgment. Theoretically, any citizen may make such a plea, and any magistrate may decide that the plea is valid, on such grounds as prior military service, pitiable circumstances, or the ability to provide useful information. The magistrate must then take personal charge of the criminal and arrange for the petition to be heard at the Court of the King. This keeps the number of successful pleas down significantly.

THE COURT OF LAW

When PCs accept appointments to the magistracy, whether as magistrates or sheriffs, they take an oath and their name is entered in the records of the Office of Law. They receive a magistrate's seal – a gold disc that may be worn as a medallion, bearing on one side the royal arms and those of the Office on the other. This is their official identification, and presentation commands the immediate cooperation of any noble household, city council, village elder, or royal soldiers.

Magistrates also receive a mantle in the royal colors, denoting them *de facto* members of the royal household. Sheriffs and any support staff get an armband. *Any action in their capacity as a Court must be prefaced by donning these items and reciting the oath.* This theoretically includes clandestine investigation and the apprehension of armed suspects.

The Magistrate/Sheriff's Oath

I proclaim myself a servant of the king. I proclaim myself an upholder of his Law. I perform this duty without fear or favor, for the mean as the great and in every land that lies under his Dominion.

Responsibilities

The duties of a Court include:

- At all times uphold the King's Law.
- Visit all villages, cities, and noble households in the area assigned to them over the course of a year.
- Respond to any request for assistance within said area.
- Keep comprehensive records of each trial that is conducted.
- Convey these records to the Office of Law, ideally on an annual basis.
- Make a genuine effort to stay up to date with royal proclamations.

A few typical disciplinary measures: a stern warning (particularly to nobles), fines or confiscation of possessions, public shaming (sometimes while bound), servitude to the government or the offended party, branding, mutilation, exile, execution, or (in magical societies) curses.

Benefits

The privileges of a Court include:

- An annual income of 200 coins for a magistrate or sheriff and 100 for each of the support staff, if the appointment is full time. For a person with no landholding, this kind of income is almost unheard of. If their duties are only part time, income is reduced to 100 and 50, respectively.

- Additional monetary rewards, for action above and beyond the call of duty (such as apprehending a notorious bandit or settling a feud between noble houses).

- The cooperation of noble and elders mentioned previously, which can include accommodation, resupply, transport, information, and escort, plus any other little favors that may be negotiated.

- Access to the Court of the King and the Office of Law. Never undervalue this!

Strangers in Town

Whether summoned for a specific purpose or conducting its assigned tour, the Court must make itself known to local authorities upon their arrival in any population center. If summoned, they must promptly familiarize themselves with the matter at hand and commence their investigation. If they were not summoned, the Court should enquire as to whether there is any need for its services. Some local authorities will indeed keep troublesome cases for the next visitation, especially when investigation is required. If there is no obvious need for the Court, its members should observe the location quietly for signs that the King's Law has been broken in any significant way.

As a small force of armed and possibly magical specialists, the Court may be asked to assist with more than strictly legal difficulties. A band of murderous brigands that the locals cannot handle, some covert necromancer despoiling the cemetery – it's all part of the job! Indeed, when investigating a crime, the Court can use any of their skills and abilities and take any action, provided they do not directly contravene the Law.

Holding Court

Court can be held anywhere, although castle halls, the village greens, and city squares are usual. All citizens who wish to witness proceedings must theoretically be permitted to do so. Disorderly rabble, however, may be ejected by the attending sheriffs. A Court is held once the matters brought to its attention have been investigated and all relevant parties gathered at the chosen location. For PC Courts (or PCs who intersect with Courts), the process of a trial holds many possibilities for role-playing, skill use, and even combat; they will usually be the climax of the investigation. Whoever plays the presiding magistrate must indeed weigh the evidence and pronounce a

The Form of a Trial

"Let the names and stations of all present be proclaimed to the Court and entered in its records."

"Let the presiding magistrate state the accusation."

"Does the accused confess?" If yes, then let judgment be pronounced.

If not: *"Let the accused answer the charge."* It is usual for all parties to speak for themselves, especially when lie detection is possible. However, a spouse, friend, or local dignitary may take on the role. In a pinch, a magistrate may perform this task, especially if the accused is unwilling to speak or already dead. Placing the dead on trial is perfectly in order, especially if death occurred during the course of an investigation.

"Who speaks for the injured?" As above, with added emphasis on speaking for the dead. It is not unusual for sheriffs also to present information at this point, outlining the conduct of their investigation, or for divinatory spells to be cast in public view and the results proclaimed.

"Has no further person information to bring before the Court?" This is the traditional moment for dramatic intervention.

"Then let judgment be pronounced." The magistrate announces the verdict and punishment. The sheriff may enact it, or it may be politic to hand the judged over to local authorities. If the judged seeks the King's Clemency, let him state the grounds.

judgment (perhaps after retreating to discuss the case with his fellows). This judgment will be remembered – and so will the members of the Court. Will it be as embodiments of wisdom and mercy, or inflexible guardians of the Law? The repercussions in the game world may be far-reaching indeed.

PLOT HOOKS

Any of the crimes discussed previously can form the basis of exciting and intriguing adventures. The following suggestions take things one step further.

Welcome to the Village: The night is dark, the forest thick. When the PCs finally reach the village, no one seems aware of any crime or is willing to admit to having summoned them. In the morning, it's a different story, but something is still not right. The witnesses' stories seemed learned by rote, and the accused's protestations of innocence are particularly vigorous. In reality, the heroes have accidentally stumbled upon the wrong village – one that has been kept secret by the ruling noble, in order to reduce his tax assessment.

Death or Dishonor: The Court caught some of the miscreants, but not all. As the trial begins, the PCs receive a secret ultimatum: Find the accused innocent, or a hostage dies! Can they discover the truth and resolve the situation while proceeding with the Court?

"Vert" and "Venison": What is the line between "venison" and "deadly monster on a rampage" – since the latter one can be legally slain in self-defense (or indeed, by the sheriff himself)? If the setting features walking trees, the "vert" alternative could be highly amusing.

Although the crimes remain the same, criminal justice systems and social customs often vary widely in the two Asian countries presented in GURPS China and GURPS Japan.

The Trouble With Free Cities: Summoned by the city council to try a man accused of some weird, mercantile form of theft, the investigators find he has summoned his own Court to handle the proceedings! The heroes must either find a way to remove the other Court or work out their differences. Competing speakers in court! It'll never catch on . . .

Fey Rights: The Law applies to all subjects of the king. But what if the person claiming a fair trial is not particularly human? A loquacious goblinoid, a fast-talking lycanthrope, a spirit connected to a local river – any could present the heroes with a major dilemma. Is this just a ploy to avoid a messy death, or a sincere plea for equal rights?

Son Set: The investigators are secretly approached by an elderly noble who wishes his upright and talented daughter to inherit the title over his dissolute son. He asks that the Court attend his castle under a pretext and gather evidence against the man. His peers must never know!

The Quill, Mightier than the Sword: Who would want to steal the Court's records of the past year? The people demanding the ransom, that's who. But once the records are reclaimed (by whatever means), only a sharp eye and paranoid mind will notice they have been subtly altered to favor one of the lobby groups.

Night Court: The Court has been summoned – by the restless dead! The revenants of some knightly order or noble family known in life for their devotion to the principles of good

and law require their murders be investigated and the culprits duly tried. There'll be precedents set tonight!

Ye Olde Blacke Oppes: The investigators catch someone who is without doubt the culprit, but claims to have been acting as a servant of the king: "Will you *kindly* stop interfering with my mission!" She has a seal similar to that carried by a magistrate, only with the arms of the Office of Security on the reverse. Does the king know that his Law is being broken in his service?

Watching the Watchers: The Court has been summoned to investigate possible treason. Whether guilty or simply insulted, the noble concerned has determined to discredit the Court on its own terms. He has set up a trail of evidence that will prove forged and witnesses that will recant, claiming that the sheriff threatened them and the magistrate asked for bribes – potentially treasonous behavior itself!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kyla Ward writes, acts, paints, and fences – sometimes simultaneously. She has been gaming for 25 years. A freelancer for White Wolf, Eden, and Gold Rush, her work has also appeared in *Dragon*, *D20 Weekly*, *Black Gate*, and *Australian Realms*. She lives in Sydney, Australia, with partner, cats, etc. and when releasing novels sometimes goes by the name Edwina Grey. To see some very strange things, go to tabula-rasa.info.

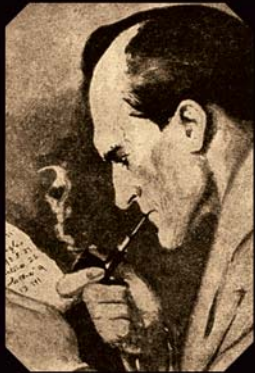
Governors being accustomed to hear of more crimes than they can punish, and more wrongs than they can redress, set themselves at ease by indiscriminate negligence, and presently forget the request when they lose sight of the petitioner.

– Samuel Johnson

GURPS Fourth Edition

MYSTERIES

The guide to more effective investigators.



STEVE JACKSON GAMES

CRUEL AND UNUSUAL

BY STEVEN MARSH

The civilized world's reluctance to use cruel and unusual punishment is a relatively recent phenomenon. By modern standards, the common punishments meted out within most medieval settings would likely qualify as both: public floggings, being locked in the stockades, crushed under rocks, getting tossed to lions before cheering crowds, and so on. In many ways, the sentences doled out were limited only by the imagination of the judge, perhaps limited (or influenced) by the prevalent religion.

This article attempts to provide a bunch of ready-to-use punishments that could be considered cruel and – more importantly – unusual. These ideas have all been designed with an eye toward adventuring possibilities. They are often presumed to come from a noble or other high-ranking official; this is partly because PCs tend to attract more noteworthy adversaries in the justice system, but mostly because run-of-the-mill judges can't be bothered with coming up with really creative punishments.

In many cases, the convicted in these punishments are given much more latitude than they would in a more reality-based society. However, it should be made abundantly clear to those sentenced that if they use that latitude to flee or mount an offensive, then the retribution if they are caught again will be swift and probably fatal.

Note that few of these punishments rely on magic – at least, not as an ongoing concern. Disciplinary measures where a magical effect is an ongoing punishment is more commonly known as a “curse,” and it's a bit too easy to be cruel and unusual with those. (“I sentence you to have arms for legs and legs for arms!”) For those looking for inspiration of how to design and administer curses, check out “Tooling with Curses,” from *Pyramid #3/1: Tools of the Trade – Wizards*.

To use this table, roll 2d, reading each die individually.

CRUEL AND UNUSUAL IDEAS

1-2, 1 – The Fiends Network

The criminals are required to track down three people guilty of the same crime! (Note that if the punishment for

those three people is to track down three people each, then the foundations for a witch hunt are laid.)

1-2, 2 – Snakes and Ladders

The priests assure the judging noble that only those with guilt in their soul are subject to the effects of the medusa in the catacombs! Of course, if the number of statues in the catacombs is any indication, then solely guilty people have been tossed below and told to find their own exit . . . which is what the convicted must do.

*Success consecrates the
foulest crimes.*

– Seneca

1-2, 3 – Master's Service Theatre

The convicted are permitted to go on their way, but their next dungeon expedition (or other discrete mission) requires them to take a small group of additional members, whose sole purpose is to observe their progress, make notes and observations, and provide sarcastic and jeering comments. (Alternatively, the PCs are required to be the ones doing the following, observing, and jeering! They are forbidden from becoming involved in any way, except hiding and avoiding damage.) All parties should repeat to themselves it's just a job; they should really just relax.

1-2, 4 – A Checklist of Impossible Things

The sentenced must come up with one (or more) “impossible” objects within the time limit, or pay the ultimate price! These challenging items can include anything odd: a nightingale's song, separate from the bird; the middle of the tallest tree in the kingdom; or the first flower of spring. (The latter can be especially tricky if they have a week and it's the middle of winter!)

Laws often spring from informal customs. A ruler may create new customs antithetical to those of his neighbors just to anger them or to help him more easily determine foreigners to the region.

Less Unusual, More Cruel

In the “real world,” most punishments would err more on the side of “cruel” than unusual. Of course, these are less suitable for gaming purposes, since they’re typically just different ways to inflict injury or death upon a criminal. Still, here are some ideas for flavorful punishments that can be sprinkled in a campaign (probably against NPCs only).

- Criminals could be brined (forced to soak in a vat of salty water until dead).
- If optics has been discovered, then giant lenses might focus the sun’s light to burning beams. Strap a criminal down in the town square and await the noonday sun . . .
- A convict can be placed beneath a large vat in a convenient location, where citizens stop by and toss rocks into the tub. Whose rock will be the one that results in his death gasp? (Alternatively, if city folk are encouraged to toss copper coins or other items of value into the vat, then this can become a good fundraiser.)

- Criminals may be strapped to a somewhat distant wooden wall, and guards or other militiamen use him for target practice and take crossbow shots at him until he dies. Perhaps if the criminal lasts a day, he is set free. (PCs strapped to such a wall in a cinematic campaign might use whatever tricks and stunts they can to avoid bolts or intimidate shooters into missing.)

- The sentenced could be placed within a suit of armor or other form of equipment that the royal armorer wishes to test, and attacked until he suffers enough injury to satisfy the noble. The information, of course, goes toward making better protection.

- If a group of convicts are sentenced at once, then the court might seat them in a circle and ask them all to come up with the most creative way to torture the person to their left. The one who comes up with the best way (at the noble’s whim) is spared, while the others suffer the fate devised by their friends . . .

1-2, 5 – Cross-Sword Puzzle

The group is found collectively guilty, and the penalty is a fight to first death, in public! (See *GURPS Martial Arts: Gladiators* for ideas about “putting on a show” for the crowd.) Once one of the party is killed, the rest are released. This punishment is an ideal opportunity for fast-talking or tricky heroes: “Well, our companion is stone-cold dead. See? Could I kick him if he wasn’t? Well, we’ll take his body off your hands now . . .”

1-2, 6 – Justice Is Thick-Shelled

The judge sentences the accused to become . . . a turtle! He proclaims that the criminal is now a turtle and – as such – is worthy of no more attention or acknowledgment. After the judgment, wherever the convicted goes in the kingdom, the people refuse to recognize him or otherwise interact with him. If pressed, they say it’s because he’s a turtle – despite the fact that he has in no way had his appearance or abilities altered. If the “turtle” were to perform an epic enough deed, the judge might “reverse” the affliction – after all, it is an auspicious day when a turtle saves the kingdom! (Of course, the real world has any number of cultures for which the punishment was banishment or ritual shunning; the naming of him as a “turtle” or some other creature is merely a flavorful modification.)

3-4, 1 – The Future Is Now

The convict is sentenced to 50 years – literally! Through magical means, he is shunted 50 years into the future, ensuring that the friends and loved ones he leaves behind will be dead or much older. (Of course, he can also be frozen for that duration – or any length of time that would be dramatically

appropriate.) This is an excellent way to significantly alter a campaign world; a lot can happen in 50 years, and it can be a good way to surprise jaded players by reintroducing them into a world they thought they were familiar with.

3-4, 2 – Is “Cow-Faced” a Term of Endearment?

The noble sentences the criminal to marry his ugly daughter! The only catch is that he’s not going to reveal which daughter he believes to be the ugly one – it may not be obvious. In this case, the entire trial might be an elaborate ruse for the noble to be justified in killing the convict for dishonoring his family – after all, picking the “wrong” daughter is tantamount to saying she is ugly. Regardless of what the noble’s motives are, it will take a clever criminal to “escape”!

3-4, 3 – Fool Proofing

The punishment is: training! The group must instruct the noble’s bungling offspring (or cousin, nephew, etc.), allowing him to accompany them on a mission. If he returns without having made significant progress, the sentence is death. If he does not return alive, the sentence is death. And he’s incompetent enough that attempting to keep him out of trouble could be a de facto sentence of death!

3-4, 4 – I Thought They Smelled Bad on the Outside . . .

The convict must accurately map the sewers. Besides obvious adventure possibilities, this could provide future opportunities to the criminal. For example, if he learns of a secret entrance into the palace, does he report it and hope for some reward, or conceal it and hope to use that knowledge later?

Sometimes we must drink more, sport, recreate ourselves, and even sin a little to spite the devil, so that we leave him no place for troubling our consciences with trifles. We are conquered if we try too conscientiously not to sin at all. – Martin Luther

3-4, 5 – Eight Legs a Week

The accused must deal with . . . the spider pit! He won't actually be tossed into the pit of spiders, since there aren't any spiders in there yet; really, it's just a pit at this point. No, the convict must figure out how to fill the currently empty pit with spiders, within the allotted time. The judge has no suggestions, which is why they're foisting the job off on him; they're fine with a smaller number of giant spiders, or untold buckets of regular-sized ones. They're not picky.

When a man wants to murder a tiger, he calls it sport; when the tiger wants to murder him, he calls it ferocity. The distinction between crime and justice is no greater.

– George Bernard Shaw

3-4, 6 – Return to the Caverns of Death

The noble was once an adventurer, in his youth. One of the earliest dungeons he explored resulted in him losing an item of sentimental value. He wants the criminals to return to his original dungeon and find this lost object. This should be a relatively easy sentence – after all, he removed all the threats from that place decades ago! What could possibly have happened since then? (This is an excellent opportunity to update or recycle an adventure known to the players.)

5-6, 1 – Soul Searching

The noble demands that the criminal join a fast-rising religious movement within his domain, to determine if there are any sinister secrets to be feared from the organization. (Of course, the criminal could instead reveal his mission to those he is spying on, becoming a double agent.)

5-6, 2 – Drink Me!

The noble sentences the guilty to test his alchemical creations. Sadly, he is quite delusional; his concoctions don't do anything. If the noble is informed that he is not very adept at his chosen hobby craft, then his ire might fall all the harsher on the tester(s). Is it better to lie or perhaps fabricate results than anger the noble? (As a twist, the GM can have any kind of unusual side effects manifest from this testing after the seeming resolution of this plot thread.)

5-6, 3 – Over-Knight Sensation

The convict is dropped near-naked into the town square, without wealth or gear, but with a mandate: Elevate your position and enter the competition scheduled to begin in two weeks! If the criminal is charismatic, he might capture the imagination of the city, as a literal “rags to riches” story of an everyman fighting to become a champion. The plebeians in the stands might even engage in a chorus of “We Will Rock You” . . .

5-6, 4 – The High-Tech Edge

A new blacksmith, who claims to make weapons of superior quality, is courting the noble for his patronage. The judgment, then, is for the criminal to utilize the blacksmith's gear on his next mission, taking notes as necessary. Of course, if the gear is inferior, this could result in an awkward and dangerous situation if it starts failing in the middle of the adventure.

5-6, 5 – Lies Hurt; The Truth Kills

The noble wants to know what the common people under his domain feel about him and his reign. He demands that the convicted go out among his holdings, attempting to ascertain their true thoughts. (This is another variation on the “Do we tell the noble the truth and risk raising his ire?” conundrum.)

5-6, 6 – To Be Forgiven of Sin, One Must First Sin

The judge will make the convict an example against excess! He commands the guilty party to eat or drink to excess in public (even if the original crime was in no way eating- or drinking-related). This can be an especially amusing if another adventure coincides with the punishment: “I am shooooo drunk . . . Hic! Wait; did shomeone jusht shay the giantsh are attacking?!”

“You Must Go to the Castle Aaargh . . .”

A plot element that isn't used in this list is one that is perhaps the most obvious: The convicted are directed to undertake an expedition to deal with a problem at the local dungeon/tower/temple/whatever. This is because, really, it's *too* obvious. There is practically no difference between “The local noble asks you to investigate the Dungeon Heromaim” and “The local noble sentences you to investigate the Dungeon Heromaim.” Obviously, this omission shouldn't stop the GM from using this plot hook! However, if the GM already has a ready-to-use adventure, then he probably doesn't need an article like this to provide inspiration.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hoghead Publishing, and others. He has been contributing to *Pyramid* for almost 10 years. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son Sam.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

MAGIC AND THE LAW

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Here are two seemingly contradictory statements:

- Magic in a medieval-style campaign world would have astronomical effects on the legal system.
- Magic in a medieval-style campaign world would not change the legal system much.

Of course, astute readers note my clever use of “seemingly” in the first sentence and realize that I’m going to do one of those rhetorical switcharoos. So here it is:

There is no contradiction.

I’ll deal with the second statement first, since it’s the most straightforward of the two.

MAGIC MEANS NO CHANGE

Most medieval settings place ultimate legal power in the hands of one person or a small group of people – a noble, a judge (appointed by a noble), a council (who report directly to nobles), etc. The point is, the legal system usually boils down to a tiny group of people with the power to make life-or-death decisions in a relatively arbitrary way.

As a slight digressional contrast, I’ll note that, in the modern world, our legal systems represent the culmination of hundreds or even thousands of years of legal history and thought. The civilized courts are concerned with propriety, protocol, and precedent; they want to follow the rules, secure in the knowledge that the rules they are following are being followed elsewhere. In return, they know that their rulings might be referenced in other cases, and use their power with as much restraint and wisdom as they can muster.

In contrast, most medieval courts didn’t really concern themselves with such matters. It usually boiled down to one person making a judgment based on the evidence as best he could (or, perhaps cynically, making a decision that helped secure his position and domain).

So, in a nutshell, if a matter has gone before some medieval-style court, there is almost no difference between:

“I’m pretty sure you’re guilty, so we’re going to take all your possessions and lock you in the stocks for a while.”

and:

“Magic might have been involved, but I’m pretty sure you’re guilty, so we’re going to take all your possessions and lock you in the stocks for a while.”

At the end of the day, the decision is still being made by someone who hopes to be “pretty sure” about the judgment he’s making.

MAGIC MEANS BIG CHANGE

The amount of wiggle room that magic presents in the “pretty sure” spectrum is considerable. Since magic bends the rules of reality by definition, it can be very hard to be “pretty sure” of anything. This is especially true for more grandiose effects; if illusions can bend someone’s form, or telepathic powers can erase memories, or magic can teleport someone to or from hundreds of miles away, then means, motive, and opportunity become much harder to resolve. In this case, it’s almost certain that magic will have had fundamental changes on the legal system.

SUGGESTIONS

Here are some possibilities for how fantasy settings might handle magic in broad strokes.

All Magic Is Illegal

This is one of the most common suppositions of medieval-style settings. If all magic is outlawed, then the use of it in any form is enough of a crime to let the noble do pretty much whatever he wants to the accused. Of course, in this case, it behooves magicians to keep their craft as quiet as possible.

Merchants in medieval times kept cash in a pouch that they wore, or they stored it in a small, perhaps hidden box.

And such a society can easily devolve into blind accusations of witchcraft and other near-unprovable forces: "He plays cards too well; it must be magic!" Or: "She stirs my passions too greatly; she must be bewitching!" Assuming that magic isn't too subtle, if the society doesn't devolve into constant witch hunts then it's quite possible there will be backlash the other way, with those hearing accusations requiring a fair amount of proof before action will be taken against alleged magicians. This is especially true if the punishment for those making unproven allegations of magic is comparable to punishments for proven magicians. In this case, it's quite possible for a discreet miracle-worker to hide in plain sight, doing magic quietly enough that no one dares accuse him.

Some Magic Is Illegal

This is perhaps the second most common form. In this case, some kinds of magic is permitted while other types are outlawed. Obviously that's a huge category (one that could form its own article). Perhaps clerical/spiritual magic is legal while arcane/mystical forms are illegal. Maybe some schools are illegal (necromancy is a big no-no in most worlds). For most game systems, the easiest way to come up with ideas about this is to look at the classification system used in the game, and see if any broad generalizations can be made. For example, in *GURPS* you can ask, "Is this legal or illegal?" for each school of magic, while *Mage: The Awakening* might provoke the same question for each sphere or magical tradition.

Magic is Legal, But Magical Crimes Are Punished Harshly

This can be an interesting challenge. Basically, the use of magic in a way that doesn't offend society is permitted, but if any crimes are committed using magic or of a magical nature, they are judged more harshly. This is a good option for most "dungeon-crawl" settings. It allows magicians to wander around openly, without worrying that anyone will be itching to start flinging fireballs into crowded marketplaces.

*Men are much more unwilling
to have their weaknesses and
their imperfections known than
their crimes.*

– Lord Chesterfield

Magic Changes the Legal Rules

One interesting possibility is that the existence of magic in a crime changes the rules. One easy possibility is to draw a parallel from the real world's treatment of religious crimes. Those with ties to the church would find their crimes adjudicated through the church's legal system. Similarly, perhaps

Game Changers

Some abilities are so powerful and useful from a legal standpoint that they would automatically affect how courts are run and administered. Some examples include:

- The ability to detect lies or compel the truth
- The ability to see the past
- The ability to speak with the dead
- The power to detect "good" or "evil" (if such exists objectively in the game world)
- Really, just about any information-gathering spell

If these abilities do exist, about the only way they *wouldn't* affect the courts is if they were too expensive, rare, or unreliable. (If only one person in the village has the power to tell if someone is lying, how do you know *he* isn't lying?)

the existence of magic in relation to a crime is *de facto* cause to turn the case over to the wizard's guild (or what have you).

Perhaps the existence of magic changes the rules of the game. For example, an enlightened society might have an idea of "guilty beyond reasonable doubt." However, the courts might realize that the existence of magic makes it all too easy to generate "reasonable doubt": "Your honor, how do we know an illusionist didn't steal my client's form to commit this crime?" Or: "How do we know a magical duplicate of my client didn't perform these vile acts?" In this case, maybe the courts have determined that, if the involvement of magic can be proven beyond reasonable doubt, then the burden of proof for the rest of the crime shifts to "preponderance of the evidence." This might happen even if the accused had nothing to do with the involvement of magic! Under such a system, think thrice before committing a crime against a wizard . . .

FINAL THOUGHTS

If you do have publicly known magic in your game world, give some thought about how the legal system has resolved the questions of what to do with it before the flame starts flying. (This assumes, of course, that you don't want part of the thrust of the campaign to stem from the courts struggling to figure out what to do about these magical matters: "Do we count the necromancer's armies in our census, sir?") Revelations about how the world deals with magic in its laws go a long way toward painting what the society is like, which in turn goes a long way toward making a memorable campaign.

Even if the presence of magic doesn't change things *that* much.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Steven Marsh is a freelance writer and editor. He has contributed to roleplaying game releases from Green Ronin, West End Games, White Wolf, Hogshead Publishing, and others. He has been editing *Pyramid* for over nine years; during that time he has won four Origins awards. He lives in Indiana with his wife, Nikola Vrtis, and their son Sam!, who is a two-year-old force of nature entirely worthy of his exclamation mark.

ODDS AND ENDS

TABOOS AND CUSTOMS

Add some flavor to a world-roaming campaign by creating a list of taboos and customs, one each on slips of paper. When the adventurers arrive at a new place, the GM pulls out two or three and works them into descriptions of the place without overtly telling the PCs of the taboos or customs. Can the heroes figure out what they need to do before they get into trouble with the law?

Here are some ideas that can form the basis of customs and taboos. There may be restrictions on who can do what, and when, where, and with which items they can do so. Different restrictions might exist inside and outside of buildings. For example, women may be permitted to carry weapons in town as long as they are in plain sight outside buildings but concealed inside structures, while males are considered too aggressive to ever carry weapons.

Sample Items or Actions

- Accessories (such as eating utensils, grooming supplies, etc.).
- Clothes (styles, ornamentation and trim, cut, colors, fabric, footwear, headdresses, masks, bags, hair styles, facial coverings, makeup, etc.).
- Locations within and outside of town.
- Magic (including casting spells and using supernatural items).

"There's a Small Medium at Large!"

One aspect that will greatly influence how magic affects the legal system is how common it is, as well as how powerful. In general, if magic is common, then the legal system is more likely to have come up with a plan for how to deal with it. At an extreme, it might even have various ideas for different kinds of magic. Maybe evidence of fairy magic is reason enough to turn the whole matter over to the fae court, while accusations of necromantic affairs might be enough to get the church involved.

If magic is powerful, then it could make things easier for the court (powerful magic is easier to detect) or more difficult ("We can't risk offending the Ancient Magi!"). In general, the more powerful magic is, the more likely society will encourage magicians to police themselves. If this becomes official policy, then those who police magic could be powerful above and beyond their arcane abilities.

- Pets (including number of creatures and types of restraint).
- Weapons (including quantity and concealment).
- Language (certain words, ideas, or expressions).

Sample Affected Groups

- Everyone.
- Those of a particular sex (male/female/other?).
- Those of a particular age (babies, young, fighting age, old, etc.).
- Those of a particular physical condition (menstruating women, bald men, the sick, etc.).
- Those of a particular social class (untouchables, heroes, nobles, etc.).
- Those of a particular social situation (married, widowed, celibate, etc.).

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



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

RECOMMENDED READING

METING OUT

JUSTICE

BY ANDY VETROMILE

When dealing with the topic of justice in a fantasy setting, the biggest hurdle to overcome is that everyone uses the same punishment to drive the fear-based plot: death. Sure, it's a fairly barbaric world and nothing lights a fire under someone more than the chance he's about to be separated from his loved ones, hearth, home, and head, but as a comedian once said, "Why do they call it the death *penalty*? I think at that point the game is pretty much over."

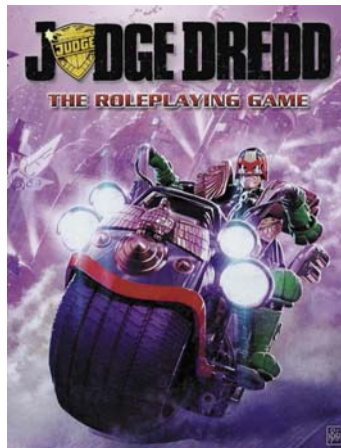
To make things less final and add more adventure ideas, try to think of a way to punish the PCs that doesn't involve the hangman's noose or a stroke of the sword (and no, this does not mean "use a guillotine or an ax instead"). Exile is popular. The drawback is that, if the GM goes through with it, he's got to come up with a whole new set of maps. The benefit is the GM has options for scenic new countryside . . . and if it's a magical world, that "new countryside" might be very broadly defined.

One exile option is the forbidden land, a place of taboo where few people dare to venture. Though obvious, it bears mentioning that anyone hazarding a trip out of these areas is also going to be awfully unwelcome. Responses may include getting attacked by a foreign city's guards and being captured for use as slaves. *Judge Dredd: The Roleplaying Game* (Mongoose, mongoosepublishing.com, promises their new version is coming late summer of 2009 for \$49.95) offers its take here: They have an entire wasteland sitting between Mega-Cities One and Two (New York and Los Angeles), and most of the inhabitants are mutants, monsters, and previously exiled folks. Remove the trappings of *Judge Dredd's* science-fantasy worldview and make it pure fantasy. Now the adventurers are a sort of boon to the host nation – these kingdoms can send poor, sentenced saps into the mana-blasted

swamps that separate them from their neighbors. If the exiles can reach the other city alive, they're free, perhaps with a reward should they establish a reliable trade route.

Expanding on that, *Deadlands: The Lost Colony* (\$12.50, PDF, Pinnacle Entertainment Group, peginc.com) offers an entire penal colony planet for the team to get dropped off on. (It's not a state-sanctioned place of punishment in the book, but you can tell from the title alone the rock isn't flooded with tourists, either.) To use this in a fantasy setting, the serial numbers have to be shaved a little more closely, but it's doable. Most magical worlds offer other realms as hazards – sites you can't simply walk home from: floating rocks, the fabled City of Brass, any of your choice of hells, and the like. *The Lost Colony* provides a truly alien atmosphere, but depending on the sense being conveyed of the new prison – elevated fantasy or disjointed nightmare – there are countless ways to swing it.

For tips on how to get elsewhere, check out the recently revised and reissued *Manual of the Planes* for *Dungeons & Dragons* (\$29.95, Wizards of the Coast, wizards.com). Alternatively, give the kingdom a stargate. Although Alderac no longer has the rights to create material for its *Stargate: SG-1 Roleplaying Game*, information about the existing books is online at stargatesg1rpg.com. Again, sandblast the telltale markings off the franchise, and give it the old fantasy sheen: A portal to other worlds? What king wouldn't want to enrich himself – uh . . . his *people* by finding out what treasures lie in wait on the other side? As the criminals pile up in his dungeons, he hits upon the idea that he could get use out of them and eliminate the need to wash the blood off the walk every morning.



When heroes arrive in unfamiliar wilderness, they can be nervous: What monster, or other threats exist? The same tense atmosphere should accompany entry in new urban environs: What are the laws? What are the penalties? Who do we avoid?

If you're going to base an adventure or even the whole campaign on the topic of medieval jurisprudence, at least give the heroes the freedom to choose their own poison.

"Walk the magical dimensions," he tells the champions, "and you shall be made free." Whether he intends to keep the promise is irrelevant if the team has to worry about surviving first. For adventuring possibilities, this gate would naturally lead to some of the aforementioned magical cities and such, but a few might pop out into the warrior nation next door; they either never knew they had a hole in space in their domain, or else they were just a bit slower in figuring out how to make it light up.

For a twist, the team might be from another dimension already; the fantasy world could be *their* punishment – particularly fitting if they were too reliant on their fancy high-tech gadgets. Are they stuck here? Were they only limited to not going home via the same method? The latter would mean they could still search for other lands, one of which might have the means to go home. In the meantime, maybe they could show the local nobles a thing or two by applying some of their own "magic."

Instead of exile and letting the player characters run rampant, limit their freedom of movement. Dungeons are the bread and butter of a good adventurer's tale, but they presume the heroes aren't chained to the wall. Through the right lens, an entire town could be a cage for explorers used to having the world at their feet. Perhaps the authorities order the heroes not to leave the confines of a single borough. In USA Network's excellent *Burn Notice* (20th Century Fox video, available on DVD), the hero – Michael Westen – is left out in the cold by his spy agency when someone claims he's a liability. This strands him in Miami, where he finds a purpose in helping ordinary people with his extraordinary skill set. While his situation is a little different, it is a good example of adventure being what you make of it. Setting aside for the moment what keeps the group from wandering out of bounds (possibilities include informants, magical leg-bracelets, walls encircling the town, or the heroes' own moral fortitude), they could be the best thing to happen to many of the trapped residents of a small crime-ridden burg or ghetto.

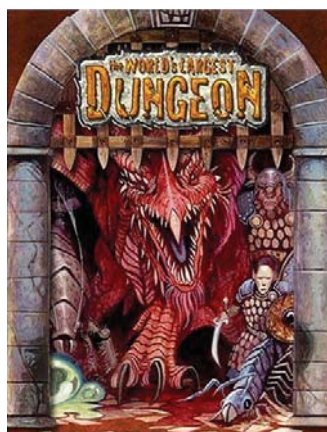
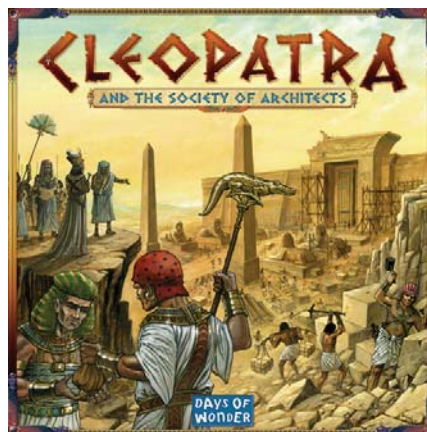
The *Miami Sourcebook* for the *Millennium's End RPG* (Chameleon Eclectic, 1994) would be great fodder for this if the adventurers actually were in the world of *Burn Notice*. (Some *Millennium's End RPG* products are available in PDF form through DriveThru RPG, rpg.drivethrustuff.com/index.php?manufacturers_id=122.) However, the *World's Largest Dungeon* (\$99.99, Alderac Entertainment Group, alderac.com and worldslargestdungeon.com) is an easier conversion. Pull that tome out, and it becomes your campaign. The writing is spotty and more gimmick than success story, but it is a fully realized tale about

[SPOILER ALERT!] a huge prison built for several powerful entities who terrorized the world in the early years of history. The benefit of this book is you already have the plotline of how to get the condemned in and then out of their sentence. [END SPOILER ALERT]

Finally, hard labor is another alternate punishment, though it means different things to different people. It usually conjures movie images of people in striped prison uniforms breaking rocks in an open field. To shift that back to the fantasy theme, try *Cleopatra and the Society of Architects* (\$50, Days of Wonder, daysof wonder.com); it puts the heroes in the harsh light of the sun, working to build a temple to the Queen of Egypt. A fast game (it takes less than an hour), it could be used to determine the direction of the team's "rehabilitation." Cards are resources, and resources build structures such as sphinxes and obelisks. It's

easier to get things done using cards that incur corruption, and when part of the construction project is finished, the player receives talents in payment. The money can represent any funds the PCs earn during their incarceration, or it could be a measure of their success in the work camp. They might use it to buy their way out, but beware: The person with the most corruption at the end of the game is fed to the crocodiles regardless of their winnings. How the GM chooses to employ that mechanic as it pertains to the RPG half of this experiment . . . well, maybe it's just best to make plans to escape.

Crime is certainly not the only thing in a fantasy game met by the threat of death and severe penalties, but if you're going to base an adventure or even the whole campaign on the topic of medieval jurisprudence, at least give the heroes the freedom to choose their own poison. Sometimes literally.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Vetromile is a freelance writer and editor with an insatiable taste for games. He's been reviewing them for over 10 years and still can't wait for the next release. He has also edited several *GURPS* books.

RECOMMENDED READING

CRIME AND THE DETECTIVE

BY MATTHEW POOK

Chaucer's phrase (see p. 37) has become a proverb all its own – "Murder will out" – possibly derived from a superstition that a fresh corpse will bleed in the presence of its murderer. Of course, it actually means that the crime will become public, though its perpetrator may be another matter. In the traditional whodunit, the murderer has to be revealed or the reader will be denied the satisfaction of knowing the truth and seeing justice done. The same can be said of RPGs, but where the whodunit has a single author in control who easily guides the cast of characters to a satisfying conclusion for her large audience, the RPG whodunit has the GM whose uneasy task is to guide the players – as much audience as participants – to a satisfactory conclusion. The RPG whodunit therefore has to be much simpler and more flexible, which presents the GM with a few problems.

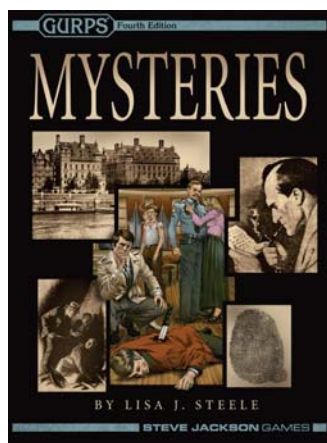
The first is that despite the number of published scenarios that involve a mystery (born of a murder or not), there is a dearth of advice for the GM on writing and running such adventures. In fact, short of perusing writers' guides to whodunits, the only gaming guide to the genre is *GURPS Mysteries* (\$19.95, Steve Jackson Games, sjgames.com). Written by a criminal defense attorney, this book serves as an invaluable guide to the genre from describing a crime and the motivation behind it to its detection via explaining its clues and witnesses. In fact, several crimes are described, including arson, blackmail, burglary, and kidnapping, but homicide or murder is the book's focus. Whatever the crime, *GURPS Mysteries* takes us through the ages, from Ancient Rome and the Middle Ages to today's mean streets and the far future with a discussion of the paranormal along the way. It even includes a complete chapter devoted to the low-tech mystery and the low-tech investigator. It addresses some

of the issues of roleplaying the historical whodunit, from the need for the sleuth to have status if he is to be free to investigate to the players being *too* aware, both in terms of the genre and technology. (How do you handle players who've read too many detective stories or watched too much *CSI: Miami*?)

The second problem is that there really is no one good RPG devoted to the medieval mystery genre. Some do make worthy attempts, as we shall see, but to do the genre full justice, a GM will need to bring together more than a single book – some for the genre itself, others for the history.

Our starting point is the genre's natural home, England of the late Middle Ages following the death of William the Conqueror, roughly 1087 to 1154. We will end very far from England, but still in the medieval period and still in the genre.

For an RPG dealing specifically with the medieval mystery, turn to author Simon Washbourne, who wrote *two* such RPGs devoted to the subject. Directly inspired by Ellis Peters' *Cadfael* novels and Bernard Knights' *Crowner John* novels, the *Medieval Mysteries RPG* (\$13, Beyond Belief Games, stores.lulu.com/simonwashbourne) uses a gritty version of the *d20 System* rules – in particular limiting character hit points and giving the chance of wound infection – to provide everything necessary to investigate crimes during the Middle Ages. It comes complete with an overview of life during the period and a good bibliography, but only a single scenario. Its treatment of the investigative process is perhaps a little too cursory for anyone not already well versed in the subject, something that more scenarios might have helped with. What it does give is a detailed guide to roles in the genre and setting in the form of nine new classes, divided between those that make good investigators (Apothecaries, Clerics, Crowners, Merchants, and Nobles) and those that work as part of an investigator's retinue (Fighters, Foresters, and Rogues). In keeping with the genre, it is suggested that one or two players take the role of investigators while the other players become part of the retinue.



Since most people in a medieval city can't read, citizens might buy their news from a town crier or bard, who collected news and gossip. For a fee, people could listen to their choice of informational stories.

Mordre wol out that se we day by day.

– Geoffrey Chaucer, “Nun’s Priest’s Tale”

Washbourne’s second RPG is the **Medieval Mysteries 1PG: Sleuthing in the Middle Ages** (\$3.95, Heyoka Studios, available via Precis Intermedia, pigames.net). It is in essence a distillation of his **d20 System** version, streamlined and simplified to fit the **1PG** format. This keeps each element of the game to a single page – one page for character generation, one for the GM, one for an explanation of the genre, and one for each scenario. Unlike most **1PG** titles, Washbourne adds several extra pages that support the genre’s historical elements. These describe medieval life, crime, and punishment, and provide glossaries of both medieval terms and the medieval church. The **1PG** system is also very easy; attributes and skills are only rated between one and three, and nothing more than an ordinary six-sided die is required.

The author adds to the system, too. When a player makes a successful skill check to discover a clue, he earns Deduce/Hunch points. These can be spent to Deduce specific information about a clue, or to gain a Hunch – a fresh lead with which the GM can nudge the player along.

The **Medieval Mysteries 1PG** comes with six single-sheet mysteries, which include the investigation of crimes with compelling conundrums: the discovery of the body, a man dropping dead, or a young woman claiming the sanctuary of the church after she killed a man the night before. Some of the crimes have given solutions, while others have open solutions, enabling a GM to better adjust the crime to fit the players’ efforts.

One of the scenarios does appear in the **Medieval Mysteries RPG**, but the presence of the other five make the **1PG** version an invaluable and inexpensive resource for the **d20 System** version or any medieval-set campaign with an investigative bent. Although the **1PG** version has fewer character roles, it is suggested that – like the **d20 System** version – the player characters be divided between a single investigator and several supporting characters. Both GM and his players need to work hard to ensure that each character gets his time in the spotlight, but this divide between primary and secondary characters makes it suitable for play with a smaller group.

For more history on the early medieval period, David Chart’s **Medieval Player’s Manual** (\$22.95, Green Ronin Publishing, greenronin.com) provides that and more with a wealth of detail that supports a slightly fantastical – but still authentic – approach to medieval era gaming. Combine it with the other supplements to add low-key magic, alchemy, astrology, divine magic, relics, ecclesiastic law, and more, including a detailed campaign outline.

After England, the next stop is the China of Robert van Gulik’s magistrate, Judge Dee, which can be decently done using **Qin: The Warring States** (\$37.95, Cubicle 7 Entertainment/Le 7ème Cercle, cubicle7.com). Set in ancient China prior to unification, the structured nature of Chinese society facilitates the creation and investigation of mysteries. It is heavily influenced by Wuxia films such as *Hero* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, so there is an emphasis on combat and athleticism. This is especially true in the game’s Taos – abilities that harness the forces of creation – such as the Tao of the Invisible Shield and the Tao of the Light Step. Yet Taos of the Clear Mind, Inner Eye, and Serene Presence are useful in intellectual, investigative, and social situations respectively, and allow room for the more courtly game or one with a magistrate as its central character.

Our medieval-mystery seeking trip concludes with an RPG inspired by yet more fiction, specifically the tales of civil servant Sugawara Akitada, written by Ingrid J. Parker. Although set during the 11th century of Japan’s Heian era, they can still be gamed using **Legends of the Five Rings Third Edition** (\$40, Alderac Entertainment Group, alderac.com). The setting for this RPG is Rokugan, a more fantastic version of feudal Japan.

This nation is governed by the Emperor and eight great clans, each vying for supremacy over the others, while all that stands between the Empire and the Shadowlands along its southern border is the Carpenter Wall, manned by the Crab Clan. All PCs are samurai, but each clan has various schools in which it trains its bushi (warriors), courtiers, and shugenja (sorcerer-priests). For our purpose, the mysterious Dragon Clan provides our investigators, as graduates of the Kitsuki family’s magistrate school having learned techniques of perception, awareness, and intuition. Their obsession with the truth – both of physical evidence and spoken word – places them at odds with other clans, which rely on testimony when conducting investigations. This means that

if the heroes find themselves in Ryoko Owari – the City of Lies – a PC Kitsuki magistrate can think like a modern investigator, making him a perfect addition to a mystery-solving group.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matthew Pook resides in Birmingham, England, with the requisite pair of black cats and a perky Goth (not obligatory, but fun nonetheless), plus more games than he can eat. A pedant and proofreader by day, a reviewer by night, he has been gaming for nearly 30 years. He has been saying mostly good things about those games for almost 10 of those years now.



LAST WORD

WITH SIMON WASHBOURNE

For the *Last Word* in each issue of *Pyramid*, we chat with someone in the game industry known for his work in the topic field. This month we talked with Simon Washbourne, author of the **Medieval Mysteries RPG** and the **Medieval Mysteries 1PG** (see p. 35-36 of this issue for reviews).

PYRAMID: What is the Last Word when it comes to medieval "crime and grime"?

SIMON WASHBOURNE: Society.

How do you mean that?

Well, it's society that determines what's a crime and what's not, and society also determines the penalties for crime. "Grime" is a society thing, too; I mean, you don't get grime in the countryside; you get mud and dirt. Grime only comes from cities – and society.

Society.

– Simon Washbourne

Do you think that the law and lawlessness in medieval society is closely related to our own modern view, or is it something alien to our sensibilities?

I guess it's probably alien in many ways – I mean, ideas like "sanctuary" and "hue and cry" are very peculiar to the modern mind. Some of the weirdest medieval legal oddities are the fines that were imposed. For example, a village found a body and reported it to the coroner – who promptly fined the whole village unless they could prove the victim was not a Frenchman. Still, our modern laws developed over many years from the laws that were being laid down in the Middle Ages, so there must be some correlation.

What do you think is the biggest mental adjustment that gamers can make to get themselves in the mindset of what the "law" meant back then?

To be honest, I don't really think we – as gamers or modern folk – can really get our minds into that mindset. I mean, we cannot know what it meant to be a serf (virtually a slave) working for the lord of the manor for most of the week without pay, or having no real leisure time, or being more or less restricted in movement to within a few miles of your home village. The laws to those guys must have felt so oppressive, and today we are so free in comparison . . .

Very true. In thinking about your examples of "sanctuary" and "hue and cry," it seems to me that there's a shift in the medieval mindset that pushes legal/criminal matters

into hands outside a strong government. "Hue and cry" – where commoners are expected to aid in the apprehension of wanted criminals – shifts responsibility for law enforcement to the common man, while sanctuary – where criminals can remain free from arrest by remaining in a church – places authority and salvation outside the state's hands as well (and, presumably, into God's). Thoughts?

God (as represented by the church) was a very real, very powerful entity in those days. We barely give the church a thought these days. Comparatively, it was in their whole lives, ground in from birth to death. The church was used as a marketplace and a focal point for the community. Nowadays, we walk past Gloucester Cathedral (near where I live) and say, "Wow, that's a great building."

You've written two gaming books on the subject of crime in the Middle Ages. From a gaming or writing/reading point of view, what do you think the appeal is of the medieval crime/mystery genre is?

For me, I loved the *Cadfael* books and TV series and always felt that historical RPGs were not well represented in general. (They are more so now, of course; there are a number of small-press publishers putting out some good stuff.) I've always been interested in history, and I think there is great potential in games that have a much more "mundane" focus. (By mundane, I mean without supernatural or magical elements; the medieval period is far from mundane.)

One of the things that puts gamers off historical settings is that they feel almost intimidated by it, I think. As long as you get the "feel" of the period, I don't think the actual historical nitty-gritty is so important.

So, what do you have in the works now?

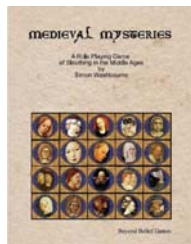
I'm working on a second foray into the western genre with **Guns of Laredo**, using my **Barbarians of Lemuria** rules.

*Is there a spin that makes this one different from your other Western game, **Go Fer Yer Gun!**?*

Guns of Laredo is inspired almost exclusively by George G. Gilman's *Edge*, *Undertaker*, and *Adam Steele* books. It is adult western of the most low-down gritty variety – the characters are real mean, ultra-violent, and not so far from the bad guys that you can really see a difference. I'm going for a really violent edge to the game, and there will be some mechanics that nudge your characters in that general direction. Real "crime and grime," if you like.

Well, I'll need to put up my shortsword and don my six-shooters for that, then!

Simon Washbourne's books are available through Beyond Belief Games, located online at stores.lulu.com/simonwashbourne



ABOUT *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of *GURPS* players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: info@sjgames.com. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. *GURPS* continues to grow – see what's new at gurps.sjgames.com, or visit www.warehouse23.com.

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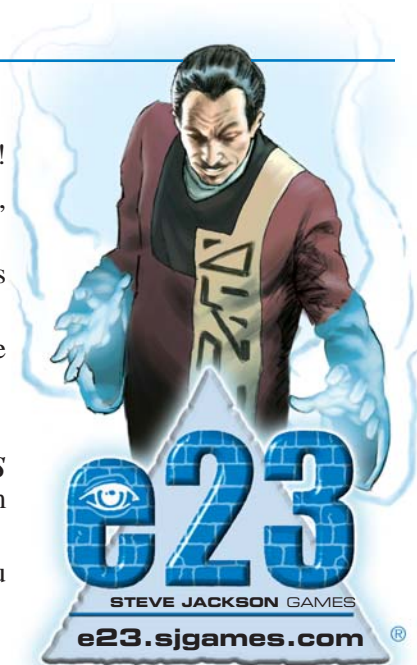
Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all *GURPS* releases are available on our website – see above.

GURPS rules and statistics in this magazine are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Fourth Edition*. Page references that begin with B refer to that book.

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