

## **Your Number Is Up**

by Andy Vetromile

Art by Kurt Brugel

*"Don Fedello?" Arthur Creaseman stepped into the dimly-lit lounge. He removed his hat respectfully and waited. He knew he'd been noticed, now he was waiting to be acknowledged. Across the room behind a sizable mahogany table and a hefty helping of shrimp scampi, sat Ermine Fedello, the most powerful man in the city.*

*Fedello was at least 80 years old - - how much older, no one could say. His birth records were a 75-year-old memory, left behind in Europe when he made the trip to Ellis Island. He was a lean figure, a scarecrow in a dinner jacket with skin stretched drum-tight over a fragile skull. The only features of importance left to Fedello's head were the eyes, which now rose from his lunch to fix Creaseman to the spot. Age had diluted neither his appetite nor the force of his personality.*

*"Come in, Artie, come in," Fedello bade Creaseman absently. He gestured to the other side of the table as if to indicate Creaseman should have a seat, but there was no chair. Arthur inhaled and stepped forward. "I understand there's a little - - how'd you put it? - - glitch in the casino."*

*Creaseman's lungs would not release his breath. "Yes, Don Fedello, but my men have assured me it's just an electrical problem. A day or two and . . . "*

*". . . and I will have lost nearly a quarter of a million dollars in gambling revenue," Fedello finished, spearing another shrimp. "Open the doors."*

*"But, Don Fedello," Creaseman choked, "If the tables continue to lose anyway, opening the casino again . . . "*

*Fedello sighed huskily, then spoke as if addressing his remaining shrimp. "If the problem is not fixed in 72 hours, I will find whomever is skimming from me and remove them. Tell that to your men. I think you'll find it to be an excellent motivator."*

*"Yes, Don Fedello."*

*Fedello waved soundlessly at the door, and Creaseman found enough composure to bow slightly, turn quickly, and exit the building.*

*On the street, Creaseman tucked his hat back onto his head. His bodyguard opened the car door for him. "How'd it go, boss?"*

*"Not good, Carl, not good at all," Creaseman said, sliding into the back.*

*Carl's face screwed up in thought for a moment. "Anything I can get you, boss?"*

*Creaseman thought as well. "Fall guys, Carl."*

"Your Number Is Up" is a [GURPS](#) adventure for campaigns with an occult or paranormal setting. It requires the *Basic Set* and [GURPS Horror](#). It works best with 3 or 4 100-point characters, and can be easily modified for use with other systems.

## The Story So Far

Mobster Arthur Creaseman runs an illegal casino in the subbasement of the Caspian Hotel for Don Ermine Fedello. Recently, the casino began a run of bad luck. One night, the roulette tables began to pay off big for the patrons. The next night, blackjack paid off. Then craps. In spite of the steps he took to cheat, Creaseman lost money every night. He tried to close the doors, but Fedello forced him to reopen and gave him 72 hours to find the problem. After that, the godfather would take matters into his own hands.

Arthur did what any mobster would do: started looking for patsies.

## The Root of All Evil

Four years ago, the Caspian's site was nothing but a burned-out warehouse ghetto. Creaseman cleverly ran a secret casino in an underground storage area while the neighborhood was commercially rezoned. Jerry Penham, a student from a nearby college doing studies in chaos theory, wanted to test some ideas in the casino. He got invited through Lawrence Hawthorne, his roommate at school; Lawrence's father was a councilman, which gave the junior Hawthorne some illicit connections.

Creaseman watched Jerry all night. He was sure the student was trying to cheat him, and confronted him after the casino closed. Always the naive one, Jerry tried excitedly to explain his theories, and the unstable mobster bludgeoned him with a chair.

Arthur panicked. His temper always had him in the hot seat, and when he discovered the kid was the friend of a councilman's son, he knew Fedello would go through the roof. Creaseman and his bodyguard Carl hid the body until they could bury it in the new hotel's cement foundation. Lawrence, fearing the mob and scandal, told the cops he and Jerry had been drinking, after which Jerry had wandered off to the park.

The police weren't comfortable with that, but they had no hard evidence and were eventually told to back off by the councilman. Many assumed pressures at school made Penham leave town. The case is still open.

But Jerry is still here, haunting the place of his burial and throwing a phantasmal wrench into the mob's moneymaking enterprise. He plans to stay until Creaseman pays for his crimes.

## Enter the Characters

It is assumed the PCs are all occult investigators of some stripe. Whether secretive or public about their work, Creaseman will still find them and send Ari Legato, his lawyer, to secure their services. Legato is a small, thin fellow with grey, swept-back hair. Other than a skill of 17 in Law, he is a completely average character. He tells

the group:

*"I have a client who is interested in having what he believes to be an (ahem) 'occult occurrence' investigated, in hopes of putting a stop to it. It is disrupting his business, and if you are discrete in your work you will be handsomely paid to end it. We will provide your fee, expenses, and any equipment needed. Would this be of interest to you?"*

Smart PCs will question such a good offer. Legato hasn't been told much. He can tell them the following:

?The place in question is the Caspian Hotel (he won't mention the casino).

?Their benefactor is Curtis Calhoun. This is half-true. Calhoun runs the hotel and is on the books as the owner. He knows something isn't right, but he doesn't ask questions.

?Legato doesn't know the details of the "problem." He's just the mouthpiece. The reason for the runaround is no one wants the investigators to know about the mob angle, otherwise they wouldn't take the job. If they refuse, the attorney can up their pay. If they still won't take it and the GM wants them to accept, he can have the mob kidnap a Dependent as enticement. Remember, Creaseman has only three days.

Research on Legato, Calhoun and the hotel reveals little unless the party specifies they are seeking Mafia ties, and even then they'll need the appropriate Contacts. Calhoun is clean and loaded with business degrees. The hotel and Ari Legato can be connected, but the money trail is a long one.

## Welcome to the Caspian

If they accept, the investigators will be taken to the hotel and given rooms. The Caspian is as fancy as any they're likely to have seen (at least on an occult investigator's paycheck), with clean plush carpets, impeccable style and service personnel so attentive you can't turn around without bumping into three of them. Once settled, they will be invited to dine with "Mr. Calhoun's operations manager, Arthur Creaseman."

The meal is served in a private lounge at the back of the hotel's restaurant. Arthur, with Carl looking on, engages the PCs in friendly conversation, avoiding the subject of the disturbances. He wants to know what the group does, whether his background checks were on the money and whether they're loose-lipped about their clientele. Then he takes them to the subbasement to see the casino.

## Arthur Creaseman

Thick-necked mobster, 45, 5'10", 170 lbs., flickering gaze, dresses impeccably, sweats when his tables lose.

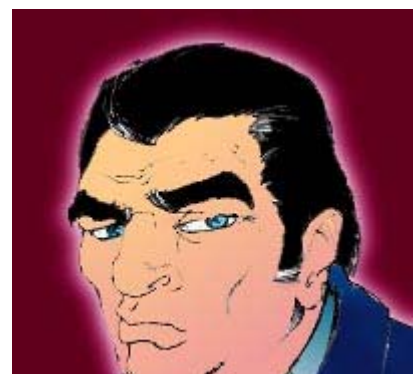
**ST 12 DX 12 IQ 13 HT 10**

**Basic Speed 5.5; Move 5**

**Dodge 5 Parry 3 Block 4**

**Damage:** Thrust 1d-1; Swing 1d+2

**Advantages:** Patron (Don Fedello), Strong Will/1, Wealth (Wealthy), Status/1, Acute Vision +1.



*Disadvantages:* Bad Temper, Bully, Duty (Mafia), Paranoia.

*Quirks:* Hates Italian food; not religious; has a gun in every room of his home; doesn't mind doing his own dirty work; enjoys public radio.

*Notable Skills:* Accounting 15, Administration 14, Area Knowledge (Campaign City) 14, Drive/TL7 (Car) 12, Gamble 15, Guns/TL7 (Pistols) 14, Leadership 13, Streetwise 12.

*Equipment:* Glock 9mm (p. B208), cash clip, cell phone.

Creaseman is a bankable moneymaker but he's also a couple sandwiches short of a picnic. He thinks he doesn't advance in the mob's ranks because he's only half-Italian, but the truth is the mob won't let a liability like him get too far.

Arthur rules by fear. His hopes of succeeding Fedello as don are only a pipe dream; Fedello is the only man he's afraid of.

By day, Creaseman conducts business throughout the hotel. At night he's always in the casino sweating over the tables.

## Going Down

At the bottom of the elevator, the party is led down a hallway and through a conspicuous metal detector and finally into the casino.

The large room is filled with gambling tables. A striking red carpet, brass fittings and deep-hued wood complete the simple decor. Fans hang from the ceiling and smoky bubbles hide the security cameras. There are no clocks. Along the back wall, left to right, are a large service elevator, a storage room and another hallway. On the left side of the hall is a private elevator. Only Creaseman has a key. On the right is Arthur's office and the security office. If the penny hasn't dropped yet, the adventurers should now realize they are working for The Wrong People. If they try to back out at this point, Artie will forego upping his offer and threaten the PCs into cooperating. He doesn't have time to negotiate.

## Questioning Creaseman

Arthur will answer the group's questions. He'll tell them about the unusual activity at the tables. He will not tell them about the 72 hour deadline or that he works for Ermine Fedello. If they knew he answered to a higher-up, he might not be able to leave them holding the bag.

During the interview, it should become clear that Creaseman doesn't believe in what the investigators preach. If they discover the problem, great, but they're here to take the blame. It's also obvious Creaseman doesn't seem concerned that the party knows of his felonious nature.

If they're worth their paycheck, they'll ask their new boss about unusual events on the premises: untimely or violent deaths, disasters, former residents. Creaseman's look momentarily darkens, and he'll reply, "No. If anything like that happened, I would know."

The party can then search the casino under the watchful eye of two goons. They'll report back anything juicy they overhear to their boss, but they won't crowd the PCs. The party will be allowed into all the rooms (including Arthur's office, though they'll

only get to eyeball it).

### Average Mob Enforcer

Faceless mob muscle, 26, 6', 170 lbs., dark suits.

**ST 12 DX 13 IQ 9 HT 11**

**Basic Speed 6 Move 6**

**Dodge 6 Parry 4 Block 4**

**Damage:** Thrust 1d-1; Swing 1d+2

*Quirk:* Suspicious bulges.

*Notable Skills:* Area Knowledge (Campaign City) 10, Brawling 12, Drive/TL7 (Car) 12, Gun/TL7 (Pistol) 13, Shadowing 9, Stealth 12.

*Equipment:* Smith & Wesson .38 revolver (p. B208).

These are the dime-a-dozen soldiers the mob sends out to break kneecaps. Any time the GM needs average thugs to throw at the PCs, he should use these stats.

## Further Investigations

Here's a quick run-down of the people and places the team is most likely to get their information from. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but they are the most obvious sources.

### The Casino

The party has the run of the hotel, but they'll have company wherever they go. They can check the casino during operation if they want; in fact, Creaseman will insist (video of them in the casino could come in handy). The hotel tailor provides evening dress if they have none. Arthur tells the PCs that, if guests ask, they should say they are personal guests of his.

If the PCs wish to have a private conversation, nights in the casino are ideal. The place is jumping so surveillance is tough, and their host has to put on a good show. His muscle can't follow the party without making other guests antsy.

The investigators won't be disappointed. Once the room has a good head of steam, Jerry will work his magic. The GM should pick a game that will make a nice dramatic impression and let the ghost go to town making it pay off. Any devices the group brought for measuring PK levels and such will register wildly if they can use them. This will be an exercise in discretion. So much as a pocket calculator in a casino smacks of high-tech cheating, and their use will infuriate the guests. The party will get a good reading at the tables even during the day, but at night Jerry's voodoo will bury the needle.

During all this, Creaseman begins to pace and sweat with barely-contained anger. After the place closes, he'll demand that the party explain. Of course, he doesn't believe in ghosts or lame excuses, so he'll chew them out regardless.

The only other evidence is casino file video confirming Arthur's story.

### The Word on the Street

Pavement pounding won't reveal much that isn't already known: the casino is in

trouble, plagued by strange events, and may close. Most of the underworld believes Creaseman murdered Jerry Penham, but no one knows what he and Carl did with the body, so there's little reason to connect a four-year-old murder with the goings-on at the hotel. After all, Arthur's killed a lot of people over the years . . .

## Following the Money

Now that they know the mob is involved, the adventurers may try any Contacts in the underworld or the law enforcement community. Meeting discretely with those Contacts may prove tough with Creaseman's surveillance (see below).

Neither the authorities nor street folk can connect Penham and the Caspian. What they can reveal is that Artie reports to Fedello, the city's premiere mobster. No one makes a move without Ermine's okay, and the hotelier is always on thin ice with him. Artie's not known for his stability, but he's an organizer and good at developing new schemes, so the mob keeps him around.

Something the GM should keep in mind about the authorities: if they find the PCs are in with the mob, however unwillingly, it may tempt them to exploit this "good fortune" to their own ends. Unless the characters want to play both sides against the middle, they should keep this a secret.

## Straight from the Horse's Mouth

After Jerry, the next-best source of information is Carl Hanson, Arthur's bodyguard and accomplice. He literally knows where the bodies are buried, so he's the best bet for uncovering the cause of the phenomena. Carl's a terribly nice fellow, but he's loyal to the wrong kind of people. To tip off the characters that he's a potential resource, the GM should see that the big lug always has a friendly word for them and waves gregariously from the casino bar.

Since his boss invited them, Hanson assumes the party is, in mob parlance, "okay," so he's open to small talk about family business. They have to ask the right questions, though. Asked about any unusual occurrences in the hotel's history, he lets slip, "Oh, no, not since the construction." Carl's new friends must tread lightly. The subject of Jerry Penham is verboten, and it will take Fast Talk or Seduction rolls made at -5 to get him to open up further. Alcohol and the lateness of the hour will reduce this penalty, but a bribe will insult Carl and send up a warning flag even in his addled mind.

With the security cameras following the party, Artie will notice any exchanges with his employee, and you can bet the rent that when the boss asks him, Carl will spill everything he remembers. It might be prudent to finish off Hanson's short-term memory with an unrelated discussion, like asking him about his time in the ring.

## Carl "Canvas" Hanson

Boxer-cum-bodyguard, 33, 6'1", 190 lbs., looks older than he is, suits always seem too small on him, fidgets as though shadow-boxing.

**ST 13 DX 14 IQ 10 HT 12**

**Basic Speed 6.5 Move 6**

**Dodge 7 Parry 4 Block 5**

**Damage:** Thrust 1d; Swing 2d-1

*Advantages:* Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, Reputation (+2, fight fans, 10-

).

*Disadvantages:* Duty (to Creaseman, 12 -), Gullibility, Hard of Hearing, Overconfidence.

*Quirks:* Baby - sits his sister's kids once a week; has a satellite dish but only watches ESPN; won't use a microwave; thinks zoos are cruel; pays cash.

*Martial Arts Style:* Boxing.

*Notable Skills:* Area Knowledge (Campaign City) 10, Body Language 10, Boxing 15, Drive/TL7 (Car) 13, Running 12, Sports (Football) 13, Swimming 14, Tournament Law (Boxing) 11.

*Maneuvers:* Feint 17, Jab 15, Riposte 12, Roundhouse Punch 14, Slip 6.

*Equipment:* Brass knuckles, pictures of his sister's kids.

Hanson's heavyweight boxing career was cut short by deafness in his left ear and brain damage. The pugilist took a job collecting debts for Creaseman, but became Artie's bodyguard as paranoia set in. The two go everywhere together. At night Carl sits and eats peanuts at the bar while the boss mingles. Carl is the only person Creaseman trusts.

Carl comes from a fighting family; the PCs may even recognize him. He feels he let the family down, not by working for the mob but by getting thrown out of the ring. He's always glad to relive his glory days.

## Ace in the Hole

Of course, Jerry Penham can tell the adventurers everything - - if he'll talk to them. He knows they're working for his murderer, so they'll have to convince him of their intentions. They may not even be able to talk to him without some psychic assistance (it will help if one of the characters is a sensitive).

Jerry's focus is the casino, and getting a medium into the subbasement is not going to be easy. Creaseman will want to know why the team needs a "new member," and he'll do a background check on anyone they bring in. They can't tell Arthur about the seance without admitting they know he's guilty of capital murder, and anyone the group brings in will fall into the shadow of the mob. Depending on the range, the GM may decide to allow the seance to work outside the hotel or on another floor, but being constantly under surveillance makes a sitting on the hotel doorstep unlikely.

If the party is able to prove their good intentions, Jerry may elect to spend some of his precious mana to materialize for them and parley.

## Jerry Penham

Dead math student, 26, 5'9", apparent weight 155 lbs., thick glasses, pleasant smile, comfortable casual clothes.

**ST 10 DX 11 IQ 15 HT 10**

**Basic Speed 5.25 Move 5**

**Dodge 5 Parry and Block NA**

**Damage: 0**

*Advantages:* Lightning Calculator, Mathematical Ability.

*Disadvantages:* Curious.

Jerry was only a couple of credits away from his doctorate, and the experiment in the casino was going to be the basis of his doctoral thesis. He was a retiring,

harmless young student before he was murdered; he's grown up a lot since then. Although he appears as he looked the night Creaseman did him in, Jerry's attitude is a great deal more antagonistic, especially toward anyone he thinks will stand between him and his revenge. His endearing innocence may resurface if he finds someone he can trust.

Penham mostly uses his magic to affect the roulette ball and craps dice, or to change one card to another when drawn from a deck. He isn't a powerful ghost, but he uses his abilities to maximum effect (see Ghostly and Demonic Magic sidebar, p. H46).

## **Someone to Watch Over Me**

Creaseman will keep the party on a leash during their investigations, but it's a long leash. He needs the party as patsies, so he'll rein in his vicious personality up to a point. If he thinks they have outlived their usefulness or stepped too far out of bounds, he'll do away with them.

He'll keep tabs on them through Clyde Revere, his tail-man. Clyde is very good at his job and he will report the group's activities and their lines of inquiry. If they split up, Revere will follow the largest group and send some thugs to watch the rest. These goons aren't as skilled as the tail-man, though, and will be easier to spot and lose. For Clyde, use the Mob Enforcer stats (above) with the following changes: raise Area Knowledge to 12, Shadowing to 14 and Stealth to 13.

The PCs' rooms are bugged and the phones tapped. Conversations are recorded and their content reported to Artie. Revere also uses this information to decide who to follow out of the building. Smart PCs will discover (or assume) this is going on, and will take the opportunity to feed false information to their hosts.

## **Playing Your Hand**

Once they have all the pieces of the puzzle, what does the team do with the information?

They could tell Creaseman what they've found, but there are two things wrong with this approach. First, he won't believe it; in his most fanciful dreams, he wouldn't consider it possible. Second, he'll kill the party for knowing too much.

The police would be interested in what the party has found, but there's no way to prove it (Kirlian auras notwithstanding). The PCs have nothing concrete, Carl won't roll over on his boss, and no one's going to issue a warrant to tear up the foundations of a four-star hotel.

The truth is, the characters are pretty much on their own. The heavy-handed approach is to exorcise Jerry, which will entail the same problems with secrecy as contacting him; rules for exorcism are on p. H45. If they befriend him, he can help bring down Creaseman, though his abilities lie mostly in being able to manipulate the tables (and even those will peter out the further he gets from his focus).

## **The Trump Card**

Ironically, the best ally the players have against Arthur Creaseman is Ermine Fedello. If they tell him what his puppet has been up to, he will be outraged. He already



suspects his lieutenant has been skimming money, but even if the investigators let on about the supernatural aspect of their case, Fedello is much more imaginative than Artie and carries more Old World superstitions. He might actually believe them. The team will have to shake pursuit long enough to get to the don, but their tail won't cross the boss's boss.

Discovering a link between the two men is another kettle of fish. The don takes steps to stay out of the spotlight. Characters with a law enforcement background may know of him; otherwise Contacts and Streetwise rolls, at -3 to skill, will be necessary to make the connection. Or they can follow the money trail, at -5 to an Accounting roll. As a legitimate businessman, Fedello is easy to find.



### Don Ermine Fedello

Ancient mob boss, 80 (?), 5'5", 105 lbs., skeletally thin, piercing stare, garlic on his breath, usually wears a smoking jacket or dressing gown.

**ST 8 DX 9 IQ 14 HT 8**

**Basic Speed 4.25 Move 4**

**Dodge 4 Parry NA Block NA**

**Damage:** Thrust 1d-3; Swing 1d-2

*Advantages:* Alertness +1, Ally Group (his crime family), Charisma +1, Longevity, Reputation (+3, criminals, all the time), Status/3, Wealth (Very Wealthy).

*Disadvantages:* Addiction (tobacco), Addiction (pain pills), Enemies (Opposing Mafia family and FBI tag teams, 9-), Stubbornness.

*Quirks:* Overly generous to his grandchildren; keeps four myna birds; misses playing golf; doesn't use his doctor-prescribed oxygen; sends cases of bourbon as Christmas gifts.

*Notable Skills:* Accounting 12, Administration 16, Area Knowledge (Campaign City) 13, Cooking 13, Detect Lies 14, Diplomacy 14, Economics 14, Gambling 12, Guns/TL7 (Pistols) 13, Leadership 14, Savoir-Faire 14, Streetwise 12.

*Equipment:* Ruger STD, .22 (p. B208), cigarette holder, pain pills.

Fedello has been fending for himself since he came to America at about age 5. Always sharp, he learned flawless English, which allowed him to ingratiate himself into high society. This was his stepping stone to the upper echelons of the mob.

Now the most influential crime figure in the city, he monitors his organization with a tireless eye. Nothing happens without his say-so. Everyone expected him to die 15 years ago, but he continues to abuse his body, ignore his doctor and thrive.

### The Wrap-Up

If the party thinks the don is too good to be true, well, let them. Fedello has nothing against them; indeed, he is in their debt and will honor their deal with Arthur. The PCs can tell the cops any story they like. The Feds haven't moved on the godfather yet, and they're not going to do it on the say-so of ghost chasers. Creaseman will disappear, and since it was his casino it can be disavowed or dismantled. If the team is a little more reluctant to start their cars in the morning, so be it.

Jerry Penham may ask the characters to take care of some loose ends for him:

getting him a decent burial, setting his parents' and Lawrence's minds at ease, perhaps publishing whatever findings his theories produced. Then Penham will "move on."

Of course, it's always possible the group ran afoul of Creaseman and got waxed. If so, they can team up with Jerry and try to bring the mobster to justice from beyond the grave.

## Other Adventures

Jerry could be an interesting NPC to keep around. The party will have to return to the Caspian Hotel to talk to him unless the GM frees him from his focus (in which case he might be a good replacement for any character who died during the adventure). He may even try to secure the party's services for other ghosts in need of occult adventurers!

Jerry lost a lot of naivete when he got murdered. Maybe he's more vengeful than the party thought. After he deals with Creaseman, he may go after the Hawthorne family. If Lawrence got married, the ghost could target his two year old daughter . . .

Perhaps Creaseman got wind that the party spilled their guts to Don Fedello and he rabbited. If he's alive, the group has a new Enemy. Arthur will regroup and plot revenge in classic fashion. If he saw evidence of the supernatural, he may change his tune and try to amass occult power. Now he's really dangerous. And if Fedello killed Creaseman, Artie may come back for revenge, too.

Article publication date: July 10, 1998

---

58 *Pyramid* subscribers rated this article **3.59** on a scale of 1 to 5. Visit the [ratings page](#) for more info.

---

Copyright © 1998 by [Steve Jackson Games](#). All rights reserved. Pyramid subscribers are permitted to read this article online, or download it and print out a single hardcopy for personal use. Copying this text to any other online system or BBS, or making more than one hardcopy, is *strictly prohibited*. So please don't. And if you encounter copies of this article elsewhere on the web, please report it to [webmaster@sjgames.com](mailto:webmaster@sjgames.com).

---



[Home](#) - [Subscribe!](#) - [Current Issue](#) - [Playtesting](#) - [Chat](#) - - - [Feedback](#)