

PYRAMID

Issue 3/8 June '09

CLIFFHANGERS

PULP ACTION!

by Sean Punch

**AIR DEVILS OF
THE SOUTH SEAS**
by Matt Riggsby

**INTO THE TEMPLE
OF THE HUNGRY STAR!**
by J. Edward Tremlett

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

It's time for a two-fisted tour into yesteryear with this issue of *Pyramid*. GMs who need help with their 1930s-era pulp campaigns will find two adventures – one for **GURPS** and one generic – while players get assistance applying the **Action** supplements to their pulp heroes!

Sean Punch, **GURPS** line editor and **GURPS Action** author, explains how to adapt modern-day **Action** templates and rules to pulp-era adventurers in *Pulp Action*!

Matt Riggsby – author of **GURPS Locations: The Tower of Octavius** – takes heroes to an island paradise on the eve of World War II in *Air Devils of the South Seas*. Who or what are the monsters raiding villages, and why are they doing it? It's got full stats for **GURPS**, but the core mystery works great in any game!

In J. Edward Tremlett's adventure framework *Into the Temple of the Hungry Star!*, the heroes will discover horrifying secrets about South American artifacts and try to prevent the destruction of the world!

If the heroes are globe-trotting investigators, they'll love this issue's handout: a huge list of countries and territories of the world in the 1930s, including a map to plot and record their travels. It's great for GMs keeping track of global information, too!

Andy Vetromile and Matthew Pook explore games that can be used, perused, or abused for pulp-era inspiration in this month's *Recommended Reading*!

Finally, the *Last Word* comes to us from Leonard Balsera, one of the voices behind the fan-favorite **Spirit of the Century**. What is the last word on cliffhangers, and does it end in an exclamation point?!

*Without adventure, civilization
is in full decay.*
– Alfred North Whitehead

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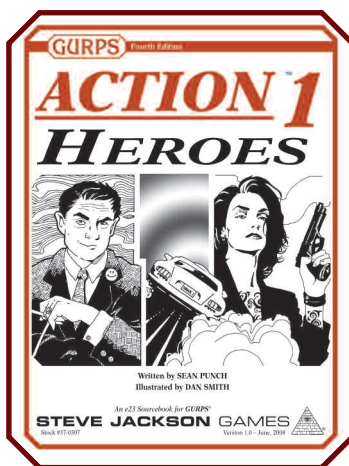
FROM THE EDITOR

WHEN SUDDENLY . . .

The world's seemed smaller and smaller with each passing year, and it's now possible to communicate with someone half a world away in milliseconds. But one of the earliest escalations of that global compression started during the "cliffhanger" era.

One reason I suspect for cliffhangers' popularity is that it bridges the old and the new, the possible and the impossible, the known and the unknown. It's entirely feasible to face a master swordsman in one scene and a madman with a machine gun in another. It can take six hours to wind your way from one side of Berlin to the other, and another six hours to fly to London.

Hopefully, then, this issue's adventures, rules, and ideas (including some support for the **GURPS Action** line) help you bridge the gap to the campaign you want to run. Whether it's a near-realistic tour of the 1930s or a near-sci-fi romp into yesterday's future, we've hopefully got something to whet your appetite.

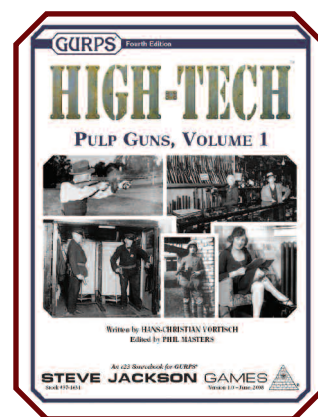


IT HAPPENED HERE!

This issue contains another meaty handout. One of the things we've tried to do with the *Pyramid* revamp is to take advantage of the format and present items that can be used right now in a campaign. If you came up with any ideas for clever things to do with these handouts, tell us (or other folks) about your brainstorm. If you have any suggestions for future things you'd like to see in the mag, we *really* want to hear from you!

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. If this is your first issue of *Pyramid*, then welcome aboard the adventure express! Regardless, we always welcome comments about what we're doing right and wrong. If you're inspired to contribute to *Pyramid*, please check out our Writer's Guidelines at sjgames.com/pyramid/writing.html for more information!



*I have all of [the issues of **Pyramid**] and they are excellent.
I really am digging this format.*

– Trentin C Bergeron, on the Steve Jackson Games forums

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PULP ACTION!

BY SEAN PUNCH

GURPS Action is a near-perfect match to pulp adventure. You roleplay larger-than-life figures who use guts, determination, two fists, and trusty pistols to tackle enemies – all of which nicely describes pulp heroes. This isn't surprising: Many early (and a few recent) action movies were silver-screen retellings of pulp stories.

The team-based approach of **Action** is actually a *better* match to pulps than to modern action movies. Most flicks today feature a lone hero, or maybe two buddies. Pulp fiction had its loners but frequently featured special police units, infantry squads, ships' crews, etc. Even Doc Savage didn't work alone, despite being pulp's paragon polymath.

There's even a bonus benefit: *The Cell Phone Problem* (**Action 2**, p. 9) goes away.

The snag is that **Action** assumes TL8. You can make a case for late TL7 – many of the genre conventions and gizmos originated then – but the age of cliffhanging adventure is TL6. The pulp era ends decades before the first hackers and satellites materialize. This necessitates changes to the baseline assumptions.

TEMPLATES

The templates in **Action 1** need some tweaks for a pulp campaign. In *all* cases:

- The Computer Operation skill is common as a background choice or better. Replace this with an Area Knowledge or Current Affairs specialty at the same level. Facts about people, places, and events reside in minds, not on Google.
- Unarmed skills for most pulp heroes are Boxing or Brawling for striking, and/or Wrestling for grappling. Judo and Karate play a role, but pulps portray them as Asian Secrets. Those who know them must make their Area Knowledge (above) something stereotypically *Oriental*.

Assassin

Pulp heroes are often killers, but people who kill *as* their job – as opposed to *while doing* their job, often in self-defense – are depicted as bad guys. Still, the stealthier kind of vigilante might use the template, which the GM can rename “masked vigilante.”

Advantages: Masked vigilantes are unlikely to have Zeroed; it's hard to doctor every paper on you in a bureaucracy that uses manila folders and not computers. Replace that option with Alternate Identity, which might be legal [5] or illegal [15], depending on the chosen lens.

Disadvantages: Vigilantes may opt for Intolerance (Crooks) [-5], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10], or Sense of Duty (Law-Abiding Citizens) [-10] – or even Selfless [-5*] or Charitable [-15*] – in place of assassin traits like Callous, Code of Honor (“Stay bought”), Greed, Obsession, and Social Stigma. They may also take Secret Identity [-20] instead of Secret.

Primary Skills: Guns (Rifle) doesn't have to be the foremost Guns specialty; it might be swapped with Guns (Pistol, Shotgun, or SMG). The glorification of snipers is a post-WWII trope. Pulp killers favor pistols, shotguns, and Tommy guns.

Secondary Skills: Replace Electronics Operation (Security) with Lockpicking and Traps, both still (A) IQ [2]-12, on the list of options.

Cleaner

Like the assassin, this archetype borders on being too offensive for pulp sensibilities: Good guys might shoot first, but they don't need to hide the bodies. Still, a cleaner may fit a campaign where the PCs are spies who must avoid detection by Nazis or the like.

Advantages: Any Contact Group is almost certainly “the Mob.” As with the assassin, replace Zeroed with Alternate Identity [5 or 15].

Disadvantages: Unlike the assassin, someone who deliberately feeds bodies to pigs probably *does* have unpleasant disadvantages. This is a major part of why the character type isn't especially fitting outside of bleak espionage campaigns.

Primary Skills: The Driving specialty is customarily Heavy Wheeled. Cars have big trunks at TL6, but in most places, there aren't enough of them at night to avoid suspicion – and in the Egyptian desert, trucks are the only option that doesn't have four legs.

Secondary Skills: Electronics Operation (Media) isn't relevant if no one has security cameras taping you! Hazardous Materials is unlikely. In an urban setting, replace these options with Streetwise (A) IQ-1 [1]-13 and Urban Survival (A) Per-1 [1]-13; in a local campaign, Area Knowledge (The Harbor) (E) IQ [1]-14 is classic.

Demolition Man

The jittery, nitro-toting explosives specialist fits many pulp stories! In caper plots, he blows safes. In tales of manly adventure, he demolishes bridges from beneath truckloads of gun-waving minions, or even uses his skills for mineral exploration and construction.

Danger! A city, a newly found civilization, or even the world is in danger of being destroyed!

Lenses for Pulp Heroes

Most lenses from **Action 1** (pp. 4-5) suit pulp heroes:

- *Criminal* works fine as written. Many pulp fans rooted for the gumshoes and G-men who hunted gangsters, but the genre frequently glamorized the exploits of crooks.

- *Intelligence* is also fitting; spies, too, were glamorized in the source fiction. The Brainwashing skill isn't suitable for PCs, though. It's rare and the exclusive purview of *evil* mad scientists.

- *Law enforcement* is the most common lens, suited to private dicks and real cops alike. The Liquid Projector and Tonfa skills aren't suitable, however – they cover weapons not used by police at TL6.

- *Military* is appropriate – especially for war heroes. Parachuting would be a rare skill for an ordinary trooper, and NBC Suit and Scuba would be rarer still.

The *security* lens isn't especially suitable for heroes. Good guys who foil spies and uphold national security have the law enforcement lens. Secret police and other dedicated "security agents" are classic bad guys who serve dictatorial foreign powers.

The brief *academic*, *journalist*, and *rich adventurer* lenses on p. 5 of **Action 1** fit pulp stories and are as likely

as those discussed above. One new lens suits gadgeteers and medics.

New Lens: Man of Science

20 points

You may *serve* a government, but you've dedicated your life to science and invention – not the gun.

Skills: 20 points chosen from Criminology, Meteorology, Research, Speed-Reading, Teaching, or Writing, all (A) IQ [2]; Archaeology, Astronomy, Chemistry, Cryptography, Engineer (any), Forensics, Geology, Mathematics (any), Metallurgy, Naturalist, Paleontology, Pharmacy, or Psychology, all (H) IQ-1 [2]; Biology or Physics, both (VH) IQ-2 [2]; 2 more points in any lens skill to raise it by one level; or 6 more points to raise it by two. The GM may allow Science! IQ-1 [12]; see p. B175.

Social Traits: Professors *may* spend some of their template's advantage points (or leftover lens points) on Tenure [5]. This works like Rank 1 when making Assistance Rolls for cash ("research grant"), facilities, files, forensics, and replacement gear; see **Action 1**, pp. 24-25.

Disadvantages: Given the early 20th century's relatively lax safety standards, many real-world explosives experts – and their pulp counterparts – suffered Hard of Hearing, Missing Digit, Wounded, and even One Eye [-15]. The GM should let PCs have these disadvantages in lieu of other choices on the template.

Primary Skills: The Explosives (Demolition) and Explosives (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) paths are both acceptable, but the latter is the rarer at TL6. And simply ignore all references to Nuclear Ordnance Disposal!

Secondary Skills: Guns (Grenade Launcher and LAW) aren't at all likely. For a TL6 combat engineer, Liquid Projector (Flamethrower) (E) DX+1 [2]-14 is a valid option, and Artillery (Cannon) (A) IQ [2]-14 and Throwing (A) DX [2]-13 – for mortars and hand grenades, respectively – move up onto the list with Guns skills. Replace Scuba with Diving Suit (A) DX [2]-13.

Background Skills: As TL6 explosives are less potent than TL8 ones, and often come by the truckload, Driving (Heavy Wheeled) is more likely than Driving (Automobile).

Face Man

The face man – *especially* with the rich adventurer lens (**Action 1**, p. 5) – is a model pulp hero. With the criminal lens, he's a fixer and remains fitting. The pretty face that's no man but all woman is important enough to rate its own template; see *Femme Fatale* (pp. 7-8).

Advantages: The archetypal wealthy industrialist may opt to replace Smooth Operator 2 [30] with Business Acumen 3 [30]. This reduces all primary skills but Merchant by two levels, but raises Merchant and the secondary skill choices of Administration, Gambling, and Propaganda by *three* levels.

Disadvantages: In his first -15 points of disadvantages, a captain of industry may opt for Compulsive Spending [-5*] or Miserliness [-10*] – depending on outlook – instead of traits better-suited to con-men, like Secret, Social Stigma, and Trickster.

Primary Skills: A rich adventurer should pick Savoir-Faire (High Society); a fixer, Savoir-Faire (Mafia). The former may swap any primary skill for one of Administration (A) IQ-1 [1] or Accounting, Economics, Finance, or Market Analysis, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-13 – all of which get +3 if Business Acumen is selected over Smooth Operator.

Secondary Skills: Wealthy faces may take the business skills above as some of their 10 secondary choices. Of the existing choices, they usually favor Connoisseur, Dancing, Gambling (gets +3 for Business Acumen), Propaganda (ditto), and higher Savoir-Faire over criminal skills like Counterfeiting, Disguise, and Pickpocket. Electronics Operation (Media) is anachronistic, but add Writing (A) IQ-1 [1]-14 to the options – it plays much the same role.

Hacker

This archetype doesn't exist in pulp stories. See *Gadgeteer* (p. 8) for the closest match.

The heroes must save the doomed location or, barring that, as many of the residents as possible.

Infiltrator

Cat burglars and secret agents are alive and well in the pulps. Lenses besides criminal and intelligence are rare, however – although an especially nosy journalist *might* qualify. In all cases, TL6 infiltrators get their bonuses more from innate talent than from gear.

Advantages: Catfall, Craftiness, High Manual Dexterity, and improved DX and IQ are suitable; the GM might even require pulp infiltrators to spend 20+ advantage points on these. Signature Gear is iffy – in the age before computer prototyping and anonymous Internet sites, sneaks avoid rare, specially machined, *traceable* gear. As for the assassin, replace Zeroed with Alternate Identity [5 or 15].

Primary Skills: Reinvest the 4 points earmarked for Electronics Operation (Security) in your choice of Lockpicking or Traps, improving it to (A) IQ+2 [8]-15. Alarms at TL6 may be technically “electronic,” but are rare; Traps suffices to deal with them. Locks are the real challenge, making high Lockpicking valuable.

Secondary Skills: Parachuting, Piloting (Glider), Scuba, and Submarine (Free-Flooding Sub) would be exotic in the extreme at TL6. The GM could fairly require the secondary “mobility skills” to be four of Boating (Motorboat or Unpowered) or Driving (Automobile, Heavy Wheeled, or Motorcycle), both (A) DX [2]-15; Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Running (A) HT [2]-11; or 2 points to raise one of those skills or Acrobatics or Stealth by a level. Electronics Repair (Security) is not an option.

“What is this ‘Electronics,’ Professor?”

The Electronics Operation and Electronics Repair skills, and related Engineer specialties (see pp. B189-190), *do* exist at TL6. However, they have nothing to do with transistors and integrated circuits – they cover vacuum tubes, relays, and other complex electrical circuits. Use and maintenance of such gear *isn't* for the standard pulp hero. It's the preserve of the gadgeteer (p. 8), who's the only one who should have these skills.

Investigator

This template needs few changes to suit a pulp campaign! The law enforcement lens turns the investigator into the archetypal G-man or gumshoe, but any lens can work. The journalist lens (**Action 1**, p. 5) is especially fitting.

Primary Skills: Remove the Electronics Operation (Surveillance) option. The other skills are fine. Detectives favor Criminology, Detect Lies, Interrogation, Observation, Search, and Shadowing. Journalists prefer Detect Lies, Interrogation,

Photography, Research, and Speed-Reading, and may take Writing (A) IQ [2]-15 as a primary skill.

Secondary Skills: These skills, too work – but as usual, replace Computer Operation with (more) Area Knowledge and Current Affairs.

Medic

Pulp stories have a fascination with doctors. Physicians often have adventures and are sometimes central figures. In the source fiction, such heroes are as likely as gadgeteers to have the Man of Science lens (p. 5).

Advantages: Pulp medics who invent miracle cures (and possibly use Science!) may spend some of their 30 advantage points on Quick Gadgeteer (Pulp Medic, -50%) [25]. Quick Gadgeteer works as described on p. 9, but the limitation restricts inventions to miracle cures, truth serums, and anachronistic *medical* technology.

Disadvantages: “Fallen” medics with Secrets about being drug dealers and/or Social Stigma (License Revoked) are uncommon. Most pulp doctors have disadvantages like Charitable, Code of Honor, Honesty, Selfless, and Vow, and may take those *instead of* other choices. Men of Science may add Compulsive Experimentation [-5*] to that list – and even Fanaticism (Science!) [-15], which includes the compulsion alongside Delusion (“Nothing can harm me in my lab!”) and an Obsession with some scientific goal.

Secondary Skills: Hazardous Materials and NBC Suit imply an attention to safety that doesn't suit the era; remove those choices. On the other hand, some or all secondary skill points can be spent on scientific skills or Science! Replace Piloting (Helicopter) with Teamster (A) IQ [2]-15 as an option; flying ambulances are rare, and aren't helicopters, while horse-drawn ones are still used.

Shooter

The shooter works almost “as is.” Anyone who thinks that firing two pistols at once, solving problems with violence, and showing off with guns are conventions of modern action movies, unsuitable for simpler times, hasn't read pulp stories.

Advantages: Many TL6 weapons are massive and lack modern recoil compensation, so more ST is wise (ST 12 for a stockless shotgun or Tommy gun, ST 13+ for big-bore rifles – and period grenades are *heavy*). Also, the shooter serves as muscle in general and should be able to slug people. The GM may opt to raise the template's base ST from 11 to 12-13, reducing advantage points from 30 to 10-20.

Primary Skills: Tough guys who are hulking, not nimble, can opt out of Acrobatics and Jumping, and put those 5 points into additional primary skill choices (1 point each) and/or improved unarmed skills (2 points each). Guns (Grenade Launcher and LAW) are unlikely – although in a late-TL6 campaign, the GM *might* permit the former for flare guns and rifle grenades, and the latter for primitive bazookas. Liquid Projector (Sprayer) is for pepper spray, which hasn't been invented.

No pulp adventure should ever go more than two scenes without violent action. See Making It Pulp on p. 15 for some ideas for popping excitement into any scene.

Wheel Man

Pulp stories are chock-full of daring riders, drivers, airmen, ship's captains, and even zeppelin pilots. While cars and trucks are important, they aren't as dominant as they are in modern action stories. Thus, the wheel man might be more a "wagon man" or a "stick man."

Advantages: Wheel men who prefer animal-powered transportation should replace Driver's Reflexes 4 [20] with Animal Friend 4 [20], lowering Boating, Driving, Piloting, and Submarine by four levels but boosting Riding and Teamster by the same amount. Night Vision is *incredibly* valuable in the age before widespread radar.

Primary Skills: Vehicle specialties are three of Bicycling (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Boating* (Large Powerboat, Motorboat, Sailboat, or Unpowered), Driving* (Automobile, Heavy Wheeled, or Motorcycle), Piloting* (Heavy Airplane, Light Airplane, or Lighter-Than-Air), or Riding† (Camel or Horse), all (A) DX [2]-14; or Teamster† (Equines) (A) IQ [2]-13. Skills marked * add Driver's Reflexes, while those marked † add Animal Friend. Electronics Operation goes away as an option; replace it with Packing (A) IQ [2]-13.

Secondary Skills: Parachuting to escape wrecked aircraft is possible throughout the era, but only *likely* after 1920.

Wire Rat

For the equivalent pulp archetype, see *Gadgeteer* (p. 8).

NEW TEMPLATES

Two new archetypes especially suit pulp action campaigns.

Femme Fatale

250 points

You have great gams, a thousand-watt smile, and equally high-voltage brains – and you like to get your way. Does that make you a "bad girl"? Maybe, but while some doors are closed to a woman, lots more open *because* you're a skirt. At a club where a fellow would be searched for a heater and punched in the kisser, the lunk at the door takes one look at you and shows you to the best table.

Attributes: ST 9 [-10]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 14 [80]; HT 13 [30].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9 [0]; Will 14 [0]; Per 14 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6.50 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Beautiful [12]; Luck [15]; and Smooth Operator 2 [30]. • A further 20 points chosen from among lens advantages (*Action 1*, pp. 4-5), DX +1 [20], IQ +1 [20], HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20], Will +1 to +4 [5/level], Alcohol Tolerance [1], Charisma 1-4 [5/level], Cultural Adaptability [10], Daredevil [15], Fashion Sense [5], Gun Perks [1/perk], Intuition [15], Language Talent [10], Languages (any) [2-6/language], No Hangover [1], Pitiable [5], Rapier Wit [5], Sensitive [5] or Empathy [15], Serendipity 1 [15], Signature Gear [Varies], Smooth Operator 3 [15], Social Chameleon [5], Voice [10], Wild Talent 1 [20], improve Appearance to Very Beautiful

[16] for 4 points, or replace Luck [15] with Extraordinary Luck [30] for 15 points.

Disadvantages: -20 points chosen from among Compulsive Carousing [-5*], Compulsive Gambling [-5*], Compulsive Spending [-5*], Duty (Agency, mob, service, or similar; 9, 12, or 15 or less) [-5, -10, or -15], Greed [-15*], Lecherousness [-15*], Secret (Past conquests or scams) [-5 or -10], or Sense of Duty (Team) [-5]. • Another -20 points chosen from among those traits or Alcoholism [-15], Bad Temper [-10*], Callous [-5], Chummy [-5] or Gregarious [-10], Compulsive Lying [-15*], Impulsiveness [-10*], Jealousy [-10], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism (Reluctant Killer) [-5], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], or Selfish [-5*].

Primary Skills: Dancing (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Savoir-Faire (High Society) and Savoir-Faire (Mafia), both (E) IQ+2 [1]-16†; Acting and Fast-Talk, both (A) IQ+1 [1]-15†; Disguise, Gambling, and Holdout, all (A) IQ [2]-14; Diplomacy (H) IQ [1]-14†; Carousing (E) HT+2 [1]-15†; Singing (E) HT+1 [2]-14; and Sex Appeal (A) HT+5 [1]-18†.

Secondary Skills: One of Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-14, or Boxing or Wrestling, both (A) DX [2]-13. • Fast-Draw (Pistol) and Guns (Pistol), both (E) DX+1 [2]-14. • Six of Sewing (E) DX [1]-13; Erotic Art, Filch, or Stealth, all (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Acrobatics, Pickpocket, or Sleight of Hand, all (H) DX-2 [1]-11; Current Affairs (People) or Housekeeping, both (E) IQ [1]-14; Leadership, Public Speaking, or Streetwise, all (A) IQ+1 [1]-15†; Connoisseur (any), Cooking, Interrogation, Merchant, or Smuggling, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-13; Forgery, Poisons, or Psychology, all (H) IQ-2 [1]-12; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [1]-15†; Body Language (A) Per-1 [1]-13; Detect Lies (H) Per [1]-14†; or 1 point to raise one of those skills or Acting, Carousing, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, Savoir-Faire (any), or Sex Appeal by a level.

Background Skills: Choose a 20-point lens (*Action 1*, pp. 4-5).

• Area Knowledge (any) (E) IQ [1]-14 and Driving (Automobile) (A) DX-1 [1]-12.

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

† Includes +2 for Smooth Operator.

‡ Includes +4 for Beautiful.

Customization Notes

Femmes fatales are a diverse lot. In many ways, all they have in common is "female" and "good-looking." Important subtypes from pulp stories include the following.

Gun Moll: You're a gangster gal, and you don't try to hide it. Higher HT is good for surviving a violent life – and don't forget Gun Perks, along with Signature Gear in the form of a cute little gun that fires real bullets. Disadvantages are things like Compulsive Gambling and Duty to the mob. Poisons and Sleight of Hand are handy for slipping some goof a Mickey. Intimidation, Streetwise, and improved Savoir-Faire (Mafia) are vital if you plan to play with the boys.

Perky Companion: Sometimes, the square-jawed pulp hero brings along his secretary or wife – and naturally, she's a head-turner who can shoot and drive. Advantages should include classics: Empathy or Intuition, and maybe Pitiable for gamines.

For pulp action with a touch of magic and weird science, pick up GURPS Thaumatology: Age of Gold.

Disadvantages *shouldn't* be criminal or appetite-driven; Chummy, Duty, Pacifism, and Sense of Duty fit best. She can sing, dance, primp, and pout with the best, and even gamble ("Four kings . . . that's good, right?"); other skills are more proper, like Cooking, Housekeeping, and Sewing.

Torch Singer: You're a dusky gaze and a husky voice packed into a tight red dress. Voice is a given, Fashion Sense or higher Appearance is likely, and Alcohol Tolerance and No Hangover suit the lounge life. Problems might include Compulsive Carousing, Lecherousness, or a Secret – and sadly, sometimes Alcoholism. You're at home in front of a crowd, so get Public Speaking. Other skills depend on the venues where you work, and range from Sewing for your own costumes to Acrobatics and Erotic Art for certain kinds of dancing. At a club with the right clientele, Current Affairs (People) is likely.

Gadgeteer

250 points

You invent gadgets like some people change their socks. The world often isn't ready for these. In the field, you give your buddies a hand with all things technical: engines, radios, bizarre gizmos from the fiendish Dr. Fu's lab, etc. In the shop, you do things they laughed at you for at the University.

Attributes: ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 15 [100]; HT 11 [10].

Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 15 [0]; Per 15 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [10]; Basic Move 6 [0].

Advantages: Artificer 2 [20]; Gizmos 1 [5]; Luck [15]; and Quick Gadgeteer [50]. • A further 20 points chosen from among lens advantages (**Action 1**, pp. 4-5), DX +1 [20], IQ +1 [20], HT +1 or +2 [10 or 20], Will +1 to +4 [5/level], Artificer 3 or 4 [10 or 20], Daredevil [15], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Gizmos 2+ [5/gizmo], High Manual Dexterity 1-4 [5/level], Intuition [15], Mathematical Ability 1-2 [10/level], Serendipity 1 [15], Signature Gear [Varies], Versatile [5], Wild Talent 1 [20], or replace Luck [15] with Extraordinary Luck [30] for 15 points.

Disadvantages: Compulsive Inventing (12) [-5*]. • -20 points chosen from among Duty (Agency, mob, service, or similar; 9, 12, or 15 or less) [-5, -10, or -15], Greed [-15*], Secret (Illegal experiments) [-5, -10, or -20], or Sense of Duty (Team) [-5]. • Another -15 points chosen from among those traits or Absent-Mindedness [-15], Bad Sight (Mitigator, Eyeglasses, -60%) [-10], Curious [-5*], Fanaticism (Science!) [-15], Intolerance (Stupid people) [-5], Obsession (Invent some specific device) [-5*], Trademark (Use of some unusual device) [-5 or -10], Workaholic [-5], or worsen Compulsive Inventing from (12) to (9) [-7] for -2 points or (6) [-10] for -5 points. • A further -10 points chosen from either of the previous lists or Bad Temper [-10*], Clueless [-10], Impulsiveness [-10*], Jealousy [-10], Loner [-5*], Oblivious [-5], Overconfidence [-5*], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], Pyromania [-5*], or Stubbornness [-5].

Primary Skills: Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-16. • *Five* of Armoury (Body Armor, Heavy Weapons, Small Arms, or

Vehicular Armor), Electrician, Electronics Repair (Communications, Scientific, Security, Sensors, or Surveillance), Machinist, or Mechanic (any TL6 motive system, power plant, or vehicle type), all (A) IQ+2 [2]-17†; Electronics Operation (Communications, Scientific, Security, Sensors, or Surveillance) or Traps, both (A) IQ [2]-15; or 2 points to raise any primary skill by a level.

Secondary Skills: One of Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-13, or Boxing or Wrestling, both (A) DX+1 [4]-12. • Guns (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [2]-12. • Six of Fast-Draw (Gizmo) or Guns (any), both (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Boating (Large Powerboat or Motorboat), Driving (Automobile, Heavy Wheeled, or Motorcycle), Piloting (Heavy Airplane, Light Airplane, or Lighter-Than-Air), or Stealth, all (A) DX [2]-11; Current Affairs (Science and Technology) (E) IQ+1 [2]-16; Architecture, Explosives (any), Hazardous Materials (any), Holdout, Lockpicking, Photography, Research, Speed-Reading, Teaching, or Writing, all (A) IQ [2]-15; or 2 points to raise one of those skills or a primary skill by a level, or to buy another primary skill.

Background Skills: Choose a 20-point lens, nearly always Man of Science (p. 5).

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

† Includes +2 for Artificer.

Customization Notes

What's your area of technical expertise? A few suggestions:

Armorer: You invent deadly military machinery years before its time! Primary skills should be several forms of Armoury – and perhaps Mechanic specialties that suit military vehicles. Secondary skills ought to be Explosives, Hazardous Materials, and some of the Guns and vehicle-operation skills that go with your primary skills (for *testing*).

Crime-Fighter: You build doodads that give you an edge over crooks. Primary skills include a selection from Armoury (Body Armor or Small Arms), Electronics Operation (Security or Surveillance), Electronics Repair (Security or Surveillance), Mechanic (Automobile), and Traps. Secondary skill points buy more of the above, plus Holdout and Photography. Use the Man of Science lens to add Criminology and Forensics.

Mad Scientist: You'll show them all! Pick *any* combination of primary skills – but this should include Electronics Operation (Scientific) and Electronics Repair (Scientific). Secondary skills are typically more primary specialties, plus Current Affairs (Science and Technology), Hazardous Materials, and Research. Use the Man of Science lens to add Science!

EQUIPMENT

Numerous items on pp. 26-34 of **Action 1** are anachronistically high-tech for a TL6 pulp setting. Fortunately, **GURPS High-Tech** covers TL6 equipment in great detail – and **GURPS High-Tech: Pulp Guns, Volume 1** and **Volume 2** add racks full of suitable weapons. Still, some gear works "as is," while other articles make great inventions for gadgeteers.

Thwart the machinations of the Jovian Overlord and his minions in the pulp science-fiction setting of GURPS Tales of the Solar Patrol.

Quick Gadgeteer for Pulp Heroes

In a pulp campaign, Quick Gadgeteer (p. B57) allows *any number* of Gizmos, not just three. It also enables inventors to construct anachronistic devices; see *Equipment* (pp. 8-9) for examples.

Invention requires a roll against the Armoury, Electrician, Electronics Repair, Machinist, or Mechanic skill the GM deems relevant, or against Pharmacy for new drugs; a gadgeteer with a suitable Engineer skill may use that. The roll is at -1 per \$2,500 of gadget value or fraction thereof (remember to double or quadruple the price of gear from TL7 or TL8, respectively). The item's cost must be paid normally; this represents parts, not the finished creation. Construction takes 2d minutes if the penalty was -1,

1d-2 hours (minimum 30 minutes) if it was -2 or -3, 1d hours if -4 to -7, or 4d hours if -8 or worse.

Scrounging reduces expenses but takes time. A successful Scrounging roll lowers price by 5% per point of success; minimum discount is 5% (success by 0-1), maximum reduction is 50% (success by 10+). Succeed or fail, a Scrounging attempt doubles construction time.

Success gives *one* gadget. To build another, do it all over again – you can't mass-produce night-vision goggles and wrist-watch radios at TL6! Failure wastes the parts (and the money they cost). Critical failure yields a dangerously flawed creation.

These rules *replace* the notes on gadgeteering on p. 7 of *Action 2*.

These pieces of basic kit date to TL6, with cloth replacing soft synthetics and wood or metal replacing hard ones: antitoxin kit, binoculars, body bag, compass, cutting torch, disguise kit, duct tape, dynamite, explosives tools (caps, timers, etc., but *not* remotes), first aid kit, flares, gas mask, grapnel, hand ram, hand-cuffs, holsters, labs, personal articles (business cards, cigarette lighter, wristwatch, etc.), scopes, silencers, spotting scope, surgical kit, tool kits and other unpowered tools (bolt cutters, crowbar, fire axe, folding shovel, glass cutter, lockpicks, multi-tool, sledgehammer, wire cutters, etc.), and whistle.

Most "generic" weapons listed in *Action 1* have TL6 analogs, too. Exceptions are the assault carbine, assault rifle, and compact SMG (all late TL6); the grenade launcher (use rifle grenades instead); the compact, high-powered hand grenades (use the TL6 ones on p. B277); and the pepper spray, stun gun, and Taser (all TL7-8).

Certain articles that *exist* at TL6 but that aren't *common* in pulps, especially hardware with a "scientific" feel to it, are the purview of gadgeteers, and the GM may require the Gadgeteer advantage to obtain them. At the GM's option, a few TL7 and even TL8 items might be invented by gadgeteers; it certainly suits many pulp stories! Cost doubles for TL7 goods and quadruples for TL8 equipment; see p. B27.

Possible gadgeteer-only items from *Action 1* include:

TL6 – Chemical detector, Geiger counter, search endoscope, thermite, and truth serum.

TL7 – Flex cuffs, glow stick, load-bearing vest, plastique, pocket torch, scuba gear, shotgun mike, space pen, suction cups, surveillance endoscope, and voice modulator.

TL8 – Climbing and rappelling kits (the listed gear uses high-tech synthetics), compact radio, crash kit, defibrillator, extrudable explosive, hand grenades (compact ones, not hefty TL6 ones), hydraulic door opener, mini- and ram-air parachutes, night-vision gear (all kinds), pepper spray, portable ladder, reflex sight, rope (the listed examples use advanced materials), spike strip, stun gun, Taser, and winch (the personal lifting device, not vehicular winches).

The GM can let gadgeteers obtain full-automatic rifles, grenade launchers, and other TL7-8 military weapons if he wishes. Such hardware will reduce the campaign to rubble, though. Dynamite and Tommy guns should suffice for most purposes.

Ordinary clothing – including leatherwear (hats, jackets, and shoes), long coats, sunglasses, and even oddities like ear muffs – is fine. Those with *High-Tech* can add in TL6 body armor. Better armor, however, is out-of-idiom *except* for gadgeteers, and even then it's cumbersome. Treat all pieces of armor in *Action 1* as TL8 gadgets, at quadruple cost and double weight.

Radio technology varies so greatly with TL that there's little choice but to review *High-Tech*. Portable radios aren't a pulp staple, though. It's entirely acceptable to limit radios to vehicles and buildings, except for the gadgeteer's anachronistic compact set.

Other compact electronics – with the exception of those called out as gadgets – don't work in TL6 pulp. This definitely includes anything that depends on computers, lasers, satellites, or global networks.

GAME PLAY

A pulp game can be run just like a regular *Action* campaign, with a few tweaks.

Campaign Types

Especially suitable campaign types from among those listed on pp. 5-6 of *Action 1* are *Brotherhood in Blue* (with more mobsters, fewer serial killers, and no computer crime), *Caper* (even non-criminals in pulps prefer elaborate plans resembling those in caper stories), *Task Force* (ultra-black organizations are modern, but blurring together the missions of fighting criminals, spies, and foreign soldiers is common in the source fiction), *Troubleshooters* (the Doc Savage premise, in essence), and *Vigilante Justice* (like the Green Hornet and the Shadow).

Thomas Edison or Nikola Tesla could have been associates or mentors of weird-science PCs.

The *Mercs* and *Spy vs. Spy* frames fit in name, but in practice don't play out as they would at TL8. In pulp stories, the former resembles *Troubleshooters* far more than "The A-Team," while the latter ends up looking identical to *Task Force* and not like Bond-style super-spies. *Commandos* and *War Against Terror* lionize special-operations and antiterrorism forces in a way that isn't seen in TL6 fiction.

As well, a new campaign type is appropriate:

Globetrotters: The PCs travel – and in true movie fashion, the GM may mark their route on a map as they go! Their goal might be raiding tombs, visiting islands with giant wildlife in the name of science, or chasing rivals. Each adventure visits an exotic locale by camel, seaplane, tramp steamer, etc. Likely roles are several investigators pursuing the expedition's goal, shooters for defense, a medic to treat jungle fever, and a femme fatale to sow discord. The leader is often a face man. A PC wheel man may control the group's transportation. Voyagers tend to have the journalist, rich adventurer, and Man of Science lenses. Tomb raiders might have the criminal lens, though; the group's muscle, the military lens; and those taking notes on foreigners, the intelligence lens.

Bacon, Bread, Dough

Another thing that changes in an **Action** campaign set at TL6 is the heroes' bottom line. Reduce the dollar amounts under *Standard* (and *Not-so-Standard*) *Issue* (**Action 1**, p. 27) by 50%. This trims starting and replacement budgets, personal wealth, pocket money, and the value of Signature Gear. It also affects the dollar values given in passing in *Finding a Client* (**Action 2**, p. 6), *Scrounging* (**Action 2**, p. 7), *Bribery* (**Action 2**, p. 15), etc.

Assistance Rolls

Not everything under *Sample Assistance* (**Action 1**, pp. 24-25) works as written in pulp settings. In addition to ignoring references to things like "computer," "DNA test," and "satellite," the GM should make these changes:

Aerial Surveillance: If possible at all, this involves a biplane or a zeppelin.

Backup, Bailout, Base Access, Disappearance, False ID, Fire Support, Replacement Gear, Safe House, SWAT, Transportation, and Warrant: These work as written, but if the GM feels that a time is so short that only TL8 computers and communications could explain it, he can double the time it takes assistance to materialize.

Cash: Halve all dollar amounts.

Facilities: The best-quality labs and shops give +3 to skill at TL6.

Files, Forensics, and Record Search: These involve *paper* files or reports, and slow courier is the only option.

Insertion/Extraction: This involves TL6 vehicles – usually not helicopters and subs.

Medevac: This means a wheeled or even horse-drawn ambulance, and simply isn't an option in remote areas.

Technical Means: This means code-breaking and good old-fashioned wiretap transcripts at TL6. Satellites and spy planes haven't been invented!

Tasks

The tasks in **Action 2** mostly work fine "as is." The crucial thing to remember is that technical tasks are subject to the equipment limitations noted earlier. Things that call for Electronics Operation and Electronics Repair *might* be possible in some cases; if so, call a gadgeteer. Even a gadgeteer can't try *Hacking* (**Action 2**, p. 13), *Cellular Monitoring* (**Action 2**, p. 14), or other tasks that require a TL7-8 society, though. Similarly, any task involving Computer Hacking, Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Electronics Repair (Computers), or Expert Skill (Computer Security) isn't possible for anyone.

Of course, this means the heroes won't face high-tech difficulties like being thwarted by biometric locks; detected by lasers, motion detectors, smart fences, and surveillance cameras; shot by remote-control weapons and Tasers; and bound in flex cuffs. If they run into WMD at all, it'll be WWI-vintage chemical weapons – not nukes and VX. So maybe it comes out in the wash.

Cinematic Combat Rules

Action 2, p. 38

An additional rule suits pulp games very well:

Kayo: If a hero (or villain!) has managed to sneak up behind someone – often thanks to Stealth aided by an ally's distraction – he may attempt to use a *crushing* attack to knock out his quarry without grievous bodily harm. He must declare this before striking. Roll an attack to the head, with all the usual modifiers. On a hit, roll damage normally and subtract the DR of headgear, plus another DR 2 for the skull. Instead of suffering injury, the victim must make a HT roll at a penalty equal to the penetrating damage (if damage is *exactly* 0 after DR, roll at full HT) or be knocked out for 15 minutes.

Medic!

Action 2, p. 40

At TL6, first aid takes 20 minutes and restores only 1d-1 HP; critical success heals 5 HP.

Ten Rules to Use Sparingly

Action 2, p. 44

Ignore the admonitions against using Fright Checks and the paranormal. Pulp stories often feature weirdness like mummy's curses and Aztec demons. The GM may even use this article alongside *The X-Terminators* (Pyramid #3/5) to run a campaign where sages, scouts, and slayers rub shoulders with femmes fatales, gadgeteers, and the traditional archetypes in **Action 1**. If so, magic, psi, and fearsome monsters are all appropriate!

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.

AIR DEVILS OF THE SOUTH SEAS

BY MATT RIGGSBY

The time is anywhere in the late 1920s or early 1930s. The place is a remote and precariously located patch of ocean. An unknown assailant is threatening natives and civilized people alike. It's up to the heroes to get to the bottom of things.

The area in question lies between the Dutch East Indies, Papua New Guinea, and Japan's Southern Pacific Mandate (which consists of most of Micronesia, assigned to it by the League of Nations). The area is large – dotted with many small islands – and usually wonderfully tropical, though given to sudden, brief storms in the afternoons.

It would be near-idyllic if it weren't for a spate of serious violence. Several ships steaming through the area have been lost despite calm weather and clear sailing in recent months, and piracy is suspected. Likewise, a number of native villages have been raided by a shadowy figure known as the White Devil. Farms and villages have been heavily damaged, even destroyed, and several people have died. The task for the bold adventurers is to find out who is behind the raids and stop them.

This scenario is appropriate for a party of characters built on something around 150 points. This is purely two-fisted excitement in an exotic but technically mundane location. There are no explicitly supernatural or superscience elements involved (though it does push the envelope for the era), but those with low levels of such things won't do great damage to the scenario, and the use of cinematic options is very appropriate. This adventure only requires the **GURPS Basic Set**, so long as the GM is willing to improvise a bit on equipment. However, there are pointers for **GURPS Action 2** for those who have it (if not, just take references to BAD as a general description of how tough things are), and **GURPS High-Tech** and **GURPS High-Tech: Pulp Guns** are recommended for equipment.

GETTING EVERYONE INVOLVED

There are a number of ways of drawing heroes into investigating the recent problems. Trophy-hunters and scientists may be in the area already, searching for rare birds, flowers, or lost tribes. Shipping lines might send private investigators to determine whether or not there are actually pirates. Government investigators may be sent in either an official or

unofficial capacity. British and Dutch agents have legitimate interest in the area, and – while it's not US territory – an American company with friends in Washington is involved. Rich layabouts may be in the region in search of a new thrill, and any kind of drifter can be out looking for work. Of course, friends, relatives, and colleagues of any of the above may head to the area in order to find them if they've gone missing.

WHERE TO BEGIN

The nearest thing the region has to civilization is Plantation Docks, a small settlement on the island of Noputu. Plantation Docks is something more than a small port facility but not quite a town. However, it constitutes the closest thing to “modern” civilization, a reasonable base of operations, and the easiest place to get to from the outside world.

Plantation Docks consists of a core of colonial (nominally British) and business offices and Western-style, if very low-rent, accommodations. These are surrounded by small neighborhoods of ethnic Chinese, Filipino, and Indian traders and a “suburb” of huts housing the natives who do most of the heavy lifting. The total population is around 6,000, though the native areas gradually trail off into fields and villages, and a large chunk of the population is transient, coming in and out to trade. Notable features of Plantation Docks include the following.

The Docks: A long wharf sticks out into a surprisingly deep harbor, allowing reasonably sized cargo ships to be loaded with coconut, bananas, sugar cane, and other tropical produce from the nearby warehouses where goods from the surrounding islands accumulate for several days before a new ship comes in. Typically, traffic comes in the form of rowed long-boats and small motor launches communicating with the surrounding islands and the occasional flying boat. In addition to the wharf and the warehouses, there is an office for the harbor-master (who reliably can be found napping there), a refueling depot, a primitive machine shop run by a surprisingly talented old Serbian machinist, and the most powerful radio transmitter on the island. The harbor-master also acts as postmaster, should the occasion arise.

We should come home from adventures, and perils, and discoveries every day with new experience and character.
– Henry David Thoreau

Small Town Life

The South Seas are still a long way from civilization, but it's not the wilderness, which puts certain limitations on what investigators can get away with. Chases and fist-fights are commonplace in Plantation Docks and, aside from demands for compensation for broken furniture from annoyed bartenders, are unlikely to have long-term consequences. The occasional gunfight might inspire some wariness and even official investigation, but if no one important is hurt, investigators can get away with those as well. Dragging someone into a dark alley at night for a quick interrogation is also likely to pass unremarked.

However, that doesn't mean that investigators can act with a completely free hand. In most places the investiga-

tors visit, most people they meet know one another by sight, and visitors are a visible curiosity. Even if no one interferes with them, hardly anything they do goes unnoticed. Slamming a suspect against a wall for a bit of rough questioning is one thing, but tying him to a chair for several hours or shooting him in the head execution-style is quite another. Serious or sustained criminal behavior will eventually draw enough attention that some sort of official intervention is inevitable. Local police, who resemble an American small-town sheriff and a handful of deputies, are the first line of defense, but if the investigators fight them off (which they're probably entirely capable of doing), they'll eventually have to face more formidable opposition.

Piet Kirk's General Store: The island's main retail outlet carries an odd mix of utilitarian and luxury goods. Piet offers very little food beyond coffee and a few tinned goods. (Local produce is cheap and plentiful; Piet is happy to broker purchases or point customers in the right direction.) However, he has a wide range of guns (common sidearms and hunting weapons – no military gear) and ammo, radio sets, navigational tools, digging equipment, blades, and other assorted hardware and basic electronic parts. He also has a good supply of liquor, tobacco, and their related paraphernalia, and a nice selection of colorful cloth. If there's something he doesn't have in stock, he can try to get it, but it will take at least a week for most items. Particularly exotic or expensive goods are simply unavailable.

Rosie's Bar: The rougher of the two large drinking establishments in Plantation Docks. It's essentially a converted warehouse, divided into a large barroom in front and a storage room and office in back. It's the primary bar for sailors spending a few hours in port and a well-known site for drunken brawls. The building and furniture are remarkably sturdy, though. Rosie is a fading raven-haired beauty in her 40s who runs her bar with a combination of sex appeal and superior brawling skills. She'll happily tell people a story about why she fled Texas, but the tales of lurid crimes and broken hearts are never the same twice.

The Empire Inn: A more sedate watering hole as well as temporary accommodations for travelers with a bit of money to spend. It's the one place on the island where one can get a decent cup of tea and a cucumber sandwich with the crusts cut off. The rooms are plain but very clean.

Kaukalili House: This structure is a warren of rooms resulting from three houses becoming connected to one another. A series of internal walls were added or removed to turn it into a random jumble of combined office and living spaces. Notable inhabitants include Dr. Jaime Gutierrez, a Filipino doctor and the only professional medical care in a two-day radius by boat; Rev. Lambert Carrington and his wife (Leslie), a pair of mid-

dle-aged, surprisingly easygoing Methodist missionaries from Toronto; and Elias Sherman Root, local representative of the American-Pacific Agriculture Company.

The Residence: This well-maintained Georgian building theoretically serves as the residence and office of the colonial government. However, the nominal representative of the government – the elderly Terrence Augustine Plenthy-Morewich – is little more than a glorified clerk. At any rate, he is vastly more interested in botany and scantily clad native girls than public service. He can mostly be found in the jungles of the inland hills with a sketch pad and a healthy supply of gin and tonic, which he is happy to share. Visitors to the residence are more likely to run into his secretary, Rajiv Prakash, who is friendly and encouraging but can accomplish little without his master's cooperation. His cousin Malik Sharmila is the island's chief law officer, commanding a force of about 20 native police.

Plantation Docks is also equipped with a number of smaller bars; specialized retailers dealing in clothing, tools, and so on; small boarding houses; a few pawnbrokers who act as local banks; some shipping agents; and other professional services.

Transportation is either cheap but slow or fast but expensive. Goods are transported at least partly by rickety cars and trucks around the large islands, but also by wagons drawn by water buffalo, donkeys, or people. People usually travel by foot. Hitchhiking is an accepted practice, so investigators disinclined to walk can get a ride if they don't mind going slowly, taking a roundabout route, and sitting on a sack of taro roots as they go. If they want to control their mobility, a few Streetwise or Merchant rolls can find them a car to hire for at least \$20 a day (a little extra gets a driver who knows his way around). There's also a lot of sea traffic, from tramp steamers to motorboats to native longboats. Again, hitching rides is an option, and boats are available for charter or hire. Some things go by air, but planes are rare enough that if investigators want to fly themselves, they need to bring their own plane.

What's threatening civilization? Pick one! ALIENS from outer space, the earth's core, or under the sea! GIANT CREATURES that had been hiding until modern man disturbed – or created – them! Vast CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS striking from the shadows! Who can possibly save HUMANITY?!

PRIMARY INVESTIGATION

Plantation Docks is the most sensible place to begin the investigation, and news of their arrival has at least partly penetrated the expatriate community. Investigators can get an overview of the situation from just about any source (if using **GURPS Action**, the BAD at this stage of the investigation is 0): Nine villages in 100-mile radius of Noputu have been raided over the past three months. Seven of them were producing goods for export exclusively for the APA. At least 29 people have been killed and several times as many wounded in the attacks. During that time, six freighters passing through the area have been lost: The *Betty Sue Borden* (American, bringing in building materials and assorted consumer goods), the *Northumberland Belle* (a British fuel tanker), the *Shokaku Maru* (Japanese, carrying agricultural produce, partly for the APA), the *Chien Sing* (operating out of Macau under British flag, bringing in a variety of consumer goods and machine parts), and the *Mount Pleasant* and *Mount Carmel* (American, carrying produce, both for the APA). Flotsam from the *Shokaku Maru* and *Mount Pleasant* have been found, indicating that they were sunk. Since the weather has been relatively calm over the last several months, accidents seem unlikely.

Soon after their arrival, the investigators are met by Elias Root, the Westerner most concerned with the recent raids, and his chief assistant, Ramon Caldera. His company has been heavily hit, so he wants to know if there's anything he can do to help. He's overstretched at the moment, because many of his local overseers have gone missing and he and his remaining staff are constantly traveling around the islands; he can't provide constant support. However, he volunteers such information as he has (for example, complete lists of locations of villages and plantations associated with the APA, itineraries of regularly scheduled freighters, navigational charts, and, if they ask politely, limited access to a vehicle and fuel supply).

In addition to information and possibly material aid, he suggests a direction for the investigation. Elias puts forward the theory that the raids are more than mere piracy. Rather, he thinks a rival company is attempting to push the APA out of the area and move in itself. However, he admits that he's unaware of any rival firms who appear poised to move in if the APA leaves.

If the investigators speak to the local police, they can get similar information, though less material aid. If they can find him, Plenty-Morewich has an alternate theory: The White Devil is politically motivated. He's most likely a nationalist trying to drive out expanding Western commercial and political interests, but it's possible that he's being sponsored by one of the local powers (he thinks the Japanese are the culprits, if there is an outside influence).

If investigators visit islands that have been raided, they'll hear similar descriptions of raids. The surviving witnesses report that attacks were preceded by ominous roaring sounds in the sky and fires on the water. Soon thereafter, the villagers were attacked by "air devils" (so called because of their fearsome appearance and rapid arrival and departure, as though they had flown). The air devils use machetes, guns, explosions,

and gouts of fire. Fields were burned, and barns and houses were plundered and destroyed. Their leader, the White Devil, is notable for a bald, earless white head, with his eyes and mouth outlined in crimson; the other air devils had similarly smooth heads, adorned with colorful stripes, thunderbolts, and other symbols.

Westerners were clearly targeted in the raids. Over a dozen – mostly local overseers associated with the APA – are now missing, but there have been no ransom demands. (The overseers were predominantly experienced Mexican and Central American overseers transferred in from the APA's declining American operations.) However, despite those disappearances and a few native and Western casualties, the objective appears to have been destruction rather than killing. A close examination of attack sites turns up brass cartridges from a variety of pistol rounds and one or two blasting caps.

Westerner witnesses are in short supply; most only saw the aftermath of the raids, not the air devils themselves. However, after checking out three or four villages, the investigators can find Auguste Marchand, a veteran of the Great War who can give a detailed description. The White Devil finds out about the visit. If they go to interview Auguste, his house is set on fire as they approach, necessitating a rescue.

If they succeed, they get an description of the raids that makes more sense: The lights in the sky had the look of flares, while the roaring sounded like a number of aircraft engines. The noise seemed to die down shortly before the "devils" appeared, so they probably landed in the water. The "devils" themselves are men, but they wore fierce-looking masks. In addition to submachine guns, they used dynamite, hand grenades, and a flamethrower.

At this point, the investigators are likely to have found all readily available information. They have to start digging deeper for more clues, and the BAD becomes -1.

THE SMUGGLER

One thing that may occur to the heroes is that the White Devil must be procuring supplies from somewhere. Weapons, ammunition, and dynamite are easy enough to acquire, but he seems to be using them in quantity. Flamethrowers are special-purpose military weapons, difficult to obtain anywhere. How could he be getting them? Could he be paying for them with plunder looted from the villages he raids?

If the sleuths are clever enough to ask, they can get descriptions of identifiable valuables from the raided villages, mostly jewelry from Europeans and religious paraphernalia from a few churches. Searching around the peddlers and pawnbrokers of Plantation Docks (or in the bars; some of the loot enters circulation as gambling losses) will eventually turn some up. The adventurers can, with a little Fast-Talk or Intimidation, use the threat of arrest for trafficking in stolen goods to leverage the discovery of ill-gotten gains into a pointer to their source. Alternatively, some careful enquiries and Streetwise rolls will lead to the same place.

That place is the tramp steamer *Ciudad de Manila* and its captain, Ignacio Bernal. Bernal is just one of a number of

From 1898 to 1959, Hawaii was a territory of the United States. Adventurers may visit this exotic location to find lost artifacts or while on their way to the South Pacific.

shady characters who makes port regularly at Plantation Docks, though the authorities have yet to be able to pin anything on him. He has been known to run booze, dirty books, and anything else which may be valuable and (in some jurisdictions) illegal, but he's particularly good with guns.

Bernal doesn't want attention, and if he gets wind of an investigation involving him, he flees. The *Ciudad de Manila* is fast for a vessel of its type, so he can lead the heroes on a difficult chase. If boarded or otherwise confronted, his crew fights, but not well; they're brawlers, not trained combatants (use the Common Thug templates on p. 17 as a basis, adding Seamanship skill).

Isolated from any help, Bernal tries to weasel out of questioning but eventually talks. He has supplied weapons, ammunition, explosives, and various machine parts and tools to a mysterious buyer. Whoever it was appeared in the night (often waking him up or pulling him into an alley), kept his face covered or stayed in darkened rooms, and paid in either cash or valuable goods. Payment was made in advance and goods were delivered to a variety of locations, unloaded onto the shores of uninhabited or lightly inhabited islands, some of which were uncharted. If absolutely forced to, Bernal can give coordinates of the uncharted islands. He has no future deliveries scheduled and has no idea of where the White Devil is or how he could be contacted. If the adventurers try to compel him to act as bait or otherwise participate in any schemes to gather more information, he'll flee at the first opportunity.

THE FOREIGN AGENT

A day or two after every significant bit of detective work that the investigators do, they should roll against Vision to notice that any records they have been keeping are being tampered with. They aren't being altered, but it should become clear that someone is shadowing the investigators and checking on their notes.

If they set a trap or surreptitiously keep watch through the nights, they catch a young burglar slipping into their rooms at night, stealing their records, and returning them. If confronted, the burglar flees and leads the adventurers on a chase on foot. If apprehended, the thief starts by denying everything, though not very skillfully ("I wasn't in your room and I didn't take anything while I was there!"), but quickly rolls on the man who hired him to break in.

Even if they don't notice their records are being read, investigators who keep an eye on their surroundings will eventually realize that they often end up in the same place as an Asian peddler. If they visit a raided village, he's there selling cloth and knives. If they talk to Elias Root, he's on the nearest street corner, smoking a cigarette.

The peddler is Kazumoto Saito. He can convincingly claim to be a mere merchant (ethnically Japanese but a long way from home), living in Plantation Docks for the past year or so and making a small living serving native farming communities. However, he also carries a very nice, very concealable pistol and a tiny camera, and he has an expensive radio transmitter concealed in the two-room hut where he lives. Kazumoto eventually admits that he is an undercover agent.

He's a commander in the Imperial Japanese Navy, stationed at Plantation Docks to keep an eye on activities around the border of the Japanese mandate. Since some of the raids have hit islands in the mandate, he's been investigating them as well, which naturally led to an interest in the heroes' own sleuthing. He's been hiring local toughs to help him keep tabs on the investigators and even sneak him peeks at any notes they've been keeping. However, he's not interested in obstructing their investigation so long as they don't snoop around Japanese territory.

If the adventurers are reasonably diplomatic and can convince Kazumoto that they have no interest in what the Japanese are up to, he'll share a summary of his own investigation. Noting that the White Devil is hitting mostly farming villages selling cash crops to the APA, he agrees with Root's contention that the White Devil is employed by someone who wants them out. However, he believes the underlying issue is political, not economic. The presence of the APA implies a growing American presence, and pushing them out firms the hand of the Dutch and the English. Japanese interests would be boosted as well, but Kazumoto insists that Japan has no interest in a confrontation with the Americans; investigators may doubt this, but Kazumoto is sincere.

He's also collected whatever forensic evidence the investigators may have missed, has concluded that at least some of the air devils are reaching their targets by plane, and is working with somewhat superior maps than the investigators have, indicating a few small islands of which they may be unaware. Notably, his charts display a few islands considered taboo by the natives. No one native to the region visits or discusses them, and many of the maps currently in use were assembled with native advice, so those areas are often left blank. He suspects the White Devil may be using one of them as a base of operations.

LOOKING FOR A FIGHT

If the investigators want a confrontation, they can get one, eventually, by staking out an island that has not yet been raided. Every night they stay in place, roll 3d. On a 16 or 17, the White Devil raids somewhere else. Should they investigate the newly raided villages, they'll have a chance to pick up on any clues they may have missed before.

On an 18, the White Devil and 11 of his men arrive on the island the investigators have staked out. Working with an accomplice on shore who guides them in with flaming buoys, the White Devil and his men, flying a half-dozen two-seater floatplanes, pull up on the beach. They start shooting and throwing explosives more or less indiscriminately when they arrive at the target village. They stay close enough to see and hear one another fairly easily, generally in a long line three or four yards apart, occasionally splitting up into two or three smaller groups if particular targets (plantation houses, churches) require more effort to destroy.

If they encounter resistance, they will initially take cover but continue fighting and trying to advance. All are combat veterans (see the Air Devil template on p. 17), and the White Devil himself is a competent battlefield leader, so they will neither flee in panic nor charge mindlessly against an enemy.

For pulp adventure inspiration, check out the extensive bibliography of GURPS Cliffhangers.

Making It Pulp

One of the distinctive traits of pulp and cliffhanging adventure is periodic bursts of action interrupting the main plot. Although the various threads of the investigation laid out here set out some action beats, they certainly won't be enough. Raymond Chandler famously advised that, when a story wasn't exciting enough, have two men with guns suddenly burst through the door. That's what the GM must do here, punctuating sleuthing with bursts of feverish – if potentially tangential – activity. If the investigation goes for two hours of play without action naturally occurring, the GM should insert one of the events suggested below to perk things up.

The White Devil (actually, the shadowy figure behind him) will make some desultory attempts to kill the adventurers and interfere with their investigation. The attempts are more inconvenient than an actual threat, partly because good help is hard to find and partly because the mastermind is perfectly happy to stir up anxiety and confusion around the raids and their investigation. Some attempts at interference include the following ideas.

- The investigators find a time bomb in their vehicle or residence, which will go off in seconds. They may try to escape, but they may feel compelled to protect bystanders as well.
- While on the road, a hidden sniper shoots out one of their tires, sending them veering over a cliff.

- The building the heroes are in is set on fire, or a bomb is set off.

- The investigators' vehicle's throttle has been sabotaged and becomes stuck at maximum power. In a plane or boat, this happens at a time when they need maximum control and maneuverability, such as during a landing or navigating through coral reefs.

- Because nothing compares to the classics, two men with guns burst into the room. If the adventurers are traveling, they're pursued by a vehicle containing two men with guns (plus the driver).

In all cases, the attackers have been hired or coerced by the White Devil but can't give significant clues as to his whereabouts; they were paid in advance, with veiled threats about what would happen if they failed. However, the White Devil isn't the only one who can cause problems and get the investigators running around. Instead of a nighttime burglar (see *The Foreign Agent*, p. 14), a daytime pickpocket grabs an investigator's notes as they're walking through Plantation Docks, leading to a chase. Using the Chase rules in **GURPS Action 2**, the streets and marketplaces of Plantation Docks are very suitable to attempts to Hide (for example, ducking under market stalls), Stunt, and Stunt Escape (such as running in front of approaching vehicles or beasts of burden just before they block a path). Barroom brawls are common occurrences in Plantation Docks, so sleuths can be regularly interrupted by a sudden need to beat people up.

However, they don't expect determined resistance and are disinclined to take many casualties, so they will fall back in good order (and in groups, covering one another's retreat) to their planes if the fight goes on very long. The White Devil is also determined not to leave anyone who can reveal his secrets, so badly wounded raiders can expect a bullet (or grenade) from their own side.

Alternatively, the adventurers might follow up on Kazumoto's suggestion that the raiders are holed up on a forbidden island. He's right, as it happens, so if the investigators explore this option, they'll locate at least one raider. Unfortunately, the raiders are likely to find them first. Intruders to the "forbidden" area will eventually be discovered by the White Devil's occasional air patrol or scattered lookouts on small, deserted islands. When that happens, the heroes are attacked by at least one large biplane; if the investigators are airborne, the White Devil sends enough planes to outnumber them. The White Devil's patrol tries to destroy any vehicle the sleuths have but doesn't stick around to finish off survivors.

If the team comes out of one of these encounters with a live captive, he's unlikely to be able to speak without significant medical care and recovery time, and the White Devil sends gunmen to make sure that the captive doesn't talk. If the investigators manage to shoot down or prevent the takeoff of any of

the White Devil's planes, they find that the planes are of good quality but relatively unremarkable, save for some unusually complex radio gear. A successful Electronics Operations roll indicates that it's specialized for detecting directional radio transmissions. A skilled electrical engineer could duplicate it, producing a device that would reveal whether or not it was in the path of a directional beam at a particular frequency. However, not knowing the approximate location of the transmitter nor when the transmitter is broadcasting, the odds against catching the beam are astronomical.

In any event, direct confrontation with the White Devil complicates things significantly. The BAD worsens to -2, and the White Devil starts making more concerted attempts to kill the investigators.

THE PIRATE

If the adventurers get to this point, it should be clear that they need to look seriously at the forbidden islands. If they indicate that they're willing to spend a significant chunk of money, Rosie (or, if they aren't hanging out at her bar, someone else with underworld connections) hints that she can put the investigators in touch with someone who can help them – for a price.

What if the pulps weren't fiction? GMs could have PCs meet characters from famous books or movies.

If they pay her fee, she arranges a meeting with Richard Feldt, resident of a nearby island and retired captain of the semi-legendary *Black Madonna*. If the investigators ask around, a Streetwise roll turns up rumors about the ship and its captain, but little definite. He came to the islands seven or eight years ago with an international crew. They dealt in contraband for a while and, after making a great profit, retired. The *Madonna* was never seen in port.

When the heroes meet him, Feldt is cheerful, possibly drunk, and definitely disinclined to take them anywhere. He enjoys wine, women, and song, and is already getting them in reasonable quantities. However, those are also his motivating weaknesses. He's open to offers of better drinks, friendlier female companionship, and superior recreations (it's unlikely that any of the investigators have immediate access to large record or film libraries, but if they do, this is where they become useful). Failing that, he'll settle for large stacks of cash (tens of thousands of dollars or equivalent in any other reasonably useful currency) in advance.

If successful in hiring him, or if someone sufficiently persuasive can make three successful Carousing rolls in the course of an evening, Feldt reveals how they can chase the air wolves: under water. Though one of the more successful U-boat captains of the Great War, Kapitänleutnant Feldt saw how things were going for Germany. By the middle of 1918, Feldt began gathering a crew of like-minded sailors. In late September, they simply slipped away while on a mission, letting the High Command believe they had been struck by a mine. Members of his crew dropped out over the next several years to be replaced by others around the global south, until Feldt reached the south Pacific and decided to retire. The *Black Madonna* can get the investigators where they need to go without alerting anyone.

If the investigators are unable or unwilling to hire Feldt, it's possible that they can steal his ship. The *Madonna* is hidden in a narrow inlet near Feldt's large, native-style residence. For a vessel that has seen only cursory maintenance over the past several years, it's still in reasonably good shape, but it's poorly supplied. There are no provisions, no torpedoes, only a few rounds for the 100mm deck gun, and only enough fuel to go about 500 miles (more than enough to search the forbidden islands). It also needs more labor to sail efficiently than the team can probably muster. It requires at least seven men to operate properly. Determined characters can make it go with fewer, but *all* rolls for shipboard operations, including maneuvering, are at -1 per man short.

THE ISLAND

Eventually, the investigators make a survey of the forbidden islands, whether underwater or after defeating the White Devil's patrols. When they do, they will inevitably find his hidden island base.

The base is on a slightly unusual atoll, consisting of an outer ring, an enclosed lagoon, and an inner island. The outer ring is 100 to 200 yards thick, with a diameter of about three

miles. Most of it is sandy beach, but it has a thin screen of palm trees all around. The inner island has a diameter of about two miles, rising gently to a point about 50 feet above high-tide level. The lagoon is very shallow, and it's possible to wade several hundred yards into it. There are a few gaps through which a ship (or surfaced submarine) could sail. An aerial survey or careful observation from the ground reveals several small buildings, a camouflaged radio tower, several floatplanes in the lagoon, and two ships: the *Betty Sue Borden* and *Northumberland Belle*. The buildings have the look of residential shacks or small storehouses rather than fortified positions.

When the team arrives, it is clear that the White Devil is gearing up for another attack. *Very* close observation reveals that some of the planes are having bombs attached to their undersides. If the heroes don't act quickly, the raiders are going to do a lot of damage. The investigators are outnumbered (there are about 30 men on the island), but they have a few hours to prepare and the advantage of surprise. The White Devil isn't expecting anyone to slip past his lookouts, and it's easy for a small group to sneak around the other side of the island and through the jungle. If the adventurers strike quickly, they can blow up storage sheds, disable heavy gear, and take out most of the opposition before the bad guys have a chance to organize.

I am like any other man. All I do is supply a demand.

— Al Capone

UNMASKING THE DEVIL

The White Devil fights to the death, but the other air devils can be convinced to surrender if the White Devil is taken out and the situation appears hopeless. When the smoke clears and the prisoners can be interrogated (or, at worst, papers can be read), much is revealed, especially if they can take one particular person alive.

During the fighting, the investigators don't find anything that looks like a stockade where prisoners are being kept. They will, though, discover Elias Root in one of the buildings. He says that he was just captured by the White Devil and is being held prisoner. However, he has a gun concealed on his person, and the moment the heroes' backs are turned, he'll shoot them and make a run for the parked planes. If captured, he'll try to escape (though not very skillfully) and offer immense bribes to anyone guarding him.

Get the heroes into the action with newspaper and radio news reports, strange movie trailers, mysterious or taunting letters and telegrams, pleas for assistance from associates, or attempted abductions of the PCs or their families.

The White Devil, stripped of his mask, is Ramon Caldera, Elias Root's right-hand man. The masks were worn primarily for anonymity and to frighten the locals; the design comes from Caldera's favorite sport, *lucha libre*, still unknown in most of the world but popular in his native region of Mexico. He and his men built the base after hijacking the two ships in the lagoon, erected the radio tower to transmit a directional signal so that they could navigate at night, and undertook the raids to spread terror among the islands with the occasional mission to sink merchant ships. The rest of the air devils were "abducted" from the islands where they worked, explaining their disappearance and putting them beyond suspicion.

When the adventurers finish sorting through the rubble, they find that Kazumoto's theory was close, but not close enough. Root is motivated by political concerns, but far from wanting the U.S. pushed out of the region, he's trying to provoke *more* American intervention. Indeed, he wants the U.S. to take over the region, and as the man on the spot, he hopes to gain a territorial governorship, turning his position with the company into real power. The air devils were motivated by promises of power in the new administration and the proceeds of piracy in the meantime.

The aftermath of the adventure depends largely on what prompted the investigators initially. Fighting off the air devils and exposing Root will bring considerable local adulation, which heroes might use as justification for buying Contacts and Allies in the region. Private detectives will have earned their pay and probably a bonus if they avoided any random raids by staking out a single location; official representatives may earn promotion.

However, rewards are greatly diminished if the team fails to halt Root's bombing raid on Plantation Docks. Such an overt threat will be met with official military intervention and probably increased international tensions. Ironically, Root's plans will fail if that happens. The APA will cut its losses and withdraw from the region, giving the American government no reason to intervene. With Root gone and his group disbanded, the heroes may never discover the secret of the air devils of the South Seas.

CHARACTER AND EQUIPMENT STATS

These stats may be used for the people and equipment with which investigators are most likely to be violently involved.

Thug, Common

Use this for lightweight opposition relying on fists or large knives. They can become gunmen by giving them Guns/TL6 (Pistol or Submachine Gun)-12; the guns they use are likely to be either standard revolvers or cheap submachine guns.

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

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

Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Brawling).

Skills: Brawling-11; Knife-11; Streetwise-10.

Thug, Tough

This is tougher opposition, not quite as nimble but able to take and dish out more damage. Use fists or clubs if they're not terribly serious about hurting people, or machetes (use the cutlass from the **Basic Set**) if they are. They may likewise be pressed into service as gunmen, with Guns/TL6 (Pistol or Submachine Gun)-12.

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

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12; Will 10; Per 10; FP 11.

Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 8.

Advantages: High Pain Threshold.

Skills: Brawling-11; Broadsword-11; Streetwise-10.

Air Devil

Use this model for the raiders. All are military veterans and reasonably serious fighters.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 10.

Basic Speed 5.25; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Skills: Brawling-12; Broadsword-11; Guns/TL6 (Submachine Gun)-12; Piloting/TL6 (Light Airplane)-12; Soldier-10; Stealth-11; Streetwise-11.

Ramon Caldera/White Devil

181 points

Caldera's weapon of choice is a .45 caliber SMG, though he carries a machete as well.

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 11 [10].

Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 12 [5]; FP 11 [0].

Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Broadsword).

Social Background

TL: 6 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: Spanish (Native) [0]; English (Accented/Broken) [3].

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; Danger Sense [15]; Daredevil [15].

Disadvantages

Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Callous [-5]; Greed (12) [-15]; Overconfidence (12) [-5].

Skills

Area Knowledge (South Pacific) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Broadsword (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Guns/TL6 (Submachine Gun) (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-13; Leadership (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Navigation/TL6 (Air) (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Piloting/TL6 (Light Airplane) (A) DX+1 [4]-14; Stealth (A) DX [2]-13; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Tactics (H) IQ+1 [8]-12; Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-14.

End each session at an exciting point by saying, "Stay tuned for another thrilling episode." Play theme music (see p. 39).

Elias Root

114 points

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 10 [0]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 10 [0].

Damage 1d-2/1d; Basic Lift 20; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0].

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

Social Background

TL: 6 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: English (Native) [0]; Spanish (Broken/None) [1].

Advantages

Charisma 1 [5]; Smooth Operator 2 [30]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20].

Disadvantages

Megalomania [-10].

Skills

Accounting (H) IQ [4]-12; Administration (A) IQ [2]-12; Area Knowledge (South Pacific) (E) IQ [1]-12; Current Affairs/TL6 (Business) (E) IQ [1]-12; Current Affairs/TL6 (Politics) (E) IQ [1]-12; Diplomacy (H) IQ+2 [4]-14*; Farming/TL6 (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+3 [4]-15*;

Finance (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Guns/TL6 (Pistol) (E) DX [1]-10; Holdout (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Leadership (A) IQ+2 [1]-14*†; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-12; Politics (A) IQ+2 [2]-14*; Strategy (Land) (H) IQ-2 [1]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [1]-13*.

* Includes: +2 from Smooth Operator.

† Includes: +1 from Charisma.

Float Plane

The air devils fly float planes, aircraft with pontoons for landing on water rather than wheels for landing on the ground. Float planes were a compromise between the capabilities of a flying boat and the cost of a small plane. The particular planes flown by the air devils are biplanes armed with twin .30-caliber machine guns. The cost in the table is for an unarmed civilian version.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Matt Riggsby has explored the savannas of Africa, the rough-and-tumble Barbary Coast, the ruins of Classical civilization, and the exotic wonders of the subcontinent! He works for an international company that heals the sick using Chinese crystals! He occupies an ancient hidden base with his femme fatale wife, intrepid son, and a pack of loyal dogs!

Float Plane

TL Vehicle	ST/HP	Hnd/SR	HT	Move	LWt	Load	SM	Occ.	DR	Range	Cost	Loc	Stall
6 Float Plane	60	0/3	9f	4/56	2.1	0.4	+4	2	3	360	\$68,000	O2RWiX	24

PILOTING/TL (LIGHT AIRPLANE)

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CLIFFHANGER COUNTRY CHECKLIST

Most cliffhanger campaigns are set in the real world, but most of us don't have an encyclopedic knowledge of geopolitical realities as they existed in the 1930s. Worse, it can be tricky for players (and GMs) to keep track of where the PCs have been, what leads or contacts they might have in various countries, and so on.

This checklist is an effort to help on both fronts. First, it is an attempt at a comprehensive listing of nations and important colonies or possessions from that era. (Although all recognized nations are included, along with most territories, the list may not cover every piece of rock that a colonizing country planted a flag in and gave a name.)

Second, it's designed as an aid to facilitate recordkeeping among players and GM. The large boxes are big enough to put a small two- or three-digit number in, which can correspond

with a number placed on the map of the world. The small boxes can be used to record any information you might want to keep in a check-box format: They might represent how many times a particular country has been visited, how much trouble they're in from local authorities (five checks = "most-wanted enemy of the state"), how much influence a PC has over the area, or anything else. The space after each country can be used to record any notes pertaining to that location.

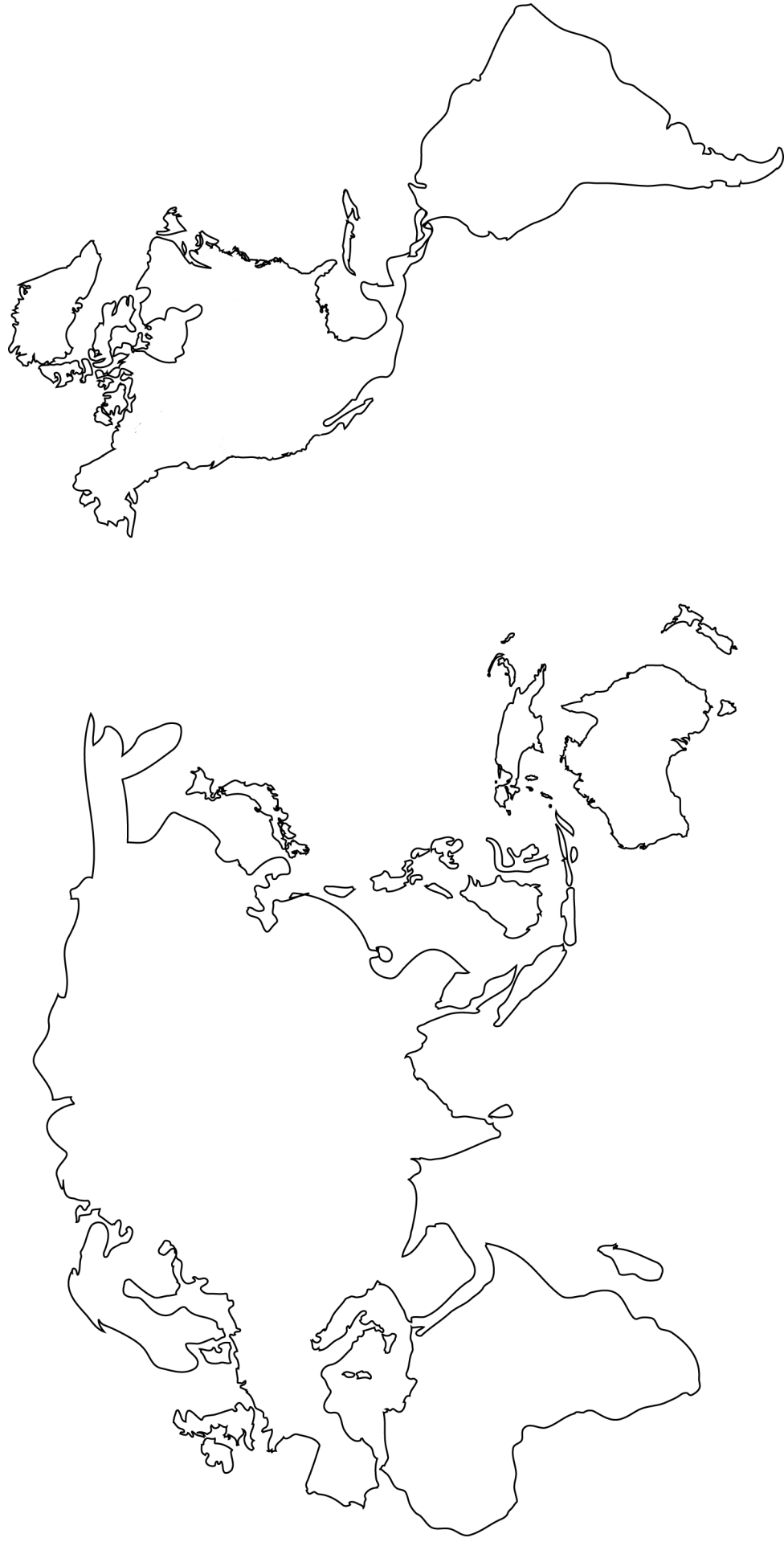
Countries in bold were generally recognized by the international community to be independent states. However, these often answered (directly or indirectly) to more powerful nations. Names in parentheses are "official" names. Locations not in bold are territories, provinces, colonies, or areas otherwise beholden to another power; the country in brackets is the nation that the territory is beholden to.

Dossier for: _____

Goals: _____

Updates: _____

MAP OF THE WORLD



☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Bulgaria (The Kingdom of Bulgaria)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Burma [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Cameroon [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Canada (The Dominion of Canada)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Cape Verde [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Celebes [The Netherlands]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Ceylon [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Chile (The Republic of Chile)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ China (The Republic of China)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Christmas Island [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Cocos Islands [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Colombia (The Republic of Colombia)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Cook Islands [New Zealand]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Costa Rica (The Republic of Costa Rica)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Cuba (The Republic of Cuba)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Curaçao [The Netherlands]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Cyprus [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Czechoslovakia (The Czecho-Slovak Republic)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Dahomy [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Denmark (The Kingdom of Denmark)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Dominican Republic
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Dubai [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Dutch Guiana [The Netherlands]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Ecuador (Republic of Ecuador)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Egypt (Kingdom of Egypt)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ El Salvador (Republic of El Salvador)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Estonia (Republic of Estonia)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Falkland Islands [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Faroe Islands [Denmark]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Federated Malay States [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Fiji [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Finland (Republic of Finland)

☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Formosa [Japan]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ France (French Republic)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ French Equatorial Africa [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ French Guiana [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ French India [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ French Indochina [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ French Oceania [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ French West Africa [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Fujairah [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ The Gambia [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Germany (German Reich)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Gibraltar [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Gilbert and Ellice Islands [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Gold Coast [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Great Britain (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Greece (Kingdom of Greece)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Greenland [Denmark]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Guadeloupe [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Guam [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Guatemala (Republic of Guatemala)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Guernsey [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Haiti (Republic of Haiti)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Hatay (Republic of Hatay)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Hawaii (Sandwich Islands) [United States]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Honduras (Republic of Honduras)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Hong Kong [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Hungary (Kingdom of Hungary)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Iceland (Kingdom of Iceland)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ India [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Inini [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Iran (Empire of Iran)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Iraq (Kingdom of Iraq)

☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Ireland (Republic of Ireland)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Isle of Man [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Italian East Africa [Italy]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Italy (Kingdom of Italy)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Jamaica [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Japan (Empire of Japan)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Java [The Netherlands]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Jersey [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Johor [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Karafuto [Japan]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Kedah [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Kelantan [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Kenya [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Korea [Japan]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Kuwait [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Kwang-Chou-Wan [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Kwantung [Japan]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Latvia (Republic of Latvia)
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☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Libya [Italy]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Liechtenstein (Principality of Liechtenstein)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Lithuania (Republic of Lithuania)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Luxembourg (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Macau [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Madagascar [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Maldiv Islands [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Malta [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Manchuria (Empire of Manchuria; Manchukuo) [Japan, in 1932]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Martinique [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Mauritius [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Mexico (United Mexican States)

☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Monaco (Principality of Monaco)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Mongolia (People's Republic of Mongolia)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Morocco [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Mozambique [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Muscat and Oman [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Nepal (Kingdom of Nepal)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ The Netherlands (Kingdom of The Netherlands)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Netherlands East Indies [The Netherlands]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Newfoundland [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ New Caledonia [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ New Guinea [The Netherlands, Australia (separate regions)]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ New Hebrides [Great Britain/France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ New Zealand (Dominion of New Zealand)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Nicaragua (Republic of Nicaragua)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Nigeria [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Norfolk Island [Australia]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ North Borneo [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Northern Rhodesia [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Norway (Kingdom of Norway)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Nyasaland [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Palestine [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Panama (Republic of Panama)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Panama Canal Zone [United States]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Papua (Territory of Papua) [Australia]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Paraguay (Republic of Paraguay)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Perlis [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Peru (Peruvian Republic)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Philippine Islands [United States]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Poland (Polish Republic)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Portugal (Portuguese Republic)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Portuguese East Africa [Portugal]

☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Portuguese Guinea [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Portuguese India [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Portuguese Timor [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Portuguese West Africa [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Puerto Rico [United States]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Ras al-Khaimah [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Réunion [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Rhodesia [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Río de Oro [Spain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Rumania (Kingdom of Rumania)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Saint Helena [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Saint Pierre and Miquelon [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ San Marino (Most Serene Republic of San Marino)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ São João Baptista de Ajudá [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ São Tomé and Príncipe [Portugal]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Sarawak [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Sardinia [Italy]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Saudi Arabia (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Seychelles [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Sharjah [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Siam (Kingdom of Siam)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Sicily [Italy]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Sierra Leone [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Somaliland [Italy, Great Britain, and France (separate regions)]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ South Africa (Union of South Africa)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Southern Rhodesia [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Soviet Union (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Spain (Republic of Spain)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Spanish Guinea [Spain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Spanish Morocco [Spain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Spanish North Africa [Spain]

☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Spanish Sahara [Spain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Spanish West Africa [Spain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Straits Settlements [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Sudan (Anglo-Egyptian Sudan) [Great Britain/Egypt]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Sumatra [The Netherlands]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Swaziland [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Sweden (Kingdom of Sweden)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Switzerland (The Swiss Confederation)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Syria [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Taiwan [Japan]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Tanganyika Territory [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Terengganu [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Tibet (Kingdom of Tibet)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Tonga [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Trans-Jordan [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Trinidad and Tobago [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Tristan da Cunha [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Tunisia [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Turkey (Republic of Turkey)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Uganda [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Umm al-Quwain [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Union of South Africa [Great Britain]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ United States (United States of America)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ United States Virgin Islands [United States]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Uruguay (Oriental Republic of Uruguay)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Vatican City (State of the Vatican City)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Venezuela (United States of Venezuela)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ West Africa [France]
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Yemen (Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Yugoslavia (Kingdom of Yugoslavia)
☐	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Zanzibar [Great Britain]

INTO THE TEMPLE OF THE HUNGRY STAR!

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

Priceless Artifact Stolen from Museum!

Ancient "Mystery Orb" Burgled in Broad Daylight!

Three Dead, Five Wounded at American Museum of Natural History.

– *New York Times*, Wednesday, January 6, 1937

Mystery Murder in Ambassador Hotel!

Three Men "Gruesomely" Killed by Unknown Assassin!

Neighbors Heard Screams, Saw "Strange Fellow" Leave!

– *New York Post*, Friday, January 8, 1937

New York, 1937: A story is rapidly unfolding, of greed and ambition intersecting with deadly ancient secrets. A pro-Nazi American industrialist and a disfigured German "archaeologist" have given the Führer dangerous knowledge – the location of a terrible weapon, hidden in a long-lost South American temple. The resulting expedition uncovered a strange, spherical vehicle from beyond the stars.

Hitler wants it for the *Luftwaffe*. The pieces that should make it fly once more are being gathered by servants of the Third Reich. Soon they will be assembled in the secret base the Nazis have constructed within the Peruvian temple.

When that moment comes, Hitler will have an invincible weapon . . . *or so he thinks*. The vehicle is actually controlled by horrible creatures that devour men in seconds. Most of the men who stole the second artifact in New York City are now dead because of them. If the vehicle takes off, it could well spell the end of humanity.

Fortunately, some stalwart heroes choose to stand between evildoers and the cataclysmic forces they would unleash! This collection of clues provides the skeleton of a two-fisted adventure that could see a party chasing Nazis from New York to Lima, and then into the lush and deadly jungles of Peru. Along the way, they may fight hired thugs, encounter the sinister

Ahnenerbe and alien monsters, and take part in a South American showdown that may decide the fate of the human race!

The article is generic, and could be used with **GURPS** *Cliffhangers*, *Adventure!*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *D6 Adventure*, *Savage Worlds*, *Thrilling Tales*, or any other pulp game that could be set in the 1930s.

A PAIR OF HORRIBLE OCCURRENCES!

There are two main hooks for this story: the break-in at the American Museum of Natural History, and the murders at the Ambassador Hotel. Clues found at one will lead back to the other.

The Museum

According to the *Times*, the five-man robbery took place at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 5. One man – an "odd fellow" – entered at 2:00 p.m., headed slowly toward the South American wing, and stayed at or around it. Two more men entered at 3:00 p.m., nodded to the first man, and walked the floor for an hour. Then the final two arrived at 4:00 p.m.; they rendezvoused at the orb exhibit and began firing at nearby guards.

Two guards died instantly. Another was shot in the arm and ducked for cover. Several stampeding museum-goers were hurt, and a young mother with a baby was taken hostage and threatened with being shot. The guards backed off.

The exhibit case was smashed, the orb taken, and then the men split up. Three men – including the "odd fellow" – left by a side stairwell and killed the back door guard. That victim was unaware of the robbery because a very loud delivery truck was idling outside, usual for that time of day.

The number of hobos in the United States surged during the 1930s. Primarily men, most honorable hobos were traveling workers who hitched rides, mainly on freight cars.

The two men with the hostage got outside, clubbed the hostage unconscious, and left the baby to scream by its mother. The guards were overwhelmed by all three problems and quickly lost sight of the robbers. No one saw them get into a vehicle.

The stolen artifact was a solid gold orb eight inches in diameter, carved with a strange, hideous face – mouth and eyes shut. It was supposedly found in Southern Peru in 1912, but no one is certain where or by whom. Also unknown is what culture produced it; it bears striking resemblances to other, Pre-Incan artifacts, but nothing else is known – hence “the mystery orb.”

Digging at the library reveals that this isn't the only pre-Incan artifact to be stolen lately. According to the *New York Times*, on June 13, 1936, someone walked through an open door at Lima's Museo de Historia Nacional and took a large metal box found in the southern plateaus of Peru, in the Apurimac region. Like the orb, no one had successfully identified it.

The article has a crude drawing of the box. Strange glyphs depict a large star-like object setting people afire. The faces of the star and the orb look eerily similar. Also, there is a hollow space inside the box that would, if the scale is correct, fit the orb perfectly.

The guard who was shot got a good look at the robbers during the robbery, but thinks they were wearing fake glasses and noses. There was also the “odd fellow,” who moved slowly, with a pronounced limp, and whose facial expression never changed. He had a droopy mustache, wore eye-glasses, didn't take off his hat once inside, and never spoke. Once the robbery happened, he sped up considerably, though it seemed the other robbers were leading him by the hand.

Quizzing other guards and staff members reveals that they may have seen two or three of those robbers before. They even think they saw the “odd fellow,” always in the South American exhibit by the mystery orb. That one, and the others, had been coming in maybe once a month since late last year.

Searching the grounds turns up clues. There's a large number of old cigarette butts under a bush out in back, well in view of the loading dock and back door the robbers used. They are a German brand – Reichsmark – and there's a book of matches from the Ambassador Hotel with them.

Going to the Ambassador with descriptions of the men proves vague and useless unless they mention the “odd fellow.” The management wonders if that isn't Mr. Smith up in Executive Suite 5. He was residing there with the four men who were murdered, but Mr. Smith – missing since the murder – doesn't have a mustache.

The Ambassador

The murders happened around 10:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 7, in Executive Suite 5 on the top residence floor. Neighbors heard talk and laughter coming from the apartment from 9:00 p.m. onward, cut off by “horrible screaming” at 10:30 that lasted for maybe a minute. Mr. Georgetown of Suite 4

The Heart of the Hungry Star

The orb is a dangerous alien object. It is the energy conduit for the Sphere (see pp. 34-35), and it brings the hungry, ultra-dimensional beings that power the Sphere out to feed.

When installed in the Sphere, the orb provides limitless flight and enables devastating attacks at night. However, during the day it must “sleep” due to the effect of solar rays and the atmosphere.

Outside the Sphere, but inside a building, a bag, or its box, the orb “sleeps.” It also remains dormant in daylight, regardless of whether it is covered. If outside and fully exposed to the night sky, it awakens: Its golden eyes and mouth slide open, and it brings forth otherworldly creatures to feed on the living.

The creatures look like sliding bursts of silver and blue flame. They attack by partially enveloping their prey and swiftly devouring what they touch. They are highly intelligent, but they have no desire to communicate with food.

Outside the Sphere, at night, the orb brings out 2-12 creatures at a time. In the Sphere, it spews forth 30-180 at a time. Thankfully, they each eat only one person before returning to the orb.

arrived first, five minutes after the screaming stopped, and found the door open. He also caught sight of “a figure” shuffling down the hall, but he went into the room instead of chasing.

Four of the suite's five occupants (Anderson, Jones, Thomas, and Roberts) were in the main room, all sliced into large pieces and strewn about the floor and furniture. There were pools of blood on the floor, spatters on the walls and ceiling. The police determined that large parts of the corpses were missing, as though removed from the crime scene.

Nothing appeared to have been rifled through or taken. A window was open in the main room, with no sign of anyone climbing in or out. However, a partial tread through the blood went from the open window to the door, and then out, eventually petering out in the hallway in the direction Mr. Georgetown saw the “figure” going. The tread is from a man's shoe, approximately 11 inches long.

There was no sign of the fifth occupant, Mr. Smith. He has yet to check back in with the hotel's staff or contact the authorities. He struck the staff as “weird,” and he didn't talk to anyone. He also walked with a limp.

The blood-soaked table in the main room has two items of interest. One is a drawn map of a multi-level structure, complete with stairwells, several Gs in strategic locations, and a large O in one section. The drawing is a crude approximation of the American Museum of Natural History, with the O being the South American wing. There's also a brochure for the Grace Line, and the many ships and routes it contains. The blood makes it impossible to tell if anything was written on it.

Since 1900, the National Hobo Convention has taken place the second weekend in August in Britt, Iowa. This might be a good place to find leads on mysterious happenings around the country or to contact people who have dropped out of society. It can also make a unique PC background.

The Odd Fellow

Werner Abendroth is a notorious German “archaeologist” – read “tomb robber” – who’s looted his way across Africa, Europe, and Central America. In 1912, he tried to upstage his rival, Dr. White of Harvard, by beating him to a rumored temple in Apurimac. White’s expedition got there before Abendroth’s collection of thieves and mercenaries, but by the time the German arrived, White’s party was dead – bodies sliced apart, pieces missing.

Abendroth looted the corpses and found the golden orb, which he hid on his person. He also found White’s diary – a blood-spattered mess that spoke of the temple, the box they found there, and the traps that claimed half of White’s remaining party. However, it couldn’t tell Abendroth where the temple was, and his near-mutinous party didn’t want to go on further. So Abendroth returned to Cusco, shot his “partners,” and sold what he could.

He kept the diary, though, planning to study it for another trip back. Unfortunately the Great War started, and Abendroth suffered terrible injuries. He lost an eye, a hand, and ability to speak, and he had to wear a mask over his face to keep people from screaming. His pre-war sav-

ings kept him alive, but he was a broken shell of a man until 1924, when he first heard Adolph Hitler.

Hitler’s words relit the fire Werner’s heart. He gave his money and expertise to the Third Reich, eventually becoming a founding member of the Ahnenerbe, the Nazis’ center for studying German heritage and “primordial intellectual history.” One day, thanks to a flamboyant American businessman the Führer took a liking to, Werner found the temple his rival had located, and discovered something amazing inside of it. Now he strives to make that ancient relic work again for the glory of the Fatherland.

Abendroth is a twisted fanatic bent on serving Hitler at any cost. He rationalizes everything so as to move forward, and not backward, and will gladly sacrifice anyone and anything. Even after the considerable shock the night of the murders, he’s still fixated on getting the orb to Peru and then to the temple.

He’s physically shattered and weak, but he gains a madman’s strength when he’s within reach of a goal. His fake left hand has been specially weighted to act like a club in combat. His ruined face is so hideous that the sight of it will petrify even the most steadfast of souls.

Going through the victims’ clothing and effects reveals that two of the men smoked Reichsmark cigarettes. There is ID for all five men, but it looks very new, and a trained eye spots that they’re forgeries. If the IDs are shown to museum employees, and eyeglasses and larger noses drawn onto them, they’re sure the men were the robbers.

Mr. Smith’s room reveals much. There’s a small stack of very new business cards for Colossus Oil. They have a phone number and an address in Madison Square. No one answers the phone.

Smith’s clothing seems rather ordinary, though his shoes are size 11. He has current German newspapers and archaeological magazines by his bedside. He also has many small notepads and pencils. Crumpled papers in his wastebasket are filled with sloppily written German phrases like “good night” and “all is in readiness, yes?”

There’s a wall safe behind a strangely placed painting – the hotel staff knows nothing about it. Cracking it reveals a number of items. There are six .32 automatics (used in the commission of the museum robbery) and two mostly full boxes of .32 ammunition. There are five pairs of fake eyeglasses with attached noses. There’s a signed first printing of *Mein Kampf*, made out to “*Mein Freund, Mein Soldat, Werner.*” (My Friend, My Soldier, Werner.) Finally, there’s a painted metal facemask: the kind that maimed soldiers wear, secured by eyeglasses. It has a droopy mustache and an eerie, blank expression. If it’s shown to museum employees, they recognize it as the face of the “odd fellow.”

Stuck in *Mein Kampf* is a piece of paper that says “Callao 236 Avenida Venezuela.” That is the address of Petroco’s main office in Callao, Peru. Someone could also mistake it for an address in Venezuela.

Police and Thieves

The corpses were missing large amounts of their anatomy, as if pieces had been chopped clean off. One fellow was bisected vertically, another was gone from the waist down, another from the floating ribs up, and another was nothing but feet, head, and hands. The cuts were swift and sharp, slicing smoothly through even the thickest bones. The missing parts were nowhere to be found.

The mortician made an interesting discovery: In each complete head, they found that one of the back molars had been removed and replaced with a false tooth. Those fake teeth were filled with a lethal dose of cyanide – a dangerous practice used by Soviets and Nazis.

The men had wallets full of money and business cards for “Colossus Oil.” The police have been calling the number to no avail. They can’t get any information on next of kin from the hotel, and they’re also not having any luck finding Mr. Smith.

Frankly, the detectives on the case are spooked and want to wash their hands of the entire thing. Assuring them of a quiet turnaround gets a lot of friendly cooperation.

Adventures could take place in exotic African, Asian, or South American locales. Or they could happen closer to modern civilization. In the United States, the Florida Everglades, the Great Lakes, and the Rocky Mountains (among other places) were all undeveloped and remote enough that they still held many mysteries.

Colossus Oil

On paper, Colossus Oil is a small, independent refining company. It takes oil from a field in northern Texas, refines it, and sells it at prices just below the current market value. It employs 50 people in New York, 100 in Texas, and another 30 in its delivery arm. Or at least it did once.

Now, Colossus is an empty office with a working phone, five German agents, and five thugs. The refining company has been shuttered for years, since the oil dried up. Nonetheless, the illusion is maintained as a tax dodge and a handy way to keep money and muscle off the books by Mr. David W. Rhodes of Petroco, who owns Colossus by way of Crusader Petroleum.

The office is a rundown building. The structure was paid for in cash by some fellow two years ago, according to the building super, but it hasn't been used yet that he's seen. "Colossus Oil" is stenciled on the office door. Inside are a couple of chairs, desk, and a working telephone that rings when the number on the cards is called.

Petroco owns at least seven companies – real and imaginary. Crusader Petroleum has a proper office in Times Square, just a few blocks from Petroco's New York City offices. Furthermore, Crusader actually *does* employ over 200 people, at home and abroad.

Crusader's chipper receptionists won't reveal anything about Colossus, its connection to the men in the Ambassador, or what they were doing. The matter's being "handled," and that's all they know. They will tell their bosses about anyone asking questions, which is funneled up to Rhodes, who has such people marked.

Crusader Petroleum has a warehouse in the rundown Gashouse District, which is where "Warner Smith" – Werner Abendroth – has hid since the murders. He was in the bathroom when someone put the orb in the open window, and he heard the horrid screams of his men. Then he came out and saw what was left of them – but not what did it – panicked, and ran, taking only the orb and the diary. He called on Rhodes at his personal residence in Times Square, hysterical with fear that "some creature" had followed him up from South America.

Rhodes calmed Abendroth down, saying he'd take care of everything. That's why Abendroth is under watch by five armed, Colossus-paid thugs, who are keeping anyone from finding Abendroth, and keeping him from doing something stupid. The thugs make a daily circuit: They travel from the warehouse to Colossus' "office" (they call for instructions at certain times depending on what day of the week it is), to the Ambassador to watch, to Crusader to report in, and then back to the warehouse for the night.

Werner no longer rants on paper about the "creature," but he re-reads Dr. White's diary for clues and demands the men get his things from the suite. He keeps the orb on him at all times.

If the police enter the suite, then, once they leave, the thugs try to get what's in the safe. They might be seen entering or leaving, or spotted tailing anyone who sees them.

The thugs are professionals who know when to kill and when to back off until later. They don't dare anger Rhodes by failing, or creating a bigger mess than they're sent to clean up. They can't be bribed and won't talk if threatened.

The Waiting Game

After the murders, Rhodes wired for new bodyguards. Five days later, the replacements pull into New York City from England. There are five replacements, one of them an Ahnenerbe scientist – a boot-licking idiot, but the four others assure Abendroth that he can be controlled. They are met by a delegation from Crusader, including Mr. Rhodes. They are taken to Crusader for a debriefing and to get new IDs. They then travel to the warehouse so they can catch up with Abendroth.

In three days, the passenger ship *Santa Clara* docks. Petroco sends a representative, guarded by a thug, to the docks office of the ship's owner, Grace Lines, to explain that four men they'd purchased tickets for are no longer employed. But they'd like to buy five more – three men to a cabin – for Masters Thomas, Petersen, Davis, Dale, and White. They'd also like to board earlier than the 16th; Mr. Smith, who already has a ticket, is in "poor health" and needs extra time.

Grace Lines' overworked representative is happy to accommodate the well-heeled and rude fellow from Petroco, and his "colorful" escort. He's also content to give the information to interested parties for a modest bribe.

In 1930s mysteries, all sorts of motives were credible which aren't credible today, especially motives of preventing guilty sexual secrets from coming out. Nowadays, people sell their guilty sexual secrets.

– P.D. James

SHIP OF DEATH, PORT OF DANGER

Horrible Death on the High Seas!

Ten Hideously Murdered on *Santa Clara*, South of Panama Canal.

– *New York Post*, Monday, January 25, 1937

Six Men Killed in Dinner of Death!

All Were Employees of the Museum of National History.

– *El Comercio*, Monday, January 18, 1937

The trip to Callao takes 14 days, with stops at Havana, Cristobal, Balboa, Buenaventura, Guayaquil, Talara, and Salaverry. Grace Lines prides itself on having a 24-hour turnaround at port, but unexpected snags may delay things.

Automobiles (also called jalopies or flivvers) were a status symbol of the rich.

The Money Man

Independent oilman David W. Rhodes is a flamboyant man about town, a high-rolling businessman with a talent for moving things without anyone noticing, and a Nazi agent of influence. He came to Hitler's attention when he discovered how to sell oil to Germany in spite of international sanctions, and became embroiled in the temple excavation scheme due to his history in Apurimac.

In 1927, Rhodes and Reginald P. Smith discovered mineral riches and petroleum seepage in that region. In 1929 they set up a development deal with Peru's government. They found the metal box and handed it over as a gift. The deal went sour due to cheated backers, the 1929 crash, and a revolution that replaced Peru's president. Smith committed suicide, but Rhodes soldiered on.

By 1934, Rhodes was trading oil to postwar Germany, using a sneaky circuit of money and material. His audacious scheme brought him to the attention of the Führer, and they became fast business partners on a first-name basis.

Learning that Rhodes had been involved with the failed Apurimac deal, Hitler introduced him to Werner Abendroth, co-founder of the Ahnenerbe, who was curious to know if their survey had come across a ruined temple built into a cliff. Rhodes, sensing a golden moment, said that they had, and he'd be happy to tender over the survey information, provided he could also profit.

A mutually beneficial plan was created. In June of 1935, the Ahnenerbe launched a secret expedition, under the guise of Petroco developing Peru's petroleum fields. German men and equipment were ferried in via Petroco, and, following Smith's survey, Abendroth found the temple. Ahnenerbe scientists and archaeologists excavated it, using local workers to "defuse" the traps.

When they realized what they'd discovered, they knew they needed the orb and the box to make it work. Rhodes was happy to make further arrangements, and he brought Abendroth and his four German agents into New York as "employees" of Colossus. Now that things have gone wrong, he's called more men over from Germany to help Werner, and he is making plans to go to Peru later for the big day.

Rhodes is a highly amoral man who sees wealth and influence as the only real factor in his decisions. He has embraced Nazism as a means to his own end, but sees parallels between Hitler's views and his personal ideals. He wouldn't be terribly upset to see Hitler in charge of America, too.

Rhodes is in good health for his age. He doesn't care to get his hands dirty with killing, except in special "gratifying" occasions. He smokes cigarettes with a long holder, sips champagne in flutes, and always has the last word in any conversation – except with Hitler, of course.

Like most of Grace's passenger ships, the *Santa Clara* is a nonluxurious affair. The dining facilities won't win any awards for the cuisine, and the cabins are decent but cramped. Passengers are expected to make their own fun, or spend most of the trip in their cabins, reading or sleeping.

That makes it perfect for the six Nazi agents, who hole up in their two cabins and have their meals delivered by a cranky steward who – tired of their lousy tips – is open to bribery. They carry their papers and Petroco identification (both forged) and have .32s hidden in their suitcases. Abendroth has his copy of *Mein Kampf* with the address if he got the book back, and another copy of the address if he didn't. He carries Dr. White's diary and the orb on his person at all times.

Each agent is allowed to exercise out on the deck for an hour each night, but he must do so with a partner to avoid being jumped. At no time will a room have no one in it. Abendroth won't leave his at all – until it all goes wrong.

The Night of Death

After leaving Balboa, south of Panama, the idiot – "Mr. White" – takes a notion to gloat, thinking they're safe. He waits until his bunkmates are asleep, takes the orb from Abendroth's coat pocket, and goes for a moonlit stroll on the promenade

deck. Once he's got a few people around, he pulls out the orb and looks at it, waiting for some fool to ask him what he's got in his hand.

"White" dies without even knowing it – vanishing from the knees up in a burst of silver-blue fire, the orb dropping between his disconnected feet. Someone screams as more bursts begin to feed on passengers. The orb smiles as it rolls along the deck.

The screams awaken Abendroth and the other agents. They get there in time to see the last alien feeding and vanishing, and the orb closing its eyes and mouth – sated for now. Abendroth then understands what the "creature" was, and what he's had in his coat this entire time. Believing he's been holding one of the Aryan gods of old, he gets to his knees and crawls to it, voicelessly begging for mercy.

What happens next depends on others' actions. The remaining agents, not fully understanding the situation, try to get Abendroth and the orb back to their cabins. They can hole up there and stay on board until Callao, as planned. They lose three days when the ship docks at Buenaventura to allow for emergency attention and an investigation – one Grace Lines pays to have stymied, fearing rumors of a "death ship" – but that delay is more than acceptable. The news also gets out, but they don't care.

From 1884 to 1959, Alaska was a territory of the United States and a place in which miners and prospectors sought their fortune.

If the agents have reason to suspect someone thinks they were somehow involved, but they're not openly contested, they slip off board when they reach Buenaventura, cable Petroco for help, and make the rest of the journey by land. If they're openly contested at any point while at sea, they get their weapons, smash the wireless, and take hostages, allowing Abendroth and two other agents to steal a lifeboat and row for shore. The "pirates" then either follow in a rowboat with hostages or, if cornered or beaten, chew their cyanide molars.

Bienvenido a Callao

German-speaking Petroco workers in tan uniforms greet the agents when they arrive, whether by sea, air, or land. They travel by private car to the warehouse at 236 Avendia Venezuela – a rundown, industrial thoroughfare most tourists avoid. This is Petroco's main headquarters in Peru. It handles shipping of men and materiel, forging of visas, and smuggling of guns and other things from Germany.

They also "interview" Peruvian citizens who've heard about the opportunity to make money at a new oil camp south of Cusco. They only take young, unmarried men without much family. If they "disappear" at the site, few people will ask questions.

In a dark back room, the mysterious box sits under armed guard. Abendroth – still praying voicelessly to the Aryan angel in his hands – solemnly puts the orb inside and closes the lid. From that point on, he does not leave it, even when Mr. Rhodes flies in from America to rendezvous with them for Cusco and the camp.

On that day, they travel under heavy guard; everyone's on high alert, and not just because the plan is coming to fruition. The company just had to deal with five guards and a mid-level administrator at the Museo de Historia Nacional, and they're waiting to see if the other shoe drops.

The six men were the ones they bribed when Abendroth and his agents stole the box last year. The greedy fools were asking for more money and being loud about it, too. So, they were invited to a private luncheon at a local cevichería to "talk about it"; instead, they were gunned down by their heavily disguised host, Herr Niemand. The assassin then vanished into the lunchtime crowds.

He's certain he wasn't followed, but one can never be too certain. That's why he's staying in Callao to watch for anyone asking too many questions about the incident. He's also looking for anyone who "meddled" in New York City or the *Santa Clara*. Petroco has a wide network of German spies, company employees, and local thugs on its payroll, and he hears if anyone asks questions about the company, last year's robbery at the Museo de Historia Nacional, or what happens to local workers who leave in the Petroco truck to Cusco. He'll deal with them accordingly.

The Museum

The director at the museum welcomes interest in the missing box. He has told the police and reporters everything he knew, and nothing's changed. Well, except that the five

Herr Niemand

He is the Nazis' faceless and sinister master of disguise. It's said he can go from being a short, Asian dwarf to being a tall, African woman if he's had enough preparation time. It's also said he can turn invisible, though that would be impossible, surely.

One thing is certain: Having been in Callao since the box was stolen, he has an ear in every bar and office, and an eye in every street and marketplace. He *knows* when people ask about certain subjects. If he's outnumbered, he need only snap his fingers to fill the street with hired thugs, Nazi scum, and other human refuse.

He always gets away in the end. Always.

guards who were working that night were recently killed, along with the man who was overseeing that exhibit. That's a coincidence, surely.

Other workers can't provide more information, but they are less charitable about the deceased. They confide that the guards were notorious for being on the take: letting curious tourists come in for "private tours" after closing, and maybe outright theft. Someone *did* leave the back door unlocked that night. The general consensus is that they got what they deserved.

An exhibit of excellent photographs takes the place of the artifact's display. An angry, hungry star that looks like the awakened orb looms on the lid – hovering over incomplete people who seem to be caught on fire. Anyone who's seen the orb in action recognizes the face and its handiwork.

No one working at the museum knows who made the box or what may have been in the hollow. There is an ancient legend in the southern part of the country – one older than the oldest Pre-Incan civilization. The legend seems to be illustrated on the box's lid and sides.

"Long ago, a hungry star flew through the heavens. It saw Man and fell to the earth to feed. It killed many as it raced through the night sky. By daytime, it was so full that it could not move.

"Three days and nights, this happened. Then the bravest priest among the people decided to kill it. He went into the sleeping star's mouth. He cut out its heart. He put it in this box. That night, the star did not rise.

"The people rolled the star into a cavern. They built a temple over it. They hid the heart where no one could find it."

Is there a temple in Southern Peru coinciding with that legend? No one knows for certain. A Dr. White from Harvard went off to look for such a temple in 1912, but his party vanished.

The director reveals that a foreign oil company discovered the box in 1927 and gave it to the Leguia government. They were surveying for oil and minerals in Apurímac, and setting up a deal to exploit the region. But the stock market crashed, the government was overthrown, and the deal collapsed. The director thinks that it was the Rhodes-Smith Company, but he's not certain.

Some common tropes of the pulp genre: strange crimes, weird science, exotic locations, and deathtraps.

Adiós, Cusco

The Petroco trucks stop in the sleepy mountain city of Cusco before continuing on to the camp. They have a headquarters there, with plenty of bunks, a few shower facilities, and some communal areas. The place also acts as a dump for guns and ammunition; the police are paid to ignore it. There's nothing really incriminating here until Abendroth and Rhodes arrive, and they're gone by the next day.

Asking questions about Petroco here gets less guarded answers than in Callao. People are willing to say the camp has a bad reputation. When it first started, they got workers from here, but the men didn't come back. Their families were informed that they died in "careless accidents," and the next of kin weren't qualified to get their wages. No one in Cusco will work there anymore, which is why Petroco recruits in Lima now.

The police and local government are in Petroco's pocket, so there's no chance of them doing anything. Maybe if the federal government knew what was happening, they'd put a stop to it. Maybe they know and don't care.

No one is willing to accompany anyone to Apurimac. The company highway is patrolled by bent policemen eager to arrest people, and armed Petroco guards who shoot first and ask questions later. Those citizens who trek through the jungle can give decent directions, and some travel pointers, but that's as far as they'll go.

THE TEMPLE OF THE HUNGRY STAR!

Petroco's highway snakes through the jungle for a hundred miles, and terminates between two toothlike outcroppings of rock and vine. A metal-reinforced guard shack lies between the outcroppings, and its three German guards sport Haenel MP28/II submachine guns.

There are other ways in, such as the jungle to the sides. Infiltrators have to sneak around highly alert, three-man guard patrols. There are 18 guards on shift, divided between the front shack, the grounds and the temple. Another 18 are resting, but they can be called up by siren.

The camp stretches the entire valley. A small city of ratty workers' tents surrounds metal huts (for paid employees), a dining hall, makeshift medical facility, and the camp headquarters. A battery of gas-powered electrical generators sputter in the area past the living quarters, providing electricity for the camp, including the lights strung up all over the place. Beyond the generators is a large, open pit for burning refuse. A little farther away from the pit, the temple juts from the bottom of a high cliff, surrounded by lights and metal and wood supports.

The camp bustles with activity night and day. Men with German accents bark terse, highly accented Spanish orders to gangs of scared-looking laborers. Workers take boxes, girders, and lengths of wood to and from the huts, the generators, and the temple. At any given time, two-thirds of them are working, with the remaining third having a meal followed by sleep.

It won't be hard for anyone to disguise himself as a worker, but the need for extra caution is clear: Every so often, there's shouting at someone for making a mistake, followed a gunshot. A gang of workers then carries a fresh body to the refuse pit.

The Temple

The temple is badly ruined, vine-claimed and crumbled so badly it's a wonder Dr. White even found it. The chamber where the box was located is open to the sky. Below it, a large, gaping hole leads inside. The opening is reinforced by wood and steel, has lights trained on it, and more German guards stationed there. Workers carry things in and out.

Past the rude, forced opening, there is the wider original shaft leading into the cavern, its walls festooned with electric lights. The walls have giant, eerie glyphs depicting the sphere in action. There is significant damage to the wall and floor after a little bit; the holes look like they might have contained traps.

Halfway to the cavern, a couple smaller, unlit cross-shafts can be ducked into. These interlocking passages allow one to sneak into the cavern, but none of them have been cleared of traps. Poison darts, jutting spears, and whirling blades – attached to clever counterweights in the floor – must be defused or avoided. Screams echo all the way to the cavern, alerting guards and scientists to intruders.

There is another way in: An unguarded ventilation shaft lies on one side of the cliff, away from the lights. If the metal cover is removed, it can be entered, but it's a tight fit, filled with hideous spiders and webs. It comes out within sight of the Sphere, but just out of sight of the Ahnenerbe scientists tending it.

Inside the tall, deep cavern is a maze of stalactites and stalagmites, with a line of lights strung to mark the one safe path. Deviation leads to dead ends, bottomless pits, matted webs crawling with huge cave spiders, and the occasional trap. A three-man team of guards waits here for intruders.

The Sphere

The path leads up a gentle slope. At the top of it are banks of strange electric devices tended by white-clad Ahnenerbe scientists. In the middle, glowing like some strange religious object, is the Sphere.

Looking at the Sphere makes the mind reel. It is 15 feet in diameter, without visible openings, and made of a dusky silver metal with a gentle, pulsating glow. It looks like a giant replica of the orb, right down to the ugly face with its closed eyes and mouth.

The object isn't solid, and scientists walk right through its sides, though something keeps them from falling through the floor. Inside, the Sphere is transparent, and the outside can be seen in crisp detail. There's no writing on its walls, and no recognizable controls. The only thing inside is a round, hollow pedestal as solid as the floor, projecting from the center. The orb would fit it perfectly.

Those needing cheaper or more reliable transportation might use a horse (to ride or, more likely, to pull wagons), ride a bicycle, or simply walk. In well-paved places, roller skating might be popular.

The box is nearby, on a table, hooked up to electronic devices. If the Nazis have the orb, it's nestled snugly within it. Abendroth likes to spend time looking at the orb, so chances are good he's here, too.

Beyond the Sphere is the rest of the cavern, an even denser maze with even deeper pits and bigger webs, but no traps. It may go on forever into the mountain, or stop at some bottomless chasm, or fantastic underground cave that leads to a waterfall out the side.

If Everything Goes Wrong

Should no one stop the plan at some earlier point, a group of adventurers might come across what's left of the camp. They find a ruined collection of tents and metal huts, strewn with skeletons missing large portions of their anatomy.

The temple is pulverized dust – exploded from the inside out. Inside the cavern, little remains: half-melted electronic devices and more partial skeletons litter the center area. A painted metal mask lies near the remains of a hand.

In the rubble, there's a box protecting an undamaged movie camera and an expensive AEG tape recorder from Germany, both containing recordings. After developing the film, a skilled hero should be able to synchronize these and find out what's recorded.

In the movie, the reactivation of the Sphere goes as planned. A collection of highly prized prisoners are taken to the main staging area and kicked to their knees near the cameraman and a champagne-sipping Rhodes. This way they, too, can witness the amazing moment from the best vantage point.

Rhodes toasts the camera and says something, along the lines of, "I'd offer you champagne, but they only brought one bottle. Sorry."

With all Ahnenerbe personnel standing proudly by, a nearly ecstatic Abendroth hands the box to a scientist. The man walks into the Sphere along with two men in high-tech pilot suits. What happens inside can't be seen, but, if the investigators have the recorder running, the man says he's implanting the orb . . . now.

There is a moment's silence, and then an otherworldly, bone-rattling hum fills the cavern. The man says things are lighting up, structures forming from nowhere. He can see controls – strange and shifting, like blue and silver fire. They are moving to envelop the pilots . . .

Then the panicking starts.

Many electrical devices overload as the lights explode, but the cavern is still lit by the Sphere. It shrinks and grows – *breathing* – and changes its features to look like the awakened orb: maddened, staring eyes and a wide, hungry mouth. It floats a foot off the cavern floor and looks upon those gathered there, grinning as the screaming inside of it abruptly stops.

Abendroth, enraptured, takes his mask off and walks toward his metal angel. He cannot scream when the fire takes him, but those around him do, and begin to panic and run. Some shoot at the Sphere as it feeds on them, too, while others try to lose themselves in the maze. Anyone trying to escape to the daylight is consumed by the Hungry Star, free to feed at last.

Rhodes drops his champagne flute and flees further into the cavern. The captives stumble to their feet and do the same. A scream that might be Rhodes, or one of them, bursts out a moment later . . .

Then the camera is started at by the Sphere, and the film abruptly stops.

THIS IS THE END!

What happened from after the Sphere awakened? The Hungry Star probably left, deciding that Earth is an unsuitable feeding ground. It may come back at some later date. Then again, it may not.

The camp headquarters has enough paperwork to implicate Petroco – though maybe not Rhodes – in theft, murder and other shady dealings with Germany's government. Depending on what year the temple is found, that may no longer matter.

Werner Abendroth is most likely dead – consumed by his hungry metal god, and taking Dr. White's diary with him. Herr Niemand vanishes, but will be (un)seen again throughout World War II and maybe beyond. The Ahnenerbe continues to explore the world, finding occult secrets and weapons for Hitler to exploit.

If Rhodes dies, Petroco collapses in a torrent of revelations about its shady dealings. If he lives, he continues to help bankroll the Third Reich for his friend, Hitler. He isn't the only American businessman to aid Nazi Germany, but he might be the only one to do it so effectively.

Reality Check

Historically astute readers may realize that David W. Rhodes is a thinly disguised William Rhodes Davis, an American oilman who was an "agent of influence" for Nazi Germany in the lead-up to war. He can be credited for getting the *Wehrmacht* a good deal of its oil, and he tried to influence the 1940 election by replacing Roosevelt with an isolationist and former Democrat and giving millions of dollars to the Republican candidate.

Davis died of a "heart attack" in August of 1941, well before Pearl Harbor. The reason his schemes aren't more well-known is because Davis had fingers in so many of Washington's back pockets that exposing him would have been political suicide. Rhodes' failed oil deal in Peru was based on a similar failed gambit by Davis, minus the temple and alien spacecraft.

Also real was the Ahnenerbe, who scoured the globe to help prove Nazi theories about Aryan history. Werner Abendroth is entirely fictional, but the Nazis had a number of other weird and fanatical "scientists" on board. They didn't make it to Peru, but they would have sent an expedition to study Andean civilizations if 1939's invasion of Poland hadn't happened.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. Edward Tremlett lives a life of two-fisted adventure! He's trekked in 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 Cihullu*. 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 when he's not battling fascist scum in the desert with a typewriter.

G U R P S[®]

CLIFFHANGERS

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RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

THREE WAYS TO HANG OFF CLIFFS

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

Let's talk cliffhangers – not the genre, but the act of imperiling do-gooders. (We're talking PC do-gooders here . . . if you're imperiling the players, the campaign has gone off the rails in a way no mere column can correct.)

A good, suspenseful "To Be Continued!" is the best way to end a session or begin a dinner break. (And, of course, it naturally follows that a good "cliffhanger" is a great way to begin a session or restart the game *after* a dinner break.) But how do you get to that point? Broadly, there are three possibilities, broken down by how rigidly the cliffhanger is instituted. I've used all three kinds in my campaigns, and they each have their place.

RIGID SET PIECES

Perhaps the most common cliffhanger – certainly in published adventures – is the rigid set piece. The heroes will somehow arrive at the abandoned museum looking for the vital parchment, and the museum will end up on fire, and there will be two dozen Nazis that barge into the museum at that time.

Rigid set pieces are great because you can work out a lot of the exact choreography ahead of time. If you have a map of the hidden temple, and you know the heroes are likely to find it, then you proclaim that an earthquake is going to threaten to bring the whole temple down around the explorers; the ominous rumbling and falling of first rocks marks the fade-to-black of the cliffhanger!

The biggest problem with rigid set pieces is that it can often feel like railroading to the players. Returning to the abandoned museum example, let's say the heroes suspected some kind of trap and managed to rope the local police force into patrolling the area around the museum. "How," the players (and heroes) might exclaim, "did the Nazis get through our carefully prepared defenses?!" In extreme cases, the players might wonder if their actions have *any* affect on the outcome; they might just

start grumbling to have the GM insert them into the next set-piece scene.

Still, the GM can work around this. One possibility is to alter the set piece if the heroes come up with something brilliant. Instead of two dozen Nazis barging into the museum, there now may only be a 12-pack of baddies. A second possibility is to make such planning *result* in the situation the heroes find themselves in. If the PCs have the police working to gather evildoers, then the two dozen Nazis (the original number planned) might barge into the museum, grumbling that there were going to be *four dozen* Nazis attacking, but the meddlesome heroes have whittled their numbers!

IMPROMPTU

Another possibility is to wing it. After all, if you throw situations at the heroes fast and hard enough, something cliffhanger-worthy is bound to pop up within a few minutes of when you wanted to stop gaming for a while. The heroes are driving after the bad guys' box truck, and one of the players rolls a critical failure on a driving check. You check your watch; it's dinnertime! You declare that a mishap with a fruit cart has caused the adventurers' car to smash into the back of the other transport, sending the heroes flying face-down to the floor of the truck bed amid a half-dozen enemy agents lurking in the back of the vehicle. The adversaries cock their guns and say, "Bad luck, coppers," as the truck continues its high-speed trek toward its destination.

There are two big problems with impromptu cliffhangers. First, they require a lot of creativity and fast-thinking on the GM's part. It's especially important to come up with the situation and make sure there aren't any obvious loopholes or problems with the setup that make it too difficult (or too easy!) to survive. Not everyone is up for that; if that's the case, consider one of the other techniques.

Potential contacts Rudyard Kipling, Nikola Tesla, and Albert Einstein are described in GURPS Who's Who 1.

Forget Freedom: Faster! Frantic! Fun!

It should be noted that a very fun cliffhangers adventure could be built around the GM removing the illusion of free will from a set-piece-heavy campaign, and simply begin each scene with the next cliffhanger! The GM could then insert some narration between the scenes that sets things up for the next scene: “You manage to escape the burning museum with the parchment you need. Deciphering it leads to a plane trip to Madrid. An hour into the flight on the tiny 12-passenger plane, you hear two gunshots from the cockpit . . .”

This technique has three advantages. First, it’s possible to squeeze a very complex, action-packed story into a short amount of time (depending on the game system). Second,

it keeps players from getting bogged down in non-fun side-tracks that don’t fit the genre well. Finally, it allows the GM to advance the plot with information the heroes have but the *players* don’t! “Deciphering the parchment gave you an idea what the Nazis are after; you pray you’re wrong, but you don’t dwell on it because . . . you hear gunshots in the cockpit!” This suits many cinematic treatments of the genre, where the heroes don’t let the audience (in this case, the players) know something they do, so the director can maximize the effect of a big reveal later.

This method isn’t for everyone, but – if the group’s in an experimental mood – it’s definitely worth considering.

Second, this kind of cliffhanger can throw the overall plot into disarray unless the GM is – again – quick on his feet. For example, maybe the GM intended the bad guys to escape in the truck originally; the next two chapters rely on the adversaries delivering some important piece of information to the higher-up lieutenant. But after coming up with the cliffhanger, the GM realizes that the players are now in a pretty good position to stop the truck entirely, and capture a bunch of folks who can be interrogated! Uh-oh!

Fortunately, GMs who are capable of thinking on their feet for impromptu crises are also pretty good about coming up with alternate plans that allow the adventure to progress. Furthermore, if you use this technique as a session-ending cliffhanger, then you have until the next session to come up with a resolution. (There’s something deeply satisfying about the players leaving the table thinking, “How are we going to get out of this?” – especially when the GM is thinking the *exact same thing*.)

SEMI-IMPROMPTU

As a final possibility, it’s possible to come up with “semi-impromptu” cliffhangers – those crises that can manifest whenever appropriate, but that aren’t tightly scripted by the GM. Perhaps the most obvious execution of this idea is the “double agent”; if someone tagging along with the heroes (or associated with them) is actually working for the baddies, then you can spring that revelation on the players at any point you need an exciting cliffhanger.

For example, the GM notices it’s time for a break. As he describes the scene, he says, “As you watch the enemy’s truck escaping with your only hope of thwarting the ancient menace, you wonder, ‘How can today get any worse?’ Then you hear the cocking of a gun behind you, where Dr. Hopper’s niece suddenly seems much more menacing than she did when this all began . . . (Fade to black!)”

The problem with semi-impromptu cliffhangers is that they usually need to be fairly self-contained, which often means they aren’t as “flashy” as their tightly scripted set-piece counterparts. Traitorous associates, previously sabotaged cars, and slow-acting poisons can work their magic whenever the GM wants, but it’s tough to (say) work a pre-planned boulder-trap cliffhanger into the story without risking railroading. (Of course, even this depends on the situation: If the adventure

calls for the heroes to comb a dozen different tombs looking for clues, then it’s entirely reasonable that one can contain a semi-impromptu boulder trap!)

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

So how can you work these techniques into your game?

Part of the answer to that depends on how you define “cliffhanger,” and how often you want them to occur. If you want the end (or beginning) of each scene to begin with a bang, then you’ll probably want to use all three techniques to keep the game running smoothly. Plans for a of couple well-conceived set pieces form the foundation, a few semi-impromptu seeds can be sprung whenever things get dull, and you can improvise the rest as opportunities present themselves.

If true cliffhangers will be more rare, then you can pick a method that suits your style. Some GMs hate the straitjacket of set pieces, while others dislike coming up with logical threats on the fly. Alternatively, you can choose methods depending on the adventure. A “dungeon crawl”-style adventure can lend itself well to set pieces; you know the heroes are going to have to pass through points X, Y, and Z, so set up danger there. Conversely, a tale with lots of investigation and interaction where the heroes control the pace lends itself well to semi-impromptu cliffhangers – so long as you get the heroes to take possession of the cursed Temüjin Blade, ingest the mindswallow blossom toxin, or get behind the wheel of their sabotaged car, you can have things go wrong whenever it feels right.

Regardless of the adventure style, totally impromptu cliffhangers are almost always appropriate. If the heroes get near a cliff, then someone needs to be dangling off the edge before the end of the scene.

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

WAYS TO SET THE MOOD

Part of the fun of a cliffhangers game is making the era come alive. The pulp era is one of the first where we have a lot of real-world material you can give to the players! Here are some cheap and easy ideas.

Old-Time Radio: Many radio programs are readily available, commercially or freely online. The theme songs for some of these are especially evocative. For a good free resource, check out archive.org/details/oldtimeradio.

For those skilled with audio software, one fun thing to do is to trim the commercials from these old shows. Play them whenever there's a bathroom break!

Print Isn't Dead!: Magazines and newspapers were commonplace during this era. Search at the local library for

archives and scans of media from the 1930s. Some magazines from the era include *Life* (from 1936), *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, and (especially) *National Geographic*. For added realism, tailor adventures around the articles and issues you find! The explorer the heroes met? You have his article from *National Geographic*! Various *National Geographic* archives have been made available via CD-ROM, and a free searchable version of the *Time* archives are online at time.com/time/archive and a freely searchable archive for covers of many magazines is at coverbrowser.com.

Images: In the same way, you can take images from the era. One great resource is images.google.com/hosted/life – a searchable archive of the *Life* photo archives, including the ability to search by year. They're great for mood pieces; a search for "1930s museum" (no quotes) pops up over 100 pictures that can serve as adventure seeds.

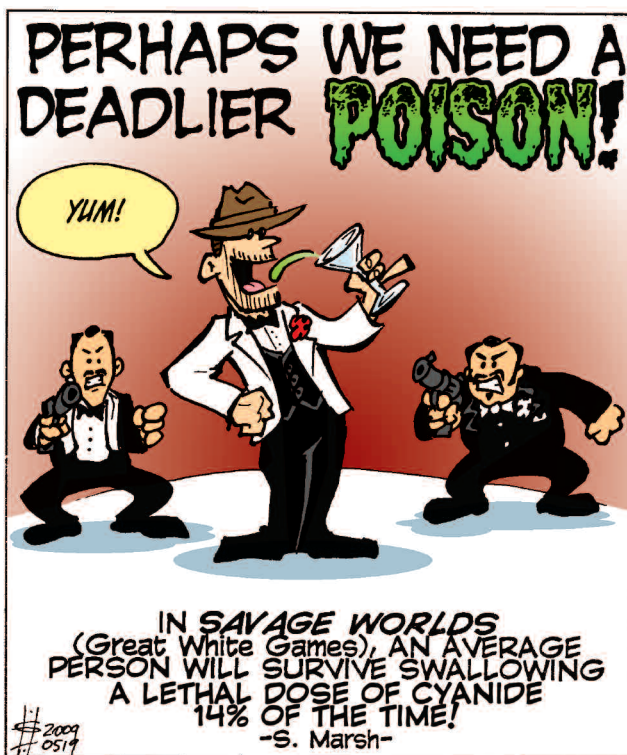
Foiled Again!

Did the players thwart the scenario too soon? Perhaps not! Here are some ideas to salvage an early-ending adventure. The GM may need to tweak some of the bypassed obstacles of the original adventure to fit into the arch-foe's "back-up plan." Of course, whatever method the villain uses to get away should simply slow the team for a while, not stop them permanently!

- The rescued item or person is a fake.
- The villain used a double in his place. This could be a person disguised with make-up or it could be ingenious weird-science robot that the criminal controls remotely.
- The villain isn't really there. He's used mirrors to create the illusion of his presence. In truly strange tales of adventure, the foe may actually use magic or advanced mental abilities to cause the illusion.
- An innocent bystander wanders into the scene and gets in the way of capturing the villain. Some classics include children, nuns, and a mother pushing her baby in a carriage.
- Just as the heroes are about to capture the villain, he flicks a switch or pulls a cord and something happens. This might be: a trap door (to whisk either the villain or the adventurers away), a smoke bomb or fire, a barrier dropping between the opponents as the heroes approach, a cage drops from the ceiling or pops up from the floor and surrounds the heroes, armed henchmen coming out of hiding, animals swarming toward the investigators, a rain of things (frogs, stones, etc.) distracting the heroes, an electrified floor activating and shocking the adventurers.

MURPHY'S RULES

BY GREG HYLAND



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

RECOMMENDED READING

WHAT YOU NEED FOR ADVENTURE

BY ANDY VETROMILE

Pulp adventurer's checklist:

1. Colt revolver
2. Leather jacket
3. Rugged chin

The player can provide most of this by penciling it in on his character sheet. Then the GM has to step in and do his part.

First, he has to hook the heroes with something shiny, preferably an artifact, but it could be any plot or circumstance surrounding some notable period or personage. Let's start out with goodies. For **GURPS** fans that means **Warehouse 23** (\$7.99 PDF, Steve Jackson Games, sjgames.com), but that's a gimme. **Illuminati: New World Order** cards are also available (prices vary depending on which sets are bought, but it ranges from \$1-\$2 for smaller boosters to \$80 for a full POP display; Steve Jackson Games). Hoary devices and powerful magic items are just one small part of the tapestry woven into this card game of world domination. Some of the modern devices could spark an idea or two about fantastic new developments and villainous death machines in the early part of the 20th century.

If the MacGuffin is some great tale revolving around one of the famous figures of history – i.e., the target isn't a museum relic or other saleable item but rather some overreaching mystery or location – the GM could utilize a comprehensive list of faces from the past. Every card in **Burn in Hell** (\$27.95, Steve Jackson Games) falls into this category, so drawing one of them at random can spark an idea for the next mission.

For example, one card is "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

GURPS fans again have the advantage of defaulting to one of their targeted references, **GURPS Voodoo: The Shadow War**, for more information (Steve Jackson Games, 1995). Duvalier didn't hold power until the mid-20th century and so missed out on the heyday of the Spanish gold extraction, but there could always be a lost mine in dire need of finding. If that's too late

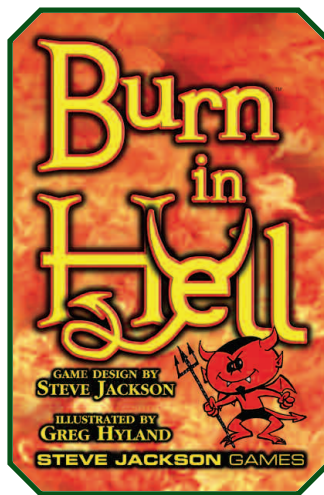
on the GM's timeline, this card still offers an interesting personage with whom to start the adventure (the team could meet Duvalier during his formative years as a simple doctor). The "wise" Americans running the place can still be an obstacle, political or otherwise, to those wanting to clean up on the island nation's treasure.

In spite of what the title may suggest, not every figure in the **Burn in Hell** deck is a horrible despot or merciless killer. Those might carry a heavier load in the history books, but even plain-vanilla philosophers and explorers can have a whole mythology spring up about their writings or exploits. The deck has sufficient threads and fodder for years of cliffhanger deeds.

After the adventurers have a goal, they have to get where

they're going; every pulp story has to have a red line delineating to where the cargo plane is flying. The obvious go-to game is the **Ten Days** . . . series from Out of the Box Publishing (\$24.99 each, otb-games.com), reviewed in *Pyramid* #3/5. To keep the globetrotting angle fresh, there's **Assassin** (Avalon Hill, 1993). Never a big seller, it can be had for \$20 at on-line auction sites – which is two bucks more than it sold for to begin with. The goal of the game is to cover as much ground as possible through Europe using a variety of travel methods. This may sound similar to **Ten Days**, but one of the players has an assassin card in his hand, and he's trying to liquidate the other players. If he doesn't think he can pull this off, he can try to pass that card off to an opponent so it can be their headache instead

of his (hoping, of course, he doesn't become the new hitman's next target). Used as an adjunct to a series of cliffhanger stories, it can be the cat-and-mouse game played out by the team and their pursuers. (Once folks start looking for something valuable, someone else invariably follows them around, striving to take it away after the first group does all the heavy lifting.)



GURPS Who's Who 2 details a number of people that adventurers might meet in the early 20th century.

Cliffhanging adventures probably play closer to a real team of players' skill sets than anything else on the market, so getting the in-game exploits to track with meta-gaming elements isn't just easy, it's proof that living on the edge is a whole lot of fun.

Just how the assassin card is adjudicated is up to the GM, of course; the "tail" may just be greedy, but he may also be unscrupulous and try to cover up whatever concomitant crimes he's performed to achieve his goals. He could eliminate anyone who knows of the existence of the MacGuffin (at least until he can get it to an auction or other buyer), or "he" might even be a whole faction of fanatics devoted to protecting the powerful (religious?) artifact the heroes hope to uncover.

Travel in pulp games also has to include a perilous journey through likely inhospitable places to get to the fabled site. Jungles, thick forests, and mobster-ridden downtown New York all pose fearsome challenges, so perhaps **Quicksand** (Fantasy Flight Games, 2003) is the ticket. The upside is that it's fast to play and fairly inexpensive (it's one of the games the company typically offers at a discount during the holidays for about \$5). The downside is it's not that involved. Players are secretly assigned one of the adventurers on a trail in the jungle, a path that leads the fastest person to a wondrous temple. If someone lets on which explorer is his, rivals have the chance to run that piece into a space with the eponymous hazard – best to be circumspect about advancing one's piece. In a story with several interests all vying for the same thing, the GM can use it as a test to see where groups are relative to each other and this assignment's prize.

If everyone is willing to commit a little more time to playing out the action in parallel, **Draco Mundis** (\$32.99, Asmodee Editions, asmodee-us.com/games/strategy) does a more thorough job of massaging the metaphor. Players place various units, each with its own powers and movement options, on the board's square grid in anticipation of hunting great lizards (and each other) in the legendary Valley of Dragons. It's a 19th-century "gentlemen's club" theme, but allies include less-than-genteel big-game hunters, truck-mounted machine guns, biplanes, and cannibals, so the pulp attitude is safe. Since just about any combination of kills is possible, the GM can dictate what units are the most valuable depending on what part of the cliffhangers oeuvre is getting the treatment. Are the poor, put-upon Sherpa



to be protected at all costs, carrying the gold of El Dorado? Or does taking out the big guns represent crippling the commissar's ability to threaten a village?

Finally, no one ever gets to walk right up to the Spear of Longinus and snatch it off the mantle, his mission complete. He's always got to work for it, and that usually means solving puzzles and avoiding hidden dangers.

Another Out of the Box product, **Zen Benders**, has this idea built in. The game recalls those sliding-tile games in which the



shifting pieces of a design ultimately form a picture. One can seldom find a tiled item on the market with an appropriately dire theme to it, like human sacrifice rituals from South America. At the very least, the **Zen Benders** line has a cartoonish dragon version (unless the GM decides race cars or wiener dogs are more terrifying guardians of treasure). Additionally, the editions aren't limited to interlocking tiles but rather use dice-like blocks that rotate in their grooves as well as easing side-to-side. In game

terms, tell the good guys they have to move bricks or old slate carvings about on a temple's altar or across a stone doorway.

Because the pieces can be removed and replaced, several patterns are possible with a single copy of the game, and the GM can give harder designs to the players to make things tougher on their heroes. Impose on them a time limit for solving the puzzle, after which the chamber begins filling with water or lava or some such. Alternatively, since these toys are inexpensive enough that the GM can buy two sets, he can set the players to figuring out their copy before he works his own puzzle to completion. If the GM gets it first, the team has lost out to the Nazis who have dogged their trail all this time. If they're lucky, this "only" means the bad guys are loading the goods onto a cargo ship instead of burying the PCs alive in this convenient hole. The exact outcome can depend on the margin by which the GM finished his task before the players did theirs.

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

STAND BY

FOR ACTION!

BY MATTHEW POOK

The problem with the pulp genre is that it is not one genre, but many. Aerial combat, detective, gangster, jungle adventure, masked vigilantism, science fiction, sword and sorcery, Western, and weird menace are just some of the tropes whose tales all appeared on the pages of the pulp magazines. What defines them all, at least for our purposes, is their action-oriented narratives and their assertion that real men were heroes, villains were truly dastardly (and knew when to make a comeback), and women were to be either rescued and cherished or spurned for their perfidious nature (regardless of how plucky they were).

For good, straight pulp action RPGs, a few come to mind. The ever reliable **Pulp HERO** (\$34.99, HERO Games, herogames.com) serves as good an introduction to, and an overview of, the genre. **Hollow Earth Expedition** (\$39.99, Exile Games, exilegames.com) serves up the best setting, rife with ancient and lost civilizations, ape cities, dinosaurs, and Nazis, all in the vein of Edgar Rice Burroughs with a little Doug McClure. Lastly, consider **Spirit of the Century** (\$30, Evil Hat Productions, evilhat.com), whose rules encourage the characters to interact with both their colleagues and the environment by performing stunts and other acts of derring-do, so serving to exemplify the pulp spirit. Such blatant recommendations duly noted, we move on to less obvious selections, all in the pulp mode.

We begin with a campaign supplement in the science-fiction genre for the pocket-friendly and already pulp-ish **Savage Worlds Explorers Edition** (\$9.99, Pinnacle Entertainment, peginc.com). **Slipstream** provides a complete setting and campaign that is a homage to the Flash Gordon Saturday-morning serials. Here, however, the heroes are not Flash, Dale Arden, and Doctor Zarkov; the setting isn't Mongo; and the villain isn't Ming the Merciless. Instead, the setting exists in the Slipstream, an air-filled pocket universe of world fragments behind a black hole. This dimension is inhabited by the

two-brained, four-eyed Babelonians, Bird Men, Earthlings, Lion Men, the peaceful Psiclops, Robot Men, and the statuesque Valkyria, among many other races. (You can create new alien races with the rules included.) The villain of the piece is the alluring Queen Anathraxa, who rules the Slipstream with a harsh will. She is served by her antimatter weapon-wielding, power armor-wearing Handmaidens, her ape-like Primal soldiery, and her brainwashed Spacejocks.

Player characters can be anything from diplomats and mad scientists to reformed pirates and space cops. Equipped with their ray guns and a rocket ship, the heroes are up against one of Queen Anathraxa's dastardly plots in Slipstream's campaign, "Series 1: Death Clouds." Although in keeping with the genre, this campaign is more linear than those found in other **Savage Worlds** supplements, but this is leavened with the book's other Savage Tales (or adventures) that can be added as needed. Included in the campaign are suggested cliffhangers and dramatic interludes to help raise the tension and enforce the genre.

Of course, if you actually want to do classic pulp using **Savage Worlds**, then the **Daring Tales of Adventure** series (\$5.50 or more each, Triple Ace Games, tripleacegames.com) provides scenarios galore in both print and PDF formats. These can easily be used in other pulp games.

Another easily adapted game is **Dime Heroes** (\$3.95, Deep7, deep7.com), a "beer and pretzels" RPG only available in PDF format. At a few pages long, its "1PG" format keeps everything simple, with one page for character generation, one for the GM, one for an explanation of the genre, and one for each scenario. The rules are quick and easy, and the GM advice is short (keep it fast, keep it simple). It comes with its own serial, "The Crimson Tiger Strikes." This crime-fighting caper (masked or not) is divided into five chapters, each ready to serve up its own cliffhanger ending, with the whole serial providing two good sessions' worth of gaming – as is, or using the pulp RPG of your choice.



GURPS WWII: Weird War II offers many ideas for setting pulp campaigns in the early years of the Second World War.

Dime Heroes is supported with equally pocket-friendly supplements for aerial adventure (*The Aviator's Handbook*) and magic (*Magic & Mysticism*). The best, however, is *Jungle Adventures*, which takes the adventurers deep into the rainforests. The scenario gives a good introduction to the jungle adventure genre, introduces the Jungle Lord/Lady character type (complete with loyal chimpanzee or elephant companion), and forces any Explorer to be accompanied by an irritating kid or the niece of the expedition's financier! Its scenario, "The Blood God," makes the supplement a worthwhile addition to the pulp GM's library.

For the weird menace genre, there is no finer choice than *Call of Cthulhu* (\$34.95, Chaosium, Inc., chaosium.com) and its growing number of variants. In classic mode, it sets 1920s investigators on a Sanity-defying path that will eventually reveal to them the true nature of the cosmos and humanity's insignificant place in it. Being the definitive game of Lovecraftian investigative horror, it is not inherently pulp-ish (we await the publication of Chaosium's *Pulp Cthulhu* for that). It possesses a darker, nihilist viewpoint that simply states that the investigators' efforts are ultimately futile, they only being able to stave off the return of the Cthulhu Mythos, not stop it. Alternative rules – *Realms of Cthulhu* (Reality Blurs, realityblurs.com), *Shadows of Cthulhu* (\$19.95, Reality Deviants, rpgobjects.com/index.php?c=rdp), and *Trail of Cthulhu* (\$39.95, Pelgrane Press, pelgranepress.com) – provide a pulpier approach to facing the Mythos. (*Trail of Cthulhu* also offers a purist, Lovecraftian mode.) However, perhaps the pulpiest approach can be seen in the original game's campaigns. The best known of these is *The Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep* (Chaosium, 1996), a complex globe-spanning campaign in six parts in which the investigators try to discover the fate of the Carlyle Expedition. From New York, they travel to London, Cairo, Kenya, Shanghai, and (possibly) Australia, uncovering both the expedition's fate and a plot to launch a world-ending rocket. Along the way, the heroes face savage natives, despicable members of the establishment, ancient horrors, alien intelligences from the past, and inscrutable gods. Providing months of lethal, Sanity-sapping investigative play, *The Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep* is rightly regarded as one the hobby's best. Nevertheless, the campaign leaves much to the Keeper to explain, and so fans are developing *The Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep Companion* to not only explain and expand the campaign, but also mark the 25th year of the original version's release.

For pulp fantasy (or "swords and sorcery"), *Jaws of the Six Serpents* (\$19.95, Silver Branch Games, silverbranch.co.uk) offers rules and a lightly sketched – though still darkly edged – setting that emulates Robert E. Howard's Conan tales. Its heroes and villains are primarily human (so no dwarves, elves,

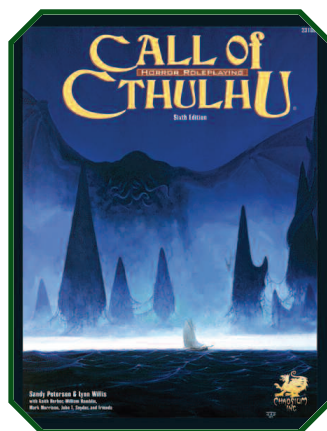
orcs, and so on), mostly defined by their cultural origins and occupation; there is a dearth of magic, both in terms of sorcery and enchanted weaponry; and what monsters exist are truly rare and monstrous. Indeed, magic is primarily divided between Sorcery (powerful and flexible, but slow and difficult to control with the chance of backlash) and Charms (cantrip-like spells that have one set effect, but are quicker and much, much safer). *Jaws of the Six Serpents* employs Chad Underkoffler's PDQ (or Prose Descriptive Qualities) rules, which demand a player's involvement in narrating the action or the outcome, but are otherwise straightforward and unfussy. Without an emphasis on magic or magical props, characters in *Jaws of the Six Serpents* are expected to be more self-reliant if they are to be heroic.

Unfortunately, no single RPG of aerial adventure exists, but with the right combination of games, it can be done. The boardgame *Crimson Skies* (FASA, 1998) provides the aerial combat rules and the setting, a balkanized America shattered by the effects of the 1929 Stock Market Crash. In this alternate history, the former states re-established themselves as nations such as the Republic of Texas, Empire State, the Industrial States of America, the Peoples' Collective, and the Confederation of Dixie.

With the collapse of ground traffic, cargo and passenger transport has transferred to the air-born zeppelins. With the change has come the threat of sky pirates, and in response to that threat, aerial mercenaries and militia. Ace pilots have become media darlings, flying ever so slightly fantastic aeroplanes based on 1930s prototypes. The focus of *Crimson Skies* is relatively quick and easy aerial combat, but the atmospheric setting handily lends itself to roleplaying with élan. Perhaps the best RPG fit is *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* (\$30, Eden Studios, edenstudios.net), the RPG of zombie horror; as the mechanics work on the same scale. Along with the rules for the genre, the *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* supplement *Pulp Zombies* (\$20) adds the recently risen dead to the genre, as well as settings involving a Hollow Earth, gangsters, and a Martian invasion, among others. With the RPG handling the ground action, *Crimson Skies* lets the heroes take to the air.

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.



Stand by for action! We are about to launch Stingray! Anything can happen in the next half hour!

– *Stingray*

LAST WORD

WITH LEONARD BALSERA

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 Leonard Balsera, coauthor of *Spirit of the Century* and the forthcoming *Dresden Files RPG*.

PYRAMID: Leonard Balsera, what is the last word on cliffhangers?

LEONARD BALSERA: Momentum.

Keeping the game moving with the momentum (usually "fast," in cliffhangers), or interfering with the momentum?

Movement, movement, movement. All the time. One of the most important parts of a cliffhangers-style game is to make sure that stuff keeps relentlessly *happening*. That stuff doesn't always need to be car chases and explosions (though there's nothing wrong with those), but the group needs to keep a handle on pacing to get the proper feel. Pulp heroes don't devise intricate schemes at their home base that are going to account for any potential surprises; they show up and put two fists into the most obvious obstacle, and then improvise the rest.

Momentum.

— Leonard Balsera

Really? I can't help but wonder about, say, the quiet moments in the Indiana Jones films (Indy getting patched up, Indy having a quiet dinner of eyeballs, etc.). Sure, stuff starts happening soon enough, but I think I'd be exhausted with too much movement . . .

In the scene where Indy gets patched up, Marion hits him in the face with a mirror. And you pointed out the other thing: eyeballs. Momentum doesn't always have to be physical; social encounters can generate that same kind of sense, so long as they possess a dynamic quality to them, in terms of how the PCs and NPCs are interacting. Indy never has a truly idle moment in any of his stories. He goes to visit Dad and finds the house ransacked. He goes to his room to sulk after getting into an argument with Willie Scott, and someone tries to kill him. Something always happens; there's never any dead air.

Of course, you don't want things to be cranked up to 11 100% of the time, but I think you should always inject something into even the quietest of scenes to convey a sense of the unusual or to suggest that something is going on in the lives of the characters. When the femme fatale (or the bad boy, God bless gaming and trope reversal) shows up at the character's hotel room, they explicitly shouldn't be having a quiet talk over coffee. Unless that quiet talk is about murder or some other such thing.

"And So, Dr. Jones, let me ask you about . . . vinyl siding."

Right! It just doesn't fit.

In RPGs, there's often a problem conserving momentum; if the heroes' plane doesn't leave until the morning, they'll want to spend those eight hours investigating every lead, checking guns, making contingency plans, and so on. How do you handle that?

As a GM, I make my cuts from scene to scene very explicit. If the group says, "We're going to take off in the morning and visit the jungle base," the next sentence out of my mouth is liable to be, "Okay, sweet; so the jungle base looms beneath you as the plane gets closer . . ." This can work to convey the kind of pace you're looking for. If there's anything that's really important for the PCs to do, believe me, they'll interrupt you at that point; resolve those details quickly and move on.

Obviously, the game system you're using is also a factor. *Spirit of the Century* makes it fairly easy to say, "Hey, I prepped this thing last night and it helps me out now," in the moment, rather than having to spend time with the planning beforehand. In *GURPS Cliffhangers*, I allow IQ or other appropriate rolls for that kind of "planning," but let the player just declare it in the midst of the action.

Momentum's easier to achieve if the players realize you aren't going to hose them with "gotchas." If the hero's gun doesn't work, it's not because it wasn't loaded but because a python ate it.

There's an atmosphere of trust that has to exist. I mean, you could say that about any gaming, but in pulp, I think there's an expectation that the heroes are competent enough people that either a) they already thought of it – whatever "it" is – or b) they can improvise their way around it when they confront it. GMs and players have to be on the same page with that.

Where else should our audience go for more Balserian insight into good gaming?

You can find a lot of my ramblings in the upcoming *Dresden Files RPG*. I'm the lead system developer for it, and we're in the final stages of text completion and revision at long last. I've tried to put a healthy dollop of advice in there; I think it's just as important as the rules are.

*How well would Harry Dresden do in a *Spirit of the Century* tale?*

I think Harry's sort of a pulp character born into the wrong genre at times. He has magic, so he'd probably hold his own pretty well. I think he'd be jealous of how much of a beating Centurions can take and not bat an eye, but I think he'd also appreciate the simplicity of being able to just punch the bad guy in the face and not worry about the consequences.

For more information about and preview material for the *Dresden Files RPG*, see dresdenfilesrpg.com. To learn more about Evil Hat Productions, including *Spirit of the Century*, visit evilhat.com.



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.

e23. Our e-publishing division offers *GURPS* adventures, play aids, and support in PDF form . . . digital copies of our books, plus exclusive material available only on e23! Just head over to e23.sjgames.com.

Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at www.sjgames.com for errata, updates, Q&A, and much

more. To discuss *GURPS* with SJ Games staff and fellow gamers, come to our forums at forums.sjgames.com. The *Pyramid* web page is pyramid.sjgames.com.

Bibliographies. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

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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