

PYRAMID[®]



Issue 3/23 September '10

ACTION ADVENTURES

BLOWUPS HAPPEN

by Stephen Dedman



NIGHT OF THE MEGACARP
by Ken Spencer

OPERATION SUN DOG
by J. Edward Tremlett

CALAMITY ROAD
by Timothy J. Turnipseed

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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*One way to get the most
out of life is to look upon it
as an adventure.*

– William Feather

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

COVER ART

Bob Stevlic

INTERIOR ART

Greg Hyland

IN THIS ISSUE

When you think action, you think **GURPS!** This installment is so jam-packed with action adventures, you might think we're violating some kind of high-octane ordinance!

It starts with a light-fingered maid. It ends with heavy-duty explosives. In between are bluffs, toughs, and fisticuffs. Can the heroes accomplish their mission, or do *Blowups Happen?* This adventure – written by **GURPS Martial Arts Adventures** co-author Stephen Dedman – comes with full **GURPS** stats for all the parties involved.

It's not a late-night made-for-cable movie – *this is real!* Something's fishy in a small town in Indiana, but no one wants to believe it – especially not when a major storm is rolling in. Horror, action, and nature's fury combine for *Night of the Megacarp* – including **GURPS** info for the titular threat.

Pack your cold-weather gear, soldiers: You're going to Antarctica as part of *Operation Sun Dog!* Your mission is to stop the Fourth Reich before it takes over the world – or inadvertently destroys it. Don't forget your explosives! This adventure blueprint includes **GURPS Action** guidelines.

Is there anything more action-packed than a car chase? What about a car chase with three robot-controlled vehicles, huge cash prizes, and byzantine plots? The adventure outline *Calamity Road* – suitable for any system – gives the GM the movers, motivations, and mishaps that can befall this unusual contest.

GURPS Action 2: Exploits gave GMs the tools they need to adjudicate exciting chase sequences. This issue's *Chase Cards* support that supplement by providing essential information about range and maneuvers, giving a visual aid to players and GM alike. The gaming group can use the cards to speed up decisions, keep track of progress, and introduce plot twists.

Many GMs don't want to kill off the heroes. However, they still want the players to sweat when death *could* wield its scythe. *Pyramid* editor Steven Marsh examines this very problem in this month's *Random Thought Table*, complete with **GURPS** notes.

Of course, an issue wouldn't be complete without a few serious and not-so-serious *Odds and Ends*, including *Murphy's Rules*.

This month's *Pyramid* is the anticipatory silence before the explosion. It's up to you to wear your sunglasses and walk toward the camera looking cool!

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FROM THE EDITOR

ACTION ITEMS

This month's issue is devoted to action adventures. That's a lowercase "action" – compared to the bold-italic *Action* that lets you know it's designed for use with the popular *GURPS Action* line. Still, all the adventures herein are suitable for *GURPS Action* (not to mention other *GURPS* campaigns, or – indeed – other systems entirely), and hopefully they'll provide lots of inspiration for your high-octane exploits.

One interesting aspect of these adventures is how different they are all structured. There's no one "right" way to write an adventure, and each one tries to capture a distinct flavor in the way it presents its information. Really, this suits the action-adventure genre; *Rush Hour*, *The French Connection*, and *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* are all (by some definitions) action movies, but they all approach *how* they deliver their action in different ways.

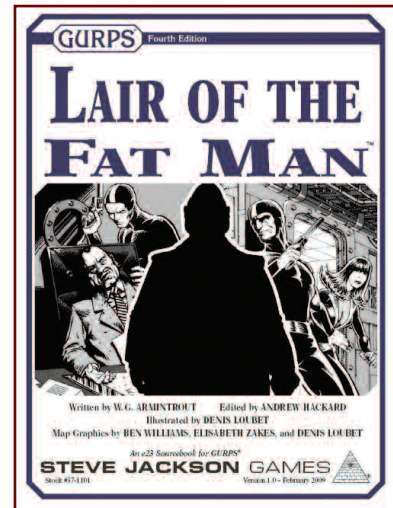
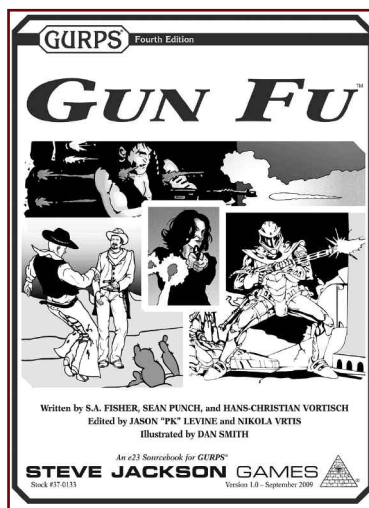
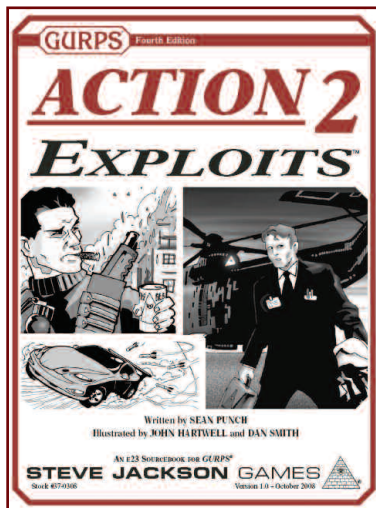
In the same way, consider mixing up your own action adventures (if you don't already). If the heroes know that the adventure is always going to open with a mission from their

boss, segue into a chase, lead into an information-gathering segment, and end with a gunfight, then much of the power of the action genre disappears. (Tweaking the meager example above – how interesting would it be to have an adventure that opens with a gunfight, leads into information-gathering, has a pre-climactic sequence of receiving explanatory orders from higher-ups, and ends with a car chase?)

Action hinges on delivering thrills, and thrills depend on not knowing quite what to expect – which is part of what we strive with *Pyramid*, too.

AFTER-ACTION REPORT

Speaking of delivering thrills, is there anything we did this issue that you want us to do more often? Was there anything that should send us back to our secret underground labs to try again? We'd love to hear from you. Send us a note at pyramid@sjgames.com, or visit our virtual gathering at forums.sjgames.com.



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BLOWUPS HAPPEN

BY STEPHEN DEDMAN

This adventure for *GURPS Action* is for a group of heroes who find themselves tasked with thwarting a dangerous situation with global implications (Operation Fatboy – see p. 8). The setup for this scenario is open-ended, and can take place in almost any foreign country. The only real assumption the adventure makes is that the heroes have some kind of ties to the United States (or are at least sympathetic to them), but this can be tweaked – primarily with a name and nationality change to the contacting agent known as Houston (see p. 6).

Kid: This is the coolest thing I've ever seen! Explosions everywhere!

– *Transformers* (2007)

BEFORE THE OPENING CREDITS

As prelude to this adventure, at least one of the heroes – ideally someone under the age of 40 – has accepted an invitation to a foreign country, either to do a short job (if criminal) or as a witness in a criminal case; either way, all his expenses (including hotel room) are prepaid.

Two days before he is scheduled to fly home, an unscrupulous maid searches the chosen PC's hotel room while he is taking a shower; this is a Hearing check to detect the attempt.

If he hears her and attempts a sneaky approach, roll a Quick Contest of his Stealth versus Lara's Hearing. If he ties or loses, see above. If he wins, he catches her throwing a bag out of the window, and can cut off her exit from the room. (The bag, of course, contains any valuables she was able to find, especially his passport, ID, guns, etc.)

Regardless, Lara will manage to get *something* valuable of his out the window – if not, there's no adventure to be had! The victimized hero can make another Hearing roll to catch the sounds of someone running down the alley a few seconds later.

How much of his gear Lara has had time to steal should be determined by how well the PC made the initial Hearing roll. If he failed that roll, she has time to steal everything she's after.

If cornered, Lara tries Fast-Talk, then Sex Appeal, then Intimidation (threatening to accuse him of attempted rape); the pepper spray hidden in her cleavage and her street-fighting techniques are both last resorts.

Should the hero run to the window, he gets a brief glimpse of a skinny local fleeing south into the street. If the hero tries to give chase, the nearest stairs are at the north end of the corridor, 15 yards away. Unless he climbs or jumps down into the alley (still wet from the shower and probably wearing little more than a towel), he has little chance of catching him.

It's Not Paranoia if They Really Are After You . . .

If the player argues that his hero would have hidden or secured everything so that it can't be easily stolen, but has not previously mentioned this, the GM should decide whether this is in character (likely for a character with paranoid tendencies, less so for one with the Absent-Mindedness disadvantage). If necessary, roll a contest of Smuggling vs. Lara's Search, or respective Traps skills. (This might be a good opportunity for the GM to inform the player about the Standard Operating Procedure perk; see *GURPS Gun Fu* or *GURPS Power-Ups 2: Perks* for more info.)

If he hears her, but chooses a noisy approach – e.g., shouting or turning off the shower – the maid (Lara) has time to open the window and throw the loot into the alley, three floors below, before the PC enters the room. She will then try to Fast-Talk her way out of trouble.

Stats for equipment mentioned in this adventure can be found in GURPS High-Tech.

If interrogated, Lara can only reveal that her partner (Ali) has told her that there's suddenly high demand for passports and other foreign IDs, especially those belonging to men aged 18 to 40, as well as the usual credit cards, jewelry, weapons, etc.

TO CATCH A THIEF

If the PCs want to retrieve their stolen goods, they can try shadowing Lara in the hope that she leads them to Ali. This plan has a good chance of success – they live together in a small room near the Kick-Off (see below) – but by then Ali has fenced everything to Slugger. Regardless, shadowing is more difficult if the PCs don't resemble locals.

If Ali is successfully shadowed, he leads them to the Kick-Off. If he spots the PCs, he tries a number of tricks to evade pursuit: see *Chases (GURPS Action 2: Exploits, pp. 31-35)*.

Even if he suspects he's being chased or followed, Ali eventually visits the Kick-Off before going home.

THE ALMOST OBLIGATORY TAVERN SCENE

The Kick-Off, located next to a run-down gym on the edge of a slum, caters to a mostly criminal clientele. The barmaids and dancers are also prostitutes, but not above robbing or scamming tourists. Slugger, the owner, is also a fence, and the storeroom behind the bar is full of loot (see box above).

In addition to the contents of his storeroom, Slugger keeps a sawed-off double-barrel shotgun, 12G; an *Auto Pistol*, 9mm; and a heavy flashlight under the bar. There are 4d clients (mooks) in the bar at any time. Half of them are armed with brass knuckles or sap gloves, and the rest are armed with small knives, push knives, or snub revolvers (equal chance of any one among the remaining half). Improvised weapons (bottles, half pool cues, etc.) are also readily available, and the 1d barmaids/dancers grab these if threatened.

Slugger pays protection to the local cops, so law-abiding adventurers can't expect any legal help. He also pays a percentage of his illegal income to the local crime boss; if the heroes do attack the saloon, they may need the services of a cleaner (see *GURPS Action 1: Heroes, p. 6*) to avoid comebacks from both groups.

If criminal PCs decide to plunder the place and shake down the clientele, the till contains \$451, and each customer has $(1d \times 10) + 1d$ – all in local currency. Searching them all should yield at least one set of lockpicks, as well as leather jackets, coats, hats, sunglasses, jewelry, and personal basics. (As part of the agreement with the local gangs, Slugger doesn't sell or take illegal drugs, nor does he allow them to be sold in his bar; thus the PCs are unlikely to find any.) Most of the liquor behind the bar is poor quality.

Slugger doesn't know why the passports are needed, but he knows who is buying them: a forger named Joe, who runs a camera shop in a better part of town.

If the PCs don't visit the Kick-Off, or don't proceed to Joe's camera shop, go to *Mission Control* (p. 5).

Slugger's Loot

Slugger's storeroom contains:

- More than enough stolen passports, credit cards, and other ID for the PCs (if they need them).
- A chainsaw.
- A crash kit.
- Two cell phones.
- Three miniature digital camcorders.
- Duct tape.
- Industrial cleanser.

It also contains a variety of (unloaded) guns:

- Seven snub revolvers.
- Four auto pistols, .45.
- Eight auto pistols, 9mm (one with a silencer).
- One compact SMG, 9mm.
- One compact pump shotgun, 12G.

BIG SHOTS

Joe's storefront, Capital Cameras and Computers (BAD -2), occupies two floors of a converted bank. The windowless basement is only accessible through wooden security doors marked "Staff Only," with good electronic keypad locks. It houses a small film studio and a computerized print shop, including a good-quality counterfeiting/forgery kit (*Action 1, p.28*) and a disguise kit.

The windows and exterior doors of Joe's shop are security glass, covered with commercial security grilles (when closed, 11:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.) and good locks with switch sensors; triggering any of these alarms summons cops, who arrive within 1d+3 minutes. The basement is protected by motion detectors and infrared cameras: If intruders are detected, Joe is alerted; depending on the circumstances, he either summons cops or underworld mooks.

Passports are delivered to Joe in the morning by one of his sales assistants, who is also a dancer at the Kick-Off. (The courier who picks them up works for a legitimate international courier firm, and doesn't know what's in the packages.) Joe replaces the ID photos with digital images he receives by e-mail, sends the altered documents by courier to a postal box in Khartoum, and receives payment directly into his Swiss bank account. All other contact with the people who buy the passports has been by e-mail. These details can be found either on his laptop or by interrogating him; he makes sure that his criminal activities are not apparent to anyone watching the store or tapping his phone.

The laptop Joe uses for e-mails – which includes the assumed names and likenesses of many of the mercs recruited for Operation Fatboy (see p. 8) – is kept locked in the business safe hidden in the corner furthest from the door. The only weapons in the building are a pepper spray under the cash register and a snub revolver in the safe.

Just for fun, throw in a fight scene just as or soon after the heroes arrive at the tavern. The fight has nothing to do with the investigators, but at least one of them gets caught up on the edge of it.

Joe's activities are being observed by the man named Houston (see below), who also notices the investigators if they investigate the place; Houston contacts them shortly afterward.

MISSION CONTROL

Houston may phone the PCs to arrange a meeting, or he may be waiting in their hotel room(s) when they return there. In either case, he warns the heroes that not only are they in danger, they're endangering an investigation into a major identity theft ring. He goes on to say that if the PCs are interested in a job, he has one that may suit them – one that the U.S. government can't legally do.

Houston does not identify himself except to say he's "from the embassy"; his Texan accent matches his assumed name. If the PCs are soldiers or spies, he appeals to their patriotism first; if they're criminals, he starts by mentioning a chance to make some money. If one of the heroes has had his passport stolen and not recovered, he'll add that this is a chance to retrieve it before it's used in a crime.

If the adventurers express interest, he'll say his group believes the passports are going to be used to help smuggle a group of mercenaries and materiel into somewhere in Africa to aid insurgents. The weapons were paid for with blood diamonds, but if the heroes intercept the arms, the rebel attack's going to have to be put on hold, perhaps indefinitely. If the PCs are patriots, he'll add that there are rumors that the disputed territory is rich in uranium which the rebels would be glad to sell to Iran or North Korea. If they're criminals or mercenaries, he's prepared to offer some favors such as erasing criminal records or letting them keep what they take from the shipment. He can cover any reasonable expenses, and provide any necessary papers.

Should the party agree, Houston tells them that he's been monitoring Joe, and is sure he's too risk-averse not to be backing up his computer files somewhere; if the PCs could access those, they might be able to track down some of the mercs. Alternatively, if they can acquire some of the doctored passports without tipping Joe off, Houston may be able to access airline records to see whether any tickets have been booked under those names.

After the heroes acquire passports or hack into Joe's computer, the information leads to a hotel in Cairo (the Pharaoh's View – see below). If informed of this information, Houston provides the adventurers with the resources to get to Egypt.

If Things Go Wrong . . .

Even if the PCs are unable to get the passports or hack into Joe's computer, Houston has a backup plan, and a few days later he calls the party again. "We've had some luck – arrested a merc traveling with a stolen passport. He had a ticket for Cairo, and the address of a hotel there. How would you like an all-expenses paid trip to Egypt?"

Sounds too easy: The heroes are hired to protect a top-secret cookie recipe. As the number of people after it climb, the guardians realize that the recipe conceals a coded message!

THE FRIENDS OF MR. CAIRO

Assuming the heroes remain in contact with Houston, he issues one PC (the face man, if the group includes one) with a passport and credentials for "Kim Lee." Lee is believed (correctly) to be a member of the enemy merc team, although Houston has no other information on him. The other heroes are equipped with plane tickets and fake IDs. Houston gives them his cell phone number, but asks them not to write it down, and tells them only to call it when they're sure it's safe to do so.

The Pharaoh's View turns out to be a large but badly run-down \$40/night hotel on the west bank of the Nile; there is a room reserved for Lee, and enough vacancies for the other PCs (though there are better hotels nearby). There is a message waiting for "Lee," saying "N" will meet him for breakfast at 8:00 a.m. (The "N" in question is Nathan – one of the mercs.)

At 8:00 a.m., the five mercs – Nathan, Simeon, Kane, Roy, and Diego – sit at the only table set for six. If "Lee" joins them, Nathan hands him a prepaid cell phone and, after asking about his flight, say (in English), "They've finally found my missing case. I'm going out to pick it up this morning, before it gets too hot."

"We may as well come with you," says Diego. "It's not out of our way, and you might need an interpreter. Lee, you speak Arabic, don't you?"

If the adventurer impersonating Lee *doesn't* speak Arabic, convincing the mercs that he actually is part of the team takes a good or better reaction from Nathan (roll individually for the mercs; anyone with a bad or worse reaction to the PC remains suspicious and may attempt to tail him or otherwise investigate). Nathan and Diego expect Lee to be able to drive a truck, repair a diesel engine, fire a machine gun and rifle, and speak French and Arabic; they become increasingly wary if he fails at any of these tasks.

Assuming the impersonating PC is able to convince the others of his legitimacy, he can remain on the merc team (but see *Troubleshooting*, p. 7). After breakfast, Nathan and Diego asks Lee to accompany them: Nathan drives one rented SUV, with the other three mercs following in another. They stop on a desert road miles from any building; the only thing breaking the monotony is a row of rusty 55-gallon drums. A few minutes later, a van and another SUV pulls up behind them, and four men exit: Tariq holding a pump shotgun, Yuri an attaché case, and two mooks with compact SMGs. Yuri greets the mercs in English, telling them that he has the items they ordered, and opens the back of the van. The trunks inside contain four sniper rifles, 7.62mmS; four assault rifles, 7.62mmS; two compact SMGs, 9mm; one HMG, 12.7mm; two magazines for each gun; and 120 blasting caps. "Everything else is in the conex," Yuri explains. "You can pick it up tomorrow morning: I'll call you to tell you where." He hands Nathan the attaché case, saying, "Feel free to count it."

"If you've cheated us," says Nathan, "there's enough left in the budget to have you and your entire family killed."

Troubleshooting

If the person impersonating Lee fails at that task and is kicked off the team – perhaps via a hail of bullets – the rest of the adventure still continues as planned, unless it’s disrupted (see *Breaking the Chain*, below). Simply assume the remaining aspects of the timeline – the money hand-off, the weapon transfer, etc. – happen as written, only without mention of Lee. In this case, it’s up to the players to figure out how to remain close enough to the action to disrupt it (remember that Houston doesn’t want to be contacted until it’s safe to do so).

The mercs practice firing at the drums, then Yuri gives Nathan the keys to the van and he and his men leave in their SUV. Nathan tells “Lee” and Diego to return the hired SUVs to the airport and catch a taxi back to the hotel; then he and Simeon drive the van back to the hotel and take the cash up to Diego’s room. He calls the other mercs, telling them to meet him to count the cash: \$120,000 in U.S. \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100 bills, mostly near-perfect counterfeits. When the money has been sorted into bundles of \$1,000, Nathan places these back in the case and tells the mercs he’ll see them at breakfast – “but keep your phones on, just in case.” With that, he goes to his room. The mercs and the PCs have an afternoon and night in Cairo before setting out.

The van is parked inside a ceiling-high chain-link cage in the hotel basement. The cage and the van have Good mechanical locks: The van is protected by a proximity sensor (see *Action 2: Exploits*, p. 22) that sends an SMS to Nathan’s phone; a hidden camera inside the cage feeds through to his phone as well as to a monitor in the manager’s office.

Nathan stays in his room that night, with the cash under the bed and his pistol under his pillow. Yuri calls Nathan at 8:20 the next morning, while the mercs are eating breakfast, and tell him the container truck is parked at a truck stop on the road to Khartoum. Nathan orders the mercs to grab their bags and check out immediately.

Breaking the Chain

The PCs can disrupt “Operation Fatboy” at any stage – for example, by killing the mercs and taking the money and the gear in the van – but if they don’t intercept the container, the attack still goes ahead. (If any of the players seem to be pursuing this course of action, give everyone a Tactics or Strategy roll to realize this fact.)

THE BIG BANG

Now that the heroes have a reason for being here, the real fun begins.

HEAVY WEAPONS

The truck stop (BAD -4) is 90 miles south of Cairo’s sprawl. There are three container trucks, 1d+1 smaller trucks, and a familiar-looking SUV (Tariq’s) parked outside. The truck with the weapons has loud alarms and good locks, but no traps. Tariq and two mooks are waiting inside the cafe; Tariq has been ordered to give the truck’s keys to Nathan personally.

Inside the container – behind a façade of boxes containing solar panels (and marked “FRAGILE”) – are more boxes labeled “Filters”: These contain 30 RPGs (p. B281) and 360 HEAT rounds. If these are removed, the PCs find 600,000 rounds of 7.62mmS ammo, 250 lbs. of plastique, and 1,800 fragmentation hand grenades (600 of the grenades are Diehl DM61s, the rest are ARGES grenades similar to the fragmentation grenades in *Action 1*, pp. 33-34). The far end of the container is packed with heavier weapons and munitions (see *Conex Contents*, p. 8). All told, this is slightly more than \$1.3M worth of armaments, weighing 16.06 tons. The explosives are distributed along the 40’ length of the container. If any ammo penetrates the container, roll 3d; a bullet sets off an explosion on a 15 or higher, while an

RPG or missile does so on a 12 or higher. A bullet triggers an explosion on an excellent or better result; an RPG or missile triggers one on a good or better result. Not all the munitions detonate at once; the blast does 5d×9 cr ex per turn for 11 turns, wrecking the container and all its contents.

The semi-truck (p. B464) is parked between the cafe window and the gas pumps. Although it may seem most expedient, blowing up the container kills everyone in the cafe, most of them innocent bystanders (use stats for mooks or dancers), unless the cafe is evacuated or the truck moved. The café walls are 6” brick, but the windows are brittle 1/4” glass, DR 2.

If Tariq and/or the mooks see the PCs steal the truck, they’ll chase it in their SUV and try to shoot out the tires. The truck’s fuel tanks contain just enough diesel to go 40 miles; if the heroes take it without refueling, they may be stranded in the desert and making daily survival rolls until other PCs or the GM rescue them. The road is average terrain; the surrounding desert is soft sand – very bad terrain.

If “Lee” stays with the mercs past this point, Nathan makes up a roster for the six men to rotate driving duties in four-hour shifts, three in the truck (one in the sleeper), three in the van. The van is stocked with group basics, a crash kit, and a week’s supply of water and MREs; Nathan does not plan to stop until they reach Aswan, 460 miles south.

To make this adventure less gun-focused, pare all weapon stats down to the ones found in Action 1: Heroes. To make it more gunpowder-powered, consider running it as a GURPS Gun Fu adventure.

There is \$20,000 in the truck, the rest of the cash in the van. If “Lee” is still trusted by the mercs, this provides him with the last opportunity to steal the truck without a fight: The next overnight stop is in Khartoum, where more mercs are waiting for the weapons.

Criminal-minded adventurers may be tempted to steal the weapons, truck, etc., rather than destroy them; if so, finding a buyer or getting the loot out of Africa should be an adventure in itself. Yuri’s gang would count as a very dangerous Enemy.

Conex Contents

The shipping container has the following heavy weapons and munitions:

- six M2 60mm mortars with 120 HE rounds.
- 10 Stinger missiles.
- 20 9M14P Malutka-P “Sagger” missiles.
- five Molot NSVS-12/7 HMGs, with 150 50-round cans.

See *GURPS High-Tech* if the details of these are important, but “really big boom the bad guys shouldn’t have” is enough detail for *Action*; these weapons shouldn’t be involved unless there’s a danger of their exploding (see p. 7).

Operation Fatboy

While the other mercs have only been told that they’ll be arming Congolese insurgents, Nathan knows that the plan is to “liberate” Katanga Province, starting with simultaneous attacks on Lumumbashi airport and Parliament House, while insiders seize control of police stations and military bases. The attack has been financed by a mining company hoping to take over the province’s mines, including its uranium deposits – but the company and mercs cut their losses and call off the attack if the weapons are lost or destroyed.

EPILOGUE

Assuming the heroes succeed in their mission and contact Houston, he honors any end of his agreement with the PCs. He can “take care of” any outstanding intact weapons, if asked to do so. If the heroes have acquired too much dangerous armaments from the shipment (GM’s discretion) or otherwise been indiscreet in how they deal with them, Houston might use additional resources to keep tabs on the heroes or the munitions. (Houston didn’t go to all the trouble of keeping dangerous munitions out of enemy hands only to see them end up in *other* enemy hands.)

If the heroes have not been successful and insist on contacting Houston anyway, he gets very angry and cuts off communication. He no longer answers that cell phone number, and the heroes might find they have a new enemy.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

The crux of this adventure comes from the conflict – combat with noncombat – with the adversarial team of mercs. The GM should familiarize himself with their abilities, to make sure the heroes are provided with an appropriate challenge.

The “local language” of some of the characters below is one appropriate for the country where this adventure takes place.

NATHAN, MERCENARY SQUAD LEADER

370 points

“Nathan” lived most of his early life near military bases in Germany and the U.S. with his Dutch-born mother and a series of soldier stepfathers, before being enrolled in a military academy. He studied Russian until the Soviet Union collapsed, and enlisted in time to serve in the Bosnian War. However, he found “peacekeeping” frustrating and unrewarding, ultimately becoming a mercenary. His “take no prisoners” attitude proved useful in his new career, but has led to him being wanted for manslaughter in Europe.

Nathan is a muscular, clean-shaven 44-year-old man with a tanned complexion, crewcut blond hair, and gray eyes.

He wears a sand-colored shirt over khaki cargo pants, and boonie hat.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 16 [120]; **IQ** 12 [40]; **HT** 12 [20].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 13 [4]; Will 13 [5]; Per 13 [5]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 7.00 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 11*; Parry 13* (Brawling).
6’2”; 190 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: Dutch (Native) [0]; English (Native) [4], German (Accented) [2], Russian (Accented) [2], Serbo-Croatian (Accented) [2].

Advantages

Charisma 1 [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Danger Sense [15]; Fit [5]; Gunslinger [25]; Hard to Kill 4 [8]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Language Talent [10]; Night Vision 4 [4]; Temperature Tolerance 2 [2].

Perks: Dirty Fighting; Penetrating Voice. [2]

Nathan somehow meets and strikes up a friendship with one of the other members of the PC group. Now what?

Disadvantages

Bloodlust (12) [-10]; Bully (15) [-5]; Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]; Greed (15) [-7]; Secret (Wanted criminal) [-10]; Sense of Duty (Team) [-5].

Quirks: Aggressive when drunk; Chauvinistic; Dislikes motorbikes; Distrusts men who don't drink alcohol; Likes old Westerns. [-5]

If you've cheated us . . .

Skills

Acrobatics (H) DX [2]-15; Administration (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; Area Knowledge (Europe) (E) IQ [1]-12; Area Knowledge (U.S.A.) (E) IQ [1]-12; Armoury/TL8 (Small Arms) (A) IQ [2]-12; Boating/TL8 (Motorboat) (A) DX-1 [1]-15; Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-18; Camouflage (E) IQ+1 [1]-13†; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Climbing (A) DX-1 [1]-15; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-12; Current Events/TL8 (Headline News) (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Detect Lies (H) Per [4]-13; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX [2]-16; Fast-Draw (Ammo) (E) DX+1 [1]-17*; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-17*; Fast-Draw (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [1]-17*; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ+1 [2]-13; Fishing (E) Per [1]-13; Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-16; Gunner/TL8 (Machine Gun) (E) DX [2]-17; Guns/TL8 (Grenade Launcher) (E) DX [1]-16; Guns/TL8 (Light Anti-Tank Weapon) (E) DX [1]-16; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [1]-17‡; Guns/TL8 (Rifle) (E) DX+2 [4]-18; Guns/TL8 (Shotgun) (E) DX+1 [1]-17‡; Guns/TL8 (SMG) (E) DX+1 [1]-17‡; Hiking (A) HT+1 [4]-13; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-12; Interrogation (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-15; Jumping (E) DX [1]-16; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-17; Leadership (A) IQ+2 [4]-14§; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Parachuting (E) DX [1]-16; Running (A) HT+1 [4]-13; Savoir-Faire (Military) (E) IQ [1]-12; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-14; Scuba (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1]-15; Soldier (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Stealth (A) DX [2]-16; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-13; Survival (Mountain) (A) Per+1 [4]-14; Swimming (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Tactics (H) IQ [4]-12; Throwing (A) DX [2]-16; Traps (A) IQ [2]-12.

Techniques: Stamp Kick (H) Brawling-2 [2]-16.

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

† Raised from Survival default.

‡ Raised from Guns (Rifle) default.

§ Includes +1 from Charisma.

Equipment

Auto backup pistol, .40, in undercover holster inside pants; concealable vest (DR 12/5); push knife in belt buckle; tactical folding knife; gloves, shooting; boots, reinforced; wristwatch with GPS; money belt with \$1,000 in assorted currency; ballistic sunglasses; cell phone; mini flashlight; personal basics; false ID. Field pack contains survival knife, rugged notebook computer, military binoculars, night-vision goggles, drag bag, satellite phone, water purification gear, and extra clothes.

The laptop (-5 to hacking attempts) contains detailed maps of Katanga Province and its airport, but no other details of Operation Fatboy.

MERCS

242 points

The mercs picked to run the guns from Cairo are truck drivers with military experience and useful language skills, rather than combat specialists, but they can and fight when necessary (and sometimes when it's not).

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 12 [20].

Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 13 [4]; Will 11 [0]; Per 13 [10]; FP 12 [0].

Basic Speed 7.00 [10]; Basic Move 7 [0]; Dodge 10*; Parry 11* (Boxing).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: One Native [0] and one Accented [4] (see p. 10).

Advantages

Absolute Direction [5]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Driver's Reflexes 4 [20]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 2 [2].

Perks: Dirty Fighting. [2]

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (15) [-5]; Code of Honor (Soldier's) [-10]; Greed (15) [-7]; Lecherousness (15) [-7]; Overconfidence (12) [-5].

Skills

Area Knowledge (see p. 10) (E) IQ [1]-11; Boxing (A) DX [2]-14; Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-11; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-13; Computer Operation/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX+3 [1]-17‡; Driving/TL8 (Heavy Wheeled) (A) DX+4 [2]-18‡; Electronics Operation/TL8 (Communications) (A) IQ [2]-11; Fast-Draw (Ammo) (E) DX+1 [1]-15*; Fast-Draw (Knife) (E) DX+1 [1]-15*; Fast-Draw (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [1]-15*; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-11; First Aid/TL8 (E) IQ [1]-11; Freight Handling (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Gunner/TL8 (Machine Gun) (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+2 [4]-16; Hiking (A) HT [2]-12; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-11; Knife (E) DX [1]-14; Mechanic/TL8 (Diesel Engine) (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Navigation (Land) (A) IQ+3 [2]-14‡; Observation (A) Per [2]-13; Parachuting (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-14; Smuggling (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Soldier (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Stealth (A) DX [2]-14; Streetwise (A) IQ+1 [4]-12; Survival (see p. 10) (A) Per [2]-13; Swimming (E) HT [1]-12; Throwing (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Urban Survival (A) Per [2]-13; Wrestling (A) DX [2]-14.

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

† Includes +4 for Driver's Reflexes.

‡ Includes +3 for Absolute Direction.

Perhaps one of the anonymous mercenaries is an Enemy of one of the PCs – or becomes an Enemy after this adventure.

Equipment

Auto Backup Pistol, .40, in undercover holster inside pants; tactical folding knife; boots, reinforced; cargo pants, shirt, baseball cap; cell phone; multi-tool; mini flashlight; personal basics; false ID.

Information on specific mercs is as follows:

Diego: Languages: Portuguese (Native); English (Accented). Skills: Area Knowledge (South America); Survival (Jungle). 5'8", 170 lbs; tanned complexion, dark brown comb-over and mustache, brown eyes.

Paul: Languages: French (Native); English (Accented). Skills: Area Knowledge (Mediterranean); Survival (Beach/Island). 6'1", 180 lbs.; tanned complexion, wavy brown hair, hazel eyes.

Roy: Languages: English (Native); Swahili (Accented). Skills: Area Knowledge (Southern Africa); Survival (Plains). 6'2", 190 lbs; dark brown complexion, shaved head, dark brown eyes.

Simeon: Languages: Arabic (Native); English (Accented). Skills: Area Knowledge (Northern Africa); Survival (Desert). 5'11", 160 lbs; brown complexion, black dreadlocks, mustache and goatee, dark brown eyes.

LARA

74 points

As the (unwitting) instigator for the adventure, Lara is more catalyst than threat, but she's still picked up a few tricks that have proven useful to her criminal career.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 11 [20]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 12 [5];
FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 8 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: Local language (Native) [0]; English (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Attractive [4]; High Pain Threshold [10]; Night Vision 2 [2].
Perks: Dirty Fighting, [1]

Disadvantages

Greed (15) [-7]; Impulsiveness (15) [-5], Wealth (Poor) [-15].

Skills

Acting (A) IQ [2]-11; Brawling (E) DX [1]-11; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-12; Body Language (A) Per [2]-12; Dancing (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Driving/TL8 (Motorcycle) (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Fast-Talk (A) IQ [2]-11; Filch (A) DX+1 [4]-12; Holdout (A) IQ [4]-12;

Housekeeping (E) IQ+1 [2]-12; Knife (E) DX [1]-11; Professional Skill (Bartender) (A) IQ-1 [1]-10; Running (A) HT [2]-10; Savoir-Faire (Servant) (E) IQ [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-12; Sex Appeal (A) HT+2 [4]-12‡; Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-11; Urban Survival (A) Per [2]-12.

Techniques: Knee Strike (A) Brawling+0 [1]-11.

‡ Includes +1 for Attractive.

Equipment

Lara carries pepper spray. (If these stats are used for the women in the Kick-Off and the truck stop, they are unarmed; however, they may pick up improvised weapons if a fight begins. Their clothing has no DR except for their rubber-soled shoes – DR 1, +1 to Stealth.)

*Anthony DiNozzo: I always figured I'd go out like Cagney in **White Heat** – fiery explosion.*

– NCIS: Naval Criminal Investigative Service #5.6

ALI

91 points

Ali's in over his head, although he doesn't realize it yet.

ST 10 [0]; **DX** 13 [60]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 10 [0].
Damage 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 11 [5];
FP 11 [3].
Basic Speed 6.00 [5]; Basic Move 7 [5]; Dodge 9; Parry 9 (Brawling).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].
CF: Western [0].
Languages: Local language (Native) [0]; English (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Craftiness 1 [5]; Flexibility [5]; Fit [5].
Perks: Compact Frame; Urban Jungle Gym. [2]

Disadvantages

Greed (12) [-15], Skinny [-5]; Wealth (Poor) [-15].

*If you liked this adventure from Stephen Dedman, check out the action in **Hardcore**, an adventure appearing in **Pyramid #3/14: Martial Arts**.*

Skills

Acrobatics (H) DX [4]-13; Area Knowledge (E) IQ [1]-10; Brawling (A) DX [1]-13; Climbing (A) DX+3 [2]-16*; Driving/TL8 (Motorcycle) (A) DX-1 [1]-12; Escape (H) DX+1 [1]-14*; Filch (A) DX [2]-13; Holdout (A) IQ [2]-10†; Jumping (E) DX+1 [2]-14; Knife (E) DX [1]-13; Running (A) HT+1 [4]-11; Scaling (H) [2]-14; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-11; Stealth (A) DX+1 [2]-14†; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10; Urban Survival (A) Per [2]-11.

Techniques: Scaling (H) Climbing-2 [2]-14.

* Includes +3 for Flexibility.

† Includes +1 from Craftiness.

Equipment

Switchblade; climbing shoes; ordinary clothing.

SLUGGER

153 points

Slugger is more brawn than brain. He's not incredibly powerful, but he can still cause problems for the heroes if their paths cross.

ST 14 [40]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 13 [30].

Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 16 [4]; Will 11 [5]; Per 10 [0]; FP 13 [0].

Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10*; Parry 11* (Boxing).

Social Background

TL: 8 [0].

CF: Western [0].

Languages: Local language (Native) [0]; English (Broken) [2].

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; Hard to Kill 1 [2]; Hard to Subdue 2 [4]; High Pain Threshold [10].

Disadvantages

Appearance (Unattractive) [-4]; Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Bully (12) [-10]; Gluttony (15) [-2]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Overweight [-1].

Skills

Brawling (E) DX [1]-12; Boxing (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Carousing (E) HT+1 [2]-14; Driving/TL8 (Automobile) (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Guns/TL8 (Pistol) (E) DX+1 [1]-13†; Guns/TL8 (Shotgun) (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]-12; Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2]-11; Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-10.

Techniques: Disarming (H) Boxing+1 [2]-15; Neck Snap (H) ST-1 [4]-11; Uppercut (A) Boxing+0 [1]-14.

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

† Raised from Guns (Shotgun) default.

Equipment

Ordinary clothing, reinforced boots; weapons under bar.

... AND THE REST

The GM should feel free to tweak (or ignore!) these stats based on what's needed to keep the adventure fast-paced, on-track, and action-packed.

Mooks

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

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

Basic Speed 5.00; Basic Move 5.

Advantages: High Pain Threshold.

Disadvantages: If needed, use disadvantages for Cleaner or Wheel Man.

Skills: Area Knowledge-12; Brawling-12; Carousing-11; Driving/TL8-12; Fast-Talk-11; Filch-10; Guns/TL8-12; Intimidation-12; Knife-11; Observation-10; Running-10; Scrounging-10; Shortsword-10; Stealth-11; Streetwise-12; Urban Survival-10.

Equipment: Yuri's mooks wear concealable vests, long coats, ballistic sunglasses and reinforced boots. Mooks in the Kick-Off and the truck stop wear leather jackets, ordinary clothing and shoes.

Bar Girls

Use stats for Lara.

Tariq

Use stats for Slugger, changing native language to Arabic. He carries a revolver, .44M, and wears a concealable vest, leather jacket, ballistic sunglasses and reinforced boots.

Truck Drivers

Treat as Mooks, but without weapons. Native language is Arabic. Roll 1d for second language (accented or broken): 1-3 English, 4-5 French, 6 none.

Yuri

Yuri prefers to avoid fighting, but if cornered, has the same combat skills and equipment as Nathan (see pp. 8-9).

Yuri could be a dangerous enemy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen Dedman is the author of *GURPS Dinosaurs* and the novels *Shadowrun: A Fistful of Data*; *The Art of Arrow Cutting*; *Shadows Bite*; and *Foreign Bodies*. He has also written a number of *Pyramid* articles and other RPG material, plus more than 100 short stories published in an eclectic variety of magazines and anthologies.

He is co-owner of Fantastic Planet, a science fiction and fantasy bookshop in Perth, Australia, and is trying to save enough character points to buy off the long-standing Wealth (Struggling) disadvantage. For more information, check out stephendedman.com.

NIGHT OF THE MEGACARP

BY KEN SPENCER

Fact: Asian silver carp, also known as flying carp, were introduced into Midwestern waterways in order to control algae.

Fact: Flying carp escaped into the wild waters and have created stable, and growing, breeding populations.

Fact: Flying carp are listed as a dangerous invasive species, and have begun to wrack untold damage on native ecosystems.

Fact: Flying carp can grow to be over 40 pounds in weight, and can leap 10 feet into the air.

Fact: Every day 70 trains pass through the town of Vincennes, Indiana in order to cross one of the few heavy bridges spanning the Wabash River.

Fact: Some of these trains carry toxic and dangerous mutagens from government labs in New Jersey, to storage facilities in Colorado.

Fact: There are flying carp in the Wabash River.

The following events began on the night of August 5, 2010. They are a true and accurate account of the terrors that threatened a sleepy Indiana town. The names of the victims have been changed at the request of their families.

Night of the Megacarp is a **GURPS Action** adventure for four to six heroes. It presents a scenario wherein the investigators must discover and stop an invasion of the town by giant mutated flying carp. The PCs could be townspeople, state troopers, or a government black ops team sent in to resolve the situation. One interesting possibility for this adventure to throw it into an ongoing campaign. The heroes could be taking some R&R in a quiet town, on their way to somewhere else on an assignment or mission, or just laying low in an out-of-the-way locale.

The adventure is divided into a series of acts, and each act is further divided into several scenes. Each section begins with a title and the scene's BAD rating (see **GURPS Action 2: Exploits**, p. 4), followed by *The Facts*. This narrative is meant to provide important information about the scene, as well as help the GM gauge the mood and setting. It's up to the GM to determine how (or if) this information is conveyed to the players. Not all events that are in *The Facts* will necessarily transpire – especially if the heroes become involved – but they are a reasonable approximation of what *could* have happened, and are the most likely trajectory of the adventure if the heroes are *not* involved (or don't become involved until later in the tale).

After *The Facts* are one or more paragraphs that provide game rules and information; these are labeled *The Action*.

The general flow of the adventure is one of increasing tension until the threat of attack breaks out into full-on action. More investigative groups may want to focus on the earlier stages of the adventure, possibly with the goal of identifying the threat and figuring ways to counter it. Combat-orientated parties will probably want to pass through the opening phases rather quickly, getting to the fish slaying at the end.

The GM can start the adventure at several points. The classic monster-movie pacing should begin with a normal day in Vincennes, with the adventurers going about their day-to-day business. Emergency service personnel should go on a couple of mundane runs, such as small fires, car accidents, or domestic disturbances. Other character types may be shopping, going to work, or otherwise engaged. Bring in the train wreck, and then a return to normalcy before *Something Fishy Is Going On* (p. 14). For parties passing through or visiting, the train wreck would best be used as a background event, something that happened a few days ago. Then jump into *Something Fishy Is Going On* and run the adventure from there. If the party becomes separated, they can be brought together before, during, or after the storm by having them work on the same sandbag line along the river. This would provide an opportunity for them to be present when the megacarp first exit the water.

THWARTING THE MENACE

There are several options for stopping the menace of the megacarp. The party can take the direct approach and try to gun them all down. A better option would be to organize a posse or militia of armed citizens to help put down the fishy fiends. This will need to be done ad hoc and on the spot. As per the standards of monster movies, *no one* believes the heroes until the monster has shown itself. Another option – especially if the heroes bring the scales to the attention of Dr. Richards – is to devise and deploy a toxin that will kill the megacarp while they are still in the water. Finding the ingredients during the storm or the attack would be difficult (especially if the toxin must be modified to an airborne vector).

The official web site for Vincennes, Indiana, is www.vincennes.org.

The formula needs to be developed at the university, and the ingredients scattered across town (a farm, the sanitation department, the glass factory). There is also a National Guard armory on the south side of town, but it is near the river. Here the party can find a host of useful items, such as survival and medical supplies, weapons, and vehicles. Getting this should not be easy, and a school of megacarp – most likely school Alpha – should stand in the way.

Indiana Wants You!

Vincennes is the home of the Indiana Military Museum, and though in the real world, the tanks and other weaponry on display have been de-militarized, there is no reason that must be so in this adventure. Most of the equipment is from World War II, but even a Sherman tank is a mighty weapon against the megacarp.

Great things have been effected by a few men well conducted.

*– George Rogers Clark commenting on
the Illinois Campaign and the taking of Fort Sackville*

THE TERROR BEGINS

Although the heroes might not be involved with this aspect directly, this is where the megacarp got its start.

THE TRAIN WRECK

The BAD for this section is -1.

The Facts

LAH Train #34 was running its regular route on time, making the trip from Paxton, New Jersey to Colorado Springs, Colorado without incident. Several of the cars were labeled as biological waste and were to be transferred in Colorado Springs to a convoy of Air Force trucks that would then take them to the underground containment facility at an undisclosed location. On August 5, at 03:45 a.m., the train began crossing the Wabash River at Vincennes, Indiana. After nearly half of the mile-long train had crossed the aging trestle, years of inattention and metal fatigue caused the steel to buckle, spilling several cars into the river.

A rapid response team of federal, Indiana, Illinois, and local authorities promptly arrived, and by 8:45 a.m. the situation was contained. No loss of life had resulted, and the authorities breathed a sigh of relief as the cars involved were listed as carrying rubber ducks, popcorn seed, and watermelons. The clean up was delegated to a private contractor, who would spend the next four weeks fishing rubber duckies out of the Wabash and Ohio Rivers. The corn was scooped up on the spot, and since it proved little hazard, what was not immediately salvaged was left to float downstream. The watermelons did not survive their adventure intact.

The corn wasn't normal, however, but a specially treated and genetically engineered hybrid created by the federal government as an emergency crop in the case of a natural disaster. This corn

was supposed to grow rapidly, resist disease and parasites without the use of chemicals, and survive harsh conditions. This batch of seed had been tested and proven to be too effective, as well as causing abnormal growth in any creature whom consumed it. Sadly, a bureaucratic error at the point of shipping had mislabeled the popcorn seed as being a run of the mill hybrid, and not a dangerous mutagenic bound for destruction and disposal. Thus when the majority of the clean up crew left the area on August 10, the corn seed was left to sit in the river.

The mutagenic corn was eaten by the Asian flying carp, which are so large and mean that nothing eats them, save a few impoverished and desperate souls who live in Shelltown on the Illinois side of the river. (For more information about those unfortunates and their fate, see p. 16.) The mutagenics quickly built up in the flesh of the carp, causing them to grow to enormous size (as if 40-pound carp aren't large enough), sprout knife-like teeth, and develop primitive lungs. Their fins changed into stout legs, allowing them to drag their (now immense) masses onto land. Combined with their naturally aggressive nature and predatory drives, the result was 100-pound crawling engines of death and destruction.

The Action

Heroes responding to the train wreck are faced with a scene that at first looks to be catastrophic. (The GM can play up the horrific aspect of this, before revealing that it's not as bad as it looks.) Sixty feet of trestle is missing in the center of the span, a car hangs precariously off on each side of the gap, and three cars have plummeted into the river. The water is not very deep at this point, with the sandy river bottom lying 35 feet below the current water level. Rescue efforts will be quickly suspended after it is discovered that there is no one to rescue, and clean up begins immediately after.

For another fearful fish, try the lune fish in GURPS Creatures of the Night. Those critters will drive anyone insane.

THE TENSION BUILDS

This part of the adventure is the most likely area for the heroes to become involved; the megacarp have become active and are beginning to make themselves known.

SOMETHING FISHY IS GOING ON

The BAD for this scene is 0.

The Facts

The first sign of trouble occurred on August 10 at 10:00 p.m. Wayne Brewer, the night watchman at the Georges Rogers Clark Memorial in Vincennes, reported hearing strange noises coming from the river. He had been conducting his nightly rounds and strolled along the river walk bordering the memorial proper. He shined his light down into the river but saw nothing unusual other than a large congregation of flying carp. He reported the noise in his log, and the next morning the groundskeeper investigated the riverbank, finding only strange, three-foot-wide drag marks in the mud, and several four-foot-diameter holes dug into the levee. These he dismissed as the activity of muskrats, and noted that he should add it to the list of levee repairs. In truth, this was the first sign that the megacarp were active, crawling onto land and digging burrows into the soft mud.

The Action

Although the heroes may not discover this piece of information until well after the event, there are several ways they can hear about it earlier. Brewer drinks every afternoon at Pete's Bar near the corner of Second and Main. He is a loud, talkative man, and will be happy to tell fish stories to anyone who approaches him. In fact, there is a good chance the party will overhear him talking about his weird experience if they happen to spend any amount of time at Pete's. As there are only three bars in the small town, they will likely end up there at some point in their investigation.

VENGEANCE OR IRONY?

The BAD for this scene is -1.

The Facts

Six hours after Wayne Brewer heard the noises, the Vincennes Police Department was called to a disturbance at Harrison Park, a popular fishing spot and site of the city's boat ramp and bait house. Having little to do and wanting some excitement, the officers responded with lights and sirens. They found the boathouse wrecked, the walls caved in, mud dragged all over the floor, and all the light poles knocked over. Furthermore, the vandals had ransacked the city's bait

shop, even going so far as to destroy the coolers and tanks. At this time, a massive storm front began to push into the Wabash Valley, hampering investigations and eliminating much physical evidence.

The Action

This incident will appear in the *Vincennes Tribune*, the local newspaper. It will also be the talk of the town, and secondhand accounts will begin to appear at gathering spots, such as Pete's Bar, within hours. An intensive search of the area will turn up a few clues overlooked by other investigators: several large fish scales measuring three to five inches in breadth, and a lack of graffiti or tool marks on the bait shop and boathouse. The approaching storm floods the area six hours after the incident, eliminating any evidence.

For More Information . . .

The George Rogers Clark Memorial is a National Historical Park, a real place that you can visit or research online for further information. The story of George Rogers Clark and the taking of Fort Sackville is one of the lesser known, but highly influential, stories of the American Revolution. It basically helped the colonies lay claim to the entire Ohio River Valley during the negotiations of the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

THOSE MEDDLING KIDS

The BAD for this section is -1.

The Facts

At 9:00 p.m. on August 11, a group of teenagers drinking at a secluded spot by the river were startled when, in their words, a "big crocodile or something" leaped from the water and came at them. Startled, and not wanting to tell their parents they were drinking beer or that they were at a known teen "hook-up" site, none of the young men and women reported this encounter. Katie Henge, a 16-year-old cheerleader at Lincoln High School in Vincennes, disappeared that night; she is assumed to be the first victim of the megacarp. Investigators later found shreds of her clothing, an earring, and suspicious drag marks leading from the riverbank and into the water.

The Action

This information will be hard to come by during the storm and immediately after. Law enforcement PCs will receive a call at 2:30 a.m. on August 12 from Mrs. Henge reporting that her daughter has not come home. Considering it is the last weeks of summer vacation and kids will be kids, this is not an unusual

Normal-size "flying carp" can be dangerous on their own.

call. Adventurers investigating Katie's disappearance can get a list of her known associates from her mother, and from there track them down to their homes. The teens will give up what little information they have if subjected to the least of interrogation or threats. Investigations at the scene will reveal the drag marks, as well as clothes and earring noted above. Also, several large fish scales similar to the ones found at the boathouse can be uncovered.

THE DEATH OF OLD MAN EARLY

The BAD for this scene is -1.

The Facts

The final warning as to the nature of the terror that would be unleashed on the sleepy town came on the morning of August 12, when police responded to a call from Eileen Bennet. Mrs. Bennet often looked in on her great uncle, a reclusive hermit who went by the name of Old Man Early. Early lived alone in a shack by the Wabash River, and had a reputation of being cantankerous, drunk, and more than a little insane. When his niece came to bring him his weekly delivery of beer, chitlins, and newspapers, she found the shack partially flattened. Inside was a pulpy mass and the shattered remains of a shotgun. Police responded and searched the crime scene, finding suspicious drag marks that led into the water, as well as large amounts of river mud in and around the shack. The pulpy mass was not

human, and appeared to be the remains of at least one large fish that had been repeatedly shot, point-blank, with buckshot. The shotgun was empty, showed signs of recent firing, and had been damaged by a heavy crushing force, possibly a machine vise. Further investigations of the scene and a search of the area for Old Man Early were halted, as the approaching storm front ripped through the region, causing massive flooding and knocking out power and phone lines and the town's lone cell tower. The storm swamped the local emergency services network, keeping rescuers from Evansville and Terre Haute from arriving until late on August 14 (see *The Calvary Arrives*, pp. 16-17).

Water, Water Everywhere

Ultimately, the flooding fills the streets along the river and inland for a mile. Along the river the water is two feet deep, with some depressions reaching three to four feet. The waters will also reach into the first floors of any buildings downtown, and fill the basements entirely.

The Action

After an intensive investigation, the heroes can find more large fish scales as well as body parts of large fish. Dredging the river will turn up Old Man Early's mangled head, as well as his wedding ring. All evidence is destroyed or washed away during the storm.

THE BATTLE FOR VINCENNES

Here is where all hell breaks loose (albeit a watery, fish-smelling hell). Whether the heroes are attempting to merely survive the situation or bring it to a high-action resolution is up to the heroes and GM.

THE ALPHA WAVE

The BAD for this scene is -3.

The Facts

Events came to a head starting on the afternoon of August 12 and running until outside emergency services arrived on August 14. The storm had driven the voraciously hungry megacarp out of the river and onto land. Emboldened by the easy prey available in flood and storm wracked neighborhoods, the megacarp moved inland, brazenly attacking first groups of people, and then smashing their way into homes and businesses. The initial attacks occurred in and around the George Rogers Clark Memorial, with a school of 30 megacarp savaging park workers trying to secure the property in the face of the storm. From there, this school – named school Alpha in official reports – proceeded toward the Old Cathedral, breaking in the

door and devouring the resident priest and several parishioners in the cathedral. School Alpha then headed southeast into a residential district where they killed and ate 15 people before being shot by armed citizens.

The Action

A combat between the PCs and the 30 megacarp of school Alpha at the George Rogers Clark Memorial (called the GRC by the locals) would be an excellent start of the action segment of the adventure. The GRC is a large rotunda-style monument in a neoclassical design. The roof of the monument would provide an excellent vantage point for snipers, and the monument itself has a large interior chamber with reinforced doors and an iron cage that can be drawn across the entrance. Furthermore, the only access to the rotunda are steep steps in the front of the structure, leading up to a broad walkway that circles the rotunda proper. The grounds of the memorial are open, though the rotunda itself has a low wall around it. If school Alpha is not stopped, it will head to nearby residential areas, and the PCs will hear the sounds of gunfire and shouts from that area throughout the night.

Some algae consumed by carp are not digested; instead, they feed on the nutrients in the fish and multiply faster.

THE BETA WAVE

The BAD for this scene is -3.

The Facts

A second school – labeled school Beta – rampaged through the impoverished community of Shelltown, across the river on the Illinois side. There they assaulted the ramshackle collection of dilapidated trailers and flimsy structures, killing 25 people before being destroyed themselves when a meth lab exploded.

The Action

It is unlikely the PCs will be in the vicinity of Shelltown when school Beta arrives. However, if they are drawn across the flooded river by the sounds of gunfire and screaming, they will face off against 14 megacarp, and 20 frenzied and high residents. Mostly, the destruction of Shelltown should serve to add to the party's confusion and tension, as the exploding meth lab will be spectacular, and sets off several secondary explosions (including other meth labs if the GM wants).

THE REMAINING WAVES

The BAD for this scene is -3.

The Facts

The two primary schools – Gamma and Delta – split after reaching Main Street, with Delta heading inland toward Vincennes University, and Gamma remaining on Main Street throughout the night, and on into the next morning. Delta attacked the university, bashing their way into the biology building and consuming all the laboratory animals there, as well as Dr. Felix Richards, the head of the Biology Department.

The Action

The school Gamma, containing 28 mutant fish, rampages through downtown Vincennes. Downtown consists of two parallel streets that run for five blocks from Second Street to Seventh Street. Main Street (perpendicular to the river) and Second Street (parallel to the river) intersect near the river and across from the GRC.

On Main Street there are several two to three story buildings with shops on the first floor and apartments above. There are two banks, one at Third and Main, and a second at Fourth, both of which could provide a good defensive position. Among the shops on Main Street is a jewelry store between Third and Fourth, which has stout doors and locking cages covering the front and back doors. Other locations on Main Street include: a small game store, an ice cream parlor, the offices of the local ASPCA (the heroes can save the kitties and puppies!), several antique stores, and a movie theater converted into a church.

Busseron runs parallel to Main and makes up the second series of downtown blocks. Important locations include several offices (lawyers, doctors, real estate agents), the Vincennes City Police Headquarters, parking lots, a café, the local PBS station, and a fast food restaurant. The megacarp will be drawn toward any moving people, the sounds of animals (remember the ASPCA offices), and smells of food (the ice cream parlor, café, and fast-food restaurant). People on Main Street will be busy cleaning up after the storm, and would provide excellent opportunities for the heroes to save innocent bystanders or even organize a resistance. It should not be forgotten that Vincennes is the seat of a rural county, and many of the residents will own at least one firearm, though their ability to use it may be inadequate.

School Delta is the largest school – 50 megacarp – and poses a significant threat. They head up Second Street from the river, and form a nearly unstoppable mass of death-frenzied fish flesh. For combats in and around Vincennes University, use any map of a small college. There are no distinguishing features of the university that make a great combat scene, though pursuing megacarp through the dorms while terrified students rush about would be tense and action filled.

Response Time

Include scenes of the rampage at various intervals to provoke action and reaction from the players. Good options are: a woman running down the street being pursued by several megacarp, people trapped on buildings by the flood waters with megacarp circling and climbing, students at the university fleeing, locals vainly trying to fend off the fish with shotguns and improvised weapons, or children separated from their parents.

THE CAVALRY ARRIVES

The BAD for this scene is 0, although this can escalate if the heroes decide to take on federal agents.

The Facts

By 5:00 p.m. on August 14, Emergency Services and repair crews from Evansville began arriving. They faced a scene of

devastation, as not only the storm, but also the megacarp, had ransacked the small town. In response to anguished calls over short-range radios, a company of National Guardsmen were mobilized and dispatched to the scene. Later that night, at around 7:00 p.m., five unmarked black suburbans pulled into town. These vehicles disgorged several men in dark suits that then set about rounding up survivors for interrogation.

The carp's leaping ability has contributed to many boating and water-sport injuries.

Claiming to be from the FBI, these men attempted to explain away the whole event, but to little effect. Too much had been seen, and too many people had died. They did manage to confiscate a large number of cell phones and cameras. Shortly after the arrival of the agents, three large semis were spotted parked along the intersection of Second and Main. Figures in HAZMAT suits fanned throughout the town, collecting the remains of the megacarp, and in some cases those who had been brutally mauled by the mutant fish.

The Action

Should the party survive, they will then face interrogation and threats from the federal agents sent to cover up the mess.

If the heroes are members of law enforcement or otherwise employed by the government, it will be made clear that their careers and pensions are on the line if they talk to the media. Private citizens will be told to keep silent or be in violation of federal law concerning national security. Unruly or aggressive citizens will be arrested and taken away. They will be found days later by the side of the road, with no memory of the past five days.

Nothing to see here. Move along.

ROLL CREDITS

Several NPCs may prove useful for the party, or at least may be encountered in the course of the adventure. Eric Roberts is the mayor of Vincennes, and Earl Brannon is the county sheriff. Both men hold their jobs through nepotism and graft, and should prove useless during the crisis (assume they go out of the way to protect themselves). Law enforcement in Vincennes is split between the county sheriff and the Vincennes Police Department headed by Eli “Bunny” Wright, a man who holds his position through smart politicking and graft, but one who will lay his life on the line to protect his town. The fire department and emergency services department are both headed by Geoff Stainwright, a career firefighter and hard-nosed fire chief. Dr. Felix Richards, the head of VU’s biology department, will be able to identify the fish scales or any megacarp remains as belonging to some variant of Asian silver carp.

Without heroic involvement, several individuals will otherwise stand out as being instrumental in the defense of Vincennes (and can be used to beef up the PCs). Sergeant Sean Bailey of the VPD, a 10-year veteran of the force and single father of three, leads a posse of armed citizens against school Alpha. Sgt. Bailey performs above and beyond the call of duty, and his skill as a marksman (2000 Olympic Gold Medalist) and leadership skills save many lives. Also of the VPD, Detective Harry Myers prove insightful in identifying the problem shortly before the megacarp swarmed out of the river. His keen investigational skills and quick thinking help to save the women and children in the Halstead Halfway House for Battered Women (three blocks south of Main, on Second Street). David Sanders, an Iraq War veteran and paramedic, comes to the aid of several stranded and injured citizens. His medical skills saves countless lives, as does his ability with a sidearm. Finally, Jake Saunders – the Vincennes Tribune’s chief investigative reporter – was on the case from the beginning. His constant poking into the train wreck, following of leads, and general professionalism would have averted the massacre . . . if any one had listened. It is from his account of the terrible events that befell this sleepy town that we draw our adventure. Lastly, presented below are the **GURPS** statistics of the menace, the dreaded megacarp.

Heroes to goldfish everywhere.

MEGACARP

Megacarp resemble the Asian silver carp that they once were, having long heavy bodies and bright shiny scales. The mutant version described here grows to over 3’ in length and weighs upwards of 100 lbs. Their ventral fins are elongated and form stubby legs, and they have developed a simple lung-like apparatus. Unlike the original silver carp stock, megacarp have developed toothy maws and predatory instincts. Despite their bulk and short legs, megacarp are capable of amazing feats of jumping and climbing. Their senses of sight and hearing are not as acute when out of the water, but they do possess a heightened sense of smell.

ST: 16	HP: 16	Speed: 6.25
DX: 12	Will: 10	Move: 6
IQ: 2	Per: 10	Weight: 100 lbs.
HT: 13	FP: 13	SM: 0
Dodge: 9	Parry: NA	DR: 1

Bite (14): 1d cutting.

Traits: Acute Senses (Smell) 2; Amphibious; Doesn’t Breathe (Gills); Horizontal; Teeth (Sharp); Wild Animal.

Skills: Acrobatics 12; Brawling 14; Climbing 12; Tracking 12.

EPILOGUE

Along the Wabash River, just south of Vincennes, a small hole dug into the riverbank goes unnoticed. Inside are hundreds of golf-ball-sized, red fish eggs. Slight movements of stout legged fry can be seen through the semi-translucent casings. One thought hangs in the air . . .

It’s not over.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ken Spencer is a freelance writer and stay-at-home dad. He greatly enjoys writing for *Pyramid*, as well as for Chaosium and Alephhtar Games. Somehow, he also finds time for a monthly column, “A Bit of History,” on rpg.net. Ken lives near the Wabash River in southern Indiana, with his wife, their son, her dog, his cat, and everybody’s fish.

CHASE CARDS

GURPS Action 2: Exploits introduces an excellent chase system (*Exploits*, pp. 31-35). However, there are many options to keep track of, some of which may not be relevant to all situations. In addition, sometimes choices must be made in secret, such as the case when both pursuer and quarry are in poor visibility (see *Exploits*, p. 32). The *Chase Cards* are an attempt to help out gaming groups in both situations.

RANGE CARDS

The five range cards correspond to the *Range Band Table* entries (*Exploits*, p. 31). The GM should tip the current range card sideways, lift it up, or place a marker upon it, to let everyone know what the current range is.

PLOT POINT CARDS

In addition, there are four *Plot Point* cards. These cards are designed to be tucked in under a relevant range card, to indicate Something Interesting that happens during the chase. For example, the GM might decide that, when the pursuing heroes close from Medium to Short, there will be a fruit cart in their way; he makes a note that this is what *Plot Point #1* represents, and tucks the card under the Short range card (since that's when it is "activated"). Of course, the GM could do this privately, without the publicly visible card, but some groups like

the anticipation of know that Something Interesting will be happening when they get closer (or farther) in their chase.

If the GM likes random events, he can assign something interesting to all four Plot Points, shuffle this mini-deck, and deal one or all of these cards face-down before placing the range cards atop them.

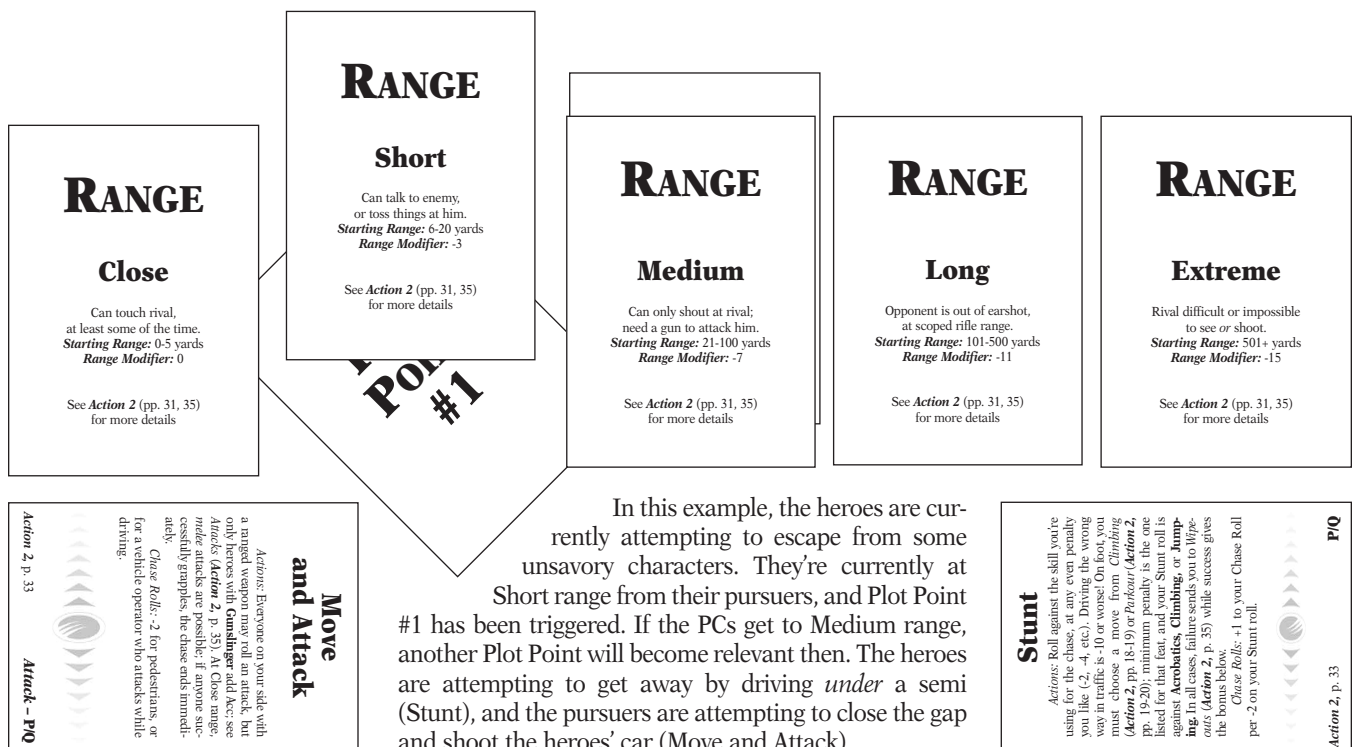
MANEUVER CARDS

The 18 cards on pp. 20-21 represent all the maneuvers possible in a **GURPS Action** chase. Each side (pursuer and quarry) needs their own cards. (Of course, in a three-way chase – *Exploits*, p. 34 – the third party will need his own set, too.) Each card contains almost all of the information found in the rules, albeit with most examples and ancillary cases trimmed for space. Page references in the lower-left corners indicate where to look for more information, should it be needed.

The lower-right corner displays whether the card can be used by pursuer, quarry, or both. In addition, the five possible attack actions (*Exploits*, p. 35) are also marked in that corner.

Finally, the three possible passenger actions – plus "Other Tasks" – also have their own cards, enabling those on the sidelines to participate. (See *Exploits*, p. 33, for more info.)

In use, each side picks the card that represents its maneuver, and places it face up in most situations, or face down if needed (again, see *Exploits*, p. 32, for more info).



RANGE

Close

Can touch rival,
at least some of the time.
Starting Range: 0-5 yards
Range Modifier: 0

See *Action 2* (pp. 31, 35)
for more details

RANGE

Short

Can talk to enemy,
or toss things at him.
Starting Range: 6-20 yards
Range Modifier: - to -6

See *Action 2* (pp. 31, 35)
for more details

RANGE

Medium

Can only shout at rival;
need a gun to attack him.
Starting Range: 21-100 yards
Range Modifier: -7

See *Action 2* (pp. 31, 35)
for more details

RANGE

Long

Opponent is out of earshot,
at scoped rifle range.
Starting Range: 101-500 yards
Range Modifier: -11

See *Action 2* (pp. 31, 35)
for more details

RANGE

Extreme

Rival difficult or impossible
to see or shoot.
Starting Range: 501+ yards
Range Modifier: -15

See *Action 2* (pp. 31, 35)
for more details

PLOT POINT #1

PLOT POINT #2

PLOT POINT #3

PLOT POINT #4

Attack

Actions: Everyone on your side with a ranged weapon may roll an attack, adding his weapon Acc; see *Attacks (Action 2, p. 35)*.

Chase Rolls: Static maneuver.



Action 2, p. 32

Attack – P/Q

Disembark/ Embark

Conditions: Must be in a vehicle to leave one, or have access to a vehicle to board one; the latter requires suitable scenery or Lucky Break.

Actions: Make a vehicle control roll to start a vehicle (or *hotwire* it; *Action 2, p. 23*); if you fail, you can try this maneuver again next round. Passengers can attack with ranged weapons; see *Attacks (Action 2, p. 35)*.

Chase Rolls: Static maneuver.



Action 2, p. 32

Attack – P/Q

Emergency Action

Conditions: If you experienced a close call last round, you *must* do this (or Stop); otherwise, you can't choose this maneuver. See *Wipeouts (Action 2, p. 35)*.

Chase Rolls: -5.



Action 2, p. 32

P/Q

Force

Conditions: Round starts at Close range and you're in a vehicle that could strike your rival's (no boats forcing motorbikes off the road!).

Actions: Roll against vehicle operation skill to hit. Target may attempt a vehicular dodge. If you hit, your target must make a vehicle control roll at -1/+1 per 5 full points by which your vehicle's ST is higher/lower than his vehicle's ST; e.g., if you have a HMMWV (ST 72) and he's in a sports car (ST 57), he rolls at -3. Failure sends him to *Wipeouts (Action 2, p. 35)*. Passengers can attack with ranged weapons; see *Attacks (Action 2, p. 35)*.

Chase Rolls: -2.

Action 2, p. 32

Attack – P/Q

Hide

Conditions: Round starts at Medium range or greater; suitable scenery or Lucky Break.

Chase Rolls: -10 at Medium range, -5 at Long range, or +0 at Extreme Range. On foot, you must make your Chase Roll against **Stealth**. If you win the Quick Contest of Chase Rolls, then your foe shoots right past! You may opt *either* to escape, ending the chase, *or* to pull out behind your rival at Close, Short, or Medium range, making you the pursuer next round. If you *don't* win, your pursuer is automatically at Close range!

Action 2, p. 32

Q

Mobility Escape

Conditions: Either a *mismatched* chase (e.g., air vs. land vehicle) or suitable scenery or Lucky Break. A Lucky Break can enable a Mobility Escape even if your opponent is equally mobile; e.g., in a foot chase, you could board the subway and flee your pursuer.

Chase Rolls: If your pursuer truly can't follow you, his maneuver is treated as static even if it otherwise wouldn't be, on this and all future rounds. He can, however, use his own Lucky Break to prevent this (e.g., board that subway himself) if he doesn't select a static maneuver.

Action 2, p. 32-33

Q

Mobility Pursuit

Conditions: Either a *mismatched* chase or suitable scenery or Lucky Break. A Lucky Break can allow this even when both parties are traveling the same way – e.g., you catch a ride on a conveyor belt to cheat in a foot chase.

Chase Rolls: +5. If you win, you *must* use any range shift to reduce range.

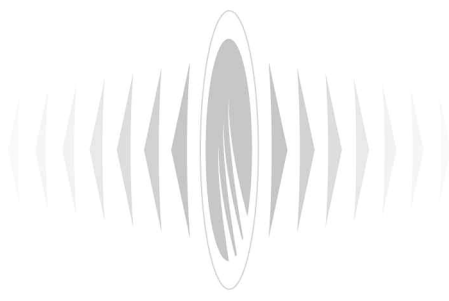


Action 2, p. 33

P

Move

Chase or flee your rival using sheer skill and speed. This is the "default" maneuver: no conditions apply, there are no Chase Roll modifiers, and nobody attacks (take Move and Attack for that).



Action 2, p. 33

P/Q

Move and Attack

Actions: Everyone on your side with a ranged weapon may roll an attack, but only heroes with **Gunslinger** add Acc; see *Attacks (Action 2, p. 35)*. At Close range, *melee* attacks are possible; if anyone successfully grapples, the chase ends immediately.

Chase Rolls: -2 for pedestrians, or for a vehicle operator who attacks while driving.



Action 2, p. 33

Attack – P/Q

Ram

Conditions: Round starts at Close range *and* you're in a vehicle that could strike your rival.

Actions: Roll against vehicle operation skill to hit. The target may attempt to dodge. If you hit, each of you rolls thrust damage for your vehicle's ST, subtracts the target vehicle's DR, and applies injury to vehicular HP. A pedestrian uses *his* ST and HP if run over. If your quarry did a Reverse this round, *double* damage for both of you! Anyone operating a vehicle involved in a Ram must make an unmodified vehicle control roll; on a failure, see *Wipeouts* (**Action 2**, p. 35).

Chase Rolls: -2.

Action 2, p. 33

Attack – P



Action 2, p. 33

Q

Reverse

Chase Rolls: -10. On foot, you can opt to make your Chase Roll against **Acrobatics**. In all cases, regardless of the Quick Contest of Chase Rolls, failing your roll sends you to *Wipeouts* (**Action 2**, p. 35). If you win *and* don't wipe out, you're the pursuer next round! Win or lose, range automatically becomes Close.

Be warned that if your pursuer picks Ram, both of you will take double damage if he hits!



Action 2, p. 33

P/Q

Stunt

Actions: Roll against the skill you're using for the chase, at any even penalty you like (-2, -4, etc.). Driving the wrong way in traffic is -10 or worse! On foot, you must choose a move from *Climbing* (**Action 2**, pp. 18-19) or *Parkour* (**Action 2**, pp. 19-20); minimum penalty is the one listed for that feat, and your Stunt roll is against **Acrobatics**, **Climbing**, or **Jumping**. In all cases, failure sends you to *Wipeouts* (**Action 2**, p. 35) while success gives the bonus below.

Chase Rolls: +1 to your Chase Roll per -2 on your Stunt roll.



Action 2, p. 33

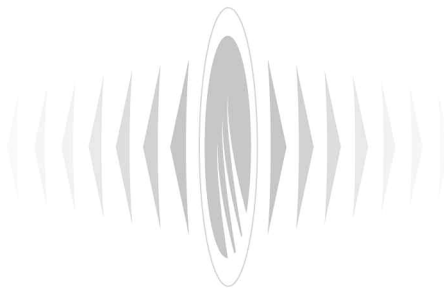
P/Q

Stunt Escape

Conditions: Suitable scenery or Lucky Break.

Actions: Execute a Stunt exactly as usual, but declare that you're using the scenery or Lucky Break specifically to *escape*.

Chase Rolls: +1 to your Chase Roll per -2 on your Stunt roll. If your pursuer responds with Stunt at the same penalty or worse, he receives his Stunt bonus; if he has superior mobility and responds with Mobility Pursuit, he gets +5. Either way, the Quick Contest of Chase Rolls proceeds normally. If he picks any other maneuver, however, treat it as static even if it normally isn't, on this and all future rounds.



Action 2, p. 34

Q

Attack

If the vehicle operator took a suitable maneuver, a passenger can attack; see *Attacks* (**Action 2**, p. 35).

Action 2, p. 33

Attack – Passenger

Board

If the round starts at Close range, a passenger can try to board an enemy vehicle! Roll a Quick Contest of **Acrobatics** or **Jumping** vs. the opposing driver's vehicle skill. Each contestant adds his vehicle's speed bonus. If the passenger wins, he leaps aboard the enemy vehicle and can continue to attack those on board as if at Close range – a distraction that gives the enemy driver -2 to Chase Rolls. If he ties, or loses by 1-4, he stays on his own vehicle. If he loses by 5+, he falls out, is run over as if the target vehicle had done a Ram on him (or falls, if he jumped from an aircraft), and is out of the chase.

Action 2, p. 33

Passenger

Seize Control

If a vehicle's operator is down due to injury, a passenger can take over the controls to continue the chase. He must take Emergency Action next round (instead of Stop); after that, he can participate normally. He can also try this after boarding a hostile vehicle. If the driver, or a passenger who wishes to seize control from a subdued driver, opposes him, roll a Quick Contest of **DX**, **Judo**, or **Wrestling** each round. The winner controls the vehicle, but at -5 due to the ongoing struggle.



Action 2, p. 33

Passenger

Other Tasks

A passenger can try any noncombat task possible for someone outside the chase: disarm a bomb, treat an injured ally, etc. This is at -2 if the vehicle delivers or receives a Force or a Ram, or -5 if the driver tries Emergency Action, Reverse, Stunt, or Stunt Escape.



Action 2, p. 33

Passenger

OPERATION SUN DOG

AGAINST THE FOURTH REICH IN NEUSCHWABENLAND

BY J. EDWARD TREMLETT

In 1938, the Third Reich undertook a brief exploration of Queen Maud's Land in Antarctica, renaming it Neuschwabenland. The initial exploration was for scientific purposes, but that didn't stop them from using the area for their own military advantage during World War II. They erected an outpost in underwater caves, and created a submarine base, functional "flying saucers," and a laboratory for developing vril power – an advance that could have won the war.

In July of 1943, the Americans sent a commando raid to deny the outpost to the enemy. Its hard-earned success brought about both the end of Nazi Germany's hold over Antarctica and exploitation of vril, or so Allied Intelligence thought. However, decades later, the remnants of the Third Reich found a way back, and they have carefully and quietly rebuilt what had been destroyed.

Now Army Intelligence has learned that the Ice Palace is back in action. Details have been lost in the intervening years, so they don't know the full story. They have no idea that, when the commando raid went off, the Nazi base was suffering a strange and dangerous malady – one that aided the commando raid, but also caused a near-total massacre of the team.

They have no idea that the same sickness has erupted yet again and could go on to infect the outside world . . .

Operation Sun Dog is a one-shot scenario that utilizes the rules from **GURPS Action 1** and **2**. It gives a group of four to seven PCs a chance to shine against an amazing experiment, a stricken and divided enemy, a deadly plague, and one of the most inhospitable places on Earth. It presents the general narrative of the adventure, details on the plague, Basic Abstract Difficulty (BAD) levels, and ideas on concluding the scenario. It also gives the history of the Ice Palace, information on

vril-powered Nazi "round aircraft," and tips on creating adventurers using **GURPS Action 1: Heroes**.

PREPARATION

The heroes are in the U.S. Army, specializing in extreme cold-weather operations. If it helps, tell the players to think of a strike team like the one from the movie *Predator*: They've worked together for some time, have complementary skills – and each others' back – but don't hew to "realistic" methods of military operation.

One of the heroes should be the team leader, with another adventurer ready to assume command if need arises. There can be up to 10 people in the team, so six to three members could be NPCs. If something happens to a PC, the GM could hand the player an NPC, so he can continue play.

This is a commando-style scenario, so the primary recommended lens is military, along with security, law enforcement, athlete, or survivalist. The group *needs* a competent medic, a multilingual wire rat, and a demolition man, and the others can be assassins and shooters. Regardless of what lens-template combination the players choose, they *must* have Guns (Rifle or Submachine Gun) and Survival (Arctic); feel free to swap out certain skills from the options given to ensure this.

To keep things simple, it's recommended that the team members be equipped with normal weaponry that's been specially modified for much colder temperatures than normal. These modifications should *not* significantly detract from normal operation – the heroes will have enough problems. As for cold-weather equipment, feel free to load up everyone with goodies from **GURPS High-Tech**, or just assume that the arctic clothing (p. B430) they've been trained to use comes with complementary military-grade gear.

Although not exactly realistic, if the heroes are famous commando freelancers (and part of an ongoing campaign), they might be asked to "volunteer" for this mission – even without direct military ties.

Dillon: Dutch, the General's sayin' that a couple of our friends are about to get squeezed, and we can't let that happen. We need the best. That's why you're here.

– Predator

PART 1: ASSIGNMENT INTERRUPTED

November 10.

It's been a long, rough flight to McMurdo. The team isn't happy to have been taken off normal operations, much less bundled into a transport plane with hardly any explanation. The long slog and the hotfoot transfers from plane to plane – each shakier than the last – has them rattled and impatient.

By the time they get out of the C-5 Galaxy and onto the Ice Runway, they're about ready to punch someone. So it's a good thing there's a large, flint-eyed officer well above their pay grade awaiting them. A stern look when they salute silences all complaint and questions, as does his finger – quickly pointed at ground transport.

"Go with them. Don't talk to anyone," he orders. "Get fed, get clean, and meet me in the briefing room at 1600. Don't make any friends. You are not here. You never were. Clear?"

Oh, are they ever.

McMurdo is a large, sprawling base that belies the extreme conditions here, even during the antarctic summer. The heroes have no chance to do any sight-seeing; after sandwiches and lukewarm coffee, and showers of variable temperature, they are quickly marched off to a private briefing room. There, the flint-eyed lieutenant colonel with no name plate is waiting, a file folder marked *TS//NOFORN* in hand.

"Gentlemen, you have a choice," he says, slapping the file down on the table. "You can stay and listen to what I have to say, or you can leave. You have a golden opportunity to do something extremely dangerous, possibly even suicidal, for your country. It's nothing you aren't ready for, but I won't think badly of anyone who wants out."

Anyone who stays gets a scary smile, followed by the opening of the file.

"Gentlemen, you will fight the last battle of World War II, right here in Antarctica. There has been a Nazi base hidden under Queen Maud's Land for the last 70 years. We thought we took care of it, back in '43. We were wrong. We need to fix that."

The nameless colonel explains that the secret base is in a cave system, under the ice. The caverns have an entrance about 10 miles inland from the current edge of the Fimbul Ice Shelf, along Longitude 0. The system was discovered by the Nazis in 1938, and exploited during the war under the code

name *Eisschloss* – "Ice Palace." It had barracks, a power plant, a submarine pen, and something much more interesting.

He snaps down an old, grainy picture. The focal point is a disc-shaped aircraft in what appears to be a vast hangar. The craft is seemingly hovering at least 20 feet off the ground. A German scientist stands under it, pointing up and smiling.

The colonel explains that the photograph is of the *Rundflugzeug-projekt*, taken in Germany in 1941. The top-secret project was to create a "round aircraft" that could hover, achieve amazing speeds, and turn on a dime. It looks like they fulfilled at least the first objective before packing the project up and moving it to Antarctica, for reasons not fully understood.

In 1943, acting on intercepted information, the army sent a small commando group to infiltrate and destroy the base. At the time, they believed the operation was extremely successful. Subsequent explorations of Antarctica, such as Operations Highjump and Windmill, revealed no further activity.

A few months ago, Army Intelligence learned that the base was reactivated in the mid-1980s. A well-connected group of South American Neo-Nazis successfully infiltrated certain South African scientific initiatives and used their material and expertise to reenter and rebuild the base. There seems to have been no contact with their South African allies after 1994, which could indicate that the project has since failed. However, the army is taking no chances, hence this mission.

Operation Sun Dog is to be a denial to the enemy. The group will be transported by submarine to the edge of the Fimbul Ice Shelf, at Longitude 0. There they will disembark, find the entrance to the base, infiltrate it, and completely destroy it. The army is not interested in recovering parts, plans, intelligence, or prisoners – they simply want this Ice Palace melted down.

The team members are going in blind and mute: There are no plans of the outpost, personnel estimates, or armament and defense detail. They cannot call for backup. Moreover, if the team fails to report back within 48 hours, they will be considered lost, and the submarine will go under the ice shelf and torpedo the area to kingdom come.

The mission will start in 48 hours – giving everyone enough time to rest up and get ready for what could be the final battle of World War II, 65 years late. They will be fully equipped with the weapons and gear they've been trained to use – with a few modifications to ensure they work at -45°F – but that's all they'll have.

A sun dog is created by sunlight reflecting through ice crystals on a very cold day. It's also been used by various organizations (such as the FBI and the Canadian military) as a mission name.

Hidden History

Much has been made of the Germans' secret Antarctic base, and the trip a pair of U-boats made there at the end of World War II. In truth, the crews were just seeing if there was anything salvageable from the base after the raid. The real action took place during the war, when the Ice Palace was in full swing.

In 1938, the German Antarctic expedition discovered a small meteorite with intriguing magnetic qualities. It was broken into smaller pieces and taken back to Germany. In 1940, the Reich's scientists discovered that it had the potential to channel energy from an unseen source – doubtlessly “vril,” a substance described by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in *The Coming Race* (first published in 1871). When meteoric metal and nickel were combined, the resulting product could create motion, electricity, or repulsion, depending on what angle the metal was turned.

The applications of the amazing alloy were obvious, especially to those involved in the *Rundflugzeug-projekt*. However, there was a serious problem: The raw ore of the meteorite was highly unstable unless kept in magnetic conditions like those found at the South Pole, and had a marked tendency to explode unless gently handled when outside those conditions. The scientists were able to make a prototype *Rundflugzeug* (seen in the photograph; see p. 23) and several banks of simpler *Feuerball* aerial mines (the infamous “Foo Fighters”), but, after a catastrophic accident, the original meteorite was gone.

It was therefore decided to go to Antarctica, search for more meteorites like the one found in 1938, and smelt the ore there *in situ*. Doing so would dovetail with another discovery that had been made in Neuschwabenland: a series of underwater caves, and a tunnel leading from them to the surface, in the Fimbul Ice Shelf. Engineers exploited the caves, intent on turning the caverns into a secret U-boat base. It would be challenging to create facilities for small-scale ore smelting within them, but not impossible.

By 1943, the base was partially functional, and the ore-smelting operation was well underway. A vril-powered generator supplied energy for the entire base. An advanced desalinization machine provided fresh water. Progress was being made on the flying saucers. The plan was to have vril-powered U-boats attacking the Allies in the south Atlantic, and “round aircraft” flying back to Europe to aid in the fight there.

But something went terribly wrong. A strange and terrible sickness erupted, claiming half the base's personnel within six months. The commander sent information and photographs of what happened on a supply U-boat, but the information was intercepted by Allied Intelligence, whose agents damaged the data so badly that only pieces remained. The fragments led Allied Intelligence to believe the Antarctic base was actually *creating* the disease, rather than suffering from it.

That misunderstanding sparked the raid in 1943. It suffered 95% casualties, but succeeded in obliterating all personnel and most traces of the *Rundflugzeug-projekt*. Some of the larger pieces and more intact plans were

later confiscated by the ultra-secret Black Box (see *Pyramid #3/17: Modern Exploration*), but that was the end of the Ice Palace – for a while. Then, in the mid-1980s, records and memories of the original 1943 raid were somehow pilfered from all postwar Intelligence Agencies, and the more secretive sections of the American Military also forgot about it – putting an end to America's regular Antarctic Nazi hunts.

Meanwhile, the sorry remnants of Nazi Germany, operating out of ODESSA-created enclaves in Argentina and Brazil, hatched a plan to get back some of what they'd lost. In 1984, they reconnected with old allies in South Africa's *Afrikaner Broederbond*, who'd risen into the higher and quieter ranks of that country's National Intelligence Service (NIS). The Fourth Reich promised them eventual access to advanced weaponry, provided they helped with relocating, resupplying, and heavy lifting. Eager to give their country a defensive edge in the Cold War, the NIS readily agreed.

Soon, Nazi agents worked alongside research scientists at the South African National Antarctic Expedition (SANAE) in the former Neuschwabenland. The agents successfully relocated the surface entrance to the *Eissschloss*, and spent the next few years carefully excavating what had been there. Within a decade, using material and machinery supposedly meant for SANAE III, they'd rebuilt much of what the 1943 raid had destroyed. They also partially relearned how to harness vril power, at least enough to recreate the Ice Palace's generator.

In 1994, apartheid collapsed, and the arrangement with the NIS ended. Some of the more deeply involved *Broederbond* administrators and agents took the last boat to the *Eissschloss*, rather than be arrested. There, they spent the next 15 years helping recreate a vril-powered base in less-than-ideal – but highly secret – conditions, occasionally aided by the diminishing Nazi presence in South America. ODESSA sent supply ships to rendezvous with the base's single, creaky U-boat on regular basis, to get them food, weapons, and equipment, but that was all the contact they had with the outside world.

The secrecy ended six months ago, when a researcher in South Africa's National Intelligence Agency discovered a cache of information regarding the *Ys Paleis*. The rather chatty file told the whole, sordid story, and indicated the whereabouts of several long-missing NIS members the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had never been able to locate.

The discovery was highly embarrassing to post-apartheid South Africa, so the NIA – not wanting to be involved – slipped the information to America's Defense Intelligence Agency through a back channel. The DIA, also embarrassed, sent it down to the Army's ultra-secret Intelligence Support Activity. The ISA has, in turn, recruited the PCs and ordered them to engage in this “no prisoners, smash and burn” operation.

The exact nature of the illness is given in *Truth and Consequences* (pp. 30-31).

The person in charge of the team isn't able to get any more from the LTC, other than a private reiteration that Army Intelligence wants everything burned, and does not care about retrieving intelligence or useful data. The colonel quietly admits that something about the base's history has them "seriously spooked," but that's all he says on the matter.

hear over the shrieking wind is the slow and dangerous cracking of the ice under their feet.

The directions are simple – follow the compass due south along Longitude 0. There's next to no chance of being spotted and shot at this far out. The main danger will be succumbing to the extreme cold, or falling through cracks in the ice.

How BAD Can an Ice Palace Be?

Operating at full personnel, with everyone well and on their toes, the Basic Abstract Difficulty (BAD) would be at least -6. However, given the sad state of things, BAD is set at -2. If the heroes are careful and stealthy, it shouldn't get worse than -3. If they forgo all attempts at being quiet, it goes to -4.

The GM should keep watch on in-game time. The base's security relies on people reporting in every hour, on the hour. If someone doesn't, someone else reports it to the base commander, and then checks it out. If he doesn't like what he finds, or don't report back within 10 minutes, the alarm is sounded, and BAD goes to -4.

Remaining personnel consists of the base commander, the assistant medic, 52 soldiers, 35 engineers, and seven scientists. They are mostly middle-aged, average persons born in the South American Nazi enclaves, with a few émigrés from South Africa. Most speak German, with some Spanish and/or English; the South Africans speak Afrikaans with some German and some English.

The Nazis are armed with 9mm auto pistols and 7.62mm assault rifles, along with large knives. None of them carry grenades for fear of cave-ins.

Each room description has an associated Contagion Check. This becomes important when the PCs are injured, and after 24 hours have passed. See *Truth and Consequences* (pp. 30-31) for more information.

Cold: The adventurers are wearing arctic clothing, which adds +5 to HT or HT-based Survival rolls. However, the temperature gives them a -4 on their roll, and the high wind requires rolls every 10 minutes.

Falling: The GM should require a random PC to roll a DX roll to see if he can stay upright when a strong gust of wind comes his way. If he fails, he tumbles down and must make a DX roll to get back up again. If he rolls a critical failure, he falls through the ice, causing thermal shock (see p. B430). Thankfully, everyone is roped together, so saving the fallen person won't be too difficult.

The group has two choices in dealing with those stricken by the cold or injured: They can either leave someone else behind to make sure the afflicted doesn't

succumb to hypothermia, or leave the hurt person behind by himself in a shelter, hopefully to pick up later. This mission doesn't have much leeway for anything else.

The entrance to the base lies just where the description said it would be. It's a large, badly weathered, 10-foot cube disguised as a shelter and equipment shack left over from SANAE III. It's painted with South Africa's colors, and warnings in Afrikaans.

The cube is actually a steel pillbox covered in wood. The hinged, steel door on the front (DR 30, HP 47) has a lock that's only operable from the inside. There's a hidden viewport above the door, allowing for 90° of night-vision forward. There are no mines, tripwires, or external traps.

What do the commandos do is up to them. Do they crawl forward under the cover of the wind, blow the door, and rush in? Sneak around the sides or back, looking for mines and tripwires? Make some kind of distraction, wait to see if someone comes out, and shoot him?

If the team sneaks forward, they might be spotted by the lone sentry, but he won't attack them. Instead, he opens the door and staggers toward them, mistaking them for the rescue team he's deluded himself into thinking is coming.

"Please help us," he loudly and desperately begs in German. "Everyone is sick."

PART 2: ONTO THE ICE, INTO THE OUTPOST

November 12.

The submarine shakes and creaks as it surfaces. Horrible groaning noises reverberate through the hull, and then, after a final, loud cracking, there's nothing.

The team members synchronize their watches to local time and go up through the tower, one after the other, and into the blinding, biting, stark white wind. There is no horizon, no sky, and no sun – only the submarine and the cracked, heaving ice around it.

They tie a safety line, jump off the gangplank, and then they're off. The wind is so loud in their ears – and the concentration to stay on their feet so all-consuming – that they don't even hear the sub slip back under the ice, not too far behind them.

They are now past the point of no return.

This part of the adventure is the most arbitrarily deadly. The heroes must make it 10 miles to the outpost in white-out conditions, in -40°F, with the wind a steady 30 mph with sudden gusts up to 60. They will not be able to see more than 10 feet in front of their faces at the best of times, and all they can

Aside from wind, cold, and sunburn, adventurers in Antarctica should be careful about crevasses, or cracks in the ice. Even a light dusting of snow can hide these foot traps from view.

The heroes have a free shot before the guard realizes his mistake. In the windy white-out, a shooting won't alert anyone inside. However, blowing the door or tossing a grenade will cause someone inside to wonder what's up, and lead to an increase in BAD (see *How BAD Can an Ice Palace Be?* on p. 25).

The inside of the pillbox consists of a wood table and chair, some long-emptied ration packs, and a canteen full of melted snow. There is a working electric heater, and an intercom leading to the checkpoint, below, which has been smashed. There is also a working alarm button that, if sounded, would ring klaxons throughout the base. It's clear the sentry had been here for some time, and not been in good hygiene, judging from the smell.

In the back center of the floor is a thick, round, metal porthole that can only be opened from this side. Tugging it up produces a rush of pressurized air that carries a nasty, musty smell, and reveals a hatchway three feet in diameter, going down at least 30'. There are metal rungs along the wall, and a pulsing, yellowish light comes from the open porthole at the bottom.

Once down the hatch, it's obvious that the bottom porthole is – like its twin up top – made to be opened from the outside of the hatchway. It seems to be a security measure, and should therefore be shut, but instead it's hanging open (see *Beware an Open Door*, below). An intercom by the hatch allows two-way communication between this room and the pillbox (or would have if the upstairs unit was working).

Beware an Open Door

The hatchway is cunningly trapped to corral invaders. If the top hatch is left open for more than 10 minutes, a timing mechanism starts. If no one closes the top hatch within the next 50 minutes, the bottom hatch shuts and locks down. The hatch remains locked until released by a special button in the Commander's Office. The locking mechanisms are inside the hatchway. The hatch and hatchway are made of secure metal (DR 30, HP 47). Blasting in the checkpoint runs the risk of a cave-in.

The checkpoint it opens into is a metal room, measuring 15' by 15', with a large table with an electric heater under it, four chairs, and an empty cabinet intended for rifles and ammunition. There are six places on the wall to hang arctic gear, four of which are taken up. The gear is a style that was popular in the 1980s.

There's a dead guard at the table, wearing a gas mask. He seems to have shot himself fairly recently. A note near his hand says, in German, "Do not enter. We are already dead."

There's a single door, opposite the porthole; it's metal (DR 30, HP 47) and has a one-inch viewpoint made of thick glass. The door can be opened, locked, or barred from either side; it's locked from *this* side, and the corpse has the key.

There is an intercom unit by the door, with an alarm button next to it. This intercom communicates to one outside the checkpoint door; another one to the guard station in the main hallway, and another inside the door to the living quarters.

No Contagion Check for this room.

PART THREE: ENTER THE ICE PALACE

The commandos have their mission, but they alone decide if they follow their orders to the letter. The GM can present opportunities for negotiation, cooperation, compromise, and surrender – though the latter might not be a very good idea. For details on the Contagion Check, see *How BAD Can an Ice Palace Be?* on p. 25 and *Effects of the Infection* on p. 30.

The Main Hallway

The half-mile long, mostly straight passageway leading from the checkpoint door to the living quarters (see below) is a rock tunnel that runs roughly north to south. The passage has been partially excavated to provide an eight- to 10-foot ceiling and an even, 15° angle of descent. Yellowy light fixtures illuminate the area every 30 feet. The tunnel is an unheated -15°F, and has several dangerous, icy patches, but its floor is secured with ridged, metal plates for walking.

The walls have intermittent, large patches of bright red, almost fluorescent, pin mold. The patches seem to pulsate, and red clouds are created in the slightest breeze.

Halfway down is a guard station with two chairs and an electric heater unit. A very nervous guard wearing a gas mask is here, just visible to the naked eye from the checkpoint door's viewpoint. He's still rattled from the checkpoint guard's suicide, and the pillbox guard's refusal to come back. Confused and partially deaf from the mask, he will have a hard time hearing the checkpoint door open.

An intercom unit is here, along with an alarm button, and a full cabinet of rifles and ammunition. The guard's supposed to check in with the living quarters once every hour, on the hour. He has the key to the checkpoint door, but not the living quarters.

Contagion Check is HT-2.

The Living Quarters

At the end of the main hallway is a door just like the checkpoint door. It is locked and barred from the inside, and has an intercom and alarm button nearby, but no guard is watching it. The guard in the main hallway is supposed to use the intercom to say he's coming back, and then bang on the door to be let in. He would then be quizzed as to his health.

Beyond the door is a heated, 120'-long, 10'-wide, 7'-high steel hallway, also running from north to south. It has a concrete floor, and yellow bulbs every 20 feet, alternating sides. After the first 15 feet, there are thin, unlocked metal doors on either side, every 30 feet, for a total of eight doors.

It may seem ironic given the amount of snow that's everywhere and its proximity to the ocean, but one of the greatest dangers in Antarctica is fire. The entire region is a desert! Anyone familiar with Antarctic life would know this danger, and a fire on the base would cause panic among its personnel.

The trench is also said to have caves, warm water lakes, and is supposed to be suitable for human habitation. We have compiled some wild stories of subs heading south to this Neuschwabenland, under the continent and coming out south of New Zealand.

– Daniel Wyatt, *The Falcon File*

The first door on the left is the sick bay (below), the first door on the right is the makeshift quarantine (below), and every door thereafter leads to a barracks (below). Each room is 15' long and 30' wide. At the end of the hallway is another thick, metal door with an intercom and an alarm button, and beyond that is the main cavern (below).

The walls have been visibly scrubbed clean. Buckets of stinking disinfectant and well-worn brushes are everywhere.

No Contagion Check in the hallway.

Sick Bay

The well-lit room is a dedicated medical facility. There's a desk across from the door, a small surgical area on the north side, and six cots on the south. Steel cabinets all over the room are filled with medical records, medical supplies, and surgical tools and supplies. Moveable curtains provide some privacy around the surgical area. There are two electric heaters, an alarm button, and an intercom that connects with the quarantine (below), the U-boat dock (p. 28), and the commander's office (p. 28).

There are six men on the cots – three sedated and three almost dead. The sedated men are chained down and possess terrible wounds infected by red, feathery fungus that pulses with their heartbeat. The three others are horrifically deformed: faces missing from lower jaw to forehead, the gaping cavities filled with obscene, pulsing growths of the pin mold.

The beefy, insane medic is hiding behind the desk, wearing a gas mask. He picks a genuinely scary moment to jump up and attack the heroes with scalpels. He has the key to this room and the quarantine (see below), across the hall.

Contagion Check is HT-2.

Quarantine

The door to this room is locked, and the medic has the key. The well-lit room is a mirror image of the medical facility (see above), except that it has been turned into a makeshift quarantine. Everything but the cots has been removed.

Inside the room are three skeletons covered in black, suppurating tissue shot through with massive, bright red fungal growths. An aged Polaroid camera lies nearby to take a photographic record of how quickly the mold consumes the dead.

Contagion Check is HT-3.

Barracks

Each 10'-long, 30'-wide room can house up to 30 men, sleeping in bunk beds. There are supply cabinets filled with clothing and personal effects by each bed, two light bulbs under glass, two electric heaters, and an intercom to the front and back doors of the main hallway. A dry sink with a mirror above it is against the right wall, and a closet-like bathroom lies left of the mirror. Each bathroom has a portable chemical toilet, the smell of which is barely noticeable over the disinfectant the occupants have been feverishly using.

The rooms contain between five and 15 men at any given time, all armed and nervous. They have two to four gas masks and enough ammunition, food, and water enough to last them some time.

No Contagion Check in these rooms.

Main Cavern

Beyond the living quarters is a large, unheated, irregularly shaped cavern that measures 350' long and 370' wide at its lengthiest points, and is around 70' high. It's illuminated by powerful lights on a 40'-high tower near the cavern's center. Metal plates run from the living quarters to all points of interest, including the unfinished submarine pen.

The east half of the cavern is mostly taken up by a deep, kidney-shaped pool leading out to the ocean. The U-boat dock runs alongside its middle, and a 5'-thick, 6'-tall metal wall acts as a levy. A 30' unloading crane and many barrels of petrol stand at the ready. An old but clearly working U-boat is docked there.

At the southern end of the pool is an abnormally large desalination station. The massive, thumping conglomeration of tubes, pipes, and cylinders pumps water to storage tanks nearby.

On the west side of the cavern is a 40'-wide and 20'-high opening to another, large, unlit cavern, which is the unfinished U-boat pen (p. 29). North of that opening is an immense pile of twisted metal, burned wood, and other detritus left over from the 1943 raid. Several well-lit tables stand nearby, with objects being reassembled on them.

The rest of the cavern is filled with three metal huts (50' wide, 100' long, 30' tall; see pp. 28-29) and a 10'-by-10' shed (p. 29).

In an optimistic-enough GURPS Action campaign, infected heroes can be the beginning of a new story. "We've stabilized your condition for now; there's a 24-hour window to find a cure. We have evidence of a former-Soviet research lab working on a 'panacea' . . ."

The huts are lined up parallel to one another, east to west, with 10' separating them. The shed is close to the light tower, and is the nexus point for several thick electrical cables that snake to all buildings.

All three huts are mostly hollow, and made so that the front (facing the submarine pen) can be rolled away to allow passage for things 40' wide and 15' tall. They are heated, and their outside are completely covered with fungus.

Anyone who hasn't been encountered yet should be in this cavern, mostly in the huts. Five men are in the pile of junk, looking for useful things. Two armed, two-man patrols are on constant rotation, going from hut to hut, to the living quarters' door, the U-boat pen, desalinizer, shed, and back again. Everyone wears gas masks outside the buildings, and rely on dwindling supplies of disinfectant while inside.

The cavern is filled with large patches of the fungus, with concentrations becoming greater the closer one gets to the middle hut.

Contagion Check on the cavern is HT-3.

U-Boat Dock

The dock connects at the steel wall's western promontory, and goes straight for 20', alongside the U-boat. It has an intercom that connects with the sick bay (p. 27) and the commander's office (below), and an alarm button. The crane runs on vril power. Several full, large barrels of petrol are nearby. All surfaces are slick with feathery, pulsing fungus. No personnel are stationed here.

The U-boat is U-885: a type IXD craft, measuring about 287' long. This particular long-range submersible carried several fleeing Nazis to South America, and was modified to become a supply ship for the Ice Palace. It carries up to 63 men, fares about 21 knots when surfaced and seven when submerged, and has a maximum depth of about 750'.

The U-boat has been modified to operate in cold temperatures and carry building supplies. It also runs on vril, so it can cruise at high speed indefinitely so long as the air holds out and the engines keep up. It has four working torpedoes, and no deck guns.

The pool widens out considerably underwater, giving the U-boat room to turn around. It connects to a 65' wide and 75' tall undersea passage that leads out and down in a northwesterly direction for 210', and then slopes upwards to the north for another 60'. After that is the ocean, where a large, sonar-founding rock formation around the passage's opening keeps these caves a secret. One good torpedo strike would send those rocks crashing down, effectively blocking it up.

Hut One

Most of the first hut is taken up with the *Rundflugzeug-projekt*. The back part is walled off to create an office for the base commander (below). A complete, one-man prototype

(the one from the photo, painstakingly rebuilt) sits next to two others in different stages of completion. Around them are power tools, mechanical parts, and top secret plans in scribbled, hard to read German. There is no intercom or alarm button, here.

There are usually between 10 and 15 scientists here, working in eight-hour shifts to complete and perfect three working *Rundflugzeug*. They've had to work from what little was left undamaged in 1943, what they've brought in since then, and what they've learned – and backward engineered – from the notes.

Contagion Check here is HT-1.

Vril-Powered Flying Saucer 101

Anyone who pokes around the aircraft discovers that it operates unlike any he's seen. No visible signs of propulsion, altitude control, or turning mechanisms. No gas tank, engine, or landing gear. And the control panel is only a strangely stylized wheel!

The secret is a small but complex machine behind the pilot's seat. Inside are three gyroscopes in a line, each with a small "coin" of meteoric ore in its center. Their spinning provides the power to hover, move, and produce enough electricity to power the craft's other systems. This is what makes the vril-powered *Rundflugzeug* so extraordinary.

The prototype could carry up to three average-sized people right out of the cavern, provided there is a way out. However, it wouldn't be able to go through the underwater passage; the water would short out the machine, and the pilot would likely freeze to death thereafter.

Commander's Office

The walled-off area has a simple door, which leads to a wide office cluttered with old, burned papers and records. A large desk dominates the north side, behind which sits the aged, overweight base commander. He has an intercom on his desk that connects with the sick bay (p. 27) and the U-boat pen (p. 29), an alarm button, and the button that releases the checkpoint hatch (thoughtfully labeled "Hatch Button" in German, Spanish, and Afrikaans). He also has few fully loaded rifles to fight off the armed insurrection he thinks the South Africans are planning, a pistol with one bullet left, and several bottles of fine, South American wine to help forget his troubles.

On his desk is the WWII base commander's journal, recently found buried in the wreckage pile. In keeping with the base's bad luck, it was located just after the plague came back, and only now does he know the whole story of what happened (in *Hidden History*, p. 24). Apparently the original medic had just discovered that the fungus came from the meteorite, but he had no equipment to develop an antidote. Then the Americans came, and that was that.

GURPS WWII: Motor Pool has WWII-era ships and other vehicles. *Pyramid #3/11: Cinematic Locations* includes a description of a World War I U-boat, including maps, which could be adapted for this adventure if the team managed to get on the sub.

The commander is demoralized and garrulous, and, being more than slightly inebriated, gladly tells the PCs what he knows. If they'd rather just shoot him, the book has been thoughtfully marked to the start of the 1943 plague, and the day just before the original raid. He also has records of the base's rediscovery, rebuilding, and continued operations all the way back to 1984; they may not reveal anything useful to the scenario, but should burn quite well.

No Contagion Check in this room.

A Tale of Two Leaders

Hermann Mann, the base commander, is an extremely sad fellow. A son of a fleeing, high-ranking Nazi, he was groomed to bring about the Fourth Reich, but whatever hopes he had of fulfilling his father's dreams have long since left. He kept up appearances for morale, but now that the plague has ravaged his command, he makes almost no attempt to conceal how little he cares. He knows it's only a matter of time before everyone dies, or the South Africans mutiny on him.

Magnus Vorster, technically second-in-command, is extremely frustrated. He was one of the NIA administrators who brokered the deal with the Fourth Reich, and then fled South Africa when Apartheid fell. He'd hoped they could one day retake their home country, but he has realized this may be impossible. Worse, this plague has destroyed all remaining morale, and shown up Mann for the joke he is.

There are 35 Afrikaners among the remaining personnel, and all are loyal to Vorster. They merely wait for a signal from their leader – usually brooding in the unfinished U-boat pen – to take control of the Ice Palace. The commandos' presence in the base may be the tipping point.

Hut Two

The second hut has the all-important ore-smelting facility. The small but powerful smelter sits in one end of the hut, while the other end contains several meteorites and the cutting equipment used to carefully slice them. The deadly meteorite is half gone, under the main cutter. Several small ingots of high-grade nickel are nearby, waiting to be mixed with the meteorite pieces.

All surfaces within here, except for the smelter, are covered with frighteningly large patches of mold. Sickening, feathery clouds of it float around, seemingly moving on their own.

The hut is filled with gruesome pictures: exploded and burned bodies, wrecked hangars, and rooms that seem as though they were destroyed with high explosives. Under each one is a stern warning in German: "WORK SLOWLY! Haste makes death."

There are usually five scientists in here, working short, six-hour shifts. They wear gas masks and rubber suits, even in the smelter's sweltering heat.

Contagion Check is HT-5.

Hut Three

This is the multipurpose hut, which serves as kitchen, dining hall, and laundry. These days, it's hardly used, except as an overworked laundry and a point for dispensing rations. Someone is always here, in a gas mask, doing the laundry to ensure everyone has clean socks and underwear.

Every day, at noon, there's a line-up of runners for each room in the living quarters, and they're given a carefully rationed number of tins to take back. Thanks to the plague, the food will most likely stretch until the next rendezvous with a supply vessel.

The Contagion Check inside the hut is HT-1.

The Shed

Inside the shed is the vril generator for the entire Ice Palace. Its spinning gyroscope has a disc of meteoric ore the size of a manhole cover, which could create enough electricity to power 10 such bases by making the disc spin faster. Doing so would explosively overload the Ice Palace's entire electrical system, though. A guard is stationed here at all times.

Contagion Check is HT-1.

Unfinished Submarine Pen

The roughly oval-shaped space beyond the main cavern measures 100' long by 150' wide at its widest points, and 35' high at its highest. A nasty, burnt smell emanates from back here, and piles of ashen, half-burned skeletons lie everywhere. There is no mold here. A 20'-tall and 30'-wide hole in the northeast corner of the cavern leads to more caves beyond.

The cavern's southern side is dominated by a deep pool of water, measuring 50' long and 100' wide, that's shored up by a 5'-tall, 6"-thick steel wall. Steel plates intended for a submarine dock are piled up near the wall, along with a 30'-high steel gantry, a 20'-tall petrol-powered crane, and boxes of very dusty tools and equipment. There are also some old, long-unused water pumps, with hoses leading to the opening in the northeast corner.

Close to the entrance are three clunky, World War II-era excavation machines modified to run on vril. The tracked, one-person, open-top vehicles have a thick, 10'-long adjustable drill capable of boring through rock at the rate of one inch per minute. The half-ton drill bits can be replaced when they wear out, but it seems replacements have not been forthcoming: Two vehicles have seriously dull bits that would most likely get stuck.

The GM is free to ad lib the system of caverns as it goes further into the continent – mostly down, and mostly submerged with freezing water. An off branch could lead up and out, though the exit would likely be covered by hundreds of yards of ice.

There is no Contagion Check in this cavern, or any other beyond it.

For more flying saucers, deadly experiments, and science-spawned monsters, pull out a copy of GURPS Atomic Horror.

SURVIVAL AND SUCCESS

If the commandos follow their orders, burn everything, and get out within 48 hours, then the mission's rather straightforward. If they want to change their mission when they see what they're actually dealing with, the GM will need to make some decisions.

Orders Are Orders

Death, destruction, and fire can be easily arranged. There is enough petrol at the submarine bay to thoroughly consume all infected corpses, and scour all fungus-ridden surfaces clean. The huts and their contents can be taken apart with a few well-placed packs of plastic explosives, and the submarine can be easily scuttled by blowing it apart from within.

The party most likely will not have enough explosives to bring down the roof of the main cavern. However, they could easily engineer a cave-in at the living quarters, the less tall areas of the main hallway, or the hatchway. The U-855 happens to have four torpedoes that could be used to take out the rock formation guarding the underwater entrance to the cave system, but does anyone know how to pilot a WWII German U-boat?

What does the group do with sick teammates? Do they kill them here to stop the disease, or bring them along to get them treated? Or do they all elect to stay and burn for fear for letting the plague loose?

Changing Plans

Once the heroes realize they've entered a plague zone, and may be infected, they may decide to cooperate with the enemy to survive – especially if they trip the hatch trap and don't know how to fix it. They will most likely want to know how to open the hatch, as well as what's making them sick, and if there's a cure.

The question is how *much* do they cooperate? Do they offer to take compliant Nazis prisoner, rather than shooting and burning them all, in exchange for information and a way out? Do they follow through on that promise? What will they do if the South Africans activate their planned takeover of the Ice Palace at that moment? How will they get out and get all these men to safety?

Capture

There is the possibility of being overwhelmed and taken prisoner. The survivors are stripped, searched, and handcuffed to cots in the barracks. The base commander assigns a rather sadistic fellow to handle the interrogation, and gives him permission to kill one prisoner straight away to show the others they're serious, but no more than that.

Once the Nazis know what the commandos are doing there, and why, the base commander speaks with the surviving prisoners in person. He will want to know how the Americans learned the Ice Palace was back in operation, and what will happen if the team does not report back in. If he realizes there's a 48-hour countdown, he may seek to make a deal for a safe surrender for him and his men.

Not all his men will desire this. Magnus and the South Africans will doubtless learn of Mann's offer and start the coup early. There is little chance of negotiation with these desperate men with no country – letting them have the U-boat and escape may be the only way to avoid further bloodshed.

Effects of the Infection

Anyone who is wounded enough to bleed must roll against the worst Contagion Check they've encountered the entire time to avoid infection. Also, after 24 hours in the base, everyone must roll the worst Contagion Check they have encountered within that time period.

Anyone who gets a cut infected loses 1 HP per day if he fails his recovery roll (see p. B328); he regains nothing if he succeeds. The wound quickly turns into a bright red, fungus-ridden mess that spreads along with HP loss, eventually rendering limbs and organs useless.

Those who get the contagion by exposure have the spores lodged in sinuses. They lose 1 HP per day if they fail their recovery rolls, and regain nothing if they succeed. The spores sprout almost immediately, causing headaches that reduce DX and IQ by 1 for every HP the victim loses. Once the victim loses 1/3 of total HP, the gruesome, face-destroying effects occur, and the victim goes into a coma.

Penicillin and anti-fungal medication keeps the HP loss from occurring, but they do not cure the illness. A cure could eventually be found, but it would require access to laboratory equipment and biochemical expertise no one in the base has.

TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

What happened in 1943 was an unfortunate result of amateurs dealing with xenometallurgy. If the original commando raid had been given more time to study what had happened, they might have found a way to destroy the threat for good. Unfortunately, they did not. Now the world may pay the price.

In early 1943, all personnel directly involved in the smelting of the meteoric metal became sick. They complained of headaches, fevers, and strange, itching sensations. Some were clearly suffering from fungal infections, and while treatment could ease the symptoms, the disease did not go away. Worse, if any of the men were cut, their wounds developed bright red fungal infections almost immediately.

Then the walls began to turn red, as fungal patches – seemingly impervious to cold – began to erupt on the walls in the main cavern, and beyond. Soon thereafter, some of the stricken men developed sudden, horrible sinus infections.

As a further twist on this scenario, the scientists made copies of their notes and sent them out on an earlier supply run, to be passed to other agents. Perhaps there's another secret base working on its own saucers.

Their noses turned black, they went blind, and the entire face between mouth and forehead quickly collapsed into suppurating, noxious sludge within 24 to 48 hours. It was all the base's doctor could do to stabilize a few of them by radically excising all infected and surrounding tissues, but most patients died awaiting surgery.

The base doctor correctly identified the infection as a kind of *rhinocerebral mucormycosis*: a highly rare fungal infection that usually affects only weakened immune systems. However, these men were fairly healthy, even given the extreme conditions. The base medic had no answers, but after more men showed early symptoms of the disease, he realized he had an epidemic on his hands.

The Nazis did not learn, until it was too late, that one of the meteorites they were working on carried extraterrestrial fungus spores. While cutting the rock to small pieces for smelting, the spores came loose, and began to thrive in the personnel's bodies. Gas masks kept it out of the lungs, but penicillin didn't do more than slow the infections down. Nothing could be done for the walls but constant scrubbing with disinfectant.

By the time of the first commando raid, half the base had succumbed, their fungus-ridden bodies burned to ashes in the unfinished submarine pen. The remaining personnel had sealed themselves into clean rooms, walked down the main hallway only when necessary, and lived in fear of cuts, bruises, and headaches. Death was a welcome release for many of them.

Fortunately, the fire set by the original commando raid destroyed all active spores. When the new base crew got back to work, they started mining the meteorites, and eventually started using the deadly one three months ago – sparking the infection yet again. Just as before, over half the personnel are dead or dying, and the remainder live in fear of being hurt.

Unfortunately, their medic shot himself just last month when he thought he'd contracted the disease, and his assistant is next to useless at diagnosing the cause of the malady. It's all the base commander can do to keep his men from fleeing in the U-boat.

EPILOGUE

If the commandos make the rendezvous, they are met on the sub by seamen in advanced NBC suits, disarmed, and

locked up. Any prisoners they bring share the same fate. Several hours later, the sub docks alongside an unmarked medical freighter, and the visibly stricken (and any prisoners) are taken "for treatment." The rest are marched through extreme decontamination procedures, and quarantined for 72 hours.

Once proven clean, the team meets with the lieutenant colonel again. He sadly informs them their stricken teammates died in treatment, and will be given heroic but false cover stories to explain their deaths. He impresses upon them the confidentiality of the matter, and they sign their lives away on several reams of secrecy forms.

He does not answer any questions about any prisoners, except to say: "You should have followed your orders more closely."

If they're late for the 48-hour deadline, the waiting submarine considers them lost, and torpedoes the entrance to the caves – trapping the U-boat. The mysterious lieutenant colonel arranges to have the team "lost in training" near where they were picked up, and uses his ISA (or Black Box?) tricks to erase all traces of their time at McMurdo. If the team does escape thereafter, and radios McMurdo for help, they are met at the base by people in advanced NBC suits, disarmed, and marched to a waiting medical freighter. If they just appear, they'll have four hours before the freighter pulls up and confines them and everyone they've talked to.

The surviving PCs are thereafter watched by several agencies. They may be called on for even more dangerous missions, perhaps in the hopes that attrition will keep them quiet for good. They may also be recruited by the Black Box, or a similar group that needs reliable soldiers who've seen the worst things can get and kept going.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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

These subterranean philosophers assert that by one operation of vril, which Faraday would perhaps call "atmospheric magnetism," they can influence the variations of temperature – in plain words, the weather; that by other operations, akin to those ascribed to mesmerism, electro-biology, odic force, etc., but applied scientifically through vril conductors, they can exercise influence over minds, and bodies animal and vegetable, to an extent not surpassed in the romances of our mystics.

*– Edward Bulwer Lytton, **The Coming Race***

CALAMITY ROAD

BY TIMOTHY J. TURNIPSEED

“What if I told you that for less than it costs to take the family out to dinner a night a week for a year – yes! For about the same price as a big flat-screen HDTV, you would never. Have. To drive. Your car. Again!”

*“Think about it, folks. You get up early in the morning, you get in your car, and you sleep – yes, I said **sleep** – as your car drives itself to work. Grandparents too old to drive, kids too young to drive, friend too drunk to drive: It doesn’t matter. Put them in the car, tell the thing where you want it to go, and – bang! – they’re there. The car does all the work. Now what . . .”*

Behind the pitchman, a white tanker truck passing on a high mountain road wobbled, and then tumbled down the cliff toward the shot. A woman screamed off camera, and unseen others exclaimed in fear while the pitchman stared in frozen fascination. All the while, the doomed truck advanced with terrifying relentlessness, flinging dirt, rocks, and truck parts in all directions as it flipped and leaped and twisted. And then . . .

The tanker dissolved in a searing flash that coalesced into a towering mushroom cloud. Thunder exploded an instant later, and the view shook with the camera as a billowing dust cloud rolled in.

“Sorry, Al,” said someone off camera as the dust cleared. “We’re still . . .”

“That was no accident,” the pitchman snapped. “We need security. I want professionals!”

Pops Racer: You think you can drive a car and change the world? It doesn't work like that!

– *Speed Racer* (2008)

In a world where humanity is enslaved by the steering wheel, one man dares to free everyone from the tyranny of the road and the specter of sudden death. *Calamity Road* is an action adventure easily adaptable to any RPG system set in

the modern world or the near future. In it, the heroes take part in an exciting experiment that could revolutionize personal travel.

A quirky visionary has invented a device claimed to convert normal cars and trucks into robots that safely drive themselves. The inventor has set up a race in treacherous mountainous terrain to prove his device works, but sinister forces threaten to sabotage the race and bankrupt his company. Called upon to defend the experiment, the heroes must navigate more than the extreme terrain. There are drug dealers, corporate intrigue, family strife, and many other obstacles the party must overcome if they are to survive the lethal gauntlet of Calamity Road.

THE HOOK: THE AMBUSH

At some point dramatically appropriate during a previous adventure, a group of masked gunmen ambush the party. These attackers aren’t very competent, and astute heroes might note that they seem to have been given substandard equipment, conflicting goals, and lackluster strategy (“Get them!”).

Assuming any of the attackers are captured alive (and assuming the heroes can get them to talk), the ambushers reveal the following information:

- The prisoners seem confused and disoriented.
- They work for an infamous Mexican drug lord.
- Their boss is worried that more of his family members – especially his children and grandchildren – will fall victim to the endless drug war. Lately, he has become excited about making some deal he claims will allow him to surrender his illicit empire while making even more money, and all of it legal.
- The FBI and the DEA have agents working on this particular drug lord. Assuming any hero has the initiative to call these agencies (or maybe one of the party has a contact in one of those groups), he learns that everyone who attacked the party are either undercover *Federales*, moles planted by a rival drug gang, or someone who failed the drug lord in some way. The leader of the ambush is married to the drug lord’s daughter. Reportedly, said leader is an abusive husband who beats his wife frequently.

On the race day, you might find it useful to keep track of progress with counters. Car Wars Expansion Set 6: The AADA Vehicle Guide Counters is just what you need, with over 150 counters, including trucks and helicopters.

This encounter's purpose is to give the heroes some reputation (perhaps not wholly deserved) at being an effective force in dealing with this drug lord. In an ongoing campaign, this encounter might be slipped in during a quiet moment of another adventure, laying the groundwork for this one.

A Run for the Border

The attackers know where their boss lives, but challenging the boss would involve the party travelling to Mexico, assaulting a fortified hacienda protected by the best security gear and mercenaries money can buy, and ticking off the Mexicans, who do not appreciate foreigners coming into their country without permission to shoot up their citizens. If the party wants to go that route, then it requires another adventure entirely.

THE SETTING: CRAZY AL'S PITCH

Some time after the ambush, the party is contacted by Alvin "Crazy Al" York (a colorful gentleman who almost lives up to his name). He tells them that the drug lord who sent the ambush has been threatening his business, and that he is gratified the party was able to handle them so well. In addition, he wants to hire the heroes to protect his Calamity Road experiment, and will offer the group 5% shares of common stock in his corporation, York Systems. He adds that, before they make a decision, he wants them to watch a video that should answer their questions. Then either he sends them a link to download the promo, or a courier hand delivers it.

The not-quite-professional video consists mostly of Crazy Al talking, interspersed with shots of the course and the contestants. The transcript – which the GM can read verbatim, paraphrase, or hand out, as desired – is as follows.

Crazy Al: "Crazy Al here, folks, and I am going to Change! Your! Life! What if I told you that for less than it costs to take your family out to dinner a night a week for a year – yes! For about the same price as a big flat-screen HD TV, you would Never. Have. To drive. Your car. Again!

"Think about it, folks. You get up early in the morning, you get in your car, and you sleep – yes, I said *sleep* – as your car drives itself to work. Grandparents too old to drive, kids too young to drive, friend too drunk to drive: it doesn't matter. Put them in the car, tell the car where you want to go – bang! – they're there 'cause the car does all the work."

"Tell me folks. What if there was an affordable automatic pilot for your car that uses a state-of-the-art sensor array to guide you safely around any obstacle to your destination, and it can be installed in any vehicle with cruise control. Yes friends, how much would you pay to turn that car or truck sitting in your driveway or your garage right now into the high-tech smart car of the future?"

"Too good to be true? Well bang! I'm gonna prove it folks. Ol' Al's gonna put his money where his mouth is!"

(The camera follows a twisted mountain road from an aerial shot.)

"There it is, folks: Calamity Road. The sickest, most twisted racecourse you'll ever see. We've got it all: sheer climbs, roller-coaster declines, blind curves, hairpin turns, and thousand-foot drops without a hint of a guardrail. If my Pilot device can guide a vehicle through this convoluted deathtrap at highway speed, it should have no trouble with your morning commute."

The Pilot Vehicles

Crazy Al: "Now let's talk to some of the folks who've put their faith in Crazy ol' Al, huh? These three vehicles have all had a Pilot installed."

(At this point, the camera pans to the three test vehicles.)

#1: The Minivan

Crazy Al: "From one of America's largest and most storied auto manufacturers, still employing Americans to build the best cars and trucks in the world, we have Steve Shuster. Steve?"

(Pan to another man, presumably Steve.)

Steve: Thanks, Al. Folks, let's face facts. A minivan is not a sports car, nor do you take it off-road. Many people who drive our fine minivans do not do so for the joy of driving: Rather, it's a reliable way to get the whole family or the neighborhood kids from point A to point B. So why not let the thing drive itself? That's why we've taken our latest minivan, put one of Al's Pilots in it, and we fully expect to see our product safely cross the finish line. Our company is proud to be part of this historic American experiment.

#2: The Motorcycle

(As Al introduces someone else, the camera pans to a man beside a motorcycle.)

Motorcyclist: "Our motorcycles have been part of American history since World War I. Here we continue that pioneering spirit. Why not sleep on those all night rides, and trust state-of-the-art collision avoidance to protect you from all those car drivers who ignore us bikers. Just lean back, relax, and let Al's Pilot see you through."

#3: The Liquefied-Hydrogen Tanker

(Al introduces someone else as the camera pans to a bespectacled man in a fine suit with a team of people in laboratory coats standing behind him.)

Scientist: "If we are serious about reducing our carbon footprint and leaving a world that is fit for our children and grandchildren, then we must be serious about green technology."

Crazy Al's pitch video may have been shown to potential investors, who might have their own ideas of how the race should go. On the race day, there might be spectators, snipers, or saboteurs.

Hydrogen, with more power and less pollution than traditional sources of energy, promises to be a major part of the green revolution. But protectors of the status quo have trumped up fears by lying about the dangers of liquid hydrogen. A liquefied-hydrogen tanker truck is not a rolling H-bomb. In some ways, it is safer than the gasoline tanker trucks speeding to the gas pumps at your neighborhood convenience store every day. Friends, if this truck behind me can safely navigate the extreme terrain of Calamity Road, then it should have no problem driving through your town.”

(The camera pans back to Al.)

Crazy Al: “And to all my good trucker buddies out there, don’t worry! By law, there still has to be a human in the cab. On the other hand, if the Pilot device can safely guide a cluster bomb like this down Calamity Road, then bang! No more sleepless nights for you!”

Organizer: You are certainly the most distinguished group of highway scofflaws and degenerates ever gathered together in one place.

– The Cannonball Run

The Teams

Crazy Al: “What’s that, you say? There’s more traffic on your road than just a couple other vehicles? Well guess what? There’s traffic on my road, too, in the Calamity Road Race! They’ll be driving ordinary cars, just like you’d have to put with on your trips. And the stakes couldn’t be higher. Winner gets 15% shares in York Systems! Runner up gets 10% and third place gets 5%. Think of it, folks, with these miracles of modern science, my company will be worth billions of dollars. That’s ‘billion’ with a ‘B.’ Bang!”

“And the beauty of it is, since these cars will all be chasing each other as quickly as possible, there’ll be worse-than-ideal conditions on the road -- the perfect test for the Pilot!”

#1: The Princess

Crazy Al: “Move over boys, there’s a playgirl in town. From the exotic Arabian desert comes this cool drink of water, princess of the burning sands, Aisha ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb!”

(The camera pans to a beautiful young Arabic woman, smiling smugly and posing provocatively.)

Princess: “You can call me ‘Ai.’ No man commands me. No husband, no king, no one. I’ve got a way to win this race: my way!”

#2: The Planet Savers

(Al introduces two young men next to a sleek, smallish, plastic-looking car.)

Savers: “It’s long past time we quit feeding the fossil-fuel beast consuming our planet. We’re going to show the world an electric car is superior to the old, pollution-spewing gas-burning death machines by winning this race!”

#3: The Party Enemy

An NPC that is an enemy from the party’s past, and/or a recurring villain has entered a car into the race. Either the party enemy is driving the car, or a professional racer is driving it for him.

#4: The Wayward Son

Crazy Al: “Representing our brave men and women in uniform is decorated Afghan War veteran Captain Alvin Cullum York, Jr. A real American hero, Junior is not about to let the despicable terrorists who broke his body break his spirit!”

(The camera pans to a man in a wheelchair. He looks like a younger version of Crazy Al.)

Junior: “York Systems is an American company, and it should stay that way. That’s why I have to win this race.”

#5: The Trophy Wife

(Al introduces a gorgeous young woman. She speaks labored English with a Russian accent.)

Anastasia: “I am Anastasia Romanov-York, and I be proud of new home, U.S.A.! I win race for American dream. God bless America!”

#6: The Saint

(Al introduces a matronly woman. She speaks in a weepy voice.)

Saint: “Did you know that more children in this world die of diseases from filthy, polluted water than any other cause? I drive on behalf of For the Children, and if I win, then every penny will go to clean water for all the poor, suffering little disadvantaged children of the world.”

(Al now wraps up the introductions and gives the date and time of the race, which is one week from the time the PCs were contacted – or whenever the GM decides would be dramatically appropriate.)

(The video abruptly ends.)

The race is perfect for occasional players: Let them take the part of one or more of the teams.

THE MISSION: CALAMITY ROAD SECURITY

The party's mission is simple: They must ensure that the test vehicles make it to the end of the Calamity Road Race (which the test vehicles need to complete without stopping). Thus, they need to keep said vehicles from being disabled or destroyed, accidentally or otherwise. Only one test vehicle needs to survive to the end to prove the concept, but there is a bonus for saving two, and a massive bonus for saving all three.

The A.I. in Al's Pilot devices has a driving skill that is slightly better than the average human being. However, as they have been through a simulation of the course over 1,000 times each, they will flawlessly navigate the route if unmolested. The test vehicles are *not* racing. Their only job is to cross the finish line within the allotted time.

The party is allowed to bring their own vehicle, but they may have no more than three vehicles total on the course. Crazy Al will loan the party up to two military surplus Humvees. They can keep up with the test vehicles, but they don't have anything like the acceleration or top speed of racing stock cars. Nonetheless, they are considerably more resistant to ramming and bullets, and these advantages will prove handy.

Assisting the party in their mission is Shane "Copperhead" Wilson, the man flying Al's helicopter. (If one of the PCs can fly a helicopter, then Al will loan an additional small civilian helicopter for the adventurers use during the race.) The helicopter gives security an "eye in the sky" and provides documentary footage of the race.

Speaking of documentary footage, every portion of the course is covered by two or three cameras at any one time.

Each racing team has its own considerably tough security to guard the vehicles and the crews, but only Calamity Road Security (the PCs plus Wilson) are allowed on the course.

Al will not give the party weapons, but they are free to bring any of their own.

Again, as long as a single test vehicle survives the race, the party succeeds.

THE FEUD: WIFE VS. SON

The party gets two visitors the night before the race. The first is Anastasia Romanov-York, Crazy Al's 19-year-old wife. She says Al has promised to give her an additional 15% share in York Systems if she comes in first in the Calamity Road Race. Al has informed her that he secretly would prefer if as much of the company would remain in family hands as possible. She believes Junior is the biggest threat to her victory, and suggests that the party to disable or delay Junior during the race. (If it's pointed out to her that Junior is also family, Anastasia says that Al doesn't consider Junior family. Junior hates Al and defies him at every opportunity; does someone so disrespectful of his father deserve his inheritance?)

The second visitor is Alvin C. York Jr., Crazy Al's disabled veteran son. He says his father has promised to give him an

additional 15% share in York Systems if he comes in first in the Calamity Road Race. Al has informed him that Al secretly would prefer if as much of the company would remain in family hands as possible. Alvin thinks his young stepmother is a gold-digging whore who never loved his father.

Further, he has proof that she cheated on her father with Copperhead, Al's helicopter pilot. Finally, he feels that if Anastasia gets the company, it will be owned by Russians, and not Americans. After all, he has it on good authority that Anastasia's sister works for the Russian Mob. To this end, Al Jr. wants the party to disable or delay his young stepmother so he can cross the finish line before she does.

As to why he and his father do not get along, Junior explains that though Crazy Al was a successful Marine sniper in Vietnam, he grew to despise all war. Thus, he felt personally betrayed when his son joined the Army, and father and son rarely spoke after that. Still, Junior believes the rifts are starting to be healed, and he points to the fact that Al invited him to be part of this race as proof.

If it's pointed out to Anastasia or Junior that the same offer's been made to both, they both believe that this is Crazy Al's way of bringing the two of them together. (He is crazy, after all, and what better way to unite disparate individuals then by making them work toward the same goal?). If this happens, the two of them will work together . . . unless and until there is the slightest hint of betrayal by the other (real or imagined). Then they turn on each other.

ANASTASIA'S STORY

The following background is not to be shared with the party unless and until they ask questions and/or investigate the Russian on their own.

Anastasia Romanov was the sixth child of a poor Russian family overcrowded into a single apartment. Her father drank himself to death, and her mother was a school teacher who was poorly paid when she was paid at all. Anastasia's older sister turned to prostitution to keep the family fed, and inevitably became an overworked sex slave of the ruthless Russian Mafia.

Desperate not to meet the same fate, Anastasia worked hard to find other options. She eventually discovered a modeling agency. The agency promised the beautiful Anastasia that she would travel the world living the glamorous life of a supermodel, while sending home enough money for her family to live their own dreams.

It was all a lie: The "modeling agency" was a front for human trafficking. Anastasia was sent to Rio de Janeiro where it was made clear to her that she would be "working" with up to eight customers each night. But after an initial medical screening discovered the rather pious 18-year-old girl was a virgin, she was sold to a visiting wealthy American businessman: "Crazy Al" York.

Al brought Anastasia to America and married her. Further, he brought her entire family into the country, put them all up in a nice home, and began the naturalization process for each of them. A grateful Anastasia was at first quite content with her new (if much older) husband.

GURPS Autoduel is a near-future setting devoted to vehicle races. The supplement offers an overview of the world and tips for running campaigns there.

But Al had very little time for his young wife. He was so busy working on his dream that she hardly saw him at all. Eventually, she fell for Shane “Copperhead” Wilson, Al’s helicopter pilot. When Al walked in on them one day, Anastasia begged his forgiveness, and he said he forgave her.

WHAT’S REALLY HAPPENING

- Al hired the Mexican drug lord to test the party’s fitness to be Calamity Road Security. Said drug lord used the opportunity to cleanse his organization of undesirables. He also gave them poisoned tequila for a good luck toast, to make it easier for the party to kill them. Incidentally, Al sold the drug dealer some stock in his company.

- Only the Planet Savers (team #2), Anastasia (team #5), and Junior (team #4) have scruples about injuring their rivals. The other three will not hesitate to help an opponent over a cliff if the opportunity presents itself.

- The old party enemy or recurring villain – or the organization said NPC is working for – has entered two teams in the race. They have their professional driver in team #3 who is supposed to win the race, but winning the race for shares in York Systems is their Plan B. Plan A is to ruin York Systems by making sure that none of the test vehicles complete the race. This will give them the time they need to manufacture their own driverless system, for Copperhead has already sold them Al’s technology.

Their other team is #6 (The Saint). “For the Children” is a front group. Her vehicle is heavily reinforced. This slows acceleration but makes for excellent ramming. The Saint is to “accidentally” eliminate the test vehicles. After all, she’s just a well-meaning humanitarian and not a professional driver, right? Amateur drivers make mistakes . . . If subtlety proves too difficult, she has a deal with Copperhead where he will use a device in his helicopter to temporarily jam the cameras at any given stretch of road. Constant camera failure is suspicious, so the Saint will try not to overuse the trick.

- Al has sabotaged Copperhead’s helicopter; after all, he slept with his wife. The chopper will crash in spectacular Hollywood fashion at some point during the adventure. If a PC takes the initiative to inspect that helicopter before the race, and if he is very good at mechanics, the sabotage will be discovered.

- Al has a terminal disease that will probably kill him within a year. A PC would have to possess exceptional medical skills to notice the symptoms just by looking at him. The only way to be sure is for the party to somehow get a hold of Al’s medical records.

RACE DAY

Prior to the day of the event, everyone stays civil. Once the start gun announces the race’s commencement, things get wild. The specifics of the race are left to the GM, but there should be steep grades, blind curves, hairpin turns, huge drops with no guard rails . . . and plenty of gunfire. The GM may decide ahead of time which test vehicle will win, or he simply can design obstacles and a time table and use dice rolls and roleplaying to determine the outcome.

Remember that the three Pilot-controlled vehicles are all programmed to try to win – even though there is no financial incentive for the PCs, the Pilot “drivers,” or anyone else for

them to do so. This directive keeps the Pilot vehicles in the race, and makes them avoid most sensible tactics (like slowing down to 5 mph and waiting for the insane-driving human racers to pass them).

RESOLUTION

Crazy Al invested all of his money, his investors’ money, and tons of borrowed money in his invention. If none of the test vehicles cross the finish line within the allotted time, he is utterly ruined; the “failure” of the Pilot device makes the concept unmarketable.

Even if the experiment succeeds, he’s still ruined! Al has sold about 300% of the shares in his company. When this fraud is discovered, the government will seize all the company’s assets, sell them off, and distribute a pittance to its creditors. Thus, everyone who bought (or was given) shares in the company owns worthless stock.

This should send Al to federal prison, but since he will die soon, he hardly cares. Whatever happens on Calamity Road, his Pilot device works; the technology is out there. Thus, the old man leaves this world with the knowledge that he has changed it forever.

As for his son and his young Russian wife, in his eyes, they both betrayed him. It warmed Al’s heart to see them fight each other over a worthless prize.

Cledus Snow: You know who that is? That’s Mr. Evil Knieval. He snuck in my back door, son, when I wasn’t lookin’. You better flip-flop back here and gimme’ a hand, son, or we gonna be in a heap of trouble.

– Smokey and the Bandit

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

If you’re anything like Timothy J. Turnipseed “indeed,” you’re a large African-American man from Mississippi; that, and you enjoy a good story. Major Turnipseed’s extensive experiences have taken him to such exotic locales as London, Egypt, Mexico, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and of course, some particularly . . . interesting times in Afghanistan and Iraq. He’s been gaming since junior high and is an enthusiastic *Pyramid* contributor. In his day job, he teaches military history at a local university in Texas, where he constantly urges his students to run the race, keep the faith, and endure to the end.

RANDOM THOUGHT TABLE

DEFANGING THE JAWS OF DEATH

BY STEVEN MARSH, *PYRAMID* EDITOR

The old TV show *Sledge Hammer!* had, perhaps, one of the best “cliffhangers” of television history. (You might want to skip ahead a paragraph or two if you’re sensitive to spoilers . . .) For those unfamiliar with it – or needing a refresher course – *Sledge Hammer!* is the story of the titular tough-guy cop-who-doesn’t-play-by-the-rules. Devoid of a laugh track, it was nevertheless a parody of many mid-’80s action shows (most notably *Hunter*, another show with a titular tough-guy cop-who-doesn’t-play-by-the-rules). At the end of the first season in 1987, our hero encounters a nuclear bomb, which he proceeds to try to disarm (after uttering his catch phrase, “Trust me . . . I know what I’m doing”). The bomb is seen to go off – complete with mushroom cloud – and the episode ends with several shots of a completely bombed-out and ruined city. The second season begins with a recap (“Last, on *Sledge Hammer!*” voiceover; the failed-bomb-defusing scene; and the shot of the explosion), and then opens with a card and a voiceover, saying, “The following season of *Sledge Hammer!* takes place *five years before* that nuclear explosion. Thank you.” And, indeed, the rest of its second (and final) season is a “prequel” to the first one.

It’s a brilliant parody of many action-oriented shows, because it violates the first tenet of the action-adventure genre: You know the hero isn’t going to die. You know he probably isn’t going to fail in any significant way. No matter how long the chase takes, he’s going to have a chance at disarming that bomb (see p. 39).

Now, for many gaming groups, this tenet (and the rest of this column) won’t apply.

For the rest of you, you might be wondering *how* to keep player interest up when realizing the heroes can’t die could take away the tension that comes with the risk of failure. Here are some humble ideas.

DON’T WORRY ABOUT IT

The simplest answer – and, perhaps, one of the most common – is that the group simply realizes it’s a genre convention,

and enjoys the game for what it is. In this case, the participants know that the heroes will not fail in any meaningful way (or, at least, in any meaningful way at the story’s climax). The phrase “you couldn’t disarm the bomb” or “you died” would no more be used in such a campaign than the phrase “you look up and see a giant, alien, metal spaceship in the sky” would be uttered in a historical medieval-Japan game.

In this case, there isn’t much more to be said. If the players are fine with this approach and having fun, it may not matter that their heroes are never in actual peril. It’s only a game, and folks can still have fun playing something similar to *Clue* (or *Cluedo* to our international friends) where the protagonists poke around a mansion looking for a murderer, without much risk of the heroes getting slain themselves.

Still, some groups might want more options that heighten the tension without actually allowing failure. What then?

DEPUTY SERGEANT KIPPLE! Noooooooooooo!

One in-world option used often in action movies and comic books is to give the heroes plenty of associates – ideally ones that provide an emotional stake. Did the PC fail to make a dodge roll required to avoid a hail of bullets? Then maybe a love interest leaps in front of the gunman to intercept the lethal gunfire – with fatal consequences, of course.

All long-running superhero comics have had dozens of these ancillary members. Some of these folks have been around for decades before getting killed; other times, they’re introduced at the start of a story and built up, only to be slain.

In action movies, one of the most effective variants of this technique is placing the hero in charge of a group of innocent (or, at least, “less-competent”) folks who need to be escorted to safety. Again, as a viewer, you know that Slugshot McHardbody isn’t going to die in the restaurant hostage situation, but that confidence doesn’t apply to any of the other six diners he’s with!

For some adventurers, the “beloved” might be an object. Without it, they go crazy.

Establish any of those folks as important (and liked by the players), and you have the emotional effects of death without actually killing any of the PCs.

No Points for You!

Now we move on to the realm of metagaming. One effective – and arguably fair – technique is to withhold some or even all bonus character points for completing a mission if that hero should have died. Such a penalty would still give the GM power to provide a true threat to the PCs – you may not lose your hero if you should’ve “died,” but you’ll lose all character-building progress you should’ve made this adventure!

You Have a Point!

Hero-threatening techniques that involve the denial or removal of character points go together well with options that allow players to spend banked character points on in-game effects. If avoiding a “dying” result from a gunshot wound would cost 25 character points, then spending one point beforehand to declare it a “flesh wound” (p. B417) doesn’t seem like such a bad idea. Many groups have players who are reluctant to spend points on such ephemeral abilities, banking on the idea that the GM wouldn’t *really* kill their heroes even if they don’t. However, by allowing the GM to “spend” points for the player (in the form of penalties or removal) mitigates this metagaming concern. The player now has a choice: “Do I spend one point to mitigate this damage, or do I hope the damage isn’t as bad as I feared – at the risk of a handful of points if I’m wrong?”

JUST LIKE “IT BUILDS CHARACTER,” ONLY THE OPPOSITE

For old-school gamers, one of the threats that players most feared were level-draining monsters. One brush with some spectral specimen, and you’ve just rendered the last six weeks of gaming moot. Given that restoring lost levels was sometimes more challenging than getting resurrected at the local temple, this often made such threats *more* feared than death.

This technique can be brought over into point-based systems – replacing “lose a level” with “lose a bunch of character points.” If the player suffers a “fatal” attack, then the GM simply informs him that he now owes [X] character points, and he should rejigger his character sheet accordingly (reducing skills, eliminating advantages, or perhaps adding disadvantages). The hero is now worth [X] fewer points than before.

Defining “X” is up to the GM. One good (if harsh) guideline is that Extra Life is worth 25 points (p. B55). At that point level, the GM is – in effect – letting the hero buy that advantage on the fly. (For that many character points, it’s probably fairest to at least let the hero come back fully healed; the “fatal” shot merely knocks him unconscious for a scene or so, and when he wakes up, he’s back in action, ready to go!) Of course, the GM is free to set a reduced-cost version of Extra Life for PCs.

How does this idea differ from the previous technique of withholding points earned for the adventure? The need to

rejigger the character on the fly. First, this can lead to strategic consequences (“what am I most able to remove from my sheet while still being able to finish the mission?”). Second, if the GM forbids the buying of certain advantages after the game starts, or if he requires time be spent on increasing skills, losing points in this way can be more affecting than simply being denied a point reward at the end of the adventure.

It should be noted that, from a game-mechanical POV, this method is an abstracted version of the “associate dies” method discussed earlier. After all, if a 10-point Ally or Contact takes a bullet for you, he’s not going to be returning your phone calls anytime soon.

Note that the cost of Extra Lives in this fashion can *scale*, if the GM wants. For example, he might say that the first death in an adventure costs 5 points, the second costs 10, and so on. (He might even invert this, so that the first death is 25 points but future deaths are cheap or free – once the adventure has proven lethal, there’s no need to keep driving the point home!)

GET IT TOGETHER

It should be noted that the more draconian the GM is in assessing penalties for dying, the fewer risks the heroes (and players) are likely to take. Sure, losing 25 character points is a lot better than dying, but it still represents the loss of 10% of efficacy for a starting **Action** PC – early enough in a campaign, the player may prefer death for his hero! Discouraging risk is something that runs against the grain of most action adventures, but so does treating death as if it holds no power whatsoever. What to do?

One interesting possibility – especially for groups who receive missions from an outside agency – is to use *all* these techniques, letting the GM inform the players which one will be used. Imagine a threat hierarchy:

Threat Level	Result of “Death”
Yellow	Death is impossible
Orange	Death results in loss of bonus points for adventure
Red	Death results in an immediate 12-point loss
Black	Death results in an immediate 25-point loss

This would enable the GM to inform the players, “The agency has rated this threat Code Orange.” In addition to setting pregame expectations, this method would also let the GM tweak *how* the party members approach an adventure. Heroes are likelier to wade head-first into a Code Yellow encounter than a Code Black, even if the adventure is otherwise the same.

Once you start viewing the removal of character death as an opportunity rather than a hindrance, you can start using it as a tool to make your action games more exciting in a number of ways. The heroes don’t fear death? *Excellent*; let the games begin!

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 10 years; during that time, he has won four Origins awards.

ODDS AND ENDS

PLOT POINTS

The following are plot points that can be interjected into any *GURPS Action* chase, even used with the Plot Point option from *Chase Cards* (see pp. 18-19).

1 – *Double Cross*. The heroes' chase intersects another chase, going perpendicular to the heroes and their quarry/pursuers! Depending on everyone's skill results, a crash might result. If not, the GM might require Per checks to make sure that all parties continue chasing the right groups after the near-brush. Regardless, curious heroes might need to resist the urge to figure out what the other commotion was.

2 – *Roundabout!* The heroes encounter a previously unknown traffic circle. They might choose to go around normally (which may be challenging at a high speed), or *through* the diameter of the circle – possibly advantageously opening or closing the distance in the chase, and possibly ripping the car apart.

3 – *Rain Falls Up*. A broken fire hydrant is spewing water high into the air, decreasing visibility, increasing road slickness, and making a general mess.

4 – *!ecnalubm* An emergency response vehicle gets close to the chase; if the PCs are able to hear emergency-band radio, they realize that getting in its way may result in loss of life. (Of course, *not* getting in its way may also result in loss of life – the heroes'!)

5 – *Seventy-Six Trombo* OHMYGAWD! A parade is on the main route the chase has meandered through. The quarry can use this to escape or get lost.

6 – *Jaguars and Mustangs and Saabs, Oh My!* A classic car road show is driving through the chase area. Motorhead heroes might weep openly as millions of dollars in cars are destroyed – or high-powered classic muscle cars might become involved in the chase!

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BY GREG HYLAND



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- Bookkeeper!
- Who Watches the Hallmark Channel?
- 27 Minutes Until Countdown
- The Deadliest License and Vehicle Registration Office
- Limitless Ammo, Infinite Armor, No Particular Hurry

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